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## **HIGH IMPACT TEACHING STRATEGIES THAT FACILITATE STUDENTS' SPEAKING SKILLS DEVELOPMENT**

### **STRATEGII DIDACTICE CE FACILITEAZĂ DEZVOLTAREA ABILITĂȚILOR DE VORBIRE ALE STUDENȚILOR**

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#### **Rezumat**

Articolul vizează descrierea unor strategii și tehnici interactive orientate spre facilitarea dezvoltării abilităților de vorbire într-o limbă străină. Tehnicile în cauză oferă o alternativă modelelor tradiționale de predare a vorbirii la lecția de limbă străină. Capacitatea de a vorbi fluent o limbă străină este absolut esențială pentru succesul studenților. În acest sens, strategiile la care ne referim vor ajuta profesorii de engleză să încurajeze participarea studenților la acte de vorbire, ajutându-i să-și amelioreze fluența în limba străină studiată.

**Cuvinte-Cheie:** elevi, limba engleză, engleza ca a doua limbă (EDL), strategie, tehnică, abilități.

#### **Abstract**

The purpose of this article is to present some interactive and student-centred examples of the speaking activities that offer an alternative to the traditional way of teaching speaking in an ESL classroom. The strategies mentioned in this article will help English teachers instruct their students, to improve their language development, in a supportive, encouraging way. These strategies and specific activities aim to help ELLs acquire and use oral language, thus improving their fluency in the studied foreign language.

**Key-words:** ELL (English language learners), ESL (English second language), strategy, technique, skill.

„Speaking skills are defined as the skills which allow us to communicate effectively. They give us the ability to convey information verbally and, in a way, that the listener can understand. Speaking skills are one of the most important skills we learn, as they allow us to communicate with others and express our thoughts and feelings. Speaking skills can be

separated into formal and informal speaking skills, and we use both types of speaking skills in a variety of contexts throughout life” [2, p.17].

The four elements of the speaking skills to be practised while performing speaking tasks are *vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, fluency* [4, p.34]. These elements are taught and assessed daily by English teachers during ESL classes (see Figure 1.).

The aim of this article is to present some interactive and student-centred examples of the speaking activities that offer an alternative to the traditional way of teaching speaking in an ESL classroom. Being able to speak a foreign language fluently is critical to our student's success both inside and outside the classroom. It is obvious that in each class some students are too shy to speak up in the classroom or to answer a question, even when they have the answer. The strategies we are going to mention in this article, we think so, will help English teachers instruct their students to improve their language development in a supportive, encouraging way. These strategies and specific activities, we believe, aim to help ELLs acquire and use oral language.

According to *British Council*, many students mention that they can understand their teacher's English, but when they speak to 'real people' they cannot understand them. This is a common comment many teachers have heard from their students. This means that students feel that classroom-based speaking practice does not prepare them for the real world [10]. Besides the above-mentioned issue, students often highlight listening and speaking as their biggest problems. Why? We assume it happens partly because of the demands of listening and speaking and partly because of the way speaking is often taught.

This teaching speaking process usually consists of language practice activities such as discussions, information-gap, true-false activities, etc., of course, these are well-known and frequently used while teaching ESL. But they basically do not teach patterns of real interaction. So, what can be done in the classroom to prepare students for real interaction?

To understand how to teach speaking, first of all, we should identify what students' needs are. In this regard, we would like to share a few observations. Some points to look through, according to *Course Hero*, what students' needs are:

- practice using mother tongue strategies, which they do not automatically transfer;
- an awareness of formal/informal language and practice at choosing the appropriate language for different situations;
- the awareness that informal spoken language is less complex than written language;
- exposure to a variety of spoken text types;
- the ability to cope with different listening situations;
- competence at both 'message-oriented' or transactional language and interactional language, language for maintaining social relationships;
- knowledge of real interaction patterns;
- intelligible pronunciation and being able to cope with streams of speech;
- rehearsal time (giving students guided preparation) [11].

These are some ideas a teacher should take into consideration while thinking about how to improve students' speaking skills and facilitate the development of students' communicative

competence. At this point, we come with some practical suggestions on how to implement this in practice. They are as follows:

- transferring mother tongue strategies – this means, when preparing for a spoken task, make students aware of any relevant mother tongue strategies that might help them to perform the task successfully. For example, 'rephrasing' if someone does not understand what they mean;
- acknowledging students with examples of formal/informal language i.e. provide students with one or more short dialogues where one speaker is either too formal or informal. Students first identify the inappropriate language, then try to change it. Also, show students how disorganised informal speech is;
- presenting examples of vague language, this is using tapescripts of informal speech, focus on examples of vague language;
- preparing a selection of different spoken text types. At this point a teacher draws up a list of spoken text types relevant to the level of a class, teaches the language appropriate for each text type;
- using interactive listening - develop interactive listening exercises. Face-to-face listening is the most common and the least practised by coursebooks. Any form of 'Live listening' (e.g. the teacher speaking to the students) is suitable;
- familiarizing students with transactional and interactional language means raising students' awareness by using a dialogue that contains both. For example, it could be a situation when two friends chat to each other (interactional) and order a meal in a restaurant or cafe (transactional);
- providing students with real interaction patterns, these are simulation tasks that teach real interaction patterns. Introduce the following basic interactional pattern: Initiate, Respond, Follow-up [10];

It is absolutely important to:

- introduce students to spoken English, which will include after a listening exercise giving students the tapescript. Using part of it, students mark the stressed words and put them into groups. Compare a speech with an informal conversation. In the same lesson or subsequent listening lessons, you can focus on reductions in spoken speech, for example, linking, elision and assimilation.
- give students time for preparation and rehearsal, before a spoken task, give students some preparation and rehearsal time, and your guidance on how to use it. Necessary to provide them with a proper sheet with simple guidelines.
- finally, create real-life tasks/situations - try to use real-life tasks as part of your teaching.

<i>Points</i>	<i>Fluency</i>	<i>Pronunciation and accent</i>	<i>Vocabulary</i>	<i>Grammar</i>	<i>Details</i>
<b>5</b> Excellent performance	Smooth and fluid speech; few to no hesitations; no attempts to search for words;	Pronunciation is excellent; good effort at accent	Excellent control of language features; a wide range of well-chosen vocabulary	Accuracy & variety of grammatical structures	Excellent level of description; additional details beyond the required

	volume is excellent.				
<b>4</b>	Smooth and fluid speech; few hesitations; a slight search for words; inaudible word or two.	Pronunciation is good; good effort at accent	Good language control; a good range of relatively well-chosen vocabulary	Some errors in grammatical structures possibly caused by the attempt to include a variety.	Good level of description; all required information included
<b>3</b>	Speech is relatively smooth; some hesitation and unevenness caused by rephrasing and searching for words; volume wavers.	Pronunciation is good; Some effort at accent, but is non-native	Adequate language control; vocabulary range is lacking	Frequent grammatical errors that do not obscure meaning; little variety in structures	Adequate description; some additional details should be provided
<b>2</b>	Speech is frequently hesitant with some sentences left uncompleted; volume very soft.	Pronunciation is okay; No effort towards a native accent	Weak language control; basic vocabulary choice with some words clearly lacking	Frequent grammatical errors even in simple structures that at times obscure meaning.	Description lacks some critical details that make it difficult for the listener to understand
<b>1</b> Poor performance	Speech is slow, hesitant & strained except for short memorized phrases; difficult to perceive continuity in speech; inaudible.	Pronunciation is lacking and hard to understand; No effort towards a native accent	Weak language control; vocabulary that is used does not match the task	Frequent grammatical errors even in simple structures; meaning is obscured.	The description is so lacking that the listener cannot understand

Figure 1. Speaking assessment rubrics

Of course, the above-mentioned tips refer to speaking activities, that include the pre/while/post stages, these cannot be successful, productive, and efficient without a clear understanding of what language a teacher should teach [1]. As spoken language is both interactional and transactional, what should teachers focus on in class? When teaching spoken language, teachers are advised to focus on teaching longer transactional turns, because students need to be able to communicate information efficiently whether in their country or a native-speaker country [6].

As well, to teach interactional language a foreign language teacher may use an awareness-raising approach. For example, with monolingual classes by listening to a recorded mother-tongue conversation before a similar second language recording. (For recordings of native-speaker interactional and transactional conversations, navigate the Internet and have a look at 'Exploring Spoken English' by Carter) [3, p. 118 – 120]. The internet is a great source

of native-speaker interactional and transactional conversations, one just needs to google for them.

Among important language, teaching objectives is the task of getting our students to use new vocabulary? As it has already been mentioned in this article, giving students preparation time significantly increases the range of language used in the performance of the task, it is sensible to give students preparation time, this will encourage them to use new language [5].

This is achievable through simulation tasks which are very welcome while developing speaking skills. At this point pre-speaking activities are of great help; they may consist of a variety of tasks dedicated to lexicon shaping. In advance prepare cards with the vocabulary to be used by students, involve students in performing lexicon practice assignments and encourage students to do different tasks, fill in/matching worksheets, reading activities that recall the use of the vocabulary under study. Only after a set of tasks of this kind engage students, for example, in the following task *imagine*: 'Having a conversation with a stranger on public transport. One can motivate students into speaking with a few key questions like: *How will you start the conversation? What topics are you going to talk about? How are you going to move from one topic to another? How are you going to end the conversation?* After the preparation stage, students give a 'live performance'. This can be in front of the class or group to group in a large class [8]. This increases motivation and adds an element of real-life stress, but if you feel like it is too much stress for your students you can ask them to record their speeches using such online app tools as *Voice-spice* <https://voicespice.com/>, *Vocaroo* <https://vocaroo.com/>, *Voki* <https://l-www.voki.com/>. Another way of encouraging students to use new vocabulary in a communication activity is to make a game out of it. Give students a situation and several key phrases to include. They get points for using the language.

Similarly, when working on the language of discussion, teachers can produce a set of cards with the key phrases on. The cards are laid out in front of each group of 2/3/4 students, this one can be freely used online via a digital tool called *Wordwall* (<https://wordwall.net/>) using that one can arrange the material using the „*Open the box*“ template, so each student will be assigned a special list of words or word combinations. If a student uses the language on a particular card appropriately during the discussion, he/she keeps the card. The student with the most cards wins. If he/she uses the language inappropriately, then he/she can be challenged and has to leave the card on the table, a similar simulation can be performed in a virtual format.

Some other tips we would like to share concerns the techniques we can use while getting students into the habit of talking on different topics. These are strategies to structure oral discourse. When we teach our students how to write an essay in a foreign language, we teach them how to structure their writing. To do so, we provide them with pictures, guiding questions, keywords, sentence starters, and model paragraphs to help them feel at ease with the difficult task ahead. However, when it comes to teaching speaking, we may not be aware that oral discourse requires structuring as well [8]. It is definite, the more chances our students get to speak English in class, the more chances they have to improve their performance in English, and as a result, they are expected to perform better in oral exams.

However, all learners/students/pupils are different, and some may need more than just opportunities to speak in English. All students will benefit from learning strategies that show how to structure oral discourse. This is another important issue we want to refer to in this article. It has been observed that some students need these certain techniques to help them gain confidence and get started in oral performance. The techniques to be shared will surely contribute to preventing students from purposeless wandering when they have to give certain answers in oral interaction.

So, the first technique is “*Say what. Say why. Say other things to try*”, this one was mentioned by Ritchhart [8]. It sounds catchy and with a certain rhythm that is easily remembered by students. This technique helps students frame their answers in possible real-life situations. At first, students are explained the trick that will help them start an oral discourse on a topic. For example, imagine the following situation: students have to speak on “*What to do at weekends*” (or “What do you do at weekends?”). Students shape their answers using the three step-strategy, they think over the answer following the formula:

- ***say what you do*** – e.g. *I go jogging/I read a lot.*
- ***say why you do that*** – e.g. *I go jogging because I love to exercise, I feel healthy when I jog.*
- ***say other things to try*** - e.g. *I go jogging because I love to exercise, I feel healthy when I jog. I always go alone because my friends don't like to exercise much. They like playing video games. Sometimes I join them.*

Students then use this strategy when talking about a variety of topics. This is the structure of the technique; students find it enjoyable and easy to recall. Besides, teachers can use it while teaching different topics, for example, *music, shopping, cinema, health, sport*, etc. This technique, of course, will not help much in getting rid of grammatical inaccuracy, but will significantly improve the organization of students' answers.

Another technique is entitled “*Claim, Support, Question*” [8], this one suggests that students first have to say something or make a point, in most cases while using this technique the teacher suggests a point he/she wants students to share on, then students provide evidence or reason for the point, and finally pass the speaking turn to a partner by asking a question. This technique works well for discussion tasks in which students have to interact with each other, to make a decision or solve a problem. This one could be more interactive if the teacher uses a ball to signal the beginning of the activity and to announce each of the three steps, so, when the teacher bounces the ball for the first time, a/the student states a *Claim*, something for example “*It is important to look after yourself*” (when the topic under study is for example “*Health care/Looking after yourself*”), bounce two means *Support*, the student mentions “*It is important to look after yourself, as this means to be healthy and in good physical shape. Leading a healthy lifestyle is important for me. What I do is I go to the gym twice a week*”, the teacher bounces the ball again which means *Question* time, the student addresses a question to the partner, such as “*What do you do to look after yourself?*”. This also could be played in an online version; a teacher can use a bang sound to capture students' attention to announce each stage.

Teachers have always been concerned with how to help students produce longer pieces of discourse, the next technique is dedicated to experiencing this [5]. Those who suggested it gave it the name WWW, but it does not stand for World Wide Web, though this bond makes it easier to be recalled. So, the three “W” stand for “*What you think, What you like, What you do, and other people too*”. This one can be applied as an opinion game. In advance, teachers can prepare slips of paper with topics written on them (e.g. video games, sports, friends, holidays, free-time activities, shopping, etc.). One student picks a card and reads the topic aloud. In the online version, the teacher can use an online tool such as *Wordwall* by placing the topics on the template called *Random Wheel* which is going to help in choosing a topic, the teacher starts by naming one student, who initiates the speaking process using the structure mentioned above. For example, the topic is “*My breakfast habits*”, the student who was named starts with:

- *What you think: “I think that breakfast is very important”*
- *What you like: “I like having coffee with milk and biscuits”*
- *What you do: “Sometimes, I don’t have breakfast because I don’t have time and I only eat a toast”*
- *And other people too: “My children eat healthy food for breakfast like milk and cereals or porridge”*

It is advisable to place a poster with a chart with these rubrics on one wall of the classroom, so that students can always see and use them, which of course, will help students speak fluently on a variety of topics without much preparation.

Another speaking technique consists of question words “Who, where, what, and why, you can have a try!” [8]. This one is suggested as a post-reading speaking task. In many courses, students have to read stories, passages, paragraphs and this technique can help them structure a description. With smaller kids, teachers can use this one to work with pictures. However, tasks based on picture description are used not only with kids, with different age groups. Generally, pictures show one or several characters doing an action in a certain setting and at a certain time. This is the reason the technique begins with *Who*, for “*Who is in the picture?*” then comes *Where*, for “*Where is the character?*”, next *What*, for “*What is the character doing?*” and finally *Why*, for “*Why is the character doing the action?*”. These four questions are quite enough for picture description, at least when we refer to the on-the-spot speaking, that students will produce on their own without rehearsal and preparation time.

For virtual (online) learning teachers can create virtual posters with the structure/keywords/ of the four techniques mentioned above, so they could be at students' disposal when performing speaking activities. What is necessary on the side of the teacher is to mention which technique she/he is willing the student to apply at a certain part of practising an oral discourse task.

No doubt, that the techniques mentioned in this article will contribute to shaping your students' thinking and, as a result, their oral discourse. Though, of course, the development of oral discourse can occur only over time and requires a consistent approach by the teacher to contextualize work in the classroom, provide opportunities for interaction, and offer objective assessment (see Figure 1).

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## VALORIFICAREA LIMBAJULUI PAREMIOLOGIC ENGLEZ ÎN ÎNVĂȚĂMÎNTUL UNIVERSITAR

### VALORIZATION OF ENGLISH PAREMIOLOGICAL LANGUAGE AT UNIVERSITY LEVEL

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#### Rezumat

Articolul evidențiază potențialul didactic bogat al proverbelor în cadrul orelor de limbă engleză la nivel universitar. Autoarea identifică avantajele predării proverbului, privite ca fenomene lingvistice particulare din perspectiva abordării interculturale, evidențiindu-se implicațiile acestora pentru aplicațiile didactice. Utilizate ca texte originale în dezvoltarea competenței de comunicare, proverbele devin un mijloc de educare dar și de însușire a limbii engleze.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** proverbe, paremii, predarea limbii engleze, gramatica, pronunția, vocabular.

#### Abstract

The article highlights the rich didactic potential of proverbs in teaching English at university level. The author identifies the advantages of teaching English proverbs, seen as particular linguistic phenomena from the perspective of the intercultural approach, highlighting their implications for teaching applications. Used as authentic texts in the development of communicative competence, proverbs become a means of education but also of learning the English language.