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口语教学与研究

Practical English Language Teaching:
Speaking

Kathleen M. Bailey

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郑 重 声 明

出 版 前 言

根据教育部大学英语教学改革的精神,《大学英语课程要求》提出要培养"学生的英语综合应用能力,特别是听说能力",其中包含教学理念和教学模式的创新。要达到大学英语教学改革的预期效果,教师是关键因素。大学英语教学改革的实践者是在教学第一线的广大英语教师。目前我国大学英语教学师资短缺,加强大学英语师资培训是摆在我们面前的一项刻不容缓的任务。为此,高等教育出版社特引进出版《高教社外语教师教育与发展丛书——体验英语教学系列》。

这是一套开放性的大型系列丛书,收入多位世界级语言教学专家的作品,具有权威性;内容涉及外语教学方法、测试、评估等诸多方面。"丛书"不仅系统介绍外语教学相关理论,更结合作者多年的教学经验,提供大量实践案例,能够开拓我国外语教师教学及科研视野,培养教师在教学问题上独立思考、研究和创新的能力,成为我国外语教师教育与发展的助力器。

《高教社外语教师教育与发展丛书——体验英语教学系列》充分体现了体验式的教育理念,配合教育部大学英语教学改革推荐教材《大学体验英语》立体化系列教材及学习系统而出版,目的在于介绍新的教学理念,推进教学理念向教学实践的转化。

近期我社还将出版供师范类学生、英语教师和英语研究者使用的英语语言教学丛书。我们由衷地希望这些教材的出版,能对我国高等院校的英语教学有所促进和帮助。

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高等教育出版社

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Dedication

For Les

Softly

    Playfully

        Eagerly

            Asking,

                Kindly

                    Inquiring

                        Now

                        Gone

Acknowledgements

Foreword

Vision and purpose

The *Practical English Language Teaching* series is designed for practicing teachers, or teachers in preparation who may or may not have formal training in second and foreign language teaching methodology. The core volume in this series, *Practical English Language Teaching*, provides an overall introduction to key aspects of language teaching methodology in an accessible yet not trivial way. The purpose of this book is to explore the teaching of speaking in greater depth than was possible in the core volume, while at the same time remaining both comprehensive and accessible.

Features

- A clear orientation to the teaching of speaking, including an historical overview and an introduction to major approaches and analyses that have informed pedagogy.
- A detailed treatment of the teaching of speaking at beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels, providing practical techniques for teaching and assessing speaking and pronunciation at each of these levels.
- Reflection questions inviting readers to think about critical issues in language teaching and Action tasks requiring readers to apply the ideas, principles, and techniques to the teaching of speaking and pronunciation in their own situation.
- A great deal of practical illustration from a wide range of textbooks and extracts from authentic classroom interaction.
- A "key issues" chapter that provides suggestions for dealing with large, multi-level classes, introducing technology, and catering to different learning styles and strategies.
- Suggestions for books, articles, and Websites offering resources for additional up-to-date information.
- An expansive glossary that offers short and straightforward definitions of core language teaching terms.

Audience

As with the overview volume, this book is designed for both experienced and novice teachers. It should also be of value to those who are about to join the profession. It will update the experienced teacher on current theoretical and practical approaches to teaching speaking. The novice teacher will find step-by-step guidance on the practice of language teaching.

Overview

Chapter 1
The first chapter provides an orientation and historical overview of the teaching of speaking. The chapter also introduces key principles for teaching and assessing speaking.

Chapters 2–4
Chapters 2–4 introduce you to the teaching of speaking to beginning, intermediate, and advanced students respectively. Each chapter follows the format below.

Chapter 5
The final chapter explores key issues including the teaching of speaking and pronunciation in large, multi-level classes, working with learners who have different learning styles and strategies, responding to learners' errors, and using technology.

Chapter structure for Chapters 2–4

Goals: Summarizes what you should know and be able to do after having read the chapter and completed the Reflection and Action tasks.

Introduction: Gives an overview of the chapter.

Syllabus design issues: Outlines the speaking issues that are relevant at different levels, and the concerns that inform syllabus design.

Principles for teaching speaking: Appropriate principles for teaching speaking at different levels are introduced, discussed, and illustrated.

Tasks and materials: Describes and illustrates techniques and exercises for teaching speaking and pronunciation at each level.

Assessing speaking: Introduces practical techniques for assessing learners in the classroom.

Conclusion: Reviews the goals of the chapter and how they were discussed within the chapter.

Further readings: Lists articles or books to enhance your knowledge about teaching speaking and pronunciation.

Helpful Web sites: Provides ideas for Web resources for teaching speaking and pronunciation.

Table of Contents

Chapter **One**

What is speaking?

Goals

✔ **provide** your own definitions of *speaking* and *pronunciation*.

✔ **describe** different approaches to teaching speaking.

✔ **understand** the relationship between the various components of spoken language.

✔ **explain** what *speech acts* are and give examples of various speech acts.

✔ **describe** how speaking is taught in three prominent language teaching methods used over the past several years.

✔ **identify** communication strategies that language learners can use when they encounter difficulties.

✔ **distinguish** between direct, indirect, and semi-direct tests of speaking.

✔ **explain** the differences between objective, analytic, and holistic scoring of speaking tests.

✔ **appreciate** the important role of pronunciation in helping learners increase their comprehensibility when they speak English.

1. Introduction

This chapter will explore the fundamental concept of speaking and its components, including the important subtopic of pronunciation. In the first part of the chapter, we will answer the question, "What is speaking?" Next, in Section 3, we will examine different approaches to teaching speaking. Then, in Section 4, we will study a model of the various components that must come into play when we are speaking in a new language. In the process we will review some differences between spoken and written language. In Section 5, we will look at some important issues about teaching speaking, including a quick overview of the main teaching methods that have been used over the years. Finally, we will consider the vexing question of how learners' speaking skills should be assessed.

2. What is speaking?

In this section, we will consider what we mean by "speaking." In language teaching we often talk about the four language skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) in terms of their direction and modality. Language generated by the learners (in either speech or writing) is considered **productive**, and language directed at the learners (in reading or listening) is known as **receptive** language (Savignon, 1991). **Modality** refers to the medium of the language (whether it is aural/oral or written). Thus, **speaking** is the productive, oral skill.

Speaking consists of producing systematic verbal utterances to convey meaning. (**Utterances** are simply things people say.) Speaking is "an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing and receiving and processing information" (Florez, 1999, p. 1). It is "often spontaneous, open-ended, and evolving" (ibid., p. 1), but it is not completely unpredictable.

Speaking is such a fundamental human behavior that we don't stop to analyze it unless there is something noticeable about it. For example, if a person is experiencing a speech pathology (if a person stutters or if his speech is impaired due to a stroke or a head injury), we may realize that the speech is atypical. Likewise, if someone is a particularly effective or lucid speaker, we may notice that her speech is atypical in a noteworthy sense. What we fail to notice on a daily basis, however, are the myriad physical, mental, psychological, social, and cultural factors that must all work together when we speak. It is even a more impressive feat when we hear someone speaking effectively in a second or foreign language.

3. Approaches to speaking

For many years, language teaching was seen as helping learners develop **linguistic competence**—that is, helping students master the sounds, words, and grammar patterns of English. The idea was that by studying the bits and pieces of a language, students could eventually put them all together and communicate.

In the 1970s and 1980s, however, our understanding of language learning experienced a significant shift in focus. This shift was influenced by international developments in linguistics, curricula, and pedagogy, as well as by sociolinguistic research (primarily in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the U.S.). In addition, the numbers of refugees and immigrants resettling in English-speaking countries made linguists and language teachers realize that developing linguistic competence alone was not enough to be able to speak English well and get along in society.

In the mid-1970s the notion of linguistic competence came to be viewed as a component of the broader idea of **communicative competence** "the ability of language learners to interact with other speakers, to make meaning, as distinct from their ability to perform on discrete-point tests of grammatical knowledge" (Savignon, 1991, p. 264). Being communicatively competent "requires an understanding of sociocultural contexts of language use" (ibid., p. 267).

There are several important models of communicative competence (see especially Bachman, 1990, and Canale and Swain, 1980), all of which include some form of **sociolinguistic competence**, or the ability to use language appropriately in various contexts. Sociolinguistic competence involves **register** (degrees of formality and informality), appropriate word choice, **style shifting**, and politeness strategies.

Another important element of communicative competence is **strategic competence**. In terms of speaking, this is the learner's ability to use language strategies to compensate for gaps in skills and knowledge. For example, if you don't know a word you need to express your meaning, what strategies can you use to make your point?

A fourth component of communicative competence is **discourse competence**, "how sentence elements are tied together," which includes both cohesion and coherence (Lazaraton, 2001, p. 104). **Cohesion** is "the grammatical and/or lexical relationship between the different parts of a sentence" (Richards, Platt, and Weber, 1985, p. 45). Cohesion includes reference, repetition, synonyms, and so on. In contrast, **coherence** involves "how texts are constructed" (Lazaraton, 2001, p. 104; see also Bachman, 1990, pp. 84–102, and Douglas, 2000, pp. 25–29). Let's consider the following conversation as an illustration.

In this brief conversation, there are several examples of cohesion. In Lindsey's first turn the pronoun *it* refers to the test she has just mentioned. In Jeff's second turn, he repeats the word *test.* In Lindsey's second turn, the words *statistics* and *formulas* are synonymous. Finally, in Jeff's last turn "that stuff" refers to *statistics* and *formulas.* All these devices make the conversation cohesive.

Coherence also has to do with "the relationships which link the meanings of utterance in a discourse" (Richards, Platt, and Weber, 1985, p. 45). However, coherence often involves the speakers' background knowledge. For example, the following exchange is coherent because the two people know that the two events are scheduled at the same time:

> **Extract 2**

Person 1: Going to the review session?

Person 2: Rugby practice.

Both cohesion and coherence contribute to discourse competence. For people speaking in a new language, the specific linguistic elements that make speech cohesive can be especially demanding to produce during the pressure of a conversation.

Reflection

Think about someone you know who is truly bilingual or multilingual who can function effectively and apparently effortlessly in two or more languages. Can you think of examples of the four components of communicative competence in that person's speech?

I have a friend named Lillian, who is a native speaker of Cantonese. She is a fully-competent bilingual who regularly demonstrates all four components of communicative competence when she speaks. In terms of her linguistic competence, she has very good pronunciation, a wide vocabulary, and

excellent mastery of English grammar rules. She also can appropriately engage in many different types of speaking, from a casual conversation to giving a formal conference presentation to a large audience of strangers. Her speech displays both cohesion and coherence, so she demonstrates her discourse competence as well. If she needs to use an unfamiliar word or structure, she uses her strategic competence and finds a way to convey her meaning.

These four components of communicative competence have several practical implications for **EFL** and **ESL** teachers. Since communicative competence is a multifaceted construct, it is important for teachers to understand the complexities learners face when they are speaking English.

One of those complexities is balancing fluency and accuracy. A proficient speaker is both fluent and accurate. **Accuracy** in this context refers to the ability to speak properly — that is, selecting the correct words and expressions to convey the intended meaning, as well as using the grammatical patterns of English. **Fluency**, on the other hand, is the capacity to speak fluidly, confidently, and at a rate consistent with the norms of the relevant native speech community. (We will revisit the concepts of fluency and accuracy in Chapter 4.)

An important concept for teachers to understand is that while students are at the beginning and intermediate levels of language learning, that is, while they are still developing their proficiency, fluency and accuracy often work against each other. Before grammar rules become automatic and while learners are still acquiring essential vocabulary items, applying the rules and searching one's memory for the right words can be laborious mental processes, which slow the learners' speech and make them seem dysfluent. Likewise, language learners can sometimes speak quickly, without hesitating to apply the rules they have learned, but doing so may decrease their accuracy (that is, the number of errors they make in speaking may increase).

Reflection

Think about a time when you yourself were studying a new language. What was more important to you—fluency or accuracy? Did you consistently try to combine the two? Or did your focus at the time depend on the context in which you were speaking?

An important concept to keep in mind is that people use language in recognizable ways to get things done. There are many, many **"speech acts"** (or **functions**) in any language, and it is important that students learn the appropriate ways to accomplish their goals when they are speaking. Some

important speech acts in English include thanking, requesting information, apologizing, refusing, warning, complimenting, directing, complaining, and so on.

One interesting issue in teaching and learning speech acts is that there is no one-to-one form/meaning correspondence. The same utterance can be used to mean more than one thing, and this duality can be the source of some confusion. For example, many years ago, my husband and I were packing our gear for a camping trip. He asked me, "Did you pack the silverware?" and I said no. That evening, after driving for several hours, we set up camp, and cooked a meal. When we sat down to eat, we discovered that we had no eating utensils. I had interpreted his question as a request for information, and assumed that he would pack the silverware. He had intended his question as a directive, reminding me that I should pack the silverware.

Likewise, there are many ways to accomplish the same goal in speaking English—in other words, different forms can be used to accomplish the same speech act. Think about the following utterances:

1. It's cold in here!
2. Aren't you forgetting something?
3. Hey, how about closing the door?

All of these utterances are directives used to try to get someone to close a door to a room. These sentences would be spoken by someone inside the room to the person who had left the door open. Understanding these utterances and acting on them appropriately, however, depends on the context in which they are spoken. The context apparently involves two (or more) people, a room with an open door, and a cold day. But would a low-level employee make any of these statements to a company president? Almost certainly not. These directives are all very casual—in fact, quite informal—and would probably only be said by social equals who know one another quite well (or by someone who has no concern for politeness constraints, or who has different expectations about politeness).

There are many ways of making spoken utterances more or less polite. The various linguistic means of softening a message are known as **mitigation**. This "softening" can be accomplished through pronunciation of words, phrases, clauses, or entire utterances.

What are the specific differences among the following utterances?

1. Pack the silverware.
2. Please pack the silverware.
3. Would you please pack the silverware?
4. I'd appreciate it if you would please pack the silverware.

What are the mitigating effects of the additions made to each subsequent utterance?

As you can see, these utterances get increasingly longer as words are added. The basic proposition remains the same: the speaker wants the listener to pack the silverware. What changes then?

In the first utterance, we have just the bare imperative, or command. Syntactically it consists of the verb *(pack)* and the direct object *(the silverware)*. In the second utterance, only the politeness marker, *please*, has been added. In the third, the basic proposition (the speaker wants the hearer to pack the silverware) and the politeness markers are embedded in a question form: "Would you...?" Finally, in the fourth utterance, that entire question has been embedded in the additional statement, "I'd appreciate it if..." Each of these changes has the effect of softening, or mitigating, the directness of the request.

This exercise reminds us that the same basic proposition can be conveyed in many different ways. As people learn to speak English, they must develop their repertoires for expressing themselves appropriately in various situations.

4. Speaking in action

Figure 1 on page 8, which I think of as van Lier's (1995) pyramid, is a "picture" of the components of spoken language. The left column lists four traditional areas of linguistic analysis (which teachers must understand), and the center column labels the units of spoken language (which learners must master). These units are often referred to as the "levels" of language. They must all work together, simultaneously, when learners speak English. We will use this pyramid as a tool for exploring the components of spoken English that we, as teachers, must understand in order to help our learners.