Impromptu Speaking and Authentic Assessment in English Language Teaching/Learning

Adolf Tanyi Mbeh

Abstract— **Spoken English is one of the major communicative skills in English. The impromptu speaking teaches the students to focus their speaking and listening skills as well as teaching them how to logically organise their ideas. This paper sustains that impromptu speaking can aid ESL learners in their confidence in formal speaking situations while improving their general ability to communicate on all levels. The article presents examples of topics and speech frameworks are given to help teachers understand the mechanisms of an impromptu speech. An assessment sheet is also outlined and explained for teachers. This will help them'' organise speech development and assessment of the learners. In addition, some of the most common formal speaking difficulties are discussed and different solutions are suggested.**

Index Terms— **Impromptu, speaking, assessment, ESL learners, communicate.**

I. INTRODUCTION

Of all the four skills in English language Teaching - listening, speaking, reading, and writing- speaking seems intuitively the most important. This is because people who use a language are referred to as "speakers" of that language, as if speaking included all other kinds of knowledge relating to that language; and many if not most foreign language learners are primarily interested in learning to speak. Speaking, as a productive skill, seems intuitively the most important of all the four language skills because it can distinctly show the correctness and language errors that a language learner makes (Khamkhien; 2010). Speaking a foreign language is a major part of communicating in that language.

Classroom activities that develop learners' ability to express themselves through speech would therefore seem an important component of a language course. Yet, it is difficult to design and administer such activities in many ways than for listening, reading and writing where the reverse is true. We shall come on to what the problems are presently, but first let us try to define what is meant by 'an effective speaking activity' (Ur). It is from this backdrop that speaking will be examined since most foreign language learners and institutions always give more preponderance to speaking skills than other three main skills of language. Since learning goes hand in hand with assessment, most types of language assessments have equally been examined in a bid to help the teacher and the learner. Indeed, "accountability is not only about measuring student learning, but actually improving it" (Darling-Hammond, 2004).

Adolf Tanyi Mbeh, Department of Didactics, Faculty of Education University of Yaounde I

II. IMPROMPTU SPEAKING

Impromptu speaking is giving an unprepared talk. A person simply takes the floor, selects a subject, and begins. A fundamental principle is that the ideas voiced are unrehearsed and unprepared.

Follow these steps to give an effective impromptu speech:

1. Decide quickly on one major point or idea and frame it in a declarative statement.

2. Try to think of an anecdote from personal experience that will support this main idea. Perhaps there is an item in the room that can help you illustrate your main idea.

3. Think of an opening that will capture people's attention immediately. Try to arouse curiosity and create a desire to hear what you will say. Some suggestions for openers are:
   - Let me begin by saying . . .
   - I' d like to talk about . . . because . . .
   - How many of you have ever . . . ?
   - Picture this.

4. Do not leave long silences. Instead, use phrases (fillers) such as:
   - Well . . .
   - It's on the tip of my tongue.
   - Let me see . . .

5. As you speak, think ahead to an effective way to close. You want to fix your major point in your listeners' minds. Some suggestions for closers are:
   - Let me conclude by saying . . .
   - Let me reiterate . . .
   - To conclude . . . / To sum up . . .
   - In conclusion. . . /in summary . . .
   - I'll finish by saying . . .
   - Prepare the impromptu topics ahead of time and keep them in an envelope. Think of topics with which the students are familiar, but which they will find challenging. If you repeat this activity during one semester, add new topics. Here are the topics we used in class today:
   - Timing is very important. Once a student has picked a topic from the envelope (and checked with you if she has any questions about it), she should go to the hall and brainstorm her speech for one minute. During this minute, another student can be giving her speech. Keep the students moving like this: one speaks for one minute while another one is preparing in the hall. This avoids any 'down-time' in the class. Do not try to keep track of

all this timing by yourself. Assign a couple of students to keep the time.

• If a student picks a topic which she really does not like or with which she is entirely unfamiliar, allow her to pass on it. Only one pass per student!

• You can tape record your students' speeches on individual cassettes, or create a small portfolio of self, peer and instructor feedback over time. If you repeat this activity three or four times during the semester, the students will improve on their ability to deliver impromptu speeches and they will have their own notes to look at or recordings to listen to! Students who are keen on these activities and you can point out areas where they need improvement. Over the semester, you may even have to extend the speaking time to two minutes as the students become used to giving these Speeches.

A- Rubric for Impromptu Speaking

After having examined the goals and guidelines for impromptu speaking, brainstorm a list of criteria that peers and the instructor could utilize to provide feedback to the speaker.

Possible Areas to Consider in Assessing the Success of an Impromptu Speaker

Criteria	How is this criteria related to the goals of the activity?
1. Articulation	
2. Fluency	
3. Coherence of Ideas	
4. Humor	
5. Relevance	

1. Which criterion will provide the student with the most useful feedback?
Coherence of Ideas
2. Which criterion will be easiest for peers to assess? How can they assess this criterion?
Humor
3. Which criterion would be most useful for the teacher?
Coherence of Ideas
4. Select one criterion and suggest how you would adapt for high beginners as compared to advanced speakers.
Attitude of the teacher
5. Select one criterion and create a 3-point rating scale with 3 being highest and 1 being lowest.
Relevance
6. Examine the micro and macro skills for speaking and select three that seem to apply easily to this task

B- Impromptu Speaking Rubrics
The SUE Method

S = Success: Did the student successfully accomplish what was assigned?
U = Understanding: How easy was the response to understand?
E =Effort: Was the speaker making an effort to communicate rather than just answering briefly?

Ratings: + = **excellent**
           ✓ = **good**
           - = **needs to improve**
           0 = unsatisfactory

	S	U	E	Grade
Student 1				
Student 2				
Student 3				
Student 4				
Student 5				

C- Oral Rubric

Comprehensibility	Vocabulary	Correctness of language	Risk-taking, signs of improvement
5 Speech was easy to understand. It was a complete speech with a beginning, a middle, and an end.	5 Lots of details. A wide variety of vocabulary words (more than just from current lesson)	5 Good pronunciation. Almost no grammar mistakes. Language flowed smoothly.	5 Speech was creative, told with expression. You used transition words, inserted colorful comments. You found a way to communicate entirely in English
3 Speech was fairly easy to follow, but there were a few rough spots (hesitation or groping for words.)	3 You used the vocabulary necessary to complete the speech. The basic vocabulary was used correctly.	3 Mostly correct, but you had some difficulty with pronunciation or grammar.	3 Some vocal expression and creativity. The speech was told correctly with some elaboration.
1 Speech was difficult to follow. Flow of speech was very choppy.	1 The speech lacked needed words or had misused words.	1 Many words were pronounced incorrectly. Significant errors in usage or grammar.	1 Monotone. You resorted to Mother tongue/ French. You only did the minimum to get by.

D- Peer Feedback form: impromptu Speech
Speaker's Name _____date _____
Your Name _____
Part 1: Circle the word **Yes, Some or No** to tell how you feel about the speaker's speech
1. I understood what the speaker was talking about. **Yes some No**
2. The speaker included an introduction and a conclusion in his / her speech
   Yes   some   No

Part 2. Complete the following sentences:
3. I liked when the speaker _____
_____
_____
The speaker was good at _____
_____
_____
In my opinion the speaker could improve by
_____
_____
_____

Topic for Impromptu Speaking Workshop:
- My trip to north west
- How to reduce stress
- My favorite holiday
- Good manners
- Authentic assessment

E- Defining Authentic Assessment
Step 1: Individual reading.
1) Highlight ideas that are very familiar to you and that you feel confident in explaining to others and giving examples from your experience. (Jot notes next to idea so that you can explain examples of your experience with this notion to others.
2) Underline ideas that are somewhat familiar to you - you have an educated guess about what they mean. Write one key word related to your guess next to this item.
3) Put a question mark (?) next to ideas that are unfamiliar to you.
4) Ranking: Review question marks and write a 1 next to the idea you are most interested in knowing more about. Write a 2 next to another idea you are also interested in knowing more about.

An authentic assessment describes "the multiple forms of assessment that reflect student learning, achievement, motivation, and attitudes of instructionally-relevant classroom activities. Examples of authentic assessment include performance assessment, portfolios, and student self-assessment."
Some characteristics of performance assessment:

- *Constructed response*: students construct a response, provide an expanded response, engage in a performance, or create a product.

- *Higher order thinking*: the student typically uses higher levels of thinking in constructing responses to open-ended questions.
- *Authenticity*: tasks are meaningful, challenging, and engaging activities that mirror good instruction or other real-world contexts where the student is expected to perform.
- *Integrative*: the tasks call for integration of language skills and in some cases, for integration of knowledge and skills across content areas.
- *Process and product*: procedures and strategies for deriving the correct response or for exploring multiple solutions to complex tasks are often assessed as well as the product or the "correct" answer.
- *Depth vs. Breadth:* performance assessments provide in-depth information about a student's skills or mastery as contrasted with the breadth of coverage more typical of multiple-choice tests.

Brown (2004) notes that the alternative assessment movement arose as a rebellion against the notion that all people and all skills could be measured by traditional tests; leaders in alternative assessment proposed that additional measures of student language ability be assembled such as portfolios, journals, observation, self-assessments, and peer-assessments in order to triangulate data about students. Brown (2004:252) lists defining characteristics, stating that alternative assessments:

1) Require students to perform, create, produce or do something.
2) Use real-world contexts or simulations.
3) Are non-intrusive in that they extend the day-to-day classroom activities.
4) Allow students to be assessed on what they normally do in class every day.
5) Use tasks that represent meaningful instructional activities.
6) Focus on processes as well as product.
7) Tap into higher-level thinking and problem-solving skills.
8) Provide information about both the strengths and weaknesses of students.
9) Are multi culturally sensitive when properly administered.
10) Ensure that people, not machines, do the scoring, using human Judgment.
11) Encourage open disclosure of standards and rating criteria.
12) Call upon teachers to perform new instructional and assessment roles.

Authentic Assessment 1
"*The word "assess" comes from Latin, meaning*, "**to sit beside**." *Tutors sat beside their students, correcting, praising, or admonishing them, and guiding them toward a better performance*" (Blaz 2001:1).

Part 1: Warm-up (20 minutes) You may assess students
Purposes:
1) Access related background knowledge.
2) Make personal connections to subject matter.
3) Link by analogy daily life assessment to language classroom assessment.
4) Boost confidence and interest.

5) Demonstrate a warm-up useful in any teacher development setting for assessment workshops.

1st warm-up activity on emotions. Time: 7 minutes
Steps
1) Write the word TEST on the board.
2) Ask participants to write two or three adjectives that come to mind when they hear or see the word TEST. (1 min.)
3) Collect 5-10 words from various participants.
4) Participants write response to two questions (1 min):

What theme do you observe in the adjectives that we elicited?
Why do you think that the word test elicits this type of emotional response?

5) Pair: participants discuss responses to these two questions (1 min.)
6) Plenary: 2-4 pairs share responses with group (3-4 min.)

2nd warm-up on assessment in daily life. Time: 15 minutes
Steps
1) Make a list of daily life experiences that you have assessed in some way this month. (E.g. movies, a restaurant, a person's behavior, a website, your accommodations, etc.)
2) Select one from the list and answer the following questions:

- What criterion did you utilize to make your assessment?
- Was it easy or hard to do this assessment?
- Did you utilize any outside sources to complete your assessment or confirm your assessment, if so what were they?
- What was the purpose of your assessment?

Participants write on their own for 3 minutes (Think)
3) Participants discuss responses with partner for 3 minutes (Pair)

Participants respond in plenary to the following question: 5minutes. (Share)What similarities and differences do you notice between daily life assessment and language classroom assessment?

What skills and background experiences do participants take along from daily life assessment experiences that will help them in the classroom?

(Take notes on over head)
4) Go back to the objective and see which tasks have been accomplished.

PART 2: Define Authentic Assessment and fill out self assessment form from O'Malley and Pierce:

Goals:
- To familiarize participants with the basic principles and practices of authentic assessment through outside resources (definitions from three sources)
- To have students assess current background knowledge and gaps in reading- based knowledge, discussion and filling out self-assessment chart
- To set several achievable goals for the outcome of this seminar

A. Definitions: 1) Individual reading: (5-7 minutes to read and respond individually)
2) Jigsaw with 3 definitions (5-7 minutes to fill out the chart)

3) Sharing (5-7 minutes to share personal responses)
4) Plenary: Each group writes a question that I will answer
B. Discuss pros and cons of standardized testing vs. alternative/authentic assessment (10-15 minutes.)

PART 3: Self-Assessment and interest Assessment
1) Participants fill out authentic assessment awareness and goal setting (10 min).
2) Participants check-off list of areas in which they would like to see and work with hands-on examples of instructional tasks linked with authentic assessments.

Types of Standardized Assessment in ELT and TESOL

Listening assessment	Speaking assessment
Reading assessment	Writing assessment
Rubric creation and use	Peer assessment
Self-assessment	Observation
Portfolio Assessment	Journals

Part 4: Ticket out the door –Assessment of the day's work
Warm-up: Assessment In Daily Life
Approximate time: (15min.)
STEPS
1) Make a list of daily life experiences that you have assessed in some way this month. (E.g. movies, a restaurant, a person's behavior, a website, your accommodations, etc.)

2) Select one from the list and answer the following questions:

Item selected from above list: _____
- What criterion did you utilize to make your assessment?
- Was it easy or hard to do this assessment?
- Did you utilize any outside sources to complete your assessment or confirm your assessment, if so what were they?
- What was the purpose of our assessment?

WHOLE CLASS PLENARY/ Your notes: Teaching Speaking

Table 1: characteristics of a successful speaking activity
1. Learners talk a lot. As much as possible of the period of time allotted to the activity is in fact occupied by learner talk. This may seem obvious, but often most time is taken up with teacher talk or pauses.
2. Participation is even. Classroom discussion is not dominated by a minority of talkative participants: all get a chance to speak, and contributions are fairly evenly distributed.
3. Motivation is high. Learners are eager to speak: because they are interested in the topic and have something new to say about it, or because they want

to contribute to achieving a task objective.

4. Language is of an acceptable level. Learners express themselves in utterances that are relevant, easily comprehensible to each other, and of an acceptable level of language accuracy.

Table 2: Problems with speaking activities
1. Inhibition. Unlike listening, reading, and writing activities, speaking requires some degree of real-time exposure to an audience. Learners are often inhibited about trying to say things in a foreign language in the classroom: worried about making mistakes, fearful of criticism or losing face, or simply shy of the attention that their speech attracts.
2. **Nothing to say**. Even if they are not inhibited, you often hear learners complain that they cannot think of anything to say: they have no motive to express themselves beyond the guilty feeling that they should be speaking.
3. **Low or uneven participation**. Only one participant can talk at a time if he or she is to be heard; and in a large group this means that each one will have only very little talking time. This problem is compounded by the tendency of some learners to dominate, while others speak very little or not at all.
4. Mother-tongue use. In classes where all, or a number of the learners share the same mother tongue, they may tend to use it: because it is easier, because it feels unnatural to speak to one another in a foreign language, and because they feel less 'exposed' if they are speaking their mother tongue. If they are taking in small groups it can be quite difficult to get some classes - particularly the less disciplined or motivated ones - to keep to the target language.

Table 3: Types of oral fluency activities
Activity 1 :   *Discuss the following conflicting opinions.*   **Opinion 1.** Children should be taught in heterogeneous classes: setting them into ability groupings puts a 'failure' label onto members of the lower groups, whereas putting more and less able learners together encourages the slower ones to progress faster, without penalizing the more able.
Opinion 2. Children should be divided into ability groupings for most subjects: this enables the less able ones to be taught at a pace suitable for them, while the better students do not need to wait for the slower one to catch up.
Activity 2.   A good schoolteacher should have the following qualities. Can your group agree together in what order of priority you would put them?   Sense of humor   enthusiasm for teaching   Honesty   pleasant appearance   Love of children   fairness   Knowledge of subject   ability to create interest   Flexibility   ability to keep order   Clear speaking voice   intelligence

Observation (Didactic / Pedagogic Rationale)

If you speak informally with a classroom teacher at the end of an academic year, will most of them be able to give an intuitive assessment about individual students' abilities in the second language? If you said yes, consider and take a few notes about how teachers develop their intuitive assessments of their students' second language abilities and development. Teachers can make their intuitions part of a student's assessment adding another element of triangulation to the student's evaluation. Examine the list of potential observation foci. Select one and describe a practical way that teachers might record observations about individual students for this particular aspect of student development.

Potential Observation Foci

- Sentence-level oral production skills (see micro-skills, Chapter7)
- Pronunciation of target sounds, intonation, etc
- Grammatical features (verb tenses, question formation, etc.)
- Discourse-level skills (conversation rules, turn-taking, and other macro-skills)
- Interaction with classmates (cooperation, frequency of oral production)
- Reactions to particular students, optimal productive pairs and groups, which "zones" of the classroom are more vocal, etc.
- Frequency of student-initiated responses (whole class, group work)
- Quality of teacher-elicited responses
- Latencies, pauses, silent periods (number of seconds, minutes, etc)
- Length of utterances
- Evidence of listening comprehension (questions, clarifications, attention-giving verbal and non verbal behavior
- Affective states (apparent self-esteem, extroversion, anxiety, motivation, etc.)
- Evidence of attention-span issues, learning style preferences, etc.
- Students' verbal or nonverbal response to materials, types of activities, teaching styles
- Use of strategic options in comprehension or production (use of communication strategies, avoidance, etc.)
- Culturally specific linguistic and nonverbal factors (kinesics; proxemics; use of humor, slang, metaphor, etc)

III. CONCLUSION

The way communication is carried out in our respective institutions is culture-bound. That is why the whole of "Received Pronunciation" still leaves more to be desired. This paper is just one of the working tools to help any language learner and some examiners to improve on their teaching and learning skills. In own opinion, by giving general language proficiency and a knowledge of the more obvious courtesy conventions, most learners will be very confident when they are given the opportunity to express themselves on the bases of practical culture-bound exercises.

Some kinds of simulation activities should be encouraged in the classroom context. And this should always be followed by assessment exercises. That is why some types of assessment examples were presented in this paper.

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