

Accuracy versus fluency essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

These people are required to reach a sufficient level in a foreign language in order to accomplish military assignments in missions broad. Teaching foreign languages, mainly English, for these military purposes is provided by the Defense Language Institute in V; kop where I have been working as an English teacher for almost three years.

My principal goal is to provide the soldiers with as efficient English lessons as possible because it will be them who will have to deal with international relationships and take measures for solving various situations.

The main reason for choosing this topic for my bachelor thesis was realizing how important speaking is in every day situations. No matter where we are, either in the Czech Republic or in a foreign country, English conversation plays a crucial role in understanding each other and dealing with different kinds of uncovered problems. It means that not only soldiers that I teach, need English for communication abroad but also Czech teachers need English to communicate with their colleagues – native speakers.

At my work I have an opportunity to encounter with people from various parts of the world and I am very interested in the Way they use English as their mother tongue. These co-workers have a greater supporting role in our teaching process and it is always valuable to have a chat with them and ask questions to make sure our judgment was right.

Even if they come from America, England or Australia and their accents differ, it is just a question of time for teachers and also students to adjust to their speech and distinguish differences in pronunciation.

Being able to keep a fluent conversation with a native speaker is viewed as the main goal of my students, which underlines the importance of speaking skills in a student's point of view. Therefore, in my thesis I decided to concentrate on communicative activities which might be helpful for English learners and enhance their students' communicative skills. My thesis is divided into two parts -? theoretical and practical. In the theoretical part I deal with the difference between speaking and conversation, and explain its practical use in every day life.

Communicative approach focuses on a balance between fluency and accuracy and is the most suitable for those students whose aim is to gain confidence in speaking and conversational abilities.

Nevertheless, speaking in a foreign language has often been viewed as the most demanding of the four skills. " While listening and reading involve the ability to correctly receive messages and are therefore referred to as receptive skills, speaking and writing, on the other hand, involve language production and are referred to as productive skills. (Harmer 1995, 16)

Producing spoken language has often meant a difficulty and an obstacle for English learners. There might arise a question why. The answer is obvious. In the natural spoken language students are required to be aware of characteristics of fluent speech, such as reduced forms, use of slang or idioms, fixed phrases, collocations and most importantly the pace of speech.

All of these have to be taken into consideration while practicing conversation in class. Without these, our spoken language would sound bookish and unnatural.

TO avoid this, it is essential to introduce and practice “ real” communication with our students within the learning process. If it is neglected, it may be a reason why students are often shocked and disappointed when using a foreign language for the first time whilst interacting in foreign environment. They have not been prepared for spontaneous communication and could not cope with all of its simultaneous demands. The embarrassment is usually caused by students’ inability to adjust to native speakers’ speech.

This is natural and adjures patience while learning to speak or communicate in a foreign language.

As I already mentioned, native speakers are a great support and the opportunity to communicate with them means even greater encouragement for our students. Although it is quite demanding for students to keep up in conversation with them, they take it as an advantage in their studies. Most English learners are actually familiar with the fact that the best way to advance their speaking skills is adjusting to it in an English speaking environment. 2. 1.

2 Difference between speaking and conversation Although the terms “ speaking” and “ conversation” may seem clear, they often get misunderstood.

Speaking as a skill taught at schools presents the student’s ability to express his or her opinions, thoughts and ideas to a particular matter. Speaking practice, which is usually based on story telling, giving speech or presentation, is the necessity for later successful conversation. Nevertheless, the focus on speaking activities has diminished in recent years. This has

been caused by many factors, especially by realizing the need of everyday communication. As I mentioned above, giving speeches or presentations is not what we incinerate on in our lessons.

Even though these are crucial prerequisites for later conversational practice, the teachers tend to focus on communicative activities as the main goal of speaking lessons. I have no objection to this, but it is essential to mention the importance of presentations for military English learners working for the Ministry of Defense and the consequences of the lack of speaking skill while giving military presentations abroad. For this reason, it is very important for teachers to think through the purpose of speaking and communicative activities being prepared for lessons and also the target group of learners.

Nolan (1987, 3) mentions that being able to speak reasonably correct and even fluent English is one thing, but being able to engage in on-going, interactive, mentally satisfying conversation is another. Conversation is such a natural part of our lives that many people are not conscious of what happens within it. However, conversation follows certain rules which should be obeyed in order for participants to feel relaxed and be satisfied with it.

Arthur (1987, 5) adds that the main purpose of conversation is the exchange of information among people.

While communicating, our students may find themselves in different social situations playing various social roles and the main task for language teachers is to prepare them for these real situations they might participate in. This also includes leading students to develop the ability to initiate and sustain conversation whenever it occurs. 2.

1. 3 Students' motivation to participate in a speaking lesson When students learn a foreign language, they very often accumulate a lot of knowledge (grammatical rules, lists of vocabulary items), but then they find out that they can not actually use this language to communicate when they want to.

Scrivener (2005, 147) claims that there seems to be some difficulty in moving language from passive knowledge into active usage. Without experience in using the language, learners may tend to be nervous about trying to say things. Partly they may fear seeming foolish in front of others, they may worry about getting things wrong they may want to avoid teacher's comments or correction and so on.

It takes quite a long time for some students to express themselves, which leads to long embarrassing pauses while learners are trying to find out how to say what they really want to say.

One of the best ways of helping learners to activate their knowledge is to put them in " safe" situations in class where they are inspired and encouraged to try to speak a foreign language. Teachers should try to create such activities in which learners feel less worried about speaking and less under pressure. Nevertheless, the teacher is not the only one whom the students' success in speaking is based on. There are also motivational factors, differing from student to student, which influence his progress in the spoken language.

Harmer (1991, 4-6) distinguishes extrinsic and intrinsic motivation.

He claims that students' attitude to speaking the language may be affected by different factors from the outside, such as people in close surroundings,

previous speaking experience in a foreign language or the job opportunities offered after mastering foreign language communication. All of these represent extrinsic motivation. Although extrinsic motivation is nowadays a driving force for most students, without intrinsic motivation no goal in improving the speaking skill could be achieved.

Success is also based on students willingness to learn to speak a foreign language, which may be influenced by the teacher's methods used in teaching communication and, above all, his or her personality.

Considering these, teachers should realize how important role they play in encouraging the students to learn to speak a foreign language. Students' personalities also play an important role in determining how quickly and correctly they will manage a speaking task.

Those students who are risk-takers, unafraid of making mistakes, are generally more talkative but usually make many errors. Those who are shy may take a long time to speak confidently, but when they finally manage it, their English contains fewer errors.

The aim of both types of students is the same, indeed – to use the language correctly and fluently. To achieve this goal the teachers should try as much as they can to break the silence in the classroom and get the students speak no matter how many mistakes they make or how long it takes them to produce sentences.

In order to decrease shyness while speaking in front of the whole class, students may be offered the opportunity to work in groups or pairs, which is

a suitable approach for enhancing the active language use. Harmer (1991, 7-9) points out different motivational factors depending on the age and level of the students. Children's and adolescents' motivation to speak a foreign language is irrelevant for the purpose of my thesis because, as mentioned above, deal with adult English learners and their motivational needs for a foreign language communication are substantially different from the others. concentrate on intermediate students who represent the majority in my classes.

Their English is good at this stage but they are motivated by a primary goal of achieving a more advanced level of the language. They already know a lot and are able to have a conversation about every day matters but sometimes there might occur some problems. One of them is often the feeling that they are flooded with the new complexity of the language and cannot cope with it.

Teachers, when having found this out, should focus on building up the knowledge students already have and assure them they can speak the language well enough to understand and be understood. Our (1991, 274-280) declares that "motivation is very strongly related to achievement in language learning." This statement results from teaching practice showing that eager learners willing to invest effort in speaking activities are likely to make greater progress.

On the contrary, those sitting leniently at the desk without desire to be involved in any kind of speaking activity, may find themselves stuck to be able to improve their speaking skill. Having noticed this, teachers should encourage low-motivated students to develop the interest in communicative

activities. Our (1 991, 281) describes some strategies to enhance students' motivation to speak in a lesson. The principal one is selecting the topic carefully to make it as interesting for students as possible.

If the teacher's choice fails in the class, there should be no panic or embarrassment.

The possible solution to this situation may be asking the students to vote for a topic they would be interested in talking about. Varied tasks are also suggested for a successful and efficient speaking lesson as well as using visuals to enhance students' motivation to speak. Average pictures copied from different sorts of textbooks and workbooks do not encourage adult learners to speak anymore. Based on my teaching experience, adult learners prefer to be set into real situations, dealing with real and current news items concerning today's world and society.

To satisfy students' expectations, teachers should be supplied with sufficient amount of authentic materials, such as newspapers and magazines.

The speaking tasks could be based on describing the photos to each other and guessing the place in the world where the action has happened.

Connection between the picture and reality makes it even more tempting for students to express their points of view to a particular event and, at the same time, the teacher's goal is achieved as well – getting students to speak and communicate with each other. 2. 1. Accuracy versus fluency Accuracy and fluency are terms characteristic for a successful and fecund conversation. Scrivener (2005, 160-162) declares that accuracy is the ability

to speak correctly without making serious mistakes and therefore a greater use of instant teacher's correction within a speaking activity is appropriate.

On the contrary, fluency is the ability to speak confidently without irrelevant pauses or hesitation, however, often with making major mistakes. In this case, instant correction may be inappropriate and could interfere with the aims of the speaking activity.

Teachers should be aware of whether their main goal in a speaking activity is accuracy or fluency and adapt their role in class eligibly. If the main aim is to get students to speak, then one way to achieve that would be reducing teacher's contribution. It is supposed that the less he or she speaks, the more time and space it will allow the students to.

If the main aim is accuracy, the teacher should concentrate on students mistakes and devote time to their correction. However important speaking without mistakes is, a promoted trend at present seems to be to lead students to a fluent conversation in every day situations.

Taking this into consideration, this approach best fits the needs of today's society which is based on fast exchanges of information. Nevertheless, it would be injudicious to qualify accuracy as less important in communication and underestimate its importance. It is also essential for the ability to speak a foreign language well. 2.

1. 5 Correcting students' mistakes Fluency activities In a fluency activity the teacher is expected to monitor the class and encourage the students to

speak with minimum interfering and correction. This technique is called scaffolding.

Scrivener (2005, 162) states that “ it is a way a competent language speaker helps a less competent one to communicate by encouraging and providing possible elements of conversation.

In practice it means to encourage the weaker one by nodding, eye contact, repeating the last word in order to encourage the speaker to continue, asking tag questions, etc. The aim of this encouragement is to make a student speak as much as he or she is able to. Considering a fluent activity, correcting the mistakes should be done after finishing this activity.

Suggested techniques are the following: a) writing the sentences used during the activity on the board and discussing them with the whole class b) writing incorrect sentences used during the activity on the board and encouraging the students to make correction c) inventing and writing down the story that includes some errors the teacher overheard during the activity and students try to find them and correct them d) writing out two lists A and B – each list contains ten sentences from the activity but some of them are correct, some of them incorrect.