Teaching the Speaking Skill in Iraqi Secondary Schools: A proposed Method*

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Abstract

Speaking skill is one of the major skills in teaching a foreign language. Developing this skills depends on some techniques used by teachers in the classroom. Unfortunately, most of these techniques are neglected by Iraqi teachers for different reasons. The present study sheds light on the difficulties that face the development of speaking skill in Iraqi schools. Moreover, a proposed method is presented to be adopted by those teachers to develop this skill.

Key words: speaking skill, Language teaching, learning.

1.0 Introduction :

Speaking is one of the most important skills in language proficiency, from a pedagogical point of view, the speaking "kill is very important because the person who is able to speak a language is also able to understand it and can learn to read and write it with ease C Oxford, 1995). Thus, efforts should be made to find new methods and techniques for teaching this skill.

In order to make class more effective and to develop the speaking, skill, learners must be indulged into actual speaking-situations, into a more relaxed informal situation which can help in providing them with motivation and interest.

Folland and Robertson (1979: 12) state that " a conversation classis an important way for developing the speaking skill through situations which are stimulating and as realistic as possible".

The official reports and studies carried out by the Ministry of Education in Iraq show that there is a poor achievement in learning the speaking skill. The present work is an attempt to propose a new method in teaching speaking skill at the Iraqi secondary schools. It is believed that the present method is helpful in orienting teachers as far as the speaking skill is concerned.

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1.1 -Language and Communication :

Language is a basic means of communication and it is actually important and essential human property .Speaking about communication through language necessarily involves speaking about different points of view as regards language ,i.e structural and functional. The former focuses on the grammatical system while the latter on the functional of language .However, the communication perspective is concerned with the structural as well as the functional aspects of language.7alette(1977; 120) believes that "speaking is a social skill, where as one can read and write in private or listen to the radio or watch television alone, a person ra.rely speaks without an audience of some sort ".

The communicator needs to acquire not only a repertoire of linguistic items, but he also needs to have the ability to use language as an instrument for satisfying his communicative needs. In this regards, Littlewood (1984: 4) states that:

> The most efficient communicator in a foreign language is not always the person who is best at manipulating its structures. It is often the person who is most skilled at processing the complete situation involving himself and his hearer taking account of what knowledge is already shared between them, and selecting items which will communicate his message effectively.

Additionally, communication can be classified into verbal and nonverbal, intentional and unintentional. Some factors affect the ability to communicate, the desire to communicate, comprehension and the limitations of information play a role in effective communication.

1.2 Linguistic Competence and Communicative competence:

Two types of competence are involved in the command, of a language: the linguistic and the communicative. The first is defined by Chomsky as the internalized knowledge possessed by a native speaker-hearer of language. .But this kind of competence does not account for the acceptability and appropriateness which are related to context. This implies that another type of competence is required. Allen and Corder(1974:161) argue that understanding language requiresknowledge of the manner in which language system -competence in the Chomskyean sense-is used. This type accounts for the mastery of elements of fluency, inteligibility, transactional performance, discourse competence and the nature of language. Both types of competence are interrelated and constitute the learner's speaking skill.

1 - 3 Teaching Speaking Skill in Iraqi Secondary Schools:

The writers of (The New English Course for Iraq) henceforth -NECI- (1978:41) state that the course aims at enabling learners

to develop the speaking skill in order to manipulate this skill
in daily life to participate effectively in discussions and conversations carried out in English, as well as to develop self-confidence in understanding the spoken 3nglish. Unfortunately, the series of NECI fails to achieve this goal due to the application of the principles of the audio-lingual approach.

2.0 Description of the Proposed Method:

Communicating through the development of the speaking skill is one of the major aims of learning a foreign language. Hence,

learners acquire the elements of linguistic competence as well as the strategies for using them in concrete situations. The growth of the learner's ability in vocabulary, sentence structures, pronunciation must be carefully planned and guided so that students can achieve effective communication.

It is suggested in the present work that the teacher starts his / her lesson with five-minute warm-up exercises, and finishes it with another five-minute activities. The teacher must keep in mind that the goal is to develop the learner's speaking skill .

The main principles of the proposed method are :

(1) the group-discussion technique is extensively used in teaching. The class can be divided into groups .Each group can speak in a low controlled voice audible only to the other members of the group. This keep the continuity of interest, helping the student feel his own progress, enabling the teacher or the
-rroup leader to observe the member who does not participate effectively.
(.2) Communicative points and not structures must be the objectives

of the teachers. Grammar , for instance, is taught as a tool rather

than a central teaching point.

(5) Correcting of errors can be done softly and casually. Teachers
should not embarrass learners if errors are to be corrected. For the sake of communication, teachers should be permissive with the learner's errors.

(4) Repetition is not that good way to solve a problem. Hence, this has to be avoided.

(5) The use of Arabic is permitted if it helps in understanding and explaining some areas of difficulty.

(6) The use of Multi-media in teaching is a basic principle of the proposed Method. Various teaching aids are used to motivate learners.

(7) Meaningful context is essential in teaching language. So, structures are more useful and effective if situationalized

The proposed method follows the following steps in teaching skill components ;

1) Presentation

A mixture of techniques are used to achieve meaningful class presentations such a.s explanation, contextualization, and situationalization.

(2) Practice

.Students must be engaged in practice most of the learning-time. Instead of repetition and drills, constant practice can be adopted .

(3) Production

Students, then, should be given the opportunity to apply what they have learned in a context and produce their own sentences .

3.0 The Proposed Method :

The following is a discussion of the teaching of elements of linguistic competence, while elements of the communicative competence will be taught through teaching the dialogue and other activities .

3.1 Teaching grammar:

3.1.1 Explanation :

Grammatical points should be described; the teacher can rely on a second language in this respect. Learners , moreover, should not be left to internalize the rules by themselves. The teacher can follow the following steps :

1) A presentationof a model sentence with accurate pronunciation;

the meaning of difficult words are to be given .

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2) An explanation of the form and meaning of the tense. Besides , the teacher is to explain the negation and interrogative in the tense in question .

3) Mentioning that some verbs cannot be in the tense such as verbs of sensation and verbs that indicate mental states.

4) Ungrammatical points can be entrusted to draw the learner's attention to the

differences .

5) Reintroduction of all the grammatical points

3.1.2 **Practice :**

Practice is more effective than explanation; it may take the following forms :

(1) Division of class into groups .

(2) Use of audio - visual aids .

(3) Correcting incorrect statements .

(4) Questioning is a technique to motivate students to practise.

(5) Designing games.

3.1.3 Production

Production takes two forms: oral and written .Students do most of the talking in this stage . Moreover, written homework must be assigned to reinforce the material presented.

3.2 Teaching Pronunciation :

The aim of teaching pronunciation is to use sounds in utterances for communication. One of the problem is that learners transfer the sound system to their native language and use it. In teaching the segments, the following steps are allowed :

1- Explanation 2- Description 5- Perception 4- Practice 5- Production **.**

-7-

(1) The teacher begins with the sound problems in isolated words.

(2) The meaning of these words should be clear.

(3) Pull description of the sound.

(4) Listening to the tape and identifying the words that have the vowel .

(5) The aims must be utilized.

(6) Reliance on Native Language in examples may be helpful.

(7) Sounds can be put in context - long- sentences and conversational.

3.5 **Teaching Vocabulary;**

Teaching new vocabularies can be done through the process of presenting various activities such as reading comprehension, oral practice and the dialogue . Learning lists of words is not fruitful. The best way is to teach words in context.Teaching vocabulary requires the mastery of its spelling, pronunciation, morphological structure and meaning. The meaning of a vocabulary item is

grasped by :

   a. Presenting the word in a context ; b.Defining the word ;

   c.Using the antonym ; d.Using the audio-visual aids ;

   e.-Dramatization ; f.The use of the native language •

   The following are the steps for teaching vocabulary :

(1) Presentation of words in isolation with slow pronunciation.
(2) Presentation of words in short sentences and then in a context conversational
      sentences .
(5) Pronouncing the words by saying the sentences many times slowly by the
      learner .
(4) Explaining the meaning of the word using one of the ways mentioned above
      .
(.5) Practising by the class using role-playing , games , Questions and answers
      etc.
(6) Encouraging learners to use the words for communication purposes,

3.4 Teaching Listening Comprehension :

        The aim of teaching listening comprehension , according to the proposed
method , is to enable learners to communicate and to
develop various skills such as concentration, structuring and interpretation of the
basic points. The teacher select a. passage either tape-recorded or read by the
teacher himself, he can follow these steps :

(1) Explaining the passage in two or three sentences .

(2) Clarifying the difficult words, structures and ideas .
(3) Students listen to the material recorded on a tape or read by the teacher at
      normal speed twice .

(4) Teachers gives oral questions based on passage •
(5) He must reread the passage and repeat the questions.

6) Students write down their answers on a sheet of paper .

3.5 Teaching the Dialogue:

        In teaching the dialogue the following steps must be followed:

presentation , practice and production .

3.5.1 -Presentation :
(1) The dialogue is presented twice either by a tape or by the teacher himself

with acceptable pronunciation and intonation.

(2) The content of the dialogue is given by the teacher clearly and in a simple

language.

(3) New vocabulary items, grammatical construction and pronunciation points
must be explained .

(4) If available , audio-visual aids are helpful in this respect •

(5) The class is divided into groups to act the dialogue or to

exchange roles. The teacher can participate in this activity

as a co-communicator or director .

3.5.2 Practice :

Practising the dialogue involves the following :

(1) Two learners are asked to dramatize the dialogue; the teacher assigns the
roles.

(2) The teacher my suggest topics or situations and ask the students to create
their own dialogue.

(3) The teacher can ask questions about aspects of the dialogue.

3.5.3 Production :

The teacher can divide the class into small groups, each group has a
different dialogue situation. Learners, then invent their dialogue .

4.0   The Experiment :

As the present study is based on the hypo '.thesis that speaking skill is not
properly taught in the Iraqi secondary schools. The method to teach this skill is
inadequate and out-of-date . It emphasizes the linguistic elements and ignores
the elements of the communicative competence. A new method is proposed to
teach this skill making full use of the new insights in the field. Trying to test
the (efficiency of this method, the experimental-control group technique and
pre-post tests design have been adopted.

Teaching the Speaking Skill in Iraqi Secondary Schools: A proposed Method

4.1 The Design of the Experiment :

Al-Majar Al-Kabeer Secondary school for girls was chosen to conduct the experiment. Two sections, out of three, were selected from the fifth class. One section was the experimental group and the other is the control group. The proposed method was applied in teaching the experimental group.

The control group was taught applying the instructions of the "Guide" by a well trained teacher.The two groups used the same textbook (NECI, BookVII).The lessons were five periods per week (both sections were scientific).The average number of weeks in a school was thirty. The teaching started on Nov. 1st .^"S and lasted for a period of eight weeks, i.e Dec. 50th 1996. A pre-test
was established to ensure that the two groups had the same background of speaking i.e they were comparable and the experiment
could be started safely. A post-test was given at the end of the experiment after two-month teaching according to the proposed method.

4.2 The Purposes of the Experiment :

The main purpose of the experiment are:

(1) Evaluating the learner's performance helps obtain an overall picture of the learner's abilities in speaking and diagnose the problematic areas.
(2) Comparing the performance after two months of applying the proposed method helps verify the hypotheses of the study • (5) Comparing the scores of learners in the pre-post tests will help verify the validity of the proposed method and decide which method is better for teaching.

4.5 Selection of the Samples :

Fifth class in Al-Majar Al-Kabeer Secondary School for Girls is chosen for the experiment. The justifications for this choice are :
(1) There are many environmental, social and economical similarities among the learners (subjects).
(2) All the subjects are female and. have the same educational background .
(3) Audio-visual aids are well-provided for the school.
(4) All the teachers of English in the school are well-trained and active.

The two groups are matched in the following variables to ensure that they are equivalent and comparable.
(1) Subjects are identical in educational background. Those who have studied for some years in other countries are excluded as in the table:

Table (1)
Number of Subject before and after excluding learners studied in other countries

group	Before excluding	After Excluding
Experimental	30	28
Control	31	29
Total	61	57

2) Age is taken into consideration. Subjects who have exceeded the (17-18) years are excluded. Table 2 represents this:

Table (3) shows that there is no significant difference

Table (2) Age of subjects before and after excluding older ones

Group	Before excluding	After Excluding
Experimental	28	25
Control	29	25
Total	57	50

Table (3) shows that there is no significant difference between the two groups in age.

Group	No.	Mean	Sd	DF	T-value
Experimen-tal	25	17.4	0.21	48	0.05
Control	25	17.7	0.21		

4.4 Description of the Tests

The tests were a group discussion technique, tasks, topics, time limitation and circumstances were all similar for both

groups. To break down the anxiety barrister examiners were absent except for some cases where the presence of one of them was significant. The learners were told that the test was intended to help the Iraqi learners to overcome the inadequacies in teaching the speaking skill. The testee's achievements were recorded on tapes which would be listened to by examiners to score the response

Topics for tests were carefully chosen. The testees were offered three topics for the pre-test, libraries, hobbies and the spare
time and three for the post-test : T.V. programmes, good books to read

4.5 Features of the Test :

Both tests applied in this study share the following features:

(1) The anxiety barrier is broken by the absence of the examiners.

(2) Topics to talk about are given by the examiners.

(3) Moderators were employed to conduct the discussion.

(4) All testees have performed an equivalent task under equivalent conditions.

(5) The group-discussion technique seems stimulating and closer to actual life situation than the interview test.

In addition the tests were reliable. They could measure consistently what they had intended to measure. Harris (1969:45) defines reliability as "the stability of the test score". Reliability can be estimated by the following ways:

(1) Using alternate forms which are equivalent in length, difficulty, time limits and formats.

(2) Retesting the same subjects with the same test and correlating the results of the two administrations.

(3) Using the split-half procedures by computing two scores for the two halves of the same test.

In the present study, the second technique was adopted. This technique refers to the stability of the subjects' scores when the same test is given to them twice. The results indicate that the correlation coefficient of reliability is 0.6.61 :

Table(4):The Mean and correlation Coefficient of the Test-Retest scores

	Mean	r-value
Test	61.72	0.86
Retest	61.78	

4.6 Final Administration of the test:

The testees were told by the examiners where and when to appear for the test. The examiners also announced the topics to choose from.
Testees were given five minutes warn-up period to discuss the topics freely and to eliminate the psychological tension. After this warn-up period, the test started. The examiners did not interfere in the discussion ; their role was limited to take care of the arrangement of the group, making sure that they were not randomly rating: and evaluating the learner's performance .The discussion was recorded on tapes which would be listened by the second committee and later on by the judges to be evaluated. The same steps were followed in both tests,

4.7 Criteria for Evaluation:

The present study adopts Harris rating scheme (1989:84) with
some modifications. For the sake of simplicity and to give importance to communicative competence as well as linguistic competence, the criteria for design in the assessment system, adopted in the experiment, will be into ten categories instead of five. The scale is graded from ten to one .

The scoring is based on the scale which is graded from ten to one. The testees responses rated by noting two types of errors occurring in each utterance : major and minor error. Each utterance consists of at least ten words. Major errors cause non-comprehensive from current use so as to confuse the listener. Minor error do not disrupt communication.

4.7.1 Elements of Linguistic Competence:

In scoring the elements of linguistic competence the following scale has been followed :

1 Grammar

- 10   Free from errors

- 5   Makes minor errors
- 1   Makes major errors. The score will grade the marks according to these scales for all. elements

2. Vocabulary

- 10   Vocabulary items are varied and appropriate

- 5   Uses inadequate vocabulary items

- 1   Vocabulary items are limited and inappropriate.

5. Pronunciation

- 10   The pronunciation is native sounding.
- 5   Has minor pronunciation problems that need concentrated listening .
- 1   The pronunciation problems are so severe to make speech unintelligible.

4. Intonation

- 10   The intonation is native like.

- 5   It is a mixture of native and Iraqi like.

- 1   It is Iraqi like.

5. Fluency

- 10   As fluent as a native speaker

- 5   Make slight hesitation and pauses

- 1   Hesitates and makes long pauses.

6. Comprehension

- 10   Understands everything without difficulties.

- 5   Understands with difficulties.

- 1   Cannot understand every simple conversational speech.

4.7.2 Elements of Communicative Competence

      In scoring the element of communicative competence, the following scales are followed :

1. Intelligibility

- 10   Perfectly intelligible and not obscure.

- 5   Slightly obscure.

- 1   Mostly unintelligible.

2. Transactional Performance

- 10   Participates autonomously.

- 5   Participates with difficulties.

- 1   Does not participate unless he is elicited.

3. Discourse Competence

- 10   The questions and responses are appropriate to the topics.

- 5   Sometimes goes far from the topic.
- 1   The questions and responses are unrelated to the topic.

4. The Nature of the Language

- 10   Uses simple short sentences

- 5   Sometimes tends to use complex ambiguous sentences,
- 1   The sentences used are ambiguous, complex and unacceptable.

Table(5) Marks Devoted to Elements of the Linguistic and Communicative Competence

1 - Grammar	10	10
2- Vocabulary	10	10
5- Pronunciation	10	10
4- Intonation	10	10
5- Comprehension	10	10
6- Fluency	10	10
7- Intelligibility	10	10
8- Transactional Performance	10	10
9- Discourse Competence	10	10
10- Nature of Language	10	10
Total	100	100

4.7.5 Scoring Scheme

The learners' performances were recorded on tapes "which would be listened to by the evaluators to be scored. The examiners were given the following

 1. Lists of the learners' names.

2. Copies of the rating sheet.

3. A copy of the ten-point scale criteria for evaluation.

The examiners listened attentively to the discussion of each group *and* evaluated the testees' performance according to the point
scale mentioned in the rating sheet. The rating sheet contained two Tables each one representing a separate element of the test. Each Table was divided into ten cells arranged in columns in accordance with the distribution of the rating scale. The examiner would insert a tick inside the suitable cell for each table which accounted for the learners' level in that element. The total score for the whole test was (l00);each of the ten elements allotted ten marks. The marks, of the ten elements were totaled in order to obtain the final score for each testee and the final score represented the level of performance.

4.8 Analysis of the Results

Two types of statistical analysis "re made : the horizontal and the vertical analyses. The former covers the results of the two groups on the same test. The latter deals with the comparison between the means gained by the testees of the same group on the tests.

4.8.1 Comparison of the Experimental Group and the Control Group in the Pre-test Score:

The following table tells us that the *mean* of the experimental group is (54.44) and that of the control group is (56.44). The t-value is 0.61 which indicates that there is no significant difference between the two groups. Thus, they are comparable and the experiment can be started safely.

Table(6) The Mean,Sd and 't' value of the Pre-test scores

Group	No. of Subjects	Mean	Sd	DF	T-Value
Experimental	25	54.44	10.401	48	0.612
Control	25	56.44	9.899		

4.8.2 Comparison of the Two Groups in the Post Test:

The mean of the Experimental group is (64.46) and the mean of the Control group is (60.56).The t-value is (1.215) whjch indicates
that there is a significant difference between the two groups. This means that the experimental group is progressing.

Table(7) Mean,Sd and T- Value of the Post-test Score

Group	No. of Subjects	Mean	Sd	DF	T-Value
Experimental	25	64.48	12.342	48	1.213
Control	25	60.36	11.149		

4.8.3 Comparison between the Pre-test and the Post-test of the Experimental Group Scores:

This comparison is made to find out whether there is a significant difference between the Pre-test and the post-test scores of the Experimental group. The t-value is (3.168) which indicates a significant difference between the two tests scores of the experimental group This means that the subjects in the experimental group have improved their abilities in the speaking skill.

Table (8)
Mean SD and "t" value of the pre-test and the post-test Scores of the Experimental Group

Test	Mean	Sd	DF	T-Value
Pre-test	54.04	10.401		
Post-test	64.48	12.342	24	3.168
Difference	10.37	2.403		

4.8.4 A Comparison of the Pre-Test and the Post-Test Scores of the Control Group

After two months of teaching according to the instructions of the " Teacher's Guide ", the difference between the mean scores of the pre-test and the pos-r-test of the control group is very slight. The "t" value is 1.28 which indicates that there is a slight difference between the two means. This little difference is due to length of the course time. It also indicates that teaching speaking in the form of recitation or memorization cannot make any significant progress,

Mean, SD and "t" value of the pre-test and the post-test Scores of the Control Group

Test	Mean	SD	DF	T-value
Pre-test	56.44	9.89		
Post-test	60.36	11.14	24	1.287
Difference	4.8	1.3		

4.9 Discussion

The experiment conducted has confirmed that :

1- The comparison between the two groups is useful in many ways:

a. Results showed that 20 learners out of 50 have failed to

The improvement of the performance of the experimental group subjects indicate that they have benefited more from the proposed method which proved to be more efficient than the one in use, see table **(11) .**

Table(11) Post-Test Scores

Experimental Group				Control Group			
No.	Score	No.	Score	No.	Score	N o .	Score
1	65	13	61	1	70	13	60
2	43	14	68	2	65	14	40
3	75	15	60	3	68	15	48
4	60	16	45	4	77	16	62
5	75	17	68	5	75	17	65
6	73	18	55	6	57	18	80
7	55	19	80	7	62	19	55
8	77	20	85	8	70	20	42
9	50	21	72	9	46	21	60
10	73	22	60	10	70	22	63
11	57	25	44	11	65	23	67
12	50	24	76	12	52	24	44
		25	85			25	50

(3) It is possible that longer application of the proposed method will yield results much better than those achieved in the experiment.

(4) In the post-test scores, the experimental group subjects obtained higher marks in the elements of the communicative competence than in the pre-test. This reflects the emphasis the proposed method has given to these elements.

5 .0 Recommendations:

In the light of the results, the following recommendations are proposed :
(1) EL teachers must be informed of the recent views and techniques concerning the teaching of the speaking skill.
(2) Teachers have to be trained to teach and test both linguistic and communicative competence .

(3) Topics should be carefully chosen and be relevant and interesting stimuli. Classes should be designed to offer intensive practice in using EL.
(4) Emphasis should be placed on building communicative skills to use language effectively in realistic situations.
(5) Dialogues are not basic activities for teaching the speaking skill. They are only warm-up activities.
(6) To increase the learner's motivation and interests, techniques adopted for teaching the speaking activities must not be limited to one type, they should, be various.

Teaching the Speaking Skill in Iraqi Secondary Schools: A proposed Method

(7) Group-discussion technique can be used even in asking and answering questions. Each group can speak in a low, controlled voice audible only to the members of the group.

(8) In testing the speaking skill, teachers are advised to use tape recorders to record the learners' responses to be evaluated later on. In scoring, teachers are recommended to follow certain scoring scheme and it is preferable to use ten-point scale criteria as used in the experiment.

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Dr. Oda and Salih

طريقة مقترحة لتدريس مهارة التكلم في المدارس الاعدادية

الخلاصة

يتناول البحث الوضع الحالي لتدريس مهارة التكلم في المدارس الإعدادية في العراق و أهم نقاط الضعف في هذا المجال. يقوم الباحثان بالتدريس في محافظة ميسان من اجل تطبيق الطريقة المقترحة والتأكد منها قبل التوصية باستخدامها. و بعد التجربة يلجأ الباحثان الى الوسائل الإحصائية لمعرفة النتائج بصورة دقيقة حيث يتم بعد ذلك تقديم المقترحات في الجزء الأخير من البحث.

Teaching the Speaking Skill in Iraqi Secondary Schools: A proposed Method

Dr. Oda   and   Salih

63

Dr. Oda and Salih

Teaching the Speaking Skill in Iraqi Secondary Schools: A proposed Method

Dr. Oda   and   Salih

Teaching the Speaking Skill in Iraqi Secondary Schools: A proposed

Method

Dr. Oda   and   Salih

Teaching the Speaking Skill in Iraqi Secondary Schools: A proposed Method

Dr. Oda   and   Salih

73