Coping with learning to speak English among senior high school students

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Abstract: Learning to speak English needs a great effort to make due to various linguistic aspects involved. It may deal with diction, pronunciation, sentence patterns, and grammar. Besides, the exposure to the target language, habbit formation and motivation play an important role. In senior high schools, speaking is one of the skills to be learned. However, learning to speak English among senior high school students is not satisfactory. The majority of students who have finished senior school cannot speak English. Meanwhile, the ability in English is judged by the capability of speaking English well. Once people can speak English fluently, people think that their English is good. Based on the observation in the classroom presentation, it was found out that the common problems of speaking English that the senior high students often made were speaking slowly and taking too long to compose utterances, not being able to participate actively in conversation, having unnatural sounds of English, having poor grammar and pronunciation, not being able to sustain spoken interaction, often making breakdown communication and misunderstanding, lacking vocabulary needed to talk about common utterances, and lacking communication strategy as well. This paper is going to explore the real problems of learning speaking English among senior high school students, the probable causes of the problems, and some ways out to solve the problems.

Key words : speaking, English, senior high school, problems

Introduction

Speaking involves some linguistic features such as diction, grammar, pronunciation, rhythm, intonation, accent, and speed. For a second or foreign language learner, speaking can be harder because they are much influenced by the way he/she speaks in his/her mother tongue, especially in the case of pronunciation, accent, and rhythm. Brown (1994:256) puts forward that speaking is difficult due to clustering, redundancy, reduced form, performance variables, colloquial language, rate of delivery, stress, rhythm, intonation, and interaction. Besides, there are some other psychological factors which inbitit learning to speak in classroom. The students oftentimes feel shy and reluctant to speak up. Nunan (1999:225) points out that it is not easy to teach speaking because some students are reluctant to speak in the target language. Some students find it hard to say something because they are afraid to make mistakes and to be laughed at by their classmates. In this case, a teacher has to exert some efforts to encourage them to express what they have in mind in the target language.

A teacher needs to have suitable techniques on how to make her students brave to speak up in the target language. In this paper, some techniques were applied to motivate the students to express what they felt and thought in the target language. Based on students' comments, the students felt that they were encouraged to say something in the target language after they were introduced to some techniques on how to say things in the target language.

Procedure

In teaching speaking, three different speaking genres were introduced. They were telling past experience in the form of spoken-recount text, describing something in the form of spoken-descriptive text, and stating arguments in the form of spoken-exposition text. The three speaking genres were taught through different techniques to make students dare to speak in class.

Spoken-recount text

To tell students' past experience in the form of spoken recount, the teacher gave guided-conversation activities. The first technique used was Yes/ No Question Game in which students were asked to do "a guessing game" by asking "Yes/ No Question". For the first step, the teacher gave an example how to ask questions as an exposure. She asked the students by using Yes/ No questions, for example,

Questions	Responses
• "Did you go to Prambanan temple in your last holiday?"	No, I didn't. No, I didn't.
• "Did you go Jakarta in your last holiday?	No, I didn't.
• "So where did you go in your last holiday?	
• "Did you leave for the place at 7 a.m.?	I went to Borobudur .
• "Did you go with your family?"	No, I didn't. I left for Borobudur at 8.
• "Did you go with your close friends?	No, I didn't.
• "So whom did you go with?	No, I didn't
• "Did you go there by bus?	
•	I went with my schoolmates.
• "Did you go by car?"	
• "Did you spend the night in a hotel?"	No, I didn't
	Yes, I did
	No, we didn't.

	We didn't spend the night in a hotel.

The questions went on till they represented the sequence events and the reorientation. The second step was that the teacher asked the students to work in pairs to do the same things as the example. The teacher gave the worksheet to be filled in by interviewing his/ her partner's past experience. After they had finished interviewing, the teacher asked them to make a group of four. The last step was that students made a report about the interview in the form of monolog recount in front of their own groups.

The goal of this technique is to motivate students to be active in speaking practice, to establish alive interesting English classroom, to create habit formation on how to raise yes/ no questions, and to retell their past experience in a correct text structure. Being given the guided-worksheet in which sentences had been arranged in an order events, students were hoped to be able to produce monolog recount text in a correct generic structure. Group working was aimed at giving opportunity to every student to present his/her monolog recount.

The second technique applied in the classroom was "Who am I game?" The "Who Am I" technique is also a guessing game activity in which the players try to guess a name, profession, or thing that has been approved. Although this game is quite simple to organize and set up, the teacher can customize it to be as challenging and competitive as she likes. It can make the class alive, communicative and noisy as well.

The procedure of applying this technique is relatively simple. It is a guessing game which needs the traits and characteristics of a famous, historical, or outstanding figure. The word to be guessed can also be a name of a profession, place, or thing. The game should be started from an easy one; something which is quite common to the students.

First of all, the teacher gave an example how to play the game by writing down a name of a famous person or a profession on a piece of paper, folding it, and putting it in her pocket. Then she asked the students to raise questions related to the written profession or written famous person by

raising questions in the form of "WH-questions, Subject questions, Tag questions, and Yes/ No questions. The typical questions are such as *"Is it related to health?", "Do you work indoor?", "Do you drive a vehicle?", "You take care of patients, don't you?"You work in a hospital, don't you?", "Do you wear a uniform?", Do you work in group?", "You are well-paid, aren't you?",* and *"Do you work all day long?".*

When the game got stuck, meaning the students could hardly raise more questions, the teacher gave a clue so that the game could go on until finally one of the students could guess the target word correctly.

After the students knew the procdure well, the teacher asked one of the students to go forward to be a player. The teacher asked him/ her to write down a profession or a famous person on a piece of paper, folding it, and putting it in his/ her pocket. He/she then asked his/her friends to raise questions by using "Wh-questions", subject questions, tag questions, and yes/ no questions. The students started guessing what had been written on the paper by raising questions such as *"You work in a company, don't you?", "How do you go to work?", "Do you make an appointment with a client?", "Do you work using your laptop?", Is it related to transportation, and the like.* After a student could guess the word correctly, the teacher asked another student to be another player. She might give a reward to the student who could guess the word correctly. This game could be played in turns till the time allotted was over. When the game got stuck, the teacher might give a hand by giving a clue so that it could run again. After they had done making questions and answers, the teacher asked one of the students to repeat the sentences based on the information they had made by arranging them in monolog recount. This activity involved the students' ability in memorizing and repeating sentences. Repetition plays an important part in language leaning; it is effective in helping students to transfer knowledge from their short-termed to their long-termed memories. When the students think about what they are repeating and try to organize it in their heads, they acquire a better chance of remembering what they are learning, even if they merely repeat it without thought (Harmer, 2007:56).

Spoken-descriptive text

In teaching spoken-descriptive text, the teacher used realia as a stimulus to speak. The procedure of applying this technique was as follows. The teacher gave an example how to describe something she had in her hand. She started describing something very common toward something more specific. For example, she took a pencil case to describe from the general information to the specific ones. She might say: *"It is a pencil case. I bought it in Pantes Supermarket a month ago. I bought it for ten thousand rupiah. It is very useful for me because I can put many things in it. I can put some pens, pencils, erasers, board markers, and some others. Every day I bring it to school and I always put it in my bag.*

It is made of plastic. It has blue with black stripes on its cover. It has a red zipper. In every corner of the pencil case there are four corn-metal accessories. Its size is about 15 cm long and 10 cm wide."

After giving an example, the teacher invited students to choose a real thing, like a pen, a bag, a pencil case, a board marker, or other things around the classroom. Next, every student in the class tried to build up sentences related to the thing they had in hand.

Using realia can create the learning process alive, meaningful and more memorable for the students as they can connect it with their real life. They feel motivated and get involved with the learning process since they can apply their English by describing something common in their environment. The choice of the object can go from a very simple to a more sophisticated one. More importantly, a teacher has to let students choose materials which are of the students' interest.

Spoken-exposition

For teaching spoken-exposition, the teacher used the techniques of brain washing and mind mapping. Brainstorming or brain washing encourages students to constantly be able to produce ideas using its technique (Clark, 1958). An English learner might be able to come up with a lot of different ideas in his or her mind when he/she is given a certain topic. In addition, brainstorming or brain washing allows the main

points to be clarified and determines ways to support these main ideas. Brainstorming is one of the methods for generating ideas. It clears one's mind and enables the organization of one's thoughts. Also this skill is effective for encouraging a creative mind to come up with new ideas. In teaching and learning English, the teaching of brainstorming is an important skill to build up ideas for better writing or speaking.

Mind mapping was developed as an effective method for generating ideas by association in the 1960s (Murley, 2007). A mind map is a graphic organizer in which the major categories radiate from a central idea and sub-categories are represented as branches of larger branches. It is a visual tool that can be used to generate ideas, take notes, organise thinking, and develop concepts (Budd, 2003; Murley, 2007; Siriphanic & Laohawiriyano, 2010; Al-Jarf, 2011). Mind mapping in language teaching helps the teacher introduce or bring together multiple words that are linked to one subject or theme.

The procedure in applying this technique was as follows. First, the teacher gave one motion or theme and triggered students by asking some arguments of the motion. Next, she made a list of arguments and broke down the arguments into specific detail, gave examples and proof of the arguments. The last step was that the students had to express the ideas and elaborate them in front of the class. The generic structure of the exposition text needed to be explained in order that students were able to speak up systematically. After the teacher had given an example of how to brainstorm and how to elaborate ideas into specific details supported by proof and examples, she asked the students to do the same as the teacher did. She asked students to select a problem, topic, theme, or motion provided by the teacher and react to it quickly. They started to brainstorm by making a list of arguments related to the motion they chose. Quantity of ideas was more important than that of quality. Students were not allowed to criticize anyone else's ideas. Students accepted and recorded all ideas or suggestions. After students had expressed their ideas, they broke down the ideas into specific details. Then, they had to talk about the ideas in front of the class.

The teacher applied the brainstorming strategy in her teaching practice. She began with a whole-class brainstorming session where each student recorded his or her own ideas. She rended a problem question as a stimulus and a time limit to eliminate silly ideas and daydreaming. Next, she let each student share his or her list of arguments. Then, she opened the brainstorming session for everyone. She began to evaluate some of the ideas in terms of their effectiveness in solving the given topic or motion.

Another technique of teaching spoken exposition text is mind mapping. The procedure is almost the same as that of brainstorming technique. In order to create a mind-map, teacher usually started in the middle page of the paper to draw the central theme or main idea. Then, she draw wider in all directions to create a growing diagram composed of keywords, concepts, facts, and information. Mind-mapping graphically shows ideas in a relational framework, with the main topic at the center of the paper, major subtopics on branches derived from the main topic, and sub-subtopics around each major subtopic.

Mind map can be created by using paper and pens or using one of several computer applications (Murley, 2007). Mind mapping can ease the students to generate their mind. The students can create it on a blank of paper, using pen or pencil.

The following procedures are an example of how to make a paper-pen based mind map:

a. Place the central theme or main idea in the center of the paper.
b. Use lines, arrows, branches, and different colors as ways of showing the connection between the central theme or main idea. The relationships are important in order to keep the idea related to main topic.
c. Avoid creating an artwork. Teachers should draw quickly without major pauses or editing.
d. Choose different colors to symbolize different things.
e. Leave some space on a page due to the reason that a teacher can continue toad to the idea over a period of time. If A4 sized paper is small, A3 will be better.

Students' response

The following are the students' response toward the teaching learning process toward the speaking class using Yes/ No Question Game, Who am I game?, Brain washing and Mind Mapping. In

general, the students were more motivated to speak in English. They were braver to express their ideas in the target language, no matter how good their English was.

Spoken-recount text

A student said that the use of reporting a friend's past experience could improve his English and he was happy to learn English by using this technique.

Student A:

Translated from his Indonesian*: (I feel very happy today because the English class can improve my English speaking ability especially in questioning session and reporting friend's past experience. Besides, the techniques can make us more communicative).*

Student B:

Another student said that he was happy to have an English class because he could improve his English and reporting could make his English communicative.

Translated from Indonesian*: (I feel very happy today because the English class can improve my English speaking ability, especially in questioning session and reporting friend's past experience. Besides, the techniques can make us more communicative).*

Using games

Student C:

She said that her English class became easy and fun. It made her confident to speak in English.

Translated from her Indonesian *:(In my opinion, the English class is fun and learning English is not difficult. The game makes me explore my speaking English. It can also make me confident to speak in front of the class).*

Student D:

He said that English class became interesting and fun. And he became confident and brave to speak English.

Translated from Indonesian*: (The English class today is interesting and it triggers me to speak. I like the speaking English class today because the guessing game activity is fun and reporting the interview makes me more confident and brave to speak).*

Student E:

She said that using games triggered her to speak. And she found it easy to do the activity.

Translated from Indonesian (*Yes/ No question game, who am I game activities are easy to do. The activities trigger me to speak*).

Brain washing and mind mapping

Student F:

She said that mind mapping could improve her vocabulary and grammar. And at the same time, English became fun.

Translated from Indoesian*: (I feel the class today is more interesting because pair working activity makes the interview easy and makes me participate well in the activity. Mind mapping and brain storming activities are also fun too because I learn many new words and grammar. I know how to elaborate main ideas into supporting details and proofs).*

Student G:

Another student commented that her class became fun and she became confident.

Translated from Indonesia: (*The class today is very interesting because the atmosphere is very fun and relax but keeps focused on the speaking activity. In interviewing (question and answer session) I got my confident because I had to do repetition in asking yes/ no questions. By repetition I know the way how to ask question and how to answer question in past form, I know more vocabulary and grammar. I am not shy anymore when I have to present my report in front of the class).*

Student H:
A student commented that the techniques used to teach speaking were all interesting. Brain storming and mind mapping were not easy, but

they could improve his vocabulary related to other subjects.

Translated from Indonesian *: (I think the English activities using game, brainstorming, and mind mapping are very interesting.. But brainstorming and mind mapping techniques are not easy to do. We need many vocabularies and knowledge related to other subjects, like biology, geography, health, and many others. Besides, we have to think hard first to elaborate sentences and break down the ideas into supporting details and proof. We need to search many resources first so we cannot directly speak up completely).*

Student I:

Another student thought that brain storming and mind mapping were difficult but they were challenging. She liked the techniques used to teach speaking.

Translated from Indonesian: (For me brain storming and mind mapping techniques are more difficult than the guessing game activities. But they are more challenging. I really start understanding about how to elaborate main ideas into supporting details and I have to think hard how to speak up. By struggling hard finally I got the point and I can speak up although I have to be strained. I like the three learning activities because they make us active and encourage us to speak. We become brave and get confident although sometimes I have to think and struggle very hard).

Concluding remarks

It is not easy to teach speaking due to some reasons on the part of the students. Some students are not motivated to speak in the target language. Some are reluctant, and some are afraid to make mistakes. It needs a special strategy to have them speak in the target language.

A teacher needs to be creative and anticipative in teaching speaking in the hope that the students will be willing to speak up in the target language, and have fun at the same time. Students must be triggered to express their ideas in the target language willingly.

In this study it was found out that some techniques could be applied to encourage the students to speak up in the traget language. The techniques applied in this study were games, brain washing and mind mapping, and realia.

From the students' comment, it was seen that the students liked the techniques to be applied in learning to speak English. Some students said that they enjoyed their class when the techniques were being applied, although some students foud it hard to do mind mapping and brain storming at the beginning. Yet, they enjoyed the challenging activities.

More importantly, the teacher should give a good example in speaking English, and be creative in helping her students to speak in the target language. An interesting teacher will raise the students' motivation. It was found out that some students would like to be able to speak English well as the teacher did.

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