

AN APPROACH TO CREATIVE SPEAKING ACTIVITIES

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Abstract. The main objective of initial foreign language instruction centers on fostering oral proficiency. In the process of learning a foreign language, speaking typically involves reproduction and imitation, with activities geared towards generating precise output with close support. However, achieving fluency and fundamental speaking abilities requires more than simply regurgitating memorized language chunks. In essence, to advance in acquiring the target language and to attain genuine communicative competence, learners must also demonstrate the ability to use language spontaneously and creatively. This article suggests an approach to enhance discursive skills in the advancement of oral communication.

Key words: communicative tasks, language acquisition, formulaic expressions, experimental language use, model of creative speaking.

The primary objective of early foreign language learning is to develop communicative competence, focusing primarily on listening and speaking skills. Particularly in the initial stages, speaking entails repetition and simplicity, providing young beginners with opportunities to practice language patterns and grasp basic communicative contexts, such as introducing themselves using memorized phrases. This emphasis is also evident in many textbooks designed for young learners, which include numerous speaking activities aimed at producing guided and clear output. These activities may involve dialogues where learners are given questions and answers to modify by inserting various vocabulary items into provided sentence structures. Such activities can be motivating as they enable young learners to actively participate in

lessons and successfully interact in the target language early in the learning process. In both contexts, learner interaction is often limited to the use of pre-established expressions, with creativity involving either selecting pre-established expressions from practiced materials or completing oral gap-fills.[1]

The model is structured into three levels. At the first level, learners engage in reproductive language use, which involves activities designed to build a foundation for creative speaking. In this phase, learners utilize fixed expressions to effectively communicate. Activities are structured and closely aligned with class input, primarily focusing on imitation. These activities include reciting rhymes and chants, singing songs, retelling stories or parts of stories, scripted acting, dialogues, role plays, and sketches. Additionally, guided information-gap activities are employed, providing learners with fully supplied language to use. Guided activities are highly motivating as they enable beginning learners to speak imitatively and actively participate from the outset. Furthermore, the repetitive nature of these activities minimizes the likelihood of errors, thereby boosting learners' self-confidence.

To ensure that young learners maintain their joy, enthusiasm, and ambition, it is crucial to offer them more opportunities to explore and experiment with the language while emphasizing the creative and productive learning process. A key consideration is how to incorporate such opportunities into lessons for young learners. Here, employing more open communicative activities appears to be a beneficial approach. Essential activities could include communicative tasks and improvisation activities, as they have the potential to encourage language use that goes beyond formulas and repetition.[2]

In this article, our aim is to contribute to the understanding of communicative competence in the young learners' classroom by introducing a research-based model of creative speaking. Initially, the results of research into task-based work with young learners, as well as examples of their task-based language production, are explored as a more open and flexible alternative to traditional communicative tasks. This approach

also provides various opportunities for children to independently engage with language sources that are already available to them.

A literature review reveals that a task-based approach holds significant potential when the goal is to engage learners in conversational interaction that allows for creative expression. One interpretation of a communicative task, as described by Ellis, is a meaning-focused activity that requires conveying information and enables learners to utilize linguistic resources to achieve a clearly defined outcome. Thus, communicative tasks facilitate negotiation of meaning in situations where the focus is on completing a task. Learners benefit from task-based interaction as they are exposed to meaningful input, receive feedback on their language production, and have opportunities to produce varied output.[3]

For instance, Pinter examined 10-year-old Hungarian learners of English who engaged in information-gap tasks, allowing them to express their own meanings in a less constrained manner. The study aimed to observe changes in learners' performance and the benefits of task-based interaction with this age group. The repeated use of tasks resulted not only in more fluent language use but also in learners responding to and assisting each other in interaction, whereas initially, they only demonstrated their knowledge of English. These findings provide evidence for the beneficial effects of using tasks with young learners. However, it is noted that when comparing task-based interactions with older learners, they focused more on problem-solving and completing the task effectively, whereas the observed 10-year-old children primarily named things in their pictures, which was not as effective.

Tasks serve as opportunities for creative speaking. In a scenario where two learners collaborate using the target language to identify five differences in a picture, their performance reflects their ability to utilize their interlanguage (IL) grammar within the constraints of spontaneous oral language production. Consequently, errors naturally occur, providing insights into the learners' current stage of interlanguage development. Maintaining the format of an information-gap task, each learner is given a picture of a

monster and must identify five differences by conversing with each other. This task enables children to rely on their own linguistic abilities. Examples of learner interactions demonstrate how this fosters the creative and productive use of language.[4]

An approach to creative speaking activities involves fostering an environment that encourages learners to express themselves freely and imaginatively. Here's a framework for implementing such activities:

Create a Supportive Atmosphere: Establish a classroom environment where learners feel comfortable taking risks and expressing themselves without fear of judgment. Encourage open communication and respect for diverse ideas and opinions.

Provide Stimulating Input: Expose learners to a variety of engaging and thought-provoking materials such as poems, stories, artworks, videos, and music. These can serve as inspiration for their speaking activities.

Promote Authentic Communication: Encourage learners to engage in meaningful, real-life communication tasks that are relevant to their interests and experiences. This could include discussions, debates, interviews, and storytelling sessions.

Encourage Creativity and Imagination: Provide opportunities for learners to think creatively and imaginatively. Encourage them to use their imagination to create stories, role-plays, skits, and dialogues.

Incorporate Collaborative Activities: Foster collaboration among learners by incorporating group projects and pair work activities. Collaborative tasks not only encourage communication but also promote cooperation and teamwork.

Offer Feedback and Reflection: Provide constructive feedback on learners' speaking performances, highlighting both strengths and areas for improvement. Encourage learners to reflect on their speaking experiences and set goals for future development.

Use Technology: Integrate technology tools such as multimedia presentations, video recordings, and online platforms to enhance speaking activities and provide additional opportunities for practice and feedback.

Variety of Activities: Incorporate a variety of speaking activities to cater to different learning styles and preferences. This could include debates, presentations, storytelling, role-plays, improvisation games, and creative writing tasks.

Encourage Risk-Taking: Encourage learners to take risks with their speaking by providing a supportive environment where mistakes are seen as opportunities for learning and growth.

Celebrate Achievements: Recognize and celebrate learners' achievements in creative speaking. This could include showcasing their work, organizing speaking competitions or performances, and providing certificates or awards for outstanding performances.

By implementing these approaches, educators can effectively promote creative speaking skills and empower learners to express themselves confidently and creatively in various contexts.

Improvisation activities, including drama, offer numerous benefits for foreign language learning. To achieve natural communicative competence, learners must engage in activities that support their innate desire to interact with peers and allow them to tap into their rich reservoir of imagination, creativity, curiosity, and playfulness, thus fostering autonomy in language use.

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While English has been taught as a mandatory subject in primary schools in Uzbekistan, it hasn't yielded the desired outcomes. The education system often revolves around the utilization of English, but it hasn't effectively engaged students. To address this, fostering dialogue among students about themselves is crucial. Encouraging dialogue and discussions through questions helps students overcome their reluctance and embarrassment to speak English. This creates a supportive environment characterized by friendly and collaborative relationships. One significant obstacle for learners to overcome is the fear of making mistakes, saying something incorrect, foolish, or incomprehensible. As teachers, our mission is to create a warm climate that motivates students to speak freely without fear of judgment. Students should feel comfortable pausing or making mistakes during their attempts to speak.

In conclusion, the method outlined for conducting speaking activities illustrates how the path towards greater autonomy in language usage can be facilitated and encouraged, and how children can be progressively guided from stages of simple reproduction of language towards more creative and productive speaking. Research findings suggest that tasks and improvisation activities, contrary to common assumptions, are not overly challenging for young learners to grasp. Instead, they hold significant potential to enhance their communicative competence right from the outset.[6]

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