



Enhancing speaking through real life situations

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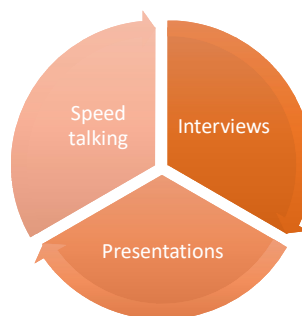
Introduction

The Language Centre at the Polytechnic Institute of Bragança (IPB) organises semester courses in order to prepare students for an Erasmus + mobility period across Europe. They are 60 hour courses according to the language levels provided in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). In these courses (English, Spanish, French) students frequently highlight speaking as one of their biggest problems. Language practice activities usually consist of discussion, information gap activities, role-play but no real interaction. Therefore, the focus is to try to overcome this and prepare students for real life demands by introducing several activities in a consistent way, which can be both useful for their future and from the educational point of view. This experience was carried out over the last three years.

Objectives

The main objectives of this experience in the language classroom are:

- To improve students' overall performance in speaking
- To raise students' awareness of real life speaking patterns
- To introduce more speaking activities in language learning context
- To promote real life speaking activities
- To contribute to their speaking proficiency and speaking confidence



Methodology

Different speaking activities are carried out throughout the courses. However, our main focus is on three types: speed-talking, interviews and presentations. These type of activities correspond to common real life situations when on a student exchange.

Students are frequently asked to introduce themselves in a quick manner, by stating their opinions on a specific topic or their home country and culture. This is therefore mimicked through the **speed-talking** activity, where students are placed in pairs, seated in front of each other and they have 3 minutes to debate a topic. This discussion can be about marriage and sexuality or pressing issues in media, which are given to them through randomly chosen flashcards. When time is up, they have to change pairs and topics, so that they cover different themes and express diversified opinions on general contemporary issues with different people.

When abroad, students have to be inquisitive, either with other students, when taking care of academic procedures regarding their mobility, when arranging accommodation or when talking to teachers about assignments. This is why they engage in **interviews**. They are usually short (8 to 10 minutes) and the interviewee is someone who is not part of the class, usually an international or Erasmus student so that their spontaneous and real curiosity is explored.

During their mobility period students also have to present on several topics. This is the reason why they have to be prepared from the academic point of view. After being taught some basic academic language in English, Spanish or French, as well as some useful speaking tips, they have to present on an academic topic of their choice. These **presentations** are given to their colleagues who come from different backgrounds and, as such, they are required to communicate better in order to get their message across.

Interaction is mainly on learner-learner basis, the teacher only supervises the activity, acting as a facilitator who monitors time and the compliance with basic rules.

The activities are carried out along the semester, recorded and filmed, and are viewed by the whole class as a debriefing exercise, where everyone contributes in terms of feedback. Although the main focus of these activities is not grammatical correction and overall linguistic norms, these are considered relevant since the students need correctness to frame their own proficiency and linguistic performance.



Results

Over the past three years these activities have been carried out with enthusiasm by students of different levels at the IPB Language Centre. Direct observation allows us to conclude that they not only enjoy these activities, but they also find them useful. This is backed by a questionnaire given to them at the end of the course where they express which aspects they found more interesting and attractive. The speaking activities speed-talking, interview and presentation appear on the top 5 of activities mentioned, along with written argumentative essays and emails. When returning from the Erasmus + mobility, students of the previous two years have given feedback stating that these activities were relevant for their speaking confidence when at the foreign university/school.

References

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Conclusions

There are several activities to enhance speaking in the classroom. In the case of the mobility preparation courses at the IPB Language Centre they follow the needs that students might encounter during their semester abroad. Direct observation confirms that the students like to participate in the activities and questionnaires confirm this. Feedback given after they return from their mobility period also shows that the activities are useful.

In the near future, we aim at introducing more real-life speaking situations in the language courses, planning to adjust better the different activities to the levels starting at A2, since confidence in speaking is viewed as one of the most relevant reasons why students wish to learn a language.

