Research Article

HOW TO MAINTAIN FLUENT IN SPEAKING ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

As speaking is a way of communicating and expressing thoughts, ideas, needs, and feelings in a language, the significance of this skill is not deniable. However, students normally find it challenging to express themselves due to different reasons. The main problem that stops them from speaking is a lack of knowledge or even overusing a word. For instance, they might not be able to find a proper word or expression and consequently, they will encounter obstacles continuing talking to maintain fluency which is the first characteristic of speaking. Competence strategies are strategies that could be used in order to fill the gaps in speaking which happen as a result of not knowing a word to maintain fluency. Since speaking happens in real-time and there is no time for preparing and drafting like writing, students normally find it difficult. Fluency as a sub-skill in speaking is about being able to talk without pauses and long hesitation. To be fluent students need language knowledge and discourse knowledge such as grammar and lexis, to be able to organize their thoughts and communication strategies to avoid hesitation. Goh and Burns (2012, p.168) argue that "communication Strategies, involve developing cognitive strategies to compensate for limitations in language knowledge (e.g., circumlocution, paraphrasing, gestures, word coinage, approximation, avoidance), metacognitive strategies (e.g., planning in advance what to say, thinking consciously about how you say something), and interaction strategies (e.g. asking for clarification/ repetition, reformulating, rephrasing, and checking comprehension).

Keywords: Speaking skills, fluency, competence strategies, vague language, all-purpose words.

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is one of the two productive skills (writing and speaking) that allow people to express their opinions, plans, wishes, feelings viewpoints, and thoughts. Consequently, speaking is the most practical and frequently used language skill. When students face a lack of vocabulary or grammar structures to continue, all-purpose words and vague language come in handy. Native speakers also use this strategy while speaking when either they don't want or are unable to give accurate information. all-purpose words are also used to avoid being impolite. All-purpose words are divided into different groups. List completers such as and things like that, placeholders such as thingy, quantifiers such as about or around, generalizers such as sort of, and finally suffixes such as "ish" in greenish. Vague language may be defined as that which modifies a linguistic item, phrase, or utterance to make its meaning less precise (Channell 1994: 20).

1. SKILL ANALYSIS:

Productive skills happen when the target language is used to produce the language in order to interact. However, there are also some significant differences between written language and spoken language. While there is always time for preparing for writing and organizing thoughts, speaking happens in real-time and is synchronous, unscripted, spontaneous interpersonal, and mostly informal. According to Goh and Burns (2012), the most significant difference between speaking and writing is the audience and the purpose.

2. SPEAKING SUBSKILLS:

2.1. Fluency:
In speaking, fluency is about having the ability to talk in a language

for a while without having too many pauses and mistakes and too much hesitation. Fluency could be gained through semantic fluency lexical syntactic and articulatory fluency through pronunciation. Native speakers are able to talk continuously without having pauses despite not remembering a word or phrase and without many mistakes.

3. SPEAKING STRATEGY (COMMUNICATION STRATEGY):

Developing communicative strategies is a very broad term that refers to helping students develop fluency and remain fluent while talking. However, it is categorized into three different groups including language knowledge, discourse knowledge, and strategic competence.

3.1. Language knowledge:

Any knowledge about a language that learners use to form sentences to get the message across and convey the meanings from sounds, and letters, to sentences and talks such as Producing the sounds of the language and blending them where appropriate, assigning stress in prominent words, using different intonation patterns to add to the meaning, knowing words, phrases and appropriate chunks and correct word order to convey your message.

3.2. Discourse knowledge:

It refers to the needed knowledge to be able to join the sentences and also how to start, finish, order, and change the topic of a talk such as Signpost things like a change of topic, organizing and structuring an effective anecdote, initiating, maintaining and ending conversations, giving effective instructions and making messages coherent.

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3.3. Strategic competence:

While grammatical competence is about using the grammar structures in communication and sociolinguistic is about the socially accepted way of communication, strategic competence is about the ability to convey the meaning and get the message across despite probable problems and obstacles such as limited lexical resources or not remembering words to maintain fluent and avoid long and repetitive pauses and hesitation. According to Littlemore, Figurative Thinking and Foreign Language Learning 2006"In very general terms, strategic competence refers simply to a student's ability to use language interactively." It consists of paraphrasing or circumlocution, miming, appealing for help through asking questions and using fillers such as kind of, well, etc, and all-purpose words like stuff and things instead of object names.

3.3.1. Circumlocution:

Native speakers use this strategy to paraphrase the words or structures using synonyms, opposites, and giving definitions when they face a lack of knowledge or not remembering words for instance, instead of the word pharmacy the student might say it's somewhere we go to buy medicines.

3.3.2. Miming:

It is used by native speakers as a non-verbal language instead of saying a word or an action. For instance, clapping hands to show praise and admiration.

3.3.3. Appealing for help:

An English speaker might ask questions in case they don't understand a word. They ask for repetition, clarification, and explanation.

3.3.4. Using fillers :

They are also called hesitation devices which are used by fluent speakers to buy time and hold the floor such as, you know…., let me see..., well as far as I know ….. If I am not mistaken ………., that's an interesting question ……..

3.3.5. All-purpose words strategy:

Using all-purpose words or vague language is another strategy that could be applied when there is a word or some words when a native speaker doesn't know a word, to avoid overusing a word, to be more polite, when they don't want to be precise or even when the details of something is unimportant and unnecessary to be mentioned. Vagueness is one of the basic properties of natural language Cao & Gao, 2007. However, the use of all-purpose words is not similar in different languages and cultures. In English all-purpose words or vague language is divided into different categories in terms of use and meaning. Quantifiers, generalisers completers, placeholders and suffixes are the various groups of all-purpose words.

3.3.5.1. Quantifiers:

Using vague language is very common in speaking when we don't want to talk about the exact amount, number, or proportion of something. Depending on the amount or number we can use some all-purpose words such as *a few of* to refer to low numbers and loads of to refer to a great number of something. some other words such as approximately, and around are also possible to be used to avoid being precise about a number or time. E.g., see you at about 3 o'clock.

3.3.5.2. Generalizers:

Generalizers are some words and phrases which are used so as not to be precise. Sort of, kind of, and type of are some examples of generalizers in vague language. E.g.," 'Do you see what I mean?' 'Sort of.

3.3.5.3. List completers:

When a speaker is talking about a list of unimportant things, they will use list completers to avoid going through the details of the list. So on and things like that are some examples of list completers. E.g., I did the dishes, dusting, and so on. I bought some fruit, vegetables, and stuff like that.

3.3.5.4. Placeholders:

Placeholders are certain words that are used by native speakers and don't have specific meanings when they fail to remember a word. Some examples are *what sit*, *thingy*, and *Thingummy*. E.g., You can use this little *what sit* to take the back off your phone. I found a little metal thingamajig in my desk drawer.

3.3.5.5. Suffixes:

Y and ish are two common suffixes that are added to adjectives by fluent speakers specifically colors in order to avoid being precise. Blondey and greenish are some of the examples. E.g., "It's a sort of greenish blue."

4. ISSUES:

While using all-purpose words, the speaker might face some issues that are going to be explained here in detail.

4.1. lack of knowledge:

4.1.1.Another situation in which language learners face problems maintaining fluency and talking without pauses is when they lack knowledge of vocabulary. Vocabulary number in all languages is unlimited and it is always impossible to know specific words. For instance, Yesim, one of the students is not able to talk continuously which is normally a result of not knowing certain words and leads her to feel anxious. Communication strategies could be used as aids in order to achieve the goal of transferring the meaning and message by being aware of problems arising. for instance according to 2015 "students might avoid a certain language or grammatical item, abandon the message, paraphrase when they do not have the appropriate form, describe the object or its properties, use self-correction, repeat a language item to gain time, mumble, translate literally from a native language, use similar sounding words, ask the interlocutor for the correct form or item, use gestures to convey meaning, insert a word or a phrase from their native language, apply L2 morphology and/ or phonology to L1 lexical items, or use word coinage which produces items that do not exist in the target language."

4.1.2.Another problem that could stop learners from being fluent is not remembering a word. It might happen to anyone either in L1 or L2. While talking in our mother tongue we might not remember a word. However, we try to continue talking by replacing that word with

a more general word with a similar meaning. The same problem might occur to a language learner while using L2.

4.1.3. Learners might want to talk about a number or amount of something but might not be sure about the exact number and will get stuck and can`t continue talking.

4.1.4. Learners sometimes want to talk about a list of things but might encounter a lack of knowledge to go through the items.

4.2.L1:

4.2.1. Another issue in speaking is first language interference while speaking. when the speaker is trying to produce the language orally and using the grammar structures and lexis, the words and structures in their native language will go into their mind rather than the language they are supposed to use and they start thinking in their mother tongue instead of the target language which could make them feel distracted.

4.2.2.l 1 might affect their pronunciation and intonation. Depending on their first language, learners might follow their first language intonation and pronunciation in speaking. This issue could be easily seen in ITI classes and students. They tend to follow Turkish intonation in their speaking and the majority of them have problems pronouncing "th" which could cause misunderstanding pronouncing some words such as tree and three.

4.2.3. The differences between L1 and L2 in using fillers are an issue too. How, when, and where to use fillers and hesitation devices is different in different languages. According to Basurto 2016, page 194"One of the main ones is the difference between the L1 and L2, as fillers are different in each language and students should be alerted of differences and peculiarities of interjections in their L1 and L2 (Aijmer, 2004)."

4.2.4. In case learners are talking about a proportion or number and are not sure about the exact number, using all-purpose words and quantifiers such as a few or lots of come in handy.

4.4.3. Time:

They might not know an exact word and need time to think more and start having long pauses which destroys the fluency and their confidence.

5. SUGGESTIONS :

In the following parts, some suggestions are included to cope with the issues mentioned above using different tasks and strategies:

5.1. lack of knowledge:

5.1.1. Using all-purpose words is the solution for lacking instructions in lexis. Using Vague language and all-purpose words such as stuff or things instead of names of objects are one of the best strategies. According to Bygate (1987) in the book speaking page 4"If we think about how we use our first language, then it is obvious that we spend most of our time using sentences, and very little of our time reviewing our knowledge or trying to compose perfect sentences. We would find it most difficult to describe and explain all the decisions we make when we speak. So, knowledge is only a part of the affair: we also need skill. What is the difference between knowledge and skill? A fundamental difference is that while both can be understood and memorized, only skill can be imitated and practiced."

5.1.2. Another strategy that could be helpful when a learner suffers from a lack of knowledge due to either not remembering or not knowing words or grammar structures is circumlocution or paraphrasing. Giving definitions, synonyms, and opposites …. Instead of the problematic words helps the speaker to continue talking. According to Schmidt's (2001) 'noticing hypothesis' holds conscious attention to features of L2 input is key to learning. Instructors can raise learners' awareness of factors that influence perceptions of fluency (e.g., formulaic sequences, discourse markers, pauses, fillers) by assigning form-focused tasks that include an explicit explanation of the meaning and use of these devices.

5.1.3. Miming or using gestures is the last approach when the other ways don't work. However, it might not be as useful as the other strategies. According to Bygate (1987), speaking on pages 45-46"A third type of achievement strategy that has been identified is what has been called cooperative strategies. These are used when the speaker gets help. For instance, he may ask for the word, by asking for a translation of his mother-tongue word, by physically indicating the object that he means, Understanding speaking, or by miming. However, he can get help through other means. He may try to provide a syntactic frame in order to elicit the word he wants from his interlocutor. S1: this little boy is wearing short pants [mhm] and a plain S2: shirt"

5.1.4.In case they face a lack of knowledge to go through the details of a long list or even prefer not going through too many items, list completers such as and so on or something like that can be helpful. According to Qiao Zhang, Article in the Journal of Asian Pacific Communication · 2018 VCI or vague category identifier could be used to indicate an unspecified category. More examples of DT are and something like that, and stuff, and all that, and that sort of thing, and things, or things like that, or anything like that, or something.

5.2.L1:

5.2.1. All-purpose words can help them to use vague language and general words to maintain fluency. For instance, when a student in lower level or even upper intermediate can't remember a word, can use stuff instead of any words related to objects and things or do instead of some verbs and things like that instead of some details.

5.2.2. Shadowing strategy will help them to follow and learn correct pronunciation and intonation. Listening to an audio file from a native speaker for a while, pausing the audio, and asking students to repeat the part and trying to imitate will lead them to correct pronunciation and intonation.

5.2.3 . The issue with differences in using fillers in L1 and L2 could be tackled and explained by facilizing students with some input by using videos or listening from native speakers using the fillers. exposing, highlighting, and clarifying helps them to distinguish the differences and start using the fillers correctly.

5.3. Time:

In case they don't remember a word and have to generalize the word or expressions and need to buy time and hold the floor, generalizers such as sort of any kind of are the solution. They help the speaker to have more time to think in order to find the proper word and make them talk more generally. According to Zhang, an Article in the Journal of Asian Pacific Communication · 2018 De-intensifier (DT) could be used to express vaguely a low-intensity degree and decrease the tone of speech. More examples of DT are sort of, kind of, somewhat, pretty much, fairly.

CONCLUSION

This article has taken the strategic competence and communication strategies in English Language Teaching into consideration to improve fluency as a sub-skill and develop speaking skills. Despite the fact some people might consider these competence strategies as weaknesses or unnecessary and are bad languages to use, they are accurate and all native speakers use them.

Abbreviations:

L1: First language, Mother tongue
L2: Second lagunage
DT: De-intensifier

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