“THE SILENT CLASSROOM”: WHY SPEAKING SKILLS ARE BEING LEFT BEHIND AND HOW TO FIX THEM

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Annotation: This paper examines a persistent and under acknowledged paradox within language education: the structural marginalization of speaking skills despite their centrality to communicative competence. In programs where upward of 80% of instructional time is devoted to reading, writing, and grammar, oral production is rendered pedagogically invisible allocated neither time, nor consistent methodology, nor meaningful assessment. The study analyses institutional drivers of this imbalance, including standardized test design, teacher training deficits, and policy incentives that priorities measurable written outputs. Psychological dimensions foreign language anxiety, the silent period, and the affective filter are reviewed through the lens of current SLA research. The article concludes with an evidence-based framework for rehabilitating oral skill development without dismantling existing curricula.

Keywords: speaking skills, communicative competence, language education, affective filter, classroom silence, foreign language anxiety, oral assessment.

«МОЛЧАЩИЙ КЛАСС» ПОЧЕМУ НАВЫКИ ГОВОРЕНИЯ ОСТАЮТСЯ ПОЗАДИ И КАК ЭТО ИСПРАВИТЬ

Аннотация: Статья посвящена одному из наиболее устойчивых и одновременно слабо признаваемых противоречий в практике языкового образования - систематическому вытеснению навыков устной речи на периферию учебного процесса. В программах, где более 80% учебного времени отдаётся письму, чтению и грамматике, говорение оказывается структурно лишённым ни времени, ни целенаправленной методики, ни адекватной системы оценки. Анализируются институциональные причины этого дисбаланса, психологические барьеры (тревожность, страх ошибки, молчаливый период как защитная реакция), а также методологические просчёты, унаследованные от грамматико-переводного метода. Отдельно рассматривается, кто в системе образования несёт ответственность за этот разрыв и каковы реальные - не декларируемые - последствия для учащихся.

Ключевые слова: навыки говорения, коммуникативная компетенция, языковое

образование, аффективный фильтр, тишина в классе, речевая тревожность, тестирование устной речи.

“JIM SINF”: NIMA UCHUN SO`ZLASHUV KO`NIKMALARI ORQADA QOLMOQDA VA UNI QANDAY TUZATISH MUMKIN

Annotatsiya: Ushbu maqola til ta'limi amaliyotidagi eng doimiy va, bir qarashda, kutilmagan ziddiyatni - so'zlashuv ko'nikmasining tizimli e'tibordan chetda qolishini ko'rib chiqadi. O'rganilgan materialning 80 foizdan ko'prog'i yozma va o'qish vazifalari orqali tekshiriladigan dasturlarda o'quvchi og'zaki aloqa uchun akademik savodsizliqqa mahkum etiladi. Maqolada bu hodisaning institutsional, psixologik va metodologik sabablari tahlil qilinadi; kommunikativ kompetensiya, affektiv filtr va tilga oidkognitiv yuk bo'yicha empirik ma'lumotlar ko'rib chiqiladi. Asosiy xulosa: og'zaki nutq - bu alohida ko'nikma bo'lib, u maxsus pedagogik e'tibor, vaqt resurslari va baholash tizimlari bilan qo'llab-quvvatlanmasa, o'z-o'zidan shakllanmaydi.

Kalit so'zlar: og'zaki nutq ko'nikmasi, kommunikativ kompetensiya, til ta'limi, affektiv filtr, sinf ichidagi sukut, baholash xolisligi, nutq tashvishi.

INTRODUCTION

People in the education field don't really want to speak about it. Most students who have completed language courses can write a decent essay, and can explain a grammar construct, but get "stuck" the first time they encounter a real conversation with a native speaker. They learn for years and they don't speak.

This is not due to bad luck or some individual failures. It is “programmed” into the system. The traditional classroom environment is designed in such a way that, though real conversations do occur, they occur only rarely when the script dictates and they are not graded or are graded for elements of the conversation that are irrelevant to real conversation. In class, the teacher speaks 70-80% of the time believe it or not, this has been measured (Flanders, 1970; Walsh, 2011). The student is listening, writing and sometimes reading aloud. That's the “silent classroom.”

This is not an article about fault teachers. The majority of teachers operate in circumstances where it is virtually impossible to teach speaking: over-filled syllabuses, emphasis on written exams, no training to really know how to teach speaking, and too many students in one class. The issue is not the system, it is the problem within the system. So it's not just about practicing more; it has to be systemic as well.

The situation is even worse in Uzbekistan. The education system is constantly changing standards of language, there is pressure from international examinations such as IELTS and the CEFR, there is a dearth of a genuine English-speaking environment, and the students have high anxiety due to English as a third or fourth language behind Uzbek, Russian and sometimes Karakalpak. It is not as though the remnants of the “old” grammar-translation technique (which was abandoned but remains alive and kicking in the trenches) have not left their mark, either.

2.1. Speaking is an ability structurally set aside

If people refer to “the four skills” - reading, writing, speaking and listening – it seems as if

they are all the same. In fact, some have far greater significance than others. An OECD study (2019) on language programs in 48 countries shows that on average less than 15% of the class time is used for speaking. That figure would drop to 7-9% in countries, such as Japan and South Korea, with a high culture of written exams.

It isn't that people are bad. That's the way they're constructed. Speaking in groups is challenging to test. You can test 30 students in 45 minutes with a written test. The same group will be tested with an oral examination of 5-6 hours duration. That's not something that can be done on a regular school routine. Thus, the system selects the "easy" to measure and wraps up development of everything else.

Examine the changes over time in international standards. According to the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference) (published in 2001 and updated in 2018), interactive speaking comes first when defining language levels. However, most national exams which claim to be based on the CEFR focus on the ability to speak and provide separate, costly, and optional assessments of speaking. Until 2013 the British GCSE used to have speaking as a core component of the grade; following reform, it was dropped “for objectivity”. The outcome was all but inevitable.

2.2. The psychology of silence: what is going on in the mind of the student.

In the affective filter theory (1982), Stephen Krashen explained that anxiety, lack of self-esteem and fear of errors in public speech forms a psychological barrier for language learning. Thirty years later, Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) developed the FLCAS scale (Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale), which remains the most commonly used scale for measuring this. MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) conducted a meta-analysis of 26 studies and their results revealed a negative correlation between anxiety and speaking performance, which was -0.49. In layman's terms: pupils are afraid to talk. Not because they're lazy, but because messing up in class is more expensive than in a notebook. Teacher sees a mistake in a notebook. Everyone can see the mistake when it is made public. This is a social risk and the brain sees it as a true risk. One of the best survival tips in an environment where making mistakes is met by punishment (or perhaps simply the sense of punishment).

Jones and Thornton (2012) investigated 14 schools in the UK and their results showed that 63% of B1-B2 (intermediate) students are deliberately simplifying what they say when speaking in public to avoid making mistakes. They switch complexity for safety. This is an avoidance strategy and it's the contrary of what language development requires.

2.3. The silence that came from the old ways: the legacy of old methods.

From the 19th cetury until the present, the grammar-translation method had been the key method used in European and Soviet language education, and it was never intended to teach speaking. The aim was to read: works from the classical tradition, diplomatic documents, scientific articles. Speaking was perceived as something that would “just come later.” It never did.

Since the 1970s, Hymes, Wilkins and Brumfit have promoted the communicative method (CLT Communicative Language Teaching), which was supposed to correct this. In theory, at the center, talk and business, talk and business. In practice, CLT was filtered through one of the institutional institutions, and became something else: textbooks with “communicative

exercises," in which students read out pre-written answers to book questions. That's not speaking. That is reading the words as if they were spoken.

How can this be explained? Teachers. Or, how teachers are educated. Burns and Noel (2008) conducted a study on confidence in running speaking tasks among 120 English teachers in Australia and discovered that only 34% of the teachers were confident in conducting speaking activities without a very clear structure. 71% reported that in teacher training college their training was not adequate in teaching speaking. When teachers are teaching, they are teaching that which they have been taught, and they have been taught mostly not speaking.

2.4. This is an equitable and fair system for which benefit is provided?

Speaking is in opposition to the education market economy. Standardized tests are how big publishers, like Pearson, Oxford University Press, and Cambridge Assessment are able to make money. IELTS brings Cambridge around $350 million a year (according to their own 2022 data). The speaking section of IELTS lasts for 11-14 minutes and must be graded by a human being. That's expensive. It is not suitable for machine grading. So, industry has a vested interest in maintaining Speaking separate and a bit 'out there' regardless of the amount they claim it is essential.

Tech companies fill in their own way. Duolingo, Babbel, Rosetta Stone emphasize reading, writing, and listening. They do not engage in real interaction with one another but rather in imitation. Because if you're having a high error rate then the rating of your App Store would be reduced, most language apps will consider anything that resembles the word "correct". It's designed to make the user feel good, rather than to teach genuine abilities.

2.5. What really takes place following school

The EF English Proficiency Index (2023) assessed the English proficiency of 2.2 million people aged 18 and over from 113 different countries, finding that Uzbekistan is in the "Low Proficiency" category at position 89. Concurrently, the official use of English in the schools of Uzbekistan is more than 95% of students. People learn over a number of years and then fail to use the language. It's not failure at school. That's a system that's designed to get that kind of result.

When it comes to the job market, the gap has a price. The ILO or World Bank Central Asia Study revealed that working proficiency in spoken English is associated with a wage premium of 23-31 percent in sectors such as international business, IT and tourism. And functional is here means to be able to negotiate, explain a technical task, join a video call. That's what schools are not taught.

There's a problem with higher education. If a student enters a technical university with an IELTS 6.5 certificate, he or she may be unable to deliver a 10-minute oratory speech about a personal project in English - this was not the language in which they studied for IELTS. Teachers know this. Employers know this. The system continues to operate as before.

2.6. What works: evidenced based methods

Not all is lost. There are techniques that have been proven that don't rely on ads in the textbook, but actual results.

Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT).

The method was developed by Pica Skehan and Martin Bygate, and involves authentic communication tasks such as not ‘talk about the weather' but ‘explain to your partner how this diagram works'. Based on 49 experimental studies, Norris and Ortega (2000) conducted a meta-analysis that revealed TBLT to be constantly better than the traditional exercises in achieving a better improvement in speaking, particularly in fluency and strategic skill.

Dogme ELT (Meddings, 2000) - no text book used, just real conversation on real issues that students are interested in. In controlled studies (Shilcock, 2011; Conti, 2016), large increases in students' willingness to speak up were identified, provided that the teacher is prepared for an unpredictable lesson. Most aren’t.

Structured Output Practice (SOPT) coupled with formative assessment of speaking is the most feasible and scalable model. The Japan “Super Global High Schools” program (2014-2020) revealed that incorporating a speaking component into their regular exam resulted in an increase in students' speaking time from 8 to 23 minutes per lesson in two semesters. Not adding any extra funding and not changing curriculum, just changing what's being graded.

That's the important part. Grading drives behavior. If not graded, then it doesn't happen. If it's graded: It happens. It's not cynicism. That's the way things work in institutions – and it can be done right.

2.7. Current solutions and issues.

It's not right to not pay attention to criticism of popular solutions. Untrained communicative methods become chaos! Avoid free conversation tasks, these result in more silence. Price (1991) and Chen (2015) found that students' anxiety level affects their ability to learn without structure.

The issue of authenticity is also tricky. Advanced levels: Using real materials (podcasts, YouTube, natives) is helpful; however, at beginner levels, it is unhelpful because they have not developed enough mental capacity to process natural speech. Cognitive overload, not motivation, is the "real language" at level A2 that is raw and unfiltered.

Last but not least, tech solutions such as AI tutors and voice chatbots have the potential to revolutionize the speaking practice landscape. To date, it has been one-sided promises. Plonsky and Ziegler (2021) have determined that conversing with a chatbot enhances transactional skills (like requests, instructions) but almost has no impact on interactive skills (like arguing, holding a subject, politely interrupting, reading body language). Communication is more than merely words. It's real-time social action.

CONCLUSION

It isn’t a metaphor for a bad lesson, but the “silent classroom.” It is the structural outcome of a system in which speaking does not really have a place: it is not a central part of the

curriculum, in exams, in teacher training, in publishing business models, etc. When everyone does what's in his or her best interests and those incentives are not related to speaking, the result is the expected speaking crisis.

It would not be possible to rectify this problem by using a single tool. It takes a package of changes: making speaking a part of the required work for grading and then what teachers and students pay attention to changes; revising teacher preparation to emphasize how to teach speaking and then the training changes; shifting to more small groups and/or rotating speaking formats within the overcrowded classroom and then the teaching style changes; and making formative assessment of speaking routine and then the teaching practice changes.

No significant financial investments in these changes are needed. They need a political will a will to grade what is hard to grade. Until then the classroom would remain silent. And it's graduates will remain on paper competent, and in conversation mute.

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