THE ROLE OF FEEDBACK IN IMPROVING SPOKEN LANGUAGE

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Abstract: Feedback is a central component in language learning that facilitates both performance improvement and learner development. In the context of speaking skills, feedback provides learners with essential information about the accuracy, clarity, and effectiveness of their spoken language. It functions as a mirror that reflects a learner's output, highlighting areas of success and those requiring refinement. The role of feedback is not limited to correcting errors but also involves guiding learners toward greater fluency, autonomy, and confidence in their oral communication.

Introduction

Speaking, unlike writing or reading, demands real-time processing and delivery. Thus, learners often feel anxiety, time pressure, and performance stress when engaging in spoken language tasks. Feedback acts as a support system, offering both corrective and motivational cues that allow learners to grow. Effective feedback bridges the gap between current performance and targeted proficiency, empowering learners to take control of their speaking development.

The process of spoken language learning involves multiple components such as pronunciation, fluency, grammar, vocabulary, and pragmatic usage. Feedback interacts with each of these components by pointing out errors, reinforcing correct use, and offering strategies for improvement. When feedback is delivered effectively, learners are not only made aware of their weaknesses but are also given direction on how to overcome them. This makes the speaking process more conscious, focused, and developmental. Theories in language learning, including cognitive and sociocultural perspectives, strongly support the role of feedback. According to cognitive theory, learners construct knowledge through interaction with their environment, and feedback serves as cognitive input that helps restructure internal language systems. In sociocultural theory, feedback is part of the scaffolding provided by more competent peers or instructors, helping learners perform tasks that would otherwise be too difficult to manage alone. This assistance is especially crucial in speaking where timing, appropriateness, and fluidity play significant roles.

Corrective and formative feedback

One of the most commonly studied aspects of feedback in speaking performance is corrective feedback. Corrective feedback involves pointing out spoken errors and often providing the correct form. This may be done implicitly, through recasting the learner's utterance in a correct form, or explicitly, by directly indicating that an error has been made. Each approach has its strengths. Recasts are less face-threatening and keep the communication flowing, while explicit correction is clearer and draws more attention to the error. Studies show that the type, timing, and frequency of corrective feedback all influence its effectiveness. Immediate feedback during speaking tasks can help learners make real-time adjustments, reinforcing accurate language use. However, too much interruption can disrupt fluency, suggesting a need for balance. Delayed feedback, given after the task is complete, allows for reflection and deeper processing. This is particularly effective when paired with learner self-assessment or peer discussion.

In addition to corrective feedback, formative feedback plays a critical role. Unlike summative assessments, which evaluate performance after the fact, formative feedback is continuous and supportive. It allows learners to adapt and refine their speech during the

learning process. Teachers who provide ongoing comments, suggestions, and encouragement foster a more dynamic and responsive learning environment. Such feedback is especially important for developing speaking fluency, as it encourages risk-taking and experimentation without fear of failure. Learners are more likely to try complex language structures or new vocabulary if they know that feedback will guide rather than punish.

Motivational and affective feedback also significantly influence spoken language performance. When learners receive feedback that acknowledges their effort, praises their improvement, and encourages persistence, they become more engaged and confident. Speaking in a second language often involves overcoming personal inhibitions and social anxiety. Positive feedback reduces these emotional barriers, making it easier for learners to express themselves. On the other hand, negative or overly critical feedback can have the opposite effect, diminishing learner motivation and increasing fear of making mistakes. Therefore, the tone, language, and timing of feedback are just as important as the content.

Another important dimension is peer feedback. In classroom settings, learners often work in pairs or small groups where they can observe and comment on each other's speaking. Peer feedback promotes active listening, critical thinking, and cooperative learning. It also builds a sense of community and shared responsibility for learning. Learners may find peer comments less intimidating and more relatable, especially when delivered in a supportive manner. However, effective peer feedback requires training. Students need to learn how to give constructive and respectful comments and how to receive feedback without defensiveness.Technology has expanded the possibilities for delivering feedback in speaking. Language learning apps now provide real-time pronunciation scoring, fluency analysis, and interactive conversation simulations. Teachers can use video recordings, annotation tools, and speech recognition software to provide detailed feedback on student performance. Learners themselves can record their speech, compare it with native speakers, and track their progress over time. These tools make feedback more accessible, immediate, and individualized. They also enable learners

to take a more active role in their learning by identifying errors, monitoring progress, and setting goals for improvement

Despite the numerous benefits, implementing effective feedback in speaking instruction poses challenges. Teachers often face time constraints, large class sizes, and varied learner needs, making it difficult to provide personalized and detailed feedback. Moreover, not all learners respond to feedback in the same way. Some may be motivated and receptive, while others may feel discouraged or confused. It is essential for educators to develop feedback literacy, understanding not only how to give feedback but also how to train students to interpret and use it effectively. This involves teaching learners to reflect on their performance, ask questions, and seek clarification. Developing such skills transforms feedback from a one-way message into an interactive dialogue that supports continuous growth.

To maximize the benefits of feedback, several best practices can be adopted. Feedback should be specific, timely, and focused on key aspects of speaking performance. Rather than addressing every mistake, teachers can prioritize a few critical issues and provide strategies for improvement. Feedback should be descriptive rather than judgmental, highlighting what was done well and what could be improved. Using models of effective speaking, rubrics, and guided reflection tasks helps learners better understand feedback and apply it in future tasks. Additionally, combining different sources of feedback—teacher, peer, self, and technology—creates a richer and more balanced learning experience.

The role of feedback in improving spoken language performance extends beyond the classroom. It prepares learners for real-world communication where they must adapt, respond, and improve continuously. In professional, academic, and social contexts, the ability to receive and act on feedback is essential for effective communication. Therefore, language instruction that emphasizes meaningful feedback equips learners not only with linguistic competence but also with lifelong learning skills.Feedback fosters self-awareness, adaptability, and confidence—traits that are essential for success in any communicative setting.

Conclusion

Feedback serves as one of the most powerful and indispensable elements in the development of spoken language performance. It not only functions as a mirror that reflects learners' current abilities, but also as a compass that guides them toward desired linguistic and communicative outcomes. Within the complex and fluid process of speaking, feedback provides clarity, correction, direction, and emotional support. It empowers learners to take responsibility for their growth, helps them notice gaps in their performance, and encourages them to engage more actively in the learning process.The role of feedback extends far beyond error correction. While identifying inaccuracies in pronunciation, grammar, and word choice is important, equally essential are the affective and motivational dimensions of feedback that make learners feel supported and encouraged. Language learning, especially in the domain of speaking, often challenges one's confidence and identity. Learners must not only master linguistic structures but also perform them in social, often public contexts. Feedback that is constructive, respectful, and timely mitigates this pressure and transforms speaking from a source of anxiety into a space for growth and exploration.In this context, multiple types of feedback—from teacher to peer, from self-reflection to automated systems—must be viewed as complementary rather than separate. Their integration provides a more holistic, comprehensive, and effective model of learning. Corrective feedback sharpens accuracy, formative feedback strengthens fluency, affective feedback builds confidence, and reflective feedback enhances autonomy. Feedback in speaking is most effective when it is personalized, goal-oriented, and embedded within authentic communicative tasks. Speaking proficiency improves when learners receive opportunities to try, fail, reflect, and try again—with feedback acting as a continuous guide throughout.Moreover, technology has significantly enriched how feedback is delivered and received. Tools that provide instant pronunciation analysis, fluency scores, and visual annotations make feedback more interactive and accessible. However, technology should not replace the human dimension of feedback, but rather enhance it. Teachers remain central figures in interpreting performance, providing nuanced judgment, and nurturing the emotional resilience learners need to persist and succeed.Educators must also develop what is increasingly referred to as feedback literacy—the ability to design, deliver, and manage

feedback in ways that foster growth. This involves more than simply pointing out mistakes. It means creating an environment where learners feel safe to speak, reflect on their own performance, ask questions about feedback, and gradually internalize the principles of effective communication. In doing so, learners are not just recipients of feedback, but active participants in the learning dialogue.As language instruction moves toward more learner-centered, communicative, and technology-integrated paradigms, the role of feedback becomes even more prominent. Feedback must be embedded in every stage of instruction—from task preparation and delivery to reflection and revision. Institutions and curriculum designers must prioritize feedback-rich practices, provide teachers with professional development opportunities, and invest in tools that support dynamic feedback systems.In conclusion, feedback is not an isolated teaching act. It is an ongoing, evolving conversation between teacher and learner, between performance and improvement, between effort and success. It shapes how learners perceive their abilities, how they approach challenges, and how they transform into confident, capable communicators. In the realm of spoken language performance, feedback is not only a corrective force but also an empowering one—fueling the learner's journey from hesitant speaker to fluent user, from passive recipient of instruction to active owner of voice.

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