



## DEVELOPING SPEAKING & VOCABULARY SKILLS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE

DEEPTI SINGHAL<sup>1</sup>, Dr. SHUCHI AGRAWAL<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Dept. of English, AMITY University, Noida

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, AIESR, AMITY University, Noida



### ABSTRACT

The contemporary times demand a learner to be communicatively competent in speaking and use of good vocabulary. The various reasons given in response to the question 'what goes wrong when our students speak English' can be as follows:

- Students are tongue tied and shy and they refuse to open their mouth.
- They lack confidence.
- They are afraid of speaking, fear of going wrong and committing mistakes.
- They grope for words.
- They are unable to distinguish between **Sea** and **She**.
- They perform well in the classroom, in predictable contexts, but are unable to tackle unpredicted situations outside the classroom.

This list of problems in speaking English is not exhaustive, you could add to this list. But such a diagnosis is necessary to decide on what kind of treatment is needed in order to develop our learners' spoken skills. In a multilingual society like India, two or more language plans may become mixed, leading to code switching, code mixing, transfer or so called interference errors e.g. while giving directions to the stranger, the learners may say 'maidan' or 'pucca road' or 'kachha road' etc. as teachers, we have to make our learners aware of the contexts where such expressions are acceptable and where they are not. The teaching of speaking and vocabulary skills demands application of well thought strategies both inside and outside a classroom.

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In *Garrett's Model* (1982), our cognitive process cause speech to pass through four levels of representation before it is actually produced as sound:

- Message level/conceptual planning process, at which ideas and general meanings are represented.
- Functional level plans, here broad syntactic frames are assembled and word meanings are selected.
- Positional level, here sentence structure and word forms (with endings) are defined.

d) Production level, here actual articulation of words is produced.

Now we can define Speaking – Speaking is effective communication, when all aspects of a language are integrated into a single utterance. There are two approaches to the development of oral communication skills.

- Learning language as a skill, in the classroom.
- Developing spoken skills through exposure and use.

**Language as a skill involves three aspects:**

1. Learners have to become aware of the key features of the target performance so that they can create the mental plans.
2. They have to practice converting these plans into actual behavior.
3. Learners must be capable of expressing an idea by selecting particular structures or vocabulary.

According to Rivers (1983), the first two aspects make up the skill-getting stage and the third is the skill using stage of language learning.

#### **Skill getting–**

Cognition: perception & abstraction

Production: articulation & construction

#### **Skill using–**

*Interaction:* reception & expression- motivation to communicate

As we see, motivation to communicate must be aroused. In our classrooms, motivation will need to be fostered by the intrinsic attraction of the task proposed and the student's interest in developing it. Here we have to accept that some people are temperamentally incapable of interacting with a babble of words, to force them to do so, gives birth to pseudo communication and into mouthing learned phrases. The quality of the interaction will be judged by the ability to –

- Receive and express meaning.
- Understand and convey intentions.
- Perform acceptably in situations and in relations with others.

The conditions necessary for successful development of natural spoken skills –

- a) Exposure to language input: our learners in or outside the classroom are to be exposed to English through clearer pronunciation, slower pace, simpler structures and common vocabulary
- b) Interaction with other people is crucial
- c) Motivation is the important factor: the urge to use the language for communication has to be aroused, e.g. a child brought up in a multilingual cosmopolitan setting will pick up a new language faster than a child brought up in a monolingual setting.
- d) Exposure to
  - Interaction with other people

– The need to communicate Comprehensible language

- e) Positive attitude to English and the learning experience
- f) Internal processing of input
- g) Development of internal grammar
- h) Communication (Littlewood, 1992)

As teachers we need to be more observant and see that we give enough practice in listening and provide opportunities where the learners have to be sensitive to what others are saying. We need to focus on both the aspects.

- Comprehension (is A able to follow what B is saying?)
- Comprehensibility (is A comprehensible to B?)

Techniques in developing oral communication skills:

- a) Question and answer technique.
- b) Lecture mode: besides content of your lecture, draw your students' attention to the presentation skills while lecturing.
- c) Group mode.

#### **Solutions suggested for problems in speaking:**

##### **For Attitudinal Problems**

- Overcome the inhibition or fear.
- Overcome nervousness.
- Think in English.
- Concentrate on whatever one is listening to e.g. a group discussion, news item on the radio or T.V.
- Have confidence in yourself.

##### **For Sounds, Stress and Intonation Problems**

- Use audio tapes in recording your own speech.
- Show patience, it is a long term process.
- Exploit every situation to speak in English.

##### **For problems concerning Vocabulary and Grammar**

- Exposure through reading and listening.
- Grammatical awareness needs to be developed through reading and writing.
- Listening to as many programmes as possible on the radio or T.V.

##### **Information Gap Activities**

An information gap is created when one person has the information and the other is left in the dark. Such activities can be thought of at the beginning of a session when your students get to know each other. Involve yourself by telling something about yourself.

### Opinion Gap Activities

This is based on the principle of the value clarification approach which originated in the USA. This may be a very motivating experience, because the student feel that they are communicating about something meaningful, as well as being taken seriously as people; on the other hand, a situation in which the participants have to reveal some of their more private thoughts may appear threatening. Thus practice such exercises in a supportive and relaxed atmosphere.

### Role Play

This is a way of bringing situations from real life into the classroom. We ask students to use their imagination. There are many suitable roles for school/college classes such as: teacher, bank officers, clerks at a post office, passersby, co passengers in a train journey, enquiry counter and a station or airport etc.

Goals of teaching spoken English cannot differ essentially from goals of teaching meaningful speech, which is governed by three sets of rules:

- a) Rules specific to spoken English: they pertain to the bounds of English, word and sentence stress, rhythm and intonation.
- b) General speech rules, concerning the features, qualities and contexts of speech.
- c) Rules of discourse concerning the semantics and structure or rhetoric of speech. This evoked meaning is both substantial and interpersonal. Language is essentially discourse and its markers.

Spoken English courses, which currently have little or no place in the formal mode of education; have an important place in the non formal stream. In teaching spoken English in India, we must accommodate regional variation and the goal should be shifted from articulation competence to discourse competence. We must use the learner's mother tongue in teaching English, and revert to our heritage and tradition to grammar as the supreme instrument of language learning.

### Vocabulary

The teaching of four skills of English language viz. listening, speaking, reading and writing faces a common hindrance, lack of strong vocabulary. So it is very important, that our learners have good

vocabulary. Let us try to ponder over the techniques, which can be used for developing vocabulary. Before that, let us discuss the types of vocabulary. This is of three types:

*Ad-hoc vocabulary*: those words which may be important for a given piece of text, but are unlikely to have any utility outside the text.

*Passive vocabulary* (recognition vocabulary): words which are likely to be encountered frequently, in speech or writing, though a learner may never use them in his/her own speech or writing.

*Active vocabulary*: words which a student will require for his/her own use, in speech or writing.

I would like to focus more attention on passive vocabulary because a learner should recognize the words, on his/her encounter with them. A teacher can use her/ his introduction, to present in advance the words which he/she judges to be important for passive vocabulary. For example, he/she can plan an anecdote for use in leading up to the text, and can weave the words, he wants to present into the same anecdote. The teacher may write them up on the blackboard, for the effect of highlighting the difficult words. Use the words naturally in a meaningful context, not necessarily giving meaning equivalents. For some words equivalents can be given even in the mother tongue.

### Use of mother tongue

No doubt use of mother tongue in a class of English language is perfectly legitimate but with great care. Indiscriminate use of MT interferes with the practice of certain skills in the target language. The prime consideration for the teacher must be to provide as much practice in the use of the target language as possible.

### Techniques for teaching vocabulary

- a) Using objects:
  - i) labels
  - ii) magazine pictures
  - iii) Props-objects that can be shown in the class.
  - iv) Slides for conveying the cultural difference of ordinary words e.g. house in a village, in a town, in the hills, in England.
- b) Using gestures and symbols:
  - i) Descriptive adjective-tall, thin, happy.
  - ii) Prepositions of place-on, in, into.

- iii) Action verbs-go, sing, throw.
- iv) Symbols.
- c) Using known vocabulary:
  - i) Synonyms-probe-investigate.
  - ii) Antonyms-progress-decline.
  - iii) In sentence contexts- e.g. Ravana was a cruel man. Ashoka was a kind king.
  - iv) Using word categories:
    - i) Stationery-pen, pencil.
    - ii) Cosmetics-cream, powder.
    - iii) Utensils-spoon, ladle, kettle.
- d) Definition and paraphrase:
  - i) E.g. parasite-animal or plant living on or in another.
- d) Using MT- judicious use of MT for giving equivalents.
- e) Verbal context-e.g. expensive-glass bangles are cheap but gold bangles are expensive.
- f) Familiarity/experience.  
e.g. Oboe: a learner has never heard this word before, but he/she can make out these two sentences.
  - He used to be the oboe player in the town (game).
  - He never liked to play the clarinet after he started playing the Obey. (Musical instrument).
- i) Semantic grouping: retention of vocabulary is equally important. This is done through semantic grouping. Words are easily learnt if they are organized into semantic groups e.g. shore, ocean, island etc.

#### Vocabulary expansion

- I. Wide reading is recommended as the best way of increasing one's vocabulary.
- II. Direct instruction- lists of words are studied deliberately for word power exercise in Reader's digest.
- III. Incidental instruction, a combination of wide reading and direct instruction.

Lastly, vocabulary becomes permanent only if it is transferred to writing, speaking and thinking vocabularies. Learners should be encouraged in this direction.

#### Role of a Teacher

In learning/teaching various skills of a language, the role of a teacher is paramount. So the fundamental questions, who is a good teacher? Does experience of number of years makes one a good teacher? It is often thought that a teacher, old in teaching experience is a good teacher. Well, this is not really true. There is nothing like experience, rather it should be quality of experience. Experience should help us to grow, not to keep us crystallized in a particular pattern of behavior. For some people experience only means years, regardless of outcomes. The criteria for a good teacher can be broadly classified under two heads:

#### Personal Attributes

- personality traits(confident, calm, witty, sense of humor)
- attitudes ( patient, encouraging, tolerant, can take criticism, tries to learn)

#### Professional Expertise

- Professional skills (classroom techniques and skills)
- Knowledge (of subject and of the psychology of learning).

#### Conclusion

English language has glamour and offers jobs, so there is a rush. Job seekers are in a hurry to get a degree somehow and there is no time or need to read the original texts or get ennobled. Bazaar notes have replaced the original texts and the only aim is to get through the examination. The departments of English, along with B.Ed. have become money-spinners for the universities. There is no quality control and universities have become graduate manufacturing factories, graduates without any competence either in literature or language. Isn't it ironical, the scholars of M.Phil./PhD head toward spoken English institutes, where tutors are mere graduates? It needs serious introspection.

The English' tsunami' has come with an economic incentive backed by modern technology. The demand of good communication skills in English is increasing day by day. English has become a sought after commodity. We teachers of English should strive to raise the communicative competence of our learners of English language. Teaching of English has to be viewed as mastering of

language skills (speaking & vocabulary) and not a portion to be covered.

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