

“The pen is mightier than the spoken word. Or is it?”

(Essberger, 2001)

Teaching Spoken English in the Austrian Classroom

- *English course books as the secret syllabus. Do they live up to their reputation?*
- *17 TECHNIQUES TO MAKE LEARNERS SPEAK –a first aid kit for teaching speaking in EFL classes*

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Abstract

Teaching spoken English in lower secondary education has officially gained importance since the new curriculum in 2008. This paper attempts to shed light on what characterizes real speaking tasks. Additionally, it discusses whether the course books, which are considered the *secret* syllabus, manage to live up to their reputations. It is the result of an analytic research process investigating the activities suggested in Austrian course books and to what extent teachers make use of them.

Moreover, it provides a list of speaking activities for teaching a foreign language, collected after a thorough investigation of the literature referring to this particular topic. The collection of speaking activities describes their features and contains information about their communicativeness.

Zusammenfassung

Das Unterrichten der Kompetenz Sprechen im Fremdsprachenunterricht der Sekundarstufe 1 hat seit dem neuen Lehrplan in 2008 offiziell an Bedeutung zugenommen. Dieser Artikel ist ein Versuch, Merkmale für lebensnahe und kommunikative Sprechanlässe im Fremdsprachenunterricht zu definieren. Weiters wird untersucht, ob Englisch Lehrwerke, die oft als *heimlicher* Lehrplan gehandelt werden, ihren Aufgaben gerecht werden. Der Schwerpunkt der Studie liegt auf der Analyse der Sprechanlässe, die in den Lehrbüchern angeregt werden, und deren Verwendung durch Lehrerinnen und Lehrer im Unterricht.

Darüber hinaus wird eine Sammlung von Sprechanlässen angeboten, die sowohl Aufschluss über Art und Ausmaß der Kommunikation geben soll, als auch Vorteile und Herausforderungen kommentiert, die mit diesen Aufgaben einhergehen.

Keywords:

Teaching speaking in EFL
 Analysis of Austrian English course books

Communicative Speaking Tasks in EFL

Curriculum

Schlüsselwörter (German keywords, optional):

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1 Introduction

Teaching speaking in the lower secondary English classroom seems to be a challenging task. This may derive from the fact that speaking a foreign language, especially hearing oneself imitating its pronunciation and its intonation is a very intimate, often peculiar sounding process somewhat comparable to singing. There are lots of people who would not dream of singing in public; they might even feel inhibited doing it in front of their friends. Hughes points out the difficulty of having to change and expand identity as a language learner and the challenge of “speaking appropriately with a new voice” (2011, p 9). Yet, teachers expect learners to engage in role plays and participate in speaking activities which might be inhibiting, especially for teenagers, who are already plagued by numerous insecurities. The inclusion of speaking in the EFL classroom is a task which only seems to be manageable successfully when learners are involved in tasks encouraging them to speak and listen to other learners. Planning this apparently constitutes a challenge for teachers and course book writers.

Although all parties involved in learning and teaching – learners, teachers, school boards, course book writers - claim that they are aiming for the same goal, namely putting an emphasis on the improvement of speaking, there seems to be a general subjective impression of an unsatisfactory outcome.

Therefore, this paper aims to shed light on

- the Austrian curricular guidelines for teaching speaking
- the characteristics of real speaking activities
- the speaking activities provided by Austrian course book writers.

It also suggests activities that can be initiated in order to enhance oral communication in the EFL classroom, including merits and challenges of the respective task.

2 Curricular guidelines for teaching speaking

One relevant change regarding speaking from the year 2000 to the officially updated version of the curriculum published in 2009 is that instead of the initial four skills there are now five skills mentioned: speaking is split up into “conducting coherent and cohesive monologues” and “participating in dialogues and discussions”. (In the CEFR these speaking skills are termed *spoken production* and *spoken interaction*, which is why I decided to use these terms henceforth.) The curriculum also suggests devoting equally balanced time to the five skills “with emphasis on integrated and contextualized methods” (Austrian Ministry of Education, 2008, pp 1-2).

Mathematically, speaking has therefore gained importance from the former 25% (as one fourth of the four skills) to a more substantial 40%, as spoken production and spoken interaction are supposed to cover 20% each, and 20% respectively for listening, reading and writing.

Apart from that, curricular guidelines are kept fairly general, which demands a lot of commitment of teachers on the one hand but allows a lot of autonomy and self-determination on the other.

3 The research framework

This chapter focuses on various attempts in literature to define the characteristics of communicative speaking tasks. It describes the consequential research interests and the design and phases of the data collection.

3.1 Theoretical background

When reading, listening or writing are taught each student is expected to be involved in practicing these skills during a given time; equally for speaking students have to have their fair shares of involvement.

Since the learners should be provided with activities that encourage speaking and listening to each other, the question arises as to what constitutes a good speaking activity.

According to Lightbown & Spada’s research, comprehensible output does not automatically follow comprehensible input (2006, p 176). Learners require opportunities for communicative practice in the shape of

real speaking activities, which can be defined as “any activities that encourage and require a learner to speak with and listen to other learners” (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2004) and ideally include the following six criteria:

- **Productivity:** *The focus is on output*
- **Purposefulness:** *The activities focus on meaningful results and/or social functions*
- **Interactivity:** *The speakers communicate with other people*
- **Challenge:** *The activities include enough but not too much new information and/or language so that they are interesting and challenging but not impossible to solve*
- **Safety:** *There is sufficient but not too much scaffolding so that the individual learner is prevented from getting lost but not spoon-fed either*
- **Authenticity:** *The activities are related to real life*

(Adapted from Thornbury, 2005, pp 90-91):

Nation and Newton have recently argued that a well-planned language course has an equal balance of what they call “the four strands”:

1. *Meaning-focused input:* learning through listening and reading
2. *Meaning-focused output:* learning through speaking and writing by passing on information
3. *Language-focused learning:* learning through consciously ‘noticing’ and practicing language features such as grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation
4. *Fluency development:* using familiar language repeatedly and at an increasing speed in order to become “fluent in what is already known”.

(Adapted from Nation and Newton, 2009, pp 1-9)

When teaching speaking, it is certainly useful to initiate pre-communicative activities or form focused learning but teachers have to be conscious about the fact that this provides the learner with one *puzzle piece* of language for the bigger picture of communication, e.g. pronunciation “without actually accomplishing an illocutionary act” (Littlewood, 1981, p 8). Thornbury points out that speaking events do not exist independently of other language skills; in the real world not only listening is involved but frequently reading and writing are necessary as well (2005, p118). This implicates that speaking needs to be practiced in conjunction with other skills in communicative activities, no matter how scaffolded they may be in order to meet the learners’ needs.

When communicative activities are planned, the social organization of the class has to be taken into consideration:

Whole class forums often harbor the danger that the learners appear to be engaged on the surface when in fact they are hardly involved at all. Plenary class activities might work well for some situations such as drills or guessing games where it may be possible to keep the attention span of the majority of students quite high for a while. However, class discussions, for example, are usually dominated by a few fluent speakers and there is the danger to fall into the trap of believing that simply because there is an animated discussion going on that all the students are actively involved. Arithmetically it is not even possible for 20 students in a class to speak for more than a minute or two per lesson.

Individual work can be applied especially when the class is organized in frequent self-directed learning settings where the learners might use headphones to listen and respond. They might use recording devices, such as their mobile phones, to record their speaking for the teacher or their peers to comment on later.

In pair work and group work all learners are involved at the same time. The lists below illustrates that pair work and group work harbor undisputed benefits that may very well outweigh all the challenges that could be argued when organizing the class this way:

Benefits:

- There is increased chance to be actively involved in language use.
- Shy students often find it easier to express themselves in small groups.
- The teacher’s role shifts from ‘doer’ to observer: group or pair work allow to assist when needed, assess the performances of individual students, note language mistakes for future corrective work and devote a little more time to slower learners.
- Different tasks can be assigned to different pairs and groups, which may then lead to final discussions or natural sharing time.

Challenges:

- Students will probably not provide as good *language models* as the teacher.
- In monolingual classes learners may be tempted to lapse into the native language.

- The organization and planning can be more time-consuming than whole class settings.
- Classes may be noisy or even disruptive.

3.2 Research interest

English course books for lower secondary education have significant influence on what *goes on* in Austrian classrooms. For a lot of Austrian teachers, the aims and procedures suggested by the authors are treated as the *secret syllabus*. English teachers usually agree on one course book for the school, which is subsequently ordered for all students. In order to avoid exploding costs of photocopies this book tends to be the main source used in English lessons. It is up to the individual teacher's decision which and how many additional materials are used.

The insertion of the CEFR levels into the Austrian curriculum and the introduction of the E8 standards caused the production of a number of new course books. All of them claim to prepare the learners for the standardized tests. This led to the following research interest: Which course books were available on the Austrian market in 2011, two years after the publication of the updated version of the Austrian curriculum, and in what way did these course books influence teaching speaking in the Austrian lower secondary classrooms.

The research was focused on following resulting questions:

1. To which extent do Austrian teachers rely on their course books when carrying out speaking activities?
2. Do Austrian course books offer enough activities for teachers to devote balanced teaching time to all language skills?
3. What kind of speaking activities do course books suggest?

Seven year seven course books available on the Austrian market in 2011 were investigated:

1. English To Go 3
2. Friends 3
3. More 3
4. New Highlight 3
5. Red Line 3
6. The New You & Me3
7. Your Turn 3

3.3 Design and phases of the data collections

The investigation was targeted on the actual time that students spoke English per academic year, according to the suggestions of the respective course book. This time was then to be compared with the *ideal* speaking time suggested by the curriculum.

Each of the activities offered in the various course books were counted and categorized by using five categories: Listening, reading, speaking, writing and focus on form. Even if focus on form is not one of the five skills, it is part of the teacher's work and therefore part of the course book. If *focus on form* was simultaneously supporting one of the four skills, the activities were categorized according to the most clearly used skill. If however, grammar was de-contextualized and e.g. gap filling or drill was suggested, these activities went into the category *focus on form*.

In addition, the number of the speaking activities devised by the course book was counted. This way the total speaking time could be put into relation with the *ideal* speaking time the students were supposed to engage in per academic year.

In order to get reliable measuring tools to define how long the various speaking activities would take, a representative range of speaking activities was selected (e.g. role plays, discussions, interviews, information gap activities, games, vocabulary and pronunciation exercises occurring in the various course books) and carried out with an English class in several cycles over a period of an academic year. A stop watch was used to measure the students' speaking time. Only the real time an individual student was actually producing language was measured, not the total length of the activity.

The ideal speaking time was calculated by identifying the number of possible English lessons per academic year, which is an average of 115. This number was multiplied by 32 minutes instead of the 50 minutes, that one

lesson usually has, reflecting all the time that may be used for administrative work, dealing with disciplinary problems, explaining, collecting, or giving back assignments.

The amount of 3670 minutes represented the total time of English instruction per academic year. This figure was then divided by 4 for the four skills. The quotient of this calculation, 918 minutes, stood for the ideal speaking time.

It has to be noted that in this research speaking was not split up into the two categories of oral production and spoken interaction. When this rather time consuming investigation was started, neither publishers nor teachers were truly aware of the fact that speaking was on the verge of being split up into two categories in the Austrian curriculum. Therefore four categories with ideally 25% percent allotted for each skill were used.

The speaking tasks were not only counted, they were also categorized: Firstly into communicative and pre-communicative activities and secondly in a more detailed fashion into the individual speaking activities in order to show what kind of tasks the various authors put emphasis on.

The glimpse into lower secondary EFL classrooms concerning spoken communication was provided by an online questionnaire for teachers, which resulted in 326 respondents. Additionally an open ended questionnaire was designed for a group of 35 teachers in order to compensate for limitations that the closed online questions might have harbored.

The following questions were analyzed for this paper:

- How important do teachers consider speaking?
- How often do they teach speaking?
- How much do teachers rely on course books when teaching speaking?

4 The results of the research

The following points discuss the results of the course book studies and if their roles in the classrooms are as significant as generally assumed. In addition, the findings on the investigation on teachers' attitudes towards initiating speaking are discussed.

4.1 Investigation of the course books

At the time of the investigation, the authors of *The New You & Me*, *More, English to Go*, *Friends* and *Your Turn* designed basic and enriched versions of their course books for year seven and year eight courses. While the basic version was aimed at the second and third ability groups of general middle schools, the enriched version dealt with fairly the same topics in more challenging ways for students of grammar schools and 1st ability groups. Concerning the numbers of activities, there is hardly any difference between the two versions, but the enriched courses generally offer more complex texts and more challenging tasks. *Highlight* and *Red Line* suggest the same content for all learners in one book. At the end of each unit a few more challenging tasks can be found.

While all seven books declare in their teacher's handbooks that they put emphasis on the training of the communicative competences and the preparation for the E8 Standards, only very few attempts can be found to explain any approaches underlying their activities. In fact, only *Friends* and *English To Go* mention *Multiple Intelligences* as important components of their concepts. In addition, the authors of *English To Go* claim to make use of two complementary approaches: the *Lexical Approach* and the *Cognitive Grammar Model*. They also provide sufficient background information to explain the approaches behind their tasks.

4.1.1 The number of speaking activities

All the speaking tasks found in the course book were counted in order to provide an overview of the frequency of activities for oral production and spoken interaction occurring within an academic year.

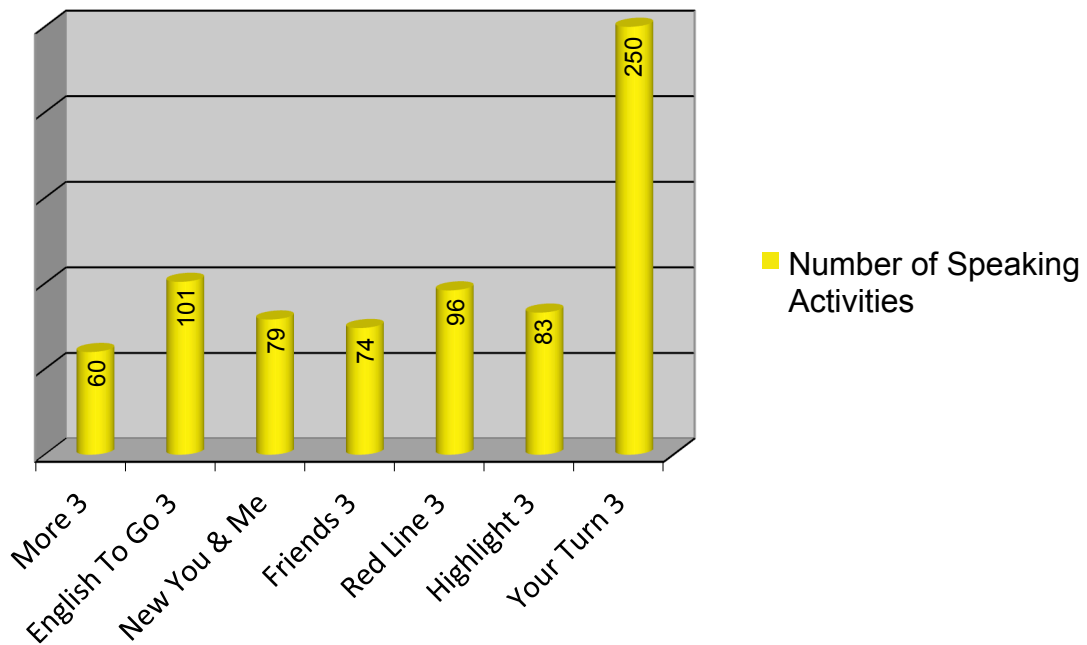


Fig. 1: The number of speaking activities in the course books

Figure 1 illustrates that six of the investigated course books offer an average number of 73 speaking activities. Given that the average student has 115 English lessons per academic year, speaking is not initiated in every lesson by these course books. With 250 speaking activities, *Your Turn 3* is clearly set apart from the other books.

4.1.2 Real speaking time

For Austrian seventh and eighth graders, with an average of 115 lessons per academic year, the ideal speaking time should be 918 minutes per student. In the investigation the actual speaking time initiated by the course books within one academic year was added up and compared with the ideal speaking time.

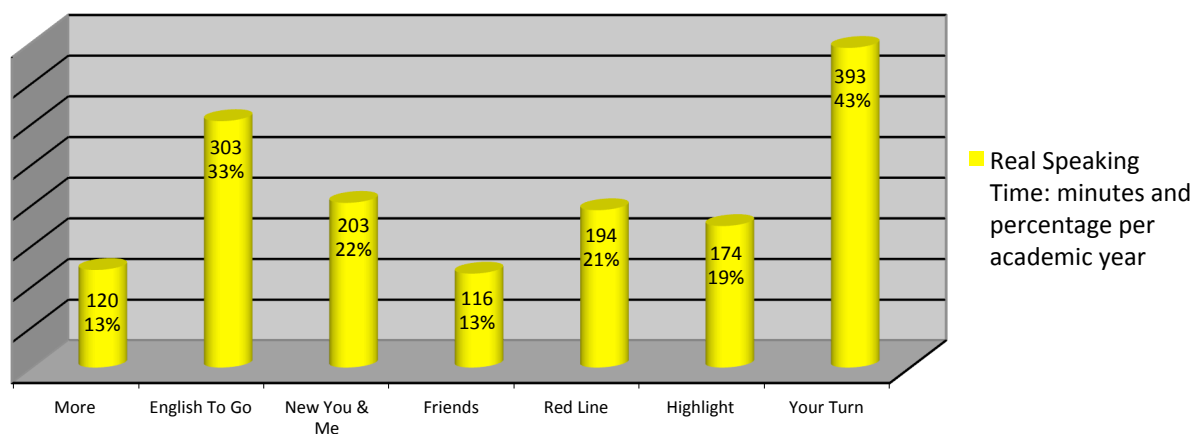


Fig. 2: Real speaking time initiated by the course books

Figure 2 shows the real speaking time initiated by course books both in percent and in minutes per academic year. These numbers are far away from the time that should be devoted to speaking. Even *Your Turn* with the highest amount of minutes does not reach half of the *ideal* time. *English To Go* with 303 minutes covers a third of it.

The results also imply that in some books the average speaking activity takes longer than in others. For example, *The New You & Me* is on position five with only 79 speaking activities (see figure 1) but it ranges third with 203 minutes, which suggests an average of speaking time of 2.5 minutes per activity. The average speaking activity initiated by *English To Go* takes 3 minutes. *Your Turn*, with both the highest amount of speaking activities and the longest speaking time, offers a lot of speaking exercises with an average of 1.5 minutes.

4.1.3 General list of activities

In order to find out the ratio of speaking tasks compared to the activities devoted to writing, listening and reading, a count of the number of activities devoted to other skills apart from speaking was included. It seemed necessary to count the number of de-contextualized grammar activities as well since they are present in all the course books.

Number of tasks	More 3	English To Go 3	New You & Me 3	Friends 3	Red Line 3	Highlight 3	Your Turn 3
Number of LISTENING tasks	67	46	59	50	58	70	148
Number of READING tasks	190	139	172	135	104	168	202
Number of WRITING tasks	96	103	115	119	130	160	149
Number of GRAMMAR tasks	44	60	49	46	55	88	74
Number of SPEAKING tasks	60	101	79	74	96	83	250

Table 1: The number of listening, reading, writing, grammar and speaking tasks in the course books

In all the course books except for *Your Turn* and *Red Line*, the reading activities score highest. In *Red Line* the reading tasks score second after writing.

In *English To Go*, *The New You & Me*, and *Friends* speaking takes the third position, in *More* and *Highlight* the fourth. It is also noteworthy that in *Highlight* speaking is even surpassed by the number of de-contextualized grammar activities.

Only in *Your Turn* the speaking tasks exceed all the other activities. However, one has to point out that *Your Turn* almost always offers the largest number of activities for each of the categories listed.

4.1.4 Evaluation of the nature of the tasks offered in course books

Evaluating the speaking tasks in the individual course books would clearly exceed the scope of this paper. Still, a general assessment of the nature of the activities is appropriate and necessary.

Apart from *The New You & Me*, all books were written after the year 2000 when the national curriculum demanded that the four skills had to be equally balanced. Despite the ministerial approval in all seven cases this requirement has clearly not been met by any of the course books in all seven cases.

Moreover, none of the course books offer sufficient lexis for turn taking, reacting to a person's utterances expressing agreement, disagreement, empathy, different ideas etc. and the regular practice of this lexis. Equally missing is the teaching of discourse markers to make oral conversation sound natural.

Speaking Tasks: categories	More	English To Go	New You & Me	Friends	Red Line	Highlight	Your Turn
1. Interviews	2	4	3	9	2	4	18
2. Role plays/simulations (NOT memorized)	2	5	7	2	6	4	13
3. Information gap activities	0	0	3	2	3	6	9
4. Games/puzzles	3	3	4	3	3	3	17
5. Projects/tasks all skills involved	5	9	0	3	6	5	7
6. Pronunciation/intonation	8	3	7	6	6	9	22
7. Grammar	3	5	2	4	7	2	23
8. Vocabulary/phrases	3	4	3	2	10	6	19
9. Memorized role plays/dialogues	7	2	8	3	0	10	0
10. Answers/descriptions/opinions/reports	27	66	42	40	53	34	122
Total number of speaking tasks	60	101	79	74	96	83	250

Table 2: Categories of speaking tasks in the course books

The categories 6.-9., *Pronunciation/intonation*, *Grammar*, *Vocabulary/phrases*, *Memorized role plays/dialogues* and *Interviews* provide language focus. Some attempts have been made to offer tasks for practicing pronunciation and intonation. However, focus on accuracy is mostly conducted in written tasks in the shape of gap filling or matching exercises. The number of communicative speaking activities that also focus on accuracy should be increased in all books.

The results in category 10., *Answers/descriptions/opinions/reports*, illustrate that the greater part of tasks initiated in all books are making reports and descriptions, answering questions and giving opinions in class talk, pair or group work. One would assume that these activities should arise naturally in EFL classes. Since they frequently accompany listening or reading input they can be easily organised and therefore would not need a lot of preparation time for teachers if they had to prepare them themselves.

The comparatively small amounts of activities for the categories 1.-5., *Interviews*, *Role plays/simulations (not memorized)*, *Information gap activities*, *Games/puzzles*, *Projects/tasks involving all skills* show that the majority of the book authors failed to equip their course books with enough real life tasks that trigger curiosity and create a natural need to talk. Tasks such as information gap activities, jigsaw activities, information-gathering assignments, role plays with role cards, and task-completion activities such as games, map-reading and puzzles can only scarcely be found.

In other words, most of the course books fail to provide teachers with the tasks they need most: Motivating real-life activities, as the ones above which generally require a lot of planning, creative thinking and organizing. A focus on offering more of them would relieve teachers of a lot of time consuming work. This should be expected to be implemented by high-quality course books.

4.2 The importance of speaking the role of the course books according to teachers

In both, the qualitative and the quantitative questionnaire, the teachers were asked how they teach oral production and spoken interaction and which role course books play when they initiate speaking tasks.

4.2.1 Importance of speaking in teaching

In order to find out how important teachers consider speaking they were asked in the quantitative questionnaire to rank order *Culture studies*, *Grammar*, *Listening comprehension*, *Oral communication*, *Reading comprehension*, *Pronunciation*, *Spelling*, *Translation*, *Vocabulary*, and *Written communication* from one to ten.

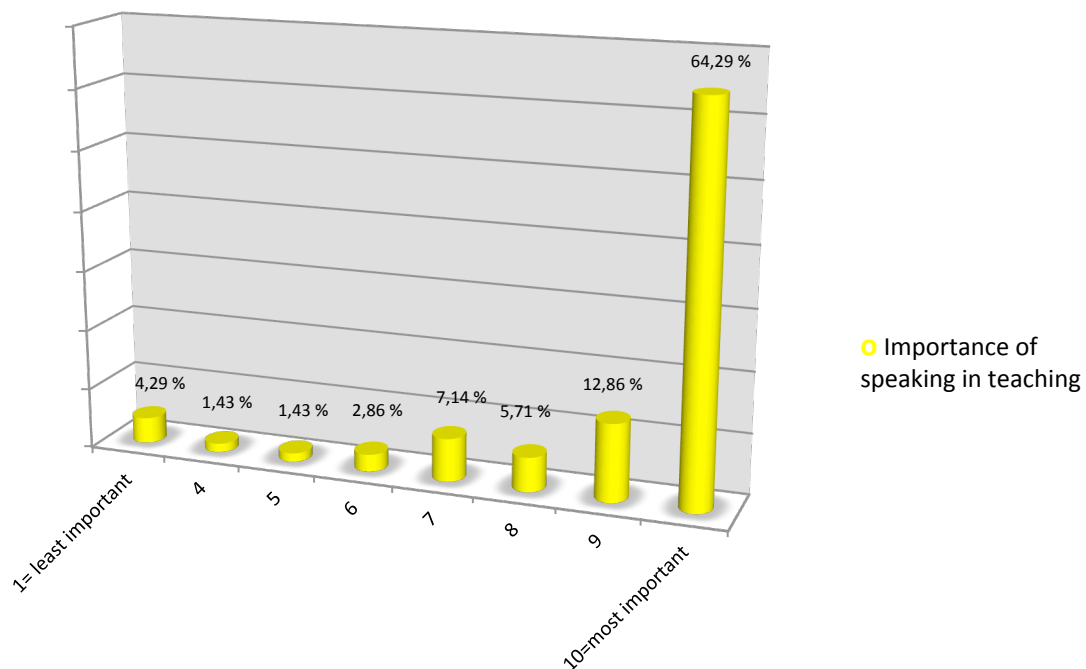


Fig. 3: The importance of teaching speaking according to English teachers

More than 64% consider teaching speaking most important in EFL lessons. This suggests that the ability to communicate orally seems to be the primary aim in EFL. 2 and 3 are missing: nobody gave speaking the place two or three in the rank ordering question.

4.2.2 Teaching time devoted to speaking

According to the new curriculum reading, listening, writing, oral production and spoken interaction have to be given identical emphasis. Therefore one research question was aimed towards how much time was devoted to teaching speaking in the EFL classroom.

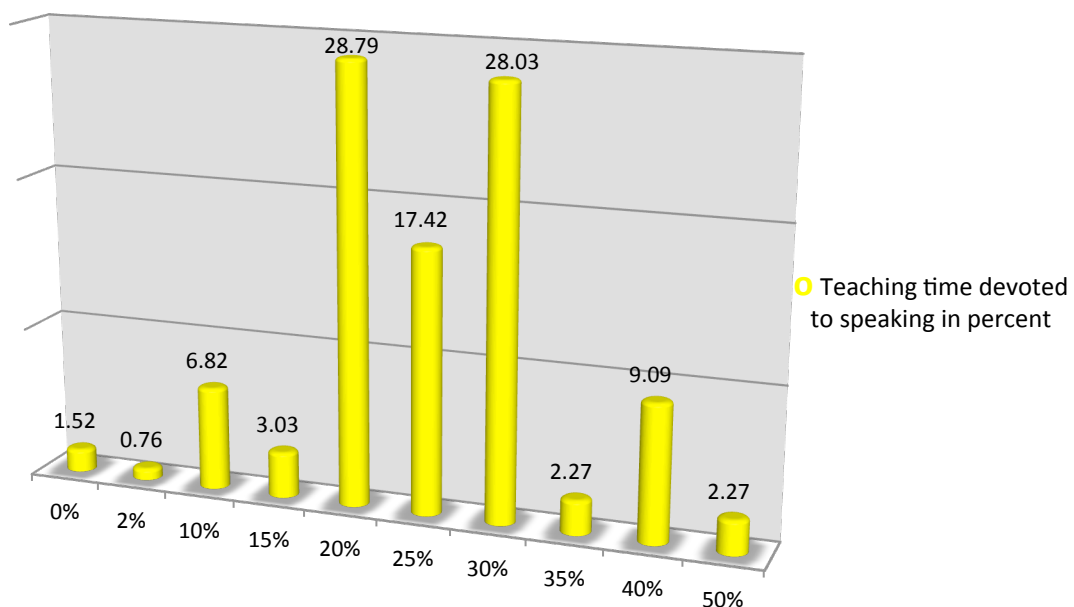


Fig. 4: Percentage of time devoted to teaching speaking

The new view of splitting speaking into two sub-skills and mentioning those within the five skills suggests that the total teaching time devoted to speaking should be 40%.

Looking at this result from the four skills point of view, the teachers appear to be well on track because most of them (74.24%) say they are using 20-30% of the teaching time for speaking.

4.2.3 The importance of course books in EFL classes

The question 'How often do you use the course book?' was aimed towards shedding light on how much influence course books have on syllabic decisions made by teachers.

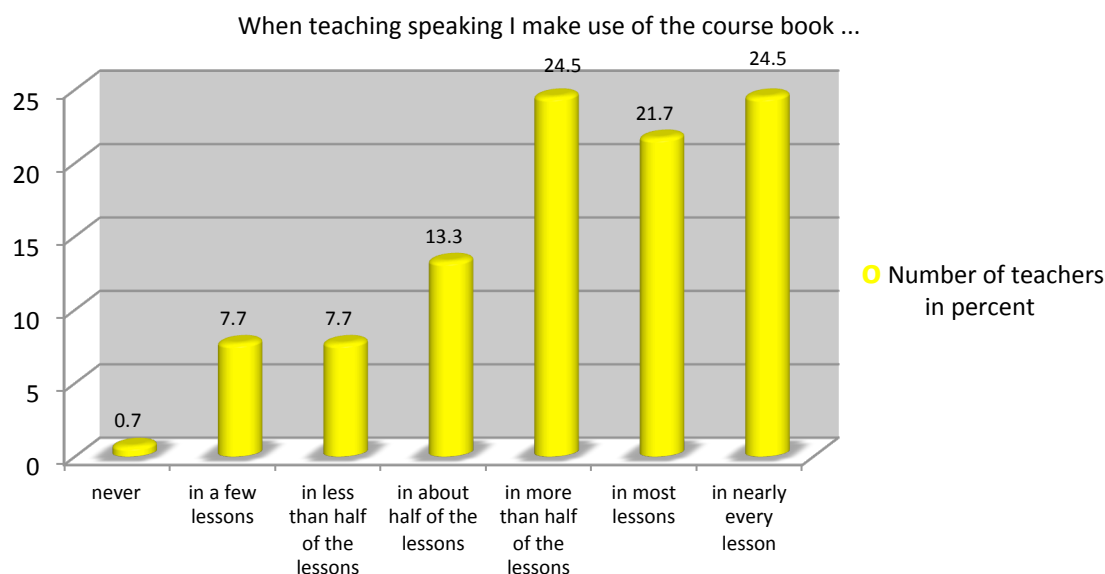


Fig. 5: Percentage of teachers using the course books for teaching speaking

Most teachers (70.7%) say they use course books when teaching speaking in more than half of their lessons to nearly every lesson. Additionally, photocopiable materials and materials produced by teachers score highly.

Results from the open-ended questionnaire suggest that some teachers felt the need to comment on this:

-“In *More* there is a flood of reading exercises and there are a lot of listening comprehensions too. But I get the impression that my pupils don't speak enough.”

-“There are so many great activities in *More*. But I often have the feeling that they only speak for a short time. But I don't know what to leave out so there is mostly no time for extra speaking activities.”

-“I always like to give my lessons a personal touch and use extra exercises for speaking.”

-“I have never seen the perfect book. I always add my own activities.”

-“It [*Red Line*] says it prepares for the standards. They should know.”

-“The activities [in *More*] are fine. But there are never enough grammar exercises. I always have to give them extra worksheets to practice.”

-“The book [*Friends*] doesn't have very interesting topics for pupils today. I often do things that are *in* at the moment.”

4.2.4 Speaking activities initiated by teachers

While in the online questionnaire there were categories of speaking activities to choose from, the open ended questionnaire asked the 35 participating teachers to list their own speaking activities when initiating speaking.

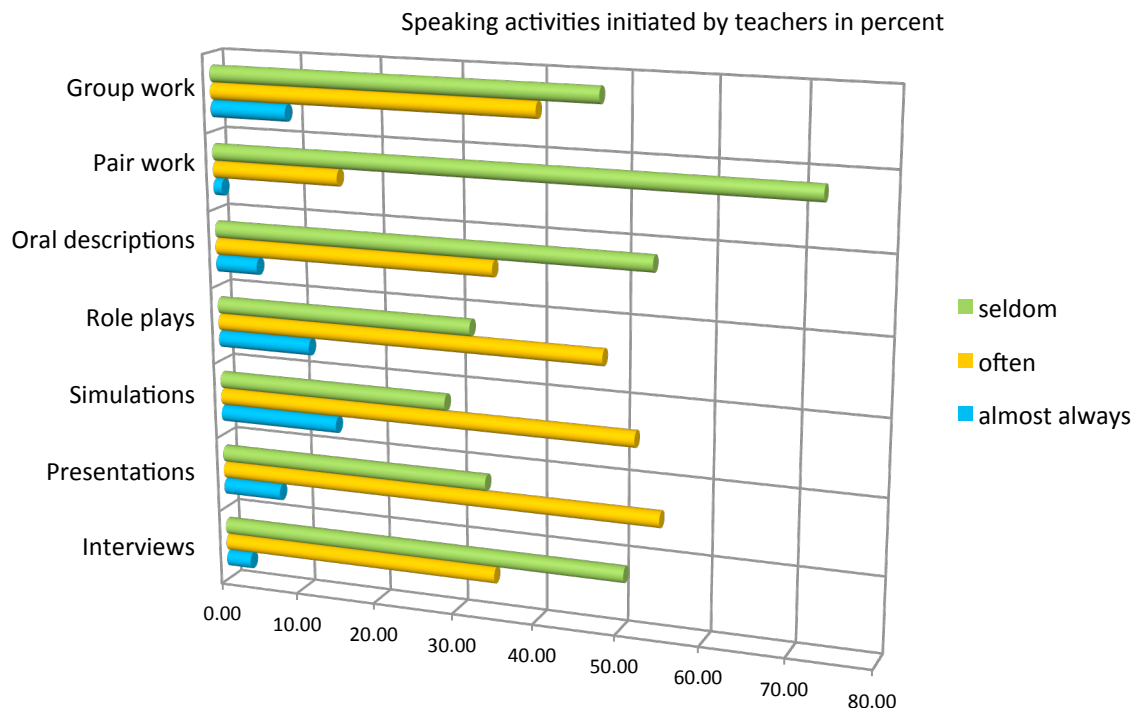


Fig. 6: Percentage of different kinds of speaking activities initiated in the English lessons.

The results of the online questionnaire imply that role plays, simulations and presentations are most frequently initiated by teachers when speaking is taught. What is striking is the fact that apparently interviews and pair work are seldom used in the teaching of speaking. This shows a potential for improvement and should be picked up by teacher in-service training and teacher education as well as course book writers.

In order to provide a better overview, results from almost always and very often, often and sometimes, seldom and hardly ever in this graph have been accumulated.

The open-ended questionnaire, where the teachers listed their own activities, presents slightly different results.

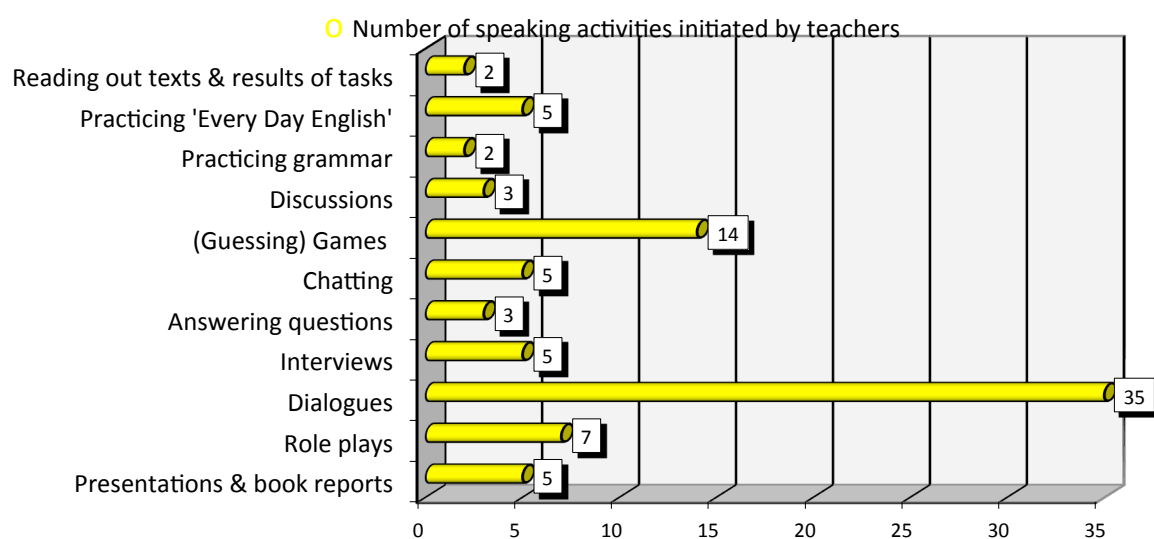


Fig. 7: Speaking activities initiated by teachers

Each of the thirty-five participants mentions dialogues as the most frequently used oral task, fourteen frequently use games and quizzes, seven often initiate role plays. Some teachers consider *reading out texts and the results of tasks*, and *practicing grammar* as speaking activities worth mentioning.

5 A summary of the research results

One of the more significant findings to emerge from the course book analysis is that the Austrian course books do not offer enough speaking activities to cover the teaching time that should be spent for speaking according to the curriculum. In addition, the tasks generally do not provide enough lexis and scaffolding to enhance longer stretches of spoken interaction. Course book authors fail to include a sufficient number of communicative tasks that focus on form on the one hand and *real* life tasks that create a natural need to talk on the other.

The most striking result to emerge from the questionnaire is that most teachers claim to devote 20-30 % of their teaching time to speaking and that they apparently compensate the lack of speaking activities in the course books with additional materials such as published resources and self made materials.

The results of this study support previous signs that the students do not speak often and long enough and mostly do not reach the speaking time suggested by the curriculum.

Teachers seem to be partly aware of the fact that their course books do not support them sufficiently in teaching speaking, which is why they make use of other materials as well.

The speaking activities that teachers declare they initiate are mainly different kinds of dialogues, games and quizzes, role plays and presentations. Real life communicative tasks such as information gap exercises, jig-saw activities or information gathering activities are not mentioned.

6 Conclusion and suggestions

The importance of teaching speaking is manifested in the Austrian curriculum, and course book writers and teachers are aware of the importance of teaching the spoken language, there is still a long and winding towards the targets for speaking according to the curriculum. The aim should be to increase both the communicative tasks and the speaking time in the Austrian classrooms.

This goal can only be achieved if profound changes in teacher training and continuing teacher education are made by introducing a more communicative approach to language teaching and by reconsidering traditional classroom arrangements.

A more profound knowledge about different aspects of teaching speaking is expected to lead teachers to a more critical attitude concerning course book activities. This might ideally put pressure on course book writers to provide not only a sufficient number of speaking activities per academic year but also to increase the number of *high-quality* and truly motivating communicative tasks, such as real life activities requiring creative thinking and genuine interaction, and the necessary scaffolding tools to support the learners in their progress. Secondly, it might ensure that course books would actually assist teachers in teaching speaking instead of leading them into wrong directions.

7 First Aid Kit for teachers: 17 TECHNIQUES TO MAKE LEARNERS SPEAK

“The value of an idea lies in the using of it.” (Thomas A. Edison)

This paper does not end with conclusions and suggestions for the future; it has been decided to attempt a more immediate approach. In order to provide the reader with suggestions that can be realized straight away an alphabetical compilation of speaking activities has been collected and categorized.

The chart below focuses on what are commonly acknowledged to be real speaking activities without adding any of the other skills that might be involved at the same time. With regards to the theoretical background

discussed in 3.1, each activity has been labelled as a pre- communicative or a communicative activity. Additionally each technique is categorized as either language or fluency focussed and the social organization of the class is indicated. Finally, advantages and disadvantages or challenges that might arise are pointed out.

In the appendix a more extended version of this rather compact inventory comprising detailed explanations and examples has been added.

Captions:

- WCT ⇒ *whole class teaching*
 IW ⇒ *individual work*
 PW ⇒ *pair work*
 GW ⇒ *group work*
 CA ⇒ *communicative activity*
 PA ⇒ *pre-communicative activity*

ACTIVITY	FOCUS	INTER-ACTION	ADVANTAGES	CHALLENGES/ DISADVANTAGES
Chants & rhymes	language PCA	WCT IW	repetition as a comfort zone; practicing sounds; degree of anonymity while speaking; chunks may be memorized	no language production; no real life activity; thinking can be <i>switched off</i> while speaking
Conversations & chats	fluency language CA	PW GW WCT	real life activity; language production ; useful for language focus - concentrating on certain <i>features</i> ; e.g.: giving advice	needs careful planning and preparation: starters as ice- breakers, prompts to keep conversation going, scaffolding according to students' needs
Descriptions pictures, people, places, events	fluency CA	PW GW WCT IW	real life activity; language production	there should always be a task for the listeners to pay attention: e.g. drawing the landscape described by the partner
Dictations running dict., mumbling messenger dict.	language PCA	PW GW	memorizing strategies; pronunciation and spelling	no real language production
Dialogues	fluency language CA	PW	real life activity; language production ; also useful for language focus to practice certain lexical or grammatical features	when used for focus on language it needs careful planning and preparation to ensure real language production; may need prompts and scaffolding
Digital voice mails & recorded diaries	fluency CA	IW	to some extent real life activity; language production ; can be collected in a portfolio to keep track of the speaking process	may need scaffolding according to learners' needs; danger that learner sticks to prepared text instead of speaking freely
Discussions & debates (fish- bowl debate)	fluency CA	PW GW WCT	real life activity; language production ; especially fishbowl debate highly engaging as long as prompts and scaffolding are well planned	class discussions likely to be dominated by a few fluent speakers; problem can be met by PW/GW first to collect arguments before discussion starts

Drills	language PCA	WCT IW	repetition as a comfort zone; practicing sounds; degree of anonymity while speaking; chunks may be memorized; may be helpful for 'noticing' certain structures	no language production, no real life activity; often no meaning, de-contextualized; to avoid <i>mindless</i> repeating: prompts can be provided that require to fill empty slots;
Guessing games	(mostly) fluency CA	PW GW WCT	realistic; language production ; element of spontaneity and unpredictability; natural way of much needed practice in forming questions	as a whole class activity likely to be dominated by a few fluent speakers
Information gap & jigsaw activities	fluency CA	PW GW	real life activity; language production ; makes use of natural curiosity; genuine need to communicate; spontaneous and highly interactive	might need careful planning, preparing and scaffolding
Milling activities	more language than fluency PCA	random pairs	real life activity; language production ; repetitive practice of asking questions; certain element of curiosity; connected to tasks, such as note-taking and/or reporting results	highly guided (not necessarily a disadvantage though); clear rules have to be set: danger of copying responses from partners' notes without asking the questions
Presentations, talks, stories, jokes and anecdotes	fluency CA	IW (PW WCT)	language production ; preparation for real life speaking: reacting to critical feedback and unexpected questions - practice of peer evaluation; additional communicative benefit by preparing speech in PW	listeners should be <i>nudged</i> towards paying attention by note-taking (constructive feedback, questions); to avoid <i>excessive</i> sticking to notes: cheat notes with certain number of words/phrases
Surveys & interviews	fluency CA	PW GW	real life activity; language production ; several tasks involved: production of questionnaire, interview, documentation and report; information gap if groups get different tasks	audience might not pay attention to reports; needs careful planning and preparation of ideally different task or tasks for creating a more natural need to listen to reports
Reading aloud	Language PCA	mostly WCT	practice of pronunciation, intonation and chunking language meaningfully; practice of peer evaluation can add communicative value	no language production unless students write texts themselves; no real life activity; only a useful activity if students are familiar with the text
Role plays & simulations	fluency CA	PW GW WCT	realistic; language production - provided that students produce the dialogues themselves: promotes communication, cooperation, collaboration in a real life context; can be scaffolded easily	memorized role-play or simulation from course books cannot be considered communicative
Silent dialogues	fluency CA	PW WCT	realistic; language production ; <i>talking in slow motion</i> : slowed down process supplies valuable thinking time; can have beneficial effects on extending the range of certain language features	learners might mull over their utterances too long; might turn into a real writing activity

Speed dating, concentric circles, onions	(mostly) fluency CA	PW	real life activity, language production ; repeating the same task several times effects fluency, accuracy complexity of production; can be information gap; makes use of natural curiosity	learners concentrate on delivering message but do not listen to partners: there should always be a task for the listeners in order to pay attention (needs careful planning); time for preparing cheat notes may be helpful
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9 Appendix

Extended version of 17 TECHNIQUES TO MAKE LEARNERS SPEAK

1. Chants and rhymes: *whole class teaching; individual work; language-focused; pre-communicative activity;*
 Chants and rhymes are usually contextualized and provide sufficient repetition to allow learners to practice the sounds, to reach a level of comfort and to feel successful. The use of humour adds significantly to the response the chants receive. The language chunks presented in chants and rhymes may be in fact more memorable than in standard drills because humour breaks down barriers and enhances the learning experience. Choral speaking works particularly well with students who are most reluctant to give voice to their new language. Learners are given a degree of anonymity and thus even the most timid are encouraged to participate.

2. Conversations and chats: *pair work; group work; whole class teaching; fluency-focused; communicative activity;*

Thornbury considers casual talk to be “by far the most common and the most widespread function of speaking” and to evolve “out of learning how to carry on conversations” (2005, p105). Planning something naturally unstructured and spontaneous as casual conversation is a real challenge for teachers and course book designers. In addition it depends on the classroom dynamics, if learners are prepared to share events in their lives. It is advisable not only to prepare a set of themes but also sentence starters as *ice-breakers* or prompts to keep the conversation going.

Conversations and chats can also be arranged as *language-focused* activities: e.g. by practicing appropriate reactions to a partner’s comment using certain expressions such as “You don’t say!”, “Really!?”, “You must be joking!”, “Oh, that’s really bad news.”, “Poor you!”

3. Descriptions (pictures, people, places, events): *pair work; group work; whole class teaching; individual work; fluency-focused; communicative activity*

One should bear in mind that if a student describes something to an *audience*, there should always be a task involved to make the listeners feel compelled to pay attention, e.g. the listeners get pictures to choose from. This way more people than just the speaker will be involved and it gives the activity more communicative purpose.

4. Dictations (picture dictation, running dictation, mumbling messenger dictation): *pair work; group work; whole class teaching; fluency-focused; language-focused; communicative activity; pre-communicative activity;*
Descriptions can be adapted to picture dictations when a person describes landscapes or rooms and one or more peers have to make drawings according to these instructions.

Running dictation: learners run to a text and read it and then pass the information verbally to a partner who either has to write down the entire text or fill in missing words into a gapped text.

Mumbling messenger dictation: learners run to the teacher who mumbles a text quietly without stopping. They listen and pass the message verbally to a partner.

Running dictations and **mumbling messenger dictations** are *language-focused* as no actual language production is required. The speaking skills that are practiced in these activities are memorizing strategies, pronunciation and spelling.

5. Dialogues: *pair work; fluency-focused; language-focused; communicative activity;*

“Dialogues have a long history in language teaching – not surprisingly, since language is essentially dialogic, any grammar structure or lexical area can be worked into a dialogue with little ingenuity, and they can be easily organized.” (Thornbury, 2005, p72)

Depending on the prompts or the instructions given by the teacher dialogues can be fluency-focused or language-focused. They can be anything from uncontrolled to heavily guided.

Fluency-focused dialogues can be prompted with pictures or prompt cards that might request to perform certain tasks (e.g. asking and telling the way, purchasing a certain item in a store). They can be scaffolded depending on the learners’ readiness. Language-focused dialogues can concentrate on lexical features (examples see *conversations and chats*) or on certain grammatical features:



A: *Do you ever wish you were taller?*

B: *Sometimes. If I were taller, I could be a basketball star.*

Expressions for answering ‘Do you ever’:

All the time.
Sometimes.
Occasionally.
Yes, but not often.
Yes, but rarely.
No, never.

Do you ever wish any of these things? Explain:

You were faster?

You were richer?

You were taller?

You were better looking?

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Appendix Fig. 1: Dialogue – language focused

6. Digital voice mails, recorded diaries: *individual work; fluency-focused; communicative activity;*

Learners can record themselves at home and submit their recordings (ideally per email) to the teacher for feedback. The learners can be given prompts just like for descriptions or any other kind of monologue. These recordings can be collected in a portfolio to keep track of the speaking process. Audio and or video recordings can be devised for both oral production or spoken interaction and can – in today’s era of mobile phones and tablets – be organized more easily than ever before.

7. Discussions and debates: *pair work; group work; whole class teaching; fluency-focused; communicative activity;*

Discussions require different language than, for example, presentations because the participants have to respond to arguments and counter argue. The most natural discussions are the ones that *erupt* spontaneously. However, the literature offers a great number of different discussion-like activities. The merits of discussions in groups have already been considered above.

In the case that class discussions are preferred because of the class dynamics, a good way to get all students involved (at least for some part of the debate) is to give them discussion cards and to allow them to collect arguments in groups before the discussion.

The **fish-bowl debate** might be the optimal form of class debates as it combines all advantages of class discussion and group work: Four to five chairs are arranged in an inner circle. This is the fishbowl. The remaining chairs are arranged in concentric circles outside the fishbowl. A few participants are selected to fill the fishbowl, while the rest of the group sits on the chairs outside the fishbowl. One chair is left empty. The audience outside the fishbowl listens to the discussion, but any member of the audience can, at any time, occupy the empty chair and join the fishbowl. When this happens, an existing member of the fishbowl must voluntarily leave the fishbowl and free a chair. The discussion continues with participants frequently entering and leaving the fishbowl. Depending on how large the audience is teachers can have many audience members spend some time in the fishbowl and take part in the discussion.

8. Drills: *whole class teaching; individual work; language-focused; pre-communicative activity;*

The aim of language practice drills is to train learners to talk and to help them master the basic structural patterns of the target language by imitating and repeating words, phrases or even whole sentences. Thornbury considers the merits of drills in drawing attention to certain language patterns and thinks that they might therefore present a helpful noticing technique and they provide a means of gaining control over language – of ‘getting your tongue round it’. He defines *fluency* as the capacity of stringing long runs together and of having a store of memorized chunks. He believes that drilling may help in the storing and retrieving of these chunks. (Thornbury, 2005, p63-64) It is advised to keep drills meaningful as well as contextualized. To avoid *mindless* repeating prompts can be provided which require filling empty slots. For example:

The students are asked to contradict either as a whole class or individually:

Teacher: You are lazy!
 Students: We are not lazy
 Teacher: You forgot your homework!
 Students: We did not forget our homework!
 Teacher: You are going to fail the test!
 Students: We are not going to fail this test!

9. Guessing games: *pair work; group work; whole class teaching; fluency-focused; language-focused; communicative activity;*

Guessing might be one of the simplest and most well-known activities. There is an element of spontaneity and unpredictability and the focus is on the outcome rather than the language used to get there. A great deal of guessing games provide learners with much needed practice in forming questions, an essential skill that does not always receive sufficient attention. In a whole class activity the focus can be shifted towards form when the teacher only answers questions which are formed correctly and otherwise keeps silent.

10. Information gap and jigsaw activities: *pair work; group work; fluency-focused; communicative activity;*

Information gap and jigsaw activities take advantage of the natural human curiosity. In both these types of activities, students complete a task by obtaining missing information, a feature these activities have in common with real communication. They therefore feature authenticity as there is a genuine need to communicate in order to fulfil a task or to achieve certain results. They are spontaneous and highly interactive. Converted into races, a competitive element can be added. Teachers need to be aware of the language demands they place on their students. If an activity calls for language the learners have not been familiarized yet, certain elements of language have to be pre-taught or the learners have to be assisted by scaffolding.

11. Milling activities: *random pairs; (mainly) language-focused; communicative activity;*

Milling activities, where learners are expected to mingle and conduct short and mostly directed interviews, sound fairly restrictive because they tend to be highly guided. Nevertheless, they comprise considerable merits: they provide repetitive practice of asking questions, the outcome is not entirely predictable and it makes use of the element of curiosity. In addition there is almost always a task connected to it, such as note-taking and/or reporting results.

The more advanced the students are, the more complex will the questions be fashioned: "Do you like...?", "Would you ever...?", or 'Find someone who...' where the learners actually have to (re)formulate the questions themselves.

Partner A: Ask your partner the questions below and answer his/her questions.
These verbs can help you: *stay, meet, lose, eat, be*

- 1) Have you ever abroad?
- 2) Have you ever awake all night?
- 3) Have you ever sushi?
- 4) Have you ever your wallet?
- 5) Have you ever a famous person?

Responses: Yes, many times. No, I haven't. Yes, once. Yes, I have. Yes, a few times.

Partner B: Ask your partner the questions below and answer his/her questions.
These verbs can help you: *be, find, touch, watch, win*

- 1) Have you ever a prize?
- 2) Have you ever late for school?
- 3) Have you ever a horror movie?
- 4) Have you ever a dangerous animal?
- 5) Have you ever something valuable?

Responses: Yes, many times. No, I haven't. Yes, once. Yes, I have. Yes, a few times.

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Appendix Fig. 2: Example for milling activity

12. Presentations, talks, stories, jokes and anecdotes: *individual work; fluency-focused; communicative activity;*

Telling stories and jokes is an important feature of casual conversation; the experience of standing up in front of a group of people is a brilliant preparation for real life speaking, especially in connection with critical feedback and unexpected questions by colleagues that might have to be reacted to. The communicative aspect can be heightened when learners are asked to work in pairs and take turns in practicing their *speeches*.

In addition to critical feedback a question and answer session should be allowed or the listeners can be provided with a check list (see example for a simple feedback sheet below), which helps them to evaluate the speaker's performance. This way the *one man show* can be extended to a task for the *audience* and the valuable element of peer evaluation can be practiced as well. However, teachers have to take into consideration that speaking in front of a large number of peers can be very inhibiting for learners. To alleviate the situation, presentations could be organized in small groups while other learners are occupied with different tasks.

Feedback Name: Date:

Please fill in: 😊😊 excellent 😊 good 😐 so-so 😞 not that good

Name	Title	Quality of the poster	Speaking clearly	Interesting presentation

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Appendix Fig. 3: Example for simple feedback sheet

13. Surveys and interviews: *group work; fluency-focused; communicative activity;*

Surveys are elaborated versions of milling activities and usually consist of several tasks: The production of a questionnaire, the interview and the documentation, and the report of the groups' findings. Even if all the groups work on the same topic it is advisable to allocate the various groups with slightly different points to find out. This way the reports to the class will draw more interest as there is a certain aspect of information gap included.

14. Reading aloud: *pair work; group work; whole class teaching; language-focused; pre-communicative activity;*

Who does not remember endless seeming lessons where as students you were supposed to take turns in reading aloud texts you barely understood in a way that it was painful to listen to? "This is the reason why this activity, commonly perceived as an unimaginative and easy time filler for the teacher was *shunned* as dull, anxiety-provoking, and of negligible benefit for a while." Gibson (2008, p29)

Reading aloud can be a useful tool for practising pronunciation and intonation provided that the learners are familiar with the text to be read out aloud. It is a skill that has to be practiced in order to realize which words to stress and how to divide the utterances into meaningful chunks in order to process messages comprehensibly. Ideally, a dialogue that has been written jointly by the students can be *rehearsed* before *performing* it in class. Reading aloud used sparingly and appropriately can prove to be a successful tool, for example, when carried out as a competition: a student reads aloud a familiar text until he/she makes a mistake, then it's the turn of the next one. This way listening carefully and the awareness of what is pronounced correctly and what is wrong is practised.

15. Role plays and simulations: *pair work; group work; whole class teaching; fluency-focused; communicative activity;*

Drama (the general term for role-play and simulation) is a teaching strategy which promotes communication, cooperation, self-control, goal-oriented learning as well as emotional intelligence skills.

Role-play involves participants to slip into a given role, into a specific person in a pretended situation interacting with other characters. Information about the specific role can be provided by specific role cards. At the beginning, cue cards might contain detailed instructions. For example:

Cue Card A:

You are making a party and calling a friend to invite him/her.

1. Greet and say who is calling.
2. Say why you are calling and tell your friend what kind of party it is.
3. Say where and when the party takes place.
4. Say what you are going to do.
5. Say good bye.

Cue Card B:

You are answering your friend's phone call, inviting you to a party.

1. Greet and ask how your friend feels.
2. Thank your friend for inviting you and ask where and when you should come.
3. Say that you will be a bit late and explain why.
4. Ask what you should bring along.
5. Say good bye.

Simulation is a simulated real-life situation where the learners play themselves practicing in a real-life context. This could be a typical asking and telling the way situation.

Drama is a structured situation where learners have roles, functions, duties, and responsibilities involving problem solving. It can be highly language productive allowing on the one hand more advanced students a lot of freedom of what they want to say; on the other hand "it can be set up in a highly structured way with a lot of teacher control." (McDonough and Shaw, 1993, p.165) Literature offers a lot of drama activity types which can be adapted to different levels.

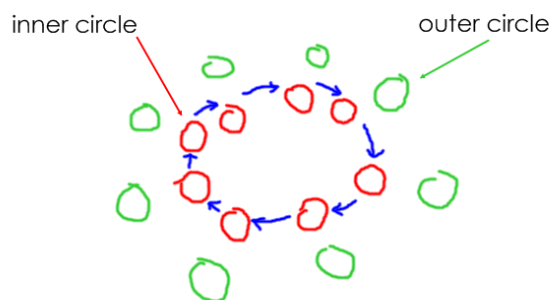
While the potential of drama is undisputed in communicative language learning **memorized role-play or simulation** can hardly be considered communicative unless the students have written the 'dialogues' themselves and memorize them in order to perform for an audience (on stage or for shooting videos). Like in rote learnt texts there is a certain language-focus, e.g. on pronunciation and intonation. Memorizing skills are practised as well and a lot of learners, especially young ones, love acting. However, these activities will hardly contribute to enhance fluency unless some learnt-by-heart chunks enter long term memory and can be retrieved in different situations.

16. Silent dialogues: *pair work; fluency-focused; communicative activity;*

Although silent dialogues are actually written tasks, the way they are carried out they can be considered as *talking in slow motion*. Real time speaking can often put a lot of pressure on the learners. The slowed down process supplies valuable thinking time which can have beneficial effects on extending the range of certain language features.

Silent dialogues work best in pairs: a shared sheet of paper is passed back and forth between the partners; the dialogue is carried out silently, without listening and speaking but by reading and jotting down reactions.

17. Speed dating (also called concentric circles, onions): *pair work;, fluency-focused, (language-focused); communicative activity;*



Appendix Fig. 4: Organization of speed dating activity

This activity might have many more different names but it is basically carried out this way: There is an outer circle of students facing an inner circle with the same number of students (should there be an odd number, one student has a short break each round or the teacher takes part as well). Within a time limit (usually 1-2 minutes per partner) the students take turns in telling a story or any other kind of monologue to their opposites. The students in the outer circle then move on so that they have a new partner and the activity is repeated until all the pairs had a *date*.

This activity follows the idea of task repetition which suggests that repeating the same task several times may have positive effect not only on the fluency but the accuracy and complexity of the learners' production (Thornbury, 2005, p85. Nation & Newton, 2009, p9)

It can be observed that students adjust to their listeners: They make efforts to speak more clearly, explain vocabulary or add or omit details when they notice that their communication was not quite that communicative the round before.

At the end, there can be a feedback which speech was clearest, the most interesting or the most helpful etc. To avoid the students' temptation to focus on simply delivering their speech without listening to what their 'date' has to say the teacher might set a task at the end where students for example have to fill in a charts or answer questions.

The possibilities for this activity are numerous; each student can give a monologue to a certain topic – for example *My favourite movie*. In the end the students can do a written or oral report on the most interesting movie. To prepare these monologues the students can be asked to prepare *cheat notes* writing down about seven words want to use.

In the case below the students retell the story about teenagers describing their favourite room in the house. In the end they are asked to fill in a chart about what they have found out after they have heard the (hopefully) same story from several different class mates.

OUTER CIRCLE GROUP:

Emily:

The best place in my house is the kitchen. There's a big table and four chairs where we have breakfast and dinner. There's a big window and we can look into the garden. There is a sink and a huge fridge, but not a washing machine (that's in the garage). Our cat's basket is there, too, and she sleeps there at night. I like the kitchen because it's a place for all the family. We always meet there and talk about our day. It's always a bit messy but we all love cooking and baking and chatting. There is always something on the cooker or in the oven. So it always smells good and it's warm in there, too.

<i>name</i>	
<i>best place</i>	
<i>furniture</i>	
<i>activities</i>	
<i>reason why</i>	

INNER CIRCLE GROUP:

Greg:

The best place in my house is the sun room. Three sides of it are made of glass and there are three skylights, too. You can see our big garden with the pond. There is a glass table, two armchairs and a small sofa. There's also a cupboard and a huge pot plant. When we have friends over we drink tea or eat cake or ice cream in the sun room. We often use it to play games on the glass table.

There's no TV or stereo, because it's nice just to look at the garden and the pond and listen to the rain when it drums on the skylights.

I like the sun room because it's always tidy and quiet. I also love reading there on rainy or snowy days.

<i>name</i>	
<i>best place</i>	
<i>furniture</i>	
<i>activities</i>	
<i>reason why</i>	

Speed dating activities can also be language-focused, and/or guided. The students might talk about a current worry that they have getting advice. The worry can be invented or be on a paper strip to read out while the answer might focus on a certain grammatical form:

Worry: "I have lost the key to my locker."

Advice: "If I were you I would..." or: "You could..."