STUDENTS' PROBLEMS IN
SPEAKING FOR SOCIAL PURPOSES CLASS

Angela Nirmala Nariswari
Fakultas Bahasa dan Seni, Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana, Salatiga
112015092@student.uksw.edu

Listyani
Fakultas Bahasa dan Seni, Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana, Salatiga
listyani.listyani@uksw.edu

ABSTRACT

Speaking is one of four other skills that a language learner should master. In their language learning journey, these learners may encounter many problems. The same thing may happen to the students of the *Speaking for Social Purposes* class. It is a speaking class offered to the first semester students in an English Language Education Program. This study presents a quantitative study conducted in a private university in Central Java, Indonesia. The main aim of this study is to find problems and solutions in the *Speaking for Social Purposes* class. A survey was done on seventy-four (74) students from an English Language Education Program about the difficulties and solutions they experienced in the speaking class. Data were derived from open and closed-ended questionnaires as well as interviews with three students. Hopefully, this study will be beneficial for both teachers and students of speaking classes.

Keywords: problems, speaking, Speaking for Social Purposes, speaking class

INTRODUCTION

Speaking for Social Purposes class is one of the courses that have a purpose to develop students' speaking skills in front of the public. This class helps students to speak up their ideas in mind. The most general topic in this speaking class is real-life phenomena. Usually, the topic will be about the students' life experiences or nowadays' cases. *Speaking for Social Purposes* class helps students to be confident to speak in front of the public. Having the courage to speak in front of the public is needed because it can give the students experiences to speak up their minds in front of many people. They can experience facing the real situation in daily life. If students have courage, they can speak fluently. Having a confident personality helps them to speak bravely. When they are brave to speak, they will normally have fluency. Although it is still debatable, fluency should be given priority over grammar. When we are brave and confident to speak in front of the public, we will be able to handle other problems such as fear of making mistakes.

In one *Speaking for Social Purposes* class at an English Language Education Program (ELEP), in a private university in Central Java, Indonesia, the lecturer often conducted the class in a cafe. The lecturer told the students to share their opinions about something and speak it up. Students were told not to be afraid to make mistakes. They were taught to keep on speaking even though they might make mistakes like grammatical errors or incorrect pronunciation. After the students finished speaking, the lecturer gave feedback that helped them to increase their courage and knowledge in speaking. They had the class in the cafe for the rest of the semester.

This kind of activity helped students to have confidence in speaking in front of the public. Besides the activity that the lecturer gave, students needed to have the motivation to speak in English in front of the public, have an interest in the course, and have an adequate vocabulary to cope with the materials and the course.

There have been some previous studies done on speaking problems experienced by students. Heriahsyah (2012) researched the difficulties and causes perceived by English Department students of Syiah Kuala University in learning speaking and the efforts made by them to overcome their difficulties. From both observation and interview, that study revealed that all students encountered various difficulties in English speaking ability. The main problem faced by the students was 'lack of vocabulary', while 'being afraid of making mistakes was the prime cause of the problem which became a problem for them to speak.

Another study was done by Ratnasari (2020). Her research used a case study as the research design, and it was aimed to answer the research questions such as challenges faced by the students in learning speaking skills and the strategies implemented by the students to overcome the challenges. There were three participants in this research, namely two Mechanical Engineering Department, Olaf and Elsa, and one English teacher in the Mechanical Engineering Department, Anna. The data were obtained from interviews and students' speaking grades through classroom presentations. Results showed that there were four challenges, such as lack of vocabulary, nervousness, unsupportive environment, and lack of grammar knowledge. Besides, there were five strategies, such as codeswitching, seeing the audiences as the statues, using google translate machines, making a personal approach to the English teacher, and encouraging self.

There is only one research question in this study; What are students' problems in *Speaking for Social Purposes* class? The study was conducted in the second semester of 2018/2019 academic year, involving 74 (seventy-four) students. Hopefully, the results of this study can help the students and future teachers to decrease the obstacles in speaking classes and perform better.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing and receiving and processing information (Brown, 1994; Burns & Joyce, 1997). Speaking is the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols, in a variety of contexts (Chaney, 1998, p. 13). Speaking is one of the language skills that have to be developed to maintain the balance with other skills; listening, reading, and writing. Speaking in front of the public may have certain purposes, it is somehow called speaking for social purposes. Speaking for social Purposes is like sharing or giving information that might be needed for others. Sharing the information with others give benefits in social relationship, it also helps to give information that is needed.

Public speaking is a productive skill aimed at communication. To make communication in a foreign language to be successful, a speaker needs to be familiar with linguistic and cultural backgrounds, that are shared by native speakers, and has to obey certain rules and conventions, that are not written down anywhere, nor are easy to define (Harmer, 2001, p.246). Public speaking needs to be learned deeply and need to be used in daily life to make the speakers accustomed to it. The speaker also needs to be familiar with the factors inside the public speaking such as vocabulary, grammar, and the attitude to speak in front of many people. Fluency is also needed in speaking in front of the public.

About *Speaking for Social Purposes*, Verderber, Sellnow, and Verderber (2011) stated that public speaking is simply one form of human communication. The teaching activities usually have some levels. In the beginning, the speaking activities will be

conducted only in class, then the next activity can be conducted in a public space like in a café or a conference.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in an English Language Education Program (ELEP), in a private university in Central Java, Indonesia, in Semester I, 2018/2019 academic year. The participants of this study were the freshmen of the 2018 of ELEP Study Program. They were all 74 student participant from four speaking classes. These students were taking the Speaking for Social Purposes class.

The data collection methods were questionnaires with open and close-ended questions and audio recorded interviews. The data gathering procedures were as follows. First, the researchers asked permission from the course coordinator to conduct research in *Speaking for Social Purposes* classes. After that, the researchers contacted the class teachers and asked permission to distribute questionnaires to the students. Out of 74 students, four students were randomly interviewed for clarification of their answers. Interviews were done individually on December 4 and 5, 2018. Participants 1 and 2 were interviewed on December 4, while Participants 3 and 4 on December 5, 2018.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Fluency

Pronunciation is one important factor in speaking. Many students feel that if they do not speak fluently, they are afraid that others may think they are less intelligent than others. As many as 43 students (58.11%) in *Speaking for Social Purposes* classes emphasized that they had difficulty when they were having a conversation. They could not complement their interlocutors because they were not fluent enough in speaking English. One student did not feel confident and had trouble with fluency. This bothered the conversation that was going on.

Nevertheless, thirty-one (31) students (41.89%) preferred sticking with their fluency rather than thinking of their grammar while they were speaking. Even though their grammar was not perfect, they would keep going on speaking using the fluency ability that they had. They would use their fluency skill as much as they could. Shown below is a statement from an interview on December 4, 2018, with Participant 1 about fluency. Participant 1 stated, "*As long as the listeners understand what we are intending to say, there is no problem. It means the communication goes on well*".

Thirty-one other students were very confident with their speaking skills. They would go on to speak as long as the listeners understood.

Direct Feedback from the Lecturer

Direct feedback is another thing that students normally wait for. Sixty-eight (68) students or 91.89% of the students found that direct feedback was really helpful to improve their speaking skills because they would know directly what was wrong with their words, sentences, or grammar. On the other hand, six (6) students (8.11%) found that direct feedback would distract their concentration in speaking. They might have forgotten what they were going to say next after getting corrected by the lecturer. Some of them even felt embarrassed when being corrected in front of their friends. The students wanted to finish their sentences before they got feedback from their lecturer. Shown below is Participant 2's statement from an interview about direct feedback from the lecturer. The interview was on December 4, 2018. Participant 2 mentioned, "*Direct*

feedback bothers my concentration and makes me feel embarrassed in front of my friends. But after that, I know what my mistakes are."

Four out of the six students said that getting direct feedback often made them unable to concentrate because the teacher stopped them when they were speaking. After the teacher gave feedback directly right after the students made mistakes, they often forgot what they were trying to say next. Being corrected in public is also embarrassing for some people, it was like having mistakes shown openly.

Fear of Making Pronunciation Errors

Pronunciation errors are errors that can be easily seen by the listeners. That is why many language learners are afraid of making this kind of error. Twenty-one (21) students or 28.38% of respondents in this study said that they would not produce sounds because they were afraid to make pronunciation mistakes. Participant 3 mentioned in an interview on December 5, 2018, "*If I make mistakes, I will feel embarrassed. I have to prepare it beforehand. Before the presentation or speech, I always practice and prepare well at home*" After the students knew that they were making a mistake, they would feel embarrassed and afraid to try again, they were afraid if they would make the same mistake again. The other 53 students (71.62%) admitted that they did not feel embarrassed with their pronunciation errors.

Fear of Making Grammatical Errors

Fifty-four (54) students in this study (72.97%) made mistakes and kept going on in speaking, while twenty (20) of them (27.03%) made mistakes and felt afraid to try again. Fear of making grammatical errors is detention for developing skills. The fear of making grammatical errors stop the students' desire in learning. After mistakes are made, they might feel embarrassed with their friends or the lecturer. Students nowadays are usually making fun of others' mistakes, it will also make the one who makes mistakes afraid to try again and show their ability in it. So, the lecturer and the students' classmate's roles are really important in this part.

Feeling Tense

Speaking in front of many people may cause tense feelings for some students. Forty-four (44) students (59.46%) felt tense because they were afraid of making mistakes, some did not get used to speaking in a public place or did not have any motivation to do that. These forty-four (44) students were feeling tense was used by being afraid to make mistakes, feeling shy to speak in front of many people, and the rest thirty (30) students (40.54%) did not have self-confidence in performing their skill.

Lack of Self-Confidence

Being confident in doing anything is beneficial. Confidence helps students to be able to do something well. Speaking activities are one activity that should be done with confidence. When students lack self-confidence, it will cause tense feelings, nervousness, and fear to make mistakes. Lack of self-confidence leads other problems to appear in speaking.

Based on our research, forty-two students did not have self-confidence because they had bad experiences in learning speaking such as being criticized by others, being judged because of their mistakes, and feeling not good enough in speaking. Participant 4, for example, stated in an interview on December 5, 2018, "*To be honest, I am embarrassed when I speak in English in incorrect way. I feel I am worse than my friends and far-left behind by my friends when it happens*".

Being judged because of making mistakes is a common thing in the studying environment. After we make mistakes, usually the others will laugh directly, and some of

them are talking behind our back. That is why forty-two (42) students (56.76%) did not have self-confidence, it is due to their past experience in speaking. The other 32 students (43.24%) admitted that they had self-confidence.

Too Much Reliance on Feedback from the Lecturer

In the *Speaking for Social Purposes* class, feedback is divided into two: direct feedback and indirect feedback. Direct feedback should be given right after the students make mistakes, the lecturer usually gives feedback by telling what is wrong and gives the correction. Indirect feedback is the kind of feedback that students with a lack of self-confidence like because this feedback is usually given by the end of the lecture. The lecturer will take notes of what is being said by the students and discuss it at the end of the class. These two types of feedback should be utilized by the students to make their speaking skills to be better. Having feedback from others especially from lecturers is helpful for students in improving their speaking skills. All participants in this study admitted that they were all waiting for their teacher feedback, and sometimes they hoped too much.

The Solution to Solve the Problems

Note-taking is already being a habit of students. To make it easier for themselves, seventy-two (72) students (97.30%) usually wrote down what the lecturer has said. They wrote the feedback given by the lecturer. From the note, they can recall what was being learned the previous day and they could take a look at which one was being corrected by the lecturer. Once they wrote down all the feedback, they could reflect and remember their learning process. Only two students or 2.7% did not take notes, they relied on their memory and understanding of the lecturer's explanations.

From this study, it can be concluded that the lecturer had a big role to make students comfortable in the learning environment, in this case, in the speaking class. Thus, students can minimize the problems they encounter in their speaking class.

DISCUSSION

About speaking fluency, Hartmann and Stork (1976) pointed out the term "fluent" means a speaker can use the correct structures of a language at normal speed, which means speaking naturally with a concentration on the content delivery, rather than focusing on the form or structure of a language. For some students, fluency is more important than grammar. When it comes to speaking, first as a student, they have to be able to make others understand what we are talking about. Speaking with fluency will make the sentences easier to be understood. Unfortunately, fluency is one of the problems that the students faced.

Feedback is information with which a learner can confirm, add to, overwrite, tune, or restructure information in memory, whether that information is domain knowledge, metacognitive knowledge, beliefs about self and tasks, or cognitive tactics and strategies (Winne and Butler, 1994). Dealing with teacher feedback, there is an opinion from Doughty (2001). Giving feedback is one of the methods to correct students' mistakes. Direct feedback is given right after the students make mistakes in speaking. It is given by the lecturer. Immediate feedback rather than delayed feedback is likely to result in greater learning gains (Doughty, 2001).

A study related to feedback was also done by Listyani (2021) revealed that 76 English Language Education Program students in a private university in Central Java Indonesia. It was found that 49 student participants (64.47%) had good or positive perceptions of teacher feedback in their writing class. Ten students (13.16%) showed

unfavorable attitudes towards teacher feedback, and the remaining seventeen students (22.37%) had mixed perceptions of teacher feedback. The unfavorable attitude was mainly caused by students' difficulties in understanding the teacher feedback.

Pronunciation is the important thing in speaking. Understandable pronunciation is one of the basic requirements of learners' competence and it is also one of the most important features of language instruction. Good pronunciation leads to learning while bad pronunciation promotes great difficulties in language learning (Pourhosein Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2012). Clear pronunciation will be helpful for the speaker and the listener. In this case, students in the Speaking for Social Purposes Class were the speakers. They were the ones who were speaking and their pronunciation had to be clear. Making pronunciation errors may also decrease students' performance. Fear of making pronunciation errors can detain students' speaking skills. When the students are afraid of making pronunciation errors, they will be afraid to start the conversation.

Grammar is an essential component in any language learning process (Káñina, Rev, 2015) Grammar has been a big matter in English language skills. Speaking is one of them. Besides relying on fluency, twenty-two students also thought about grammar that they used in speaking.

Dealing with anxiety, Listyani and Tananuraksakul (2019) claimed that three things seem to be the foundation of language learning success. These three things are related to individual learner differences. They are motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety-free condition. These three things become a filter of whether language learners will be successful or unsuccessful in their language learning journey. Another study done by Damayanti and Listyani (2020) also suggests that to overcome students' anxiety in speaking classes, the teachers' role is very important in this situation. Both students and teachers could should a positive classroom atmosphere to overcome students' anxiety.

Too much reliance on teacher feedback can indicate too much dependency on the teacher as well. Shore (2021) explained that excessive dependency will create problems for both teacher and the student. An overly dependent student can command so much of the teacher's attention. As a result, the teacher will have little time left for other students. The time spent with an overly dependent student is not always helpful. Shore even mentioned that the student's excessive reliance on the teacher can limit his/her involvement with other peers. Therefore it will minimize opportunities to develop essential social skills and stifling his social development.

One common strategy that the student participants in this study used in their learning strategies is note-taking. Note-taking helps students learn and note-taking helps students learn to write (Piolat, 2001 & Boch, 2005). Loveless (2021) also claimed that effective note-taking is one of the keys to be successful at school. Students should devote adequate time reviewing the information discussed during classes. It is very difficult to remember specific details–event major concepts–from classroom lectures without good notes.

CONCLUSIONS

As mentioned before, the purpose of this study is to find the problems that students faced in speaking for social purposes class. Based on the findings of this study, there were six problems that student respondents in this study faced. Those are fluency, getting direct feedback, fear of making pronunciation errors, fear of making grammatical errors, feeling tense, and lack of self-confidence. From the participants' opinions, the problems could be solved by note-taking, practicing speaking, and the lecturer's role to create a comfortable

environment. Note-taking can be used when the lecturer gives feedback. The students can write down what was being corrected in their notes so that they would not forget the feedback. Practicing speaking can be done on their own or with help from the other students. The students can practice alone in front of the mirror to increase their confidence or they can speak to each other to make them fluent in speaking English.

The lecturer has a role to create a comfortable environment. The lecturer can give games before class or brain doing storming. These activities can help the students become more relaxed before class. Future researchers can conduct a similar study with the same methodology on different participants and classes.

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