

In-Class Practice of Oral English for College Students

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Spoken English is very important for college students. But among all the language skills, students' speaking ability has been neglected for a rather long time. When the students successfully passed the College Entrance Examinations, they may have been well prepared for college English study only in reading, writing, maybe listening, but most probably, not in speaking. The English teachers must provide them with proper materials for speaking ability training. We have to nurture both their interest and courage, and push them forward step by step. Since the oral practice must be arranged in English class most of the time (because we have to check and help with their performance in time), the teachers should prepare proper materials and try their best to get the students involved, and the students should make full use of English classes. So that they may be able to communicate with foreigners in English if they choose to further their study abroad or work with foreign colleagues in some international companies after graduation.

Keywords: oral English, college students, materials, in-class practice

Introduction

Oral English is an important part of college English teaching. As a tool of communication, spoken English should be taken as important as written English. Speaking is a major form of communication in practically working environments. Speeches that business people and professionals are likely to make include instructions, explanations, oral reports, speeches to win approval of policies, to promote the sale of products and services, to inspire others, to create good will, to celebrate achievements, to accept offices and awards, and to entertain others (Wen & Wang, 2004). So, we should put emphasis on oral English teaching in college English classes since the students should be well prepared for their future career. However, most of the students are afraid of some oral practice in college English classes because they did not have enough spoken English training at high schools. While almost all the high schools do not offer any spoken English courses since spoken English ability is not included in the College Entrance Examinations. In colleges, we seldom offer enough spoken English courses either. When the students graduate from the colleges and go on with their work or further study both at home and abroad, they will somehow need to communicate with foreigners in English. Some of the students may be good at English reading and writing, and they may well understand the foreigners immediately, but they just cannot find the right words to express themselves properly.

Neglect of Speaking Ability

We have long focused on reading and writing in English teaching, but neglected speaking ability both in

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high schools and colleges. The English examinations in both high schools and colleges seldom evaluate the students' ability in spoken English. As a result, many college graduates cannot speak English although they are familiar with English grammar, and most of the time, they probably perform well in written exams and are good at reading and writing.

The fundamental of improving in a language is simply to talk more, read more, and write more (Chi, Ma, & Cai, 2016). To perfect the spoken language requires one's systematic learning first, careful study, and much practice (Chi et al., 2016). To help with the students' English-speaking ability, we should put emphasis on oral English teaching. The college English teachers can push the students through some well-prepared in-class activities step by step. At the very beginning, we can design some simple oral practice for the English class according to the students' vocabulary and interest. For example, we can arrange the students to introduce themselves in English at the beginning of the course, so that they may get to know each other. We should design classroom discussion and public speaking. Such oral expression practice under some pressure of the circumstance can effectively ease the students' nervous state of mind (Yan & Qi, 2014). We can also put them into groups of four or five, and ask them to do some oral group work, such as retelling short stories read in class, repeating some lines of video clips played in class, or discussing over some given topics in their groups. It is also highly recommended that we arrange the students to do some presentation before each class. We can spare about five minutes or so, and the students may talk about the weather, their college life, the city, their hometowns, or any hot spots of some current events, or just share their daily life with the help of some pictures or PPT. These activities are simple and interesting, and the students can easily get involved. They may quickly get used to such practice and coordination with their group members. The teachers have to observe their performance and offer some help if they need any. And after each student has finished with his or her performance, it is best to comment on the speech and give more positive advice than negative judgement. We have to keep in mind that the students should be treated as beginners in speaking practice although they might have been studying English for six years or even more.

Design of Oral Tasks

Most of the time, the reason why some students are afraid of oral English practice is the design of the tasks. We cannot assign the oral tasks immediately at the very beginning. The oral English practice should begin after we have fully evaluated the students' English ability. We can arrange proper oral work only when we get to know about the students' vocabulary, listening ability, and their knowledge of English grammar, etc. Of course, the oral tasks should not be too difficult for the students. No one can express in a foreign language correctly if he is asked to talk about something far beyond his knowledge or vocabulary of the foreign language. On the other hand, they should not be designed too easy as well. The students can learn little from some easy daily talks if they have already read enough about their majors in English. We should prepare the oral practice according to the students' English standard.

There are also a lot of useful resources out of classroom. Many young people are fond of music, so it is a good idea to introduce some English popular songs and singers to the students. Some classic music can well help with their interest and understanding of English language as well. We can also introduce the history and background information of some famous songs and singers. The more the students get to know about the English language, the better they will learn the language. The students may also be interested in some classic English movies or hot spots of some famous film festivals. We can share some video clips of such movies in class, and

ask the students to discuss about the songs and the movies with their classmates, and then share their viewpoints in class. We should encourage the students to check and correct their pronunciation with the help of the lines while watching the movies. It is a good habit to follow the lines of the movies and learn the correct pronunciation and intonation. Once, the students know the correct way to improve their pronunciation and intonation, they will try to make the fullest use of the studying resources.

More Difficult Assignments

Then, with the development of their vocabulary and English-speaking ability, we should replace these simple tasks with some more difficult assignments. For example, we can ask the students to read some English books or watch some certain video clips of English movies after class, and share their opinions in English. We can also ask them to design a questionnaire for a given topic. They should do some research together with their group members or on their own. After they have finished the questionnaire on the basis of their survey, they should share their reports in class. All the other students, including the teacher, may raise some questions after their reports. We can also arrange a debate in class on the basis of their reports. Some students may challenge the opinions of the reports, while the reporter and some other students may act as the defenders. When the students find they can express their own ideas in English, and their classmates can well understand them and give them proper responses, they will be greatly encouraged and feel confident, and thus get interested in spoken English.

Improve the Students' Confidence

Sometimes, the passages of the course book are not so difficult for the students. We may choose one passage for the students to prepare before class, and ask them to demonstrate their work in class. The students will act as teachers and show how they will handle their English class. They may go through the English class routine and speak English only. They raise some questions according to the passage, and their classmates may answer these questions. Such practice can well improve the students' confidence.

Young students are more interested in hot spots of the news and current affairs than we can imagine. We can arrange some introduction to current news and ask the students to discuss or even debate over the hot spots. The students will be greatly encouraged when they find they can express their opinions in English. It is very important for the teachers to push the students, and when the students feel confident about their speaking ability, the task of teaching will be much easier.

Speaking Ability in Academic Evaluation

Sometimes, some students are reluctant to get involved in such research and debate. We can also push them. The results of the oral practice should be included in the final academic evaluation as well as the written examinations. Thus, the students will put more time and energy on oral English, and they will be able to speak English better.

The students have to learn lots of knowledge and practice even more skills in college. Their time is limited. They have to be able to use English as a tool when they graduate from colleges, both written and spoken English. Speaking a certain language is not as easy as writing some grammatically correct sentences in that language and just read out these sentences. Speaking is a skill, and it needs practice above grammar (Thornbury & Zou, 2011). Since we have long put emphasis on written English teaching, most students are good at written English. But

their oral English is poor. So, we should design proper oral practice in class and encourage the students to practice oral English. So that they can use English to communicate with foreigners in their own fields in the future.

Conclusion

It is difficult for the students to make great progress in English speaking since they have long neglected oral English. But they should be able to communicate with foreigners in English after graduation. We can help them practice oral English in class with appropriate materials, and try to build better grading systems including evaluation of oral ability. Thus, the students may be encouraged to put enough emphasis on oral English study.

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