

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR SPEAKING SKILLS: PECULIARITIES OF TEACHING AND LEARNING PROCESSES

The article deals with the problems of teaching and learning speaking, in particular those, which are most relevant to the context of developing oral skills at the advanced level of foreign language proficiency. The given article investigates pedagogical technologies, didactic process determining the students, majoring in Medicine, as a subject of pedagogical activity. Practical suggestions for developing skills in speaking are given. The paper analyzes the general principles that make speaking more 'relaxing' and less 'sacrificing' to both a teacher and a student. It also examines forms of control and evaluation, and suggests some recommendations, which seem most suitable for advanced language learners in the light of the above theoretical considerations.

Key words: *students, majoring in Medicine, speaking skills, peculiarities of teaching and learning processes, general principles*

У статті розглядаються проблеми викладання та навчання говоріння, зокрема ті, які є найбільш відповідними контексту розвитку усних навичок на просунутому рівні володіння іноземною мовою. Дана стаття досліджує педагогічні технології, дидактичний процес визначення студентів як суб'єкта педагогічної діяльності за спеціальністю "Медицина". Наведені практичні рекомендації щодо розвитку навичок говоріння. У статті проаналізовано загальні принципи, які дозволяють викладачам навчати, а студентам освоювати говоріння більш "розслабляючим" та менш "жертвуючим" способом. Дана стаття також вивчає форми контролю та оцінювання і пропонує деякі рекомендації, які здаються найбільш придатними для студентів, які вивчають мову на просунутому рівні, з огляду на вищезазначені теоретичні міркування.

Ключові слова: *студенти, спеціальність «Медицина», навички говоріння, особливості процесів викладання та навчання, загальні принципи*

В статье рассматриваются проблемы преподавания и обучения говорения, в частности те, которые являются наиболее соответствующими для контекста развития устных навыков на продвинутом уровне владения иностранным языком. Данная статья исследует педагогические технологии, дидактический процесс определения студентов как субъекта педагогической деятельности по специальности "Медицина". Приведены практические рекомендации по развитию навыков говорения. В статье проанализированы общие принципы, которые позволяют преподавателям обучать, а учащимся осваивать говорение более "расслабляющим" и менее "жертвенным" способом. Данная статья также изучает формы контроля и оценки и предлагает некоторые рекомендации, которые кажутся наиболее подходящими для студентов, изучающих язык на продвинутом уровне, учитывая вышеуказанные теоретические рассуждения.

Ключевые слова: студенты, специальность «Медицина», навыки говорения, особенности процессов преподавания и обучения, общие принципы

The need for ESP as a professional language in Medicine is nowadays beyond doubt. Public speaking (medical conferences, international meetings) reveals the vital necessity for understanding and expressing one's own thoughts in spoken English. Scientific meetings offer a unique opportunity to exchange ideas with health care professionals from across the world. Most interns and staff members still desist from attending international medical congresses and even if it happens, the participation is limited to simple dialogic unities. Future doctors, students majoring in Medicine, have to use speaking skills throughout the day to process and deliver instructions, make requests, ask questions, receive new information, and interact with the foreign partners. In other words, students are to be trained to use their knowledge of English in scientific practice and perform job-related functions. Thus, oral communication is one of the most important skills, which students can master – both for social and academic success [1].

Oral skills are very important to most foreign learners of a language, as teachers generally recognize. Even though, speaking is often regarded as a minor part of a language-teaching programme for students majoring in Medicine. There are many reasons:

- the absence of an oral examination in medical institutes of higher education;
- the difficulties presumed to exist in getting a class to converse in a foreign language;
- the popularity of the labs and the belief that it is enough for the teaching of spoken language;
- the lack of sufficient study/contact hours in all years so that students have the fuller opportunities to learn and practice their English to reach the CEFR standards [1, p. 5 – 8].

Most English teachers are frustrated by the lack of sufficient class time to bring their students up to a good level of English proficiency. This is the number one complaint of teachers across all Ukrainian universities. The way out is to develop autonomous learning strategies to compensate the shortfall in contact hours [2, p. 93 – 96].

If students are to master speaking skills thoroughly, they must be provided with regular opportunities of using their skills in situations, which are stimulating and as realistic as possible [5, 7]. The conversation lesson is an important way of providing this, and should have a place in syllabuses at all levels. This obliges the teacher to approach the problem of conversation in as serious and professional way as he approaches other forms of language teaching.

The given paper focuses on practical suggestions for developing skills in speaking and implication for teaching / learning process.

A decades-long speaking has been seen as only a supporting system for asking/answering questions (general, special) to the information read/heard, rather than

as a skill in its own right. For many years, the teaching of speaking focused primarily on the product (answering ‘reading comprehension questions’) rather than on the process (natural, vivid speaking according to the given situation). The absence of authentic materials led to unstable proficiency in different skills, with clear weakness in the speaking skill in particular. We all heard the comments given by students, that teacher’s English is more comprehensive than speaking to ‘real foreigners’. It is a bit of exaggeration, but students feel that classroom-based speaking practice does not prepare them for the real world and they still highlight speaking and listening as their biggest problem. However, methodologists have looked again at speaking as a process and put forward ways of teaching this skill which acknowledge and emphasize its importance [2, 3, 6].

There are general principles that make speaking more ‘relaxing’ and less ‘sacrificing’ to both a teacher and a student. The first and most obvious one is to introduce and practice elements of spoken language. This not only includes the skill of expressing oneself orally, but many other aspects. The lesson should aim at improving comprehension of speech; of possible everyday conversational speech and more specialized uses (medicine, business, economics, and technology). The conversation lesson should also provide the opportunity to use vocabulary actively, in realistic contexts. Not only can familiar words be used but also new words can be practiced immediately. Idiomatic language is easily and naturally introduced in the lesson and students can be encouraged to use it and to learn to recognize differences between written and spoken language. There are different examples, given below, how to make everyday conversational speech more purposeful, meaningful and fulfilling:

1. When taking the history of the presenting complaint (HPC), you often ask about pain. Use the following words to complete the questions.
2. Work in small groups. Take turns describing a patient you have treated to the parts of the body a-k and then answer questions from the group members.
3. Work in pairs. Can you predict what each person’s job involves? What do you think are their main responsibilities within the team?
4. What do you think is the most stressful aspect of medical work? What is the most rewarding?
5. Work in pairs. Compare and contrast working in city urban and rural areas in your hometown.
6. Work in small groups. Talk about your own experience on the ward for the first time. What was the best or worst experience you ever had on the ward round as a junior doctor?

The second principle is closely related to the first, and is to bring passive knowledge of the language into active use, and to develop this in new situations. It is common experience that students gain good marks in paper-and-pencil tests but have difficulty in expressing themselves, particularly orally. The conversation lesson gives them an opportunity of developing active oral skills. These may include such aspects of conversational language as ‘strategies’ (formulas of disagreeing), ‘gambits’ (What’s your

opinion...?I see your point, but...), ‘stabilizers’ (I mean... Well, now...) and even some conventionalized paralinguistic features.

The third principle is to create a situation in which the two other goals may be realized. The situation should be as realistic as possible, but it will unavoidably unrealistic to some extent, because in most teaching situations learners share a common mother tongue. But once it is pointed out that in much of the words English at any rate, is used as *lingua franca*, the situation will appear more realistic.

The form of the conversation lesson (place, the size of the class, the duration of the lesson, material, and topic) is of the utmost importance when attempting to reach these abovementioned principles. Conversation needs not be restricted to advanced students; as soon as the basic grammar and vocabulary have been taught, students should be given the opportunity of using it orally. Conversation should be a complement to other aspects of language teaching. Fifteen minutes to conversation is possible for students who know little English, if the topic is carefully chosen and the material planned for their level.

The material provided as a basic or input for the conversation is very important. Some sort of material is necessary to provide the stimulus for a conversation, to provide assistance to the students both lexically and in the provision of ideas, and to ensure free participation by all members of the group by providing all students with the same vocabulary and ideas about the topic. This material should be limited in length and form to be within the comprehension and productive capabilities of the learners, and to leave the group the possibility of expanding the discussion in its own way.

The teacher should provide topics, which are: (a) related to the students’ needs; (b) of a suitable level of difficulty, and (c) neither too diffuse nor too limited in scope [4, p. 25 – 53]. We have to ensure that topics proceed from personal concern or experiences of the students to more abstract matters. This should occur both within each topic in the discussion points, and over the whole course, so that the topics become progressively more difficult.

There are few things more uncomfortable than being in a conversation on topic you dislike or have nothing special to speak. Thought-provoking discussions can come to the rescue. Controversial speech topics are used by great majority of teachers: 1) to develop critical thinking skills; 2) to engage the audience into the listening/speaking process; 3) to share the experience, values and interests on a given issues. The selection of topics can vary from ‘child labour’, ‘abortion’, capital punishment’, ‘animal testing’, ‘driving age’ to ‘genetic cloning’, ‘ethnic adoption’, ‘plastic surgery’, ‘pharmaceutical industry’ and others. Some students are perfectly capable of holding a mature conversation on these topics, others not depending on their language and cross-cultural and interpersonal skills. Persuasive speech topics can really develop speaking environment, increase interest in the ideas of discussion, and eliminate negative thinking. They help students reframe strong feelings into productive dialogue.

There are many reasons why teaching dialogue form is the most rewarding for the students to work with at all levels. It involves a natural and exclusive use of audio-lingual skills. By dialogues, we do not mean simply those in plays, but those typically occurring

between two or more persons in a situation, and not necessarily read aloud from a typescript. We shall also attempt to suggest ways in which persuasion might be used as a topic in class to stimulate the use of realistic language through appropriate role-playing.

We have to provide students with a variety of authentic speaking-listening materials so they can see the differences between them, and start discussions on appropriate versus inappropriate language. It is one of the simplest technologies that offers creative and motivating pedagogy, provides the opportunities for innovative, creative and high interactivity in teaching and learning process that can help students increase their understanding on specific topics. A great advantage of the video materials is that they provide original and authentic input as they are produced originally by native speakers in films, different TV programs, Power Point presentations. Different audio-visual tools can be used in variety of instructional and teaching settings for providing illustration for a certain topic and content, self-study (developing autonomy of study) and evaluation situations.

Students who work in an international environment have often been forced to develop the ability to communicate but they are often frustrated with the inadequate results of their 'rough' communication or with the impression, they create when they speak. They are usually receptive to feedback because their hope is that we will help them to make their English more effective. It is therefore essential that we find ways of correcting students' mistakes and helping them to improve in other ways. It is part of our job to tell students when we feel their language is inappropriate or incorrect for a given situation. We must accept the role of 'assessor' and 'corrector' if we are to provide students with a useful programme of study and, indeed, give them what they want. We have to concentrate more on communication itself and fluency than on correctness. It is necessary to give a constructive feedback to the students, in a way that makes them think about the mistakes, rather than just listen to corrections.

All practical suggestions discussed in this paper were developed for improving and facilitating speaking skills in the teaching/learning process. The principles regulate the selection of learning content for teaching and require the teacher to prepare the lesson carefully. The approach must be professional: to consider the level and needs of the students, and to choose suitable controversial topics, vocabulary items and structures. Thus, the conversation lesson takes its place as an important part of the foreign-language syllabus. If taken seriously by a competent and professional teacher, the lesson will have a good washback effect on the rest of the teaching. The students should be encouraged to assist each other, so that the conversation never degenerates into questions and answers between a teacher and a student in turn. The fact that the students are in control of the lesson and know that they will not be continually corrected also helps.

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