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Teaching Speaking Principles: The Necessity of Applying the Principles in Teaching Speaking

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Abstract

This article includes four teaching speaking principles that are necessary for teaching speaking, motivating, and improving students' speaking skills. They are, first, selecting speaking tasks to regard to popularity, learners' levels, and communicative purposes; second, good preparation including teachers' reparation for themselves and preparation for students will help teachers succeed in a teaching speaking course; third, encouragement to active participation from all students and finally, speaking should be integrated with receptive skills.

Keywords: speaking, teaching speaking principles, non-native English learners, Vietnamese students, EFL.

Introduction

English, recognized as a global language, is a bridge of success in social communication, business or international negotiation. "Of all the four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), speaking seems intuitively the most important" Penny Ur (1996:120). However, unlike other skills, speaking is a rapid, spontaneous process that demands immediate products. Although speaking demands at least of syntax and lexis, most foreign language learners find it the hardest to complete. Some even say that they feel really nervous whenever they start to speak English to other people. If speaking is so vital, yet so difficult to master, how can a language teacher possibly help? This article will, therefore, present four key principles which can bring teachers chances to succeed in teaching speaking and enhancing their students' speaking skill.

Principle 1: *Selecting Speaking Tasks Regard to Popularity, Learners' Levels and Communicative Purposes*

To develop students' speaking skills, task selection is the first necessary step. The selection of the right speaking tasks decides the overall success of the whole speaking process since it is the center around which the speaking class revolves. As Ur contends, some

characteristics of a successful speaking activity are "motivation is high" and "learners talk a lot" (1996:120). First of all, selecting speaking tasks must be suitable to leaners' level. We cannot give elementary learners the same tasks as upper intermediate learners'. "This can have a very demotivating effect" (Harmer, 2007: 96). A topic that is not proper to students' level or age will not generate much talking. For example, teenage learners are not much interested in talking about children's education or how to become a successful realtor. Likewise, talking about their children, social events or end-of-season sale is attracting more attention in working adults' classes. In short, global topics which everyone can relate to such as a vacation, an evening out, childhood memory, a famous person, or a well-known film, or entertainment channels are easier to attract learners. Avani H. Upadhyay asserts that "teaching English through TV Series will appeal to them instantly and it will lead to a more engaging language class" (Vol.11.Issue 1. 2023, online). Sherman claims, "What makes people laugh often has to do with 'in-knowledge', with making quick connections and coming close to sensitive issues", cited from Avani H. Upadhyay (Vol.11.Issue 1. 2023, online). Clearly, an interesting topic is able to motivate and attract more learner's attention. Furthermore, tasks that move away from real-life communication will smother the development of speaking skills. Thus, it is essential to choose tasks that give learners plenty of chances to produce meaningful language with real communicative purposes. When they have interest and motivation to talk, their speaking skills are more likely to develop. However, teachers have to narrow down topics so that students know the direction they are expected to follow and make sure they follow course time and syllabus course.

One thing teachers need to remember is "if everything is just too easy, students are likely to lose their respect for task of learning" (Harmer, 2007: 101). In generally, teacher's flexibility and adaptability are necessary to select right speaking tasks for students' levels and purposes.

Principles 2: *A Good Preparation Will Help Teachers Get Successes in A Course*

A. Teachers' Preparation for Themselves

First of all, proper talks between a teacher and students about their needs in the course is necessary. The benefit from the talk is that makes teacher and students understand each other, and students feel more comfortable to talk to the teacher about their learning speaking difficulties and their learning needs. Then, teachers "might discuss explicitly with students what is needed for effective speaking in English" (Tricia Hedge, 2000: 271) and "it is desirable and necessary" to talk with students what they will learn in the course such as how to use speaking strategies, "ways of opening or closing a conversation, turn-taking". It is a first activity to draw students' attention and eagerness for learning useful knowledge in the course.

Secondly, planning lessons is necessary preparation. Harmer asserts that "whatever our reaction to the planning paradox, however, the fact remains that most teachers do think about what they are going to teach before they go into the lesson". Whether teachers think planning lesson is vital or not, a lesson planning helps teachers get intention before a lesson starts, and "create a logical sequence of activities in a lesson, with clear aims and clear links" (Tricia Hedge, 2000:30). Moreover, while planning a lesson, teachers will have to take into account the level of students, the class's features so that they will adjust and choose appropriate teaching methods, proper practice activities or focus more or less on the features (pronunciation, sentence stress, grammar, etc..) for particular students or student groups.

B. The Preparation for Students

All of us know that the aim of teaching and learning speaking English is that learners

Vuong Tran Nguyen Thi Nhat

can speak English competently. However, they cannot speak a second language as naturally and fluently as their mother tongue. They need time and ideas to plan the message content (conceptualization) and find vocabulary and grammar to express that message (formulation). So, how can teachers prepare for their students properly? Obviously, students need learning structures and vocabulary that are related to the topic before they practice speaking in the classroom. Teaching pronunciation, sentence stress or providing students reliable websites or sources also necessary so that they can use them to practice pronunciation and intonation. In addition, learners also need learning how to use communication strategies to keep the conversation happen in case of lacking the vocabulary and structures they needed. As Tricia Hedge says "whether or not a teacher believes that communication strategies can be taught, it is certainly worth exhibiting positive attitudes towards achievement behavior and encouraging it". However, in practice speaking, learners must be given sufficient time to produce their thoughts and they are ready for speaking. As Nunan suggests "the provision of planning time can significantly increase levels of both fluency and accuracy" (Nunan, 1999:227).

Beside of teaching grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation, students also need learning the way to use language to express their ideas or thought properly so that they "know how to perform a particular function or express an intention clearly" and "spoken messages must also be appropriate to the social context in which they are produced" (Tricia Hedge, 2000:49). For example, to ask someone if he or she wants to go to a cinema, a student should say "Would you like to go to the cinema with us?", "Do you feel like going to the cinema with us?" or "Do you want to go to the cinema with us?" or to show out his or her opinion, he or she will use "I believe …", "In my opinion, / In my point of view..." or "Why don't we…?", and, students can also know how to open or close a conversation appropriately.

In addition, "the cultural conventions will need to be learned as well as the appropriate formality in style of speech and the level of politeness that is appropriate to the relationship between participants" (Tricia Hedge, 2000:267). For example, it's really impolite and it may make woman feel unpleasant when she is asked "How old are you?" or if someone is asked "How much can you earn / How much do you make now? in some countries in Europe, but it is normally asked in conversations, even in the first time, in Vietnam. Almost Vietnamese people feel easy and pleasant to give their answer. Teaching, thus, essentially includes teaching how to say what to whom and when. Otherwise, a cultural shock will occur.

Principle 3: *Encouraging Active Participation From all Students*

It is obvious that effective speaking class involves active and equal participation from all students, and all learners have a chance to contribute to speaking activities. So, to get the aim teachers should pay attention to some principles. The first, the teacher should have gentle and proper ways to control assertive learners who are occupied speaking activities in the class because when some students dominate, "the rest either listen, or, bored by being bystanders, lose interest completely and turn to some other occupation" (Ur, 2000:6). Then, teachers must give all members in the class opportunities to talk. To do so, first of all, the teacher must give clear information or not too complex questions to students when the teacher wants students to give him or her their answers because "when students fail to respond to the teacher's question, it may be because the questions were too complex, inappropriately phrased or contained difficult vocabulary items." (Carter and Nunan, 2001: 124), and it is also important for the teacher to notice that "not giving enough wait-time for learners to process a question and formulate an answer is another reason for the lack of response from students" (Carter and Nunan, 2001: 124). However,

Vuong Tran Nguyen Thi Nhat

teachers should be aware that "this does not mean that lengthening wait-time necessarily improves students' responsiveness" (Carter and Nunan, 2001: 124)

The second is mistake or error correction and the teacher's role in a speaking class. It is generally agreed that correction is part of the teaching and learning process but "the treatment of error requires consideration of many issues" and "if we decide to undertake this role, we will need a careful policy for making decisions about what, when, and how to correct" (Tricia Hedge, 2000: 15), whereas it may lead to a reluctance to try out new language or even to speak at all. So, the teacher should not interrupt while student's speaking; but taking note their mistakes and then giving feedback in proper way (see Treating error in the classroom of Tricia Hedge, 2000, page 288). The teacher, however, sometimes ignore student's mistakes and let them realize and correct mistakes naturally from other outstanding students and your feedback in class, "the mistakes can probably be self-corrected is the learner's attention is drawn to them" (Tricia Hedge, 2000: 289). One more thing in this part, the teacher must get self-control so as not to talk too much about a certain topic. In fact, "there's nothing wrong with teachers getting involved, of course, provided they don't start to dominate" (Harmer, 1998:94).

Furthermore, choosing appropriately speaking activities such as role - play, free discussion, pair work, group work or other speaking activities for each certain class can provide opportunities for students to talk and "also encourage students to use the language or practice strategies that they have learned, ranging from simple dialogues prompted by specific information to more complex situations" (Tricia Hedge, 2000: 277-278). In short, choosing right speaking activities for each certain class may also break the ice and provoke quiet students into speaking because "quiet students speak more freely when they are playing a role" (Harmer, 1998:132).

However, teachers also consider reasons preventing students from active participation so that they can adjust their methods to suit to their students. According to Tricia Hedge (2000: 292), "trying to produce language in front of other students can generate high levels of anxiety" because of their lack of confidence in their ability, "they may have a natural anxiety about being incomprehensive", "they may have cultural inhibitions about losing face, or they may simply be shy personalities who do not speak very much in their first language." This is particularly true for some Vietnamese learners who have been influenced and molded by traditional teaching methods. Thus, it is a major responsibility for the teacher to create a reassuring classroom environment in which students are prepared to take risks and experiment with the language, and "the teacher needs to be sensitive to the psychological state of the students and to be supportive and appreciative of any effort made by students" (Carter and Nunan, 2001: 125). Rey R. Magora, in his research article, states that speaking strategies to hurdle speaking anxiety should be developed and utilized and teachers with their awareness, experiences and specific strategies alleviate speaking anxiety. (Vol.12.Issue 3. 2024, online). Teachers' strategies are of key importance in creating a relaxing atmosphere for students to feel at ease to speak. Teachers need to "encourage students to try, to take risks without fear of losing marks or feeling stupid by clarifying that this stage focuses on fluency- the actual ability to achieve communicative purposes rather than on phonological, lexical and grammatical accuracy", and by encouraging students to take part in speaking activities in their classes and let them know that making errors is not a penalty and it's really spontaneous thing of learning a new language.

Principle 4: *Speaking Should Be Integrated with Receptive Skills.*

It's obvious that "receptive skills and productive skills feed off each other in a number

Vuong Tran Nguyen Thi Nhat

of ways" (Harmer, 2007: 266). Clearly, the integration of speaking skill with perceptive skill brings learners valuable input which helps learners get speaking output effectively. It is due to the fact that students "see words in context to see how they are used" while they are reading and listening (Harmer, 2007: 229). Besides of getting new language input, students are given knowledge relating to speaking topic through reading and listening. Evidently, the theme of a reading or listening text could be exploited as a speaking topic. So, in speaking, they have chance to practice and apply what they learnt.

However, to help students practice and use their language knowledge effectively, receptive skills precede speaking, "a lot of language production work grows out of texts that students see or hear" and students need examples of speaking which "show certain conventions for them to draw on" (Harmer, 2007:267). Let take an example which illustrates clearly of integrating receptive and productive skills in teaching speaking of Harits Masduqi. "The lesson aimed at helping the students understand and use *determiners: this/that/these/those* in relation with things round classroom. At first, the writer set up a listening activity in which the learners circle the correct answer based on conversations. Afterwards, the writer will play another cassette that focus on pronunciation *this/that/these/those. What's that? What's this? What are these? What are those?.* The writer then set up a pair speaking activity in which the students practiced *What's that? What's this? What are these? What are those?*". Harits Masduqui also explains that "In this activity, the pupils found the objects in the pictures and test his or her partner about the objects. In the final stage, the writer extended their speaking practice by asking them to point to things in the class room and ask his /her partner about the things" (Harits Masduqui, Volume 2 Number 1 2016).

In generally, "it would make no sense to teach each skill in isolation" (Harmer, 2007:265). But, "there is no absolute format for the integrated lesson" (Harits Masduqui, Volume 2 Number 1 2016). So, it completely depends on teachers' intention of designing lesson plans providing that their lesson plans work well and successfully in class.

Conclusion

Speaking is one of the most important skills in teaching and learning English. And speaking also plays a vital part in communication. It's a spontaneous activity and it is both easy to win someone's heart and cause communication breakdown. Therefore, teachers, who is teaching speaking, have to equip their learners with the necessary knowledge so that learners can develop their oral skills by applying speaking principles in their teaching. Encouraging active participation from all students, selecting speaking tasks regard to popularity and communicative purposes and good preparation will encourage students to take part in speaking activities eagerly because they feel confident with what they are taught and equipped before practices. Besides, the integration with receptive skills also enhance students' vocabulary and necessary knowledge relating to the topic of a lesson. As a result, students are willing to participate in English classes without feeling embarrassed and are not afraid of potential laughter from peers. This suggests a supportive environment that fosters language learning and communication.

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Vuong Tran Nguyen Thi Nhat

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