

*A Study on College Oral
English Teaching Model*

大学英语口语教学模式研究

张莉 陈韵 【著】



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Preface

It has been long discussed what is like the ideal oral English teaching model. Various books, articles, studies and researches achieved great results. For years, China's college English education has been endeavoring to find a unanimous answer. As a systematic whole, college English has its main components knowledge and practical skills of the English language, linguistic knowledge, learning strategies and intercultural communication. It attaches linguistic knowledge with non-linguistic knowledge.

Oral English is one of the headaches of all the four skills, namely, speaking, listening, reading and writing. A large number of students are found to be hardly correct and fluent in oral English upon graduation. A combination of potent limitations is responsible for this situation, such as large class size, inappropriate teaching method and time constraints. This book is trying to provide some suggestions and contributions in improving this dilemma on the basis of two theories: the task-based teaching approach and the formative assessment. We hope this book will be helpful for the second language learners, language teachers and researchers.

At this moment, I want to express our gratitude to all those who have helped and guided us during the preparation and completion of this book.

Words are not enough to convey our profound gratitude to our doctoral tutor, Professor Liu Limin, whose continual inspiration, enlightening instructions, and thoughtful guidance render great help to us. Besides, special thanks go to all the students who participated in the experiment with great care and enthusiasm. Finally, our sincere gratitude also goes to our editor in charge Zhao Yuting, who spent much time and effort on the publication of this book. Without their support and guidance, this book would not have been what it is.

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Chapter 1 Status Quo and Challenge of College Oral English Teaching

1.1 Status Quo of College Oral English Teaching

1.1.1 Introduction

Nowadays, growing attentions in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) have been laid on investigating various aspects of L2 learners' performance of tasks. Task-based approaches are proved to represent a clear case to facilitate language learning. Skehan (1998) defines tasks as activities that are meaning-focused and outcome-evaluated and that have some sort of real-world relationship. In other words, transacting tasks will push forward interlanguage development because the demands that tasks make will engage the very processes that lead to acquisition (Foster & Skehan, 1996). According to Skehan, task-based approaches put much emphasis on the meaning of language rather than its forms and are designed to test learners' various abilities, including problem-solving ability, working under the time pressure, and getting evaluations in terms of outcome, instead of language display. These characteristics of real world interaction provide opportunities to the SLA learners with the authentic language environment and eventually attain the native-like language proficiency through task-based activities.

This approach to syllabus design and language pedagogy requires researchers to know more about the general area and the variables of task-based instruction. The SLA researchers have made great efforts to study a variety of design features of tasks and implementation procedures as well as the impacts on such aspects of language use. These include comprehension,

input processing, meaning negotiation and the three dimensions of L2 production because the selection of the appropriate implementation of the tasks from a wide range of choices is very important for the quality of production. That is to say, the implementation conditions of the chosen task are vital to the quality of the learners' output.

Whereas, in early period of SLA research especially in oral English teaching sector, the focus was laid on the following five aspects: 1) Oral English error analysis and its reason (Richards, 1974); 2) Verifying the acquisition order between first language and second language (McNamara, 1973); 3) Application of communicative strategy (Taerch & Kasper, 1983); 4) Analysis of variation of interlanguages (Tarone, 1983); 5) Fossilization of interlanguage (Lardiere, 1998 & 2000). In recent years, the focus has changed into the following three aspects: 1) The analysis of the influences of different task and different prerequisite on accuracy, fluency and complexity of oral production from the information process pattern (Foster & Skehan, 1996); 2) The study on L2 learners' strategies for dealing with insufficient language resources from the perspective of psycholinguistics (Dornyei & Kormos, 1998); 3) The researches of various factors affecting the automation of the skills in oral English production from the perspective of cognitive psychology (Lennon, 1990). The above researches revealed the features of L2 oral production from different perspectives. But due to small samples, narrow scope or short experiment span of most of the researches, it is difficult to form a complete system to illustrate a whole process of oral English acquisition in L2 learners.

1.1.2 Conceptual Basis of Oral English Teaching Model

This research takes the view of Task-based Language Teaching Approach (TBLT), which focuses on learner-centered education, negotiation of meaning, authenticity principle and focus-on-form principle. In order to illustrate the oral teaching model this book holds on, it is useful to understand the conceptual basis of our model.

To a large extent, the choice of teaching pedagogy is decided on how the researchers and language teachers look at the nature of language. The traditional views treat language as the knowledge without any differences than any other knowledge such as math, physics or history. The teaching of language is to pass the knowledge to the language learners and the education of language is the teaching and acquisition of language knowledge. So, the tradition teaching approach lays great emphasis on reciting and remembering. It is often teacher-centered and teachers are the absolute authority in traditional classrooms.

The major stimulus for change in oral English teaching from traditional approach has been a dissatisfaction with the effects of oral proficiency. The schools and universities invested tremendous time and efforts. Whereas, many students were still unable to use the language effectively. They often had a good knowledge about the language they were learning but had little ability to communicate appropriately with that language. Especially in oral English teaching classroom, grammar-translation method proved to be unsatisfactory.

Then there has come some dramatic changes and developments in oral English teaching in past several decades. Skinnerian behaviorism held audio-lingualism, in which the students were able to master oral language skills through imitation and endless drills. The students were able to give patterned responses in predictable situations but had difficulties in creative use of language and unpredictable circumstances outside of classroom.

The revolutionary figure and the American structural linguist and cognitive scientist Noam Chomsky put forward the difference between competence and performance, which led to the great emphasis on creativity of language use. Following Chomskian revolution, Hymes (1972) and Nunan (1999) focused on communicative competence, which provided a much broader view of language use. In oral skill, speakers needed to know not only grammar structures, but also norms of language use and appropriateness of language communication.

In contemporary oral English classroom, communicative language