EVOLUTION OF TEACHING SPEAKING: FROM AUDIO-LINGUAL TO MODERN COMMUNICATIVE APPROACHES

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Abstract: The teaching of speaking has experienced significant evolution over the past century, reflecting broader developments in linguistics, psychology, pedagogy, and sociocultural perspectives. Early approaches, such as the Audio-Lingual Method, emphasized repetition, memorization, and pattern drills based on behaviorist theories, prioritizing accuracy and habit formation over meaningful communication. Limitations of these approaches, including lack of authentic interaction and constrained learner creativity, led to the emergence of communicative and post-communicative methodologies that emphasize functional language use, interaction, and learner-centered instruction. Modern approaches, including Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), and technology-enhanced language learning, integrate fluency, pragmatics, intercultural competence, and multimodal communication into speaking instruction. The evolution reflects a shift from teacher-centered, form-focused pedagogy to learner-centered, meaning-focused instruction, where authentic communication, negotiation of meaning, and reflective practice are central. Understanding this trajectory highlights the interplay of theory, methodology, and technology in shaping effective speaking pedagogy and informs contemporary practices for developing communicative competence in learners.

Keywords: teaching speaking; audio-lingual method; communicative language teaching; task-based learning; second-language pedagogy; spoken interaction; language acquisition

The teaching of speaking in second- and foreign-language classrooms has undergone profound transformation over the past century, shaped by shifts in linguistic theory, psychology, pedagogy, and sociocultural understandings of communication. Early structured approaches such as the Audio-Lingual Method were founded on behaviorist learning theories, which viewed language acquisition as habit formation achieved through repetition, reinforcement, and controlled practice. Within this paradigm, spoken language was taught through pattern drills, mimicry, memorization, substitution exercises, and dialogue recitation designed to instill grammatical structures as automatic responses [5, 85].

The spoken output students produced was expected to be accurate, structurally controlled, and largely predetermined. Fluency was subordinate to correctness, and creativity in language use was discouraged, as spontaneous production was believed to risk the formation of "bad habits." Pronunciation was emphasized through phonetic training, intonation drilling, and choral repetition, while meaning was generally secondary to form. Teachers dominated classroom interaction, acting as models of correct speech, sources of input, and evaluators of learner output; students mostly listened, repeated, and responded to highly controlled prompts.

Although this method allowed learners to internalize certain patterns efficiently, it offered limited opportunities for authentic communication or meaningful interaction. Over time, the limitations of this method became evident: learners drilled extensively but struggled to use language spontaneously in real contexts [2, 124].

Additionally, developments in linguistics—particularly the shift from structuralism to functional and generative theories—challenged the notion that language is mainly a set of habits. Psycholinguistic research also showed that learning involves cognitive processes such as hypothesis testing, pattern recognition, and strategic thinking rather than mere repetition. As globalization increased the need for communicative competence, educators recognized that successful speakers must negotiate meaning, express personal opinions, manage turn-taking, and adapt their speech to different contexts, all of which required moving beyond mechanical drilling. Thus emerged a new era of methodologies that reconceptualized language as a tool for expressing meaning, performing functions, and interacting within social contexts. This shift signaled the beginning of the communicative turn, a movement that redefined the goals of language education and placed authentic speaking at the center of instruction.

As dissatisfaction with purely structural methods grew, communicative language teaching approaches developed to address the need for functional, meaningful, and context-driven speaking skills. The Communicative Approach argued that the primary purpose of language is communication, not the mastery of isolated structures, and therefore learners must be trained to use language purposefully in real situations.

Speaking instruction became focused on engaging learners in communicative tasks such as information gap activities, role plays, simulations, interviews, debates, problem-solving tasks, and collaborative projects. Instead of repeating predetermined sentences, students were encouraged to express their own ideas, negotiate meaning, ask questions, and respond to authentic communicative demands. This required a deeper understanding of communicative competence, which involves not only grammatical knowledge but also the ability to use language appropriately in different social contexts, manage discourse, and employ strategies such as paraphrasing or asking for clarification [6, 154].

Errors, once regarded as negative habits, were now understood as natural evidence of interlanguage development; learners were encouraged to take risks, experiment with language, and prioritize fluency in early stages. Teachers shifted from authoritarian models to facilitators, guiding interaction, providing input, and creating an environment in which learners could use language creatively. Authentic materials such as interviews, broadcasts, conversations, videos, and realia entered the classroom to expose learners to natural patterns of spoken discourse. This movement was reinforced by theories of second-language acquisition that emphasized the importance of comprehensible input, interaction, and output.

More recent research highlighted the role of negotiation of meaning, noticing, and task-based learning, prompting the development of task-based language teaching, which prioritizes real-world tasks and communication outcomes. Speaking became increasingly integrated with listening and other skills, reflecting the holistic nature of real communication. Technology, too, played an important role as language laboratories evolved into multimedia platforms offering audio-visual resources, and later into digital learning environments that enabled video conferencing, online speaking exchanges, and interactive simulations. This technological evolution further broadened opportunities for authentic and semi-authentic communication beyond the classroom.

Additionally, pronunciation instruction shifted from segmental accuracy to suprasegmental features such as stress, rhythm, and intonation, recognizing their importance for intelligibility. Meanwhile, sociocultural theories emphasized the importance of social interaction and cultural context, leading to approaches that integrated cultural awareness, discourse competence, and

pragmatic competence into speaking instruction. The classroom became a space where learners engaged in meaningful dialogue, learned to interpret communicative norms, and practiced using language for purposes such as persuading, narrating, explaining, negotiating, and clarifying. Throughout this period, pedagogical frameworks expanded to include strategies for cooperative learning, learner autonomy, project-based learning, and reflective practice, marking a departure from rigid teacher-centered models to dynamic learner-centered environments that view speaking as a complex, multidimensional skill [4, 471].

In the modern era, communicative language teaching has continued to evolve, enriched by insights from corpus linguistics, cognitive psychology, sociocultural theory, discourse analysis, multimodal communication studies, and educational technology. Today's approaches to teaching speaking emphasize authenticity, interaction, personalization, intercultural competence, and digital literacy. Learners are expected to participate in communicative tasks that reflect the complexity of real-world discourse, including academic presentations, workplace communication, online collaboration, media production, intercultural dialogue, and problem-solving communication [1, 45].

Task-based learning has become a prominent model for structuring speaking lessons, focusing on pre-task preparation, meaningful task performance, and post-task reflection that promotes linguistic noticing and refinement. In multimodal communication environments, speaking instruction integrates verbal, visual, gestural, and digital modalities, reflecting the realities of contemporary communication. Technology now plays a transformative role: video-conferencing platforms enable interactions with international peers; speech recognition tools provide immediate feedback on pronunciation and fluency; virtual simulations and role-play environments create immersive communicative contexts; and artificial intelligence-assisted speaking tutors support individualized practice. Digital storytelling, podcasting, collaborative video projects, and social-media-based tasks empower learners to produce meaningful spoken content that reaches real audiences, increasing motivation and relevance.

At the same time, modern pedagogy emphasizes inclusivity, learner agency, and differentiated instruction, recognizing that learners possess diverse linguistic biographies, learning preferences, and affective needs. Speaking instruction addresses not only linguistic competence but also confidence, anxiety reduction, collaborative skills, and communicative strategies. Contemporary frameworks incorporate principles of translanguaging, allowing learners to draw on all their linguistic resources to support meaning-making and gradually transition to fuller target-language use.

Pragmatic competence—knowing how to use language appropriately in different cultural and situational contexts—has become a major focus, as global communication requires sensitivity to politeness norms, discourse conventions, humor, indirectness, and nonverbal communication. Furthermore, modern teaching emphasizes reflective practice: students analyze recordings of their speech, evaluate their strengths, set communicative goals, and monitor progress. Teachers design assessments that measure not only accuracy but also fluency, interactional skills, discourse organization, and pragmatic awareness [7, 467].

Modern methodologies thus reflect a balanced, holistic approach that values both form and meaning, accuracy and fluency, structure and creativity. The evolution from Audio-Lingual drilling to communicative and post-communicative approaches illustrates a broader movement in language education toward learner-centeredness, authenticity, and intercultural competence. The history of

speaking instruction is ultimately a story of increasing recognition that language is a dynamic, social, purposeful activity; that learners are active agents capable of constructing knowledge; and that meaningful communication, supported by thoughtful pedagogy and appropriate technology, is the most powerful engine of language development [3, 62].

As the field continues to evolve, future approaches will likely integrate even more sophisticated uses of technology, incorporate deeper intercultural dimensions, and emphasize communication as a collaborative, multimodal, and socially embedded practice. The trajectory of speaking pedagogy reflects a clear pattern: moving away from mechanical repetition toward interactional, cognitive, and experiential learning that prepares learners to participate confidently and competently in a globally interconnected world.

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