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Research Article

Opportunities for speaking: the if, how and when of students' spoken target language in the second foreign language classroom

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Abstract: The present study investigates spoken target language in Spanish classes within Swedish lower secondary schools. In spite of the communicative goals of foreign languages, speaking is the least investigated skill and the investigation contributes with insights into the contexts when the target language is spoken in Modern language class. Twenty-one lessons in five different classrooms were audio- and video-recorded, then analysed using a tool developed specifically for the present study, the *Revised speaking observation scheme*. In this scheme the students' spoken language was in focus and explicitly separated from the teachers' language. The findings show that students mostly spoke the target language during activities when they were encouraged or requested to do so, and not used it as the regular means of communication. When scaffolding structures were available, the students used them in their own production, and speaking completely without scaffolding was rare. Moreover, the classroom activities involving spoken target language were placed on a communicative continuum and could be categorised as either triggering *language practice* or *language use*. Hence, the results suggest a need for more explicit spoken language activities during class, scaffolded in a way that enables the students to perform them.

Keywords: Spanish, second foreign languages, speaking

1 Introduction

Speaking a new language is an essential aspect of communicative competence. In fact, for many learners, the most desired aim is to use the new language in spoken communication, preferably fluently (Barfod Lund et al., 2023; Finndahl, 2023). In addition, quite similar to learning other skills, learning to speak a new language is inseparable from practicing it, and the setting and amount of time devoted to the task matters: 'The basis of a common-sense approach to opportunities for learning is the time-on-task principle. How can you learn to do something if you don't do that during learning?' (Nation, 2007, p. 2) Therefore, the purpose of language education should be to offer possibilities to practise in order to prepare students for speaking and communicating freely also outside of the classroom. As articulated by the Council of Europe (2020, p. 29), '[…] language learning should be directed towards enabling learners to act in real-life situations, expressing themselves and accomplishing tasks of different natures'.

However, speaking a foreign language is unquestionably a complex and challenging process, as expressed by Goh (2017), further reinforcing the need for adequate practice:

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> Speaking may look effortless for competent speakers, but it is in fact a cognitively and socially demanding skill. This is particularly true for language learners who need to decide what to say and how to express and encode their thoughts into sounds in speech streams that make sense to their listeners.
>
> (Goh, 2017, p. 247)

Therefore, it could be speculated that if oral proficiency is lower than expected in a given context, it may be because learning activities do not provide adequate opportunities for students to practise speaking. As far as Sweden is concerned, little is known about the competence when it comes to speaking Spanish in secondary school, since the Swedish National Agency for Education does not provide information on students' level of proficiency in second foreign languages. Although the work of Aronsson (2020) and Granfeldt et al. (2023) indicates that spoken proficiency in Spanish as a Modern language generally does not correspond to the expected levels according to the evaluation criteria, none of the studies investigate how teaching speaking is actually carried out. For instance, a recent research review indicated that spontaneous, realistic conversations and teachers' feedback are beneficial for speaking (Skolforskningsinstitutet, 2024). Nevertheless, neither this review nor previous research have displayed how spoken communication should best be planned and carried out. Hence, more research is needed in this area. Is it in fact possible that classroom activities do not provide the right opportunities for students to practise speaking?

The Swedish School Inspectorate (Skolinspektionen, 2010) conducted an evaluation revealing that students of Modern Languages are offered few possibilities to communicate in the foreign language during instruction, and a recent follow-up evaluation (Skolinspektionen, 2022) confirmed this description. However, neither of these two evaluations investigated particularly the students' spoken output, nor did a European survey on foreign language teaching and learning in 2011 (Skolverket, 2012).

In summary, when it comes to the kind of activities that are carried out in the Modern language classroom, and to which extent they offer possibilities for students to speak the target language, very little is known in the Scandinavian context. Moreover, as speaking independently in real-life situations is a central goal in foreign language learning, there is a pressing need to investigate classroom procedures when it comes to scaffolding and independence in the students' spoken target language. In order to fill this gap and contribute to understanding how teaching and learning speaking are enacted in the Spanish classroom in Sweden, the following research questions have been formulated:

1. What activity types can be identified in the Modern Language classroom?

2. What characterises the activities in which students speak the target language?

3. To what extent do students speak the target language independently during classroom activities?

2 Educational context

In the compulsory Swedish educational system, English is the first foreign language, becoming compulsory from year three in primary school (age 8-9). The second foreign language is generally covered within the school subject of Modern languages, which becomes optional from year six (age 11-12). Among the options of French, Spanish and German, Spanish is the most

popular language choice (Bardel et al., 2019; Skolverket, 2017b, 2023). Compared to English, however, Modern languages face a very different situation; overall, it scores lower in terms of social status, learner motivation and student proficiency levels (Erickson et al., 2022; Skolverket, 2012).

In a comparison of spoken language proficiency among the Modern languages, Spanish differed notably from German and French. Although the results cannot be generalized, the Spanish results were poorer, and the students themselves also rated their spoken competence lower (Granfeldt et al., 2023). This unequal situation has been established, with possible explanations for the problematic state of Spanish, such as the groups are larger and the shortage of qualified teachers (Finndahl, 2023; Riis & Francia, 2013; Österberg, 2021).

3 Key Concepts

In the present study, three key concepts are essential: communicative language teaching, language alternation and scaffolding.

The umbrella concept, *Communicative Language Teaching* (CLT), introduced in the late 70s comprises several didactic approaches, with the common feature of applying a functional and action-orientated, rather than accuracy-focused, perspective on language teaching and learning (see e.g. Council of Europe, 2020; Tornberg, 2000). However, although CLT has been the predominant doctrine for 40 years, there are still questions on how it should precisely be interpreted and implemented in different educational contexts (Spada & Fröhlich, 1995, pp. 2-4).

Accordingly, the Swedish syllabi for second and foreign languages are based on a communicative approach. Learning aims related to speaking include the ability to express oneself, interact with others, develop problem-solving strategies, and gain confidence in using the language (Skolverket, 2022). However, when it comes to how this should be carried out in practice, lower secondary school's steering documents do not specify the choice of language, while the syllabus of upper secondary school explicitly states that teaching, in all essentials, should be carried out in the target language (Skolverket, 2021).

As for interpreting CLT in practice, there are various possibilities to assess to what extent the of teaching and learning are, in fact, communicative. One way to understand communicativeness in language learning, appropriate in relation to the aims of the present study, is established by Littlewood (2004, 2018). He defines activities along a continuum between a focus on forms and a focus on meaning, ranging from predictable and unpredictable, and from language practice to language use. In this sense, the distinction between *language practice* and *language use* is whether there is an information gap or not, explained in the two phases *pre-communicative language practice* and *communicative language practice* below. The model, with five phases (see figure 1, below), concerns language learning generally and is not specifically focused on oral skill development.

Figure 1.

The communicative continuum (Littlewood, 2018, p. 1227)

Analytic / Explicit Learning	←	→	**Experiential / Implicit Learning**	
Non-communicative learning	**Pre-communicative language practice**	**Communicative language practice**	**Structured communication**	**Authentic communication**
Focusing on the structures of language, how they are formed and what they mean, e.g. substitution exercises, inductive 'discovery' and awareness-raising activities	Practising language with some attention to meaning but not communicating new messages to others, e.g. describing visuals or situational language practice ('questions and answers')	Practising pre-taught language but in a context where it communicates new information, e.g. information gap activities or 'personalised' questions	Using language to communicate in situations which elicit pre-learnt language but with some degree of unpredictability, e.g. structured role-play and simple problem-solving	Using language to communicate in situations where the meanings are unpredictable, e.g. creative role-play, more complex problem-solving and discussion
Focus on forms and meanings	←	→	**Focus on meanings and messages**	

When communicating in the foreign language classroom, learners generally have access to more languages than just the target language. In the present study, they share knowledge in the majority language, Swedish, and the foreign language, English. The study applies the notion of *language alternation* (Musk & Cromdal, 2018), referring to actions when speakers switch between languages.

The use of the majority language in second- and foreign language education has been debated and investigated thoroughly throughout the years (Turnbull & Dailey-O'Cain, 2009). In the current era of globalisation, the existence of learners' different background languages has been emphasised, stressing that language learning goes beyond becoming a nearly-native speaker in a target language. In alignment with this multilingual turn (May, 2013), the target language monolingual approach has been problematised, and 'a growing body of research shows that L1 use can in fact facilitate L2 growth in a variety of ways' (Van Compernolle, 2015, p. 89). For example, Macaro and Lee (2013) showed that a monolingual approach increased beginner learners' anxiety, especially for young learners. The majority language can have scaffolding functions in language learning; for example, in solving linguistic problems, planning or evaluating a task in the target language.

Learners' collaboration during a task can enhance learning, but there are also various pathways to learn a language and use it independently in oral communication. *Scaffolding* is one such way, a notion originally related to sociocultural theory (Säljö, 2014), and is commonly interpreted as something learners now can do with support, but later will be able to do on their own. Scaffolding language production, in terms of assisted performance (Van Lier, 2004, p. 167), can be understood as language production that is not yet-independent and free. In the present study, two types of scaffolding are relevant: *reproduction*, which is the use of available language samples, e.g. read aloud, and *borrowing*, which is the use of available formulations to express self-initiated content (Prabhu, 1987, pp. 61-62).

Taken together, these concepts form the basis of the present study and will be applied during the analysis of the data to investigate the teaching and learning of speaking skills.

4 Previous Research

As previously mentioned, not much is known when it comes to teaching and learning of speaking skills in Modern languages within Scandinavian lower and upper secondary schools. However, the following section outlines significant findings in relation to the aim of the present study.

To begin with, there are indications that Swedish students' spoken proficiency levels in both Spanish and the other Modern languages, French and German, do not correspond to the expected proficiency levels (Aronsson, 2020; Granfeldt et al., 2023). The anticipated level for lower secondary school is related to the established levels of European framework CEFR (Council of Europe, 2020) level A2.1, and the Swedish syllabus stipulates that A2.1 should correspond to the approved level of grade E (Council of Europe, 2020; Skolverket, 2017a). In comparisons between speaking and writing, the Swedish students appear to be more proficient in writing skills, yet they are still not proficient enough in relation to the expected level (Aronsson, 2020).

Spoken proficiency includes both productive and interactive skills. In an evaluation, the results of Swedish Modern language students did not differ between these two aspects, although the students themselves rated their performance higher in interaction than in production (Granfeldt et al., 2023). During the test, some students reported feelings of anxiety, partly because it involved the presence of an unknown person, the researcher (Granfeldt et al., 2023).

As for the research related to how speaking ought to be taught, the best practices have proven to be diverse and context-dependent, but there is a consensus on one aspect: the need for L2 input (Garbati & Mady, 2015). In investigations in the Scandinavian context, the amount of spoken Spanish and French in Modern language classrooms has been measured and found to be considerably low (Llovet Vilà, 2016; Stoltz, 2011; Vold & Brkan, 2020). Swedish students themselves have reported a low number of spoken activities and a lack of habit of speaking and interacting freely in the classroom (Aronsson, 2023; Granfeldt et al., 2023).

One may think that this does not provide possibilities for speaking, but it appears that students do not always make use of the provided speaking opportunities in the Modern language classroom (Flyman Mattsson, 2003). When it comes to ways of making students speak the target language, two studies in the UK presented methods that made the students speak more spontaneously, frequently and confidently (Christie, 2016; Thompson & Mutton, 2023). These methods involved consequent use of formulaic expressions (Christie, 2016) and the application of communicative strategies to reduce anxiety. It was established that focusing on communicative strategies raised the students' general linguistic awareness (Thompson & Mutton, 2023).

Other research-based practices that have proven effective in encouraging students to make use of speaking opportunities include explicit teaching, scaffolding, providing authentic encounters, planned and spontaneous presentations, task planning, fluency activities and role-play (Garbati & Mady, 2015). Explicit teaching about speaking, fluency activities and presentations imply a specific focus on speaking compared to other skills. Given that education generally has a written bias, where writing, reading and comprehension skills are practised more often than spoken production and interaction (Pérez-Vidal et al., 2012), it is crucial to explicitly foreground speaking (Goh & Burns, 2012). The Scandinavian context does not differ in this sense, and Modern language students have expressed that lessons often contain too much writing, text-reading, grammar and computer-work compared to speaking activities (Barfod Lund et al., 2023). Additionally, they have observed that spoken activities sometimes include written components (Aronsson, 2023). The students aim to speak the language fluently and

confidently, but they have experienced that a focus on accuracy and lack of classroom practice presented a barrier on the way (Barfod Lund et al., 2023).

The ability to speak a foreign language with confidence constitutes an integral part of the communicative competence, and given the communicative and action-orientated curriculum, this approach should be enacted in the classroom practice. Nonetheless, Scandinavian studies investigating French and Spanish have shown low levels of communicativeness in the target language, i.e. focusing on practicing linguistic forms rather than using the language for communication. This applies to both spoken language in the classroom and the didactic material used (Aronsson, 2023; Engman & Aronsson, 2022; Flyman Mattsson, 2003; Llovet Vilà, 2016; Stoltz, 2011).

In the Modern language classrooms, both the target language and the majority language are spoken, and researchers have investigated the roles of each in Scandinavian French classrooms. The findings reveal that the two languages have different functions, and although classrooms are different, spoken target languages were primarily related to conversation activities, unless the content was complex (Stoltz, 2011), and activities focused on vocabulary, greetings and speaking exercises (Vold & Brkan, 2020). On the other hand, the majority language was spoken primarily in activities related to formal structures (Stoltz, 2011), grammar, writing and management matters (Vold & Brkan, 2020).

To summarise, the amount and functions of target language have been studied, as has the communicative approach. Nevertheless, there is a need for further research into opportunities for speaking practice in the classroom and (like Stoltz, 2011) attempt to clearly distinguish between the language spoken by the teacher and that spoken by the students.

5 Data and methodology

5.1 Data collection

In order to investigate classroom practices regarding teaching and learning speaking, data were collected during 21 lessons in five Spanish groups in different Swedish lower secondary schools. Five teachers, referred to by the pseudonyms Ana, Beatriz, Claudia, Diana and Eduardo, took part in the study. The students were in their ninth school year (15–16-years-old) and had studied Spanish since their sixth year.

Each group consisted of 15–31 students. Four to five consecutive lessons were observed with each teacher, which provided a comprehensive picture of the educational pattern (Klette et al. (2017, p. 10). The teachers were asked not to adapt their teaching methods for the sake of the research project, but to proceed and carry out what was already planned. During the observations, fieldnotes were taken, materials displayed on the board and in the books were photographed, and a camera recorded the group. The camera was placed at the back of the classroom, and six dictaphones were deployed in the classroom, which managed to capture a considerable amount of the spoken language. Two schools had long lessons twice a week, with an average time of 80 minutes/lesson, while three had lessons three times a week, with an average time of 50 minutes/lesson. The recordings resulted in a total time of 18h and 56 min of video footage, and 104 h and 18 mins of audio recordings.

Students, as well as teachers, principals and caregivers, all signed informed consent prior to participation. A few students in each group chose not to participate in the study, and it was assured that they were placed outside of the reach of cameras and dictaphones.

Prior to the present study, six lessons with another teacher had been observed and recorded as part of a pilot study. In the pilot study, the majority language (Swedish) was widely spoken, and significant alternation between the majority language and the target language (Spanish) was observed. The languages were intertwined to varying extents, which complicated the investigation. However, when examining the recordings more carefully, it was generally possible to determine which language was put in the forefront during an activity, and majority language often seemed to scaffold comprehension and production of the target language.

Moreover, when scaffolding structures were provided, the students made use of them in their own language production. Thus, based on the results of the pilot study, the analysis in the present study should take language alternation and scaffolding into account. In sum, the pilot study guided the methodological decisions in the main study and contributed to the development of the analytical framework.

5.2 The Speaking Observation Scheme (SOS)

In order to analyse teaching and learning speaking, an instrument was needed. The *Speaking Observation Scheme - SOS* (Llovet Vilà, 2016)[1] which includes five dimensions, has been used for investigating oral skill development in Norwegian Spanish classes and was thus a suitable base for the aim of the present study. This scheme is a development of the *Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching Observation Schemes* (COLT) (Spada & Fröhlich, 1995),[2] a widely used tool for observing and analysing foreign language classrooms. One advantage of building on an established analytic tool is that it has been tested previously, although a possible limitation with a deductive approach is that the researcher may become less receptive to new interpretations of the data.

The original *SOS* included one dimension about who selects the content and one dimension regarding the didactic material; two aspects not addressed in the present study. Hence, the *Revised SOS*, (figure 2 below) was developed, including three dimensions corresponding to relevant aspects related to the aim of the present study. *Structure* (based upon *planning* in the original SOS) was coded in columns A-E, *Spoken language* (based upon *speaking* in the original SOS) in columns F-I, and *Communicativeness in target language spoken activities* (corresponding *task dimension* in the original SOS) in columns J-N.

1 See appendix 1
2 See appendix 2

Figure 2.

Revised Speaking Observation Scheme

Revised Speaking Observation Scheme - Dimensions													
Structure: A-E					Spoken language: F-I				Communicativeness J-N				
A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N
Structure - time, activity units		**Structure - participant organisation**			**Spoken language - teacher**		**Spoken language - students**		**Communicativeness in target language spoken activities**				
Activity unit duration aprox. Minutes	**Activity unit**	**Class**	**Group/ pair**	**individual**	**Teacher speaks majority language including language alternation**	**Teacher speaks target language including language alternation**	**Students speak majority language including language alternation**	**Students speak target language including language alternation. *R*eproduction, *B*orrowing or *P*roduction**	**Non-communicative learning**	**Pre-communicative language practice**	**Communicative language practice**	**Structured communication**	**Authentic communication**

The dimension *Structure* identifies the content and duration of the activities, as well as their participation structure, i.e. whether they were carried out in whole class activities, in pairs/small groups or as individual work.

The dimension *Spoken language* distinguishes between teachers' and students' language. Given that the present study focuses on students' spoken output, it also classifies their language as either *reproduction*, *production* and/or *borrowing*. Reproduction is understood as the use of available language samples, e.g. reading aloud, while production involves a self-initiated formulation. Borrowing, in this context, entails the of use an available formulation to express self-initiated content (Prabhu, 1987, pp. 61-62).

When it comes to establishing the degree of communicativeness of spoken activities, whether they are considered to have a focus towards forms or towards meaning, Littlewood's (2018) communicative continuum (see section 3 above) was applied. It defines language learning from non-communicative learning to authentic communication.

The events during the 21 lessons were described and divided into *Classroom Activity Units* (CAUs). Each unit was listed in column B, described and subsequently analysed in relation to the information in the other columns. The units were framed by the teacher's actions, generally explicitly expressed in words but also by acting in a way that indicated a change in participant structure, content or modality. For example, the teacher explained something to the whole class as one unit, followed by individual work as another unit, i.e. a change in participant structure. A change in content occurred, for example, when the teacher asked the students how they were, followed by a unit in which the teacher presented a test result. One example of a change in modality was a unit involving a listening exercise, followed by a unit in which the teacher asked the students about their comprehension. The analysis followed the indications for the original COLT A-scheme and did not code units shorter than one minute (Spada & Fröhlich, 1995). All in all, 197 CAUs were distinguished in the data.

5.3 Applying the Revised SOS in analysing classroom activities and spoken output

In order to establish what types of activities that occur in the foreign language classroom, the dimensions *Structure* and *Spoken language* were applied, and a thematic analysis was carried

out using the methodology of Braun and Clarke (2006). Through an iterative process to find commonalities and differences in the data, themes, called *Activity types*, were eventually identified. These types were added as a column in dimension *Structure*. Figure 3 below displays the Revised SOS from the end of a lesson in Ana's group.

Figure 3

Revised Speaking Observation Scheme with activity types

Structure - time, activity units, activity types			Structure - participant organisation			Spoken language - teacher		Spoken language - students		Communicativeness in target language spoken activities				
Activity unit duration aprox. minutes	Activity unit	Activity type	Class	Group / pair	individual	Teacher speaks majority language incl. language alternation	Teacher speaks target language incl. language alternation	Students speak majority language incl.language alternation	Students speak target language incl. language alternation. R eproduction, B orrowing or P roduction	Non-communicative learning	Pre-communicative language practice	Communicative language practice	Structured communication	Authentic communication
7.	T. explains different genres around TV and series. S. write down in their notebooks. T. asks 1 or 2 S. whether they like the genre or not.	Teacher explaination or presentation	x				x	x						
1.	T. instrues that S. shall ask eachother whether they like different genres or not. T. writes scaffoldning phrases on the board.	Teacher instrumental instructions	x			x								
8.	S. ask each other what they like to watch.	Speaking and problem solving		x			x		P/B			x		
1.	T. ending class by showing a web page where S. can watch news from the Spanish speaking world on their own.	Lesson closure	x			x								

To answer the question about what activity types can be identified, all the information in the *Structure* dimension was correlated with *Spoken language* and *Communicativeness in target language spoken activities*. Participant organisation, group/pair, was referred to only as *pair*, given that eventually no distinction was made between work in pairs and work in small groups with three or four students.

The degree of communicativeness in the spoken activities was coded in five phases. However, given that it is a continuum, it was not always possible to determine one unit's precise character, and subsequently, some units were coded in two adjacent columns. The phase in the middle, *Communicative language practice*, includes new information or a gap to bridge, i.e. there is a need for communication. Thus, units in this phase and to the right of it were considered to have a focus towards meaning and content, while the two on the left, *non-communicative* and *pre-communicative*, were considered to have a focus towards forms and structures. Moreover, the progression towards unpredictability guided the classification, as did the verbs, to *practise* or to *use* the language.

One example of a whole class activity towards a focus on forms and language practice was when Diana's students read aloud instructions in the whole class for an exercise about shopping clothes. The activity was predictable and focused on practicing pronunciation. Neither the teacher nor the other students received any new information through the interaction.

In contrast, an activity with a higher degree of communicativeness and focus on meaning was a pair activity from Ana's class. The students asked each other about weekend activities, using the language to communicate new and partly unpredictable information (c.f. excerpt D below).

In order to answer the question about the degree of independence in the students' spoken target language, the dimension *Spoken language* categorised speaking as reproduction (R),

borrowing (B), and production (P). Borrowing, in the present study, refers to written words or phrases, and not, e.g. copying a spoken utterance from a peer.

6 Results

The analysis revealed various activity types in the foreign language classroom and provided insights into when and how students spoke the target language. The results will be presented in response to each of the research questions.

6.1 Identification of different classroom activity types

Through the thematic analysis of the descriptions of the CAUs, 11 *Activity types* were identified. All types were not found in every classroom, nor were they equally distributed among the lessons; however, they describe lesson procedures and were defined as follows:

1. *Greeting or starting element* – Activities typically structured for starting a lesson and included asking the students how they are or organising the lesson. Sometimes, it included repetition from and connection to previous lessons. The CAUs were always carried out in the whole class, and the longest lasted three minutes.

2. *Structure and organisation* – Activities outside of the actual learning content, e.g. about the collection of cell phones, attendance matters, materials, textbooks, computers and lesson structure. They were always conducted in the whole class, and the longest CAU lasted four minutes.

3. *Teacher explanation or presentation* – The teacher explained grammar, linguistic structures or content that appeared to be unfamiliar to the students in the whole class. The CAUs lasted up to nine minutes and sometimes included modelling of more complex procedures.

4. *Teacher instrumental instructions* – The teacher ensured comprehension or provided practical instructions about textbook pages and the order of exercises. This could also include repetition of previous activities that was familiar and did not require explanations. These CAUs were carried out in the whole class, and lasted no more than six minutes.

5. *Correction or follow up* – Activities when the teacher typically closed previous moments. They often included comprehension checks, correction of right answers or reflective questions about how the students had perceived the material. The longest CAU lasted 13 minutes, and they were always carried out in the whole class.

6. *Watching or listening* – All participants listened to and/or watched the same TV-episode, film clip or audio exercise. The longest CAU lasted 20 minutes.

7. *Writing, reading or problem solving individually* – The students worked both in textbooks and digitally, practising linguistic structures and vocabulary. They were engaged in translating or producing text, and the longest CAU lasted 42 minutes. Given that these activities were carried out at their own pace and not by the whole class simultaneously, some were double coded with type eight.

8. *Writing or problem solving in pairs* – The students worked together in pairs, both in textbooks and digitally. They practised linguistic structures or vocabulary, e.g. through games, translations and producing or correcting text together. The longest CAU lasted 39 minutes.

9. *Reading aloud* – The students read text aloud in pairs, sometimes including translation. The longest CAU lasted 22 minutes.

10. *Speaking and problem solving* – The students worked orally in pairs with tasks, such as asking and answering questions, describing pictures, telling a story or practising linguistic structures and vocabulary. The longest CAU lasted 22 minutes.

11. *Lesson closure* – The teacher typically reminded the students about homework before the next class or discussed practicalities such as arranging chairs and computers. Sometimes, the teacher resumed the class, evaluating the outcomes in relation to the initial aims of the lesson. The teacher generally thanked the students and gave them credit for their work. The longest CAU lasted three minutes.

The 11 types highlight different activities in the foreground and offer varying possibilities for spoken target language. It was observed that the students spoke the target language (including language alternation) in activities categorised as *Speaking and problem solving*, *Reading aloud* and *Correction or follow up*. Approximately one-fourth of the total lesson time included CAUs with spoken target language classified under these three types.

In other activity types, students' spoken target language was not observed. At some points in *Writing or problem solving in pairs*, according to the teacher's instructions, the students were supposed to carry out spoken exercises; however, generally, the students ignored them and instead proceeded to the next exercise. Occasionally, a few students did engage in the spoken exercises together with a peer, but then not as thoroughly as instructed. In other words, spoken activities only occurred directly in response to the teacher's instruction and not when the students were working at their own pace.

6.2 Character of activities with students' spoken target language

With regard to classroom activities where students spoke the target language, the analysis revealed various common features. For example, the thematic topics were related to: shopping for clothes, leisure activities and holidays, descriptions of people, preferences and opinions, TV-genres, and the *series SKAM-España* (Utbildningsradion, 2020). Another feature concerns participant organisation as they spoke the target language either in the whole class or in pair settings and never as individual practices. In the whole class activities, teachers generally facilitated balanced participation among students, instead of repeatedly asking the same student/s.

As explained above, the Revised SOS methodologically enabled analysis of both the students' and the teacher' s spoken language. Although the present study investigates the students' language, it was also possible to establish if and when it was related to the teacher's choice of language.

During whole class settings, the activities that were carried out in the target language were reading aloud, resuming events and reporting the answer of a peer. However, in activities involving corrections, follow-ups and greetings, as well as answering the teacher's questions,

the students spoke the majority language, with a few exceptions. The teacher's spoken language alternated during these activities, with approximately the same amount of CAUs in each language. During comprehension checks and procedural matters (e.g. attendance and mobile phones), the students spoke the majority language, while the teacher occasionally spoke the target language, but generally relied on the majority language.

In pair settings, spoken activities in the target language included reading aloud and summarising events. During translations, corrections, and asking and answering questions, the students spoke both languages, while the teacher generally spoke the target language. However, during grammar-related issues, writing or editing text, the majority language was spoken by both the teacher and the students.

The next characteristic feature of spoken activities was their communicative nature. The amount of time categorised as non-communicative learning and pre-communicative language practice approximately equated to the amount of time categorised as communicative language practice and structured communication. There were no examples in the data of "authentic communication", according to the definition by Littlewood (2018).

Activities aimed at emphasising meaning and fostering higher levels of communicativeness were more often carried out in pair settings. One example of this is when Ana's students took turns asking each other what sort of programmes they liked to watch. In their notebooks, they had written *dibujos animados*, *deporte*, *las noticias*, *telecomedias*, *telenovelas*, *concursos*, *documentales*, *películas* (*cartoons*, *sports*, *news*, *comedies*, *dramas*, *competitions*, *documentaries*, *films*), while on the board, the following were written: *te gusta/n*, *sí me gustan*, *No, no me gustan* (*do you like, yes I like, no I don´t like*). See excerpt C below.

The third common feature pertains to the spoken output and choice of either target or majority language. When students spoke the target language, teachers did the same.

During approximately two-thirds of the time allocated for spoken activities, both language columns were coded. This indicates that within some segments of the CAU, they spoke more target language, while in other segments, they spoke more majority language. These CAUs were longer than the ones coded as only target language, and three-fourths included the feature of reproduction or combinations with reproduction, indicating that little language was produced independently. One example of a CAU coded in both language columns is displayed in excerpt A below.

Regarding the CAUs that were coded only in the column target language, displayed in the examples B, C and D below, only one-third included reproduction or combinations with reproduction, while two-thirds included borrowing and production. This means that although less time was coded only in the target language, proportionally more target language was spoken in those CAUs.

6.3 Degree of independence in the students' spoken target language

In line with the findings of the pilot study, the students' target language included alternation with the majority language and was also generally supported by scaffolding structures. As to how freely the spoken output was, the notions of reproduction, borrowing and production were applied and interpreted as a scale of independence. In the examples provided, production is marked in bold, and reproduction is marked in bold and underlined. It must be kept in mind that the activities were analysed, applying the Revised SOS, at a class level and do not specify each student's spoken language.

Reproduction

In the data, almost half of the CAUs involving spoken target language included featured reproduction. Reproduction often took the form of reading aloud, whether from a self-written text or a printed one. One example is displayed in excerpt A below, where students in Claudia's class read sentences aloud and then collaborated with a peer to determine whether they were true or false in relation to a previously watched an episode of *SKAM– España*. When not reading aloud, they spoke the majority language, which was a common practice.

Excerpt A

Speaker	Utterance	Translation
S. 1	OK**, Eva le dice la verdad a su madre, qué te parece, falso**	OK, Eva tells the truth to her mother, false
S. 2	Ja, för hon berättar ju inte sanningen.	Yes, because she does not tell the truth.
S. 1	Nej, **Eva y Lukas hablan en clase,**	No, Eva and Lukas talk in class
S. 2	Det är **correcto**	That is correct
S. 1	**Eva sabe que Jorge va a estar en la cafetería..** eh… nej, det är väl **falso**?	Eva knows that Jorge will be at the café… eh.. no, that´s incorrect, isn´t it?
S. 2	Vad är **sabe**?	What does "know" mean?
S. 1	Hon visste inte om det.	She did not know about it
S. 2	Jaha, ja, **falso**	Ah, yes incorrect
S. 1	Ja… **Eva y Jorge se pelean en la cafetería.**	Yes… Eva and Jorge fight at the café
S. 2	Det är **falso**.	That is incorrect

Production

On a few occasions, the students spoke the target language without any visible scaffolding structures. This occurred only in whole class settings, during spoken activities led by the teacher, and the longest CAU lasted four minutes. Below follows one excerpt from the beginning of a lesson in Claudia's class, where the teacher asks the students how they are.

Excerpt B

Speaker	Utterance	Translation
T.	**Bienvenidos a la clase de español, ¿Cómo están?... a ver, ¿cómo están? Laura, ¿cómo estás?**	Welcome to Spanish class. How are you?...Well, how are you? Laura, how are you?
S.	**Bien**	Fine
T.	**Bien, a ver, quita por favor tu música… gracias. ¿Cómo estás, Isa?**	Fine, well, please remove the music. Thank you. How are you, Isa?
S.	**Bien**	Fine.
T.	**Bien. Adrián, ¿Cómo estás hoy?**	Fine. Adrián, how are you today?
S.	**Cansado, pero bien**	Tired, but fine.
T.	**Me alegro. Ricardo, tú: ¿cómo estás?**	I´m glad. Ricardo, how are you?
S.	**Estoy muy cansado**	I am very tired.

Borrowing

On the scale of independence ranging from reproduction to production, the strategy of borrowing was interpreted to lie in the middle. In approximately half of the CAUs involving spoken target language, the students borrowed written scaffolding structures and used them in

their own spoken production, often with grammatical errors. In fact, the errors served as a characteristic that distinguished production from reproduction.

The middle ground-strategy of borrowing, thus, essentially constituted different combinations of reproduction (the written word/s) and students' own production, resulting in different degrees of independent production of the target language. Below are two excerpts from activities with different designs, and the written reproduced language is underlined.

In the following example, two of Ana's students talked about preferences, using the given structures (see 6.2. for detailed information), but they also produced their own language.

Excerpt C

Speaker	Utterance	Translation
S.1	**¿Te gustan … el deporte?**	Do you likes sport?
S.2	**No. No me gusta… deporte. ¿Te gusta… dibujos animados?**	No, I don´t like…sport. Do you likes cartoons?
S.1	**Hmm … Sí, me gusta…N, pero no ver mucho. ¿Te gustan… eh series?**	Hmm. Yes, I likes it, but I don´t watch a lot. Do you like series?
S.2	**Eh…un poco… Me gusta telecomedia, pero no es mi favorito. Te gusta eh… ver películas?**	Eh… a bit. I like sitcoms, but it is not my favourite. Do you like eh.. to watch movies?
S.1	**Eh, hm.. Sí, me gusta.. Y tú, ¿te gusta películas?**	Eh, hm… Yes, I like it. And you, do you likes movies?
S.2	**Sí. A veces … pero tengo muchos películas que yo no veo, no veo mucho. ¿Te gustas ver los noticias?**	Yes. Sometimes… but I have many movies that I don´t watch, I don´t watch a lot. Do you likes to watch the new?

In the next example, students only borrowed the written question on the board: *¿Qué has hecho este fin de semana?* (What have you done during the weekend?) and thereafter formulated the target language independently. This type of borrowing, with a large amount of independent production, was rare. The following example is from Ana's class where two students ask each other about what they did during the weekend.

Excerpt D

Speaker	Utterance	Translation
S. 1	**Eh… ¿Qué has hecho durante el fin de semana… este fin de semana?**	Eh… what have you done during the weekend… in the weekend?
S. 2	**eh, yo…**	Eh.. I…
S. 1	**he**	Have…
S. 2	**yo he… dorm…¿dormedo?**	I have.. sleep… sleeped?
S. 1	**es.. ahora, hago….¿ado?**	It´s… now I sleep…ed?
S. 2	**ado, dormi…dado, he dormidado.**	ed, sleep…eded.. I have sleepeded
S. 1	**Ah sí ¿Con quién ?** [laughter]	Oh, with whom? [laughter]
S. 2	**Y he jugado** Alfapeto.	And I have played scrabble
S. 1	**¡Ah sí, qué bién!**	Oh, yes, that´s good!

Speaker	Utterance	Translation
S. 2	**y he jugado a …**	And I have played…
S. 1	**¿ah sí?**	Oh?
S. 2	**y he jugado** [inaudible] **Y he jugado...** pusslat**…**	I have played… [inaudible] And I have played… puzzling
S. 1	**¿Perdón?**	Pardon?
S. 2	**¿Cómo se dice…** Pusslat? Pusslando?	How do you say… puzzled? Pusslando?

7 Discussion

The present study illustrates classroom procedures and examines when and how the target language is spoken in class. Thus, it provides an understanding of the opportunities for oral practice in the foreign language classroom. The following sections will discuss the findings, as well as their implications for practice.

7.1 Activity types and activities with spoken target language

The investigation revealed that when students spoke the target language, teachers generally did the same. This finding was made possible through the methodological choice to focus on the students' spoken output as a point of reference. Previous Scandinavian research has generally investigated the reverse condition (e.g. Stoltz, 2011), starting with the teacher's language or not explicitly separating teacher's and students' language. However, considering that students are the learners, language teaching should focus on their possibilities to speak.

Even though the purpose of the present study is not to quantitatively measure the amount of students' spoken target language or to suggest an appropriate amount, it is relevant to comment on some of the quantitative results, especially considering that previous Scandinavian research, has argued that too little target language is spoken in class and that students are unaccustomed to speaking the target language (Aronsson, 2020, 2023; Flyman Mattsson, 2003; Granfeldt et al., 2023; Llovet Vilà, 2016; Vold & Brkan, 2020). The study shows that approximately one-fourth of the total lesson time was dedicated to activities where the students spoke the target language. Given that the spoken activities were organised in both whole class and pair-settings, however, each student actually had less than this to practise speaking. Moreover, since speaking is just one of the four different language skills, traditionally identified as reading, writing, listening and speaking (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 33), one-fourth of the time could be considered sufficient. On the other hand, in theory, all spoken language, even during writing tasks or administrative discussions, where the students usually spoke the majority language, could have been in the target language, which would have provided more opportunities to practise speaking.

By identifying different activity types, it was possible to illustrate the different lesson procedures and determine the extent to which they involved spoken target language. In activities where the students worked on various exercises at their own pace, generally involving writing and reading, no spoken target language was observed, results aligning with previous findings (Vold & Brkan, 2020). Moreover, more time was allocated to activities without spoken target language, which coincides with investigations suggesting that foreign language instruction

tends to be more on written than of spoken aspects (Aronsson, 2023; Engman & Aronsson, 2022; Pérez-Vidal et al., 2012).

Interestingly, the data revealed occasions where the students were supposed to engage in spoken activities, but they skipped them and worked on other exercises instead. This finding indicates a resistance to speaking compared to other skills, possibly due to a lack of habit or the perception that it is more convenient to finish one's own exercises than to engage with a peer. Perhaps, though, the resistance is because speaking in a classroom requires courage. All in all, the results show that students did not initiate spoken target language on their own but rather when they were encouraged or requested to do so. This important finding implies that speaking is best being carried out as a common activity in direct connection with the instruction, with the teacher and other resources at hand to support and encourage students to actually perform it.

As for language alternation, the students spoke the target language when reading aloud, summarising events and asking or answering questions. During procedural matters, grammar-related issues, and writing and editing texts, the majority language was generally spoken by both students and the teacher. In activities involving corrections, follow-up activities, and greetings, the students generally spoke the majority language, and the teacher spoke the target language. In other words, the target and majority languages were used differently and had different functions in the classroom, which also aligns with prior research on classroom language (Stoltz, 2011; Vold & Brkan, 2020).

Considering that the students are beginner learners in a Modern language classroom and have the possibility to speak the majority language, it is not surprising that both languages were spoken in class. Although target language is the aim, it is also established that majority language may serve as a communicative resource for scaffolding target language learning (Macaro & Lee, 2013; Turnbull & Dailey-O'Cain, 2009; Van Compernolle, 2015).

With regard to communicativeness, previous research has found that speaking activities tend to be more focused on forms (Aronsson, 2023; Flyman Mattsson, 2003; Llovet Vilà, 2016). However, the results of the present study differ a little from these findings. Here, approximately the same amount of time was devoted to activities towards a focus on meaning as to those towards a focus on forms. It must be kept in mind that the classification of communicativeness may vary somewhat between studies, and thus are not fully comparable.

Given the results, neither previous research nor the present study demonstrates a developed communicative classroom approach. One possible explanation is that the definitions in the communicative continuum (Littlewood, 2018) represent levels of complexity and may therefore be more difficult for beginner learners. Another explanation could be an implementation gap in the communicative approach, as established by Llovet Vilà (2016, 2022), suggesting that teachers struggle with how to apply a communicative approach in practice.

Considering these findings, there is a need for models and definitions of *Communicative language teaching* that are more adapted to the context of young learners of Modern languages in compulsory school. Moreover, the results suggest that teachers should consistently consider the concepts of *language practice* and *language use* when planning spoken activities. Both actions are needed as they involve learning to speak, and considering the communicative purpose, language use ought to be emphasised.

7.2 Independence and scaffolding in the students' spoken target language

The competence to speak and interact freely in a new language is a central learning aim; thus, it seems wise to incorporate activities that include only free production to allow students to practise it from the start. However, research suggests that the road to learning often includes different sorts of scaffolding, established by, for example, Säljö (2014); and Van Lier (2004). To address this matter in the present study, the degree of independence was defined through the notions of reproduction, borrowing and production, and the methodology made it possible to establish a relationship between the degree of independence and the proportion of target and majority language spoken. Clearly scaffolding does not only occur in the shape of written language.

The results showed that most of the CAUs coded only as target language involved production and borrowing, which means that proportionally more target language was not just spoken but in fact produced. The opposite condition also applied, namely that the majority of CAUs in both languages involved reproduction. Hence, reproduction alone does not necessarily encourage production. Instead, the key lies in the nature of the activity, which must prompt students to do something with the reproduced language and use it for a specific purpose.

Exclusive production, i.e. independent spoken language without scaffolding written structures, was rare. This finding aligns with the results of Aronsson (2023); and Engman and Aronsson (2022), who explained that spoken activities generally also contain written elements, which may be considered problematic. However, exclusive production occurred only in the whole class settings and during short activities, allowing each student only a few possibilities to speak. Thus, one possible explanation for why spoken activities generally involve written elements is that they often occur in pair settings, without explanations and support from the teacher, which can be difficult for beginner learners. In other words, written words and phrases make it possible for students to actually perform spoken activities, which is one way to understand scaffolding in language production 'in terms of assisted performance' (Van Lier, 2004, p. 167).

That being said, for teachers who must plan the scaffolded spoken activities, it is a delicate balance to determine the appropriate level of support and relate it to the educational context and the activity's purpose. They must provide support to ensure that their students are able to perform the activity, but still challenge them to produce independent target language, including linguistic errors.

8 Conclusion

The present study has investigated teaching and learning of speaking Spanish in five classrooms in Swedish lower secondary schools. Although the results may not be generalisable, they answered the questions about when and how the students spoke the target language during the 21 lessons.

As for the when-question, the investigation has shown that among the different types of activities during Modern language class, the students spoke the target language only when they were explicitly encouraged to do so. During other types of activities, the students spoke the majority language or did not speak at all. These findings indicate that precisely spoken activities should be carried out more often, preferably in pair settings, so that the students have better opportunities to practise speaking.

When it comes the how-question, the target language was generally not spoken without scaffolding. A presumed resistance to speaking was identified which suggests that spoken activities should be carried out as common tasks directly connected to the instruction and involve scaffolding, so that each student is able to participate. Although the study distinguishes between language practice, focusing on forms, and language use, focusing on meaning, both actions involve students' spoken language and serve a purpose in the classroom. The aim of language learning is undoubtedly to use the language independently in production and interaction, but on the road to that goal, the study has shown how learners can use practised language in their own production. This opens possibilities when designing communicative spoken tasks for beginner learners.

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Appendix 1

Speaking Observation Scheme (SOS)

1.Planning				2.Content control			3.Materials				4.Speaking			5.Task dimension				
S	Time	Sequence	Activity	T/ Txt	T/ Txt/ St	St	Source				Skill Comb.		Language	F				M
							Sp	M	O	St	P	Int	Use	Nc	Pc	C	Sc	Ac
1.1	*1.2*	*1.3*	*1.4*	*2.1*	*2.2*	*2.3*	*3.1*	*3.2*	*3.3*	*3.4*	*4.1*	*4.2*	*4.3*	*5.1*	*5.2*	*5.3*	*5.4*	*5.5*

(Llovet Vilà, 2016, p. 106)

The SOS describes the nature of each activity under the section planning, detailing also who selects the content and the teaching materials. Furthermore, it includes one section for speaking, identifying production and/or interaction and also classifies spoken language use as either reproduction, production and/or borrowing. Reproduction is understood as a use of available sample of language, e.g. read aloud, while production is a self-initiated formulation. Borrowing, in this context, is the use of an available formulation to express self-initiated content (Prabhu, 1987, pp. 61-62). Finally, the SOS includes a task dimension, which describes communicativeness in alignment with Littlewood's communicative continuum (above), ranging from non-communicative learning to authentic communication.

Appendix 2

COLT PART A

Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching Observation Scheme

School ..... Grade(s) ..... Observer .....

Teacher ..... Lesson (min.) ..... Visit No .....

Subject ..... Date ..... Page .....

TIME	ACTIVITIES & EPISODES	PARTICIPANT ORGANISATION							CONTENT								CONTENT CONTROL			STUDENT MODALITY					MATERIALS							
		Class			Group		Indiv.		Manag.		Language				Other topics										Type				Source			
																									Text						
		T↔S/C	S↔S/C	Choral	Same task	Different tasks	Same task	Different tasks	Procedure	Discipline	Form	Function	Discourse	Sociolinq.	Narrow	Broad	Teacher/Text	Teacher/Text/Stud.	Student	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing	Other	Minimal	Extended	Audio	Visual	L2-NNS	L2-NS	L2-NSA	Student-made
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33

COLT PART B: COMMUNICATIVE FEATURES

Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching Observation Scheme

School ..... Date of visit .....

Teacher ..... Subject ..... Coder .....

		TEACHER VERBAL INTERACTION																		STUDENT VERBAL INTERACTION																	
			Target language		Information gap				Sustained speech		Reaction to form/ message		Incorporation of student utterances								Target language		Information gap				Sustained speech			Form restriction			Reaction to form/ message		Incorporation of student /teacher utterances						
					Giving Info.		Request. Info.																Giving Info.		Request. Info.														
A	E	M	Off task	L1	L2	Predict.	Unpred.	Pseudo requ.	Genuine requ.	Minimal	Sustained	Form	Message	Correction	Repetition	Paraphase	Comment	Expansion	Clarif. request	Elab. request	Discourse initiation	L1	L2	Predict.	Unpred.	Pseudo Requ.	Genuine Requ.	Ultra-minimal	Minimal	Sustained	Choral	Restricted	Unrestricted	Form	Message	Correction	Repetition	Paraphase	Comment	Expansion	Clarif. request	Elab. request
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40

(Spada & Fröhlich, 1995)