

DEVELOPING SPEAKING SKILLS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ADVANCED EFL LEARNERS IN THE CONTEXT OF UNIVERSITY MODERN LANGUAGE STUDIES – QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Summary

The monograph concentrates on the development of the speaking skill in advanced students of English and their perceptions of the learning process and its selected aspects connected to foreign language speaking in different situational contexts.

The theoretical part starts with the discussion of issues related to developing learners' speaking abilities seen as the process which requires integrating the knowledge of the language and the skill of using it (declarative versus procedural knowledge). The opening chapter presents the interpretations of L2 speaking development within three influential theoretical orientations: the cognitive approach, the sociocultural theory based on the ideas of Vygotsky (1978), and the interactional approach represented, among others, by Long (1996).

The next subchapter focuses on the notion of communicative competence (Canale and Swain 1980, Canale 1983, Bachman 1990, Celce-Murcia 2007, Wilczyńska 2002). It discusses the main terminological problems which stem at least partially from the very popularity of the construct, and compares some of the numerous concepts of competence which have emerged over the last five decades. The definitions of the main sub-competences are provided and analysed with regard to differences and similarities between them. Finally, the author's own proposal is presented, namely the construct of individual competence in speaking, which aims to facilitate the identification and description of the selected abilities involved in oral communication in particular social and communicative situations.

The last part of chapter I concentrates entirely on the problems involved in determining one's level of proficiency in speaking, given the individual and changea-

ble nature of the skill in different contexts, and the number of factors which influence the character and quality of one's language production. The analysis takes into consideration the scales for speaking assessment put forward by the Common European Framework (Council of Europe 2001).

Chapter II is intended to look into the theoretical assumptions behind some popular approaches to teaching speaking (Thornbury 2007). An attempt is made to identify the actual scope of interest within the field of teaching speaking, particularly the general problems, goals and contents of speaking instruction at the advanced level of language proficiency. Task-based teaching and genre-based approach are given special emphasis as potentially most effective in teaching speaking to advanced students of language departments. Next, the notions of communication, discourse and interaction are examined (Dakowska 2001) and the complex relationships between them are discussed with regard to different psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic and didactic perspectives. This discussion serves as an introduction to the next subchapters which focus on educational discourse, types of tasks and interaction in the language classroom and the problems of authenticity in language learning and classroom communication (van Lier 1996).

The final theoretical section, chapter III, is devoted to individual differences in teaching and learning a foreign language (Dörnyei and Ryan 2015, Pawlak 2017). As the scope of interest within the field is vast, only some individual factors were analysed, namely those which are considered to be most directly linked to learning how to speak and communicate with others in a foreign language in the classroom and beyond, that is personality, motivation and willingness to communicate. Each of them is discussed with speaking skill development and advanced language students' needs and capabilities in view. As far as personality is concerned, the level of extraversion, language anxiety, self-esteem and risk taking are given particular attention as they are believed to influence individual speaking development in the most direct way. Motivation, perhaps the most widely discussed traditional individual difference, is interpreted in an untraditional way – as a dynamic and complex phenomenon in the process of constant change. Finally, the construct of willingness to communicate is explored in the light of selected literature, new developments in the field and the rich body of research.

The empirical part of the book starts in chapter IV with an introduction to the research project. The introduction contains general and detailed research questions, the rationale for the study and the presentation of research techniques used in the project. It also provides the characteristics of the research group in which general information about the participants is followed by the results of several self-assessment procedures taken by them in regard to different aspects of their speaking ability.

Chapter V concentrates on an analysis of the collected data. The results of five questionnaires concerning selected individual differences (language anxiety, personality factors, motivation) and perceptions of the learning process (in regard to speaking) among the students are presented and discussed. The following subchapters

offer similar reports which give an insight into the findings of observation and individual semi-structured interviews. Next, in an attempt of conveying a more detailed picture of individual dispositions, problems and attitudes, individual profiles of 15 respondents are presented. Finally, the answers to the research questions are intended to sum up the findings and open up a space for conclusions in the last chapter.

Thus, chapter VI contains the concluding remarks and implications for teaching. It also presents the model of teaching speaking to advanced students of modern language departments which is intended to integrate task-based and genre-based approaches. The last subchapter of the monograph specifies the directions for further research.

