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Թեմա՝ Situations as a Means of Developing Speaking Skills

Կատարող՝ Ամալյա Մինասյան

Ղեկավար՝ Օհաննա Ավետիսյան

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## Introduction

The utilizing of situation in classrooms is one of the teaching strategies deemed to be significant to address the issue of lack of proficiency level among graduates and also to enhance their communication skills. Situation can be an effective way to enhance speaking performance because it advocates natural method which recommends a process of learner discovery through trial and error.

Within this context, a situation intervention was used to help promote the development of students' speaking skills. situation may be situated in authentic settings where students are allowed the opportunity to acquire the intended learning outcomes by making mistakes in safe environments. In this way the ultimate goal achievement in acquiring language proficiency and fluency is well supported.

The **aim** of the research paper is to identify that using situations as a learning tool in English classroom is a good election to motivate students to think critically, communicate effectively and learn self-discipline.

The main **objectives** of the current study are:

- 1.to analyze the types and methods of speaking skills;
- 2.to use daily life situations as a speaking exercise;
- 3.to use "SITUATION's" potential to improve learners' speaking skills.

The aim and objectives of the research predetermine its structure.It comprises introduction,chapter 1,chapter 2 and conclusion.

**CHAPTER 1** presents the types of speaking skills,how to teach speaking skills and how to use situation as a speaking exercise.

**CHAPTER 2** mainly identifies situations for children and beginners.

## CHAPTER 1. SITUATION AS A SPEAKING EXERCISE

### 1.1 Teaching Speaking Skills

The process and the aim of language learning include acquiring the four language skills: listening, reading, speaking and writing. Henry Widdowson groups them into receptive and productive ones. According to Widdowson, reading and listening skills belong to receptive group, as they demand understanding and comprehending of the received material. Speaking and writing skills are called productive skills because they involve language production. While uttering sounds gives a chance to communicate orally, writing skills enable people to communicate in a written form.

In her “A course in language teaching” Penny Ur insists that among all the four skills, speaking seems intuitively the most important as people who know a language are generally referred to as ‘speakers’ of that language. (1996: 120) This statement comes to say if a person can use the language orally he is also supposed to have some listening, writing and reading skills as all these skills are closely connected. Although speaking is seemingly one of the most difficult skills the language learner might possess, many if not most foreign language learners are primarily interested in learning to speak rather than write, listen or read. For many language learners the ability to speak a foreign language is the same as knowing that language because for them speech is the basic means of communication with the native speakers or other language users.

Dakowska claims that speaking is now the most emphasised skill in the field of foreign language teaching, but unfortunately, it is also recognised as the most difficult one to develop in classroom conditions. (2005: 231) Students are constantly encouraged to use the target language during classes, but when the lesson is over, they have no possibility to use it in real communication. Of course, some learners seek the opportunity to speak their foreign language outside the classroom; however, most do not try to practise the target language at all. Certainly, one of the disadvantages of teaching English as a foreign language is that students cannot use the language in everyday speech. De facto, speaking a foreign language means being able to interact with people in authentic situations, not only during classroom controlled speaking activities. Therefore, teachers’ task to develop that skill is extremely

challenging and needs much time, as only by practice learners may succeed. In the majority of schools, however, communicative efficiency is still not a priority. In most classes, teachers fail to provide students with activities that would reflect genuine interaction. Students rarely talk to each other and rarely have the possibility to talk to a teacher as well (Gołębiowska, 1991: 9).

Now that we have discussed the importance and the place of speaking skill among the other skills, let us examine the complexity of the speaking process. It is clear that being able to communicate successfully in a foreign language demands not only practice but also the understanding of some linguistic elements, which are important for verbal interaction. First of all, the complexity of the speaking process is closely connected with the peculiar characteristic features of the language used by humans which make it so unique and different from the one used by animals. George Yule distinguishes six crucial attributes of human language. The first feature presented by the author is displacement. This trait allows users of a language to discuss events, people and things not present in the immediate environment. The second property is arbitrariness, which informs people that a relationship between a linguistic form and its meaning does not exist – it is entirely arbitrary. For example, deducing the meaning of a word “wardrobe” from only the form would be difficult for a novice of a second language learner. There are some onomatopoeic words that seem to retroflex the sounds they stand for, but they are relatively occasional. The next feature, productivity, informs us that the possibility to produce the potential number of utterances in any human language is infinite. Children are able to create new sentences they have hitherto never heard. What is more, people who find themselves in new situations can describe the new position, whilst animals cannot. The fourth characteristic of human language is discreteness, which points out that distinctions among sounds of a language are significant. To illustrate this phenomenon, the apparently small difference between the /p/ and /b/ sounds is meaningful when used in words like pig and big. The last but one quality of human language is duality. This property notifies that people’s language is organised at two levels. At one level, we are able to produce separate discrete sounds, like /i/, /p/ and /n/. At another, the mentioned sounds may be arranged into “nip”, but also into “pin”. Finally, cultural transmission informs us that while physical features such as face shape or the eye colour may

be inherited, a language cannot. Children are born with an innate capacity to acquire language, but they do not have a genetic predisposition to acquire a specific one.

Still, in the issue of communicative competence, the work of Harmer clarifies that if a person is able to speak a language it means that the speaker possesses the knowledge of the target language's features, and he or she has the ability to process information on the spot. The author indicates that language's features refer to linguistic competence and comprise the following elements: connected speech, expressive devices, lexis and grammar, and negotiation language. Students should be aware that natural processes like omitting words or weakening sounds occur in real-life situations during speeches. Activities, which practise connected speech, rather than activities focused only on individual phonemes, improve learner' fluency. It is also advisable to try to implement certain suprasegmental features in order to show emotions and attitudes, for instance by varying the speed of utterance or changing facial expressions. Students also need to know various phrases and conversational patterns since negotiation language involves expressions people often use for clarifications, such as "Could you explain it to me one more time, please?". Next, the author adds that not only are the above-mentioned language's features necessary to succeed in speaking process but "success is also dependent upon the rapid processing skills that talking necessitates" (Harmer 2001: 271). These skills are language processing, interacting with others and information processing. Language processing allows retrieving the words and phrases that are stored in one's memory and then arranging them in syntactically correct sentences. Secondly, effective speaking also requires a good deal of listening to and understanding other participants' feelings, as well as cultural and social rules such as turn-taking or how loud to speak. Finally, the pace of processing the information plays an important role – the faster a speaker is able to respond, the more efficient communication is. Beyond question, linguistic knowledge about the notion of communication and then about a language is very important when investigating teaching speaking a foreign language. The areas of communicative competence attempt to explain what knowledge about a target language a learner should possess.

Knowing the principles of communicative activities, it is now easier to distinguish certain types of this spoken interaction. Many authors list such activities according to various

characteristics, for example in relation to their popularity or completely accidentally. The activities below are not enumerated in accordance to their popularity. According to Gołębiowska (1987: 13), in discussions, learners are presented with a problem and have to express their own opinions about it. Students also retain their personalities and views and their task is to come to an agreement considering an issue introduced by the teacher. Communication games are another type of speaking activities proposed by Harmer (2001: 272); the word game suggests an element of fun during a lesson (indeed, learners draw pictures, solve puzzles, etc.), but of course games are designed to provoke communication between students and often depend on an information gap. In prepared tasks, learners are asked to make a presentation on a topic of their own choice. The aim of such tasks is to develop informal, spontaneous conversation. Although it is more of a writing-like task, if possible, students should speak from notes rather than write. By being pre-planned, a questionnaire ensures that both the questioner and person responding to the questioner have something to say to each other; if well prepared, they may encourage the natural use of clear and repetitive language patterns. Dakowska states that an interview involves two roles: the role of an interviewee, which is more demanding according to factual information, and the role of an interviewer. Very often interviews are integral parts of more structured tasks, such as simulations or projects (Dakowska, 2005: 245). Undoubtedly, speaking skills are the skills which are both the most difficult to possess, but, yet, they are also in the highest demand since people's biggest desire nowadays is the ability to speak English without any mistakes. Without the ability to communicate in different languages the world simply could not have been able to function and that is why developing speaking skills should be of great importance at schools.

## 1.2 SITUATIONS in ELT Classrooms

To begin with, let us understand what “situation” is. Collins English dictionary defines it as an “act of imitating the character and behaviour of someone who is different from the imitator”. (2018: 316) This definition is true no matter in which field the technique of situation is used. In this course, we are interested in them as a classroom activity used to develop speaking skills. From this point of view, different linguists and pedagogues suggest a number of different but at the same time closely related explanations of this speaking exercise. Among all of them, we found the views of three authors particularly interesting.

According to a famous pedagogue Gillian Porter Ladousse “situational activities range from highly controlled guided conversations at one end of the scale, to improvised drama activities at the other; from simple rehearsed dialogue performance, to highly complex simulated scenarios.” (1987: 3) The author of these words puts a lot of emphasis on a wide scope of role-play activities. Such a speaking task may be a limited one and be supported by prepared cues, for example by dialogues; or, conversely, role-play might be an activity where students rather improvise than rely on the practised dialogue. This way of situation usage seems to be highly effective as the students are encouraged to use their own vocabulary and practice it. However, there is a great risk that student will not tend to enrich their vocabulary but rely on the one they already possess. Under such circumstances, it is the teacher who decides what he wants to put an emphasis on- acquiring new vocabulary and set phrases or using and practising the given vocabulary. Porter Ladousse also points out in her work that role-plays may differ in complexity, that is, some performances may be very short and simple, whereas some utterances may be very structured. Consequently, the difficulty of the activity greatly depends on vocabulary and the language level.

A further explanation is proposed by Scrivener. He describes the process of situation as follows: “During the situation, learners are usually given some information about a “role” (e.g. a person or a job title). These are often printed on “role cards”. Learners take a little preparation time and then meet up with other students to act out small scenes using their own ideas, as well as any ideas and information from the role cards. A simple role card could



do nothing more than name the role e.g. mother, detective or alternatively they could offer guidance as to what to do rather than the role itself, e.g. buy a train ticket to Brighton". (Scrivener; 2005: 155) It is clearly stated that students are assigned particular roles to play. Scrivener also has it that role cards have an important function, thus, thanks to them learners are equipped with crucial information about their roles and the vocabulary they are going to use. Guidelines put on such cards help students in conveying important facts about their characters to be played and make the speakers feel more secure, as basic clues are included on paper. The weaker learners may base their utterances only on a card, while the strong ones find role cards as prompts. A good set of role cards is frequently designed so that the participants may have different points of view and obvious disagreements (Scrivener; 2005: 156). Author also inclines that students need an appropriate amount of time to prepare ideas and language before playing their roles. What is more, he says that learners not only use the ideas put on role cards, but also try to add any language they possess.

Gołębiowska indicates that in situation learners are given a task to complete and in order to do it, they are told who they are or what their role is, what their opinions are, and what they know that is unknown to the other students. (1987: 13) She stresses the fact that students are told who they are, namely, that they play the role of somebody else. Being cast in a role of a different character may diminish the fear of speaking, as these are not the speakers who make mistakes, but the personalities played by them. The key feature of role-play is that learners can become anyone they want for a short time. Their task is to pretend a different person and it may be, for example, a doctor, a pop star, a parent, a millionaire and so on.

In classrooms, different types of situations are used. We distinguish a few types of role-plays according to different criteria. It has already been mentioned that such exercises may differ in length and difficulty. According to the number of students included in the exercise we also differentiate individual role-play exercises and interactive role-play exercises.

The individual situation exercises address one of the six facets of understanding – perspective, which is the ability to have and demonstrate critical points of view, and to be able to see things from another person's perspective. For example, students explore a

historical event from the perspective of a historical figure, or they investigate an artifact from the perspective of different cultures or countries. There are different forms of individual situation exercises:

- Form of a *story*: The exercises of such form aim at developing student's ability to create the suggested story with his own words. For example, in an environmental studies class, students tell the story of how a water molecule travels from ocean to land and back again to the ocean.
- Form of a *letter*: From the first look, this exercise is concentrated on developing writing skills rather than speaking skills. However, the teacher might ask the student to introduce the final work orally. An example of usage of this form might be when the students are introduced to be a part of a scientific group organizing that are having an expedition to space and must write a letter to Congressmen on the importance of funding such an expedition, by highlighting how data could be used to benefit humanity. Once the letter is ready, the teacher might ask the members of the group to represent their key points orally
- Form of a *problem statement*: In such exercises, the students are given a problematic situation to perform or a problematic statement to discuss. The key points that the students point out are latter introduced in a role-play. This could also be used as a term paper for which students are asked to provide a description of the problem, alternative explanations of its causes and a plan of action.
- Form of *political position paper*: In such forms students are introduced to certain political points of views. The further task might be discussing them in groups and then performing a situation where students will be trying to act according to the political views they are following. This brings evidence from various disciplines, such as social, economic and scientific research findings.
- Form of *speech*: Here students choose one of the suggested topics and discuss it within their groups. Latter, they are to prepare a speech about it and perform a situation that is related to the topic and presented speech. For example, students may take the role either supporting or opposing climate and environmentalist concerns over oil drilling in Alberta.

- Form of *research findings report*: For example, students time-travel to Late Permian, explore and report findings on animal extinction during this Earth's most severe known extinction era.

The interactive situational exercise may have the form of debates or problem-solving exercises. According to Maier, depending on the goal targeted through role-play, such as knowledge, attitudes and skills, there are three variations:

- When the target is *knowledge* acquisition, role-play is used as a method to observe and analyze. What is important in this case is not much the role-play act itself, but rather the opportunity for students to acquire some observational skills and to understand and to assimilate the new information.
- When the goal of situation is *attitude* development, the activity should be organized in a way that allows the learners to experience emotions. This type of situation engagement requires enough time for a follow-up discussion. The focus should be on the player's affect experience and not on the observations made by the audience. Therefore, it is essential for the instructor to provide the opportunity for the participating students to identify, validate and discuss their emotions.
- Lastly, when situation targets *skills* acquisition, it should be structured so that players are provided with opportunities to reflect and receive feedback. Students are expected to rely on past experiences, use their creativity and address the challenges of their roles. The instructor should provide immediate constructive feedback with suggestions for change which can be incorporated in the following role-play practice of skills by the student. This is a quick type practice and the student may be requested to perform the skill again. (2002; 76)

There are also two different types of situations, that is to say, real-plays and surreal-plays. A role-play activity which is a rehearsal for the real world is called real-play (Al-Arishi; 1994; 339). Therefore, textual material should be authentic; realia may be brought into the classroom. Moreover, real-playing fits in the desire for realism because it gives students the chance to practise typical activities they will probably perform in real life; these are ordering food in a restaurant, greetings, asking for directions, booking holidays at a travel agency and so on. Thanks to that kind of role-playing, learners have a possibility to rehearse these activities and then, in the future, they may have fewer problems because they have

practised in the classroom. Still, in the issue of real-playing, Scrivener figures that one of learners plays himself or herself, but in the context other than a room where they are taught. (2005; 158) Interestingly, the author implies that this type of situation is especially useful or business for professional people. Next, Scrivener adds that speakers may create their own real-play cards rather than being given a set of prepared ones.

In sharp contrast to real-play, surreal-play should encourage an imaginative self-expression of the inner world of each student's mind (Al-Arishi; 1994; 337). While real-play seeks approval for believing that a classroom can become the real world, surreal-playing calls for promoting an expression of thoughts and feelings of each student's mind. Such an activity is also called imaginative role-playing. As stated by Doff, not only children fantasize, but also teenagers and adults often imagine themselves in different situations. In this case, teachers let students do what they naturally find enjoyable. (1988: 240)

For a situation to be a successful speaking exercise, it is necessary to pay a good attention on its organizing process. Firstly, it is important to mention that if a teacher is not convinced about the validity of using role-playing, the activity itself "will fall flat on its face just as you expected it to" (Porter-Ladousse, 1987: 8). The educator has to be convinced that role-play is an exciting technique to use and has many benefits. If the teacher is not enthusiastic about the play, the students will not as well.

Any teaching sequence necessitates three vital elements: the engage stage, study stage and activate stage. In the first phase – the engage stage, the teacher's task is to attract and keep learner's attention and interest in a lesson. Student's minds have to be involved and emotionally connected with a lesson, for example by a pleasant situation or a nice picture (Harmer, 2012: 178). At the next stage learners need to study the new language; it may be grammar or vocabulary exercises. Having known the new item, students are given a possibility to activate both the new language and the language they have known. Learners do it when they speak freely. Having been engaged, being presented the new language and having practised it, learners try to activate it at the final stage. Harmer points out that some lesson sequences such as PPP (presentation, practise and production) follow the cycle of ESA (engage, study and activate). Students are presented the new language, practise it, and,

finally, they make an effort to produce the new language or any language. The author indicates that role-playing is an excellent way to put the language into action.

Last but not the least the teacher's role in a situation activity must be considered. One of the teacher's function is being a facilitator. As learners practise role-play, they may discover that they lack words or phrases .They may need new language to be given by the educator. This role makes the teacher act as a kind of a „walking dictionary“, evaluating the class and offering help when it is necessary.

The next role of the teacher is being a spectator. His or her task is to watch the role-play and then give remarks and advice at the end of the performances (Budden, 2004: 143). The teacher walks round the classroom listening to the students talking and putting down the mistakes that should be discussed .The educator can correct forms from the learners by writing them on the board, or by giving some kind of remedial task that he or she had predicted would be needed.

Hence, situation seems to be an important tool in teaching speaking skills. Although there is no one certain definition of situation and there are some weak points about that activity, its numerous advantages far outweigh the disadvantages. The activity gives a chance of having a rehearsal for the language that the student are going to use in real life situations.

## CHAPTER 2. Situations for Children and Beginners

You can conduct situations with all age groups and proficiency levels. While younger learners and beginners may need support, especially in early stages of participating in role plays, they will still benefit and become more independent and confident with practice. For example, use situation to teach beginning functions such as greetings, giving compliments, and common expressions. Clark (1992), Richard-Amato, and others support the use of index cards for role play. The use of index cards with written cues or the complete situation exchange will help students know what to say. At later stages, you may be able to leave blanks on the cue cards or just write the idea that each student should try to express. In *Index Card Games for ESL*, Raymond Clark describes this family tree activity. Each student is looking for family relations and receives a card with a description of his or her relationship with various others in the class who have similar cards. Students circulate, asking each other questions, until they find their relatives. Students tend to get very involved in this activity. In larger classes, you can add interest by developing the activity so that there are two families in the class. Students must find their own family members.

Situation can range from highly structured, short exchanges, as in a restaurant, to those that are longer and more open ended. If you want a highly structured role play, you can write it up in situation cards similar to the cue cards described earlier. Here is an example of a situation card.

**Instructions:** You are making an appointment with your professor. You have to do this through the college secretary.

1. Greet the secretary.
2. Explain that you want to meet with your professor.
3. State why you want to meet (to discuss course content, to explain an absence, to ask about your exam grade).
4. List your available times.
5. Ask the secretary when the professor is available.
6. Ask if the secretary needs any other information.
8. Thank the secretary for her time.

You can go even further and fill in the actual lines, or portions of the lines, that students are to say if you think they need that degree of support at beginning levels. As they learn their parts, urge students to hand in the cue cards. For adults, choose roles to play from everyday life—family members, store clerks, police officers, teachers, and social workers in various situations. However, students, particularly younger ones, may also enjoy taking on fantasy roles. One kindergarten teacher had to watch the story of “Little Red Riding Hood” role-played many times to satisfy all of her little wolves. Characters from television, from the students’ textbook, and from other books students are reading, are also suitable for situation activities. Situations with fewer roles than there are students are preferable over those with too many roles. Two students can usually perform the same role—for example, two police officers, two customers—and support each other in carrying out the situation. You can also divide the class into small groups for role plays that involve only three or four people, having each group perform the same role play. Generally, fewer roles mean more talking time for each student.

In addition to being the motivator and possibly the writer and director of the role plays you present in your class, you should also be involved in the activity. Richard Amato suggests that this gives you a reason for circulating in the group, providing prompts, helping where needed, and observing and assessing language use.

### **Preparing Students for Situations**

Here are the steps in preparing students for their participation in role plays.

### **Identify Aims and Objectives for a Situation**

The aims and objectives for instructional situations should be based on student needs, objectives, and your course curriculum. Students need to understand why they are participating in the situation and how it will contribute to their learning. For example, perhaps you are teaching a unit on housing. Our colleague, Donald Campbell, wanted his students to learn how to complain to the landlord about various problems with a rental unit. This was relevant to students, and they could immediately see the value in role-playing such situations. Student understanding will lead them to be more motivated and willing to see the situation to its natural end. It will also provide something to discuss after the role play ends.

### **Identify the Context for a Situation**

Be sure to familiarize students with the environment in which the situation occurs. In the preceding example, you might have pictures of a meeting between a landlord and tenant, or you might have a phone conversation on an audio or video recording, perhaps one that you have created that provides an idea of the social environment, such as the formality of the interaction. Simulate a sense of reality by using simple props such as a pen and notepad for a waitress, a hat for a police officer and signs. For a traffic accident role play, for example, our students used chairs as props to create city blocks and labelled the streets with local names. Moving the chairs to form city blocks illustrates how you can use the classroom space to simulate an environment. You may need two rooms or a room and the hallway outside. If you have a small classroom, see if you can use the student lounge or another available space for simulations. You may find that the larger space has natural props such as a telephone and more furniture. Further, a change of place may help in mentally removing students from the classroom and your usual student-teacher roles.

### **Language Presentation for a Situation**

You will need to prepare students for the language they will use in the situation. Depending on proficiency levels, this may also include nonverbal and sociolinguistic aspects such as register. In our landlord-tenant example, our colleague presented vocabulary,



including individual words and phrases related to making complaints, such as My toilet/sink is plugged. My window/door/lock is broken. I have mice. Some of the phrases for solutions from the landlord included, Get a plumber. Try a plunger. I'll send a plumber/carpenter/exterminator. He included wall charts, drawings of household problems, worksheets, jazz chants, charades, and other techniques to have students learn the language and practice fluency. He also modelled nonverbal aspects of the communication, explaining reasons for certain aspects of body language such as social distance. Having students fill out a worksheet as individuals or in pairs is one effective way to prepare them for the role play. Here is an example using the tenant-landlord example. Small groups complete the worksheet. You may want to correct the questions before asking the students to act out the role play together. Later, students will do a role play in pairs using their own script. This worksheet is for high-beginner or low-intermediate students participating in role play for the first time, so the teacher has provided a great deal of guidance and preparation.

### **Simulations**

A distinction is sometimes made between simulation and role play. A simulation is a highly developed role play, almost a miniplay, that it is not scripted. The teacher sets up a simulated environment, such as the traffic accident set-up described earlier. The key is to structure the roles and action around a problem or series of problems. A simulation is more involved than a single transactional episode, such as a customer returning a defective vacuum cleaner or making an appointment. In simulations, students may have to perform a variety of speeches and activities.

For example, Irene Frankel and Cliff Meyers (1992) present a simulation of going to the doctor. This involves setting up a waiting room, a receptionist's desk, and an examination room. Students check in with the receptionist, spend time in the waiting area, and are called one by one to see the doctor who proceeds with an examination and diagnosis. You can even extend your simulations to include a "trip" to the pharmacy to fill a prescription. The role play, by contrast, might be just the conversation between the doctor and the patient. There are a number of sources of simulation games and activities. Teresa Genzel and Martha Cummings (1986, 114–15) describe a shopping simulation and Helena Curtain and Carol Ann

Dahlberg (2004) describe fantasy simulations for children in EFL situations. Such simulations can create a vivid connection between the classroom experience and the target culture. Here is one example: Children are issued passports and airline tickets and prepare for a “trip” to Germany, Canada, Colombia, or any other destination appropriate. . . . The teacher prepares an “aircraft” with a masking tape outline on the floor . . . with chairs placed side by side, in twos or in fours, and labeled with letters and numbers, as in a real aircraft . . . there are . . . realia typically found in an airplane.

### **Conclusion**

It can be concluded from the result of this study that situation technique has positive impact in improving learners’ speaking skills as it gives the students a chance to explore different situations of real life and enables them to speak accurately and confidently in that situation in the target language.

Although during situation in a large classroom, the situation gets chaotic sometimes and the performers sometimes forget their dialogues, which create embarrassment, eventually with the help of little feedback from the teachers, this problem can be resolved.

Students highly rated the role-play activities and resources and believed them to be relevant to what they were doing and a motivational learning framework. Feedback obtained from surveys and interview sessions showed strong and positive engagement in using the situations strategy and there was an improvement in their perception of their confidence and speaking performance.

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#### INTERNET SOURCES

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2. <https://www.twinkl.com/teaching-wiki/speaking-skills>
3. [https://www.academia.edu/19911454/G\\_DEVELOPING\\_SPEAKING\\_SKILLS](https://www.academia.edu/19911454/G_DEVELOPING_SPEAKING_SKILLS)