THE DEVELOPMENT OF SPEAKING SKILLS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LESSONS

Kosimova Dildora Toshxujayevna, Gaybullayeva Hatira Muratdjanovna
Associate professors of Tashkent state pedagogical university

Abstract . The paper deals with the importance of teaching speaking skills in foreign language lessons and it compares theoretical backgrounds and objectives of language teaching with the reality observed at some primary and lower-secondary schools . It also presents the results of the research which prove that in the observed lessons, speaking skills were not developed sufficiently.

Key words: speaking skills, language habits, explicit knowledge, implicit knowledge, proceduralization, traditional techniques, learner-oriented activities

Introduction

This article draws on the principles of teaching and learning foreign languages and on the proceduralization of explicit language knowledge – the process that learners need to go through in order to develop the communicative competence. In the research carried out in primary and secondary schools in the Zilina Region in Slovakia, we investigate if the classroom communication enables learners to proceed from gaining explicit language knowledge through gaining language habits to finally gaining implicit language knowledge which enables them to use language structures automatically in productive creativity. In this process of proceduralization, learners achieve the communicative competence which is the objective of language learning. **Communicative Competence and Its Objectives** The learner who achieves the communicative competence is able to use appropriate language in a given context of use, and has mastered a range of language structures and their functions. The communicative competence is usually defined in categories of four sub-competencies : a) grammatical competence b) sociolinguistic competence c) discourse competence d) strategic competence In the Common European Framework [2], the sub-competences of the communicative competence are defined in terms of the linguistic, pragmatic and socio-linguistic competences. The linguistic competence includes "lexical, phonological, syntactical knowledge and skills and other dimensions of language as system, independently of the sociolinguistic value of its variations

and the pragmatic functions of its realisations" . It is emphasised that "this component… relates not only to the range and quality of knowledge… but also to cognitive organisation and the way this knowledge is stored… and to its accessibility (activation, recall and availability)" [2]. In other words, the learners need to gain not only the language knowledge, but also the strategies which are needed so that they become independent learners and independent users of the target language. The strategies also help them gradually turn the explicit knowledge of language structures into implicit knowledge which is readily available whenever needed. Learners' communicative competence is further demonstrated through their socio-linguistic competence, which means that learners are able to respect social conventions in various social environments and communities. The pragmatic competence is "concerned with the functional use of linguistic resources (production of language functions, speech acts), drawing on scenarios or scripts of interactional exchanges. It also concerns the mastery of discourse, cohesion and coherence" . In this context, "the impact of interactions and cultural environments in which such abilities are constructed" is of significant importance. The new educational law stresses the fact that the language is the means of thinking and communication among people and therefore, the process of learning a language should focus on the development of communicative competences. The main emphasis is placed on the productive creativity, which means that learners should be encouraged to use the language creatively to express their own ideas, opinions, arguments or feelings.

Achieving Communicative Competence in School Conditions

In the light of the development of the communicative competence, we believe that effective language learning techniques are those which enable learners to achieve the objectives stipulated in the educational law, i.e. all components of the communicative competence. Language learning moves from declarative, explicit knowledge (such as grammar rules, grammatical forms, vocabulary) to its proceduralization (gaining implicit knowledge), i.e. the ability to use the language automatically and creatively when needed. Gaining declarative or explicit knowledge of language systems has definitely its meaning when the language is studied in school conditions because the language classroom is often the only space where the learner has the opportunity to encounter the target language. However, explicit knowledge is not sufficient, and it is also necessary to provide learners with opportunities to change their explicit knowledge into implicit through giving them space for multidimensional interaction so that they can gain language habits and subsequently secondary language skills [5], and competences.

These are achieved in the process of proceduralizing in which the explicit knowledge is changed into implicit, procedural knowledge. It is also necessary to realize that in order to be taught language explicitly, learners need to be cognitively mature. Therefore, the younger the learners the less appropriate cognitive teaching is. It is generally accepted that at the primary level learners should acquire language, not learn it consciously. On the other hand, explicit teaching might be of great importance for adult learners, including upper-secondary students, whose cognitive thinking has been developed. Even though explicit learning might be helpful, having gained the explicit knowledge learners should be given adequate space to proceduralize the explicit knowledge in meaningful, communicative tasks. We would like to emphasize that it is not sufficient to let learners practise new language structures at sentence level in various grammatical exercises included in coursebooks. Learners also need to practise them in speaking tasks such as oral drills, or tasks including an information gap [11] which are meaningful and personalized. These tasks should be done in pairs or in small groups so that multi-dimensional communication is possible and the learner talking time is increased. According to teachers in Slovakia proclaim that they use communicative tasks, but the results of her research prove that they put much more emphasis on declarative knowledge and they overestimate it. On the other hand, the learners express dissatisfaction with the fact that their secondary skills are not developed sufficiently. ([10], p. 58) achieved similar results in her research when she found out that students achieve better results in discrete-item tests than they do in language in-use-tests even though their teachers claim that they use communicative tasks in the teaching process.

Kinds of Techniques and Activities

In the 1960s, ([9], p. 3) divided techniques used in language teaching into manipulative and communicative. According to him, manipulative techniques are those in which the learner receives all the language from the teacher, the book or the cassette and his only task is to reproduce it. On the other side of the continuum, there are tasks which enable learners to use words and structures that they themselves choose, which means they also have to control meanings of their utterances. At present, the techniques are divided in a similar way . The most important aspect is considered to be the level of language control by the teacher. On the one side of the continuum there are controlled techniques, often referred to as accuracy-oriented or systems-oriented techniques. The questions a learner is asked to answer or to respond to are all display questions to which the answer is known in advance. These techniques usually focus on the correct form of the target structure, not on its use. They are teacher-oriented and highly

structured. Learners' responses are predictable and the teacher's role is mainly that of a controller who controls not only what happens in the lesson, but also the language learners are asked to use. Through predominantly controlled techniques and afterwards predominantly free techniques, learners proceed to the other side of the continuum to the techniques that are referred to as skillsoriented or fluency oriented techniques. Their main focus is the meaning and message of the communication. The questions are referential questions and therefore, the language learners produce is not predictable. For this reason these techniques are considered to be communicative. The freer the language enabled by a technique the more learners can proceduralize their knowledge and gain secondary skills and communicative competence. 5. Research Objectives This article is based on a larger research which we carried out from January 2010 till November 2010 and whose main objective was to find out if teachers at primary and secondary schools in the Zilina Region use techniques that lead to developing language habits and language skills, in other words techniques which are not controlled and which enable learners to produce language to express their own ideas, opinions and feelings. We observed forty five English lessons taught by fifteen English teachers (three lessons each) at primary, and lower and upper secondary schools (five teachers at each level). For the purposes of our research we differentiate three groups of techniques which reflect the three above mentioned stages of language learning: a) techniques helping learners gain explicit knowledge b) techniques helping learners gain language habits c) techniques helping learners gain secondary skills. In addition to that, within each of the groups we differentiate between traditional techniques and activities. We understand the traditional techniques as those which are teacher-oriented and done with the whole class. They do not allow independent, productive work of learners and do not allow productive creativity. On the other hand, activities are those tasks which enable learners to work independently from the teacher, and produce language to express their own ideas, feelings and opinions; they also make multi-dimensional interaction possible, and make learners think productively at all stages of language learning. 6. The Speaking Skills of Primary and Secondary School Learners The main focus of this study is to discuss if the techniques and activities which we observed in the forty five lessons enable learners to gain speaking habits and secondary speaking skills, i.e. the skills which make it possible for them to speak the target language spontaneously, without too much thinking and too many hesitations, and without too much searching for words or sentence structures. Such techniques and activities support productive creativity and thus help learners achieve

communicative competence. As mentioned above, we observed English teachers teaching at three stages of schools. According to the new educational law primary learners are supposed to achieve A1 level of the CEF , which means that they should be able to "produce simple mainly isolated phrases about people and places" . At the end of the lower secondary education, the learners should achieve at least A2 level of the CEF and should be able to "give a simple description or presentation of people, living or working conditions, daily routines, likes/dislikes, etc. as a short series of simple phrases and sentences linked into a list". Even though these two groups of learners are not expected to communicate freely or to produce a sustained monologue, they should be able to at least answer simple referential questions and have gained some language habits. The third group of learners in our research includes Gymnasium students whose objective is to achieve B2 level. As to the speaking skills, the B2 learner is expected to "give clear, detailed descriptions and presentations on a wide range of subjects related to his/her field of interest, expanding and supporting ideas with subsidiary points and relevant example" At B2+ level, the learner can "give clear, systematically developed descriptions and presentations, with appropriate highlighting of significant points, and relevant supporting detail" In addition to that, the learner should also be able to "develop a clear argument, expanding and supporting his/her points of view at some length with subsidiary points and relevant examples" In order to be able to do that, the learner must have a good command of secondary skills and strategies that lead to the mastery of a foreign language. Therefore, the learner must have not only been exposed to a variety of language input, but must also have had ample opportunities to practise language freely and creatively.

Taxonomy of Techniques and Activities

In order to be able to observe what happens in the lessons we worked out a taxonomy of techniques and activities on the continuum of controlled (accuracy-oriented) to free (fluency-oriented) techniques and activities. The controlled side of the continuum includes mostly techniques, whereas the free side of the continuum includes mainly activities. Before we carried out the actual research, we observed fifteen classes and worked out the taxonomy used in the research. The observed categories were divided into four groups: a) classroom management b) controlled techniques and activities enabling gaining explicit knowledge; c) semi-controlled techniques and activities enabling gaining language habits; d) free techniques and activities enabling gaining secondary skills. In the first group we included the time teachers spent on managing the class, e.g. doing the register, organizing learners, giving instructions or recording

the results of learners' work. These do not contribute to the development of learners' language skills directly, but are a necessary part of the teaching process. The second group consisted of accuracy-focused techniques and activities whose main objective was for learners to learn or acquire language structures or vocabulary items, or to practise pronunciation. Most of the whole-class techniques were 'heads-down' activities, which means learners were doing exercises from the course-book and writing the answers in them. They also included a lot of techniques where learners were asked to translate the English texts or exercises into Slovak and afterwards produce the answers. Using techniques teachers applied direct teaching

References

1. BROWN, H. D.: Teaching by Principles. An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy. London: Longman, 2001.

2. Common European Framework. 2007. [cit. 2008-10-25]. http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Framework_EN.pdf

3.COULTHARD, M.: An Introduction to Discourse Analysis. London: Longman, 1985.

4.HARMER, J. The Practice of English Language Teaching. London: Longman, 2004.

5.CHODERA, R., RIES, L.: Teaching Foreign Languages on the Eve of the New Century I. (In Czech: Vyuka cizich jazyku na prahu noveho stoleti I). Ostrava: Ostravska univerzita, 1999.

6.LARSEN-FREEMAN, D.: Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

7.LOJOVA, G.: The Theory and Practice of Teaching Foreign Language Grammar (In Slovak: Teoria a prax vyucovania gramatiky cudzich jazykov.). Bratislava: Monitor Promotion, 2004.

8. LYNNE, T.: A Course for Teaching English Learners, New York: Pearson Education, Inc., 2008. [9] PRATOR, C.: Development of a Manipulation – Communication Scale. Education Resources Information Centre. [citované 2009-02-23] http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/recordDetails/detailmini.jsp?_nfpb=