大学外语教学探索与创新

刘永波 孙祖兴 主编

Exploration and Innovation of College Foreign Language Teaching

山东大学出版社

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前　言

山东省第五届中外教师外语教学研讨会暨2010年山东省外国文教专家“教学奖”授奖仪式，于2010年7月2日在山东财政学院隆重举行。

参加本次研讨会的有荣获“教学奖”的38位外国专家和外籍教师，荣获第五届中外教师外语教学研讨会优秀论文奖的85位中国外语教师和23位外籍教师。各位获得“教学奖”的外国专家和为研讨会提供了优秀论文的中外教师，为山东的教育发展、人才培养和对外开放做出了卓越的贡献，他们所取得的成绩得到了政府有关部门的充分肯定。

在经济全球化和信息国际化的环境下，国际间的交流与交往日益频繁，外语的重要性日益凸显。因此，如何做好外语教学，提高学生的外语水平和参与国际交流与国际竞争的能力，是摆在我们面前的新任务。

为此，教育部近年来大力实施大学外语教学改革，先后颁布了大学和高职高专两个英语课程教学要求。我省高校积极参与外语教学改革，结合自身实际情况和培养目标，努力探索适合本校外语教学发展和特色的改革之路，取得了明显的成效。我省大学生英语学习成绩稳步提升，全国大学英语四、六级考试的成绩一直位居全国前列。

尽管我们的外语教学和外语教学改革取得了一定成绩，但经济全球化和高等教育国际化给我们的外语教学提出了新的问题和更高的要求，在外语教学方面还有很多问题需要研讨。中外教师共同研讨在外语教学方面的问题，交流经验，对推动我省外语教学改革，提高我省外语教学水平必将起到积极的作用。

山东财政学院拥有一支优秀的外语教师及外籍教师队伍，在外语教学改革方面积累了许多经验。山东财政学院领导高度重视外语教学工作。外国语学院、国际处的同志们积极热情，为承办本次研讨会付出了艰辛的劳动，大家

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表示赞赏。

参加本次论文评审的五位专家分别是山东大学李玉陈教授、山东师范大学侯明君教授、济南大学张法科教授、鲁东大学肖德法教授、山东经济学院在任英国专家芬·尼柯尔教授。他们都是外语界和高校外语教学领域的知名专家。对他们所给予的支持表示感谢。

希望各位专家和老师能充分利用这一平台，交流经验，探索外语教学改革的新路子。

山东省教育厅副巡视员 杜希福

2011 年 8 月

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The Application of Constructivism in Oral English Teaching to Non-English Majors

JIN Li

(Shandong University)

Abstract: Constructivism holds that the primary responsibility of the teacher is to create and maintain a collaborative problem-solving environment where students are allowed to construct their own knowledge, and the teacher acts as a facilitator and guide. The author briefly describes Constructivist theory and its implications for oral English teaching and learning, states the current situation of oral English teaching for non-English majors in China, lists the main problems the students and the teachers face, and suggests some solutions to the problems. Finally, the author introduces her practice in oral English teaching.

Key words: constructivism; oral English teaching; non-English majors; the author's practice in oral English teaching

1. Constructivism

Constructivism holds that learning is an active process in which learners construct their own knowledge and understanding. They do not simply mirror and reflect what they are taught or what they read. Learners look for meaning and will try to find regularity and order in the events of the world, even in the absence of full or complete information. Constructivist teaching theory holds that the students should be the center of teaching, although we should not neglect the importance of the teacher's guidance. We should use multi-media and internet, construct real environments, carry on cooperative teaching and lead the students to self-construct knowledge.

2. Current Situation in Oral English Teaching and Learning

In foreign language teaching, the four basic skills—listening, speaking, reading and writing—have greatly improved on the part of Chinese students in the past decades.

However, these skills have not been developed at the same rate. Many students can understand others' English but they cannot express themselves effectively in English. For the majority of students, speaking still remains the most difficult skill to master, which can be reflected in the weak ability to communicate orally in English even after years of study at universities.

According to the renowned linguists, W. M. Rivers and M. S. Temperley (1978), 45% of communication is carried out through listening, 30% through speaking, 16% through reading and 9% through writing. It can be concluded that communication by mouth and ear is the basic communication of human beings. Thus, speaking is one of the most important skills in language learning.

It is well known that the teaching of oral English has been the weak aspect of our EFL (English as a foreign language) teaching, and its research has not made adequate progress as expected. The production of spoken English—learning to speak English, is considered to be one of the most difficult aspects of English learning for teachers to help the students. So, how to improve and develop oral English teaching in Chinese schools has drawn the attention of both teachers and educators, and it has become one of the most important issues in EFL teaching field today. To change this situation, much effort has been made to work out more effective ways to develop students' competence in speaking English. Although many researchers and educators have tried to put various teaching theories and methods into practice to improve the teaching of oral English, there has not been much progress to date. Thus, it is urgent for teachers of English to conduct research on this aspect, and to find more effective ways to improve it.

Considering the current situation in teaching oral English and its research in China, it was in the fall of 2009 that we at Shandong University saw further reform in college English teaching; that is, oral English has been designed for the first time to be an independent compulsory course for non-English majors, which used to be one part of college English. This reform aims to help the non-English majors with their oral English.

3. Problems for Non-English Majors

For non-English majors, English used to be just one course, but now, with the further reform of college English teaching at Shandong University, the students there have to take two English courses. They will face the following problems:

(1) Limited time. Non-English majors know the importance of oral English, but English is just a required course for them, not their major. They are limited by time of classroom guidance (once a week, only 2 hours).

(2) Limited by vocabulary and insufficient input of western cultural background

information. Traditional English teaching requires the students to memorize more individual words, phrases or collocations, not the contexts in which they appear, which results in the problem that the students do not know how to express their ideas appropriately with the words they know. And limited cultural background information blocks the communication with the people from different cultural backgrounds.

(3) Lack of motivation and confidence. The students are desperately in need of improving their speaking competence, but few of them have an interest in speaking. Chinese traditional education makes the students shy in class and in public. They seldom voluntarily present or share their ideas in class, even if they know them.

4. Solutions to the Problems for the Non-English Majors

4.1 Make full use of time in class and extend their English learning after class

English is a foreign language for the students in China. They do not have a good environment to speak English. It is well known that classroom instruction is the basic form of English teaching and learning, but class time for the non-English majors is limited. So, the teachers should help the students to make the best use of class time and encourage the students to say what they can say. To those beginning to learn English, they often do not dare to respond to the teachers in English for reasons, such as, lack of confidence or limited vocabulary. So, the teachers should give immediate feedbacks for the students' performance in class, which will help them enjoy the success in learning. Then they will be glad to speak more and more in class and in public. With the encouragement of the teachers, the students will continue their oral English speaking even after class.

4.2 Student-centered class with teachers' guidance

"Teaching is guiding and facilitating learning, enabling the learners to learn, setting the conditions for learning" (H. Douglas Brown).

In class, the students should be given more time to speak; that is, the students should be the speakers in class, they cannot be regarded just as audiences. The teachers should use different kinds of activities to guide and encourage the students to communicate with their peers using their newly constructed knowledge.

4.3 Accumulate the students' vocabulary to help with their oral English

It is common that the students stop in their speeches or communication just because of a word, which they do not know, or they have no English equivalents of some Chinese characters, from which we'll see vocabulary's importance in delivering English

speeches. Therefore, the teachers should help the students find the best ways to enlarge their vocabulary. Learning the rules of spelling and pronunciation and mastering the links between words will help the students to learn more words in their own ways. With a large vocabulary, the students can express themselves better. For instance, they will be happy to "show" themselves and voluntarily share their opinions in class and gain more confidence in speaking in public.

4.4 Enhance students' awareness of target country's cultures

Language and culture usually go hand in hand, which tells us culture is very important in language learning. When you learn English, you must have some knowledge of the cultures in the English speaking world. Only when you know the background culture can you understand the speakers easily and express yourself correctly.

4.5 Arouse the student's intense interest in English learning

Language learning is most effective when students' interest, motivation and attitudes are taken into consideration. Students are encouraged to experience the language, learn the language by self-discovery, participate in discussion and negotiation activities. It emphasizes the role of positive affective states on the part of the students. It advocates the task-based approach to language learning and teaching: learning by doing and by using the language. It incorporates learning strategy development into the classroom instruction.

As we all know, "the aims for English teaching is to train the students how to use the language, yet this kind of ability will more quickly be developed on condition that the students are greatly engaged in the English language learning and immersed in an atmosphere of using the language"(Yuan, 2003:261). So, in class, English teachers are required to guide the students and make the whole class full of communication. To some extent, the students' attention and interest are aroused and in the mean time, the students' speaking is effectively practiced. As English learners in the classroom, if they show great interest in English learning, they should listen to the teachers attentively and follow the teachers step by step. Then they will be active in class activities and willing to communicate with others. Finally, their speaking ability will surely be improved. On the contrary, a student who has no interest in learning English will be reluctant to listen to the teacher and fail to communicate with others, which will cause him to be a stranger to English.

Some measures for arousing students' interest are as follows:

(1)News report or extemporaneous speech before class;

(2)Pair work; group discussion, retelling stories, role play in class;

(3)Video and film watching;

(4)Games, such as speedy alphabet.

As the result of more varied methods, the students' ability of speaking along with their engagement with vocabulary, interest, confidence, co-operation ability, etc. are all improved.

5. Our Practice of Oral English Teaching in Class

The further reform of college English teaching at Shandong University brings out a lot of changes accompanied with the new vitality. At the same time, it sets incomparable challenges for the teachers, which requires them to be competent in the newly reformed curriculum. In doing so in our class, the students are improving their ability in using English. The following is what we have done in our oral English classes.

Now, we're using "Learning to Speak: An English Video Course", published by Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, as our textbook, which consists of 8 units, specifically 8 topics, each unit including Lesson A and Lesson B.

Lesson A is composed of four parts:

Part I: Vocabulary Link, introducing vocabulary and offering some information for practice, which are related to the topic

Part II: Listening, offering some exercises related to the topic

Part III: Speaking, offering some useful expressions and some exercises related to the topic

Part IV: Communication, containing comprehensive exercises related to the topic

All the above 4 parts offered in Lesson A can almost be done in class, which is designed to help students to improve their English listening and speaking efficiently.

Following the Communication part, 4 pieces of Optional Listening are offered, which are arranged from low level to high level.

Lesson B contains two parts:

Part I : Global Viewpoints, 5—6 people from different countries are interviewed. In this part, students are required to understand what they are talking about and then do the following exercises.

Part II: City Living, a 5/6-minute video clip, introducing people's real life in the English speaking world. It is not very easy to understand, so this part is divided into three sections to help the learners to understand it.

(1) Preview, introducing the main idea and some language points;

(2) While You Watch, offering 50% script of the video clip and the remaining 50% to be filled in;

(3) After You Watch, offering another communication exercise which aims to help

improve the learners' fluency in using English with what has been learned in this unit.

After City Living, there is one more Optional Listening.

Thus far we have discussed the textbook we are using now.

In the following we shall share how we practiced in our classes with this textbook. Take Unit 3, Book Two for example.

Part I Vocabulary link

Vocabulary is the lead-in to the topic on food. With the offered information and pictures in the book, we guide the students to recognize what is in each picture and ask the students tell the class its characteristics with English adjectives. Then, use the adjectives to describe each food. When the students learn how to describe each individual food, we introduce more foods and more adjectives, which are close to the students'life. Then, they can use the information to do pair work or group work to practice how to describe the food they like and why they like it. The last step of this part is to ask some volunteers to present what they like to eat.

Part II Listening

In this part, we usually listen to the recording twice (we assign the students to preview before class), then ask the students to use the notes they took to do pair work, share the key information they got and later retell the recording in their own words, namely, newly constructed knowledge.

The above two parts usually take up 2 periods, in which we also introduce some restaurant terms and different types of services when dining out.

Homework is assigned to review what is learned and preview the remaining two parts: Speaking and Communication.

Part III Speaking skill: I suggest...

Before we take up Part III, we do some revision as usual. We start the new lecture in this way: If I treat you to a meal, I'd like you to give me some suggestions about which type of food you would like, fast food or slow food? This question will introduce how to make suggestions, which is the teaching goal of Part III. Then we can introduce some other ways to make suggestions. Next step is to let students practice how to make suggestions in class.

When time is available, we can ask the students to make a comparison between fast food and slow food. Then we can learn their advantages and disadvantages, which will benefit both our speaking and writing.

Part IV Communication: your favorite food

(1) Listen to a paragraph;

(2) Offer some pictures, which are key information in the paragraph;

(3) Guess the main idea by answering the questions;

(4) Show the script of the paragraph.

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