
A STUDY ON ELICITATION TECHNIQUES TO IMPROVE SPEAKING SKILLS

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Abstract: Speech is the natural form of language. In speech, we make use of oral signs that are addressed to the ear. A child acquires the power of speech by responding to the sound made by the people around him and limiting them out of his need for communication. The speaking ability of the child depends upon his listening ability. A learner who gets a lot of practice in listening becomes good in the spoken aspect of the language. Speaking is the skill that makes a learner active in the class. The teacher should provide a lot of opportunities for the learner to speak in the class. The teacher should arrange for the students to speak the language being learnt in meaning full situation.

At this point we will examine how we can bring these characteristics while using some of the existing elicitation techniques in oral production. Elicitation techniques are very useful to develop the speaking skills among the students. Practicing these techniques in the class everyday students can speak very fluent language.

Keywords: Elicitation, Controlled, Conversation, Recreation, Strategies, Acquire, Competence.

Introduction: Speech is the natural form of language. In speech, we make use of oral signs that are addressed to the ear. A child acquires the power of speech by responding to the sound made by the people around him and limiting them out of his need for communication. The speaking ability of the child depends upon his listening ability. A learner who gets a lot of practice in listening becomes good in the spoken aspect of the language. Speaking is the skill that makes a learner active in the class. The teacher should provide a lot of opportunities for the learner to speak in the class. The teacher should arrange for the students to speak the language being learnt in meaning full situation.

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Content: One of the basic problems in foreign language teaching is to prepare learners to be able to use the language. This leads us to make a distinction between knowledge about a language and skill in using it. In order to use the language, we do not merely need to know how to assemble sentences in abstract. We have to produce them and adapt them to the circumstances. Oral expression involves not only the use of the right sounds in the right patterns of rhythm and intonation, but also the choice of words and inflections in the right order to convey the right meaning. (Mackey, 1965). The success in developing and evaluating this oral skill thus depends on ensuring that these dimensions of the oral skill are kept in mind. This implies first that we free oral

tasks/tests from the burden of conventional language testing wisdom – its assumptions about people and testing. The test may not even exist, instead a human approach encouraging people to talk to each other as naturally as possible is employed. Contemplating these challenges about oral testing Randall L. Jones says “Oral testing is difficult and it is expensive. But we should always remember that it is not impossible” (Jones, 1975).

At this point we will examine how we can bring in these characteristics while using some of the existing elicitation techniques in oral production.

The elicitation techniques range on a scale of increasing predictability of response from the least controlled to the most controlled. For example reading aloud produces an entirely predictable response, while an Interview is less controlled. The suitability of any of these techniques depends only on the situation and purpose for which it is used. (under Hill, 1987).

Discussion/Conversation: This is the most natural thing in the world, a human encounter, a meeting between two people. It thus needs an informal, test – free situation and conditions to be successful and genuine to produce valid and reliable results.

Establishing a right atmosphere, allowing use of enough time is necessary here. Oral – report making presentations is an authentic and communicative activity both for professional and academic purposes. This can be conducted both in a formal/less formal conditions.

In a formal test procedure, the learner makes the presentation directly to the interviewer.

In a less formal situation, mini presentations as a routine part of the daily teaching schedule may be used for testing purposes at the same time.

For these different situations the factors of time given for preparation and the time limit for presentation are also variables.

Learner – Learner joint discussion/decision making: In this activity – the discussion, rather than the final decision is the important feature.

There is usually no single correct answer, after having reached a conclusion also the assessment will be based on the way they express and justify their opinions, and evaluate those of others.

This also needs an informal setting for the learners to freely and fully express their opinions.

To assess the learners through this technique, it requires that the teacher assesses or observes the discussion in an informal way so that his presence does not influence the learners production or even record the discussion and mark it later.

Role Play: In this activity the learner is asked to take on a particular role and to imagine himself in that role in a particular situation.

Role play activities are good at eliciting the learner's ability to ask questions.

This activity requires pair/group activities in a classroom.

The time given to prepare for a role play and the authenticity of the topic/situation chosen will add to the genuineness of this activity.

Regular adaptation of this technique in a classroom and informal observation of the teacher of all the students in the class will make a good reading of the progress of learners oral proficiency.

Interview: It is the most common of all oral tests. Compared with discussion/conversation, an interview is structured. And compared with question and answer, an interview is more authentic, it has a consistency and a relevance that stretches over more than one question or comment.

It can be held in a formal situation with the knowledge of the testee of being tested but still has the potential to maintain an informal air depending upon the interviewer's ability. Regular practice of this in an EFL programme will give very good scores of the learner's progress.

Learner – learner description and re-creation: One learner describes a design or construction of

model building materials to another learner who has to reconstruct the model from the description alone, without seeing the original. Accurate and successful description/reporting may also be judged by the time taken to complete the model, or the degree of accuracy of reconstruction achieved.

This task, even if it has an informal characteristic attached to it, it will give a reliable/valid score of an individual's oral proficiency. This activity can be used in both formal and informal testing situations.

Giving instructions/descriptions/explanation: With minimal preparation, the learner describes, at some length, a well known object, a system or an everyday procedure.

This activity can also be used in the same way as activity No:6.

It can be used successfully in a formal test situation as well as an informal one.

Form filling

Making appropriate responses.

Question and answer

Reading blank dialogue

All these techniques could be grouped together in terms of the control over the predictability of the response they exercise. And these can be employed in more or less formal situations of testing.

Using a picture or picture story

précis or re-telling story or text from aural stimulus.

Retelling a story from written stimulus

These techniques can also be grouped together. They can be given as formal tests to the learners and observed or as an informal test in a class room.

Reading aloud: By employing this regularly in an informal way in a classroom, the teacher can assess learner's ability to pronounce rightly, his intonation, fluency etc.

Conversational Skills: Conversation is often defined very narrowly as the oral exchange of information. However, to understand clearly what conversation means, a distinction has to be made between grammatical competence and conversational competence. Grammatical competence describes a speaker's knowledge of the underlying systems of vocabulary, morphology and syntax that are required to construct grammatical sentences in a language. The sentence is the unit of description for grammatical competence conversational competence on the other hand, is defined not with reference to the sentence, but to the utterance. This refers to the speaker's knowledge of how speech acts are used in

social situations. Huymens used the term “communicative competence” to refer to knowledge both of rules of grammar, vocabulary, and semantics and rules of speaking – the patterns of sociolinguistic behavior of the speech community. (Hymes, 1972, as quoted by Jack D. Richards, 1985). Based on these propositions, language proficiency has been defined as the degree of skill with which a second or Foreign language is used in carrying out different communicative tasks in the target language. What implications does this view pose to language testing? J.L. Clark suggests that proficiency is the learner’s ability to use language for real life purposes without regard to the manner in which that competence was acquired. Thus, in proficiency testing, the frame of reference... shifts from the classroom to the actual situation in which the language is used. (Clark, 1972). Also, Communicative competence includes knowledge of different communicative strategies or communicative styles according to the situation, the task, and the roles of the participants.

And to arrive at a valid assessment of an individual’s ability across all these dimensions it requires the individual to perform in a natural context, far different from a test situation.

For any conversation or speech event to occur, it involves participants taking turns to both speak and listen. Therefore, it is these two conversational skills off language which are actual indicators of a person’s language performance. And it is especially with regard to these two skills that the normal pragmatic

rules of communication should be taken care from being violated.

Conclusion: Speaking and listening are the activities in which people are involved all the time in their daily lives. Therefore it becomes necessary that authenticity or semblance of natural discourse is maintained.

By allowing the learners to perform in an informal/formal test situations it implies that we encourage/control the features of natural communication. For example an authentic, informal test situation the learner is allowed the freedom to omit parts of the sentence, use syntactic abbreviation, simplify his speech by using long connecting sentences without a break etc. Informal test setting also allows self-correction, false starts, repetition, rephrasing, circumlocution etc. As we look for assessing progress in the learner’s oral ability, we should look for their flexibility in their use of these features. Whereas in a formal test situation, efficient turn taking, accuracy etc are given more importance.

In the areas of learning where process is considered important, formal assessing is less common place. More so when conversational skills are tested where spontaneity, naturalness and human interaction are decisive factors, it calls for such test settings also where these dimensions of conversational skills can be captured.

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