



The general skill of speaking English as a Foreign Language for Cuban Language Schools

La habilidad generalizada hablar en inglés como lengua extranjera para las escuelas de idiomas cubanas

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Abstract

This article defines and describes the concepts of generalized skill, generalized operations, and operations. It provides the internal structure of the generalized skill to speak English as a foreign language for students of Cuban language schools and the synthetic analytical scale for its evaluation.

Keywords: skill, generalized skill, operations, speak.

Resumen

En el presente artículo se definen y describen los conceptos habilidad generalizada, operaciones generalizada y operaciones. En el artículo se aporta la estructura interna de la habilidad generalizada hablar en inglés como lengua extranjera para estudiantes de las escuelas de idioma cubanas y la escala sintético analítica para su evaluación.

Palabras clave: habilidad, habilidad generalizada, operaciones, hablar.

Introduction

The study of a foreign language is of vital importance from personal and strategic points of view, from the social point of view, it favors the insertion of the individual into society with better professional conditions, whether in the area of tourism, research, international relations, foreign collaboration and the establishment of new friendly relations.

The Ministry of Education in Cuba created the Languages Schools in 1961 belonging to the subsystem of Adult Education, with a still present objective, the learning of a foreign language to respond to the individual and collective needs of improvement in this aspect of the workers and to the interests of our country, immersed at that time in plans of social development on a large scale from its opening to the world.

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Currently, due to the transformations that have taken place in our country as a result of scientific-technological and social development, this Education has been immersed in different social programs related to the study of languages, especially for foreign collaboration, so nowadays we talk about Youth and Adult Education. People who present an autonomous nature since they have work experience, family, defined interests, and social life. The public is conditioned by personal and situational factors so they make their own choices considering the experience and the environment in which they live. They do not have much time to learn, so they set their objectives, an aspect that makes them increasingly demanding with the quality of their learning, they know what they want and what they need to learn.

The speaking skill is of paramount importance in the learning of a foreign language for several reasons, first is a vehicle for communication. Speaking is the primary means of communication in any language. Developing speaking skills allows language learners to express themselves, engage in conversations, and convey their thoughts and ideas effectively. Second, its practical application. The ability to speak a foreign language is crucial for real-world interactions, such as traveling, socializing, and conducting business in a multilingual environment. Third, it provides fluency and confidence. Practicing speaking helps learners improve their fluency and build confidence in using the language. It enables them to express themselves more naturally and spontaneously. Fourth, it helps cultural understanding. Speaking a foreign language provides insight into the culture and customs of the target language, as language and culture are closely intertwined. Through speaking, learners can better understand the nuances and social conventions of the language they are studying. Fifth, it supports listening comprehension. Developing speaking skills also enhances listening comprehension, as learners become more attuned to the pronunciation, intonation, and rhythm of the language through active speaking practice. Finally, it Overcomes fear and anxiety. For many language learners, speaking in a foreign language can be intimidating. However, regular practice and exposure to speaking opportunities can help individuals overcome their fear and anxiety related to speaking in a new language.

Overall, the development of speaking skills is essential for achieving proficiency in a foreign language and for fully engaging with the linguistic and cultural aspects of the target language.

There have been several notable research studies and investigations related to speaking skills in language learning. Some of the key areas of research and findings include:

1. Communicative language teaching: Research has shown that communicative language teaching approaches, which focus on real-life communication and interaction, are effective in developing speaking skills. Studies have highlighted the importance of meaningful communication and authentic tasks in promoting speaking proficiency.
2. Error analysis: Research on error analysis in speaking has provided valuable insights into the types of errors language learners make when speaking a foreign language. By identifying common errors and patterns, researchers and educators can develop targeted interventions to help learners improve their speaking accuracy.

3. Speaking strategies: Studies on speaking strategies have explored the techniques and approaches that language learners use to enhance their speaking performance. Research has identified various strategies, such as self-monitoring, planning, and self-correction, that can support speaking skill development.

4. Task-based language learning: Task-based language learning research has investigated the effectiveness of task-based activities in promoting speaking skills. Studies have shown that task-based approaches, which involve engaging learners in communicative tasks, can lead to improved fluency, accuracy, and confidence in speaking.

5. Technology-enhanced speaking practice: Research on technology-enhanced speaking practice has explored the use of digital tools and platforms to support speaking skill development. Studies have examined the benefits of using technology for speaking practice, such as providing opportunities for interactive speaking activities, feedback, and self-assessment.

These are just a few examples of the research areas and investigations related to speaking skills in language learning. Ongoing research in these areas continues to contribute to our understanding of how best to support learners in developing their speaking proficiency in a foreign language. However, its inner structure as a general skill for foreign language learners of the Cuban Language Schools is not provided yet. So, this article is intended to provide its inner structure for this context.

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Materials and methods

To carry out this research as well as to determine the inner structure of the skill of speaking English as a foreign language learner of the Cuban Language School it was used the methodology established by González (2023, p. 41) for the determination of generalized skills

However, there are various materials and methods used to teach speaking skills in language learning. The combination of the inner structure with advanced methods in teaching would guarantee the development of general speaking skills. Some of the main materials and methods include:

1. Conversational practice: Conversational practice involves engaging learners in authentic, real-life speaking activities. This can include role-plays, discussions, debates, and other interactive tasks that provide opportunities for learners to practice speaking in meaningful contexts.

2. Audiovisual resources: Audiovisual materials, such as videos, podcasts, and audio recordings, can be used to expose learners to natural spoken language and provide models for pronunciation, intonation, and fluency. These resources can also be used for listening and speaking practice activities.



3. Speaking prompts and tasks: Speaking prompts and tasks are designed to prompt learners to engage in speaking activities. These can include discussion questions, picture descriptions, storytelling prompts, and other open-ended tasks that encourage learners to express themselves orally.
4. Communicative language teaching (CLT) approaches: Communicative language teaching methods focus on promoting communication and interaction in the target language. This can involve using communicative activities and tasks that require learners to engage in real-life communication, such as information gap activities, role-plays, and problem-solving tasks.
5. Task-based language learning (TBLL): Task-based language learning involves using tasks as the central focus of instruction. Tasks are designed to require learners to use the target language for a specific purpose, such as completing a task or solving a problem. This approach can help learners develop speaking skills in a meaningful and communicative way.
6. Speaking assessment tools: Various assessment tools, such as oral presentations, interviews, and speaking tests, are used to evaluate learners' speaking proficiency. These assessments can provide valuable feedback to learners and help instructors identify areas for improvement.
7. Technology-enhanced speaking practice: Digital tools and platforms, such as language learning apps, video conferencing software, and speech recognition technology, can be used to provide additional opportunities for speaking practice and feedback.

These materials and methods are often integrated into a communicative language teaching approach, which emphasizes the development of speaking skills through authentic communication and interaction. By using a combination of these materials and methods, instructors can create a dynamic and engaging learning environment that supports learners in developing their speaking proficiency.

Results and discussion

Before delving into the skills involved in the speaking process, it is necessary to deal with the methodology established by González (2023, p. 41) for the determination of a generalized skill. It is significant to note that this methodology not only allows the identification of one generalized skill per subject, as the author states but that the determination of the number of generalized skills depends on the dynamics of the subject and the characteristics of the content. Thus, for example, in the subject of Integrated English Practice, four generalized skills are considered: speaking, writing, listening, and reading. In this work, the generalized skill of speaking, its generalized operations, and operations for Language school education, which are shown in Figure 1, are specified.

This theory is based on the conception of skill invariant, the referred conception is taken because:

- it allows structuring the skills in the form of a system;
- it is a didactic model for the improvement of skill formation and development;

- it makes possible the determination of generalized skills and therefore it is possible to apply them in a context other than the university context.
- In the theory proposed by González (2023, p. 41) he alludes, among others, to the following procedures for determining generalized skills:
 - the logic of the science to which the subject is related is analyzed;
 - the objectives of the level and grades are analyzed;
 - The logic of science is analyzed in the teaching-learning process of the subject;
 - based on the logic of the subject, the generalized ability is specified.

When analyzing the logic of the science to which the discipline is related, in Cuban Language Schools and how, according to the conception with the invariant of ability, the relation problem - object - the objective of teaching is reiterated at the level of discipline and subject, the general objectives and those of each grade are analyzed. From the analysis of the objectives of the level and each level and of the methodological guidance, the logic of the discipline is specified (in this case, both the objectives of the level and of each level are functions of the development of speaking skills). With the foundation of the logic of the process, an assessment is made of which of the skills has the greatest correspondence with it, which constitutes the skill with the highest level of generalization and must also have the characteristic of integrating within itself the system of skills that the discipline contributes to developing in the students.

Logic leads to:

- To use syntactic structures appropriately.
- To encode the message clearly and understandably.
- To use the communicative functions and notions adequately.
- To ask and answer appropriately.
- To paraphrase
- To reinforce the verbal message with non-verbal elements.
- To understand and be understood.
- To choose appropriately the norm and variant of the language.
- To establish contact with the audience.
- To articulate correctly.
- To vary tone, intonation, melody, and pause.
- To determine appropriate strategies for initiating, maintaining, resuming, resizing, and concluding the topic of conversation.
- To encode fluently.

As the logic is taken to the teaching-learning process, the objectives of the subject at the level are analyzed, establishing an analogy between the Integrated English Practice of the entire Language School levels. Integrated English Practice is assumed as a discipline and, as they constitute a subject in each level, the parallelism is established according to the curricular conception assumed.

The logic of the teaching-learning process of Integrated English Practice in Language School education allows assuring that one of the generalized skills of the disciplines is speaking, which has the characteristic of integrating the system of skills that Integrated English Practice contributes to develop in the students of this education.

The appropriation of general skills leads to the formation of theoretical thinking (Santiesteban, 2021), that is, to operate with theoretical generalizations, concepts, laws, and general principles, with the essence of knowledge. If only specific skills are developed, the type of thinking that is formed is empirical, on the contrary, the mastery of general skills, oriented to the essence, establishing links and relationships, and applying knowledge to new situations.

According to the definition of the concept of generalized skill, the generalized skill to speak is constituted by systematized knowledge; as well as the abilities that allow the subject/speaker to interact, communicate, and discourse any moderately complex teaching and non-teaching text - codified in a common linguistic system between the sender and the receiver, the structure of the ability to speak is shown below.

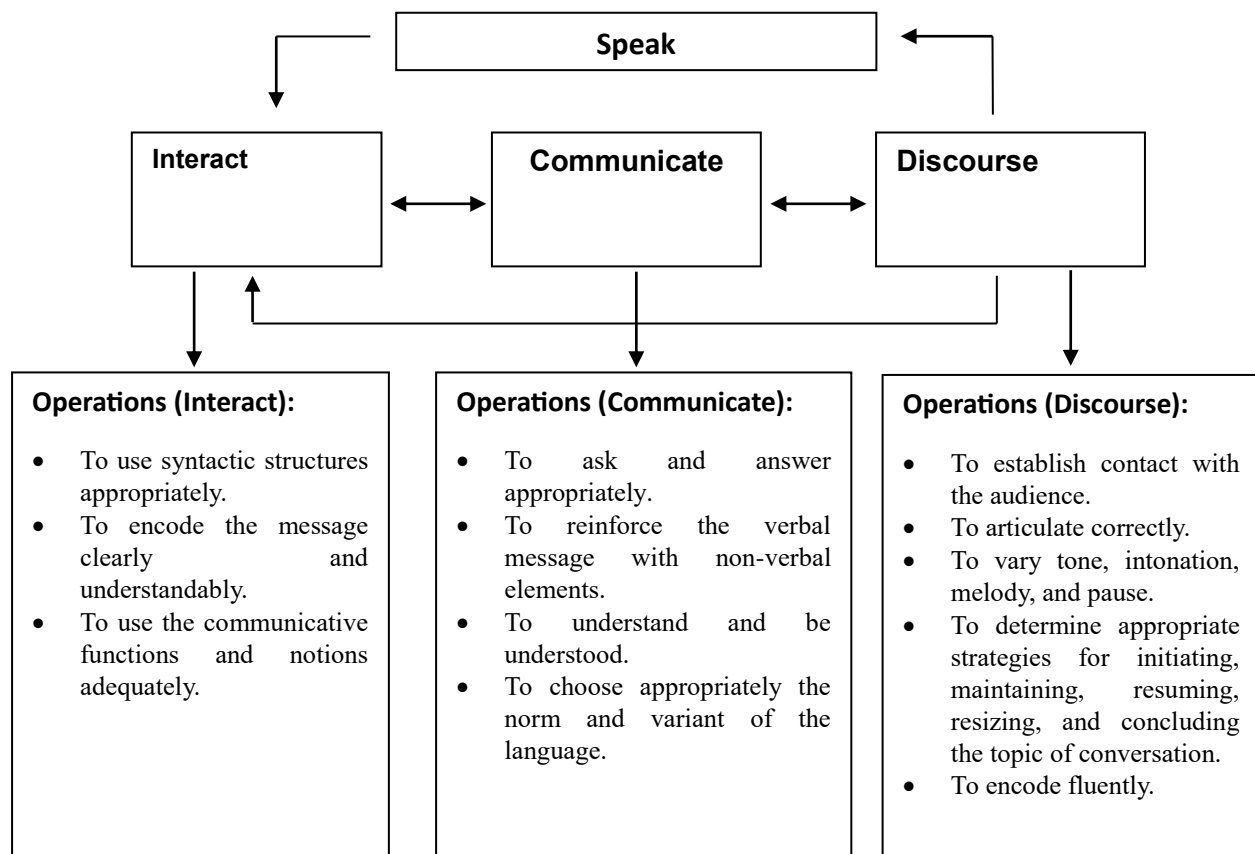


Figure 1. Structure of the generalized speaking.

To be able to carry out an objective evaluation of the aforementioned ability, the following is a definition of the operations that make up the aforementioned ability.

1. To use syntactic structures appropriately.

Very high (5): the use of syntactic structures appropriately is very high when the speaker, among other things, masters the syntactic structures; being able to merge the structure into the senses. In addition, he/she uses the structures with fluency and competence.

High (4): the use of syntactic structures appropriately is high when the speaker, among other things, masters the syntactic structures. In addition, he/she uses the structures with fluency.

Medium (3): the use of syntactic structures appropriately is medium when the speaker, among other things, knows the syntactic structures, but s/he is unable to use them in other contexts. In addition, he/she uses the structures regularly.

Low (2): the use of syntactic structures appropriately is low when the speaker, among other things, knows literarily the syntactic structures, but s/he is unable to use them.

Very Low (1): the use of syntactic structures appropriately is very low when the speaker does not respond.

2. To encode the message clearly and understandably

Very high (5): the encoding of the message clearly and understandably is very high when the speaker, among other things, is understood. Demonstrates competence in performing all the activities.

High (4): the encoding of the message clearly and understandably is high when the speaker, among other things, is understood. Demonstrates competence in performing all the activities, although s/he commits mistakes that do not affect the understanding of what s/he says.

Medium (3): the encoding of the message clearly and understandably is medium when the speaker, among other things, is understood. S/he commits mistakes that somehow affect the understanding of what s/he says.

Low (2): the encoding of the message clearly and understandably is low when the speaker commits mistakes that affect the understanding of what s/he says.

Very Low (1): the encoding of the message clearly and understandably is very low when the speaker does not respond.

3. To use the communicative functions and notions adequately.

Very high (5): use of the communicative functions and notions adequately is very high when the speaker, among other things, determines the most appropriate communicative functions and notions in correspondence with context and the people to whom s/he is speaking.

High (4): use of the communicative functions and notions adequately is high when the speaker, among other things, determines the most appropriate communicative functions and notions in correspondence with the context or the people to whom s/he is speaking.

Medium (3): use the communicative functions and notions adequately is medium when the speaker, among other things, uses the communicative functions and notions, but the selection is not appropriate in correspondence with the context or the people to whom s/he is speaking.

Low (2): The use of the communicative functions and notions adequately is low when the speaker, among other things, knows the communicative functions and notions, but s/he is unable to use them.

Very Low (1): use the of communicative functions and notions adequately is very low when the speaker does not respond.

4. *To ask and answer appropriately*

Very high (5): to ask and answer appropriately is very high when the speaker, among other things, can grasp and produce his/her ideas; that is when the speaker can decode the full range of information, demonstrating competence and fluency.

High (4): to ask and answer appropriately is high when the speaker, among other things, can grasp and produce his/her ideas; although he is fluent s/he commits mistakes that do not affect understanding.

Medium (3): to ask and answer appropriately is medium when the speaker, among other things, can grasp and produce some of his/her ideas; lacks fluency, and commits mistakes that somehow affect understanding.

Low (2): to ask and answer appropriately is low when the speaker, among other things, cannot grasp some ideas; lacks fluency, and he rarely utters words in isolation.

Very Low (1): to ask and answer appropriately is very low when the speaker does not respond.

5. *To reinforce the verbal message with non-verbal elements.*

Very high (5): to reinforce the verbal message with non-verbal elements is very high when the speaker, among other things, is very fluent in the verbal activity and supports his ideas with non-verbal elements. So that he conveys the exact meaning he wants to.

High (4) to reinforce the verbal message with non-verbal elements is high when the speaker, among other things, is fluent in the verbal activity and supports his ideas with some non-verbal elements. So that he conveys the meaning he wants to.

Medium (3): to reinforce the verbal message with non-verbal elements is medium when the speaker, among other things, is not so fluent in the verbal activity and uses slight of non-verbal elements.

Low (2): to reinforce the verbal message with non-verbal elements is low when the speaker, among other things, knows some non-verbal elements but does not use them appropriately.

Very Low (1): to reinforce the verbal message with non-verbal elements is very low when the speaker does not respond.

6. *To understand and be understood*

Very high (5): To understand and be understood is very high when the speaker, among other things, can determine the most significant senses, define the meaning of the text, of the supra-oratorical units, the paragraph, the sentences, the lexical units, the utterances, and achieves the meaning of the text, and externalizes it with fluency and competence.

High (4): To understand and be understood is high when the speaker, among other things, can determine the most significant senses, define the meaning of the text, of the supra-oratorical units, the paragraph, the sentences, the lexical units, the utterances, and achieves the meaning of the text, and externalizes it with fluency.

Medium (3): To understand and be understood is very medium when the speaker, among other things, can determine the most significant senses, define the meaning of the text, of the supra-oratorical units, the paragraph, the sentences, the lexical units, the utterances, and achieves the meaning of the text, and externalizes it.

Low (2): To understand and be understood is very low when the speaker rarely determines some significant senses, and utterances, but can hardly understand and be understood.

Very Low (1): To understand and be understood is very low when the speaker does not respond.

7. *To choose appropriately the norm and variant of the language*

Very high (5): To choose appropriately the norm and variant of the language is very high when the speaker, among other things, takes into account the context and the people who speaking to select the norm and variant of the language effectively.

High (4): To choose appropriately the norm and variant of the language is high when the speaker, among other things, takes into account the context and the people who speaking to to select the norm and variant of the language.

Medium (3): To choose appropriately the norm and variant of the language is medium when the speaker, among other things, takes into account either the context and or the people who speaking to to select somehow the norm and variant of the language.

Low (2): To choose appropriately the norm and variant of the language is low when the speaker, knows the norm and variant of the language but does not select it appropriately.

Very Low (1): To choose appropriately the norm and variant of the language is very low when the speaker does not respond.



8. *To establish contact with the audience.*

Very high (5): To establish contact with the audience is very high when the speaker, among other things, dresses professionally, has a good posture, is educated, keeps eye contact, reviews the footwork, while standing still, and keeps your weight on both feet. When moves to a new position plate your feet before starting to talk, is aware of his hand movement. All movement should be meaningful and purposeful. Do not exaggerate. All the time demonstrates competence and a high level of creativity.

High (4): To establish contact with the audience is high when the speaker, among other things, dresses adequately, has a good posture and is educated, keeps eye contact, reviews the footwork, and is aware of his hand movement. All movement should be meaningful and purposeful. Do not exaggerate. All the time demonstrates competence and a high level of creativity.

Medium (3): To establish contact with the audience is medium when the speaker, among other things, dresses adequately, has a good posture, keeps eye contact, and does not control his hand movement. Sometimes exaggerate or do none.

Low (2): To establish contact with the audience is low when the speaker does not dress adequately, does not have a good posture, and does not keep eye contact. his movements are not meaningful.

Very Low (1): To establish contact with the audience is very low when the speaker does not respond.

9. *To articulate correctly.*

Very high (5): To articulate correctly is very high when the speaker, among other things, pronounces every sound accurately.

High (4): To articulate correctly is high when the speaker, among other things, pronounces the sounds correctly.

Medium (3): To articulate correctly is medium when the speaker, among other things, pronounces most of the sounds correctly.

Low (2): To articulate correctly is low when the speaker, among other things, pronounces most of the sounds incorrectly.

Very Low (1): To articulate correctly is very low when the speaker does not respond.

10. *To vary tone, intonation, melody, and pause*

Very high (5): To vary tone, intonation, melody, and pause is very high when the speaker adheres completely to the rising and falling English intonation model.

High (4): To vary tone, intonation, melody, and pause is high when the speaker adheres to the rising and falling English intonation model but commits very slight mistakes.



Medium (3): To vary tone, intonation, melody, and pause is medium when the speaker knows the rising and falling English intonation model and commits few errors.

Low (2): To vary tone, intonation, melody, and pause is low when the speaker knows the rising and falling English intonation model and commits many errors.

Very Low (1): To vary tone, intonation, melody, and pause is very low when the speaker does not respond.

11. To determine appropriate strategies for initiating, maintaining, resuming, resizing, and concluding the topic of conversation.

Very high (5): To determine appropriate strategies for initiating, maintaining, resuming, resizing, and concluding the topic of conversation is very high when the speaker determines the appropriate communicative function and notion taking into account the context and the person whom he is speaking to, demonstrates competence and culture in the act of speaking.

High (4): To determine appropriate strategies for initiating, maintaining, resuming, resizing, and concluding the topic of conversation is high when the speaker determines the appropriate communicative function and notion taking into account the context and the person to whom he is speaking to, demonstrates a certain level of competence and culture in the act of speaking.

Medium (3): To determine appropriate strategies for initiating, maintaining, resuming, resizing, and concluding the topic of conversation is medium when the speaker uses the communicative function and notion but does not take into account the context and the person to whom he is speaking.

Low (2): To determine appropriate strategies for initiating, maintaining, resuming, resizing, and concluding the topic of conversation is low when the speaker uses abruptly the communicative function and notion.

Very Low (1): To determine appropriate strategies for initiating, maintaining, resuming, resizing, and concluding the topic of conversation is very low when the speaker does not respond.

12. To encode fluently.

Very high (5): To encode fluently is very high when the speaker has a wide range of vocabulary, enhances ideas correctly, has a very clear speech, paraphrases whenever needed, and can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialization. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.

High (4): To encode fluently is high when the speaker has a wide range of vocabulary, enhances ideas correctly, has a very clear speech, paraphrases whenever needed, can understand the main

ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialization. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects.

Medium (3): To encode fluently is medium when the speaker has a mid-range of vocabulary, enhances ideas correctly, and can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialization. Can interact.

Low (2): To encode fluently is low when the speaker has a low range of vocabulary, enhances ideas, and cannot understand the main ideas of complex text.

Very Low (1): To encode fluently is very low when the speaker does not respond.

These skills are not levels, even though at the beginning they may manifest themselves as such, their development is achieved with differentiated systems of exercises that presuppose the procedures suggested in this article.

Conclusions

The structuring of the generalized skill of speaking makes it possible to organize the skills involved in the speaking process into a system.

The synthetic analytical scale allows an objective evaluation of the level of development of the generalized skill of speaking.

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