

**IMPROVING SPEAKING SKILLS OF THE MEMBERS OF THE
SPEAKING CLUB AT MADRASAH ALIYAH MA'ARIF NU KOTA
BLITAR THROUGH THE USE OF ADJACENCY PAIRS**

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Abstract

Teaching speaking skills effectively must extend far beyond the mere acquisition of language accuracy, which often focuses narrowly on lexical and grammatical components. While structural correctness is undoubtedly important, true communicative competence requires a heavy emphasis on language appropriateness, contextual awareness, and conversational flow. Recognizing this critical need, this community service initiative was designed to significantly enhance students' speaking proficiency by prioritizing fluency, appropriacy, and the naturalness of English expression. To achieve this sustainable goal, the program utilized the Training of Trainers (ToT) methodology, specifically targeting the instructors of the Speaking Club at MA Ma'arif NU Kota Blitar. By training the trainers first, the initiative ensured a multiplier effect, equipping educators with innovative pedagogical tools, most notably adjacency pairs, to structure natural, conversational exchanges. The training program was implemented smoothly and successfully. The outcomes clearly demonstrate a measurable improvement in the instructors' pedagogical knowledge and practical skills. Specifically, participants successfully developed enhanced speaking materials, comprehensive lesson plans, and targeted teaching strategies centered around adjacency pairs, ultimately empowering them to build greater fluency, appropriacy, and naturalness in their students' English-speaking abilities.

Keywords: adjacency pairs, language appropriateness, speaking fluency

INTRODUCTION

In teaching speaking, teachers need to pay attention to both accuracy and fluency. By doing so, they can help students develop a balanced speaking ability that combines both aspects. This can be achieved by providing opportunities for students to practice speaking in a variety of contexts, with feedback on both accuracy and fluency. By striking a balance between these two aspects, language learners can become more effective and confident communicators. Understanding the difference between the concepts of accuracy and fluency is essential for language teachers to know where the teaching of speaking should be directed.

Accuracy refers to the ability to use language correctly and accurately. This includes using correct pronunciation, grammar, appropriate word choice, and correct sentence structure. Accuracy is vital in language learning, as it helps to avoid misunderstandings and ensures that the intended message is effectively conveyed to the addressee. Meanwhile, fluency refers to the ability to speak smoothly and spontaneously, with minimal pauses or errors. Fluency encompasses several key aspects, including the ability to speak at a natural pace, maintain conversational flow, and use language naturally and spontaneously. A fluent speaker can convey their message easily and effectively, without struggling to find the right words or construct grammatical structures.

Syarifuddin (2017) posits that the goal of language learning is to increase learners' communicative competence, covering such competences as discourse, sociolinguistic, and strategic as the underlying sub-abilities of speaking proficiency. Hence, besides focusing on accuracy and fluency, a teacher aiming at developing students' speaking skills should also mind the students' language appropriacy, i.e., using language appropriately according to context. Hymes (1972) emphasized the importance of communicative language competence and introduced the concept of "communicative competence," which includes aspects such as appropriacy and effectiveness. Canale and Swain (1980) also emphasized the importance of sociolinguistic competence in communicative ability, which includes the ability to use language that is appropriate to the social and cultural context. In short, teachers should help students understand the nuances of language and how to use language appropriately in different situations.

As a language skill, speaking is commonly taught through traditional instructional approaches (Guebba, 2021). Teaching speaking also needs to pay attention to strategies that can help students develop their natural speaking skills. One strategy that can be used is developing students' ability to take speaking turns, maintain their turns, and give signals that they are listening to the interlocutor. Familiarizing the students with expressions of fillers and backchannelling can also make the students' conversation sound natural and fluent.

Based on the observation before conducting the community service, we found that many speaking club members of MA Ma'arif NU Kota Blitar seemed very motivated in practicing English conversation. However, we found that their speaking proficiency is less fluent, unnatural, and they still frequently use contextually inappropriate expressions. We assumed that such a condition occurs due to the fact that the instructors seemed to lack pedagogical knowledge in teaching speaking and needed training tools that enable the target students to speak responsively, spontaneously, naturally, and appropriately in doing verbal interaction in English.

To overcome this pedagogical problem, we recommend adjacency pairs-based training as a means of promoting the club members' speaking proficiency, particularly through adjacency pairs-based learning material and teaching scenarios. We assume that adjacency pairs (AP) potentially benefit the students in developing speaking ability. We believe that adjacency pairs are effective in improving students' responsive skills. By practicing appropriate responses to given stimuli, students can develop the ability to respond spontaneously and naturally in conversations. Additionally, adjacency pairs can also help students develop natural speaking skills by practicing common conversational patterns in the target language. This can help students feel more comfortable and confident in using the target language in everyday conversations. Hence, they may feel more comfortable and confident in their ongoing speaking practice engagement. Based on the background mentioned above, the objective of the program is to assist the instructors and members of the speaking club of MA Ma'arif NU, Blitar, in the preparation of speaking learning materials and the habituation of club members in using adjacency pairs to build fluency, appropriacy, naturalness, and spontaneity in speaking in English.

This community service activity aims to assist the instructors and members of the speaking club of MA Ma'arif NU Blitar, in terms of preparing speaking learning materials and the habituation of club members in using AP to build fluency, appropriacy, naturalness, and spontaneity in speaking in English. This AP-based speaking training is theoretically inspired by several theoretical frameworks. Utilizing AP in conversation practice is in line with Canale and Swain's (1980) model of Communicative Competence, covering strategic, sociolinguistic, and discourse competence, all of which are completely addressed through AP-based practice. Next, as outlined in Conversation Analysis (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974), APs are identified as the basic units of conversation. Therefore, using AP in developing speaking ability is the right choice for students aiming at more natural and responsive skills. At last, utilizing AP in enhancing speaking proficiency is supported by the Noticing Hypothesis (Schmidt, 1990) and research on formulaic sequences (Wray, 2002), which essentially recommend the use of common conversational patterns to enhance automaticity and naturalness.

After participating in this community service activity, it is hoped that the instructors of the target speaking club can explore authentic teaching materials related to the response pair to be presented to their students. For students, they are expected to be able to respond appropriately, naturally, and spontaneously in verbal interaction with foreign counterparts or with their colleagues.

PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

Based on the observation before conducting the community service, we found several issues urgently to fix. Particularly, our observation in the target group, i.e., the speaking club of MA Ma'arif NU Kota Blitar, resulted in the identification of the following problems:

1. The speaking instructors at the targeted Speaking Club apparently lacked pedagogical knowledge related to material development and had limited insight into speaking learning strategies. From our small talk with them, they said they had limited access to joining professional development programs such as pre-service training, seminars, workshops, or similar activities since most of them are S1 fresh graduates and non-government officers.
2. The members of the speaking club at the school were provided with randomly selected learning materials, not based on student-speaking need analysis and insightful speaking pedagogical objectives. This traditional conversation practice seemingly leads to students' 'weird' English language use, especially in terms of their language appropriateness and naturalness.
3. The formulation of students' speaking competence indicators was not in line with the theoretical constructs of speaking ability. Therefore, it was also apparent that the series of conversation practice activities was monotonous. Most speaking classes in the club were conducted in drilling, memorizing, and rehearsing random conversational texts.

Our observation led to the conclusion that the instructors lacked speaking-pedagogical knowledge and needed an effective training tool enabling their students to be able to speak responsively, spontaneously, naturally, and appropriately in English conversations. To overcome this pedagogical problem, we conducted training of trainers (ToT) for the instructors, so-called AP-based training as a means of promoting the club members' speaking proficiency in the target aspects. This training activities mainly covered (i) a lecture on theories related to the concepts conversation analysis focusing on adjacency pairs, fillers, backchannelling, turns taking and their function in a conversation activity; (ii) modelling AP-based speaking material design and teaching scenario; (iii) Simulating AP-based teaching scenarios to see its positive impact on the students' fluency, spontaneity, naturalness, and appropriateness in English speaking.

METHOD

Target Group

The participants who became the strategic target group in this community service activity were (i) the speaking instructors and (ii) members of the Speaking

Club at MA Ma'arif NU Kota Blitar. The reasons for selecting these participants were as follows:

1. The speaking instructors at the targeted Speaking Club have limited access to joining professional development programs such as pre-service training, seminars, workshops, or similar activities since most of them are S1 fresh graduates and non-government officers.
2. Many of them do not have adequate experience in teaching English speaking.
3. The members of the speaking club at the school do not receive suitable materials and conversation practice, resulting in unnatural English language use, especially in terms of language appropriateness and fluency.

Method of Implementation

The method used in implementing this community service activity is training for English instructors and members of the Speaking Club at Ma'arif NU Kota Blitar. The instructors targeted for training are those who have good English language competence but are not graduates of English language education programs or lack pedagogical knowledge about material development and learning strategies for teaching speaking.

The training focused on developing materials based on adjacency pairs and strategies for delivering them in conversation practice to promote fluency, appropriacy, and naturalness in English language use among the club members.

The steps of the training activities are as follows:

1. Seeding of information or theories related to the concept and method of speaking learning, as well as the concept of conversation analysis elements such as adjacency pairs, fillers, backchannelling, turn-taking, and their function in a conversation activity.
2. Modeling examples of speaking material development based on adjacency pairs and conversation analysis in English with relevant communication contexts.
3. Practicing designing a teaching scenario for adjacency pairs as a preparation stage for teaching practice.
4. Practicing teaching with a pre-designed lesson plan and adjacency pair materials that have been previously developed.

Evaluation Design

Evaluation in this community service is directed at two levels, namely (a) process-product assessment and (b) students' speaking assessment.

a. Process-Product Assessment

The evaluation focused on both process and product assessment. Process assessment was conducted from the dissemination of concepts/theories related to adjacency pairs, as elements of conversation analysis, and their role in teaching speaking, modeling through examples, practicing material development and learning strategies with adjacency pairs, and teaching practice. Product assessment was examined via products produced by the instructors, including learning material and the design of a lesson plan for teaching speaking based on an AP framework in the opening, core, and closing phases of lessons.

The evaluation of the training program's success was conducted through direct observation, examining indicators of success such as: (i) Teachers' knowledge on conversation analysis elements such as adjacency pairs, turn-takings, and expressions of fillers or back-channelling; (ii) Teachers' skills in designing and developing speaking materials and learning steps based on adjacency pairs and conversation analysis framework; and (iii) Teachers' skills in designing a teaching scenario and implementing it in teaching and learning process, covering the opening, whilst, and closing phases.

b. Students' Speaking Assessment

Test Format

The AP-based speaking test in this community service was developed in the form of a face-to-face oral test between the examiner and the students. The test lasted about 5–7 minutes per individual participant. The instrument included 10 FPP stimuli representing eight types of AP such as question–answer, request–acceptance, offer–acceptance/refusal, etc. All of the stimuli are framed within the daily activity contexts, which were varied according to power and societal distance. The context variation aims to elicit the students' sense of appropriateness in choosing responses that suit the given context. The students' responses during the test session were recorded to facilitate the scoring stage executed by two raters, who had received an intensive briefing before the scoring session.

Test Administration Procedure

The test administration procedure was structured in three stages, i.e., opening, implementation, and closing. In the opening stage, the examiners welcomed the test participants, making a small opening talk to create a comfortable atmosphere. Next, the examiner explained that the activity was a speaking test, the results of which were meant merely for evaluative purposes of the AP-based training. The examiner also emphasized that the students' answers were not judged in right or wrong basis and asking the participants to respond naturally and

spontaneously, just as in everyday conversation. As the test atmosphere had been conducive enough, the examiner activated the recording device and started the test.

In the implementation stage, the examiner read the FPP stimuli one by one using natural intonation. After reading a stimulus, the examiner allowed a three-second pause for the student to give a response, as the SPP. While the test participant was responding, the examiner was not permitted to offer corrections, interruptions, or assistance of any kind.

If the student failed to respond within the three-second pause, the examiner was permitted to repeat the stimulus once. If the student still failed to respond again after the prompt was repeated, the examiner proceeded immediately to the next stimulus, and the student was assigned the lowest score for that item. This procedure was repeated until all 10 stimuli had been presented. During the session, the examiners managed to maintain a consistent reading pace and intonation across all participants to ensure the test's reliability.

The last stage was the closing stage. Once the 10 stimuli had been completed, the examiner said thank to the participant while ceasing the recording. Subsequently, the recorded responses were submitted for the scoring session. The recordings were independently scored by two raters based on the given rubric previously described. The final score was the average of the scores assigned by the two raters.

Scoring Rubric

Students' speaking ability is assessed by an analytic rubric, adapted from the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (2012), incorporating modifications to the IELTS Speaking Band Descriptors to suit assessment needs. Empirically, IELTS test takers have a positive perception on the IELTS speaking test since it was influenced by the familiarity and ease of the topic Hussain Mir (2022). The adaptation is also based on the Communicative Competence framework conceptualized by Canale and Swain (1980).

The rubric focuses on four main aspects: fluency, spontaneity, naturalness, and appropriateness. Each aspect is rated on a scale of 1 to 25, categorized into four intervals: poor (1–6), fair (7–12), good (13–18), and excellent (19–25). The descriptors for each interval across the aspects are outlined below:

1) Fluency

In this rubric, fluency refers to the ability to speak smoothly at a normal pace with minimal pausing. Indicators include the smoothness of the speech flow, the frequency of long pauses, and the appropriate use of conversational fillers. The "excellent" category is assigned if speech is highly fluent and virtually pause-free, whereas the "poor" category is assigned if speech is highly halting or disjointed.

2) Spontaneity

This aspect refers to the student's ability to respond to a given stimulus (First Pair Part/FPP) within a reasonable timeframe, maintaining the flow of turn-taking. Indicators of spontaneity include the speed of the response—measured from the end of the FPP to the start of the Second Pair Part (SPP)—and the degree of relevance of the SPP to the FPP. An "excellent" rating is awarded if the student provides an immediate and highly relevant response, whereas a "poor" rating is given if the response is very slow or irrelevant to the FPP provided.

3) Naturalness

This aspect refers to phonological resemblance—both segmental and suprasegmental—where the student's speech sounds like that of a native English speaker. Indicators include the use of linguistic chunks and adjacency pair patterns typical of native speakers. An "excellent" rating is given to students who can use a variety of natural adjacency pair patterns, while a "poor" rating is assigned if the language sounds stiff and bears little resemblance to native speaker speech.

4) Appropriateness

Appropriateness refers to the ability to select expressions or linguistic forms that suit the social context, the relationship between speakers, and cultural norms. Indicators include the alignment of the response with the appropriate level of formality and degree of illocutionary directness, in accordance with pragmatic and sociolinguistic politeness norms. An "excellent" rating is awarded if the chosen SPP is entirely contextually appropriate, whereas a "poor" rating is given if the response is unsuitable or contextually inappropriate, potentially leading to social discord with the interlocutor.

The raters may carefully assign low or high scores within the established range for each category, based on their professional expertise. Cumulatively, the maximum score a student can obtain is 100, and the minimum score is 4.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Description of the implementation results of the training activity of this community service can be presented in the following sections.

Pre-Training Conditions

The pre-training conditions can be described as follows. The target audience for this PKM activity was instructors and student members of the Speaking Club at MA Ma'arif NU, Blitar. There were two instructors and 10 peer-speaking coaches recruited by the school who were not core teachers in English language subjects. In our observation, the instructors had fairly good English proficiency. Unfortunately, some of them were not graduates of English language education undergraduate

programs, so they lacked pedagogical knowledge related to material development and had limited insight into speaking learning strategies. This less-than-conducive condition was evident during the pre-training observation conducted by the community service team.

In terms of material, it was apparent that the topics presented in the conversation activities in the Club were not based on student needs analysis and learning objectives. Moreover, the development of competency indicators was not in line with the theoretical constructs of speaking ability. Moreover, it was also apparent that the series of conversation practice activities seemed monotonous and random in terms of the material or topics presented to them for practice.

Description of the Training Process

The training activity aimed at improving English speaking fluency through the use of adjacency pairs for members of the Speaking Club at MA Ma'arif NU, Blitar was held on October, 31 and November, 1, 2025. On the first day, the training focused on disseminating information or theory related to the concept and method of speaking learning, as well as the concept of adjacency pairs and their function in conversation. This activity was packaged in the form of a material presentation and an informal discussion delivered by the PKM team to the club-supervising teachers, main instructors, and peer-speaking coaches.

The material covered such topics as (i) explanation of the theoretical concepts of adjacency pairs, (ii) exemplifying expressions included in the adjacency pair categories, and (iii) selecting adjacency pair expressions from films or YouTube video content to obtain authentic material and modify it with video editors to suit instructional needs or learning objectives of the club instructions. Below are the pictures of the dissemination activities previously mentioned.



Figure 1. Material Presentation to the English Instructors of the Speaking Club

On the second day, the training focused on providing a teaching scenario model and guiding the instructors to plan and practice their own-developed lesson plan and teaching techniques on how to do a training on adjacency pairs to the

students. The modeling was carried out by directly guiding the conversation club instructors in facilitating club members to practice speaking English on an adjacency-pair basis. The practice activity process was recorded to provide instructors with accurate and practical feedback and correction on the students' imperfections in speaking practice in terms of the accuracy aspect, such as pronunciation, intonation, grammar, and the appropriateness of choosing expressions in the process of practicing conversation using specific adjacency pairs in various contexts.



Figure 2. Instructors' teaching practices on providing adjacency pairs material and implementing the teaching scenario model.

Post-Training Conditions

The evaluation of the success of this community service program was conducted at the end of the training, which was carried out through direct observation by examining the predetermined success indicators. Regarding the first indicator, namely the instructor's knowledge of the concept and definition of adjacency pairs, it can be stated that their knowledge after attending the training has increased dramatically, from having little knowledge at all about the concept, meaning, and usefulness of adjacency pairs in developing speaking skills, to now having adequate knowledge about the concept, meaning, and use of adjacency pairs in developing conversation skills of club members.

The insight into adjacency pairs has enabled the instructors of the Speaking Club to have basic skills in designing and developing teaching materials and learning steps based on knowledge of adjacency pairs quite well after receiving guidance and direct direction from the PKM team during the learning modeling stage. This is vital for the success of teaching speaking since the courses are predominantly designed to equip students with oral proficiency, and the stages of improvement need to be included in the syllabus of teaching speaking (Fauzan, 2017).

From the perspective of the club members at the school, the post-training conditions can be reported as follows: they are now more enthusiastic about participating in a series of activities to improve their speaking skills with more structured material and functional and natural examples obtained from authentic materials prepared by their instructors in a systematic and meaningful way. Currently, they are focusing on short conversation texts of adjacency pairs, being familiar with *fillers*, *back-channelling* expressions, and making more natural interactions.

Discussion

Improvement of Students' English-Speaking Skills

To assess the speaking skill improvement of the club members, in terms of fluency and appropriateness, the community service team administered a pre-test and a post-test. Overall, the students' scores in both tests are presented in table 1. As can be seen in the table, the mean scores of the members in the pre-test increased from 66.06 to 76.81 in the post-test. The N-gain scores of 5 students fall into the low level, while the rest of them (11 students) achieved N-gain scores at the medium level. Meanwhile, the average N-Gain score is 0.3075, which falls into the category of the medium level.

Such an average roughly suggests that the community service program, which is improving speaking skills through the use of adjacency pairs, is quite effective, especially within the aspects of fluency and appropriateness. This can logically be explained by the fact that AP materials provide ready-made speech patterns for students practicing speaking. Students do not need to construct utterances from scratch using their own vocabulary, grammar knowledge, and expressions in the same way native speakers (NS) do. Instead, they receive appropriate input reflecting the cultural and social usage of native speakers, which boosts their confidence in the language acquisition process and reduces their cognitive load. This environment facilitates more spontaneous and fluent language production.

Theoretically, this effectiveness aligns with the findings of Dominggus. C. et al (2024), who found that the use of the AP strategy can improve the students' speaking performance. The effectiveness of the AP approach applied in this community service activity also reinforces Conversation Analysis theory (Sacks et al., 1974)—which asserts that APs are fundamental interactional units effective for training speaking spontaneity—as well as Canale and Swain's (1980) theory of Communicative Competence and Schmidt's (1990).

Table 1. Students' Speaking Improvement

Student	Pre-test	Post-test	N-gain	Category
1	67	77	0.30	Medium
2	69	76	0.22	Low
3	67	77	0.25	Low
4	64	75	0.30	Medium
5	65	75	0.28	Low
6	69	76	0.22	Low
7	64	76	0.31	Medium
8	68	79	0.35	Medium
9	69	81	0.36	Medium
10	64	76	0.32	Medium
11	60	70	0.25	Low
12	65	78	0.37	Medium
13	65	78	0.37	Medium
14	69	80	0.35	Medium
15	67	77	0.30	Medium
16	65	78	0.37	Medium
Mean	66.06	76.81	0.3075	Medium

The effectiveness of AP instruction is also in line with several studies of the same interest. Muhammad, R. (2019) suggests that AP-based instruction increases EFL learners' speaking performance in terms of fluency and spontaneity. Likewise, Salehi (2013) emphasized that exposure to common adjacency pairs improved the students' naturalness and pragmatic appropriateness, which is also parallel to Rose and Kasper's (2021) review. It concludes that L2 interactional competence can be best developed through an explicit instruction of interactional routines.

Meanwhile, factors that inhibited and supported the entire process of the service community program also need to be noted. First, the implementation of this AP-based speaking training encountered several obstacles. The first one deals with the classroom-effective hours that prevented the speaking club activities from being scheduled consistently due to time and classroom availability. This also affected the coordination process of implementing this training program.

Next, the background of the students' English was diverse, ranging from basic to intermediate levels. There was a wide ability gap, causing an uncondusive atmosphere among conversation club members. The students showed a tendency to cluster themselves based on ability levels. Some formed cliques with peers of similar ability. The High-ability ones formed one clique and so did the low-ability students. This condition seriously affected the implementation of speaking development among students, particularly in terms of the selected learning material and instruction strategy.

In addition to the unfavorable factors, there were several positive aspects supporting the implementation of this AP-based training program. First, the high enthusiasm and motivation of the students as club members in developing their English speaking skills, especially in terms of their fluency and appropriateness. This is what encourages the instructors to be enthusiastic in facilitating and guiding the club members in developing their speaking skills in English despite their very minimal honorarium. Secondly, good coordination between the service team and the school principal in charge of the management of the school makes for easier implementation of the program amidst the limitations of the school's resources.

Follow-Up Plan

From the previous description related to the problems, benefits, inhibiting factors, and supporting factors of this community service activity, it is necessary to have a sustainable activity to improve the quality of the students' speaking practices and instructors' teaching strategies for developing English speaking fluency and appropriacy of the club members. Hence, what is needed is a schedule and commitment to learn from the participants.

In addition, the provision of facilities such as internet and a self-access center for the club needs to be installed for the sake of exposure to media on various expressions of adjacency pairs. The follow-up activities utilizing social media such as WhatsApp groups, Instagram, or Facebook to sustain focused speaking practices in building fluency and appropriacy are strongly recommended. Those social media are utilized by instructors and the club members to create English speaking exposure and atmosphere, aiming at forming fluency, naturalness, and appropriacy of students' English speaking. Besides, those online platforms can be used as consultation or discussion media between the club instructors and the PkM team to sustain the consistency of the speaking development program to cultivate the students' speaking naturalness, fluency, and appropriacy.

CONCLUSIONS

From the previous description, the AP-based training activities of the community service in guiding the instructors and members of the Speaking Club of MA Ma'arif NU Kota Blitar, in terms of developing speaking materials, Lesson Plan and teaching modelling for instructors and club members have been well implemented. The instructors were able to develop AP-based material, designing speaking a teaching scenario or lesson plan, and executing teaching practice based on the theoretical framework of conversation analysis, specifically adjacency pairs. Moreover, it can improve the competence and skill of the target audience

accordingly, i.e. the speaking club members in developing speaking fluency, spontaneity, naturalness and appropriateness.

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