(B)
2014　2016

Study of students capacity to speak

Humphries, Simon

1,300,000

CTS (1) / ＂Capacity to Speak"
(2)
CTS

Lack of spoken English in Japanese high school EFL classrooms is a widely reported problem, which had not been studied empirically. This study aimed to find ways to increase students' capacity to speak (CTS) through investigating their attitudes to various classroom situations. The study explored: (1) the classroom situations that can facilitate and inhibit speaking, and (2) students' underlying reasons. A structural equation model was created to illuminate the strength of variables that promote/inhibit speaking. Results showed that students tended to prefer mechanical rather than communicative activities. Moreover, rather than motivation and anxiety, confidence and classroom support are stronger factors influencing students' CTS in the classroom. As a result, teachers should introduce a mix of activities and creative a supportive environment where students can work toward shared goals.

Applied linguistics

Capacity to Speak High School Classroom English

From April 2013, a "Course of Study" policy came into effect for Japanese high schools that stated: "Classes are to be taught in English, in principle" (translated by Fredrick, 2011). This policy represented the latest step in a series of policies, launched since the late 1980s, aimed to develop students' communicative competence in English. However, classroom observational studies have painted a bleak picture regarding the amount of English communication by teachers and students in secondary-level classrooms. Classroom observers have consistently noted the prevalence of yakudoku (grammar-translation) instruction (O'Donnell, 2005; Sakui, 2004; Sato, 2002; Sato & Kleinsasser, 2004; Taguchi, 2005; Watanabe, 2004). Yakudoku classes are teacher-centered, conducted in Japanese, focused on sentence-level translation into Japanese and minimize students use of English (except for copying and repetition) (Gorsuch, 2000). Paradoxically, however, from teachers' perspectives, student passivity restricts their ability to implement communicative activities (Humphries, 2014).

Classroom observations highlight the strong tendency for students' silence during instruction (Humphries & Stroupe, 2013; King, 2013). Various reasons have been suggested for their reluctance to participate, such as: (a) demotivating instructional practices (Kikuchi, 2009); (b) students' preference for traditional approaches as "real study" for examinations (Sakui, 2007); (c) cultural classroom norms of teacher-led communication developed in other subjects (Nishino & Watanabe, 2008); (d) hypersensitivity to others (fear of making mistakes, fear of appearing to lack modesty) (King, 2013); and (e) linguistic problems (lack of comprehension, inability to articulate thoughts in English) (Harumi, 2011).

Research to date has focused on accounts from schoolteachers and undergraduate student surveys. However, studies focusing on Japanese secondary school instruction are rare, even though this is the crucial context for the development of communicative abilities in English. In particular, there is the need for an empirical study of students' attitudes while they are still at school.

As outlined in   , despite the government's communicative language teaching policies culminating in the proposal that all classes be conducted in English and despite various studies of the perceptions of teachers and undergraduates, to date there has been no empirical study of Japanese school students' perceptions of the factors that hinder or encourage their capacity to speak English while they are still at school. Based on the literature outlined in   and the findings from my investigations, the study investigated two areas:

(1) students' perception of their capacity to speak English during different classroom activities, and
(2) the influence of intangible latent variables on the dependent variables (capacity to speak English during classroom activities).

The capacity to speak refers to students' perceptions of their abilities to speak under various situations, including situations they have not experienced directly.
Teachers, teacher-trainers and policy-makers could use the findings from this study from two practical perspectives. Firstly, in line with the Course of Study to encourage speaking in English, the teachers could select activities based on results indicating a high capacity to speak. Secondly, the strength of the intangible latent variables on classroom activities could increase teachers' empathy for students. For example, an activity such as "answering the teacher in English" may have a strong negative result (causing silence). Strong intangible latent variables might be "fear of mistakes while classmates listen" and "lack of preparation time"; therefore, the teacher might use a strategy to get the students preparing answers with peers and circulate to collect answers while the majority are distracted on task.

Data were collected and analysed in two stages. The first stage was a qualitative study aimed at developing categories for the main quantitative study.

(1) First stage: Qualitative Study
I collected the data using narrative frames, which is a methodological approach first

proposed by Barkhuizen and Wette (2008). They state that narrative frames are a useful way of collecting "a large amount of data from a large number of participants" (p. 372). As noted by Nguyen & Bygate (2012), narrative frames are more open-ended than questionnaires and participants have "more freedom to divulge information than might have been the case in potentially face-threatening interviews" (p. 57).

A link for an anonymous and voluntary online questionnaire was sent to First Year undergraduates. 104 students completed at least one of the following two statements in Japanese about their high school days:

1 When [classroom situation], I could speak English well, because [reason]
2 When [classroom situation], I could not speak English well because [reason]

The data were translated independently by a bilingual Japanese person and then analysed using a memo-writing grounded theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Students' responses were tagged anonymously from S1 to S104.

(2) Second Stage: Main Quantitative Study
Based on the categories that arose from the qualitative study and based on the literature, I developed a questionnaire containing two main sections. The first section looked at seven underlying factors that could influence students' CTS: school context, experience outside school, motivation, confidence, anxiety, use of English by others and classroom environment/support. Each of these seven latent variables were measured by four manifest variable questionnaire items.
The second section had seven items representing activities that differed in levels of cognitive difficulty, spontaneity, creative vs mechanical, and pressure to speak in front of the class. Students answered if they had done the activities and rated their CTS. Students answered using a 6-point Likert Scale.
The questionnaire was administered online in May-June 2016. Five high schools agreed to participate from three regions (Kansai, Shizuoka and Aichi) and I received 261 student responses (84 x Grade 10; 61 x Grade 11; 115 x Grade 12).

Based on the data collected, I investigated the following research questions:
1 What activities increased students' CTS in English?
2 What activities decreased students' CTS in English?
3 What underlying factors strongly influenced students' CTS?

I used SPSS to analyse the first two research questions and gain the frequencies of responses. For the third research question, I developed a Structural Equation Model using AMOS.

(1) Qualitative Study Results and Implications
Based on the first (qualitative study), students' comments about situations that increased their CTS formed into six categories: (a) pair and group work, (b) positive supportive environment, (c) teacher's language, (d) preparation time, (e) simplicity versus effort, and (f) forced to speak. In contrast, most of the students who responded to the questionnaire highlighted situations that reduced their CTS and eight students felt that they lacked any opportunities to speak at all. In general, situations that decreased their CTS formed five themes: (a) speaking to the whole class, (b) influence of peers, (c) influence of the teacher, (d) complex thoughts and complex language, and (e) lack of preparation time.

Based on the findings described above, four categories emerge that can influence students' CTS either negatively or positively: (a) use of English and level of support offered by the teacher and classmates; (b) rules and framework for speaking; (c) the activity's cognitive load and level of spontaneity; and (d) the affective state of the student.
Teachers can use four major strategies to try to increase students' CTS. First, develop a supportive classroom culture that uses cooperative learning rather than whole class competitive instruction (Lightbown, 2014). Second, set a framework of rules. If students accept that they should use English and they understand its benefits, then they can monitor and encourage each other to follow rules that they help to create. Third, introduce a variety of activities. Many students favoured discussions and other activities that encourage creative language production, but other respondents favoured simple structured activities such as recitation from the textbook or repetition after the teacher. Some students disliked

speaking in front of the whole class, but others preferred presentations and speeches because they had time to prepare what to say. Fourth, show empathy and flexibility to students' needs. Students in this study indicated that their CTS increased or decreased due to affective factors such as their desire to communicate or their levels of anxiety in front of the teacher and peers. Teachers need to be patient with reticent students, give them time and support to develop their language before nominating students to speak while their classmates listen.

(2) Quantitative Study Results and Implications

Regarding the first two research questions that asked which activities increased and decreased students' CTS, most respondents experienced answering a simple question, repeating after the CD/teacher, reading aloud from the textbook and gap-filling skits with a classmate and students felt they had a high CTS for these activities. They also frequently did speeches, but reactions were mixed as to whether they could speak well.

Discussions were attempted less and students seemed less enthusiastic about their CTS for these types of communicative activities. It's interesting to note that students who had not tried discussions tended to predict that their CTS would be lower. Maybe teachers had correctly predicted this problem and avoided these activities or maybe students might be surprised that they can do it if they are given the opportunity.

Regarding the third research question (what are the underlying factors), I used RMSEA analysis in AMOS to find the Structural Equation Model with the best fit. It was interesting to note that the model fit when motivation, anxiety and school context were removed. The most powerful latent variable influencing CTS is confidence followed by classroom support.

This study has strong implications for teachers and curriculum planners. Respondents tended to favour mechanical activities such as replying to the teacher, repeating after the teacher or CD, reading aloud from the textbook and gap-filling skits. These were also the activities that teachers in Japan tended to do the most, so they seem to recognise this preference. Students had more ambivalent attitudes towards communicative activities such as discussions. However, this study asked students who take English as a compulsory subject. We need further study with English majors who would probably reveal different results. As with the results from the qualitative study, I would advise teachers to introduce a mix of activities—both mechanical and creative. They should also provide structure at the beginning and slowly remove this structure as students' confidence increases.

It is not too much of a surprise that motivation did not fit the model. The motivation questions related to concepts outside the classroom, such as: getting a better job or better university place, the importance of English internationally, and talking to foreigners. Students can have these motivations yet still struggle to speak. Intrinsic motivation—developing that flow during an activity—is directly relevant in the classroom, but harder to measure in a questionnaire like this. However, it is surprising that anxiety did not fit the model. Worrying about expressing themselves, making mistakes, worrying about how they appear in front of classmates for showing off or using weird English have been widely cited as reasons for stopping students from speaking. This area needs further study.

The opposite to anxiety is confidence, which was the strongest factor in helping students speak. Items that indicated high confidence included the following: Students who felt that they were studying well, could understand the teacher's English well, could make English sentences easily and felt that they would get good a good grade. Teachers need to be aware of this by designing activities that build on students' confidence. They need to make students feel that they are progressing and praise them when they do well.

Classroom support was the second strongest area. Students felt that they could speak better when their teachers show empathy and use easy English, and when their classmates enjoy the class and show empathy. Rather than competitive activities, teachers could design tasks where students collaborate to achieve shared goals.

1 Humphries, S. & Burns, A. (2015   ). 'In reality it's almost impossible':

CLT-oriented curriculum change. *ELT Journal,* *69*(3), 239-248. *DOI: 10.1093/elt/ccu081.*

2 Humphries, S., Burns, A. & Tanaka, T. (2015). 'My head became blank and I couldn't speak': Classroom factors that influence English speaking. *The Asian Journal of Applied Linguistics 2*(3), 164-175. ISSN 2308-6262.

4

1 Humphries, S. (2017 3). I Forgot the Words: Classroom Factors Influencing English Speaking. Presented at the TESOL Convention, Washington Convention Center, Seattle, .

2 Humphries, S., Burns, A., Akamatsu, N., Tanaka, T. (2016 11). Factors influencing high school English speaking. Presented at ,
, .

3 Humphries, S., Tanaka, T. & Akamatsu, N. (2015 11) Classroom factors that influence English speaking. Presented at
, , .

4 Humphries, S. (2015 9) Classroom factors that influence EFL students' capacity to speak English. Presented at the BAAL Conference, Aston University, Birmingham .

(1)
HUMPHRIES Simon Humphries, Simon

60609535

(2)

(3)

(4)