CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of language learning strategies in improving participants' oral presentation skills through training.

This chapter includes information about the statement of the problem, research questions, objectives of the study, significance of the study, scope of the study, hypothesis of the study, delimitation of the study and definition of significant terms.

1.1 Rationale and Statement of the problem

Oral presentation has been widely utilized by English language teachers in promoting oral proficiency (King, 2002). According to King (2002), students found the idea of giving oral presentations frustrating and intimidating. They also found that oral presentation preparation can be a time-consuming with no guarantee of a satisfactory performance, and students do not improve their speaking skills under such stressful situations.

However there is substantial research supporting the notion that oral presentations actually contribute to overall speaking skills, and moreover, can be an ability that is actualized through training. Academically, students at the

University levels are expected to complete oral presentations. For example, postgraduate students are often expected to present their studies or research orally (Jordan, 1997). From Nantachaipant's 2004 study of Payap University students taking an English 1 course, the students were asked to present three oral presentations. The results showed that the students' oral presentation skills were improved after being trained through the autonomous learning approach which developed students to take responsibility for their own learning. (Littlewood, 1999)

Underhill (1987) explains that making a presentation is an authentic and communicative activity both for professional and academic purposes. Lucas S. E. (1989) quoted Russell Rae saying that "Many skills used in conversation also apply to public speaking. As you learn to speak more effectively in public, you may also learn to communicate more effectively in other situations." Lucas also suggests the three main differences between public speaking (which could also be applied to oral presentation) and conversation: 1) that public speaking is more structured, 2) it uses formal language, and 3) it requires a different method of delivery.

According to Lucas S. E., oral presentation requires abilities higher than simply speaking English and oral presentation can be more difficult than conversing in the English language. Even though oral presentations can be used for enhancing students speaking ability, it is a difficult skill to improve.

There are also different factors which make speaking more difficult for students such as affective factors, interaction effect, accuracy and fluency or interlocutor effects. Brown (1994) states that "one of the major obstacles

students have to overcome in learning to speak is the anxiety—because of the language ego." Thai students are often too shy to speak; they are afraid that they will make mistakes while they are speaking with foreigners.

There are, however, different ways and methods to improve students' speaking skill such as group work, pair work or the task-based learning approach. Strategic training is also one way to improve speaking skill. Therefore this research focuses on strategic training namely metacognitive, cognitive and social affective strategies, in improving oral presentation skills of university level students who are taking an English two course which will be discussed later in this study.

There are many sub skills under speaking skills that students should be able to perform such as lectures, seminars, oral presentations, introspect and discussion (Jordan, 1997). This research, however, will focus only on oral presentation skills which are necessary skills, especially for academic purposes (Jordan, 1997).

Scharle and Szabo (2000) suggested that the students should be trained to use 'a variety of available strategies' in order for them to find out what works for them and to help them 'discover' how and when to use different strategies in different learning situations.

Much research on learning strategies among the successful and less successful students discovers that students who know how to learn are more successful. In other words, students who implement a wider variety of

learning strategies become more successful in learning the language (Pitt 2005, Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary, Robbins 1999, Wenden A. 1991).

Cognitive strategies refer to a mental step that students use to process linguistic and sociolinguistic content (Ellis, 1985 and Wenden, 1991). Wenden (1985) proposes four processes which are used in cognitive strategies: 1) selecting, 2) retrieving, 3) storing, and 4) using information. There are also many sub strategies under cognitive strategies which can be beneficial in improving oral presentation skills such as imagery, resourcing, note-taking etc.

Metacognitive strategies are also very important in improving students' oral presentation skills. Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary and Robbins (1999) believe that "metacognition, or reflecting on one's own thinking and learning is the hallmark to the successful student." Wenden (1991) sees meta-cognitive knowledge about language learning as contributing to developing learner autonomy. Meta-cognitive strategies involve students following three processes which can be applied and used in oral presentation: 1) planning, 2) monitoring, and 3) evaluation.

The last strategy involved is the social affective strategy. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) see social affective strategies as involved interaction with another person or intentional control of emotions. Shamais (2003) cited Oxford (1990a) who saw affective and social as separate strategies. Affective strategies are used for handling feelings, attitudes and motivations such as, lowering anxiety by use of music, encouraging oneself and discussing feelings with others. Social strategies are used for facilitating interaction by asking

questions and cooperating with others in the learning process, for example, asking for clarification, cooperating with others and developing cultural understanding.

To summarize, the three main strategies (cognitive, meta-cognitive and social affective strategies) according to different researchers can be significantly beneficial for training the students in promoting the oral presentation skills of Thai students. However, this study attempts to find out whether language learning strategies can be used in training Thai students in improving their oral presentation skills, and whether or not the students become successful in giving an oral presentation.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

This study aims to achieve three objectives which are:

1. To construct, implement and develop English oral presentation lessons based on strategic language training.
2. To investigate the oral presentation skills of the students after being trained on how to apply learning strategies in performing an oral presentation.
3. To explore students' preferred strategies in giving an oral presentation.

1.3 Research Questions

The above objectives can be stated as the following research questions:

1. Is the strategic language training effective in developing students' oral presentation skills?

2. What are the students' preferred strategies in giving oral presentation?

1.4 Significance of the Study

The purpose of the study is to explore the effects of using strategies-based training; cognitive, metacognitive and social affective strategies to promote students' oral presentation skills. The finding of the study may provide information of whether or not language learning strategies is suitable for promoting students' oral presentation skills, and which strategies can be found helpful or not helpful in developing students' oral presentation skills.

1.5 Scope of the Study

This study was narrowed into the following:

1. Target Group

The target group was 21 students enrolled in the English 2 (AE 102) course during the summer of the academic year 2007 at Payap University.

2. Variables

2.1 The independent variable was strategic training in improving students' oral presentation skills.

2.2 The dependent variable was students' oral presentation skills.

1.6 Delimitation of the Study

This study will not focus on the differences in age, gender, or race. The number of participants may be decreased after midterm examination due to students dropping out of the course. The training will take place during the summer course in which the students will be studying English everyday from Monday to Friday. Thus, the students may not attend all the classes during training which may affect students' ability in giving an oral presentation.

There is also time factor which could effect students' oral presentation skills, such as, time in preparing first and second oral presentation because the students will be trained during the class when giving the second oral presentation. The students may also don't feel confident enough having to speaking in front the students that they are not familiar with.

1.7 Definition of terms

Cognitive strategies   Cognitive strategies are strategies used in selecting, retrieving, storing and using info This research will focus on the following strategies under cognitive

strategies which are: 1) Directed Attention, 2) Selected Attention, 3) Summary, 4) Resources, 5) Organization, 6) Rehearsal, 7) Note-taking, and 8) Memory strategy.

Meta-cognitive strategies refer to the ability and knowledge of how to use the language. It involves students selecting the information that interests them, and then planning, monitoring and evaluating language production after it has taken place (Wenden 1991, O'Malley and Chamot, 1990). In this study the students will be trained on how to use planning and evaluating strategies.

Social Affective strategies involve the student's motivation, attitude, beliefs, and culture. The representative strategies under social and affective strategies are cooperation, motivation and self-talk (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990). This study will focus on only self-talk and co-operation strategies.

Oral presentation skills refer to the skills of students in presenting their given topic after they have trained for a period of time in applying learning strategies in oral presentations.

Undergraduate students refer to non-English major students taking the English Two course (AE 102) during the summer of the 2007 academic year.

Strategic language training refers to an explicit and systematic training on how to use each language learning strategies under metacognitive, cognitive and social affective strategies that were pre-chosen by the teachers in training learners how to plan and give and evaluate an oral presentation.