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THE CONCEPTUALIZATION AND DISTINCTIVE ATTRIBUTES OF SPEAKING SKILLS IN THE CONTEXT OF LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Ruziyeva Muxlisa Azim kizi

Speaking is a key skill that helps us communicate and interact in both personal and work environments. It is a complex process that involves more than just saying words. Languages are used by both native and non-native speakers. English is a widely spoken international language with large populations using it around the world. This language has four main skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Speaking is a productive skill, meaning it involves creating spoken words. According to Chaney (1998), speaking involves creating and sharing meaning using both verbal and non-verbal symbols in various contexts. This means that speaking is not just about saying words but also about organizing and conveying ideas. It is important for speakers to understand the meaning before they share it. This understanding can be enhanced by using non-verbal language to organize thoughts and emphasize points, especially when students are speaking. Nunan (2003) also defines speaking as producing English speech sounds and patterns; using word and sentence stress, intonation patterns, and rhythm in appropriate social settings, with the right audience, situation, and subject matter. It involves organizing thoughts in a meaningful and logical order, expressing values and judgments, and using the language quickly and confidently with minimal unnatural pauses, which is known as fluency.

To speak English well, you need several components: pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, accuracy, and fluency. Additionally, factors like anxiety, self-confidence, and interest also play a role (Brown, 2000). To understand speaking well, it is important to look at its nature and the different parts that make up effective speaking. There are several areas of knowledge in speaking. As stated by Akhyak and Anik (2013:19) in their journal, "speaking involves three areas of knowledge. They are mechanics (pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary), which is the ability to use the right words in the right order with correct pronunciation; function (transaction and interaction), knowing when clarity of message is essential (transaction/information exchange) and when precise understanding is not required (interaction/relation building); and social-cultural rules and norms, which include the knowledge of turn-taking, speech rate, length of pauses between speakers, and the relative roles of participants. Based on the experts' opinions above, it can be concluded that the nature of speaking is a tool for communication. Through speaking, people can convey information and ideas and maintain social relationships by communicating with others.

Harris (1974) states that there are four components of speaking. They are:

1. Pronunciation is a critical component of language proficiency, encompassing various elements such as vowels, consonants, stress, and intonation patterns. Mastery of pronunciation not only affects how words are articulated but also influences overall communication effectiveness and listener comprehension. Vowels and consonants form the basic sounds of a language. Correct articulation of these sounds is fundamental for clear speech. Mispronunciations can lead to misunderstandings, as different sounds can change the meaning of words entirely. For instance, the distinction between the sounds in "ship" and "sheep" in English hinges on the precise pronunciation of vowels. Stress refers to the emphasis placed on certain syllables within words or words within sentences. Proper stress patterns can significantly alter meaning and comprehensibility. For example, in English, the noun 'record' and the verb 'record' differ primarily in stress placement. Intonation, the variation in pitch while speaking, conveys nuances of meaning, emotion, and intention. It can indicate whether a sentence is a statement, question, or exclamation, and can also express the speaker's attitude. Intonation patterns contribute to the natural flow of speech and are vital for maintaining the listener's interest and understanding. Nunan (2003:23) describes pronunciation as how we articulate words, phrases,

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and sentences, noting that it communicates a lot about who we are and what we are like as people. This perspective highlights that pronunciation is not merely about producing correct sounds; it also reflects personal and cultural identity. Accents, for instance, are a natural result of language learning and reflect the speaker's linguistic background. Students who can pronounce words correctly will still have a foreign accent, which is a normal part of second language acquisition. Accents indicate that a speaker has learned the language as an adult or adolescent rather than as a child. While a foreign accent is often viewed negatively, it should be recognized as a sign of bilingualism and the effort put into learning a new language. Effective pronunciation practice involves listening and mimicking native speakers, engaging in repetitive drills, and receiving corrective feedback. Technology, such as language learning apps and software, can provide valuable resources for improving pronunciation. Additionally, exposure to the language in various contexts—through media, conversations with native speakers, and formal education—enhances pronunciation skills over time. So pronunciation is a multifaceted aspect of language learning that involves the correct articulation of sounds, appropriate stress and intonation patterns, and reflects personal and cultural identity. Mastery of pronunciation is essential for clear and effective communication, and achieving it requires dedicated practice and exposure to the target language.

2. Vocabulary plays a vital role in language proficiency and effective communication. It involves selecting and using the right and appropriate words to convey precise meanings and ideas. A spoken word, as a sequence of sounds, encapsulates specific information that facilitates understanding between individuals. A larger vocabulary equips individuals with a broader range of expressions, allowing for more nuanced and accurate communication. It reduces the risk of misunderstandings by enabling speakers to choose words that precisely fit the context and convey their intended meaning clearly. This precision in language use enhances both the clarity and depth of conversations. Nunan (2003:26) emphasizes that having a rich vocabulary significantly improves students' ability to communicate across various language skills—speaking, listening, reading, and writing. In speaking, a robust vocabulary allows for more fluent and engaging interactions. Speakers can express their thoughts more dynamically and respond appropriately to different conversational cues. In listening, a wide vocabulary aids comprehension, enabling individuals to understand a greater variety of words and expressions used by others. This understanding is crucial for following conversations, grasping the main ideas, and responding appropriately. When it comes to writing, an extensive vocabulary allows for more expressive and sophisticated text. Writers can avoid repetition and choose words that best convey their message, enhancing the quality and readability of their work. Similarly, in reading, a rich vocabulary helps in understanding and interpreting diverse texts, making it easier to comprehend complex material and appreciate nuanced meanings. Vocabulary acquisition is a continuous process, enriched by exposure to the language in various contexts. Engaging with diverse reading materials, listening to different media, and participating in conversations are effective ways to expand one's vocabulary. Educational strategies such as word games, flashcards, and vocabulary lists can also aid in learning new words and their proper usage. Additionally, understanding word formation processes, such as prefixes, suffixes, and root words, can help learners deduce the meanings of unfamiliar words.

3. Grammar is a fundamental aspect of language that encompasses the rules and principles governing the structure of sentences. It involves understanding how words change their form and how they are combined to create coherent and meaningful sentences. Mastery of grammar is essential for effective communication, as it ensures that the speaker's intended message is conveyed accurately and clearly. Grammar covers various elements, including syntax (the arrangement of words in a sentence), morphology (the study of word forms and structures), and semantics (the meaning of words and sentences). By understanding and applying grammatical rules, speakers can construct sentences that are not only correct but also precise and

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expressive. In the speaking process, grammar plays a critical role in ensuring clarity and credibility. When speakers use correct grammar, their messages are easier to understand, reducing the likelihood of confusion and misinterpretation. For example, the difference between "I have eaten" and "I eat" lies in their grammatical structure, which indicates different times and contexts. Such distinctions are crucial for conveying the right meaning. Moreover, proper grammar enhances the listener's perception of the speaker's competence and reliability. If a speaker frequently makes grammatical errors, listeners may find it challenging to follow the conversation and might question the speaker's knowledge or credibility. Therefore, using correct grammar helps in maintaining the listener's trust and engagement. Nunan (2003) highlights the importance of grammar in language learning, noting that it provides a framework for understanding and producing language. It enables learners to comprehend how sentences are constructed and how different elements of a sentence interact with one another. This understanding is essential for both spoken and written communication. Effective grammar instruction involves teaching the rules and conventions of the language while also providing ample opportunities for practice.

4. Fluency is a key aspect of language proficiency that encompasses the ease and speed of speech flow. It refers to the ability to speak smoothly, continuously, and without undue hesitation. Fluency is not only about speaking quickly but also about maintaining a natural rhythm and flow that facilitates effective communication and keeps the listener engaged. Nunan (1999) defines fluency as the capacity to speak smoothly and continuously without hesitation, highlighting the importance of fluidity in speech. Fluent speakers can articulate their thoughts seamlessly, transitioning between ideas effortlessly and responding promptly in conversations. This capability is crucial for engaging in dynamic and spontaneous interactions.

Several factors contribute to fluency, including:

1. Fluent speakers can access and use vocabulary and grammatical structures automatically, without pausing to think about each word or rule. This automaticity allows for quick and natural speech production.
2. Fluent speech is coherent, with ideas logically connected and presented in a clear and orderly manner. Coherence helps listeners follow the speaker's train of thought easily.
3. While pronunciation primarily relates to the accuracy of producing sounds, it also affects fluency. Clear and correct pronunciation ensures that speech is understandable and contributes to the overall smoothness of delivery.
4. Fluent speakers know how to use pauses effectively. While excessive or inappropriate pausing can disrupt the flow of speech, strategic pauses can enhance clarity and give the speaker time to think without breaking the continuity of their message.
5. Proper use of intonation and stress patterns adds to the naturalness of speech. These elements help convey meaning, emotion, and emphasis, making the speech more engaging and easier to follow.

Various strategies help to improve fluency, such as:

1. Engaging in frequent speaking activities, such as conversations with native speakers, language exchange programs, or public speaking exercises, helps build fluency over time.
2. Listening to fluent speakers and imitating their speech patterns, intonation, and rhythm can help learners develop a more natural speaking style.

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3. Repetitive speaking drills, such as tongue twisters, read-aloud exercises, and shadowing (repeating after a speaker), can improve speech speed and fluidity.
4. Encouraging learners to prioritize communication over grammatical perfection can reduce anxiety and hesitation, allowing for more fluent speech. Mistakes are a natural part of the learning process and should not hinder the flow of conversation.
5. Participating in interactive and communicative activities, such as role-plays, debates, and group discussions, provides real-life practice and helps learners become more comfortable with spontaneous speaking.

Fluency involves the ease and speed of speech flow, characterized by smooth, continuous, and hesitation-free speech. It is a critical component of effective communication, facilitated by automaticity, coherence, proper pronunciation, strategic pausing, and appropriate use of intonation and stress. Regular practice, listening and imitation, speaking drills, focusing on communication, and interactive activities are essential strategies for developing fluency in a second language.

According to Heaton (1988), there are three components of speaking: accuracy, fluency, and comprehensibility. These components help listeners understand, be clear, and easily grasp the messages conveyed by the speaker, ensuring effective communication.

In conclusion, speaking is an essential skill for effective communication, requiring a balance of fluency, accuracy, and clarity. Developing this skill involves not only linguistic knowledge but also continuous practice, confidence, and awareness of social and cultural contexts.

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