Strategies for Communication Skills Development

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Problems that Stand in the Way of Developing Communication Skills

English language, the language of the most powerful and progressive countries of the world, is a universal avenue for political, historical and scientific thoughts. It is used to comply with the demands of trade and travel. This language has made progress in every field of human activity and it spells opportunities in plenty, both national and international.

To be able to speak fluently in English is lionized and one can't deny the fact that English speaking people have an ascendancy over others. They ride the crest with confidence around the world. In such a scenario, to prepare the student community to speak effectively in English is a time consuming and challenging task confronting language teachers.

The present article is to explore the problems standing in the way of language pedagogue in developing communication skills of the students. It examines the possible tools by which the communicative competence of the students can be improved.

1. Student Motivation

Getting students to speak in the target language is very much dependent on their awareness of the importance of the language being learnt. Explaining to the students the significance of the language is a paramount mission since it facilitates instigating the curiosity of the students.

In this era of globalization, people migrate from one country to another seeking better education and employment opportunities. The triumph of higher education and procurement of global placement are shown by one's ability to comprehend and reciprocate in English language effectively. The secret behind entering into lucrative careers is also counted on one's dexterity to communicate in English fluently. Hence to measure up to the global competition and to move around the world with confidence, it is indispensable to have mastery over the English language.

When the pedagogue is able to inspire the students, making them aware of the opportunities promised by the language, can actuate the students to try to speak in the language, it will also impel the students to put forth extra effort to achieve the goal, that is, to acquire communicate competence in the target language. Thus the success of the language teachers is measured in terms of their motivating the students. Should the students don't confer real fascination in learning the language; the efforts taken by the teacher will not yield the desired result.

2. Tailoring Classroom Teaching that Fosters Speaking

The language pedagogue should ensure that the classes are tailored in such a way that promotes speaking skills of the students. For instance, students may be asked to review the lesson taken in the class. Drama, novel and poetry dealt in the class may be used as one of the sources to encourage the students to talk and it can also be used for role play.

Sometimes students may be encouraged to illustrate their experiences similar to the one explained in the class. The merger of classroom activities with the student's own experiences would prove to be prudent mixture as it would stimulate the interest of the students, and it would lay foundation for unlocking the potential of the students. Thus tailoring classroom activities with the experience of the students will be of immense use of generate new information from them and to involve them in speaking.

3. Shift from 'Signification' to 'Value' in Teaching'

In order to able to speak the language, it is mandatory on the part of the learner, to stock a certain amount of grammar and vocabulary. So, learners must be animated to internalize structures of the language. But merely teaching the grammatical rules and regulations is

not sufficient in this regard. Rather it is the duty of the teacher to enable the students to apply the rules learnt in the class with real life situations.

This view can be further elaborated with H.G.Widdowson's view of 'signification' and 'value'.

> We don't communicate by composing sentences, but by using sentences to make statements of different kinds, to describe, to record, to classify and so on or to ask questions, make requests, give orders. Knowing what is involved in putting sentences together correctly is only one way of what we mean by knowing a language, and it has very little value on its own; it has to be supplemented by a knowledge of what sentences count as a means of communicating. So knowing a language involves not only the knowledge of the formal properties of the language system but also the knowledge of how this system is put to use in the performing of social actions of different kinds. In other words, knowledge of a language is not only a matter of grammatical competence but also of communicative competence.

Widdowson terms the former as significance and the latter as value. While it is true that the knowledge of signification is essential, it is also true that the knowledge of value is still more essential to speak. The teaching of value that is, what sentences count in their normal use as a means of communication is essential than teaching of signification.

According to H.G.Widdowson, the difference between the teaching of value and the teaching of signification is made apparent when there is a comparison between the syllogism and action chain sequences. Because the use of syllogism helps the learner to understand how the language is being used in different contexts and there by the value of the sentence is very well learnt by the learner. Thus, it is paramount importance to teach not only in terms of linguistic structures but also in terms of communicative acts.

4. Emphasis on Need Based Teaching

The role of the language teacher, one who teaches communication skills should centre on catering to the needs of the target group. It is believed that the language learnt is best retained in memory when it is related to the needs of the learners. In order to equip the students to speak in the language, some language activities the learner likely to engage in future, may be taught in the class. One cannot deny the fact that speaking situations are highly personal and unique. But it is also true that some situations may be taught and practiced in the class.

J.A.Van ek suggests four components of situations which provide sufficient basis for comprehensive language acts. The essential roles for which the students must be ready are:

1. The social roles the learners likely to play in his language act.
2. The psychological roles the learner will be able to play.
3. The settings in which the learners will be able to use the foreign language.
4. The topic which the learners will be able to deal with in the foreign language.

i. The social roles the learners likely to play in his language act.
For instance:

Stranger/stranger   Friend/friend

The prescribed roles have a bearing to the individual circumstances if slightly modified, and this will prepare the learners to establish and maintain social relationship with foreign language speaker.

ii. The psychological roles the learner will be able to play.
Neutrality, Equality, Sympathy, Antipathy

He suggests that students may be taught and geared up to play the aforesaid roles which are more conventional and typical and they are pertinent in various types of linguistic interaction.

iii. The Settings in which the Learners will be able to Use the Foreign Language

a) Geographical location

The learner may be groomed or trained to use the foreign language where the foreign language is native language. He may also be drilled to use the language where the foreign language is not a native language and he may be primed to use the language in his own country.

b) Surroundings

1. Family   2. Friends   3. Acquaintances   4. Strangers

Training the students to speak the language in the above surroundings would help the learner to move around the society with confidence.

c) Place

The efficiency of the learners in using the foreign language in private life and public life, and places such as shop, hotel, theatre, banks, office, school, during interviews etc will fetch him respect and compliments.

4. The Topic which the Learners will be able to Deal with in the Foreign Language

The teaching and training of the following list of topics will enable the learner to face the situations of any type irrespective of his preparation.

1.Personal identification
2. Trade, profession, occupation
3. Free time, entertainment
4. Travel
5. Relation with other people
6. Health and welfare
7. Education
8. Shopping
9. Food and drink
10. Services

The above list of setting and topics are suggested by Richterich.

Language learning objectives are expounded in terms of behaviour. Hence the purpose of learning must be correlated with one's ability to execute an activity which he is not able to carry out earlier.

Determining such general language activities would help the students to fulfill his language needs and one cannot deny the value of contextual language teaching for the development of communicative competence. When teaching is geared towards learners needs and content matter is more meaningful for students, the language is best learnt as it involves both the comprehension and the production of language and it also promotes language development. Thus the teacher should give emphasis to need based language teaching.

5. Resorting to Paradigm of Error Correction

Students are likely to commit errors in the process of language production. So, less importance must be attached to error correction, while the focus is on communicating and discussing ideas, because important error correction will discourage English language learners from using the language in communication. The language pedagogue is expected

to be extremely supportive and he should permit the learners to work at their own pace to encourage language speaking. Giving positive feedback facilitates to ignite students to enunciate more. He can supply relevant words or phrases should be resorted to. Thus as far as error correction is concerned oblique paradigm is preferable to candid paradigm.

6. Risk-taking in Language Learning

In learning a foreign language, students must be encouraged to take the risk of speaking instead of remaining passive. Students should have a feel that learning the language is distinct from using it for communication. Here, we need to note that even the native speakers of English take years to master their language. If this is being the phenomenon, it is no wonder that the second language learner are likely to commit errors in the process of learning. They should be invigorated to speak even though they are caught by the fear of using wrong words or expressions. Inculcation of self-confidence will go a long way in this regard since negative attitudes and beliefs would reduce confidence and harm language learning where as positive attitudes and beliefs can do the reverse.

7. Speaking - not only Classroom-oriented; but also Experience-oriented

The language teacher should make it obvious that mastery over the language cannot be simply achieved overnight and in the short span of time. Rather it enjoins sustained effort and good amount of experience on the part of the learner.

To enable the students to get experience, the language pedagogue should provide the students the chance to speak in the class. Students may be divided into groups and motivated to get involved in sustained meaningful discussions in the classroom and thereby the language pedagogue can enhance and maximize their language use.

Apart from classroom experience, the learned should make it sure that his language use, is getting supplemented outside of the classroom too. Since classroom experience alone does not seem to guarantee fluency, students must be of self started and be on the lookout of the circumstances by which they can propagate their speaking skills. Moreover language speaking involves number of muscles, so the more we exercise it, the easier it is to use. The greater his experience the greater will be his ability to speak. Such a kind of awareness must be inculcated in the minds of the students.

8. Enhancing the Comprehensive, the Analytic and the Cognitive Skills

Students need to comprehend the language spoken and analyze how language operates in communication. From our own experience, we find students who have received many years of formal English teaching, remain deficient in their capacity to use the language and to comprehend its use in normal communication. In order to overcome such problems

the language teacher should attempt to enhance the comprehensive and analytic skills of the students. To explore these skills they may be given an opportunity to defining the goals of instruction and to contribute for innovative teaching. To improve the cognitive skills of the students, initially teaching simple topics, then gradually moving towards complex ones will be of great help and it ensures language development as well.

9. Necessitate Need for Communication

In language acquisition language learning and language use are not distinct activities; rather they are one and the same. But this rule does not apply to second language learning as language learning and language use are unassociated and disparate. Unless the language teacher makes it obligatory to speak in English in the class, the students will not come forward to enunciate. Therefore, the students must be made aware of its need in communication. Besides, he himself should handle classes in English in order to accredit the students to tread on his heels and to create favourable ambience in order to ignite the students to speak.

Conclusion

Teaching communication skills requires analytic skill to learn from experience on the part of the teacher. Besides developing communication skills of the students is a practical activity rather than a theoretical activity. So the language teacher should be aware of the practical relevance of his teaching as a means of communication. Since teaching 'signification' alone doesn't guarantee to develop speaking skills of the students, the language teacher should ensure that value teaching takes place off and on. Thus the best way of teaching is to associate it to applications.

To conclude I say that the role of language teachers is active rather than passive. Hence, they should explore the possibilities of a communicative approach themselves. To put it in a nutshell in developing communicative skill of the students, the language teachers should adjust their approach to the requirements of students and exigencies of the teaching situation.

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