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TEACHING TO SPEAK – STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE THE SPOKEN ENGLISH OF PROSPECTIVE TEACHERS



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Abstract: To teach the skill of speaking is to teach the learners to produce English sounds correctly using vocabulary in grammatically correct sentences coherently and fluently. Learners are to use English confidentially. It is imperative for teachers to use methods and techniques to kindle interaction in the second language classroom. Speaking has a crucial place in second language learning and teaching. Task based language teaching will encourage students to communicate in English fluently and effectively. Teachers must provide maximum opportunity to students to speak the target language through a rich environment that contains collaborative work, authentic materials and tasks, and shared knowledge. This is an experimental study and the investigator has devised few spoken English strategies to enhance the spoken English of prospective teachers. The aim of this paper is to highlight the importance of using spoken English strategies effectively to enhance the spoken English of prospective teachers.

Keywords: Strategies, speaking, fluency, brainstorming, storytelling, role play.

INTRODUCTION

English has become a mandatory requirement in today's world. It is generally recognized that language is a "vehicle for the expression or exchanging of thoughts, concepts, knowledge, and information as well as the fixing and transmission of experience and knowledge" (Bussmann, 1996: 253). According to P. H. Mathews, language is "the phenomenon of vocal and written communication among human beings generally." (Mathews, 1997:198). Officially English has a status of assistant language, but in fact it is the most important language of India. After Hindi it is the most commonly spoken language in India and probably the most read and written language in India. Indians who know English will always try to show that they know English. English symbolizes in Indians minds, better education, better culture and higher intellect. Indians who know English often mingle it with Indian languages in their conversations. It is also usual among Indians to abruptly move to speak fluent English in the middle of their conversations. English also serves as the communicator among Indians who speak different language. English is very important in legal, financial, educational and business in India. Hence one can very easily understand the need of English for communication.

GENESIS OF THE PROBLEM

The three basic conditions of language learning are exposure to the language, interaction with other people and the need to communicate. These conditions are facilitated or hindered by the learner's attitudes towards learning English

as a second language. Lack of speaking competence deprives the opportunities for the college students to take up interviews for employment. Many students dream of speaking fluent English. Though they score well in their theory exams and showcase themselves as meritorious students yet they struggle hard to face the interviews which are generally conducted in English where they check the communication ability of the candidates. English is essential to prosper in this competitive world. As the investigator is a teacher trainer she feels that it is the need of the hour to develop the spoken English of the trainees. In the near future the trainees are to become young teachers and they have to develop the spoken English of their students. Hence the investigator has experimented has experimented few strategies she has devised that can be applied in the classroom to develop the spoken English ability of the trainees.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Carol Griffiths (2006) motivation has been shown to be a major factor in successful language learning. Language aptitude is described as a stable characteristic of the individual which accounts for speed in language learning. Personality is another learner characteristic which is usually considered relatively stable. Chidambaram, K. (2004) identified that the medium of instruction has direct impact on the achievement of second language skills. Bui Thi Minh Hong (2006) stated that using Computer Mediated Communication in teaching pronunciation and conversation are put forward to improve

students' oral skill. Chen-Ying Li (2010) has brought out the importance of the story-based approach that creates an entertaining environment which stimulates a higher level of intrinsic motivation and engagement from second language pupils.

Banumathi A (2004) made a study on Needs Analysis and Advanced Professional Spoken English Course for Engineering Students. Her objectives are to study the needs and demands of the employer, to study the importance of need analysis in an ESP curriculum and the necessity of revising the syllabus and to introduce the Advanced Spoken English Course focusing on placement. A questionnaire was administered to user agencies that came for campus interview to the department of placement and training. The findings are that the user agencies rank communicative ability as number one criterion. Students should be enabled to express themselves logically. Positive attitude and team spirit should be improved and students should be helped to acquire oral communication skills and strategies to participate in group discussions and interviews successfully.

Hannah Sanala Mohan (2007) made a classroom study to investigate the use of drama devices in an ESL classroom at IITM. The findings of the study tell that the use of drama devices and techniques can yield many positive results such as lowering of inhibitions, fostering confidence, good self-projection and facilitating enhanced participation. Vandana Sharma (2006) says that listening and speaking in English encompasses both formal and informal communication whether it is face to face communication, telephone conversation or taking interviews. All these communications require self confidence and high degree of command over English language in speaking, reading, writing and understanding.

NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Teachers' main concern is to train their pupils to express themselves by means of spoken language. With this main objective English is being introduced at tertiary level. But, in spite of many years of learning, students fail to communicate fluently in English. Deficient teaching-learning procedure is the reason for this failure and the investigator wishes to make an in depth study of the strategies that can develop oral English skills among the prospective teachers who has English as one of their optional subjects. In spite of learning English for 12 years in schools and two years in colleges trainees find it difficult to communicate in English. They feel shy to speak in English as they are not given opportunities in speaking in English. The investigator felt the need of improving their English and gave one hour training everyday to the experimental group everyday using few strategies. This helped them to develop their spoken English. This study will identify the factors that smooth the progress of spoken English among prospective teachers and the remedial measures that are to be provided to improve the skill of speaking among the trainees.

OBJECTIVES

- To measure the ability of the trainees in speaking in English.
- To apply few strategies to develop the speaking skill of the trainees

METHODOLOGY

An observation schedule was constructed to measure the speaking ability of the trainees. The assessment was done on interaction, pronunciation, fluency, coherence, vocabulary and grammar. Observation was made on 70 B.Ed trainees from Annammal College of Education for Women, Thoothukudi who have English as their Optional II paper. Remedial measures were taken using few techniques to enhance the speaking skill in English to the experimental group which consisted of 35 graduate trainees. The investigator devised three strategies and trained the prospective teachers to enhance their spoken English skills. Strategies to Develop Speaking

Brainstorming
Storytelling
Role Play

Brainstorming

Brainstorming is an activity which is used to generate ideas in small groups. The purpose is to generate as many ideas as possible within a specified time-period. (Richards, 1990:112). Because of nervousness in a second/foreign language or fear of teacher correction, many students are afraid of using language unless they are sure that it is totally correct. But brainstorming can help students to learn to take risks. McCoy (1976) makes a strong argument in favour of learning problem-solving skills in order to reduce anxiety. There are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers in brainstorming and no danger of teacher correction. By carrying out a simple brainstorming warm-up, students can obtain a sense of competence and feel more confident in making intelligent guesses. A topic will be given and the students are encouraged to generate ideas and it is felt that even disadvantaged learners communicate worthy ideas. Actually in the spoken English classroom brainstorming was used as a warm-up activity.

Storytelling

Language and gestures are used in a colourful way to create imaginary scenes in a sequence in storytelling. Studies have shown that story telling has made significant contributions to speaking and listening in building language skills. Fox and Wang and Tzeng, (2004) demonstrate the confidence with which children can structure narrative orally and experiment with language through storytelling. In story telling there is more learner autonomy which is an effective approach in language learning. Here the learner takes charge of his/her learning. A clipping on storytelling prepared by Regional Institute of English, Bangalore was shown to the students for five minutes and followed by that the teacher narrated the first two lines of the story and using their own imagination students created the story. All the students participated interestingly in the story telling session. Through Story telling they learnt vocabulary, fluency and whenever they went wrong in pronunciation the teacher corrected their pronunciation. They learnt to construct grammatically correct sentences.

Role Play

"Role-plays are very important in the Communicative Approach because they give students an opportunity to practice communicating in different social contexts and in different social roles" (p. 137, Larsen-Freeman). Stern (1983) suggested "role playing helps the individual to become more flexible" and "develop a sense of mastery in many situations". (p. 213) She suggested "through role play, L2 learners can experience many kinds of situations in which they will use the language; and as they develop a sense of mastery in them, they should be able to apply the language more easily to new situations." (p.213) In using role play activities materials can be taken from any books such as story books, comics, cartoon strips and textbooks. Here in this training the teacher has created authentic materials like street markets, family situations etc., and narrated them to the students and they worked in groups to interact and enact. Role plays improve interaction, pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary and grammar.

Findings and Discussion

The pre test results have shown that the prospective teachers are poor in pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary and grammar. In the pretest, out of the 70 samples 62 samples scored 0-3 marks in their oral skills and the rest scored 4 – 7 marks. The result of the pre test shows a poor attainment in the skill of speaking and the investigator observed that the trainees hesitate to communicate in English. They are afraid of going wrong in their interaction and they have difficulty in pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary and grammar. There is confusion of tenses, mistake in subject verb agreement and use of pronouns. Since they are poor in vocabulary they fumble for words while speaking.

The experimental group which contains 35 prospective teachers has undergone training for 60 hours on three strategies and the investigator has seen vast difference in the post test scores at the end of the 60 hours training. 30 of them scored 6 – 8 marks and 5 of them scored 9 marks. This shows that if trained properly students have the capacity to develop their speaking skill in the second language.

Most of the prospective teachers in the experimental group is from vernacular medium and they are used in reading and writing in English and not listening and speaking. They memorized few summaries, and meanings and passed their public and university examinations in English paper. Listening in English is absent as their teachers even in the English classes just explain the text in the regional language. Speaking in English is completely absent. Though opportunities are given in the college to speak in English they remain silent. There is loss of confidence and motivation in using English in everyday communication. They are afraid to speak in English with the fear of committing mistakes and humiliated by others. In the spoken English training class they were given confidence to come out of their cocoon. The spoken English trainer found out that all the students love to speak in the prestigious language. She gave confidence to them that out of continuous practice they can also speak simple, correct English.

The strategies that are designed are simple to

motivate them and they were also made to watch the Speak English CDs prepared by RIE, Bangalore. This gave them confidence that they can also speak in correct English. It is observed that all of them know the importance of English. When they work in groups they discuss their problems and try to overcome them. The brainstorming sessions helped the investigator to identify the ability and creativity of the prospective teachers.

The role of the teacher in a second language classroom is demanding. The teacher is the driving force behind students' interaction. Teachers have to create a climate in which students feel at ease to communicate in the target language. The class serves as a comfortable and stimulating environment where teacher-student and student-student interaction happens spontaneously and naturally. It is the teacher who puts the wind in the sail of interaction and promotes and nourishes it constantly. To allow students to interact spontaneously in English, teachers must set up situations and scenarios that call for speaking in English fluently.

Teachers can use varied interesting strategies to develop the skill of speaking among the students. The present study proves the use of speaking strategies in developing oral skills. Teaching and learning of English language occur as a result of the interaction among the teacher, learners and instructional media materials. The nature of this interaction determines the achievement in language skills.

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