Motivating your students to talk

Exploring a content-based approach to teaching speaking
Agenda

Session 1

● Ice-breaker
● Common problems in the teaching of speaking
● What is a content-based approach? How might this approach help to solve these problems?

Session 2

● Discussion on sample speaking activities
● Tips on designing and administering effective speaking activities
‘Sweet’ introduction

1. Choose 1 piece of candy but DON’T eat it yet.
2. Each type of sweets represents one fact you need to tell others about yourself.
3. Take turns to introduce yourself, beginning with your name and then one fact for the type of candy you have.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Favourite leisure activity</th>
<th>One memorable event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[Image of chocolate]</td>
<td>[Image of marshmallows]</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Favourite place on earth</th>
<th>Wildcard</th>
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<tr>
<td>[Image of chocolate bar]</td>
<td>[Image of lozenges]</td>
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Voices from the classroom
What are the most common challenges in the teaching of speaking?
Discussion

● In your experience, what are the most common problems with teaching speaking?

● What do you think are the causes of these problems?

● How do you overcome them?
Reticence about speaking in English

- The state of ‘being hesitant and anxious about speaking in the target language’ (Bailey 2005, p.163)
- A common problem in many HK classrooms (e.g. Tsui 1996; Liu & Littlewood 1997; Littlewood 2000)
How reticence hinders oracy skills

According to Swain (1985)

- Passivity and reticence = *fewer* practice opportunities
- Learners are less likely to *notice the gap* between what they can say and what they intend to say
- Less likely to *challenge* themselves and make progress
Causes of reticence

According to teachers

● Students’ low proficiency
● Students’ fear of mistakes and peers’ derision

According to research

● Ss may simply resort to silence as a safe way out.
● Students’ fear might be teacher-induced.

Tsui (1996)
Surprising contributing factors

Classroom practices that were found to incur learner’s anxiety (Tsui 1996):

- Teacher’s unrealistic expectations
- Teachers’ intolerance of silence
- Teachers’ incomprehensible input
- Teachers’ uneven allocation of turns
Discussion

Consider what is problematic in each of the following scenarios. Explain your views to one another and suggest how you might conduct yourself differently if you were one of those teachers.

S: Dai-ma

T: Louder!

S: No.

Tsui (1996, p.150)
Scenario B

T: ‘Offered,’ that means…can you give me another word for ‘offered’? Another word?

S: Give.

T: Given, not give, because it’s passive voice…

Tsui (1996, p.151)
Scenario C

T: Don’t just look at the books. Just think from your general knowledge. Can you think?

T: Timmy, can you hurry up? What are you doing?


S: Skinny

T: Anything else? Affects, how does it affect you and your… (Tsui 1996, p.152)
Nationality and speaking anxiety--why are Chinese learners so quiet and passive in class?

There is a relationship between reticence in classrooms of Chinese learners and Confucian values of ‘face’ and ‘silence’ (Liu 2002; Woodrow 2006)

I need to fully absorb what is being taught first.

I don't want to ask a stupid question.

I need to respect my teacher and preserve harmony.
Two types of anxious language learners (Woodrow 2006)

**Information Retrieval Anxiety**

“When I speak to my teacher and ask some question to my teacher I usually feel very anxious. And when I say in front of the class and speak some question some topic I usually very anxious. I can’t remember anything I just maybe ah...ah...ah.”

**Skills Deficit Anxiety**

“When I stand in front of classmates and students and make a presentation I will feel anxious because I lack practice of speaking.”
The difficulty in teasing out the causes

“Level of language proficiency, self-efficacy, personality, motivation, willingness to speak the target language and other factors may interact with each other to determine whether a learner is passive or active/confident or nervous in the classroom.”

Jin & Cortazzi (2011, p.119)
Recommended strategies to reduce students’ reticence

Emotional support
- Establish a supportive climate
- Build good relationship with Ss
- Regard for students’ perspectives, interests and needs

Classroom organisation
- Establish classroom routines
- Use peer support and group work

Ready to rock?

READY TO ROLL!!
Recommended strategies to reduce students’ reticence

Instructional support

- Encourage students’ language use by lengthening wait time, modifying questions, accepting a variety of answers, writing answers before offering them to the whole class.
- Teach learning strategies explicitly and provide scaffolding to Ss with ‘skill deficit anxiety’ while relaxation technique to Ss with ‘information retrieval anxiety’.
- Design activities that focus on content rather than form.

Tsui 1996; Wooddrow 2006
Reflection

1. What do you think are the main causes of the problem of reticence in your own teaching context?

2. How would help your students overcome their reticence in terms of **emotional support**, **classroom organisation** and **instructional support**?
Will a CBI approach to speaking work for my students?

- what is CBI?
- what is the rationale for using CBI, particularly for teaching speaking?
- what are the various types of CBI?
Towards a content-based approach (CBI)

What is CBI?

CBI is an approach which draws on the core principles of communicative language teaching (CLT), which emphasize activities that involve *real communication* and *meaningful uses of language* promotes learning.
Definitions

- CBI is ‘...the integration of particular content with language teaching aims...the concurrent teaching of academic subject matter and second language skills’ (Brinton, Snow & Wesche, 1989)
- CBI is aimed at ‘the development of use-oriented second and foreign language skills’ and is ‘distinguished by the concurrent learning of a specific content and related language use skills’ (Wesche, 1993)
How CBI is supported other major language learning theories

**Stephen Krashen's SLA Theory:**
A focus on form will not result in language acquisition—only a focus on meaning will achieve this. For language acquisition to occur, learners must be exposed to sufficient amount of ‘comprehensible input’.

**Cognitive Learning Theory:**
Learners must pass through a series of stages in order to become autonomous. Successful completion of each stage only occurs where there are extensive opportunities for noticing, practice and feedback, with an emphasis on the development of learning strategies.

See Kasper (2000) for more
Premises for CBI

1. People learn a second language more successfully when they use the language as a means of acquiring information, rather than as an end to itself.

2. CBI better reflects learners’ need for learning a second language.

Richard and Rodgers (2001)
Premises for a CBI approach to speaking

- When there is a greater focus on content than form in a speaking task, learners are distracted from worries about making language errors and opportunities to develop fluency are maximised.
- Group work is often used in CBI. Less confident learners are more willing to speak up after having a discussion in their own group.
- CBI develops learners’ knowledge of the world and provides opportunities for obtaining, synthesizing and evaluating information from different resources, which can make students more independent and confident, helping them to break away from their traditional role as a passive recipient of knowledge.
CBI as a continuum

‘Models of CBI differ….All share, however, a common point of departure--the integration of language teaching aims with subject matter instruction.’ (Snow 2001, p.303)
**Content-driven or language-driven?**

- Content is taught in L2.
- Content learning is priority.
- Language learning is secondary.
- Learning objectives determined by content course goals or curriculum. Little accountability for language development.
- Student evaluated on content mastery.

- Content is used to learn L2.
- Language learning is priority.
- Content learning is incidental.
- Learning objectives determined by L2 course goals or curriculum. Content is a vehicle for language development.
- Students evaluated on language skills / proficiency, not held directly responsible for content-mastery.
Various examples of CBI

Learning English Through Rugby

NSS English Elective

Learning maths in an EMI school
Concerns about using a CBI approach

1. Students may feel they aren't improving their language skills when little attention is paid to the development of language skills and strategies.
2. Students may use their mother tongue rather than the target language during the lesson.
3. Students feel overwhelmed by the cognitive demands coming from the content.
4. It is hard to find information sources that are pitched at the right level for the students.
Questions for discussion

1. What do you see as your main focus in using a content-based approach?
2. What kinds of speaking activities do you envision your students doing in your content-based lessons?
3. What concerns do you have about using a content-based approach? How would you overcome them?
To sum up

- **L2 learning itself is a stressful process** and likely to generate much anxiety in the learners given the fact that they are required to perform in a language that they are still trying to master. This is especially true in the case of L2 listening and speaking (Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope 1986).
To sum up

- Acknowledging the effect of anxiety and creating a low-anxiety, supportive classroom are among the first steps to reduce reticence about speaking.
- CBI can help students focus on comprehension and meaning use of language. But for more effective learning to take place, explicit focus on language skills and strategies are still needed to help students engage in learning.
- Helping learners to overcome their anxiety takes time. However, making ongoing efforts to address it is well worth the effort.
Hey guys look
I'm a coffee break!
Ha ha get it?

Seriously though, I'm really hurt
Coming up

Examples of content-based activities will be shown to you for your evaluation and discussion.

Some guiding questions:

1. Is there any authentic, meaningful use of language?
2. Is there a balance between language and content?
3. Is adequate scaffolding provided for students to accomplish the task?
4. Are there any clear language objectives--what specific skills or strategies are being focused on in each activity?
5. Is the activity well structured and well-thought-out?
Activity 1: Agreeing without compromising
My comments

- *Familiarity with the topic*—boost learners’ confidence in using English.
- *Personalization* of the content speaking activity—make activities match students’ circumstances, interests and goals (See Bailey 2005).
- *A chance to disagree* with one another without doing any harm to their friendships.
- Expressing disagreement is a difficult task, *providing the kind of challenges needed by intermediate and advanced learners* (e.g. learning to present views with effective supporting details and temper disagreements to sound polite).
- Expressing disagreement is also a *useful strategy* to sustain conversations.
- *Useful expressions* for disagreeing politely are provided.
Activity 2: Logical Fallacies
My comments

- Learners will feel more confident when knowledge of debate is made *explicit* to them.
- Learners are allowed to initially focus *on content*, the task is then followed by an activity with *explicit attention to language*.
- Discussing the terms *in groups* allows students to discuss in a *low-risk environment* as they have the safety and support of the group.
Activity 3: Should prostitution be legalised?
My comments

- A *genuine controversy* with statements to stimulate discussion
- The ‘True or False’ task can *familiarise students with the topic*, which helps to increase their fluency, accuracy and confidence.
- Learners are guided step by step to *analyse their production*.
- Learners may *notice their gaps* even *without teacher’s input*.
- Ts may provide Ss with *appropriate and accurate linguistic models* so they know the specific language for making improvement/achieving their learning goals.
A few more tips

Even free discussions need support and structure

- Provide content and linguistic resources
- Phrase the activity with careful instructions and assign group roles
- Organise ways to give feedback
- Encourage as much contribution from all members and negotiation of meaning as possible

Hedge (2014, p.277-278)
A few more tips

Reduce language anxiety to the minimum

‘Reduce the **unpredictable and precarious** nature of the tasks is what it takes to break students away from their traditional passive role’

‘If feedback is done with great sensitivity to students’ self-esteem in a **trusting and supportive environment**, it should enhance their confidence and proficiency rather than inhibit their desire to speak English.’

Liu & Littlewood (1997, p.380)
Thank you

Q & A

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References


