

Strategies and Procedures of Teaching Speaking to Beginners and Intermediate Students in an EFL Context: The Example of Senegal

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Abstract

This paper focuses on some strategies and procedures that can be used to teach speaking to beginners and intermediate students in Senegal where the majority of the students has not only a lack of opportunities and are seldom exposed to the English language, but also are found to be silent, shy or have a profound fear of being wrong. Since more importance is given to reading and writing skills, communicative activities such as introductions, role plays, use of fables and talking tasks are efficient alternatives to improve students' oral communication skills in junior and high secondary public schools in Senegal by integrating lessons with the National curriculum for English language. This study also claims that students' use of mobile phones which is forbidden by the schools legislation is inevitable to improve speaking skills in the process of foreign language learning. It shows that despite resources constraints in many remote areas, it is possible to improve students' oral communication skills in a relaxed and stress free environment.

Keywords: Oral communication skills, Speaking, Improve, Foster, Foreign language learning, beginners, intermediate students, interviews, Asking questions, Pair or group work.

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INTRODUCTION

In language learning, students need first of all to develop the four basic skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing, but they also need to practice in such skills in a way that makes them (learn how to find information, learn to do their own research, learn to report their findings, learn to present their ideas to others, learn to communicate conclusions, learn to take pride in their achievements, learn to develop personal responsibility, etc..) An approach that is similar to Celce-Mercia and Yoshida [1] viewpoints when they state that for

grammar activities to be optimally effective, they should be based on what actually occurs in authentic discours... Exercises should not be artificially created simply to force learners to practice in a given structure; learners benefit greatly from having a context that realistically motivates the use of the target structure [1]

As the English language is increasingly used as a language of global communication, an International Language (EIL) or a universal Lingua Franca, laying the stress on speaking to enhance the learners' communicative ability is of paramount importance. In the Senegalese context, the teaching of speaking and listening are almost neglected to the detriment of

reading comprehension and writing. As a result, the majority of Senegalese English learners are linguistically competent and communicatively incompetent. They are what Michael Swan's [2] calls "*linguistically gifted idiot!*"

The aim of this article is to try to bridge the gap between Senegalese learners' linguistic competence and their communicative incompetence by proposing some speaking activities that foster communication. In so doing, starting from the beginners to install in them the culture of speaking will be a significant step, for they do not have any contact with the target language except the limited hours at school. The transition to the intermediate students would be easier if the students, at the lower level, are conscious that language is meant for communication. As far as the intermediate students are concerned, it would be a matter of deepening and making the communicative activities more challenging and funny [6-16].

Activities to trigger beginners eagerness to speak

In an EFL context where learners do not have any contact with the target language apart from the limited hours at school, it is pedagogically important to start each course with some classroom activities that can help the teacher and the students to get to know one-another, in an easy, stress free and relaxed

atmosphere. The first type is based on having the students interviewing one-another and asking questions, so that there is an independent dialogue between class members, with a minimum of interruption and supervision by the teacher.

Introductions

Since this is a speaking class the teacher should begin by telling his students something about him or herself, for example, the teacher’s name, his/her place of birth, qualifications and experience, what he/she as teacher expects students to do and to get from the class, followed by some guidelines on how student performance will be evaluated.

Start with an activity to introduce the people in the class to each other as a warm-up task. Put the students in pairs, in two rows of chairs opposite one another, and have them interview each other in English, taking-down notes, following the guideline below. When the interviewing is finished, each student stands up and introduces his/her partner to the class in no more than two to three minutes. When the first pair have finished, go to the next pair and so on.

I would like to introduce you to my friend whose nickname is

Name:.....
Nickname:.....
Birth Date:.....
Place of birth:.....
Family members:.....
Education:.....
Skills:.....
Hobbies:.....
Other interests:.....
Sports:.....
Prizes/Awards:.....
Travel experience:.....
What makes this person unique?.....

As students are speaking, the teacher should keep correcting their grammar. For example, “He was born on the tenth of April in Latmingué.” Or “She graduated from Cheikh Anta DIOP University with a degree in English.” The mistakes will be almost all the same, so by the time the students near the end of the activity, these mistakes will be repeated less frequently.

Questions for the Teacher

Depending on the number of students in the class, get them to put their chairs in a circle. Then, ask each student to take a sheet of paper and write the numbers from 1-10 down the left-hand margin and write a list of ten questions to ask the teacher. Next to the number one each student must write one question as illustrated below. When the student has written the first question, he/she passes the sheet to the person on the right, who in turn writes a different question after the number two, and so on all around the circle, until every student has written 10 different questions. For example,

1. What is your name?
2. Where do you come from?
3. Do you like football?
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

When the students are finished writing their questions, and their sheets have gone around the circle, and finally come back to their owners, then, the student may go around once more and ask the teacher any question that is listed on the sheet. Nobody should repeat a question that has already been used.

First, the students will ask a question, then, the teacher will answer it. If there is any grammar mistake in the question, the teacher can correct it, repeating the question correctly and answering in clear and simple language that everyone can understand.

Remembering Introductions

Another way for a group to get acquainted and have a good laugh at the same time is to put about fourteen students in a circle and have them speak in the following pattern, each one remembering and repeating what was said before and then adding his/her own new information.

The first one says,
 “Hello, my name is Alassane BARRO.
 My major is English and my minor is French.”
 The second one says,
 “Hello, this is Alassane BARRO.
 His major is English and his minor is French.
 My name is Marc DIATTA.
 My major is Spanish and my minor is English.”
 The third one says,
 “Hello, this is Alassane BARRO.

His major is English and his minor is French, and this is Marc DIATTA.

His major is Spanish and his minor is English, and my name is Aly SARR NDAO.

My major is English and my minor is Arabic.”

And so on and so on until they have gone around the full circle with no one forgetting and no one becoming confused. Or if they do forget and get confused, just stop at that place in the circle and start over again, beginning with the next person and continuing in the same way until they have gone all the way around the group.

Then, when the above task has been completed successfully, you might mix up the seating plan by getting everyone to change chairs and then continue speaking the round of introductions until it is again fully completed.

Find Someone Who...

Every student takes a copy of this sheet and stands up and walks around the room, asking the other students about the information below, asking and answering only in English and using only full sentences. For example,

Find someone who has been to Gorée.

Question: “Mossane, have you been to Gorée?”

Answer: “Yes, I have been to Gorée.”

Or “I have never been to Gorée.”

Then, write down, “Mossane has been to Gorée.”

Find someone who
Doesn't like mbalax music.
Doesn't smoke.
Never drinks alcohol.
Never tells a lie.
Doesn't have a TV.
Cannot cook.
Can drive a motorcycle.
Never takes a taxi.
Usually takes the bus.

When everyone has finished asking questions and has written down the names of which students have done what, then, the teacher can put the students in a circle and ask them questions one-by-one and correct their grammar mistakes as they speak. Sometimes, the teacher can help with the answers, for example: “Everyone can use Microsoft Word.” “There is no one who can program a computer.” “Nobody lives at home. They all live in the dormitory.” Get students to write the questions and then check their grammar before they actually stand up to do the task.

Simon Says...

This is a game that children like to play, but it's an effective language learning exercise because it is based on speaking and listening and carrying out actions based on simple sentences. The rules are simple, all the students stand in a big circle, and there is a leader who gives commands like

Simon says, “Close your eyes.”

Simon says, “Put your fingers in your ears.”

Simon says, “Hold your nose.”

If the command begins with the words, “Simon says,” all persons in the class/group must follow the order. Anyone who does not follow the order is disqualified and must drop out of the game. What makes the game more tricky and funny is that, if there is a command that does not begin with “Simon says,” the listeners should not perform the action. Anyone who does perform the action is disqualified and must drop out of the circle. The idea is to keep tricking a few, so they do the action without first hearing

“Simon says,” and, then, the circle keeps getting smaller and smaller until only one person is left, who will be declared and applauded as the winner.

If the leader orders, “Simon says, salute,” everyone must salute, but if the next command is “OK now sit down” without the words “Simon says,” then anyone who sits down is out of the game, and so on. Everyone will have a good laugh and not have to take things too seriously. While this is normally a game for 10 to 16 year-olds, it can be played in a more sophisticated way, even with adults, by making the commands more mature and demanding:

Simon says, “Tell me your mother's maiden name.”

Simon says, “Tell us how many children you have.”

Simon says, “Please tell us what kind of car you would like to own.”

If the question is, “Would you like to win ten million in the lottery?” and the person answers, “Yes, Sure,” then he/she is out of the game for answering a question that didn't begin with “Simon Says.”

Grammar tasks and speaking activities

Due to the limited hours, the plethora of students in the classes and the lack of extrinsic motivation, many Senegalese English teachers do not teach grammar communicatively. The following grammar activity is meant for showing alternatives to this problem. Write some words to describe and modify the verbs listed below. Do not use the same descriptive word (adverb) twice. Most of the words you think of will end in “ly.”

Shout	loudly	excitedly
Struggle		
Think		
Eat		
Sleep		
Drive		
Dream		
Look		
Write		
Criticize		

You can keep up this activity as long as you can keep finding verbs to describe. Get the students to think of a sentence for each example and tell it to the class.

What Are You Doing These Days?

We can also practice speaking by using verb forms and parts of speech, which are part of the popular mechanics of language. An example would be the present continuous tense, when we say, “What are you doing these days?” To answer correctly you must say something like:

At the moment, I am *trying* to finish my Master’s in Accounting.
 Now, I am trying to quit smoking.
 I am trying to lose weight by doing aerobic dancing.
 These days, I am very busy making sales calls to our clients.
 I am *learning* a new software program to help speed up the work process.
 I am forming my own company so I can quit my job.
 I am practicing meditation to try to reduce stress.
 I’m looking for a new girlfriend because my last one left me.
 At present, I’m looking for a new job so I can get a higher salary.
 I am selling Amway products to try to earn some extra money.

So, now let’s go around and ask each class member what he is doing these days.

Write the answers in the boxes provided:

I am taking an English class to try to improve my speaking skills.

Writing down the answers helps us to get the feel for the pattern.

INTERACTION ROLE-PLAY

Another way to teach speaking is through setting up interactive role play situations in pairs or groups. This means putting two or more students together and giving them a handout sheet, which they can, first, read and study, taking time to look-up unknown words and asking their friends about meanings and pronunciation. Then, give them a little more time to practice speaking, with everybody in the

room reading aloud to get a feel for the role they will be playing and get used to the words sounds, phrases and the rhythm of the language.

Telephone Role Play

Telephone and discuss with a friend what you might do together tonight. Put students in pairs and get them to do a dialogue something like the one below:

Wagane: “Hi, Diaga this is Wagane, are you free tonight? I would like to go out somewhere and have some fun. What do you think?”

Diaga:“Actually,....., but if I work hard, I think I can be free by about eight o’clock. How about that?”

Wagane:“That’s great! OK,

Diaga: “ Yes, I think that’s a very good idea..”.....

Wagane: “Yes, as a matter of fact, I

More Telephone Role Plays

Put the students in pairs and get them to write and perform the text for a dialogue in which the first student is reporting a crime or accident to the second student who is taking the call on 77 234 66 77 and asking a lot of appropriate questions. The incident might be any of the following:

“Hello, I am calling to report a...

- Car accident
- Fire
- Bank robbery
- Murder
- Drug deal
- Rape attempt
- Sexual assault
- Theft of a baby
- Collapsed building
- Flood

The 77 234 66 77 receptionist should begin by asking questions like, “Who are you? What is your name? Where are you? What is the address? What happened? How many? Why? What time? How long? Etc,” and then follow up from the initial query by asking for more details or even giving advice on the phone to a person in distress. Students can use their imaginations to make it more exciting.

Fostering speaking through fables

Having experienced a long tradition of orality, famous fables can be efficient materials to teach speaking in the Senegalese context. Fables will be meant for students to read aloud, sentence-by-sentence, student-by-student, following the teacher’s directions and guidelines, for three main purposes which are as follow: [4]

The first purpose is to give the students the chance to read aloud, one-by-one, going around the classroom, asking all the students to read in turn, with the teacher helping with pronunciation. Because they only have to read one sentence, the students will not

feel threatened and will thereby gain confidence, especially if this kind of practice continues over a series of stories, over a longer period of time. Because there are not too many words in a sentence, the teacher can isolate the sounds and syllables and stresses that the students have pronounced incorrectly, and the teacher can focus on those sounds. Because most of students will have trouble with these same sounds, get the whole class repeating the correct pronunciation, thereby including everyone at the same time. Because students know that one of their most important weaknesses is in pronunciation, they will be more than willing to play along.

The second purpose of this task is for the teacher to help students with the difficult vocabulary words in order to enhance their reading comprehension. The teacher should keep explaining and explicating the meaning of the words and phrases in the text as they move along, line-by-line, while being careful to keep a balance in teacher/student dialogue, rather than burden the student’s by making them listen to a long, monotonous teacher’s-monologue [5].

The third, and perhaps most interesting, part of this task should be a teacher–led discussion in which all class participants exchange ideas in trying to interpret the meaning of the story and any literary devices and hidden meanings on a second or even third level. Certainly an important aspect of understanding any language involves comprehending the significance of such literary devices as similes, metaphors, personification and symbols. Once the teacher has explicated the text, he/she can also, finally, lead a discussion on how the story applies to real people in real life and what the story means to each individual person. If the discussion gets off-topic, never mind, just let them keep talking. If the he most important thing is talking, keep them talking and talking.

The Scorpion and the Frog

The story you are about to read is a fable, which loosely defined, means an animal story that has an allegorical or symbolic meaning on another on a

second level. When we have finished reading the story, we can interpret and explain its meaning.

The story goes like this, once, a long time ago, there was a little, lithe, green frog that lived happily in the middle of a lovely, large lily pond in a world that was entirely free of care and trouble.

One fine day, when the frog happened to be hopping along the shore, he met a scorpion who had stopped on his way at the edge of the lake. As the frog was a talkative soul, with a friendly heart and an open nature, he began to engage the scorpion in conversation. Indeed, the two passed the whole afternoon in this fashion, each enjoying the attention and the company of the other, in accordance with his own nature. When dusk was approaching, the scorpion asked the frog if he would take him on his back and swim across the pond so the scorpion could reach the other side.

The frog answered that he would be most happy to accommodate the wishes of his new friend, except for one thing. The frog admitted candidly, that he was afraid the scorpion would bite him while he was riding on his back and that he could die in the course of doing a good deed. The scorpion appeared to ponder this thought for a moment, and then he laughed. Why do you laugh,” asked the frog? And the scorpion answered, “If I bit you while I was riding on your back in the middle of the pond, and I bit you so that you died, then I would sink into the water and I too would die. That wouldn’t make much sense would it?”

Then, it was the frog’s turn to ponder for a moment, and then he said:

“Well, all right, if you put it that way, I don’t suppose that I will have too much to worry about.” So he let the scorpion climb on his back, just as the sun was sinking, and the two set out to cross the pond. The frog swam strongly, and the scorpion sat snugly on his back. Indeed, everything seemed to be going very well, when the scorpion suddenly stung the frog right in the middle of his back. Screaming out in pain and surprise, the frog turned to the scorpion and said:

“What did you do that for?”

And the scorpion looked him coldly in the eye and said: “That’s just the way I am.”

This makes us wonder why the people that we want to love and trust always stab us in the back even when it means they will also be hurting themselves.

Talking tasks

Talking tasks for the classroom may involve role play situations using dialogues, interviews, opinions, discussion, debates, and presentations.

What about Sex Before Marriage?

Opinion is divided between young people whether they should or should not have sex before marriage. The traditional view is that pre-marital sex goes against Thai tradition and customs. Many girls and their families are certainly in favor of this point of view, but some young couples who are in love and plan to marry anyway would disagree. So would a lot of boys who just want to have sex without thinking too much about any sense of responsibility. What do you think? Look at the opinions below and express your feelings.

Senegalese culture is against it. The woman is disadvantaged.

There is no advantage for the woman if she is not ready for a family.

Young people are not ready and capable to deal with having a child.

Sex before marriage allows you to get to know if you belong together.

Sex is just another part of life, and you don’t have to be married.

Giving Reasons Why

Why does an object fall to the ground when we drop it?

Why do the oceans have a tide?

Why is it dangerous to get too much exposure to the sun?

Why is smoking dangerous for your health?

Why does drinking alcohol make you tipsy?

Why does drinking a lot give you a hang over the next day?

Why do student

Asking Your Friends for Advice

In this task, one student goes to the front and pretends to have a problem and asks the others for advice. This is a kind of free-for-all activity that gives everyone a chance to speak if they wish. It also shows the teacher which students are ready to participate and which ones hang back and may need extra attention and encouragement. A student explains his/her problem thus:

I want more than anything to major in drama and maybe one day be a star, but my parents are dead set against it because I would have to come home late from rehearsals, I wouldn’t be wearing a school uniform, and this might not be safe, and, most of all, they feel that I would have no chance of a proper career if I follow this path, what should I do? The other students can ask questions and talk with her about her problem.

CONCLUSION

Generally speaking, this article suggests that in the context of foreign language learning, the practice of teaching English language needs to be changed. Not only the teacher centered classrooms are to be changed with the students centered classes, but also students

should be provided with some specific learning opportunities of oral communication skills in the classroom through activity-based teaching in which students should be given tasks in pairs and in group.

With the supervision and the mentoring of the teacher, these strategies and procedures would develop both accuracy and fluency. Students will gradually realize their own mistakes in terms of pronunciation and this will lead towards self and peer correction process. It is the language teacher who has been considered to be a catalyst whose continuous feedback motivates students and gives chances to improve oral communication skills. An encouraging language used by the teachers in a funny and stress free environment sparks an inspiration and excitement in students for learning English language and speaking it. It develops intrinsic motivation within them.

It is clear that using teaching strategies such as introductions, demonstrations, role plays, and discussions are efficient ways to improve students' oral communication skills. Thus, this study argues that until and unless teachers and school principals provide opportunities to students to practice language in classroom, the real purpose of the language teaching will not be achieved.

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