

A Study of the Cooperative Principle Application in College Oral English Teaching and IELTS Speaking Teaching

Ruoning Wang^{1,*†}

¹ School of Languages Cultures & Societies, The University of Leeds, Leeds, West Yorkshire, LS2 9JT, The United Kingdom

*Corresponding author. Email: ¹ml21rw@leeds.ac.uk.

†Those authors contributed equally.

ABSTRACT

Oral English teaching focuses on many factors including students' communicative competencies, vocabularies, pronunciations, and grammar to cultivate students' intercultural communication ability. Although it has attracted the attention of researchers at home and abroad to oral English teaching, few scholars have studied the application of the Cooperative Principle in oral English teaching. Both IELTS speaking and College Oral English teaching always combine the Cooperative Principle. Therefore, students, teachers, and native speakers were invited to attend questionnaires and interviews in this study. With analysis of the data, the paper studied the differences in the Cooperative Principle application between college oral English classes and IELTS speaking class, and functions of the principle in IELTS Speaking teaching. Furthermore, there are differences in vocabularies and pronunciation accuracy between college oral English teaching and IELTS speaking teaching, which is one of the reasons for improper usage of expressions. Hopefully, this study could make some contributions to college oral English teaching by studying the application of the Cooperative Principle in IELTS speaking teaching.

Keywords: Cooperative Principle; Oral English Teaching; College Oral English; IELTS Speaking.

1. INTRODUCTION

Language, specific to human beings, plays an indispensable role in our daily life. One of the most important languages using skills is speaking, which can directly reflect one person's English level to some extent. The Cooperative Principle (CP) is often used in conversations consciously or unconsciously. This paper takes the proficiency test's speaking test International English Language Testing System (IELTS) Speaking test as a case study based on CP. According to the questionnaire survey and interviews, this paper discusses the defects of college oral English teaching, the difference between the application of CP in college oral English teaching and IELTS speaking teaching. More detailed information is shown in the following parts.

2. A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLE AND THE IELTS SPEAKING TEST

2.1. The Cooperative Principle

Herbert Paul Grice is a well-known British-educated philosopher of language. He suggests that there is a set of assumptions guiding the conduct of conversation. This is what he calls the Cooperative Principle, which is one of the widely-accepted linguistic theories [1]. It also provides the basis for the further theories put forward by other scholars, such as Leach's Politeness Principle and Sperber's Relevance Theory [2][3].

Grice formulates the principles and its maxims that participants will be allowed to obey the rules as follows: "make your conversational contribution such as it is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" [4]. There are four maxims of the

Cooperative Principle: the Maxim of Quantity, the Maxim of Quality, the Maxim of Relation, and the Maxim of Manner. The specific contents are as follows:

“A. The Maxim of Quality: Try to make your true contribution one.

- a. Do not say what you believe to be false*
- b. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence*

B. The Maxim of Quantity:

- a. Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purpose of the exchange)*
- b. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required*

C. The Maxim of Relation:

Be relevant

D. The Maxim of Manner: Be perspicuous

- a. Avoid obscurity of expression*
- b. Avoid ambiguity*
- c. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity)*
- d. Be orderly” [1]*

CP can improve the progress of the dialogue, which helps our conversation more clearly and efficiently. Sometimes violating the principles may bring us a sense of humor and save us from unintentionally awkward situations, but it would be better to be relevant with the conversation and try to be as clear as possible. Nowadays, the CP cannot only be used in writing and listening but also could be used in oral English teaching. Its abundant pedagogical value has laid a solid theoretical foundation for further research.

2.2. The IELTS Speaking Test

IELTS is one of the famous international standardized English proficiency tests. As a highly recognized international English test, it has been recognized by many countries and regions around the world. As an important requirement for studying abroad and immigration, its authoritative, professional and scientific is unarguable. Thus, it can be used to assess a person's English proficiency in a comparatively more comprehensive and scientific way.

As one of the key aspects of assessment, the speaking test cannot be abandoned, which also makes most Chinese candidates worry about the score of the speaking test when they are taking the tests. IELTS speaking test will be based on a more realistic contextual situation, and evaluate the candidates' oral English capability from three different aspects. The Speaking test is divided into three sections, Part 1 is the introduction and general questions, Part 2 is the long turn, and Part 3 is the analytical discussion [5]. During the speaking test, the examiner will not only ask candidates several questions

face-to-face from the question bank in the corresponding season in Part 1 but also let candidates have a two-minute presentation with showed questions in Part 2, which means those two parts are testing candidates' daily talk and public speaking capabilities. And in the most difficult part in the whole speaking test — Part 3, the examiner will ask random questions in a wide range of directions which is not in the question bank based on Part 2's topic. And most questions are from the social perspective, which means this part is testing critical thinking capability. In about 15 minutes, the test examines the candidates' speaking skills in different ways.

As one of the authoritative language proficiency tests, it has scientific grading standards. The speaking test, has four evaluating criteria: language fluency and coherence, lexical resource, grammatical range and accuracy, and pronunciation. The first criterion is fluency and coherence. It refers to candidates' capability to speak English at length, including organizing their ideas logically and appropriately signposting. It also refers to candidates' ability to express ideas and justify opinions and discuss and speculate about issues without long pauses or repetition of the same words. The second criterion is the lexical resource. Lexical resources pay attention to the lexical range used by candidates. The wider the range, the better the candidates will score. The third criterion focuses on the range on the accuracy of the test takers' grammar while speaking. The range of grammar includes using a variety of complex structures. These are sentences with multiple bits of information, contrast that to separate simple sentences with a single piece of information. The fourth criterion focuses on the accuracy and variety of pronunciation features, which includes individual sounds, such as the spelling of the word, the word stress, the sentence stress, intonation, and chunking [5].

3. RESEARCH METHODS

This part introduces the research question and the research design of this paper, which explains the reason for choosing four kinds of people as the subjects, choosing questionnaire and interview as research methods, and give a brief description of the research process.

3.1. Research Question

The present thesis intends to investigate the following questions:

- 1) What's the difference between the application of Cooperative Principle in college oral English teaching and IELTS speaking teaching?
- 2) Do the maxims of the Cooperative Principle apply in oral English learning?

3.2. Subjects

The subjects of the questionnaires survey are Chinese IELTS candidates who have not yet studied abroad and are also college students, Chinese IELTS candidates who have started studying abroad to get their master's degrees as overseas students. Meanwhile, some of those Chinese IELTS candidates, overseas students, college oral English teachers (including general oral English teachers and IELTS Speaking teachers), and native English speakers were invited to participate in interviews by the author.

After having general research on the background, it has been found out that most Chinese IELTS candidates' speaking score is low, the author hypothesized the main reason is the differences between the application of CP in college oral English teaching and IELTS speaking teaching. Thus, the author decided to set Chinese IELTS candidates who are also college students as one of the subjects. To find out the defects of college oral English class more directly, it has been decided to invite college oral English teachers (including general oral English teachers and IELTS Speaking teachers) and native English speakers to have the interviews. Furthermore, to research the usage situation of native speakers from Chinese students' angles, the author decided to set overseas students who attended the IELTS test as another group of subjects.

3.3. Research Design

This part introduces the research design of this paper, which explain the reason for choosing four kinds of people as the subjects, choosing questionnaire, and interviewing as research instruments. Explanations of the reason for choosing questionnaires and interviews as research methods of this paper will be described in this part either.

3.3.1 Questionnaire

Because of the high efficiency, high recovery rate, and convenient operation in combination with the internet, the author chooses questionnaires as one of the survey methods. The second point is that the questions are unified, which is beneficial to the comparative analysis of the respondents under the same circumstances. And answer the questionnaires are not limited by time and space, even students studying abroad can take part in the questionnaire survey, which makes the questionnaire survey more accurate. For example, the author invited some friends who are studying abroad to attend the questionnaire survey, which brought more participants, and provided more ideas, and made the research more accurate. Moreover, a questionnaire can contain several short and quick questions, which can figure out the result efficiently, and makes the participants more willing to attend the questionnaire.

3.3.2 Interview

The author chose to interview as the research method, because it is authentic and in-depth, which can help the author understand the interviewee's thoughts more deeply based on the questions. This method can let the interviewee explain his thoughts either, which makes the answers to the interview questions more accurate. In this paper, the Chinese IELTS candidates, overseas students, college oral English teachers, and native speakers were invited to attend the interview, because some of the questions need to be answered subjectively, and sometimes they will be asked with further detailed questions. Hence, the paper decided to choose to interview as one of the research methods.

3.4. Research Process

First of all, messages and emails were sent to interviewers, which invites them to attend the interview, and asks whether they would like to attend or not. Questions of questionnaires and interviews were set and revised meanwhile. After confirming the questions, a questionnaire was posted on the internet and shared into some group chats which have quite a lot of IELTS candidates and students who are planning to study abroad or have already started studying abroad. Next, the interview questions were sent to interviewers, and then they completed the interviews. After that, the interviewers' answers were summarized into different documents and the data obtained from the questionnaire survey was analyzed.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

This part is mainly about the analysis of the data which was collected by the questionnaires and interviews. And find out the differences between the application of CP in college oral English teaching and IELTS speaking teaching, the existing defects of college oral English teaching, and the functions of CP in IELTS Speaking teaching and tests. 51 people attended the questionnaire survey, and the author collected back 51 questionnaires, of which 49 were effectively recovered.

4.1 Chinese IELTS Candidates and Overseas Students

Through the analysis results from questionnaires and interviews, the differences between college oral English teaching and IELTS speaking teaching were summarized, including the usage of situational context, usage accuracy of vocabularies, the usage of obscure words, the length of answers, the pronunciation, and the requirement of fluency, which indicates the application of CP in the IELTS speaking teaching. The table below is resulted from the questionnaire survey which is design

by the author. The percentage is calculated with frequency analysis.

Table 1. The Band Score of Candidates' IELTS Speaking Test

Brand Score	Number of People	Percentage
5.0	2	4.1%
5.5	10	20.0%
6.0	22	44.9%
6.5	12	24.5%
7.0	2	4.1%
7.5	1	2.0%

Firstly, the band scores of the IELTS speaking tests were collected from participants of the questionnaires. According to Table 1, and the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), and the explanations on the backside of the IELTS Test Report Form, the result shows that nearly 89.4% of candidates are independent users, which equals modest and competent users. About 6.1% of candidates are proficient and good users. This can prove that most of the Chinese candidates can independently speak English, and can use and understand fairly complex language, particularly in familiar situations; while a small group of candidates is good users who can handle complex language well and understands detailed reasoning. Meanwhile, the questionnaire also collected participants' other band scores of listening, reading, writing and their overall scores. After comparative analysis, it has been found out that most candidates got a high overall score of 7, and they also got a high score in listening and reading tests, while most of them got a relatively lower score in speaking and writing tests. This phenomenon indicates that Chinese candidates' speaking and writing capability is generally lower than their listening and reading capability.

Table 2. The Detailed Differences between the IELTS Speaking Class and College Oral English Class

Differences	Number of People	Percentage
The lexical difficulty, variety, and accuracy	33	64.71%
Grammatical range and accuracy	18	35.29%
Fluency and coherence	28	54.9%
pronunciation accuracy and the variation of intonation	17	33.33%
The number of words and the conciseness of answers	10	19.61%
The language environment and context are virtual or	17	33.33%

based on realities

The comprehension method of questions	8	15.69%
The usage of obscure technical terms	8	5.88%

In order to find out the specific differences between the IELTS Speaking class and college oral English class, the questions in Table 2 were set up. The table is resulted from the questionnaire survey which was design by the author. The percentage is calculated with frequency analysis. Participants can choose more than one option. Initially, the author predicted that the main differences lie in the lexical difficulty, fluency and conciseness. According to the table above, the lexical difficulty and fluency are the main differences, while the conciseness is not.

The candidates who chose option 1 and option 3 accounted for the largest proportions with both above 50%. 35.29% of the candidates chose option 2, which made it become the third top of those 8 options. Meanwhile, 33.33% of the candidates chose options 4 and 6, which made it ranked fourth. Option 1 is about the difference between lexical usage, and most candidates think that different from lexical difficulty, the IELTS Speaking class emphasizes the lexical variety and accuracy, which means this is quite important in communications in English-speaking countries. Corresponding with CP, "the lexical variety and accuracy" is related to the maxim of manner, which needs speakers to use words accurately to avoid ambiguity. The point here is that, when students are communicating in English, it would be better to correctly use the words that students understood properly rather than use difficult but impressive vocabularies blindly.

Lexical usage is one of the most basic language skills, so does oral English, which can reflect a person's English level to some extent. According to option 1, it indicates in most of the time, Chinese college students are required to use as many difficult and impressive words as they can, which become a fixed rule in Chinese students' minds. Thus, most candidates thought the more complex contents, expressions, and words they use, the higher score they will get. When the candidates are talking about their familiar content, they will use many professional words. But sometimes those words are also obscure for native speakers. If one of the speakers uses too many professional terms, the other speaker will be difficult to understand and gradually lose the interest of continue list to listen to the other speaker's words, which makes the conversation cannot smoothly go on.

For option 6, it is mainly about the differences between the contextual situation, which refers to the maxim of quantity. The data shows 33.33% of the candidates who participated in this questionnaire survey thought that the oral contexts in IELTS tests and speaking

classes were based on reality more often. And according to table 5, shows most oral context used for practice in college oral English teaching is virtual. It's indeed necessary for students to practice their oral English in a contextual situation because they need to learn how to use those expressions that they learned in the class.

4.2 Oral English Teachers and English Native Speakers

For the maxim of quantity, it requires us to make our words as informative as is required. One of the defects is that when students are having conversations, there is a phenomenon that output of information from students is incomplete, which leads to the interruption of communication according to the interviews and other literature [6]. Meanwhile, some students will output too much information, which resulting the other speaker cannot take part in the conversation. And those two phenomena both violate the maxim of quantity. One of the college oral English teachers who attended the interview expressed his opinion about this.

"This is quite a common problem for language teachers.....This (the conversation during the class) also provides information from which the teacher or the student's partner can then continue the conversation. Therefore, it is usually preferable that an answer be too long rather than too short. However, in each class there often are one or two students who do talk quite endlessly, which takes time and opportunity away from other students and can also adversely affect their confidence (shy students can feel overwhelmed and unable to "match" the talkative student's fluency). So, this is a kind of teacher's paradox: we want students to be confident talking, but not overly so!"

Conversation analysis is concerned with the "analysis of the competencies which underlie ordinary social activities" [7]. While conversation analysis researchers are concerned with the sequential development of conversation, and how each utterance (or non-verbal contribution) affects the next [8].

During these kinds of practices, to ensure students have equal chances to practice their oral skills, teachers would gently interrupt and properly control the process of the conversation with feedback and questions. It's not only because most conversations need interactions, but also because conversations are not formal as a "speech", and they are different from "speech". We make conversations with each other is to get information and maintain our social ties. And although it's an "unreal" conversation that occurred during the classes, students may still make such conversations in their daily lives. So, in these kinds of cases, when students are practicing conversations, the maxim of quantity applies in a language learning class to make sure every student has equal opportunities to practice, providing references to

improve students' interpersonal competence. And teachers can control and deliver a better course to students according to the maxim of quantity.

While during the interview, the author found out another pattern. Teachers may require students to speak at length, which is mainly applied to practice presentation skills. Usually, teachers will make a requirement of the length of the speech or presentation. Different from a short turn, a long turn consists of a string of sentences that may last as long as an hour's lecture [9].

In these kinds of cases, it violated the maxim of quantity. While teachers violated this maxim is to guide the students with further questions to help them carry on the speech or presentation in detailed detailing as well. Furthermore, presentation usually occurs on non-special occasions, such as during a meeting or a course. Thus, when students are practicing presentation skills, the maxim of quantity doesn't apply in a language learning class.

For the maxim of quality, it requires us to say true things. While nowadays, the contextual situations used for practice are always virtual, which are created by the teachers or depend on the context of virtual textbooks. This may cause students' communication to l of logic and experience the contextual situation which is unreal. But it is reasonable for all the students to use contexts to practice. One of the college oral English teachers thought:

"The purpose of creating role play-type environments is just to make speaking practice more enjoyable and true-to-life for the students, and so to provide them with a contextual situation in which they can practice using the language."

There is an inherent and inevitable relationship between the original contextual situations and language teaching. According to the view of language in the social environment, Zhang advocates the situational nature of foreign language teaching, that is, foreign language teaching should be carried out in a certain contextual situation to achieve good results [10]. He believes that the situation is not a single information "stimulus", but a complex information source. Foreign language teaching needs to establish a certain and necessary connection between the foreign language and the contextual situation [10]. "Our English teaching in our middle schools tends to always circle the narrow range of the language," he said, "We're always working on vocabulary, grammar, and other branches." [11]

Native English speakers were asked sick questions to research their attitudes to CP. When talking about the usage of obscure expressions, they all agreed that when talking on any occasion, it would be nice if the words and contents are understandable, especially when people are talking about professional content. One of them explained.

“Because where possible conversations should be in clear language that anyone can understand.” And the other said, “The key to good communication is to explain things as simple as possible that a layperson can understand.”

Orwell once said that one should “Never use a long word where a short one will do [12].” When people are communicating, it needs at least two people to participate in the conversation. The clear and comprehensive words and expressions can help both sides understand what they are talking about, which provides fair opportunities to every person to participate in the conversation, ensuring the floating of the conversation.

4.3 Functions of Cooperative Principle in IELTS Speaking Teaching

4.3.1 Provide References to Improve Students’ Interpersonal Competence

For Part 1 of the IELTS Speaking test, the examiner will mainly ask the candidates some general questions, which is to test candidates’ basic interpersonal competence by taking short turns. What should a course in spoken English production prepare a student to do? The intention is often that the student should be able to “express himself” in the target language and to cope with basic interactive skills such as exchanging greetings, thanks, and apologies, and to express his “needs” – request information, service, etc. The syllabus which results from a “need” or “notion” approach will prepare a student to produce short turns of a transactional and/or international type [12]. Usually, a short turn consists of only one or two sentences. But to make the conversation go on smoothly between the examiners and candidates by short turns, the candidates need to answer the answer with one to three sentences concisely. The candidates need to first reply to the question directly, and make some further explanation according to his answer, which needs them to obey the maxim of relation. For example,

Examiner: What do you do?

Candidate: I am a teacher.

For the answer above, it is a little bit too short. With the guidance of the maxims, the answer can be expanded to:

Examiner: What do you do?

Candidate: I have been a high school English teacher in Beijing.

Therefore, to sum up, the function of the maxim of relation is to provide methods and references for teachers to help candidates stick to the general questions and give out their answers, while the function of the maxim of

quantity is to provide a reference for teachers to help candidates answer the questions at the appropriate length.

4.3.2 Provide Methods to Enhance Students’ Public Speaking Ability

In Part 2 of the IELTS Speaking test, the candidates need to give a two-minute short speech, which is also the “long turn”. However, due to the limited conditions, candidates cannot speak in an hour, hence the test requires candidates to make a two-minute short speech. The candidates will be given one minute to prepare with a paper to write some points with the question card shown, and usually, the topics are about retelling an event that happened around the candidate, which also tests the narrative capability.

Firstly, during the long turn, candidates need to highly pay attention to the relevance of the topic and mention the required content on the question card. Meanwhile, the long turn demands much of the speaker in the way of producing structure and always relates to the topic. To make a good structure during the two minutes long turn, candidates need to be concise. Thus, the candidates can use the bullets points on the task card to help them structure the long turn and use keywords to make notes in the one minute that is given. Teachers can combine the maxim of relation to help students choose appropriate keywords and help them find out inappropriate keywords and contents of answers since the students might forget to make their answer relate to the topic. Meanwhile, when candidates are talking about their familiar content, they may be excited and talk about more information which is redundant for the whole structure. During the practice, when students didn’t finish their answers when the time is out, teachers can help students cut off the redundant part, and make the answers more related to the topic according to the maxims. Thus, the functions of the maxim of relation and the maxim of quantity also provide methods for teachers to help the candidates stick to the topic and help them organize the structure of the long turn by controlling every sentence and every part at the appropriate length, to finish the long turn in two minutes.

Secondly, candidates will describe their similar events and fields, which may lead them to use too many obscure professional terms. And the examiner may ask further questions about the professional contents, requiring the candidate to give out a more detailed explanation after the long turn. And the question is random and based on the examiner’s own opinion, the candidates cannot get well prepared. Failure to further explain the question will lead to deduction of the score. In this situation, teachers can help students change the obscure words and contents, not only can help them avoid more mistakes but also help their answers clearer and easier to understand for the examiners, to avoid the possibilities of being asked difficult questions during the

test. As it turns out, the functions of the maxim of manner provide references and methods to help teachers find out obscure words. Redundant contents can also be found out and guide them on how to avoid obscure words and redundant contents.

4.3.3 Provide References to Polish Students' Critical Thinking Ability

The last part of the whole IELTS Speaking test is analytical discussion, which tests candidates' debate and critical thinking capabilities. This part is the combination of short turns and long turns. The concern with teaching short turns arises naturally from the traditional view in language teaching, which was that the only structure the student was required to master was the sentence. However, due to the innovation of society and economy, recently the focus has shifted from the form of the sentence to the functions it can be used to perform [12]. And for students who can only "express themselves", there is still a long way to go if they want their sentences to have the functions which can be used to perform, such as debate, business negotiation, and diplomatic affairs.

In this part, the examiner will randomly ask some deeper questions which are related to the topic used in Part 2 and candidates' long turn answer, which makes this part become the most difficult part of the speaking test. Because the questions are totally based on the examiners' mind and cannot be fully prepared before the test. The candidate needs to give out his own opinions and make further explanations with a couple of sentences. It is highly possible for candidates to gradually forget to be related to the question when he gives out examples in his answer. Meanwhile, the whole process of critical thinking during the test needs candidates to think deeply from different aspects but still stick to the question. Thus, in these cases, when teachers find out the answers are unrelated to the questions, they can remind students to relate to the questions on time or ask further questions to guide students to think deeper about the questions according to the maxim of relation.

On the other hand, it is still an intercultural communication process that is similar to debating and is combined with long turns. Thus, candidates must organize the structure of their answers, or they may also be interrupted by the examiner and move on to the next question if the answer is too long and will lead to deduction of scores because of the incomplete answer. In this case, teachers may help students avoid using complicated grammar structures and obscure words, to use simple sentences and signposting combine with the maxim of quantity. Thirdly, this part won't be scoring based on candidates' opinions, but still needs to think and debate with rigorous logic. Hence, if it is possible, teachers can help and require their students to obey the maxim of quality – to discuss true cases in realities to ensure their expressions' fluency and make the answers

logically reasonable.

To sum up, in Part 3 of the IELTS Speaking test, the function of the maxim of relation, the maxim of quantity, and the maxim of manner worked again. And the maxim of quality can help teachers find out and guide their students to avoid logical mistakes to make the answers reasonable.

5. CONCLUSION

The application of CP in IELTS speaking teaching is more than college oral English teaching, which also indicates the college oral English teaching's over-reliance on textbooks, emphasize using advanced vocabulary and speaking at length, leads to the problems such as improper usage of vocabulary, making the sentences redundant and obscure. Furthermore, the Cooperative Principle provides many methods and references for teachers to find out students' mistakes and inappropriate content, and guide them to avoid those disadvantages. Native speakers obey the Cooperative Principle in most cases indicates CP has the functions to improve students' oral English practical capability. In most cases, the maxims of the Cooperative Principle apply in oral English learning, but it is not applicable when the students are practicing the skills of speech. It is a useful method to combine CP with college oral English teaching. Students can combine them with their oral English learning to improve their practice and learning efficiency.

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