PLAYING TO COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY
"KNOW-IT-ALL LINGUISTS"

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Abstract

Facing the new and the unknown, which happens when communicating in a formal oral situation, is a process marked with feelings of both anxiety and uncertainty. A game can help reduce the anxiety involved in our affective or emotional reaction when we are afraid of being negatively judged by strangers.

The simulation/game we present has as its objective how to improve oral presentations effectively. The players are given a rating system that takes into account four different aspects of communication in oral presentations. Each aspect includes different variables which are used as rating criteria. The first aspect assessed is delivery. The second aspect is content. The third refers to the organisation of the information. And the last aspect of communication evaluates language. The players in "Know-it-all Linguists" are immersed in a situation in which they assess their peers, thus heightening their awareness of what is involved in effective speaking.

Introduction

Although verbal language is the most important and complex sign system created by man to speak with other people, other aspects should be taken into account to communicate effectively. On the one hand, communication is conveyed by means of both verbal and non-verbal expression forms. Speakers are much more conscious, however, of the way their verbal messages are worded, while the non-verbal forms are less monitored. On the other hand, there is a cognitive and relational gap between interactants that must be filled in order to succeed in communication. Leading linguists agree on the distinction of usage and use based on the notion of effectiveness in communication. This means that an utterance with a well-formed grammatical structure may or may not have sufficient value for communication in a given context. Participants must learn to produce communicatively successful utterances and not only grammatically acceptable ones. Variations in language usage depend not only on grammatical correctness, the usage, but also on situational variables such as the speaker/listener.
relationship, the speaker's purpose and the appropriateness for the context of utterance, the use.

Communicating effectively requires several skills in which not only foreign learners have to be proficient. Language itself does not provide effective communication. Delivery, content and organisation are as important as the quantity of the language used to achieve a successful presentation. In our game, we persuade participants through immersion in an assessment situation to reflect on how they deliver and present content, organise ideas and use the language in their academic or professional context.

An adult may acquire or improve the language by reflecting on his bad language bad habits, by paying extra attention to the usage of the language and by analysing errors in the use of the language. But these strategies are not enough; the learner must also be sufficiently competent in the language. The Know-it-all Linguists simulation gives the opportunity to participants to improve their oral communicative competence by being professional linguists who analyse and reflect on the use and the usage of the language.

**Scenario**

Professional Training Solutions is a leading company in the field of training professionals. Staff working in this company are expert linguists whose main duties are to help other professionals acquire high competence in expressing ideas, presenting results and new products or defending proposals or a project. Professionals are trained by reflecting on their own errors in oral discourse. Four different aspects and their variables are assessed and evaluated by the linguists.

Three professionals who need competence in oral skills are to be evaluated by a group of linguists on their current oral abilities and oriented in their training needs. After watching a documentary, the professionals have to prepare an oral presentation about what they have seen. An expert audience of linguists is divided in four groups. The first group rates delivery, including volume, eye contact with audience, natural delivery, rate of speech and non-distracting mannerisms. The second group of linguists judge content, specification of the central idea, suitability of the topic for the time available and for the audience, relevant details, facts, examples supporting the central idea and the adjustment of the presentation to the time required. The aspect evaluated by the third group of linguists refers to the organisation of the information, use of transitions, main points clearly stated, and logical development of ideas and conclusion. The last group of linguists evaluates language, e.g. accuracy of communication, appropriate vocabulary, pronunciation/intonation, variety of expressions and precision in communication.
Scores obtained in rating each aspect decide which professional communicates effectively and which needs some kind of training. Candidates who obtain at least 60% of the total score in rating are ready to carry out the oral tasks of their job commitments.

Profile of professional 1: Psychologist

You are a psychologist working as an associate professor at the School of Psychology at the University of Durham, in the county of Tyne and Wear, England. You are a specialist in corporate psychology and you have been contacted by an important multinational to give a series of talks to (the) employees. Professional Training Solutions is going to give you the opportunity to analyse and improve your oral skills.

Profile of professional 2: Computer science engineer

You are a computer science engineer who has been accepted in the Educational Resources Department that British Telecom has in London. Your main task in this company is going to be to introduce the new educational products in the market. You will attend fairs and conventions and also different types of presentations where showing product features, the advantages and the product itself will be your principal task. Professional Training Solutions is going to give you the opportunity to analyse and improve your oral skills.

Profile of professional 3: President of a parent-teacher association (PTA)

You have been voted president of the parent-teacher association of St. Joseph's Comprehensive School, in Plymouth, England. You have to report in at least three annual assemblies on the actions carried out by the association, put forward new proposals, and present statements of the association accounts. Chairing meetings is another duty as president of the PTA. Professional Training Solutions is going to give you the opportunity to analyse and improve your oral skills.

Profile 4: Linguists (delivery judges)

You are expert linguists working for Professional Training Solutions. Your task consists in assessing and evaluating professionals on delivery in oral expression. You will take into account volume, eyes contact with the audience, natural delivery, rate of speech and non distracting mannerisms. For this purpose you will use the rating criteria sheet.

Profile 5: Linguists (content judges)
You are expert linguists working for Professional Training Solutions. Your task consists in assessing and evaluating the content of the presentation. You will take into account the central idea, suitability of the topic for the time available and for the audience, relevant details, facts, examples supporting the central idea and the adjustment of the presentation to the time required. Use the evaluating criteria sheet for this purpose.

Profile 6: Linguists (organisation judges)

You are expert linguists working for Professional Training Solutions. Your task consists of assessing and evaluating the organisation of the oral presentation. You will take into account the use of transitions markers main points clearly stated, logical development of ideas and conclusion. For this purpose you will use the rating criteria sheet.

Profile 7: Linguists (language judges)

You are expert linguists working in Professional Training Solutions. Your task consists of assessing and evaluating the oral expression language used in oral presentation. You will take into account accuracy of communication, appropriate vocabulary, pronunciation/intonation, variety of expressions and precision in communication. Use the rating criteria sheet for this purpose.

Facilitator's directions:

The simulation comprises 3 phases set out as follows:

Phase I: Briefing
- Explain the purpose of the activity
- Explain the phases of the simulation
- Introduce and assign roles (linguists and professionals)
- Explain the action
- Introduce the documentary
- Check on participants' understanding of their profiles and tasks

Phase II: Action
- Professionals are guided on how to give the oral presentation
- Each group of linguists concentrates on a different aspect of the oral discourse and its rating criteria
- Professionals watch the documentary and prepare their oral presentation in 10 minutes
- Sequentially, professionals each present their oral dissertation in around 5 minutes, while the professionals speak, linguists judge using the different parameters. Maximum attention to speakers is required.
- After the last oral presentation, each group of linguists has 5 minutes to calculate the total partial score of each professional and 20 minutes to discuss errors and justify the punctuation given to all of them. A spokesperson from each group of linguists, will present the results to the whole audience and among all will decide which of the professionals needs some kind of specific oral training
- Professional may prepare and present again taking into account the end analysis
Phase III: Debriefing

- Linguists and professionals may first talk about the second performance and discuss if oral skills have been improved
- Participants discuss the rating system
- Participants analyse the effectiveness of the activity and make proposals
- Groups report on team work
- Participants give their opinion of the activity

An overall view of the action that takes place in the second phase of the simulation is offered in figure 1.

[table 1 about here]

Materials needed:
- Video tape
- Video projector (VCR)
- Television
- Scenario and profiles sheets
- Rating criteria sheets

Time: 90 minutes (time may vary)

Number of participants: 15 linguists and 3 professionals (numbers may vary)

The main purpose of the activity is to involve participants in an oral error analysis task. By playing the simulation participants will evaluate the main aspects of oral communication. They assess how to deliver, how to focus on content, how to organise the discourse and finally how the language is used. Begin the exercise by dividing participants into groups of 5. Explain the main purpose of the activity and the phases of the simulation. After introducing and assigning the roles, explain the action and the tasks each group has to carry out. Clarify rating criteria and any question before beginning the exercise.

After watching the documentary each professional (psychologist, computer science engineer and president of a parent-teacher association) will prepare and present a summary of the documentary. Linguists divided in groups will analyse errors and will make training proposals. Professionals will draw on linguists comments before performing again. Your task as a facilitator is to help participants understand their roles and concentrate on their task of assessing the presentations. Be ready to clarify any doubts.

For debriefing, have everyone sit on a circle. Ask questions that will introduce discussion on the rating criteria, the effectiveness of the activity, team work and any other aspect of interest.
Oral comprehension and expression evaluation criteria

Professional: ................................................................. Total points received ............... 

Rating System

The following evaluation will be completed by filling the appropriate number of points in the blanks provided. The points values are as follow:

2 = Excellent  1 = Satisfactory   0 = Needs improvement

These points can be added up to give a total score for each section on the form. Space is provided on the form for comments on specific strengths or weaknesses of the speaker's presentation. Suggestions for improving future presentation may also be added.

I. Delivery

___ A. Volume - loud enough to be heard clearly
___ B. Eye contact with audience
___ C. Natural delivery - not read or memorised
___ D. Rate of speech - not too fast or too slow
___ E. Posture/body movements - no distracting mannerisms

Comments:

II. Content

___ A. Clear central idea
___ B. Topic suitable for time available - not too limited or too general
___ C. Topic suitable for this audience
___ D. Topic developed with relevant details, facts, examples that provide strong support of the central idea
___ E. Presentation meets time requirements - not too long or too short

Comments:

III. Organisation

___ A. Introduction
___ B. Use of transition
___ C. Main points clearly stated
___ D. Development of ideas logical, easy to follow
___ E. Conclusion

Comments:

IV. Language

___ A. Accuracy of communication - clarity of ideas
___ B. Vocabulary appropriate for this audience - difficult or technical words explained
___ C. Pronunciation/Intonation
___ D. Use of a variety of expressions - no inappropriate jargon or informalities
___ E. Precision in communication - effective control of grammar/vocabulary

Comments
Fig. 1.- Action planning