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Assisting Second Language Learners With Speaking Prompts: An Experimental Study With Reference To ESL Learners From TBML College Of Porayar, Tamilnadu

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Abstract

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is one of the effective methods of Language Learning tried out in many ESL Classrooms all over the world. It helps the second or foreign language learners to improve their communicative competence through a variety of tasks and activities which help the learners to interact with others effectively. This paper 'Assisting Second language learners with Speaking Prompts' – A Study with reference to TBML College students of Physics department from Porayar, Tamilnadu attempts to study Communicative competence of the learners who use speaking prompts. The central notion of Communicative Competence is to assist the learner to Communicate by focusing on form rather than meaning. This is done by making use of tasks, specifically designed for this purpose. When Learners speak they hesitate a lot, therefore they struggle to continue to speak. It is in this context CLT based tasks simply allow them to continue to speak, without worrying about their mistakes. Fluency is their immediate goal, accuracy is given importance at the later stage. Every time the students struggle to speak, their Communicative competence improves at least to a minimum level. Hence, this study makes use of 'Spoken Prompts' (i.e. an easy to use scaffolding frame work that help them to speak) on various interesting topics so that the learners are allowed to speak on their own without worrying about their grammatical errors and they are given scores for their performance and these scores are analysed with the use of descriptive statistics.

Keywords: *Communicative Competence, Spoken Prompts, Fluency, Accuracy, Scaffolding.*

1. Introduction

Communicative Language Teaching is one of the emerging areas in English Language Teaching. 'Communicative Competence' has emerged as a crucial as well as a challenging area of research in learning a second language. It has been the centre of focus in the process of learning / teaching a second language nowadays. There are many studies which try to explore the possibilities of improving the speaking skills of second language learner. Many tasks are used in 'CLT' that help the learners to have a better learning experience, by involving themselves in various tasks.

This paper “Assisting second language learners with Speaking prompts” attempts to find out whether “Communicative Competence” (taught through CLT) of the learners with the help of Speaking Prompts, improves to a reasonable extent.

To administer the said task, the following materials are used.

- Giving verbal assistance and useful phrases and link words in a chart.
- Pictures giving clues to the related topics.
- Cue Cards and Flannel boards.
- Hints of the Topic or Framework for Speaking.

2. Research Question

Does assisting with spoken prompts help the learners to improve their communicative competence?

3. Objectives

- To find out whether Communicative Competence improves with the use of Spoken prompts.
- Whether retention capacity to speak continuously based on spoken prompts exists.
- Whether the learners are able to expand their idea while speaking based on a Spoken Prompt.

4. Background of the Study

This study makes use of the theory of Communicative competence a term coined by Dell Hymes in 1966, who observes, “... a normal child acquires knowledge of sentences not only as grammatical, but also as appropriate. He or She acquires competence as to when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where in what manner. In short, a child becomes able to accomplish a repertoire of speech acts, to take part in speech events, and to evaluate their accomplishment by others”. (Hymes 1972,277).

He also observes the importance of meaning rather than form in which the grammatical part of speech is given secondary importance and the idea to be communicated is given the primary importance. This concept is made use of in many CLT classrooms on regular basis. This concept was again modified by Canale and Swine in the early 80’s. They talked about a new concept of Communicative competence that includes the following.

- Strategic Competence
- Discourse Competence
- Socio-Linguistic Competence and
- Grammatical competence

Though Communicative Competence has evolved as an umbrella term which refers to the said areas, this study focuses only on Communicative Competence as referred originally by Hymes. To do this a separate task and relevant materials have been designed.

5. Materials used for this Study

A list of interesting topics has been selected and Spoken Prompts have been developed for each topic. This is nothing but a framework for speech that includes key points and key expressions such as important phrases, link words, images etc. are given in various forms using cue cards, flannel boards, interesting images.

6. Student Profile

Ten ESL learners studying first year B.Sc., Physics from TBML College, Porayar, Tamilnadu were chosen for this study. They were aged between 17 and 21. Their language capacity could be termed as intermediate low (as per the AICFL level 1999). These students have completed their Schooling in Regional medium (Tamil) in government schools. Besides most of them come from fisherman villages, a typical environment where the chances of using English is quiet remote. They never had reading habits nor did their parents support them in terms of providing them with English Newspapers or extrinsically motivating them about the importance of English.

7. Methodology

At the outset, these Students from TBML College, Porayar were introduced about the study and they were motivated about the benefits of the study. Since the students were from different backgrounds a baseline test was conducted to know the competence of the students, with reference to speaking in L2. Students who scored more than 60 percentage of marks were chosen for the study after knowing about their interest to participate.

Now that the group is almost homogeneous they were put in two distinct groups ie, Control Group (A) and Experimental Group (B). Then they were introduced about the contact hours and the type of coaching. In the first contact hour for the control group a distinct variety of topics were given namely, Earth, Astrology, Afforestation, Movies, Friends etc. and they were asked to choose the topic of their choice and speak for almost 3 minutes. They were given 5 to 10 minutes for preparation. Once they started performing they were given scores based on their ability to speak in L2.

In the contact hour scheduled for the experimental group of students were given topics based on their interest. The following topics were given, Gandhiji's Experience in South Africa, Smoking is injurious to health, Mobile phone usage, etc. and these topics test their abilities to narrate in L2. For this purpose interesting anecdotes were chosen from various sources and they were given preparation time for about 5 to 10 minutes like the control group. Besides they were given spoken prompts (i.e., a prompt is something that helps the learner to pick up words, phrases, cohesive devices etc, sometimes including even pictures in order to give scaffolding.) They were asked to speak for about 3 minutes one by one and then their performance was noted and they were given marks.

Scores of Baseline Test

S. No	Name	Father's Name	Roll No	Baseline Test Scores (10)
1	C. Abinaya	Mr.K.Chandramohan	CC101	07
2	S. Ajay	Mr.U. Sankar	CC102	06
3	M.Jayamalini	Mr.J. Mahendiran	CC103	05
4	K.Kabilan	Mr.P. Kandasamy	CC104	06
5	J.Manikandan	Mr.R. Jayaraman	CC105	08
6	D MeriBerina	Mr.Divyanathan	CC106	07
7	G. Emimal	Mr.U. Ganesamurthy	CC107	06
8	J. Smaila	Mr.J.John Peter	CC108	07
9	S. Sowmya	Mr.S. Shanmugavadivel	CC109	05
10	E. Yovan	Mr.S. Easter raj	CC110	05

As could be seen from the marks scored in the Baseline Test, they may be considered as a Homogeneous group.

8. Criteria for the Assessment

The following criteria were chosen, namely fluency, accuracy and complexity.

- **Fluency:** The ability to speak continuously without hesitation.
- **Accuracy:** Usage of grammar to speak with linguistic competence.
- **Complexity:** The ability to use complex words, phrases and idioms etc.

9. Tools used for the Study

The following tools were used for their study.

- Descriptive Statistics.
- Diary Notes

10. Results

Descriptive Statistics.

S. No	Roll Number	Title	Marks Scored Max 10	Fluency	Accuracy	Complexity
1	CC101	Earth	5	6	2	2
2	CC103	Astrology	6	7	2.5	2
3	CC104	Afforestation	5	5	2.5	2.5
4	CC107	Afforestation	4	5	2	2
5	CC109	Earth	2	4	1	1.5

Experimental Group B.

S. No	Roll Number	Title	Total Marks Scored Max Marks (10)	Fluency	Accuracy	Complexity
1	CC102	Gandhiji's Experience in South Africa	9	6	4	3.5
2	CC105	Black Americans Experience in Shop	9	6	4	4
3	CC106	Mobile Phones usage restricted	7	5	3	3
4	CC108	Gandhiji's Experience in South Africa	8	5	3	3.5
5	CC110	Smoking is injurious to health	8	6	4	4

11. Discussions

- Overall there was a significance difference between these two groups with reference to speaking in L2.
- The performance of the experimental group of students was far better than the control group of students.
- The spoken prompts used have played a major role in their ability to speak in the second language. In fact it has served as a proper framework for their speech as it included glossary, points, topic sentence, supportive sentences and phrases.
- Since the framework for their speech is in their hands it was easy for them to continue to speak logically. This helped them to speak coherently also.

- Another advantage is that they didn't have to look for points, they simply continued with their speech, retaining all the points related to the topic. Another notable point is that, when they continue to speak their confidence level improved to a great deal.
- Whereas the control group of students stopped in the middle of their speech looking for phrases, words and points, which has put them in a spot of bother. Psychologically they were demotivated and felt quite inferior.
- As they did not have a framework in the form of spoken forms their speech lacked coherence and logic.

As students struggle to communicate they were able to communicate to a certain level, this is in tune with the theory of Communicative competence by Hymes.

With the use of prompts and by giving them a conducive atmosphere to speak in the second language has actually provided them with a platform to perform confidently.

The students from the experimental group using the speaking prompts performed far better than the students from the control group using speaking prompts. For Example, Roll Nos. CC102 and CC108 from the experimental group were given an anecdote, "Gandhiji's Experience in South Africa", with speaking prompts and Roll Nos. CC101 and CC107 from the control group were given a topic on 'Factual information' with speaking prompts. The learners from the Experimental group did better than the learners from the control group since the topic is an 'anecdote' and its speaking prompts helped them to understand the topic and present them in coherence but the learners from control group found it difficult to present the topic factual information coherently in spite of using the speaking prompts. As We could see the performance of these students from the marks scored, Roll Nos. CC102 and CC108 from the experimental group have scored better marks using speaking prompts than the Roll Nos. CC101 and CC107 from the control group.

Likewise Roll No. CC104 from the control group was given a topic 'Afforestation' and Roll No. CC106 of Experimental group were given a current topic, ie, ' Mobile Phones usage restricted'. Roll No CC106 of experimental group has scored better marks by using speaking prompts than Roll No. CC104 of control group. A general topic was given to Roll Nos. CC109 of control group, 'Earth' and CC110 of experimental group, ie, ' Smoking is injurious to health' and the participant from the control group found difficult to deliver and the participant from the experimental group did far better using speaking prompts and scored better marks than the participant from the control group. Two other situations were given to two different sets of students and the results were almost the same like the previous ones. As could be seen from the results, students from Experimental Group perform far better than the control group since they could do better with the usage of speaking prompts on the topics, 'Anecdotes' and the students from the control group could not present coherently since they found it difficult to present on the topic 'Factual information'. Fluency has not been given importance in this exercise and the test focuses of the Communicative Competence of the learners.

12. Limitations

- This study is restricted to only one college.
- Sample size is small therefore it may not be generalized.
- Number of contact hours allotted for the coaching of the learners was quite restricted.

13. Conclusion

Thus there is a significant difference in the performance between these two groups. The students from the control group found difficult to arrange their points on the related topic and also to present it coherently since they did not have any clues and prompts whereas the students from the experimental group using the speaking prompts could perform better by way of thinking, arranging and also speaking coherently. The students from Experimental group perform better than the students from the control Group using the speaking prompts.

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