

TEACHING SPEAKING: CURRICULUM APPROACHES

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1. Changed approaches to teaching speaking

Some features of spoken interaction

- The clausal nature of spoken language, with clauses linked together through simple coordination (*and, but, because*), rather than the use of complex sentence constructions, as are common in written English.
- The use of incomplete sentences, such as *Saw a great movie last night.*
- The use of *chunks* or multi-word units, such as *it's almost as if* and *what I'm thinking is* (see Chapter 9).
- The use of fixed utterances or routines, such as *Nice to meet you, How have you been?* and *Talk to you later.*
- The use of idioms and colloquial expressions, such as *make a move, pig out,* and *send someone up.*
- The use of discourse markers, such as *the thing is, by the way* and *and another thing.*
- The interactive and negotiated nature of oral interaction, involving such processes as *turn-taking, feedback* and *topic management.*
- The differences between different genres of spoken English, such as *small talk, conversations* and *transactions.*
- The difference between formal and casual speech.
- The difference between written grammar and spoken grammar (see Chapter 9).

Role of English as an international language

2. Genres of spoken interaction

small talk, conversation, transactions, discussions, presentations

3. Small talk

Skills involved in mastering small talk include:

- Acquiring fixed expressions and routines used in small talk.
- Using formal or casual speech depending on the situation.
- Developing fluency in making small talk around predictable topics.
- Using opening and closing strategies.
- Using back-channelling and echo responses

- A. Look at what my dad gave me for my birthday.
- B. Fantastic.

- A. He got it in Italy.
B. Awesome!

- A. So where are you from?
B. Chicago.
A. Chicago. That's interesting.

Teaching small talk

- *Modelling and creating:* Students study examples of small-talk exchanges and create similar exchanges on the same topic.
- *Class mingles:* Each student has one or two topics on a card. The class mingles, students greet, introduce their topic, make small talk for one or two exchanges, close the conversation and move on to a different student.
- *Question sheets:* Students have a worksheet with ten different small-talk questions. They move around the class and take turns asking questions and responding to their exchanges in small-talk format.

Use of authentic samples

- A: Hi.
B: Oh hi, how's it going?
A: Good, good, fine.
B: Are you, er, doing some shopping?
A: Yeah, just a few things really, you know.
B: Yeah.
A: Yeah ... actually, I've been looking for a present, for Hiroko, but it's difficult to ... you know ...
B: Yeah, umm, what kind of thing?
A: Oh, something like, umm, a present ... something like, it's her birthday tomorrow actually. [laughs]
B: Tomorrow?
A: Yeah, tomorrow. So I've looked in Hamaya, like at the make-up and stuff, but it's not very exciting.
B: Tomorrow? How about Amu Plaza ... they've got Tower Records and some kind of new shops.
A: Yeah. OK, great, Tower Records might be good. I might give that a go. I've got to go over to the station, anyway. So, anyway, good to see you, and thanks for the tip.
B: That's fine. Say 'happy birthday' to Hiroko from me.
A: OK, I will. Bye.
B: Yeah, bye.
A: Bye.

4. Conversation

Characteristics of conversation in the Common European Framework of Reference	
C2	Can converse comfortably and appropriately, unhampered by any linguistic limitations in conducting a full social and personal life.
C1	Can use language flexibly and effectively for social purposes, including emotional, allusive and joking usage.
B2	Can engage in extended conversation on most general topics in a clearly participatory fashion, even in a noisy environment. Can sustain relationships with native speakers without unintentionally amusing or irritating them or requiring them to behave other than they would with a native speaker. Can convey degrees of emotion and highlight the personal significance of events and experiences.
B1	Can enter unprepared into conversations on familiar topics. Can follow clearly articulated speech directed at him/her in everyday conversations, though will sometimes have to ask for repetition of particular words and phrases. Can maintain a conversation or discussion, but may sometimes be difficult to follow when trying to say exactly what he/she would like to. Can express and respond to feelings such as surprise, happiness, sadness, interest and indifference.
A2	Can establish social contact: greetings and farewells; introductions; giving thanks. Can generally understand clear, standard speech on familiar matters directed at him/her, provided he/she can ask for repetition or reformulations from time to time. Can participate in short conversations in routine contexts on topics of interest. Can express how he/she feels in simple terms, and express thanks.
	Can handle very short social exchanges, but is rarely able to understand enough to keep conversation going on his/her own accord, though he/she can be made to understand if the speaker will take the trouble. Can use simple everyday polite forms of greeting and address. Can make and respond to invitations, suggestions and apologies and say what he/she likes and dislikes.
A1	Can make an introduction and use basic greeting and leave-taking expressions. Can ask how people are and react to news. Can understand everyday expressions aimed at the satisfaction of simple needs of a concrete type, delivered directly to him/her in clear, slow and repeated speech by a sympathetic speaker.

Topic management

- Initiating a topic in casual and formal conversation.
- Selecting vocabulary appropriate to the topic.
- Giving appropriate feedback responses.
- Providing relevant evaluative comments through back-channelling.

- Taking turns at appropriate points in the conversation.
- Asking for clarification and repetition.
- Using discourse strategies for repairing misunderstanding.
- Using discourse strategies to open and close conversations.
- Using appropriate intonation and stress patterns to express meaning intelligibly.

Features of topics in casual conversation

- Topics switch freely.
- Topics are often provoked by what speakers are doing, by objects in their presence or by some association with what has just been said.
- There does not appear to be a clearly defined purpose for the conversation.
- All speakers can introduce topics, and no one speaker appears to dominate the conversation.
- Speakers comment on each other's statements.
- Topics are only elaborated on briefly, after follow-up questions or comments from listeners.
- Comments in response to a topic often include some evaluation.
- Responses can be very short.
- Ellipsis is common.
- The speaker's cooperation is often shown through speaker support and repetition of each other's vocabulary.
- Vocabulary typical of informal conversation will be present, such as clichés, vague language and taboo language.

Teaching conversation

Ways of teaching conversation include:

- *Awareness-raising activities:* Students examine examples of conversation, either recorded (audio or video) or transcribed examples, and look for examples of how openings, topic introductions, back-channelling, etc. are realized, and for indicators of casual or formal speech.
- *Dialogue completion:* Students are given transcripts of conversations with selected features removed (such as openings, closings, clarification requests) and asked to try to complete them. They then listen to or read the completed dialogues, compare and practise.
- *Planning tasks:* Students are given topics to include in a conversation and asked to write dialogues that include them and that also include personal recounts. They then compare and practise.
- *Improvisations:* Students are given skeleton dialogues or dialogue frames (e.g. containing a sequence of topics or functions they should use in a conversation) and use them to improvise conversations.

Both small talk and conversation have features in common:

- *They require being a good listener:* This can be indicated through the use of back-channel signals.
- *They involve asking questions:* Conversation develops through the participants asking questions and following through on the answers they get with further questions.
- *They involve sharing of information:* Participants are expected to share information they have that is relevant to the topic being discussed.

5. Transactions

Examples of transactions

- Ordering food in a restaurant.
- Ordering a taxi.
- Checking into a hotel.
- Changing money at a bank.
- Getting a haircut.
- Buying something in a store.
- Borrowing a book from the library.

Exchange between customer and an assistant in a coffee shop:

A: Hi, what'll it be today?

B: Uhm, cappuccino, skinny, please.

A: Large or small?

B: Large.

A: For here or take out?

B: Here.

A: Anything to go with it?

B: No thanks.

A: Not a problem. That's three-fifty, please.

The skills involved in using English for transactions:

- Selecting vocabulary related to particular transactions and functions.
- Using fixed expressions and routines.
- Expressing functions.
- Using scripts for specific transactions and situations.
- Asking and answering questions.
- Clarifying meanings and intentions.
- Confirming and repeating information.
- Using communication strategies.

Teaching transactions

- *Awareness raising*: Studying examples of how typical transactions occur (e.g. buying a cinema ticket) and what moves are involved. (Comparison with how similar transactions occur in the learner's culture may be important for some transactions.)
- *Learning expressions and routines*: Modelling the language needed for different transactions and comparing different linguistic options (e.g. comparing different ways of performing requests in formal and informal situations).
- *Modelling*: The teacher demonstrates different ways of completing transactions.
- *Planning*: Students plan how they would carry out specific transactions and what language they would use and might need to anticipate.
- *Practice*: Students practise transactions in both controlled and freer formats (e.g. using model dialogues and role plays).

Examples from "As I was Saying"

- Giving and receiving directions.
- Arranging to meet someone.
- Renting a car.
- Visiting a medical centre.
- Ordering food in a restaurant.
- Checking into a hotel.
- Buying items in a store.
- Renting an apartment.

Teaching sequence

1. Vocabulary and language development (vocabulary and expressions).
2. Dialogue study and practice (to model the transactions).
3. Role play (using cue cards that listed the moves used for each transaction).
4. Listening follow-up activities, using the native-speaker performances.
5. Follow-up language study and practice, based on some of the language used by the native speakers.

6. Discussions

What thus often happens in secondary and tertiary education contexts is the incidental, non-explicit teaching of oral skills, for instance, in so-called conversation classes. These classes are often organized in a series of discussion groups with the structure of the course being determined by the topics which are handled in turn. These are generally matters of moment, taken from newspapers, magazines, and other sources, and it is hoped that the input materials will somehow generate interest and 'engagement', thus stimulating good [discussions]. This model ... is of limited effectiveness in terms of improving oral skills.

Descriptors for levels B2, C1 and C2 in CEF:

	Formal discussions and meetings
C2	Can hold his/her own in formal discussion of complex issues, putting forth an articulate and persuasive argument, at no disadvantage to native speakers
C1	Can easily keep up with the debate, even on abstract, complex, unfamiliar topics. Can argue a formal position convincingly, responding to questions and comments and answering complex lines of argument fluently, spontaneously and appropriately.
B2	Can keep up with animated discussion, identifying accurately arguments supporting and opposing points of view. Can express his or her ideas and opinions with precision [and] present and respond to complex lines of argument convincingly. Can participate actively in routine and non-routine formal discussions. Can follow the discussion on matters related to his/her field, understanding in detail the points given prominence by the speaker. Can contribute, account for and sustain his/her opinion, evaluate alternative proposals and make and respond to hypotheses.

Skills involved in taking part in discussions include:

- Giving opinions.
- Presenting a point of view.
- Supporting a point of view.
- Taking a turn.
- Sustaining a turn.
- Listening to others' opinions.
- Agreeing and disagreeing with opinions.
- Summarizing a position.

Teaching discussions

- *Choosing topics:* Topics may be chosen by students or assigned by the teacher. Both options offer different possibilities for student involvement.
- *Forming groups:* Small groups of four to five allow for more active participation, and care is needed to establish groups of compatible participants. For some tasks, roles may be assigned (e.g. group leader, note-taker, observer).
- *Preparing for discussions:* Before groups are assigned a task, it may be necessary to review background knowledge, assign information-gathering tasks (e.g. watching a video) and teach some of the specific ways students can present a viewpoint, interrupt, disagree politely, etc.
- *Giving guidelines:* The parameters for the discussion should be clear so that students are clear how long the discussion will last, what the expected outcomes are, roles of participants, expectations for student input and acceptable styles of interaction.

- *Evaluating discussions:* Both the teacher and the students can be involved in reflection on discussions. The teacher may want to focus on the amount and quality of input from participants and give suggestions for improvement. Some review of language used may be useful at this point. Students may comment on their own performance and difficulties they experienced and give suggestions for future discussions.

7. Presentations

Features of presentations

Often have identifiable generic structures, and the language used is more predictable. ... Because of less contextual support, the speaker must include all necessary information in the text – hence the importance of topic as well as textual knowledge. And while meaning is still important, there will be more emphasis on form and accuracy.

Examples of presentations:

- Giving a class report about a school trip.
- Giving a welcome speech.
- Making a sales presentation.
- Making a poster presentation about a chosen topic.
- Thanking a speaker who visited the class.

Skills involved in making presentations:

- Using an appropriate script (e.g. a welcome script, a thank-you script).
- Using language of an appropriate register (e.g. a more formal public style of speaking).
- Presenting information or the message coherently.
- Using accurate grammar and pronunciation.
- Presenting in a manner appropriate to the audience.
- Maintaining audience interest.

Teaching presentations

- *Phase 1: Building the context*
Students are introduced to the social context of an authentic example or model of the type of presentation to be practised, the purpose it seeks to achieve, the people involved and what their expectations are.
- *Phase 2: Modelling and deconstructing the text*
Students examine the discourse and language features of the text and explore what makes such a presentation effective or ineffective.
- *Phase 3: Joint construction of text*

The teacher and students jointly develop a new example of the same type of presentation text. This may involve back and forth between teacher-directed activity and students working in pairs on areas such as effective openings, transitions between points, etc.

- *Phase 4: Independent construction of a presentation text*
Students work independently or collaboratively on a new presentation text. This may be based on outlines, checklists or other support provided.
- *Phase 5: Presentation*
Students make their presentations and receive feedback from peers and from the teacher.

8. Curriculum development in designing speaking courses

9. Determining the goals of the course

Needs analysis procedures:

- Interviews with learners about their current and future needs for spoken English.
- Administration of a questionnaire to find out in what situations the students use English, and some of the difficulties they experience.
- Information from tests and other forms of assessment (e.g. interviews, observations or role plays).
- Conversations about learners' needs (e.g. with other teachers, employers or advanced learners).

Sample learning outcomes:

Example A: The speaking course should aim to develop speaking skills for use in contexts relevant to the learners' needs and enable learners to:

- Use a wide range of core speaking skills.
- Develop fluency in expression of meaning.
- Learn to initiate and respond to talk on a broad range of topics.
- Use appropriate vocabulary and grammar in spoken communication.
- Understand and use social and linguistic conventions of speech for various contexts.
- Employ appropriate strategies to manage the process of spoken interaction.
- Use spoken discourse, according to the conventions of different speech activities and genres.
- Increase their awareness of the features of effective and appropriate second language speaking skills.
- Manage and self-regulate their own speaking development.

Example B: The speaking course should address level 2 on the Common European Framework and develop the learners' ability to:

- Participate effectively in short social exchanges using small talk.
- Participate effectively in short conversations of general interest.
- Participate in functional exchanges using appropriate strategies and expressions.
- Carry out basic transactional exchanges in English related to daily life.
- Ask and answer questions on a range of common topics.
- Use communication strategies to deal with communication difficulties.
- Make short class presentations.
- Participate in small group discussions.

Outcomes focusing on just one spoken genre, such as telephone conversations:

The learner will learn the following telephone skills in English:

- To participate effectively in telephone conversation.
- To initiate a call, identify self and state business clearly and appropriately.
- To use appropriate moves for telephone exchanges, e.g. greeting, body for the call, pre-closing and closing.
- To ask for information / offer a service.
- To make statements, ask and answer questions and give feedback.
- To sustain conversation, e.g. take turns, confirm, clarify, repair and identify topic shifts.
- To use accurate vocabulary and grammatical structures.
- To use intelligible pronunciation so that comprehension is not impeded.

10. Choosing classroom activities

Activity	Purpose
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dialogue work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach fixed expressions and routines. • Provide example of transactions. • Provide examples of moves (e.g. openings and closings).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study transcriptions of spoken exchanges. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop awareness of nature of authentic interactions. • Develop awareness of spoken grammar. • Develop awareness of differences between casual and formal interactions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information-gap activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop communication strategies. • Practise conversational repairs.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surveys and questionnaires. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop questioning strategies. • Use follow-up questions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ranking activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Express opinions. • Justify choices.

• Role plays.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop routines for handling transactions. • Practise turn-taking. • Learn fixed expressions.
• Jigsaw activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give accurate descriptions. • Practise clarifying meaning.
• Picture description.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practise recounts.
• Repeating an activity several times.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop fluency. • Use more complex language.
• Record their own performance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify errors. • Recognize need for more complex language.
• Tasks, such as explain how to prepare a dish.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present information clearly. • Practise comprehension checks.

Criteria for selecting activities

- What will the focus of the activity be, e.g. will it practise (an aspect of) small talk, conversation or discussion skills?
- What are the language and other demands of the activity?
- How will the activity be modelled?
- What stages will the activity be divided into?
- What language or support will be needed?
- What resources will be needed, e.g. pictures or cards?
- What learning arrangement will be needed?
- What level of performance is expected?
- How and when will feedback be given?

An activity can also be assessed according to these criteria:

- How much practice and production it generates.
- How much authentic language and interaction it provides.
- How transparent its purposes and procedures are.
- How relevant it is to the learners.
- How challenging it is.
- How motivating it is.

Goh and Burns seven-stage cycle of activities in a speaking lesson or series of lessons:

1. *Focus learners' attention on speaking:* Students think about a speaking activity, what it involves and what they can anticipate.
2. *Provide input and/or guide planning:* This may involve pre-teaching vocabulary, expressions or discourse features and planning for an activity they will carry out in class (e.g. a presentation or a transaction).
3. *Conduct speaking task:* Students practise a communicative speaking task with a focus on fluency.

4. *Focus on language/skills/strategies*: Students examine their performance or look at other performances of the task, as well as transcripts of how the task can be carried out, and review different features of the task.
5. *Repeat speaking task*: The activity is performed a second time.
6. *Direct learners' reflection on learning*: Students review and reflect on what they have learned and difficulties they encountered.
7. *Facilitate feedback on learning*: Teacher provides feedback on their performance.

11. Assessing speaking skills

Issues to consider

1. What aspects of speaking will be assessed?
2. At what stage in a course will it be assessed?
3. What language and discourse features will be assessed?
4. What tasks will be used to demonstrate the learners' speaking ability?
5. How will the learners' performance on the tasks be scored?

Example from the genre of 'making small talk'

<i>Type of speaking to be assessed</i>	<i>Skills involved</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making small talk. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using a suitable opener. • Introducing a suitable topic. • Exchanging information about the topic. • Asking suitable questions. • Using language appropriate to the situation. • Using a suitable strategy for ending the exchange.

Other genres

- *Conversation skills*: students can be given 'frames' or guides to work from and asked to act out a conversation in pairs or groups. For example: 'Greet your partner and make small talk; introduce a topic related to a weekend activity; continue the conversation for a short time, and then introduce a topic about something that you will be doing tonight; then close the conversation.'
- *Discussion skills*: students might discuss and resolve a problem.
- *Transaction skills*: Role plays need to be carefully constructed to ensure that they elicit natural language, particularly language that has been taught during the speaking course.

- *Interviews:* Although these are a common procedure used in oral assessment, in view of the points as noted above unless interview skills are a significant component of a speaking course, they should only be used to give a general impression of a student's speaking skills – particularly the ability to respond to and answer questions.

Use of rating scale: example for job interview language performance

	<i>Low</i> <i>High</i>				
Clarity of expression					
Pronunciation	1	2	3	4	5
Comprehensibility	1	2	3	4	5
Speed	1	2	3	4	5
Hesitations	1	2	3	4	5
Intonation, rhythm	1	2	3	4	5
Facial expression	1	2	3	4	5
Eye contact	1	2	3	4	5
Clarity of meaning					
Vocabulary	1	2	3	4	5
Phrases	1	2	3	4	5
Grammar	1	2	3	4	5
Overall evaluation	1	2	3	4	5

Self-assessment

	<i>Very well</i>	<i>OK</i>	<i>A little</i>
I can describe features of my home town. I can give suggestions about places to visit. I can give advice for visitors.			

Teaching small talk

A sample lesson plan for teaching small talk

1. Teacher introduces notion of small talk and gives examples.
2. Students discuss questions about small talk, e.g.:
 - How can you start a conversation with someone?
 - What can you say in this situation?
 - Who uses small talk and when?
 - In what situations do we use it?
 - What are some suitable topics for small talk?
3. Teacher presents model conversation showing examples of small talk. Students practise and discuss.
4. Students examine dialogues with examples of inappropriate small talk in English and discuss.
5. Students work in groups and prepare list of topics for small talk.
6. Teacher creates sample dialogues, using some of the students' topics.
7. Students work in pairs to create dialogues from their topics.
8. Teacher introduces importance of asking questions in small talk. Students look at their dialogues to see what kinds of questions they contain.
9. Teacher models different ways of asking questions.
10. Students write new dialogues, with a focus on asking questions.
11. Teacher provides skeleton dialogues (dialogues with every second line removed), and students guess the missing lines.
12. Teacher models ways of ending a small-talk exchange.
13. Teacher gives students situations, and students create dialogues for each situation, e. g.:
 - In line at the supermarket checkout: the line is moving slowly.
 - In line for an outdoor concert: it is starting to rain.
14. Students present their dialogues. Others evaluate them using a checklist:
 - Did the conversations open appropriately?
 - Was the conversation at the right level of formality/informality?

- Were the topics appropriate?
- Did the conversation sound natural?
- Was the small talk successful?

Further reading

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