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DEVELOPING PRODUCTIVE SKILLS IN ESL AND EFL TEACHING CONTEXTS

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ABSTRACT

This article is dedicated to discuss the peculiarities of speaking skill as a special purpose and secondary purpose. Namely, it is about improving the speaking skill in English as a special, first language, as well as a foreign language. The article indicates the main views of the topic, and implements the outcomes of the research. Some recommendations are also mentioned in this article. Teaching and learning English, except for the native language, is thus crucial for communicative purposes to cope with the growing local, national and international demands for English skills. In Uzbekistan, English is considered as a foreign language, and is used for the purposes of academic advancement, career advancement, and traveling abroad. To cope with the growing local and international demand, a number of efforts from all parties involved have been made to the Uzbekistan educational system to help boost the learners' English performance.

KEYWORDS: *Speaking skill, Developing, ESL, EFL, Teaching, Context, English*

INTRODUCTION

In the world of globalization, English has increasingly become the medium in every domain of communication, both in local and global contexts. As a result, the demand for using English effectively is necessary in every country. Teaching and learning English, except for the native language, is thus crucial for communicative purposes to cope with the growing local, national and international demands for English skills. In Uzbekistan, English is considered as a foreign language, and is used for the purposes of academic advancement, career advancement, and traveling abroad. To cope with the growing local and international demand, a number of efforts from all parties involved have been made to the Uzbekistan educational system to help boost the

learners' English performance. The process of learning English is slow and progressive and it could be interpreted as a series of challenges to face. This process consists of the development of certain skills. According to the common framework, these are divided into productive and receptive. Receptive skills comprise reading and listening. They are important because they allow learners to understand contents, textbooks, works or documents. Productive skills consist of speaking and writing and they are significant because they permit learners to perform in communicative aspects such as oral presentations, written studies and reports among others. Therefore, these skills need to be developed and learnt properly. According to the experiences of many teachers as well as learners of foreign languages, most difficulties are found in the process of learning and teaching productive skills. On the other hand different methods, approaches and techniques are invented to make the teaching and learning process of productive skills easier both for teachers and learners. Thus the main purpose of this study is to identify the techniques of teaching productive skills as practiced in the modern world as well as in our country. This study sought to answer few questions related to the implementation of those techniques in our country. Hopefully, answering those questions will help us to find a way to utilize modern and contemporary techniques in our country in an effective manner. Subsequently, the purpose of this study is to identify and suggest probable solution to effective teaching of productive skills. In communicative approach there are four basic skills of learning foreign language like English i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing. When it comes to talking about using English at any level of education whether it is primary, secondary, intermediate or at the tertiary level, it requires teaching the four skills of the language giving equal importance on each of these skills. Each of these is important. In communication and especially in communicative English each skill demands equal importance. Ever growing needs for using English around the world is the consequence of the role of English as the world's international language have given priority to finding more effective ways to teach these crucial language skills. In Bangladesh Secondary education is one of the most important sectors in education. English is taught at this level but appropriate emphasis is not given on learner's speaking and writing skills. Though speaking and writing are the two common means of communication, education planners of primary, secondary and higher secondary levels give less emphasis on these skills. As a result, students could not apply English in their practical life successfully.

In this paper much attention will be paid mainly to one category of language skills and those are productive skills. There are two groups of skills that are known and studied in the context of educational process represented by teaching and learning. The category of receptive skills - also recognized as passive skills - is demonstrated by reading and listening. In many cases of foreign language learning they appear as the first skills to be understood and comprehended. Foreign language learners mostly start their way of mastering a new language by observing, reading and collecting language experience. Passive language skills do not force students to produce anything actively. They gain the knowledge in a passive manner and later they start producing their own monologues, dialogues and many other "spoken results" are created. The same process is done with writing which the same way as speaking belongs to the category of productive language skills, also described as active skills. More energy is needed to 'produce' any outcome of those types. Both types of language skills make an integral part of learning process at any stage of its development. At first the paper will describe different strategies how both speaking skills are taught and it will present examples of more and less successful activities when learning not only

English as a second/foreign language, abbreviated ESL/EFL. As Littlewood explains “ a ‘second’ language has social functions within the community where it is learnt, whereas a ‘foreign’ language is learnt primarily for contact outside one’s community” (Littlewood, 1991, p.2). The article itself will concentrate more on the process of learning than teaching. There are various factors that influence the final outcome and success in grasping a foreign/second language. We will look at potential users of a new language and try to answer why some of them are more successful than the others. One of the final paragraphs will deal with the basic characteristics of English as a foreign language. It will underline the authors’ own experience with teaching this language of a small nation to a heterogeneous group of students.

2. Productive skills, their description and basic features

When one starts learning a foreign language, he surely and subconsciously is exposed to both categories of language skill. As mentioned before, productive skills - also called active skills - mean the transmission of information that a language user produces in either spoken or written form. Productive skills would not exist without the support of receptive ones. Passive knowledge - such as listening and reading - symbolizes a springboard to active implementation of grammar structures, passive vocabulary lists, heard and repeated sounds of a foreign language. This theoretical background applies to any studied language. This should also prove that both types of skills are inseparable and one cannot exist without the other. When learning a foreign language, receptive skills usually come first and should be followed by practical application of productive ones. If a learning process lacks one of them, the final outcome will not be complete. As most active users of any foreign language know, speaking and writing are in reciprocal relationship. Undoubtedly, grammatical structures, words and their proper use, and certain extent of accuracy need to be respected. These are implemented in both types of active skills. As Riggensbach and Lazaraton point out, rather than implementing activities that concentrate attention strictly to accuracy, plenty of language instructors focus on promoting communicative competence in language students by applying “communicative activities” (Riggensbach & Lazaraton, 1991, p.125). The classroom environment and atmosphere definitely create necessary part of successful teaching and learning. These are highly valued by the learners. Creative teachers, who do not want to let their learners to get bored, work with a wide scope of speaking and writing activities. For the teaching purpose, not only lesson plan but also a term syllabus needs to be created beforehand. More experienced language instructors bear in mind that students’ responses to needs analysis forms bring valuable pieces of information for setting up the core of the language course plan. The content of such a plan should include some general activities, but there also should be a set of tailor-made exercises that suit the specific group of learners and where particular objectives are set. This aspect of selected activities will be dealt with later in the paper. As Olshtain and Cohen state (Olshtain & Cohen, 1991, p.154), “if we wish to master another language we need to become more communicatively competent”. Their observation proves the idea that language accuracy is necessary but not the most vital feature of speaking activities. To organize the lesson effectively a wide range of diverse activities should be involved in the lesson plan. Examples of speaking activities that are listed in the “speaking menu” are organized from least to most difficult ones. As mentioned above, some grammatical structures and vocabulary are incorporated in order to suit the content to less homogeneous group of course participants and guide them towards the same or similar outcome. The teaching experience and long-term observation bring us a long register of activities and exercises in order to practice productive skills effectively. Speaking proves to be one of the main goals when learning English or any other language as a foreign

language. There are favourite activities that are considered to be suitable even for learners-beginners. To name a few and prove that speaking and writing are in mutual relationship we can start with writing or enumerating a list of words linked with a certain topic, and/or writing and simultaneous using of everyday phrases in short face to face conversation exchanges, role-play telephone conversations and picture games in the ESL/EFL classrooms. At this early stage of learning some learners enjoy keeping their personal diaries, some Dita Golkova and Sarka Hubackova / *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* (2014) 477 – 481 labelling pictures or images with basic descriptions, or filling in word bubbles in comics with everyday phrases. During the latter stage of learning students get acquainted with more specialized vocabulary and previously mentioned activities can be replaced with more advanced levels of those and/or new types of tasks. With respect to certain factors that may influence the final outcome of the language teaching, the following activities can be used: more complex conversation role-plays with stress on proper grammar structures and extended vocabulary register of certain topics, description of real-life topics and more serious local and global issues in a form of writing tasks, and e.g. oral summary of a recently seen film, read book or heard story. There are numerous ways how to raise learners' awareness of adequate phraseology of any foreign language and grammar accuracy but one important and necessary part in the process of learning is teacher's evaluation and provided feedback. Traditionally, the teacher evaluates his learners either by giving grades or verbally. The teacher's feedback involves criteria such as focus on content, i.e. clarity, original idea, organization and delivery of the speech, and whether the goals of the activity were kept. A common tool to collect some information of this kind is to design the evaluation sheet. An interesting outcome is revealed when the instructor distributes self-evaluation sheets to his students and they evaluate themselves. The teacher may even discover originally unexpected assessment from his students when comparing his and the student's grading (Riggenbach and Lazaraton, 1991, p. 129). Besides those previously mentioned traditional activities supporting proficiency of productive skills there are new and modern trends that proved to become very popular with young and middle-aged learners. Not all of them are popular with everybody but some seem to be gaining their audience. With the expansion of the Internet services and applications, a number of innovative methods how to support productive skills became highly valued and frequently used; After designing, distributing and collecting a simple questionnaire in a heterogeneous group of students in a course English as a foreign language, or Czech for foreigners, at the Faculty of Informatics and Management, University of Hradec Kralove, the answers brought clear picture that the Internet provides students with possibilities such as different kinds of social networking, e.g. Face book, Twitter, LinkedIn, My space, to name a few most common ones. The aim of this paragraph is not to judge these options for their reliability, suitability and invasion into our private space but to underline their existence and certain meaning for practice of productive skills. What comes into questions is grammar adequacy, level of vocabulary correctness, less formal English that play their roles in this format of communication tools without any supervision. Students in their answers also supported the idea of joining discussion groups; various interest clubs, real-life conversations that deal with contemporary issues. 3. Productive skills when teaching/learning English and Czech as foreign languages a concise and abbreviated definition of big linguistic field such presented as language typology serves as a theoretical background to this paragraph. Language typology is a linguistic field which examines linguistic features of different languages. It studies structures of languages and their diversity and consists of several disciplines, e.g. qualitative, quantitative and theoretical

typology [<http://www.princeton.edu/>]. Examples of languages that are members of Indo-European language group are Italian, Spanish, Latin, German, and sub-category called Slavic languages is represented by Czech, Slovak, Polish, etc. Czech belongs to West Slavic languages that respect format of inflection which means that nouns, adjectives and verbs change their forms according to set of patterns. Linguistic typology as a field of linguistics presents a morphological category of a synthetic language which is based on high proportion of morphemes per word. This brief theoretical introduction brought evidence that English as a foreign language is not an easy language to master. As inflective language it has a set of noun, pronouns and adjective forms produced in declension and a set of verb forms produced within conjugation. This language feature brings about a chance of free word order in contrast to the English language which also belongs to the family of Indo-European languages, namely Germanic languages, but it historically developed into a category of analytic languages where word order is very important. As parts of speech do not take many different endings, the SVO formula for word order is rather strict and users of English as lingua franca find the feature of inflection with many parts of speech as very complex and difficult language property. The existence of three grammatical genders, i.e. masculine – with two further categories of animate and inanimate nouns, feminine and neuter makes this view of English for a non-native user even more complicated. The previous theory should not serve as discouraging means for potential learners of English as a foreign language. The description of such language properties should attract all language enthusiasts who are keen on experimenting with relatively flexible word order in English sentences. On the other hand, English phonological system has a limited set of vowels and consonants with a few diacritic signs that appear above some of 480 Dita Golkova and Sarka Hubackova / *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* (2014) 477 – 481 the letters and indicate e.g. length of the vowel, but not the word stress. Since the pronunciation rules are invariable and the number of pronunciation exceptions is limited, the learners' attitude towards speaking is mostly positive. As our foreign students of English claim, the beginning of language course seems to be encouraging because gradual progress is observed. Students who attend our language courses within the university create a heterogeneous group of learners in many aspects. To name a few, students come from diverse cultural environments, their mother tongues are of different origins, their period of stay ranges from one term to two years, etc. Littlewood also points out that personality trait are likely to influence second language learning (Littlewood, 1991, p.64). Of course, there are some facts that unite the learners in one class. These can be staying in one common academic space, living temporarily in the natural environment of the studied language, sharing similar interests and worries, and also the language goal of mastering a certain level of understanding in a completely strange place. Before a teacher starts teaching such a heterogeneous group he should be aware of some effective ways how to motivate and encourage his students in their study effort. He needs to find out what mother tongues his students have and if there is any convenient opportunity he should emphasise similarities or differences of a particular language. Students always appreciate it and this process could eliminate some further misunderstandings or language interferences. The teacher should be able to establish a natural and relaxed atmosphere and continuously stimulate students in their learning. With respect to students' adult age, the teacher will definitely be able to find a way to his students. To continue with the set up topic of productive skills, there should be maintained activities that awake interest in such a morphologically complex language. From the responses in students' questionnaires is obvious that university students are keen on getting overall knowledge of the language

environment. On the whole, they are grateful for activities that provide communication with some grammar practice and teacher's feedback afterwards. The learners are prepared to "show off" their little knowledge individually, in pair work monitored by the teacher, and in group discussions with bigger support from the lecturer, especially at an early stage of learning. Sabrina Peck states that adult learners might show more interest in team discussions if the themes are relevant to their objectives (Peck, 1991, p. 368-370). She also adds that other unique factors are level of education, emotional and social needs. The aspect of previous instruction in studied language is also important. Actually, foreigners become more language-skilled and independent in a culturally new environment when they start constructing their sentences with adequate grammar knowledge and general, everyday topics. Themes for pair conversation or group discussions range from those oriented at children, e.g. family matters, favourite pets, school, favourite meals, aimed at teenagers, e.g. hobbies, music, future plans, and also directed at adult, mature learners. Their popular themes are weather, academic life, job, pastime and weather to name a few. In terms of writing activities that support active skills, very effective and successful seem to be writing and replying to emails between students or students and a teacher, filling in basic forms in the new foreign language, writing a brief family history or keeping a diary at later stage of learning. There are more and less successful students in the area of productive skills, but the truth is that they should not be discouraged in any phase of learning process. Continuous chase for more effective activities in order to meet the learners' needs and even more activate their productive skills should be one of the teacher's main objectives and motivations.

In this paper, we have demonstrated that productive skills do not exist utterly independently from receptive skills. Passive skills represent an essential part of language skills and basics of some categories of productive skills. Both types of active skills, i.e. speaking and writing share some types of activities and some belong merely to one of them. Nowadays, at the age of the Internet there are more innovative and lively ways to practice active skills. However, some of them are accepted only by foreign language users and not by their language instructors. Foreign students in our courses claim that English as a foreign language is difficult to master in the area of proper noun and adjective endings, and concerning verbs the situation is even more complex with changes in prefixes and suffixes, too. However, once a learner overcomes a certain stage of slower progress, enthusiasm and involvement in further studies is even bigger. In most cases, a foreign learner is highly motivated by the surrounding cultural and natural language environment, and certainly by his teacher.

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