

*Olga Kuznetsova**

STANDARD AMERICAN ENGLISH AS AN ASPECT OF AMERICAN BUSINESS COMPETENCE

Стаття розглядає лексикографічний компонент американської культури ділового та спеціального спілкування, як елемент розвитку комунікативних навичок студентів на основі методик, запропонованих в сучасному Standard American English.

Language instructors have the problem of getting their students to use their knowledge for actual purposeful verbal communications. This side of language teaching has come into greater prominence in recent years. Most courses now emphasize the importance of fostering learners' ability to communicate in the foreign language rather than their skill in constructing correct sentences, and there is a corresponding increase in the time and energy allotted to communication exercises in the classroom.

The most natural and effective way for learners to practice talking freely in English is by thinking out some problem or situation together through verbal interchange of ideas; or in simpler terms, to discuss that is to include anything from the simplest question-answer guessing process, through exploration of situations by role-play, to the most complex political and philosophical or legal debates.

The main aim of discussion in a foreign language course may be **efficient fluency practice**. It is today commonplace to say that language is never used, except in the classroom, for its own sake, but always for the sake of achieving an objective, or to perform a function: to persuade, inform, inquire, threaten, etc. Hence achieving an objective in itself must form one of our aims in holding discussions. As language teachers, we may see this as more or less secondary, but never negligible; and for our students at least it should be the central thought focus during talking. The purpose of the discussion, whether it is solving a problem, exploring the implications of an idea, constructing proposals or whatever, is to be taken very seriously and the results respected by teacher and students alike.

A special characteristic of a successful discussion is the apparent motivation of the participants: if to look around and see that all those not actually speaking are concentrating their attention on the speaker, and that their expressions are alive, that they are reacting to the humour, seriousness or difficulty of the ideas being expressed - then that is another sign that things are going well.

The problem of getting students to express themselves freely in the foreign language has come into prominence in recent years as a result of the growing emphasis on communicative abilities. But the basic idea of encouraging fluency through conversation is as old as language teaching itself. One conventional way of doing this is the 'conversation class', where a group of students sit down with a teacher and are required to talk with her. This often degenerates into a more or less biographical question-and-answer session of the where-do-you-live-what-are-your-hobbies variety, monopolized by the minority of fluent speakers. The reason for this is in the first place the lack of a defined and interesting **topic**.

* кандидат психологічних наук, доцент кафедри англійської мови гуманітарних факультетів Київського національного університету імені Тараса Шевченка

So the first thing to do is to bring interesting subjects of conversation to the classroom. Teachers increasingly hold topic-centred discussions or debates as a framework for fluency practice.

Topic is still seen by most teachers as the central focus of classroom discussions. To our mind, it is certainly important, but not central: the crux is not what to talk about, but why you need to talk about it.

Now a discussion which has no aim but to discuss the topic may, and often does, succeed, if the students are the type that enjoys arguing and are able to think in abstractions. But often, in our experience, the participation gradually subsides until you hear the familiar words: 'I have no idea what to say!' What the students who say this actually mean is that they have no reason to say anything. To tell students to talk about the latest political scandal, or whatever, is almost as bad as telling them simply to talk English. Why should they? They would never, outside the classroom, dream of inventing sentences about a subject merely for the sake of speaking. Such speech only imitates real conversation, it is in truth as artificial as most other classroom exercises, for it lacks the purpose of genuine discourse; and from this lack of purpose springs the lack of interest and motivation that too often leads to the 'petering out' phenomenon. In short, students need a **reason** to speak more than they need something to speak **about**; once they have such a reason, however, the fact that the topic is stimulating will make the whole discussion more interesting.

The topics themselves, moreover, are often rather limited. Most teachers and materials-writers mistakenly treat the concept 'interesting' as somehow synonymous with 'controversial'. Most of our normal talking is concerned with subjects that are more or less interesting to us, but few of them are actually controversial, and very little of our talking is arguing. If we want our discussions to give the students practice in a varied sample of language functions, then we must considerably widen our conception of what makes an interesting subject.

Further reservations about solely topic-centred discussions concern the usual manner of their organization. Firstly, in proposing a subject for debate, teachers (or their books) often misguidedly make their students a present of all the main arguments and items of information they are likely to need, thus robbing them of the initiative. Half the fun of debating is thinking up cogent points, bringing fresh evidence, or suggesting original examples. If all this has been done for them, then all the students can do (unless they are very original) is paraphrase ready-made ideas. These are unlikely to interest either speaker or listener, and we are back to the problem of lack of purpose.

Such discussions are nearly always carried out in the full class forum, a group of anything from fifteen to forty students. Now we want all our students to speak, and for as much time as possible; the simplest arithmetic will make it clear that in a eighty(ninety)-minute period, even if every member of the class speaks, he/she will do so for only a minute or two; not one's idea of optimum active learner participation. Of course, in reality even this is not achieved. The discussion is usually dominated by a few fluent speakers, and the rest either listen, or, bored by being passive bystanders, lose interest completely and turn to their private thoughts or, simply, next problems. That has a disrupting influence on the proceedings.

The obvious answer to the problem raised is to divide the class into discussion groups of between two and eight participants. In fact, this is so obvious that it is surprising how little it is done. The physical reorganization can be done very simply by getting some students to turn to face those behind them if they are normally in rows. This may need a little modification to ensure that groups are heterogeneous - or homogeneous, if that is more suitable to the exercise - and that there are no serious personalities clashes.

The first advantage of group-work is of course the increased participation. If you have five or six groups then there will be five or six times the amount of talking. Class discussions, as has

been pointed out, are very wasteful in terms of the ratio of teacher-or student-effort and time to actual language practice taking place; group discussions are relatively efficient. Moreover, this heightened participation is not limited to those who are usually articulate anyway; students who are shy of saying something in front of the whole class, or to the teacher, often find it much easier to express themselves in front of a small group of their peers.

The motivation of participants also improves when they work in small groups. This is partly a function of the release from inhibition described above, but other factors also play a part. The physical focus of the discussion is close and directed towards the individual student; that is to say, whoever is speaking is only a small distance away, clearly audible, facing the others and addressing them personally. Any visual or other materials are likewise close by: the whole activity is immediate and involving. More important, group-work lends itself to game-like activities; almost any task-centred exercise can be transformed into a game by adding an element of tension. Where this is not supplied by the task itself, the simple institution of an arbitrary time-limit or inter-group competition can easily do so.

Another advantage of group-work is that it frees the teacher from her usual role of instructor—corrector-controller, and allows her to wander freely round the class, giving help where needed, assessing the performance of individual students, noting language mistakes for future remedial work, devoting a little more time to slower learners. She also has an important role to play in leading and encouraging discussions.

In the course of group discussions, students will learn from each other, whether consciously or unconsciously. They may correct each other's mistakes, help out with a needed word; and of course they will teach each other some non-linguistic material as well, through the content of the discussion.

Sure, there are various problems associated with group-work: students get out of control; they tend to lapse into their native language when not under the teacher's the organization into groups time-consuming, noisy and disruptive; what to do with students who won't take part; or with a group that finishes too early; how to draw the session to a close; and so on. These questions have to do partly with that nebulous quality called 'discipline', partly with practical organization. As regards discipline: this basically depends on the personality of the teacher, her class, and the relationship between them, not on the type of activity. On the whole it is safe to say that a class which is controlled in frontal work will be controlled also in groups. Thoughtful and efficient organization can, however, contribute a good deal to solving the problems enumerated above.

In conclusion it is worth noting again that if communication practice is one of the most important components of the language learning/teaching process, it is also one of the most problematical. It is much more difficult to get learners to express themselves freely than it is to extract right answers in a controlled exercise.

Reference

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