

A Practical Study on English-Speaking Learning Strategies of Junior College English Majors

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ABSTRACT

Oral English is an important aspect of language output in the process of second language acquisition (SLA). For many English learners, time-consuming and ineffective oral English learning is a major issue. Aside from the language environment, one of the primary causes of this difficulty is a lack of suitable strategic guidance. In recent years, scholars have conducted more and more research on English-speaking learning strategies, but few have conducted corresponding research on junior college English majors. Based on the data obtained from questionnaires and interviews, this study investigates the use of speaking memory strategy, speaking cognitive strategy, speaking compensation strategy, speaking metacognitive strategy, speaking affective strategy and speaking social strategy in oral English. This study shows that junior college English majors generally adopt medium-level speaking strategies, among which speaking metacognitive strategy and speaking affective strategy are used more frequently, which has some enlightenment for junior college English majors on how to learn oral English effectively.

Keywords: Junior College, English majors, Speaking Learning Strategies.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 On the Connotation of Speaking Strategies

The research of language learning strategies has always been concerned in the field of language learning. Oral English is a part of language output, and speaking strategies also is a part of language learning strategies. English-speaking learning strategies are an important factor affecting students' oral English ability. The interpretation of language learning strategies has been widely discussed in academia.

Scholars have their own answers to the meaning of language learning strategies. Rubin proposed that learning strategies are strategies that help to develop learners' self-constructed language system and directly affect learning [1]. Chamot believed that learning strategies are the skills, methods and conscious behaviours that learners use to help learn [2]. As Oxford stated that language learning strategies as "specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations" [3]. Ellis illustrated that learning strategy refers to the psychological behaviour or behaviour related to a specific stage in the

whole process of language acquisition or language use [4]. Chinese scholar Wu thought that language learning strategy is a dynamic concept and practice, which aims to improve learning ability or play a positive role in language processing [5].

Although there is no universal definition of language learning strategies, the majority of individuals agree that the goal of utilizing them is to increase learning efficiency. This paper regards language learning strategies as a series of measures adopted by learners in order to make language learning more effective. Therefore, speaking strategies are some of the means adopted by learners to improve their oral English ability.

1.2 The Classification of Speaking Strategies

Just because scholars have different definitions of language learning strategies, they all have different ideas on the classification of language learning strategies. But what is more well-known is the strategy classification studied by O'Malley and Chamot [6] and Oxford [3].

O'Malley and Chamot [6] classified language learning strategies into three categories: metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies and socio-affective strategies. Oxford [3] classified learning strategy into two

broad types. The two types are direct strategy and indirect strategy. Direct strategy is used to deal with new language materials and are directly related to the language itself in specific tasks and situations, including memory strategy, cognitive strategy and compensation strategy. Specifically, memory strategy includes associative memory and careful review; cognitive strategy includes practice, receiving and sending information, and analysis; compensation strategy includes reasonable guessing and expression substitution. Indirect strategy is used to deal with macro learning management, including metacognitive strategy, affective strategy and social strategy. Metacognitive strategy includes planning learning and reviewing progress; affective strategy includes reducing anxiety and setting reward mechanisms; social strategy includes asking questions and cooperating with others.

After the researcher considered it, speaking memory strategy, speaking cognitive strategy, speaking compensation strategy, speaking metacognitive strategy, speaking affective strategy, and speaking social strategy are classified in this study.

1.3 Research Status

In China, scholars attach importance to the use of English-speaking learning strategies. In their research, it is pointed out that the application of oral strategies by Chinese students is at a medium level, and the frequency of using strategies is different. In previous studies, Shen [7], Wei [8] and Wang [9] all believed that college students had the highest level of speaking memory strategies and the lowest level of speaking social strategies. Xiang [10] pointed out in a survey of 117 English major freshmen that students use speaking metacognitive strategies in the highest proportion and speaking compensation strategies in the lowest proportion. In Gao [11], it was pointed out that non-English majors majoring in English use compensation strategies the most frequently in oral English. Feng and Zhou's [12] survey showed that senior high school students use more direct strategy than indirect strategy, among which speaking memory strategy are used most frequently. Yan [13] researched the usage of English-speaking learning strategies by freshmen in higher vocational colleges and advised that people should attach importance to English learning strategy training to improve the oral English ability of higher vocational students. Zuo [14] pointed out that non-English majors in higher vocational colleges have the lowest frequency of using affective strategies in oral English. Cui and He [15] pointed out that non-English majors in higher vocational colleges use learning strategies less frequently, especially metacognitive strategies. From these results, the research on speaking strategies in China is mostly focused on undergraduates or postgraduates, while there is little research on junior college students. As a result, more

research on junior college English majors is needed to properly comprehend their usage of speaking strategies.

1.4 Research Gap and Questions

Scholars have been concerned about the usage of English-speaking learning strategies in recent years. However, the research objects are mostly aimed at undergraduates and graduate students, with junior college students receiving less attention. Many researchers have advocated improving speaking anxiety from the perspective of teaching, as well as improving the classroom teaching environment from the perspective of teachers and paying attention to students' usage of learning strategies, based on existing research. Not too much from the learners themselves, put forward some suggestions. As a result, this study begins with junior college English majors, explores their use of speaking learning strategies through questionnaires and interviews, and attempts to identify effective approaches to increase junior college English majors' oral proficiency.

In order to investigate the speaking strategies of English majors in junior college, this study is based on the following questions: (1) What is the frequency of English-speaking learning strategies used by junior college English majors? (2) What is the content of English-speaking learning strategies most commonly used by junior college English majors?

2. METHODS

2.1 Participants

The subjects of this study are 277 English majors from a junior college in Hebei Province, including 17 boys and 260 girls.

2.2 Instruments

The use of speaking strategies by 277 junior college English majors was investigated using questionnaires and interviews in this study. The researcher designed the questionnaire based on the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) of Oxford [3]. She tweaked the scale's items based on her years of oral English learning experience to ensure that it accurately reflected the students' usage of strategies during the oral English learning process. And the scale is designed by 5-point Likert Scale, in which 1 = never use it, 2 = seldom use it, 3 = sometimes use it, 4 = often use it, 5 = always use it. The subjects picked the degree to which each statement corresponds to their own situation based on their own circumstances. The reliability coefficient analysis of the scale is performed to measure the stability, and the result is 0.978, indicating that the scale's reliability is excellent. In addition, the researcher conducted qualitative study interviews with five students to learn about their individual spoken English strategies. Because of the

impact of COVID-19, all interviews were conducted online, and the researcher used the data gathered from the interviews to provide additional interpretation of the questionnaire answers.

2.3 Data Collection and Analysis

After distributing questionnaires to 277 students, the researchers interviewed the students who were chosen. The collected data are analysed by SPSS 26, which consists of two steps: (1) To determine the trend of these junior college students’ speaking strategies, the researcher measured the Mean and Standard Deviation (SD) of their speaking strategies (see Table 1). (2) To determine these junior college English majors’ preferences for various strategies, the researcher measured the Mean and SD of the students’ utilization of six strategies (see Table 2-Table 7).

3. RESULTS

3.1 The General Trend in the Adoption of English-speaking Strategies by Junior College English Majors

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of speaking strategies

Type	Mean	SD
Speaking Memory Strategy	3.09	.96
Speaking Cognitive Strategy	2.96	.98
Speaking Compensation Strategy	2.98	1.00
Speaking Metacognitive Strategy	3.14	.99
Speaking Affective Strategy	3.14	1.00
Speaking Social Strategy	3.06	1.04
Total	3.06	.92

According to Oxford [3], the average range of 2.5-3.4 falls into the medium frequency range, indicating that learners use this strategy occasionally; the average above 3.5 indicates that learners use this strategy frequently or always; and the average below 2.4 indicates that learners rarely use this strategy. Table 1 shows that junior college English majors employ speaking strategies at a moderate degree.

The average scores of the six categories of strategies are all between 2.5 and 3.4. According to Table 1, the most used strategy is speaking metacognitive strategy (Mean=3.14, SD=1.00), followed by speaking affective strategy (Mean=3.14, SD=1.02), speaking memory strategy (Mean=3.09, SD=.97), speaking social strategy (Mean=3.06, SD=1.06), speaking compensation strategy (Mean=2.98, SD=1.01) and speaking cognitive strategy (Mean=2.96, SD=.99).

3.2 Specific Strategies Most Used by English Majors in Junior College

Table 2. Descriptive statistics on specific use of speaking memory strategy

Item	Mean	SD
Q1. I use new words to make sentences to help me remember.	2.99	1.13
Q2. To help me remember new words, I imagine myself in situations related to them.	3.19	1.09
Q3. I often review English texts and recite them.	2.94	1.09
Q4. I learn new words by thinking about where I first saw them on the page, on the board, or on a street sign.	3.22	1.12

As can be seen from Table 2, the most used speaking memory strategy for students are Q4 (Mean=3.22, SD=1.12) and Q2 (Mean=3.19, SD=1.09). During the interview, the students stated that the association concept is the most effective technique for them to recall the words because it deepens memory.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics on specific use of speaking cognitive strategy

Item	Mean	SD
Q5. I often practice English pronunciation.	3.05	1.08
Q6. I make an effort to converse with those who are fluent in English-speaking.	2.72	1.13
Q7. I often watch some English TV programs or movies.	3.21	1.11
Q8. I make summaries of things I hear or read in English.	2.85	1.34

As can be observed from Table 3, the majority of these students employ Q7 (Mean=3.21, SD=1.11) and Q5 (Mean=3.05, SD=1.08). The students interviewed all mentioned that they would practice their pronunciation by watching English movies and reading subtitles after class. This also validates the results of Table 3.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics on specific use of speaking compensation strategy

Item	Mean	SD
Q9. When I can't remember certain words, I use gestures to express them.	2.95	1.22
Q10. I try to guess what people will say next in English.	2.91	1.18

Q11. If I can't remember a word when speaking English, I will use synonyms to express it.	3.13	1.13
Q12. When I don't know what word to use in English, I create one up.	2.93	1.19

Among the speaking compensation strategy, students usually choose Q11 (Mean=3.13, SD=1.13), as demonstrated in Table 4. Although most students utilize Q11 to assist them in oral English learning, some students in the interview stated that if they could not remember a word, they would forgo talking and speak Chinese straight.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics on specific use of speaking metacognitive strategy

Item	Mean	SD
Q13. I pay close attention when someone speaks English to me.	3.48	1.09
Q14. I look for people who can talk to me in English.	2.94	1.12
Q15. I practice oral English by all ways.	3.02	1.12
Q16. I often think about how far I've come in my oral English studies.	3.13	1.10

In the speaking metacognitive strategy, students usually choose to use Q13 (Mean=3.48, SD=1.09) and Q16 (Mean=3.13, SD=1.10), as seen in Table 5.

Table 6. Descriptive statistics on specific use of speaking affective strategy

Item	Mean	SD
Q17. I encourage myself to speak English even if I am afraid of making mistakes.	3.28	1.12
Q18. I try to calm down when I feel scared of using English.	3.14	1.14
Q19. I give myself a gift or a treat when I make progress in spoken English.	3.15	1.15
Q20. I exchange my experience of speaking English with others.	2.98	1.13

The results in Table 6 show that these students develop a preference for Q17 (Mean=3.28, SD=1.12) and Q19 (Mean=3.15, SD=1.15) when using the speaking affective strategy. At the same time, the interviewees

stated that they will never improve their oral English if they are terrified of making mistakes and refuse to talk.

Table 7. Descriptive statistics on specific use of speaking social strategy

Item	Mean	SD
Q21. When I speak English, I ask the teacher to point out my mistakes.	3.22	1.14
Q22. If I don't understand what the other person is saying, I ask him to slow down or repeat it.	3.23	1.16
Q23. I ask questions in English.	2.88	1.18
Q24. I practice oral English with other students.	2.92	1.17

The results in Table 7 show that among the speaking social strategy, Q22 (Mean=3.23, SD=1.16) and Q21 (Mean=3.22, SD=1.14) are the most frequently used by these junior college English majors.

4. DISCUSSIONS

According to these results, the usage of subjects' English-speaking strategy are in the middle of the spectrum, and their preferences are diverse, with indirect strategy being used more frequently than direct strategy. The most widely used indirect strategy are speaking metacognitive and speaking affective strategies, followed by speaking social strategies. This is a better result than the undergraduates researched by Lu [16] and the higher vocational students studied by Wang [17]. Metacognitive strategy, according to Wen [18], perform a monitoring and regulatory function throughout the entire learning process. Metacognitive strategy is vital in oral English learning because they allow learners to make timely modifications to attain their desired goals. This demonstrates that these English junior college students can recognize their differences from other students and progress to a higher level. Speaking memory strategies are the most commonly used direct strategies by the participants. It should be noted that junior college English majors use speaking compensation strategy and speaking cognitive strategy fewer commonly, with speaking cognitive strategy being the least used. This result is consistent with Wang's [19] view that cognitive strategy is the least used by students.

In the use of direct strategy, most students use joint thinking to memorize words and practice pronunciation by watching English movies and reading subtitles. Although this method is effective, it is also straightforward. And the daily vocabulary acquisition of these junior college students is too tiny, the field of knowledge is relatively narrow, and they are unable to

integrate. Speaking metacognitive strategy and speaking affective strategy are used more commonly by junior college English majors when using indirect strategy. The researcher is pleasantly delighted to discover that they have this ability. Despite the fact that they are college students, they do not give up and instead worked hard to develop themselves. However, the researcher finds that these students rarely ask questions in English in their daily life, and seldom exchange their oral experience with their classmates.

From the results, the subjects of this study are not balanced in the use of English-speaking learning strategies. This shows that it is necessary to train students in English-speaking learning strategies systematically. Through the combined use of English-speaking learning strategies, learners' awareness of independent learning is cultivated, and the goal of developing oral English proficiency is ultimately achieved. First of all, students should schedule their time, set plans for oral English learning, and evaluate at the end of each day on what has not been accomplished. Second, students should employ a range of learning methodologies. Students can, for example, use an app like Cambly to practice speaking English. On this app, there are many native speakers who can converse with them in real time and correct their errors. Students can perfect their pronunciation by dubbing and other means in addition to following the subtitles. Simultaneously, when watching American TV dramas, you can acquire some authentic oral expressions and develop your own English thinking, i.e., practice English recounting without subtitles. Students should take the initiative after class to create an oral practice environment, such as choosing subjects for oral dialogue with classmates, simulated presentations, and so on. Students should learn to relax and offer themselves some positive pointers, such as speaking some words to encourage themselves to boost their confidence or setting up their own reward mechanism, maintaining an optimistic learning attitude, and so on, in light of the anxiety issues that they will face. Students should use their social skills in the classroom, taking the initiative to communicate with classmates, asking questions in English, and using their linguistic sense.

5. CONCLUSION

This study shows the use of English-speaking learning strategies by junior college English majors. Through questionnaires and interviews, it is found that students use more speaking metacognitive and affective strategies for language learning practice, and put forward how to find the best speaking learning strategies for students. The findings of the study increase the knowledge of English-speaking strategies of junior college English majors and provide suggestions for students to improve their oral learning. This study has some parts to continue to explore, such as the universality

of interviewees and the comparison of students' differences and learning motivation. The research content can continue to expand, including the connotation of speaking learning strategies, as well as the impact of students' interest motivation, academic achievement and emotional factors on English-speaking learning strategies.

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