Speaking in a Second Language in Bangladesh

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Abstract: *The second of the four skills of English Language 'speaking' indisputably performs an enormous function in communication. Speaking two languages intensely shapes the brain and changes how the nervous system responds to sound. Developing a second language has both the advantages and difficulties. Though English is more imperative for the development of a second language after Bengali, Arabic and Hindi are also found in practice by the learners of Bangladesh. Although Hindi is widely developed because of the satellite channels, still English is the concern of our second language learners. Arabic is a concern because of Islam being the foremost religion in Bangladesh along with having a complete Education Board for learning Arabic through the Madrasha System. Some people also learn German, French, Japanese, etc. in our country. However, speaking in a second language is not always easy and systematic in a third world country like ours. So the modification of the learning system and the development of speaking in a second language have to be adopted in a proper way.*

Key Words: Assessment; Strategy; Numan's Suggestions; Bilingualism; Intricacy; Panorama

Introduction

Speaking in a second language beside the native one is an extra-ordinary quality. Learning and speaking a second language can have a positive effect on the brain, even if it is taken up in adulthood, as suggested in a study by the University of Edinburgh. The US researchers from Northwestern University opine that bilingualism is a form of brain training – a cerebral 'work out' that fine-tunes the mind. 'Speaking' is the release of language through the oral cavity. To speak, we create sounds using many parts of our body, including the lungs, vocal tract, vocal chords, tongue, teeth and lips.

Speaking necessitates that learners not only know how to fabricate specific points of language such as grammar, pronunciation, or vocabulary *(linguistic aptitude)*, but also that they understand when, why, and in what ways to produce language *(sociolinguistic aptitude)*. Finally, speech has its own skills, structures, and conventions different from written language [1]. A good speaker synthesizes this array of skills and knowledge to succeed in a given speech act.

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Objectives and Methodology

The main objective of this work is to determine the prevailing intricacies of speaking in a second language in Bangladesh and to suggest the probable elucidations to improve a second language speaking. To develop the topic, the primary idea is found from the study of David Numan's *Language Teaching Methodology: A Textbook for Teachers*. This work is concerned with how to work out the speaking task in a second language and how to achieve a development in this regard. In this paper, the researchers have tried to expose what realization comes after reading Numan's writing. And finally, the researchers have made some suggestions regarding the topic of the present study. So, it is the observation method through which this study has been developed.

Literature Review

Before preparing this paper the researchers have gone through the third chapter of David Numan's *Language Teaching Methodology: A Textbook for Teachers*, "Speaking in a Second Language", which has been the main concern of this research. Several critical books composed by – A. Burns, H. Joyce, M. O'Malley, L. V. Pierce, etc. have also contributed for the part of the study on the development of speaking in a second language, especially in English. Moreover, the different web-sites on applied linguistics and second language teaching and learning have also been helpful in this regard.

Perspective of Speaking

It needs to be clarified first, what speaking is, or why do we speak. As Numan suggests, speaking is the "ability to carry out a conversation in the language" [2]. We second this statement, because we all know that conversation and interaction with each other is the main purpose of any language. Here, according to its conventional task, speaking routines are divided into two types – 'information routines' and 'interaction routines' – the first one is the transactional function of language and the second one is the interactional function of language. Again the information routines are shown as of two types – 'expository' and 'evaluative' – the first one covers description, instruction, comparison, etc. and the second one covers explanation, justification, prediction, decision, etc. This categorization of the information routines clarifies that the expository tasks present something concretely as it is; for example – the news-reading session in radio and television, where the newsreader's main task is to expose or to report something very objectively. On the other hand, in the evaluative tasks, the speaker's personal and subjective judgement is the main thing; for example – a press conference, a meeting, a classroom discussion, etc., where the speakers come forward with their personal opinions. Under interaction routines, two types are introduced – 'service' and 'social'. The 'service type interaction routines' cover a job interview, viva-voce exam, etc. and the 'social type interaction routines' cover a dinner party, a festival gathering, etc. It is clear from these two interactional types that the first one deals with very formal situations and the second one covers informal situations. Of course, it is a fact that, we never talk to others in the same manner in the two situations – when we are facing a viva board and when we are in

a social gathering. Beside these routines, considering 'what', 'who', 'to whom', 'when', etc., the terms, 'negotiation of meaning' and 'management of interaction' are brought and introduced under the shade of 'negotiations'. Here, according to purpose, person, situation and context, the exchange of proper and exact message and meaning through speaking during the conversation is not only the suggested thing, rather the speaker's arrangements of thoughts and ideas and expressing them in a particular discourse is also emphasized. If someone talks about a particular incident and the listener understands something else, the meaning negotiation is not done. Not only that, while talking on a particular topic, the speaker's sudden irrelevant introductory utterance of a new idea is also to be strictly avoided.

Then, the two terms, 'predictability' and 'unpredictability', referred and explained by Numan, are also notable points for conversation. The thing, which is totally known to two persons, that means, which is totally predictable to both of them, is not a suitable subject matter to be talked or spoken by them, because there is nothing left new for any of them that they can share or negotiate. For example – if someone starts telling his/her friend what happened in the ELT class when they both, the speaker and the listener, were present in the class, it will not at all be a conversation. Again, if there is something that is totally unknown or unpredictable to someone and another person starts telling him/her regarding that very thing, it will not also be a conversation, because invariable the listener will not understand what the speaker is talking about. For example – if someone, being a student of Applied Linguistics & ELT, is talking about modern ELT theories and methods to a totally illiterate person of a village of Bangladesh, obviously this will not make a conversation. Here we exactly second what Numan has opined, i.e., "most interactions can be placed on a continuum of relatively predictable to relatively unpredictable." [2]

While dealing with the topic, 'speaking', we have to take into consideration the different text types, like political speeches, nursery rhymes, church sermons, casual conversations, etc. All the different text types, which are termed as different genres, have different communicative purposes and functions. In fact, the term 'genre' refers to "a purposeful, socially-constructed, communicative event." [2] Here, our little effort will make an attempt to clarify the fact that different genres cover different socio-cultural aspects. For example: if we are describing two marriage ceremonies to two persons of two different geographical areas (suppose, one of the listeners is from the USA and the other is from Bangladesh), obviously we are going to narrate to them two 'different' marriage ceremonies – one, in the American background and the other, in the context of Bangladesh. To be expected for sure that each of the two listeners will understand more clearly, what is said to them regarding the marriage ceremony of his/her own culture, even though the second language expression is tougher. Here a non-linguistic factor works positively, i.e., the listener's ability and/or capability of expectance and his/her understanding of the familiar context, the situations that he/she knows better. So, while a language teacher is dealing the second language with the learners in an ESL (English as a

Second Language) or in an EFL (English as Foreign Language) classroom, it is better to consider the topics, which are very familiar to the learners. So, different text types (genres) as well as different situational examples can help a lot in teaching the speaking skill in a second language.

Assessment and Strategies of Speaking

Speaking assessments can take many forms, from oral sections of standardized tests such as the Basic English Skills Test (BEST) or the English as a Second Language Oral Assessment (ESLOA) for authentic assessments such as progress checklists, analysis of taped speech samples, or anecdotal records of speech in classroom interactions. Assessment instruments should reflect instruction and are to be incorporated from the beginning stages of lesson planning [3]. For example, if a lesson focuses on producing and recognizing signals for turn-taking in a group discussion, the assessment tool might be a checklist to be completed by the teacher or learners in the course of the learners' participation in the discussion. Finally, criteria should be clearly defined and understandable to both the teacher and the learners.

Students often think that the ability to speak a language is the product of language learning, but speaking is also a crucial part of the language learning process. Effective instructors teach students speaking strategies – using minimal responses, recognizing scripts, and using language to talk about language – which they can use to help themselves expand their knowledge of the language and their confidence in using it. These instructors help the students develop speaking ability so that the students can perform 'speaking' as they learn.

Discussions and Findings

- **Bilingualism Matters**

Recently a research supported by the *Indian Department of Science and Technology* shows that speaking in a second language may delay the onset of three types of dementias. The research is published in the November 6, 2013, online issue of *Neurology*, the medical journal of the *American Academy of Neurology*. The study result shows that people who spoke two languages developed dementia four and a half years later than people who only spoke one language. "Our study is the first to report an advantage of speaking two languages in people who are unable to read, suggesting that a person's level of education is not a sufficient explanation for this difference," said the study-author Suvarna Alladi, MD, Nizam's Institute of Medical Sciences in Hyderabad, India. The researcher further states, "Speaking more than one language is thought to lead to better development of the areas of the brain that handle executive functions and attention tasks, which may help protect from the onset of dementia."

Bilinguals have 'better memories and problem solving abilities'. U.S. researchers consider bilingualism reinforces the brain's supervisory functions, such as its operational memory and multitasking and problem solving abilities. And bilinguals subconsciously

use and control both the languages constantly. They conducted two tests to investigate whether smooth bilinguals actively chose which language to think and speak in. Judith Kroll, Professor of Psychology, Linguistics and Women's Studies at Penn State University rightly mentions, "not only is bilingualism not bad for you, it may be really good." [4]

- **Intricacies of Speaking in a Second Language**

While we are discussing 'Speaking in a Second Language', we cannot ignore the intricacies in it. The main point that comes here is 'the so called interlocutor effect'. When there is no proper establishment of 'negotiation of meaning' and 'management of interaction', such problematic issue is obvious to arise. [2] So, the speaker, as well as, the second language learner, must be very aware and conscious enough while speaking in the second language. He can overcome such problem-creating-weakness not only by achieving a good command in the target language but also by practicing a lot to develop his speaking capability in the second language. If we narrate or explain an incident or an event to some of our friends, and if we have weakness in the second language, we cannot have the exact ability to express what happened exactly, and consequently, our friends, the listeners to whom we are talking, will not understand what we are talking about. But if we have sufficient knowledge in the second language, there would not be any problem in the 'negotiation of meaning'. Moreover, we must have a good idea about the selection of words, sentence structure, and also about the subject-verb-agreement in the second language. That means, in a word, all the learners must have a good communicative skill in the second language, without which, while interacting, 'incorrect/improper negotiation of meaning' is sure to happen, and then, we understand very well that, the real message that speaker wants to convey, will never be properly conveyed to the listener.

David Numan, in his article has chalked out the 'interlocutor effect' in section 3.5 under the head, "The difficulty of speaking tasks", and in the succeeding two sections (3.6 & 3.7), under the heads, "Classroom interaction" and "Stimulating oral interaction in the classroom", Numan gives a nice solution to overcome this problem, which, no doubt, will be accepted and supported by all the advanced-level language learners and also by the competent language teachers. Numan suggests that, the students in a language classroom are to be engaged in group tasks for performing oral tasks. The whole class can be divided into several groups and be given real-life-situational communicative and orally interactional tasks to be performed. – We all know that the principal aim of language is to make a properly interactional and communicative bridge among the people either of the same society or of different societies. So, the researchers of this study are strongly of the opinion that such oral-task-performing-classes are sure to develop the communicative skills of the second language learners.

So far we have covered the points understanding of reading Numan's writing, and we have also added some innovative comments to explain the act of 'speaking in a second language'. May be, there has remained some points in Numan's article that we may miss. But, we would like to produce further more opinions that we think to be mentioned in this regard.

A Brief Synopsis of Numan's Suggestions

Numan's suggestions are really helpful for the language learners in the ESL contexts, because all the suggestions are suitable (according to our understanding) for the ESL learners. Only the ESL learners can utilize the proposed suggestions that Numan has made (no doubt, we all know that almost all the countries of the ESL context are the developed ones in their language-teaching-planning). But, our point is, what about the language learners in the EFL contexts? Do they really get an exact help by all the proposals that Numan has mentioned? Not too much, just a little effort of brainstorming will let us understand that, in fact, there lie many eccentricities in the spoken language teaching field in an EFL context, especially, in a third world country, like ours.

Panorama of English in the Context of Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, where 'English' is in the status of a 'foreign language' only, not in the status of an 'official language', HOW TO DEVELOP 'ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING', is a burning issue. In fact, only observing an English language class at a renowned institution of Bangladesh is not enough to praise Numan's article for the contribution of improving the learners' speaking skill in a second language, i.e., 'English', in an EFL context.

It is true that, in some of the Dhaka City based English medium schools, in some of the private Universities, in the existing twelve Cadet Colleges in Bangladesh, and also in some very few such well-programmed institutions 'spoken English' is tutored by a few learned and/or skilled instructors of the English language. But, is it the total picture of the whole country? No doubt, the answer is: 'No'. Actually, while dealing with such a delicate topic (Speaking in a Second Language), we often forget the total of the general class – the class that includes our weak students, as well as, our less competent and irresponsible teachers (of course, we need to take into account: 'why the teachers are irresponsible'). In this regard, we cannot also ignore the existing problems in the English language teaching planning.

Few Major Lacking and Some Probable Suggestions: STILL WE HAVE HOPES

Speaking skill is often derelict in the classroom by the teachers in Bangladesh. They presume that it is an area that does not necessitate tutoring or facilitation. In order to commune successfully through speaking, learners must exhibit smoothness, lucidity, and a mindfulness of audience. Such verbal communication skill is learned through performing and surveillance of an efficient speaker, such as 'the teacher'. We would like to suggest for and about the teachers first, and then, automatically, the students will be involved in the discussion.

In fact, most of the English language teachers (both in secondary and intermediate levels) in our country are not competent enough to offer a proper communicative skill to their pupils. Many of them even have very poor concept and/or knowledge about the modern

language teaching approaches and methods. Often, they do not know, or may be, do not care for the proper/effective ways to develop the speaking ability of the students. So, let us consider first, whether writing and proposing the theories are enough, or the implementation of the refined methods is needed. Of course, our rational mind lets us go for the second option, i.e., the implementation of a refined approach/method is much more important. If we want to implement them, the teachers are to be made skilled first: 'how to implement them'; and to do this, they are supposed to be trained with proper care and effective management.

In this regard, there is a hope for us, because very recently the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of Bangladesh has already started arranging several training programmes for the teachers in the Teachers Training Colleges, Higher Secondary Teachers Training Institutes, and also in NAEM (National Academy for Education Management), where language teachers are being trained for improving their English language teaching skills and also for contributing for the language learners (the students). And, after attending a well arranged training program, our English language teachers are expected to be able to offer a better English speaking skill to the language learners. Moreover, in BIAM (Bangladesh Institute of Administrative Management) the Education Officers of both Thana/Upazila and District levels are sometimes being given some training to supervise the Education Management according to their jurisdiction. We think, hope and believe, they all, together, can contribute in the teaching of 'Speaking in a Second Language' by their honesty and sincerity. Furthermore, the English departments of many public and private universities are also working on the same issue of creating effective language instructors or improving the teaching skill of the English language teachers of the schools and colleges. So, we still have the hope to come out of the situation and develop the level spoken English by our learners. But, again, the thing we think needed most is proper monitoring and care by the State Authorities on this delicate issue.

And regarding the irresponsibility and insincerity of the language teachers, we think all of us know that, the language teachers have become so, because the syllabuses for the secondary and intermediate levels are designed in such a manner that the target of the language teachers is only teach some traditionally age-old grammar-translation items and to make their students pass in the board exams even though at present it is the Communicative Language Teaching in black and white. The students are also happy when they pass with a good grade, even though, they do not learn anything regarding the basic skills of the language, especially the vital one, i.e., speaking. Moreover, the most striking lack in this regard is the fact that there is no paper introduced or practiced by rules in the Secondary or Higher Secondary levels that can engage the learners in speaking (neither in the mother tongue nor in the second/foreign language). And these are the students, who, in future, become language teachers. Then very well we can assume what the ultimate result is. So, our educationists must rethink on the importance of

introducing some compulsory listening-speaking courses in the syllabuses. (Our observation says that some well-programmed schools/colleges and some of the universities, especially some private universities, have already started this practice).

Conclusion

From the above discussions, we feel to sum up with the opinion that only proposing some ideas and arranging a few workshops and seminars are not enough to bring out a good competence in speaking in a second language in our context. As a matter of fact, the development of the speaking skill in a non-native language is not an issue to be dealt with a lighter approach. Rather implementation of a revised, refined and well-organized planning is to be incorporated and its impact needs to be focused in the syllabus through the classroom activities. Here the national planners are to take initiatives to review the existing the syllabus, teaching techniques and traditional practices. Otherwise Numan's proposal, on which the present study is primarily based on, will remain 'cover-closed' in his *Language Teaching Methodology: A Textbook for Teachers*.

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