

As the first step of the CEF alignment studies, speaking at DBE was focused on since speaking appeared to be the most neglected goal (result of DBE program evaluation reports 2003-2004 / 2004-2005). First, a research team was established. The research team started off by examining the speaking goals of the DBE and by analyzing the speaking tasks/activities in the presently used materials. The aim was to see the match between the specific objectives and materials and to suggest tasks/activities in case there were any discrepancies. Each group's objectives were also examined in order to enable us to come up with exit level descriptors for each of them.

INTRODUCTION

This report aims at answering the following question:

Do the DBE speaking objectives for each level match effectively with the materials used (course books and the supplementary materials)?

In order to find the answer for this question, the following process was followed;

- The speaking component of the materials for each level were examined thoroughly in order to discover whether they were enough in number and suitable to the needs of the students considering the objectives.
- Objectives of each level were examined to see whether there was grading and recycling within themselves.
- The same procedure was followed for across levels, as well.
- Objectives at each level were also compared to the overall goals to determine their suitability.

As a result of this process, the following results are reached and presented level by level;

BEGINNER ELEMENTARY AND PRE-INTERMEDIATE LEVELS

For the beginner-elementary and pre-intermediate levels, there are three books but only one objective that reads; ***“By the end of this span, the students will have practiced expressing themselves by using the target structures in the exercises in the course book, especially through the communication activities in each unit”*** and this objective matches with the materials due to the books' strong emphasis on form rather meaning.

However, it is worth noting that the achievement of this objective does not necessarily guarantee the achievement of the overall speaking goal of DBE which reads; ***“Express themselves in spoken language with a reasonable degree of fluency and intelligibility appropriate to academic contexts”***. Besides, strong emphasis on language – accuracy- can inhibit fluency to a certain extent.

Concerning the goal, ***“Develop academic language skills through integrated skills tasks”***, it is possible to conclude that although there is skills-practice in the course books, they are not in an integrated form, and the speaking activities are accumulated in the communication focus part, in which the students are asked to communicate not necessarily for a meaningful purpose but in order to be able to use the language presented in the unit. The book lists some task types as interviews, surveys, opinion polls, information gaps, discussions, role plays, games and problem solving activities. However, the aim of the instructor in those speaking tasks is to elicit the target structures and vocabulary of the relevant unit from the students.

In the communication focus section of the first unit in ***Focus on Grammar an INTERMEDIATE Course for Reference and Practice*** - for the Beginners - for example, the students are first asked to listen to an interview with a foreign student for a school newspaper, check the things the student usually does and the things she is doing now or these days. Students tick the appropriate boxes under the titles “usually” and “now/ these days”. (The activities and the situations are given as a list below these titles and they go as; “speak English”, “live in a small town”, “walk slowly” so on). This activity prepares the students for the next one in which they are required to walk around the classroom asking questions to one another to find someone who(likes visiting foreign countries, is not wearing a watch, speaks more than two languages so on). As it can be seen, one of the language foci of the unit is revision of “present tenses”, and in the listening-very first activity- the students are guided or equipped with the language they are to use in the second one (page:10).

Another activity in the same unit is a picture description where the students are asked to work in pairs to describe what is happening in each picture given, and they are also provided with some examples forms/structures which include the kind of language to use while discussing the possible explanations for each situation. Then, they are asked to compare their answers to those of their classmates. Tasks in the book are generally of the same or similar nature requiring the students to practice the language presented in the relevant unit.

Finally, regarding the exit goal that says “**build confidence in speaking in public**”, it can be concluded that, in the light of the given facts, it seems difficult for the students to achieve this aim at the end of the PIN level.

As a result;

- 1- The syllabus is based on structures practiced via the four main skills where there is strong emphasis on language and form which are not used as means to an end but rather as an end in themselves. The materials reflect this nature, too. Each unit in the books is based on a selected language point around which the tasks and activities take place.
- 2- As a result of the situation mentioned in item 2, the communication focus parts of the FOGs (including **A BASIC Course for Reference and Practice, An INTERMEDIATE Course for Reference and Practice and A HIGH-INTERMEDIATE Course for Reference and Practice**) offer language based speaking tasks in which the students are required to produce the grammar focus presented and practiced in the unit. The book assumes that the language taught and practiced in the unit will prepare the students for different communicative tasks and speaking practice on different topics/pictures using the relevant structures. However, not much input or strategy training has been provided for this aim in the books, especially concerning the Beginner, Elementary and Pre-intermediate levels, where students need more help to be able to carry out such productive skills. Besides, the books do not help the students with pronunciation, intonation, rhythm, stress patterns or spelling work.
- 3- As mentioned by the DBE instructors, the books are quite loaded and there is not enough time to practice the speaking skills in class. Besides, since the speaking skill is not tested, the tasks related with that skill are mostly skipped in class.
- 4- Since there is only one objective written for these three levels, recycling and grading of objectives for those levels is not possible. Therefore, there is a need for specific objectives written separately for each level. Otherwise, it becomes difficult to write “can do statements” as well as “descriptors” for each level. The speaking objective written for the beginner levels overlap with the upper level with a few minor differences. Objectives of the Upper levels expect the students to show higher performance regarding the speaking skills, especially on presentation skills. As the level gets higher, the students are directed towards a more process approach before presenting certain topics; they are required to introduce themselves, the topic and prepare an outline.

INTERMEDIATE LEVEL

The course book for this level is *'Focus on Grammar, an Advanced Course for Reference and Practice'*. Just as the other books in *Focus on Grammar* series, there is strong emphasis on structure and this is practiced through skills work. Therefore, the same trend, that is, having a speaking component for the sake of grammar practice, can be observed in this book, too. The tasks generally do not make it necessary for the student to speak, but what the task aims at can be done through written practice as well. This would suggest that these speaking tasks are not very meaningful or communicative.

Speaking activities come under the title 'Communication Practice', where listening leads to the speaking activities including information-gaps, discussions, surveys, problem-solution tasks and games. Information gap activities are frequent throughout the book, which means that students have the chance to practice the following from the 'Intermediate group speaking objectives':

- asking and answering questions to meet their needs in classroom situations;
- giving responses to questions posed by the instructor or classmates;
- asking clarification questions in a lecture or discussion;

However, apart from grammar instruction, there is no input or raising awareness activities on these objectives, which makes them difficult to be achieved. For instance, voicing a question is different from writing a question in that there are a variety of questions which require different intonation patterns; however, students' awareness of such skills is not raised in the book. Besides, there is no register work in the book, where students are presented with the ways of adapting their questions/language according to their listener. The committee feels that this rather should be an objective in this level.

There is one picture description task in each unit and it seems to provide free speaking practice. Students are guided through some questions which aim to elicit the language focused on in the unit. These picture description tasks seem to help students in:

expressing themselves or giving information about sb./ sth. using the target language introduced in the Course Book;

- oral fluency through the exercises in the Course Book, especially through the freer activities in each unit;
- sharing personal or group opinion with the instructor and classmates; p.362
- discussing problems and their solutions, their weaknesses and strengths;
- talking about causes and effects of certain issues;
- talking about advantages/disadvantages, similarities/differences of different situations;
- voicing questions, comments, criticisms, objections, complaints to the instructor;

Whereas some picture description tasks seem to focus more on language work (for instance the one on p.74, p.116, p.195, p.315, p.334), others provide students with a problem and ask them to find solutions (p.166) or express opinions on a situation (p.362, p.375, p.405, p.445).

Although they are not as frequent, there are a number of speaking tasks where students are asked to give an oral presentation (p.14, p.133)

However, it seems that the following two objectives, which are both concerned with interaction rather than production, are not met in the book

- initiating and maintaining a conversation appropriate to the context in an academic setting and speaking with reasonable accuracy, fluency, intelligibility;
- making their argument on controversial issues and defending it, or refuting others' arguments.

Finally it could be assumed that in any language classroom students are expected to "give oral responses to reading comprehension questions" and therefore, this may not be considered a speaking objective for any level.

UPPER INTERMEDIATE LEVEL

By looking at *"Insights 2"* (1st semester) & *"Raise the Issues"* (2nd semester), the main course books of the Upper-intermediate level(UIN), in detail and comparing it with the speaking objectives, again it was realized that the objectives are appropriately covered with the books and speaking material handouts. Once *"Insights 2"* is concerned, it was noticed that there are many speaking activities usually in the form of discussion:

- asking questions and expecting students to discuss them in pairs or groups as pre/post reading/listening activities
- recycling vocabulary
- picture discussions related to the unit's topic, that is, oral interpretation of visual information

Some of the objectives of the fall semester are:

- * asking clarification questions in a lecture or a discussion session;
- * giving oral responses to reading-comprehension questions;
- * using comparison and contrast structures to talk about similarities and differences.
- * the oral interpretation of visual information;
- * asking questions for further information or clarification;
- * giving responses to questions posed by peers or the teacher;
- * debating an issue where there is disagreement or misunderstanding;
- * defending one's choice in a discussion within class;
- * sharing personal or group opinion with the instructor and classmates.

These are in parallel with *"Insights 2"*, but what was felt from the objectives is that some of them are tailored towards the needs of the book not of the departments' overall objectives. Moreover, some of the objectives may be debatable when compared to CEF (Are they really objectives or tools? Perhaps this is another issue to be dealt with).

When the second book *"Raise The Issues"* was considered, it was seen that it actually has a speaking section including group discussions, role-plays and a debate. The speaking activities are directly related to the unit and require students to make use of all the material presented in the unit. On a higher level, it also requires critical thinking.

Yet again, looking at the objectives of the spring semester, it was felt that the objectives were geared towards the book not vice versa. For example,

- * debating on an issue where there is disagreement or misunderstanding

ORAL PRESENTATION GUIDELINES HANDOUT

Examining the handout, it was noticed that it is quite detailed with all the necessary information given to prepare a good presentation. The handout also include a presentation rubric where students are asked to grade oral presentations. Therefore, they are actively involved.

The following objectives are fulfilled with this handout:

- * introducing themselves, the topic and the outline of their presentations;
- * giving an oral presentation;
- * giving responses to questions posed by peers or the teacher;
- * debating on an issue where there is disagreement or misunderstanding;
- * defending one's choice in a discussion within class;
- * sharing personal or group opinion with the instructor and classmates.

The only question that could be asked here is at what level should presentation skills be introduced to students? Another point that has to be considered here is that starting from 2006-2007 academic year, UIN level students will not sit for the EPE in January. Students that have reached the required average will become Advanced level in the spring semester, where they will be preparing portfolios with more emphasis on speaking skills. As of yet, we do not know what the curriculum will be like.

Some objectives that need consideration:

An issue noticed in both books is that language structures for some objectives have not been given to students, such as debates, clarification questions, meeting classroom needs, giving information about and expressing themselves etc.

- * asking and answering questions to meet their needs in classroom situations;
- * expressing themselves or giving information about sb./sth. by using the target language;
- * asking clarification questions in a lecture or a discussion;
- * talking about similarities/ differences or advantages/disadvantages in a given situation;

Probably, it is assumed that the students know these language structures which bring us to another point that is worth considering. The other levels do not cater to some of the objectives mentioned above as well; then why were they added?

CONCLUSION

As a result of the analysis process, in general, it was realized by the committee members that there is almost no mismatch between the objectives of different levels and the materials studied. Besides, there is a noticeable overlap between the objectives across levels. However, the achievement of the speaking objectives for each level in the DBE does not necessarily guarantee the achievement of the overall speaking goals. In fact, there is a noticeable gap between the expectations worded in the overall speaking goals of the DBE and the speaking objectives for different levels. Moreover, wording of some objectives do not seem to be suitable for the speaking skills. It was noticed that this is especially valid for the only objective (for the first three levels) of the beginner-elementary-pre-intermediate groups. It is grammar focused, expecting the students to use the target structures presented in the course books while expressing themselves. It is also found to be too broad.

Finally, as for the books it could be said that due to their form-focused nature, they seem to be more appropriate for self-study and reference purposes.