

5 Using Posters to Promote Speaking

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1 INTRODUCTION

This study is about public speech and how to develop this skill in learners using posters. Much has been written about how to teach L2 speaking, but this tends to focus on interactive activities in small groups. Similarly, our Basic Education curriculum promotes speaking, but learners are rarely required to speak in front of the whole class. As a result, our learners are not developing the ability to speak to an audience clearly and with confidence. The purpose of this study is to explore how posters can be used with Grade 1 learners to begin to develop in them public speaking skills in English.

2 TEACHING SPEAKING

2.1 Speaking

Cameron (2001:40) says that “Speaking is the active use of language to express meanings so that other people can make sense of them.” Bygate (1987) and Thornbury (2005) in their definitions highlight the interactive nature of speech; managing this interaction is an important skill for L2 learners to develop. In terms of the process of speaking, Levelt (cited by Scovel, 1998 and Bygate, 2001) identifies four processes of speaking: conceptualisation, formulation, articulation and self-monitoring. This means that if a person wants to speak, at first they try to conceptualize what they remember and think to form an idea. Then they form it into words and sentences. After that they translate it into sounds and syllables and start speaking. Finally, they adjust what they are saying while speaking by identifying and correcting any mistakes (Bygate, 2001).

Other concepts which are commonly discussed in relation to speaking are fluency, accuracy and complexity. According to Thornbury (2000), speaking fluency involves linking words together without stopping. On the other hand, accuracy is

“using the language correctly relative to the target form” (Cameron, 2001:194). It is important in terms of communicating between people. For example, speakers need to use the grammar correctly and to produce the sounds of words precisely. Complexity is the ability to use a range of strategies for linking words and sentences together; it also involves being able to express the same idea in a number of different ways.

A final distinction that is relevant to this study is that between spontaneous speech and scripted speech. Public speaking relates to the second of these as speakers normally plan what they are going to say, as opposed to most normal spoken conversations where there is no element of planning.

Much has been written about how to teach speaking. Current thinking stresses the importance of creating for learners meaningful opportunities to speak English. Many communicative speaking activities exist, such as role play, group discussion, games, problem solving, information gap activities and guessing activities (Littlewood, 1981; Scott & Ytreberg, 1990; Harmer, 2001). In this study the technique I will explore is using posters as the basis of public speaking in class.

2.2 Children’s Characteristics

Pedagogical decisions need to take into account the characteristics of the learners. Children have a number of characteristics which teachers of English need to keep in mind, and this applies too of course when we are planning to set up activities which promote public speaking. Firstly, children have a desire to talk and move (Scott & Ytreberg, 1990). Second, they learn by having fun (Halliwell, 1992). A third characteristic is that children get bored quickly (Harmer, 2001). Another characteristic of children is that they can learn through all their senses (Moon, 2001).

2.3 Posters

Posters are recommended in English for Me (the Basic Education English textbook) as an activity children can do individually or in groups. Here I modify this idea and use it to promote public speaking. I designed some posters of my own for this study and in doing so paid attention to particular criteria. For instance, an article called ‘Tips for poster design’ (n.d) indicates that the poster should be simple and not have too much detail. Also the colours are very important, because colourful posters interest children (Cameron, 2001). I give more information about the posters used in this study later on.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Questions

The main question for this study was ‘How can I help my English For Me (EFM) Grade 1 learners to develop speaking while using posters?’ I divided this main question into three sub-questions:

- 1- Do my learners show confidence in speaking while using posters?
- 2- Do my learners develop more accuracy in speaking while using posters?
- 3- Which poster seems to help learners most and why?

3.2 Participants

My research was conducted with EFM Grade 1 learners, who were aged between six and seven. For most learners this was their first year of learning English and there were 30 learners in the class. The school was located in a modern town situated between the beach and the mountains. Most of them were good at listening but they did not have opportunities to use English outside the classroom and for this reason their spoken English was not good. Six focal learners from this class were chosen to participate in this study, three boys and three girls. I chose them to reflect a range of abilities in English – two were good, two average and two weak.

3.3 Data Collection

3.3.1 *The Posters*

I selected four topics from four units from English for Me 1B and created a poster for each. The first poster was about unit 1 which talks about animals. The second was for unit 2, which is about toys. The third was based on unit 4, where the topic was home. The fourth was for unit 5, which was about food. Each poster required the learners to do a task of some kind. For example, for poster 1, the learners had to stick body parts on the poster to form an animal, then they had to describe their animal to the rest of the group – e.g. ‘This is a cat. It is yellow. It’s got two ears, a yellow body, four legs and a big tail’. In poster 4, the learners had to stick on the poster pictures of food they like then talk about this by producing sentences such as “I ate two bananas, a carrot and three apples”.

3.3.2 *Observations*

I observed the focal participants while they were working with the posters (this took place over a period of six days during which the learners worked on the posters for the first 10 minutes of each lesson). Observation is “difficult and complex” (Simpson & Tuson, 2003:3) and to facilitate the process I prepared an observation sheet on which I recorded my reactions (see Appendix). There were three criteria on this sheet: enthusiasm (did the learners smile while using posters?); confident speech (did they speak loud and clearly?); the final criterion was positive body language (did they stand straight with their shoulders back?). I assessed all six learners against these criteria on each of the four posters. There were three possible ratings for each criterion: a happy face, meaning ‘yes’ a neutral face, meaning ‘partially’, and an unhappy face, meaning ‘no’.

3.3.3 *Audio Recording*

I recorded the learners as they worked on the speaking tasks for each poster then transcribed what they said. I used this transcription to evaluate learners’ speech against five criteria: accurate pronunciation, accurate grammar, completed sentences, fluency, and complexity. The scale used in assessing these criteria ranged from 5 (‘excellent’) to 1 (‘poor’).

3.3.4 Interviews

Interviews are a useful strategy for finding out what individuals feel and prefer (Cohen et al., 2000). I interviewed the learners in Arabic to make it easier for them to express their opinions. The interviews were done individually, as soon as possible after each poster was used. I asked the learners a similar set of questions for each poster:

- What is this poster about?
- How did you feel when you saw this poster the first time?
- What did you learn from this poster?
- What words did you learn from this poster?
- Do you like to speak publicly? Why?
- How do you feel when you speak publicly?
- How do you like to speak – in pairs or publicly? Why?

I did not audio record the learners' answers but wrote them down word for word, then translated them into English.

4 FINDINGS

4.1 Learner Confidence

As explained above, I assessed each learner on each poster and made a note of my observations on a sheet using smiley faces. I then converted these into numbers – 3 for a happy face, 2 for a neutral face and 1 for an unhappy face. Table 1 summarizes the results of this analysis in relation to learners' enthusiasm. It also includes a mean overall rating for each poster.

Table 1: Observed enthusiasm in six learners using four posters

Poster	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	Mean
1	3	3	3	3	3	3	3.0
2	3	2	2	3	3	3	2.7
3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3.0
4	3	3	3	3	3	2	2.8

This table shows that enthusiasm was overall quite high; poster 2 was the one where it was lowest. Table 2 presents the results of this analysis in relation to learners' confidence in speaking.

Table 2: Observed confidence in speaking in six learners using four posters

Poster	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	Mean
1	3	2	2	2	2	2	2.2
2	3	2	3	2	2	2	2.3
3	3	2	2	3	3	2	2.5
4	3	3	3	3	2	2	2.7

Here too the results were quite positive overall (remembering that a score of 3 means that the learners spoke confidently). Poster 1 was that on which learners seemed least confident. Table 3 presents the results of the observations in relation to learners' body language. Poster 1 was that where body language was least positive, though overall, again, body language across the four posters was seen to be positive.

Table 3: Observed positive body language in six learners using four posters

Poster	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	Mean
1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2.0
2	3	2	3	2	2	1	2.2
3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3.0
4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3.0

This analysis suggests, then, that while working on the poster activities, learners were generally enthusiastic, spoke confidently and displayed positive body language. Learners' positive responses to the posters were confirmed in the interviews.

4.2 Oral Accuracy

Figure 1 summarizes the analysis of the accuracy of learners' speech during the poster activities and as shown during the transcribed recordings. As explained earlier, learners' speech was assessed against three accuracy-related criteria on each poster using a five-point scale on which 5 is excellent and 1 poor. The figure shows the mean score (out of 5) for each criterion on each poster.

These results indicate that while pronunciation was generally high throughout the four posters, there were initial problems with grammar and producing completed sentences; the latter improved steadily from the second poster onwards while grammatical accuracy was high in the final two posters.

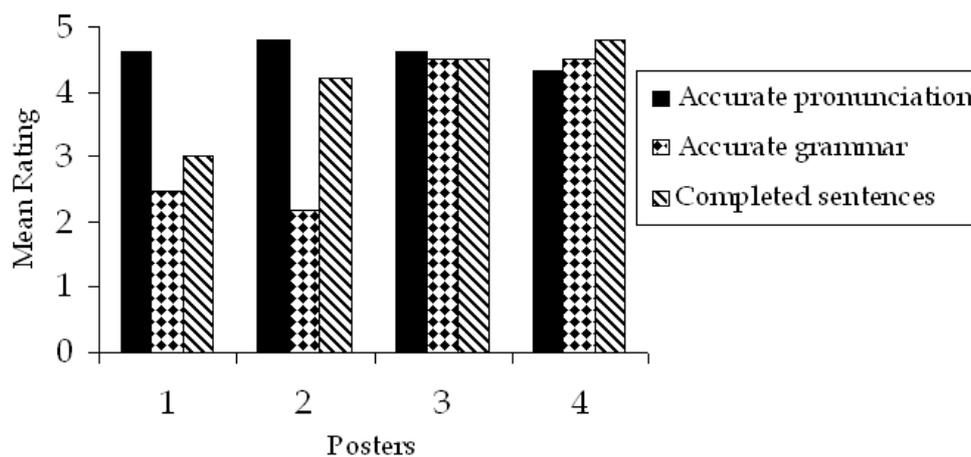


Figure 1: Oral accuracy in four poster tasks

Overall, if we look at the three accuracy criteria together over the four posters, an upwards trend can be noticed; the overall mean for the three criteria on poster 1 was 3.4, for poster 2 it was 3.8 and for posters 3 and 4 it was 4.5.

4.3 Most Beneficial Poster

At the end of the study I interviewed the six learners to ask them about the posters that helped them to speak most. Table 4 summarizes their answers to the various questions I asked. The numbers refer to the four posters. Although I wanted the learners to nominate one poster for each question the first learner mentioned them all for the first three questions and two of them for the final question.

Table 4: Learners' attitudes towards four posters

Questions	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6
Which poster helped you to speak most?	1,2,3,4	3	4	4	1	3
What was most the beautiful poster for you?	1,2,3,4	4	3	3	4	3
Which poster did you admire most?	1,2,3,4	4	4	1	2	2
Which was the easiest poster for you?	1,3	4	1	2	4	2

These results support those which can be inferred from earlier tables. Posters 3 and 4 seemed to be those that the learners responded best too, while Poster 2 was the one the learners had least positive attitudes towards.

5 DISCUSSION

Reilly (2007) says that posters are essential in teaching EFL. In my research, the posters gave my learners more opportunity to practise speaking English. All of them had the chance to speak publicly four times. Therefore, these regular opportunities for practice may have supported the development of their confidence.

The results showed that learners' confidence and accuracy generally increased across the tasks they did. I cannot conclude that it was the poster work that made the learners more confident and accurate (differences in the topic and language in each task may have affected how learners responded) but the activities clearly did push the learners to participate confidently and to produce accurate language.

In addition, this research also illustrates how learning activities which take into account the characteristics of children can be beneficial with young learners. The various activities the learners had to do while working on the posters appealed to a number of their natural instincts. The activities were fun, the posters were colourful, there were opportunities for movement and to do hands-on activities. These characteristics must at least partly explain learners' positive responses.

The nature of the posters themselves was also an important factor here. The ones I used were big, colourful, and required pupils to stick things on them, touch, play and make choices. Learners may not respond so well to posters which are unattractive and which do not stimulate activity.

Overall, this study supports my belief that posters can contribute to helping young learners become more confident and more accurate speakers of English.

5.1 Limitations

As with all research, there are some limitations to consider in interpreting the results presented here. One is that I cannot claim that there is a direct causal relationship between using posters and improved accuracy and confidence in speaking. Clearly, learners' accuracy did improve as they worked through the first posters, but this may have been a reflection of the activities themselves (i.e. the activities in Poster 4 may have been easier than those in Poster 1). A more objective and standardized way of measuring accuracy across tasks is thus needed. Also, assessments of learners' confidence were based on my judgements of how they felt in the classroom. These judgements may not have been consistent; I was teaching whilst I was trying to observe the learners and this may have also affected my assessment of how confident and enthusiastic they were. Finally, while I had planned to examine the fluency and complexity of their speech too, I only focused on accuracy.

6 CONCLUSION

This study gave me the opportunity to explore how a pedagogical technique I was interested in could support the development of learners' speaking. The results here give me confidence to consider using posters to support oral work; I believe with regular opportunities to speak to larger groups or the whole class learners will become more confident and accurate speakers of English. Thus posters can help teachers address one of the main aims of the Basic Education curriculum for English, which is to develop learners' oral skills.

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APPENDIX: OBSERVATION SHEET

😊Yes

😐Partially

☹No

CRITERIA	😊	😐	☹	TOTAL
Enthusiasm				
Confident Speech				
Positive Body Language				
Total in each column				