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Teaching of Speaking Skill: Principles and Approaches

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Abstract

Human societies are more extensively concerned with any language as a mode of communication rather than as the expression of a culture. One has to learn how to use language, even one's mother tongue, efficiently, for which leaning is necessary. Language is a tool which is used for communication and to handle any tool needs a certain skill i.e. speaking skill. Speaking skill plays a crucial role for learners to be able to attain the highest levels of success both personally and academically. There was a time when learning English was confined as a skill of literary appreciation. In the changing scenario of globalisation, the paradigm has shifted from 'writing' to 'speaking'. Among the four basic skills i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing (LSRW) of any language, speaking is the highest skill to be learnt and developed to meet the purpose of effective communication.

Keywords: Communicative English, Second Language Learner, Target Language, Regional Language, Paradigm Shift

Introduction

Our most remarkable educationists, socialists, politicians, before independence have been constantly dedicating to enlighten our culture and country by such a means which will bring the light and happiness in the world indicating India is not behind the progress and time. The means is nothing but the English language. We mark this language with Britishers who came here and ruled us and simultaneously taught our ancestors how to read and write; listen and speak in English. They did so for their benefits and today we are learning this language to make ourselves more competitive, more communicative and to be more useful around the world.

Role of English in India

Even after 68 years independence of India, English continues to serve as the 'link language', 'library language' and 'window to the world'. Neither Hindi nor any regional language has risen in status to substitute the influence of the English language in the socio-economic and educational arenas. As Krishnaswamy and Sriraman put it,

Macaulay might have thought that the knowledge of English was essential for civilizing Indians, earlier generations might have thought English was necessary for the shaping of character or development of the aesthetic sense, but the present generation is convinced that English is needed for mobility and social and economic

advancement. It is the language of opportunities because it takes one outside one's own communities to places (within or outside India) where more opportunities are available for professional and economic growth. That is why there is a great demand for English; it has a lot of 'surrender value' and teachers might want to cash in on it. (Krishnaswamy and Sriraman, 1995:50)

The English language has several roles in Indian education as literature, as a second language (L2) and as a library language, and now as a service language. Gokak lists five important reasons for the study of English in India:

1. English will continue to be the language of:
 - a. trade and industry,
 - b. administration at higher levels,
 - c. Competitive examinations.
2. Knowledge of English is imperative for getting access to scientific and technical knowledge.
3. So long as we have not overtaken the West in its intellectual leadership of the world or even matched its own ground, rejected English as a second language (L2) will amount to committing intellectual 'hara-kiri' (suicide).
4. Knowledge of English is necessary for discarding English at a later stage through translating English books and journals into regional languages.
 5. We need to interpret Indian thoughts and culture abroad. Our budding diplomats, thinkers and interpreters in the

international field have to express themselves with elegance and grace in written and spoken English, not merely with formal correctness. (Gokak, 1964: 57-58).

Learners realise that English is necessary but their proficiency levels are very low. As Agnihotri and Khanna (1995:13) rightly point out 'an Indian child gets deeply frustrated when she realises that all the years of studying English have not equipped her to negotiate successfully in ordinary day-to-day encounters that demand the use of English'.

Importance of teaching speaking skill

In learning a second language, the ability to speak in the target language is paramount. It reflects one's knowledge of the language and one's ability to use that language to express ideas, thoughts, feelings and knowledge of the world. The primary purpose of many second language learners is to be able to speak to friends, teachers and visitors in that language. A majority of language learners and educators consider speaking as a yardstick of knowing a language. Nunan (1991) wrote "success is measured in terms of the ability to carry out a conversation in the (target) language (p25)". Moreover, it is clearly observed that learners who do not learn how to speak or do not get an opportunity to speak in classroom may soon get demotivated and lose interest in learning. More importantly, it is the

fact that speaking is fundamental to human communication. In our daily lives, we speak more than we read or write. Rankin (1928 cited in Mohanraj. J. 1995) found that the amount of time devoted to the language art is inversely related to its social utility in human affairs. His study revealed that in course of our daily communication with people 70 percent of our working day is spent in verbal communication. In this communication time, 45 percent is spent in listening, 30 percent in speaking, 16 percent in reading and 9 percent in writing.

In contrast, many teachers of English still spend the majority of class time on teaching grammar, reading, vocabulary, and writing by almost ignoring speaking and listening skills. They do so as the former areas are tested in examination. Hence, speaking becomes the most neglected skill in most of the classrooms. Consequently, learners may have a good knowledge of grammar and a wide vocabulary which they use to pass examinations but they prove very poor when it comes to speaking.

Baker and Westrup list very good educational reasons to practice speaking during a lesson:

- Speaking activities can reinforce the learning of new vocabulary, grammar or functional language;
- Speaking activities give the learners the chance to use the

new language they are learning;

- Speaking activities give more advanced learners the chance to experiment with the language they already know in different situations and more different topics. (Baker and Westrup, 2006: 68)

Approaches to speaking skill Bygate's theory

According to Bygate, in order to achieve a communicative goal through speaking, there are two aspects to be considered - knowledge of the language, and skill in using that knowledge. It is not enough to possess a certain amount of knowledge, but a speaker of the language should be able to use that knowledge in different real situations.

We do not merely know how to assemble sentences in the abstract: we have to produce them and adopt to the circumstances. This means making decisions rapidly, implementing them smoothly, and adjusting our conversation as unexpected problems in our path.

Bygate (1987, 4) notes down, 'Knowledge itself is not enough: knowledge has to be used in action'. Bygate (1987, 7) views the skill as comprising two components: production skill and interaction skill, both of which can be affected by two conditions: firstly, processing conditions, taking into consideration the fact that 'a speech takes place under the pressure of time'; secondly, reciprocity conditions connected with the mutual relationship between the interlocutors.

1. Production skills

The processing conditions (time pressure) in certain ways limit or modify the oral production i.e. the use of production skills. For that reason, speakers are forced to use devices which help them make the oral production possible through 'facilitation', or enable them to change words which they use in order to avoid or replace the difficult ones by means of 'compensation', Bygate says (1987,14).

There are four elementary ways of facilitating that Bygate distinguishes: simplifying structures, ellipsis, formulaic expressions, and using fillers and hesitation devices.

On the other hand, when a speaker needs to alter, correct or change what he or she has said, one needs to make use of compensation devices. These include tools such as substitution, rephrasing, self-correction, reformulating, false starts, repetition and hesitation. Bygate concludes that incorporation of these features, facilitation and compensation, in the teaching-learning process is of utmost importance. To help learners to improve their oral production and compensate for the problems they may face:

All these features [facilitation, compensation] may in fact help learners to speak, and hence help them to learn to speak. If we think of learners by definition as not being fluent in finding the words they need, or in structuring their utterances, then much of what we have been discussing is likely to be just as important in

the foreign-language class room as for native speakers. In addition to help learners to learn to speak, these features may also help learners to sound normal in their use of the foreign language. (Bygate 1987, 20-21).

2. Interaction skills

According to Bygate (1987, 22), both speakers and listeners, besides being good at processing spoken word should be 'good communicators', which means 'good at saying what they want to say in a way which the listener finds understandable'. This means being able to possess interaction skills. Communication of meaning depends on two kinds of skill: routines, and negotiation skills.

To begin with, routines are the typical patterns in which speakers organize what they have to communicate. There are two kinds of routines: information routines, and interaction routines. The information routines include frequently recurring types of information structures involved in, for example, stories, descriptions, comparisons, or instructions. Bygate further divides information routines according to their function into evaluative routines (explanations, predictions, justifications, preferences, decisions), and expository routines (narration, descriptions, instructions).

The interaction process, on the other hand, present the characteristic ways, in which interactions are structured dealing with the logical organization and order of the parts of conversation. Interaction routines can typically be observed in, for example, telephone conversations, interviews, or

conversations at the party. (Bygate 1987, 23-27)

Negotiation skills, on the other hand, solve communication problems and enable the speaker and listener to make them clearly understood. In fact, according to Bygate, negotiation skills get routines through by the management of interaction and negotiation of meaning.

The first aspect of negotiation skills 'management of interaction' Bygate refers to 'the business of agreeing who is going to speak next, and what he or she is going to talk about' (p.27). These are two aspects of management of interaction that Bygate distinguishes: agenda of management and turn-taking. On one hand, participants' choice of the topic, how it is developed, its length, the beginning or the end is controlled by the agenda of management. On the other hand, effective turn-taking requires five abilities: how to signal that one wants to speak, recognize the right moment to get a turn, how to use appropriate turn structure in order to one's turn properly and not to lose it before finishing what one has to say, recognizing other people's signals of their desire to speak, and, finally, knowing how to let someone else have a turn. (Bygate 1987, 35-40)

The second aspect of negotiation skills – 'the skill of communicating ideas clearly and signaling understanding or misunderstanding during a conversation' – is referred to as negotiation of meaning (p.27).

There are two factors that ensure understanding during oral

communications, according to Bygate; they are: 'the level of explicitness' and 'procedures of negotiation'. (Bygate 1987, 29)

The level of explicitness refers to the choice of expressions with regard to interlocutors' knowledge. As regards the procedures of negotiation, i.e. how specific speakers are in what they say, this aspect of negotiation of meaning involves the use of paraphrases, metaphors, or the use of vocabulary varying the degree of precisions with which we communicate. (Bygate 1987, 29-34)

To sum it up, there are two basic aspects that Bygate distinguishes when considering the skill of speaking. These include the knowledge of the language and the skill in using that knowledge. This knowledge of producing the language has to be used in different circumstances as they appear during a conversation by means of the skill.

Harmer's theory

Harmer (2001,271), when discusses the elements of speaking that are necessary for fluent oral production, distinguishes between two aspects – knowledge of 'language features', and the ability to process information on the spot, 'mental/social processing'.

The first aspect of language features, necessary for spoken form involves, according to Harmer, the following features: connected speech, expressive devices, lexis and grammar, and negotiation language. For a clearer view of what the individual features include, here is a brief overview:

connected speech- conveying fluent connected speech including assimilation, elision, linking 'r', contractions and stress patterning and weakened sounds);

- expressive devices- pitch, stress, speed, volume, physical-non-verbal means for conveying meaning (super segmental features);
- lexis and grammar- supplying common lexical phrases for different functions (agreeing, disagreeing, expressing shock, surprise, approval, etc.).

In order to wage a successful language interaction, it is necessary to realize the use of the language features through mental/social processing – with the help of 'the rapid processing skills', as Harmer calls them (p.271).

'Mental/social processing' includes three features – language processing, interacting with others, and on-the-spot information processing. Again, to give a clearer view of what these features include, here is a brief summary:

- language processing- processing the language in the head and putting it into coherent order, which requires the need for comprehensibility and convey of meaning (retrieval of words and phrases from memory, assembling them into syntactically and proportionally appropriate sequences);
- interacting with others- including listening, understanding of how the other participants are feeling, a knowledge of how linguistically to make turns or allow others to do so;

- on-the-spot information processing- i.e. processing the information the listener is told the moment he/she gets it. (Harmer 2001, 271)

From Harmer's point of view the ability to wage oral communication, it is necessary that the participant possesses knowledge of language features, and the ability to process information and language on the spot. Language features involve four areas – connected speech, expressive devices, lexis and grammar, and negotiation language. Suppose the speaker possesses these language features, processing skills, 'mental/social processing', will help him or her to achieve successful communication goal. Processing skills include these features – language processing, interacting with others, and on-the-spot information processing.

Harmer (2007) also writes about 'students and speaking'. According to him getting learners to speak in class can sometimes be very easy. He says learners are often reluctant to speak because they are shy and are not predisposed to express themselves in front of other people, especially when they are being asked to give personal information and opinions. The learners worry about speaking badly and therefore, losing face in front of their classmates. To find out a solution to this, Harmer suggests:

- Preparation: give time to students to brainstorm ideas so that they have something to say when the real discussion happens. Allow students to prepare themselves for the speaking they are going to do.
- The value of repetition: Repetition has many benefits. It allows students to improve on what

they did before. It works even better if students get a chance to analyse what they have already done.

- Big groups, small groups: a major reason for the reluctance of some students to take part in speaking activities is that they find themselves having to talk in front of a big group. A way of counteracting this is by making sure that they get chance to speak and interact in smaller groups too.

- Mandatory participation: it should be mandatory for all the students to be equally engaged in different activities in classrooms. (Harmer, 2007: 345-347)

Harmer (2007) also explains the role of a teacher as that of a prompter, participant and feedback provider.

Both Bygate and Harmer agree that for a speaker, in order to be able to wage a successful fluent oral production, it is necessary to possess knowledge of the language and skill in using that knowledge. Harmer and Bygate approach the speaking from the viewpoint of a skill that involves several elements to be considered during language teaching. Harmer makes a distinction between knowledge

of language features (skills) and the ability to possess information and language on the spot via mental/social processing. According to Bygate, the skill of speaking involves production skills and interaction skills.

While Harmer includes under the term language features connected speech, expressive devices, knowledge of lexis and grammar, and negotiation language; Bygate, on the other hand, distinguishes between two devices that are involved in production skills – facilitation and compensation.

Conclusion

This paper has realised the importance of speaking performance in developing understanding and verbal expression. The learners need a high degree of proficiency in English and interactive competency to become successful in the outside world. One has to understand information, remember, analyse and respond to that information. In order to respond one must organise one's thoughts, present them cohesively and accurately. One must be able to agree, disagree, refuse, persuade or negotiate. One must be able to draw out information and seek clarification.

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