

Study on the L2 English-Speaking Engagement of Chinese Younger Students

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Keywords: WTC, GRR, Differentiation

Abstract: The influence of inefficient teaching methods or cross-linguistic characteristics in the field of second language oral teaching has always been concerned and discussed. By carrying a survey with 50 Grade 5 bilingual Chinese students in Intel Bilingual Primary School, this paper aims to observe, identify and make a brief analysis on the key issue of effectively teaching English second language young learners in primary in their spoken English, from the perspectives of instructional theories and strategies use.

1. Introduction

As a result of globalization, learning a second language (L2) has become more in demand. Among second languages, English ranks as one of the most popular choices because of the value it provides personally and professionally to Chinese students (Winter, 2003) However, within the implementation of English teaching as a second language, research shows that teachers struggle to engage students with speaking more fluently and proficiently in the classroom (Driscoll MP, 2000). As a result, not only do students struggle to develop strong oral language skills, but they also fail to be sufficiently motivated and engaged in actively learning the English language and the content taught in English. Therefore, this essay critically examines and discusses the key issue of effectively teaching English second language learners in primary school, especially in the target area of speaking engagement for Chinese students. A few major research theories and methods related to L2 speaking engagement will be discussed. Then, strategies will be proposed for helping primary-aged students with speaking engagement in light of the theories, research, and pedagogy[1].

2. Key Issue of Speaking Engagement at Hangzhou Intel Primary School (Pseudonym)

The issue of lack of speaking engagement, motivation and practice for students is evident at Hangzhou Intel Primary School in Hangzhou, China. A recent survey at the school for a group of 50 Grade 5 bilingual Chinese students demonstrated this data. Hangzhou Intel Primary School administered the survey to be understand bilingual students' perceptions of classroom instruction and learning related to speaking English as a second language.

The survey results in Table 1 indicate that at Hangzhou Intel Primary School, the teacher's methods and delivery of instruction matter for influencing Chinese students' speaking engagement with English as a second language. These three main reasons for explain why the students feel less engagement in their English-Speaking lessons. Therefore, we will discuss the effective delivery

ways of English speaking lesson to solve these 3 fields of the key issue by illustrating the theories and strategies as follows.

Table 1: Survey Results for Grade 5 Students

Survey Questions & Results for 50 Grade 5 Students in Hangzhou Intel Primary School		
<i>What kind of English language instruction decreases your speaking engagement in the lesson?</i>	<i>What impact with this have on you during the lesson?</i>	<i>Percent of Students</i>
1. Uninteresting delivery; Teacher doesn't use enough lesson models or examples.	Distracted in the class Causes a lot of confusion and therefore an unwillingness to communicate.	42%
2. The lessons are too easy or too difficult for me	Boredom or loss of confidence to speak.	26%
3. Teacher talks too much	Lack of opportunity to share ideas or ask questions with teacher or other classmates.	32%

3. Theoretical Concept of Willingness to Communicate (WTC)

The education research has identified many areas of weakness for both teaching and learning when it comes to second language acquisition in English, especially with speaking. The learning situation at Hangzhou Intel Primary School also reflects these challenges. Thus, the following sections will focus on key strategies for addressing the issues of Chinese students not having sufficient and engaging opportunities to practice English oral language development, resulting in their lack of preparation and/or willingness to communicate[2-4].

One important recent theoretical concept in second-language acquisition research is that of Willingness to Communicate (WTC) (Tomoko Yashima, 2002). This concept explores the topic of how and why second language learners do or do not involve in the English communication. This topic also is important to teaching language practice because one goal is for students to become communicative and fluent in the target language. More recently, second language (L2) pedagogics are recognizing the demands for authentic use of the L2 as an significant part of language studying and delivering, with the target of improving the L2 students' competence of communication. However, according to Reinders (2016), one problem is that students "do not engage the target-language acquisition by nature, no matter the speaking lesson is inside or outside the classroom". Still, some classroom instructional designs can help students become more effective learners, willing to communicate because of a learner- centered philosophy (Nunan, 1988, 1995a, b).

3.1 Strategy of Utilizing "Awareness Activities" to Promote Oral Language Development

It is not an uncommon phenomenon in primary schools to find English teachers often mechanically teaching in front of the classroom or podium, while students are just expected to watch, listen, and memorize information, with very little interaction among them. This can result in lower learning motivation for students and less speaking practice. Research shows, however, if the teachers make the environment more comfortable or become more open by utilizing the awareness activities can help to engage students and meanwhile it can lower their affective filter. (Krashen, 1982). Some of these awareness activities also help young pupils who appeal to have shorter spans of the attention and more physical energy. According to Walsh (2002), awareness activities focus students on having a more conscious use of language and noticing the effects of interactional

features. Additionally, awareness activities involve at least three processes: attention, noticing, and understanding (see Figure 1).

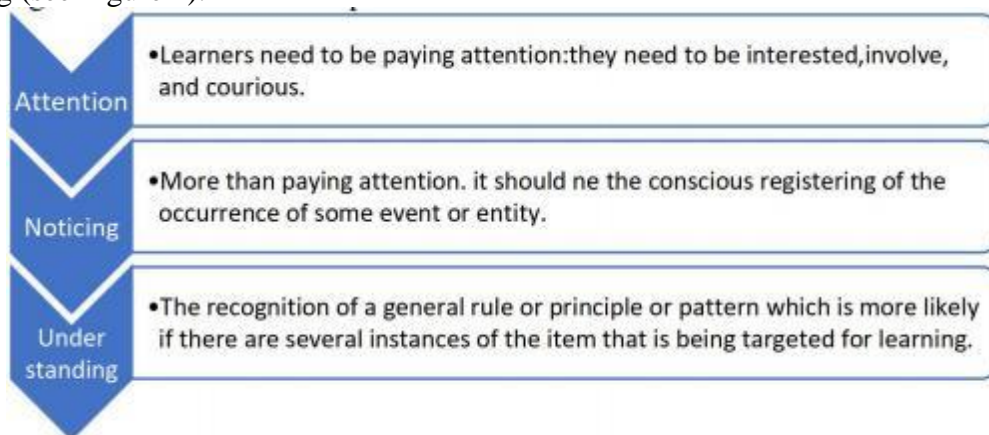


Figure 1: Three awareness processes.

In addition, children can increase their language engagement use by utilizing their physical surroundings to support verbal interaction. As Scott and Ytreberg (1990, 2) state, “Through the hands and eyes and ears, student own understanding comes easily. The physical world is always keeping the dominant position.” Hence, one vital strategy is by using the supplement the activities with lots of brightly colored visuals, puppets, toys, or objects to catch the learners’ attention or adopting the interesting stories read or beautiful songs to keep the children language-engaged in the joyful activities. These visual and realia stuff enable to make the comprehensible language inputting. The follow-up activities are listed for a teacher faing the younger students in the speaking lesson delivery[5-6].

3.2 Suggestion

Another way to increase comprehensible input for students is to create discussion using “show and tell” activities. These awareness activities could include the use of some props, dolls, stuffed animals, or toys. Speaking for authentic purposes, a show and drama activity are ideal ways to get students motivated in the speaking lessons. As an English teacher, you can arrange a short “show and tell” presentation for the introduction to any lesson since it gets students an opportunity for verbally introduce in English. Through this activity, students will be engaged in their performance of speaking. (Joan Kang Shin, 2006).

Some important considerations for implementing awareness activities are the following. First, the focus of learning should not be on the fun activities themselves, but on the actual oral language development. Thus, teachers should pay attention that the fun activities relate to the lesson’s language objectives. The following criteria can assist a teacher to keep the focus of awareness activities on learning priorities for second language learners:

- Their focus is on-Supplying the vital content and practical and application English learners with practice and application of the concept of key conceptual language;
- Their focus is on- Increasing the communicate time and chances between the students themselves and with teachers as well.
- Their focus is on -Provide the oppportunities for students to use English for listening, speaking, reading, writing.
- Their focus is on- The teachers can easily achieve the teaching level
- Their focus is on -Students can provide the information for teachers which can help them to make the lesson objectives and examination paper

In summary, there is great value in utilizing awareness activities targeted at helping learners to close these gaps in motivation and speaking engagement.

4. Stephen Krashen's Theory of Second Language Acquisition

For the speaking lesson, the teachers should create the authentic conversation environment for pupils to make the practice as much as possible to figure out the lack of oral practice opportunity. University of Southern California's renown linguistics professor Stephen Krashen developed an important theory about L2 acquisition which is called the "Monitor Model" (Krashen, 1982). Krashen's model contains five distinct hypothesis about L2 learning and acquisition:

(1) hypothesis of monitor; (2) hypothesis of affective filter; (3) hypothesis of acquisition-learning; (4) hypothesis of inputting, and (5) hypothesis of natural order According to Krashen's model, language is presupposed to be "acquired" or learned in a natural manner through the engagement in authentic communication. This model has implications for the key issue of speaking engagement for second language learners in the Chinese context because often students are hesitant to engage in speaking and are prone to be passive learners.

4.1 Gradual Release of Responsibility Teaching Method to Facilitate Language Practice

Various education, psychology, and language-learning theoretical concepts and research have been synthesized to create an instructional model or teaching framework that gradually shifts the cognitive load for learning (and speaking) from teachers to students: The Gradual Release of Responsibility (GRR) Teaching Method (Fisher & Frey, 2008). This research-based framework supports the development and "acquisition" of second-language learner's speaking ability because it provides sufficient "use of language" modeling, guided practice, collaborative practice, and independent practice to students (see Figure 1). GRR also makes use of students' prior knowledge or schema in L1 to transfer language skills and concepts to the target L2 through focused and guided instruction (Fisher & Frey, 2008). GRR also helps students to engage in productive group work during collaborative learning, which provides students with time to practice the L2 language in a safe and supportive environment with peers and the support of the teacher[7].

It does take a strong commitment from the teacher when keeps a classroom structured, but the rewards are well worth the effort, time, and planning required. With building a structured delivery, teachers will realize that it is unnecessary to talk too much during the lesson but pupils enjoy their speaking more, teachers see more growth of their students, and experience more positivity atmosphere. (Derrick Meador, 2018) However, the structured teaching requires that teachers know content and their students very well, that teachers assess students' understanding of the content regularly, and that they plan the interrelated speaking lessons purposefully by transferring the responsibility from the teacher to the student. The classroom teaching is a blend of whole-class, group and individual instruction. This type of teaching, the gradual release of responsibility, also be conceptualized as shown in Figure 2 as below. (Douglas Fisher & Nancy Frey, 2014)

In addition, the GRR is an important teaching method because research shows that often teachers struggle to effectively teach and develop English learners' speaking skills as a result of poor teaching methods. For instance, some teachers lack understanding of professional English teaching methods or lack innovative thinking in classroom design which leads to insufficient interest in English teaching (Virginia P. Richmond, 1990). In addition, some teachers are always in the dominant position in terms of lesson delivery, which occupies too much time that is supposed to be for students to practice oral language development (Douglas Barnes, 2008). Furthermore, research shows that some teachers have not established differentiated teaching as a pedagogical approach to teaching, resulting in student's individual language needs being ignored (Pearl Subban, 2006).

Therefore, it is believed that educators who have developed sound teaching skills and methods will be better able to exploit classroom learning opportunities effectively to develop students' speaking engagement.

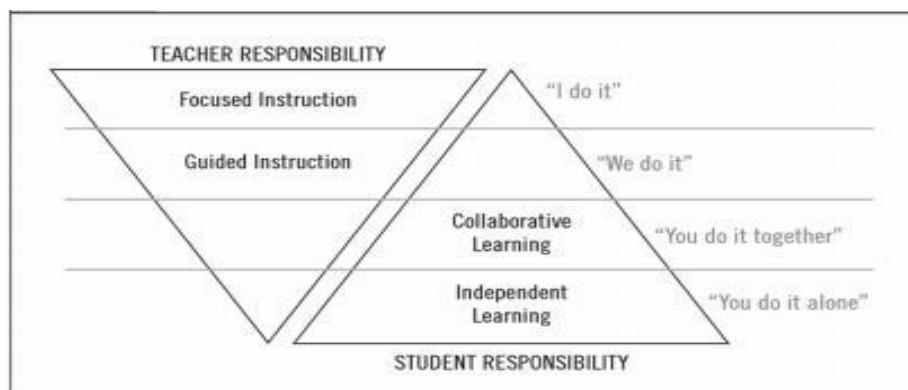


Figure 2: Gradual Release of Responsibility Model

4.2 Suggestion

It is recommended that teachers should pay attention to “What can I do to ensure that speaking tasks of L2 learners really are meaningful?” The teachers should realize the student-centered teaching model is so important to encourage the engagement for the speaking education which has the higher initiative requirement.

First, use appropriate speaking teaching pace which means teacher should be aware of your teaching tempo; Make sure your lesson are well prepared to ensure your teaching is effective by implementing the “GSS” instructional Framework in your speaking lessons. Teacher may do the guide talk in the earlier section.

Second, teachers really do need to examine the quality of each steps and observe the stage of “you do together” to make sure the students are talking in English or doing the role play conversation in pair or in the group.

Third, guiding them, especially on the independent stage, giving students an exercise task (listen and imitate) to use the social and native speakers' conversation and imitate their articulation of the utterance. Wilson and Cutting (2001) remind us that students advance their learning through independent practice.

5. Carol Ann Tomlinson's Theory of differentiation teaching

In relation to individual and diverse students in classrooms, differentiated instruction is a teaching theory which adapts that vary instructional approaches. (Carol Ann Tomlinson, 2001) Not all students are alike and they do not learn in the same paves, differentiated instruction, with considering their speaking capability, applies a method to teach and learn in multiple options for the oral inputting and presentation of oral practice. This model of instruction requires teachers to be flexible in their approach to teaching and adjusting the speaking curriculum.

5.1 Strategies for solving the issue of the same material delivery

The students from diverse cultural backgrounds Tomlinson and Imbeau (2010) describe differentiation as creating a balance between academic content for the whole class and students' individual requirements. Creating the learning opportunities for the correspondent leveled group students is the aim of differentiated instruction. In other words, it makes allowances for differences

in how individual students learn in order to guarantee an equal access to the important academic content.

By differentiation, all the various leveled students can have the corresponding -grade material to practice which make them get the enough engagement. Especially for the weaker students, it seems the scaffold which in turn enhance their confidence and motivates them to open their mouths for speaking practice.

In effective differentiation, conscious attention to designing instructional activities and the adaptive assessment with ongoing evaluation are required in order to meet the needs of the students. (Carol Ann Tomlinson, 2000) It is true that teachers must have a comprehensive repertoire of instructional strategies at hand, but they must also be able to "think outside the box" to make sure that each student's demands are met. Differentiating instruction uses a variety of instructional strategies for delivering the same curriculum to all groups of students in the same classroom which means the teacher will deliver lessons at varying levels of difficulty

In my school we divide the students into different groups according to their English levels by using the "Universal Access" to implement the Differentiation. Teacher creates a task list of Must do and May do in each differentiation lesson. All the stronger students not only need to finish the items in "Must do" area but also will accomplish most of mission from the "May do" list.

Table 2: Universal Access List

Universal Access	
Must Do	May Do
English speaking activity	Record your 4th paragraph reading in the "Class Do Jo" system.
Read the book from the page of 100- 103	Finish the exercise on the page of 105 - English tale telling.
Finish the worksheet	Raz-kid level- challenge reading

The expat teachers will teach the weaker students and always do supportive guides for them meanwhile the teacher assistants will lead the stronger students and challenge them with the higher-level works.

5.2 Suggestion

First, using Kidney-shaped table for small group instruction. A kidney-shaped table would help with the communication easily for teacher and student and also facilitates the conversation among the students especially when the pair-work or group-work needed. Another benefit of this type of table is that the teacher is within an arm's reach of each student makes teaching so convenient. When pupils are in close proximity to the teacher, they are more focused and engaged in English conversation class, they are able to make greater strides. (Winter, 2007)

Second, giving a quiz at the end of the month or quarter so that teachers know if students demonstrating strong speaking achievement, different groups need to be changed according to the scores which reflects students' progress.

6. Conclusion

Robert W. Blair (2010), a famous American scholar, has pointed out that "As long as people who learn a foreign language are surrounded by a rich, reinforcing and continuous foreign language environment, and they can apprehend and accept this language, then the most effective foreign language learning effect can be achieved.

After analyzing the Key Issue of Speaking Engagement, we realized how do teachers do for

enhancing the L2 learners' English-Speaking degree of involvement. It is recommended that by using these three strategies: (1) Utilizing "Awareness Activities" to promote oral language development; (2) Adopting "Gradual Release of Responsibility" teaching method to facilitate language practice; (3) Implementing differentiation teaching to motivate the various level students to get the effective learning in the language acquisition. Robert w. Blair (2010), a famous American scholar, has pointed out that "As long as people who learn a foreign language are surrounded by a rich, reinforcing and continuous foreign language environment, and they can apprehend and accept this language, then the most effective foreign language learning effect can be achieved. So that students can actively participate in the whole process of learning. With this target, various speaking activities those listed above (Strategy: "Awareness Activities") can contribute a great deal to students in developing positive interaction in speaking lessons. These activities make students learning more meaningful and fun, to a great extent, it opens u the possibility of more speaking progress. (J. Bamford R. Day, 2005)

In addition, modeling is another crucial component of releasing responsibility in speaking lesson. Younger learners are hardwired to imitate other native English speakers (Winerman, 2005). The so-called engagement mainly refers to the participation of student's speaking, behavior as well as emotions, and all of these three aspects are closely correlated. In other words, according to the leaning requirement of English speaking skills, teachers' responsibility should be released from the stage from "I do" to the stage "you do it independently".

Verbal ability development. In classroom teaching, teachers should fully mobilize the enthusiasm of students, create a good speaking practice environment and teacher always plays the role of guiding.

Finally, previous discussion considers the use of differentiated skills in the classroom for younger learners' engagement (Johnsen, 2003), the "Universal Access" and the kidney-shape desk for teachers to create the heterogeneous classrooms (Johnsen, 2003; Tomlinson, 1995). All these makes differentiation more strategic and more practical. It enable to support the weak speaking pupils meanwhile challenge the advanced ones which is indeed a comprehensive considering and it encourages children at all levels to get more in the speaking lessons.

In a word, teaching speaking is a very significant part of second language acquisition. All these speaking teaching approaches are certified for advancing the ability to communicate in a L2 clearly and efficiently which also contributes to the success of the L2 English-Speaking engagement for the Chinese younger students in school and success later in every phase of life.

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