

The Importance of Cooperative Principle in Oral English Learning

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Abstract: English as an important international language plays a more and more crucial role in the world cultural exchange. However, English language learning is still far from being satisfactory, and unable to meet the needs of the political and economic development of our country. As a result, the significance of English language learning is becoming more self-evident. The ultimate aim of English language learning is to develop students' competence of speaking, listening, reading and writing. In the past decades, the four basic skills of Chinese students have been greatly improved. But, they have not been improved at the same pace, especially for the oral English.

Keywords: Oral English Learning; Cooperative Principle; Cooperative Learning; the Application of CP

1. Introduction

When the Cooperative Principle was introduced into English language teaching, it received good result. And with the Cooperative Principle, we would make a great contribution to change the traditional learning pattern and English language learning would be more and more effective. Therefore, it is very important to apply Cooperative Principle to oral English learning.

2. An Introduction to Cooperative Principle

2.1 The Concept of Cooperative Principle

From 1950s, Herbert Paul Grice began to focus on the theory of conversational implicature. But it was through the William James lectures he delivered at Harvard in 1967 that this theory first became known to the public. Part of the lectures was published in 1975 under the title of "Logic and Conversation", on which we base our present introduction. Grice posited a general set of rules which contribute to ordinary conversation were generally expected to follow. He named it the Cooperative Principle (CP) and formulated as follows:

In social science and linguistics, the Cooperative Principle describes the way for people to interact with others. Grice believes that there is some regularity in people's conversation. "Our talk exchanges do not normally consist of a succession of connected remarks, and would not be relational if they did. But, in conversation what we say would not be our real meaning. Speakers may express his idea indirectly instead of speaking out directly for various reasons.

2.2 Four Maxims of Cooperative Principle

There four maxims for the Cooperation Principle---the Gricean maxims, which was proposed by Grice from the pragmatics of natural language. The Grice maxims explain the link between utterance and what is understood from them. CP describes how effective communication in conversation is achieved in common socials situation and divided into four maxims of relation, quality, quantity, and manner.

However, Grice assumes that people do not always follow the four maxims in their conversation. On the contrary, Grice found that people could imply hidden meaning when these maxims are violated. For example, when we answer "It is raining." to someone who has suggested to play basketball. This sentence does not follow the maxim of relation, but listener can imply the hidden meaning of speaker.

2.2.1 The maxims of quantity and quality

1. The maxim of quantity

(1). The requirement of quantity maxim

Try to provide necessary information and not to offer redundant information.

a. Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).

b. Do not make your contribution more informative than that is required.

(2). The violation of quantity maxim

The violation of quantity maxim means speaker does not provide enough information or give more or less information than its actual need in conversation. We can find some typical examples from daily life,

A: Where does Jack live?

B: Somewhere in China.

In this conversation, B does not give enough information to A.

2. The maxim of quality

(1). a. Do not say what is false.

b. Do not say what for which you lack adequate evidence.

(2). The violation of quality maxim

The violation of quality maxim refers to offer false message deliberately or say something which do not have enough evidence. For example: Queen Victoria is made of iron. This sentence violates the maxim of quality because there is no person made up of iron. Actually, this sentence is a kind of metaphor, expresses that the Queen Victoria had some properties like hardness and durability.

2.2.2 The maxims of relation and manner

1. The Maxim of Relation

Be relevant.

For example:

A: Can you tell me the time

B1: It's 11: 20.

B2: well, the milkman has come.

Apparently, the answer of B1 is more relevant than B2. B1 directly answer A's question and A needs little inference, while B2' answer is indirect and A has to infer.

2. The Maxim of Manner

The requirement of Manner Maxim

a. Avoid the obscurity of expression.

b. Avoid ambiguity.

c. Be brief.

d. Be orderly

There is example to show the violation of Manner Maxim,

A: Where is Washington?

B: He is dead.

A: I mean the capital of the United State.

B: They loaned it all to Europe.

In this conversation, the ambiguity is brought in by the ambiguous words—Washington(the president or the capital of US) and capital(the Washington city or money).

2.3 The Further Developments of Cooperative Principle

After Grice, there are some linguistics make a further development of Cooperative Principle, which is called Neo-Gricean. Horn and Levinson are the main representatives of them, who rearranged Grice's maxims and reduced their number.

1、Horn's Q-principle and R-principle

Horn suggests that the CP can be modified, so that he proposed two principles—The Q-Principle and R-Principle.

(1). The Q-principle (Hearer-based):

Make your contribution more sufficient, say as much as you can (given R). Horn describes "the Q-principle as hearer-based economy

for the maximization of information content.”^[3] It akin to Grice’s maxim of Quantity.

(2). The R-principle (Speaker-based):

Make your contribution more necessary, say no more than you must (given Q). The R-principle was described as a speaker-based economy for the minimization of form, akin to Zipf’s least effort. The speaker who employs this principle uses the minimum form, so that the hearer is entitled to infer that the speaker means more than he says.

2、Levinson’s Q-,I-and M-principle

Levinson thinks the understanding and calculating of implicature can be achieved according to three principle—Q-principle, I-principle and M-principle.

(1). Q-principle

“Speaker’s maxim: Do not provide a statement that is informational weaker than your knowledge of the world allows, unless providing a stronger statement would contravene the I-principle.

Speaker: as informative as possible.

Recipient’s corollary: Take it that speaker made the strongest statement would consistent with what he knows.”^[4]

Hearer: understand to the degree that the speaker says.

(2). I-principle

Speaker’s maxim(the maxim of minimization): say as little as possible.

Recipient’s corollary: the enrichment rule. Amplify the informational content of the speaker’s utterance, by finding the most specific interpretation, up to what you judge to be the speaker’s intended point.

(3). M-principle

Speaker’s maxim: Do not use a prolix or marked expression without reason.

Recipient’s corollary: If the speaker used a prolix or marked expression M, he did not mean the same as he would have had used the unmarked expression U- specifically he was trying to avoid the stereotypical associations and I-implicature.

3. An Overview of Spoken English Learning

3.1 The Condition of Spoken English Learning in China

English as an international communication tool is playing a crucial role in global development. With the economic and cultural improvement of China, the popularity of English learning has reached its climax. Oral English as a significant part of English learning is gaining unprecedented attention. Therefore, more and more colleges put oral English learning on a high position of teaching plan.

However, teacher-centered teaching mode is adopted by most courses in the class, in which teachers have absolute authority and pay much attention to grammar and vocabulary rather than the practice of communication. In most conditions, teachers and students have no oral interaction between . It is very common that teachers keep saying and the students just listening and taking their notes in the whole class. Teachers dominate the most time to speak and students just keep silent and rarely open their mouth.

Furthermore, in students’ minds, score is the most important thing. So in the learning process, the most of Chinese students place emphasis on the correctness of grammar and the meaning of vocabulary instead of practice and expression. Therefore, out of class, they would spend most of their time in remembering words and studying the correctness of the sentences’ grammar. Then they will neglect and give up the opportunity to practice oral English. Finally, students have poor skill to apply what they have learned in actual communication or they can not effectively express what they want to say –we called“ 哑巴英语 ”in Chinese.

All in all, these learning patterns show the problems of oral English learning in China. Therefore, we should pay our attention on the condition of oral English learning.

3.2 The Main Reasons for Students’ Poor Oral English

3.2.1 Lack of cooperation in class

The traditional pattern of English learning is that teacher dominates the class. During the most time of class, teachers are keeping

speaking and students just play a role of listener and take their notes. There is no enough opportunity for teachers and students to have oral interaction with each other. This method can not arouse students' interest in English learning and have no motivation to open their mouths to speak and practice English.

In the same way, the cooperation among students is not active. When teachers give some open topics to discuss, some students worry about their pronunciations or correctness of sentence so that do not take part in the process of idea exchange. They always keep silent while others speak enthusiastically. Then they would not get enough practice in oral class and the learning result will not ideal.

3.2.2 Lack of oral practice out of class

Students take the score of examination and the accuracy of exercise as the standard of English level. For this reason, after class students do their best to input lots of English knowledge instead of open their mouth output what they have learned from book. Therefore students' ability of listening and speaking are far behind their reading and writing. Furthermore, language atmosphere is not good for students to practice, which make students do not have enthusiasm to communicate with others in English. Finally, after so many years' study, they are "deaf" and "dumb" in English communication.

3.2.3 Lack of pragmatic activity in oral English class

In traditional oral English classes, teachers' class design may neglect the pragmatic knowledge which we used everyday in our daily life and choose pedagogical tasks. Pedagogical tasks are those activities that students do in the classroom but may not take place in real life. For example, the students work in group. Each is given a picture. Most of the things in the pictures are the same, but there are also some differences. The students are asked to describe their picture to each other and identify the differences; teacher may divide students in several groups to discuss the solution or suggestion to some problem, such as "Give some useful suggestion about how to change the bad environment of campus". All these topics have no use in our actual speaking so that when students meet events in daily life they can not use what they had practiced in class to express their idea clearly and correctly.

4.The Value of Cooperation In Oral English Learning

"Cooperation is the process of working or acting together. In its simplest form it involves things working in harmony, while in its more complicated forms, it can involve something as complex as the inner workings of a human being or even the social patterns of a nation. It is the opposite of working separately in competition."

The cooperation in oral English learning is team work. Team work refers to a group of people who with ability and have common faith to support and cooperate with each other for the same purpose. It can transfer all resources and talents and remove all the phenomenon of discord and unfair automatically. At the same time, team work will give these sincere and selfless contributor appropriate returns. If the team is formed voluntarily, it will produce a strong and lasting power.

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