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TEACHING CONVERSATION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM: CONVERSATIONAL TECHNIQUES

Abstract. This article deals with the theoretical analysis of teaching conversation which is based on real-life situations and develops learners' conversational skills in English language classroom. Teaching conversation is the highest and a creative phase of language learning process. It is characterized by «interacting». Accordingly, the principles and «steps» of teaching conversation by means of using various conversational techniques are described in the article. In order to achieve the aim of development learners' conversational skills, teachers should use special conversational techniques such as small-group discussions, role-plays, simulations, improvisations, debates, brainstorming, reporting, interviews and others. Therefore, the performing procedures of some of the techniques (small-group discussions, role-plays, improvisations, debates) are analyzed in the article.

Keywords: teaching conversation; communicative competence; conversational skills; conversation group; principles of teaching conversation; manipulative phase; communicative phase; conversational techniques.

Introduction. Nowadays, there is no doubt that teaching English conversation is the most important part of language learning. It is clear to teachers that students need English to communicate first and foremost therefore they must have more conversation practice in language classroom. Grammar, writing and other skills are all very important, but in the students' minds conversation is the most important. Unfortunately, teaching conversational skills is much more challenging than teaching grammar and writing skills. It demands energy of teachers as well as students to provide conversation lessons or arrange conversation activities that can stimulate all members of the class to use English effectively.

There is a considerable number of Ukrainian and Western foreign language-teaching methodologists as well as linguists, who devote their basic researches and articles on learning language to the problem of teaching conversation in English language classroom by means of conversational techniques. Among them are as follows: S. Ann, E. Anthony, K. Beare, G. Brown, A. Chaney, P. Cole, J. Dobson, G. Gibson, H. Kayi, W. R. Lee, M. Magher, D. Nunan, A. Palmer, L. Regan, P. Sze and others.

The goal of the article is to analyze the conversational techniques which are performed in English language classroom in the teaching conversation process.

The main researches. It is common practice for general-purpose second foreign language programmes to incorporate the teaching of speaking skills. The recognition of speaking as a «crucial part» [7] of a second language curriculum is reflected in «general methodology texts», as well as in «second language syllabuses» [12, 229]. Speaking is «the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols, in a variety of contexts» [3, 13]. Despite of its importance, teaching speaking has been undervalued for many years. English language teachers have continued to teach speaking just as a repetition of drills and memorization of «artificial dialogues which purport to be developing learners' speaking skills» [12, 230]. As a result many English language learners have developed the «ability to speak both accurately and appropriately» [12, 237]. In the other words, they are able «to speak reasonably correct and even fluent English» [9, 3] but they are unable to engage in «on-going, interactive, mentally satisfying conversation» [9, 3]. They don't take the initiative to say more, they satisfy themselves with short answers, they are not able to keep up long turns in conversation due to a lack of conversational skills. The ability to take part in a conversation is «believed to be a part of learner's communicative competence, the ultimate goal of second language learning» [12, 229]. Therefore teaching conversational skills in the frame of teaching speaking can improve learners' confidence how to communicate in an informal setting using basic vocabulary and sentence structures. This is the way the learner's conversational competence is developed.

Teaching conversation is the highest phase of the language learning process which is characterized by «interacting» (direct conversation) [4, 2] between the members of a conversation (communicative) group. Direct conversation practice for students learning English may occur in regular classroom surroundings or in non-academic environments such as conversation clubs. English conversation clubs are organized by teachers and students who want to practice English in more congenial atmosphere than the classroom may allow. The meetings of conversation clubs usually follow a regular schedule – once a week or once a month. The success of the conversation club depends on the leader of the

communicative group who must be experienced in teaching so that to arrange entertaining activities (such as debates, film showings, games) that can stimulate all members of the group to use their English effectively [4, 6].

Academic conversation groups are critical to teaching conversational skills, as they give students an opportunity to practice what they have learned. They are organized by the teachers during a given class hour or a conversation session covering an entire class hour. Apparently, the teacher who trains the students in the fundamentals of English is the one who directs the conversation sessions. The teacher should create a classroom environment where students can practice «real-life communication» [7]; arrange authentic activities and meaningful tasks that promote speaking; «stimulate the students to talk about their perspective backgrounds, adding variety and interest to the conversation session» [4, 7].

As usual, the first two or three minutes of each conversation session (conversation class) is used to set up groups. Arranging the students in small groups of three to five members at the beginning of the class, «is the first step towards developing students' conversational abilities» and effectively managing conversation sessions [5]. The methodologists are sure that it is «good for students to speak to each other in English» and «it is better for the students to work with another student rather than alone» [11]. They suggest changing the members of conversation groups quite often so that the students don't get bored with their partners and can effectively develop their conversational skills; setting «talkative students» up in one group and «quiet students» in another group so that the «talkative students» don't «monopolize the conversation» and make the «quiet» one speak more in the group of equal in abilities [11].

To facilitate conversation group activities and overall group interaction dynamics a student leader who is the right hand of a teacher can be assigned. His task is to help managing the class and ensuring the groups stay on task throughout the duration of the conversation session. The leader's role is to relieve the teachers from «some of the burden of facilitating activities and interaction, and allows the teacher to address the actual interaction that occurs within the group» [5]. Anyone who speaks English fluently, and who is reasonably inventive, enthusiastic, sensitive, friendly, firm and patient should make a fine conversation student leader [4, 7 – 8]. The student leader is responsible both for the

interaction within his conversation group as well as for the results of the whole conversation session. If a student leader facilitates the group work effectively, all the members of the group will be awarded full marks for that particular conversation class. If the group fails to stay on task or if the group appears to be inactive then the leader will be held partly accountable for this and receive a lower leader's grade [5]. The work of the student leader is considered helpful and effective if the group consists of four or five members. As larger the group is as more control the interaction procedure within the group demands.

Now many English teachers and methodologists agree on that teaching conversation is a creative phase of language learning process as it makes students «use the language creatively» [4, 4] having mastered all of the language patterns through manipulative activities before. By doing the manipulative activities (pronunciation drills, oral and written grammar exercises, dictation exercises, vocabulary drills), students begin to «regard English as classroom mental gymnastics, rather than a means of communication» [4, 4]. As a result, they may reach the intermediate or advanced stage performing different manipulative drills and exercises and at the same time being «psychologically unprepared» to use these patterns in conversation format. To avoid this distressing situation, English teachers suggest incorporating carefully controlled conversation sessions at the earliest possible stage of language learning process. They are sure that directed conversation session might occur as follows in English as a foreign language course: elementary level – 2 to 5 minute sessions throughout a class hour; intermediate level – 5 to 20 minute sessions per class hour; advanced level – periods of 20 minutes or more [4, 4 – 5].

To organize a successful conversation session during a given class hour English teachers are recommended to study and use in practice the following basic principles of teaching conversation. The first principle declares «focus on communication and fluency, not correctness». Any student should be emphasized that it's not a matter of holding the conversation «correctly» but whether or not the classmates understand him. The second principle says «lay the groundwork». Before entering in academic conversations, students have to agree on some basic rules: 1) listen to each other courteously; 2) listen actively by clarifying meaning and ask for examples; 3) advance one's own opinions clearly and

politely while considering the audience. The third principle – «student directed: student choice of topics». It depends on different social and cultural background of students. The students are allowed to come up with own topics to use over the course of the term. They do not have to be academic topics but anything students are interested in and can discuss for an extended time. The fourth principle is based on arranging the students in groups. It declares that conversation occurs successfully and productively in small, not large groups. Having students work in small groups help to develop their conversational skills. «Encourage students to rotate partners» is the next principle of teaching conversation. Some teachers assign conversational partners or groups for the term. This has advantages such as students get to know each other better and they can quickly get into their groups when asked to. But the occasional rotation of partners or groups every few weeks gives students an opportunity to get to know more of their peers and to get exposed to more ideas while being the member of the same group for a long period of time. The sixth principle concerns «teaching conversation strategies». English teachers believe that it is very important to teach students conversation strategies because even a native speaker can fail if he doesn't know them. They say that students can carry on an everyday conversation on any topic without difficulty in an informal setting but they can't have a «real conversation» on the same topic in the classroom. Therefore students have to know different strategies to provide a successful conversation. The seventh principle declares «teach vocabulary». It is clear that students are not able to enter a specific conversation if they don't have the vocabulary on the topic. Accordingly, they have to be introduced some key phrases and words related to the topic. «Teaching both formal and informal conversational skills» is the eighth principle. There are specific strategies for entering, extending, and ending conversations both formally and informally. Knowing these strategies for different types of conversations help students avoid confusion and gain experience in different types of conversations. The last, the ninth principle of teaching conversation can be applied to assessment of the conversation session. Because of focusing on conversation itself rather than on «correctness», students should be assessed mostly informally [1].

Teaching conversation «means to teach English learners to produce the language speech sounds and sound patterns; use word and sentence stress, intonation patterns and the rhythm of the foreign language; select appropriate words and sentences according to the proper social setting, audience, situation and subject matter; organize students thoughts in a meaningful and logical sequence; use language as a means of expressing values and judgments; use the language quickly and confidently with few unnatural pauses, which is called as fluency» [10, 34 – 36]. In order to teach conversation appropriately and productively English teachers should keep up the certain «steps» in the English language classroom. They are as follows: 1) teach a content lesson (focus on key vocabulary on the topic and review simple grammar rules) before students are given the chance to practice conversation; 2) separate students into pairs or small groups so as they feel less self-conscious about their skills and have more opportunities to speak; 3) set parameters for the conversation (discussions can focus on agreement or disagreement over a definite issue, sharing ideas about current events, brainstorming solutions to an issue); 4) assign role-playing activities so as the students can practice specific vocabulary or phrases in realistic situations; 5) practice simulations (simulations include more elaborate settings such as TV host, singer, etc.) because a simulation can help students practice their conversational skills and feel more confident while speaking in front of the class; 6) ask students to be reporters or to interview one another (students who act as the reporter or interviewer use their conversational skills to get information, and students who act as the subjects use their skills to make up answers to the questions); 7) allow students to play games together having made a rule that students have to speak in English while playing [8].

Teaching conversation is based on real-life situations that require communication. By using different conversational techniques in English language classroom, students have an opportunity to communicate with each other in the target language imitating real-life surroundings. Before analyzing different conversational techniques used to develop learners' conversational skills, we would like to discuss the term «technique». American linguists and foreign-language teaching methodologists define this term as everything «that actually takes place in the classroom; a particular trick, stratagem, or contrivance used to accomplish an immediate objective» [2, 201]. They consider «technique» to be an

element of «a teacher machine complex» alongside the «approach» and «method». Accordingly, they say that «techniques must be consistent with a method, and therefore in harmony with an approach as well» [2, 201]. On their opinion the usage of certain techniques in English language classroom depends on «the teacher, his individual artistry, and on the composition of the class» [2, 201].

Among the conversational techniques that promote oral language are distinguished small-group discussions, role-plays, improvisations, simulations, debates, speeches, information gap, brainstorming, storytelling, interviews, story completion, reporting, playing games, picture narrating, picture describing, etc. But we will examine some of the conversational techniques in detail, such as small-group discussions, role-plays, improvisations and debates. It is clear to the foreign-language teaching methodologists that questions and answers are the major elements in natural conversation and the backbone of directed conversation sessions. They distinguish between question-answer drill in the manipulative phase of language learning and question-answer sequences in the communicative phase. In the first phase, question-answer drill helps the students internalize the phonetic and syntactic design of English. In the communicative phase, question-answer sequences have relation to the students' life or interests, to the real-life surroundings; they provide the development of learners' conversational skills [4, 24].

Small-group discussion is an excellent way to give students opportunities to speak English, especially if the class is a large one. English teachers are sure that, for efficient group discussions, it is better to form small groups than large groups because «quiet» students may avoid contributing in large groups. A discussion can be held for various reasons. The students may aim to arrive at a conclusion, share ideas about an event, or find solutions in their discussion groups. Before the discussion, it is essential to give a discussion topic and to set the purpose of the discussion activity, so that students do not spend time chatting with each other about irrelevant things [7]. The teacher's task is to supervise group work, circulating from one group to another and offering advice where necessary. Encouraging teachers to hold discussions in English language classroom the foreign language-teaching methodologists have worked out the following discussion techniques: 1) divide the class into small groups of four to six people each; give each

group a different discussion topic; 2) allow the groups to discuss their topics for at least 10 minutes; help them elect a spokesman who will report on the groups' collective thoughts to the entire class; 3) call on the spokesman of one of the groups; give him time (five minutes or so) to make presentation; question him or another member of his group on viewpoints expressed; 4) follow the same procedure with the remaining groups until all groups have given their presentation [4, 62 – 63].

Improvisation is a special conversational technique borrowed from the field of drama; it is a hypothetical situation in which two speakers interact without any special preparation. English learners working with this technique use the language in an inventive and entertaining form. They must be advanced-level students because improvisations demand a high degree of language proficiency and imagination. Before working with improvisation, the teacher should note that the situation is clearly stated, easy to act out, and has a dramatic story twist. When students are fairly fluent in English, they are able to create a plausible conversation around this situation, complete with appropriate facial expressions and gestures [4, 41 – 42]. Here are some examples of a setting for improvisation:

You are working down the hall in an office building. A girl ahead of you drops a paper but does not realize it is missing. You pick the paper up and give it to her. As she thanks you, you suddenly realize that she was a classmate of yours several years ago.

You order soup in a restaurant. When the waiter brings the soup, you think you see a fly in it. You are very annoyed and ask the waiter to bring you something else.

You have a party with a friend who is supposed to be driving you home. It is late at night and time to go home, but you think your friend has had too much to drink, even though he insists he can drive all right.

You are looking for a house to buy. You find a beautiful one which is really quite cheap. Then you learn that it is supposed to be haunted.

To work with improvisations any teacher should have a large supply of hypothetical situations which are simple stated and challenging to the students' creativity. As an alternative to using the situations suggested by the teacher, students can write their own situations for improvisation. In this case, teachers should follow a certain procedure: 1)

explain a general idea of improvisations to the class; 2) ask each student to write three situations involving two speakers only on a separate slip of paper; 3) collect the slips of paper; read over the situations and correct the English where necessary; 4) choose the situations which are the most suitable to use in language classroom [4, 45].

To begin the enactment of the situations for improvisation in the classroom, English teachers recommend the following procedure: 1) call one student up to the front of the room; 2) have him read the situation loudly and clearly to the rest of the class; 3) allow him to choose another student in the class to perform the improvisation with him [4, 45].

Role-play is another way of getting students to speak. It is an engaging device to stimulate students to use their newly acquired English. While participating in role-playing students pretend they are in various social contexts and have a variety of social roles. In role play activities, teachers give information to the learners such as who they are and what they think or feel [7]. Role-plays have many advantages. First, since they are entertaining, they motivate the students. Second, they increase the self-confidence of hesitant students, because in role-play activities they do not have to speak for themselves, they do not have to take the same responsibility [6, 20 – 22].

Generally speaking, role-plays require too much time to work with in just one class hour. However, teachers may work with a short skit or several skits during a class period to give their students chance to participate in role-playing. Here is an example of a setting for a short skit (role-play):

Speakers: Grandfather, grandmother, mother, father, older son, younger son, daughter

Situation: The daughter is getting married. Her parents want her to wear the grandmother's fifty-year-old wedding dress, but she wants to wear a new, modern dress. Her brother are bored by the wedding plans, her father is afraid her wedding will be too expensive, and her mother is too excited to speak calmly about anything.

In order to work with short skits effectively, foreign language-teaching methodologists suggest the following procedure: 1) use the longest «dialogues» from students' English textbooks as a basis for a skit; have the students read their assigned role aloud two or three times; have them close their books and follow the general pattern of the

material by role-playing in their own words; 2) think of a situation involving several people; write on the blackboard a few lines of conversation that the characters might say; ask the students to suggest additional lines; 3) ask each student to think up his own situation involving several people; have him write a situation on a slip of paper; 4) collect the slips of paper, so that to choose the situations that would be easiest for the student to act out; 4) describe one of the situations you have selected to the class, assign roles and have the students enact the situations on an impromptu basis [4, 47 – 48].

Debate is another conversational technique which is performed in English language classroom to improve learners' conversational skills because students «need practice in speaking English more than in polishing debating skills» [4, 64]. Participating in debates may be enjoyed by the students reached the advanced level in English. In choosing a debate topic for English conversation groups the teacher should find a subject that has elements of controversy but does not arouse uncontrollable passions. For debates to be successful, a traditional debate format should be followed: 1) describe the debate topic; 2) ask which students would like to be «pro» and which «con»; 3) select an equal number of students to speak on each of the two debate teams (two to four people on each team); have the two teams sit in front of the class so that everyone can see them; 4) give the students time to prepare their arguments; they can speak from notes but they should not read their presentations; 5) appoint one member on each team as the «captain» who gives his presentation first and summarizes the team's views at the end; 6) set a three-minute time limit for each presentation; 7) after everyone has given his presentation, class members in the audience can question people on either team [4, 64 – 65].

Conclusions. Teaching conversation is a very important part of foreign language learning. The ability to communicate in the language clearly and efficiently contributes to the success of the language learners in school and later in everyday life. Therefore, it is essential that language teachers pay great attention to teaching conversation. They should create a classroom environment where meaningful communication takes place. With this aim, various conversational techniques such as small-group discussions, improvisations, debates, simulations, role-plays and other can be performed in English language classroom in order to develop basic conversational skills necessary for real-life.

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НАВЧАННЯ ГОВОРІННЮ НА УРОКАХ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ: РОЗМОВНІ ТЕХНІКИ

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Анотація. Стаття присвячена теоретичному аналізу процесу формування навичок говоріння шляхом використання спеціальних комунікативних технік на уроках англійської мови. У статті висвітлюються принципи й шляхи формування навичок

говоріння та обґрунтовується методика застосування комунікативних технік, зокрема таких, як дискусія, рольова гра, імпрровізація та дебати. У процесі дослідження виявлено, що комунікативні види діяльності сприяють ефективному формуванню навичок говоріння.

Ключові слова: навчання говорінню; комунікативна компетенція; навички говоріння; комунікативна група; принципи навчання говорінню; маніпуляційна фаза; комунікативна фаза; комунікативні техніки.

ОБУЧЕНИЕ ГОВОРЕНИЮ НА УРОКАХ АНГЛИЙСКОГО ЯЗЫКА: РАЗГОВОРНЫЕ ТЕХНИКИ

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Аннотация. Статья посвящена теоретическому анализу процесса формирования навыков говорения путем использования специальных коммуникативных техник на уроках английского языка. В статье описываются принципы и пути формирования навыков говорения, а также обосновывается методика использования коммуникативных техник, в частности таких, как дискуссия, ролевая игра, импровизация и дебаты. В процессе исследования выявлено, что коммуникативные виды деятельности способствуют формированию навыков говорения.

Ключевые слова: обучение говорению; коммуникативная компетенция; навыки говорения; коммуникативная группа; принципы обучения говорению; манипуляционная фаза; коммуникативная фаза; коммуникативные техники.