

An Analysis on the Application of the Communicative Strategy to Oral English Teaching

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Abstract: For students especially those who are not good at memorizing words and grammars, communicative strategy is an indispensable means and method used to deal with the communication difficulties. Accordingly, improving college students' oral English skills should be combined with learning of communicative strategy. This paper mainly analyzes the importance of cultivating college students' communicative strategy, how to apply communicative strategy into oral English teaching and the problems we should pay attention to in the course of application of communicative strategy.

1. Introduction

It's true that many university students are not able to speak English well enough although they have been learning English many years since they were children. From a college student's point of view, the communicative strategy has great effect on oral English learning. The fact is that although nowadays more and more teachers prefer a communicative teaching approach and offer learners some opportunities for practicing English, the language learning environment is still greatly different from the real-life communication. This gap makes Chinese learners often find it difficult to cope with communicative problems in real situation, though they have grasped much language knowledge. Students gradually realize the importance of communicative strategy in improving their oral expression abilities and making up for language deficiency.

2. Current situation of University Oral English Teaching

In the traditional exam-oriented education of English, too much attention is paid to exam skills, while the students' spoken ability is ignored. Learners are also inclined to have a rejection of learning English because this kind of traditional teaching tends to be boring and has little effect on oral English skills. But in today's global environment, spoken English is very important to business work, daily life, and further learning. It is necessary to improve oral English and gain some advantages for the future. Good oral English with a nice tone, clear fluency, correct grammar, proper use of words, clear logic, and conforming to English expression habits is our dream and pursuit of learning English.

In the past years, college English teaching has paid more attention to oral English. Teachers try to teach in English in class and make students exposed to English as much as possible. Unfortunately, because of traditional language teaching methodology's predominating position, a large number of college students still can't express themselves fluently and successfully after years of English learning. They are often frustrated by face-to-face interviews and talks in English though they have passed many English language proficiency texts with high marks. Though college students' oral English level is obviously improved, it is still not good enough compared to the abilities of listening, reading and writing. In this case, the communicative strategy which is of great importance for people to better communicate has to be used in university oral English teaching.

3. Analysis of the Communicative Strategy

Briefly speaking, the communicative strategies are skills and methodology, which are used under a certain second language situation where the speakers haven't grasped the language well enough and intended to communicate fluently with others, achieve mutual understanding and deal with uncertainty in conversations.

Communicative Strategy (CS) is first termed by the British linguist Selinker in 1972, in the paper about the referral of a trilingual (interchange), used to explain the intermediary language learners in a major emerging phenomenon of cognitive strategies areas. "Verbal and non-verbal strategies that may be called into action to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to performance variables or to insufficient competence" (Canale & Swain, 1980:30). Having a good command of communication strategies is important for second language learners to make up for difficulties in verbal expressions and to keep communication channels open.

In other words, communication strategies refer to all the skills and methods, which are applied by speakers to deal with linguistic difficulties encountered when they communicate in a foreign language with a reduced inter-languages system. On the communicative competence, although foreign language scholars have some different views, they generally agree with the interpretation of Hymes. Hymes put forward his communicative competence theory based on the theory of Chomsky's linguistic ability. Hymes' understanding of communicative competence includes linguistic competence and the use of language ability.

4. The Application of the Communicative Strategy to Oral English Teaching

Compared with communicating skills, students generally attach more importance to knowledge of language, and they think the problems in oral expression are mainly due to the lack of language knowledge. Many students do not realize that some communicating strategies can be adopted to solve the problems when communication goes beyond their language ability. Therefore, students must master some necessary communicative strategies, which can definitely help them jump the hurdles in English expressions and freely express themselves. In some cases, communicative strategies are more easily to learn than language knowledge, thus becoming more popular among university students.

4.1 Raising Students' Awareness to Use the Communicative Strategy

Communicative consciousness plays a very important role in human communicative activities, because it can help the students to correctly understand the usefulness of communicative strategies and enhance awareness of communication, and promote the students to use communicative strategies properly in oral speaking activities.

In English class, we often find that some students either avoid answering questions or only say: "I don't know" because they are lack of vocabulary or psychologically nervous. Communication stops here and they are not able to continue with expressing their ideas. They sometimes even give up the topic they are talking about or literally translate their mother-tongue, because they have not yet formed a strong awareness of strategy, and they have not realized that strategies can help them increase their oral competence effectively. So when encountered obstacles in communication, they are lack of the awareness to use proper communicative strategy to keep communication continue. It shows that the students' strategy concepts need to be further strengthened, and teachers should combine theories with practice, introduce the relevant knowledge of communicative strategy to help students gradually improve the ability to communicate better with more people in spite of limited vocabulary and language knowledge.

4.2 Communicating Inside the Classroom

The classroom is certainly a place without very specific context for communication. There is limited room with the same teacher and the same students. Anyhow, classroom is the cradle to improve college students' oral English; just as most of us Chinese learn English through class

teaching in school for many years, therefore, classroom is irreplaceable in cultivating students' communicative strategies. So teachers should try to create atmosphere for students to use English in class as much as possible. The more interest students have in study, the better effects they will get. So it requires teachers to try their best to look for interesting topics and stimulating activities in which more students could join in to communicate with classmates. A teacher plays a key role in inspiring students' enthusiasm in oral speaking and students' concentration on the strategies during communication inside the classroom.

Games are often adopted as satisfying class communicative activities, the purpose of which is to create interesting circumstances for students to communicate in half-true language environment. Students have chances to make use of all kinds of words here, including items about Abstract nouns and material nouns. The purpose is to test the students whether they could use some effective communicative activities unconsciously in relaxed situations like circumlocution, a pproximation, pausing etc.

4.3 Oral English Training Activities

To help the learners to be able to express their ideas in English, teachers need to make the classroom a conversational place. If the learners could not talk naturally during the course of each lesson, it is hardly surprising when they can still hardly speak at all after several years of learning in classes. Therefore, from the first class of the new semester, English teachers are suggested to leave about 5 minutes for students to practise oral English. For example, they can tell the whole class something new or interesting or valuable. They can also do pair-work or group-work to act a dialogue or even a very short play. Daily Report is really effective in that students dare open their mouth, broaden their horizon and enlarge their vocabulary.

Try to create a relaxed atmosphere in class so that students are not afraid of speaking in front of the rest of the class. Speaking activities are advised to take place in pairs and groups, so that the learners can speak English with the rest of the class listening and trying to understand. Students in groups can enjoy the companion of each other and can always be ready to help each other to keep communications going on. Through timely feedbacks from group members, it inspires them to master the key points about communicative strategies and oral expressions as well.

In this training, students have the right to choose the topics that they are interested in and prepare well for the reports ahead of time. As a result, the successful performance give them confidence and desire to show themselves in front of classmates. Most importantly, during personal show or group work, they learn to deal with communicative difficulties with limited level of oral English, when communicative strategies play a significant role. After some time, both their oral English level and communicative strategies are sure to be improved.

4.4 The Application of Modern Teaching Methods

With the rapid development of modern teaching methods and equipments, English teachers should make good use of the multimedia such as tape recorders, episcope, VCD and computers in English teaching. There are also many useful and free Apps to learn English, like Juku pigai, English Liulishuo, English Qupeiyin, BaiCiZhan, which are designed with the latest artificial intelligence technology. Installed in phones, these Apps make learning available at any time and any place. So students can not only listen to idiomatic English expressions but also put themselves into various vivid English communicative scenes and even take part in various virtual communications, which would make students get more interested in English. In addition, English teachers can choose high-quality materials, use multimedia, and encourage students to dub pictures, recordings, make up stories about pictures and so on to make oral practice exciting and entertaining.

4.5 Making Good Use of the Textbook

Cultivating students' ability of listening, speaking, reading, writing, exchanging information and expressing feelings and emotions in real scenes is the best way to teach English. In today's college English teaching system, textbooks occupy a very important position, and largely determine the way and method of teaching. Guided by the principle of applicability and practicality, paying

attention to the cognitive and affective factors of college students at different ages, these textbooks need to be taught with the help of communicative strategies. Based on textbooks, teachers should try to take every opportunity in class to make the students use the language, like asking them questions on the textbooks, ask students to discuss topics in the texts and also hot topics in daily life, take part in speech contest, make up stories, and so on.

Teaching activities should not be limited on the content of textbooks. Teachers are asked to prepare for each class carefully and try to figure out more exercises relevant to the topic of textbooks. When studying topics that may generate different appreciations, debate is a good choice in class. Divide students into groups to discuss a topic given by teacher. Debate is relatively difficulty for freshmen taking into account their vocabulary and expression abilities, and they have to make the other classmates understand what they said. It is impossible to improve language level in limited class time. In this situation, students are forced to make use of communicative strategies which can help them overcome troubles in communication effectively and find how to combine communicative strategies with language learning better during study.

Teachers also could make good use of pictures, videos related to textbooks to create true or half-true scenes close to life. It can both strengthen students' knowledge and improve their abilities of reading and speaking and awareness to use communicative strategy.

5. Conclusion

Speaking ability is an important skill to any language learner and one of the crucial skills involved in communicative competence. Many language learners agree to take oral speaking capability as the primary goal and content of language learning. Compared with other abilities, speaking is relatively more important for university students either in daily life or in international business activities. However, to improve speaking ability could not be achieved without the cultivating of communicative strategy, which includes verbal and non-verbal strategies that could effectively compensate for language inefficiency of students. In university oral English teaching, teachers should fully recognize the importance of communicative strategy, insist on applying communicative teaching approach, instruct students to open their mouth and improve oral speaking ability.

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