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IMPROVING SPEAKING FLUENCY AMONG B2-LEVEL LEARNERS THROUGH COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING:A FOCUS ON TIMED SPEAKING ACTIVITIES

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ABSTRACT

Fluency is one of the most visible signs of speaking ability, yet many learners who have reached the B2 level still stop, restart, and search for words when they have to speak without preparation. Their grammar and vocabulary may be sufficient for the task, but the speed at which they can use this knowledge is not. This article proposes a communicative approach to developing speaking fluency among B2-level English learners through timed speaking activities. It presents an 80-minute lesson consisting of three stages: pre-communicative listening and noticing, communicative countdown rounds, and post-communicative reflection and feedback. In the main stage, learners repeat the same talk to different partners within shrinking time limits, so that the time pressure encourages them to speak more smoothly while the communicative purpose keeps the interaction meaningful. The article draws on research on fluency development and repetition-based speaking tasks to provide a theoretical basis for the proposed lesson.

Keywords

speaking fluency, B2 learners, timed speaking activities, 4/3/2 technique, Communicative Language Teaching.

1. Introduction

Imagine a B2 learner who knows the word she needs, can build the correct sentence, and understands the question perfectly. Yet when her partner looks at her and waits, she pauses, starts again, and finally says something shorter and simpler than she intended. The knowledge is there, but the clock is faster. This situation is

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very common in English classrooms, and it shows that being accurate on paper and being fluent in real conversation are two different skills.

Fluency matters because listeners judge speakers not only by what they say but also by how smoothly they say it. Long silences, frequent restarts, and unfinished sentences can make a speaker sound less confident, even when the ideas are good. As a result, learners may avoid speaking in class or give very short answers to stay safe.

Although B2 learners can generally take part in conversations on familiar and abstract topics, many of them still need to develop the speed and ease with which they produce language. One practical way to do this is to give learners speaking tasks with clear time limits. When time is limited, learners have less opportunity to plan every word and must rely on the language they already know.

The aim of this article is to propose a Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) lesson designed to improve speaking fluency among B2-level learners through timed speaking activities. The lesson consists of three stages: listening and noticing, countdown speaking rounds, and reflection with feedback.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Speaking Fluency and the B2 Learner

Fluency is not a single skill. Segalowitz (2010) distinguishes between the speaker's underlying cognitive ability to produce language efficiently, the observable features of speech such as speed, pauses, and repairs, and the impression that listeners form about the speaker. For classroom teaching, this means that fluency can be noticed, discussed, and practised, rather than treated as a natural talent that some learners have and others do not.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2020) describes B2 speakers as people who can interact with a degree of spontaneity and ease. This description suggests that B2 lessons should provide opportunities for learners to speak at length and respond without long preparation. Fluency practice should therefore be a regular part of the lesson rather than an occasional extra.

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It is also important to separate fluency from accuracy. During a fluency activity the main goal is to keep communication moving. If the teacher corrects every mistake immediately, learners may become cautious and start monitoring every word, which slows their speech even more. For this reason, error correction in fluency tasks is best delayed until the activity is over.

2.2. Timed Speaking and the 4/3/2 Technique

One well-known way of developing fluency is the 4/3/2 technique, first described by Maurice (1983). In this activity, learners speak on the same topic three times, each time to a new listener and each time with less time: four minutes, then three, and then two. Nation (1989) discussed this technique as a way of improving speaking fluency and reported that learners tended to speak faster and hesitate less in the repeated talks. The idea behind the technique is simple. In the first round, learners are busy deciding what to say. In the second round, the ideas are already familiar, so more attention can be given to choosing words and building sentences. By the third round, learners can deliver the same message in a shorter time, with fewer pauses. Arevart and Nation (1991) found that learners' fluency improved over a series of such activities, and De Jong and Perfetti (2011) reported that repeating the same speech helped learners use language more automatically.

Two features make this technique attractive for B2 learners. First, the repeated topic reduces the pressure of finding new ideas, so learners can concentrate on speaking smoothly. Second, a new partner in each round gives the speaker a real reason to repeat the message, which makes the repetition feel more natural than a drill.

2.3. Communicative Language Teaching and Time Pressure

Communicative Language Teaching is an approach that places meaningful communication at the centre of language learning. Learners use English to share information, give opinions, and respond to other people, rather than repeating sentences for their own sake.

Timed speaking activities fit well into this approach if the time limit is combined with a real communicative purpose. A countdown on its own can feel

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stressful, but a countdown that helps learners compete with their own earlier performance can be motivating. In the proposed lesson, learners therefore do not compete with each other. Their only task is to deliver the same message more smoothly each time.

3. Lesson Design

The proposed lesson is designed for B2-level English learners and lasts 80 minutes. Its main objective is to help learners speak with fewer long pauses and to keep talking even when they cannot remember a word.

By the end of the lesson, learners should be able to:

1. Recognize features of fluent and hesitant speech in short spoken extracts.
2. Use simple strategies, such as paraphrasing and linking phrases, to continue speaking when language is difficult.
3. Deliver the same talk to different partners in a shorter time and with fewer pauses.
4. Reflect on their own speaking and set a goal for further practice.

The lesson contains three stages: pre-communicative, communicative, and post-communicative practice.

3.1. Stage One: Listening and Noticing (15 Minutes)

Aim: To help learners notice what makes speech sound fluent and to prepare them for the main task.

The teacher begins by playing or reading two short answers to the same question, for example: “Describe a place where you like to spend free time.” In the first answer, the speaker hesitates, repeats words, and stops often. In the second, the speaker keeps going, uses linking phrases, and paraphrases when a word is missing. Learners listen twice and discuss which speaker sounded more confident and why.

The teacher then introduces a short list of “keep-going” phrases that learners can use instead of silence:

- “What I mean is…”
- “Let me put it another way…”

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- "The thing is…"

Learners are told that during the main activity pauses are natural, but long silences should be replaced with these phrases. This stage gives them useful language and a clear picture of the goal before they start speaking.

3.2. Stage Two: Countdown Rounds (45 Minutes)

Aim: To encourage learners to speak more smoothly through repeated, time-limited talks.

Activity A: Three-Two-One (20 minutes). Learners work in pairs. Each learner chooses one topic card, such as "A skill I would like to learn and why" or "The most useful thing I own." Learner A speaks for three minutes while Learner B listens and does not interrupt. Then the pairs change, and Learner A gives the same talk to a new partner in two minutes. Finally, the pairs change again, and the talk is given in one minute. After that, the roles are reversed, so that every learner has the chance to speak.

The teacher explains that the content should stay the same but the delivery should become tighter. Learners are encouraged to keep the best ideas and cut the less important details as the time becomes shorter.

Activity B: Speed-Chat Circle (15 minutes). Learners form an inner and an outer circle and face a partner. The teacher gives a question, for example "What would you change about your city?", and each learner has 45 seconds to answer. When the teacher says "Change!", the outer circle moves one place, and a new question is given. The quick change of partners and the short time limit keep learners alert and prevent them from over-preparing.

Activity C: Free Conversation (10 minutes). Learners return to their original partners and talk freely about one of the topics for ten minutes without a time limit per turn. The teacher notes how learners now manage longer turns.

During all three activities, the teacher monitors and makes notes of common problems, such as frequent restarts, but does not interrupt. Feedback is given afterwards, in Stage Three.

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This stage reflects the communicative principles of CLT because learners exchange real opinions and experiences with different partners. The time limit works as a tool that supports fluency, not as a test.

3.3. Stage Three: Reflection and Feedback (20 Minutes)

Aim: To help learners evaluate their fluency and set a personal goal.

First, learners use their phones to record a one-minute version of their talk. They listen to the recording and complete a short self-check card with three questions:

1. Did I keep speaking without long silences?
2. Did I use at least one "keep-going" phrase?
3. What is one thing I will try to do better next time?

Then learners share their answers with a partner. The teacher gives whole-class feedback based on the notes made during Stage Two. Three or four typical language errors are written on the board anonymously, and the class corrects them together. In this way, accuracy is not ignored, but it is addressed after the fluency work has been completed. The lesson ends with a short summary and a homework task: learners record a one-minute talk on a topic of their choice and try to speak without stopping. The recordings are used by learners for self-monitoring. They should not be treated as evidence of measurable improvement unless they are evaluated in a systematic way.

4. Expected Outcomes and Teaching Implications

The proposed lesson may help B2 learners speak with greater ease and become more comfortable with the pressure of real-time conversation. Because the same message is repeated, learners can notice how their speech becomes smoother from one round to the next. This visible progress may also increase their confidence and willingness to speak.

The lesson can be adapted to other levels and topics. Teachers may change the time limits, use different topic cards, or combine the rounds with other skills, such as note-taking or summarizing. However, the effectiveness of the lesson has to be tested in a real classroom, for example by comparing the number of words learners produce per minute and the number of long pauses before and after a series of lessons.

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5. Conclusion

Developing speaking fluency is important for B2-level learners who want to communicate confidently in English. Although learners at this level may have enough vocabulary and grammatical knowledge, they may still need regular practice in using this knowledge quickly and smoothly.

This article has proposed an 80-minute CLT-based lesson consisting of listening and noticing, countdown speaking rounds, and reflection with feedback. The activities are designed to help learners recognize what fluent speech sounds like and practise delivering the same message more smoothly within shorter time limits.

The proposed lesson connects timed practice with meaningful communication and encourages learners to reflect on their own progress. Although classroom implementation and further assessment are necessary to determine its effectiveness, the lesson provides a practical framework for developing speaking fluency among B2-level learners.

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