

The Construction of an Ecological College English Class on the Basis of the Task-based Language Teaching Method

Junhua Ren

Foreign Language College, Tianjin Polytechnic University, Tianjin, China
Email: renjunhua2010@126.com

Abstract—The Chinese college English class is inharmonious; therefore the ecology of the class is imbalanced which can be identified in the unequal relationship between the teacher and the students, the imbalanced quantity of “input” and “output”. The inharmonious class will discourage students to acquire English. In order to solve the problem the task-based language teaching method is adopted to construct a balanced ecological English class

Index Terms—ecology of class, task-based language teaching, task

I. REASONS FOR THE IMBALANCED COLLEGE ENGLISH CLASS

The concept of Ecological Class was first identified in Education Sociology published in 1932 by Waller, an American educationist (Zhang, 110). According to this concept the college English class can be viewed as a micro ecological environment composed by the teacher, students and the environment of class. Therefore if a factor in the ecology of the English class is destroyed, the English class will be inharmonious because of the imbalanced ecological system of class. It is not hard to find the present college English class is ecologically imbalanced and the reasons can be found in the following:

A. *The Unequal Relationship between the Teacher and Students*

In the traditional English class the teacher is the center of the class, who plays the role of an organizer, supervisor or director; however what students can do is just to follow the teacher's order passively, who are shy and afraid of the real class interaction. Therefore a teacher-centered class will not raise the students' passion to learn English, in which the students' personality can not be shown and their development can not be realized exhaustively. This type of class has lost ecological balance.

B. *The Imbalanced Relationship between “Input” and “Output”*

Restricted by the Chinese foreign language teaching environment in which students cannot learn English through the real “output”, Chinese college English teaching emphasizes particularly on “input” which is viewed as a key role for students' acquisition of English. Therefore the teacher controls the class and inputs English knowledge to students, which naturally makes students become the container of knowledge. The teacher's “one voice” in class has violated students' right of English output. In Swain's Output Hypothesis (Ellis, 1994), a successful foreign language learner needs a lot of comprehensive input as well as output for “output” can optimize “input”. Only when the relationship between “output” and “input” is harmonious, the class will become a balanced ecological class.

C. *The Incohesion of Learning and Practice*

Many students cannot communicate in English fluently and correctly even after passing College English Test Four or Six (CET4 or CET6). This is an embarrassing phenomenon which is caused by the test pressure on the teacher and students. Influenced by the test the English class teaching makes some students skilled in passing tests. What the students have learned in class is usually on the basis of the English textbook and the test papers of CET4 or CET6, which is not relate to students' daily life and their professional knowledge. Therefore it is impossible for students to apply what they have learned into practice. The incohesion of learning in class and practice after class breaks the balance of ecological class.

D. *An Oversimplified Assessment of Learning Effect*

The assessment of students' learning effect in college English class is too simple because the teacher usually evaluates students' learning effect on the basis of their class performance, their finished assignments and the scores of the tests. During the process of evaluation the teacher is the director while students are not responsible for it. This oversimplified assessment can neither stimulate students effectively to learn English nor bring them a strong sense of emotional experience and learning identity. Therefore a plural and interactive ecological assessment system should be

established in college English class.

II. THE CONSTRUCTION OF AN ECOLOGICAL COLLEGE ENGLISH CLASS BASED ON THE TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING METHOD

In order to construct an ecological college English class the teacher will take the following three responsibilities in the three steps of teaching respectively: in the preparation step, the teacher will design individualized tasks for students according to their interest and level of English; in the teaching step, the teacher will encourage and help students perform the tasks, so the learning process is changed into the performance of tasks. During the process students will output English consciously or unconsciously and the teacher's "one voice" class will become students "voices" class; finally in the assessment step, the teacher will set a standard for the assessment and then adopt a plural assessment system consisting of students' self-assessment, interactive assessment and the teacher's assessment together.

A. *The Preparation Step Consists of Preparing Students and the Textbook*

To construct an ecological English class in which the relationship between the teacher and students is equal and harmonious and the students' personality can be manifested, in the preparation step the teacher will prepare the textbook as well as students.

1. Preparing Students Is the Preliminary to the Design of Individualized Tasks

The teacher will study students before teaching, which consists of students' major, English level, cognitive style and learning motivation. And the process will enable the teacher design individualized learning tasks which are proven to be appropriate and acceptable to the students

2. Preparing the Textbook Is to Make It Appropriate to Students

Preparing the textbook involves the choice and understanding of it. After studying students the teacher can choose the right textbook according to the students' major and English level, which makes it possible for the students to practice what they have learnt in class so learning in class and practice after class are incohesive.

After choosing the right textbook, the teacher will study it as a whole and will design listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating tasks for students to perform in or after class. These tasks will make the textbook active, which will be more appropriate and acceptable to students.

B. *Tasks Change "One Voice" Class into "Students' Voices" Class*

The traditional college English class is "one voice" class which means only the teacher outputs English in class. This type of class violates students' right of outputting English. In order to encourage students to output English in class and change "one voice" into "student's voices" class, the teacher will design tasks and then help students to perform through which they will actively participate in the class activities like the topic introduction, language point analysis and text summary.

1. Tasks Involves Students in the Process of Topic Introduction

With the teacher's help students will perform different kinds of tasks, like "Data Collection" and "English Report". The teacher will assign students to collect some data relevant to the text after class based on the students' major, personality and the topic of the text and then require students to make an English report according to what they have collected. "Data Collection" enlarges the content of the textbook so it increases "input" in class; moreover, "English Report" offers more chances for students to "output" English. The teacher will aid students to perform these tasks and supplement student's reports to some extent.

2. Tasks Realizes Students' Autonomous Learning

Students will perform various tasks in class aided by the teacher, such as "Language Point Explanation Task", "Five-minute Writing Task", "Role-play Task" and "Dubbing Task".

"Language Point Explanation Task" refers to the task which requires students to play the role of a teacher to explain some certain language points that are unsolved deliberately in class. For performing the task, students need to refer to dictionaries or some reference books and write the "lecture notes". As a matter of fact this type of task offers an opportunity for students to play the role of a teacher which can help them take the responsibility of learning.

"Five-minute Writing Task" refers to the task that requires students to write a composition in five minutes under the teacher's guidance. The title of the composition can share the same title of the passage studied in class or be chosen by students according to their interest. Performing the task can promote students' time-limit writing ability.

"Role-play Task" refers to the task that requires students to rewrite some certain passages from the textbook with the teacher's help. After rewriting students will choose and play a role in the passage which appeals to them. That task aims to involve students in the passage by playing their favorite roles, which can help them understand the passage better.

"Dubbing Task" refers to the task that requires students to dub some excerpts from classic English movies or speeches chosen by the teacher who also helps students analyze the pitches and tones of the heroes or heroines. That task can improve students' pronunciation.

3. Tasks Encourages Students to Make a Text Summary

Students will perform discussion, debate and theme writing task, through which they are able to make a summary for what they have learnt in class.

When students are performing the tasks, the teacher may adjust the difficulty according to the students' reaction to the tasks. Students can perform the tasks individually, with a partner or in a group.

C. A Plural Assessment of Learning Effect Is Established

In the traditional college English class the assessment of learning effect for students is very simple since the teacher plays the sole role of evaluation while students are not involved in it. In an ecological college English class based on the task-based language teaching method the assessment of learning effect will depend on students' task performance. As practitioners of tasks students should be involved in the assessment.

Firstly, the teacher will set the assessment standard; secondly, on the basis of the standard students will make a self-assessment or an interactive assessment in a group, which offers another chance of learning for students and thus strengthens their learning identity; finally, the teacher will make an object assessment according to students' self-assessment or interactive assessment in a group. Therefore, a plural assessment of learning effect is established, which consists of students' self-assessment, interactive assessment and the teacher's assessment.

III. CONCLUSION

The task-based language teaching method is viewed as the development of communicative language teaching method. It can effectively encourage students to "output" English through the meaningful communication which is realized by their learning task performance. In order to change the present imbalanced ecological college English class into a balanced one and promote students' English ability comprehensively, the teacher should encourage students to participate in the activities of the topic introduction, language point analysis and text summary through their performance of various individualized learning tasks. The process will make students become the real center of the teaching and learning.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author wishes to thank Professor Zhan and Sun who work in Beihua University. With his patient guidance the author reads more books about SLA and foreign language teaching, which are very important for the author to study the task-based language teaching method further. This work was supported in part by a grant from Professor Zhao who works in Tianjin Polytechnic University and gives the author much suggestion to write the paper.

REFERENCES

- [1] Ellis, R. (1994). *The Study of Second Language Acquisition*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
- [2] Jack, C. R. & Theodore, S. R. (2000). *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.
- [3] Zhang, Qing. (2010). On the Construction of College English Ecological Class. *Journal of Changchun University of Science and Technology (Higher Education Edition)*, 5.1, 110–111.
- [4] Wang, Jianqin. (2009). *On the Second Language Acquisition*. Beijing: The Commercial Press.
- [5] Wei, Yonghong. (2004). *Study on The Task-Based Language Teaching Method*. Shanghai: East China Normal University Press.



Junhua Ren was born in Jinshi City, Hunan Province in July, 1978. She graduated from Graduate School of Beihua University and received her Master's degree in applied linguistics in 2005.

Now she works in Foreign Language College of Tianjin Polytechnic University. She has taught the students the following courses: College English, Interpretation and Business Negotiation etc. She has worked in the university for five years.

Ms. Ren has published three papers: *An Analysis of the Functional Speech of the Imperative Clause in English Advertising*, *A Metafunctional Analysis of the Imperative Clause in English Netvertising*, *An Analysis of the Writing Deviation of English Poetry*.