

Teaching Speaking: A Holistic Approach

Christine C. M. Goh and Anne Burns

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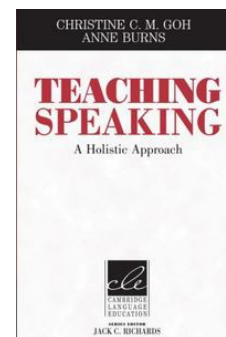
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There is an agreement in the literature that speaking is the most important and rewarding aspect of language learning (Hall & Austin, 2004; Nunan, 1991). However, speaking is regarded as a neglected skill in foreign language education (Ur, 1996), in that most English classes fail to improve learners' speaking skills. There are a number of factors that cause this problem, one of which is probably a gap in the recent literature with regard to an effective approach to teaching speaking with a flexible nature that can be adapted in different contexts.

This gap is the main concern of Goh and Burns' book, *Teaching Speaking: A holistic approach*. The book comprises twelve chapters, which are organised in four parts: a) speaking processes and skills (Chapters 1, 2 and 3), b) spoken discourse (Chapters 4 and 5), c) designs and approaches (Chapters 6, 7 and 8), d) classroom practices and processes (Chapters 9, 10, 11, and 12). In the first chapter, the authors introduce some important concepts and discuss relevant approaches to speaking and language acquisition with particular emphasis on Swain's output hypothesis. They underline the importance of "negotiation for meaning" and "input-feedback-modified output" in oral interaction.

In Chapter 2, Goh and Burns base their discussion of the cognitive processes in speaking on Levelt's (1989) model of speech processing and introduce three key features of learners' speech: "fluency," "accuracy," and "complexity." This chapter provides information that will be useful for teachers in focusing on the process rather than the product of learners' speech. Chapter 3 deals with describing "speaking competence," in which the authors introduce a model of second language speaking competence that addresses the concept of "communicative competence."

In Chapter 4, the authors describe the spoken language in detail through explaining the differences and similarities between the spoken and written language. These sections include useful examples to understand the difference between spoken and written language.

Chapter 5 deals with the spoken language from a broader perspective and introduces discourse features in speech. The authors focus on "adjacency pairs," "turn taking," "topic and interaction management," and "discourse strategies." For each feature, sample dialogues are provided, which makes it easier for readers to understand their functions. In the final part, the authors explain how corpus linguistics contributes to our understanding of written and spoken language. This part is important as it introduces a new concept in the field which is likely to be one of the concerns of ELT research in future.

Part 2 provides more practical information that can be useful in designing speaking classes. In Chapter 6, the authors propose a methodological framework that has four dimensions which are illustrated as triangles (p. 141): "fluency, accuracy, and complexity," "components of speaking," "metacognition," and "classroom methods." In addition to these dimensions, this framework also illustrates the relationship between learners, teachers, and materials.

Chapter 7 introduces a model for teaching speaking: “the teaching-speaking cycle.” This model mainly concerns preparing students for the tasks, providing tutoring before and after the task, asking students to repeat the tasks, and encouraging them to self-regulate their learning.

Chapter 8 is a useful resource for teachers who plan and develop speaking programs as it presents a detailed outline of issues to consider in planning a speaking course. The authors offer some frameworks to collect information about learners’ perceived needs in speaking, which can be used as a starting point of planning a speaking program. The final part of this chapter is a short introduction of outcomes in which general information is provided about the role of assessment and evaluation in speaking programs.

Part 4 deals with classroom practices and processes. In Chapter 9, the authors introduce different types of speaking tasks such as “communication-gap,” “discussion,” and “monologic” tasks through providing a sample classroom procedure for each task. The teachers will find these sections very useful as they provide comprehensive information on how to design speaking tasks. After that, the authors discuss how to organise pair and group work and introduce some techniques for forming students into pairs and groups.

Chapter 10 concerns how to enhance learners’ speaking performance. The authors build their discussion on developing learners’ language and discourse awareness. The final section deals the function of task repetition and provides information on how to use task repetition to facilitate student performance in speaking tasks.

In Chapter 11, Goh and Burns revisit the issue of “raising metacognitive awareness,” which is one of the major concerns of their approach. The authors explain how metacognition influences student participation and performances in speaking tasks and introduce discourse and communication strategies as a means to foster learners’ self-regulation. Sample procedures are displayed which can be used in speaking classes to raise students’ metacognitive awareness before and after a speaking task. Teachers will probably find these templates and checklists very useful.

The final chapter of the book is assessing speaking. This chapter offers a practical overview of issues to consider in planning and conducting assessment procedures in speaking classes by introducing tasks and activities for conducting classroom-based assessment such as individual, paired, and group interviews. The final part of this chapter presents some scales that can be used to rate and score student performance.

Overall, this book contributes to the knowledge of teaching speaking and is an important resource for teachers and teacher educators. The book offers some sample classroom procedures, tasks, scales, and frameworks that can be adapted in different contexts. The approach presented in the book is mainly based on the fact that learners’ active participation in speaking classes might not lead to the development of speaking ability. Instead, teaching of speaking requires developing learners’ metacognitive awareness, which will allow them to manage their learning through building awareness of themselves.

Given that “self-regulation is one of the most exciting developments in second or foreign language learning” (Oxford, 2011, p. 7), Goh and Burns’ holistic approach is important in terms of building an awareness on how to incorporate self-regulation into the teaching of speaking. Their approach goes beyond the teaching of speaking and refers to the issue of how to promote learners’ self-awareness in speaking classes. In doing so, throughout the book, the authors underline the importance of modified-output by referring to the critical roles of teachers in facilitating practice and learning through providing input and feedback. Their model of the teaching speaking cycle concerns how to assist learners to build learners’ self-awareness, which could enable them to take control of their own learning. To reveal the impacts of new concepts introduced in this book on developing learners’ self-awareness and speaking skills, it is needed

to conduct classroom-based research studies which will further our knowledge of teaching speaking.

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