

## **A methodology for oral production**

Paper presented at the 12vo. Encuentro Nacional de Profesores de Lenguas Extranjeras, UNAM. Distrito Federal, Mexico, August 9, 10 and 11, 2006.

**Carolina Bañuelos García**  
**Language School UABC**  
**Tijuana México**

Carolina Bañuelos holds a BA in ELT, a Master's Degree in Teaching. She teaches English as a second language, lectures at the Language Teaching program and the diploma course in teaching English as a second language offered at the UABC Campus, Tijuana. Among her interests are teaching and learning as well as oral competence in English as a second language.

[carolabanuelos@hotmail.com](mailto:carolabanuelos@hotmail.com)

**María del Rocío Domínguez Gaona**

Universidad Autónoma de Baja California  
Language School Tijuana

She holds an Master's in Education in Educational Technology and ELT, University of Manchester; a Specialty in Teaching, UABC; a BA in English, Universidad Veracruzana. A B. Phil.Ed in ELT, University of Exeter. She has been an EFL teacher for more than 20 years at the UABC. At present, she is a lecturer in the teacher training programs of the UABC and the Research Department coordinator at the Language School in Tijuana.

E-mail: [rocio\\_dominguez@uabc.mx](mailto:rocio_dominguez@uabc.mx)

**Key words:** Methodology, oral production, strategies, interaction

Summary:

The purpose of this presentation is to explain a methodology for oral production for beginning English students. We suggest activities to promote dynamic communicative interaction such as communicative games, discussions, and prepared talks.

When we talk about language skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking), different reasons that can delay or impede language learners to become competent users of these abilities come out. From all four skills, oral production is considered as the one students need to develop more immediately; that is why there is a number of factors that have been implied as enhancers or impediments to the development of such ability.

In this paper we mention some of the strategies that have been used in conversation sessions with some groups of beginners and the way those strategies

have helped to avoid those conflicts in order to enhance students to improve their oral production.

The methodological proposal explained in this presentation intends to cover these objectives:

- To expose the beginning English learners to interact according to the context.
- To give students opportunities to practice different types of interaction routines.
- To help students to express opinions, ideas, desires, to negotiate or solve a problem, and to maintain a friendly social relationship (functions).
- To promote communication strategies.

At the beginning of the conversation sessions some doubts about how to carry them out aroused; some of them were: How could we help students obtain the means to develop the different communication functions? To what extent should we take grammar or pronunciation into consideration? When to teach the later, beginners or advance level? Should the teacher focus mainly on the functions? How many hours would be enough for someone to be able to speak? Would that depend on the students' age or on their ability to understand the language? How many times do students need to repeat a word or a phrase so they can dispose of it at a needed time and with the appropriate fluency? These doubts can be dissipated as literature is revised and action is taken.

Besides making the right decisions related to the former questions, it is important to pay attention to the activities, materials, and strategies, as well as the way they are applied. Bygate (1987, p. 3) states that "The basic problems in foreign-language teaching is to prepare the students 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." Thus, if we focus on having clear objectives, using the appropriate material, choosing activities that motivate the students, and selecting all those tools that will help us to reach these objectives, only successful oral production can be expected. Next, we describe the factors that were considered in this methodology:

### **Fluency**

As it was mentioned before, the students considered in this proposal are beginners. We do not usually pay enough attention to oral production at this stage arguing that

students do not have yet enough knowledge of grammar and vocabulary to start a conversation, no matter its length. It is certain that we cannot demand for an extended, clear, and fluid oral expression, but there are some elements that can contribute to the success of early oral practice.

This proposal emphasizes fluency over grammar practice. Fluency motivates the student's confidence so he/she dares to produce oral discourse learning from the errors that would come along. When students become self-confident creativity in oral expression comes up. If students build these foundations and accept oncoming challenges, they will be able to communicate simple ideas first and more complicated later. Accomplishments bring new challenges that students will include in their repertoire, and all this will allow them to really advance to next levels.

It is true that grammar and vocabulary are necessary for the students to start conversation sessions, but they are not definitive. Instead of this grammar instruction, there are other factors to be included in this learning process, which are mentioned in Bygate (1978) and are part of this work. These are mainly, although not the only ones, the different functions of the language. Thus, it is necessary to be aware of the importance of not only teaching the students to put sentences together, but help them to produce them, to start making decisions about interaction that leads to ask for and give information, so that little by little they can increase communication speed and act according to the social context where communication is taking place.

### **Skills to be developed**

Because in this work we use the concepts of "knowledge and use" of the language, it is convenient to state the meaning of them according to Bygate (1978). This author says that knowledge is related to the motor skills, while use refers to the interaction skills.

1. Motor skills of perception are the abilities that can be developed through exercises such as: model dialogues, predetermined patterns practice, repetitions. This type of exercises helps, if the comparison is allowed, to know some game rules without knowing how to play the game.
2. Interaction skills help students make decisions related to communication to convey meanings accurately according to the intended type of interaction.

This work tries to focus on the combination of both; this means using model dialogues but changing the predetermined information to a real one related to the students own lives; this way students are motivated to use interaction abilities to exchange real personal information with their teacher and classmates. Through this interaction practice, students also have the opportunity to get familiar with some elements native speakers use in real interactions such as interrupting, paraphrasing, hesitating, etc. There are also ways to start a conversation included in these short dialogues, to introduce the subject, and to use phrases native language speakers use in real interactions, besides the practice of language functions (Brown & Yule, 1983, p. 27).

Michael Stubbs (in Bygate 1987, p.17) mentions some examples of idiomatic expressions used in real life communication that could be included in these practice dialogues. Some of them are:

1. (in a bar) Have this one on me.
2. I don't believe a word of it.
3. Who does he think he is
4. I thought you'd never ask
5. It's very nice to meet you

### **The strategies**

The strategies to be considered in this work are of two kinds: metacognitive and cognitive. The former allow the students to develop studying habits appropriate to individual needs, and the later have to do with the thinking internal processes and language development. Strategies are of great importance in oral expression development, that is why it is vital to include them in a work plan designed to develop such ability. Some of these strategies are mentioned below:

- Clarify doubts
- Ask for opinions
- Respond to clarifications
- Paraphrase
- Call someone's attention
- Interrupt

- Indicate incomprehension
- Use expressions
- Simplify structures
- Start the conversation

### **The activities**

In this methodology we suggest the next activities: describing him/herself, describing others, describing places and things; using visuals, games, and repetitions; sharing information, role-playing, telling stories, practicing short dialogues, interviewing, problem solving, and completing a task. It is important to emphasize that to complete these activities it is not necessary the use of complete sentences, most of the times a phrase or a word is enough; then, it is not necessary to insist on the production of complete sentences. The meaning students are trying to convey becomes more important than the form they use to do it.

### **The materials**

We recommend the use of different kinds of materials, for instance, visuals which are very useful in activities that involve describing. It is advisable to use authentic material that the students can bring to the class. Some personal items become a great source for questions and answers. If the students bring their own material, exchanging information about it becomes more meaningful and leads to wider learning possibilities. The intention behind this is to motivate the students to share some aspects of their daily lives in subjects such as: personal points of view, future actions, past events, and common interests. It is wise to use authentic audio material recorded by the students themselves, or sometimes recorded material from textbooks.

There are some other aspects to be considered to develop this methodology, one of them is error correction, considering its impact on the students self-confidence. The affective side of the students should be an aspect that cannot be overlooked; that is why it is important to correct errors at the end, after the students have finished the practice. Another important aspect is the context where the interaction is taking place; it is important to talk about things students are interested in, otherwise they can be unmotivated to express their opinions or/and ideas. Time is also a matter of discussion;

it is necessary to give students enough time to produce orally, despite the belief that there is never enough time, which is not necessarily true. For instance, if we recorded our classes we would realize that the teacher takes most of the class time to give instructions, model, etc. which reduces the amount of time for students to produce.

It is not advisable to push student to answer a question immediately. If there are some shy students in the classroom, it is suitable to give them the questions beforehand, so they have time to prepare their answers. In addition, it is necessary to promote voluntary participation instead of being us, the teachers, who decide who is going to participate. Besides, we have to take into consideration the students' learning styles as well as the different strategies they use to decide the time to produce.

Sometimes students are intimidated because they think they do not know as much as the others or they feel some of the students dominate the class. If this becomes a constant situation, it is necessary to talk to the students who feel that way individually to fix the situation. Learning a second language is a difficult task, but the teacher can make a big difference and turn that task into a pleasant and motivated activity.

To conclude, it is necessary to connect the learning a language process to what the students expect to do with the language, to understand how this is going to be useful to their future plans, and the importance it has in their present lives and interests. To do these connections we need to show the students that they do not need to wait to become an advance student to use the language, but this is something they can accomplish through discipline and honesty, following a strategic plan according to their intentions, daring to produce, and considering themselves able to reach a difficult but not impossible task.

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