

On-line Peer Assessment of Chinese Students' Oral Presentation in English*

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The current paper aims to conduct a research of on-line peer assessment of Chinese students' oral presentation in English. Based on the theoretical framework: social cognitive theory and constructivism, on-line peer assessment enhances interaction and improvement. The result comes up with the conclusion that this way of assessment is effective, especially for Chinese students, to improve efficacy, to develop confidence in oral presentation, and to foster autonomy in learning.

Keywords: on-line learning, peer assessment, oral presentation

Introduction

With the fast development of the international trade, oral presentation is increasingly popular in business transactions. Oral presentations serve multiple objectives that reflect “intellectual values and academic skills” (Morita, 2000). It is a key competency for life-long learning in general and higher education in particular (Boud & Falchikov, 2006). Al-Issa and Al-Qubtan (2010) considered giving an oral presentation as the opportunity to learn to use technology and the preparation for real life.

Assessment is critical for learning process and can potentially lay the foundation for a lifetime of learning. The current paper takes up the discussion of Chinese Students' oral presentation in the context of on-line peer assessment and will identify some of the main issues involved in assessment practices.

Theoretical Framework

Social Cognitive Theory

Social cognitive theory is very well suited to explain the development of complex behaviour such as oral presentation skills (Bandura, 2005). Complex human behaviour is—according to the theory—learned by observation through modelling (Bandura, 1986). People value particular social models during their early childhood. These models are observed in view of knowledge and skill acquisition. Also during their adult life, there is a continuous awareness of the behaviour of social models in view of knowledge and skills acquisition

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(Zimmerman, 2000). Observation of a social model is but a first step in the social cognitive learning process. By observation, Chinese students can make judgement based on the Criteria of Communicative Language Ability (Bachman, 1990) and reflect on their own performance in their oral presentation in English. As a consequence, they will try their best to meet the standard of each part of the criteria and make changes accordingly.

Observation is the first stage in skill acquisition, and learners evolve from a social-guided stage to a self-controlled stage, and finally to a completely self-regulated final stage. Ultimately they can regulate their performance to changing conditions (Wouters, Tabbers, & Paas, 2007). In cognition, after observation, the next step is repeated performance, as suggested by Bandura (1986): "People who cognitively rehearse or actually perform modelled patterns of behavior are less likely to forget them..." (p. 9). Also Wouters et al. (2007) explained this transition from observation to performance as a social cognitive model of sequential skill acquisition (Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 2002). The practice of oral presentation from Chinese students each month enables them to experience repeated performance and opens many possibilities of open discussions on how to enhance oral presentation skill.

Constructivism

Constructivism is a theory of knowledge that argues humans generate knowledge and meaning from an interaction between their experiences and their ideas. During infancy, it was an interaction between human experiences and their reflexes or behavior-patterns. Swiss cognitive psychologist Jean Piaget called these systems of knowledge schemata. Piaget's theory of constructivist learning has had wide ranging impact on learning theories and teaching methods in education and is an underlying theme of many education reform movements. Piaget's theory, has two key definitions—assimilation and accommodation. Assimilation occurs when a student perceives new objects or events in terms of existing schemas or operations. Student tends to find a way to fit this external reality with his/her internal cognitive structures or schemas. Accommodation refers to the process of changing internal mental structures to provide consistency with external reality. It occurs when existing schemas or operations must be modified or new schemas are created to account for a new experience. Obviously, accommodation influences assimilation and vice versa. As reality is assimilated, structures are accommodated.

As the criteria of Communicative Language Ability (Bachman, 1990) is available to all learners, they are likely to internalize it and form their understanding on oral presentation standard based on it. They would make great efforts to fit the oral presentation performance with the criteria. Meanwhile, in their peer assessment, they also learn about others' better performance in presentation and would accommodate the good points into their own presentation. The benefit lies in the process of evaluation on others' work, reflection on one's own learning outcome, assimilating and accomodating various resources while making a presentation. This would help students improve from all aspects, including organization of the speech, pragmatic skill, goal setting, and planning skill.

Peer Assessment

Peer assessment involves collaboration in the appraisal of learning outcomes by those involved in the learning process, i.e., students.

Definition of Peer Assessment

Boud (1991) defined self-assessment as the involvement of students in identifying standards and/or criteria to apply to their work, and making judgements about the extent to which they have met these criteria and standards. The promotion of work skills, autonomy, and self-directed and lifelong learning was deemed to be an

essential part of this process (Boud & Falchikov, 1989). Peer assessment, or the involvement of students in judging each other's work either formatively or summatively, can play an important part in a student's learning experience through provision of immediate feedback (Falchikov, 1994, 1995).

Many experts (LIU & Hansen, 2002; Lockhart & Ng, 1995; Mangelsdorf & Schlumberger, 1992; WANG, 2007; ZHU, 2001) have conducted researches on peer review of second language writing. With succinct features of archiving, hyperlink, comment, and instant/self-publishing, several projects have been conducted on the use of weblogs for second language writing (Bloch, 2007; WANG, 2007). However, the research on peer assessment on oral presentation in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context has been very limited.

The present study attempts to investigate the effects of computer-mediated peer assessment activities with the following research questions: (1) How do the students like computer-mediated peer assessment? (2) Is there any observable difference before and after students' peer assessment of oral presentation?

Participants

The present study involved 100 EFL freshman English majors, 50 of whom were male and 50, female, in Dalian University of Technology in China. All the students were native speakers of Mandarin-Chinese and foreign language learners of English. They had studied English as a subject in their high school for six years, but they did not have much oral presentation experience before they were admitted into this program. The project lasted for one semester.

Procedure

Table 1

Modified Criteria of Communicative Language Ability, Based on CLA (Communicative Language Ability) by Bachman

Language competence	Organizational knowledge	Grammatical knowledge	Phonemic features	Accurate	1	2	3	4	5	inaccurate
			Allophonemic features	unintelligible	1	2	3	4	5	intelligible
			Vocabulary	unintelligible	1	2	3	4	5	intelligible
			Syntax	unintelligible	1	2	3	4	5	intelligible
	Textual knowledge	Cohension	inappropriate	1	2	3	4	5	appropriate	
		Organization	inappropriate	1	2	3	4	5	appropriate	
Pragmatic knowledge	Functional knowledge	Illocutionary competence	unnatural	1	2	3	4	5	natural	
	Sociolinguistic knowledge	Register	inappropriate	1	2	3	4	5	appropriate	
Strategic competence	Goal setting	Identifying and choosing tasks		inaccurate	1	2	3	4	5	inaccurate
	Appraising	Degree of accurate implementation		inappropriate	1	2	3	4	5	appropriate
	Planning	Body language		unnatural	1	2	3	4	5	natural
		Paralanguage		monotonous	1	2	3	4	5	expressive

For the present study, four oral presentation assignments were designed with the following topics: "My Favorite Movie", "English Learning", "Chinese Music/Food", and "Activities That Contribute to Good Health". Students needed to do their oral presentation by turns in class and their presentation will be videoed. Then teacher uploaded the videos onto QQ zone¹ for every student to evaluate according to the MCCLA (Modified Criteria of Communicative Language Ability) (see Table 1). Then they submitted their comments onto their peers' space

¹ QQ is one of the most popular website for communication, especially among young people.

for each of the four presentations and the Internet environment kept track of the comments. They prepared the oral presentation and received peer assessment training while they worked on the evaluation based on MCCLA. Lastly, students were given an evaluation questionnaire on a five-point likert, which was designed with 10 items.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire is designed to cover questions related to students' emotional response to on-line peer assessment and changes of meta-cognitive strategy in post-presentation stage. It includes: teachers' role, learners' self autonomy, and their feedback to others' criticism. Some answers of the students to the questions in the questionnaire are as follows (LIU & LU, personal communication, 2011):

- (1) While I evaluate others' oral presentation based on MCCLA, I become more aware of the strengths and weaknesses of my own oral presentation and make changes accordingly.
- (2) The explanation of providing peer comments by MCCLA enabled me to give my classmates better suggestions.
- (3) The suggestions given by my classmates are helpful for making improvement on the presentation.
- (4) I will revise my oral presentations by following peers' advice.
- (5) My oral presentation skill has been greatly enhanced through peer assessment.
- (6) By observation of others presentation, I learned a lot from other students.
- (7) I like my classmates providing suggestions for revisions on my QQ zone.
- (8) I enjoyed peer assessment of oral presentation in English with my classmates.
- (9) I feel relaxed to give suggestions to peers through an on-line environment.
- (10) In Internet environment, I do not feel embarrassed when I see a large amount of advice given by peers.

Results

The result of the questionnaire (see Table 2) shows that most students have an active attitude towards the on-line peer assessment of oral presentation in English. They are encouraged to make revisions and to evaluate oneself more objectively, and are likely to accept others' suggestions. Emotionally, it is not uncomfortable for them to be faced with much advice and they are fully and actively involved in the whole process while improving oral presentation skill.

Table 2

Results of Questionnaire

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
5	81%	77%	92%	87%	93%	94%	85%	89%	91%	88%
4	6%	7%	4%	5%	5%	3%	6%	3%	4%	6%
3	3%	6%	3%	3%	2%	2%	4%	4%	4%	4%
2	9%	8%	1%	3%	0%	1%	2%	2%	1%	1%
1	1%	2%	0%	2%	0%	0%	3%	2%	0%	1%

Discussion

From the results, we can see that students improve their presentation skill and their interest has been stimulated. The Internet environment provides them with a comfortable atmosphere to share ideas and make comments. They are highly motivated by peer assessment and have greater tendency to learn from each other. The computer-mediated assessment removes the barrier of communication like "losing face", which originates from Chinese culture and customs of "saving face". Therefore, we can draw the conclusion that Chinese students are suitable to do on-line peer assess of oral presentation, which can push them forward while pointing out the weakness without making

them feel uncomfortable. Their efficacy has been improved and confidence has been developed, changing the silent tendency. Meanwhile, autonomy habit has also been formed, which can benefit their learning in the future.

Conclusions

The commenting functions of QQ zone are particularly worth examination since they make QQ zone a promising environment for peer review activities in the oral presentation, helping students interact with each other and refine their work.

Students' active involvement in peer assessment can be an essential part of their learning process. It develops a culture of reflection and critical analysis not only of their own work but also of the learning outcomes and assessment criteria. Peer assessment facilitates learning, offering benefits to staff and students alike, and contributing towards a holistic approach to enhancing the student learning experience. The mastery of oral presentation skill will be developed gradually in this interactive approach.

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