HOW TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' ENGLISH COMMUNICATIVE SKILLS OF THE ELEVENTH GRADE OF MAN NGRAMBE NGAWI

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Abstract

At present, speaking a foreign language represents one of the essential requirements of today´s society. Besides other skills and knowledge, it is considered as one of the most influencing factors while applying for a job or sustaining in a particular work position under the condition of advancing the language level. Based on my work experience, I can confirm that knowing a foreign language is a necessity for everyone in general, mainly for my students studentss. These people are required to reach a sufficient level in a foreign language in order to accomplish student assignments in missions abroad. Teaching foreign languages, mainly English, for these studentpurposes is provided by the Education Language Institute in MAN Ngrambe where I have been working as an English teacher for almost tenth years. My principal goal is to provide the students with as efficient English lessons as possible because it will be them who will have to deal with international relationships and take measures for solving various situations.

The main reason for choosing this topic for my bachelor article was realizing how important speaking is in every day situations. No matter where we are, either in the Indonesia or in a foreign country, English conversation plays a crucial role in understanding each other and dealing with different kinds of uncovered problems. It means that not only students that I teach, need English for communication abroad but also Indonesia teachers need English to communicate with their colleagues native speakers. At my work I have an opportunity to encounter with people from various parts of the world and I am very

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interested in the way they use English as their mother tongue. These co-workers have a greater supporting role in our teaching process and it is always valuable to have a chat with them and ask questions to make sure our judgement was right. Even if they come from various areas in indonesia and their accents differ, it is just a question of time for teachers and also students to adjust to their speech and distinguish differences in pronunciation.

Keywords: Speaking skill, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), CAR

Introduction

For most people, the ability to speak a foreign language is synonymous with knowing that language because speech is for them the basic means of human communication. English learners no longer expect the traditional approach of their teachers based on developing mainly the grammatical competence and using methodology popular in the past. Today, teachers are expected to provide their students with useful active knowledge of the foreign language, not just theory about the language.

Communicative approach focuses on a balance between fluency and accuracy and is the most suitable for those students whose aim is to gain confidence in speaking and conversational abilities. Nevertheless, speaking in a foreign language has often been viewed as the most demanding of the four skills. "While listening and reading involve the ability to correctly receive messages and are therefore referred to as receptive skills, speaking and writing, on the other hand, involve language production and are referred to as productive skills." (Harmer 1995, 16)

Producing spoken language has often meant a difficulty and an obstacle for English learners. There might arise a question why. The answer is obvious. In the natural spoken language students are required to be aware of characteristics of fluent speech, such as reduced forms, use of slang or idioms, fixed phrases, collocations and most importantly

the pace of speech. All of these have to be taken into consideration while practising conversation in class. Without these, our spoken language would sound bookish and unnatural. To avoid this, it is essential to introduce and practise "real" communication with our students within the learning process. If it is neglected, it may be a reason why students are often shocked and disappointed when using a foreign language for the first time whilst interacting in foreign environment. They have not been prepared for spontaneous communication and could not cope with all of its simultaneous demands.

The embarrassment is usually caused by students' inability to adjust to native speakers' speech. This is natural and adjures patience while learning to speak or communicate in a foreign language. As I already mentioned, native speakers are a great support and the opportunity to communicate with them means even greater encouragement for our students. Although it is quite demanding for students to keep up in conversation with them, they take it as an advantage in their studies. Most English learners are actually familiar with the fact that the best way to advance their speaking skills is adjusting to it in an English speaking environment.

Although the terms "speaking" and "conversation" may seem clear, they often get misunderstood. Speaking as a skill taught at schools presents the student's ability to express his or her opinions, thoughts and ideas to a particular matter. Speaking practice, which is usually based on story telling, giving speech or presentation, is the necessity for later successful conversation. Nevertheless, the focus on speaking activities has diminished in recent years. This has been caused by many factors, especially by realizing the need of everyday communication.

As I mentioned above, giving speeches or presentations is not what we concentrate on in our lessons. Even though these are crucial prerequisites for later conversational practice, the teachers tend to focus on communicative activities as the main goal of speaking lessons. I have

no objection to this, but it is essential to mention the importance of presentations for studentEnglish learners working for the Ministry of Education and the consequences of the lack of speaking skill while giving studentpresentations abroad. For this reason, it is very important for teachers to think through the purpose of speaking and communicative activities being prepared for lessons and also the target group of learners.

Nolasco (1987, 3) mentions that being able to speak reasonably correct and even fluent English is one thing, but being able to engage in on-going, interactive, mentally satisfying conversation is another. Conversation is such a natural part of our lives that many people are not conscious of what happens within it. However, conversation follows certain rules which should be obeyed in order for participants to feel relaxed and be satisfied with it. Arthur (1987, 5) adds that the main purpose of conversation is the exchange of information among people. While communicating, our students may find themselves in different social situations playing various social roles and the main task for language teachers is to prepare them for these real situations they might participate in. This also includes leading students to develop the ability to initiate and sustain conversation whenever it occurs.

Method

There are many methods of language teaching that may be applied for teaching speaking skill. One of the appropriate methods in developing speaking skill is Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Every speaking lesson should be based on communicative activities which fulfill two important language learning needs. They encourage the learners to acquire language knowledge and prepare them for real-life language use. Achieving the outcome requires the participants to interact, which means not only speak with a person but also listen to what he or she is saying and react to it.

Johnson (2002: 205) states that (CLT) communicative activities are dealt with in a large number of methodology books and their classification is distinguished according to each author´s point of view. However, all of them mention the same or similar communicative tasks but in different extent. Supported by a sufficient amount of literature, I created the following categorization of prevailing communicative activities:

1) Information gap activities are described by Thornbury (2005, 80-84) who claims that in these kinds of tasks there is a knowledge gap among learners and it can be bridged by using the language. So, in order to obtain the information, the interactants have to communicate. Littlewood (1994, 22-26) labels these activities as functional communication activities. He emphasizes sharing the information among learners and its processing.

2) Discussions are a commonly used activity in a speaking lesson. A topic is introduced to the students via a reading or a listening passage and then they are asked to discuss a related topic in order to come up with a solution or a response. Celce-Murcia (2001, 106) mentions that students need to be reminded that each person within a group should have a specific responsibility in the discussion – either keeping time, taking notes or reporting the results made by the group members.

3) Role plays a widely spread and one of the best communicative activities is a role play which trains the students in the classroom to deal with unpredictable real-life conversation in an English speaking environment. Ladousse (1987, 6) points out the special reasons for using the role play in the lessons. It puts students in situations in which they are required to use and develop language necessary in social relationships and helps them to build up their social skills. Using role play is useful especially while teaching shy students who have difficulty participating in conversation about themselves.

Through this activity they are put into various roles and no longer feel that their own personality is implicated. Role play is an essential communicative technique which develops fluency, promotes interaction in the classroom and increases motivation.

4) Simulation is a kind of role play but the emphasis is put on creating the atmosphere of a real world. Students pretend they are a part of a simulated environment and take part either as themselves or are given a role and pretend being someone else. To achieve a suitable simulated environment, the classroom is usually rearranged and, where possible, converted in a required place according to the situation.

5) Guessing games can be used as free activities for revision of vocabulary or as an interesting way to give quite controlled practice. Although they are called "games", they provide intensive language practice, especially in asking questions, so they should not be regarded as an extra activity. Students are fond of these guessing tasks mainly because they enjoy themselves without realizing they also practice and improve their speaking skills.

Results

Considering the result of the students performance during cycle I and cycle II, it can be concluded that Communicative Language Teaching method could improve the students speaking skill. According to the researcher observation during the teaching and learning process of speaking, most of student tent to be passive. They felt nervous to speak up and they were afraid of making mistakes. Thus, they really needed a conducive atmosphere to practice their speaking and they could enjoy learning language without burden, or free of fear to communicate.

This activity has proved very enjoyable for my students and also useful considering the need to buy different things in an English speaking environment. To make it even more realistic, I cut out various types of

devices from newspapers and magazines to fit in everyday life and used them instead of drawn funny pictures. Adult learners always appreciate the direct connection between the activity and the real world, so it is vital for me to have this in mind while choosing suitable materials for a particular communicative activity. The teacher´s role in this activity is to observe the pairs offering and buying devices and take notes about serious mistakes which the intermediate students should be able to avoid. Providing the students with new vocabulary items within the activity may seem reasonable but my aim was to make them think of indirect expression of problematic words. I also explained to them that it is not necessery to be familiar with all English words but be able to express their ideas using vocabulary they already know to be understood.

Students' roles can differ depending on the topic. I have used it many times in my lessons considering the weekly topic. While talking about relationships and marriage, I instructed the students to work in pairs and imagine that one of them works for a dating agency and helps the single one (his schoolmate) find an eligible partner. While talking about jobs and work, the students were asked to prepare a dialogue between a person seeking a summer job in England and a company worker offering different jobs abroad. The role play commonly used by the majority of teachers is asking for information about a holiday in a travel agency. Since a role play is one of the three parts of Stanag speaking exam, I have to concentrate on its practice as much as possible.

Discussion

The teacher's role in this accuracy activity is to go round and observe the groups. The conversation between two sides is based on a free speech being reported by the messenger and the teacher just listens to what is being said and does not interfere. On the other hand, the role of a messenger is very important, not only due to relaying information between two sides, but also from the grammatical point of view. The

grammar practised in this activity is reported speech and the teacher should not be indifferent to what the messenger is saying. When he or she makes a mistake in reported speech, the teacher should stop them and ask for their correction. Interfering in this role is essential, otherwise the students would not find out if they were correct or not.

Pre-teaching the rules of indirect speech formation is inevitable before the activity starts. Some students may feel confident even without revision but the teacher´s aim is to make sure that each student understands the patterns. The main purpose of this accuracy activity is to practice mainly speaking and grammar, however, it can be easily changed to a fluency activity if the teacher´s objective is practicing fluent conversation. In this case, the role of a messenger is neglected and the two sides of a particular dispute are trying to deal with the situation.

All communicative activities based on filling in the questionnaires are very useful as they prepare the students for real life situations they may come across later on. Based on my teaching experience, the best option is to start with the questionnaire requiring the personal information because this kind of form is undoubtly mostly used in reality. When the students feel confident with filling in personal forms, I proceed with using the more demanding ones. To fill in these, students have to be familiar with a wider range of vocabulary and also grammatical structures. E.g. a medical information sheet will require vocabulary concerning diseases, their symptoms, first aid etc. or the record of criminal events will demand the terminology about crime. Dealing with these forms, pre-teaching specific vocabulary items is essential for understanding the task and smooth activity development Choosing the appropriate form or questionnaire sometimes depends on a topic covered within the week.

The teacher´s role in this activity is to go round the class and observe students. In my lessons I try to listen to all pairs having dialogues and not to ignore anyone. While circulating I correct some

mistakes made by students either in questions or the answers. This interruption is not interfering; moreover, when the teacher is near by, the students expect to be corrected. Even if the teacher manages to correct some mistakes during the activity, at the end of it there should be an overall feedback on students´ mistakes and on their ability to formulate questions and answers

Conclusions

In my article I tried to deal with speaking as one of four basic skills and highlight its importance in every day situations. My aim was to distinguish speaking and conversation since these terms are commonly used but often get mixed up. I pointed out that conversation plays a crucial role in our lives and without it we would not be able to exchange the information and share our knowledge. I also dealt with motivation as an essential factor for language learners and classified its types – extrinsic and intrinsic, with the emphasis on the teacher´s personality which influences the students´ willingness to participate actively in the learning process. I mentioned native speakers as a great source for our teaching practice and described the ways they may encourage the students to carry on studying a foreign language.

To feel confident while learning to speak a foreign language, the students are supposed to be put in a „safe environment". This prevents them from embarrassment or anxiety when they are asked to express themselves. I tried to explain this term and suggested possible ways to decrease students´ concern about speaking. Due to students´ different personalities and also abilities to speak a foreign language, I dealt with pair work and group work as the ways of organizing the class. I mentioned the advantages of this kind of work, especially reducing tension in class, creating a pleasant atmosphere and building up students´ independence and confidence. Pair work was evaluated as more useful

since it is closer to real-life situations and dealing with them is the main aim that the students are heading for.

Another area I focused on, were communicative activities and their categorization: information gap activities, discussions, role plays, simulations and guessing games. I characterized them and evaluated the interaction they offer to prepare students for real-life language use. In connection with them, I dealt with terms accuracy and fluency and explained the importance of distinguishing them due to teacher´s objective within the lesson. I introduced different techniques for correcting mistakes in either accuracy or fluency communicative activities and also described the roles of a teacher and requirements which he or she has to fulfill to manage the roles successfully.

In the practical part of my article I first introduced the classes I have been teaching and also explained the teaching English communicative of MAN Ngrambe. Then I presented a set of pre-taught communicative activities which I have already used in my lessons, described their objectives and provided them with my evaluation. All activities were aimed at practicing speaking in English lessons, focusing on either fluency or accuracy.

By means of this article I realized how important it is for the teacher to have a great amount of information concerning teaching speaking to be able to provide the students with efficient conversational lessons. The methodology literature I was reading through enabled me to have a look at a speaking skill from a different point of view and think about this issue more deeply. All the theoretical information I gained from this literature was used in the practical part of my article. Based on that, I reached several findings. One of them was realizing how important role motivation plays in the learning process. It was proved that students´ progress in speaking a foreign language depends on motivation and encouragement from their teachers. I found out that if there are no stimulating factors and the students are not motivated, it leads to

boredom in class. To prevent this, entertaining communicative activities and interesting topics proved to be very useful and effective. Another fact which I found reasonable while evaluating presented activities, was distinguishing them according to the teacher´s objective. The fluency activities proved to be essential while practising fluent conversation to prepare students for the real world. On the other hand, the accuracy activities focused on grammar and due to them the students were given the opportunity to practise the correct use of foreign language. Since using various types of communicative activities proved very beneficial in my classes, I would like to recommend them to all teachers whose aim is to improve their students´ communicative skills.

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