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实践中的任务型教学： 现状与展望

陈 锴/著

TASK-BASED TEACHING OF ENGLISH
IN PRACTICE:
CURRENT SITUATION
AND PROSPECTS



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主要内容

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by

CHEN PEI

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内容提要

本书源自一项关于任务型教学在中学课堂实施的研究。该研究理论基础源于著名英语语言学家 B. Littlewood 的 five-category activity 以及 P. Skehan 的认知语言学理论。作者创新地将上述理论框架运用到 COLT (Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching) 课堂观察体系中,科学地设计出对任务型教学进行课堂评价的标准和模板 (An adapted version of COLT Part A, for TBLT classrooms)。

本书不仅对任务型教学在中国的发展做了充足的文献回顾,而且还采用案例分析法,对中学英语教师的教学情况作了分析和总结。数据由课堂观察和采访提供,采用量化和质化结合的方法进行分析。本著作的目标读者为:英语教育工作者,中小学英语教师,英语教学研究人员,应用语言学专业研究生。

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前 言

任务型教学于世纪之交传入我国。在教育部颁布的《全日制义务教育普通高级中学英语课程标准》(实验稿,2001,2007)和《普通高中英语课程标准》(实验稿,2003,2007)中,“倡导任务型教学途径”均作为教学目标明确提出。根据这两个英语课程标准,教师在教学中应增加开放性的任务型活动和探究性的学习内容,应依据课程的总体目标创造性地设计贴近学生实际的教学活动。在设计任务时,教师应以学生的生活经验和兴趣为出发点,要有助于英语知识的学习、语言技能的发展和语言实际运用能力的提高。

与传统的演绎法教学相比,“任务型”课堂教学以“学习者为中心”为基本原则,一切教学活动从学生的学习兴趣 and 认知水平出发,倡导体验、交流、参与、合作与交流的学习方法,重视培养学生的创新能力,发展学生的综合语言运用能力。这一教学模式使得语言学习的过程真正成为学生主动思维和自主学习的过程。因此,任务型教学在国内一经提出,即成为英语学科科研人员和广大英语教师关注和研究的焦点。

在中学英语课改不断深化的今天,倡导和运用任务型教学以期更好地实现新课标所规定的素质教育理念和语言学习目标,已经成为一种历史的必然。但是,任务型教学在我国大范围的实践尚属开始,由于缺乏对其理论背景和教学原则的了解,导致这一新型教学模式在实践教学操作中还普遍存在许多误区。

近年来,国内外众多学者展开了对任务型教学这一先进教学模式的讨论和研究。然而,迄今为止,绝大多数研究主要是针对其理论基

础以及实践可行性的预测和猜想,很少有学者对它进行实验性的研究。

本著作理论基础源于著名语言学家 B. Littlewood 的五类课堂活动以及 P. Skehan 的认知语言学理论。在理论研究的基础上,作者运用改编后的 COLT (Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching) 课堂观察体系中对英语课堂以及教师的授课进行了实地观察和分析,并利用先进的研究方法对结果进行量化和质化分析。该著作对中学英语的任务型教学情况有一个客观而科学的展示,并就教师培训方法、教材编写以及课程标准的制定和执行提供了一些可行性建议。

本著作最大的特点是以实践为主,而实践都来自相应的理论并与理论密切结合。个案研究和例证分析、评述给予读者很大的空间去进行思考和探索。本书既是一本内容丰富的外语教师培训教材,也是一本具有实践参考价值的外语教学专著,可供广大外语教育工作者,研究者,各个层次的外语教师以及英语专业研究生参考。

对于本书中的纰缪和疏漏之处,作者期望外语界专家、学者和同行,不吝指正。

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Abstract

The task-based approach (TBA) has gained popularity in the field of language teaching in China in the last decade. There has been a general consensus about the strength of this teaching approach; namely, that communicative tasks can facilitate the learning process by engaging students in negotiation of meaning during pair or small group work in class. Nevertheless, recently, some scholars have expressed their concerns about the effectiveness and practicability of this approach, especially in China. Their concern mainly revolves around the conflict between TBA and the social-cultural EFL context, and the problem that TBA may not be so successful in promoting high levels of linguistic competence.

Although the task-based approach has been the subject of much pedagogical research and language syllabus design work in recent years, there is a lack of empirical research on task-based teaching in school foreign language contexts. Therefore, this study aims to provide a picture of how secondary school teachers in China are attempting to come to terms with the implementation of a task-based pedagogical approach. Specifically, the researcher investigated task-based instruction as implemented by selected English teachers in their classrooms. In addition, their attitudes towards and understandings of this approach were explored through interviews. An adapted version of the COLT (Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching) Observation Scheme was used for classroom-based data collection. Adaptations incorporated TBLT principles and Littlewood's five-category framework of activities.

An initial group of ten teachers was refined to observations of four teachers, two each in two schools. Findings from the four case studies

showed that two of the teachers successfully applied most of the principles of TBLT in their observed lessons, while the other two were still in a transitional stage. Findings indicated the teachers' TBLT practices were: i) largely congruent with their educational beliefs, and ii) teachers' beliefs towards TBLT were key to effective implementation of TBA. Particularly, a trend emerged from this study that the more theoretical knowledge teachers had, the more appropriately they might implement TBLT in practice.

The study contributes to the enrichment of the knowledge about TBA practice in the EFL context and enhances our understanding of ELT pedagogic innovation on China's mainland. It can provide educational insights into issues arising during TBA implementation, information useful to educational policymakers and school administrators. It provides pedagogical implications for Chinese EFL teachers with an aim to assist them in a more successful transition to student-centered, communicative-oriented task-based approaches to English language teaching.

Abbreviations

ALM	Audiolingual Method
CLL	Community Language Learning
CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELT	English Language Teaching
GT	Grammar-Translation
PPP (3P)	Presentation, Practice, Production
TBA	The Task-Based Approach
TBLT	Task-Based Language Teaching
TPR	Total Physical Response

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter begins with a brief introduction to the development of English language teaching (ELT) in China. This background overview is followed by a discussion of the new challenges that Chinese educators are facing in terms of innovations in the field of ELT. Next, the motivation for this study on the implementation of the task-based approach (TBA) is introduced from both empirical and personal perspectives, and aims of the study are explained. The following section deals with the major research questions explored in this study. The significance and limitations of the study are summarized. Finally, the structure of the thesis is outlined.

1.1 ELT in China: The Past and the Present

It was in the mid 1800s that foreign languages were first introduced in China (Bolton, 2002; Scovel, 1995; Dzau, 1990; Lam, 2005; Liu, 1995). Due to feudal ideas lasting thousands of years and the common fear of cultural contamination, many Chinese people were not aware of the importance of foreign language learning. Along with changing political orientations, foreign languages were at times emphasized and at other times neglected (Adamson, 2002; Lam, 2005; Liu, 1995).

The first English teaching in China was done in Macau, for religious purposes. During the mid-1800s, although English continued to be linked to the spread of Christianity, defeat in a number of battles with foreign powers armed with superior weapons made government officials aware of the need to encourage the study of English. Western science and technology were introduced and scholarly works were studied, mostly for the purpose

ses of national defense. Therefore, a beginning was made to encourage the study and learning of English and the translation of Western books (Dzau, 1990). Foreign languages, if taught at all, were typically taught according to the grammar-translation method then popular throughout Europe (Dzau, 1990; Scovel, 1983). Interestingly, this method was similar to that typically used to learn classical Chinese. Mastery of grammatical rules and memorization of vocabulary were considered core elements for successful language learning. There was often a keen interest in the exact understanding of every word, and rote learning was encouraged.

Later, Western teachers, many of whom were missionaries, came to China to teach in English. The introduction of the works of Otto Jespersen (1860-1943), Harold E. Palmer, Michael West and Edward I. Thorndike helped greatly to improve the effectiveness of English Language Teaching (ELT) (Dzau, 1990).

Historically, ELT development in China from 1949 can be divided into six periods. These periods roughly follow stages in which there were political reforms and changing alignments between China and other countries:

1949-1953: Consolidation of power and economic recovery

1951-1956: The period of learning from the Soviet Union

1956-1966: The period of independent national development

1966-1976: The Cultural Revolution

1976-1990: The period of learning English for modernization

1991-Today: The period of learning English for international stature

(Adapted from Dzau, 1990; Lam, 2005; Scovel, 1995)

In the first period, after the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the focus in English teaching classes tended to be on political content. English was taught mainly for the purpose of the translation of political slogans and policies advocated by the Chinese government. During the second period, an emphasis on English was replaced by the need to study Russian. During that time, English was actually condemned as un-

patriotic because of a national campaign against “American imperialism” and “British colonialism” (Ji, 2002, p. 1). Soviet theory and practice were studied, Soviet textbooks were used, and Soviet language teaching methodologies (grammar-focused) were adopted (Dzau, 1990). In language learning classrooms, the mastery of grammar, accurate knowledge and use of words, and structural knowledge were the principal objectives for both teachers and students.

However, this phase did not last long due to a deteriorating relationship between the Soviet Union and China beginning in the 1950s. By that time, economic concerns and globalization had firmly established English as an international language of commerce and industry. As a consequence, in the field of foreign language teaching, English regained a favored position. More and more English language classes began to replace Russian classes. Meanwhile, great efforts were made to develop new materials and methods suitable for Chinese students and local conditions. But these efforts were somewhat undermined because senior teachers (often Western-trained intellectuals) generally were not trusted enough to be chosen to direct these efforts. Older, experienced Western-trained teachers were not consulted. Speed, not quality, was stressed. All class work was aimed at “catching up” with pre-set schedules and imposed objectives. Although a lot of work done in this period was meant to foster ELT improvements in China, fundamental problems in the field were not solved effectively (Dzau, 1990; Scovel, 1995).

The Cultural Revolution, a political movement of ideological extremism which started in 1966, led to an entire decade of chaos and isolation in China. It not only disrupted economic and cultural development of the country but also had disastrous effects on ELT at all levels of the educational system. The formal educational system “ceased to function, and ELT was essentially in a state of anarchy” (Hu, 2002, p. 32).

A great deal of attention has been paid to English teaching and learn-

ing since the beginning of the reform of the Chinese economy in 1978. The national program of "Four Modernizations" brought in a new era of political, economical, cultural, and scientific exchange with the outside world. These developments exerted profound influences on education in general and ELT in particular. English was again prominent as a main foreign language taught in China. In the early 1980s, for example, English was restored as a compulsory subject on college entrance examinations.

In an effort to control the contents of syllabi and to ensure the quality of education, the central government staged a strong centralization policy. Curricular design, syllabus writing, and materials production rested solely with the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education organized special committees of more experienced teachers who discussed and decided on syllabi for ELT in universities and colleges. They did a lot of work to guide efforts to improve the quality of English language teaching nationally (Dzau, 1990).

With the implementation of the Chinese reform and opening up policy, and with more and more Western companies and joint-ventures interested in China, there was stronger motivation on the part of students to study English and a greater willingness to adopt new methods. Teachers thus had a stronger impetus to improve their teaching. New teaching materials were prepared and new methods were tried out on a small scale during this period (Adamson & Morris, 1997). Chinese and foreign teachers began to be allowed to cooperate in designing syllabus and textbooks. An example of successful cooperation in syllabus design was the production of a New Syllabus for College English for Arts and Science Majors (1985), created for a four-year university degree program. The syllabus set communicative competence as the ultimate teaching objective, emphasizing both accuracy and fluency. It was claimed that language communication involves effectiveness which depends on accuracy, effectiveness, and fluency of communication. It was suggested that the traditional teacher-centered classroom approach should be

changed to a more student-centered one so that students could develop improved communicative competence (Dzau, 1990).

ELT in China has become much more international since the 1990s (Lam, 2005, p. 82). As identified by Lam (2005), notable events in the ELT field during this period indicate China's active exchange and cooperation with the outside world, as follows:

- ◆ First approved in 1999, the National Research Center for Foreign Language Education was established at Beijing Foreign Studies University in March 2000 to conduct research in foreign language education in bilingualism
 - ◆ In 2000, the International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (IATEFL) also endorsed the establishment of a China branch.
 - ◆ China joined the World Trade Organization in December 2001. The impact of this event on education was so great that a special policy plan in response to this event was published on the Ministry web site.
 - ◆ In July 2002, the TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) Candlelight project was announced in July 2002 by the Ministry of Education.
 - ◆ In August 2002, the first IATEFL China conference was held in Tonghua in the Jilin province.
 - ◆ 2002 saw China joining AILA (International Association of Applied Linguistics) in the form of CELEA (China's English Language Education Association)
- (Lam, 2005, p. 83)

In the last decade, China has undergone rapid economic development linked to an explosion in commercial, technological and cultural exchanges with the rest of the world. These phenomena have given rise to an even more pressing demand for English proficiency (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Lee, 2002; Liu, 2001, 2005; Wu, 2001). The response to this ever-in-