大学における英会話授業：自信と表現力を高める

イアン・ウィリアム・ウォーナー

University Level English Language Oral Communication:
Building Confidence and Enhancing Articulateness

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Abstract

This paper will outline and provide commentary on a series of measures which the present writer contends collectively constitute an effective strategy or plan for raising OC student confidence and enhancing OC articulateness. It will therefore - necessarily - firstly address the need for realistic OC instructor (and student) expectations and thus accurate assessment.

Key words：English Language Oral Communication
キーワード：英会話授業

1. Introduction

English Oral Communication (OC) ability is a core skill for all English learners. However, for various valid and readily understandable reasons touched on and discussed previously (Warner, 2016, 2017), it is frequently viewed by Japanese high school and university level students if not educators as being especially difficult, problematic and thus challenging. This paper will contend that the principal objective of OC tuition should normally be to foster 'forthcomingness', articulateness and speech dynamism, and therefore to simultaneously attempt to raise confidence about speaking at greater length in the target language.

2. Building Confidence and Enhancing Articulateness

01) The necessity for realistic teacher expectations:

A standard length Oral Communication (OC) course comprising fifteen 90 minute lessons totals only 22.5 hours (maximum) of tuition and practice (i.e. learning) time, assuming no student absenteeism. As such, even when class sizes are

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small and of ideal size, OC instructors need to be and remain cautious and realistic about the degree to which a single semester or two of formal OC tuition is likely to benefit participating students. OC instructor expectations in this regard need to be and remain realistic in order to ensure that OC classroom objectives and activities are appropriate rather than too ambitious or the opposite. OC instructor expectations and assigned tasks must not in fact be - or merely appear to students to be - overly or insufficiently demanding.

That OC students will usually derive some benefit - however modest - from almost any form of remotely apposite OC centered instruction and range of activities, is, clearly, beyond doubt. However, over and under-estimation of i) current overall student OC ability on the part of the instructor at the outset of any given OC course and / or at any time prior to its completion and ii) like over or under-estimation of the extent to which any given student (regardless of i) is likely to improve their demonstrable overall OC skills as a direct result of experiencing and successfully completing such a course, is a constant possibility and risk that - at all times - needs to be guarded against and minimized, if not precluded outright.

Sound selection and use of essentially or optimally appropriate OC textbooks and study materials, themes, topics and activities, along with examination test content, depends on prior accurate assessment of student current ability and vice-versa.

Suitably close monitoring and assessing of each individual student's apparent current OC ability level and, by extension, the extent of their likely learning progress over time, via judicious appraisal of observed OC performance, also obviously permits instructors to ascertain the degree of variance that exists not only within single classes but between them.

Unless institutions go to great lengths to ensure formation of concentrated talent pools, marked or very considerable variance in each student's median OC performance within - and between – single classes is clearly a natural, frequent and by no means automatically lamentable occurrence. It is simply a reality to be expected, addressed, prepared and *adjusted* for accordingly, not down-played or ignored in full or part.

Each student's current OC performance at any given point in time is obviously bound to differ from the next for myriad reasons. In the absence of unusually strict, thorough-going and rigorous university and OC course enrollment requirements and later on-going vetting and weeding-out procedures, median student OC performance in any single year grade may well be found to be located above, around or below the hoped for, or anticipated, level and - importantly - is likely to fluctuate over time, sometimes or often quite substantially, not only within single classes and from class to class (above all if current ability-based student streaming is undertaken) but also from year to year.

Even if left un-streamed and randomly composed, different classes of OC students during any one

particular semester or 12 month period may not contain similarly narrow or wide student current ability ranges or median current ability levels, let alone be populated by students with like or broadly convergent English language study motives, interests, preferences, outlooks, goals, motivation or confidence levels.

While one group of students in any one semester, year or multi-year period might be found to generally exceed instructor current ability and thus overall performance expectations, a second group might be found to broadly meet them, while a third group might be assessed as broadly lacking and wanting in overall terms.

Furthermore, doubtless for a multitude of readily conceivable reasons, what seems to work well or satisfactorily for one specific group of students can work less well and less satisfactorily (or not at all) for others, even during the same time-frame and among groups of students with probably similar current median ability, let alone later on, in subsequent semesters and years and among groups of students with seemingly higher and / or lower median current ability levels. This is - presumably - in part due to and / or compounded by the fact that university level students are recruited from different prefectures, cities, districts, neighborhoods, high schools and / or English language streams and classes, and may therefore come from quite possibly distinctive socio-economic strata, politico-cultural backgrounds and social milieus, etc.

Unintentional over- and under-estimation on the part of OC instructors regarding the degree to which any one given student (regardless of his / her current overall OC capability at the outset of any particular OC course) is likely to improve their demonstrable overall OC skills as a direct result of completing one or more OC courses, appears most likely to occur in the case of newly enrolled Year 1 freshman students, since they are initially unknown or, at best, far less well known to their new teacher(s), and the possibility that one-off (entry) exam. performance is misleadingly high or low and a poor indicator of likely future student progress, can never be totally ruled-out.

Each student - and thus each group of students - is unique and thus requires a somewhat customized, tailored and nuanced approach on the part of the instructor(s) charged with assisting and aiding them. A uniform, one size fits all approach applied uniformly across classes and / or year cohorts is unsound given the aforementioned magnitude of variance in current ability that is liable to be encountered constantly or frequently. Instead, OC instructors must make sure that they are suitably realistic, practical minded, flexible and adaptive in response to each group of students they are required to aid. This is not necessarily a straightforward proposition, not least because each fast maturing student is normally subject to quite rapid evolutionary change. Each student's current OC ability, interest in OC, preferences, attitudes and motivation levels vis-à-vis further OC centered learning, practice and experimentation are unlikely to be static. On the contrary, they are likely to be somewhat fluid across time, and in worst case scenarios, essentially unstable. While

some students evolve in the desired way from being currently less advanced OC practitioners to currently more advanced OC practitioners (relative to their class's median end-of-course grades), other students may remain constant or regress in the longer term, trajectory-wise.

All else being equal, the student who enrolls on a course of OC study with comparatively advanced OC skills is logically more likely (though of course not certain) to progress further and more rapidly than the student who enrolls on the same course with comparatively less advanced OC skills. This is because the former student will be starting out from a higher, more advantageous achievement plateau and thus likely be in a stronger and better position - cognitively - to consolidate and further expand OC capabilities and, quite possibly, be more enthused and confident about the prospect of trying - and the likelihood of actually managing - to do so. Although the rate at which currently more advanced OC students are likely to make further progress may fluctuate over time, akin to that of any other student, currently more advanced OC students are conceivably the least likely to suffer major, long term or 'permanent' losses of motivation or confidence that bring about performance atrophying or declines, and the least likely to rest on their laurels, stagnate and / or even regress in terms of knowledge and skill expansion, retention and thus general OC learning trajectory. Such students certainly appear likely to derive and experience the highest amounts of satisfaction from their study efforts because they perceive them to have thus far been - and to likely remain - broadly successful and thus satisfactory

and worthwhile. Conversely, it is the less - but not necessarily least - currently advanced OC students who are the most likely to suffer major, long term or 'permanent' losses of motivation or confidence that bring about performance atrophying or declines, and the most likely to rest on their laurels, stagnate and / or even regress in terms of basic knowledge and skill expansion, retention and thus general OC learning trajectory. This is so because they will be starting out from a lower, less advantageous achievement plateau and thus be in a weaker and worse position - cognitively - to consolidate and further expand OC capabilities and, quite possibly, be less enthused and confident (or worse) about the prospect of trying - and the likelihood of actually managing to succeed. Such students certainly appear likely to derive and experience the lowest amounts of satisfaction from their study efforts because they perceive them to have thus far been only moderately successful at best or broadly unsuccessful and thus essentially unsatisfactory, if not - in hindsight - evidence of a disastrously misguided undertaking.

In light of the foregoing, determination on the part of OC instructors to proceed blindly and / or stubbornly in any planned and / or preferred manner regardless of known and / or suspected prevailing academic realities and conditions (empirically ascertained or suggested) is irrational, self-defeating and thus academically irresponsible. Tactical flexibility, albeit within the ultimate confines established and dictated by agreed, pre-existing and approved strategic course objectives as codified in syllabi etc, is consequently vital so as to avoid, as far as is possible, teaching and /

or practicing OC in ways and with materials that are excessively or insufficiently difficult and demanding and ／ or otherwise needlessly problematic.

How students learn:

The central task of the OC instructor cannot be to attempt to force satisfactory or superior OC learning outcomes. Rather, OC teachers can merely strive, as far as feasible in any set of circumstances, to act as optimally effective encouragers, facilitators and advisers, dedicated to assisting students in their own personal efforts to help themselves, despite immoveable constraints. Apart from the limitations rightly imposed by aforementioned course design parameters, such constraints include limited and inadequate formal tuition, practice and - very importantly - self-study time (which are commonly compounded by the widespread existence of external social commitments, the fact that many full-time students feel obliged to enter part-time employment, and the need for some students to commute relatively long distances, and so on).

Students who truly desire to become effective and impressive OC practitioners surely need to possess and retain very keen personal interest in (and fascination with) the reality of OC, which, it is contended here, is something that is largely - or, at least, as much - an inherent, present-at-birth and ／ or naturally occurring mindset, orientation or ʻgiftʼ, as any consciously self-generated and ／ or externally acquired faculty - or capacity - that can be intentionally self- or externally activated, cultivated and honed. The students with the most

impressive OC skills are not necessarily those who work hardest or struggle most. Comparatively advanced OC skills may well tend to come more easily and rapidly to individuals fortunate to possess more in the way of what we might term an ʻinherent facilityʼ or ʻinherent talentʼ for OC than their fundamentally less fortunately endowed peers. Those who experience the greatest OC learning successes, surely tend to be those with greatest inherent aptitude for doing so.

Every student clearly has within them the capacity and thus potential to greatly expand his or her knowledge base and sets of practical skills with respect to any specific discipline or activity, but the ease with which one can do so, and the exact scope and extent of oneʼs ultimate potential and actual likely progression, advancement and attainment, in prevailing real-word conditions - differs from person to person for cognitive, psychological and environmental reasons substantially beyond his or her (or anyone elseʼs) own conscious control. People are who they are...

The extent to which one can successfully begin and continue to acquire, maintain and hone progressively more advanced OC skills is surely substantially or largely dependent on natural cognitive and psychological orientation and ／ or propensity and is thus a process than can surely only be encouraged, facilitated, supported, nourished and otherwise nurtured by the individual concerned and others - first and foremost, OC instructors - eager to see such a positive and desirable scenario unfold. In other words, it is a process that cannot simply

be systematically induced, willed or coerced into existence by the student concerned, their instructor(s) or any other party. Trying to force oneself or another person, inside and outside of formal lesson time, to become progressively better at such a complex undertaking as foreign language OC may or may not prove to have net beneficial effects, on a case by case basis, and is unlikely to always constitute a risk-free endeavor, especially with less currently able, motivated, confident, self-assured and, quite possibly, less emotionally stable students. It is, in any event, surely, in most cases, unlikely to bring about or translate into any truly transformative, exponential and dramatic improvement in the depth / quality or rate of learning and skill acquisition and, furthermore, is, hardly a fair approximation of what the great mass of successful foreign language learner-speakers actually do or experience.

Fundamentally, the more successful of OC learner-practitioners do not coerce themselves and are not coerced by anyone else into studying, remembering and thus learning. Rather, they are drawn - as much, or more sub-consciously than consciously - progressively more deeply into specific modes of enquiry and learning processes because they are sufficiently intellectually aroused, stimulated and thus attracted by the prospect and / or reality of doing so, and at least partially enjoy the resulting emotional experiences and feelings of accomplishment that ensue. Adequate or better student aptitude generates adequate or better student receptivity, interest and curiosity and learning outcomes. Student motivation and therefore commitment seem to be far more the

by-products of this initial core process rather than the necessary foundations or triggers for its initiation.

It is precisely the existence and extent (or lack thereof) of inherent personal aptitude vis-à-vis any given intellectual subject or skill-dependent activity that surely in large part determines the degree to which one is, and remains, attracted to that very subject or activity, and is then able to become progressively more interested, knowledgeable and capable in regard to it. The student with little or no evident aptitude for a given subject or skill-dependent activity will surely not be sub-consciously or consciously attracted to it to any sufficiently great or lasting extent and will therefore find it exceedingly hard or impossible to understand or do it in a progressively better or more correct and efficient fashion.

To reiterate, effective conveyance of knowledge and information and know-how from teacher to student is vital but inherent personal aptitude largely dictates the degree of curiosity, inquisitiveness, interest and thus receptiveness that any one student has, develops and maintains for a given subject or skill-dependent activity.
The key point is that even the most effective of instructors can thus only teach students effectively to the extents that those same students consciously and sub-consciously permit: the degree of teaching success is dependent on the extent to which their students are receptive, comprehending and able - if only gradually - to memorize-internalize what they're clearly and

logically told, shown and asked to comprehend, emulate, practice, and try to remember.

Regardless of their current ability level, OC students who seriously seek, and aim for major OC success must - preferably or ideally love - and consequently be sub-consciously as well as consciously fascinated by - actual, real-life OC. The absence of such an intense and quite possibly (necessarily) preoccupying desire will in most cases manifest itself in - or translate as - an insufficiently intense, long-term level of curiosity, self-motivation and commitment regarding OC study and practice that will, in turn, likely guarantee sub-optimal, mediocre or relatively poor learning outcomes. In other words, students who lack sufficient curiosity and interest regarding OC are unlikely, at any point in time and thus over the longer term, to be sufficiently self-motivated and driven vis-à-vis the necessarily intensive study and practice of OC and will suffer accordingly in academic terms.

It is seemingly not enough for a student merely to earnestly desire to improve their OC competency. He or she must be appropriately mentally and psychologically structured, equipped and attuned (in large part naturally, and thus by chance) in order to bring the desire to fruition.

Excessive instructor optimism or pessimism concerning the perceived utility value and likely benefits of any given course of scheduled OC lessons vis-à-vis any one group of students (which might well sooner or later become evident to some or all of the students concerned) is liable to result in the development and deployment of end-of-course learning objectives, classroom activities and examinations that are respectively too ambitious and demanding or the opposite, and thereby guarantee sub-optimal learning outcomes.

Therefore, OC instructors constantly need firstly to ensure that their planned courses of study are optimally appropriate in terms of substance, complexity and difficulty vis-à-vis the collective bodies of students who have already enrolled on them or will do so in future. Secondly, OC instructors constantly need to ensure that neither they themselves, nor any of their students, retain or, for whatever reason(s), come to develop anew, unrealistic, overly optimistic or pessimistic expectations about the probable finite impact of their OC course(s) and / or the extent of their general OC skill development.

It is all too easy for OC instructors and students to over and under-estimate OC student performance before, during and after the fact. As such, the minimum expected and required degree(s) of student progress vis-à-vis further skill development and / or new skill acquisition (and thus current ability enhancement) that any one particular OC course is intended to ensure, should be formulated dispassionately on objective lines and not distorted by any wishful, overly optimistic or unduly pessimistic thinking. The specific aims and desired ideal, model results of OC component lesson and whole-course completion must be derived from sober, pragmatic, down-to-earth reflection, estimation and calculation. Rather than being made overly or insufficiently complex

and difficult, OC objectives and activities must strike an optimal balance and be at once suitably substantive and challenging and yet wholly or largely achievable for a great majority or plurality of students in each class, from the most currently able and advanced to at least a portion of those who at times or consistently demonstrate below median comprehension and / or performance. OC instructors must be ready and willing to be flexible and adjust their plans and tactics in response to observable conditions.

While it is a major responsibility of every OC instructor to attempt to do their utmost for each a every student in an optimally effective manner, OC lesson instruction and evaluation must be imbued systematically with sufficient quantities of realism and not distorted, degraded, jeopardized or undermined by misplaced hope or excessively harsh or gloomy prognoses. OC students who permanently or regularly seriously under-perform against what are considered sound measurement criteria must obviously neither be written-off (publically or privately) as being near hopeless cases, nor lead to believe that their present deficiencies and problems are greatly smaller and less serious than empirical observation, careful scrutiny and analysis indicates.

While the possibility that some students (for example, more introverted and / or shy or nervous and insecure ones) will, on occasion at least, under-perform not only in OC exams. but in regular class time, and - in so doing - give their instructor(s) an essentially false impression of their current ability level is real, students should,

of course, only be evaluated on the basis of their observable and measurable output utterances at any given time. Similarly, OC students who permanently or regularly perform excellently against such criteria should neither be starved of praise, nor be repeatedly given the impression, that their current demonstrable OC competency level is such that they can henceforth afford to expend less time and / or effort on OC-related study.

02) The necessity for sympathetic yet honest OC instructor treatment and 'handling' of OC students:

It is vital for OC instructors to remain cognizant of the fact that many OC students (especially first graders) do not likely regard the great elevation of OC competency as a high or even particularly achievable goal (compared to reading, writing and / or listening), are basically unaccustomed and quite possibly somewhat perturbed or daunted by the standard 90 minute duration OC lesson format, and / or consciously view OC lessons and exercises - that require extended speaking - as uniquely difficult, taxing, potentially embarrassing and thus stressful. Therefore, OC instructors should take great care at all times to encourage and reassure students in their efforts to improve their OC competency, and above all, never cease to emphasize and stress that the principal objective of OC students (beyond acquiring reliable listening comprehension ability) should be the verbal conveyance, in easily comprehendible form, of sufficient quantities of information and a general willingness to be dynamic, and thus forthcoming and engaging, rather than shy,

reticent, taciturn and／or aloof. Consequently, OC instructors need to be and remain attentive to student needs and continuously patient. Crucially, they should always refrain from criticizing student OC performance in overly harsh terms. The worst, most unsound things an OC instructor can do are perhaps to i) expect and continuously insist (at an early stage, and in an animated and／or seemingly unwarranted, aggravated fashion) near perfect pronunciation, grammar and／or sentence construction, etc and ii) to frequently verbally interrupt students in a persistent, quite possibly quixotic effort to correct even relatively minor and／or non-critical errors. In short, OC tutors need to appear, in the eyes of students, to be appropriately earnest, warm, friendly, accommodating and fare OC assistants, not unreasonably strict or otherwise unrealistic, off-putting, distracting or menacing figures who appear to be ineffectual or prone to do as much or more harm than good.

03) The desirability of small OC class sizes:

It is the opinion of the present writer that OC class sizes should be as small as is practicable, at least for beginner and intermediate level OC students, since larger class sizes mean larger student audiences and thus potentially greater peer pressure and - even more importantly - less actual speaking and thus assessment time for each individual student vis-à-vis solo, pair, larger group work, and direct, one-to-one interaction with the OC instructor in charge. Large OC groups frequently or commonly dictate, slower paced, less intensively curated, driven and assessed OC lessons and are surely likely to be altogether

less effective over time in terms of ultimate utility, unless, perhaps, participating students are especially keen on OC and consequently appropriately focused and disciplined. All too often, large OC classes are an opportunity for less currently able and／or enthusiastic OC students to variously free-ride, shirk, be distracted, tune-out and avoid the instructor (and perhaps peer) scrutiny and assistance which they, more than anyone, require.

04) Whether or not to stream OC students according to perceived current ability:

Streaming OC students according to perceived current ability may or may not be an optimal course. Doing so - and not doing so - may well benefit some students but not others. Strong arguments can be made in favor of - and in opposition to - streaming. Probably a good rule of thumb policy is to refrain from streaming unless variance in current ability and／or student behavior is without doubt very large and thought likely to expand further - or unlikely to become markedly smaller - any time soon. Streaming may well be tantamount to giving currently more and less advanced OC students a better, calmer, more comfortable, agreeable and conducive classroom environment in which to practice and hone their OC skills which may then permit less inhibited and self-conscious OC performances. At the same time, streaming will invariably risk disappointing and depressing - at the very least - hitherto borderline but quite possibly enthusiastic OC performers who fail to gain a place in the more advanced class and who thereafter may thus feel dejected or appalled at themselves and／

or their OC tutor(s), and come temporarily or even permanently to resent what they view as being unwarranted personal relegation. Streaming, by definition, also reduces or eliminates the otherwise ever present - if not necessarily likely - possibilities that i) currently less advanced students will be inspired and even directly assisted by currently more advanced students and ii) currently more advanced students will learn important lessons if allowed, encouraged or even forced to mix with and assist currently less advanced ones. On the other hand, there is usually a substantial risk that officially non-streamed classes will sooner or later become largely de facto streamed classes in all but name, given the frequent, if by no means predictable, tendency of currently more - and ／ or most - advanced and currently less - and ／ or least - advanced students to congregate separately in distinct and somewhat mutually exclusive sub-groups. If streaming is to be carried out, it is surely advisable to ensure, as far as possible, that currently more advanced students are not moved singularly into the less advanced and slower stream - and that currently less advanced students are not moved singularly into the more advanced and faster stream - without their full approval, especially when dealing with students who are already members of forming or firmly established classroom friendship groupings. In sum, the importance of streaming conceivably grows the larger classes become and ／ or the wider the current ability range is found to be within them.

05) The necessity to clarify teaching objectives:
OC instructors must be clear about precisely what

kind of OC lesson-time exercise topics, questions and prompts they need or want their OC students to attempt to consider, respond to and talk about, and the vocabulary they wish to see them employ while doing so. Clearly textbook and ／ or other study material selection will substantially determine this, so special care must be taken when deciding exactly which textbooks and so forth to utilize. This is certainly not to say that textbook selection should govern teaching plan formulation. On the contrary, teaching plans should instead govern textbook selection. OC instructors should first form some fairly clear idea of what OC topics and attendant vocabulary etc. they ought to teach, then attempt to find 'lodestar' textbooks that stand the best chance of serving their purposes relatively effectively and efficiently. However, it is surely best practice to make crystal clear to students that they have a basically freehand regarding precise utterance. Unless and until a student's utterances descend into unfathomable gibberish, he or he should feel free to answer and expound etc essentially as they see fit, since the alternative of demanding particular word and sentence incorporation seems overly restrictive and incompatible with getting students to move closer to becoming independent articulators of known fact and personal thought, etc. Students commonly already know sufficient vocabulary with which to express themselves. OC lessons should not be a major venue for new vocabulary learning since the introduction of new words is too time-consuming and unwisely curtails practice of already learned ones.

06) The necessity arouse, stimulate and maintain student interest:

All authentic OC lessons must revolve around speaking topics and comprise of activities that adequately capture and hold the attention of all - or all but the most and / or least currently advanced - students. All OC lesson topics and activities should be - and appear to students to be - interesting, relevant and immediately or quickly accessible. OC lesson topics certainly do not need to be - and, for the most part, should not therefore be - relatively complicated or obscure topics that are hard for students to comprehend. Nor should they be unknown - or only partially known - to them. Speaking, discussion and debate topics can and should normally be comparatively simple to understand and respond to immediately - or rapidly - and impressive ways. Just because OC speaking prompts are made deliberately simple in the interests of facilitating high quality student OC output, in no way necessarily reduces their authenticity and certainly does not preclude students from supplying complex and sophisticated as well as appropriately lengthy answers. Speaking topics and the questions and prompts that can be derived from them, are perhaps best viewed as something akin to fishing bait, in the sense that they are offered in an attractive, conducive manner in order to induce, enthusiastic, confident and prolonged response 'bites'. Inappropriate and poorly chosen OC topics - including those that are already overly familiar to students - may well simply fail to generate or hold adequate interest for a sufficient period of time. Speaking topics known by OC instructors to be considered risqué - if not taboo - by OC students, may be worth experimenting with, at least for currently more advanced and / or mature groups of students, but should be discarded promptly whenever they are seen to fail in their basic purpose of eliciting enthusiastic and comprehensive responses of appropriate complexity and length. Use of audio-visual stimuli is highly advisable but care must be taken to ensure that it - and / or its delivery platforms - do not become a distraction for students before during or after legitimate use periods.

07) The advisability of optimal OC classroom venues, environmental factors and lesson time scheduling:

Being in a position to decide optimal OC classroom venues, environment and lesson times is a luxury that most OC instructors do not have, but there can be little doubt that - as with any subject - these three factors do - or may, on occasion, at least, have considerable behavioral and / or performance impact on a significant number of students, as evidenced in their respective OC efforts at different times and places. In short, OC learning might well benefit from classroom venues that are of conducive size and shape, quiet (or not excessively noisy), comfortable, clean, optimally lit, ventilated and heated, otherwise comforting and free of distractions. The use of armchairs and / or sofas etc and / or informal furniture arrangements may conceivably further help to relieve or eliminate subject and / or peer-related psychological stress on the part of some students (who are seemingly most likely to be those with currently less advanced OC skills). Probably of more importance, the time at which lessons are

held undoubtedly affects the performance for large numbers of OC students. For obvious reasons, first and last period lessons should be avoided at all costs - above all on Mondays and Fridays - and, whenever possible, OC lessons should - except perhaps for especially shy students - be scheduled to precede rather than follow other kinds of lessons so as to ensure that students commence OC classes in a fresh rather than already fatigued state.

08) The advisability of obtaining student input regarding speaking topics:

It is often a good idea to seek student input regarding the choice of future speaking, discussion and debating topics, at least in connection with currently more advanced students, since doing so may, in its own right, facilitate high quality OC, help to boost student interest in forthcoming lessons and encourage greater degrees of student preparation and reflection.

09) The advisability of allowing spontaneity:

OC lessons - notably those involving new, Year 1 - and currently less advanced - students - should normally be planned to a considerable but not excessive degree. Students should certainly be allowed to 'let rip' and verbally move in unspecified and unanticipated directions, providing the results are felt to be satisfactory or better and time allows.

10) The necessity for instructor fairness:

OC instructor time should, in overall terms, certainly always be apportioned equally among all OC students, not particular sub-sets. This is sometimes easier said than done when particular students or groups of students speak slowly and ／ or require more attention and assistance than others. In such cases, strict time-keeping is required so as to minimize the risk of neglecting and ／ or annoying other students who have been told - or wish - to speak or speak further and have not yet done so.

11) Revision versus variety:

While it is vital to allocate sufficient time to specific topics and not unduly rush students, it is also crucially important to ensure adequate variety within single lessons and from week to week. Numerous and varied exercises, activities and assignments should be attempted and excessive topic repetition, overlap and revision studiously avoided. Students ought never be granted excessively long prep. or hesitation time.

12) The advisability of innovation:

Tried and tested methods should be used when they are thought likely to be successful but this does not preclude some sensible degree of experimentation on a regular basis, at least when students signal that they might well welcome and benefit from it.

13) The necessity for flexibility:

OC instructors must strive to be vigilant, pro-active and flexible in response to observed and suspected problems and thus modify lesson plans and tactics accordingly, as appears necessary.

14) Driving home the CORE messages:

OC instructors must try to teach students that OC lessons should constitute trial-and-error practice

sessions dedicated to improving overall OC competency. OC instructors should frequently remind students that we learn by doing and making mistakes, noting and considering them, then making subsequent corrections, not only or primarily by trying to avoid them from the get go.

OC instructors should also i) make clear to students that ensuring articulateness and thus pronunciation and syntax accuracy is more important and thus a higher priority than ensuring grammar accuracy; ii) regularly demand that students make reasonable use of already learned vocabulary and iii) regularly urge students to expand their vocabulary and grammar knowledge (in that order); iv) regularly drive home to students the paramount need for FORTHCOMINGNESS and ELABORATION as well as concision;

15) The necessity to tackle excessive shyness:

While OC instructors must be careful not to upset or alienate students, they should nevertheless proceed in ways and adopt measures intended to eliminate excessive student shyness and introversion (which can be quite acute) and raise confidence. The playing of suitable, easy to understand and educationally worthwhile games - when possible - is advisable in this regard as it tends to break ice and relax students.

16) The necessity for spontaneity and immediacy:

OC instructors should of course generally insist that their students try to converse in immediate,

unrehearsed, improvised and experimental, creative fashion unless doing so proves to be absolutely beyond their current ability for whatever reason(s). OC instructors need to encourage spontaneity and normally prohibit preparatory script-making and note-taking beforehand. That said, OC instructors should allocate some time for note making and formal sentence construction, at least on occasion, for example, in connection with more advanced and / or formal reporting and presentation work, etc.

17) The necessity to emphasise listening efficiency:

OC instructors must regularly remind students of the vital necessity for OC practitioners to listen carefully to their interlocutors so as to stand a better chance of understanding them and responding appropriately.

18) The advisability of interjecting sparingly:

In the interests of confidence-building and the encouragement of more fluid, dynamic and / or fluid speech, OC instructors should - as mentioned above - refrain from correcting minor OC errors and otherwise interjecting more than is absolutely necessary, except when teaching very advanced students who are normally less likely to find such interventions distracting, embarrassing and / or irritating.

19) The necessity for reasonable time management:

OC instructors should ensure that students are allocated appropriate time in which to complete specified tasks and take pains NOT to proceed too

slowly or too rapidly.

20) The necessity for solo, pair and group work:

OC instructors should prioritise student 'solo' presentation and interrogation practice as part of their core effort to emphasise to students the fundamental need for conveyance of sufficient information. OC instructors should nevertheless still ensure that students regularly conduct pair-work and that they do so with a large number of partners with varying current ability levels. Instructors should furthermore ensure that all pair and group work is properly supervised and does not marginalise currently more and / or less advanced and / or more reserved students. OC instructors must additionally see to it that student work groups generally contain 3 or 4 members (max.) in order to reduce the likelihood of student marginalisation and exclusion. Finally - and importantly - instructors should take steps that prevent pair and group work activities from becoming dominated by more advanced students, or a 'refuge' and 'breeding ground' for shirkers;

21) Use of audio and video recording equipment:

OC instructors should certainly make extensive use audio and / or video camera equipment for student assessment and self-assessment and diagnostic purposes.

22) Use of CALL systems:

OC instructors can also employ CALL systems IF - and only if - they are thought to be easy to use and doing so is seen as being likely to markedly facilitate and enrich OC practice.

23) Use of on-line cloud architectures:

OC instructors should certainly make extensive use of e-mail and cloud-based services since these nowadays allow relatively easy, reliable and rapid collection, storage and accessing of class work and homework, above all audio and video media files.

24) The advisability of assigning homework:

OC instructors might as well set weekly or regular homework assignments of suitable difficulty and length since doing so goes someway to off-setting limited lesson time and time lost due to absenteeism. Homework assignments can commonly revolve around extension activities related to the last lesson and / or preparation for next or future lessons. Students can, for example, audio-record themselves, if need be via smartphone in any location of their choosing.

25) Urging greater English language OC between lessons:

OC instructors should very frequently demand that students communicate with one another in the target foreign language outside, as well as inside, of lesson times, regardless of whether such advice appears to be headed.

26) The necessity for close monitoring:

Instructors should closely monitor and record the perceived performance and progress of each student and clearly signal fundamental dissatisfaction and concern (in addition to empathy) whenever students are persistently uncommunicative or reticent. Instructors should strive to determine the cause(s) of student longer term under-performance and be sure NOT to

mistake current 'inability' for 'unwillingness' and vice-versa. Instructors should additionally do everything feasible to curtail or at least contain distracting and disruptive student behaviours and general disengagement.

27) Praising, encouraging, criticising and assessing:

OC instructors should naturally avoid being overly lenient or strict as regards the conferring or praise, criticism or assessment grades, and also ensure that exams. are not excessively stressful or insufficiently thorough or demanding. OC instructors also ought to regularly provide students with fairly honest and frank verbal and / or typed assessment feedback data and encourage realistic periodic student self-assessment, e.g. via simple self-assessment form or card.

28) Further common-sense confidence building measures:

Whenever possible, OC instructors should attempt to get to know students to some apt degree and at least informally chat with them regularly outside of lesson times, in order to alleviate students fears, reservations and misperceptions, and increase mutual understanding, respect and / or trust. On the other hand, instructors should be careful to avoid being construed by students as displaying favouritism or being too 'pushy' and / or informal.

29) The advisability of offering additional on-campus tuition and use of feedback questionnaires:

OC instructors should also encourage students

to voluntarily attend additional one-to-one and / or small group supplementary (office-hour) tuition meetings of up to 90 minutes duration, as and when time allows, especially in the case of currently more and / or less advanced students who may want or need (and especially benefit from) extra assistance. OC instructors can also collect and subsequently reflect on student course-related opinions at the end of each semester or year via custom-made questionnaire, but they should not lose sight of the fact that the opinions so expressed may well not perfectly reflect actual student views in all instances.

30) Necessity for overseas study:

Finally, OC students should be left in no doubt whatsoever that long-term student emersion overseas in a country - where the target language is constantly seen, heard and at all times necessary to use whenever OC is required - is a fundamental requirement for all those who aspire to develop and retain advanced, effective and efficient English language OC competency. Instructors should make clear to all OC under-graduate students that they should ideally spend one or more periods totalling between 6 and 12 months duration abroad in their second and / or third year of study.

3. Conclusions

The most successful students of foreign language Oral Communication (OC) are, by definition, those who manage by the end of their OC course(s) to demonstrate marked observable OC competency, or the greatest progress towards that end, but the

ability or capacity to understand and / or do such a complex thing well, correctly or satisfactorily cannot simply be implanted oneself or by others. Rather it depends on the student's own inherent aptitude and thus capacity to acquire, retain and develop sufficient capability.　However, there are clearly optimally sensible and constructive ways for OC instructors to proceed.　Many of the most important of which have been set out above. Above all, OC instructors need to accurately gauge and be realistic about each student's current skill levels and the likely extent to which each student is probably able and likely to elevate them as a result of completing one or more optimally-designed and tailored OC courses.　Over and under-estimation by instructors (and students) of student ability are constant dangers.　In addition, given that OC centers on self-expression and thus the clear and otherwise efficient oral-verbal conveyance of information, the main purpose and focus of OC courses and lessons should be the ensuring of greater student articulateness and forthcomingness (which tends to be initially lacking - sometimes chronically - among many or even a majority of Japanese OC students) and, as a corollary, the elimination, minimization, or at least dilution, of student psychological barriers that likely inhibit this.　Helping students to enhance articulateness and forthcomingness - by focusing on known vocabulary employment, sentence construction and clear output - is not only the single most important OC activity in its own right (one that should be prioritized over grammar and beyond a certain point pronunciation in most instances), but helps students become more confident which, in turn, thereafter helps them - by way of virtuous reinforcement cycle - to become yet more articulate and forthcoming.

References

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