

Research Article

Speaking on the Way: A Simulation-Based Proposal for Primary-School EFL Learners

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Abstract: The main purpose of this case study was to investigate the possibilities of simulation-based learning in Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Greek Primary Education by focusing on the speaking skill. Following a thorough evaluation of the speaking section of the sixth grade's coursebook, it became evident that the simulation-based activities had shortcomings that needed improvement. An alternative proposal of a simulation-based activity with a cultural focus revealed the complications of achieving successful implementation when it comes to simulation-based experiential learning. The findings that came from the recording of a specific learner's responses revealed that the learner took up the challenge to try a different approach to communicating in English within the context of the EFL lesson. What is more, the proposed lesson plan created implications for exploring the EFL learners' relationship to English-speaking cultures, i.e., British culture. Limitations of the study and directions for further research were also provided.

Keywords: primary education, simulation-based learning; speaking skill; Teaching English as a Foreign Language

1. Introduction

In Greek State Primary Schools, the teaching of the speaking skill is often treated as secondary to all the other skills (i.e., reading, writing, listening) because it is generally believed that young learners have a limited repertoire of linguistic resources for engaging in longer turns (Sifakis et al., 2004). Even in the case of short turns, the teacher is expected to “supply key language” (Harmer, 2001, p. 252) and drill new language forms before students can face up to the challenges of “short interactional conversations” (Sifakis et al., 2004, p. 328).

On the same note, classroom speaking is more about engaging students in “speaking to learn” rather than about guiding them towards “learning to speak” (Sifakis et al., 2004, p. 330), which entails that “instant communication” (Harmer, 2001, p. 271) is either minimized or restricted to specific types of speaking tasks (e.g., information gap activities). The best way forward is usually a middle way which involves countering the psychological barriers to oral communication in English through pair work or group work as students tend to find it preferable to taking personal initiative in speaking English. According to Ur (1991, p. 121), pair or group work stands a better chance of “increasing the sheer amount of learner talk” mainly by “lowering the inhibitions of learners”.

As for the EFL teacher's contribution, despite continued efforts to switch between different roles such as that of the “prompter”, the “participant” and the “feedback provider” (Harmer, 2001, p. 276), it is seldom successful as students are not easily prevented from either displaying disruptive behavior or using their mother tongue (Ur, 1991, p. 121). Or else put, the EFL teacher's invested effort in securing a specific learning outcome is often invalidated by student behavior problems.

More recent developments in the improvement of English speaking from different EFL contexts include the integration of authentic materials such as YouTube videos (Syafiq et al., 2021) or podcasts (Alfa, 2020), the use of language games (Nazarov, 2023), the development of a video-based virtual reality (SVVR) in the EFL classroom for the provision of an authentic context (Chien et al., 2020) and many other similar ventures, mainly with the aid of digital technologies. Seeing the logic behind such ventures entails understanding the idea of

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simulating real-life situations to bring home to students a range of cultural realities that require awareness, adaptation, coping and problem-solving skills. What it all comes down to is providing students with the necessary training not only to acquire the ability to communicate in English but also to develop interpersonal skills and experience in communicating with people from other cultures.

The following case study explores the possibilities of developing the EFL learners' speaking skills in Greek State Primary Education. The research findings came from the sixth grade of a Primary School in the North Aegean, Greece. To begin with, the teaching context is described with reference to the student profile, the relevance to the national curriculum and the prescribed coursebook's conformance to the CEFR's descriptors. As the focus of interest is the speaking aspect of the language lesson, specific activities are put under scrutiny for their spoken content utility.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. *The Context of Teaching English*

The way English is taught in Greek Primary School is dictated almost exclusively by the assigned coursebook which provides a "topic-based" syllabus (Efremidou et al., 2009). More specifically, the 6th grade's coursebook comprises the Pupil's Book (Efremidou et al., 2017), the Pupil's Workbook (Efremidou et al., 2011), and the audio-CD.

While all skills are proportionately represented throughout each teaching unit, when it comes to the practice of the speaking skill the corresponding activities may receive scant attention because they may be regarded as "noisy" (Sifakis et al., 2004, p. 373). Although the Communicative Approach has taken over in the last three decades by prioritizing fluency over accuracy, it is not clear whether "speaking is viewed", either by the teacher or by the coursebook, "as a discourse skill in its own right" (Sifakis et al., 2004, p. 330). In fact, the Presentation – Practice – Production (PPP) framework still lurks in the back of the teacher's mind, especially in relation to young learners who expect to be taught the form of the language before they can move on to its spontaneous use (Sifakis et al., 2004).

The EFL teacher is expected to teach the content of the above books in compliance with the A2 language level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Each of the ten units of the Pupil's Book is launched with a table of contents which exemplifies its "relation with CEF" (Efremidou et al., 2009) through a list of performance indicator targets (can-do statements). Furthermore, each unit is divided in three sections of which the first two are dedicated to the skills of reading and listening. Both reading and listening sections follow the pre-, while-, post- instructional sequence (Sifakis et al., 2004). The communicative element is integrated in the warm-up and production stages through the development of appropriately designed speaking activities. In the third section of the unit, students cooperate to carry out guided project work which involves the production of a contextually meaningful outcome to be derived from effective communication. In other words, the speaking skill is not the central focus of any lesson while "language awareness" (Efremidou et al., 2009, p. 5) remains the key part of the targeted linguistic competence via both "inductive and deductive approaches" throughout the coursebook (Efremidou et al., 2009, p. 1).

2.2. *Research Design*

What follows is a rigorous evaluation of the coursebook's speaking activities while the suggestions for improvement of the coursebook's speaking sections which are in accordance with "Johnson's principles" (Sifakis et al., 2004, p. 334) and "Nation's features" (Sifakis et al., 2004, p. 335) are followed by the development of an original speaking lesson based on contextualized real-life tasks that are aimed at enhancing the learner's "strategic competence" (Sifakis et al., 2004, p. 370).

2.3. *Data Collection and Analysis*

For the purposes of preparing a speaking lesson plan, the EFL teacher planned a trip to London by creating a series of speaking activities with the aid of her personal collection of London-related items (e.g., photos, drawings, maps, pocket guidebooks, souvenirs, etc.). Then, she invited volunteers to take part in the recording of the speaking lesson. The lack of eagerness led her to focus on one student whose responses were recorded and transcribed.

The sixth grader on whom the speaking session was based is an eleven-year-old L2 learner whose L1 is Greek. At the end of the school year, his aim was to sit the A2 KPG

examination in English which is organized by the Greek Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs and Sports. Combining two of Gardner's "seven intelligences" (Harmer, 2001, p. 47), that of the "Spatial Learner/The visualizer" (Harmer, 2001, p. 47) and that of the "Interpersonal Learner/The Socialiser" (Harmer, 2001, p. 47), the student responds well to a blended type of language learning. He is good at using his imagination to "create things" but when it comes to putting things into practice he learns better by "cooperating" (Harmer, 2001, p. 47). He shows greater enthusiasm for the third section of the coursebook where he can draw on his recently attained knowledge to co-construct something from beginning to end.

Taking into account what the student's profile indicates, i.e., that he is more interested in tasks which "involve a string of activities around a theme which lead to a particular outcome" than in tasks "seen as one-off activities" (Sifakis et al., 2004, p. 376), the EFL teacher tailored the eventual implementation plan to his needs by giving greater emphasis to certain tasks (i.e., Tasks 1, 4, 5, 7, 8) over others (i.e., Tasks 2, 3, 6). The transcribed dialogues from Tasks 1, 4 and 5 and the derived text from Tasks 7 and 8 facilitated the EFL teacher's job to assess the effectiveness of the lesson plan and draw upon the relevant conclusions as guidance for future planning and implementation.

2.4. Evaluation of the Speaking Activities

In Unit 2 of the Pupil's Book (Efremidou et al., 2017), the first speaking activity pertains to the reading section in Lesson 1 on page 14. It is a warm-up activity which precedes the reading text. It includes a picture of the interior space of a supermarket found on a flyer asking the students to talk about the various departments of a supermarket. Students are expected to come up with the vocabulary about supermarket shopping, while the teacher is expected to name the corresponding departments. This exercise does not fulfill any of the communicative criteria for the design of successful speaking activities. The next speaking activity, i.e. Activity 3A, can be found after the listening and grammar sections of Lesson 1 on page 17. Although students are expected to work in pairs to exchange information, it is a guided practice activity which aims at accuracy achievement. Activity 3B on the same page is "an information gap role-play activity within the context of a simulation" (Sifakis et al., 2004, p. 359) asking students to act out dialogues as shopkeepers and customers. The dialogues are to be acted out after the creation of the appropriate classroom environment through drawings and crafts. This task combines most of "Nation's features" (Sifakis et al., 2004, p. 335). It has "roles" (shopkeepers and customers), "split information" (prices of goods and shopping lists) which has to be shared between the two parties so that communication can take place and "procedures" (drawing pictures of goods, putting price tags, displaying everything and performing transactions) (Sifakis et al., 2004, p. 335). At the same time, it complies with two of "Johnson's principles" (Sifakis et al., 2004, p. 334). It is "an information gap" activity which is "task dependent" on the previous sections for language use (Sifakis et al., 2004, p. 334). "Teacher control" for this task should be "loose" because the purpose is fluency (Sifakis et al., 2004, p. 337). Activity 3C on page 17 is a decision-making activity to be carried out either in pairs or autonomously because it is not clearly communicative. Moreover, despite having Nation's features of "challenge" and "outcome" (Sifakis et al., 2004, p. 335), since the order must be within budget if the student wants to eat at the school canteen, the task rubric does not expand the communicative potential of the activity because it is part of the differentiated teaching material of the coursebook.

In Lesson 2 of Unit 2, "At the Mall" on page 18, there is a topic shift from supermarket to mall shopping accompanied by a functional language shift. A speaking activity, i.e., Activity 1, is found in the warm-up stage followed by listening, grammar and further speaking practice. In this case, there is a picture of a girl at a mall asking for situational description for the elicitation of new lexis. The listening and grammar sections of Lesson 2 are followed by the speaking practice section which comprises activities 4A and 4B on page 21. Activity 4A is a guided simulation-like group work activity, as opposed to the model of "full simulation" (Sifakis et al., 2004, p. 362) proposed by Sturtridge (1977), which turns the classroom environment into a fashion show. Students are expected to describe and comment on each other's clothes by using a specific linguistic formula provided by the task rubric. It is a simulation activity, linguistically restricted to the communicative element of guided reaction to suit the linguistic context of such an occasion but not the situatedness of a particular fashion show. On the contrary, Activity 4B is an improved version of a simulation activity which incorporates role play to reinforce the communicative context of a school bazaar. Students, divided into sellers and buyers, are expected to communicate in accordance with a

simulation scenario which provides the appropriate linguistic equipment to guarantee the success of the transaction.

It ought to be noted that the selected unit for its speaking activities is representative of the type of speaking activities that can be found throughout the Pupil's book. In that regard, it should be borne in mind that it is by no means unusual that it has been singled out for evaluation in terms of quality, usefulness and, above all, the degree of realism in the definition and implementation of the speaking lesson's objectives.

3. Results

3.1. *Suggestions for Improvement of the Speaking Practice*

All things considered, what can be derived from the above evaluation is that there is substantial room for improvement. Depending on the level of student engagement and performance, the EFL teacher could either modify the aims and objectives of the coursebook-provided speaking practice to enhance motivation or introduce new ideas about the way speaking practice could be conducted to suit the students' abilities and needs.

To begin with, the speaking activities with a focus on shopping (buying and selling) could have been better contextualized to have more applicability to the learner's real-life experiences and extended to include more communicative criteria. What is more, a transaction between a shop assistant and a customer constitutes a specific "speech event" (Richards, 1985) which requires appropriateness of language and specific formulaic expressions which should be provided. Nonetheless, it should also be made clear that students need to be trained in "survival strategies" (Richards, 1985) to account for the factor of unpredictability in everyday communication. At <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/a-shopping-role-play> there is a role-play situation between shoppers and shopkeepers which provides more guidelines for its implementation like role cards specifying the kind of shops and shopping lists to be applied while students are expected to interact based on their negotiating as well as better judgment skills. The teacher assumes a silent stance to allow students to negotiate both meaning and structure in order to develop interactive communication channels. Finally, an alternative to the stay-within-the-budget activity of Lesson 1 on page 17 could be a similar type of activity based on a British restaurant menu. Such an activity would be less guided urging learners to retrieve the appropriate functional language which they have been recently taught while it would raise and promote cultural awareness through some degree of native speaking challenge. Speakers would also be expected to negotiate their budget through spoken interaction only without transferring its outcome in written form.

The main point raised is that there simply are not enough realistic tasks allowing speakers the freedom to manage knowledge at hand. Students need more exposure to real-life speaking opportunities if they are to put theory into practice and claim learner autonomy.

3.2. *Designing a Real-life Based Speaking Session*

The following speaking lesson (Table 1) aims at raising awareness on the issue of exposure to real-life speaking opportunities that can support learners with managing problems in speaking English with native speakers. Developing survival strategies is deemed indispensable in this respect as interaction between native and non-native speakers of English may pose additional challenges to effective communication.

The rationale behind the design of a speaking lesson around a specific topic which includes a string of situations requiring communicative ability to cope with the practicalities of travel communication complies with the "action-oriented approach" (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 9) proposed by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). As stated by the CEFR, the learner is viewed as a "social agent" (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 9) faring "within a particular field of action" (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 9) and using "language-in-action" (Hughes, 2013, p. 93). In this case, the learner is a conscious traveler who passes from being a passenger (transient stage of learning) to being a participant in the real life of people to whom he or she can be made comprehensible only through English (action stage). Here, what matters is the "ability to carry out procedures" (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 11) which include ordering food and drink, making purchases, making small talk with people from diverse linguistic backgrounds just for the sake of speaking or relating to people of the same peer group to consolidate relations. The language required for use need not be necessarily taught anew since it is supposed to emerge automatically for survival reasons.

Nevertheless, the planned lesson takes into account that "one generally needs a high

level of concentration and heightened self-awareness” (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 11) to be protected against possible loss-of-face. The provision of language functions serves as a reminder but it also expects the learner to be able to activate the “know-how” (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 11) to communicate if exposed to the imponderables of a random acquaintance.

Table 1. Trip to London: Lesson plan.

| Procedure | Aims | Time |
|--|---|-----------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <u>Pre-speaking</u> <p>Teacher hands in worksheet to Learner</p> | | |
| 1. Learner is prompted to activate background knowledge related to the picture and give answers to the accompanying questions | Set the scene of the “task environment” | 1.21 mins |
| 2. Learner makes a show and tell presentation of personal items brought from home | Use deictic discourse to build up production of longer turns via speaking on topics of personal interest for a purpose | 2.53 mins |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <u>While-speaking</u> | | |
| 3. Learner is engaged into a role-play dialogue and writes down its outcomes after reaching an agreement with the interlocutor | Transfer information content from a negotiation dialogue to a form of written communication | 2.10 mins |
| 4. Learner role-plays a model dialogue with the teacher and then adapts his own ideas to the same dialogue pattern | Train the learner as much into voice management (upward and downward inflection) as into the use of polite forms when ordering food and drink | 2.02 mins |
| 5. Learner makes friendly conversation with stranger on general topics | Make small talk with a native speaker of English to develop survival communication strategies | 3.17 mins |
| 6. Learner role-plays buyer- seller exchange situation and finds communicative solutions to unpredicted turn of events | Consolidate recently acquired knowledge on function | 3.36 mins |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <u>Post-speaking</u> | | |
| 7. Learner interprets the circumstances of the communicative instance illustrated by the cartoon and thinks of possible utterances to fill in the speech bubbles | Match speech act to speech event | 12 mins |
| 8. Learner encapsulates his impressions of the trip to London in a short guest book entry | Urge the learner to address the nuts and bolts of the most memorable travel experience | 10 mins |

3.2.1. Pre-speaking Stage

The pre-speaking stage includes the following two tasks:

- Are you ready for your trip to London? Look at the picture of Paddington in London and read the caption with a quote from the *Paddington* movie (2014). Then, read the questions 1 to 4 and be prepared to discuss your answers.



Figure 1. Drawing of Paddington bear at Paddington station in London.
Source: Author's own development.

Mrs. Brown says that in London everyone is different, and that means anyone can fit in. I think she must be right - because although I don't look like anyone else, I really do feel at home. I'll never be like other people, but that's alright, because I'm a bear. A bear called Paddington.

1. Do you recognize the bear in the above picture?
2. Where is the bear?
3. Have you seen both Paddington movies?
4. Can you read aloud the lines under the picture? Whose words are they?

The picture showing Paddington Bear at Paddington underground station in London has been selected to set the scene of the “task environment” (Sifakis et al., 2004, p. 323) through Task 1 and facilitate the learner's attunement to the simulation conditions of the speaking activities. It also encourages the learner to draw upon individual “cognitive, emotional and volitional resources” (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 9) for contextual application.

Below is the transcribed text of the dialogue between the EFL teacher and the learner from Task 1 of the pre-speaking stage. As the outcome of the recorded speaking session is evaluated against the successful exchange of turns during spoken interaction, it is worth focusing on the time allotted to learner talk against the time allotted to teacher talk.

Teacher: Hello, Kostas!

Learner: Hello!

Teacher: We're going to have a speaking lesson today.

Learner: Ok.

Teacher: We're going on a trip to London!

Learner: Ok.

Teacher: I want you to take a look at this picture and I want you to tell me what you can see.

Learner: I see a bear who's looking, holding a suitcase.

Teacher: And do you know which bear is that?

Learner: Yes, he's Paddington.

Teacher: Have you seen the Paddington movies?

Learner: Yes.

Teacher: Have you seen both of them?

Learner: Yes.

Teacher: Hmm... Now I want you to read these lines underneath the picture.

Learner reads the lines.

Teacher: Whose words are these?

Learner: They are words Paddington. They are Paddington's words.

Teacher: Hmm...

As it turns out, the learner's replies are laconic probably because he is unsure whether it is a purposeful task. The teacher tries to “create interest in the topic” (Harmer, 2001, p. 253) to secure active participation. The learner responds to all questions willingly and with exactness using self-correcting mechanisms as in the utterances “He's holding a suitcase” and

“They are Paddington’s words”.

- Aegean Airlines organizes an ongoing monthly art contest for kids. You have to draw the European capital you would most like to visit and explain your reasons for traveling there. You decide to send a drawing of London and make a recording of your presentation. The prize is a round-trip for two to London with a three-day stay. Show your drawing of London as well as your memoir notice board about London and tell everyone why you want to travel there.



Figure 3. Drawing of London.
Source: Author’s own development.

Figure 2. Photo of a memoir notice board.
Source: Author’s own development.

The show-and-tell presentation in Task 2 may have the semblance of a non-communicative monologue lacking in interactional features but it “serves as an opportunity to involve learners’ own realities” (Illes & Akcan, 2016, p. 11). Furthermore, there is the feature of “challenge” (Sifakis et al., 2004) since it is a case of show-and-tell used as part of a competition procedure with the most successful show-an-teller winning a trip abroad. In this case, the learner is encouraged to show not only what he has (i.e., London mementoes) but also what he knows about them.

3.2.2. While-speaking Stage

Once the trip begins, the learner is directed towards pooling together specific or case knowledge from different sources to match the actual experience. While on the airplane, there are four different tasks to be performed:

- Aegean Airlines for Families has the Junior Pilots series for children, which is a toolkit comprising a notebook and some branded souvenirs. Agree with your mother about the things to do during your stay in London and then write them down in your notebook in the form of a list. Your mother, who has already been to London, makes the suggestions while you agree or disagree.

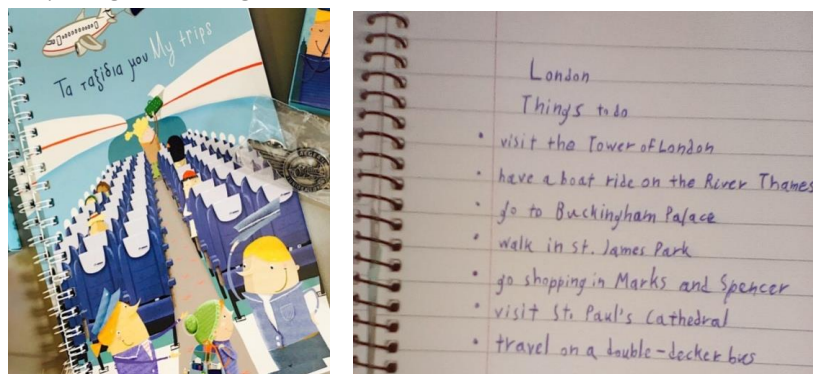


Figure 4. Photo of an AEGEAN Junior Pilot product (notebook).
Source: Author’s own development.

To make suggestions use expressions like:

- Why don't we visit ...?
 - We could visit ...
 - Let's visit
 - What about visiting ...?
 - How about visiting ...?
- To agree use expressions like:
- Absolutely!
 - Exactly!
 - Yes, I agree!
 - I totally agree!
 - I couldn't agree more!
 - I see exactly what you mean!
- To disagree use expressions like:
- I don't agree!
 - I totally disagree!
 - Absolutely not!
 - I'm not sure about that.

Task 3 includes negotiation of the trip schedule with the co-traveler (mother). The learner has to agree or disagree with what is being proposed by the teacher who assumes the role of the co-traveler. Functional language regarding suggestions and agreement/disagreement is provided to enhance the flow of speech allowing for better self-concentration.

- The flight attendant asks you what you would like to drink. Tell her what you want and then call her again to ask for something else. Role-play two model dialogues with your teacher so that you take into consideration the polite forms before you create your own. Pay attention to intonation (pitch of voice going up and down as you talk).



Figure 5. Photo of an airplane cabin.

Source: Author's own development.

Flight attendant: What would you like to drink?

Passenger: I'd like a juice, please.

Flight attendant: Would you like orange juice or apple juice?

Passenger: I'll have the orange juice. No ice, please.

Flight attendant: That's one glass of orange juice for you then. Here you go.

Passenger: Thank you.

Passenger: Excuse me, can I have a pair of headphones, please?

Flight attendant: Yes, of course. Here you are. Anything else for you?

Passenger: Could I have a blanket, please? It's quite chilly.

Flight attendant: If you look under your seat, you'll find it wrapped in a plastic bag.

Passenger: Ok, thank you very much.

Task 4 is more like an attempt at a nativelike realization of the suprasegmental features of connected speech (Jenkins, 2004) in conjunction with the "polite forms" (Richards, 1985, p. 113) used in the flight attendant-passenger interaction. The teacher and the learner read a model dialogue between a flight attendant and a passenger paying attention that polite requests are pronounced following a particular stress pattern to ensure the success of the outcome. From a psycholinguistic perspective, it could be viewed as a foreword to the landing in the heart of Standard English or Received Pronunciation (RP).

- You are browsing the pages of Lonely Planet's pocket guidebook about London in Greek. A friendly old lady sitting next to you lets her eyes fall upon the pages of your book. She catches your eye and starts making conversation. Answer her questions and try to keep the conversation going. Role-play the situation.

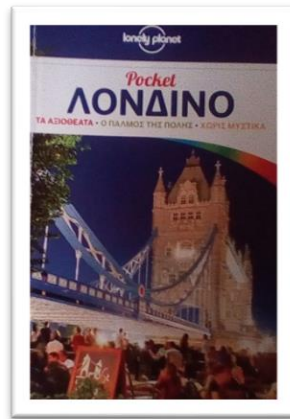


Figure 6. Photo of Lonely Planet's pocket guidebook about London translated in Greek.
Source: Author's own development.

Role A

You are the British lady who wishes to make small talk. Ask questions like:

1. What are you reading?
2. Where do you come from?
3. Why are you visiting England?
4. What's the weather like in Greece?

Role B

You are the one reading the guidebook about London. Answer the lady's questions adding one or two of your own to show interest in the conversation.

Task 5 is an example of a random conversation with a stranger with a different L1. It is also a case of "small talk" (Richards, 1985, p. 90) whereby the learner finds recourse to his general linguistic competence in order to tackle universal topics safeguarding at the same time the turn-taking etiquette. In this case, the learner is required to rise above any hesitation to use his "World English" (Jenkins, 2004, p. 116) to achieve intelligibility.

Below is the transcribed text of the dialogue between the EFL teacher and the learner from Task 5 of the while-speaking stage. Once again, the outcome of the recorded speaking session is evaluated against the successful exchange of turns during spoken interaction.

Old lady: Hello, young boy, what is it that you're reading?

Passenger: I'm reading a book about London.

Old lady: And what exactly is it that you're reading?

Passenger: I'm reading about Buckingham.

Old lady: Oh, I see. What's your name?

Passenger: My name's Kostas.

Old lady: And where do you come from Kostas?

Passenger: I come from Greece.

Old lady: And may I ask why you're visiting England? Are you on a school trip or are you on holiday?

Passenger: Actually, I won an art contest and the prize is a trip to London.

Old lady: Oh, really? And who's the organizer of this contest?

Passenger: Aegean Airlines.

Old lady: Oh, I see. And, what about British weather? You Greeks are not really used to rainy weather, are you?

Passenger: Not really. In Greece, the sun comes out every day.

Old lady: Well, I can assure you, that's not the case with British weather.

Passenger: And what about you, Mrs.?

Old lady: Well, I was in Greece because my son is married in Greece and I went to visit my grandchildren.

Passenger: Ok. Who How many grandchildren do you have?
Old lady: I've got two grandchildren. And what about you? Do you have any brothers or sisters?
Passenger: I have two sisters and one brother.
Old lady: Hmm, that's great. Well, I think that the plane's about to land now. Let's just make sure our seatbelts are fastened. It was nice meeting you, Kostas.
Passenger: It was nice to meet you, too.
Old lady: I really hope you have a great time in London.
Passenger: You, too.
Old lady: And I hope that the British sun will come out for you every day of your trip. Enjoy your stay!
Passenger: Bye!
Old lady: Bye, bye!

As evidenced by the above dialogue, the teacher assumes the role of the native-speaking stranger who wishes to make small talk by "introducing uncontroversial topics" (Richards, 1985, p. 89) such as:

- Conversational openers: "What's your name?"
- The weather: "What's the weather like in Greece?"

The first thing to take into consideration regarding small talk is that "its purpose is sociability" (Richards, 1985, p. 90). Both parties respect the "raising of safe topics" (Richards, 1985, p. 89) and the "appropriate use of turn-taking conventions" (Richards, 1985, p.90). It could be argued that the teacher acts as a language model by using "conversational gambits" (Richards, 1985, p. 92) like "Actually", "Oh, I see", "And may I ask why...?", "Oh, really?", tag questions like "You Greeks are not really used to British weather, are you?" and "memorized clauses" (Richards, 1985, p. 87) like "It was nice meeting you" and "Enjoy your stay". However, the same holds true about the learner who follows the teacher's "appropriateness aspect of communication" (Richards, 1985, p. 87) by uttering phrases like "What about you, Mrs.?", "It was nice to meet you, too", "You, too".

- **At the shopping center.** You wish to buy a woolen duffle coat like the one Paddington Bear is wearing in both movies. You go for shopping in Marks and Spencer because you saw at <http://www.marksandspencer.com/1/christmas/paddington-shop> that there is a special Paddington shop corner for Christmas. You ask the shop assistant for a red woolen duffle coat in medium size but it is out of stock. She tells you that your size is available only in blue color. You agree to try it on.



Figure 7. Photo of a Marks and Spencer bonus card.
Source: Author's own development.

Task 6 is a dialogue between a shop assistant and a customer who achieves a different outcome from the real one. The factor of unpredictability should be handled so that the transaction is not threatened simply because the interlocutor has been found at a loss for words.

3.2.3 Post-speaking Stage

The learner is allowed time to reflect on how he has coped with different stages of the trip where communication was called for to achieve implementation of his short-term goals. The post-speaking stage includes the following two tasks:

- **At the park.** You are having a leisure walk in St. James Park when suddenly a running dog walks all over you and makes you lose your balance. The dog's owner, a young girl about your age, comes to you in an apologetic way. Complete your own words in the speech bubbles of the following cartoon illustrating the moment of your encounter.

Task 7 is an extension of the small talk task of the previous stage on the issue of randomness but it also calls for a “sense of naturalness” (Richards, 1985, p. 90) of speech to repair the imminent breakdown of a social relationship which is being formed. The learner has to alter his angry attitude and tune into the native speaking girl’s playful attitude if he wants to maintain social ties through “phatic communion” (Richards, 1985, p. 90). To achieve this, the learner takes into account body language, facial expressions, signaling hand gestures and discourse markers (hmm, really, actually, like) which have a mitigating effect and responds accordingly.

Below is the implementation of Task 7 by the EFL learner (i.e., turns 3, 7, 11) who has chosen to react to an awkward situation in a way that shows growing cultural sensitivity. In fact, the learner takes all the credits for the skillful shift to light-hearted conversation.

1. **Kostas:** Hey, watch out!
2. **Dog:** Well, I’m just like chasing the duck and then you show up!
3. **Kostas:** You walked all over me! Can’t you see where you are going?
4. **Girl:** Actually, everything’s my fault. I’m really sorry.
5. **Duck:** Hmm, I am nobody’s dinner!
6. **Dog:** I’m so hungry!
7. **Kostas:** Don’t worry about it. I’m Kostas. What’s your name?
8. **Girl:** I’m Diane.
9. **Duck:** I’m just an ordinary duck.
10. **Girl:** Let’s play a game! I’ll do pantomime and you’ll have to guess.
11. **Kostas:** **That sounds fun! Let’s start!**



Figure 8. This comic strip was created with ToonDoo Comic Maker.
Source: Author’s own development.

- At the church. You are about to walk out of St Paul’s Cathedral after your visit to it. On your way out, you catch a glimpse of the Guest Book open on the page of the last entry. Visitors from all over the world have written their general impressions about their trip to London. Sign the Guest Book as well.

Task 8 contains an interesting cultural detail about churches in Britain where visitors can write their impressions by signing the guest book. This is a task which maintains the learner socio-culturally acclimatized and encourages him to epitomize feelings and thoughts about the traveling experience.

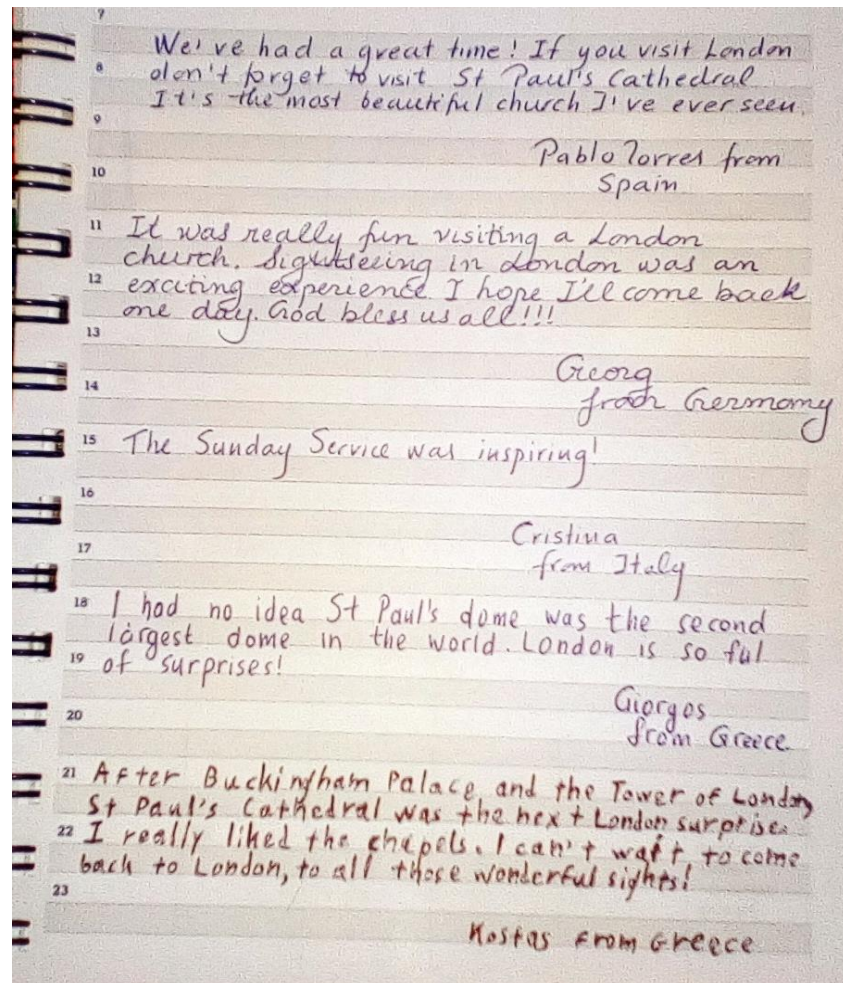


Figure 9. Photo of the guest book.
Source: Author's own development.

4. Discussion

4.1. The Role of the Teacher

The role of the teacher in this face-to-face tutorial is tailored to the needs and interests of a sixth grader. The teacher assists the learner in carrying out his action plan (trip program) and secures the achievement of the lesson plan's aims and objectives through supporting and monitoring the speaking session. To begin with, the role of the teacher is that of the "course planner" and, to proceed with, it becomes that of the "participant" because she acts as an interlocutor in the role-play tasks. The teacher refrains from exceeding her corresponding time limit since both speaking parties are expected to make even contributions. As a "course planner" (Sifakis et al., 2004, p. 382), the teacher becomes automatically an "information resource" (Sifakis et al., 2004, p. 383), and a "language resource" (Sifakis et al., 2004, p. 383), but not a standby "consultant" (Sifakis et al., 2004, p. 383) because the tasks have a testing-on-the-spot quality to them expecting the learner to explore his potential to the fullest.

4.2. The Effectiveness of the Speaking Session

Judging from the learner's comments in the guest book, speaking on the way has been a positive experience. The learner combined the conventionalized use of the English language (i.e., polite forms, small talk) with aspects of spontaneous communication (i.e., "phatic communion") while during the show-and-tell monologue he had the opportunity to accommodate his speaking style to the utterance flow. More specifically, the tasks of the while-speaking stage were "field-specific" (Hughes, 2013, p. 93) giving him enough practice for oral tests referent to specific contexts. After speech comes writing, so the learner had the opportunity to get involved in two writing activities one of which (i.e., Task 7) occupied the learning space of a "game-based procedure" (Ur, 1991, p. 290). The main difficulties involved the learner's ability to create and accommodate his own conversational style to the flow of speech. Overall, he did his best to respond to the challenge of using English out of the

classroom context.

4.3. Implications for Teaching English as a Foreign Language

The design and implementation of the alternative lesson plan has created implications for incorporating simulation-based learning in the EFL teachers' practices with regard to the teaching of the speaking skill. More specifically, the idea that British culture is worth exploring as the trigger for the design of a topic-based speaking lesson has prepared the ground for similar lesson plans in the context of primary education. In fact, the idea of taking the student on an imaginary trip to London which may have been overused in the past to the point of losing its original effect can be recast to communicate new meaning. Sequencing tasks through identifying overlooked aspects (i.e., cultural) of a trip abroad can be applied to a number of occasions by underscoring the importance of overlooked aspects of simulation-based learning such as specific language training in good survival communication strategies (e.g., politeness).

4.4. Limitations of the Study

Although this study has provided significant insight into how simulation-based learning may be used to enhance student motivation where English speaking in the EFL classroom is concerned, the simulation tasks may be carried out under real-life scenarios but do not take place under real-life conditions. Furthermore, the study's results are restricted to the case of one student which may seem to challenge the reliability and significance of the obtained results. However, it should be noted that the recording of that one student's responses reflects the teacher's mood for experimenting with a novel idea whilst monitoring the effects, predictable or not, of the transition from design to implementation and not her intention to implement a results-driven process. Subsequent studies could concentrate upon overcoming the obstacles of testing new grounds by predefining and controlling the study's variables in a more consistent way so that the scope of the analysis is wider.

5. Conclusions and Directions for Further Research

The learner benefited from the speaking session's realistic orientation because he preserved his social identity and "brought his own personality and experience to the task" (Sifakis et al., 2004, p. 398). The idea of functioning socially in an English-speaking environment was appealing because he was given the opportunity to measure himself against emerging challenges from unplanned conversations with people of different ages and statuses to formulaic transactional dialogues with a purchase outcome. It is worth mentioning that the use of the L2 was uninterrupted throughout the speaking lesson which is evidence enough that the EFL teacher's contribution should not be left unexplored because the success or failure of speaking English effortlessly is dependent to a large extent on the teacher.

As a result, it would be worthwhile for EFL teacher development programs to direct teachers towards self-monitoring the progress of their work to create a self-evaluation cycle with a view to providing impactful feedback. In fact, enhancing the impact of positive feedback would be yet another implementable goal within the context of simulation-based learning as teaching survival strategies at language level is as good as teaching life-skills development mechanisms for educational purposes. An associated idea to direct further research would be to foster a collaborative attitude in students so that they become actively involved in the design of simulation-based speaking lessons that are aimed at helping them develop a range of relevant skills.

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