The Enlightenment of Second Language Ego to Oral English Teaching in Senior High School

Junhua Wang

School of Foreign Languages, Chongqing Normal University, Chongqing, China

Abstract—**Affective factors play a vital role in second language acquisition. Language ego, as a crucial affective factor, should be taken into consideration when teachers teach oral English in senior high school. Learning a new language is the process of acquiring a new language ego. A positive second language ego can promote students' English learning. A negative language ego, especially inhibition, can become the major hindrance to students' oral English learning. However, many English teachers cannot realize the importance of second language ego, which causes many problems in oral English teaching. In this paper, the author elaborates the concept of language ego and demonstrates that the primary focus of developing a positive second language ego in senior high school is to overcome inhibition, which is beneficial to oral English learning. Furthermore, the author also gives some suggestions to English teachers concerning solving problems when they teach oral English. As a result, students can get into an optimal learning state, then the efficiency of oral English teaching can also be improved.**

Index Terms—**second language ego, oral English teaching, inhibition, senior high school students**

I. INTRODUCTION

When *the National English Curriculum Standards for Senior High School* was put forward in 2018, the main aim of English teaching in China was changed accordingly. Now, the main aim is to cultivate students' core competence, which integrates language competence, cultural awareness, thinking quality and learning ability. Consequently, the focus of English teaching is concerned about students' individual development. Along with this change, to make English teaching more effective, much attention should be directed to the study of learner's individual differences and affective factors. Research at home and aboard has shown that the learner's affective factors impact greatly upon their English acquisition. However, most studies mainly focus on these factors, namely, motivation, empathy, anxiety, and inhibition, while only a few scholars have researched second language ego.

In recent decades, many scholars have found that second language ego is closely related with language achievement. Zukowski (1997) did relevant research on the existence of the second language ego and emphasized its existence. He also believed that learning a language is earning another identity. Kinginger (2004) conducted case research on an American student who studied in France. It showed that after one-year learning, the student changed a lot, especially in her self-cognition, which is the process of forming second language ego. At home, Tian Xumin (2000) began to study language ego, but she only illustrated the concept of second language ego. Zhang Jushe (2016) studied how to improve college students' comprehensive reading ability with the effect of positive second language ego.

In general, all these studies mainly concern the interpretation of second language ego or the relationship between second language ego and language acquisition. Research which integrates second language ego with oral English teaching is lacking. In senior high school, students' second language ego matures gradually if they learn English, therefore scholars should attach great importance to their second language ego. Currently, as an essential part of language competence, oral English is relatively difficult to master. According to the research, many students, who mastered a large amount of language points, had a low level of oral English. Although they can get good grades in the examination, they cannot communicate with native speakers effectively. Thus, to improve oral English teaching, overcoming the negative influence of second language ego is an issue that needs to be researched.

II. RELATED THEORIES

A. Language Ego

In the 1970's, Guiora proposed the concept of language ego. He believed that language ego was formed when people learn their native language. In this period, the learner developed the sense of boundaries of their language. Meanwhile, they develop their mode of thinking, feeling and acting in their native language. In addition, Guiora (1980) suggested that language ego may account for the difficulties that adults have in learning a second language. According to Guiora (1980), language ego is formed at the age of five. He claims that language ego boundaries are permeable in the early stages of development, but later become fixed and rigid. It indicates that adults' language ego permeability is lower than that of children. In addition, language ego develops and reinforces gradually in the process of communication.

B. Second Language Ego

When people learn a second language, they not only form an outline of the new language, but also their new language ego. Guiora (1980) believed that the second language ego is the new identity of the learner when they study a new language. Brown (2007) also believed that when human beings learn to use the second language, they also develop a new mode of thinking, feeling, and acting, namely, a second identity. In general, when people speak a second language, they are forced beyond the familiar into experiences and feelings which they have not previously encountered while speaking their native language. H. E. Hinchey (1997) explained this with his observation that the formation of second language ego goes through five stages, including form, feeling, perception, concept, and consciousness.

C. The Relationship between Language Ego and Second Language Ego

From the above illustration, the concepts of language ego and second language ego are clear. These two concepts are related to each other in some respects. For English learners, it cannot be avoided that there is a long period of time in which they must overcome the conflicts between these two types of egos. In the initial stages of learning, second language ego would cause many threats to their native language ego and learners would be frightened, stubborn and even resistant to engaging in the L2 (second language) communication. If learners give up and continue to resist, second language ego would not be formed and second language would not be acquired either. On the contrary, if learners try associating L2 learning with L1 learning, they will integrate these two language egos and the L2 regime of communication will be predominant and their native language ego would be interrupted. Thus, their second language ego is formed gradually. Furthermore, these two language egos are both essential, for without language ego, second language ego cannot be constructed.

D. Inhibition

According to Brown (2001), adolescents have already acquired a language ego. Therefore, when they learn a second language, they often form a positive mechanism to defend their native language ego because they think their native language ego is threatened. Additionally, they would feel worried and anxious when they have difficulty in learning a second language. Currently, inhibition comes out. In other words, inhibition, one of the defense mechanisms, comes out at the first stage of formation of a second language ego. As a result, students would be reluctant to speak English in class because they are afraid of making mistakes. In general, inhibition is detrimental to students' learning and how to reduce its negative influence is challenging.

III. THE CURRENT SITUATION OF ORAL ENGLISH TEACHING

Oral English, as one of the productive skills, plays a crucial role in developing students' communicative competence. In the last few years, many English teachers have spared no effort to improve students' spoken English. However, there are also some problems which hinder the development of oral English and teaching efficiency.

A. Neglect the Importance of Oral English Teaching

In China, exam-oriented education has influenced English teaching for several decades, and has simultaneously brought many bad effects to oral English learning. Although the new curriculum reform and *the National English Curriculum Standards for Senior High School* (2018 version) have been put into practice, there are a few changes about the aims of English teaching. Nevertheless, lacking professional and updated teaching ideas, many English teachers do not know how to effectively teach oral English under the background of English teaching reform. To find out English teachers' attitude to oral English teaching in senior high school, relevant research was conducted by the author. According to the results of questionnaires and interviews, the author found that English teachers cannot adopt the appropriate methods when they teach oral English. Under such circumstance, some teachers claim that oral English teaching is difficult to implement and time-consuming. In their perspective, the most important thing for senior high school students is to master the knowledge which would be tested. Oral English is therefore viewed as being less important than paper-based tests. As a result, teachers prefer to pay more attention to the practice of grammar knowledge, reciting of vocabulary and reading of texts. Some teachers even change teaching schedule arbitrarily in the senior high school. They change the oral English class into a reading or grammar class. Although students' English language input is abundant, their English output is limited. According to the new curriculum standard, oral English is the essential part of English learning. Neglecting the importance of oral English teaching can impede the development of students' communicative competence, even resulting in "dumb English".

B. Overemphasize the Forms of Oral Activities

Teaching activities are important for both students and teachers. Good oral activities can promote students' oral English learning while bad activities would do much harm. Nowadays, many teachers put great emphasis on fluency when they teach oral English. Many activities mainly focus on form rather than meaning. According to some research, many activities presented in the classroom such as dialogue only focus on the performance of mechanical practice, where students are required to use the restricted sentence structure which is preset by their teachers. In China, high school students in Grade one have learned more than 2000 words, which theoretically can help them have simple conversations with native speakers. However, the reality is opposite. There are many students who cannot communicate with others effectively and even do not know how to start a conversation. One important reason is that teachers cannot

provide a context for students when they teach oral English. Therefore, students cannot improve communicative competence although they have mastered many sentence patterns. In other words, reciting the fixed dialogues is not helpful for students to communicate proficiently. Furthermore, the oral activities mostly focusing on forms are liable to create a monotonous classroom atmosphere, where the students may gradually lose their interest in oral English.

C. Focus on Accuracy When Speaking Out

English, as the second language, students in China always feel shy and anxious when they speak it. Because they are concerned about accuracy and are afraid of making mistakes, some students would not speak anything in oral English class. As English and Chinese are different in many aspects, such as phonology, morphology, and syntax, when students speak English in class, they often pay more attention to these aspects, which leads to lots of difficulties in oral English learning. In practical communication, the accuracy of words and grammar is overemphasized by many students because they fear their mistakes would bring misunderstanding to others. However, the importance of fluency is underestimated. To some extent, many students intend to attain accuracy at the cost of fluency. This is the reason why there are some pauses or silence when the students speak English. In conclusion, over-stressing accuracy can harm the development of students' oral English.

D. Lack the Awareness of Intercultural Communication Competence

Intercultural communication competence is reflected in the "appropriateness" and "effectiveness" of communicative behavior. However, many researchers found that many senior high school students in China lack the knowledge of intercultural communication. In oral English class, students have learned some language points successfully, but they cannot use them appropriately after class, especially in practical communication. Many students tend to pay much attention to superficial language points but the implied meaning of them is often neglected. It is found that many students do not know how to deal with cultural differences, or show respect to other countries' cultures and thus fail to establish a correct perspective of cultural values. In the English textbook, there are many cultural phenomena which are crucial to oral English teaching, but students often pay less attention to these matters even ignoring them. An example can be illustrated to reflect the misunderstanding of communication which is caused by the cultural differences. Many Americans said that it makes them uncomfortable when Chinese students express their desire to visit. Some students are inclined to say: "Are you busy?", while their American teachers think it's a question so answer it directly. Then, there is a misunderstanding. To show their respect, many Chinese students are inclined to express their desire in an implied way. However, Americans are direct and they tend to express explicitly. There is an expression which is more appropriate, "I'd like to visit you this afternoon if you're free." It shows that culture is different, so students are supposed to find an appropriate way to express when they communicate with others. Above all, lacking the awareness of intercultural communication competence, students' oral English cannot be improved easily.

IV. THE INFLUENCE OF SECOND LANGUAGE EGO ON SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' ORAL ENGLISH

Different learners have different levels of inhibition. The level of inhibition is the main factor which influences the formation of second language ego. Children's language egos are dynamic and growing and flexible through the age of puberty. Thus, second language ego at this stage does not pose a substantial threat to their language egos, so their inhibition level is low. Compared with adolescents, children can achieve a high level of oral English much easier. However, adolescents' language egos are often closed when they learn a new language. In other words, the flexibility of their second language ego is relatively weak. As a result, they have to try to form a new language ego so that they can acquire a second language. To some extent, the success of students' oral English depends on whether the learners' second language ego is positive or negative. Moreover, whether the learners' second language ego is positive or negative in oral performance is decided by the defensive mechanism especially the level of inhibition. If students have a high level of inhibition, it is strenuous for them to form a second language ego.

Senior high school students are becoming mature, both physically and psychologically in this period. Previous studies suggest that they have a high level of anxiety and affective filter in second language learning. Undoubtedly, a high level of anxiety means much inhibition and less positive language ego. Zukowski (1997) held that the deliberate and conscious development of a second language ego could facilitate the development of many important communication abilities. For the language learner, if there is less inhibition when they form a new language ego, they would achieve a high level of oral English more readily. On the contrary, with much negative language ego----inhibition, students' oral English development will be greatly hindered.

Above all, second language ego has a great influence on oral English. Therefore, English teachers should attach great importance to the function of second language ego in oral English teaching to reduce the excessive bad effects of defense mechanisms and help students form a positive second language ego.

V. ENLIGHTENMENT TO ORAL ENGLISH TEACHING

A. Create a Relaxed Classroom Environment for Students

The classroom environment has a great influence on students' oral English learning. From classroom observation,

many researchers found that the atmosphere of English classrooms is tedious and monotonous in senior high school. As a result, a lot of students take a negative attitude to the oral English class, and are anxious or nervous when their teachers ask questions. However, when there is a relaxed and comfortable classroom atmosphere, students are willing to invest considerable effort to learn oral English, and lastly, their learning efficiency would be improved. On the other hand, students will be stressed and nervous if they are involved in an oppressive environment. Hence, faced with the challenges of oral English teaching, English teachers should realize that a relaxed environment is important for students. Therefore, English teachers should try their best to change or improve the classroom atmosphere. This means that teachers should not force students to learn something or make the classroom threatening when they teach. In addition, the relationship between teachers and students is also important. He Jianhui(2012) held that an equal and harmonious relationship between teachers and students can ease the tension within the students. Above all, many students are more willing to speak out in a relaxed atmosphere. Specifically, English teachers should focus on the following aspects. They should be warm, sensitive, and open-minded. Meanwhile, they should avoid apathy and a harsh tone when they teach. What is more, teachers should realize that they are not only the organizers and guides of the teaching, but also good facilitators who provide necessary help when students need it. Furthermore, those teachers who patiently listen to students' suggestions more readily create a harmonious classroom learning environment.

B. Encourage All Students to Speak Out

After the concept of "language input" was put forward by Krashen (1982), he asserted that many comprehensible language inputs can activate the inherent language acquisition mechanism in the learner's brain. Later, Canadian linguist, Swain (1993) argued that language output can reflect the mechanism's acceptance and recreation of the input, which shows the human psychological cognitive process of language. Language output, including speaking and writing, plays a crucial role in acquiring a second language. If students are not willing to open their mouths to speak English, they will not learn oral English well and never reach the requirement of the new curriculum standard－communicative competence. As a result, second language ego cannot be formed easily. Some students are unwilling to speak English because their classmates don't speak, which is a bad thing for both teachers and students. Negative second language ego is also responsible for this phenomenon, because it can make students feel unsafe and depressive to some extent.

To encourage all students to speak out is not an easy job, so teachers must spare no effort in establishing creative ways to make this possible. For example, teachers can change the form of oral English classes to attract students' attention and interest. Specifically, teachers can bring competitions or games to the class. The competitions or games can be conducted between different learning groups and every student has the opportunity to speak English. Additionally, He Jianhui (2012) claimed, to attract students' interest, the type of activities should be varied. For example, the following oral activities are good choices: summarizing the main idea of the passage, retelling the text, talking about feelings. In addition, dialogues, group discussions, debates, interviews, and role play can be utilized. Furthermore, all activities should match most students' current level of oral English. If the activities are too easy, many students will lose interest in oral English. If the activities are too difficult, there would be lots of students who cannot finish the task or may even lose confidence to speak English. Consequently, the negative influence of second language ego will increase in some degree. Above all, it is essential for teachers to realize that all students of different levels should have the choice to speak English.

C. Treat Students' Mistakes in a Right Way

As mentioned above, many students are afraid of making mistakes in oral English, which is harmful to the formation of second language ego. The new language ego is sensitive and vulnerable in the early stage of learning. Thus, any mistake or error can be a big threat to nurturing second language ego. As a result, teachers' attitudes to students' mistakes are crucial for the development of second language ego. If the students are criticized strongly by the teacher when they make mistakes in oral English class, the inhibition or avoidance would come out to defend their fragile second language ego. This kind of defend mechanism might make students perform negatively in oral English. Therefore, teachers should learn to accept students' mistakes and should not correct mistakes directly and immediately. Teachers can encourage students by telling them that more mistakes mean that they will make greater progress. Moreover, teachers should choose a proper time to correct students' mistakes because the interruption of students' speaking can do great harm to the development of oral English. Additionally, teachers should use words of compliment frequently rather than blame in the process of correcting the mistakes. Only in this way can students' confidence be strengthened, and their second language ego can gradually form, and this is beneficial to the development of students' oral English.

D. Cultivate Students' Awareness of Intercultural Communication

As one of the core competence of English, intercultural communication is an essential factor for the successful acquisition of the second language ego. Oxford (1992) once put forward the idea that learners would experience anxiety because of fear or the experience of losing oneself in the target culture. Language is also a carrier of culture and an indispensable part of culture. Therefore, if the students want to speak English as well as native speakers, they should be familiar with the western culture which will facilitate their oral English acquisition. Clearly, how to cultivate students' awareness of intercultural communication is worth considering.

In oral English class, teachers should take full advantage of the textbook to introduce foreign culture to students. However, on account of the limited cultural content in many textbooks, teachers should also add more cultural knowledge to enrich the class. For example, the materials about foreign literature and arts can be a good choice for teachers. They can hold some activities such as performing drama to encourage students to understand more foreign culture. And thus create meaningful experience for students, helping them form a positive second language ego. In addition, teachers must help students take an inclusive attitude to different cultures. The most important thing is to help them realize that culture is not correct or wrong. In a word, cultivating students' awareness of intercultural communication is a long but valuable journey and plays a great role in the process of second language ego in oral English learning.

VI. Conclusion

Second language ego, as an important affective factor, has great influence on students' second language acquisition. A positive language ego can facilitate students learning, while a negative language ego especially inhibition could impede students' development of oral English. Currently, there are many problems in oral English teaching which are caused by students' negative language ego. The author interprets the effects of second language ego to oral English learning and demonstrates that the focus of developing second language ego in senior school is to overcome inhibition. Furthermore, some enlightenment for English teachers is included. Teachers should put great emphasis on the impact of second language ego, take some measures to reduce the level of inhibition and help students develop a new second language ego in teaching process. This paper is an attempt to address the issue of developing a second language ego, an area of study deserving greater research.

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Junhua Wang was born in Nanchong, China in 1995. She is currently a postgraduate student in the School of Foreign Languages, Chongqing Normal University, Chongqing, China. Her research interests include second language acquisition and English teaching.