

Promoting Learners' Speaking Ability by Socioaffective Strategies

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This paper aims to point out the efficiency of socioaffective strategies on Asian students' speaking competence. This paper outlines the level of strategy use by language learners and particularly emphasizes on the use of socioaffective strategies that language learners frequently overlook. By adapting the five phases of the CALLA instructional sequence (Chamot & O'Malley, 1994; Chamot et al., 1999, as cited in Chamot, 1999), the paper illustrates a useful way for language learners (especially Asian learners) and teachers to know how to make good use of socioaffective strategies in promoting speaking ability.

Introduction

Language learning strategies are broadly conceptualized as cognitive, metacognitive, and socioaffective strategies (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990). Students consciously or unconsciously employ language learning strategies in language learning. Nevertheless, a number of research studies (Chamot & Küpper, 1989; Goh & Kwah, 1997) have discovered that students rarely utilize socioaffective strategies. These studies provide the evidence that learners overlook the efficiency of socioaffective strategies (Chamot & Küpper, 1989; Goh & Kwah, 1997).

All too often, language learners neglect the effectiveness of socioaffective strategies. Therefore, the integration of socioaffective strategies into classes should be taken into serious consideration. The paper stresses on those following issues:

- What effective applications can language teachers integrate socioaffective strategies into classes in order to promote Asian students' speaking ability?
- What useful implications can language learners and teachers employ when using language learning strategies in language learning?

The Efficiency of Socioaffective Strategies for Asian Students in the ESL Environment

Learning how to speak English fluently and accurately is always a grand task for Asian students who study abroad. Due to the significance of interaction between the instructor and students, students and students at U.S. education institutions, speaking competence can hardly be overvalued. However, because of the limitation of speaking competence and the influence by Confucianism, some Asian students are not inclined to express opinions in class; some appear conservative and uncomfortable, and seldom ask questions that they do not understand (Brice & Roseberry-Mackibbin, 1999; Lim, 2003). In other words, "influenced by Confucianism, students tend to value quietness, and be less opinioned" (Lim, 2003, p.1). Commonly, they rarely ask questions even though they do not understand the content that the instructor lectures, and they seldom express their own opinions (Lim, 2003). Lack of speaking competence prohibits the opportunities for Asian students to interact with the instructor and peers in the ESL classroom. Moreover, due to the difference between Asian and the United States' educational systems, Asian students are likely to express a conflict with peers and the instructor in the ESL classroom (Lacina, 2001).

Because the teaching and learning styles in the United States are student-centered, dynamic and lively way to learning and teaching, discussions and communications naturally occur in the classroom (Lacina, 2001). Without the target language

speaking competence and strong motivation, Asian students have a propensity to talk to each other in their native language and murmur when encountering questions (Lim, 2003). These behaviors suggest Asian students have difficulties engaging in the classroom activities and discussions without the speaking competence and motivation. As a result, both language teachers and learners should take into account knowing how to use socioaffective strategies to advance learners' speaking ability and simultaneously help those learners actively engage in the classroom activities.

Researchers (O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzanares, Russo, & Küpper, 1989, as cited in Chamot, 1993) have studied the results of language learning strategies that were taught to English as a second language (ESL) learners in numerous different tasks, including vocabulary, listening, and speaking tasks. The outcomes of the studies reveal that language learning strategies are primarily of benefit for the speaking task (Chamot, 1993). It is patently attainable for learners to accomplish the goal of communicative competence in the target L2 by language learning strategies. Additionally, Bialystock (1978) recognizes that when learners communicate in the target L2, they can consciously apply language learning strategies in order to deal with the difficulties they encounter.

As commonly accepted, socioaffective strategies are the strategies that help learners regulate and control emotions, motivations, and attitudes towards learning, as well as help learners learn through contact and interaction with others (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). For example, by means of socioaffective strategies, language learners can lower anxiety by using some mental techniques and solve problems through teacher-student or peer interactions (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Therefore, socioaffective strategies can be regarded as a useful approach for Asian learners to accelerate their speaking competence and vigorously interact with native speakers and instructors in the ESL classroom.

Various researchers have devoted themselves to identifying the strategies used by students. Some Researchers (Chamot & Küpper, 1989) assert that the cognitive strategies are the most frequently used strategy. Meanwhile, learners apply far fewer metacognitive than cognitive strategies, and seldom employ socioaffective strategies. Some researchers (Goh & Kwah, 1997) report high use of metacognitive strategies and low use of socioaffective strategies; in other word, students regularly employ metacognitive strategies in language learning and rarely utilize socioaffective strategies. The previous research studies have shown a consistent perspective that language learners tend not to use socioaffective strategies in language learning.

Those previous research studies tell us that language learners are apt to use confined learning strategies and socioaffective strategies are frequently overlooked by learners. Consequently, the paper aims to provide Asian students and language teachers with an effective way to successfully promote speaking competence by means of socioaffective strategies.

Applications and Recommendations for Language Teachers and Learners

In order to help students recognize the power of socioaffective strategies, assist Asian students to improve their speaking competence, and stimulate Asian students' motivation to master their speaking competence, educators can constantly carry out the strategy research and integrate socioaffective strategies into class (Kinoshita, 2003). There are five phases that the teacher and learners can follow (adapted from the five phases of the CALLA instructional sequence, Chamot & O'Malley, 1994; Chamot et al., 1999, as cited in Chamot, 1999).

Firstly, the teacher needs to diagnose learners' level of strategy use. The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL, Oxford, 1990, p.293-300) questionnaire can be utilized to determine learners' use of language learning strategies because questionnaires are "cost-effective and easy to administer" (McDonough, 2001, p.2). In these previous research studies, the results show that students seldom use socioaffective strategies. Therefore, the particular attention is needed for the teacher to notice whether learners neglect of utilizing socioaffective strategies.

Secondly, the teacher can offer learners knowledge to know the characteristics, effectiveness, and applications of socioaffective strategies. In this stage, it is essential for the teacher to present each strategy with a specific explanation and help learners know how to use each strategy in a given situation (Chamot, 1999). For example, the teacher can teach learners to try to relax when they are afraid of speaking English. Meanwhile, the teacher is supposed to "weave strategy into regular classroom events in a natural, and comfortable way" (Oxford, 1996, p.39, as cited in McDonough, 2001) and create the supportive and encouraging environment for language learners.

Thirdly, in order to offer hands-on practice for Asian students to use socioaffective strategies, collaborative works with classmates are effective in this phase (Chamot, 1999). The teacher assigns students into several small groups consisting of at least one native speaker. Learners in each group can exchange opinions of different cultures, share their learning experiences, as well as complete a certain task. Another application in this stage is to encourage Asian students to have an individual meeting with the teacher. During the meeting, the teacher can have relaxed conversations with Asian students and try to understand the difficulties they encounter while studying abroad. The teacher provides opportunities for Asian students to express their feelings in English and to practice their English-speaking skills that are the powerful ways in which to accomplish the use of socioaffective strategies.

Fourthly, giving Asian students chances to evaluate the usefulness of socioaffective strategies is critical in this phase (Chamot, 1999). The teacher can apply group or individual interviews, questionnaire, and open-ended questions for Asian learners to express their feelings towards using socioaffective strategies (Chamot, 1999). For example, the teacher can ask Asian learners "Do you think talking to native speakers can improve your English speaking competence?" Therefore, both students and the teacher can evaluate whether socioaffective strategies affirmatively influence Asian students' speaking competence and motivation or not.

Finally, the optimal goal of language learning strategies is to guide students to become better, autonomous, and confident learners (Chamot, 1999). In order to encourage students to depend more on themselves instead of the teacher, the teacher needs to ask students to use those effective socioaffective strategies in the classroom contexts and in daily life as well. Obviously, it takes time for learners to know how to successfully incorporate socioaffective strategies in language learning. Language teachers need to give language learning strategy instruction patiently, and learners are required to use the strategy consistently. It is hoped that learners can utilize socioaffective strategies whenever they speak English even without the teachers' supervision.

Implications for Language Teachers and Learners

First, a practical implication is that Asian students are supposed to know how to use a wide variety of language learning strategies, as well as understand how to use language learning strategies flexibly. Language learners tend to use confined and fixed language learning strategies (Fedderholdt, 1998). In language learning, it is indispensable for learners to reflect on their own learning process, and habitually estimate whether the use of language learning strategies is effective for improving their language proficiency or not (Fedderholdt, 1998). From previous research studies (Chamot & Küpper, 1989; Goh & Kwah, 1997), it is undoubted that learners overlook the efficiency of socioaffective strategies. Consequently, language learners are supposed to put particular attention to noticing whether they disregard the use of socioaffective strategies. Meanwhile, language teachers should concentrate on integrating language learning strategy training in class and explain the effectiveness of each strategy (Chamot, 1999). Every student has potential to become a successful learner and achieve the success of language tasks when obtaining the knowledge of acting wisely in choosing which strategies to integrate.

Second, another implication is that applying language learning strategies in the language classrooms should be treated as a long-term instruction. There is no positive variation between learners' speaking competence and the use of socioaffective strategies in a short period of the treatment. The successful acquisition of the speaking competence can be achieved only on condition that language teachers give the strategy use instruction patiently, and learners employ socioaffective strategies continuously.

Finally yet importantly, special efforts should be concentrated on helping improve Asian students' motivation to learn English-speaking competence. Language teachers can provide Asian students with practical practice and reinforcement of the use of socioaffective strategies (Kinoshita, 2003), such as co-operating with classmates and teachers. These activities increase learners' motivation and efforts to master English-speaking competence. Language learners can integrate socioaffective strategies not only in the classroom contexts but also in everyday life (Chamot, 1999). Looking for opportunities to have conversations with native speakers, encouraging oneself with a reward when performing well in speaking English, and asking questions in English can effectively help learners to stimulate their motivation to master English-speaking competence.

Conclusion

For promoting English ability, receiving higher education, and developing the international perspectives, the population of Asian students has increased steadily in American colleges and universities recently. It is clear that Asian students bear much anxiety and pressure while studying abroad (Parr et al., 1992). According to plenty of research studies (Parr et al., 1992), international students with better language proficiency can adjust to the foreign environment more easily. Therefore, how to advance learners' language proficiency has always been a major mission in the profession of TESOL.

From this article, it is obvious that socioaffective strategies can be considered as an effective approach to accelerate Asian learners' speaking competence as well as their learning motivation. Both language teachers and learners are supposed to evaluate whether socioaffective strategies are being overlooked or not. Moreover, socioaffective strategies should be fully integrated into classroom contexts and everyday learning. Only when Asian students know how to make good use of socioaffective strategies in both the ESL classroom environment and everyday life can they improve the speaking competence and motivation.

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