

ORIGINAL

**The development of the speaking skill on tenth graders at Abel Santa María
Cuadrado Senior High School in Yara**

**El desarrollo de la habilidad de lectura en estudiantes del Preuniversitario Abel Santa María
Cuadrado en Yara**

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Abstract

The present paper stands for an attempt to cope with the development of the most demanded linguistic skill for language communication: the speaking skill, as a way to provide solution to the shortcomings tenth graders face in the teaching learning process of the English subject. Its authors elaborate and put into practice a scientific and novel methodological proposal consisting on a set of linguistic and communicative activities to be applied alongside the current program. The proposal allows the students to practice speaking through a set of activities. The set is made up of well-structured, contextualized, stepped activities that encourage students to use the foreign language communicatively and actively. They are also characterized by the use of interactional patterns to propitiate a steady exchange student- student. The results are socially quite significant because they provide a scientific solution to an educational problem and favor the comprehensive formation of students' personality.

Keywords: speaking skill; teaching learning process; curriculum; activities; well-structured activities, contextualized; interactional patterns; comprehensive formation

Resumen

El presente artículo se basa en un acercamiento al desarrollo de una de las habilidades lingüísticas más utilizadas en el lenguaje comunicativo, la expresión oral. Este trabajo tiene como objetivo principal ofrecer soluciones a las principales dificultades que tienen los estudiantes de preuniversitario a la hora de enfrentar la habilidad de la expresión oral. Los autores proponen un sistema de actividades para la práctica sistemática de la expresión oral. La propuesta está basada y estructurada en actividades contextualizadas que demandan de los estudiantes una preparación esmerada que los obliga al uso del idioma extranjero de una forma muy activa y comunicativa. Las actividades además ofrecen la posibilidad del uso del idioma entre los estudiantes utilizando patrones internacionales bien actualizados. Los resultados preliminares son significativamente muy buenos y dan solución a las dificultades presentadas por los estudiantes, observándose un desarrollo importante en la formación integral de los mismos.

Palabras clave: habilidad oral; proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje; currículo; actividades bien estructuradas; patrones internacionales; formación integral

Introduction

Language comes into life as a means of communication. The necessity of expressing ideas, feelings, and information brought about the creation of different sources of communication. On the other hand, communication also stands for the objective of language teaching and a powerful means to contribute to the development of learners' personality. The teaching learning process of English should guarantee the proper formation and development of the linguistic and communicative abilities, taking into account the implementation of the communicative language teaching approach. In the field of the teaching learning process of English as a foreign language, the practice of speaking takes a great importance, as it engages students in oral interaction with their peers.

English language teaching is a social and systematic process that takes place at school through the communicative interaction between the teacher and the learners in the target language under the basis of activities aiming at the formation of the learners' personality. English teaching should contribute not only to the functional linguistic efficiency, but also to the ability to foster the acquisition of new knowledge and the improvement of habits

and abilities that allow them to communicate by the use of the four major language communicative skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Teaching a foreign language as a means of communication requires having the students assimilate the necessary linguistic components and develop skills to express and understand what they learn; in other words, students should achieve not only accuracy but also fluency in the oral language. The teaching of oral language is a mighty means of foreign language instruction.

Learning English offers the possibility of comparing and contrasting mother tongue with the target language, identifying similarities and differences in both and acquiring a linguistic sensibility that makes possible to enjoy and love the learning of languages. Teachers have the most important role in the construction of the teaching learning process because they are the ones who make people understand the language and learn it correctly.

Speaking constitutes one of the most important language skills for communication, as it is the prevailing skill to develop at all levels, among which the Senior High Level, especially tenth grade, does not escape from this reality. However, teachers are not always aware of this fact, they usually pay more attention to writing or reading comprehension rather than speaking; instead speaking is sometimes relegated to a secondary aim. Therefore, teachers deal with it inefficiently, resulting in the low acquisition of the speaking skill among the graders at this level.

The previous explanation is a real fact, because most tenth-grade students from the school object of investigation showed certain apathy for speaking English, since they evidenced a significant low development of the speaking skill. Such behavior was also observed by the local and provincial supervisors through their systematic visits to the school.

The gathering of limitations observed permitted to relate the following shortcomings on the speaking skill, which served as a motivation to develop the research paper that served as inspiration for the present article, among them: students' lack of vocabulary to convey oral messages, inadequate use of grammatical structures, poor command of the linguistic forms to express the communicative functions studied along the units, and unsatisfactory pronunciation to convey a desired meaning. Therefore, the main goal of this article is to

assess the level of development of the speaking skills on tenth graders at the school object of research and provide a set of activities to overcome the shortcomings.

Population and sample

The research was extended to a population made up of 66 tenth graders and one teacher from Abel Santa Maria Cuadrado Senior High School in Yara, while the sample, selected intentionally, consisted of 33 students from class #1 representing the 50% of the population; just one teacher representing the 100% was taken as sample.

Materials and methods

The authors held a theoretical study based on the use of the methods analysis-synthesis and induction-deduction to support, characterize and make generalizations of the teaching learning process of oral communication in the English subject and the development of the speaking skill on tenth graders at Abel Santa Maria Cuadrado Senior High School in Yara. They also made use of empirical methods to support the theoretical methods in order to diagnose the real state of development of the skill under study on the selected sample, such as observation, survey, interview, and the pedagogical test.

Outcomes and discussion

The development of the speaking skill is analyzed from the outlook of the particular didactic principles. Authorized methodologists including Antich (1986) and Gonzalez (2009), point out a number of particular didactic principles that govern the teaching learning process of oral communication within which the speaking skill is inserted. Among the most important ones are: the conception of teaching language as a means of communication also known as communicability, the primacy of the oral language, the consideration of the students' mother tongue, the concentric distribution of the linguistic material, the leading character of practice, and the consideration of the social and cultural aspects of the language.

The developmental conception of the foreign languages from a didactic stand point comprises among other requirements and as the fundamental one, the development of the communicative competence, taking into account that the process of development of this competence comprises the acquisition of others such as linguistic, discourse, strategic, sociolinguistic and the sociocultural competences. The speaking skill in general is present in most of them as it is the skill through which interaction is mainly attained;

therefore, the development of speaking skills constitutes the base for the development of the communicative competence.

The analysis of the term skill is paramount to complete this analysis. From a didactic viewpoint, it is “the expression of the subject’s way of interaction with the objects or subjects during activity and communication. It is the content of the actions done by the persons, made up of a set of operations, which have an objective and are assimilated during the process itself.” Fuentes (2004) In this definition, the executing and inductive components of the skill are clearly determined. These are: the subject that interacts developing the skill, the object (or subject) which receives the action, the objective of the action, and a system of operations, which make up its structure.

The assumption of this definition is quite useful at the time of leading the teaching learning process of English towards the tenth graders’ development of speaking skills, that is, the teacher should bear in mind that the speaking skill is made up of further operations, also known by some linguists as sub skills, which are indispensable for its accomplishment. Developing speaking requires knowledge of the language system skills in the mastery of language (linguistic skills) and skills in its functioning as speech (communicative skills). Thus, in learning a language as communication, the learner must assimilate its components: pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar- and use them in speech.

Learning to speak, then, requires much practice in the functions and forms of the language. The aim of the teacher is to develop the linguistic and communicative skills entirely and progressively until free and spontaneous speech is attained. In this sense, Acosta (1996) proposes some of the speaking skills that the students should develop; they are pronunciation, intonation, fluency, and others.

From the **linguistic viewpoint**, the authors stand out the necessity to analyze this matter in terms of the application of different methods in foreign language teaching as a result of the study of their evolution from the very beginning of their use. It is also quite important to think over the most relevant methods instrumented for the learning of different languages. Linguistics has devoted itself to the analysis of those methods as long as they have been employed within the course of the foreign language history.

Such analysis has brought about that among the most significant methods applied in foreign language teaching there are: The Grammar Translation method, the Audiovisual

and the Audio-oral methods which are the ones that have been mostly used. However, in the former century and in the present one, the Communicative Approach has been the most widely used in the world. Therefore, any analysis in this respect should highly consider the communicative Approach in the teaching learning process of English in the Cuban schools as well, especially focused on the development of the speaking skills.

The Communicative Approach to language learning presupposes the teaching of the language based on communicative functions, which suggest that there is a very clear aim to accomplish at the time of interacting with somebody else, taking into account that it responds to a given communicative function made up of a number of exponents or also known as speech acts in which different linguistic forms are involved. The communicative function to use largely depends on the circumstance, the context, the place and the person with whom the interaction is held. All this characterized the four basic elements this approach comprises, that are context, time, place and person.

Another important aspect to be regarded within the communicative approach to language teaching is the speech-acts theory, as it has to do with the functions and uses of language. The speech acts are defined as all the acts one performs through speaking, all the things one does when speaking; for example: giving reports, making statements, asking questions, giving warnings, making promises, approving, regretting and apologizing. Speech acts are classified in several ways according to the function they perform in communication.

The speech-acts theory guides English teachers to the immediate objective of language teaching: the communicative function. The theory expresses what the students should learn to do with the language. In deciding what functions, topics and situations are most likely to be relevant to the learners' needs, teachers may rely on the experience, own intuition and observation. It helps the teacher to ask himself questions in relation to the situations, language activities, functions of the language, topics, general notions and language forms to please students' communicative needs.

Speaking is taught, consequently, on the basis of the functions which become the immediate teaching objectives. Their teaching turns into the direction and goal of every lesson and activity. This goal is achieved through the mastery of the language system (accuracy) and the ability to communicate the desired intentions appropriately (fluency).

So, speaking can be defined as the ability to communicate adequately, to express oneself intelligibly, reasonably accurately and without too much hesitation.

To attain that goal, the students should transit from a stage where they are imitating a model of some kind or responding to cues, to the stage where they can use the language freely to express their own ideas. The proportion of controlled speech to spontaneous speech should change as the course progresses. Mastery of the language forms is not an end of learning in itself; it is only a means to an end. The students do not need to work through the whole language system in order to be adequate users of the language; they just need to learn those language items essential to the expression of the communicative functions they are learning, and see them through activities of various kinds designed to develop accuracy and fluency.

Analysis of the results obtained through the application of different instruments, resulting from the research methods

With the intention of proving the objective existence of the scientific problem by means of a characterization of the current state of the teaching learning process of English and the development of the students' speaking skill in tenth grade, the authors applied empirical methods such as the observation, interview, survey, and the pedagogical test, which were aimed at verifying the way the teaching learning process of English behaved in tenth grade and the development of the speaking skill in the students from Abel Santa Maria Cuadrado, Senior High School in Yara.

Observation

The objective of the observation was aimed at detecting the students' limitations during the teaching learning process of the English subject, especially at the time of participating in the speaking skill activities. By means of the observation to seven English lessons, the authors corroborated that although the teacher used the methods, techniques, and procedures in correspondence to the objective of the lesson, the activities done by the students were mainly reproductive. In addition, the students rarely worked in pairs. It could also be appreciated that the students were not motivated with the subject, due to the poor interest they showed toward it, especially at the time of doing oral activities, as most of them were assigned to be done by the workbook in a written form in class or as homework.

The students did not feel in the mood for participating in the activities oriented by the teacher, and in most of the cases their participations during the speaking activities were poor, due to the fact that they had problems in the articulation of sounds, as well as making just necessary pauses and stressing words adequately. Besides, they showed limitations in the independence and creativeness during oral performance employing general or specific vocabulary according to the communicative function under study. Above all, they had to support on the Spanish language in most of their participation.

Interview to the teacher

The interview was given to the teacher to know her opinion about the way she manages the teaching learning process of the English subject especially the attention she gives to the development of the speaking skills. The interview to the English teacher revealed the following analysis:

In question one, the teacher considered that the tenth grade English syllabus really expressed in its contents and objectives the necessities to develop the students' speaking skills. The teacher supported her answer by explaining that the system of content covers the necessary linguistic elements and the communicative functions to favour the teaching and learning of the speaking skills. She also stated that the objectives comprise the speaking skills as the most important ones.

In question two, the teacher admitted that the speaking skill is of paramount importance as compared to the other skills, since it plays a fundamental role in the development of the communicative competence.

Survey to the students

The application of the survey to the students was intended to obtain information about the importance the students gave to the speaking skill, and the aspects that hinder the development of it. The survey was applied to the 33 students of the group.

The students' survey evidenced that when they solve the oral activities assigned by the teacher, 60% felt motivation, 50% satisfaction, 90% tiredness, 60% necessity, 70% disorientation, 75% boredom. Besides, 90% of the students considered the oral activities were specially related to the content of the subject, 40% to ideo-political aspects, 50% to culture, 60% to the current world, 30% to their necessities, and 45% to other subjects. Most of the students liked topics related to fashion, sports, fun, daily activities, and current

events.

As a matter of fact, the three instruments derived from the methods used revealed the necessity to go deeper into the searching for a solution to the problem concerning the speaking skill.

Pedagogical test

The initial pedagogical test was given to 33 tenth grade students to verify the current level of development of their speaking skill. As a way for evaluating this skill, the authors took into consideration the following indicators:

Indicators:

- ★ Pronunciation.
- ★ Fluency
- ★ Grammar
- ★ Vocabulary.

Descriptors

1. Articulating sounds, intoning questions and statements, and stressing words adequately.
2. Making just necessary pauses.
3. Attaining correct use of verb tenses and word order.
4. Employing general or specific vocabulary according to the communicative function under study.

Analysis of the results of the initial pedagogical test

The pedagogical test permitted to know the sampled students with the objective of testing the level of development of the speaking skill in them. The results of this test were the following:

Out of the thirty-three students tested in the first pedagogical test, 8 students, that represent the 24.2 %, had a good fluency when speaking, achieving the category of high. 10 students, that represent 30.3 %, obtained the category of mid; and only 15, representing 45.4 %, were in the low category.

In the case of pronunciation, 9 students, representing the 27.2 %, reached a high level. 5 students, representing the 15.1 %, were in a mid level. On the other hand, 14 students, representing the 42.4 %, achieved a low level.

In the vocabulary 4 students that represent the 12.1 % were in a high level. 7 students, representing the 21.2 %, were in a mid level and the low level was shown by 11 students, representing the 33 %.

Finally, 7 students, representing the 21.1 %, reached the high level. Also 10 students, representing the 30.3 %, were in a mid level. And 16 students, representing the 48.4 %, were in a low level.

In short words, only 7 students were placed in the high position, 9 in the mid and the half of the students got the lowest grade, denoting these students showed problems with speaking.

They actually had problem at making errors in classes showing great limitation conceiving the absence of the vocabulary and correct use of grammatical structures to express their ideas. Though pronouncing and stressing were not so good either, as compared to the rest of the indicators, were also affected.

Conclusions

1. The analysis of different conceptions of foreign language teaching, particularly the development of the speaking skill corroborated the existence of the shortcomings declared in this article, which were scientifically overcome.
2. The fundamentals provided allowed to determine the theoretical and methodological foundations for the elaboration of the proposal.

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