

Book review: *Speaking*

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Bygate, M. (1991). *Speaking* (3^a. Ed.). Hong Kong: Oxford University Press.

“Martin Bygate is a Professor of Applied Linguistics and Language Education at Lancaster University and is also Advisory Professor at the Hong Kong Institute of Education. His main interests and areas of publication are tasks in language pedagogy, oral second language development, language learning, and classroom discourse. He is presently interested in exploring the relationships between other sub-areas of applied linguistics and language education. He has previously taught at the universities of Leeds, Reading (both in the UK), and Santa Catarina (Brazil). He is co-editor (with Gabriele Kasper) of *Applied Linguistics*.” (http://www.upv.es/aesla2004/conf_inv/bygate.htm)

We as English teachers know how complicated it is at times to make our students interact in a second language. Oral production teaching creates debates because it is a difficult task to attain. Speaking fluently can not be carried out after a few hours of instruction, especially when students try to learn this skill in the classroom. Achieving proficiency becomes more complicated when we deal with large classes. To achieve successful interaction in the second language, Bygate proposes a combined methodology created by Rivers and Temperley (1978), and Littlewood (1981).

The book gives us an idea of how our students learn a foreign language. In the methodology, he exposes a variety of very useful activities to teach our students how to speak.

The book is separated in three main parts:

1. The first part deals with the aspects that contribute to the “simple task” of speaking to somebody.
2. The second part shows different types of exercises and activities that are used to develop communication.
3. The third part studies the different forms that teachers can use to examine what students do and what they learn with the different speaking activities.

One of the basic problems in foreign –language teaching is preparing learners to use the language. How this preparation is done and how successful it is, depends very much on how we as teachers understand our aims. We know that in order to speak a foreign language the student needs a certain amount of vocabulary and grammar. However, besides vocabulary and grammar our students must achieve other factors included in this process. These factors are mentioned throughout the book. We should keep in mind that it is the use of the language that is the most important goal to achieve rather than how the language works. We consciously must teach the student to produce ideas, thoughts; encourage fast communication decisions to speak right on the spot, rather than teach them to only assemble sentences.

Bygate differentiates between the knowledge of the language and the ability to use it. This is presented as follows:

1. Motor perceptive skills are about perceiving, recalling and articulating in the correct order sounds and structures of the language. We can compare this aspect of the language to learning how to manipulate the controls of a car on a deserted piece of land and far from normal traffic.
2. Interaction skills help the students make communication decisions such as deciding how to state what they mean to say based on their relationship with others.

In the first part of the book there is a chapter that distinguishes the difference between speech and writing. The first is described as the production of words as needed in the precise time and how this affects the ability to plan and organize the message. The latter can be formal and complicated with long and complex sentences. When speaking, mistakes are made because of time; this is the reason why we have to self-correct when speaking, rewording or repeating.

Bygate mentions four main ways to facilitate oral production:

- a) Simplifying the structure
- b) Using ellipsis
- c) Using expressions and
- d) Using gap fillers and hesitation devices

In this section, he also discusses some ways to develop oral production such as some strategies and skills that are described next:

Compensation refers to the different types of repetitions to correct errors that are made when speaking. The speaker substitutes nouns or adjectives for others or adds elements to alter what has been said. Another way to compensate is paraphrasing what the speaker says using adjustments: hesitations, false starts and self corrections.

Interaction skills are the routines that speakers use to communicate. The routines are conventional ways to present information. There are information and interaction routines. The information routines refer to description of places, facts and people comparisons and instructions; they also occur in written speech. Interaction routines are the sequences that are given in interaction such as conversations by telephone, in the bank, interviews, casual meetings, etc.

Bygate talks about interaction negotiation and meaning negotiation skills to succeed in communication. Negotiation of meaning is the skill to communicate clear ideas and the participant shows signs of understanding about the topic, this is only in oral interaction, because in writing the writer is unable to see if the reader understands the message, then there is no direct negotiation.

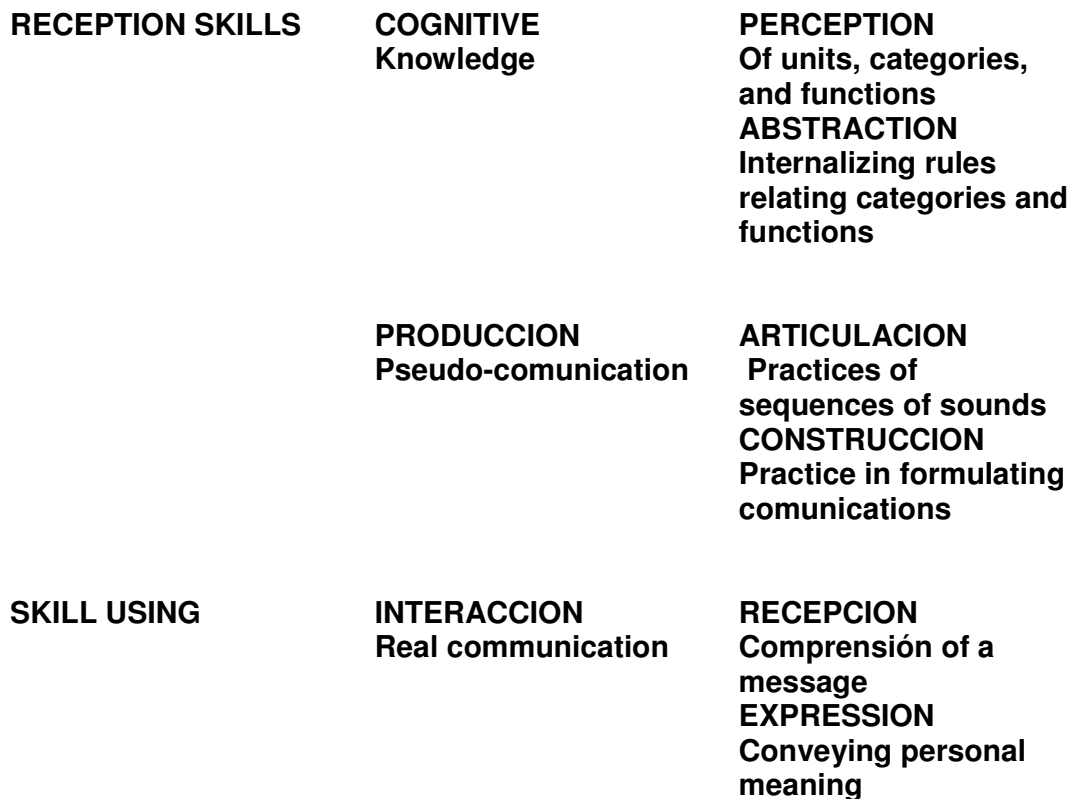
Interaction negotiation deals with who is going to take the turn, what it will be about, and who is going to speak. Actually there is not a figure that decides who is next to speak, but everyone decides when to speak.

In chapter five, Bygate deals with strategies, there are several strategies the speaker uses when he is unable to communicate properly due to lack of knowledge of the language. He mentions Faerech and Kasper (1983) and all the strategies they identify that speakers use to be able to communicate.

- A) Achievement strategies.
 - 1. Guessing strategies
 - 2. Paraphrasing strategies
 - 3. Co-operative strategies
- B) Reduction strategies.
 - 1. Avoidance strategies

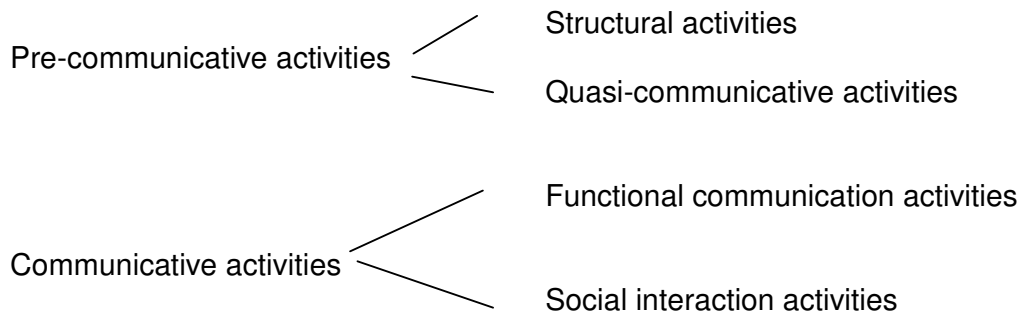
These two types of strategies help solve communication problems in learners of a second language. Achievement strategies help specially in substituting words or phrases to communicate the desired message. On the other hand reduction strategies reduce the message because speakers do not find words or phrases to substitute the unknown vocabulary, and there will be situations that they decide to change the topic or finish the conversation.

In section two, Bygate introduces two types of methodologies for oral interaction. The first methodology is the one proposed by Rivers and Temperley (1978) that is presented with a diagram where they describe the acquisition and use skills. They propose a bridge between both processes, and suggest teachers to give the students activities to help them in the transition from the first to the second.



Rivers and Temperley's framework (1978:4)

The second methodology is the one suggested by Littlewood (1981) who recommends the need of two types of exercises in the language learning process. He distinguishes between the activities that prepare the student to achieve the second ones where communication occurs.



After introducing these methodologies Bygate presents some activities that are recommended to develop these two methodologies. Some of the activities are games, simulations, projects, interactive activities etc.

Finally there is a section to explore aspects such as projects in the classroom, students' oral skills, students' level of oral production, student's perceptions of the activities.

From my point of view Bygate's book handles all aspects and problems of communication among the students. The book covers different aspects that occur in the classroom. He suggests methodologies from two well known authors in the area which are complemented with recommended activities which give a broad view of options to induce the students to use the language. He shows factors that we usually do not take into account and are important when speaking. These are aspects of the language that native speakers use to interact. Things such as: meaning negotiation, routines or interaction management. I recommend the book; it opened my perspective about how to teach speaking. I hope it helps you too.

Reference:

Bygate, M. (2004) Program of the event: AESLA 2004. Universidad Politécnica de Valencia. Retrieved September 21st 2006.
http://www.upv.es/aesla2004/conf_inv/bygate.htm