



Taking the Floor: Developing Oral Skills for Communicative Purposes

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Abstract: *This paper outlines the benefits of developing speaking skills in the language class and it further talks about the different strategies that can be adopted by a language teacher to develop a sense of motivation among the students to shun off their shyness which is beneficial for both the participants and the practitioners. It is hoped that the ideas shared in the paper can help teachers in English as a foreign language classis to effectively make use of the different strategies as a means for improving their student's English language abilities.*

Keywords- *Oral Skills, language, motivation, foreign language.*

Since the mid-twentieth century, the whole world has become narrow, approachable, close-knit and intimate because English is the first global *lingua franca* that the majority of the population in the whole world can speak. With more than 350 million people around the world speak English as their first language and more than 430 million speaking it as the second language. At present, English has become less a foreign language of communication for native speakers and more a *lingua franca* for communication between its second language speakers.

It all happened so quickly. In the 1950's, the possibility of emergence of English as a global language was- dim and uncertain. But fifty years on, English as a language exists as a political and cultural reality. Speaking a common language presents us with unprecedented possibilities for mutual understanding, thus enables us to find new opportunities for international co-operation, intelligibility and mutual respect. "Millennial retrospectives and prognostication continued in the same vein, with several major newspapers finding in the subject of the English language an apt symbol for the themes of globalization, diversification progress and identity addressed in their special editions." (Ryan, 1999) But giving English an International status is not solely the result of military domination but it required an economic strength to maintain and proliferate it. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the economic development began to prevail on the global level supported by communication boom-telephone, radio, telegram resulting in the bloom of international market, trade and advertisement. The power of media crossed national boundaries and technology in the form of movies boosted entertainment industries which had a worldwide impact. Where ever you travel you see signs and boards written in English, whenever you visit any hotel in a foreign country, they will understand English and have a menu in English. It is also used as a medium of communication in domains such as educational institutions, law, aviation, media etc. In order to enter into these domains one should have the knowledge of the global language as early as possible. Translation has played a crucial role in human interaction for thousands of years. When ambassadors and monarchs meet on international stage, they need interpreters to convey their messages. But the more a community is linguistically mixed, the less there will be parasitically dependency of a community on individuals to ensure communication. So finding a language to act as *lingua franca* or 'common language' can solve these problems.

As a result of the increasing demand of English language, the learners are nowadays keen to acquire proficiency in speaking besides academic excellence. So, they join course related to, 'Spoken English' where the emphasis is laid on learning grammatical rules which further leaves the student in a state of chaos and confusion where they are unable to apply the learned grammatical rules in the day today communication. Here, the English teacher can be a savior and a facilitator to develop the speaking skills among the learners. The present paper attempts to put emphasis on the significance of teaching speaking skills in the classroom and the different strategies like audio-visual aids, games, listening music etc. that can be adopted by the teachers to inculcate the habit of speaking among the students.

What makes teaching speaking so difficult? There is always a doubt among the learners about successful speaking. The fluency-oriented approach says that minor grammatical/ pronunciation errors are insignificant during the early stages of learning the language. So putting rigorous efforts in the early stages is considered harmful because speaking can be developed through meaningful communication. This view is supported by many English language teachers. The other view is the accuracy-oriented approach that lay emphasis on grammatical rules and appropriate pronunciation. The focus is on teaching of the newly introduced grammatical rules and their application. This view is supported by many linguists but is archaic. So, the language teacher has the onus to combine speaking and learning altogether to help the learner to improve the skills.



A true learning and understanding of language doesn't happen in many language class-rooms in India. The first and the foremost reason is that the students are not provided with the ample opportunities to speak their target language. Students should be encouraged to participate in activities like seminars, debates, oral presentations, group discussions, skit, role-plays so that they can practice the language fluently. Teachers can also divide them in small groups so that they can have healthy discussions on some day today interesting topics. Language acquisition is equally important as understanding a subject because the former involves active participation of the learner and the latter requires passive which pertains to acquiring knowledge through listening to a lecture or reading a book.

Language Games for Teaching and Learning Vocabulary

Language games provide a meaningful medium to understand the context and they provide language practice in the various skills- speaking, writing, listening and reading. "Traditionally, games have been used in the language class as warm-ups at the beginning of the class, fill-ins when there is extra time near the end of the class, or as an occasional bit of spice stirred into the curriculum to add variety. All these are fine, but games can also constitute a more substantial part of language courses." (Rixon, 1981)

Moreover, language games can make the table turn by making a dull subject interesting. Games help the student to learn the target language but in a playful method. They test or teach structure of a vocabulary in a lively manner. Games also develop interest and execute so-operation among the students. Games can also be used as a way to revise and recycle previously taught language. (Uberman, 1998). All the games have some things in common like there are certain set of rules for each game, a competitive element and some kind of paraphernalia like boards, chalks, slips, dice, counters etc. Discussed below are some games that can be used for enhancing speaking skills among the students:

- (I) **Expressive Picture Activity:** The teacher has to pair the students and have to give each student a card with a picture of an author/ event, and after witnessing the picture the student has to place it face down and he/she will describe the picture to their partner to draw it again through the explanation.
- (II) **Slap the Board:** For this activity, the teacher has to divide the class into two teams and have to write the words that the students need to learn on the board. The teacher will read a word from the board and ask the students to elaborate the meaning. But prior to that the students have to discuss the meanings within their teams. When the teacher will speak the word, the first student from the line has to come and slap the word. The first slapper to give the definition will get a point for the team. Then, these two students will go and stand at the back of the line. The teacher has to maintain the record of the marks. Continue until all the words have been slapped.
- (III) **Rub out and Write:** This game will help the students to learn new words so that they can enhance their vocabulary. Divide the class into two groups. Draw a circle and write the meanings or translation of words inside the circle. The number of translated words in the circle should be equal to the number of students in the class. Call the students according to their roll no's and ask them to translate the words into English and to say few lines about the translated word. Continue until the circle is complete.
- (IV) **Who is telling the truth? :** In this game, every student has to write three facts about himself/ herself on a piece of paper. It should be ensured that the name and roll number of each student should be written at the top of the page. Then, the teacher has to collect all the sheets and has to call three students at the front. The teacher will read aloud one of the facts from the sheets that he/she has collected. All the three students will claim that that the fact is theirs and will try to convince the rest of the students about it. Then the class will start the question and answer session with the students and will determine that who is telling the truth and who is lying.
- (V) **Hidden word:** The teacher will give a random topic and a random word that doesn't pertain to that topic to each student. Then, each student has to prepare a speech on the given topic but has to hide the word in the given topic. The student has to make sure that the rest of the students should not be able to spot the hidden word. The other students will listen to the speech carefully and try to guess the word.
- (VI) **Pictionary:** The teacher will make some flashcards related to some literary personalities, historical events, movements, places. The teacher has to divide the class into two teams. Then one person from each team will come to the teacher and see the flashcard and has to guess the word against the clock. If the students guess the right one then he/she will win a point for the team.
- (VII) **Ladders:** The teacher has to draw two ladders on the board. Then has to write a word at the end of each ladder e.g. lemon, then has to call the students one by one from each team and the student has to write a new word starting with the last letter of the former word like the teacher has written word 'lemon', the students has to write word with letter 'n' and so on. The students also have to speak few lines about the written word. Whosoever team completes the ladder first, will be declared the winner.



While practicing language games in the classrooms, the teacher has to make the instructions simple so that every student should equally participate. Then, the seating arrangement for the students should be properly organized and it should be ensured that there should be some feedback after the activity. Moreover, the above-mentioned games are good to revise the lectures at the end of the week/class. The following are mentioned few more practices through which a language teacher can enhance speaking skills among students:

Debates

It is a brilliant way to improve speaking skills and is chiefly helpful in giving knowledge about the development of a persuasive argument. A debate is a structured argument in which each student will be given a piece of paper with “agree” written on one side and “disagree” written on the other side. The teacher will read a controversial statement and each student will raise the paper showing the agree or disagree side depending upon their opinion. Then, the students will be asked to explain their position that why they have either supported or rejected the statement. The basic communication skills like the manner in which the students make the argument, the varying tone which makes the debate interesting, the ability to concisely and clearly express the ideas, the arguments used to develop your own side and how to rebut others side can be enhanced during debate sessions.

Impromptu speaking

An Impromptu speech is when a person is asked to speak in public but without prior information. The teacher has to prepare a list of topics that has to assigned to the students on which they will be able to talk about. The class need to be divided into two teams and each student shall be given a number that is the order in which they have to speak. The students have to start with a topic without preparation and they can continue for 45 seconds. While the student is speaking, the participants of the other team have to listen carefully for the vocabulary, grammatical mistakes, tone mistakes and other errors and if they will be successful to point out the mistakes well then, they get a point. This activity will help to develop confidence among the students to speak in public without hesitation.

Storytelling Activity

Storytelling is about telling stories. In the language classroom, storytelling carries a special value. Students can identify words, imagination, expression they have imbibed regularly and can see them taking a shape in their stories. Frequent use of this activity in the classroom can help the students to learn new words and expression with ideal emotional reverberation. For this activity, the teacher has to divide students into groups comprising of four students in each group. Three of the students from each group have to sit in the front row and one has to stand behind and act as the leader. The leader will be given a stack of cards with different nouns written on it. The leader has to give first noun to one student so that the storytelling can be started, the student will continue telling the story unless the leader hand over another card to the other member in the team who will take over the story further. This activity will enable the students to empathize with unknown situations/ person/ places and encourage active participation. It will also widen their imagination, increase verbal proficiency and enhance listening skills.

Oral Presentation

We have to interact with the other members of the society throughout our lives and herein, lies the importance of acquiring communication skills. To inculcate effective speaking skills among students it is also pertinent to develop an inclination towards oral presentation of the subject. Presentation is the process of displaying and explaining the content of a topic to an audience. King (2002) adds that oral presentations have been shown to help bridge the gap between language study and language use; those presentations require students to use all four language skills in a naturally integrated way; and that the presentations have been shown to encourage students to become active and autonomous learners. Presentations are student centric and require the use of all of the four language skills, i.e reading, writing, speaking and listening. The teachers can provide students with realistic language tasks in which they can make use of good vocabulary and moreover, they can also rely upon posters and power point presentation to make it aesthetically more beautiful.

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that to improve English language skills among the students, teaching should be student centric and the students should be involved in meaningful activities which they can enjoy also. Then, we could see the students in these classes becoming active learners and despite the challenges involved in using the above mentioned activities in the classroom, the teacher will find out that they can be valuable activities in helping learners to improve their speaking skills, develop their research skills, improve their creativity and gain confidence speaking in front of others.



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