Activities to Teach Speaking in an EFL/ESL Class

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Summary
Speaking; "the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols, in a variety of contexts" (Chaney, 1998: 13) is considered as an essential part of second language learning and teaching. It has often been taught as a repetition of drills or memorization of dialogues.

This presentation includes some possible and motivating ways of teaching speaking in ESL/EFL classes where a variety of balanced activities (input) to enhance learners produce oral language appropriately (output) will be shared, as well as some ideas to keep in mind when planning speaking activities.

Cue words
Speaking skill, planning, input, output.

Some Reasons to teach Speaking
Speaking is defined as “the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols, in a variety of contexts” (Chaney, 1998: 13). It can also be defined as one of the four abilities students need to develop in learning English. Indeed, it is one of the most attractive skills for students because most of the time they study the language having in mind to have a good level of communication to travel to an English-speaking country, living there, working, getting married, or just for understanding songs or movies they like.

But why is speaking so important when teaching English? According to Nunan (1991) it is because of the motivation students get from it, and because they want to be successful in carrying out a conversation in the target language. In this way, some students may get stresses, disappointed or even angry when not having opportunities to practice orally. Another reason is that speaking is considered fundamental to human communication; it is even more used than other skills like writing. The proof of that is in the quantity of speaking conversations we have every day and the quantity of written communications we do daily. Despite this, many teachers continue to teach more written and listening forms but not speaking so much. That is not a good balance because it is supposed teachers have to ensure the development of the four language skills, not just one or two of them, so if the main goal of teaching English is to enable the students to communicate in that language, then speaking should be practiced in the only moment they truly practice; their classroom.

It is necessary to keep in mind that teaching speaking is not just about using repetition drills or memorization of chunks because that does not show if students are really learning. For this reason, English teachers must base their speaking teaching in the fact that students need to learn how to express themselves according to the context they have. To develop some ideas that can help teachers to encourage students to improve their speaking in a more attractive way, the theories and ideas of some
linguistic authors are taken into consideration for designing them, for example Harmer (1998) mentions that speaking can be practiced in an activate exercise where students have to use the language not just for practicing certain grammatical part (which represents something boring and stressful for several students) but also for performing some kind of oral task. In this way, if the right activities are taught in the right way, speaking in class can be fun and raise general learner’s motivation. For this reason, here there are some ideas that can help teachers to encourage students improve their speaking in a more attractive way since they are based on one of the things students enjoy the most; movies.

Planning

The next activity that will be explained below is based on the lesson plan format suggested by Mary Underwood (1987) which includes the following sequences:

1. Warm up
2. Presentation
3. Practice
4. Homework to be set
5. How the lesson went

In each of these sequences, there are activities to be set, so it is important to take into consideration the time that each of them needs. It is also important to establish that the objective is students narrate a script for making a movie trailer. Therefore, the meaning of this speaking activity is to communicate what a movie is about in order to catch the audience attention.

Now, going step by step, in the warm up section the teacher must begin the topic with the help of something that students already know, in this case the topic is “Let’s narrate a movie trailer” so, the teacher will ask students whether during the last weekend they went to the movie theater in order to know if they notice that before the movie starts, some movie trailers can be watched, and probably in that way students can start to remember some voices that narrated those movie trailers, they can even remember very specific details such as intonation, pronunciation, vocabulary, etc. That can be very helpful for their future practice in this class.

The next step is called Presentation and it is where the topic is explained by the teacher. It probably can take more time of the estimated by the teacher because students can ask questions about the topic. Now, the presentation can be developed like this: Briefly, teacher asks students what a movie trailer is or what they imagine is it about. Based on students’ answers say, the teacher explains what a movie trailer is and with the help of some pictures he/she shows some elements and their order in the movie trailer. In this part of the presentation they both are actively speaking; the teacher (guide of the lesson) and the students. Another step on this part can be: Teacher explains the first two elements the students have to keep in mind when narrating a movie’s trailer. After that, teacher shows the steps required for elaborating a movie trailer narration in a general manner while at each step; the teacher asks them for examples in movies they know well. So far, the teacher is in the topic having in mind what the students have commented already about it. Of course it is key to get their attention in this activity because the time is essential due to it is an activity that is preferable to be completed in the same class and not cut and
retaken in the next class because students could lose interest on it. To finish the presentation sequence, the teacher can show the steps with an example of a movie showing an entire movie trailer narration, in that way, students can have a more realistic basis of what they will do. In the Practice section, students have opportunity to practice their speaking according to the topic they have seen. Despite, here it is supposed the teacher cannot talk anymore because all questions have been clarified during the presentation part, that does not mean that the teacher cannot correct students’ pronunciation or that he or she cannot make some sporadic comments about the topic or the activity itself such as “Remember to do the correct intonation according to your plot’s movie”, something to help them without making the activity for them obviously. Then, the teacher shows students some film rolls and little celofan bags, and explains the content; which consists of some pictures of scenes of different movies; drama, thriller, romance, comedy, etc., also a brief summary of the movie they have in their bag, just to remind them what is the movie about in the case they have not watched it, and finally three empty dialog balloons. Then, the teacher arranges the group to work in pairs and explains to them that they have to create their own movie trailer script for the movie kind they will pick up from one of the bags. After, they will build a film roll using the material contained in it. Besides, they have to write and narrate 3 small dialogs that will be included in their movie’s trailer narration. This idea of making them to involve some small dialogs is to ensure that in some moment of their narration they make use of certain intonation and pace. To finish 4 teams will show their film roll to the whole class and narrate their movie’s trailer while he or she evaluates their job with the help of a rubric. It is very important to remark that in this activity it is not allowed to write anything but the three small dialogs only. According to the lesson plan that has been taken into consideration for this speaking activity, the next part to be set is the homework. As a personal decision, it is not considered necessary to assign some homework due to the nature of this topic, which relies more on the interaction speaker/listener, but that depends of each teacher.

In the last step the teacher has to wait to the end of the class to write about how the lesson went because that is the part where the teacher specifies what things worked pretty well and what did not at all. This is to consider if the activity really worked with that kind of students.

**Method used**

The design of the lesson plan is based on the Krause’s Direct Method (cited in Larsen-Freeman, 2000: 26) due to its principles which fit with this speaking activity such as:

- Reading in the target language should be taught from the beginning of language instruction; however, the reading skill will be developed through practice with speaking. Language is primarily speech. Culture consists of more than the fine arts, for instance study of costumes. This principle fits with this activity because it is focused on more than reading (the balloon dialogs) the speaking skill to communicate what is a movie about.
• Objects (e.g. realia or pictures) present in the immediate classroom environment should be used to help students understand the meaning. In this case, the pictures of some scenes and the movie trailer showed at the end of the presentation would provide the students a more realistic context.

• The native language should not be used in the classroom. It is preferable to use realia or say the meaning of a word in English and not to translate it.

• Students should learn to think in the target language as soon as possible. Vocabulary is acquired more naturally if students use it in full sentences, rather than memorizing word lists. This is one of the basis of the Let’s narrate a movie trailer because students are not allowed to write their narrations in order to make their participation more natural.

• Lessons should contain some conversational activity - some opportunity for students to use language in real contexts. Students should be encouraged to speak as much as possible. For example when students have to come to an agreement about what they will say in the performance.

• The syllabus is based on situations or topics, not usually on linguistic structures. Here the point is to talk about a movie trailer; it has not a specific grammatical structure so students are free of use any kind of tense or structure as soon as they can communicate their speech correctly. And the topic is chosen specifically focused in their interests, and movies.

**Other examples**

There are other kind of speaking activities that teachers can apply. They may be adapted to students’ needs.

- **Building my perfect country.** Here the idea is students have to use their creativity and imagination to develop a country that has certain characteristics to make it perfect to live in. The class starts with a brief warm up where the teacher asks students which is the country they would prefer to live in and why, in that way students will start to mention the thing they like the most of a country and that makes a perfect link with the presentation and at the same time it requires students to speak since the beginning. In the presentation, the teacher can explain the different customs, sports, food, in short words; the culture of some countries in order to guide students to the main point in the activity that is building another country where they can involve all the culture aspects they want to. The teacher can support his class on maps or images in a power point presentation, in the case it is not possible to have it in the classroom, the teacher can make use of drawings or flash cards with things that illustrate certain characteristic of a country, for example a drawing of a wine bottle and piece of cheese to illustrate France. After that, students are asked to develop an original and inexistent country in pairs (for having more ideas). They have to mention some specific aspects of its culture and mention what language it is used there. They have to use only 4 brief written ideas such as **the wine is very popular, or people like to do exercise only at night.** It is recommend that if the group gets bored to ask the rest of the group to explain the information of their country next class or after some break. That could be the homework at the same time; to add things to their country and be prepared to explain them. This activity requires a lot of imagination and a real context because students can
make use of the things they already know about some countries. It can be fun and relaxing at the same time because they are using their speaking more than another skill.

- **Narrating a radio program.** Despite this can be one of the most used speaking activities, it is different in this case because here the point is not just to ask for a classical radio debate but it is to ask for different kind of radio programs where students have the opportunity to learn English and at the same time to explore that labor field. In the warm up sequence the teacher shares a personal experience related to listening to a radio program and asks students if they have had a similar experience when listening to radio programs. With this beginning the teacher can know if students will be motivated by the topic or if they will need more motivation to participate because they might think that it is boring because they would have to work in teams and that is something they could reject. After this the teacher explains the different types of radio shows that can be gossiping, musical, political, of social awareness, sports, trends, emotional issues, just for saying some examples trying to mention the different aspects regarding speaking like intonation, pace, vocabulary, particular rules of speaking in that kind of program, and even slang language. Of course the teacher can use a power point presentation but also he/she can bring some already recorded programs to show examples of them and at the same time to explain the characteristics that can be listened in each one of them. For practice, teacher makes teams from 2 to 4 persons, then he shows them 6 or 7 different envelopes where each one has a different radio program, each team chooses one, and they have to prepare a section of their program where they have to be talking about one specific topic (for example, if the program is about music, the topic for discussing can be the new album of Rihanna) during 5 minutes and each member of the team has to participate equally. For this, the teacher can evaluate the activity with a rubric or another kind of feedback, just for checking if students use what was seen in the presentation part. For homework, teacher will ask students to do the same activity but having the chance to select the radio program they want and working with whoever they want (in case the activity was not completed), but they will have to record their program to make it like a real radio program. They will show it in the next class. In this way students will have the opportunity to listen to themselves and to check their pronunciation and fluency errors, and also it helps them to develop self-monitoring skills.

- **911 operators!** This is one of the most real contexts a teacher can use when speaking is the main skill to be practiced because it is a related with cultural and real facts of U.S.A. In this activity the key point is to make students to pass for this experience call to help them to be prepared when necessary because no one is exempt of these situations. There is just a little detail in this activity; it will be better applied with teenagers, young adults or adults because of the nature of the situations and vocabulary needed. The teacher will ask students if they have listened a 911 phone call, probably they answer that they have done it in a movie or TV program, anyway both are valid. After that the teacher will ask what the call was about, was it an emergency? A joking call? And what was the situation and what did the operator do during the calling? With all this information the teacher can make the relation with the presentation where he/she will explain the steps that a 911 operator is asked to follow in an
emergency phone call, for instance: first they have to ask the address to arrive to the emergency place, after he has to know what the emergency is, etc. For this the teacher will explain also the kind of language used and some examples of emergencies reported to this number. Besides, the teacher will explain how the interlocutors have to answer the questions of the operators in order to get the aid as soon as possible. This explanation can be with a power point presentation or writing on the board the steps; also he/she can use a real recorded call to make the context more real. In the practice the students will have to work with a partner; one will be the operator and the other one will be the person with the emergency situation. The call has to be complete; following all the steps the teacher explained and obviously both students have to talk. This situation can be given by the teacher or the students can make their own situation. Students may have the opportunity to speak in a way they rarely do and their teacher can help them to use certain contractions that can help them to take their phone call faster and precise.

**Suggestion**

Finally, I recommend using some kind of evaluation. The following rubric was designed to check certain aspects of the activity in order to give a feedback to the students because that can be very significant for them. By using rubrics teachers demonstrate that students’ effort was really appreciated and at the same time they can know if they are doing it well or not at all.

Rubric for evaluating a narration of a movie’s trailer

| Name of the team members: | Date: _______________ |
|----------------------------|______________________|
| __________________________|______________________|

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Aspects to evaluate</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Steps included in the making of the narration.</td>
<td>It includes from seven to nine steps.</td>
<td>It includes from four to six steps.</td>
<td>It includes from one to three steps.</td>
<td>It does not include any step.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>There are rarely hesitations and speed variation for intended meanings.</td>
<td>There are regular hesitations and a normal speaking speed.</td>
<td>There are disruptive hesitations and a slow but understandable speaking speed.</td>
<td>There are too many hesitations and a very slowly and not understandable speed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coherence between the</td>
<td>The narration respects</td>
<td>The narration has one or two ideas</td>
<td>The narration has from three to five</td>
<td>The narration doesn’t say</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movie and the narration.</td>
<td>completely the genre and climax of the movie.</td>
<td>ideas that don’t belong to the movie’s story.</td>
<td>anything about what the movie is about</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Work in team</td>
<td>Both students work in the narration and each one participated in active way.</td>
<td>One of the students worked a little bit more than the other.</td>
<td>One of the students made almost the whole work and the other just narrate two to three lines in the narration.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>The narration was performed in time without problem.</td>
<td>The narration was performed just in time because of some organizing problems.</td>
<td>The narration was performed with a delay from 3 to 5 minutes.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total score**

Grade: ____/15

**References**


