DEVELOPING SPEAKING FLUENCY THROUGH TASK-BASED LEARNING: INTERACTIVE ACTIVITIES FOR B1-LEVEL EFL LEARNERS

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Abstract

Many learners can read and write English but feel nervous when they have to speak. This article looks at how interactive activities, such as pair work, role-play, information-gap tasks and discussions, can help B1 learners speak more. The article is based on reading, so it does not report test results of my own. I use Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as the main approach, and a task-based lesson plan to organise the activities. The sources show that learners speak more when they interact with each other, and that the teacher's job is to prepare, monitor and give feedback. At the end I suggest a simple lesson plan and name questions that still need classroom research.

Keywords: speaking skills, interactive activities, B1 level, communicative language teaching, pair work

1. Introduction

Speaking is often the skill that students find hardest. In many classes the teacher talks most of the time, and students only repeat sentences. Kayi (2006) says that for many years speaking was taught as repetition of drills or memorisation of dialogues, but today the goal is to improve students' communicative skills. This is why I chose this topic.

The question of this article is: how can interactive activities help B1-level English learners develop their speaking skills, according to the literature? I did not carry out an experiment. I describe what scholars say, and then I give my own suggestion, which is an idea and not a proven result.

The learners I have in mind are school or university students who have studied English for some years and are now at B1, the intermediate level. According to the CEFR descriptors (Council of Europe, 2020), a B1 learner can enter a conversation on familiar topics without preparation and can briefly give reasons for opinions and plans. Pauses to plan and correct are still very visible, especially in longer talk. So these learners already have some language, but they hesitate, and in an EFL class they have few chances to speak English outside the lesson. This is why they need many speaking opportunities inside the lesson. I treat this as an idea to check in each class, not as a fixed label.

To help them, I use Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) with interactive pair and group activities. Richards (2006, p. 4) explains that in CLT, language learning is seen as the result of interaction, cooperative creation of meaning and negotiation of meaning, and the teacher's role changes to facilitator and monitor. Kayi (2006) agrees that students learn to speak by interacting, and that CLT and collaborative learning serve this aim best. To organise each lesson, I use the task-based sequence described by Richards (2006, pp. 28–29): a pre-task, the task itself, planning, and a report.

2. What the Literature Says

2.1. Fluency needs real interaction

Speaking is not only grammar and words. Nunan (2003, cited in Kayi, 2006) says that teaching speaking means teaching learners to produce English sounds and sound patterns, use stress and intonation, choose suitable words for the situation, organise thoughts in a logical order, and speak with few unnatural pauses. Richards (2006, p. 12) defines fluency as natural language use when a speaker takes part in meaningful interaction and keeps the communication going, even with limits in language knowledge. He says fluency develops when learners must negotiate meaning, use communication strategies and repair misunderstandings (Richards, 2006, p. 12). This is important for B1 learners, who already know some language but hesitate.

For this reason, the speaking aims I choose for B1 learners are practical and match the B1 descriptors (Council of Europe, 2020): starting and keeping a conversation going on familiar topics, giving reasons for an opinion, telling a short story about an experience, and checking understanding by repeating part of what the other person said.

2.2. Pair and group work

Richards (2006, p. 17) lists several benefits that are claimed for pair and group work: learners hear language from other group members, they produce more language than in teacher-fronted activities, their motivation is likely to increase, and they have a chance to develop fluency. These are claims, not proof. He also notes that pair and group activities give learners greater opportunities to use the language (Richards, 2006, p. 14).

2.3. Types of interactive activities

Kayi (2006) describes many speaking activities, such as discussions, role-play, simulations, information gap, brainstorming, storytelling, interviews, story completion, reporting, picture narrating and "find the difference". Two points are useful for a B1 class. First, in a discussion the teacher should set the purpose before it begins and keep groups small (4 or 5 learners), because quiet students can avoid speaking in large groups (Kayi, 2006). Second, in role-play and simulation, Harmer (1984, cited in Kayi, 2006) suggests that shy students become more confident, because they play a role and do not speak for themselves.

Richards (2006, p. 16) explains the idea of the information gap: in real life, people usually speak to get information that they do not have. In class, one learner has information that the partner does not have, and they must ask and answer to finish the task. For example, in the "find the differences" activity, two students look at similar pictures and ask questions to find the differences without showing their pictures (Richards, 2006, p. 16).

Furthermore, integrating elements of Situational Language Teaching (***SLT***) can greatly enhance B1 learners' speaking proficiency. As noted in language teaching methodology, SLT focuses on teaching structural patterns and vocabulary through real-life

or simulated situations. By placing students in realistic communicative scenarios—such as ordering food at a restaurant, asking for directions, or handling workplace dialogues—learners can apply grammar and vocabulary in meaningful contexts, bridging the gap between controlled classroom practice and spontaneous natural conversation.

2.4. A study with school students

Oradee (2012) studied Grade 11 students and three communicative activities: discussion, problem-solving and role-playing. In the reported results, students' speaking scores after the activities were significantly higher than before, and their attitude to the lessons was good (Oradee, 2012, pp. 533–535). This supports the idea, but I must be careful. The study had specific students in a specific place, and they were not B1 learners in my class.

The Role of Situational Language Teaching

In addition to Communicative Language Teaching, Situational Language Teaching (SLT) provides a structured framework for developing oral fluency. SLT emphasizes that language learning is most effective when new structures and vocabulary are introduced and practiced within meaningful, simulated real-life situations. For B1 learners who often struggle with hesitation and structuring thoughts on the spot, situational tasks offer a controlled yet communicative environment where they can practice functional language use before interacting in entirely open-ended discussions.

3**. A Suggested Lesson Plan**

The following plan is my own idea, based on Richards (2006, pp. 28–29) and Kayi (2006). It follows the CLT task-based sequence for B1 learners and was not tested in this article.

1. Pre-task (5–7 min). The teacher introduces a familiar topic (for example, "a trip I remember") with pictures and gives a few useful words in advance. Kayi (2006) also advises giving the vocabulary beforehand.

2. Task (10–12 min). Learners work in pairs or groups of 4. For example, they do an information-gap activity or a short role-play. The teacher walks around and listens without correcting every mistake (Kayi, 2006; Richards, 2006, p. 28).

3. Planning (5 min). Learners prepare to report to the class what they said.

4. Report (5–7 min). Some pairs tell the class their results. The teacher comments on the content, and later gives feedback on common language problems. Richards (2006, p. 14) explains that fluency work needs extra attention before and after the task, so that accuracy is not forgotten.

Interactive activities do not solve every problem. First, fluency work can develop fluency at the expense of accuracy, so the teacher must plan feedback (Richards, 2006, pp. 13–14). Second, large classes make it harder to monitor many groups. Third, the sources I used are general, and none of them tested this exact B1 plan. So I do not claim that this plan will improve learners' speaking.

Questions for future classroom research: How long should each activity be? Which activity (role-play, information gap or discussion) works best for B1 learners? How should the teacher give feedback without stopping the speaker?

Conclusion

The literature suggests that B1 learners need many chances to speak with each other, in tasks that have a purpose, and that the teacher should prepare the task, monitor it and give feedback afterwards. CLT with a task-based lesson sequence makes this possible. The lesson plan in this article is only a starting point, and it should be tested in real classrooms.

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