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ON SOME ISSUES OF TEACHING CONVERSATIONAL ENGLISH

Annotation: In this article modern approaches of investigation of the characteristics of native speaker performance in conversation is considered, which is impossible to do without knowing the social cultural sphere, as well as national-cultural specific ways and basic types of activities of teaching speaking English have been reviewed.

Key words: the functions of conversation, national-cultural specific, fluency activities, a psychological barrier.

Аннотация : В этой статье рассматриваются современные подходы исследования характеристики носителей языка в процессе беседы, которые немислимы без изучения их национально-культурной специфики, а также основные виды деятельности и приёмов при обучении речи на английском языке.

Ключевые слова: функции беседы, национально-культурный компонент, виды деятельности обучающие беглости, психологический барьер

Different cultures talk about different things in their everyday lives. Native speakers very aware of what they should and should not talk about with specific categories of people in their own language, but rules may be different in a foreign language. Both teachers and students need to develop a sense of “taboo” subjects if they are to avoid offence.

Good conversationalists use stress and intonation to keep conversations going. A fall on words like “O.K.” or “So”, often serves to show that we are about to change the subject . A rise on “really” is a way of showing interest. All of these are important signals and it is worth pointing these out to students when they occur so that they start listening for them. A wide voice range is also more likely to keep a listener interested than a monotone. This can be difficult for

students whose native language has a narrow voice range and for these students additional sensitively training may be needed. Students also need to realize that the wrong intonation could lead to misunderstanding. For example, researchers found that Pakistani ladies who were serving in the canteen of Heathrow often got a hostile reaction by pronouncing the word with a falling intonation, rather than the rise which would be polite in British English. While it is true that speakers do not use as much gesture as people in some other cultures, e.g. Italians, they do use their hands to emphasize a point. The positioning of the body also has an effect on the listener, sitting on the edge of a seat may be seen as being aggressive. Slumping in it is a sign of boredom and even where do not mean it this may be how it comes across. In some cultures people also stand very close to those they are talking to and many Americans report discomfort when faced with Middle-Easterners who tend to value proximity and touch.

Body language is a complicated area, but it is worth observing your students and giving them feedback on how they appear to others.

Teachers need to be aware of the characteristics of native speaker performance in conversation if they are to teach conversation effectively they also need to consider which of the functions of conversation are most relevant to the students. They will vary according to level and needs, but most general the purpose of the students would be to use English in order to:

- give and receive information;
- collaborate in doing something;
- share personal experiences and opinions with a view to building social relationships.

There are 4 basic types of activities of teaching speaking:

- 1st -*controlled activities* to give students confidence and support .
- 2nd -*awareness activities* to increase sensitively in students to what they are aiming at.

3rd -*fluency activities* to give students the practice they need to use English for communication.

4th -*feedback tasks* to allow students to reflect on their own performance so that they become aware of areas in which they have to improve.

In most conversation programs we would expect a mixture of all of these activities from the start, geared to the needs of the students.

When we think about the mix the following considerations apply:

It may be necessary to introduce fluency activities gradually, students who are used to highly controlled patterns of interaction, where it is the teacher who initiates all the language exchanges and judges whether they are correct or not may find that fluency activities pose a considerable threat because they are not used to the freedom involved.

It is also unlikely that any one lesson will consist entirely of one type of activity. It is always best to aim for variety of task type.

Normal conversations proceed so smoothly because we co-operate in them. There were four maxims or principles which develop co-operative behavior established.

1. The maxim of quality.

Make your contribution, one that is true specifically:

- a) Do not say what you believe to be false
- b) Do not say anything for which you lack adequate evidence

2. The maxim of quantity.

Make your contribution just as informative as required and no more.

3The maxim of relation.

Make your contribution relevant and timely.

The maxim of manner.

Avoid obscurity and ambiguity.

Readers will realize that these maxims are often broken and when this happens, native speakers work harder to get at the underlying meaning, example:

-How did you find the play?

-The lighting was good.

By choosing not to be as informative as required B. is probably suggesting the play is not worth commenting on. A lot of the material written English as a foreign language is deliberately free of such ambiguity. This means that students have problems later in conversational situations where the maxims are not observed. Systematic listening practice using authentic discourse may be one solution.

Ask any student of English as a second language (ESL) what it is that he or she wants from the language class experience and nine times of ten the answer will be “more conversation, practice”. We have thought about this request frequently and have wondered just what our students mean.

If the students are living and studying in the United States, don't they have plenty of opportunity to practice their English? Isn't the free conversation experience waiting for them daily just out of the classroom door?

We have come to believe that one conversation groups fail it is neither the fault of the activities presented nor due to the lack of creativity of energy expanded on the part of the teacher. Hours are spent conscientiously developing and designing activities and topics to cue exciting and effective conversation among the students our hearts are in the right place! Rather the problem lies with unrealistic expectations. We put a room full of strangers into a circle and we expect them to act as close friends before they even know or trust each other. We expect them to be well versed in the dynamics of group process such as turn talking/ interrupting active listening etc. We expect them to know how to deal with the more vocal members and draw out the more timid or self-conscious ones. They are expected to know how to conduct themselves as a cohesive entity with no previous experience of self-direction in the classroom. Too often we give them topics that are too hot to handle topics that require a great deal of personal disclosure.

Many students have to overcome a psychological barrier before they are prepared to speak in the foreign language. Some students find speaking in the classroom situation a threat because there is always an audience and consequently prefer the anonymity of one-to-one encounters outside. Others on the other hand who quite happily contribute in the sheltered environment of the classroom, experience considerable problems in building up the courage to use the language outside the class.

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