THE EXPERIMENT TOWARDS MOTIVATING WRITING EDUCATION

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https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10938141

ABSTRACT

In today's globalized world learning foreign languages plays an essential role to make a contact with the people of another nation. English is the language of our international communication in all areas, such as politics, science, media or art and it is often the language of entertainment as well as socializing. Speaking is considered to be the most important skill while teaching foreign languages. Speaking skills are defined as skills which allow us to communicate effectively. "The only normal way to begin speaking in a new language is to begin speaking badly." (Greg Thomson). However, a student while speaking English faces some difficulties and the possible solutions are as follows in the article.

Introduction: In this globalization era, there have been drastic changes taking place all over the world. These tremendous vicissitudes occur when people have a strong desire to achieve something. People's desires are fulfilled when they clearly express their ideas and opinions with others. Thus, they need to learn communication skills in order to fulfill their ambitions, desires and goals. In this modern world, communication skills play a vital role and one must have mastery over these skills to get success in their respective fields. So, speaking is the most important skill among all the four language skills in order to communicate well in this global world. As English is widely used all over the world, there is a need for learners to acquire good communication skills, especially speaking skills. The teachers have to understand the problems of English language learners and try to implement various teaching strategies in their classrooms in order to develop their learners' speaking skills in English classrooms. This is possible for the teachers when they change their methods and materials and by using the latest techniques of teaching speaking skills. Therefore, the teachers should introduce some group and pair activities in their regular English classrooms that the ELLs can develop their speaking skills enormously.

As Edmund De Waal says, with the languages, you are at home anywhere. Speaking is considered as the most important skill of the learner, most of the time the proficiency of this skill is which judges the knowledge of the learner of the second language. People have too many reasons to improve their ability of the skill such as expressing ideas, creating relationships, exchanging information etc. Even though, the development of this skill is not an easy task for anybody, there are many aspects that have to be taken into account in the learning process, the learner must be active and dynamic practicing and exchanging patterns that are important in the development of the skill, during the process the learner must be expose to a natural environment and natural speeches of the target language that enable them to develop their awareness of conversational features and strategies, so the task for the teacher is to incorporate real communication in the classroom promoting interactive and realistic activities in order to help students gain confidence and feel motivated, even though despite its importance, for many years, teaching speaking has been undervalued and English language teachers have continued to teach speaking just as a repetition of drills or memorization of dialogues. Fortunately, today's world requires that the goal of teaching speaking should improve students' communicative skills, because, only in that way, students can express themselves and learn how to follow the social and cultural rules appropriate in each communicative circumstance.

Analysis and results: There is no doubt that students learn to speak in the second language by interacting. Today there are many methodologies that can help efficiency for this aim. One of them can be the communicative approach that is based on real-life situations that require communication. By using this method in ESL classes, students will have the opportunity of communicating with each other in the target language. ESL teachers should create a classroom environment where students have real-life communication, authentic activities, and meaningful tasks that promote oral language. This can occur when students collaborate in groups to achieve a goal or to complete a task.

It is essential for the students to practice as much they can in the class and in daily life as well, simple activities such as share ideas about an event, or find solutions in their discussion groups are effective to improve the skill. Before the discussion, it is important that the purpose of the discussion activity is set by the teacher. In this way, the discussion points are relevant to this purpose, so that students do not spend their time chatting with each other about irrelevant things. For example, students can become involved in agree/disagree discussions. In this type of discussions, the teacher can form groups of students, preferably 4 or 5 in each group, and provide topic of interest for them.

Teaching speaking is a very important part of second language learning. The ability to communicate in a second language clearly and efficiently contributes to the success of the learner in school and success later in every phase of life. Therefore, it is essential that language teachers pay great attention to teaching speaking. Rather than leading students to pure memorization, providing a rich environment where meaningful communication takes place is desired. With this aim, various speaking activities such as those listed above can contribute a great deal to students in developing basic interactive skills necessary for life. These activities make students more active in the learning process and at the same time make their learning more meaningful and fun for them.

Lack of confidence, poor vocabulary power, hesitation, anxiety towards speaking, fear of making mistakes, not having a suitable environment to practice English, no strong motivation from teachers were some common difficulties students faced while speaking in English.

Problems Faced by Students in Speaking English Language

• Common Grammar Mistakes While Speaking English Language.

• Lack of Confidence in Speaking English Language.

• Shyness in Speaking English Language.

• Fear of Making Mistakes When Speaking English Language.

• Lack of Motivation in Students in Speaking English Language.

10 steps to overcome language-learning barriers

• Organize your learning materials.

• Get out of your comfort zone.

• Learn from your mistakes.

• Watch daily videos on YouTube.

• Read your favorite books in English.

• Follow social media accounts that help you learn English.

• Learn a few poems and recite them.

• Try thinking in English.

Conclusions and suggestions: "Learning foreign languages can increase the size of your brain. This is what Swedish scientists discovered when they used brain scans to monitor what happens when someone learns a second language."(Guardian) Speaking English allows you to actually broaden your world, from job opportunities to the ability to relate to people from every country. Knowing the language makes it much more interesting every trip. Anywhere you want to go in the world you can find someone who speaks English. If we account only the country where the English language is the official language, the United Kingdom, Australia, U.S.A., Canada, Ireland, New Zealand and the Caribbean countries, there are more than 400 million native English speakers. Simply put, we must recognize that English is an international language, the main language of this planet. Moreover, an effective speaker can gain the attention of the audience and hold it till the completion of his message. Speaking skills are important for career success, but certainly not limited to one's professional aspirations. Speaking skills can also enhance one's personal life.

In order to build up an experimental, but representative corpus, writing tasks were submitted electronically on three different campuses by students of all levels of the two types of language training at Flemish universities, i.e. philology and translation & interpretation. In order to annotate these products (labelling not only the errors, but also the use of less typical structures as well as the contexts in which frequent errors were avoided), our team7 of lecturers systematically used one of the available tools on the market (Markin8), which had been personalised for our own purposes. Apart from evaluating the content of the writing tasks, diverse aspects of all language components in the text are labelled, from orthography over lexical and grammatical to pragmatic and text linguistic features, e.g. the structure of paragraphs and texts, the characteristics imposed by the text type and the use of the various devices for structuring the text. The annotated version is then sent back to the author, w ho receives a document as the one shown in Figure 1. At first sight this is only characterized by nicer, more motivating colours , and a first impression of more systematic labelling.

However, this version is nothing more than one mouse click away from a version with explicitly positive and more critical labels, like "well-used discourse markers" or "wrong collocation". For more information on that label, the student can open a window providing a definition as well as hyperlinks to a database containing examples and theory on the topic.

If the coach expects the label not to be clear enough, he can add a note with supplementary explanations. For instance, in comparison with grammar, lexis is characterized by open paradigms, which are difficult to be stored in an exhaustive database and, at least for Spanish, not always treated appropriately in valency dictionaries, so that a supplementary note can sometimes be useful. The coach can also add a general comment, which he can select from his own database and change it to suit present needs. For instance, for a first task a coach can be inspired by the following synthesis of the qualities of the task:

"Good beginning: your text contains good elements (discourse markers, variation), but also too many avoidable errors (use spelling and grammar check, read aloud). Apart from that, see the statistics and the linked information on some of the new goals of this year (collocation, valency, punctuation, anaphora)."

Moreover, the student is provided with some label statistics, which he can look into, in order to have a general idea of his performance. The coach also has the p ossibility to add a grade.

Systematic and motivating labelling does not guarantee a more conscious and effective learning process: psycholinguistic research on learning effects reports that 80% of the new terms one learns are lost in less than 24 hours, recurrent exposure to the material being the only remedy (Cervero & Pichardo Castro 2000: 99). Presumably, this will not only be the case for vocabulary learning, but also for the acquisition of language in general, like Ellis (2003: 29) suggests:

"Learners construct a series of systems, known as interlanguages, which are gradually grammaticized and restructured as learners incorporate new features. Furthermore, research on developmental sequences has shown that learners pass through a series of transitional stages in acquiring a specific grammatical feature such as negatives, often taking months or even years before they arrive at the target form of the rule. In other words, L2 acquisition is a process that is incompatible with teaching seen as the presentation and practice of a series of products."

As a result, we have to turn learning how to write into a more conscious process,

and a recurrent one in order to make it more effective. We therefore propose a setting of blended , task-based learning with a phased, multi-stage coaching. We have already argued the importance of coaching and working in phases, and we assume that any one working with electronic instruments today is convinced of the advantage of combining e-learning with more traditional learning instruments. Yet the choice of a task-based framework for the teaching of writing requires more explanation. In the next paragraphs we will elucidate this choice and the way tasks are handled in our model.

While part of the literature, both research-based and pedagogic (e.g. Crookes & Gass, 1993a & 1993b; Bygate, Skehan & Swain, 2001), assumes that tasks are primarily directed at oral skills and are also primarily focused on meaning, other scholars adopt the term 'task' to refer to activities involving any of the four language skills. De la Fuente 2006 reports evidence in favou of its use in vocabulary teaching.1 Ellis recognises that a task with a focus on form can be achieved in a number of ways, e.g. when teachers respond to learner errors (Lyster and Ranta, 1997) or draw the learners' attention to the usefulness of specific forms in the tasks they are

performing. In our multi-stage learning model, focus on form is not only an absolute necessity, as we work with future language specialists, who are expected to reach the highest level of accuracy, fluency and complexity, the three aspects of production in Swain's Output Hypothesis (Swain, 1985); it also gives learners and coaches the opportunity to focus on specific forms and on learner errors.2 Therefore, we sequence various tasks over a year and decompose them in a work plan with 10 stages, including pre and post tasks (Skehan & Foster, 1997), as well as various types of coaching. Let us look into the stages in more detail.3

First stage

It is crucial that teachers set motivating and challenging project goals and themes, as "writing is an integrated part of an overall communicative process in an experiential learning context" (Hyland, 2002: 145) instead of the traditional narrative text topics such as 'my holidays', our students indicate they find their creativity and writing skills are triggered much more by a title like. Besides, original and specific topics constitute a remedy against the growing plague of plagiarism.

Preferably a task also involves, like Ellis puts it, "real-world processes of language use", including modern text types such as chatting, and a real communicative outcome. Apart from a task's focus on meaning, there is an explicit focus on form and on how meaning is structured in the text. This is achieved by asking students to realize specific pre- and post tasks implying (meta-) cognitive activities e.g. taking care of the teacher's individual and collective observations on their previous task, out of which the coach also highlights a limited set of salient items to focus on. The provisional statistics of a group of 30 students (level 3) show that the 3 items to be focused on for task 2 (conjugation, orthography and collocations) improved considerably in comparison with task 1 (from 19 to 8 errors, 26 to 8 and 41 to 16 respectively, an average of -61%), which is markedly better than for other linguistic items (average of -15%). Moreover, this positive evolution was maintained throughout the rest of the year, when the 3 items were not focused on anymore. In general, the other tasks and levels show comparable evolutions.

Second stage

For the first tasks, students are invited to pair up with another student and prepare an individual draft of the same writing task, including a preliminary brainstorming and schematization of the basic ideas (pre task 1). The topic has to be chosen in such a way that a collective stage is possible, e.g. by giving a list of concrete elements that should enter the text. As Jacobs (1998)

and Storch (2001) point out, there are several potential advantages of collaborative learning1: students become more confident and motivated, they learn from each other, etc.:

"Cooperative peer response to writing is seen to be important for exposing students to real readers, for building their confidence as writers and for encouraging them to make active writing decisions rather than slipping into a passive reliance on teacher feedback. Computers decentralise teacher role and redistribute authority thus facilitating more student talk" (Hyland 2002: 129-131)1

Among the same 30 students , 24% found the collaborative stage 'instructive' and 38% 'very instructive'. On the other hand, these percentages decreased considerably (to 14% and 16%) among the members of groups without a truly collaborative stage, who had only been asked

about the potential instructive value of it. In other words, students need a concrete experience of collaborative learning in order to see its usefulness.

Third, fourth and fifth stages

On the other hand, students should be made accountable for their own contribution to the completion of the task, e.g. by having their draft assessed and commented on by group members (pre task 2). Subsequently, these comments are to be included in the language portfolio.

As for the effectiveness of the collaborative stage, all our random checks point towards a considerable decrease of almost all kinds of errors during that stage (particularly for the 'focused type', see the data at stage 1), with a temporal increase when proceeding to the first individual task, but a decrease from the second individual task on (with lasting effects on the final examination). Of course, it is not surprising that students have temporal difficulties to fit into a system of individual responsibility and control.

Once they have completed both pre tasks, students are ready in the fourth stage to write the final version of their task. In the case of a group task the group members are asked to write one group version of the task, taking into account the observations made on each of the prior draft versions (pre task 3). As mentioned before, the students are asked to deal with the individual and collective observations on the previous task, out of which the coach also highlights a limited set of salient items to focus on (pre task 4). They are also advised to make use of some effective error detection systems, namely the automatic spell checker and the read aloud method11 (pre task 5).

In the fifth stage, the text is annotated by the coach using the electronic system and commented (graded, if necessary) on the basis of a comparison with earlier tasks. As mentioned before, the labels contain hyperlinks to a database with examples and theory on the topic. The annotated version is sent back to the author(s), together with a document containing group

statistics, as well as examples of annotated good and bad practices of the group, selected from the set of tasks.

A small survey among the three participating institutions shows that they agree that electronic annotation is much more motivating, because it offers more advantages:

2.   the program allows the coaches to annotate more exhaustively and systematically;
3.   the labels help the students to find a solution;
4.   the system helps the students to reflect more upon their writing;
5.   the individual statistics help the lecturers to appreciate and follow up the writing skills of (groups of) students, as well as to collect the ingredients for the general feedback at the bottom of each task.

On the other hand, electronic labelling appears to be more time-consuming (an average of +20%), but this decreases gradually and all coaches state that it does not counterbalance the advantages of the system.

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