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### **ONLINE SPEAKING: PRACTICE AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF MONOLOGUE SKILLS**

**Розглянуто експеримент по вживанню голосового Інтернет-форуму для розвитку навичок монологічного мовлення. Аналізуються чинники мовного бар'єра, актуалізовані поставленим завданням, і способи їх подолання.**

*Ключові слова:* монологічне висловлювання, усне мовлення, онлайнове навчання, голосовий Інтернет-форум, міжнародні іспити, мовний бар'єр, виправлення помилок.

**Рассмотрен эксперимент по применению голосового Интернет-форума для развития навыков монологической речи. Анализируются факторы языкового барьера, актуализированные поставленной задачей, и способы их преодоления.**

*Ключевые слова:* монологическое высказывание, устная речь, онлайнное обучение, голосовой Интернет-форум, международные экзамены, языковой барьер, исправление ошибок.

**The article consickis an experiment when a voice-based discussion forum is apied to develop monologue skills in a group of B-1 level students. Measures aimed at overcoming the learners' language barrier are analysed.**

*Key words:* monologue skills, EFL speaking, B-1 level, online classroom, voiced-based discussion forum, international examinations, language barrier, error correction.

The study investigates prospective nonnative English learners' speaking experiences in the context of Ukrainian EFL by describing their discussion activities in their target language outside the classroom.

The curriculum of the first-year International Relations students who have taken part in the experiment is based on 132 academic hours of group studies a year at the rate of two tutorials a week. Obviously, such intensity hardly allows for proportional time to develop all the components of the linguistic abilities given good-sized homework and ample provision of study materials. The average oral response of each student of the described group is estimated to amount to less than 5 minutes a week provided the class focuses on speaking activities. According to a *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages Learning, Teaching, Assessment* alongside University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations criteria, B1-level learners should be able to sustain dialogues/conversations and monologues on an assigned topic [1; 6, 129]. It should be noted that the students participating in the experiment are taking a General English course.

Therefore, correction of conversational mistakes in the classroom will take time away from other important lesson components, such as introducing new topics. Thus, practicing monologue in a group of 17 students is challenging and can be viewed as a specific teaching goal.

A way out of this situation, suggested by T. Bender, is the combination of the two forms of learning: a computer-based long-distance learning and a face-to-face one [2]. Both the teacher and the students should be computer literate and have access to computers equipped with built-in or outer microphone and headset, and an up-to-date operation system.

A virtual leaning platform for the experiment has been a voice discussion forum *Voxopop*<sup>1</sup> (<http://www.voxopop.com/>) whose difference from a conventional one, for example BBC's *Have Your Say* ([http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/have\\_your\\_say/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/have_your_say/)), lies in recorded audio discussions as opposed to text messages. *Voxopop* discussion forum has functioned as a voiced-based e-Learning tool and a cyberspace for language learning, practice of speaking, group projects and oral presentations since 2009. Thousands of members have been using it worldwide both as a self-teaching resource for exams and as online classrooms. The teacher who organizes and moderates the discussions can opt for open, restricted or private access level and set the rules for a talkgroup.

Besides the general requirements for intermediate students, there is one more reason to develop discussion skills in the group – the students might later sit for an international English language examination (IELTS™ and TOEFL iBT® are most often taken) for post-graduate education. The IELTS Speaking Test takes between 11 and 14 minutes and is in the form of an oral interview between the candidate and the examiner. In Part 2 of the interview ('Individual long turn'), the examiner gives the candidate a verbal prompt, which is written on a card. After one minute's preparation, the candidate is asked to talk on that particular topic and the examiner listens without speaking, save for occasional feedback. In the candidate's monologue in Part 2, the expectation is that the candidate will: a) follow the instructions; and b) provide an extended development of a topic. [4; 7] The interview is audiorecorded. The TOEFL iBT test has a different format other than IELTS. Only the first two TOEFL speaking tasks, so-called 'independent speaking', are based on topics familiar to the students. There, the students are required to deliver their own ideas, opinions, and experiences when responding. The remaining four speaking tasks are 'integrated' tasks, where the students have to use more than one skill when responding. The students first read and listen, and then speak in response. They can take notes and use them when responding to the speaking tasks. At least one 'integrated' activity requires the students relate the information from the reading to the listening material. The test takers' responses are digitally recorded and are sent to ETS's Online Scoring Network where they are scored by certified raters. [10] The **conclusion** can be drawn here that due to the audiorecording factor, the online speaking practice approximates the international English examinations formats and can serve as an optimum preparation tool for a speaking test in an oversized group.

In the described group, the online discussions have been extra homework assignments. The preparation time is not limited, hence the members of the 'panel' can prepare thoroughly before they present their arguments or descriptions. Moreover, in the experiment the online discussion themes have been called forth by classroom debates. Those debates have been accompanied by reading or listening and have facilitated students' acquisition of specific vocabulary.

In some cases classroom oral responses are followed by writing tasks on a related subject. Consequently, by the time the students are encouraged to follow up with an online discussion, they can take into account their paperwork errors. If the students tend to base their oral monologues on their preceding written tasks, *style-shifting* (W. Labov)

<sup>1</sup>The site name could be derived from the Latin «vox pópuli» («voice of the people»).

should be emphasized. The speakers should be conscious of short/long verb forms, dissimilar transition words, prevalence of colloquialisms/euphemisms, and different length and structure of their sentences. In distinction from essays with their proportional structure (an introduction, a main part and a conclusion), oral response is free from structural limitations, and oral introductions/conclusions act as time-fillers.

The **preliminary results** indicate that apart from improving communication skills, the online monologue practice trains the language learners to eliminate mispronunciations and helps to widen their active vocabulary.

In the described group, only 5 students out of 17 have joined the online discussion. Four students out of the other 12 could not make their online voice recordings because of technical failures but stored their verbal responses on their computers and presented them later. Offline recording is definitely more comfortable for university students since it is not subject to peer review. However, the first attempt to record a verbal monologue, either online or offline, is an important step to advance one's speaking skills. In view of the proportion of the participants, the author would like to further focus on language barrier factors foregrounded by the speaking assignment.

The components of the language barrier have been described in both general ELT courses and online education studies [5, c. 108–109; 3, c. 142]. S. Thornbury and P. Watkins quote poll responses about dealing with different oral errors: while some language learners are confounded by the absence of corrective feedback from teachers who are tolerant of errors, others feel discouraged by excessive correction and will not continue to speak [9, c. 58-59]. **The frame of diverse decisions a teacher has to make according to a learner's error** was described by J. M. Hendrickson in 1978 and remains a disputable question of language pedagogy as a whole and, TEFL practices in particular. It should be taken into account that a voice-based forum is a 'delayed correction' tool [9, c. 40–41]. **In the context of the development of monologue skills, it is considered to be an optimum observation instrument, both student-centered and psychologically sensitive one.**

Students' language barrier may come from their unwillingness to amplify their personal experience, especially in public, or dwell on questions they have little knowledge about. If this is the case, the teacher would face a *devaluation* (Freud) of the assignment by uncooperative students. Together with *denial* and *avoidance* devaluation belongs to counterproductive *defence mechanisms* as described in the psychoanalytic theory<sup>2</sup>. Uncooperative learners would deem any hypothetic situations factitious and far-fetched. Since reluctant speakers cannot draw parallels between abstract reasoning and their past, they would ignore such tasks as irrelevant. For instance, while trying to elicit more travel tips for visitors to Ukraine in another group, I witnessed tantrum behavior of a student who refused to respond to suggestive questions saying he had never hosted overseas visitors and 'announced' that the main question had been fully answered. Fortunately, overreaction to routine interrogation is not typical and quite rare.

As it was previously mentioned, B1-level learners are expected to sustain a monologue on an assigned topic for over a minute. Therefore, if a student obstinately refuses to expand an uncomfortable topic, the teacher should demonstrate ways to overcome student's anxiety by introducing impersonal constructions or by switching to an allied subject for a full-fledged discourse.

Both EFL writing tasks and verbal responses of Russian<sup>3</sup> speakers reveal another permanent problem related to cross-cultural understanding. In their arguments for or against something, they will not think twice to characterize any fact or event in nature or

<sup>2</sup>A recent attempt to apply *defence mechanisms* and *psychological resistance* (Freud) theories to language learning has been made in M. Phaneuf's article "Defense Mechanisms among Our Students" [6].

<sup>3</sup>By the 'Russians' the author means Slavic post-Soviets.

society but will hardly mention their feelings. Russian EFL speakers would rather support their value judgments by some speculative arguments than by their empirical background. It is good enough to bring forward speculative ideas but it is not quite the thing to say or write to an international English examiner. The expectations of the latter are not to be overlooked and, if the need arises, the teacher should direct learners' efforts towards a 'wordlier', less notional supportive arguments.

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### **ІНТЕРАКТИВНІ МЕТОДИ НАВЧАННЯ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ**

**Висвітлено питання застосування інтерактивних методів навчання на заняттях з англійської мови. Продемонстровано, що кейс-метод, метод проєктів, рольова гра є новими стратегіями в оформленні сучасного навчального процесу.**

*Ключові слова:* кейс-метод, проєкт, рольова гра, міжкультурна компетенція, навчальний процес.

**Освещён вопрос применения интерактивных методов обучения на занятиях по английскому языку. Продемонстрировано, что кейс-метод, метод проєктов, ролевая игра являются новыми стратегиями в оформлении современного учебного процесса.**

*Ключевые слова:* кейс-метод, проєкт, ролевая игра, межкультурная компетенция, учебный процесс.

**The article deals with the question about interactive methods application at English classes. It shows that the case-method, project method and role-play method are new strategies in the modern academic process.**

*Key words:* case-method, project, role-play, intercultural communication, academic process.