
How can we create confident speakers?

Webinar handout

by Rhona Snelling

Introduction

Speaking is one of the four core language skills, alongside Reading, Writing, and Listening. These skills are interdependent, meaning that improvement in one often enhances the others. Speaking, as an output skill, is visible and immediate, unlike the more 'private' receptive skills of Reading and Listening.

Speaking involves various sub-skills, including:

- Non-verbal cues: Body language and facial expressions.
- Biological processes: The mechanics of sound production using vocal organs.
- Pragmatics: Understanding the context, register, and turn-taking.
- Phonology: Aspects like intonation, pitch, and connected speech.
- Cognitive processes: The rapid selection and production of words.

Levelt's model (1989) outlines the stages of speech production: conceptualization (forming ideas), formulation (selecting words), and articulation (producing speech). De Bot (1992) adapted this model for bilinguals, introducing three levels of lexical activation: dormant, active, and selected.

Use the 'CONFIDENT' acronym below to think about the different ways you can help your students become more confident speakers.

Classroom: How can you make your classroom (physical or virtual) better suited for speaking? Think about how to set up your physical classroom as well as your virtual classroom, e.g. change seating arrangements and choose (or randomise!) students for breakout rooms.

Opportunity: How can you create speaking opportunities in your class – and outside of class? Try maximising your coursebook, decreasing T-T-T (Teacher Talk Time) and asking students to set goals, e.g. “I will speak three times in this groupwork.”

Nice: How can you create a safe, welcoming atmosphere for your students? Krashen’s (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis posits that a student is better able to learn when their affective filter is low/down (and, conversely, less able to learn when their affective filter is high/up).

Fluency & accuracy: How can you balance fluency and accuracy in your speaking activities? Consider the different aims of a ‘fluency’ activity and an ‘accuracy’ activity, and what your students need at different times.

Intonation (Pronunciation): How can you use different pronunciation activities? ‘Pronunciation’, in its simplest form, means ‘how we say something’. Encourage your students to aim for intelligible pronunciation rather than any specific sounds.

Discussion topics: How can you best choose discussion topics? Invite your students to offer ideas for topics. Then choose different activities to allow discussion such as board games, interviews, and freer conversation.

Errors: How can you provide feedback to your students? Your corrective feedback could take different forms: explicit, recast, elicitation, metalinguistic clues, clarification or repetition.

Non-native: How can you use your experience of learning English to help your students? 75% of English interaction is between non-native speakers (Jenkins, 2021), so celebrate this linguistic diversity.

Techniques: How can you incorporate techniques like communication strategies with your students? These could be direct, indirect, or interactive. Try introducing noticing activities to increase students’ awareness.

References and further reading/listening

- De Bot, K. (1992). ‘A Bilingual Production Model: Levelt’s ‘Speaking’ Model Adapted’. *Applied Linguistics*, 13, 1-24.
- Jenkins, J. (2021) *English as a Lingua Franca*. Pearson English podcast. <https://www.english.com/blog/tag/english-as-a-lingua-franca/>
- Krashen, S.D. (1982) *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*, Prentice Hall.
- Levelt, W.J.M. (1989). *Speaking: From intention to articulation*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Snelling, R. (2013) *Collins English for Life: Speaking A2*. Collins.

A recording of Rhona Snelling’s webinar can be watched here:

<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/news-and-events/webinars/webinars-teachers/teaching-four-skills-mini-event>

www.britishcouncil.org

www.teachingenglish.org.uk