

**A CASE STUDY OF ENGLISH L2 STUDENTS
SPEAKING SKILL IN THE SCHOOL OF INFORMATION
AND TELECOMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

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В статье представлены результаты исследования путей обучения разговорной англоязычной речи студентов Монгольского государственного университета науки и технологии.

Ключевые слова: обучение иностранному языку, коммуникативная практика, практика речи.

This article presents a case study that examined the beliefs and practices of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) teacher in relation to teaching second language (L2) speaking. Overall, the findings indicate that the teacher's stated beliefs converge with her classroom practices. However, instances of divergence were also observed. Potential reasons for the patterns of divergence include the program expectations, the need to maintain the instructional flow of the class, and the novice teacher's lack of teaching experiences in an EAP program. Results suggest the need for EAP teachers to explore the sources of their beliefs and systematically, and regularly, examine their classroom practices through reflective practice in order to monitor their beliefs and classroom practices.

Key words: teaching L2, classroom practices, communicative, speaking practice.

Communicative and whole language instructional approaches promote integration of speaking, listening, reading, and writing in ways that reflect natural language use. Speaking is one of the most important skills to be developed and enhanced as means of effective communication.

Speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing *and* receiving and processing information [1; 2; 3]. Its form and meaning are dependent on the context in which it occurs, including the participants themselves, their collective experiences, the physical environment, and the purposes for speaking. It is often spontaneous, open-ended, and evolving. However, speech is not always unpredictable. Language functions (or patterns) that tend to recur in certain discourse situations [e.g., declining an invitation or requesting time off from work], can be identified and charted [3]. Speaking requires that learners not only know how to produce specific points of language such as grammar, pronunciation, or vocabulary [*linguistic competence*], but also that they understand when, why, and in what ways to produce language [*sociolinguistic competence*]. Finally, speech has its own skills, structures, and conventions different from written language [3; 4; 5]. A good speaker synthesizes this array of skills and knowledge to succeed in a given speech act.

A speaker's skills and speech habits have an impact on the success of any exchange [Van Duzer, 1997]. Speakers must be able to anticipate and then produce the expected patterns of specific discourse situations. They must also manage discrete elements such as turn-taking, rephrasing, providing feedback, or redirecting [3]. For example, a learner involved in the exchange with the salesperson described previously must know the usual pattern that such an interaction follows and access that knowledge as the exchange progresses. The learner must also choose the correct vocabulary to describe the item sought, rephrase or emphasize words to clarify the description if the clerk does not understand, and use appropriate facial expressions to indicate satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the service.

Other skills and knowledge that instruction might address include the following:

- producing the sounds, stress patterns, rhythmic structures, and intonations of the language;
- using grammar structures accurately;
- assessing characteristics of the target audience, including shared knowledge or shared points of reference, status and power relations of participants, interest levels, or differences in perspectives;
- selecting vocabulary that is understandable and appropriate for the audience, the topic being discussed, and the setting in which the speech act occurs;
- applying strategies to enhance comprehensibility, such as emphasizing key words, rephrasing, or checking for listener comprehension;
- using gestures or body language; and
- paying attention to the success of the interaction and adjusting components of speech such as vocabulary, rate of speech, and complexity of grammar structures to maximize listener comprehension and involvement [2].

Therefore, seeking opportunities to actively use the language is crucial to be fluent speakers. Lewis [7, p. 158–159] suggested “that learners could start out their participation in the classroom by asking information questions, for example asking the teacher’s explanation on how to translate a passage, sharing their opinions with their classmates and teachers, for example, by commenting briefly on the topic of discussion, making a connection between the current lesson and the previous ones, reporting the reading predictions, making inferences, making generalizations and justifying their viewpoints.” She further suggested “that learners participate in the classroom by adding information to someone else’s points, agreeing or disagreeing, asking for clarification, giving examples from other readings, own experience or of other people’s, presenting both sides of an argument and suggesting an untested hypothesis” [7, p. 159]. Essberger (2000) and Rubin and Thompson (1982) suggested that learners take the opportunity to answer the questions asked by the teacher and perform all classroom activities. Besides paired or group activities, communicative participation could also be accomplished by means of presentations as suggested by Essberger [1998].

In Mongolia as ESL, the problem of speaking skills is crucial. A number of researchers investigated this field and came to the conclusion about students’ low level of speaking ability and their inability to speak confidently and fluently. Students who study English as a foreign language usually have limited opportunities to speak English outside the classroom [Zhang, 2009] and also limited exposure to English speakers or members of the international community.

Pronunciation, vocabulary, and collocations are singled out as important factors to be emphasized in building fluency for ESL speakers.

Since English is a foreign language in our country, most students are not familiar with it. They use English more frequent only inside the class and less frequent outside the class. Whereas, students' have limited time to learn English in class, and they still do not have enough encouragement to practice English outside the class in order to get familiar with English. This case brings a problem that make students have difficulties to communicate in English.

This article will analyze the causes that make the students difficult to communicate in English and suggest some solutions that can overcome the difficulties.

One of the academic programs, the Bachelor degree provided by our university is a technical translator by language – major students. In order to investigate the perceived English-speaking problems of the ESL as English major students, the study reported here used semi-structured interview, which aimed for “concrete and complex illustrations” [Wolcott, 1994, p. 364] and thus provided the students with opportunities to talk about their experiences in their own words.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all the participants who are majoring in technical translator and their Spoken English have been taught by a professional native speaker for two semesters, over 96 hours. Each interview, conducted in English or Mongolian depending on the interviewee's preference, ranged in length from approximately 20 to 30 minutes. Each interviewee was asked to describe their English-speaking experience as English language learners during the program. Each interview centered on the difficulties with speaking in English.

After the interview I divided their problems into some categories according to Wolcott's research. Some student's interviews are shown in the categories.

1. Inadequate Vocabulary

In the present study, inadequate vocabulary was also reported as a prevalent concern among the students:

I think there is a gap between my vocabulary range when I write and speak. I mean when I am writing, I have enough time to figure out the most appropriate words and phrases. But when it comes to speaking, some words and phrases may never come to my mind, so my expression may not deliver my intended meaning precisely. [Davkharbayr. G]

“In some social situations that involve use of highly colloquial language, I'll find that I face a shortage of vocabulary and I can't express accurately what I want to say.” [Bertsesteg. E]

‘Working in pairs (in groups), I often begin to use my native language. Because I feel shy speaking English to be afraid of making mistakes.’ [Saikhanbileg. D]

‘Sometimes I do not have but also enough information on the topics discussed even in my native language not only limited vocabulary in English.’ [Bilegsaikhan. H]

Almost all the student thus agreed with the view that this vocabulary problem was the major reason why they sometimes could not express themselves clearly and appropriately. They also believed that this contributed directly to a lack of fluency in their speech. During the interviews, they all emphasized a need to further expand their vocabulary.

2. Grammar as a Stumbling Block

Like vocabulary, almost all the interviewees mentioned grammar as a stumbling block to their spoken English:

Sometimes, some simple grammar points like a verb’s third-person singular form, I already have the concept of subject-verb agreement in my head. But when teacher asks questions suddenly, I can’t observe this rule and end up using ‘do’ when the subject is ‘he or she’ [Davkharbayr. G]

‘I’m particularly bothered by the past tense that leads to a variety of inflectional forms of verbs. When I speak, I tend to switch unconsciously from past tense to present tense’ [Saikhanbileg. D].

‘Actually, I have no time to think when teacher ask question and I answer the questions with grammar mistakes. So that it is a big problem with my grammar in my speaking’ [Bilegsaikhan. H]

Some students reported that to ensure grammatical accuracy, they would think about the particular grammar item being involved before producing the utterance.

3. Imperfectly Learned Pronunciation and Intonation

Some students mentioned in the interviews that they had to speak carefully in order to focus on pronouncing certain words (especially those less common words) and sound clusters accurately. “When I speak fast, there will likely be inaccuracies in some sounds”, one of them commented. Others said that they got problems with some particular vowels or consonants: “I’m not quite clear about the sounds of ‘a’, ‘ae’, and ‘th’” [Bilegsaikhan. H].

There was also mention of articulation errors [for example, dropped final consonant clusters], although these errors would not lead to unintelligibility. Some students in this study also appeared to have trouble with words that had both American and British pronunciations.

4. Poor Environment Outside Class

All participants mentioned that they had studied English for 5-7 years in the high school, but they had not been taught speaking skill only taught a lot of grammar. However, they are taking English Spoken classes in the university; they have a poor environment outside class to use English.

In this study we discussed the problems that make L2 Students difficult in speaking English.

The first cause is problem with vocabulary and grammar. When students speak in English, they usually feel nervous because of their limited vocabulary. English always deals with reference of time while Mongolian does not have three. Moreover, there are singular and plural forms that the students have to distinguish and still many forms that have to be learned. Most students are very easy to get confused with English grammar, while grammar is very needed to form a right sentence. If the students do not have grammar mastery, of course they will not be able to produce sentences that grammatically right. Realizing that the grammar students have is very weak, so they feel embarrassed when they want to produce English sentences orally.

The second cause that makes the students difficult in speaking English is that the environment does not support the students to speak English frequently. The environment here means the people outside the class. Those people may think that the students just want to show off when they speak English for daily conversation. The response that the students get makes them loose their self-confidence to improve their speaking. Since the students do not want to be rejected by the people around them, so they use their native language in daily conversation. That makes the students unable to communicate in English fluently outside the class.

There are two ways to encourage students to overcome their problem. The first one is a way for the teacher to do. It is considered necessary for the teacher to force the students only to speak English during the class. The teacher may fine the students every time they speak their native language. The teacher himself must be able to convince his students to be brave to speak English, does not matter if they have very bad grammar. Just say whatever the students want to say. And the teachers must convince their students that making errors is a normal thing in learning. This way will raise students' confidence to try to speak English. It will be better if the teachers do not give correction every time their students make errors, but they should give feedback and give explanation for every error after the students finish their speech.

The second solution is for the students themselves. They can have an English conversation club that consists of their own classmates. They can share and talk about anything in English during that time. In this club, they can learn together. Students can correct each other without feeling embarrassed. English will become students' routine by doing that activity.

In conclusion, by forcing the students only to speak English during the class and having conversation club will solve their difficulties to speak English.

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