DEVELOPING SPEAKING SKILLS IN B1-LEVEL ENGLISH LEARNERS THROUGH COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Abstract. Speaking is an essential part of language learning, yet intermediate learners may struggle to speak spontaneously, choose appropriate expressions, and maintain a conversation. This article discusses how Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) can support the speaking development of B1-level English learners. It identifies the target learners, specifies the language content to be taught, and proposes a three-stage lesson sequence: pre-communicative, communicative, and post-communicative activities. The article is literature-based and offers a practical lesson framework rather than claiming new empirical findings.
Keywords: speaking skills, B1 learners, Communicative Language Teaching, interaction, feedback.

Introduction

The ability to speak English involves more than knowing grammar rules and vocabulary. Speakers need to express ideas clearly, respond to others, take turns, ask for clarification, and adjust language to a situation. Learners can sometimes complete written exercises successfully but hesitate when they must communicate without preparation. This may happen because classroom practice gives them too few opportunities to use English for meaningful purposes.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) addresses this challenge by treating language as a tool for communication. In a communicative classroom, learners exchange information, express opinions, solve problems, and negotiate meaning. Richards and Rodgers (2001) explain that communicative approaches place communicative proficiency at the centre of language teaching. Therefore, this article focuses on one approach—CLT—and considers how it can be used to develop speaking skills in B1-level learners.

Who to Teach? The Target Learners

The target group is B1-level English learners, particularly university students who can understand the main points of familiar topics and produce connected speech but may not yet speak confidently or fluently in less predictable situations. They can usually describe experiences, explain plans, give reasons, and express preferences. However, they may pause frequently, repeat familiar words, make grammatical errors, or struggle to respond quickly to a partner.

The teacher should consider learners' previous language-learning experiences, interests, confidence, and opportunities to use English outside class. Some learners may be willing to speak, while others may fear making mistakes in front of classmates. Pair work and small-group tasks can reduce pressure and increase speaking time. Activities should be challenging but achievable, with optional sentence starters or vocabulary support for learners who need it.

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What to Teach? Speaking Content for B1 Learners

Speaking lessons should combine language knowledge with the skills needed to communicate successfully. Content should match B1 learners' needs and the practical situations in which they may use English.

Vocabulary and functional expressions

Learners need topic-related vocabulary for familiar areas such as education, travel, free time, technology, work, and everyday problems. They should also practise functional expressions for agreeing and disagreeing politely, giving opinions, making suggestions, asking follow-up questions, and clarifying meaning. Examples include "In my opinion…", "I see your point, but…", "Could you explain what you mean?" and "What do you think about…?"

Grammar, pronunciation, and discourse

Grammar should be taught in context rather than as isolated rules. Useful areas include past and future forms for telling stories and discussing plans, modal verbs for advice and obligation, and comparatives for making choices. Pronunciation work can focus on word stress, sentence stress, intelligibility, and pausing. Learners also need discourse skills: linking ideas with expressions such as "firstly", "because", "however", and "as a result", as well as opening, maintaining, and ending conversations.

Fluency and interaction strategies

B1 learners should practise speaking for a sustained period without depending entirely on a script. They should learn to take turns, listen actively, respond to a partner's ideas, and keep a conversation going through follow-up questions. When they do not know a word, they can describe it, give an example, or ask for help. These strategies help learners continue communicating even when their language resources are limited.

How to Teach? Communicative Language Teaching

CLT is suitable for this goal because it provides learners with a reason to speak and encourages interaction. The teacher acts as a facilitator: setting up tasks, supplying language support, monitoring interaction, and giving feedback. Learners are active participants who share information and make decisions together. Accuracy remains important, but communication should not stop every time a learner makes a minor error. A lesson can be organised into three connected stages

Pre-communicative stage

At this stage, learners prepare for the main speaking task. The teacher introduces the topic with a picture, short question, or brief discussion and elicits what learners already know. Key vocabulary and useful expressions are presented, modelled, and practised briefly. For example, before discussing how to spend a weekend, students review phrases for making suggestions and expressing preferences. This preparation builds confidence without turning the whole lesson into memorisation.

Communicative stage

During the main stage, learners use English to achieve a clear purpose. Tasks should involve a genuine information gap, different opinions, or a shared decision. For example, pairs receive different information about possible weekend activities and must agree on a plan within a limited budget. Each learner has information the partner needs, so they must ask questions, explain preferences, compare options, and reach an agreement. Other suitable tasks include role-plays, problem-solving discussions, interviews, and small-group decision-making.

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The teacher monitors rather than dominating the conversation. While students speak, the teacher notes successful expressions and recurring errors, intervening when communication breaks down. Pair and group work gives more learners a chance to speak than a teacher-led question-and-answer sequence. Tasks should have clear instructions, an achievable outcome, and enough time for every learner to contribute.

Post-communicative stage

After the task, learners reflect on how effectively they communicated. The teacher gives selective feedback on language that would help the group improve, such as verb forms, word choice, pronunciation, or useful ways to respond. Feedback should distinguish errors that block meaning from minor errors that do not prevent understanding. Students can correct sample sentences, practise improved expressions, and repeat part of the task using the feedback. A short self-assessment—"What did I express well?" and "What will I try next time?"—encourages responsibility for learning

Example of a Short CLT Lesson

Topic: Choosing a weekend activity.

Level: B1.

Objective: By the end of the lesson, learners will be able to make suggestions, give reasons, ask follow-up questions, and agree on a plan with a partner.

Pre-communicative (8 minutes): Students discuss what they usually do at weekends. The teacher reviews expressions for suggesting, agreeing, and disagreeing.

Post-communicative (7 minutes): Pairs report their decision. The teacher gives brief feedback, and learners identify one expression they used successfully and one point to improve.

Assessment can focus on four simple criteria: task completion, fluency, understandable pronunciation, and interaction. A short checklist is more useful for this activity than assessing grammar alone. The purpose is to see whether learners can communicate their ideas and respond to a partner, while also identifying language that needs further practice.

Discussion and Practical Considerations

CLT creates opportunities for purposeful speaking, but activities need careful planning. If the task is too difficult, learners may switch to their first language or remain silent. If it is too easy, they may finish quickly without extending their speech. Teachers can address these problems by providing language prompts, assigning clear roles, varying partners, and setting a meaningful outcome. Learners who are less confident can first rehearse an idea with one partner before reporting to the class.

Conclusion

Developing B1 learners' speaking skills requires more than teaching vocabulary and grammar in isolation. Learners need regular opportunities to use English to express meaning, exchange information, and respond to other people. Communicative Language Teaching supports this goal by placing purposeful interaction at the centre of classroom practice. For the target group, the content should include useful vocabulary, contextualised grammar, intelligible pronunciation, discourse markers, fluency, and interaction strategies. A lesson organised into pre-communicative, communicative, and post-communicative stages prepares learners, gives them space to communicate, and helps them improve through feedback. These principles offer a practical framework for speaking lessons, although the results will depend on learners' needs, task design, and consistent practice.

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Note: This is a literature-based academic article. It discusses established ideas and a proposed classroom application; it does not report original experimental data.

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