



DEVELOPING SPEAKING SKILLS FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AT THE TERTIARY LEVEL

Dr. SHANMUGAYOGINI RAVINDRAN

Senior Lecturer in English, English Language Teaching Centre, University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka
ravindran_shan@yahoo.com



Dr. SHANMUGAYOGINI
RAVINDRAN

ABSTRACT

Speaking is one of the four macro skills. It is a productive skill. Speaking skills has to be developed in order to promote effective communication in the second language. The learners of second language often find it easy to obtain proficiency in reading and writing skills from their primary to secondary levels. When there is not much exposure to second language speaking environment; developing speaking skills in the target language is very remote. The objective of this study is to develop speaking skills for effective communication at the tertiary level. This study explores the strategies and speaking evaluation system which could be adopted to develop speaking skills for effective communication at the tertiary level. Forty five students from the first year Medical Faculty are randomly selected for the study. Pre and post tests were utilized along with literature review for the study. The findings reveal the fact that not only teaching speaking skill is important but utilizing appropriate strategies and introducing and adopting a speaking evaluation system is indispensable for second language learners.

Keywords: ESL speaking skills, Effective communication, Speaking evaluation system, tertiary Level ESL

©KY PUBLICATIONS

INTRODUCTION

Majority of the students who enter the universities, generally possess a certain level of academic achievement. Their English language proficiency level varies as they come from various educational, economic, religious and ethnic groups. Among the four language skills, English language proficiency in writing and speaking skills are found to be low in them. Due to this they are unable to communicate effectively either through writing or by speaking. At the tertiary level it is essential to possess proficiency in English language skills to fulfill academic, career and other communicational purposes. They often lack the ability to interact in social settings with English speaking peers because

they are in separate classrooms and often have limited opportunity to interact academically or socially.

Speaking skills

Second language (L₂) learners try to avoid speaking as they are shy and hesitant to expose the mistakes and flaws in their speech in public. In speaking tests generally learners score low ratings even at the tertiary level. Such learners may show reluctance to develop the speaking skills. Speaking is a complex act. In order to obtain the proficiency in speaking skills, one should be familiar with the rules of language, follow the paralinguistic devices, follow the communicative functions, and understand the social meaning. In most of the ESL learning

situations the L₂ learners are generally not given any awareness about the evaluation system until the examination day. L₂ teachers generally do not spend much time with each learner due to their other teaching purposes such as covering the syllabus, preparing learners for competitions organized by the school etc., . Speaking is tested only at the classroom level for the purpose of conducting assignment examinations. Speaking tests are not incorporated in majority of the final government or university examinations. Therefore promoting speaking skills is a difficult task for teachers as well as for learners.

Communication

The communication becomes meaningful and effective if the intended message is understood by the listener. In order to manipulate a conversation and to continue it by interacting meaningfully and effectively in the target language, the speakers struggle from lack of vocabulary, pronunciation, not knowing the rules of language and not able to use other strategies to speak effectively.

Global evaluation scale

The Global Oral Assessment Scale is used to assess speaking skills to enable the examiners to decide approximately what level the speaker is. The scale could be used to differentiate each feature or characteristic of speaking skills of the learners. It comprises scales including testing whether the candidate has phonological control and has a good command of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms with awareness.

Research problem

The first year ESL learners from the Faculty of Medicine are found to be in mixed proficiency levels in English language skills. Majority of the students have low proficiency in speaking skills and are unable to communicate in English orally due to lack of proficiency in speaking skills. This research intends to find out what ESL strategies and evaluation system could be adapted for the development of speaking skills.

Objective

The objective of the study is to develop speaking skills for effective communication at the tertiary level.

Methodology

This study explores the strategies to develop speaking skills and to adapt a speaking evaluation system which could be utilized to develop speaking skills for effective communication at the tertiary level. Forty five students from the first year Medical Faculty are randomly selected for the study. Pre and post tests were utilized along with literature review for the study. The participants' performance at the beginning of the semester was obtained and their proficiency levels in speaking skills were gauged. After employing effective speaking strategies and introducing the evaluation system-Global Oral Assessment Scale- the participants were tested. The pre and post test performances and literature review were utilized for the study. The Global Oral Assessment Scale- evaluation system is utilized to find out the proficiency levels in speaking skills at the post test performances of the participants.

Literature review

"Speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing and receiving and processing information". (Brown, 1994; Burns & Joyce, 1997). "A speaker's skills and speech habits have impact on the success of any exchange". (Van Duzer, 1997). "Speakers must be able to anticipate and then produce the expected patterns of specific discourse situations and they must also manage discrete elements such as turn-taking, rephrasing, providing feedback, or redirecting" (Burns & Joyce, 1997). Evaluating speaking is essential. Through evaluation the learners can be trained to follow the important elements of speaking.

Findings and discussions

Forty five students from the first year Medical Faculty are randomly selected for the study. Pre and post tests were utilized along with literature review for the study.

Pre test on speaking skills

The pre test on speaking skills was held at the beginning of the ESL learning program. The performance in the pre test on speaking skill is presented below based on Global Oral Assessment Scale ratings. At the beginning seven students were found as highly proficient in speaking skills. Nine

participants were found as proficient, eleven as medium proficient and eighteen as low proficient.
 Table 1: Pre test on the Proficiency in Speaking Skills- First Year Faculty of Medicine Strategies utilized to promote speaking skills proficiency.

Proficiency in speaking skills	High proficient No of students 7	Proficient No of students 9	Medium proficient No of students 11	Low proficient No of students 18
Accuracy	Maintains consistent grammatical control of complex language.	Consistently maintains a high degree of grammatical accuracy; errors are rare.	Shows a relatively high degree of grammatical control. Does not make errors which cause misunderstanding,	Uses some simple structures correctly, but still systematically makes basic mistakes.
Fluency	Can express him/herself spontaneously at length with a natural colloquial flow.	Can express fluently and spontaneously, almost effortlessly.	Can produce stretches of language with a fairly even tempo.	Can make him/herself understood in very short utterances, even though pauses, false starts and reformulation are very evident.
Interaction	Can interact with ease and skill, picking up and using non-verbal and intonational cues apparently effortlessly.	Can select a suitable phrase from a readily available range of discourse functions to preface his remarks in order to get or to keep the floor.	Can initiate discourse, take his/her turn when appropriate and end conversation when he/she needs to, though he/she may not always do this elegantly.	Can link groups of words with simple connectors like "and," "but" and "because"
Coherence	Can create coherent and cohesive discourse making full and appropriate use of a variety of organizational	Can produce clear, smoothly flowing, and well structured speech, showing controlled use of organizational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.	Can use a limited number of cohesive devices to link his/her utterances into clear, coherent discourse, though there may be some "jumpiness" in a long contribution.	Can ask and answer questions and respond to simple statements. Can indicate when he/she is following but is rarely able to understand enough to keep conversation going of his/her own accord
Range	Shows Great Flexibility Reformulating Ideas In Differing Linguistic Forms to Convey finer shades of meaning precisely.	Has a good command of a broad range of language allowing to select a formulation to express.	Has enough language to get by, with sufficient vocabulary to express him/herself with some hesitation and circumlocutions on topics such as family, hobbies and current events.	Can link groups of words with simple connectors like "and," "but" and "because"

Phonological Control	Can vary Intonation and place sentence stress correctly In order to express finer shades of meaning.	Has acquired a clear, natural, pronunciation and intonation. B1 Pronunciation is clearly intelligible way.	Pronunciation is generally clear enough to be understood despite a noticeable foreign accent, but conversational partners will need to ask for repetition from time to time.	A. Pronunciation of a very limited repertoire of learnt words and phrases
-----------------------------	--	--	--	---

After the pretest various strategies along with the introduction of evaluation system were used. The teacher monitored the participants' speech. It was checked whether their speeches captured attention and interest of the audience. The participants were trained to check whether the topic is introduced clearly and supported by main points and logically presented. The participants were trained to keep in mind that the body of the speech should be previewed. While presenting the main points it was checked whether they are clear and to the point. The summary at the end and an effective close were expected. Importance is very much given to the use of appropriate language and in selecting relevant topic to draw the attention and interests of the audience.

Further the participants were trained how to deliver the speech.

Before delivering the speech they are instructed to

- a. organize notes, visual aids etc.
- b. use of eye contact
- c. body language (posture & gesture) controlled and effective
- d. speaking rate - flexible & effective
- e. speaking volume- appropriate
- f. fluency, and avoiding fillers like 'ahs' & 'ums'
- g. changes in pitch & tone, & good use of pausing
- h. show enthusiasm for the topic
- i. incorporate visual aids appropriately and integrated into the speech?
- j. and to finish speech with poise.

Evaluation on whether the speaker achieves the assignment's purpose is first examined. Next the evaluator checked whether the topic is researched and it is adapted well to the audience. The evaluator also observes whether the audience interested and

the presenter completed the speech within the time limit.

In addition to these the teacher –the researcher -utilized strategies which were needed in polishing the participants' speeches and introduced the linguistic and paralinguistic elements to suit their needs keeping the time constraints in mind.

Post test on speaking skills

A post test on speaking skills was conducted after the completion of twenty hours of teaching. The target group was tested on speaking skills to develop accuracy, fluency, coherence and phonological control; the teacher tested their interaction skills by assigning group activities; such as debates and discussions. The findings from the post test indicate that confidence, creativity of topics, and speaking competence were the key aspects of improvement when speaking to the audience. Fourteen participants could maintain their speech with consistent grammatical control of complex language. They could express themselves spontaneously at length with a natural colloquial flow. They could interact with each other effortlessly. Their speeches were coherent cohesive and meaning full.

The post test findings

After training the participants as discussed, a post test was conducted. The Global Oral Assessment Scale is used as for the pre test. The following table indicates the increase in number in obtaining proficiency above their levels in speaking. Fourteen participants were found to be high proficient, twenty four proficient and five medium proficient.

Table 2: Post test on the Proficiency in speaking skills- First year Faculty of Medicine

Proficiency in speaking skills	High proficient No of students 14	Proficient No of students 24	Medium proficient No of students 5	Low proficient No of students 2

Conclusion

Overall, results from this analysis indicate that the speaking process comprises a number of stages. Speaking requires that learners not only know how to construct particular points of language such as grammar, pronunciation or vocabulary (linguistic competence), but also that they recognize when, why and in what ways to produce language.

Recommendation

Proficiency in speaking skills could be developed if teachers make use of effective teaching strategies and adapt appropriate evaluation system and give enough training to the participants.

References

- Brown, H.D. (1994). *Teaching by principles: an interactive approach to language pedagogy*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Regents.
- Burns, A., & Joyce, H. (1997). *Focus on speaking*. Sydney: National Center for English Language Teaching and Research.
- Global Oral Assessment Scale: Retrieved from http://clients.squareeye.net/uploads/eaquals2011/documents/Appendix_1_EAQUALS_CEFR_standardisation_pack_v1-_oral_criteria-complete.pdf
- English to Speakers of Other Languages.
- O'Malley, M., & Pierce, L.V. (1996). *Authentic assessment for English language learners: Practical approaches for teachers*. New York: Addison-Wesley Publishing.
- Rivers, W.M. (1981). *Teaching foreign language skills* (2nd ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Van Duzer, C. (1997). "Improving ESL learners' listening skills: At the workplace and beyond." Washington, DC: Project in Adult Immigrant Education and National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education.