Using CEFR to assess discussions in class

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How Common European Framework of Reference for languages can be used for selecting an approach to teaching and for devising an assessment form.

Sharing results of my action research on teaching and assessing discussion

Part 1:
• What is genre methodology and why it is useful for teaching discussion

Part 2:
• How discussion assessment form was developed on the basis of the CEFR

• A video of students’ participation in an argumentative discussion
• Conclusions
• References
Common European Framework of Reference for languages: Learning, teaching, assessment

Aims:

• To provide a common basis for the development of language syllabuses, examinations, textbooks etc. across Europe;

• to provide descriptors for different skills and competencies in modern languages;

• to overcome the barriers to communication caused by different educational systems
Argumentative discussion

- Exchange of ideas
- Interaction, involves both listening and speaking, reception and production
No sufficiently strong research-based consensus on how learners learn (Chapter 6 CEFR).

Teachers need provide the richest possible linguistic environment in which learning can take place without formal teaching.

‘Mainstream’ teachers and learners follow more eclectic practices recognising that learners require more contextualised input

Some believe that those who have learnt the necessary rules of grammar and learnt vocabulary will be able to understand and use the language.
Using the concept of ‘genre’ for teaching

Genre-based approach in language teaching means using target texts and recordings as models

• The aim is to familiarise students with features of genres relevant to the independent production of their own texts for similar contexts.

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) Swales (1990)
Oral genres

Business discussion

Presentation in Marketing

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What does teaching an argumentative discussion involve?

• Planning for spoken interaction involves the activation of schemata (i.e. a diagram representing the structure of a communicative interaction) of the exchange possible and probable in the forthcoming activity (CEFR, p 84)

• Genre-based approach offers methodology for the activation of schemata

• Learners need to look at a model, at an example of a communicative event and to analyse its structure and linguistic features that are typical of this interaction.
The main stages of teaching/learning a genre can be summarised as follows:

- Demonstrate
- Analyse
- Practise
- Participate
- Assess/evaluate

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Stage 1: demonstrate

Direct exposure to authentic use of language.

Extracts from TV discussions, you tube videos

Demonstrating an authentic interaction is useful for making students aware of what is common practice in this type of communication in the target language.
Tasks to students while they are watching

Reflect 3 dimensions of oral interaction: sound, organisation, behaviour

• 1) analysing the structure of the interaction, organisation of the arguments;
• 2) Identifying intonation patterns, grammatical and rhetorical features;
• 3) Analysing non-verbal communication/ gestures, facial expressions
Examples of questions to students while they are watching a video

• Identify the structure of the discussion.
• How are arguments structured?
• Which speakers sound particularly convincing? Why?
• Which rhetorical tactics do they use to sound more convincing?
• What is the role of gestures? Do they help to look more convincing?
• How do the speakers take turns? How long do they speak? Are they interrupted by other speakers?
• What is the difference between this discussion and the way it is held in your culture?
Stage 2: practice. Teaching rhetorical tactics.

Starting a turn.
1. Work in pairs. **Student A**: think of 5 statements that you would like to make about advantages of....... You can use question tags to ask rhetorical questions. Choose the relevant beginnings from the ones below to say them. Listen to your partner who is going to express his/her view in response to what you say:

   1. I have to say
   2. I can tell you now
   3. the question has got to be asked
   4. what I’m saying is that
   5. Can I just say
   6. Let me ask you a question
   7. I just want to say
Agreeing/disagreeing

• Student B: If you agree to some extent or disagree and want to make a contrasting point, start your argument by mentioning what you agree with first, and then make your point. Use the following phrases to start your argument:

• You are right in saying that …., but
• Nobody is denying that ….
• But don’t you think that…
• Well, my view is … (if you disagree)
• Well, … (if you disagree)
• Referring to what other people said:
• Use the following phrases to refer to what your partner said in the previous exercise:
  • Coming back to your (a student’s name) point that ...
  • I’m following your (a student’s name) earlier comments
  • addressing the point
  • relating to another point
  • Talking about
  • With regards to ...
  • as far as .......................is concerned
Teaching to use cleft sentences to emphasise ideas

• Complete the following statements and use them in your arguments:

  Example: *What is especially important is* to provide opportunities for ......

1. What is especially important is ...
2. What should be done is ...
3. What is worrying is (that)...
4. The point which is really important is (that)
5. It is ..... that we need / don’t need
Stage 3. Participation of students in an argumentative discussion.

- Being able to take up positions, pursue arguments and expound on one’s opinions in real time is a challenging task even for native speakers.
- Homework task to prepare for participation in a discussion

Example of a task:

Groups of students perform in turn in front of their class mates who act as the audience or can be paired up with the students to give feedback.

Homework: Prepare arguments in order to take part in discussion ‘Technological advances lead to the destruction of nature’. Form a group of 5 or three, one student should be a host and lead the discussion, while one side is against and another one is in favour. You can select roles (e.g. an environmentalist, a member of the Green Party, an engineer; a researcher from the University). Your task is to be able to take an active part in a discussion showing knowledge of the subject and an ability to express your arguments clearly and convincingly.
## Part 2. Creating a discussion assessment form

- The Framework provides illustrative scales for assessing formal discussions and meetings (p.78):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>C1</strong></td>
<td>Learners can easily keep up with the debate, even on abstract, complex unfamiliar topics. Can argue a formal position convincingly, responding to questions and comments and answering complex lines of counter argument fluently, spontaneously and appropriately.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B2</strong></td>
<td>can keep up with an animated discussion, identifying accurately arguments supporting and opposing points of view. Can express ideas with precision, present and respond to complex lines of arguments convincingly.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>B1</strong></td>
<td>Can follow much of what is said that is related to their field, provided interlocutors avoid very idiomatic usage and articulate clearly. Can put over a point of view clearly, but has difficulty engaging in a debate.</td>
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Communicative Language competences:

**Linguistic competences**
1) Grammatical range and control
2) Vocabulary
3) Phonological control
4) Semantic competence
5) Orthoepic competence

**Socio-linguistic competences**

**Pragmatic competences**

**Discourse competences**
1) Flexibility to circumstances
2) Turntaking
3) Thematic development
4) Coherence and cohesion

**Functional competences**
1) Fluency
2) Propositional precision

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Discussion assessment form:

• **Pragmatic competences:**
  • A) Taking part in a discussion;
  • B) Fluency and spontaneity
  • C) Turn-taking

• **Socio-linguistic competences:**
  • Use of rhetorical tactics

• **Linguistic competences:**
  • A) Vocabulary- range
  • B) Grammar- range and control
  • C) Phonological control
## Discussions assessment form

### 1. Taking part in a discussion.

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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Provides several-word inappropriate contributions very rarely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Makes a few contributions, but does not express one’s point of view clearly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Is able to follow a discussion and make some relevant contributions</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Is able to follow a discussion and make well-formed knowledgeable contributions</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Takes an active part in a discussion. Is able to formulate ideas elegantly. Demonstrates excellent knowledge of the topic</td>
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### 2. Fluency and spontaneity

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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Speaks with long pauses, produces incomplete stretches of speech</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Overreliance on written material while expressing one’s point of view, makes long pauses and hesitates while speaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Generally fluent speech, some reliance on written material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Good fluent speech, some short pauses</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Excellent and spontaneous speech</td>
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1. **Turn-taking**

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<td>1</td>
<td>Unable to take turns at a suitable time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Attempts to take turns but timing is inappropriate. Speaks either too long or too short</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Attempts to take turns at the correct time. Not always correct length</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Takes turns at appropriate time and makes appropriate contributions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Excellent turn-taking, appropriate timing, appropriate length of contributions</td>
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2. **Use of rhetorical tactics (additional points)**

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<td>1-2-3</td>
<td>Uses different linguistic tactics to emphasise their argument: rhetorical questions, cleft sentences, etc. (depends on the number and appropriateness)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>Can manage one’s turn in a discussion: is able to refer to particular points in a discussion, can sequence one’s arguments</td>
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• Discussion is more challenging than presentation as it involves production and reception strategies
• The students had not had previous experience of taking part in a discussion in English
• They are using different rhetorical tactics, such as referring to particular points, rhetorical questions, etc.
• The assessment form is an important motivation factor
Advantages of the assessment form

• It can be used for:
  • 1) setting objectives at the initial stage when students need to understand which level of proficiency they are expected to achieve;
  • 2) for self-assessment and for the formative assessment during the course.
  • 3) For the summative evaluation at the end of the course (for examination).
Conclusion

• Genre-based approach makes it possible to combine using authentic materials with involving learners in participating in an interaction.

• Assessment form was designed to evaluate competences involved in the production of genre of discussion.

• The novelty of the approach lies in including categories which reflect the characteristics of speech demonstrating that the genre of discussion has been mastered.

• CEFR is helpful for designing the form, however, our own knowledge and experience is needed to fill in the gaps
References

• Makarova A (2013) An examination of the concept of ‘genre’ as a tool for the design speaking activities for ESP purposes’ Open University, Ded thesis
THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION

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