

Strategies of Improving Competence in English Speaking Concepts for Learners and Analyse Aspects which Effect Their Communication Style

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Abstract

The significance of enhancing speaking abilities when teaching English is covered in the article. The writers take into account both objective and subjective factors that affect how well a speaker learns to communicate. The essay also examines different writers' perspectives on strategies and tactics for improving speaking abilities. A few challenges with speaking that come up in English language classes are taken into consideration. The writers firmly believe that while teaching English, the conversational abilities of both the instructor and the pupils should come first. The author developed his own opinion on the primary obstacles to speaking skill development and determined the factors that contribute to them while reviewing ideas.

Keywords: development of speaking skills, English, competence, linguistics, speech communication, communicative interaction, dialogic communication, monologue communication, means of communication.

A practicing oncologist probably communicates via almost all of the media. They engage in meetings, communicate by phone, send emails, have one-on-one conversations, and issue written and vocal commands. Additionally, they interact with a wide range of people, including office workers, referring physicians, patients, and their families.

However, are you speaking clearly? How do you respond to opposing or difficult viewpoints? Do you find it difficult to disagree with others, especially those in positions of power? Do you believe that meetings are a time waster? How does your communication style affect the others in your group?

Be an Active Listener The starting place for effective communication is effective listening. "Active listening is listening with all of one's senses," says physician communication expert Kenneth H. Cohn, MD, MBA, FACS. "It's listening with one's eyes as well as one's ears. Only 8% of communication is related to content—the rest pertains to body language and tone of voice." A practicing surgeon as well as a consultant, Cohn is the author of *Better Communication for Better Care* and *Collaborate for Success!* Cohn suggests creating a setting in which "listening can be accommodating." For example, don't have a conversation when one person is standing and one person is sitting—make sure your eyes are at the same level. Eliminate physical barriers, such as a desk, between you and the other party. Acknowledge the

speaker with your own body language: lean forward slightly and maintain eye contact. Avoid crossing your arms, which conveys a guarded stance and may suggest arrogance, dislike, or disagreement.

Be Attuned to Body Language—Your Own and Others Many nonverbal cues such as laughing, gasping, shoulder shrugging, and scowling have meanings that are well understood in our culture. But the meaning of some of these other more subtle behaviors may not be as well known.¹

Although speaking has been included in the educational plan for English teaching in colleges and universities in the past years, the percentage of time devoted to activities in which students can communicate with each other in English remains small in the whole class. Speaking is the skill that the students will be judged upon most in real-life situation. It is an important part of everyday interaction and most often the first impression of a person is based on his/her ability to speak fluently and comprehensibly. So, as teachers, we have a responsibility to prepare the students as much as possible to be able to speak English in the real world outside the classroom and the testing room. Speaking is a skill, just like swimming, driving a car, or playing ping-pong. Too often, in the traditional classroom, the learning of English has been relegated to linguistic knowledge only, e.g. knowledge of vocabulary and grammar rules, with little or no attention paid to practicing language skills. How can we tell the difference between knowledge and skill? Bygate (1987:4) points out “one fundamental difference is that both can be understood and memorized, but only a skill can be imitated and practiced.” One of the characteristics of speech in everyday life is that speech is spontaneous. That is, in most situations, people do not plan ahead of time what they are going to say. Only in more formal situations, such as when a person has been asked to give a speech, do people plan and organize their speech. Similarly, the method of giving priority to listening and speaking has been advocated, yet it has little effect. Both teachers and students think it neither realistic nor necessary to teach or learn speaking. It seems to them that their main objective is reading not speaking. They may also think speaking is not a skill worth cultivating because Chinese Vol. 2, No. 3 English Language Teaching 12 students have little chance to communicate with native speakers. And more readily they will admit that whether the students can go to university or a college mainly depends on the reading and writing, not speaking, for almost all the important examinations do not consist of oral tests. Pattern drills are often arranged in each unit of textbooks, most of which are not authentic but mechanical. They do not reflect the real purpose of communicative ideas. Many textbooks are crammed with a lot of grammar, reading materials and too many boring vocabulary exercises. In addition, many teachers themselves are not fluent in speaking English, nor do they know how to teach it in a big class. It is really difficult for a teacher to get everybody to have the chance to practise speaking English. Let me take “dialogue teaching” as an example. Most teachers of English follow the traditional way: learn the vocabulary, read the dialogue, translate it into Chinese, have difficult points explained, memorize the dialogue. As a result, an overwhelming majority of students cannot make themselves understood, let alone talk with the native speakers after years of learning English.

3. Theories of Teaching Oral English

A. Functions of Spoken Language Brown & Yule (1983a: 1-3; 1983b: 11-16) mention that language can be seen as having two functions: transferring information (transactional function) and establishing/maintaining social relationships (interactional function). Interactional spoken language is characterised by shifts of topic and short turns. The accuracy and clarity of information is not of primary importance, and facts/views are not normally questioned or challenged. In transactional spoken language longer turns are the norm and there is a clear topic. Since the effective transference of information is the goal, interlocutors are actively engaged in the negotiation of meaning. Brown & Yule summarise the above stating that whereas interactional language is “listener oriented”, transactional language is “message oriented”.

B. The Possibility and Necessity of Teaching Oral English

In my opinion, those who think the major objective of the students is reading not speaking have ignored some obvious pedagogical facts: Firstly, generally speaking, people have the notion that learning English has something to do with oral English. When one says some students are good at English, people will naturally think he or she can speak English well. Secondly, oral English

can be very useful for the development of reading and writing skills. As Rivers points out: when we read and write, we call upon what we know of the language orally. (Rivers, 1968, 20). He goes on to say that there must be a connection between reading and speaking. If the students are reading, then they are using their oral English, too. If a student has poor English, his reading ability may also be poor. Similarly, Rivers (1968) argues that writing involves oral ability as well. Although many teachers with poor oral ability may have some difficulty in teaching English, however, it is possible for them to do so. They may teach oral English by an indirect method. They may use a recorder to provide an authentic accent and some authentic materials like dialogue for students to imitate. They can also make good use of class time for active participation by all their students. So the teachers can make up for their deficiency in oral ability by encouraging the students' participation with prepared lessons, highly organized activities and effective techniques.

C. The Importance of Using Integrated Skills in Teaching Oral English As Harmer suggests: one skill cannot be performed without another. It is impossible to speak in a conversation.

Hand movements. Our hands are our most expressive body parts, conveying even more than our faces. In a conversation, moving your hand behind your head usually reflects negative thoughts, feelings, and moods. It may be a sign of uncertainty, conflict, disagreement, frustration, anger, or dislike. Leaning back and clasping both hands behind the neck is often a sign of dominance.

Blank face. Though theoretically expressionless, a blank face sends a strong do not disturb message and is a subtle sign to others to keep a distance. Moreover, many faces have naturally down turned lips and creases of frown lines, making an otherwise blank face appear angry or disapproving.

Smiling. Although a smile may show happiness, it is subject to conscious control. In the United States and other societies, for example, we are taught to smile whether or not we actually feel happy, such as in giving a courteous greeting.

Tilting the head back. Lifting the chin and looking down the nose are used throughout the world as nonverbal signs of superiority, arrogance, and disdain.

Parting the lips. Suddenly parting one's lips signals mild surprise, uncertainty, or unvoiced disagreement. Lip compression. Pressing the lips together into a thin line may signal the onset of anger, dislike, grief, sadness, or uncertainty.

What Not to Do When Listening: • Interrupt • Allow distractions • Judge • Criticize • Argue • Use cliché'd phrases such as "I know exactly how you feel," "It's not that bad," or "You'll feel better tomorrow" • Get pulled into responding emotionally • Change the subject or move in a new direction • Rehearse in your head what you plan to say next • Give advice

Communication Is a Process Effective communication requires paying attention to an entire process, not just the content of the message. When you are the messenger in this process, you should consider potential barriers at several stages that can keep your intended audience from receiving your message. Be aware of how your own attitudes, emotions, knowledge, and credibility with the receiver might impede or alter whether and how your message is received. Be aware of your own body language when speaking. Consider the attitudes and knowledge of your intended audience as well. Diversity in age, sex, and ethnicity or race adds to the communication challenges, as do different training backgrounds. Individuals from different cultures may assign very different meanings to facial expressions, use of space, and, especially, gestures. For example, in some Asian cultures women learn that it is disrespectful to look people in the eye and so they tend to have downcast eyes during a conversation. But in the United States, this body language could be misinterpreted as a lack of interest or a lack of attention.

Students seem to learn better when they are engaged on activities more than one skill. (1991,130) Therefore, when we teach oral English, we should get the students involved in an oral communicative activity to do some writing or reading or listening in order to accomplish the task which the activity asks them to perform.

D. Integrating Skills in Activities Byrne argues that:

"we are not of course suggesting that single skill activities are not effective: there will in fact be many occasions when we shall ask the students just to talk or read or write, because this is appropriate." He then emphasizes, "equally, however, we should be looking for opportunities to knit skills together, because this is what happens in real life." (Byrne, 1976, 131). As we all know, the main aim of foreign language teaching is to help students achieve some kinds of communicative skills in the foreign language. Therefore, the teacher should organize classroom activities, create a free atmosphere within the class or group and give the students hints to use the activities in class to integrate their skills. The following activities may be well recommended to show how to integrate skills by getting the students to work in pairs or groups:

a. Communication Activities

- Describing and drawing.
- Finding the difference between two partially identical pictures. Rixon & Byrne (1979) and Harmer (1983) refer to the above two activities as "communication games".
- Discussing ideas/views/opinions - notably students are engaged in activities in which they have to:
 - Choose from a list of (unalterable) given statements the ones they most agree/disagree with.
 - Choose from a list of given statements the ones they agree with and modify the remaining ones according to their opinion.
 - Rank a number of statements according to their beliefs/opinions.
 - Agree on and formulate statements expressing their views on a given subject and then discuss them in different groups (having to reformulate the ones they disagree on according to the second group's opinion).

The activities mentioned are selected/adopted in order to provide the students with a context in which they can re-integrate the strategies/skills dealt with in each lesson, and to lead students to "become used to dealing with the kinds of unpredictable problems which reciprocal speech brings into (these) interaction situations" (notably informal discussion and informal planning/decision making). Bygate terms these activities as "two-way" and argues that they "generate more talk and more use of negotiation procedures". Such activities are "functional communication activities" ("processing information" and "sharing and processing information"). The stimulus for communication comes from the need to discuss and evaluate (these) facts. Learners must agree, justify and persuade in order to reach a common decision. Some experts refer to such activities as "interaction activities" in which personal meaning can be conveyed.

b. Questionnaires

Questionnaires are a simple way of giving the students meaningful question and answer practice. For use they should relate to a topic of some kinds, e.g. like and dislike about food, activities, abilities etc. the answer required should be either yes or no, or one of the frequency adverbs (never, hardly ever, sometimes, quite often, etc.) If students are going to write their own questionnaires, it is helpful to elicit some ideas from the class first and perhaps write these on the board. Then ask the students to make up their own questionnaires, using some of these items. They can work in pairs for this, thus providing an additional source of talk. They may interview more than one student. They can also be asked to report what they have learned to another student or to the whole class. When students of pairs or groups collaborate on the production of the questionnaire, they will talk and write. At the interviewing stage, they integrate talking and writing as well. In comparing the results, they have reading and talking.

c. Quizzes

Quizzes are similar to questionnaires but the answers are usually factual, which often involve knowledge. To turn quiz writing into an oral practice activity, you must ask the students to work in pairs to produce the quiz. This will involve talking and writing. Each pair should then ask another pair of students to answer the quiz orally, which involves some talking, listening and writing as well. When the quiz is passed back to the students who write it, they will get reading and talking integrated.

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In short, from those types of activities suggested above, we may notice that those activities can introduce a "talk" component into the normally silent activities of reading and writing. We may also find how purposefully the skills are used in the way in which the students talk, read or write "in order to get something done" (Byrne, 1976, 132).

Choose the right medium for the message you want to communicate. E-mail or phone call? Personal visit? Group discussion at a meeting? Notes in the margin or a typed review? Sometimes more than one medium is appropriate, such as when you give the patient written material to reinforce what you have said, or when you follow-up a telephone conversation with

an e-mail beginning, “As we discussed....” For one-on-one communication, the setting and timing can be critical to communicating effectively. Is a chat in the corridor OK, or should this be a closed-door discussion? In your office or over lunch? Consider the mindset and milieu of the communication receiver. Defer giving complex information on someone’s first day back from vacation or if you are aware of situations that may be anxiety-producing for that individual. Similarly, when calling someone on the phone, ask initially if this is a convenient time to talk. Offer to set a specific time to call back later.

This is basically a question of learning style and is very important. Involved learners will always learn more in the long run than those who are bored. It’s also important to remember that, if you are the teacher, imposing your learning preference on the class can, at times, deter effective learning. Understanding the desired language proficiency goal is probably one of the most important aspects of learning well. If the learner desires to communicate basic needs by travelling, focusing on the correct use of the third conditional is beside the point. On the other hand, if students strive to higher levels of grammatical understanding, teachers need to accept that role-play games might not always be the best activity. English is not only the most useful language in the world, it also one of the easiest to learn and use. Because it has simple alphabet, easy plurals, short words etc.

IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING SPOKEN ENGLISH In today's modern world, learning spoken English has many advantages. English is fast becoming the international language of many fields, including politics, business and education. Not only is English used between native speakers and non-native speakers, but it is also used increasingly as a common language in interactions between non-native speakers. When you are asked to make a lecture in English, you can put it to good use. When you need to make a foreign friend, you just try a little in other ways except for English.

Stated goals and team values. An effective team is one in which everyone works toward a common goal. This goal should be clearly articulated. In patient care, of course, the goal is the best patient outcomes. But a team approach is also highly effective in reaching other goals in a physician practice, such as decreasing patient waiting times, recruiting patients for a clinical trial, or developing a community education program. Every member of the team must be committed to the team’s goal and objectives. Effective teams have explicit and appropriate norms, such as when meetings will be held and keeping information confidential. Keep in mind that it takes time for teams to mature and develop a climate of trust and mutual respect. Groups do not progress from forming to performing without going through a storming phase in which team members negotiate assumptions and expectations for behavior.

Clear individual expectations. All the team members must be clear about what is expected of them individually and accept their responsibility for achieving the goal. They should also understand the roles of others. Some expectations may relate to their regular job duties; others may be one-time assignments specific to the team goal. Leadership of the team may rotate on the basis of expertise. Members must have resources available to accomplish their tasks, including time, education and equipment needed to reach the goal. Openly discuss what is required to get the job done and find solutions together as a team.

Make Meetings Work for Your Team. A good meeting is one in which team goals are introduced or reinforced and solutions are generated. The first rule—meet in person only if it’s the best format to accomplish what you want. You don’t need a meeting just to report information. Here are tips for facilitating an effective meeting: Don’t meet just because it’s scheduled. If there are no issues to discuss, don’t hold the meeting just because it’s Tuesday and that’s when you always meet. Use an agenda. Circulate a timed agenda beforehand and append useful background information. Participants should know what to expect. If it’s a short meeting or quickly called, put the agenda on a flipchart or board before people arrive. Structure input. Promote the team culture by making different individuals responsible for specific agenda items. Follow-up on previous task assignments as the first agenda item to hold group members accountable for the team’s success. Limit the meeting time. Use the timed agenda to stay on

track. If the discussion goes off on a tangent, bring the group back to the objective of the topic at hand. If it becomes clear that a topic needs more time, delineate the issues and the involved parties and schedule a separate meeting. Facilitate discussion. Be sure everyone's ideas are heard and that no one dominates the discussion. If two people seem to talk only to each other and not to the group as a whole, invite others to comment. If only two individuals need to pursue a topic, suggest that they continue to work on that topic outside the meeting. Set ground rules up front. Keep meetings constructive, not a gripe session. Do not issue reprimands, and make it clear that the meeting is to be positive and intended for updates, analysis, problem solving, and decision making. Create an environment in which disagreement and offering alternative perspectives are acceptable. When individuals do offer opposing opinions, facilitate open discussion that focuses on issues and not personalities. Circulate a meeting summary before the next meeting. Formal minutes are appropriate for some meetings. But in the very least, a brief summary of actions should be prepared. Include decisions reached and assignments made, with deadlines for follow-up at the next meeting.

As with all written communication, the most important aspect to consider is the audience. Consider the knowledge and biases of the person/people you are e-mailing. Where will the reader be when he or she receives your message? How important is your message to the reader? The purpose of writing is to engage the reader. You want the reader to do something, to know something, or to feel something. Write it in a way that helps the reader. Put the most important information—the purpose of the email—in the first paragraph. Except among friends who know you well, stay away from sarcasm in e-mail messages. The receiver does not have the benefit of your tone of voice and body language to help interpret your communication. When delivering comments that are even slightly critical, it's better to communicate in person or in a phone call than to do so in an e-mail. Something you wrote with good intentions and an open mind or even with humor can be interpreted as nitpicky, negative, and destructive, and can be forwarded to others. Because we use e-mail for its speed, it's easy to get in the habit of dashing off a message and hitting the "send" button. We count on the automatic spell-check (and you should have it turned on as your default option) to catch your errors.

How to speak more accurately From a learner's point of view, the problem with English is that it is too rich in constructions and vocabulary, i.e.: There are numerous words and constructions which have similar meanings. Mistakes occur when learners remember half of one construction and half of another; they end up with a hotchpotch which is at best "incorrect but understandable" and at worst "nonsense". Choose English for use or recognition purposes only English people do not use every phrase and word in the English language. They have favorite phrases which they use time and time again. I recommend that when you are taught more than one way of saying the same thing, choose only one version to learn accurately for future use. Then store the other one vaguely in your mind for future recognition purposes only. At the same time you should avoid pitfalls. Native English speakers modify their language according to their situation, just as you would do in your own language. Unless you have constant exposure to English over many years, you cannot expect to do this. The trick therefore is to choose the best English for universal speaking purposes and to recognize other version of English, so you are not at disadvantages. By doing so, you will avoid misunderstandings and you will be able to judge the quality of another person's English. Although a knowledge of the following is essential for understanding English (and possibly for some exams), I recommend you avoid them as much as possible when speaking in normal situation. Avoiding grammatical errors when speaking. Many students experience difficulties with the use of the present perfect, because the use of it does not correspond with a similar-looking tense in their own language. If it helps you, it is possible to avoid the present perfect altogether by using SIMPLE PAST + SPECIFIC TIME

How do you communicate successfully when you only have basic language? It can be done! Don't rely on vocabulary and sentence structure alone. After all, what you probably want most is to be understood, not to dazzle anybody you're your command of grammar. Here are a few tips to get you communicating right off. Relax! No one is judging you except you! Look at each communication experience as an adventure. If you are relaxed, you will pick up on small details,

body language, etc. That you might miss if you are writing your hands and sweating. Context is your friend. What is the subject, setting and situation? Use these to make intelligent guesses about what is being said. A lot of language can be eliminated when you consider context. You will feel much more comfortable and receptive if you remember that you don't have the entire Spanish language to consider at once. Memorize clarifying questions. After you have proudly stumbled through a request for tickets at the train station, the clerk rattles off a long sentence about Vichy and Tuesday. You may be a little unclear or have only understood a portion of what was said. Rather than staring blankly, have a list of memorized clarification questions such as, "Did you say _____?" and "Would you repeat that more slowly?" that you deftly use to move the communication forward. By employing these questions, you build on what you can say and understand instead of starting over with each utterance. Besides improving your communication in your school language, you improve fluently and feel confident and in charge. Employ body language. Use gestures and facial expressions to accompany your words. Don't be afraid to be a little exaggerated. The person you are speaking to wants to understand, and will be carefully observing and listening. As you become more proficient in your second language, you will rely more on oral exchange and less on body language, but there is no shame in supporting the language you can use when you are a beginner. The alternative is to wait until you are an intermediate speaker to have meaningful interactions, and this is far too long to wait.

Imagine a sound in your mind before you say it. Try to visualize the positioning of your mouth and face. Think about how you are going to make the sound. Listen to and try to imitate the speaker. In addition to listening for specific sounds, pay attention to pauses, the intonation of the instructor's voice and patterns of emphasis.

This can be just as important as the pronunciation of sounds. The English language has many different dialects, and words can be pronounced differently. It is important, however, that you pronounce words clearly to ensure effective communication. Finally, you must practice what you are learning! Remember that you are teaching your mouth a new way to move. You are building muscles that you do not use in your own language. It is like going to the gym and exercising your body. Don't forget to exercise your mouth a little bit each day.

We need more time to improve our spoken English and we should practice more. Spoken English plays an important role in English learning. And a good level of communicative competence is the final aim of English learning. How to cultivate and improve the learners' competence of spoken English has become the focal point. By using these methods, the learner can achieve his ideal goals.

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