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FEATURE

Teaching ESOL Listening and Speaking

Shawna Vyhmeister
Kathleen Flores

Abstract. *Breaking the sound barrier in a new language is a difficult step. Like babies learning their mother tongue, language learners generally go through a silent period, during which they listen to simplified language, and may even respond to simple commands, but do not respond orally. This chapter deals with techniques designed to help adult learners gain proficiency in listening comprehension, retention, pronunciation, and fluency.*

Most language students today do not learn a language for reading ability only, as was the case in the past. With the world becoming more of a global village every day, opportunities to hear and speak English are a reality for most English learners in a way that was not the case a mere decade or two ago. When students learn English as a second language (ESL) in an English-speaking country such as the United States, they are immersed in the language to such an extent that many teachers do not feel the need to emphasize speaking and listening skills. This is especially true for children, who are likely to “pick up” the needed oral skills without a great deal of effort or specific training. Adult learners, however, especially those who are not immersed in the foreign language (EFL), will need training and specific practice in oral skills if they hope to gain sufficient mastery of the language to use it for communication. Even though the focus of language teaching nowadays is communication, not becoming a native speaker, adult EFL learners will still need help if they are to learn the language well enough to communicate freely and understandably.

Goals

By the end of this article, readers will

- Appreciate the importance of teaching both listening and speaking skills to most groups of adult English learners.
- Understand the need for teachers to carefully control the level of difficulty in speaking and listening materials.
- Understand the need for highly motivating activities to achieve participation in oral communication.
- Know how to assess materials and select appropriate items for listening and speaking activities.
- Be able to design listening comprehension and retention activities that are appropriate to the level of the learners.
- Know when to limit error correction in order to increase participation and fluency.
- Understand the difference between teaching separate phonetic sounds and teaching fluency and expression, and know when to emphasize each.

Early Beginnings of Language Teaching

As early as the beginning of written history, foreign languages were learned so that one could access the content that was written in them. A thousand years after Latin was no longer spoken, it was still being taught in schools, in order to access literature written in it. Some people today still study classical Greek and Hebrew for the same reasons. But today languages are generally studied so that we can speak them and use them to communicate with others, and this changes the way the language is taught.

A Short History of Teaching Oral Skills

For centuries, language was taught using rote learning. Foreign language teaching focused on what has often been called the “grammar-translation method,” because students studied grammar rules and structure, and mainly focused on reading comprehension of the foreign language and translation of it to their native tongue. The teaching of oral skills was not given importance since fluency in speaking was not the goal in language learning. “Oral practice was limited to students reading aloud the sentences they had translated” (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 4).

World War II was the impetus for needing people who could fluently speak the languages of their allies and enemies. During this time, speaking and pronunciation were largely taught through imitation (Cook, 2008), in the same

manner that Professor Higgins taught Eliza Doolittle to correctly say “The rain in Spain stays mainly in the plain” in the famous classic movie, “My Fair Lady.”

More recent history of language teaching has seen a plethora of methods, including “The Silent Way,” in which students are responsible for their own learning through problem solving, discovering, and creating (Brown, 1994), “Total Physical Response (TPR),” in which students learn to respond to oral instructions as listeners and performers (Brown, 1994; Brown, 2007), “The Natural Approach,” in which students rely on their teacher as their primary source of comprehensible input as they try to engage in meaningful conversations (Brown, 1994; Krashen, 1982/2009), and “The Communicative Approach,” in which students are regularly given opportunities to interact with each other and negotiate meanings to develop and hone their skills to communicate in the target language (Celce-Murcia, 2006).

Clearly, a balanced approach is needed. Most teachers do not choose one single approach, but blend several, as needed. Each of these approaches adds a new dimension to language teaching, but without understanding the theories behind the practices, it is difficult to choose appropriate techniques.

Theoretical Underpinnings Related to Listening and Speaking

General language-teaching knowledge provides some introductory understandings of how people learn languages. Even though much of the literature has downplayed the need for teaching oral skills in recent years, the focus on these areas is returning, especially in EFL settings.

ESL vs. EFL

An important distinction must be drawn between ESL and EFL, and this difference is nowhere more important than in the areas of speaking and listening. Students learning English as a foreign language do not have many opportunities to practice English outside of class. Their motivation to learn may also be much lower since they do not generally need the language in order to survive in their daily life. Because of these two major differences with an ESL immersion setting, class activities need to be structured differently. EFL students need more in-class practice to master the same concepts. They need extra motivation. They need motivating materials that will help them extend their practice outside of class hours. They may need more pronunciation instruction, and more fluency practice, as well as more listening practice in class. Unfortunately, in an EFL setting, appropriate materials are often harder to find and purchase, which can hinder practice both in and out of the classroom.

Added to this difficulty of finding materials is the fact that every learner has his or her own level, and this creates a situation in which English teachers need to be constantly searching for appropriate language teaching materials. Nowhere is this more important than in speaking and listening, where the materials need to be slightly easier for the students than in reading and writing. Students cannot speak about a topic unless they have the vocabulary; they also need grammar, pronunciation, organization, and speed. Putting all this together into multiple sentences without stopping is daunting for a language learner.

Variability

The way language, especially oral skills, should be taught varies not only based on what language is generally spoken where the learners live, but also based on the age of the students, their purpose for learning, their background, and even their personality. Children tend to be more comfortable in an immersion setting, whereas adults usually prefer learning the rules in the “safe” environment of their own language. A person’s nationality and prior experience with English classes may also strongly dictate the way he or she expects class to be taught. Some students are comfortable trying their new skills on people they meet on the street; others will barely utter a word, even in class, with prompting.

The good news is that there is not only one way to learn a language. Those who talk more tend to have poorer grammar, but they gain much more fluency, vocabulary, and confidence, and this often makes up for a few additional grammar mistakes. Often those who are timid simply do not get enough practice with the language, but sometimes they actually read better and have better grammar. What all this means is that speaking and listening are two of the five language skills (along with reading, writing, and grammar), and that, as with native speakers, when a person lacks in one of these areas, he or she usually makes up for it in another area. This means that each skill is important, but no single skill makes or breaks a person’s ability to learn a new language.

Krashen’s Natural Order Hypothesis

Stephen Krashen did extensive research on how language is learned, and came up with a series of theories. One of his theories suggests that language acquisition follows a ‘natural order’ (Krashen, 1982/2009; Schütz, 2007), somewhat akin to that of a child acquiring his/her first language. His study revealed that “acquirers of a given language tend to acquire certain grammatical structures early, and others later. The agreement among individual acquirers is not always 100%, but there are clear, statistically significant, similarities” (Krashen, 1982/2009, p. 12). Moreover, regardless of the acquirers’ first language, the same pattern exists in their L2 acquisition.

Several studies (Bailey et al.; Brown; De Villiers & De Villiers; Dulay & Burt, as cited in Mitchell & Myles, 2004) confirmed this idea of natural order hypothesis—grammatical structures that tend to be difficult are acquired last. This means that we should not teach certain language details (e.g. articles and prepositions) until students have learned the basics (nouns, verbs, and adjectives), simply because they are not ready to hold such concepts yet. There are also implications for teaching speaking and listening, as learners will not be able to master certain sounds at early stages, so there is no sense in focusing on them.

Acquisition vs. Learning

Another of Krashen's theories explains that adult second language learners have two diverse ways—*acquisition* and *learning*—of developing proficiency and competence in their second language (Brown, 2007; Krashen, 1982/2009; Reid, 2000; Schütz, 2007).

Acquisition refers to the 'natural' and subconscious process that is similar to the way children develop their first language (Krashen, 1982/2009; Reid, 2000; Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Schütz, 2007). This kind of language development occurs "through understanding the language and . . . using [it] for meaningful communication" (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 181). As a result of acquisition, students will have a 'feel' for the language they acquired (Krashen, 1982/2009), and will be able to use it much as a native speaker would. On the other hand, *learning* pertains to the means of consciously developing second language proficiency. This process involves "knowing the rules, being aware of them, and being able to talk about them" (Krashen, 1982/2009, p. 10). In short, this is developing competency about grammar rules of a second language. The basic logic is that an adult does not have a dozen years to acquire a language, and that systematic, planned exposure can shorten the time needed for learning. In any case, adults often prefer an explanation of the rules and a systematic approach over immersion, which rarely respects their preference for control and full comprehension.

The table below shows that acquisition is the "natural way" while learning is more technical. We can then conclude that fluency in the second language is achieved when the student acquires, as opposed to learns, the target language. Moreover, it is assumed that "children acquire, while adults can only learn" (Krashen, 1982/2009, p. 10). Krashen, however, negates this belief. He asserts that adults also have the ability to acquire or 'pick up' the language and this skill does not disappear at puberty (Krashen, 1982/2009). Nonetheless, with their years of experience in a different language, adults do face challenges in achieving native-like fluency in their second language.

Acquisition Versus Learning

ACQUISITION	LEARNING
✓ Implicit, subconscious	✓ Explicit, conscious
✓ Informal situations	✓ Formal situations
✓ Uses grammatical 'feel'	✓ Uses grammatical rules
✓ Depends on attitude	✓ Depends on aptitude
✓ Stable order of acquisition	✓ Simple to complex order of learning

Note. From *Krashen's Comprehension Hypothesis Model of Learning*, by V. Cook, n.d., retrieved from <http://homepage.ntlworld.com/vivian.c/SLA/Krashen.htm>

In the end, both learning and acquisition are important in adult language teaching. While adults may be more comfortable with controlled learning, they need acquisition experiences if they are to be able to use their new language in a real life setting. You can't learn to swim by practicing on the dock. Language teachers need to balance these two aspects effectively in the classroom. EFL teachers need to create opportunities for acquisition to take place, as without it, their language students will never achieve communicative proficiency.

Theory of Comprehensible Input (i + 1)

Krashen's comprehensible input posits that learners acquire a language when they receive input that is just a little bit beyond their current level. The rationale for this is that students' knowledge of the world and the context in which the input is given helps them understand the material that is just a little above their ability (Krashen, 1982/2009; Reid, 2000). This theory is based on the work by Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist who promoted the zone of proximal development concept, which refers to the distance between what the student can do with assistance, and what he/she can manage independently (Brown, 2007; Ortega, 2009).

The basic concept is simple—students need materials that are just above their current level of understanding. Too difficult, and they cannot understand—they need *comprehensible input*. If the work is too easy, they will be bored and will not learn enough. Language learners are particularly sensitive to level, and this concept is especially important in the area of listening and speaking.

Students cannot listen, understand, or retain something they cannot comprehend. Reading allows for dictionary use, and often provides pictures; it also allows the student to go back over the text again. In listening, these things rarely happen. The speaker continues, without repeating herself, and visual clues

are rare. People talk faster than the student's normal reading pace, and there is no way to go back over the text again. Speaking and listening are difficult for these reasons, and teaching them well is especially dependent on having materials and activities at the appropriate level, which is always just a little easier than for reading and writing activities. It is usually not difficult to tell, by observing students, if the correct level has been attained. If the task is too hard, students will not participate, and they may become frustrated.

Retention

There is also a quite separate concern in language teaching about the phenomenon of retention. Comprehension is one thing, but remembering something that was difficult to decipher and comprehend is even more difficult. Frequently, language learners will understand something clearly but will spend so much energy comprehending that they have no mental energy left to record what they heard. This may result in the student understanding almost perfectly what was said in class, but not remembering any of the content an hour later. Sometimes the only thing needed to increase the retention is simple repetition. Hearing something again makes the content more familiar, the listening and comprehending easier, and allows the brain to focus a bit more on recording what was heard. As language students move out of sheltered English into classroom settings, it is good advice for them to record lectures so they can listen to them again, or to at least read the textbook before class, so that the vocabulary and context will be familiar to them before they have to listen to the discussion. As a minimum, they need to review the concepts heard in class in some way so that they manage to retain them, because retention is not automatic with comprehension in language learners.

Communicative Language Teaching

Language is used for communication, and achieving communicative proficiency is the ultimate goal of today's language teaching and learning. This need for communicative competence in the target language gave rise to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Simply defined, CLT is "the engagement of learners in communication to allow them to develop their communicative competence" (Savignon, n.d., p. 22). Foreign language teaching for centuries had focused on grammar instruction—it was not until the 1970s when linguists began to view language as a system for communication instead of a system of rules (Celce-Murcia, 2006; Nunan, 2009). As the focus on communication grew, classes began to prioritize learner self-expression focused on meaning instead of drills.

What then is CLT? Since this idea has been derived from various perspectives (Savignon, n.d.), it is more appropriate to view it as an approach (Richards &

Rodgers, 2001). Brown (2007) offers the following four interconnected principles of CLT as a working definition:

1. Classroom goals are focused on all of the components of communicative competence and not restricted to grammatical or linguistic competence.
2. Language techniques are designed to engage learners in the pragmatic, authentic, and functional use of language for meaningful purposes.
3. Fluency and accuracy are seen as complementary principles underlying communicative techniques.
4. In the communicative classroom, students ultimately have to use the language, productively and receptively, in unrehearsed contexts. (p. 241)

Levels of Acquisition

One of the reasons that oral skills are difficult is that they involve a combination of multiple skills: pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and listening, all processed at a faster-than-normal pace for a language learner, and with little possibility of repetition. This difficulty creates a sort of information overload for language learners, which can be dealt with in multiple ways. Regression to simpler materials is the most common, as the difficulty and speed of oral skills requires that the materials be simpler than what students can do in reading, writing, or grammar activities.

Another way language learners often deal with the information overload in oral skills is by simply focusing on one skill. Most language teachers know that when students focus on pronunciation, their grammar goes out the window. If they are focusing on constructing sentences, pronunciation might be ignored. There is simply not enough mental processing power to do it all at once.

This difficulty with oral skills is part of an interesting pattern of language learning. When beginners learn a grammatical concept, they soon understand the concept but still make mistakes in applying it. They will eventually be able to apply it correctly in an exercise on that topic, but in a mixed exercise with other concepts, they will again make mistakes even if they understand the initial principle. If these exercises are done orally, they will again make mistakes, even though they understand the concept, because they are now focusing on different skills, and there is competition for processing power.

Adult language learners begin by learning separate rules. At first, these require a lot of attention in order to follow them. Once these rules are internalized, they form a part of systems which function almost automatically, allowing the individual to focus on meaning, expression, and other higher-order skills. As we move up the acquisition chain, free writing is next. Students will do exercises for a long time using a verb structure, but will resist using it themselves. At the top of

the acquisition process is free speech. Almost every language student has been heard to lament, “But I can understand so much more than what I can express!” Of course this is so. Even native speakers understand many more words than what we use in our own speech. That is a normal pattern of acquisition. When a student uses a construct or concept in free speech, however, we can say that it has truly been acquired. Till then, we need to continue to scaffold the learning process, as partially learned skills will often appear to “drop out” when a student expresses himself or herself orally.

Fossilization

A final important concept to understand in teaching oral skills is *fossilization*. The basic idea is simply that if a language learner does something in a certain way for long enough, he/she will establish a habit that will be very difficult to break in the future (British Council, n.d.). If improper grammar or pronunciation rules are internalized, even with training, they may never be corrected. This means that whatever pronunciation help a student receives, it will need to be reasonably early in the language learning process because after a year or two, it will have little or no effect. It also means that after a certain point, there are pronunciation errors that may as well be ignored, as they are unlikely to ever change.

Classroom Activities

While a certain amount of instruction may be necessary at the very beginning to learn some basic sounds, most oral skills are developed through practice, with very little theoretical instruction. Classroom activities for teaching oral skills should be fun, easy, interactive, and motivating. These can include games like “Simon Says,” or other memory or participative games, activities that require negotiation, oral transfer of information from one to another, etc. The main point is to have as many people talking as possible, for as much of the time as possible.

For listening, music, movies, cloze, presentations, and much more can be used but monitor the difficulty of the voice (some voices are much more difficult than others to understand) and the vocabulary level. Include retention activities such as asking questions about a movie or a presentation.

For speaking, information gap activities are the best, where students need to communicate with other students in order to complete the activity. Let students talk with each other, not always with the teacher. They will talk more and more freely if the teacher is less involved. They will speak English to each other if the activity is not too difficult, and the teacher simply monitors the groups. If it is too difficult, however, they will revert to their mother tongue.

Learning vs. acquisition in the classroom. Make sure students have opportunities not only to study the grammar rules of a language but also to have

extensive immersion activities. Especially in EFL settings, classrooms need to be places where English is spoken and students learn by using what they know. Games, interactive activities, anything can be used to inspire interest and provide practice.

High interest, low vocabulary. Because of the difficulty of speaking, oral activities need to be highly motivating. The more fun they are, the more participation will be achieved, and therefore, the more learning will take place. Make sure they are easier than the grammar activities they are currently being taught.

Correctness vs. fluency. Sometimes it is better focus on individual sounds and pronunciation, but at other times, it is wiser to work with larger pieces of text, with a focus on meaning and comprehensibility.

Repetition. Like most kinds of learning, students need a certain amount of repetition before they fully acquire a concept. For something as straightforward as vocabulary acquisition, this is estimated at 5-16 repetitions (Transparent Language, 2014). Students will be able to recognize a word, a verb tense, or a sound long before they can actually use it productively. Teachers need to provide sufficient opportunities for practice. Whatever concept is taught, it is important to provide more practice than one might think necessary, but it is important to vary the scenarios to include conversation and oral interactive settings, not merely focused written practice.

Comprehension and retention. Students understand much more than they can retain. Class activities should provide practice that improves retention, such as memory games, dictation (don't stop after every word), and activities that require following instructions or answering questions after the presentation.

Increase exposure. The basic rule for increasing exposure and practice is to increase the number of mouths moving at one time in the classroom. If more people are talking at once, more practice will be accomplished in the same amount of time.

Assessing Oral Skills

The number one rule of assessment in oral skills is, DON'T! Students have so much going on as they try to put together sentences and pronounce them understandably that they will not be able to process much correction even if you manage to stop them long enough to give it to them. There is also sufficient resistance to speaking in a new language that encouragement is called for, rather than any correction that could be interpreted negatively. For these reasons, most teachers learn early to *recast* their students' sentences—fixing the errors and helping them say what they meant—without calling attention to their errors. There is a time for specific error correction in oral skills, but it must be done gently—

even advanced students are extremely sensitive of their oral deficiencies, even if they usually score higher in this area than in others.

On the other hand, if there is really a need to assess learners' oral skills, it is wise to prepare a rubric to minimize subjectivity while grading, and to give feedback on multiple aspects at the same time. It is important to inform students of the different criteria that will be included in evaluating their oral skills before the actual assessment takes place. Such criteria may include pronunciation, intonation, fluency, vocabulary, content, and grammar, among others. As much as these different aspects are all vital in achieving oral proficiency, language teachers will do well to remember that it is a challenge to assess students at the normal speed of talking. Therefore, in deciding what to include in the rubric, the teacher must first consider the nature and the length of the speaking task students will need to engage in for the oral assessment. After all, it would be a contradiction to prepare a rubric that would take five minutes to fill out for a one-minute speaking task!

Once the focus is chosen, the rubric is easily prepared—simply list down the skills on the left, and create appropriate assessment categories on the right. More complex descriptions could be written for each box, but even a simple rubric is sufficient for scoring oral skills.

Sample Oral Skills Rubric

Skill	Exceeds expectations	Solidly meets expectations	Barely meets expectations	Does not meet expectations
Intonation				
Fluency				
Pronunciation				
Vocabulary				
Content				

Conclusion

Many language teachers downplay the importance of teaching oral skills, especially in today's environment of communicative language teaching, where there is no specific push to erase one's accent entirely. Teaching listening and speaking skills is important, however, especially in EFL settings and with adults, who may need extra practice and advice before they are ready to strike out on their own orally. A bit of teaching can cut down on the amount of time that is needed to acquire language abilities, but both the teaching and the acquisition opportunities are important to the overall process. Because of the difficulty of pulling sounds "out of the air" and of "stopping time" when one attempts to assess and correct verbal errors, oral skills are challenging to teach, practice, and assess. Students are often more fearful of this area than of any other, even though their scores are generally higher than other areas. Oral skills should be taught deliberately, carefully, and with great attention to the student's level and ability, such that success is guaranteed and students are encouraged to continue practicing.

Sample Lesson Plan

The following is a 30-40-minute speaking/listening lesson designed for advanced beginners, aged 10-adult (often the level matters more than the age). This lesson is designed to support other classes where simple past is being taught or was taught recently and needs to be reviewed.

Activity 1 Warm-up

Read the following sentences, and select students randomly to respond in the past tense, using the sentence starter below. Students should not see the text but should listen and repeat, conjugating the verb tenses as appropriate.

Teacher:	Student: <i>When I was a kid . . .</i>
1. I love eating potatoes.	11. I take music lessons.
2. I go to school every day.	12. December comes before January.
3. We play cards Sunday nights.	13. Public speaking scares me.
4. Ice cream costs a lot.	14. We don't eat out very often.
5. Our family has a dog.	15. It rains a lot in Winter.
6. My sister is Dad's favorite.	16. I always need help with math.
7. Some people work two jobs.	17. Peter is taller than I am.
8. You know my parents.	18. I like singing.
9. French pastry is good.	19. I practice English after school.
10. Grandma makes good cookies.	20. The neighbors' dogs bark at night.

Activity 2

Divide the class into groups of four, and assign one of the professions below to each group member. In teams of two, interview the other, using the questions below. Responses must be complete sentences, using the information below as appropriate (it is not given in the correct order).

When both groups of two have completed their interviews, work together in the group of four. Each person in turn will ask one of the other group members to answer the interview questions for the person he/she interviewed, using reported speech (i.e., “What does Jason do for a living?” “Does he like his job?” etc.). The individual must also respond in reported speech: “Jason said that he liked his job most days.” Go around the circle until everyone has had a chance to interview someone and to report on the interview they gave.

Interview Questions

1. What do you do for a living?
2. How many years did you go to school to do that?
3. Do you like your job?
4. How many hours do you work every day?
5. What do you like best about your job?
6. Would you advise me to become a _____?

Doctor	Teacher	Entrepreneur	Sales Clerk
Most days	9-10 hours	A college degree	An 8-hour shift
8 years after college	I love it	12 hours most days	After work, I'm free
8-12 hours	If you like helping others	If you like freedom	Not really
If you like biology	I got my master's	I'm my own boss	High school
It is hard, but rewarding	Seeing students learn	I really like it	It's great for students

Activity 3

Work with the whole class. Pantomime the following scenes, and ask random members of the class to answer the question “What am I doing?” Ask a second person to respond to the question “What did I just do?” Make sure they answer with complete sentences. If the class is missing the vocabulary for an action, encourage them to brainstorm to come up with it. Keep moving as quickly as possible.

Practice: Smile at one of the girls on the front row:

Teacher:

“What am I doing?”

“What did I just do?”

Student 1:

You're smiling at _____.

Student 2:

You smiled at _____.

- | | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| 1. Take off your watch | 11. Fold your hands |
| 2. Shake _____'s hand | 12. Put on your glasses |
| 3. Give _____ your book | 13. Comb your hair |
| 4. Take _____'s pen/pencil | 14. Put your book under _____'s book |
| 5. Sit on your desk | 15. Write your name on a piece of paper |
| 6. Open the window/curtain | 16. Put your jacket on backwards |
| 7. Touch your nose | 17. Pat _____ on the back |
| 8. Put your pen in your pocket | 18. Drop your pen on the floor |
| 9. Open your book | 19. Pick your pen up off the floor |
| 10. Tear a piece of paper in two | 20. Turn off the lights |

Useful Online Resources for Teaching Oral Skills

Stages of Second Language Learning

<http://bankstreet.edu/literacy-guide/english-language-learners/stages-second-language-learning/>

This is a website to help teachers understand the process of acquiring a second language. It provides some basic information, but it is a good place to begin if you are a beginning teacher.

English Listening Lesson Library Online

www.elllo.org

This site contains varied downloadable listening activities (e.g., audio interviews, videos, games) that can be used as practice materials for ESL learners and supplementary materials for ESL teachers. The audio files, which include script, quiz, vocabulary lessons, and caption support, feature speakers from different countries to provide a more authentic listening material.

Oral English Activities

<http://waze.net/oea/>

This site provides teachers with various class activities (organized into different categories) to promote students' oral and conversation skills in the English language.

ESL Printables

http://www.eslprintables.com/speaking_worksheets/globalization/

This website offers teachers worksheets, lesson plans, and activities (for speaking, listening, writing and reading among others), which can be downloaded and printed.

Listening and Speaking Sites

<http://www.rong-chang.com/listen.htm>

This is a site that compiles a list of various online resources and directs users to other listening and speaking sites and resources.

American English

[http://americanenglish.state.gov/search/solr/?f\[0\]=bundle%3Aresource&f\[1\]=im_field_resource_skills%3A16&f\[2\]=im_field_resource_categories%3A1](http://americanenglish.state.gov/search/solr/?f[0]=bundle%3Aresource&f[1]=im_field_resource_skills%3A16&f[2]=im_field_resource_categories%3A1)

This is a website that not only contains resources for teaching and learning English as a foreign/second language, but also features academic articles to keep language teachers and learners abreast of the issues and trends in English language teaching and learning.

Reading Comprehension Questions

1. What differences should an EFL setting make in oral skills class content and activities vs. an ESL setting?
2. Why are there so many theories of language learning, but no confirmed proof of exactly how each works best?
3. What are the similarities between learning a first language and learning a second one? The differences?
4. What difference does age make in language learning?
5. How does the learning/acquisition discussion color the way language needs to be taught?
6. Discuss how and why oral skills are “harder” to learn than reading, writing, and grammar skills.
7. What are some good sources of oral skills activities?
8. What criteria should you, as a teacher, use to select appropriate oral skills activities?

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*Shawna Vyhmeister, PhD
Professor, Middle East University
shawna.vyhmeister@meu.edu.lb*

*Kathleen Flores, MA-Ed
Instructor, Adventist University of the Philippines
Silang, Philippines
kayefbienes@gmail.com*