

İNGİLİZCE KONUŞMA VE ÖZGÜVEN

SPOKEN ENGLISH AND SELF CONFIDENCE

Meral ÇİLELİ
Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi
Eğitim Fakültesi
Yabancı Diller Eğitimi Bölümü

ÖZET

Yabancı dilde konuşma, sadece öğrencilerin öğrendikleri kuralları işleme koymalarını değil, aynı zamanda da uygun içeriğin hazırlanmasını ve uygun metodun uygulanmasını gerektirir. İçeriğin, öğrencilerin zihinsel gelişim evrelerine uygun, uyarıcı ve düşündürücü malzemelerden oluşması gerekirken, uygulanan metodun öğrencilerin her türlü baskıdan uzak, çekinmeden ve korkmadan kendilerini ifade edebilecekleri bir sınıf ortamını oluşturmaya yönelik olması önem kazanmaktadır.

ABSTRACT

Speaking not only involves putting to use what students have learned, but also requires simultaneous concern for content and methods. While content calls for absorbing and thought provoking material suitable to the cognitive developmental level of the learners, method calls for a non-threatening classroom atmosphere where students are neither hesitant nor, reluctant nor fearful of speaking the language.

Speaking seems to be the most difficult skill among all language skills to develop because it involves putting into use what students have already learned. In a conversation class the students not only have to put to practise all they know to solve particular problems of expression and understanding but also need self confidence to be able to express themselves with the patterns they have learned. Teachers are usually aware of the gap between students' understanding and production. The students are either reluctant to participate in the discussions or the discussions are usually confined to a small group. Although command of English is a central concern in the Direct and Audiolingual Methods, these approaches view language mostly as a collection of items to be put together in a process of classification and arrangement, in which almost no creative process takes place. These approaches help students to develop useful techniques for the skill acquisition part of language learning at a formal level but prove to be inadequate in participating freely. Chomsky (1959) has attacked the view that language is a "habit structure" and has repeatedly stressed the "creative aspect of normal

language use" which calls not for structural drills in language learning but rather for opportunities for the students to "create" new utterances in a free and spontaneous situation after they have internalized the basic system of rules.

Performing well in exercises does not necessarily ensure the development of communication skill and language control. Students are generally afraid or incapable of stating their own opinions. This problem has been dealt with extensively in recent studies and a need for specific methods by which lots of examples, variety and context oriented work in teaching students to communicate effectively has been developed.

However the problem seems to be more than that of the behaviorist versus the cognitive-code theories of language learning. Psychologists and educationalists are becoming more aware of the fact that an individual's self-concept, his attitudes to and perception of himself are closely related to how he learns and behaves in a conversation class. Most of our students come from authoritarian family backgrounds and from high schools

where the teacher had all the answers, and where they were required to express their opinions only when asked.

Initially the students' self-concepts are formed in their family environments. The family unit provides all the initial indications to the child as to whether he is loved or not, accepted or not, a success or a failure, because until school days the family is virtually his only place of learning. As Purkey (1970) points out, although few parents want to be failures at raising children, just as few teachers want to fail as teachers. Lack of knowledge, insensitivity and recreating the way parents themselves were treated as children, cripple children. The syndrome of recreating childhood abuses was first recognized in 1939 by Symonds and is a significant finding of research in parent-child relationships. Purkey compares this crippling process to the older Chinese practise of foot binding. In China mothers would tightly bind their young daughters feet and keep them bound for years causing terrible deformity. It was done with good intent because tiny feet and a mincing walk were considered attractive in a Chinese girl. Then, ironically, the crippled daughter as a mother would cripple her daughter as a mother would cripple her daughters just as she herself was crippled (Purkey: 1970, 32-33)

Studies show that low self-esteem is closely related to parental demand for accommodating behaviors like obedience, adjustment to others and getting along with peer group. Parents who prefer to keep their children submissive and dependent lower self-esteem and keep them tied to their parents. The parent thinks that he is doing it for his child's good when he is excessively critical of the child, pointing out every mistake and viewing it as the child's personal value. Children of such parents begin to question themselves as failures. Other parents, insecure and fearful themselves, become overprotective. They try to shield their children from every real or imagined danger and the child is taught that the world is filled with all kinds of dangers. It is very important for parents to remember the simple rule that they must have respect for and confidence in their children before their children can develop self-respect and self-confidence (Purkey; 1970) Children enter school with a predisposition towards achievement or failure already formed by the qualities of parental interest, love and acceptance offered to them. This fairly established picture of self-worth provides the child with an array of self-expectations about how he will cope with school work and how others will react to him as a person. Each student is invisibly labeled. Some enhancingly by a diet of nourishing interest and affection and others crippled by a steady downpour of psychic blows from significant others.

However, studies show that it is possible to develop educational conditions in which academic learning takes place while positive self-concepts are being built. The Humanistic Approach views learning as a way of building up a climate of acceptance among students who are then able to act out their feelings, becoming involved in each others' learning process.

Adolescence is a critical period in which both consolidation and change in the existing self-concept take place. Along with changes in body image due to physiological and physical changes the maturing of cognitive and intellectual skills and achievement of formal operational thought all take place during this period. These changes bring a more complex and differentiated self-concept involving an appreciation of both real and hypothetical possibilities. The adolescent is in a state of confusion due to conflicting demands of society and school. It is during this period of change that we meet our students and we, adults, also respond to them in ambiguous ways, requiring demonstrations of independence and self-confidence on some occasions, but obedience and dependence at other times, without the contextual reasons being all that clear. It is during this period that the adolescent needs absorbing and thought provoking material suitable to his cognitive developmental level designed to involve his personality and to stimulate his desire to communicate in conversation classes.

As teachers of English we have great freedom in conversation classes since language is basically a vehicle for communicating ideas, emotions and experiences. The academic and social learning experiences teachers provide can reteach the student a view of himself that includes competence, worth and belonging. Most teachers can recite many examples in which a student's concept of his abilities greatly restrict his achievement. It is also quite common for some students to offer an apology before they answer a question such as "I'm not really sure but..." or "This may seem a foolish question but..." Some of our students have firm images of themselves as people who cannot learn English. It is probably true that a person's attitude toward a subject is an overriding factor and his attitude is often reinforced by his poor performance. Notions of an inability to learn a foreign language appear to be self-fulfilling prophecies. The types of experiences that might alter the notions a student holds about himself are generally avoided. Instead of obtaining more practice in an area of weakness the student withdraws from the subject; as William James states "With no attempt there can be no failure, with no failure no humiliation." (James; 1891:70). As a result low ability is perpetuated.

Those doing well will not only internalize a positive view of themselves but also enjoy more satisfactory

relationships with peers, teachers and parents as a result of their success. This in turn will increase the student's motivation to approach academic tasks with confidence and persistence.

Purkey, (1970) recounts a story by H.F. Lowry, called "The Mouse and Henry Carson" which is a good illustration about how teachers' expectations, academic performance and self-concept influence each other. A mouse fouled up a computer just as the College Entrance Examination Board's data on Henry Carson was being marked. Henry, a rather unsure mediocre student was given very high scores by the computer. His potential was reassessed by teachers and Henry responded to their reevaluation by developing both as a student and as a person "Once he became aware of his potentialities and began to be treated differently by the significant people in his life, a form of self-fulfilling prophecy took place. Henry gained in confidence and began to put his mind in the way of great things and became one of the best men of his generation" (Purkey; 1970:2)

The ways people view themselves are influenced greatly by the ways in which others respond to them and expectations manifested by teachers are of utmost importance. For students to be successful in school and in conversation classes it appears self-evident that they need sufficient confidence in themselves and in their competencies to make some effort to succeed. The real problem of negative self-esteem is quite frequently hidden beneath the label of "unmotivated". While feeling worthless is not the same as being worthless, its impact on student classroom behavior is often the same. Students often report that they take little part in some teachers' lessons because of the tone and content of the comments the teacher directs at the student if he is wrong in his answer. The best way to avoid the sarcasm, the sneer, the telling off is to opt out and not reveal yourself. Maslow emphasizes the importance of the reactions of significant others in his *Motivation and Personality*, "Let people realize clearly that every time they threaten someone or humiliate or hurt unnecessarily or dominate or reject another human being, they become forces for the creation of psychopathology, even if these be small forces. Let them recognize that every man who is kind, helpful decent, psychologically democratic, affectionate and warm, is a psychotherapeutic force even though a small one" (Maslow; 89 1954)

The way teachers relate to their students has a serious impact on their students. Teachers tend to communicate low expectations to students by calling on low achievers less frequently than on high achievers. Therefore, the low achieving student is deprived of opportunity to demonstrate or acquire knowledge in the classroom. Some

teachers praise any response a low achieving student gives without accuracy or appropriateness. Overpraising inadequate responses does little to develop academic self-esteem and may endanger credibility with students. In contrast some teachers are frequently more punitive toward low achievers. They either praise the correct responses of low-achieving students less frequently than those of high achieving ones or sometimes even ignore the correct responses of low-achieving students.

Teachers also communicate their real feelings with non verbal output or body language. The non-verbal message is conveyed in the teachers tone of voice. Body stance, facial expression, gesture and physical proximity. A warm tone of voice, a friendly smile and direct eye contact all communicate that the student is really accepted. A teacher's aloof behavior, forced smile, tightly crossed arms or indifferent manner may say more clearly than words "I don't care for you." Time and spatial relationships are also two non-verbal signals of communication. Low achievers are often given less class time. Teachers appear unwilling to wait for low-achieving students to respond to questions. They are also quickly passed over if their answers are incorrect, high achieving students are likely to have more time to answer, and if they answer incorrectly, they are given more second chances to improve their responses. Similarly spatial relationships reveal teachers preferring students whose achievement level is high. Studies (Broghy and Good; 1974) indicate that when a teacher establishes a seating pattern for a class, low achieving students are placed further away from the teacher. This physical message of space is ultimately translated into a psychological message of rejection for some students particularly the low, achievers.

A teacher who is aware of his attitudes and who is conscious of how they influence his students especially in conversation classes, where spontaneous and free interaction are possible only when teachers and students have built up a warm, uninhibited, confident, relationship, is more likely to give all his students equal opportunities. He will be careful to implement ways to counteract the negative aspects of the expectancy effect. He will take care to interact evenly with all his students. Without being aware of it, we tend to interact unevenly with our students, communicating positive feedback to some, negative to others, while neglecting others. Through rotating assignments, seating charts and check sheets the teacher can try to make sure that each student is invited to participate, that the teacher's attention is equally spread and that time is taken for some personal contact with all students. One to one contacts with individual students are also very important. No matter how large his classes are it is vital that the teacher squeeze in a few moments of semiprivate chats. Even a few-second chat can have very

powerful effects on students' self attitudes. This is particularly important for relating with the quiet, submissive subdued student who can easily be overlooked and ignored.

Praising students is also important. While praise generally produces increase in effort, unrealistic praise quickly loses all meaning. When students have the security that the teacher accepts them for what they are, as worthy beings, there is no need to give false praise. Confronting reality in an atmosphere of warmth and acceptance is necessary for an accurate view of the self.

Teachers must also exploit every opportunity to individualize instruction and set tasks to suit individuals. After all students' satisfy the minimal performance standards for a curriculum, provision should be made for students to work from their level towards realistic goals. Instead of comparing students to a total class, they should be rewarded when they make significant gains in their limits. Teachers must accept individual differences rather than assume that most students can attain the same levels at the same time.

To help a student develop a positive self concept a teacher must help him to select experiences which provide a challenge and at the same time help to maximize his opportunities for success. Each student has to be viewed as a separate entity and learning tasks have to be tailored as far as possible for each student even though the entire class is being taught at the same time.

English, especially spoken English, has a unique position in education. As Rivers (1983) points out, if the task of education is to raise the level of awareness and response to all ideas, events and people, English taught

with this end has a very important place in the overall education programme. Interaction is a purposeful person-to-person affair in speech. The lack of interaction will limit English teaching at pseudo-communication level.

Spontaneous communication and free interaction are possible in a conversation class only when teachers and students have built up a warm, uninhibited, confident and sympathetic relationship. Lack of confidence on the part of the students can very easily stifle the development of speaking skills.

REFERENCES

- Brophy, J.E. and Good, T.L. (1974) *Teacher Student Relationships: Causes and Consequences*, New York Holt, Reinehart and Winston.
- Chomsky, N. (1959) Review of *Skinner's Verbal Behavior in Lang*, 35: 26-58.
- James, W. (1890) *Principles of Psychology*, Magnolia, Mass, Peter Smith.
- Maslow, A.H. (1954) *Motivation & Personality*, New York: Harper.
- Purkey, W.W. (1970) *Self Concept and School Achievement*, New Jersey, Prentice Hall.
- Rivers, M. W. (1983) *Speaking in Many Tongues*, New York Cambridge Univ. Press.
- Symonds, P. M. (1939) *The Psychology of Parent Child Relationships*, New York, Appleton-Century.