

The Application 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 listening, speaking, reading and writing. In the past decades, the four basic skills of Chinese students have been greatly improved. But, these skills have not been developed at the same pace, especially the ability in oral English.*

The Cooperative Principle was proposed by American linguistics Grice, which is the theory of conversational implicature. The Cooperative Principle is one of the major principles guiding people's language learning and achieving good result. Studying the Cooperative Principle will be helpful for people to improve the skill of English and stimulate their learning interest. Therefore, the Cooperative Principle will make great contribution to oral English learning.

Keywords: *oral English learning; Cooperative Principle; cooperative learning; the application of CP*

1. INTRODUCTION

English is becoming an universal language with the earth turning into a small village. Due to the development of economy and culture, international communication depends much more on English. The significance of English has long been recognized by both Chinese teachers and their students. Therefore, learning English is becoming an irreplaceable part of life in those non-English countries, which heavily depends on teachers' guide.

In China, government, schools and parents pay more and more attention on children's English learning. But, the traditional teaching class refers to teacher-centered teaching mode, in which teachers have absolute authority and pay much attention to grammar and vocabulary rather than the practice of communication. Although some new teaching methods appear, the phenomenon of teacher-dominated still not completely changed. In most cases, there is no interaction between teachers and students, in the whole class teachers keep saying and the students just listening and study passively. As a result, some college student can understand what do others say in English, but can not express his idea effectively, and some even can not catch the meaning of speaker which is conveyed in English. This learning pattern would lead to the fact that students lack power in oral English learning and short of study efficiency. In order to solve this problem and improve English language learning, linguists proposed a lot of relevant theories and the Cooperative Principle is one of them.

Cooperative Principle was proposed by American famous linguistics Grice and regarded as a major contribution to the area of pragmatics which is not only plays an indispensable role in conversational implications, but also is a successful example showing how human communication is governed by principle. And Cooperative Principle was first introduced to China by Hu Zhuanglin in 1980s. For Grice, Cooperative Principle means "Make your contribution such as it required, at the stage where it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you engaged." [1]

When the Cooperative Principle was introduced into English language teaching, it received good result. And with the using of four maxims of 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 significant to apply Cooperative Principle to oral English learning.

2. AN INTRODUCTION TO COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLE

Cooperative Principle, put forward by H.P.Grice is a theory about people's conversation, which is an important component of pragmatics. CP states that interlocutor exhibits a specialized form of cooperation: they follow maxims of cooperation or deliberately break them to imply information (conversational implicature).

2.1. The Concept of Cooperative Principle

Herbert Paul Grice, was a British-educated philosopher of language, who spent the final two decades of his career in the United States. Grice's work on the nature of meaning has influenced the philosophical study of semantics. His theory of implicature is among the most important and influential contribution to contemporary pragmatics.

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:

Make your contribution such as it required, at the stage where it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you engaged.

In social science generally and linguistics specially, the Cooperative Principle describes how people interact with one another. 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. They are characteristically, to some degree at least, cooperative efforts; and each participant recognizes in them, to some extent, a common purpose or set of purpose, or at least a mutually accepted direction".[2] 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. Put more simply, people who obey the cooperative principle in their language will make sure that what they say in a conversation furthers the purpose of that conversation. Listeners and speakers must speak cooperatively and mutually accept one another to be understood in a particular way. Cooperative Principle describes how effective communication in conversation is achieved in common social situation.

2.2. Four Maxims of Cooperative Principle

Cooperation Principle can be divided into four maxims, called the Gricean maxims, which was proposed by Grice from the pragmatics of natural language. The Gricean maxims explain the link between utterance and what is understood from them. The maxim is based on his cooperative principle, which states "Make your contribution such as it required, at the stage where it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you engaged." CP describes how effective communication in conversation is achieved in common socials situation and divided into four maxims of quality, quantity, relation 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 B.

2. The maxim of quality

(1). the requirement of quality maxim, try to make your contribution one that is true.

- a. Do not say what you believe to be 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 obscurity of expression.
- b. Avoid ambiguity.
- c. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
- 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 bought 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 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 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

Language is a tool for communication and the carrier of culture. The most important job of language learning is to improve the skill of speaking in order to achieve the goal of communication. With the development of China and the important global position of English, spoken English learning has gained more and more emphasis. During the past decades learning, the level of oral English has made great progress, but there are also many problems in spoken language 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, there is no oral interaction between teachers and students. 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, mark is more important than anything. 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

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.

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. Lack of pragmatic activity in oral English class

In traditional oral English class, 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 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.”[5]

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.

4.1. The Necessity of Cooperation

With our economic development, cultural prosperity and comprehensive strength of our nation, the demand of high quality talents is increasing greatly. Strong team spirit and the consciousness of group can promote enterprise’s progress and prosperity. In other words, we should cultivate a kind of talents who not only have professional quality but also have a spirit of cooperation. In view of this requirement of market, our English teaching is faced more challenge and change. United Nation Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization holds that “In order to realize the all round development of people, the designation and organization of learning process must around four basic process—learn knowledge, learn to do things, learn to coexist and learn to behave oneself.” Coexistence refers to cultivate the spirit of participation and cooperation and to develop students’ team spirit.

Language as the carrier which is used to communicate and get along with people must take the educational mission. Language learning and the cultivation of cooperation can promote each other, the former one can help cultivate mutual aid spirit, while the latter one can promote the improvement of the former one and reflect the nature of communication. The process of interaction can improve the ability of students’ self-confidence and the motivation of seeking information. Therefore, it is necessary to adopt cooperation in oral English learning.

4.2. The Contribution of Cooperation

The cooperative learning has some good effects on English learning.

Firstly, cooperative learning is convenient to check the effect of learning and stimulate students’ motivation of study. When teachers finished one lesson or one unite, teachers can not know the learning result of students comprehensively. Then the cooperation between students can check each other and reflect the learning result timely. And cooperative learning must be based on individual learning, if there is no individual learning, the cooperative learning can not be carried out. Let students think questions independently before cooperative learning, then communicate with each other and solve the problem together. This method is very useful to improve students’ ability of English learning.

Secondly, cooperative learning is conductive to cultivate students’ cooperative consciousness and team spirit. In cooperative learning, every group has its own learning objective so members of each group is a community of interests. That is to say, the group can make success only if each member does a good job. Consequently, students would set up collective consciousness.

Thirdly, cooperative learning can make good use of positive factors and improve the learning efficiency. It is very common to see that the learning condition of each student is different in English learning process. The cooperative learning changed the teacher-centered phenomenon in class and motivate the participation of students. Students communicate with each other when they meet difficulties and learn some useful things from their classmates. Besides, the cooperative learning can make students to solve small problems by themselves and even make contribute to explaining the difficult things. Eventually, the learning efficiency of all students is made a great progress.

Practice has proved that cooperative learning has positive influence on the study of language. As a result, we should make full use of the advantages of cooperative learning to cultivate the students’ language skill to provide more practice chance and dig their learning potential.

5. THE APPLICATION OF COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLE IN ORAL ENGLISH LEARNING

The importance of oral English learning is getting more and more clearly. Cooperative principle makes great effect on the spoken English learning in many ways. The final goal of English learning is communicating with others fluently and correctly. And the cooperative principle is a theory about communication and has positive effect on the ability of oral English. Therefore, in order to stimulate students' accumulation on English knowledge and avoid making linguistic errors and pragmatic mistakes, the application of cooperative principle will give a right guide of spoken English learning and achieve a good result in solving the problems which exist in oral English study.

5.1. The Application of Quantity Maxim in Spoken English Content Design

The requirement of quantity maxim is trying to provide necessary information and not to offer redundant information. That means make your contribution as informative as is required and do not make your contribution more informative than that is required. Therefore the core of Quantity maxim is providing necessary information. According to the requirement of quantity maxim, the content of spoken English should be designed properly.

For the oral English teaching, the content of class should be organized reasonably and properly in order to adapt to the specific topic or teaching purpose. On one hand, if the teaching content and conversational practice which is involved in class exceed the actual need, students would feel tired and have no motivation to practice these activities. Then the result of this teaching pattern will not good. On the other hand, if the content of teaching is not sufficient to fulfill students' requirement, students would not get enough knowledge and practice efficiently. Beyond all question, the result of this learning pattern would not ideal. Therefore, in order to improve students' oral skill and achieve good result, teachers should make a suitable learning plan to meet the need of students.

Cognitive competence of college students has stepped into maturity stage. And the breadth and depth of their mind has reached another level. Therefore, students should draw up a reasonable study plan according to their real ability. These students whose competence of oral English is strong can make a larger amount of study plan and higher requirement. On the contrary, students who do not have good oral skill can reduce the learning task and set a proper goal so that to improve their competence.

All in all, according to the requirement of quantity maxim, the designation of the content of oral learning should focus on learning requirement and the ability of acceptance of students. Then the result of oral English in actual learning will become better and better.

5.2. The Application of Quality Maxim in Communicational Situation Design

The definition of quality maxim is trying to make your contribution on what is true. That means do not say what you believe to be false or you lack adequate evidence. Because the maxim of quality emphasizes the reality, so we should create conversational situations which are closed to real world and correct mistakes timely.

The process of oral English is the process of communication. And the purpose of oral English learning is to make students open their mouth and exchange ideas with people. As a result, spoken English learning should lay stress on the effectiveness of communicational activities and create real conversational situation in class. Students can take the way of role-play, topic discussion and group debate which can provide enough opportunity to practice oral English in real atmosphere. The content of oral exercise must close to daily life, such as shopping, dating, apply for a post or media events, sport events which can take place regularly in life. In these activities, students could imagine the role they are and act accordingly, then increase their ability gradually.

Out of class, students should seize every opportunity to practice oral English. We can communicate with roommates in English when we are in dormitory or take part in some activities which provide the chance to communicate with foreigners such as English corner. In spare time, we can listen to English songs and watch English movie, we can learn new words and authentic expression from them. All of these exercises will provide us opportunity to enlarge our English knowledge and improve our oral skill.

Besides, linguistics Du Lei says, "People can not learn language without any mistakes." [7] Making mistake is unavoidable in the process of language acquisition. So teachers should correct students' communicational mistakes and false statement without interrupt their normal communication in class. Similarly, students should treat their mistakes which occur in the learning process correctly instead of neglect these errors. In order to keep the quality of language learning, when students find problems in their study, they should work hard to correct them in time. When they meet some problems which they can not solve by themselves, they can ask teachers' guide and classmates' help.

Creating communicative situations close to reality and correcting errors timely can not only keep the quality of students' learning and practice, but also can increase students' knowledge and information. Ultimately, we can enhance the competence of oral English gradually.

5.3. The Application of Relation Maxim in Layout Oral Activities

The heart of relation maxim is to be relevant. Therefore, when apply this maxim in oral English learning, it requires oral activities should connect with learning theme, students' knowledge level and communicational intention.

The relevance between learning content and topic can be implemented step by step. According to the maxim of relation, in the real learning process we can divide the study job into different parts which closely associate to the theme of learning. In the class, when doing the every conversational topic teachers should give a set of keywords around the topic then make students think some related information. At the same time, students should figure out some related words and sentence patterns which have learned in the past. Then, organize sentences which can express their ideas with all these learned information. At the same time, we should learn certain amount of related new things to enlarge our knowledge. Finally, join all these information into conversation to communicate.

Besides, the knowledge accumulation and conversational intention are also significant in oral activities' designation. When we design oral English activities, we should make students' knowledge accumulation as standard. Students can not get ideal improvement if the difficulty of the learning topic surpasses or under the level of the storage of their knowledge. Therefore, teachers should select appropriate teaching material according to students' real competence and students should choose reasonable oral practice and activities base on their knowledge. Similarly, if students' practices are connected to their communicative intention, they will make outstanding job. Otherwise, they will get frustration and just slight over the practice.

So, apply the maxim of relation in oral English learning which connects to the learning topic, students' knowledge storage and communicational intention will bring good effect on oral English learning.

5.4 The Application of Manner Maxim in Class Style

The theme of manner maxim is doing things clearly, orderly and briefly. On the basis of this requirement, the class should be concise, clear and organized.

From teachers' guiding words to the instruction of students' activities, even the multimedia courseware should be concise, clear and avoid ambiguous. In oral class, the content and style of the class which are too complicated or circuitous can prevent students from gaining information directly. Teachers should listen and observe carefully, keep the attitude of sensitive, tolerant and passion all the time. Meanwhile, keep a good balance between the participation of teacher and students to carry out oral English learning successfully.

For students, they should do their best to match up teacher's teaching procedure actively in order to guarantee the class runs orderly. In class, they should observe discipline and do not make some actions which can disrupt the order of the class. Besides, students should avoid words like "maybe, perhaps, likely and about" or hyponyms, superordinate which may produce ambiguity in conversation. For examples, when you ask an English guest "Would you like some meat?" He will don not know how to answer the question, because "meat" is the general name of all kinds of meat. Therefore, if there is more than one kind of meat, the guest would not know how to answer.

Furthermore, they should submit themselves to the direction of teacher to insure the task accomplish successfully. When teachers and students cooperate with each other perfectly, the result of oral English teaching would achieve wonderful result.

As a result, apply the maxim of manner in class style will keep the class organized, clear and make the competence of oral English improve greatly

6. CONCLUSION

This paper focuses on Grice's Cooperative Principle, which makes great contribution to the English language learning, especially the study of oral English. Due to the development of economy and culture, international communication depends much more on English language. So English learning become more and more important. But oral English is always the difficult part of English learning. Traditional oral English learning puts much emphasis on linguistic form but neglects the importance of practice and cooperation. For this reason, although students made quite a great effort, but they can not speak efficiently when they met with specific situation. Cooperative Principle was proposed by linguistics Grice, which plays an important role in changing this phenomenon. It gives us some useful guidance and suggestion in the designation of oral English learning and gets good result.

It is apparently that Cooperative Principle has great significance in oral English learning. In class, using cooperative principle properly can change traditional teaching pattern and create an active and harmonious classroom atmosphere. Then teachers and students have more interaction in class, teachers can know the problems which exist in students' learning process and correct them timely. Similarly, students can increase their learning interest and confidence in the process of cooperation. Therefore, the learning result of students in class and their oral English competence will be improved greatly and quickly.

Besides, Cooperative principle can also make students learn cooperation in their study. Therefore, they can exchange ideas with each other and learn useful knowledge and skill from other people in the process of cooperative learning. Cooperative learning can also make students realize the significance of cooperation and team spirit in their study. So students make good use of the advantages of cooperative principle can make progress out of class.

Cooperative Principle is an important component of pragmatics. The principles and maxims of it are about people's conversation. Cooperative Principle can neatly explain the literary meaning and the implication of conversation. Therefore, apply Cooperative Principle in spoken English learning can be conducive to develop students' oral ability, which is viewed as the ultimate goal of oral English learning. Then the competence and confidence of students can improve gradually.

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