

## การวิจัยเชิงเอกสารเพื่อสังเคราะห์องค์ประกอบทางทฤษฎีและองค์ประกอบทางปฏิบัติ เพื่อการพัฒนาทักษะการพูดภาษาอังกฤษของนักศึกษาไทย

ทรงยุทธ อัคโกรสล<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> ผู้นิพนธ์ประสานงาน โทรศัพท์ 084-9138790 อีเมล: songyutbee@gmail.com

รับเมื่อ 29 ตุลาคม 2563 วันที่แก้ไขบทความ 1 ธันวาคม 2566 ตอบรับเมื่อ 4 ธันวาคม 2563

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### บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยเชิงเอกสารนี้เป็นส่วนหนึ่งของโครงการวิจัยในชั้นเรียน ที่มุ่งศึกษาความคิดเห็นของนักศึกษาไทยระดับปริญญาตรีสายวิทยาศาสตร์และเทคโนโลยีที่มีต่อ การพัฒนาทักษะการพูดภาษาอังกฤษของตนเองหลังจากที่ได้ลังทะเปี่ยนเรียนรายวิชาการสอนภาษาอังกฤษ ในมหาวิทยาลัยแห่งหนึ่งในกรุงเทพมหานคร ประเทศไทย การศึกษานี้เป็นการวิจัยเชิงพรณนา มีจุดมุ่งหมายที่จะสังเคราะห์ข้อมูลที่สืบคันได้จากแหล่งข้อมูลอิเล็กทรอนิกส์หลากหลายแหล่ง ทั้งจากโปรแกรมสืบค้น สารานุกรมและฐานข้อมูลอิเล็กทรอนิกส์ของห้องสมุด เพื่อร่วบรวมองค์ประกอบทางทฤษฎีและทางปฏิบัติเพื่อใช้เป็นแนวทางในการเรียนการสอนทักษะการพูดของนักศึกษาในโครงการวิจัยในชั้นเรียนดังกล่าว โดยส่วนใหญ่ทุกความนี้รายงานการตอบคำถามเกี่ยวกับประเด็นต่างๆ เพื่อทราบวิธีการสอนทักษะการพูด อาทิ ความหมายของทักษะการพูด ผู้พูดและความสามารถในการสื่อสารของผู้พูด วิธีการสอนทักษะการพูด รวมถึงแบ่งมุ่งที่สำคัญต่างๆ และปิดท้ายด้วยแนวโน้มในปัจจุบันของการสอนทักษะการพูด ข้อมูลที่ได้จากการศึกษานี้ช่วยสร้างความกระจ่างและอีกประยุกต์ต่อการนำไปประยุกต์ใช้เพื่อการเรียนการสอนรายวิชาการสอนภาษาอังกฤษ ทั้งนี้เพื่อการพัฒนาทักษะการพูดของผู้เรียนในมหาวิทยาลัยแห่งนี้ให้มีประสิทธิภาพมากยิ่งขึ้น

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<sup>1</sup> ผู้ช่วยศาสตราจารย์ ดร. ประจำภาควิชาภาษา คณะศิลปศาสตร์ประยุกต์ มหาวิทยาลัยเทคโนโลยีพระจอมเกล้าพระนครเหนือ

## A Documentary Review of Theoretical and Practical Elements for the Development of English Speaking Skills Among Thai University Students

Songyut Akkakoson <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Corresponding Author, Tel: 084-9138790, e-mail: songyutbee@gmail.com

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### Abstract

This article reports on a literature review part of a larger research project which was an attempt to examine Thai sci-tech undergraduates' perceptions about their English speaking skill development after taking an English speaking course at a university in Bangkok, Thailand. This sub-study is a library-based descriptive review the materials for which have been retrieved from different Internet sources, including public search engines and library databases. It aims to specify theoretical and practical elements for teaching and learning the English oral skills among the students in the said larger study. Mostly, the article focuses on answering questions about elements of teaching oral skills such as definitions of speaking skills, speakers and their communicative competence, methods for teaching speaking skills, key aspects of the teaching and learning process for oral skill development, and current trends in speaking skill teaching. The data obtained provide valuable insight into what should be incorporated into the English speaking course in the research setting where the researcher's larger research took place. This is for the enhancement of its EFL learners' oral skill development.

**Keywords :** speaking skills, oral communication skills, communicative competence, teaching speaking

<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor Dr., Department of Languages, Faculty of Applied Arts, King Mongkut's University of Technology North Bangkok

## 1. Introduction

In countries where English is not used as the mother tongue or the official language of the country, learning this language as a foreign language seems to be a challenging job for language learners, for English can just be learned in textbooks in their classroom, and it cannot be used in their real-life communication (Derakhshan & Shirmohammadli, 2015). Teaching this language has then become a necessary concern. Difficulties English teachers in such countries are facing in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century classrooms appear to add more challenges. These include English language teachers' resistance to change in methodologies and materials, limited access and lack of resources, and classroom management issues and decreasing student engagement (Lorimer, n.d.). The situation has doubled in complexity when it comes to the oral production of English. This is because spoken language production has been long viewed as one of the most problematic phases of language learning (Brown & Yule, 1983; Leong & Ahamadi, 2017). A huge number of language learners view speaking as 'the most complex and difficult skill to master' (Hinkel, 2005, p. 485). They find it difficult to convey their thoughts or feelings in words of the target language. Even after years of learning English, they cannot produce the learned language fluently and accurately enough (Bueno, Madrid, & McLaren, 2006). Moreover, producing the target language orally can be exasperating because the L2-production process, in fact, requires a lot of linguistic, cognitive and psychological competences from the learner speakers (Mak, 2011).

Scholars postulate that spoken language production seems to be the most vital ability of all the four language skills to be mastered (Bueno, Madrid, & McLaren, 2006; Edalatkhah & Arjmandi, 2015; Khamkhien, 2010; Ur, 1996; Widdowson, 1994). Why so? This is because speaking ability is generally viewed by language learners themselves as the measure of acquiring the target language. Speaking a particular foreign language fluently showcases the higher ability of communication than the skills of writing, reading, or understanding spoken language. Those who learn it are likely to be mentioned as the utterers of that target language (Ur, 1996). Moreover, in recent years, oral mastery of the English language has been considerably augmenting since English has turned out to be the major language of world-wide communication. It is utilised in various areas including international relations, education, business, industry development, exchanges, entertainment, films, computers etc. In other words, English is the international language of today's modern world. Thus, learners' speaking or oral communication skills are of great value to their personal and professional life because these skills are very important for surviving in this globalised era (Rao, 2018). Hence, language teachers should always accept that there are teaching challenges to deal with. Helpful tactics to lessen the complications of teaching the English language (Chen, 2007; Nunn, 2011) should be taken into consideration. The goal is to improve learners' effective and proficient use of the language for successful communication.

In an English as a foreign language (EFL) context like Thailand, the ability to speak English is essential for future graduates before entering the working circles as well since English is the one global language that opens doors to those who can produce it fluently. According to Mala (2018) who cited the EF English Proficiency Index 2018 survey, strong correlations between countries and their people's proficiency in English have also been found. That is, societies with higher English proficiency users are more egalitarian. Their people have equal status and similar incomes as well as opportunities. Unfortunately, Thailand has not yet qualified as such an egalitarian society. The country 'has the worst English proficiency except for Cambodia and Myanmar' in East Asia (Mala, 2018, para. 6). Consequently, the Thai government has also reacted to this

necessity. A more conversational approach has been emphasised in the country's mainstream schools (Mala, 2018). Being aware of the significance of oral skills for Thai EFL learners, teachers of English at all levels should employ the teaching approaches, resources, activities, media and other supplies to enhance the learners' mastery of these skills. Also, the main objective of all English language teachers, as Davies and Pearse (2000) have pointed out, should be to promote learners' ability to employ the language efficiently, correctly in order to convey communicative purposes when communicating. Even though various pedagogical methods to boost students' oral skills have been suggested as implications from several studies, EFL learners still have difficulty in mastering this skill (Akkakoson, 2016; Leong & Ahamadi, 2017). Many of them find it not easy to communicate their thoughts in spoken English. They are having difficulties expressing their thoughts through appropriate words and expressions successfully. They give up speaking when facing psychological hindrances such as shyness and anxiety. At times, they do not have the chance either inside or outside the classrooms to use English. Learners themselves also need a considerable amount of time to practise speaking. To control such problems of teaching speaking skills, Rao (2018) recommends a strong and dynamic classroom where interaction is employed as a strategy to encourage learners' ability in interacting and communicating among themselves with abundant time to be provided. Such interaction through dynamic language learning activities in class could help learners to obtain the vocabulary and grammar necessary for their speaking skill improvement. Apart from that, language teachers should react not only to learners' language components but also affective variables such as speaking-in-class anxiety (Akkakoson, 2016), by providing a learning environment that contains no fear of oral communication and contributes to taking the risk of using the target language.

All of these challenges can affect the learners' oral skill development if instructed inappropriately. Thus, this paper aims to bring to light some theoretical and practical background information to pave the way for understanding how oral skills in English can be taught to and learned by a group of EFL sci-tech university students. Insights into the way to teach speaking skills and appropriate teaching elements were brought into the researcher's instruction of the English Conversation course he was responsible for in his larger-scale research project. To limit the focus to the topic in this review, some questions have been raised as follows:

1. What is meant by 'speaking skills' in the literature?
2. How are speakers and their communicative competence related?
3. What teaching methods can be used for developing learners' English speaking skills?
4. What are key aspects of the teaching and learning process suggested in the literature for English oral skill development?
5. What are the current practices in teaching speaking skills?

## 2. Methodology

This library-based research is qualitative and descriptive in nature. The materials compiled to ease learners' oral skill development in the larger research project have been solely retrieved from online sources. A brief account of these sources is provided below:

### 2.1 Web Search Engines

Two computer programs that were used for searching for Internet information related to oral skill development in this review were Google Search and Google Scholar. The former is one of the most widely

used web search engines with over 40,000 search queries every second on average translating to over 3.5 billion searches per day and 1.2 trillion searches per year worldwide (internet live stats, n.d.). The latter is another web search engine that arranges the full text or metadata of scholarly literature of all fields covering peer-reviewed online academic journals and books, conference papers, theses and dissertations, preprints, abstracts, technical reports, and other scholarly literature, including court opinions and patents.

## 2.2 Databases

Two databases that were employed to obtain the materials for this review include Scopus and ISI Web of Science. Both databases are the world's leading core collections of abstract and citation, and peer-reviewed literature including scientific journals, books and conference proceedings.

## 2.3 Data Search

Through the above-mentioned searching channels, the data were searched in three forms: keyword search, phrase search and research question search. Specific keywords (e.g. speaking, communicative competence, teaching speaking), phrases (e.g. trends in speaking skill teaching, current methods for teaching speaking) and research questions (e.g. What is meant by 'speaking skills' in the literature? How are speakers and their communicative competence related?) were typed in the search bars.

## 2.4 Data Processing

The data obtained from a number of online research articles, books, weblogs or websites underwent the process of document analysis during the literature review period of three months. Relevant information was extracted in a separate word file, whereas the irrelevant data were discarded.

## 3. Observations and Discussion

A brief synthesis of existing literature to explain what elements could be incorporated into the instruction of English speaking skills in the present researcher's larger project is described as follows:

### 3.1 Definitions of Speaking Skills

Speaking itself is viewed as a productive skill with real-time and aural-oral processing (Bailey, 2003). It is academically considered a bilateral communicative procedure for meaning construction in which information is produced, received and processed spontaneously (Brown, 1994; Burns & Joyce, 1997). This procedure cannot be taken place without such components as the interlocutors, their shared experiences, the physical setting and the speaking objectives. The structure and interpretation of speaking could be determined through the context in which it occurs. Speaking appears to be unpredictable because of its spontaneous, open-ended and evolving nature; however, its recurrent patterns lie in such functional situations as greeting, inviting, declining, complaining, requesting etc (Burns & Joyce, 1997). Speaking can also be viewed from its features, functions and conditions. Speaking involves three distinctive features: (1) interacting with another person or other people, (2) using paralinguistic features (i.e. eye-contact, facial expressions, body language, tempo, pauses, voice quality changes and pitch variation) to form a dialogic movement of speech, making it a multi-sensory activity (Thornbury, 2005) and (3) centring around unexpected topics. While speaking is used for interpersonal and transactional functions (Nunan, 1999), it also depends on particular conditions since it takes place only when the two interlocutors are conversing in person (Van Lier, 1989). Based on this, speaking is also recognised as conversation or casual conversation which is 'the informal, interactive talk between two or more people, which happens in real time, is

spontaneous, has a largely interpersonal function, and in which participants share symmetrical rights' (Thornbury & Slade, 2006, p. 25).

Based on this, the meaning of speaking skills in this library-based study involves the inborn skill that humans have and use to express their thoughts, feelings, opinions or information to attain a communicative goal and prolong a social relation between two or more people. This innate capacity helps all human beings to acquire language. When being young, they gain their first language speaking through interacting with the people and environment around them. Thus, the need to communicate makes language acquisition happen. The situation of speaking a foreign language is almost similar. To gain abilities in speaking a new language, the communicative aspect of the target language should be the instructor's emphasis. Learners need a source of natural communication. During the process of acquiring the target language's oral skills, learners should be provided on-the-job practices through communicating with their peers in class.

### 3.2 Speakers and Communicative Competence

Theoretical and empirical research posits that speakers have to possess communicative competence which accounts for their skills in appropriate language use when having a conversation. This competence gives a signal to the speakers: when they should speak and when they should not, how they can take turns in a conversation and how they can start and end the dialogue, and how they can get involved in a conversation and disregard the interlocutors. Moreover, it also prompts the speaker to stop speaking and take the role of the listener instead. The idea of communicative competence was initially introduced in 1967 by the American sociolinguist and anthropologist Dell H. Hymes (1927-2009) in his communicative competence model (1967, 1972). The model has been expanded at a later time by other researchers (e.g. Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Canale & Swain, 1980; Celcie-Murcia, Dörnyei, & Thurrell, 1995; Goh & Burns, 2012). Bachman and Palmer (1996) elaborated that communicative language ability consists of two broad branches: *language* competence and *strategic* competence. There are two kinds of *language* competence, namely organisational competence and pragmatic competence. The former is relevant to the grammatical and textual knowledge that regulates the sentential structures of the language, which accords with Canale and Swain's (1980) grammatical and discourse competence. The latter means the ability to suitably communicate and explain one's conveyed messages. Bagaric and Djigunovic (2007) regard this as the ability for creating and interpreting discourse. This competence covers functional knowledge and sociolinguistic knowledge. The functional knowledge allows language learners to understand normal practices of language functions and understand the actions that utterances and discourses perform while the sociolinguistic knowledge helps to properly produce and interpret statements in numerous social situations. As for *strategic* competence, Celcie-Murcia, Dörnyei, and Thurrell (1995) mean metacognitive strategies which regulate one's own thoughts to set their learning goals, plan their communicative activities and appraise the obtained results. These researchers have come up with a more detailed model of communicative competence forming it in a triangle shape, as presented in the following diagram.



**Figure 1** Model of communicative competence suggested  
by Celcie-Murcia, Dörnyei, and Thurrell (1995, p. 10)

Discourse competence is put in the middle of the triangle encompassed clockwise on top by sociocultural competence, on the right angle by actional competence, at the bottom by strategic competence and on the left side angle by linguistic competence. Relations between all of these components are represented by arrows pointing inwards to discourse competence and outwards to linguistic competence (grammar), sociolinguistic competence (appropriate use of language) and actional competence (language functions). Moving clockwise in a circle, strategic competence occurs at all times assisting speakers to compensate for any difficulties using other skills.

As suggested by Thornbury (2005), speaking is viewed as a skill or a particular activity to do something well. To communicate, speakers need the relevant knowledge that they have gradually gained. This knowledge can be categorised into extralinguistic knowledge and linguistic knowledge. The former includes knowledge about socio-cultural rules of practice in society and interconnection between speakers while the latter covers knowledge about genre, discourse and pragmatics. Moreover, the knowledge of genre related to speaking is utilised for transactional when speakers want to communicate a message or exchange goods and services, and for interpersonal purposes when they want to create and maintain social relations. To achieve these aims, speakers can develop numerous speaking occasions based on their typical ways or particular styles. Language learners need to be aware of different types of speech in order to connect and organise utterances. This genre knowledge refers to discourse competence according to Bachman and Palmer (1996), Canale and Swain (1981), and Celcie-Murcia, Dörnyei, and Thurrell (1995). As for pragmatic knowledge, Thornbury (2005) means how to use language by paying attention to factors such as the context, meaning, ability to use various speech acts, pragmatic cues, awareness of language politeness, together with the knowledge of the conversation topic and the appropriate channel of communication. This pragmatic knowledge is similar to sociocultural knowledge of Canale (1983), sociocultural and actional competence of Celcie-Murcia, Dörnyei, and Thurrell (1995), and pragmatic knowledge of Bachman and Palmer (1996). For linguistic knowledge, Thornbury (2005) is more concerned with grammar, vocabulary and phonology.

Moreover, the pragmatic knowledge also focuses on the significance of a difference between printed and verbal sentence structures which make dialogues sound natural.

Another communicative model can be witnessed from the research and development in language education proposed by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR) (Council of Europe, n.d.). This framework has been referred to as the evaluation, studying and instruction of foreign languages around the world. It explains a model of language use according to an action-orientated and socio-cognitive approach which focuses on the cognitive processing of language utilisation as well as the significance of the situation in which the language is employed (Trim, 2011). This model is composed of three basic components: language competence, sociolinguistic competence and pragmatic competence, together with subcategories under each aspect. So far this CEFR framework has provided clearly defined competences and skills that learners are required to possess in order to produce communicative performances in their real communication.

Goh and Burns (2012) have proposed a complete approach to language instruction. Their model covers (1) language and discourse knowledge, (2) basic speaking abilities and (3) communication tactics. According to these scholars, the first group of knowledge includes knowledge about lexis, grammar, phonology and discourse. Lexical knowledge refers to learners' vocabulary repertoire. In actual fact, productive vocabulary seems to be smaller than that of receptive. Words and their meanings are included in learners' mental lexicon. Words include both single words and chunks as well as formulaic and idiomatic expressions. These vocabulary stocks help to improve learners' speech performance. Grammatical knowledge covers the internalised linguistic structures of the language that allow learners to combine their stocked words together so that their sentences or utterances can be formed in order to convey the intended messages. This knowledge involves the target language's morphology and syntax, required during the speech formation phase and the speech monitoring process. Phonological knowledge deals with the sound system of the target language. This knowledge is essential for the production of words, sentences and dialogues. Speaking a foreign language needs learners' consciousness of words (at segmental level) and stress, rhythm, intonation and features of speech (at suprasegmental level). Discourse knowledge here means the knowledge of the structure of the spoken language which serves communicative purposes in different social situations. Learners have to know traditional scripts of speech events and seek language resources that help to form appropriate verbal statements, for example when restating particular stories. The second group of knowledge lies in core speaking skills. This is concerned with learners' knowledge regarding language and communication that helps to promote the production of verbal utterances. This knowledge can be classified into four major groups which are, then, more explained by micro-skills. The last group of knowledge covers communication strategies. These strategies help learners 'to overcome lexical gaps, negotiate meaning, repair communication breakdowns, and enhance the discourse that they and their interlocutors are jointly producing' (Goh & Burns, 2012, p. 63). Two types of strategies are proposed and grouped according to their purposes: avoidance strategies and achievement strategies. Avoidance strategies enable learners to lessen communication or give it up when essential resources are insufficient, whereas achievement strategies assist learners in transmitting their message and boosting their speaking chance.

In short, all the communicative competence models described above show the complex aspects of what language learners need to realise when communicating in another language. Specifications and

descriptions of subskills and components of the communicative competence seem to be helpful for the practice of language teaching.

### 3.3 Approaches to Speaking Instruction

So far theories of language learning have been viewed related to pedagogy in speaking which covers behaviourist theory, cognitivist theory, sociocultural theory and theory of communicative competence (Brown, 2007; Lightbown & Spada, 2006; Thornbury, 2005; Thornbury, 2011). Behaviourist theory is concerning the notion that the language is learned by ‘forming good habits through reinforcement’ (Thornbury, 2005, p. 38). Speaking skills can be developed through such learning elements as labelled presentation, practice and controlled production. The process of learning development focuses on spontaneous habits. It starts with presenting the learners language with input by listening to the teacher and recorded dialogues. Then, they practise through drilling and memorisation. After that, they produce language output in the class. This is relevant to behaviourist views of mind that are considered to be a brain that is to be shaped and formed. According to Lightbown and Spada (2006), and Thornbury (2005), cognitivists view the minds of language learners as a black box that has information operating capacity. A complex skill like speaking is supposed to be established through different stages starting from a controlled production to an automatic expression. Language learning begins with an awareness-raising phase, moving on to a connecting new knowledge phase, continuing with an existing knowledge phase and ending with an autonomy phase where novel language can be promptly accessible for utilisation. Sociocultural theorists put emphasis on sociocultural contexts in learning and posit that learning takes place due to having social interaction with other learners. Moreover, learners need intervention from someone who has better knowledge to give them a helpful framework or scaffold. To speak a new language, learners have to communicate with peers, teachers or others. Such interaction will help them to build new knowledge until they can make it their own and are able to perform on their own, as their self-regulation (Thornbury, 2005). Communicative competence is at present believed to be a key factor in the development of productive skills in language learners who actively take part in social life activities in their community and society (Council of Europe, n.d.). Much research on discourse analysis, conversational analysis and corpus analysis has revealed the role of communicative competence in speech production and verbal interaction. According to Thornbury (2011), the theory of communicative competence has provoked the growth of communicative syllabuses, task-based and text-based syllabuses and methodologies, which are claimed to be informed approaches to teaching and learning speaking skills. Based on the above-mentioned theories, there appear to be various approaches to teaching speaking in a foreign language which have been widely discussed in the literature, for example (1) direct approach, (2) indirect approach, (3) indirect approach plus and (4) communicative approach. Advocated by such scholars as Brown (2007), Dornyei and Thurrell (1994), Goh and Burns (2012), Richards (2008) and Thornbury and Slade (2006), a direct approach gives special importance to individual skills at the micro-level. Structural accuracy and language forms are emphasised. Dornyei and Thurrell (1994) add that in a direct approach programme, these micro-skills have to be combined with such other components as communication strategies, language inputs and speaking processes. This approach centres around analysing the spoken language, acquiring L2 and increasing the learners’ awareness of grammar, discourse organisations and practices (Dornyei & Thurrell, 1994; Thornbury & Slade, 2006). In Brown’s (2007) views, the direct approach should be incorporated with explicit instruction of speaking aspects and practicing opportunities. Moreover,

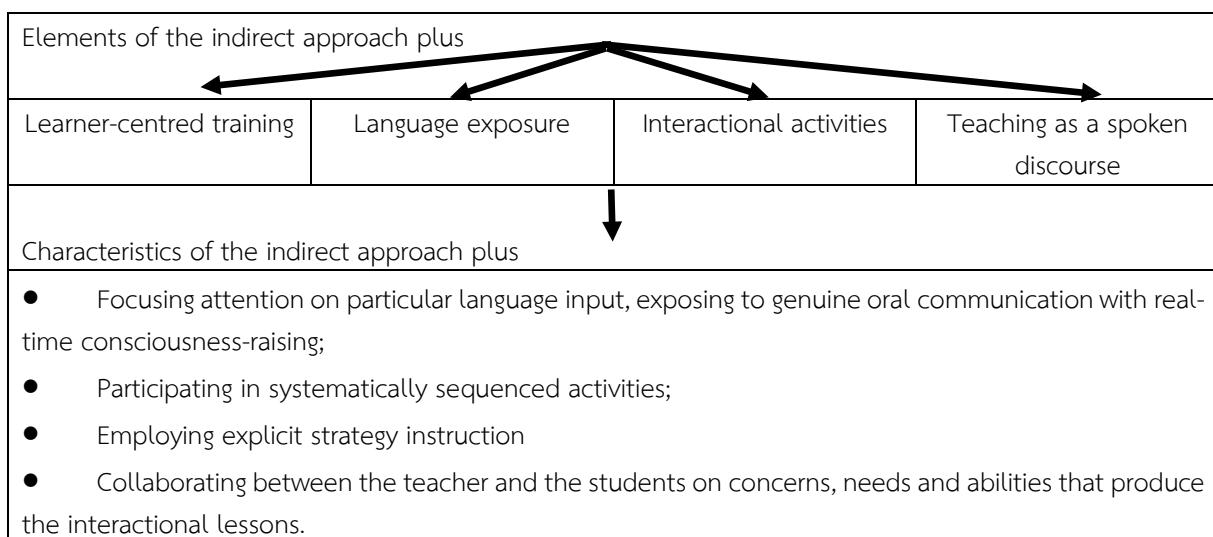
some researchers suggest using learners' recorded speech to examine their problematic speaking aspects (Sayer, 2005), levels of speaking skills (Cane, 1998) and non-native style of speaking (McCarthy, 1991). However, this approach is viewed as being over-dependent on skills and strategies with no emphasis on linguistic rules and functions of language in different contexts (Skehan, 1998). Moreover, not all mechanisms relevant to speaking can be taught while some are unknowingly realisable pragmatic markers, for example, hesitating, pausing, overlapping and raising the voice pitch to indicate turn-taking cues (Cook, 1989).

By contrast with a direct approach, an indirect approach gives special attention to the development of speech fluency. As a result, learners should be urged to take part in communicative events that provide them experiences of having a conversation with someone (Goh & Burns, 2012). Doing this, learners are expected to obtain oral production skills through conversing with their peers (Thornbury & Slade, 2006) in such activities as discussing, role-playing, filling information gaps and problem-solving (Dornyei & Thurrell, 1994). According to Brown (2001), if messages in these conversations have interacted in a meaningful way, it can be expected that learners' speaking skills will become developed. Nonetheless, if these interactive messages become duplicates of words and sounds, skills in oral production seem impossible to grow (Nunan, 1999). Since this approach tends to be less structured, it is suitable for those upper-level learners who want to practise the oral production skills they already have.

Thornbury and Slade (2006) identify an indirect plus approach which combines various teaching elements, including learner-centredness, exposure to the target language, conversational activities and spoken discourse training. Characteristics of this approach involve focusing attention on particular language input; exposing to genuine oral communication with real-time consciousness-raising; participating in sequenced activities; employing explicit strategy instruction; and collaborating between the teacher and the students on concerns, needs and abilities that produce the interactional lessons. According to Gibbons (2003), this approach requires much of teacher practice and skill nurture, learner-centred training and motivation for teacher-student collaboration for in-class decision-making. In Thornbury's (1998) views, one drawback that makes this conversational approach challenging is grammar-driven classrooms and textbooks. A communicative syllabus can be integrally designed for instruction, materials, classroom techniques, teachers and learners in a speaking classroom. The learners' communicative competence and the fluency of the target language is the goal, and teachers and students are suggested to speak for communication (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). To be able to communicate, learners need to have communicative competence that is composed of four mechanisms, namely *linguistic* or grammatical competence, *pragmatic* competence or illocutionary intent, *discourse* competence and *strategic* competence (Canale & Swain, 1980, 1981; Canale, 1983, 1984). First, linguistic or grammatical competence involves the mastery of the target language system which includes spelling, pronunciation, vocabulary, word formation, grammatical structure, sentence structure and linguistic semantics. As for pragmatic competence (or illocutionary intent), successful communicators need to have the knowledge to choose suitable messages either in a spoken or written form according to the social context in which they are created. This includes recognising such proper social conventions as status, role, attitude, purpose, or degree of formality. In terms of discourse competence, language learners should have 'the ability to combine meanings with unified (worked well together) and acceptable spoken or written texts in different genres' (Maley, 1986, p. 88). Finally, strategic competence also plays a role. Having recourse to communication strategies demonstrates how well learners possess this competence. When they are unable to convey their messages in words since lacking resources to express

them effectively, they find other words or expressions or even non-verbal strategies to make themselves clearly understandable. The above discussion suggests that communicative syllabuses place emphasis on both language form and usage, which may result in accuracy as well as fluency. According to Kajornboon (2000), providing only exercises on the language in class is not recommended. Speaking activities should be provided in order to develop the learners' oral production skills through the language itself.

Based on the above review, in the larger study where the findings of this library-research contribute to, the researcher followed the communicative syllabus where *linguistic*, *discourse*, *sociolinguistic* and *strategic* competences were prompted. The implementation of his instruction in the larger study was based on the elements and characteristics of the indirect plus approach described earlier, as summarised in the following chart.



**Figure 2** Elements and Characteristics of the Indirect Plus Approach (Thornbury & Slade, 2006)

### 3.4 Key Aspects of the Teaching and Learning Process

Nazara (2011), Ramirez (2010), and Tuan and Mai (2015) have proposed some key aspects of the teaching and learning process for learners' oral skill development. These aspects are considered essential for the development of learners' oral skills. The details are summarised as follows:

#### Beliefs about Speaking Mastery Level

According to White (1999), beliefs are instrumental, helping someone to make up the character or essence of their tasks and behaviour. In the context of foreign language learning, beliefs are thought to affect how well EFL learners learn the target language. Certain beliefs could help ones to form the maps guiding them towards their goals and giving them the power to take action (TONY ROBBINS, n.d.). Thus, the growth of language learners' skills in speaking cannot be underestimated as witnessed in the studies of Ramirez (2010) and Somdee (2012).

#### Eagerness to Develop Speaking Skills

A desire or eagerness to learn is a starting point where one's success grows (Ho, 2019). In fact, curiosity produces dopamine, a chemical that is related to motivation (ScienceDaily, 2014). It is certain that real interest or curiosity boosts confidence in learning new things. The eagerness for language use of language

learners can be described as an instrumental motivation (Foreign Language Teaching Methods, n.d., Crookes & Schmidt, 1991) which stimulates learning a language because of a practical or pragmatic reason the learner has such as getting a salary bonus, passing a language requirement, getting a monetary reward, or having a better chance of getting a job. This gains strong support from the opinions of the participants in the studies of Akkakoson (2019) and Nazara (2011).

### **Opportunity and Time for Speaking Practice**

Time for practice is quite necessary for an English speaking curriculum. It is recommended that approximately 25 percent of classroom time should be given to communicative speaking tasks. Moreover, Nation and Newton (2009, pp. 1–2) suggest that a course should be divided into four parts with approximately equal time, namely 1) meaning-focused input (i.e. reading and listening), 2) meaning-focused output (i.e. speaking and writing), 3) language-focused learning (e.g. grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation) and 4) fluency development of previously studied items of language through the four skills. The majority of Nazara's (2011) students agreed on the importance of opportunity and time for practising speaking. This researcher remarked that all classes, including non-speaking classes, can play a role in developing students' speaking skills. He advised that non-speaking classes should utilise a more interactive way of learning so that students can have a greater opportunity for practising oral skills. In that case, non-speaking-class instructors need to make the most effective utilisation of speaking as an instrument for thinking and learning.

### **Learning Resources**

Learning resources include instructional materials, activities and classroom facilities. They are important tools for teachers to support and organise the teaching and learning process. Learning resources involve 'print and non-print materials and online/open-access resources – which supports and enhances, directly or indirectly, learning and teaching' (International Bureau of Education, n.d., para. 1). The usefulness of learning materials, speaking activities, and speaking topics that the instructor brings to the classroom is positively reflected in the studies of Gutiérrez (2005), Nazara (2011) and Ramirez (2010). The participant students mentioned that the materials in their speaking classes are exciting for developing their speaking skills while a larger number of them thought that the activities in speaking classes empower them to speak English. Some said these learning resources influence their enthusiasm to participate in class.

### **Classroom Atmosphere and Learners' Psychological Barriers**

Classroom atmosphere and psychological barriers are also significant to learners' development of English oral skills. Classroom atmosphere may be seen as 'a vital component of teaching and learning that helps establish and maintain rapport between teacher and students, build motivation and confidence among the learners, and facilitate the processes of teaching and learning' (Lee & Mak, 2018, para. 1). Psychological or emotional barriers are concerned with 'the psychological state i.e. opinions, attitudes, status consciousness, emotions, etc. of a person that deeply affects the ability to communicate' (Business Jargons, n.d., para. 1). Psychological factors affecting students' speaking performance are prevalent in several previous studies (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; Khamprated, 2012; Miao, 2011; Nazara, 2011; Ramirez, 2010; and Tuan and Mai, 2015). To solve this problem, Akkakoson (2016), Marzec-Stawiarska (2015), Patil (2008), and Tuan and Mai (2015) argue that teachers should help their students to conquer shyness and embarrassment by being friendly, helpful and co-operative and by reminding students not to worry about making mistakes and giving them understandable instructions and adequate guidance. Thus, a low-stress atmosphere where

students can use the language for real purposes could make them feel at ease and get involved in meaningful communication or interaction which allows them to obtain oral skills.

### **Use of Vocabulary**

Among other sub-skills of speaking (i.e. pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and pragmatics), vocabulary knowledge is essential for language learners. In the production of the target language, meaning or concept that language users want to convey in their spoken texts will be formed, based on the words they have stored in their memory. Schmitt (2000) postulates that ‘lexical knowledge is central to communicative competence and the acquisition of a second language’ (p. 55). A limited inventory of vocabulary is commonly perceived by the students in various studies as the most significant source of speaking difficulty (e.g. Akkakoson, 2016; Khamprated, 2012; Ramirez, 2010; Sasum & Weeks, 2018; Somdee, 2012; and Tuan & Mai, 2015). The possible cause for this is probably the lack of sufficient training in vocabulary. Some scholars postulate the significance of vocabulary in language learning. Learning vocabulary assists in understanding changes in meaning according to different contextual factors (Yang & Dai, 2012). Along with pronunciation and grammar, vocabulary is considered the most necessary mechanical element in learning a foreign language through all four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Pan & Xu, 2011). According to Rohmatillah (2017), communication in the second language becomes harder if without learning the vocabulary. Low vocabulary knowledge becomes a hindrance to the learning of English (Alqahtani, 2015). In Schmitt’s (2008) views, vocabulary plays an important role in teaching and learning the second language as lexical understanding is central to effective communication. Richards and Renandya (2002) add that if without vocabulary, the learners will be discouraged to utilise the language.

### **Pronunciation and Intonation**

The most important sub-skill of speaking is pronunciation. Speech that is improperly pronounced tends not to be well comprehended by the listeners. Fraser (2000) argues that ‘with good pronunciation, a speaker is intelligible despite other errors; with poor pronunciation, understanding a speaker will be very difficult, despite accuracy in other areas’ (p. 7). Besides, intonation is also crucial. This is because ‘[w]ithout intonation, our voices are flat and monotone...[and]...[w]ithout intonation, you cannot understand the speaker’s feelings and the speaker’s attitudes’ (EnglishMate, 2018, paras. 5-6). The study of Singh, Singh, and Eng (2015) in which the Oral Proficiency in English for Secondary Schools (OPS-English) Programme activities was implemented allows continuous drilling to be conducted on the students’ pronunciation as they are listening and pronouncing, leading to an improvement in their speaking skills. Moreover, communicative and interactive tasks in the study of Gutiérrez (2005) also help to foster an improvement of students’ word order, sentence structure and pronunciation. Ramirez (2010) confirms his students perceive a major development in pronunciation and intonation since they state having advanced in their pronunciation and intonation performance after taking the course. Somdee’s (2012) students also say that they can listen to music and watch movies to practise their listening skills and improve their pronunciation through digital storytelling which is used as a multimedia tool in the classroom.

### **In-Class Interaction and Participation**

Classroom interaction and participation are important for the whole learning process. They facilitate language development and enhance EFL learners’ oral fluency and proficiency. According to Macmillan Dictionary (n.d.a, b), interaction refers to ‘the activity of being with and talking to other people, and the way that people react to each other’ while participation means ‘the process of taking part in something’. Results

from several studies lend support to this point. In the study of Gutiérrez (2005), her classroom sessions are designed to allow for ample interaction between students and peers. In Nazara's (2011) study, participation and interaction are found among the students. This researcher recommends creating study programmes which require the employment of English as a means of communication among the students. Ramirez's (2010) participants also report their more frequent interaction and participation in class at the end of the course. Apart from that, Somdee (2012) discovers that storytelling is a suitable activity that provides a great chance for students to take turns telling stories and listening to stories in English. With this, students become involved in discussions and interactions, speaking in a group, backing up, giving reasons for supporting their ideas and views and considering others' feedback on the same topic.

### **Fluency**

Fluency, according to Hughes's (2002, p. 80), is '[t]he ability to express oneself in an intelligible, reasonable and accurate way without too much hesitation, otherwise the communication will break down because listeners will lose their interest'. Hedge (2000, p. 54) suggests that fluency 'relates to the production and it is normally reserved for speech. It is the ability to link units of speech together with the facility and without strain or inappropriate show-ness, or undue hesitation'. Speaking fluency is regarded as a significant component of communication competence. Speaking fluently can assist the speaker in constructing constant speech utterances without comprehension problems for the listener and maintaining the communicative thoughts more efficiently. According to Richards, Platt, and Weber (1985), the strand of fluency is a measurement of one's communicative proficiency level. Every language learner is willing to speak fluently. Thus, this implies that speaking fluency is essential for EFL learners to develop and improve. Nation (2007) also stresses the importance of fluency development by classifying it into four strands in a language course, namely: a) language learning through listening and reading is called meaning-focused input; b) form-focused instruction is focused on language features; c) language learning through speaking and writing refers to meaning-focused output, and d) the fluency development is a fourth strand, which is the retrieval of meaning processing from the known languages and contents. Furthermore, he maintains that the improvement in speaking fluency also enhances the potentials of grammar accuracy and the levels of content control. That is, the practice of speaking fluency does not hinder the form-focused instruction, but it intensely improves the accuracy of a language.

### **Thinking in English**

Thinking in the target language, which is English in this review, is considered beneficial to language learning. Research shows that thinking about things in a target language makes your decisions better and more reasonable (Keith, 2012). This also makes you learn the language more quickly and speak it out loud more easily. According to lingHOLIC (n.d., para. 1), thinking in the target language is 'an important goal that brings you one giant step closer to becoming fluent...', and thinking in your target language is an essential part of being able to connect with the people you are trying to get to know'. The more learners think in English, the more their fluency will be improved. According to Geikhman (n.d., paras. 5-6), 'you learn the language faster and have an easier time speaking out loud' ...[and]... 'If you're "speaking" English in your mind, it's easier to speak it with your mouth'. Thinking in English does not mean translating what one wants to say from their L1 into English, but forming ideas or opinions into English utterances right before saying out loud. Doing this helps one to internalise the language. In other words, making the language part of one's own nature by unconscious adjustment and one does not have to think about it any longer. Thus, to

internalise English, language learners do not have to recall whatever grammatical rules and correct pronunciations every time they speak. It is said that language internalisation always occurs in native speakers who do not realise whether what has just been said is grammatically correct or not. As for language learners, speaking English in ones' head is a suggested way to practise English. They should be worry-free when producing speech utterances and careless about the accuracy and the listener's comprehension. Mistakes can be made as long as the content is still comprehensible. Apart from this, words that are actually uttered will be added up to the speakers' vocabulary stock. New words especially words in daily life conversations are importantly needed to be learnt.

### 3.5 Current Practices in Teaching Speaking Skills

Throughout the past decades, technological developments have obviously displayed how fast our world is changing. At the same time, what happens outside the teaching contexts unavoidably ends up having an impact on what teachers do inside the classrooms, lecture rooms, schools, colleges or universities. Hockly and Dudeney (2018) have listed some new ways of learning and new technologies for learning that have been applied to English Language Teaching (ELT) classrooms: blended learning, big data and learning analytics, flipped learning, massive open online courses (MOOCs), mobile learning, and machine translation. Such technology-enhanced learning has supplemented face-to-face teaching and learning by using online computer-assisted language learning (CALL) (Grgurovic, 2011). As for teaching speaking skills, the pedagogical approach such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) still obviously continues to be accepted and utilised in the speaking classrooms (Bruner, Sinwongsuwan, & Radić-Bojanić, 2015). Key features of CLT (i.e. authentic input and interaction, as suggested by Whong [2011]), are incorporated in the course syllabus, teaching materials, class activities and course requirements. The learners' ability to communicate fluently in different situations was put emphasis on. The mastery of the grammatical structures of the language is simply the second priority. Meaning and using language forms are urged to be negotiated in meaningful communicative events. This is to enable the learners to obtain a skill of the target language and describe what they want to say in authentic communicative activities. Richards and Bohlke (2012), and Stempleski and Robertson (2007) point out that the teaching is apparently aided by contemporary commercial textbooks in which only important grammar topics are highlighted and activities encouraging listening and speaking are meanwhile emphasised. Feedback is given without interrupting the learners' flow of talk, followed by the teachers' modelling. The learners' speaking errors are acceptable if communication breakdowns are not caused. The teachers in a CLT classroom have changed their role from an information giver/caretaker/lecturer/presenter to a facilitator/guide/motivator/director, whereas the learners have become language users or explorers who should learn via performing or employing the language and finally making new discoveries.

## 4. Conclusion

This article accounts for a library-based review, providing insight into the theoretical and practical background for instructing an English speaking course in a larger study which was designed to investigate Thai sci-tech undergraduates' perceptions about their English speaking skill development after taking the course. Theoretically, speaking is described as sounds in the language that is produced via the speech organs of a speaker for verbal communication. These sounds convey communicative purposes through meaningful messages in which information is produced, received and processed spontaneously. Normally, speakers need

to possess communicative competence which displays their ability to use language appropriately when having a conversation. Furthermore, when it comes to teaching English speaking, language teachers could relate their pedagogies to existing theories of language learning which provide various approaches to teaching speaking in a foreign language and assist in improving their students' oral skills.

Based on the purpose of this library-based review as stated earlier in the introduction section, developing students' oral skills in English as a foreign language in the present researcher's larger research project has been carried out based on the findings of this library research. The findings, that is, to theoretically follow the communicative syllabus where linguistic, discourse, sociolinguistic and strategic competences were prompted; and to practically employ the elements and characteristics of the indirect plus approach where learner-centred training, language exposure, interactional activities and teaching as a spoken discourse were integrated have been applied to the present researcher's instruction. Moreover, 10 key aspects of the teaching and learning process of developing English speaking skills identified from this review were also utilised as questionnaire topics for the EFL participants in the larger study to reflect whether their oral skills have been developed after the course they took ended.

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