

Vocational College English Teaching

Inspiration from Sociocultural Theory and Interaction Hypothesis

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Abstract—This article will present the situation of college English teaching in higher vocational colleges, and introduce two latest second language acquisition theories which are "social cultural theory" and "interaction hypothesis". The aim of this article is to explore the new modes of college English teaching in order to effectively improve the higher vocational students' ability of using language and intercultural communication ability.

Keywords—*Sociocultural Theory ; Interaction Hypothesis ; College English teaching*

I. INTRODUCTION

With the development of economic globalization, there are large demands for high quality vocational talents with high level English capability in China. Higher vocational colleges have been carried out various college English teaching mode reform, but the reform did not achieve ideal result. The students had not much chances to get real language experience, training and practice opportunities. The ability of English speaking and writing is still low. In fact, in the process of teaching teacher still pay much attention to the language input but ignore the language output, which has much to do with that. And in the current higher vocational English teaching, the cultural inheritances function obviously inadequate. The students lack of understanding of different countries and different culture. So to improve higher vocational students' language application ability and intercultural communication ability, this article will introduce two latest of second language acquisition theory— Sociocultural Theory and Interaction Hypothesis , to explore the new modes of college English teaching, and to make a operability analysis.

Within the broad field of research on learning, culture and social interaction, sociocultural theory now commonly used. By setting out the essential elements of this theory as it applies to a specific area of enquiry, the author aimed at understanding the educational functions of classroom teaching, and discussed some key concepts generated by the theory.

II. STATUS ANALYSIS

Under the new situation of social development, higher vocational English teaching not only undertakes the

responsibility to cultivate talents who adapt to the development of the society, at the same time, is also facing unprecedented challenges.

A. *The imbalance Students' levels and demands*

At present, higher vocational college students are from three different kind of school, consisting of senior middle schools, vocational high school and technical secondary school. The level of basic English skills are very big different among those graduates from the three different parts. graduates from senior middle schools ,with good English foundation, hope to further improve the ability of listening, speaking, reading and writing translation, and maybe want to enter the Top-up program ;But most of the rest of the students' English foundation is poor, and they hope to make up the basic knowledge of language in the college stage, at the same time, eager to learn some applied English related to their majors, for later employment services; And there still are some students with almost zero-based English. They already lose confidence in learning English, and just learn English in a negative and passive way, even with resistance. So the outcome is not a ideal result.

B. *Backward teaching method*

Although have been carried out various reforms in teaching mode, vocational College English still can't get rid of the monotonous teaching method and teaching means in the teaching link. Teachers take the fixed textbooks as teaching content. Although with high rate, most of the students have no real language using experiences and the opportunities of training and practice. This kind of mode, which based on teachers, teaching materials, and examinations, can not stimulate students' interests in learning, and fail to achieve to the purpose of improving students' practical ability of using language. So the fact is, students are still unable to communicate in English, and most of them know little about other countries' culture, after passing all the examinations needed.

So either from the perspective of the status quo or social development demands, higher vocational college English teaching reform is an important component of contemporary foreign language teaching reform in our country.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A. Sociocultural Theory

The research of SLA began in the 1960s from infancy, and mainly affected by cognition. But since the mid-80s, the sociocultural theory gradually formed and developed. The core concept of the social culture theory and highlight: people peculiar to senior cognitive function in the product of sociocultural theory is: the senior cognitive function of human being could make use of the product of social culture —symbols to mediate the relationship between individual and Social material world. As people not direct effects on the material world, but through physical tools as aids to produce, people also use symbolic/psychological tools as aids to control and reorganize the psychological process of the low-lives. This kind of control is different from other species, which is consciously, deliberately and indirectly adjust the relationships with others, with themselves, and with the world (Lantolf, 1994:1). Sociocultural theory consider the biological function of which form the basis of the human mind is not enough to explain our ability to adjust psychological activity consciously and deliberately. The acquisition of this ability is the product of cultural construction, especially the result of language internalization. Language symbol has a dual function: a external social communication unit, and also the internal units of thinking, namely unification of people's social communication and thinking through language symbols.

There are several theories included in the Sociocultural Theory. According to Beckett (1981), all the words in the dialogue are conversational. That is to say, there are speakers and listeners in all languages, "an individual can become a key role of language using only when involving in the talks". Dialogue theory is that all the language and human consciousness, in fact, is a dynamic, interactive, and depends on the environment. The theory of dialogue has significant implications to the SLA research, Beckett (1981) believed that language is naturally formed through the study of social interaction.

In language acquisition mode posed by Tomasello (2003), the imitation plays a main role. But it is not simply transform into the internal psychological experience in a constant form. Children is not passively copying to the environment, but emphasizing the transformation from the psychological platform to the internal psychological platform. It is a transition process of reasoning on the basis of the original development.

Vygotsky's the Zone of Proximal Development(ZPD) refers to the distance between the learners' language level in individual independence development and developed language level under the help of the proficiency partners at high level (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). In fact, ZPD is concerned with the essence of dialogue relationship between expert and novice, its aim is to promote novice's self-regulation of language ability, and promote the individual to be able to achieve by the skills learned under the help in the future; "Scaffolding" theory refers to any collaborate behavior between "adult-children" or "expert-novice"

(Lantolf & Thorne 2007). Wertsch (2007) further pointed out that the scaffolding can be the interaction among the peers and also in a collectivity.

B. Interaction Hypothesis

Long (1981) put the comprehensible input, output and conversation together, and put forward the Interaction Hypothesis and pointed out the participate in the interactive conversation can promote the second language learning. All kinds of theories emphasize the importance of interaction in the process of second language acquisition, including the comprehensible input, feedback and adjustive output. 1996 Long updated interaction hypothesis, by including some concepts such as the input, interaction and output, at the same time regarded learners' internal capacities as a part of the second language learning process. In the re-explained interaction hypothesis, interaction types, which promote the second language acquisition, include the obtaining the opportunities for comprehensible input, providing second language feedback, and producing the opportunities for adjustive output. Feedback obtained in interactive conversation can promote the development of mediation-language, because interaction can organically link the input, the learners' internal capacities, selective attention and output.

Gass&Mackey (2007) explained the SLA theory framework, containing language input, Interaction, feedback, and the output of, and focused on cognitive mechanisms which promote the SLA. Gass combined these theoretical structures and referred to as " Interaction Hypothesis ". This Hypothesis not only is the inheritance and development of consolidation pattern of the second language acquisition ,but also include Krashen's input Hypothesis and Swain's output Hypothesis. So far the "input, Interaction and output model" is a theoretical Hypothesis the most widely covered the field of SLA.

IV. IMPLICATIONS

Although the two kinds of theories exist a certain gap, but no doubt, they have become important theories to guide the English teaching. The common of these two theories is that they believe language should be mastered in social communication under the social demand, by imitating, inputting and outputting consciously, then the learners could achieve the goal of learning a language. So the author thinks that college English class should be designed based on this kind of idea, considering expanding the traditional classroom to education online or social media.

A. New classroom model

Affected by higher education scale, large classes are adopted widely in the present college English teaching. In this case, it is difficult to using the current popular international communication method or student-centered teaching mode. New teaching model should emphasize multidirectional interaction. It does not unilaterally emphasize the teacher-centered or student-centered teaching, but stresses the combination and unity of the two sides. This pattern usually includes four steps: introduction, input,

imitation, output after producing. Introduced means to stimulate students learning motivation by introduce something new, and to build learning emotional needs; Input refers to by reading and listening, students can accept the information of language; Imitation means that the students can master basic expression by constant practices, output after producing is the language produced by students according to the social demands which are designed by teachers. The aim is to achieve the purpose of communication by carrying on the processing of language design.

Specific operation can be divided into three basic stages: preparation activities, reading training and consolidation stage. In preparing activities stage, by taking the student as the center, teachers can ask the theme of the article content or coupling new assignments to advocate and encourage dialogue happened between the students and the teacher, trigger student's thinking and emotion, and provide students with the chance of language output. Teachers also can divide the students into several groups to discuss, guide them in pairs or groups activities, naturally move into real the exchange of ideas, and express their true thoughts and ideas. Then, to choose a representative from each presentation, the teacher can do review, correct students' presentation.

These steps are interlinked, mutual blend infiltration, and form a complete process of teaching. This kind of classroom teaching is one of the best teaching method choice for non-English major students, because on the one hand, theoretically it conforms to the socialcultural theory and interaction theory, on the other hand, practically it is suitable for the basic requirements for college English teaching. Not only It is teachers-centered, emphasizing the language input, but also it pays attention to language output and is students -centered, encouraging students to actively participate in. Teachers' subjectivity ensures the quality of language output, so that students can use the target language in correct specification; Meanwhile the students' subjectivity further improve the students' language application ability.

B. Online class and social media mode

In the information society, the network plays an important role. Traditional classroom can not meet the needs of the modern college students any more. The online classroom and rich social media can attract the attention of students. So how to take the advantages of network resources, and to guide student to use the network has become an important issue of education needed to be discussed today.

The network platform usually can be designed into two kinds of interactive teaching modes: teaching interactive activities and social interaction activities, which meet the requirements of not only teaching input, but also the students social output. By teaching interactive activities we mean by using of information network platform to provide learning information, and students can get useful information from these resources, also can put their information on the platform to share with others. Social interaction activities refers to the use of all kinds of social media to create

learning needs, transfer learning information in the process of communicating with others. Through some interesting topics and creating social needs, discussion, debate and negotiation can be carried out among students and teachers, which can effectively achieve the collaboration and communication with others.

Throughout the whole learning process of learners, interactive activities in the network environment is a dynamic process, and learners must constantly mutual communication and information exchange in order to carry on the learning activities in the context of network learning .

C. The arrangement of the teaching content and teaching activities

English teaching involves two parties, language knowledge and language skills. The master of language knowledge mainly depends on teacher's teaching, while the improvement of language skills needs students' to continue to practice constantly. The aim of adopting interactive teaching modes in college English course is to promote the formation and development of students' language skills. Therefore, teachers should make full use of interaction to develop students' language skills, as well as pay attention to teach language knowledge in classroom teaching. The design of the course must be closely combination with the teaching content. So teachers are required to organize the class activities in a planned and targeted way when carrying out the classroom interaction, and control interactive rhythm strictly. The density and frequency of the classroom interaction need to be set out in terms of the teaching needs.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Interaction of college English teaching plays a key role for learners to master language knowledge. To a great extent teachers' teaching behavior affects students' learning. If teachers establish a kind of behavior patterns, students will also establish a certain behavior patterns to match the teacher's behavior patterns. As a result, students participate in classroom teaching activities in different extent, and make different responses to different teachers. This interactive teaching mode with the students participate not only affects learners' attitude, also affects their future development.

Interactive English teaching is a kind of teaching mode to promote the teaching process, and improve the teaching effect. It not only emphasizes the learner's participation, cooperation between teachers and students and their emotion, but also attaches great importance to developing students' creative thinking ability. So, in the practice of teaching, teachers should respect students' individual differences, create a kind of environment which can guide students to actively participate in the activities, guide students to question, investigate, explore, practice and develop, train the students' ability to use English, and make students to fully develop actively on their characters. That is helpful for students to activate their own knowledge in the brain and transformed into language skills, so as to promote the transformation of language input to language output. Of course, the implementation of the model needs teachers' organization and guide, and also needs supervision,

inspection, evaluation and feedback on the student in time. At the same time, the students must cooperate and interact with seriously, so as to avoid programming of the teaching process. The implementation of the model not only needs the teacher and the student's time, it also put forward higher request for teacher's teaching skills and theoretical knowledge. The new teaching model of college English is based on the common content of "sociocultural theory" and "interaction hypothesis" (input, interaction and output model), comply with the principles of second language acquisition, and try to teach students in accordance of their aptitude. So for vocational colleges' college English teaching reform, it can be a certain significant reference. Therefore, research for students to participate in the college English classroom interaction teaching pattern should also be paid more attention in the college English reform.

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