

EFFECTIVE MEANS OF ACTIVATING SPEAKING ACTIVITIES IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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This article is dedicated to estimating the effectiveness of using speaking activities in teaching English as a foreign language. The author gives detailed characteristics of various speaking activation means and provides a classification table of such activities. The wide gamut of language functions, such as greetings, apologizing, congratulating, etc., is being focused on while conducting English speaking activities.

Keywords: communicative language teaching, interactive method of teaching, communicative competence, teaching English, role-play, role, speaking, ESF, English as a foreign language

There are three main reasons for getting students to speak in the classroom. Firstly, speaking activities provide rehearsal opportunities – chances to practise real-life speaking in the safety of the classroom. Secondly, speaking tasks in which students try to use any or all of the language they know provide feedback for both teacher and students. Everyone can see how well they are doing: both how successful they are, and also what language problems they are experiencing. And finally, the more students have opportunities to activate the various elements of language they have stored in their brains, the more automatic their use of these elements become [1, p.96]. As a result, students gradually become autonomous language users. This means that they will be able to use words and phrases fluently without very much conscious thought.

Good speaking activities can and should be extremely engaging for the students. If they are all participating fully – and if the teacher has set up the activity properly and can then give sympathetic and useful feedback – they will get tremendous satisfaction from it.

We need to be clear that the kinds of speaking activities we are looking at here are not the same as controlled language practice, where, for example, students say a lot of sentences using a particular piece of grammar or a particular function. That kind of speaking is part of study. The kind of speaking we are talking about here almost always involves the activate element in the ESA trilogy (engage-study-activate). In other words, the students are using any and all of the language at their command to achieve some kind of purpose which is not purely linguistic. They are practising what Scott Thornbury, in his book *How to Teach Speaking*, calls speaking-as-skill, where there is a task to complete and speaking is the way to complete it. In the same way that ‘writing-for-writing’ is designed to help the student get better at the skill of writing, so the activities in this chapter are designed to foster better speaking, rather than having students speak only to focus on (and practise) specific language constructions. As with any sequence, however, we may use what happens in a speaking activity as a focus for future study, especially where the speaking activity throws up some language problems that subsequently need fixing [2, p.67].

Scott Thornbury suggests that the teaching of speaking depends on there being a classroom culture of speaking, and that classrooms need to become ‘talking classrooms’ In other words, students will be much more confident speakers (and their speaking abilities will improve) if this kind of speaking activation is a regular feature of lessons [2, p. 69].

In the following three examples, we are going to look at very different speaking activities. All the activities satisfy the three reasons for using speaking tasks which we mentioned above. As with all other skills, what starts as a speaking activity may very well lead on to writing – or the speaking activity itself may develop from a reading text, or after listening to an audio track.

In the following activity, students have to discuss criteria before reaching a final decision [1, p. 154]. They also have to be able to give reasons for their decision. It's called photographic competition and recommended for upper intermediate to advanced students.

The activity begins when students, working in groups, are told that they are going to be the judges of a photographic competition in which all the images are of men. Before they see the four finalists, they have to decide the criteria they are going to use to make their choice. Each group should come up with five criteria. While they are discussing this, we can circulate, listening in on the groups' discussions, helping them out of any difficulties and feeding in words and phrases such as 'contrast' and 'make a strong impression', if this is necessary. We will also make a note of any language problems we may want to study later in remedial exercises.

The students are then shown the four finalists for the competition. In their groups, they have to choose the winning photograph. But they cannot do this just on the basis of which one they like best. They have to use the criteria they have previously agreed. Once again, we can go round the groups helping out, cajoling or sometimes correcting where this is appropriate.

Finally, the groups have to report back on their choices and say exactly why they have chosen them – which criteria made them choose one above the others.

The following speaking activity is called role-play and recommended for intermediate to upper intermediate students. Many teachers ask students to become involved in simulations and role-plays. In simulations, students act as if they were in a real-life situation. We can ask them to simulate a check-in encounter at an airport, for example, or a job interview, or a presentation to a conference. Role-plays simulate the real world in the same kind of way, but the students are given particular roles – they are told who they are and often what they think about a certain subject. They have to speak and act from their new character's point of view. The following role-play sets up a dramatic situation and then gives the participants role-cards which tell them how they feel and what they want to achieve [1, p. 159].

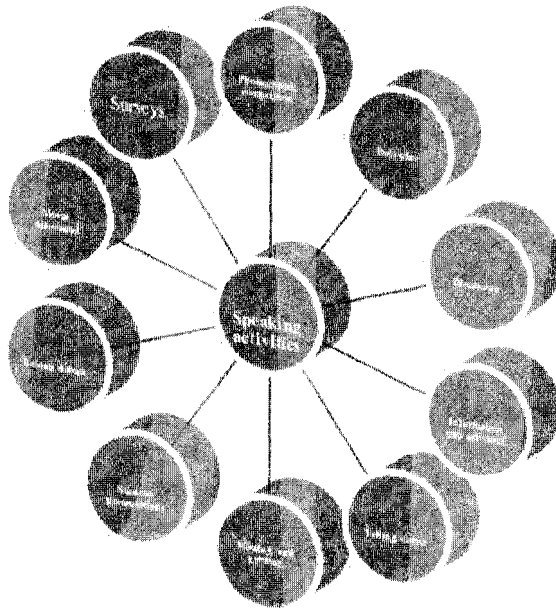
In their groups, students discuss the role they are going to play. What kind of questions will they ask if they are police officers? What will they say if they are lawyers (e.g. 'You don't have to answer that question')?, etc. They discuss what the other people in the situation are likely to do or say. While they are doing this, the teacher goes round the class clearing up any doubts the students might have and giving them language they think they might need. This pre-stage is vital for getting students in the mood for the activity.

Students are now put in new groups of suspect, two police officers, lawyer and parent, and the role-play gets going. The teacher goes from group to group, helping out and noting down any language that is worth commenting on later. When the activity is finished, the teacher tells the class what he or she witnessed and works on any persistent mistakes that occurred during the role-play.

A variation of this kind of detective activity is the game Alibi. The teacher invents a crime – probably related to grammar or vocabulary the students have been learning – and, say, three students are sent out of the classroom to concoct an alibi about what they were doing when the crime was committed [3, p. 47].

There are differing views about whether students gain more or less benefit from simulating reality as themselves or, conversely, playing the role of someone else in the same situation. When students simulate reality as themselves, they get a chance for real-life rehearsal, seeing how they themselves would cope (linguistically) in such a situation. Giving students a role, on the other hand, allows them to 'hide behind' the character they are playing, and this can sometimes allow them to express themselves more freely than they would if they were voicing their own opinions or feelings. When students suddenly want to talk about something in a lesson and discussion occurs spontaneously, the results are often highly gratifying [4, p. 134]. Imagine that during a discussion phase a student suddenly says something really inter-

esting, something which could provoke fascinating conversation or suggest a completely un-



planned (but appropriate and enjoyable) activity. In such a situation – when this kind of magic moment suddenly presents itself – we would be foolish to plough on with our plan regardless [3, p. 87].

The following activities are also helpful in getting students to practise ‘speaking-as-a-skill’ [1, p. 184]. Although they are not level-specific, the last four will be more successful with higher-level students (upper intermediate plus), whereas the first two, in particular, are highly appropriate at lower levels but can also be used satisfactorily with more advanced classes (see Figure).

Surveys: surveys can be used to get students interviewing each other. For example, they can design a questionnaire about people’s sleeping habits with questions like ‘How many hours do you normally sleep?’, ‘Have you ever walked in your sleep or talked in your sleep?’, ‘Have you ever fallen out of bed?’, etc. They then go round the class asking each other their questions [8, p. 291].

Student presentations: individual students give a talk on a given topic or person. In order for this to work for the individual (and for the rest of the class), time must be given for the student to gather information and structure it accordingly. We may want to offer models to help individuals to do this. The students listening to presentations must be given some kind of listening tasks too – including, perhaps, giving feedback [1, p. 189].

Figure

Balloon debate: a group of students are in the basket of a balloon which is losing air. Only one person can stay in the balloon and survive (the others have to jump out). Individual students representing famous characters (Napoleon, Gandhi, Cleopatra, etc) or professions (teacher, doctor, lawyer, etc) have to argue why they should be allowed to survive [1, p. 192].

Moral dilemmas: students are presented with a ‘moral dilemma’ and asked to come to a decision about how to resolve it. For example, they are told that a student has been caught cheating in an important exam. They are then given the student’s (far-from-ideal) circumstances, and offered five possible courses of action – from exposing the student publicly to ignoring the incident – which they have to choose between [8, p. 301].

These effective teaching techniques are designed to animate the teaching and learning atmosphere, arouse the interests of learners, and make the language acquisition impressive. It is really a worthwhile learning experience for both the students and the teacher. Not only can students have more opportunities to "act" and "interact" with their peers trying to use the English language, but also students' English speaking, listening, and understanding will improve. Students learn to use the language in a more realistic, more practical way. These activities are indeed useful teaching techniques which should be experimented and applied by ESL/EFL teachers more often in the ESL/EFL classrooms.

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О РАЗВИТИИ НАВЫКОВ ПРОФЕССИОНАЛЬНОЙ КОММУНИКАЦИИ ИНЖЕНЕРА

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Растущая озабоченность качеством инженерного образования стимулирует усилия преподавателей технических вузов, направленные на то, чтобы исправить текущее положение дел. Проектирование целостной системы специальной профессиональной подготовки, соответствующей современным мировым и национальным тенденциям развития высшего технического образования, должно учитывать многообразие требований рынка труда.

Ключевые слова: коммуникативные навыки, инженерная практика, словарный запас, коммуникативный обмен, инновационный подход.

Современное общество характеризуется поистине революционными изменениями, связанными с процессами глобализации и информатизации всех сфер жизни и деятельности человека. «Глобальная паутина», охватывающая практически каждый уголок мира, способствует тому, что географические границы между странами и континентами стираются, увеличивая виртуальную и реальную мобильность специалистов, инициируя выполнение совместных межнациональных, а значит, и межкультурных проектов. Кроме того, мировое научное и техническое сообщество объединяет усилия в решении вопросов по предотвращению надвигающейся глобальной экологической катастрофы. В противовес известным традициям сайентификации и технологизации образования назрела острая необходимость гуманизации образования в целом и инженерного образования в частности. Возникает потребность подготовки высококвалифицированных