
Poster Presentation

CEFR-Based Standardization of Speaking Exercises for ESP Instruction

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Genre has an important role in English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Swales (1990) defines Genre as comprising “a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognized by the expert members of the discourse community, and thereby constitute the purpose of the genre” (p. 58). Examples of written genres in business include a letter of complaint or of confirmation (Dudley-Evans & St-John, 1998). For the medical community, research articles, case reports, and presentations are common genres.

Language users need to be able to communicate in certain genres to achieve certain objectives. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is helpful for looking at overall ability. There are numerous “can-do lists” for speaking, listening, reading, and writing. The scales range from A1 (lowest) to C2 (highest) in reading, writing, listening, and speaking (Council of Europe, 2001).

There has been much work done detailing the language used in spoken genres in various fields. Also, there is a great deal of research and elaboration on the various CEFR bands. However, there is little research investigating the use of CEFR-specific speaking activities which are linked to specific spoken genres. In this case study, CEFR-based speaking activities were used for the instruction of language learners (Appendix). The learners were building their speaking abilities

in language classes to improve their communication, in specific genres in their professional field. In this case study, three language learners are discussed.

There has been a large amount of work on identifying genres used in different professional settings. The research has identified the important areas of language often used in those genres. Basturkmen (2010), describes course planning for English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classes. She details various genres students in certain fields must master. For example, spoken genres for police officers include witness interviews and interviews of suspects. Also for doctors, the patient interview (to ask about current symptoms and any prior treatment) is an important genre.

Research has been done into CEFR-referenced instructional activities and into examples of differences between CEFR bands. As previously mentioned, this study utilizes a CEFR speaking ability grid with the six bands. These bands list expectations for vocabulary range, accuracy, fluency, interaction, and coherence (Council of Europe, 2001). Westhoff (2007) discusses the role of the CEFR in guiding instruction. For speaking, it is important to highlight formulaic language or lexical chunks. Also, not overemphasizing accuracy is important. To improve accuracy, simpler grammar should be taught and simple, useful grammar rules should be given to language learners. Hulstijn, Schoonen, de Jong, Steinel, and Florijn (2012) describe concrete differences in vocabulary and grammar knowledge between CEFR B1 and B2 language users. These two areas are quite important for differentiating between the two bands. Also, rate of speaking is important. An Eiken Foundation of Japan (n.d.) website has videos showing language user performance at CEFR bands B1, B2, and C1.

Research Questions:

1. Can CEFR-based speaking activities, which are linked to genre, be created for language learners?
2. Can these CEFR-referenced speaking activities be used to effectively instruct spoken communication in genres?

Method

Three participants are discussed (Table 1). They were language learners studying at an ESP-based language school in the Umeda area of Osaka, Japan. All were in their 30s and 40s. Before commencing their study, the language users had an initial interview to determine the genres that they needed to communicate in to carry out their professional duties. They were given a level check test to determine their CEFR band. A curriculum was made that assigned CEFR-referenced speaking activities for the genre they needed. Off the shelf-textbooks were used in addition to materials from the language learner's workplace, such as catalogs, websites, building plans, papers to be published, or other workplace documents. All instruction was one to one.

Participant A

This language user needed to discuss plans and architectural drawings. His starting level was CEFR A2. The CEFR band above his current band guided the speaking activities. The CEFR B1 (Range) descriptor lists some ability "to express him/herself... on topics such as... work, travel, and current events." For the B1 (Interaction) descriptor, it describes ability to "maintain... simple face-to-face conversation... on topics that are familiar" (Council of Europe, 2001, pp.

Table 1

Average Scores of Posters

Code	Gender	Approx. Age	Starting CEFR Band	Area of Work	Genres Needed
A	M	40s	A2	Real Estate Investment	Business Meeting, Explanation of Drawings & Plans
B	F	30s	B1	Medical Research	Medical Research Presentation
C	F	30s	A2	Intellectual Property	Business Meeting, Explanation of Legal Concepts & Procedures

28-29). To be able to do this, Oral Translation exercises and Quick Response (to questions) exercises were used. The exercises related to his work, for example, talking about documents or architectural blueprints. Also, useful phrases for meetings were studied and Role Play was used to build a “repertoire of frequently used routines or patterns”, from the B1 (Accuracy) descriptor (Council of Europe, 2001, pp. 28-29). With this help, he could communicate in the business meeting genre and the explanation of architectural drawings genre. Over the course of about 18 months, he moved to a B1 band, and was more able to communicate in those two genres.

Participant B

The need was for handling the medical presentation genre. The language learner’s ability was CEFR B1. As with Participant A, the CEFR band above her current band guided the speaking activities. The CEFR B1 (Fluency) descriptor says “pausing... is very evident, especially in stretches of free production.” The B2 (Fluency) descriptor says the language user “can produce stretches of language with a fairly even tempo” (Council of Europe, 2001, pp. 28-29). Longer-turn Explanations and One-minute “Mini-Talks” were used to help the learner get more used to speaking in longer turns, especially with four sentences or more. To build rate of speed, noticing and practice with connected speech, including elision, was used. The learner also rehearsed these longer turns for homework. Although this language user remained at the B1 band, she was able to give a successful medical presentation abroad.

Participant C

This language learner needed assistance with meetings and explaining legal concepts in the Intellectual Property area. She started at the CEFR A2 ability level. Quick Response (to questions) exercises and Oral Translation exercises were used to move her into the CEFR B1 range, similar to with Participant A. Once this learner entered the B1 range, Longer-turn Explanations, with five or six sentences, were used. These helped her with the genre of Legal Concepts & Procedures Explanations. To assist her with the Business Meeting Genre, useful

meeting phrases were taught and Role Plays were used. Additionally, a listening summary exercise was used. This exercise helped her to summarize two or three minutes of legal talking into her own words. Lectures from Coursera's "A Law Student's Toolkit" (<https://www.coursera.org/learn/law-student>) course were used. Listening summary allows better participation in meetings. The language user gives a brief summary of what was said and then their own opinions. Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) explain the need for "paraphrasing and summarizing so that the speaker knows that their message has been heard" by other listeners (p. 106). She was able to move to B2. She is now better able to handle the meeting and legal concepts / procedures explanation genres. In autumn 2017, she had a business trip to the US, meeting with American lawyers in several cities, on behalf of her company.

Discussion

With the three cases, CEFR-referenced speaking activities, related to genre, were created for the language learners. These activities were effectively used to instruct speaking. The activities could be created due to the genres being identified in a pre-instruction interview. Also, the ability test for the CEFR band was given, prior to instruction. Using these activities, instruction was done, with the expectation that the learner would practice speaking (in a rehearsal format) in non-instructional time. Other materials, such as textbooks or on-line lectures were also studied by the participant. These CEFR-referenced speaking activities allowed for increased ability to handle the language user's needed genres.

For the future, it would be beneficial to explore ways to bring these speaking activities into a small and large group setting. In this case study, the instruction was one-to-one. As well, means to share these activities more widely, such as a wiki, would also be helpful.

Acknowledgement

The author would like to thank Keiji Fujimura, for his suggestion to write this article.

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Author bio

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Received: October 2, 2017

Accepted: July 17, 2018

Appendix

CEFR Referenced Activities List

	Range	Accuracy
C2		
C1		
B2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to read broadly in English in one's field, and need to write (or speak) summaries of this reading • Need to read current events in English language media • Need to also expose oneself to casual /daily life English and notice the differences– formal, informal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to continue to notice one's errors • Needs to be very receptive to error correction, spoken & written • Needs to do grammar exercises • "Grammar Partner"- correct each other's spoken and written speech
B1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Studying descriptions used in the field • Studying websites describing products • Seeing how things are described in TV commercials • Studying order of adjectives • Studying abbreviations • Writing descriptions, and then giving them orally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Production, error correction • Noticing of errors • Listening to one's own speech, noticing errors • Listening to another's speech, noticing errors "Grammar Partner" • Grammar exercises from textbooks, esp. Murphy
A2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use phrasebooks to build ability to discuss family, hobbies, work, travel, current events (like <i>1,000 Knocks</i>) • For the above purposes, use other materials such as NHK Radio / TV English materials or commercial textbooks • Oral Translation Activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pattern Practice • Making Sentences from prompts -Reading of simpler texts to get basics of sentence structure • Drilling of forms • Describing a picture • Simple Descriptions
A1		

	Fluency	Interaction	Coherence
C1			
C2			
B2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A good deal of speaking practice— repeating, “speaking partner”, shadowing at home, online English lessons • Self-timed speaking activities • Uploading video blogs / YouTube videos 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noticing the discourse markers one uses • Study of discourse markers used in TED Talks, TV dramas, documentaries, talk shows • Study of texts referring to this 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noticing one’s own speech • Noticing discourse markers used in academic and professional speech
B1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice giving a sequence or a series of steps in a process • Practice giving a longer talk, for 1 min • Repeat speaking tasks at home • Shadowing exercises at home • Role plays, done two times after correction • Voice diary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role plays practicing initiating conversations • Practicing follow up questions • Practicing interrupting others & keeping one’s turn when being interrupted • Summarizing a longer period of speech, giving the summary, then giving one’s opinion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noticing cohesive devices one is using • Doing exercises on cohesive devices • Studying Discourse Markers • Listening to a longer period of speech, noting the cohesive devices used
A2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making short presentations (3 - 5 sentences) • Short Role Plays • Rehearsing simple interactions, phone openings • Short introductions with repetition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repeating what has been said • Using phrases that integrate speech from the other person to clarify meaning, confirm, or respond • Role plays • Intensive question / answer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of linking words • More use of cohesive devices to give a simple narrative
A1			