

Classroom Techniques and Tasks for Teaching Speaking

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Abstract: *The main purpose of this study is to improve students' speaking skill and to enable them to communicate well the target language. This study discusses about Classroom Techniques and Tasks for Teaching Speaking which fulfills students' communicative needs in order to enable the students communicate well the target language. According to Harmer (2009) and Nunan (2003), speaking is a productive skill and theoretically it is a mental process. This means that it is a psychological process by which a speaker puts a mental concept into some linguistic form, such as words, phrases, and sentences used to convey a message to a listener. This article will focus on nine classroom techniques and tasks for teaching speaking.*

Keywords: Classroom, Speaking, Technique, Teaching

1. Introduction

Teaching speaking is very challenging skill, part of second language learning, and is the ability to communicate in the second language clearly and effectively. Therefore, it is essential that language teachers should pay great attention to teaching speaking rather than other skills and should provide a rich environment where meaningful communication takes place. Richards (2008) describes that speaking is the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols in a variety of contexts. He adds that speaking is a crucial part of second language learning and teaching. Moreover, Harmer (2009) and Brown (2005) describe that the activities, such as information gap, simulation, role play, contact assignments, jigsaw activities and so on help students to communicate in the target language efficiently.

1) Information Gap

Harmer (2009) says many games depend on an information gap. He means that students have to talk to the partner in order to solve the puzzle, draw a picture (describe and draw), put the thing in the right order (describe and arrange) or find the similarities and differences between the pictures.

On the other hand, Nunan (2003) adds that information gap is a useful activity in the classroom in which one person has information that the other lacks. Then, they must use the target language to share the information to each other. Information gap activities serve many purposes such as, solving a problem or collecting information. In these activities each students play an important role since the task cannot be completed if the partners do not provide the information that the other needs. That is, in information gap activities everybody has the opportunity to talk in the target language.

2) Simulation and Role Play

Harmer, (2009) claims simulation and role play give a great benefits for most of the students. Students simulate a real life encounter as if they were doing so in the real world. They can take on the role of a completely different character and express thoughts and feeling. Furthermore, he adds simulation and role play can be used to encourage oral fluency, especially where they are studying English for Specific Purpose (ESP). Harmer, (2009) also assert when students are doing simulation and role play. It is important to

know the exactly what the situation is, and they need to have enough information about the background for them to play the role or simulate.

Harmer, (2009) claims that in role plays, students are given specific rules in the target language. Role play is one other way of getting students to speak in the target language. He either points out that in role plays students think they are in various social contexts and have a variety of social contexts; role play activities make students critical and creative and make the classroom more interesting. It does not make the class boring because this method gives opportunity to students to play the characteristics in front of the class. Harmer (2009) also says that in role play, the teacher gives information to the students such as who they are and what they think, feel, or want. For example, a student goes to the doctor and tells him what happened to him or her.

Nunan (2003) states role play is an excellent activity for speaking, but simulation is more elaborated than role play. This is, it means that in simulation props and documents provide realistic for language practice, but in role play students are given particular roles in the target language. For example in role play, one student takes the role of a restaurant customer, and the other takes the role of restaurant's waiter/waitress. So for instance in simulation, the teacher might bring the grocery store products for the students to buy (coffee, tea, jam, milk) and even pay money for making their purchases.

Harmer (2009), describe that in simulations, props and documents provide a somewhat realistic environment for language practice. They further state that simulations are very similar to role plays, but what makes simulations different than role plays is that they are more elaborate or effective than role plays. In simulation students bring things to the classroom to play as real environment. If students play as a shopkeeper or a buyer, they bring money or something to sell. Harmer (2009) says that simulations have many advantages. First, as they are entertaining, they motivate the students. Second, they increase the self-confidence of shy students since in simulation activities they will have a different role and will not have to speak for themselves. It means they do not have to take the same responsibility.

3) Jigsaw Activity

Harmer, (2009) explains that jigsaw activity is bidirectional or multidirectional information gap. Each person in a pair or group has some information which the other persons need. So, they need to share the information to complete the information. They also state that during the task students should not show the information to each other, and the teachers can either use pictures in jigsaw activity. For instance, they should divide the pictures into pieces and then give them to students. Students have to discuss all the pieces. Harmer (2007) states that jigsaw activity has some advantages which are as follow: 1) Teacher is not the sole provider of knowledge. 2) Students take ownership in the work and achievement. 3) Learning revolves around interaction with peers. 4) Students are held accountable among their peers. 5) Students are active participants in the learning process. 6) It builds students interpersonal and interactive skills.

2. Discussion

Harmer, (2009) and Nunan, (2003) say that discussions range from highly formal and whole group staged events to informal small group interactions. They point out that discussions which improve someone's speaking are variant; therefore, they consist of buzz groups, instant comment, formal debates, unplanned discussion and reaching a consensus. Furthermore, Nunan (2003) and Schifrin (1994) describe that the teachers can stimulate the discussion by modifying statements, sequencing statements, defending statements, problem solving, moral issues and describing and comparing. They also state that the discussion can be organized in large classes by group work, taking turn, pyramid technique and games.

1) Story Telling and Story Completing:

According to Richards, (2008) in these activities students can briefly summarize a tale or story they heard from somebody or they may create their own stories to tell their classmates. It either helps students to express their ideas in the format of beginning, development, ending, setting and characters in a story. In this way, the teacher not only will address students speaking ability, but also gets the attention of the class. Moreover, Harmer (2007) says that story completion is very enjoyable. That is, a teacher starts to tell a story, but after a few sentences the teacher stops telling the story. Then, each student begins to narrate from the points where the previous one stopped, and each student is supposed to add some sentences.

2) Tango Activity

Nunan (2003) and Harmer (2009) add that teacher can use different ways to teach speaking. For example, if students do not know each other, teachers should ask them to introduce themselves to one other. Also, tango setting refers to an activity for pair work. It is an activity in which students have to describe something for their partner to reproduce without being able to see the thing being described. In order to prevent any possible attraction to steal a look rather than sit face to face, students sit back to back. You can sit students that one student place to other student that they can hear each other, but they cannot see what they are doing. It means

that one student's right shoulder is next to the other students' right shoulder.

3) Pairing & Grouping Work

Harmer, (2009) suggests that language teachers should provide oral group work activities in the class to improve students' speaking skills and develop successful oral group activities as they can identify the major problems faced by their students. He also says that through group work the students will understand and work with the help of others. This will increase learning, planning, and discussion skills, and eventually will improve their speaking capabilities. The students will be involved as participants and decision-makers in oral group activities. Harmer (2007) also describes that pair work and group work give the students more chances to speak English in the classroom. It means that students participate in the lesson much more actively because they are involved in talking to their friends, exchanging opinions, and practicing new structures more than listening to their teacher talking. He further states that by dividing the class into groups students get more opportunities to talk in full class organization, and each student can say something.

4) Speaking Events

Harmer's (2009) findings show that speaking events can be characterized into interactive or non-interactive. He mentions that the conversation which takes place when we buy something from a store is interactive, whereas leaving a message on an answer phone known as non-interactive. Furthermore, Harmer (2009) adds that we might make a difference between planned speaking (a lecture, wedding speech) and unplanned speaking (a conversation that takes place spontaneously when we bump someone on the street).

5) Conversational Strategies

Harmer (2009) discusses that speakers use various discourse markers to buy time (ummm...well...you...you know...), to start a turn (well...I'd just like to say...) or to make the beginning or the end of a segment (right...now...anyway...). Moreover, he points out some strategies in which is used conversation. First strategy, Thronbury (2005) add further categories of discourse, such as conversational openings, interrupting, topic shift and closing which is known as conversational rules and structure. Second strategy, Harmer (2009) says about survival and repair strategies if face-to-face conversation is to be successful, students need to be able ask for repetition by using formulaic expressions, repeating up to the point of conversation breakdown. Third strategy, Harmer (2009) adds if students face a conversation outside the classroom, they probably need to expose just the kind of questions that are commonly found in course book.

Additionally, Richards (2008) expresses that in order to evaluate and score speaking tasks, students should try to pay attention to pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, grammar, discourse features (cohesion, sociolinguistic appropriateness, etc.), and task.

Moreover, Mercia (2001) talk about how teachers can encourage their students to speak in the class. They further state that they can do this by encouraging their interaction,

giving them plenty of controlled and guided practice, making and planning speaking activities carefully. Also, Harmer (2009) talk about the guidelines for a free/ creative speaking activity.

According to Jordan (1997), in order to teach speaking, questions such as the following should be considered: who are the students? Why are they there? What do they expect to learn? What am I expected to teach? He also states that in order to teach speaking to ESL learners, in academic context, they need taking part in discussions, interacting with peers and professors, and asking and answering questions, but in nonacademic context, they need to involve basic greeting, talking on the telephone, interacting with school and shopping.

Furthermore, he states that with low level adults, teacher may need to find L1 speakers to help him/ her get information on students' experiences, educational background and needs (P. 105). Nunan (2003), however, explains that for high advanced learners, students learn to plan business meetings, give speeches, make oral presentations, participate in conferences and socialize with colleagues.

In addition, Nunan (2003) describes about the teaching oral skills in an EFL context. He says that if the necessary technology is available, showing movies or recording television programs and playing audiotapes of programs can be enjoyable for students and can provide them with authentic language practice in listening to native speaker's speech; the teacher can also assign out of class learning activities such as watching or listening to an English film, television show or radio program. Thus, by doing so, their speaking will be improved.

Finally, Harmer (2009) describes that we should expect students to be able use various discourse markers or repair strategies at all levels. On the contrary, he says that we should expect them to develop their conversational skills as their English improves. However, students need to be aware of what real conversation looks like and we should give them help in using some of the more important phrases (Harmer, P.344, 2009).

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Author Profile



Mrs. Zaitoon Bahram holds a Bachelor's in English Language and Literature, and a Master's in Public Policy and Administration degrees at Kabul University. She comes with fifteen years of teaching experience in the English Department of Kabul University since 2005. Currently she is the head of the English Department. In addition to being a lecturer in Kabul University, she has been an active woman in several social, cultural, political and civil rights movements. Since 2011, she has been serving as the Executive Director of Peace Educational and Social Development Organization (PESDO), which has implemented several of projects, mostly focusing on research, education and trainings for women, women leadership trainings for public universities lecturers, enhancing reading culture in public school in all 34 provinces of Afghanistan, gender, eliminating violence against women, health awareness and other programs. In addition she is serving as Deputy Director of Abra Afghan Ltd since 2015. Moreover she has been serving as a Master Trainer with British Council in Kabul. Mrs. Bahram also served as English Teacher and trainer of Business Communication, Human Recourse Management in Oruj Management Institute, Academic Writing in Karwan University, and some other academic and vocational trainings. She served as the President of English language Teachers' Association for Afghans (ELTAA) from 2011 to 2012. Currently as a part of her social activities she is the President of Changing Minds Association (FekryBadloon) which works with youths. Meanwhile, she is supporting national Afghan women's organizations, such as, the Afghan Women's Network (AWN), the Afghanistan Business Women's Federation (ABWF), Afghan Women Chamber of Commerce and Industries (AWCCI), Afghanistan Universities Teachers' Association, Member of Commission of Naming Streets and Squares of Kabul City