The Teaching of Speech and Oral Communication in English for Computer Studies Students: A Needs Analysis

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Abstract
This study was conducted to assess the needs of computer studies students in terms of speaking the English language for occupational purposes. The insights of selected English language and computer science professors, practitioners in the field of computer, and students were sought and analyzed. Interviews, surveys, observations, and literature reviews were done. The students observed were from a state university in Quezon City, Philippines. They were selected through stratified random sampling, while the respondents- instructors and practitioners were chosen via purposive and convenience sampling respectively. This gave a total of 200 participants. The researcher applied objective and qualitative interpretations of data to identify the speaking needs of the student respondents. Using the Munby Model, a profile of communicative needs was prepared. The results imply that these must be considered in the preparation and development of syllabus for the course.

Keywords: Speech and oral communication, students' needs analysis, teaching English for occupational purposes

Introduction

In this fast-paced digital age, language is still the main instrument of spreading information. It is the primary means of transferring vital information from different sectors of the society, be it spoken or written. As technology advances, the need to acquire a common language is becoming more urgent, and since English is the international medium of communication, the necessity to learn this language by all peoples of the world is at its peak.

It is undoubtedly true that learning the English language is vital in surviving this highly competitive world. Its essence in all areas of life can't really be denied. In commerce, education, medicine, and in other fields of endeavor, English, either in its written or oral form is very important. But does everyone has the facility of the English language which helps him survives this challenging time? Is everyone confident enough in articulating his thoughts and ideas through spoken English?

In this era of high technology, it is still a world of speech communication. While there is an increasing use of telecommunications to access the information super highway, person-to-person speech communication situation remains to be the basic means of global communication. Also, "effective oral communication. followed by listening ability and enthusiasm is still the most important factor in helping graduating college students get employment," say Winsor, Curtis, and Stephens (Padilla et al. 2003, p.10).

In most countries, of the world where English is regarded as a second or foreign language, speaking it is quite a hard endeavor. Vis-à-vis spoken language, it is more problematic because one does not only need to be acquainted with syntax, morphology, and semantics, but he must also have sufficient knowledge of phonology as well as strategies in applying spoken English. One who intends to be competitive in spoken English must strive to have a good grasp and an acceptable production of English sounds, which in cases of nonnative speakers is truly hard to do, because many of its sounds are not present in his native language.

In the statement of Cook (1996) that language is the center of human life, he definitely aimed to reiterate that language is really of vital role in the development and progress of men. Furthermore, he stressed that language is the one used to express and to communicate thoughts and feelings by people. And at present, English is one of the main language of communication.

On the other hand, Krashen (1996) stated that children experience little difficulty in acquiring more than one language, and after puberty, people must expend greater effort to learn a second or foreign language. This supports the idea that people learning English as a foreign or second language are encountering problems in learning to speak as well as to write the language. Brown (1994) mentioned a number of features that make speaking a challenging language skill. To start with, fluent speech contains reduced forms such as contractions, vowel reduction and elision, so that learners who are not exposed to or do not get sufficient practice with reduced speech will retain their formal-sounding full forms. The same can be said for the use of slang and idioms in speech. Without facility in using this ubiquitous features of spoken language, learners are apt to sound bookish. Students must also acquire the

rhythm, stress, and intonation of English, a complicated task for many. Lazaraton on her article on *Teaching Oral Skills* has perceived that the most difficult aspect of spoken English is that it is almost always accomplished via interaction with at least one speaker. This means that a variety of demands are in place at once: monitoring and understanding the other speaker(s); thinking about one's own contribution, producing that contribution, monitoring its effect; and so on (in Murcia 2006).

In the case of students in the Philippines, learning spoken English is not also that easy. Since the structure and phonology of the Filipino language and English differ in many aspects, learning the latter is also a struggle. Yet, Filipinos are truly motivated to improve and to learn. Moreover, learning a second language (English) offers great opportunity like getting a good job, a chance to get educated in good institutions, the ability to get a fuller life in one's own country or emigrate, and understanding one's culture and religious belief (Trager & Bloch 1942). But the question is, will the Filipinos have better chances since they speak English as a second language and since it is used as the language of education and the government?

The question posed is a challenge laid on the hands of the educators, curriculum developers, educational managers, and teachers. With focus on speech and oral communication course which is offered in college programs, what should be taught here? Would it be generic in content or would it be specific depending on the program the students are enrolled into?

Many cases reveal that teaching speech and oral communication among college students is so general that what is being taught in the liberal arts is what also being taught in the engineering or technology programs. Approaches as well do not vary in any means. This scenario is quite bothering since the practices, drills, or role plays provided to students are not directly aligned to where the students possibly use speaking in the future; therefore, they are not benefiting, in terms of their future professions, with their training from their speech and oral communication classes.

Hedge (1993) said that in teaching oral communication skills, there should be focus on the balance between accuracy and fluency. He mentioned two definitions of the latter: (1) the ability to link units of speech together with the facility and without strain or inappropriate slowness or undue hesitation, and (2) "natural language use", which is likely to take place when speaking activities focus on meaning and its negotiation, when speaking strategies are used, and when overt correction is minimized. It should not be forgotten that it should also focus on specific purpose. For example, in speaking for business, a text for highly-advanced learners in business fields, students must learn to plan and conduct business meetings, give speeches, make oral presentations, participate in conferences, and socialize with colleagues (England & Grosse 1995).

In computer studies, to include programs in computer science, information technology, information systems, information management and the like, speech and oral communication courses should be tailored on what the students need to learn for their future job deployments. Trainings, practices, and drills contained in the course should deal with real-life situations which they might encounter while studying, and before and during employment. Such activities would prepare them to take the challenges in the actual world which speakers of English as a second or foreign

language are confronted with. This also helps avoid second and foreign language speakers of English to be disappointed and shocked when they use the language for the first time in real interactions because they have not been prepared for spontaneous communication and could not cope with its simultaneous demand (Bailey & Savage 1994). It is therefore in this light that this study was conducted which aimed to assess the needs of computer studies students in terms of speaking the English language for occupational purposes.

Participants

This study was participated by four groups of people namely college students who are pursuing degrees in computer studies such as computer science, information technology, information management, and information systems; instructors teaching professional subjects in computer studies; instructors teaching English language arts; and industry practitioners in the field of computers. The students and instructors were both from a state-owned polytechnic university in Quezon City, Philippines.

The respondents included 150 students in which 100 of them are in the 3rd year level and 50 are 4th year college students. More student were from the 3rd year level because in the university it is in that level that speech and oral communication courses are offered. All 20 instructors from the department of computer studies participated in the research while all 14 faculty members of the language and humanities who are teaching language arts also did participate. On the other hand, 16 industry practitioners were involved. They are systems analysts, programmers, web designers, graphic artists, network analysts, database officers, information systems support, and hardware/software vendors.

Student participants were selected using stratified random sampling. Both the faculty member respondents from the computer studies and English departments were purposively selected, while the industry practitioners selection was based on purposive and convenient sampling technique. This was so because only the identified industry professions were sought and the ones available were asked to be part. All in all, 2 from each industry profession were sought. Thus, the total number of respondents for this study was 200. The table below shows the break-down of respondents:

Groups	Subgroups	Number of Samples	Total
Instructors/ Faculty Members	Computer Studies	20	34
	English Language Arts	14	
Students	Third Year Level	100	150
	Fourth Year Level	50	
Industry Practitioners	Systems Analyst	2	16
	Programmer	2	
	Web Designer	2	
	Graphic Artist	2	
	Network Specialist	2	
	Database officer	2	
	Information Systems Support	2	
	Hardware/Software Vendor	2	
Total Respondents			200

Instruments

This study used three instruments namely survey questionnaire, observation sheet, and interview guide. These instruments were used in the assessment of the learners' needs. The survey questionnaire was personally constructed by the researcher and was co-validated with language experts so that the purpose of the questionnaire will be established. The questionnaire, which is generally intended for the practitioners' evaluation of professionals needs contained possible positions for computer-related degrees, the functions of oral communications on these identified positions, the observed weaknesses of professionals in their oral communication skills specifically on grammar, discourse, socio-cultural, and strategic competence (Canale & Swain 1980), and personal supplemental observations of the respondents that would be a vital consideration in the over-all assessment of the perceived needs of students.

The interview guide intended for instructors, on the other hand, contained questions that elicit information on the capabilities and problems of the students in terms of their speaking communication skills. Also, this included some questions that would help teachers strategize on the speech communication problems of students. The instructors of English language arts were asked about strategies and techniques that would answer the difficulties being identified by them. In the case of the computer studies instructors, they were asked about the speaking engagement computer studies graduates may face and how their current students are performing in their oral communication skills. Specific speaking problems were taken down for evaluation and consideration.

As regards the observation sheet used, it was a journal of the vital information about the students that the researcher believed to be relevant in the analysis of their language needs. These data were accumulated from the integration of the researcher and three other English language arts instructors to the computer studies students. The observation sheet also contained a checklist of the micro and macro skills of oral production based on the scale of H. Douglas Brown (2004).

Procedures

To assess the needs of the computer studies students in terms of their speaking the English language for occupational purposes the researcher thoroughly underwent several procedures. These procedures were based on the proposed steps posited by Rodgers and Richards (2001) like literature review, survey questionnaire, observation, and interview. First, the researcher conducted a survey of industry practitioners. This was done through a survey questionnaire distributed to selected computer-related professionals- programmers, systems analysts, graphic artists, database officers, network specialists, information systems support, educators, software vendors, and hardware vendors. The questionnaire contained information and questions which were believed to elicit the possible needs requirement of the students. After collecting the questionnaires from the respondents, these were qualitatively analyzed and interpreted.

Second, the researcher interviewed the instructors of computer studies and English language arts. In this procedure, they were asked to describe the speaking abilities of their students and their general perceptions of their students' interests. They were also

asked to cite some perceived difficulties in speaking among students as they interact with them in their classroom discussions. Also, the computer studies instructors were asked similar information as to what were asked to practitioners. There, they were asked to give some suggestions on what particular aspects should computer studies students be trained more in their oral communication skills, since they know better the technicalities of that discipline. On the other hand, the English language instructors were asked to elaborate on the difficulties perceived among their computer studies students in terms of their spoken English. They were also asked by the researcher to give pedagogical strategies to attack these perceived problems.

Then the researcher did formal and casual observations among computer studies students. Here, the researcher intended to witness and to assess what requirements were needed by the students. He sat in some classes and observed the oral communication skills of students. He also made use of his own classes as case study. These observations also aimed to know the competence of students in their cognitive academic and interpersonal communicative skills in which the latter is believed to be more dominant in the conduct of their professions as computer professionals.

Next, the researcher surveyed and reviewed existing literature. This was done with the belief that existing records would help easily determine the needs of the students. The students' profile was reviewed because by knowing their backgrounds, their speaking abilities can be correlated. For example, it was perceived that children of professionals are more likely to speak better English than the children of non-professionals. On the other hand, books and documents on computer field careers were reviewed by the researcher for him to understand the job function and to determine the language function necessary in the conduct of the task.

Lastly, the researcher analyzed and interpreted the collected data. From the analysis, he developed the profile of the learners' communicative needs.

Results, Discussions, and Recommendations

The researcher used the Munby Model (1978) in profiling the students' needs. This model describes the kind of information needed to develop a profile of the learners' communicative needs, given in summary: (1) Personal- who are the students, their age, sex, educational background; (2) Purpose- the kinds of outcomes expected such as the communicative skills the students need to develop; (3) Setting- the jobs the students will be performing in the future and who they might be engaging within their work place; (4) Interactional Variables- their relationships with bosses, colleagues, clients and others; (5) Medium, Mode, and Channel- spoken, whether face to face or not; (6) Dialects- both formal and casual styles; (7) Target Level- basic, intermediate, and advanced level; (8) Anticipated Communicative Events- spoken language functions in the workplace; and (9) Key- the way the spoken communication is delivered (Schutz & Derwing 1981).

The table that follows presents the needs profile of the students:

Computer Studies Students Profile of Communicative Needs	
Personal	The learners here are the computer studies students who are taking speech and oral communication courses.
Purpose	The students, attending their speech and oral communication classes, are expected to improve their confidence and their oral communication skills relevant to their occupational tasks.
Setting	After graduation, students may be employed as programmers, graphic artists, web developers, systems analysts, database officer, network specialists, lecturers/trainers/instructors, software vendors, hardware vendors and other related jobs.
Interactional Variables	Professional Relationship: employee to employee, employee to superior, and employee to clients
Medium. Mode, and Channel	Spoken: face to face or through channel
Dialects	formal or casual style
Target Level	basic, intermediate, or advanced level
Communicative Events	This includes job interviews, presenting project plans, reporting project outputs, conducting lectures and trainings, conducting and sharing opinions during meeting, participating in project discussions, expounding or explaining processes to inquirers, eliciting information, explaining project specifications, and other related tasks.
Key	professional manner

This profile of communicative needs was developed based on the various processes that the researcher underwent from to assess the needs of the computer studies students. In reference to the assessment, it was found out that the students might be employed as programmers, web developers, graphic artists, systems analysts, database officers, information systems support, lecturers, instructors, trainers, software vendor, hardware vendor and other related jobs, thus, they would need to enhance their confidence and their oral communication skills for them to perform their jobs in tasks or functions which need spoken communication.

In his observation, the researcher found out that computer studies students rarely used English in their basic interpersonal communication and they seldom used it in the academic setting. These two observations contributed to the lack of confidence and oral communication skills of the students. The students seemed shy in speaking in English and rarely do they attempt t o use English in either setup- interpersonal or academic communication. They tend to be very mechanical and at the same time inadequate in terms of fluency and strategy in using the language. Oral production skills among them were said to be average if not poor.

With his interview with the instructors, he found out that his recorded observations were the same as theirs. They observed that students cannot produce long discourse in full English. Also, the Filipino language was used in dealing with their major subjects- discussions, reporting, and the like. In instances that they were required o

use English, they felt shy and intimidated. It was also a common observation among instructors that the students oftentimes commit grammatical lapses in their utterances. Most common of these were subject-verb agreement, tense usage, prepositions, and proper word choice. In terms of phonological structure, they have observed that students had difficulty in producing the critical sounds of English, both vowels and consonants, the correct accent (words, phrases, or sentences), the rhythm and intonation pattern, and blending which are essential elements for students to approximate standard speakers.

The computer studies instructors identified possible events where speaking would be necessary and some of these were included in the profile of communicative needs. They also identified the most common difficulty of the students and that included expressing their ideas about solutions of computational problems and the organization of these ideas.

As a result of the survey among industry practitioners, the researcher found out that the functions of oral communication in the workplace were as follow: Answering to job interviews; presenting project plans, reporting project outputs; conducting lectures and trainings; conducting meeting and sharing opinions during the meeting; participating in project discussions; explaining or expounding processes to inquirers; talking clients about their concerns; and explaining project specifications to colleagues, superiors, or clients. In relation to the speaking competence of employees, the surveyed revealed that employees commonly commit mistakes in their choice of appropriate words, in their production of critical sounds including rhythm, intonation, blending and accent. They also stuttered and muttered in speaking and they did not speak straight English during conversations. Moreover, many of them did not observe turn-taking and had poor interpretations of non-verbal signals. This also brought them difficulty on them in bringing back the conversation in order when there was disregard of turn-taking, and in clarifying vague signals such as body language meaning, verbal message or voice tone which seemed to be difficult to interpret during a speech act.

The aforementioned processes that brought the results discussed supports Ana Johns and Donna Mechado's argument that, "in every genuine ESP (English for Specific Purposes) course, needs assessment is obligatory, and in many programs, an ongoing need assessment is integral to curriculum design and evaluation" (2003 p.49). They further stressed that, "in performing an assessment, practitioners attempt to determine as closely as possible what students need to do- in English language contexts or with English language literacies" (2003 p.49). Process-based and sophisticated methods in assessing learners' needs have increased over the years. These include multiple intelligence and learning style survey, mode of working, spoken or written reflection, and what this research had used like survey questionnaire, interviews from expert, student observations, and job-shadowing analysis (1988).

Truly that an honest and objective assessment of the needs of students will help the teachers to strategize and align their lessons to what are most needed by the learners, and the curriculum planners to craft the appropriate course content that will best serve the learners. Thus, it is recommended that further and continuous needs assessment should be done to meet the needs of students in accordance with demands of the industry and to continuously update and develop the syllabi and materials used in the teaching and learning of speech and oral communication for computer studies students.

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