



## Review on *University Success Oral Communication*

LI Shumin<sup>[a],\*</sup>

<sup>[a]</sup>Associate Professor, English Department, Zhejiang University of Finance & Economics Dongfang College, Hangzhou, China.

\*Corresponding author.

Received 10 July 2017; accepted 8 September 2017

Published online 26 September 2017

### Abstract

A book review presented in this essay suggests that teacher-centered oral communication is not the only—nor is it an essential—means for helping students develop a sense of critical consciousness in oral communication. Utilizing Murphy's theory—Listening and speaking abilities are an indispensable aspect of second language proficiency, I point out the importance of his book in the introduction part. Outlined the second part is the organization and comments on this book. In the third part of the book's disadvantages and advantages are highlighted.

**Key words:** Oral communication; Critical thinking; Authentic material

Li, S. M. (2017). Review on *University Success Oral Communication*. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 15(3), 14-16. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/view/9948>  
 DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/9948>

### INTRODUCTION

*University Success Oral Communication* (Author: Christina Cavage) this book is designed for the EAP learners of transition level from B2+ to C1 to aid students' language learning aligned with an online learning management system, such as online lectures, drill and vocabulary practice activities that allows to monitor students' progress. The author Christina Cavage's book published in 2017 by Pearson Education, is significant and unique, in terms of utilizing authentic material that

builds on previous approaches, like how to synthesize information from multiple sources, how to make analogies in oral communications and so on so forth. The lectures are given by five subject matter experts who are separately famous in the field of Sociology, Economics, Biology, Humanities, and Environmental Engineering. Listening and speaking abilities are an indispensable aspect of second language proficiency. These two skills are commonly interconnected in real life, so English language learners need a lot of practice when the skills are integrated (Murphy, 1991) Focusing on unit topics and adopting question-centered approach provoke critical thinking in order to prepare students for mainstream university classes conducted in English. The book has a good number of bright and meaningful pictures to make the content colourful while not distracting students from the learning process. This edition of the book has supplemental materials for instructors, who can use the same book paired with the tools provided on line. The set of students material is available as a student book and as an E-Book which provides students with additional resources such as communicative grammar worksheets, a teachers' handbook and tests related to the corresponding unit. The online materials website provides teachers the access to make comments on students' assignments, design a test, track students' progresses. The test, including a placement test, a midterm and final examination papers which can be presented on line or downloaded, might be the key way to testify the students' in-class knowledge. Overall the aim of this book is to encourage EAP students to deal with challenging and engaging authentic content through scaffolding speaking skill development.

### 1. BOOK ORGANIZATION

Christina Cavage provides maximum flexibility to arrange the flow of the content by employing a three-part structure with three strands: Reading, Writing, and Oral

Communication, focusing on a particular area in each unit. For example, Human Experience in the unit of Sociology, Money and Commerce in Economics, the Science of Nature in Biology, Arts and Letters in the Humanities, Structural Science in Environmental Engineering are the mainstream class topics. In the beginning units, the book presents a comparatively general set of strategies that become more specific in the latter part of the book. For example, guidelines are provided in the beginning units on how to paraphrase key ideas and how to create cohesion in presentations and discussions in a general way, then the specific strategies are put forward in the latter part like how to interpret and utilize hedging devices in the oral communication. On the whole, the content of the book is organized smoothly, at the end of each unit in the summary of the corresponding skills is presented based on a three strands practice. This highlighted skill summary guides the whole unit, explicitly aiming at developing students' four skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Setting up coherent and orderly materials in the book is an area where some changes of emphasis could be of great significance. The book evolves into a more academic rendition that employs rich writing features aligned with a large number of examples, such as teaching students how to identify emphatic argumentation, succinct argumentation, and create cohesion in presentations and discussions with the example practice of preparing a panel discussion on modern educational trends and their similarity to or difference from ideals espoused by Socrates Plato, Goethe, and Nietzsche. These effectively facilitate the blended programs' learning. The book is not only limited to rehearse grammatical items and paraphrasing. It puts forward extensive work with authentic texts and videotaped lectures which bring the vivid language environment for the learners. These were presented by Stanford University professors sharing challenging real-life experience. Students who learn English come from various cultures which are why it is so important to teach pragmatics in the classroom (Hinkel, 2013). In the book, the author embeds continuous and extensive assessments to evaluate the students' ability for skills application in class or online. The author sums up strategies for academic success delivered through online videos. These strategies further academic progress and lessen learners' anxiety and pressure from the challenges encountered.

Based on the previous general introduction of the book, the organization is going to be illustrated in detail. Part I covers shorter listening passages, wherein the students review and practice the basic skills, and the short vignettes delivered by the Stanford Professors. This approach differentiates this material from the traditional synthetic one. This part is designed to build foundations that highlight comprehensive skills in each of its five units: Sociology, Economics, Biology, Humanities, Environmental Engineering. The associated

relevant practices are provided aiming at strengthening the understanding of the functions and applications of the skill. The author illustrates fundamental speaking skills included in this part. One skill utilizes strategies for elaboration and turn-taking, and how to take accurate, and organized notes. A second skill resides in the activation of prior knowledge, identification and presentation of main ideas, as well as supporting details, and ultimately in clarification. A third skill resides in the participation in extended discourse, the recognition and use of digressions, and the conduction of discussions. Further, this skill entails the identification and utilization of interrogatives and declaratives to gain, confirm, and assert support. The fourth skill introduces the understanding of argumentation, and the recognition and utilization of succinct argumentation and markers for organizational structure. This skill also affords the creation of cohesion in discussions and presentations. The fifth skill involves the understanding and utilization of visuals.

In Part II, longer listening passages are provided to enhance students' critical thinking skills, and to engage a smooth transition from the shorter to the full-length listening practice introduced in the third part. In this part, each theme is demonstrated in greater depth. Transition-level students are supposed to acquire the ability to support their own arguments using generalizations. They also learn to modify their tone and register, and to comprehend the inferences and implications in a lecture. The author is emphasizing the skills from building to application. She proposes good many exercises demanding extensive critical thinking and analysis based on the following skills. The first skill involves the identification and utilization of the concepts of fact and opinion, between implications and inferences, generalizations and specifics, for instance. The second skill makes use of verbal markers to synthesize data from multiple sources. In the third skill, students interpret colloquial language, assumptions, and rhetorical devices in oral communication. The fourth skill entails selecting suitable research to support ideas, integrate and present research, and cite sources of academic references. The fifth skill demonstrates the understanding of the procedural parts of a research report. It determines the quality of a report's conclusion. Take the fourth unit as an example. The author intends to demonstrate the importance of making analogies through the preparation and delivery of an informational group presentation on the continuing influence in society of a classic work of literature. The author takes great effort in Part I and Part II to emphasize fundamental and critical thinking through the careful organization of the structure from the following perspective: science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics preparing the learners with all-sided knowledge.

In Part III, rather than the shorter or the longer listening activities, it is more challenging, the lectures lasting 20-25 minutes are conducted by Stanford professors with

authentic context vocabulary and intonation. The language in these lectures does not conform to what instructional grammar books or text books teach. In another word, daily languages are embedded in the professor's lectures, such as slang words, colloquial languages, idioms, and so on. This imperfect language is different from the traditional oral communication textbooks, and it is loaded with humorous, cultural and pragmatic points, which fully show the learners the real-life language rather than book language. The language used in these lectures might account for the uniqueness and challenge of the University Success.

---

## 2. THE BOOK'S DISADVANTAGES AND ADVANTAGES

---

The textbook still leaves some room for improvement. Firstly, disconnected themes between subsequent units are separately addressing different topics. For example, the theme in unit one is about social evolution and achievements, the theme in unit two is focused on the economy, these two topics are disjointed. On the one hand, it is easy enough to get into a unit's topic and elaborate each individual area. Consideration of previous units, in terms of content it is not necessarily needed too much either for teachers and students. On the other hand, these units appear to be loosely tied together. They can either be replaced by other options or canceled which would not result in lack of comprehension. Secondly, from students' perspective, the completion of such a wide variety of practices both in the printed book and the online system probably would be too time consuming. It is not easy to balance quantity and quality at the same time. A sufficient amount of practice might yield the proper balance between quantity and quality. Thirdly the "imperfect English" in Part III delivered by the professors is might be a little too challenging for the students of transition level who is still in need of standard and accurate English to further strengthen their base of the language.

This book can be regarded as a helpful practical guide for teachers and students. For example, one advantage is the substantial amount of materials online available for both teachers and students. It can be accessed and downloaded with a password located under a scratch-

off material on the front page of the book. Images have often been underestimated as having a distracting effect by portraying "seductive details" (Harp & Mayer, 1998). The online material includes teaching notes, flexible tools and a management system, audio-scripts, video-scripts, answer keys, and more. The jury is still out on whether or not subtitles and scripts are beneficial or detrimental to students in facilitating comprehension (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). Students keep on checking the scripts presented in videos anyway, in order to complete tasks when they are required to finish them independently with no references. On the other hand, they can fully prepare academically, further review and self assessment with the assistance of these online materials.

In conclusion, even though this book may still benefit from clarifications and better conceptual connections, it effectively elaborates on how to improve oral communication. The assistance of skills based on authentic materials significantly reinforces the skills of transition level students. In sum, *University Success Oral Communication* which offers the necessary instruments for integrated instructions is a great book with a variety of interesting activities and authentic materials and it definitely is a fantastic textbook designed for adults and young adults who study English for academic purpose starting from the perspectives of topics, contents, approaches, and the carefully selected materials, lectures given by those world famous professors.

---

## REFERENCES

---

- Harp, S. F., & Mayer, R. E. (1998). How seductive details do their damage: A theory of cognitive interest in science learning. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 90(3), 414-434.
- Hinkel, E. (2013). Culture and pragmatics in language and teaching and learning. In M. Celce-Murcia (Ed.), *Teaching English as a second or foreign language* (4<sup>th</sup> ed., pp.394-409). Boston: Heinle ELT.
- Murphy, J. M. (1991). Oral communication in TESOL: Integrating speaking, listening, and pronunciation. *TESOL Quarterly*, 25(1), 51-75.
- Vandergrift, L., & Goh, C. (2012). *Teaching and learning second language listening: Metacognition in action*. New York: Routledge.