

IMPROVING THE STUDENTS' SPEAKING PRACTICE IN DESCRIBING PEOPLE BY USING CONTEXTUALIZED CARD GAME

Indah Muslichatun
Semarang State University

ABSTRACT

Students often had problems to describe someone in English. The basic problem is the lack of practice. The students needed sufficient, fun and easy practice which would make them enthusiastic to do it. Therefore, I proposed the use of contextualized card game to improve the students' speaking practice in describing people. I used classroom-action research to investigate how the use of contextualized card game can improve the students' speaking practice in describing people. By implementing the game, the frequency of the students to describe people increased in cycle 2, ranging from 6.3 % up to 87.5 % compared to one in cycle 1. The students felt fun, enthusiastic, and confident as they were practicing speaking in groups while playing game and the object of description was within their knowledge. Besides, they described people better than before because in playing the game they learned from their friends and the teacher had facilitated them with sufficient and step-by step exercises. Further, the average score of the test improved from 74 in pre-cycle to 79 in cycle 1 and 83 in cycle 2. Thus, the use of contextualized card game can improve the students' speaking practice.

Key words: Contextualized card game; describing people; speaking practice

INTRODUCTION

Speaking skill is one of the productive skills of language learning. It is very important to pay attention to the attainment of this skill as by speaking people can communicate with other people orally. Kayi (2006:3) states that the ability to communicate in second language clearly and efficiently contributes to the success of the learner in school and success later in every phase of life.

Burkart (1998:1) states that many language learners regard speaking ability as the measure of knowing a language. They regard speaking as the most important skill they can achieve, and they

assess their progress in terms of their ability in spoken communication. Besides, Picollo (2010) says that although all four skills are equally important, it is easy to understand that people say that those who know English are referred to as "speakers" of English. Many language students continue to consider speaking ability as one of their main goals of study, either because they would get some personal satisfactions from being able to speak a second language or because they think it would be useful in pursuing other interests or career goals (Omaggio, 1986:175)

Consequently, teaching speaking is worth to have good attention from English

teachers. Teaching speaking is not teaching the rules of language, but teaching how to communicate in the target language. It is in concordance with what stated by Harmer (1998:32) that people learn language not so that they 'know' them, but so that they can communicate. Offner (1997:1) also stated that the initial goal of learning language is to communicate.

One of the speaking competences required by Senior High School curriculum for grade X semester 2 is the competence of describing people (Depdiknas 2006). The students must be able to describe someone accurately and fluently in English as they often have to do it in their daily life. In class X-7 of SMAN 1 Pekalongan, students were difficult to describe someone naturally without memorizing it first. If they were asked to describe someone with the topic they had known and they had long time to prepare it, they could do it well because they just memorized something they had written first. However, if they had to do it naturally, they described someone with a lot of mistakes here and there dealing with pronunciation, tenses and vocabulary. These problems arose as the students are lack of good practice.

Many of my students are reluctant to practice speaking with their friends outside the class. Some of them do not want to practice speaking outside the class because they are not confident due to their incapability of speaking English; some

others because they feel ashamed and afraid of being told arrogant by their friends, and the other students question why they should do that while it is not their urgent need to be able to speak English fluently.

Due to the fact, the teacher should maximize the speaking class as the media for the students to have good practice of speaking.

To provide good speaking class, teachers should use communicative language teaching. Kayi (2006:1) states that communicative language teaching is based on real-life situations that require communication. ESL teachers should create a classroom environment where students have real-life communication, authentic activities, and meaningful tasks that promote oral language. This can occur when students collaborate in groups to achieve a goal or to complete a task. By using this method in ESL classes, students will have the opportunity of communicating with each other in the target language.

However, many of English teachers sometimes do not pay adequate interest to teach speaking. They simplify teaching speaking by giving drills and memorization, as stated by Kayi as follows:

Despite its importance, for many years, teaching speaking has been undervalued and English language teachers have continued to teach speaking just as a repetition of drills or memorization of dialogue (Kayi, 2006:1).

This phenomenon makes the English class boring. The students do not really learn how to use English. Instead, they just do repetition of drill or memorizing dialogs. Another problem is when teachers present a speaking class, they do not give enough exposure to the students to practice speaking. After they have one or two examples from reading or listening text, the students are directly asked to have speaking test. This jumping process is unfair for the students. Actually the students have known the basic rules of English, but because they are lack of practice, they cannot speak well. Speaking English is a skill and because of that, students have to practice it frequently to master it; not merely know the rules and formulas of producing utterances. In addition, the speaking activity is often carried out in tense atmosphere. According to Snell (1999:2), a tense classroom climate can undermine learning and discourage learners. Besides, the students often have problems on the idea as the topic of speaking is far from their understanding. Teachers should contextualize the topic of speaking to make the students feel easy to do the speaking practice. Contextual teaching and learning should get good attention from teachers. Sear (2002) states that contextual teaching and learning (CTL) is a concept that helps teachers relate school learning to real-world situations.

The general problems above also occurred in class X-7 SMA 1 Pekalongan.

In the classroom activity which facilitated my students to practice speaking, especially in describing people, not all of the students were active to speak in English. Some of the students were busy to chat in their native language. They just spoke in English very little. This was so because the speaking class was not interesting for the students. It was a boring class because the activity was not fun for the students. Besides, the students felt that the teacher did not give them enough help to do the task. In addition, the topic of the speaking task was far from the students' knowledge. They felt that they did not know well about what they had to speak. This condition made them not ready when they had to speak in English naturally either in test or in their daily life.

The lack of practice and the poor practice are the crucial problems which made some of the students poor in speaking English, especially in describing someone. Thornburry (2005:28) states that shortage of opportunities given to the students for practice speaking is identified as an important contributing factor to speaking failure. That's why it is urgently needed to find the solution of the problems.

Harmer suggests that the important thing in teaching speaking is that there should be a task to complete and the students should want to complete it (Harmer 1998:87). Moreover, if it is presented in fun situation, it will not make the students get stressed with the

speaking task and instead it will make the students love to speak. Fun atmosphere of language learning can be obtained through games. Chirandon (2010:2) claims that using games is one effective alternative treatment which encourages the active learning atmosphere and stimulates students' interest in learning English. When people learn something in fun situation with great willingness to learn, they will get the maximal result of learning. It is in line with what is proposed by Krashen as stated by Brown (2000:279) about second language acquisition. Krashen claims that the best acquisition will occur in environments where anxiety is low and defensiveness absent, or, in Krashen's terms, in contexts where the "affective filter" is low. One of the games teachers can apply is card game. Beare (2012) suggested the teachers to use cue cards first to boost the production skill of the students to ease them with what they have to speak. By having the guidance, the students will not be confused about the ideas they have to put forward.

Considering that teaching speaking, in this case teaching to describe someone, is worth attended with fun and effective activities, I tried to conduct a classroom action research to improve the students' speaking practice in describing someone by using contextualized card game. The game is a guessing game in which the students have to describe someone they know well, and the others have to guess who has been described. In the

contextualized card game which I planned, something written on the cards were the names of someone and the students were asked to speak based on what is written on the cards. They had to describe someone whose name was stated on the cards while the others had to guess who the person was. Usually, the students are happy to learn English through guessing games because they are challenged to tell about something and to guess what it is. The game can reduce tension if it is done in groups. When students practice their English in groups, they learn together how to express their ideas in English. If one of them makes mistakes in using the language, other students can correct him/her. By this, the students also learn to socialize and help one to another.

RESEARCH METHODS

The study which I carried out is a classroom action research. Burns (2010:2) says that the central idea of the *action* part of classroom action research is to intervene in a deliberate way in the problematic situation in order to bring about changes and, even better, improvements in practice. Mettetal (2002) claims that CAR will help teachers discover what works best in their own classroom situations. In conducting the research, first I did preliminary observation. Based on the reflection of the preliminary observation, I did the research in cycle 1. I went through the steps of planning, action, observation, and reflection. As the result in cycle 1 was

not satisfactory, I continued the research in cycle 2 by repeating the steps of planning, action, observation, and reflection.

This research was conducted in SMAN 1 Pekalongan in class X-7. I chose this class because there was the most number of passive students of all classes of grade X in class X-7. Besides, the average score for speaking class in the last semester was the lowest among other classes. Further, there are some students who are low-motivated in learning English. I indeed wanted to know whether the contextualized card game could improve the students' speaking practice in such a challenging class.

The data of the research were taken from the observation sheet, questionnaire, interview record, and test scores. They were used in cycle 1 and cycle 2.

The unit of analysis of this study is the students' activities to practice speaking. In the speaking test in which the writer wanted to know the influence of speaking practice to the students' performance, the unit of analysis is the clauses and I focused on students' pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary and fluency.

From the observation sheets, I made tabulation on how many students who were active and passive in the teaching and learning process; how many times the students described people and asked questions; and how many times the students made mistakes in describing people. I also made qualitative analysis from the observation sheets. From the

questionnaire and interview, I did qualitative analysis on the responses of the students to the use of the contextualized card game to improve the students' speaking practice. From the test, I compared the score average of the students in pre-cycle, cycle 1 and cycle 2.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The improvement of the quality of teaching and learning, in this case the quality of presenting speaking practice to describe people by using contextualized card game can be seen from the students' responses toward the method which was revealed in their responses on the questionnaires. From the questionnaire we can also infer the students' attitude in doing the practice.

The changes of the number of the students giving their responses under the different heading in the questionnaire can be described as follows.

- 1) The number of the students who strongly agreed that they liked the use of contextualized card game increased in cycle 2 compared to one in cycle 1.
- 2) They number of the students who liked the method increased. They liked the game because there was game in the method and the people they described were ones they knew. Some of them said that the topic of description in cycle 2 was more challenging as they could not guess easily.
- 3) The number of the students who felt enthusiastic to practice speaking increases in every cycle. On the other

way around, the number of the students who felt nervous and depressed to practice speaking was getting lesser in each cycle.

- 4) In cycle 2, more students felt that they got more chance to practice describing people compared to in cycle 1 and pre-cycle.
- 5) In cycle 2, compared to in cycle 1 and pre-cycle, more students stated that the teacher gave sufficient and step-by-step exercises to practice speaking, and helped the students to practice describing people.
- 6) In the second cycle, more students got help from their friends in practicing describing people.

- 7) After following the class, from cycle 1 to cycle 2, more students felt better in describing people in terms of pronunciation, vocabulary, structure, and fluency.

So, the use of contextualized card game to practice describing people presented the good quality of teaching and learning process as due to its good things, it enabled the students to feel fun and better in describing people.

The next is the table showing the increase of the students' chance of producing speech dealing with describing people.

Table 1.
The Frequency of the Students to Produce Speech in the practice activity
in Cycle 1 and Cycle 2.

No.	Name	Cycle 1		Cycle 2		Cycle 1	Cycle 2	The Increase
		D	A	D	A	TF	TF	TP
1.	AIA	2	5	10	6	7	16	56.3
2.	AKF	2	5	4	8	7	12	41.7
3.	AR	3	5	4	7	8	11	27.3
4.	AA	3	1	9	7	4	16	75.0
5.	AK	3	1	8	10	4	18	77.8
6.	ASF	4	2	5	8	6	13	53.8
7.	BAS	2	3	9	8	5	17	70.6
8.	BAN	7	3	7	7	10	14	28.6
9.	DAW	5	5	5	6	10	11	9.1
10.	HRA	2	5	6	9	7	15	53.3
11.	IIN	3	2	6	8	5	14	64.3
12.	JLR	5	4	7	6	9	13	30.8
13.	KAH	3	0	10	8	3	18	83.3
14.	MDY	2	1	8	8	3	16	81.3

15.	MHS	4	11	5	11	15	16	6.3
16.	MWR	2	3	5	7	5	12	58.3
17.	MCI	5	6	5	7	11	12	8.3
18.	MAS	2	5	10	6	7	16	56.3
19.	MMA	2	0	8	8	2	16	87.5
20.	MF	5	5	6	8	10	14	28.6
21.	NFJ	4	10	8	7	14	15	6.7
22.	QAF	3	1	5	9	4	14	71.4
23.	RMN	3	0	10	4	3	14	78.6
24.	R	7	3	8	6	10	14	28.6
25.	SAF	4	2	4	8	6	12	50.0
26.	SNK	2	3	9	10	5	19	73.7
27.	SRA	7	4	5	8	11	13	15.4
28.	SSP	4	10	10	5	14	15	6.7
29.	VNV	4	10	10	8	14	18	22.2
30.	ZHW	4	2	8	6	6	14	57.1

D=Describing A=Asking Questions TF=Total Frequency TP =The Percentage (%)

In cycle 2, the frequency of the students to produce speech either to describe someone or ask questions increase sharply ranging from 6.3% until 87.5 % because of the modified rules of the game. In cycle 1, the students sat down in a group of 4, while in cycle 2, they sat in a group of 3. In cycle 1, they described someone, one by one by turn by taking the clue card in the middle, but in cycle 2, in 10 minutes, a student described as many people as possible while another student asked questions and guessed, and the other student recorded the score, the mistake his/her friend made in describing people and corrected the mistakes, and recorded how many times his/her friend

asked questions. Besides, the information about the person was written in the card, not separated like in cycle 1. Those things saved the students' times and enabled them to practice describing people more often than in cycle 1. The frequency of speaking of a few of the students did not increase much as they had already spoken in high frequency in cycle 1.

The next finding is the decrease of the students' mistake in describing people in the practice activity. The following data is the number of mistakes made by the students in every cycle. The data is obtained by listing the number of the students' mistake. The recording was done by the student in each group.

Table 2.
The Number of the Students' Mistakes in Describing People
in the Practice Activity in Cycle 1 and Cycle 2.

No.	Name	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	The decrease	The Percentage (%)
1.	AIA	10	8	2	20
2.	AKF	6	4	2	33.3
3.	AR	8	4	4	50.0
4.	AA	8	6	2	25.0
5.	AK	5	4	1	20.0
6.	ASF	10	6	4	40.0
7.	BAS	6	5	1	16.7
8.	BAN	7	5	2	28.6
9.	DAW	4	3	1	25.0
10.	HRA	5	4	1	20.0
11.	IIN	8	6	2	25.0
12.	JLR	7	6	1	14.3
13.	KAH	9	7	2	22.2
14.	MDY	7	5	2	28.6
15.	MHS	9	5	4	44.4
16.	MWR	6	5	1	16.7
17.	MCI	8	4	4	50.0
18.	MAS	6	6	0	0.0
19.	MMA	6	4	2	33.3
20.	MF	8	5	3	37.5
21.	NFJ	8	6	2	25.0
22.	QAF	7	4	3	42.9
23.	RMN	5	4	1	20.0
24.	R	6	4	2	33.3
25.	SAF	8	5	3	37.5
26.	SNK	6	6	0	0.0
27.	SRA	6	4	2	33.3
28.	SSP	5	5	0	0.0
29.	VNV	6	6	0	0.0
30.	ZHW	4	4	0	0.0

The data clearly show us that the number of the students' mistakes decreases in cycle 2 compared to one in

cycle 1 ranging from 14.3 % until 50 %. Some of the students still had the same number of mistake, but the number of the

correct utterances was more than one in cycle 1 as they produced speech more in cycle 2. It reflected that in the practice activity, especially in cycle 2, the students were getting better in describing people.

They learned from their mistakes in cycle 1 and tried to improve their speech quality.

The next finding is about the students' score on their performance to describe someone. The following is the comparison of their scores among cycles.

Table 3.

The Comparison of the Students' Scores on Describing Someone among Cycles.

No.	Name	Pronunciation			Vocabulary			Structure			Fluency			score		
		P	1	2	P	1	2	P	1	2	P	1	2	P	1	2
1	AIA	3	3	3	3	4	4	3	3	4	3	3	4	60	65	75
2	AKF	5	5	5	4	4	5	4	4	4	4	5	5	85	90	95
3	AR	3	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	4	4	4	4	70	75	80
4	AA	4	5	3	3	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	4	70	80	80
5	AK	4	4	4	4	5	5	4	4	5	5	5	5	85	90	95
6	ASF	3	3	3	3	4	4	3	3	3	3	4	4	60	70	70
7	BAS	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	4	4	4	4	75	75	80
8	BAN	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	5	5	5	5	85	85	90
9	DAW	5	5	5	4	4	5	4	4	4	5	5	5	90	90	95
10	HRA	5	5	5	4	4	5	4	4	4	4	5	5	85	90	95
11	IIN	4	4	4	3	4	4	3	3	3	3	4	4	65	75	75
12	JLR	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	4	4	4	4	4	75	80	80
13	KAH	3	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	4	3	4	4	65	75	80
14	MDY	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	4	3	4	4	70	75	80
15	MHS	4	4	4	3	4	4	4	4	4	3	4	4	70	80	85
16	MWR	3	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	4	5	70	75	85
17	MCI	3	3	4	3	4	4	3	4	4	2	3	3	55	70	75
18	MAS	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	4	3	4	4	70	75	80
19	MMA	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	4	4	75	80	80
20	MF	4	4	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	80	80	85
21	NFJ	3	4	4	3	3	4	4	4	4	3	3	3	65	70	75
22	QAF	3	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	4	4	4	4	70	75	80
23	RMN	5	5	5	4	4	4	3	3	4	5	5	5	85	85	90
24	R	4	4	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	5	80	80	90
25	SAF	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	4	4	4	4	75	75	80
26	SNK	3	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	4	4	70	75	80

27	SRA	4	4	4	3	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	75	75	80
28	SSP	4	4	5	4	4	4	3	3	4	4	4	5	75	85	90
29	VNV	4	4	4	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	75	80	80
30	ZHW	5	5	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	5	85	85	90
	Means	3.9	4.0	4.2	3.7	4.0	4.1	3.5	3.6	4.0	3.7	4.1	4.3	74	79	83

P= Pre-cycle

1=Cycle 1

2 =Cycle 2

The data show us that the students' performance in describing people improved although the improvement was not very significant. This was so because the object of description was different from one cycle to another. In the first cycle, take for example the student was wrong in pronouncing the word 'busy', in the next cycle he/she was wrong in pronouncing the word 'stubborn', etc. So, there were always mistakes made by the students so it was difficult for them to get 5 in pronunciation. The same case was in vocabulary. Only a few students dared to use broad vocabulary by describing someone beyond the guidance. However, most of the students used appropriate words throughout the monologue text. In structure, the students always forgot to say *he likes... she lives.*, instead they said *he like...; she live....*, etc. The trivial errors said by the students made them hard to get 5. For fluency, the students' score between cycle 1 and cycle 2 were relatively the same as they had to describe different person. Overall, there was improvement on the students' scores on their speaking assessment.

CONCLUSION

The problems faced by the students in describing people are in terms of pronunciation, vocabulary, and structure. The problems faced by the students are actually rooted from the lack of practice. It includes the lack of the frequency of practice and the lack of good-quality practice. To cope with that basic problem,

I implemented contextualized card-game to improve the students' speaking practice in describing people. I made the students sit down in a group of four and three to play guessing game using clue cards. I gave them a pile of cards on which written the names of their classmates, teachers and famous people. Then by turn, they took the card one by one and describe someone whose name written on the card without mentioning the name. The other students had to guess who the person is.

The use of contextualized card game can improve the students' speaking practice. The frequency of the students to describe people and asked questions increased in cycle 2, ranging from 6.3 % up to 87.5 % compared to one in cycle 1. In doing the practice, the students felt fun and enthusiastic as they were practicing

speaking while playing game and the object of description was within their knowledge and understanding. Further, the students, especially the students with low achievement, felt more confident in doing the practice as they did it in group activity. Besides, in cycle 2 the students described people better than before because in playing the game they learned from their friends in terms of pronunciation, vocabulary, and structure; and because the teacher had facilitated them with sufficient and step-by step exercises. As the result of the improved speaking practice, the average score of the speaking test improved from 74 in pre-cycle to 79 in cycle 1 and 83 in cycle 2.

REFERENCES

- Beare, K. 2012. *Teaching Conversational Skills - Tips and Strategies*. Retrieved from <http://esl.about.com> on 1 January 2013
- Brown, H.D. 2000. *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*. New York: Pearson Education.
- Burkart, G.S, ed. 1998. *Spoken Language: What is it and How to Teach it. Modules for the professional preparation of teaching assistants in foreign languages*. Washington, DC: Centre for Applied Linguistics. Retrieved from <http://www.nclrc.org/essentials/speaking/spindex.html> on 15 September 2012.
- Burns, A .2010. *Doing Action Research in English Language Teaching* . New York: Routledge
- Depdiknas. 2006. *Kurikulum 2006 Standar Isi Mata Pelajaran Bahasa Inggris Sekolah Menengah Atas* . Jakarta
- Harmer, J. 1998. *How to Teach English*. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited
- Kayi, H. 2006. Teaching Speaking: Activities to Promote Speaking in a Second Language. University of Nevada (Nevada,USA). *The Internet TESL Journal*, Vol. XII, No. 11, November 2006. Retrieved from <http://iteslj.org/Techniques/KayiTeachingSpeaking.html> on 24 January 2013.
- Mettetal, G. 2002. Improving Teaching through Classroom Action Research. *Essays on Teaching Excellence. Toward the Best in the Academy* Vol. 14, No. 7, 2002-2003. Retrieved from: <http://academic.udayton.edu/FacDev/Newsletters/EssaysforTeachingExcellence/PODvol14/tevol14n7.html> on 24 January 2013.
- Offner, M.D. 1997. Teaching English Conversation in Japan: Teaching How to learn. *The Internet TESL Journal*, Vol.III, No.3, March 1997. Retrieved from <http://iteslj.org/Articles/Offner-Howtolearn.html> on 2 January 2013.
- Omaggio, A.C. 1986. *Teaching Language in Context*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle Publishers, Inc

- Piccolo, L. 2010. *Teaching Speaking to English Second Language Students*. Retrieved from <http://suite101.com/article> on 1 January 2013.
- Sears, S.. 2002. *Contextual Teaching and Learning: A Primer for Effective Instruction*. Indiana: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation.
- Snell, J. 1999. Improving Teacher-Student Interaction in the EFL Classroom: An Action Research Report. *The Internet TESL Journal*, Vol. V, No. 4, April 1999. Retrieved from [http://iteslj.org/Articles-Snell Interaction.html](http://iteslj.org/Articles-Snell%20Interaction.html) on 1 January 2013.
- Thornbury, S. 2005. *How to Teach Speaking*. New York: Pearson Education Limited.