

## ROLE PLAY IN TEACHING SPEAKING ENGLISH TO FUTURE ENGINEERS

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The paper deals with the problem of using role playing techniques for teaching English to future engineers, paying special attention to the development of oral skills. The notion of a role play is defined and compared to the notion of a similar technique – simulation. Several classifications of role plays based on various criteria, such as the number of participants, the location, and the use of aids are given in the paper. Fully scripted, semi-scripted, and non-scripted role plays that may be used in the process of teaching English for specific purposes are described. A number of useful functions (compensative, motivational, educational, instructional, communicative, and entertaining) make this technique a valuable tool in the classroom. Critical structural features of role playing activity, vital for its implementation, are studied in the article. The main elements of a role playing activity, which are supposed to be taken into consideration, are topic; situation; scenario; roles; participants' actions; task and instruction; real relations between the players; and the use of objects substituting or representing the ones used in the similar real-life situation. The key stages of a role play having various terms by different authors are preparation, explanation, performing the role and debriefing. Language skills are developed at every stage of the activity. The advantages of the use of role play are listed in the paper.

**Keywords:** role play; communicative approach; English for Specific Purposes; speaking skills.

**Introduction.** The variety of English language teaching methods allows teachers to choose and combine the most appropriate ones and make the studying process more effective. Teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP), for example, engineering, might be challenging since it is associated with certain lexical and grammatical features in a particular context. The use of communicative approach and experiential and interacting learning activities may be suitable in this case, as they facilitate students' ability to socialise freely and successfully in different situations including the professional ones. Role-playing, simulations and educational games being the techniques of the above mentioned approach, may be applied in the process of teaching English to future engineers.

The reviewed literature shows that role plays and similar activities have been studied by a large number of educators (A. Konyshcheva, O. Tarnopolsky, V. Skalkin etc). The extensive researches were conducted on such issues as the relationship of games and simulations to learning (M. Gredler), the use of role playing and simulations for second language learning (P. Tompkins), and for the improvement of learners' oral skills (C. Bokja) as well as other aspects. However, the development of future engineers' speaking skills by means of a role play has not achieved sufficiently thorough consideration.

The **aim** of the paper is to study the main types, functions and components of role plays applied in the context of teaching English for specific purposes and analyse the peculiarities of the use of role play for the development of future engineers' speaking skills.

**The notion of a role play.** Modelling of real-life situations is often used in the teaching process. Games and simulations have become an essential part of language and science education since the late 1950s [3, p.571], and are considered to be widely used techniques of the communicative approach to language teaching and learning. The main idea of the approach is learning a language in the process of communication and interaction in various life situations modelled in the classroom, which facilitates students' communicative competence formation (that is the ability to use language in a specific situation [12, p. 123]). A role play is often used in the context of the communicative approach. It can be looked at as a method, learning means, teaching technique and a form of learning activity; that is why there are several definitions of the notion. Considering a role play in the process of developing future engineers' speaking skills, it can be defined as a technique, which is based on the modelling of the target language (English) communication situations likely to happen in students' future career, and is used to form students' communicative competence. It can also be regarded as a

type of classroom activity during which every learner-communicator acts out specific roles and solves some extra-linguistic problems aimed at achieving certain professional goals [9, p. 29]. As a method or a teaching technique, role play is aimed at the development of students' language skills and communication skills relevant to a certain character or position in a specific situation. The technique also implies reproduction and acquirement of social experience, which promotes human behaviour formation and enhancement [12, p. 333]. Therefore, a role play might be used to teach future engineers how to behave in typical professional situations, how to think critically, analyse the situation and make a decision.

A role play always implies simulation of a situation, thus, it is sometimes referred to as "simulation," "game," "role-play," "simulation-game," "role-play simulation," and "role-playing game" [10]. However, despite the similarities between these techniques, scientists tend to differentiate the notions. A game, similar to a role play and simulation, is also a type of activity based on creating certain conditions and situations, which facilitates the acquirement of some experience [11, p. 25]. But in contrast to two other notions, it implies the competitive component, the choice of a winner. The terms "role play" and "simulation" are very close and are frequently used interchangeably. However, the latter is considered to be more general term for the mode of learning applied to the acquisition of skills in controlled artificial environment [2, p. 34]; a broader concept, which has elements of a role play [10]; complex, lengthy and relatively inflexible event that always includes a role play and other activities such as analysis of data, discussion of options etc [5, p. 5]. O. Tarnopolsky suggests that the difference between the notions is that simulations are mostly believed to be linked to professional content matter – including the content of professional communication in the target language, and they focus not so much on communication situations but more on the functions of professional activities being modelled in them [9, p. 30, 36]. J. Scrivener regards a simulation as a large-scale role-play, which aims at creating by the learners a complete complex "world" of, for instance, a company, government etc. [8, p. 159] Both activities may be applied in teaching English for specific purposes, and a role play as a way of simulating communicative behaviour within a specific scenario is a powerful tool used to develop speaking skills of future engineers. Being less complex activity, a role play is easier to organise and conduct (it can take up only a part of the lesson) and can be applied to teaching students of various ages and proficiency levels.

### **Types and functions of role plays in the process of teaching ESP.**

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is different from general English since it requires from learners the ability to use language for communication in a professional environment and for performing certain job-related functions. As lexical and grammatical features of the language used for specific purposes are particularly specialized, attention to language has been embedded in the teaching of key genres and language varieties learners will need to use in their disciplines and sciences [7, p. 164]. Therefore teaching ESP to university students emphasizes communication in the target context and facilitates the development of necessary professional and language skills. According to the ESP Curriculum the minimal acceptable English language proficiency level to qualify for a Bachelor's degree is B2 (Independent User) which means that a student should be able to:

- discuss the study and specialism-related issues in order to reach an understanding with an interlocutor;
- prepare public presentations on a wide range of specialism-related topics, using relevant means of verbal communication and adequate forms of discussions and debates;
- look for new textual, graphic, audio or video information in English language specialism-related sources using relevant search methods and terminology;
- analyse English-language sources of information to obtain data necessary for executing professional tasks and making professional decisions [14, p. 30]

All of these skills can be effectively practiced and enhanced by means of role play, its type depending on the learning objectives.

Though all role plays in language learning are based on modelling of communicative situations, they may be simulative, creative or competitive, and might be classified according to the complexity of speech task into controlled role plays (students are provided with parts of dialogues),

semi-controlled role plays (students get the description of the plot and their roles), free role plays (the topic of a role play is offered and the roles are assigned), and small-scale role plays (only a certain scene is acted) [12, p. 334-335]. Similar classification of role plays based on the level of intensity and independence is suggested by S. Harper-Whalen and S. Morris. They distinguish three general types of role plays: fully scripted, semi-scripted, and non-scripted role-plays [4, p. 2-3]. Fully scripted role play (with a detailed script that contains information on what to say and which words to use) allows learners to become involved in the activity when they do not know well each other or the content. Semi-scripted role play (with a semi-detailed script that offers participants a guide for their role and what to say) is useful when participants are acquainted with the topic and have done similar tasks before. Non-scripted role play gives students a chance to use new skills to create original dialogue. This type is applied for more advanced students and requires substantial preparation from the teacher and the participants. Non-scripted role plays require students' ability to use their language, communicative and professional skills, as well as personal qualities, to solve a problem or achieve a certain job-related goal and create a dialogue. This type of role plays might be used in the process of teaching English to future engineers, and for the development of their speaking skills in particular.

It is worth mentioning that according to O. Tarnopolsky role plays cannot be fully scripted. The researcher points out that the problem-solving nature makes role playing different from other types of similar learning activities such as dramatization (acting out dialogues) or playing out situations of social contacts (acting communication without solving problems) [9, p. 30]. The author also offers classification of role plays according to several criteria, such as: the number of participants (played in pairs or groups), the location (in the classroom or beyond), the necessity of previous preparation, the use of aids (visual, auditory, verbal supports), involvement of communication skills (four or less), the degree of students' behaviour freedom, and the degree of control of goal-setting in a role play [9, p. 32-33].

Literature review proves the use of fully scripted, semi-scripted, and non-scripted role-plays for teaching languages to adults and teaching English for Specific Purposes in particular (in the researches of B. Cho [1] and K. Magos [6]).

Despite the differences between the types of role plays, they all have common features. Any of various types of role-playing technique has a number of useful functions, as defined by several researchers [11, p. 26; 15, p. 62]. In teaching ESP, a variety of functions makes a role play such a valuable technique. They are:

- communicative function (a role play facilitates students' ability to communicate in professional situations);
- instructional function (students learn to apply their language, professional and communicative skills);
- educational function (a role play teaches students to behave in a proper manner in job-related situations, to respect other students' opinions etc.);
- compensative function (it makes up for the lack of communication in real English language professional environment);
- entertaining function (a role play becomes fun and enjoyable activity which arouses students interest to English and technical discipline);
- motivational function (students not only enjoy the process of playing and learning, they also realise the importance of the obtained knowledge in their future career);
- the function of self-fulfilment and individualisation (all individual characteristics of students are taken into consideration, and every student has a chance to express one's individuality acting out a specific role).

The functions of role plays mentioned above ensure the improvement of students' language and communication skills in case these activities are prepared and conducted in a proper manner.

#### **The development of future engineers' speaking skills through the use of a role play during the lesson.**

Role play will bring positive results and lead to students' progress if it is thoroughly planned and well-organized. The implementation of the technique is not a mere assignment of roles and acting

out of dialogues, and undoubtedly requires preparation from a teacher and students. Planning a role play it is important to bear in mind its structure: the components and the stages. Preparing the activity for future engineers the main elements of a role play [16, p.9] are supposed to be taken into consideration. They are:

- 1) topic (which defines the content of business spoken interaction);
- 2) situation (a set of specific conditions e.g. talking to a colleague/ boss/ foreign partner at work/ at the interview/ in a workshop/ at the factory etc.);
- 3) scenario (the plot of a conversation, plan of actions according to the aim);
- 4) roles (students act on behalf of some character, such as a famous person or a person occupying a certain position in the company);
- 5) participants' actions (students' action and behaviour during the role play);
- 6) task and instruction (main objectives of the activity and main rules, set by the teacher);
- 7) the use of objects substituting or representing the ones used in the similar real-life professional situation (these could be visual aids, such as tables, diagrams, maps, as well as tools, articles or equipment prepared and brought by the teacher or students).

The components listed above are typical of role plays and similar activities applied in the teaching process.

Planning of a role play is also impossible without keeping in mind its main stages. The number of phases may vary in different resources. A six-step procedure, for example, can consist of preliminary activity, a model dialogue, learning to perform with the help of role cards, listening to recordings of native speakers performing the role play/simulation with role cards, follow-up, and repeating the sequence [10] or might contain such stages as teacher preparation, students preparation, giving instructions, role playing, debriefing, and follow-up [9, p.33-34]. Most researchers agree on the idea of a role play having four main stages (orientation, preparation, acting out, discussion [13, p. 43]; preparation, explanation, conduction, conclusion [16, p.10; 12, p. 335-336]) or even less (creating a story, giving instructions, role playing) [6, p. 99-100]. Four main language skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing) are developed and enhanced during one or several phases.

Let us consider the role playing procedure studying the example of a role play "Choosing roofing material" for engineering students. It belongs to non-scripted role plays; can be played in pairs in the classroom during the lesson; involves speaking, listening, reading, writing skills; previous preparation from the students is recommended but not necessarily required; visual support in the form of tables with technical characteristics of materials is used. The preparative stage requires from the teacher to create favourable learning conditions: make sure the students' language development level is sufficient for such activity; prepare the materials needed to practise before the role play and visual aids used by the students in the process of role playing (authentic material are welcome to be used as they help create the atmosphere and immerse in the English language environment). During the lesson, introducing a lead-in activity, a teacher might discuss with students engineering materials and ask them to read the text about materials used in construction and do several exercises to check the understanding. It might be useful to listen to a dialog and introduce new lexical items (*metal, clay, concrete, shingles, slate etc*) and useful vocabulary to facilitate discussion (*In my opinion, as far as I know, I must say that What about, We also have to take into consideration that, I agree with you at that point, I am not sure that etc*). Students might be also asked to find interesting information related to the topic at home before the lesson. Speaking, listening, writing and reading skills are practiced. During the next phase, the teacher announces the topic of a role play (*Choosing roofing materials*), sets goals (*asking for and giving information, describing*) and tasks (*to select proper materials for the roof of the house which is being built*). At this stage, the characters are described and roles assigned, clear instructions should be given:

*Student A. You are the resident of a rural area and your house is currently being constructed. You want to choose durable and reasonably priced roofing material for the building and decide to consult an expert. Be ready to make your choice at the end of the conversation. Act the conversation. Use role and cue cards.*

*Student B. You are a roofing expert, state-licensed professional working for BestBuild company in connection with the architectural, general contracting, and engineering resources. Help the customer to choose proper roofing material. Recommend the one you think is the most suitable; persuade the customer to order it from your company. Act the conversation. Use role and cue cards.*

Role cards might contain a number of questions and answers for both participants, technical data and any other additional information which may be needed.

<p><i>Student A</i>  <b>Tell your partner about your situation and ask him/ her questions about roofing materials, using the following prompts. Your partner starts the conversation.</b>            1) Greet your partner and say that you need some advice in choosing materials for the roof of your house.            2) Tell him/ her that you ...            3) ...</p>	<p><i>Student B</i>  <b>Help your partner to choose roofing materials for his/ her new house. You start the conversation.</b>            1) Greet your partner and ask if you may help him/ her.            2) Ask about the area where the house is being built and client's preferences.            3) Say that there are ...</p>
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Students may ask questions, look for any additional information they need. Speaking and listening are developed at this stage.

After this, students work with their role cards and visual supports, make notes and act out dialogues also improving their language skills, enriching vocabulary and practicing grammar (e.g. questions and answers). Students develop their speaking skills during the last phase as well. The final part of the role play is time for summarizing, analysing, discussion, and evaluation. Teacher and students make comments on positive and negative aspects, discuss the results and their impressions, make recommendations for the next role play. As fluency becomes important during role playing, students' accuracy might be paid less attention. It should be taken into account at the final stage and students' mistakes must not be a prime factor for their evaluation. The follow-up stage is optional. The teacher might ask students to write a summary, make a presentation or write a report [9, p. 34] (e.g. about the properties and application of engineering/ building materials).

It is worth mentioning that not only specific technical topics can be used for role playing to teach speaking to engineering students; students might also practice their communication and language skills in profession-related situations like job interview, making projects with foreign partners, participation in meetings and conferences (learning about international business etiquette), going to a business trip.

Even though devising and preparation of role plays might be time-consuming and the activity might be unusual for students, the technique is an effective tool and has a number of advantages: improvement of speaking and other language skills; building up behavioural patterns in job-related context by working with authentic materials in real-life situation; students' interest and motivation increase; the development of communication skills; facilitating students' confidence boost, logical and critical thinking, and creativity; maintaining a friendly and cooperative atmosphere in the classroom etc. Implementing a well-planned and properly organized role play in the process of teaching English for specific purposes will be an interesting and useful experience.

### **Conclusion.**

Role play can be effectively used for the speaking skills development of future engineers. This technique is applied in the context of communicative approach and is aimed at teaching students to communicate successfully in a certain professional situation. Role plays are similar to simulations, but are considered to be less complex and lengthy. Various types of role plays might be implemented for teaching English for specific purposes, their key functions being motivational, educational, instructional, communicative, entertaining etc. Using role play in the classroom, it is important to take into account its main components and stages of realization. In case of proper organization and management role play will be beneficial for students and teachers.

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**А. Л. Котковець. Рольова гра у навчанні англомовного говоріння майбутніх інженерів.**

У статті розглядається питання використання рольової гри як засобу навчання англомовного говоріння майбутніх інженерів. Розкривається поняття рольової гри, досліджуються її відмінності від подібних прийомів, таких як моделювання, або симуляція. Надаються класифікації рольових ігор за різними критеріями (кількістю учасників, місцем проведення, використанням опор та ін.). Описуються рольові ігри, у навчанні англійської мови для професійного спілкування, що розігруються за задалегідь створеним текстом, частково заданим сценарієм та без нього. Рольова гра має ряд важливих функцій, таких як компенсаторна, мотиваційна, виховна, навчальна, комунікативна, розважальна та інші, які висвітлюються у роботі. Знання ключових структурних елементів та етапів рольової гри забезпечують ефективність застосування цього навчального прийому. Так, до головних компонентів рольової гри належать тема, ситуація, сюжет (зміст), ролі, ігрові дії, завдання (інструкція), реальні стосунки між гравцями та ігрове використання предметів. Основними етапами рольової гри є підготовка, пояснення, проведення та підведення підсумків (контроль, аналіз, узагальнення). Розвиток комунікативних та мовленнєвих вмінь відбувається на кожному етапі. Рольова гра є ефективним засобом навчання майбутніх інженерів англомовного говоріння завдяки низці переваг, серед яких розвиток комунікативних та мовленнєвих навичок і вмінь, тренування навичок спілкування у майбутній професійній діяльності завдяки роботі з автентичними матеріалами та ситуативному моделюванню, підвищення мотивації, розвиток логічного й критичного мислення, творчих здібностей, підтримання сприятливої атмосфери у групі.

**Ключові слова:** рольова гра; комунікативний підхід; англійська мова для професійного спілкування; навички говоріння.

**А. Л. Котковець. Ролевая игра в обучении англоязычного говорения будущих инженеров.**

В статье рассматривается вопрос использования ролевой игры как средства обучения англоязычного говорения будущих инженеров. Раскрывается понятие ролевой игры, исследуются ее отличия от подобных приемов, таких как моделирование, или симуляция. Предоставляются классификации ролевых игр по различным критериям (количеству участников, месту проведения, использованию опор и др.). Описываются типы ролевых игр, используемые в обучении английскому языку для профессионального общения: те, которые разыгрываются по заранее созданным текстам, по частично заданному сценарию и без него. Ролевая игра имеет ряд важных функций, таких как компенсаторная, мотивационная, воспитательная, учебная, коммуникативная, развлекательная и другие, которые освещаются в работе. Знание ключевых структурных элементов и этапов ролевой игры обеспечивает эффективность применения этого учебного приема. Так, к главным компонентам ролевой игры принадлежат тема, ситуация, сюжет (содержание), роли, игровые действия, задачи (инструкция), реальные отношения между игроками и игровое использование предметов. Основными этапами ролевой игры является подготовка, объяснение, проведение и подведения итогов (контроль, анализ, обобщение). Развитие коммуникативных и речевых умений происходит на каждом этапе. Благодаря ряду преимуществ, ролевая игра является эффективным средством обучения будущих инженеров англоязычного говорения.

**Ключевые слова:** ролевая игра; коммуникативный подход; английский язык для профессионального общения; навыки говорения; общение.