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## Teaching Oral Skills to Student with Prevailing Analytical Thinking

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### ABSTRACT

In this article, the author characterizes the methods used while teaching oral skills of Chinese language to students living outside China with no opportunity to communicate with native speakers. We try to find out which exercises are most helpful for students with prevailing analytical thinking. While these students normally perform well in grammar, reading, and text understanding, they may face certain difficulties in mastering oral skills, especially outside of China. These students have no chance to simply catch up the language, so, according to author's experience, they need a concerted effort to improve their speech habits. The author noticed that many students with prevailing analytical thinking tend to use the same pattern to study the spoken language as they successfully use while learning grammar and writing. Our main method consisted in experimenting with different types of exercises and tasks, both found in literature and created by our own compilation, and analyzing the results after each class along with long-term results. Also, the author searched and analyzed written sources with the aim to adapt them for practical educational purposes. We found out that students with more developed analytical thinking require a specific approach in oral skills practice, and their needs must be acknowledged by both teachers and students.

*Keyword:* teaching oral skills, spoken language, Chinese language.

### Introduction

Teaching oral language is not the easiest task, especially if the students have no opportunity to communicate with native speakers and do not have to use the language they learn in their every-day live. Russian sinologist pr. Kochergin notices that the oral skills mastering process could be successful only if the students have the motivation to satisfy their communication needs, also with a help of the repeating exercises (I.V. Kochergin. Mastering oral skills of Chinese language. 2012). It's a big challenge for every teacher, we are attempting to teach in the classroom what is normally – and perhaps best- learnt outside it (Donn Byrne. Teaching Oral English, 1976).

But the process of acquiring speech habits is not just a question of the environment, motivation, and learning conditions. Even out of the foreign language teaching framework, we can notice that people have different skills and abilities, or it is better to describe it as follows: every person has individual abilities in developing new skills compared to others, and it's absolutely a common trait for all societies. We noticed that different students show varying abilities and results in mastering oral skills. Another thing that we noticed is that sometimes the main reason why a student faces difficulties in acquiring Oral Skills is simply inappropriate learning method. A different approach to learning the foreign language could boost up the results of such students.

### Research Basis

We observed a group of Russian classmates who had the same language learning program and the same teacher, without any special course in Oral Language. It was

absolutely clear that different students in this group had different perception of the material they were studying. Although all of these students had no opportunity to practice spoken language with native speakers, some of them had an ability to speak and some of them are not.

Another example we can offer is a group of students who studied Chinese language in China, Zhejiang University, and had an Oral Language course with the same teacher. They also showed different performances. For some of them, it was very easy to catch the language and start speaking, while for others (let's call them the second group of students) it was a hard and slow process. It is worthwhile noting that it would be absolutely wrong to suggest that the second group students are inferior to the first group student, or that they were bad students or just didn't make any effort. Moreover, sometimes students from the second group are really smart, they have excellent memory and analytical skills, showing good results in reading and writing.

Another important example we feel obliged to mention is a brilliant 11-year-old student who studies Chinese language in Russia. She learns English at school and Chinese with a private tutor. The author was impressed by her fast results in Chinese language, but on the other hand, she is absolutely sure that she shows bad results in speaking and the reason is she isn't clever and gifted enough. This is not a single example when students with prevailing analytical thinking (most of the students from my "second group" are the ones with prevailing analytical thinking) decide that the reasons why they are not so good in speaking and can't catch the speech habits fast are: 1) they are not talented enough, 2) they don't make proper effort, 3) they don't study hard; 4) they have no talent to learn a foreign language. The saddest thing about this situation is that teachers tend to give the same explanations to the students unsuccessful in spoken language (which is the case with many foreign language teachers from Russia, as far as my experience is concerned).

Of course, it's absolutely impossible to divide all the people into groups and we don't aim at doing that. But according to our observations, students with prevailing analytical thinking can be found in every group of students.

### **Using Different Patterns to Study Oral Language**

In the works of Russian methodologists, we can easily find the structure of speech (Leontiev A.A. Speech, 1974), this is one example of the structure:

- 1) an intention to speak;
- 2) construction of the phrase in our mind;
- 3) choosing the words, grammar;
- 4) expressing the result

It means that to be able to speak the language, we have to master all the skills mentioned above (grammar skills, phonetic skills, etc). According to our observations, this is the way how many students with prevailing analytical thinking learn a spoken language, and this is why they have problems with oral language.

This is obviously a correct and logical structure, and then I asked the students with prevailing analytical thinking (group one) what do they think about this structure. And they said it was a good structure, a very logical structure. But if I ask a student with better abilities in spoken language (group two), they would say they never thought about it and usually would not give many comments.

The author saw many examples when students had outstanding results in Oral Language, but on the other hand, couldn't complete grammar exercises, couldn't properly construct phrases and sentences and accomplish other written exercises. Also we need to

mention a group of female students from Korea who studied language in Zhejiang University, China. Their Oral Language was just amazing, much better compared to many of their classmates, and, which is necessary to mention, they took the tone and the sound together. We cannot say if the reason was that the students were from Korea or because they studied more compared to other students. Also, they didn't use any special method to perceive tone and sound together. This and many other similar situations make me think that the students perceive the Language and, as an example important for our research, Spoken Language differently. Their brain perceives the spoken language differently, there is a mechanism of perception which has nothing in common with learning grammar, lexicology, phonology, etc. Simply defined, for some people speaking is easy, their brain "prefers" spoken language, they can catch it without analyzing.

So, what do people with prevailing analytical thinking usually do? We have a concept that they follow the structure we have mentioned above, that they tend to use the same pattern to study the spoken language as they successfully use while learning grammar and writing. Maybe their brain just chooses the most common way or convenient way to study a language and applies it to the Oral Language.

Obviously, all we can say about a human brain are just assumptions. We don't have enough information about work of the human brain to maintain anything. According to modern scientific research, there are no even two people on earth who keep the same information in the absolutely similar places of the brain. Besides, for example, Chinese grammar rules, Chinese verbs, Chinese nouns, etc., are contained in different parts of one's brain (John Medina. Brain Rules. 2014). So, all our assumptions about how we can teach oral language to different "brains" could be only theoretical.

Even though there are not enough data on the brain work to provide us with a certain method of successful Oral Skills teaching, this teaching process obviously implies a range of different approaches. It is impossible to find a uniform method to suit all students with prevailing analytical thinking, but we can at least try not to ignore their needs and their individualities. The author believes that these students require a specific approach in oral skills practice.

### **Specific Approach in Oral Skills Practice**

We would like to mention that according to the modern scientific research, our brain structure is constantly changing while we are learning, every time we receive even a bit of information, our neuron structure is changing (Eric Richard Kandel). According to this statement, we can assume that students with prevailing analytical thinking could develop their Oral skills to a very high level in case of using an appropriate method.

Many works were written on Teaching and Researching Speaking, many of them include some very good exercises, phrase patterns, etc., most of them are very helpful for a spoken language teacher (Donn Byrne. Teaching Oral English, 1977, Rita Wong, Teaching Pronunciation, 1987, Rebecca Hughes, Teaching and Researching speaking, 2002, etc.). No need to repeat the list of exercises, we could just try them with a group of students and see the results.

We will share some of our experience. The author has found out that it is very important to teach speaking habits separately from writing skills. Especially, it is important for students with prevailing analytical thinking. It is necessary to read, to practice reading out loud. It could be very useful for many students to repeat the phrase after the record as an individual practice. We have found out also that it's necessary to teach speaking habits separately from reading as well. For students with prevailing analytical thinking it is very important to do just speaking exercises without reading, writing, and grammar explanation. Constructing a phrase is usually not a problem for such students, besides, if we ask them to

translate a phrase or construct a new one, this method would probably not develop their oral skills to a great extent. But it could be very helpful to ask the students to repeat the phrase after the teacher, avoiding reading, repeating a phrase rhythmically with a different speed, paying attention to intonation, rhythm, tones in Chinese or other tonal language, etc. (individual work with a teacher, teacher constructs a phrase, or teacher constructs a phrase together with a student in advance!).

No need to say that the most important issue is to learn full phrases, not single words. There is also an excellent exercise for a small group of students, or even for two students to work together. The teacher gives them several phrases, usually these phrases are new for the students, but the teacher has already explained their meaning and given examples how to use them. The task is to create a new dialogue with these words and act it (teacher gives some time to prepare).

We found it useful to make summaries of structural forms which provide a list of phrases and sentences. They could help students to perceive the information and use it (Sarah Cunningham, Peter Moor, *Everyday Listening and Speaking*, 1992).

We should not lose sight of the fact that oral communication is a two-way process between the speaker and the listener. The spoken material could be spontaneous, face-to-face, and informal. People in different countries use different gestures, facial expressions, and other components of the body language to communicate. Imitating the speech of a movie character, imitating the intonation patterns and behavior of native speakers could also be the good methods to improve student's communication skills.

### Conclusion

The author has made an attempt to explain why some gifted students face so many difficulties with oral language, and has found out that some of them are students with prevailing analytical thinking. The author believes that students with more developed analytical thinking require a specific approach in oral skills practice, and their needs must be acknowledged by both teachers and students. The author searched and analyzed written sources in this field, considering materials in Chinese, English, and Russian, with the aim to adapt them for practical educational purposes. Unfortunately, we haven't found many sources regarding the Individual Differences of students and different approaches to the teaching process.

It's very important to teach speaking habits separately from writing skills. We found out that exercises focusing on oral skills lead to better results. Such exercises include reading or repeating a phrase rhythmically with a different speed, reading out loud, imitating the speech of a movie character, imitating the intonation patterns and behavior of native speakers, etc.

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