

INFORMATION GAP: SPEAK FLUENTLY IS BETTER IN EFL CONTEXT

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Abstract

This paper aimed to review small talk technique proposed by Hunter (2012) and to propose information gap. Small talk is another way of corrective feedback. The teacher gives feedback after the activity is done by giving them written feedback/worksheet. The feedback is given to develop the students' accuracy and speaking complexity ability. However, the question on how accurate the students, whether students are expected to be native-like or not, emerges. In EFL context, it is hard to make the students to be native-like since English is foreign language for them. The naturalness of environment does not give language input for them. Thus, students can speak fluently is better than speak accurately in EFL context. As long as, the students can deliver the message, it is enough for them because the purpose of communication is to deliver the missing information between speakers. The information gap technique is the way to develop the students' fluency. This technique provides the real communication which is delivering the missing information. In conclusion, students should speak fluently in EFL context.

Keywords: information gap, speak fluently

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Introduction

Most of teacher think that teaching speaking is important. In line with that statement, Ur (in Sinatra, 2010) states that of the four language skills, speaking is considered the most important. It is expected that the students can be an active language learner. Thus, they should master the productive skill, one of the productive skills is speaking. Moreover, in daily life, the students tend to speak a lot to communicate. Nunan (2000 in Togatorop 2011) states that people are considered successful in learning a foreign or second language if they can carry out a conversation in the language. Therefore, it is important to teach speaking skill.

It is not an easy task for teacher to make students speak up. There are some factors which speaking is difficult. Brown (2001: 270-271) listed seven things, namely "clustering, redundancy, reduced forms, performance variables, colloquial language, the rate of delivery, stress, rhythm and intonation, and

interaction". Harmer (2007) also states that students are reluctant to speak because of shyness. Moreover, Togatorop's study (2011) found out that improper teaching methodology is the barrier factor in practicing speaking. From all those factors, teaching methodology is the most important factor because a good methodology can make reluctant students speak and learn the Brown's seven factors above.

Teaching speaking is considered the most difficult to teach because the teacher should make the students speak up. It needs the teacher's creativity to use certain teaching technique so that the students can speak. It is difficult to teach speaking. In line with that statement, Thornbury (2005: 1) states "question like 'my student always say that they want more speaking, but I don't know how to teach it' express some common dilemmas teachers face when teaching speaking". It is necessary to use a good teaching technique for speaking.

Hunter (2012) proposed ‘Small Talk’ technique to “develop fluency, accuracy, and complexity in speaking.” Considering the importance of teaching technique in speaking, this paper aimed to review Hunter’s article in *ELT Journal* (vol. 66/1, January 2012), and propose Information Gap technique in EFL context.

Hunter elaborated the limitation of CLT method. He thought that CLT neither provide the ‘real’ teaching nor linguistic resources. Accuracy is not a major concern in the CLT, even not at all because students just get the message across. He prioritized accuracy over fluency. He believed that corrective feedback such as recast is the best way to improve students’ accuracy. Moreover, it focused on individual learners. A teacher can see the progress of each student.

Hunter (2012) proposed “Small Talk” methodology. It provides communicative ability of students and teacher’s feedback. The steps of small talk in Hunter’s (2012: 33) proposal are as follows:

1. The day before the session, the leader announces the topic.
2. At the beginning of the session, the leader writes discussion questions and vocabulary on the board, re-introduces the topic, and clarifies any confusion; the leader also puts the students into groups of three to four and tells the students to begin.
3. Groups discuss the topic
4. The leader asks the groups to bring their conversation to a close and prepare for check in; the groups decide what to report to the class and who will do it.
5. The leader invites each group to check in with the class about the highlights of their conversation.

6. The leader thanks the class and reminds them of the next ‘Small Talk’ date and leader.

The teacher just monitors the activity. The teacher has no role. The teacher gives feedback at the end of the session.

The Nature of Accuracy, Fluency, and Complexity

In Hunter’s article, he took accuracy and fluency definition based on Brumfit (1979). Brumfit (1970 in Hunter 2012: 31) defined that “fluency represents the learner’s truly internalized grammar”. Hunter (2012: 31) argues that “teacher should discover what learners actually wanted to say and then teach them how to say it in the target language”. In other words, the teacher should not give a list of words to pronounce but the words come from the learners themselves, and then the teacher teach them how to pronounce the words and correct them if they mispronounced. Hunter believes that accuracy is more important than fluency and complexity in speaking.

On the contrary, Lado (1991 in Syarifudin 2012) depicted that speaking proficiency is expressing ideas fluently and be able to tell and report. Thornbury (2000) defines fluency, accuracy and complexity as follows. Fluency is equated with language use. Accuracy is the extent to which learner's output match with the native speaker. Complexity is to re-organize or re-structure what the students know.

Hunter’s Proposal and Comment

Hunter’s article proposed “small talk” technique to develop fluency, accuracy, and complexity. The subject of his study was learners in the United States of America. “Small talk” technique focused more on accuracy. The teacher gave corrective feedback in the form of the written worksheet. The teacher gave written corrective feedback

to every student. The written feedback was given in the following meeting or outside classroom. The written feedback consisted of pronunciation, vocabulary and sentence or expression. The teacher corrected those components. In the classroom, the teacher had no role. The teacher let the students speak. The teacher only monitored the students.

Hunter's proposal is good, but the writer finds some weaknesses from his proposal. First, at the end of each meeting, the teacher gives corrective feedback. The feedback can be frustrating for the students because the teacher just points out the students' mistakes. It does not motivate the students to speak fluently. The students will think grammatically in speaking which in turn it can't make students speak fluently. Moreover, the feedback is time-consuming because the teacher must give corrective feedback to every student. In Indonesia context, a teacher often has a large class. It is impossible for a teacher to give feedback to each student.

Second, Hunter criticizes that CLT is not real teaching. On the contrary, Richard (2006) states that CLT is a set of principles about how a learner learns a language. It means that CLT is real teaching because it involves the process of how learner learns a language. Moreover, the goal of CLT is communicative competence in which the students know how to use the language.

Third, Hunter emphasizes more on accuracy. Since English becomes an international language, there are new Englishes in the world. Kachru (1985, in Harmer 2007) states that there are three circles: inner, outer and expanding circle. Thus, there is no acceptable standard English. The question about how accurate the students must be is debating because there is no standard English. Moreover, in Indonesia, the natural environment does not support

students to get rich language input, the students only get language input in the classroom.

Fourth, language is seen as a means of communication. Language teaching shift away from language form focused on meaning focused. The learners are supposed to be able to deliver the message across to their interlocutor. Speak fluently is better than speak accurately as long as the message is delivered. Thus, the objective of language teaching in Indonesia is communicative competence in which students know how to use the language. CLT is considered the best way to achieve communicative competence.

Communicative Competence

The concept of communicative competence is that the students can negotiate their meaning. Celce-Murcia, et al. (1995) put their model of communicative competence. There are five components under their model: linguistics, actional, sociocultural, discourse and strategic competence.

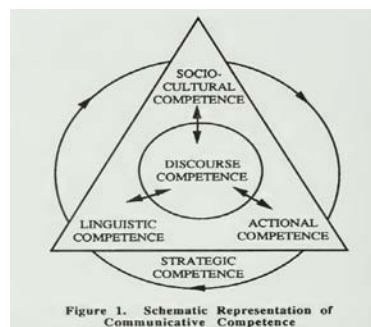


Figure 1. Schematic Representation of Communicative Competence

The first component is linguistic competence. The linguistic competence includes lexis, phonology, syntax, and morphology (Celce-Murcia, et al. 1995). Students need to know the structure of language in order they can manipulate those feature to form sentences. Students can speak fluently by manipulating those features. Widiati and Cahyono (2006) support that fluency is affected by speaker's grammatical competence to

use and understand English-language structures.

The second component is the actional competence, the ability to match actional intent with linguistic form based on the knowledge of language functions and knowledge of speech act sets.

The third component is sociocultural competence. Sociocultural competence is the ability for students to use language appropriately according to the culture. It deals with the understanding of social context. Understanding the sociocultural enables the students to know how to ask, give comment appropriately in which the language used.

The fourth component is discourse competence. Discourse competence unifies spoken or written text by selecting, sequencing and arranging words, structures, sentences and utterances (Celce-Murcia, et al. 1995). This competence is needed to make students know the time to speak when they have a conversation and also to unify their ideas. Shumin (2002 in Widiati and Cahyono 2006) states that using discourse competence students can manage turn-taking in communication.

The fifth competence is strategic competence. Strategic competence is “knowledge of communication strategies and how to use them” (Celce Murcia, et al. 1995: 26). Strategic competence enables students to use their strategies to avoid communication breakdown. Students can explain or describe a particular thing if they do not know the vocabulary.

Those competences focus on how to make students can communicate with other or negotiate meaning. Accuracy is not the primary of teaching. The primary of teaching is to make students speak fluently. The teaching approach which can be used is CLT.

Information Gap Technique

Available online at: <http://ejurnal.budiutomomalang.ac.id/index.php/journey>

The goal of language teaching is communicative competence. To achieve the goal, a teacher can employ CLT approach. CLT approach concern with language use. It means that the goal of CLT is that students can use the language.

There are six characteristics of CLT (Brown, 2001:43):

1. Classroom goals are focused on the components of communicative competence
2. Language techniques are designed to engage learners in the pragmatic, authentic and functional use of language for meaningful purposes
3. Fluency may have to take more importance than accuracy
4. Students have to use language productively and receptively
5. Give opportunity to students' learning process
6. The role of the teacher is as a facilitator.

Based on those characteristics, the teacher need to help learners use the language for communication, meaning negotiation and genuine information (Cahyono, 2010). The teacher can use information gap technique to provide opportunities for students to negotiate meaning and exchange information. In addition, the results of Nurhasanah's study (2008) and Pramesthi's study (2010) showed that information gap technique can improve students' speaking skills.

Information gap technique provides real-life communication in which one person needs information from another person. There is gap information between two people. They must communicate to fill the gap. Cahyono (2010) states that the speaker informs the interlocutor something new. Information gap technique focuses on fluency because the students get the

message across. If the interlocutor gets the message, it means that the speaker speaks intelligibly. Accuracy is less important in this technique.

Information gap can make students work cooperatively. Cahyono (2010) states that learners work cooperatively with others to do the task. Information gap technique steps are as follows:

1. Students work in pair
2. Students A will get worksheet/clue A which consist of half of information needed by student B
3. Students B will get worksheet/clue B which consist of half of information needed by student A

Students A and B must talk to exchange the information they have and write it down in the worksheet

Conclusion

Teaching speaking skill is considered difficult. Speaking is communication. Students do need to be fluent in communication because communication is delivering message. Students are better to speak fluently in EFL because of the nature of communication. Information gap is one of the techniques which provide students to speak fluently since information gap is just like the natural communication in which there is a missing gap between speaker and interlocutor.

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