Interactive Classroom Enhances
English Communicative Competence

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Abstract

English Communicative Competences are to be developed by applying linguistic knowledge in professional environments. The language learners are advised to learn the language systematically. So that they can speak and write with correction, fluidity and communicative efficiency in both general and professional environments. This paper depicts interactive session as a tool through which the language learners can develop their competences using English communication.

Keywords: Communicative Competence, Interaction, Classroom, Information, Opinion, Project Work, Reasoning, Instructional Mode.

Communication is a requisite to discuss, discover, and learn about all other concepts. Communicative competence is comprised of grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence (Canale & Swain, 1980; Canale, 1983 & Savignon, 1972). Grammatical competence is the knowledge of the structure and form of a language; some of which include its morphologic, syntactic, phonemic and graphemic features. The knowledge of the interrelationship between and logic across sentences and phrases is characteristic of discourse competence. An individual with strong discourse competence can aptly judge the relationship between different ideas within a text. Sociolinguistic competence focuses on the recognition and accordance of the rules of interaction; taking turns, appropriate greetings, proper use of formal/informal register, naturalness or overall native-like language. Finally, strategic competence is

characterized by the ability to make the most of the language, particularly when compensating for language deficiencies. For instance, it is the ability to successfully circumlocute an idea or concept that an individual lacks the proper name for, or to negotiate meaning during conversation through verbal and nonverbal communication techniques. When skillfully combined, the result is successful communicative competence in which one can express, interpret, and negotiate meaning (Savingnon, 1972).

Interaction is a two way process. In any communication event messages move back and forth between two speakers in a series of exchanges. Interaction in a group is thus multi-dimensional. The turns of conversation are distributed among the members of the group. Interaction involves listening to incoming information and responding to it relevantly. The listener's response to the speaker depends upon what one thinks of the speaker and one's perception towards life and the world. The interlocutors in an exchange treat each other with respect and the tone and manner of speaking reflect all this. Interaction would thus imply mutual understanding of each other's thoughts and feeling and the primary mode though which this is affected in language.

Spoken exchange in a group is spontaneous and multi-directional. Each member in a group may have something valuable to say. Each member may also respond to what the other has said. The force of one's ideas result in appropriate language forms to convey them and facilitates fluency. Another principle is that knowledge is constructed collaboratively by the participants and not just received by them from one dominant speaker. Responding to others' idea is crucial to the learning process. These natural principles of human communication patterns will help teachers in the language classroom to equip learners with communicative competence. Communicative competence is the ability to use language appropriately in real life situations. That can surely be achieved by classroom interaction.

As we know that a child learns his mother tongue through interaction with his family members first, then people in the neighborhood and finally in school. Language development happens through interaction with others and the language inputs are processed in mind. Now the question arises why do we need classroom interaction? One may feel that allowing interaction in large classrooms will result in disorders and chaos and at the same time allowing students to talk, takes a lot of classroom time and the syllabus may remain uncovered. One might also think that there is no convenient way of assessing oral communication in large classes and that the time is better spent on form practice. Here the fact remains that the emphasis in the learner Centered classroom is on making learners use language rather than just know about language. Making students initiate and respond to topics of discussion in the classroom will help them speak naturally and effortlessly. Thus, language learning is actually skill learning and not context learning and providing practice for the development of the skill will help future use of language.

Another aspect of consideration in classroom interaction is that, fluency in speaking a second language is often hindered by affective factors and encouraging learners to speak in class will help them shed their inhibitions. Allowing interaction as mode of learning other than teacher talk

does not mean that there is no lesson plan in the teacher's mind. It is only through the learner's interaction with the text, his peers and the teacher that the text beings to acquire meaning. As long as positive learning outcomes result, deviating from the lesson plan will not affect the learning objectives. What is important is that the language learning objectives are fulfilled where meaning making is more important because learning cannot be viewed as a product.

If we try to analyze the process of interaction in classroom, we find that it takes place at two levels:

(i) At the level of the actual content of the lesson (A)
(ii) At the level of practice & clarifications through interaction (B)

Generally, we find that level 'A' takes up a major portion of class time with the teacher doing most of the talking and there is very little time spent on level B. But if in the level B the teacher shares the students 'L1', interaction increases. So, language development will be optimal if level B and level A overlaps each other so that the language of social communication flows into the language of context communication and vice - versa.

In order that the maximum impact of this is felt, the teacher should be able to move freely between A and B so that the learners are also able to do so. It is only when content and communication interact that learning can be effective. At present what is seen in most cases is that the teacher is good in A and makes the students also proficient in A. In other words, academic language content develops mainly with the help of the textbook in the literary mode, while the spoken language that is required to internalize the learning and to communicate it to others does not happen. This retelling is what is expected in workplace communication and this is why we need to strengthen 'B'. A student should be able to explain and clarify context in simpler terms using everyday language and this can be achieved through interaction.

Now when it is very clear that learning a language requires classroom interaction, an obvious doubt pops up in one's mind that if student interaction increases that means teacher talks less. Will this not mean that learning is reduced? What is the role of a teacher when learning is made to happen through interaction? In this context, it is observed that organized forms of interaction can be arranged through pair work and group work activities. In such activities the teacher stands outside the learning circle or participates as an equal. Here the teacher's role is to provide task inputs, arrange the setting for interaction, monitor student interaction, give clarifications when students seek them, offer suggestions when a group does not know how to proceed, collect feedback on the learning achieved and consolidate learning at the end of the session. Thus. a teacher has a huge responsibility even in an interactive classroom session and moreover learners' confidence that they are not merely receivers of information but can contribute to knowledge making will encourage learners to take responsibility for their learning and initiate discussion in the classroom. This will lead them to being autonomous individuals later at the workplace with the ability to take initiative, engage in collaborative teamwork and assume leadership roles in the community.

We find that in a classroom all the teaching is done through language as it is the medium of communication between teacher and learners and in a language classroom both the content of teaching and the medium are the same. There is a difference between analyzing interaction in other subject classrooms and in the second language classroom. In the first case, we are looking at the impact of interaction on the learning of the subject whereas in the second case we are trying to understand what kinds of activities involving interaction will promote language acquisition. Here both the object of learning and the medium of learning is interaction itself. Learners need to learn to interact and they learn this by interacting.

There are various techniques through which interaction could be promoted in the classroom. The best one is supposed to be the instructional mode. Instruction in an institutional set-up can take several forms. One of them is task - based instruction. As with content based instruction, a task - based approach aims to provide learners with a natural context for language use. As learners work to complete a task, they have abundant opportunity to interact. Such interaction is thought to facilitate language acquisition as learners have to work to understand each other and to express their own meaning. By so doing, they have to check to see if they have comprehended correctly and, at times, they have to seek clarification. By interacting with others, they get to listen to language which may be beyond their present ability, but which may be assimilated into their knowledge for use at a later time. As it is well said by Candlin and Murphy (1987),

"The central purpose we are concerned with is language learning and tasks present this in the form of problem solving negotiation between knowledge that the learners hold and new knowledge."

There are various types of task - based approaches that can be implemented in classroom to promote interaction. Some of the observations are mentioned below:

1. **Information gap approach** - This activity involves the exchange of information among participants in order to complete a task. For example, an information gap activity might involve students drawing each other's family tree after sharing information for a limited time.

2. **Opinion gap approach** - It requires that students give their personal preferences, feelings or attitudes in order to complete a task. For instance, students might be given a social problem, such as high unemployment, euthanasia and be asked to come up with a series of possible solutions.

3. **Reasoning gap approach** - It requires students to derive some new information by inferring it from information they have been given. For example, students might be given a railroad timetable and asked to work out the best route to get from one particular city to another or they might be asked to solve a riddle.

4. **Project work approach** - In project work approach the language used in the classroom in predetermined after performing a three stage research. For example, students might decide to take on a project such as publishing a college magazine. This project would follow three stages. During the first stage of their project, the students would work in their class, planning, in collaboration with the teacher. The second stage typically takes place outside the classroom and involves the gathering of any necessary information. In the third and final stage, students review their project. By encouraging students to move out of the classroom and into the world, project work helps to bridge the gap between language study and language use.

Thus, we find that learning through tasks and activities demands a great deal of interaction. It is found that this sort of interaction in classroom facilitates the cognitive learning processes, develops autonomy in learners and makes interaction in real - life purposes easier that finally enhances communicative competence among the students.
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