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Spanish speaking practice in class using ChatGPT-designed didactic material

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Abstract. The presented study underlines the need to elaborate an effective way of using ChatGPT potential for organising Spanish speaking practice for B1-level students in class. The literature analysis on the use of ChatGPT as a tool for creating various educational activities that enhance students' communicative competence is presented. Its advantages are as follows: generation of realistic and dynamic conversations, facilitation of practice on complex topics, argumentation skill formation, immediate and personalized feedback, creation of real-life scenarios and simulations, autonomous learning and 24/7 access, student-centered learning approach, etc. The major difficulties that occur when it comes to teaching Spanish speaking practice in groups of B1 Spanish learners are addressed, such as lack of active vocabulary, inflected grammar structure and the necessity to find a balance between highly organized practice (e.g., drills) and loosely controlled practice (e.g., debates). In relation to the problems solutions based on the use of ChatGPT are enlisted. A methodical description of a designed didactic material (interview and statement list) that implies using ChatGPT or any other similar AI technology in class is provided. The methods used are literature analysis, observation, experiential learning. The gained results of ChatGPT integration in teaching oral expression skills in Spanish for students of B1 level are described. The study shows that when certain conditions are met student engagement and confidence are significantly improved.

Keywords: ChatGPT, speaking practice, oral skills, Spanish teaching, interview, conversation

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Introduction

ChatGPT is recognized as an effective resource for teaching oral expression skills, facilitating the development of conversational tasks and providing numerous benefits for interactive learning. By addressing various subjects, including self-expression, artificial intelligence, and superstitions, ChatGPT plays a vital role in creating educational activities that enhance students' communicative competence.

The aim of the study is to elaborate a didactic tool based on the use of ChatGPT for teaching speaking practice for students of B1-level Spanish proficiency. The aim determines the research objectives:

- to make a literature review on the use of ChatGPT as a tool in teaching oral expression skills;
- to outline major problems that occur when teaching speaking in groups of B1 Spanish learners;
- to decide on how these problems can be addressed with the help of ChatGPT;
- to compose a didactic tool (speaking activities) in the light of the presented preliminary results;
- to conduct a learning experiment using the designed didactic tool and describe the final results.

The following methods are used: literature analysis, observation, experiential learning.

Literature review

In order to proceed with the creation of a special didactic tool to teach speaking with the use of ChatGPT, it is logical to ana-

lyze its advantages that are already described by other researches. Below, the advantages of using ChatGPT for generating oral expression tasks, its application in educational literature, and a literary analysis of its use in teaching are discussed [1].

ChatGPT can simulate authentic dialogues in diverse contexts, enabling students to practice their oral expression skills in a more natural setting. For instance, when discussing personal topics, students receive tailored questions related to their interests and aspirations, fostering a learning environment that mirrors real-life interactions [2].

Engaging with challenging subjects like artificial intelligence and superstitions can be daunting, especially for students lacking prior knowledge. ChatGPT adjusts questions and dialogues according to each student's level, offering simple explanations or exploring more intricate aspects as necessary, thus enabling discussions on abstract topics with a pedagogical focus [3].

In conversations about the ethics of artificial intelligence or cultural beliefs, ChatGPT can serve as an "opponent" in debates, presenting counterarguments that encourage students to defend their views. This approach enhances their argumentative skills and critical thinking regarding contentious issues [4].

One of the key advantages of ChatGPT is its capacity to provide instant feedback on grammar, vocabulary, and coherence of speech. This feature allows students to identify and rectify errors in real-time, which is crucial for language acquisition. The corrections and alternative suggestions contribute to the continuous improvement of their linguistic abilities [5].

ChatGPT can generate scenarios where students practice everyday situations, such as job interviews or public speaking. This functionality is particularly beneficial for preparing them for specific contexts that demand fluency and precision in oral expression [6].

The ability to interact with ChatGPT at any time supports autonomous learning, allowing students to practice beyond school hours. This flexibility reinforces continuous learning and provides more opportunities for practice [7, 8].

The integration of ChatGPT in education has been extensively examined in academic literature, highlighting various methods through which this tool is utilized to teach oral expression skills:

Simulations and role-playing. Several studies recommend using ChatGPT to simulate interviews or engage in role-playing, where students adopt different roles, such as interviewer or candidate. This practice aids them in responding to questions with confidence and structuring effective replies in both formal and informal settings [9].

Debates and structured dialogues. Educators have effectively employed ChatGPT to generate debate topics or create dialogue sequences that require active student participation. By presenting arguments from multiple perspectives, ChatGPT promotes the development of persuasive skills and encourages students to explore various viewpoints [3].

Enhancement of cultural and linguistic understanding. By addressing themes like superstitions and cultural beliefs, ChatGPT can provide cultural or historical context, enriching discussions and aiding students in comprehending cultural differences. This approach fosters inclusive and culturally sensitive education [10].

From a literary and pedagogical standpoint, ChatGPT can be viewed not only as a technical tool but also as a facilitator of communication and dialogue in the classroom. Its ability to generate adaptive content enables students to engage in an active knowledge construction process rather than passively receiving information. Educational literature emphasizes the following areas:

Student-centered learning. Interaction with ChatGPT reinforces a pedagogical approach tailored to students' needs and levels. Utilizing artificial intelligence for feedback and personalized content aligns with constructivist learning theories, promoting autonomy and active participation in the educational process [3].

Dialogism and discussion-based learning. The concept of dialogism, which emphasizes dialogical interaction for knowledge construction, finds practical application in ChatGPT. By stimulating the exchange of ideas, the tool cultivates an environment where students not only practice the language but also develop critical thinking skills as they are challenged to defend or reevaluate their perspectives [6].

Inclusion of multicultural and ethical perspectives: Engaging with superstitions and cultural topics using ChatGPT allows for the inclusion of diverse perspectives, which is vital for inclusive education. This guided analysis encourages students to question stereotypes and develop a critical understanding of their beliefs and those of others [11].

When it comes to teaching speaking in groups of B1 Spanish learners, certain problems occur. The most obvious one is students' lack of active vocabulary, which can

prompt them to resort to available Internet resources (online translators, dictionaries, and ChatGPT). On the one hand, such availability allows better flexibility in class and better thought expression; it facilitates the process. Due to the integration of computer technologies and the appearance of digital storytelling students' speaking skills as well as their motivation to speech production can be enhanced in class [12]. On the other hand, there is a tendency to rely too much on these technologies, which leads to a risk of using words without the necessity to memorize them, to retain them in memory.

The second widespread problem for Spanish language learners is related to grammar. It is a grammatically inflected language, a lot of words must be modified in accordance with their context: verbs (tense, mood, person), nouns (two genders), adjectives (gender, number). It can create barriers to speaking and prevent students from spontaneous thought expression.

Poor pronunciation is not the case with Spanish for Russian speakers, although there are some frequent mistakes that need correction on the part of a professor.

When planning speaking activities, it is necessary to find a balance between highly organized practice (e.g., drills) and loosely controlled practice (e.g., role plays) [13]. In class there should be space for spontaneous communication and there should be certain limits determined by grammar and vocabulary used to talk on a specific topic. The imposed limits will contribute to a better students' focus on the material they are supposed to learn and on the skills they are supposed to acquire.

All the above-listed problems when teaching speaking in Spanish became the basis of the research questions:

- how we can use ChatGPT (any other AI chatbot) in order to make students rely more on their own skills than on the artificial intelligence platform;
- how we can minimize the difficulties related to the grammatical structure of Spanish in speaking;
- how we can improve students' pronunciation skills;
- how we can balance the advantageous of highly organized practice and loosely controlled practice.

Once the major problems and research questions related to teaching speaking in groups of B1 Spanish learners are outlined, we can proceed with the part describing how exactly these problems can be addressed with the help of ChatGPT.

Fostering autonomy in vocabulary use. Problem: Students rely on online resources, impacting memory retention. Solution with ChatGPT: Create personalized exercises that encourage students to use new words in specific contexts through generated dialogues or scenarios [14]. Facilitate practice conversations with instant feedback on vocabulary usage, helping students reflect and improve.

Addressing grammatical difficulties. Problem: The complexity of Spanish grammar can hinder spontaneous expression. Solution with ChatGPT: Students can inquire about grammatical rules and receive straightforward explanations and examples to enhance understanding. Design exercises where students use specific grammatical structures in simulated conversations, practicing verb tenses and agreement.

Improving pronunciation. Problem: Common pronunciation errors still need correction. Solution with

ChatGPT: Integrate audio resources for correct pronunciation practice, along with suggested repetition activities or role-plays focused on pronunciation. In our case the repetition of the same questions on the part of the guest speaker or an instructor can also contribute to the problem.

Balancing organized and free practice. Problem: Finding a balance between structured practice and spontaneous communication is essential. Solution with ChatGPT: Develop activities that blend both structured and free practice, allowing for a more relaxed conversation after focused exercises. Provide structured conversation topics with grammatical and vocabulary limitations, enabling practice within a defined framework before moving to spontaneous communication. These strategies leverage ChatGPT to enhance vocabulary use, grammar understanding, pronunciation skills, and balance practice types, ultimately improving students' speaking abilities in Spanish.

Considering the listed solutions, we can move on to the step of designing our didactic tool that is presented in the form of a speaking activity (see Fig. 1). The class is planned for a group of ten students, B1 level. In fact, it can be implemented among many people in big groups, if stu-

dents are divided into small teams of 3–4 people. The material consists of two parts: an interview and a table with statements. A guest speaker (a native of Spanish) was invited to the class.

The interview part, which comes first, consists of 10 questions that have been carefully selected and organized in relation to their difficulty and communicative function. In the first question, students are asked to greet their guest speaker and have the so-called small talk with him. Russian people tend to skip this phase as we prefer to say "hello" and never ask how the other persons' life is going, whereas in the Spanish-speaking world the question "how are you?" is an important conversation starter. Such cultural difference has to be considered. Other questions of the interview address ordinary issues and imply simple full answer (one sentence): What is your name? How old are you? Where do you study? How long have you been studying Spanish? etc. Some questions are provided with additional words and examples to assist a student. The interview part finishes with two gaps reserved for questions that students are to think up for the guest speaker. Such role change will stimulate the interaction between the audience and the speaker.

ENTREVISTA

1. Saludar y preguntar cómo está

2. ¿Cómo te llamas?

3. ¿Cuántos años tienes?

4. ¿Dónde estudias? *La universidad politécnica de Pedro el Grande*

5. ¿Eres estudiante de qué año? *el tercer/el cuarto*

6. ¿Qué carrera estudias? *Lingüística, traducción o pedagogía*

7. ¿Cuánto tiempo llevas estudiando español? *Llevo 3 años estudiando español.*

8. ¿Cuál es tu nivel de español aproximadamente?

9. ¿Cómo estudias español aparte de las clases?

10. ¿Cuáles son tus aficiones? ¿Qué te gusta hacer en tu tiempo libre?

Tus preguntas para él:

1. _____
2. _____

los valores, las costumbres	los rusos	los latinos
1. Pueden enfatizar más el trabajo duro y la disciplina.		
2. Pueden disfrutar de un tipo de humor más extrovertido y cariñoso.		
3. Pueden tener una visión más holística del valor de la vida.		
4. Priorizan la pasión y la alegría en la vida familiar.		
5. Pueden enfatizar la responsabilidad individual.		
6. Pueden ser menos activos en reuniones formales.		
7. Prefieren mantenerse más reservados.		
8. Tienden a hacer contacto físico.		
9. Pueden mostrar una mayor tolerancia a la diversidad cultural y social.		
10. Valoran más la responsabilidad colectiva y la solidaridad entre familias y comunidades.		
11. Valoran el respeto del espacio personal.		
12. Suelen saludar con un abrazo o un beso en la mejilla.		
13. Pueden ser más conservadores a la hora de aceptar la diversidad cultural y social.		
14. Suelen mantener la mirada directa al hablar.		
15. Mantienen menos distancia respecto a los demás.		
16. Prefieren un simple saludo formal.		
17. Ambas culturas valoran la familia, pero ellos pueden estar más centrados en la estabilidad familiar y la educación formal.		
18. Suelen tomar la palabra y expresar opiniones en reuniones formales.		
19. Pueden preferir un humor más sutil y observacional.		
20. Pueden mirar hacia abajo o inclinar la cabeza.		

Fig. 1. Speaking activities designed with the help of ChatGPT and aimed at using ChatGPT in class

Students are given the interview questions at the beginning of the class, and they have some time to deal with the question on their own in pairs or individually. These questions do not require the use of ChatGPT on the students' part (although it can be used). Time allocated for the preparatory part is about 10 minutes, upon expiration of which the guest speaker starts interaction with the audience addressing each person the same question and repeating it each time for each student (or for each small group). Such

repetition only seems to be monotonous, but its didactic value is undeniable, as students get accustomed to each question, hear each other's answers and, as a result, are gradually gaining their confidence in speaking Spanish. In other words, it helps to find that balance between highly organized practice and loosely controlled practice, and it also improves students' pronunciation skills as they have to hear the same question pronounced by the guest speaker multiple times.

Afterwards, students proceed to work in pairs and consider the statements. The statements on the topic "Values, Traditions and Customs" were prepared with the help of ChatGPT by the teacher. The procedure is explicit: the teacher creates a prompt for ChatGPT (e.g., generate a list of Spanish customs and traditions, etc.) and, based on the ChatGPT outcome, elaborates a list of statements by adjusting them to the students' level of Spanish.

Students were asked to relate the customs either to the Russian speaking community or to the Spanish speaking community and to justify their opinion. Preparation time was given to address the statements and to get ready with the answers; students were encouraged to use ChatGPT to formulate and write down their answer. Once the preparatory work is done, the guest speaker starts asking the groups' opinion randomly, and students are supposed to provide a full answer to the question.

Results and discussion

After testing the designed didactic material in the course of experimental learning, students were asked to share their opinion and attitude to the experience. Observations on the part of the teacher and the guest speaker were recorded as well.

Many students indicated that they felt more assured in their speaking skills after engaging with the guest speaker. The structured setting allowed them to practice without the fear of making mistakes.

Students valued the emphasis on cultural differences, particularly the significance of small talk in Spanish-speaking cultures. This helped them grasp the subtleties of communication and encouraged them to participate more openly.

The first part (the interview part) was designed as a warming-up activity, where questions are simple in terms of grammar and vocabulary and thus are easy to answer (e.g., How are you? What is your name? Where do you study?). This part helps students feel more confident about their language skills and get accustomed to communication with a native speaker, as any new surrounding (new people in class) is always an extra stress. Repeatedly hearing the same questions from the guest speaker enhanced their listening abilities. Students mentioned that hearing the pronunciation multiple times aided them in accurately mimicking the sounds.

Collaborating in pairs and small groups promoted a sense of teamwork. Students enjoyed discussing the topics of values, traditions, and customs, leading to engaging debates and exchanges of ideas.

As stated above, for the second part of the activity (where students work with statements) students were encouraged to use ChatGPT to come up with the full answer justifying their point of view. It is impossible to predict in which case a student might need to resort to ChatGPT support, as student needs are individual and depend on their level of Spanish; although in general it was noted that at

least in half of the cases students had to make use of ChatGPT. The option to use ChatGPT was positively evaluated. Students found it beneficial for crafting their responses to the statements, enabling them to articulate their thoughts more clearly during discussions.

Nearly all students actively engaged in the interview and subsequent discussions. The format encouraged even quieter students to participate, as they felt supported by their classmates. The chance to formulate their own questions for the guest speaker was particularly inspiring. Students appreciated this change in role and took it seriously, generating thoughtful and relevant questions. Students showed their ability to provide complete answers to the guest speaker's questions, demonstrating their understanding of the material and the context of the conversation.

To sum it up, teaching speaking with the help of ChatGPT can be organized in the following way: a teacher can make use of ChatGPT to create a list of questions and a list of statements for both activities; students can make use of ChatGPT in class as an extra tool to help them justify their point of view and create a well-structured and grammatically correct answer. This two-activity system can be used for teaching speaking in other languages, as ChatGPT is multilingual and can easily generate answers in German or French, for example.

Some points to be improved when using ChatGPT in class were also revealed. Some groups required more time to prepare their statements. Future classes could benefit from allocating additional time for this preparation to improve the quality of responses. While the discussion on values, traditions, and customs was engaging, students expressed interest in exploring other themes in future sessions, such as food, music, and holidays. Follow-up activities can be added, like writing reflections or creating presentations based on what they learned from the guest speaker and their peers.

Conclusion

The integration of ChatGPT in teaching oral expression skills significantly boosts student engagement and confidence, facilitating realistic conversations and personalized interactions, so students feel more empowered to express themselves and practice their speaking abilities without fear of judgment.

ChatGPT's ability to tailor conversations and feedback to individual student levels allows for effective learning across varied competencies. This adaptability ensures that all students, regardless of their prior knowledge, can engage with complex topics and develop their oral skills at their own pace.

A carefully designed didactic tool (speaking activities) that can balance the advantages of highly organized and loosely controlled practices stimulates debate and students' engagement in conversation, since grammar and vocabulary obstacles are at least partly eliminated.

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