

Understanding the Complex Process of Oral Communication

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Abstract:

This paper focuses on the complex process of learning oral communication in a second language. It deals with various kinds of steps from simple to complex in the path to learn better oral communication. It also talks about the important factors affecting the oral communication.

Keywords: Speaking skill, second language, oral communication, second language learner, speaking.

Introduction:

Teaching English is not an easy task and most of the times it has failed to meet its goal. Learners studying English cannot use English inside and outside the classroom. Their production in the language is limited to writing skills but they face difficulty in daily-life communication. The traditional English classroom helps to develop accuracy rather than fluency.

Oral communication perhaps is one of the most effective and common types of communication channels one uses in everyday life. Oral communication is not confined to the workplace. There are so many situations where an individual get involved in oral communication. All oral communications involve two-way communications.

All the four skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing) are integrated. But only Reading and Writing are emphasized. There is a very little room for the teaching of Oral Communication. The teaching and testing of Oral Communication are both done in a faulty way. It's being taught and tested in the same way as the other skills like Reading and Writing.

One can teach oral communication through language activities. It is an attractive way of teaching oral communication because it gives a setting for developing their listening skill as well as speaking skill and improves their linguistic abilities.

This paper focuses on the complex process of oral communication and tries to find out an easy way to teach and learn oral communication.

1. Oral Communication:

The ever-growing need for good communication skills in English has created a huge demand for English teaching around the world. Millions of people today want to improve their command over English or to ensure that their children achieve a good command of English. There are so many ways to learn English. One can learn English by listening to it like by formal instruction, traveling, studying abroad. Many opportunities are available on the internet to learn English. The increasing demand for learning English is also increasing the demand for good quality of teaching and teaching materials of English. Everybody wants to master the accuracy and fluency in English. Employers, too, insist that their employees should have good English language skills, and fluency in English are a condition for success and advancement in many fields of employment in today's world. The demand for a suitable teaching method is therefore as strong as ever. Teaching a language involves developing the ability to produce correct sentences. The ability to produce sentences is a crucial one in learning a language. Learning a language involves the ability to produce correct sentences and inappropriate context. (Widdowson, 1978: 1-3)

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1.1 The Nature of Spoken Language:

Brown and Yule (1983) begin their discussion on the nature of spoken language by distinguishing between spoken and written language. They point out that for most of its history; language teaching has been concerned with the teaching of written language. This language is characterized by well-formed sentences which are integrated into a highly structured paragraph. Spoken language, on the other hand, consists of short, often fragmentary utterances, in a range of pronunciations. There are often many repetitions and overlap between one speaker and another. Brown and Yule point that the loosely organized syntax, the use of nonspecific words, phrases and the use of fillers such as well, oh, huh make spoken language feel less conceptually dense than other types of language such as expository prose.

Brown and Yule also draw a useful distinction between two basic language functions. These are the transactional function, which is primarily concerned with the transfer of information, and the interactional function, in which the primary purpose of speech is the maintenance of a social relationship.

The interactional nature of spoken language is examined by Bygate (1987). He distinguishes between motor-perceptive skills, which are concerned with correctly using the sounds and structures of the language, and the purpose of the communication. Motor-perceptive skills are developed in the language classroom through activities such as model dialogues, pattern practice, and oral drills and so on. Until recently, it was assumed that the mastery of motor-perceptive skills was all that one needed in order to communicate successfully.

Another basic distinction is considered the development of speaking skills between monologue and dialogue. The ability to give an uninterrupted oral presentation is quite distinct from interpersonal purposes. (David Nunan, 1989: 26-27)

A teacher can apply two approaches to the teaching of speaking skill- a bottom-up approach and a top-down approach. The bottom-up approach suggests that a teacher can start with the smallest units of language, that is individual sounds, and move through the mastery of words and sentences to discourse. The top-down view, on the other hand, suggests that a teacher can start with larger chunks of language, which are embedded in meaningful contexts, and use our knowledge of these contexts to comprehend and use correctly the smaller elements of language. (David Nunan, 1989: 32)

Communication is said to be the most important skill for human survival because one needs it to maintain contact with the world. It is true that one communicates all the time, knowingly or unknowingly. Of course, Oral Communication is a two-way process between the speaker and the receiver, involving the productive skill of speaking and the receptive skill of understanding (listening).

Apart from the speaker and the receiver, there are many elements involved in the process of communication. And all of them are equally important in communication.

- i.** A source
- ii.** Stimuli received from that source
- iii.** A receiver
- iv.** Sensory receptors
- v.** The receivers' interpretation of and responses to the sensations
- vi.** Noise
- vii.** Feedback
- viii.** Situation or context

Communication, generally, is described as a process. But it is a process of processes because it involves many processes for example receiving sensation, interpretation of the received sensation and responding to interpretations. Another important aspect of communication is the nonverbal behaviour. During communication, the gestures, facial expression, and body movements naturally influence both the speaker and the receiver. And nonverbal behaviour does send meaning with the verbal message.

Spoken language production (similar to the processing of written language) involves three main phases of language processing (Levelt, 1989; Poulesse, 1997; Scovel, 1998). The first is a conceptualization of the message content, whether at the content, of a short message or the content of a longer turn or sequence of turns. The second phase involves selecting a proper linguistic formula for the message. The third phase involves the articulation of the message. Normally the third phase works smoothly and can often be difficult to distinguish.

However, there are times when each phase can cause problems. During the conceptualization phase, a speaker can give someone an appropriate message or convey an inappropriate intention. At the formulation phase, the speaker can choose the wrong word or expression to send an appropriate intention. At the articulation phase, a speaker can mispronounce words. The fact that speakers routinely self-correct these different types of error implies that monitoring and self-correction must be further aspects of the production process. Finally speaking involves adjusting one's speech to the interlocutor. This occurs in the patterns and types of turns that speakers use, as well as in their phases. (Michael Byram, 2004:564)

In second language speech, these processes can function differently from first language speech; they are commonly slower and more prone to errors in all phases of the process, therefore requiring more frequent self-correction. Speakers are also commonly unsure of what message to convey or how to convey it, resulting in the use of communication strategies (Kasper & Kallerman, 1997) to improvise what to say and how to say it. Finally, it is communication for second language speakers to have difficulty coping with the demands of managing social interaction. Here, too, in a second language, speakers find themselves having to improvise ways of communicating and of responding to their interlocutors. (Michael Byram, 2004:564)

Bygate (1987:5) points out that speaking involves two different types of basic skills, lower level motor-perceptive skills, such as how to produce phonemes or use irregular verb forms, and the decisions and strategies used in communication such as what to say, how to say it (considering the conditioning factors of the context as is dealt with in pragmatics) and what to do if problems arise to negotiate to mean. (Jane Arnold)

2. Advantages of oral communication over written communication:

- It has the distinct advantage of being quick and prompt. It provides the opportunity to both the transmitter and receiver of the message to respond directly.
- Oral communication promotes close contact and thus promotes the mutual exchange of thoughts, information, understanding, and support.
- Oral communication through direct contact undeniably inculcates a sense of self-importance in the subordinates, which successively acts as an inspiring element.
- It also helps in bringing a responsive and encouraging morale among employees of an organization.
- Oral communication further allows the superior to make a rapid evaluation of subordinates action as well as reaction to any message transmitted. This obviously assists the superior to diminish and prevent differences and revamp plans and policies according to the need of time and conditions.
- It is faster, direct and can have more impact on the receiver. One can seek clarification almost instantly by recognizing the tone of the speaker.

The ability to speak effectively to others in formal and informal settings is commonly regarded as something inborn ('the gift of the gab'), rather than something that can be learned. Some abilities are to the extent inborn, but most of them can be acquired and improved with effort. (Baden Eunson, 2005: 305)

One cannot learn English without practicing. Speaking helps in expressing ideas, thoughts, messages easily and freely. Majority of people wants to learn English only for speaking purpose. Of all the four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), speaking seems intuitively the most important: people who know a language are referred to as 'speakers' of that language (Penny, 1991:120).

Speaking is active, productive and makes use of the aural medium. Communication through speaking is commonly performed face-to-face interaction and occurs as part of a dialogue or the other form of verbal exchange. Speaking is a part of the reciprocal exchange in which both reception and production play a part. Therefore, the skill of speaking involves both receptive and productive participation.

The act of speaking involves not only the production of sounds but also the use of gesture, the movements of the muscles of the face, and indeed the whole body. All these non-vocal accompaniments of speaking as a communicative activity are transmitted through the visual medium.

3. Three important areas of knowledge:

The study of oral communication is a process that helps in understanding between the speaker and the audience.

It can be said communication is a process of understanding and exchanging messages that comprise of a set of behavior that uses in the perception, interpretation, and understanding of the meaning of the verbal and nonverbal behavior of individuals. While speaking one is communicating nonverbally. Body language has as much effect on the audience as the words on the audience- in some cases, it has more. Of course, speaking is not a mechanical process, a one-way flow of data, as if a tape recorder hooked up to a loudspeaker was sending out noises to a row of microphones, hooked up to the other tape recorders. One is communicating to the living organism and is responding to one another all the time (Beden Eunson, 2005: 322).

Many students regard speaking ability as the measure of knowing a language. These students define fluency as the ability to converse with others, much more than the ability to read, write, or understand oral language. They regard speaking as the most important skill they can acquire, and they assess their progress in terms of their accomplishments in spoken communication (Burnkart, 1998).

Generally, students need to recognize that speaking involves three areas of knowledge (Burnkart, 1998):

- **Mechanics** (pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary): Using the right words in the right order with the correct pronunciation
- **Functions** (transaction and interaction): Knowing when clarity of message is essential (transaction/information exchange) and when precise understanding is not required (interaction/relationship building).
- **Social and cultural rules and norms** (turn-taking, rate of speech, length of pauses between speakers, relative roles of participants): Understanding how to take into account who is speaking to whom, in what circumstances, about what, and for what reason. (Minda Mora, 2011)

4. The Components of speaking skills:

Speaking is making use of words in an ordinary voice, uttering words, knowing and being able to use language; expressing one in words; making a speech. While skill is the ability to do something well. Therefore, one can infer that speaking is the ability to make use of words or a language to express oneself in an ordinary voice. In short, the speaking skill is the ability to perform the Linguistic knowledge in actual communication. The ability functions to express our ideas, feelings, thoughts, and need orally.

Speaking is also one of the language arts that are most often used by people all over the world. The art of speaking is very complex. It requires the simultaneous use of the number of abilities which often develop at different rates.

Nowadays, many teachers agree that students should learn to speak the second language by interacting with others. In this case, students should master several speaking parts', such as comprehension, pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and fluency. In brief, English teachers should be creative in developing their teaching and learning process to create a good atmosphere, improve the students speaking skill, give attention to the speaking components, and make English lesson more exciting.

For this reason, the English teacher should apply the appropriate method and technique of teaching speaking. The method that is generally used by the teacher is the Communicative approach. In the communicative approach, a language is primarily a tool of communication. Thus, learning a language means learning to perform communicative speech acts with it.

In general, speech acts are acts of communication. To communicate is to express a certain attitude, and the type of speech act is performed corresponds to the type of attitude being expressed. For example, a statement expresses a belief, a request expresses a desire, and an apology expresses regret. As an act of communication, a speech act succeeds if the audience identifies, in accordance with the speaker's intention. Learners of different languages face difficulty in comprehending the intended message conveyed by a speech act or delivering a speech act using proper language. Classroom instruction on speech act can help learners to improve their performance of speech acts and thus their intentions with native speakers. There are at least five components of speaking skill concerned with comprehension, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency:

i. Comprehension:

Language teachers often experience difficulty in trying to improve their students' listening skills, especially in a 'Foreign Language' context since learners are not exposed to the language outside the classroom.

Listening comprehension is a key initial step in communication. The better a student can understand what is being said, the better will be their ability to communicate. In addition, they will be able to notice the characteristics of the target language which will improve their language development in all four key skill areas.

Students may feel a great deal of pride when they are able to comprehend something in the target language. This can be a great motivating factor in continuing to learn the language, and teachers should do whatever possible to promote this sense of accomplishment. Thus, teachers need to construct learning activities which will improve learners' oral comprehension (listening skills) and motivate them, as well.

ii. Grammar:

Without grammar, it is generally possible to communicate orally, notably through dialogue, since oral communication and in particular dialogue are bilateral processes, in which the receiver - the person being spoken to - can request clarification and repetition until the meaning of a message is clear. Grammar is very useful for oral communication, as it ensures that speakers and listeners use the same code; but a poor command of grammar will not normally prevent two people from communicating relatively effectively.

iii. Vocabulary:

Words play an important role in communication. The right word in the right place is very necessary to convey the appropriate meaning/message. One cannot communicate effectively or express his ideas both in oral and written form if they do not have plenty of vocabulary. Without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed.

iv. Pronunciation:

Pronunciation is the way for students' to produce clear language when they speak. It deals with the phonological process that refers to the part of a grammar made up of the elements and principles. 'Intelligible pronunciation is an essential component of communication competence' teachers should include pronunciation in their courses and expect students to do well in them. Without adequate pronunciation skills, the learner's ability to communicate is severely limited. Students can be expected to do well in the pronunciation of English if the pronunciation class is taken out of isolation and becomes an 'integral part of [the] oral communication' class.

v. Fluency:

Oral fluency is a measure of how well and how easily one can communicate one's ideas clearly and accurately in speech. Fluency can be defined as the ability to speak fluently and accurately. Fluency in speaking is the aim of many language learners. Signs of fluency include a reasonably fast speed of speaking and only a small number of pauses and "ums" or "errs". These signs show that the speaker does not have to spend a lot of time searching for the language items needed to express the message.

Conclusion

It is found that oral communication in the second language is not an easy process. It goes through various steps from simple to complex. Although acquiring good communication skills is not difficult or impossible and can be learned by practice inside and outside the classroom. The best way to learn it by starting with listening skill. It is believed that the more input there be more outcome.

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