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HOW TO DEVELOP ORAL FLUENCY WHEN TEACHING ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES

The article deals with the problem of oral fluency when teaching English for specific purposes. It highlights the importance of the development of fluency in English speaking class and investigates the factors that can make speaking more fluent. In this research we try to explain why speaking is complicated showing the functions of speech production, analyzing the notion of speaking competence and demonstrating the best speech conditions under which speaking fluency can be increased. With this purpose we describe the ways of developing fluency focusing on pretask planning and task repetition as some of the best ways of enhancing the ability to speak a foreign language easily well and quickly.

Key words: fluency, speaking, English for specific purposes, oral fluency development.

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ЯК РОЗВИВАТИ ШВИДКІСТЬ УСНОГО МОВЛЕННЯ В ПРОЦЕСІ ПРОФЕСІЙНО-ОРІЄНТОВАНОГО НАВЧАННЯ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ

У статті розглядається проблема швидкості усного мовлення в процесі навчання професійно-орієнтованої англійської мови. Підкреслено необхідність розвитку швидкості усного англійського мовлення під час опанування студентами немовних спеціальностей навичками та вміннями говоріння. Проведено аналіз наукових досліджень з метою описати фактори, які можуть зробити фахове спілкування більш вільним. У цьому дослідженні ми намагаємось пояснити причину складності процесу іншомовного мовлення для мовців, вказуючи на головні функції продукування усного мовлення. Проаналізовано поняття мовленнєвої компетентності в говорінні та представлено аналіз найкращих умов для організації навчання усного англійського мовлення з метою підвищення рівня його швидкості, не нехтуючи правильністю і складністю. В статті розглянуто конкретні шляхи збільшення швидкості усного мовлення. З цією метою було визначено, що для покращення якості говоріння, в першу чергу його темпу, плавності та спонтанності, студентів необхідно забезпечити мовною, інформаційною і стратегічною підтримкою. Під час навчання професійно-орієнтованого говоріння з метою покращення темпу, правильності та складності усного мовлення запропоновано використовувати попереднє планування, під час якого під керівництвом викладача або самостійно студенти мають змогу підготуватися до майбутньої усномовленнєвої діяльності, використовуючи запропоновану викладачем мовну та інформаційну підтримку. Важливою визначено також і необхідність використання спеціальних критеріїв при виборі видів завдань для навчання говоріння з метою покращення його швидкості. Запропоновано окремі шляхи покращення швидкості професійно-орієнтованого англійського мовлення.

Ключові слова: швидкість мовлення, говоріння, професійно-орієнтована англійська мова, розвиток швидкості усного мовлення.

Introduction. Fluency is a challenge to teachers and a major goal for their students. It is also serious rating consideration for a great number of oral language tests today. Even after the graduation from university natural ability to speak spontaneously, comprehensibly and quickly is still a high priority for many language learners when they start their professional activities. The question of fluency in the ESP classroom is very important but rather complicated. Looking for ways of improving oral fluency we have made some investigation and tried to find practical classroom activities that can help make psychology students sound more fluent when they make presentations and discuss their professional problems in the classroom. In this article we are going to discuss under what circumstances students start speaking, what is happening when speech is processed. Our goal is to offer conditions that can make speaking easier for ESP learners and in this way to find the modes of improving oral fluency in the ESP classroom.

Theoretical background. Fluency can be determined as an ability to speak fast with few mistakes. Lots of language specialists agree that foreign language learners should be fluent and accurate when speaking a foreign language [1-11]. Some of them can't separate fluency from accuracy mentioning complexity of speaking at the same time. Some researchers agree that people are fluent when they use language structures accurately while paying enough attention to the meaning of their utterances [6]. In this way if you speak fluently you are able to use correct language automatically at good conversational speed. This viewpoint shows that fluency is equal to accuracy and can't be separated. Brumfit stated that "accuracy will tend to be closely related to the syllabus, will tend to be teacher-dominated, and will tend to be form-based. Fluency must be student-dominated, meaning-based, and relatively unpredictable towards the syllabus" [2, p. 121]. This attitude demonstrates the necessity of creation natural use of a foreign language in the classroom as much as possible. Some investigation proposes that fluency includes four abilities. They are abilities to talk without long pauses; the ability to speak using correct syntactical and semantical sentences; the ability to say appropriate things in a variety of contexts; and the ability to use language in a creative and imaginative way [3]. In this approach, fluency is related not only to language but also to personality showing that there is a close interaction between language use and what we know about the world. The more modern language investigator Hedge defines fluency as "the ability to link units of speech together with facility and without strain or inappropriate slowness or undue hesitation" [7, p. 275]. Fluency was also closely connected with pauses by Thornbury who considers rate of speech as important as pauses [10]. The investigation of the scientific resources on the topic can be continued but it is obviously clear that there is no single complete definition of fluency which could help teachers better understand

how to develop it in the classroom. A definite necessity to achieve a high degree of fluency still exists and in our research work we are trying to find ways to incorporate more fluency development in an ESP classroom.

Materials and methods. Speaking is one of the most complicated activities and the analysis of what is involved in speaking can help teachers provide the best conditions for fluency to develop. The following factors can make speaking easy or difficult: speech processing, speaking competence and speech conditions. Speech processing is an important issue for us because what can be easy for a native speaker, can be challenging for our students. We can describe what happens when people start speaking. It goes about planning and production. First, there is the mental process when imprecise notions have to become precise. It is called conceptualization. The information speakers have to convey is based on their conceptual knowledge and other types of previous knowledge. After that this information should be presented through the formulation of utterances as soon as meaning is expressed through forms. On this stage speakers should pay attention to grammar and vocabulary not forgetting about the fact that when words are put together they need to arrange them in the order which is syntactically correct. Finally, when the utterance is spoken the articulation occurs. Thus, three major functions – conceptualization, formulation and articulation are present when producing speech and if we want our students speak fluently, these three functions should act more or less at the same time. It is possible at a certain level of automation which should be practiced in the classroom. Speech fluency increases when the level of automation is higher which happens when our students can process conceptualization, formulation and articulation almost simultaneously.

Speaking competence is another factor that can make speaking easier and more fluent. It can be presented in four skill areas of speaking competence together with the use of conversation management strategies which might lead to more effective speaking. Different skills which are required for effective speaking are presented: phonological skills, when speakers can blend the phonemes, use appropriate stress and intonation; speech function skills, when speakers are able to achieve specific communicative functions in social exchanges; interactional skills when speakers can manage interactions by regulating their speech in different modes; and extended discourse skills, when speakers are able to structure different kinds of extended utterances [5]. Conversational management strategies that are mentioned above as an additional factor to improve fluency are for enhancing messages. Learners are taught to ask for repetition and explanation, ask questions, guess the meaning of some words and expressions etc.

Speech conditions are very important. We can say that modelling good speech conditions in the classroom plays a major role in developing students' fluency and also degerming the fluency each of them is capable of. Cognitive, affective and performance conditions are determined by Thornbury. They include a lot factors such as familiarity with the topic, genre and interlocutors (cognitive); feelings towards the topic or participants and self-concessions (affective); mode, degree of collaboration, discourse control, planning time, time pressure and environmental conditions (performance) [10].

Therefore, we can make a conclusion that if we clearly understand the speech processing and pay enough attention to speech conditions, trying to adjust them to our students in the most effective way, we will be able to improve their oral fluency. The question is why different students find speaking activities more or less difficult if they have the same speech conditions. Personality of each student also influences the process of speaking and it gives us a new challenge. We should be able to recognize that for some students it is better to work alone while others prefer collaborating. This means that speech conditions are closely interconnected with personality which, on the one side, can help us develop speaking fluency, but on the other hand, can make the process of developing fluency more complicated.

The conclusion we have made does emphasize the importance of finding ways to help our students improve their oral fluency when taking into account students' personalities and creating the most effective circumstances for practice. The first thing we should mention is supporting learners during speaking activities. We can give our students language, knowledge and strategy support. When it goes about language support, we preteach or review vocabulary or grammar structures. Knowledge support occurs when we provide students with some background knowledge to assure that they have enough information to present during discussing a subject matter. Oral communication strategies such as paraphrasing, using affirmative responses etc. should be practiced from time to time so that they are rather helpful when speaking in the classroom.

The second factor that can influence speaking performance and therefore can help develop oral fluency is pretask planning [9]. ESP students can increase fluency in speaking when they concentrate more on the content than language. It is possible when before speaking activity they are given some extra time to plan what they are going to say. However, it is worth mentioning that pretask planning can help improve not only fluency but also accuracy and complexity of speaking. The main question is if pretask planning can be helpful in increasing the level of fluency, accuracy and complexity at the same time and to the same extend. We could hardly observe this. Even if students have some time before speaking, it doesn't improve all language areas equally. Nonetheless extra time before speaking is used by students rather efficiently because during the time of preparation they try to pay more attention to the language areas that they have not yet been perfect at. When students have sufficient time to formulate their utterances they demonstrate greater accuracy. The task of a teacher is to be sure that students' fluency doesn't suffer.

Thus, the pretask planning can be multifunctional. In our ESP class we use it in different ways. Our students can be introduced some new language or their existing knowledge on the subject matter is activated when recycling known language. We offer students to work in groups and share their ideas while walking around and helping different groups in organizing their ideas, encouraging learners to interpret tasks differently. The level of a teacher involvement can depend on the level of communicative preparation of the group. If this level is quite high, the pretask planning can be even unguided when students decide how to use this extra time on their own. The requirements are also higher. When students have unguided pretask planning they should be able to perform well in all areas. Their fluency must be as good as their accuracy and complexity.

Our experience shows that students perform much better when they have language and knowledge support and when they are provided with pretask planning either guided or unguided. We can observe greater fluency as well as improved accuracy. Students' motivation is high and they are ready to more experimentation in expressing complex ideas. Another important achievements is that having pretask planning time and language support students are ready to interpret tasks deeper and their self-monitoring during the activity improves.

The types of task we choose for our speaking activity can be different and can sometimes have a negative effect on oral fluency. There are some criteria for selecting tasks with the purpose not to decrease students' fluency. These criteria are suggested by

Thornbury, who is sure that the choice of a speaking activity should depend on how many of them are fulfilled in this activity. Interactivity, productivity, challenge, safety, purposefulness, authenticity are among them [10].

The speaking activity is well-chosen for an oral ESP class when it has an *interactive* element. It is well known that discussions, role plays or conversations are interactive fluency activities. In our ESP classroom we have lots of them and it helps develop fluency. But even when students have to make presentations we try to encourage listeners to ask questions and comment on the information they get expressing their viewpoints, agreeing or disagreeing with others. In other words giving speech can be interrupted or followed by discussing it.

To be able to develop oral fluency the activity we choose should be *productive*. It goes about the amount of language spoken by students. In other words, the activity should be designed to allow participants to use plenty of language to complete it. When we ask our students to work in pairs or small groups we mean that we increase the time of speaking because our students speak simultaneously. We hope that they use the time of speaking effectively but can sometimes see them speak a little or use the mother tongue. It goes without saying that a teacher should control the activity. This can be achieved through careful monitoring and encouragement by a teacher who can also choose one of the students to be an assistant and help inspecting others.

When the oral activity we are planning should help develop fluency it is necessary that it is *challenging* for students. It is up to a teacher to define the right level of challenge because if it is too high for students they can be discouraged and reluctant to speak. Thus, learners should be challenged but they need to feel on the *safe* side understanding that they can sometimes fail or perform badly and knowing they can count on their teacher's support. The conclusion is that safety is as important as challenge when it goes about the right choice of activities for our ESP students.

In an activity that is focused on fluency, it is important to care for *purposefulness* and *authenticity*. When we arrange speaking class for our students we try to be assure that they realize the outcome of the activity. In this case they are ready to cooperate and are motivated to achieve the result which can be for example the agreement on the best solution to the problem with further sharing ideas with another group. Choosing oral activities for an ESP classroom we try to provide our students with a learning experience that is focused on and relevant to their needs. We often use role plays or simulations of real-life experience so that what are students discuss is of relevance to their lives. It is easily understood that they speak more and faster as they are involved in the situation which is urgent for them.

Investigating the problem of oral fluency, mentioning that it can be developed, when our students are supported with language and knowledge, provided with a pretask planning phase and offered a proper type of task we can't help mentioning our favourite way of enhancing fluency through task, repetition which is extremely popular in language learning [8]. When our students are exposed to the same task and content, they are more confident and their performance is improved, so does their fluency. When speaking activity is unpredictable, the cognitive demands are very high. There is no automatization which prevents students from fluency and demotivate them to speak. The 4/3/2 technique was researched by language specialists and described by Nation and Newton who attributed the success of this technique to three factors [8]. When we apply this technique in an ESP classroom, we require the students to repeat the same piece of oral language or talk to three successive listeners spending four minutes for the first telling, three minutes for the second telling and to minutes for the last telling.

We can easily observe the three factors thanks to which the fluency increases. The first one is when the student should present a lot of language when speaking without interruption three times. The second appears because the student plans the utterance and chooses its content and language thereby enhancing the level of control and this makes fluency high. The third factor that determines the success of the activity and increases fluency is that the student is able to perform well by repeating the same message three times but with the challenge of a decreasing time limit.

Conclusion. Fluency is not an absolute value that students should demonstrate. The matter of degree is what is important. Our students can achieve a high degree of fluency in the ESP class and teachers, who are responsible for its developing, have a great background as well as a lot of opportunities with numerous resources and wide row of activities to draw from classroom learning. This research paper has briefly outlined the basics of an oral-fluency training in an ESP classroom. The factors that make oral activities easier or difficult have been analyzed and the interaction of cognitive, affective, and performance factors with personality have been considered. We have also tried to demonstrate the ways of developing fluency focusing on pretask planning and task repetition as the best ways of enhancing the ability to speak a foreign language easily well and quickly. The activities that the teacher chooses for oral work should be carefully selected and meet the demands of ESP students. We suggest that teachers adapt these recommendations to suit needs and abilities of their students who are doing ESP course, as well as their own teaching styles. The area of our future study can be the problem of sequencing of fluency, accuracy and complexity activities in one language activity in an ESP classroom.

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