THE ROLE OF NOTICING IN DEVELOPING SPEAKING SKILLS

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Introduction

In the process of language acquisition, speaking is one of the most critical and complex skills to develop. It involves not only the correct use of grammar and vocabulary but also pronunciation, fluency, and the ability to interact appropriately in different contexts. One cognitive process that plays a significant role in the development of speaking skills is noticing. Schmidt (1990) introduced the concept of noticing, emphasizing that language learners must consciously notice features of the target language to acquire them effectively. This paper explores the role of noticing in the development of speaking skills, its theoretical background, strategies to enhance noticing, and its practical implications for language learning.

Theoretical Background of Noticing

The concept of noticing stems from the cognitive theories of language learning. According to Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis, input does not become intake for language learning unless it is noticed. This means that exposure to the language alone is not

sufficient; learners must pay conscious attention to linguistic forms, functions, and patterns.

In the context of speaking, noticing enables learners to recognize gaps between their current interlanguage and the target language. It fosters self-awareness, which is crucial for monitoring and improving spoken performance. Through noticing, learners become active participants in their learning process, shifting from passive recipients of input to active constructors of knowledge.

How Can Learners Improve Noticing?

1.   **Recording Yourself**: Speak about a topic, record it, then listen carefully. Notice mistakes in grammar, pronunciation, or vocabulary.

2.   **Getting Feedback**: Ask teachers or classmates to give specific feedback after conversations or presentations.

3.   **Shadowing Technique**: Listen to native speakers (from podcasts, videos) and try to **copy** their exact pronunciation, intonation, and expressions.

4.   **Keeping a Speaking Journal**: After every speaking practice, write down what you noticed: mistakes, new words, structures you want to use next time.

5.   **Using Checklists**: Before and after speaking, use a simple checklist like:

- o   Did I use past tense correctly?
- o   Did I pronounce -ed endings?
- o   Did I use linking words (first, then, however)?

How Noticing Affects Speaking Skills

Noticing affects speaking skills in several key ways:

1. Accuracy Improvement

By noticing grammatical structures, pronunciation features, and appropriate usage, learners can correct their errors and produce more accurate speech over time.

2. Fluency Development

Noticing common phrases, collocations, and discourse markers helps learners speak more fluently and naturally.

3. Pronunciation Enhancement

By paying attention to sounds, intonation, stress, and rhythm patterns, learners can improve their pronunciation and be more easily understood.

4. Increased Autonomy

Learners who actively notice features of the language tend to develop greater autonomy, becoming less reliant on explicit instruction and more capable of self-correction.

Strategies to Foster Noticing in Speaking Development

Several strategies can be employed to promote noticing in the development of speaking skills:

Example:

Noticing in Developing Speaking Skills

Aziza, an intermediate English learner from Uzbekistan, often spoke English without paying much attention to grammar or pronunciation. She knew a lot of words but made frequent mistakes when speaking. One day, during her speaking club, the teacher recorded her presentation. After listening to the recording, Aziza noticed that she was incorrectly using past tense verbs — for example, saying *"Yesterday I go to the park"* instead of *"Yesterday I went to the park."*

By noticing her own mistakes, Aziza became more aware of the correct forms. After that, during practice, she paid special attention to using the correct tense. Over time, her speaking accuracy improved because she was actively noticing her errors and trying to correct them.

Conclusion:

In this case, **noticing** helped Aziza become conscious of her language use, leading to better speaking skills. Without noticing, she would have kept making the same mistakes without improvement.

"Noticing" means **paying attention** to language features such as grammar, pronunciation, or vocabulary while using or learning a language.

The famous researcher **Richard Schmidt** (1990) introduced the "Noticing Hypothesis." He said that **language learners must consciously notice language forms in order to learn them**. In other words, if a learner does not notice a mistake or a new structure, real improvement cannot happen.

The Role of Noticing in Developing Speaking Skills

1. **Identifying Mistakes**: Learners notice errors in their grammar, pronunciation, or word choice, and can work to correct them.

2. **Learning Language Forms**: By noticing how native speakers use certain phrases or structures, learners can adopt them into their own speech.

3. **Self-Analysis**: Reflecting on their own speaking — either immediately or after recording — helps learners see what they need to improve.

4. **Conscious Speaking**: By noticing, learners begin to control and monitor their speaking more carefully, leading to better accuracy and fluency.

Simple Example:

Dilshod, an English learner in Uzbekistan, often forgot to use articles (*a, the*) when speaking. His teacher recorded his speech and later reviewed it with him. While listening, Dilshod **noticed** where he missed articles. In future speaking tasks, he focused on using articles correctly, and gradually his speaking became more accurate.

1. Consciousness-Raising Activities

Activities that draw learners' attention to specific linguistic features, such as form-focused tasks, can enhance noticing. For example, learners may be asked to analyze transcripts of conversations and identify examples of tense usage.

2. Corrective Feedback

Providing immediate, explicit feedback during speaking activities can prompt learners to notice their errors and gaps in their knowledge. This feedback can be in the form of recasts, clarification requests, or metalinguistic explanations.

3. Peer Interaction

Group work and peer feedback sessions encourage learners to notice language use in their own and others' speech. Peer correction promotes awareness and reinforces learning.

4. Recording and Reflecting

Asking learners to record their speaking performances and later analyze them helps develop self-awareness. Learners can listen for errors, hesitations, and instances of effective language use.

5. Noticing Tasks

In speaking tasks, learners can be guided to focus on specific aspects, such as using modal verbs for politeness or intonation for questions.

Practical Implications for Language Teachers

Language teachers play a pivotal role in facilitating noticing among learners. Teachers should:

Design tasks that require active attention to form and meaning.

Provide timely and constructive feedback.

Create opportunities for self- and peer-assessment.

Encourage the use of reflective journals where learners record their observations.

Teachers can also model noticing behavior by thinking aloud during their own speaking and drawing students' attention to language features explicitly.

Challenges in Implementing Noticing Strategies

Despite its benefits, fostering noticing in the classroom is not without challenges. Some of these include:

Learner Resistance: Some learners may be reluctant to engage in conscious analysis of language, preferring more communicative activities.

Time Constraints: Noticing activities can be time-consuming and may compete with the need to cover curriculum content.

Overload: Excessive focus on noticing may overwhelm learners, especially beginners.

To address these challenges, teachers should integrate noticing activities gradually and balance them with fluency-focused practice.

Conclusion

Noticing is a critical cognitive process that significantly contributes to the development of speaking skills in language learners. By consciously attending to linguistic forms and usage, learners can improve their accuracy, fluency, and pronunciation while becoming more autonomous. Language teachers should strategically incorporate noticing activities into their instruction to enhance learners' speaking abilities. With thoughtful implementation, noticing can transform language input into meaningful and effective language output, facilitating more rapid and lasting acquisition of speaking skills.

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