Developing EFL Learners’ Speaking Ability, Accuracy, and Fluency

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Abstract: One of the most important goals of teaching English as a foreign language for learners is speaking because learners are interested in using second language effectively and fluency. However, EFL learners may have some problems in speaking accuracy and fluency in English speaking; they endeavor to find some solutions to communicate well in society. Thus, they need to master in second language skills through interesting materials, empowering activities, and proper opportunities to practice speaking. In addition, they require to have longer time to practice it. To achieve this goal, EFL learners need to acquire second language learning from their childhood. Moreover, it is recommended to emphasize optimal and conductive environment in the classroom so that teachers have vital roles in creating suitable and friendly environmental classroom. This article is concerned with how teachers can improve speaking skills and some factors which influence learners’ speaking competence.

Index Terms: accuracy, communicative competence, fluency, speaking competence

1. INTRODUCTION

Speaking is the most important skill in second language learning. If we focus on speaking, we notice that there are several things we usually do not pay attention to. Speaking is a complex skill and should be taught everywhere and it is a skill that learners learn better in groups (Celce-Murica, 2001). Every language has four main skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Speaking is the second naturally acquired skill and it has an important role in communication. Speaking is part of our daily life which should be developed in subtle and detailed language. One of the most important things about language is the participation in a social context (Schemitt, 2012).

Opportunities for speaking require serious structure and planning. Learners often think the ability to communicate is knowing the grammar, but it was at the beginning of the nineteen century that the systematic role of teaching was about grammar, then the first method appeared which was called the Grammar Translation Method (Celce-Murica, 2001). It was based on grammar and did not help the students’ speaking ability. After a long time the evidence showed that listening and reading can improve the speaking skill, on the other hand reading can affect both the fluency and accuracy of their speaking (Celce-Murica, 2001). Learning to speak needs a lot of practice, besides learners should use short dialogues with questions and answers. If the learners are children, it is better and easier to learn because they are most ready for communication (Celce-Murica, 2001). The current paper reviews some principles to develop speaking fluency and accuracy.

2. REVIEW OF THE THEORIES AND LITERATURE

Spoken discourse has also been described as having a linear structure, compared to hierarchical structure for written discourses, whereas the unit of organization of written discourse is the sentence, spoken language is usually delivered clause at time and longer utterance in conversation generally consist of several clauses contributed (Richards, 2007). Speaking language involves more than simply knowing the linguistic components of the message and developing language skills require more than grammatical comprehension and vocabulary memorization (Chastain, 1988).
In “teaching oral skills” Lazartan discusses current practice in oral skills pedagogy in terms of how to structure an oral class and determine its content, along with implementing a variety of classroom activities that promote skills development and understanding the issues related to classroom evaluation of speaking skills and testing via large-scale and examination (Lazartan, as cited in Celce-Murica, 2001). In today’s world with easy access to travel, globalization of business and industry and the desire of non-native English speakers to communicate with English speaking peers, English learners of all ages and purposes value the ability to orally communicate in second or foreign language (Nunnan, 1991).

2.1. Developing Speaking Skills

One of the most important goals of teachers is that to enable learners to use English for communication. According to many theories speaking skill can be improved by games, role play, etc. which evidence shows that speaking should happen in activities and in a group (Oradee, 2012). Students have a lot of problems at their primary level they want to speak but when they go to class as they do not feel learn thing (Chastain, 1988). Students are able to convert their thought and their oratory they do not feel learn thing (Chastain, 1988). Students are able to convert their thought and their oratory they do not feel learn thing (Chastain, 1988). Students are able to convert their thought and their oratory they do not feel learn thing (Chastain, 1988). Students are able to convert their thought and their oratory they do not feel learn thing (Chastain, 1988).

When you read a book, story and magazines aloud, it can help you more. When you practice, your fluency would be better too. According to Hodge, the term fluency has two meanings: the first which is the ability to link unit of speech together with facility and without strain or in opportunities slowness undue hesitation and purpose a second, more holistic sense of fluency that of natural language use which is likely to take place when speaking activities focus on meaning and its negotiation when speaking strategies are used and when over correction is minimized (Hedge, as cited in Celce-Murica, 2001, p. 104). We should encourage students to take responsibility of their own learning. We do not encounter learner with heavy enforcement, they should encounter with simple enforcement and then do complex. In this article a learner mean children and adult. Another important factor is that the learner better to participate in group and setting up a conversation, then student should participate in discussion in a group (Celce-Murica, 2001). The conversation between students and the teacher should be based on classroom observation data (Wenli, 2005).

Some teachers have problems with students that do not participate in classroom and are always silent, in countries like China and Japan, in this situation teacher should encourage student to participate in for example use pictures, role play, etc. (Wenli, 2005). Others said the teacher should prepare good environment for students for example classrooms should be in low anxiety and high motivation (Flower & Miller, as cited in Wenli, 2005, p. 48).

A lot of learners have a big problem with grammar. In Grammar Translation Method and Audio Lingual method emphasize grammar. In Grammar Translation Method and Audio Lingual method was better than Grammar Translation Method. Evidence shows that teacher should correct student grammatical errors and avoid any bad habit formation. Grammatical knowledge is necessary and facilitates acquiring speaking skill, but somebody says meanings are more important than grammar. According to them communication is based on meaning (Chastain, 1988). Some teachers encourage student to interact with others and student can communicate in real situation, also learner should know the purpose of speaking, what is speaking, where to speak, and how to speak (Oradee, 2012).

2.2. How Can Teachers Improve Speaking Skills?

Teachers should use a lot of English speaking activities that motivate learners to study and speak in second language, and teachers should be as providers and increase learning classroom environment (Oradee, 2012). Teachers can use a funny speech and ask students to talk about their best moments in their last trip. So, when two or more students participate in speech and make a simple sentence encourage the other students to participate, therefore students become surprised about their ability and intelligence (Celce-Murica, 2001). Some students have lack of desire to speak because of their shyness and low confidence, but there are no easy answers about how teachers can overcome this problem (Chastain, 1988). Evidence show that these learners should start with short answer and short sentences, but it may take so long (Chastain, 1988).

Another technique that teachers can use is role play. For example a teacher chooses a conversation from a book and after repeating a loud with students, teacher calls some students as volunteers and they play a role of the book. This activity can help student to overcome their shyness, fears and anxiety. Learner can listen and practice phrases that used in speech act (Celce-Murica, 1988). Teachers can be creative, for example choose a conversation that learners like, for example about their diary, their feelings about English ad etc. Teacher should allow learners to exchange their information and concentrate on grammar, meaning, and other skills (Chastain, 1988).

Pre-speaking activities enable learners to communicate successfully. (Chastain, 1988). It has some processes, first the teacher should affiliate student with conversation, second is giving speaking material that deal with the topic and third is prepare learner to do during speaking activity (Chastain, 1988).

There is a lot of chants and some for children and adults, make learners proficient in vocabulary and pronunciation (Celce-Murica, 2001). Another teacher uses story telling! They tell story and draw some pictures for learner and tell them...
"now you do it" (Celce-Murica, 2001).

According to Chastain (1988) teachers can use interviews, for example learner interview with their classmate about something that learned in class or about personal information. Some teachers encourage learner to ask about their friend's name and about additional questions (Chastain, 1988). In these days, a lot of teachers use television programs or cartoons to improve speaking skills. For example, learner can choose one program on news and discuss about the new with other students (Chastain, 1988).

Another factor which is very important is pronunciation. Their pronunciation is weak, because English has some vowels or consonants that learners cannot find in their native language. Teacher role is very special here. Teacher should be patient and correct errors. In my opinion one of the best ways is that, learner listen to CDs and repeat after them. Another thing is that thought group (Celce-Murica, 2001). Another skill that Celce-Murica mentioned in her Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Languages is intonation. Intonation can help learner analyze and generalize the sentences ad notice the stress timed (Celce-Murica, 2001). Learner could have produced a good speech that has meaning in the target language (Egan, 1999). Also Internet can provide broad resources for learners and even teachers (Celce-Murica, 2001). There are a lot sites can help learners with best and nearer pronunciation to second language, hence there are a lot of CDs have second language pronunciation and their meaning (Nunan, 1991).

In speaking vocabulary is important, because if learners want to speak fast, they should learn a lot of words. In this content learner can improve their vocabulary themselves without teacher. There are a lot of books they can buy in libraries and teacher can improve his or her learners' vocabulary in another way. For example, teacher can use keywords mnemonic device which is connected a word for and its meaning or teacher can use fill in the blanks test in the classroom or use idiom (Celce-Murica, 2001).

Knowing grammatical and semantic rules are not sufficient instruments for speaking. Learners must be familiar with the knowledge of how native speakers use the language in the context of well-organized interpersonal exchange, in which many factors interact. Thus, it is difficult for EFL learners, especially adults, to speak the target language fluently and appropriately (Richards & Renandy, 2002, p. 216). Wong (2006) claimed that speaking competence mainly covers speaking accuracy and fluency. Speaking accuracy indicates "the extent to which the language produced conforms to language norms" (Yuan & Ellis, 2003, p.2) which covers the correct use of pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar. Speaking fluency refers to the ability to produce the spoken language "without undue pausing or hesitation" (Skehan, 1996, p.22). As an essential tool for language teaching and learning, speaking can "facilitate language acquisition and development" (Goh, 2007, p.1), and it can be beneficial to learner's academic achievement as well as professional success (Saunders & O'Brien, 2006).

2.3. Factors Influencing Learners' Speaking Competence

2.3.1. Cognitive factors

According to Levelt (1989), the speaking processes include conceptualization, formation, and articulation conceptualization deals with what information can be selected to express the meaning. Formulation needs the speaker to figure out what proper words to use in appropriate grammatical structure. And articulation requires the speaker to produce the speech with his articulatory organs. Since all the three processes happen simultaneously, it is possible for learners to make mistakes especially in face-to-face communication. Therefore their speaking may be filled with "hesitation, false-starts, grammatical inaccuracies, and limited vocabulary" (Hughes, 2002, p. 77). Besides, human's mind is a "limited capacity processor" (McLaughlin & Heredia, 1996, p. 214). So it is not easy to focus on everything at the same time. Over-focus on accuracy may cause the lack of fluency, and too much emphasis on fluency may lead to the lack of accuracy (Skehan & Foster, 1999).

2.3.2. Linguistic factors

The correct use of language form is important for learner's oral proficiency (Saunders & O'Brien, 2006). Linguistic factors include several features like pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. Pronunciation plays an important role in intelligibility (Goh, 2007). Mispronouncing a single sound or various uses of stresses and intonations cause the learner's misunderstanding. In addition, grammar acts a key role in learning the structure of English. But learning the accurate use of grammar is one thing, correctly using it in one's speech is another. It is rather difficult EFL learners to transfer the correct grammar to their speaking (Larsen-Freeman, 2001). Vocabulary is essential for EFL learners, it acts like bricks to a building. If the receptive vocabulary is rather limited, learners can hardly put the "receptive vocabulary knowledge into productive use" (Nation, 2001, p. 129), so it is necessary for EFL learners to store a wealth of vocabulary in their long-term memory. In addition, the ability to remember words from one's mind may cover the speaking fluency (Carter, 2001; Levelt, 1989).
2.3.3. Affective factors

Both anxiety and self-restriction have an influence on learner's oral proficiency. Anxiety is the affective factor that most pervasively obstructs the learning process (Arnold & Brown, 1999, p.8). Worrying about being "wrong, stupid, or incomprehensible" (Brown, 2001, p. 269) completely influences learners' speaking performance. Most of EFL learners are nervous in class (Liu, 2006), especially when they are asked to speak in class without any readiness. “Too much nervousness makes learners tongue-tied or lost for words” (Shumin, 2002, p. 206) and completely affects their achievement in foreign language classroom (Zhang & Jia, 2006). Since risk taking is viewed as an essence for "successful learning of a second language" (Brown, 2007, p. 160), EFL learners should be motivated to speak bravely in order to promote their speaking competence gradually. Because "motivation is probably the most important factor that educators can target in order to improve learning" (Olson, 1997) and "the expenditure of effort to accomplish results" (Dubrin, 2008).

2.3.4. Components underlying speaking effectiveness

Hymes (1971) believes that L2 learners need to know not only the linguistic knowledge, but also the culturally acceptable ways of interacting with others in different situations and relationships. His theory of communicative competence consists of the interaction of grammatical, psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic, and probabilistic language components. According to Hymes's theory, Canale and Swain (1980) suggest that communicative competence consist of grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence which reflect the use of linguistic system and the functional aspects of communication respectively.

2.3.5. Grammatical competence

"Grammatical competence is an umbrella concept that includes increasing expertise in grammar (morphology, syntax), vocabulary, and sounds of letters and syllables, pronunciation of words, intonation, and stress" (Scarcella & Oxford, 1992, p. 141). To understand meaning, EFL learners need to have enough knowledge of words and sentences: that is, they must figure out how words are segmented into various sounds, and how sentences are stressed in particular ways. So, grammatical competence helps speakers to use and understand English language structures accurately and immediately, which facilitates their fluency (Richards & Renandya, 2002).

2.3.6. Discourse competence

EFL learners should develop discourse competence through international relationships. The rules of cohesion and coherence should be applied in each discourse, whether formal or informal to hold the communication together in a meaningful way (Richards & Renandya, 2002, p.217). In communication, both the production and comprehension of a language require one's ability to perceive and process stretches of discourse and to formulate representations of meaning from references in both previous sentences and following sentences (Richards & Renandya, 2002, p. 217). Thus, effective speakers should acquire a large repertoire of structures and discourse makers to express idea; show relationships of time, and indicate cause, contrast, and emphasis (Scarcella & Oxford, 1992, p.141).

2.3.7. Sociolinguistic competence

To know the knowledge of language is not enough for EFL learners to speak effectively and appropriately. They should be familiar with the culture of the native speakers to enable to use target language which is socially and culturally acceptable by native users. To achieve to this goal, it is imperative to figure out the sociolinguistic side of language which enables learners distinguish appropriate comments, how to ask questions during interaction, and how to respond nonverbally according to the aim of the talk (Richards & Renandya, 2002). Therefore, "adult second language learners must acquire stylistic adaptability in order to be able to encode and decode the discourse around them correctly” (Brown, 1994, p. 238).

2.3.8. Strategic competence

Strategic competence means the ability of appropriate use of language. It can refer to "the ability to know when and how to take the floor, how to keep a conversation going, how to terminate the conversation and how to clear up communication breakdown as well as comprehension problems” (Richards &Renandya, 2002, p. 218). In addition, strategic competence, is "the way learners manipulate language in order to meet communicative goals” (Brown, 1994, p. 228). Further, it can be the ability to make up for faulty knowledge of linguistic, sociolinguistic, and discourse rules (Berns, 1990).

2.3.9. Interactions: The Keys to improving EFL learners’ speaking abilities

Spoken language usually has two functions: interactional and transactional. The essential goal of the former is to keep social relationships, but that of the latter is to pass information and ideas. Because, much of our daily communication are interactional; being able to interact is imperative. Thus, language instructors should facilitate learners with meaningful communicative situations about proper topics by applying learner-learner interaction as the key to teach communicative language (Richards & Renandya, 2002). "Communication drives essentially from interaction” (Rivers, 1987, p.
Classroom communication includes meaning-focused activity and learners can learn how to listen and talk to others, how to negotiate meaning in shared context both verbally and non-verbally with the help of teacher (Richards & Renandya, 2002, p.218). Nunan (1989), claimed “in designing activities, teachers should consider all the skills conjointly as they interact with each other in natural behavior, for in real life as in the classroom, most tasks of any complexity involve more than one macro skill”.

3. CONCLUSION

As it has been mentioned earlier, one of the most important elements of communication is the speaking ability. Speaking is a complex skill and should be taught everywhere and it is a skill that learners learn better in groups. Learning to speak needs a lot of practice, besides learners should use short dialogues with questions and answers. If the learners are children, it is better and easier for them to learn the skill because they are most ready for communication (Celce-Murica, 2001). In EFL teaching, it is imperative to use special attention and instruction while working on the speaking ability. Thus, it is for teachers of EFL to exactly investigate the factors, conditions, and components that form the basis of effective speaking. Effective instructions inferred from the careful analysis of this area, together with sufficient language input and speech-promotion activities, will gradually help learners speak English fluently and appropriately (Richards & Renandya, 2002).

REFERENCES


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