

Experimental Research in Phonics Classroom Instruction of Low-Grade Elementary Students from the Perspective of Translanguaging*

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Abstract—It is taken for granted that English-only classroom may be helpful to students in EFL teaching. However, there is an argument against this immersion approach, especially for low-grade elementary school students in Phonics Classroom Instruction. For the low-grade elementary school students, the immersion method may put them confused with the pronunciations of Chinese alphabets and English alphabets. The authors consider that the theory of translanguaging lays a theoretical foundation for the study of elementary school students EFL teaching, so this paper presents an experimental research in the phonics classroom instruction of low-grade elementary school students from the perspective of translanguaging. The research is carried out in two small classes, of which one is English-only class, the other is the experimental class. The result of the research is that students in the experimental are more active and effective than the English-only class. The application of translanguaging aims to help students clear away the confusion between the pronunciations of Chinese alphabets and English alphabets, and the method of “2 plus 1 plus 1” that the authors have used in the experimental class promote their comprehensive development of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The “2 plus 1 plus 1” approach used in the research means 1/2 English, 1/4 Chinese and 1/4 material objects of pictures, video, radio, body languages and any other language signs. The research has proved that it is more effective to take the “2 plus 1 plus 1” approach in Phonics Classroom Instruction for low-grade elementary school students.

Keywords—*translanguaging; Phonics Classroom Instruction; low-grade elementary students*

I. INTRODUCTION

A. The Reason for This Study

First, theoretical guidance: Cenoz & Gorter, (2015) [1] pointed out translanguaging has broaden sense and narrow sense. The former is code transfer, code meshing and translation; the latter is a concrete teaching strategy (Lewis et al., 2013) [2]. Translanguaging is a flexible bilingual

instruction in teaching and learning in bilingual classroom and a teaching strategy that teacher applies to facilitate language transfer, express ideas and cultivate multilingual identity (Blackledge & Creese2010) [3]. Creese & Blackledge, (2010, p.112) [3] thought that flexible pedagogy as learners' translanguaging, which can be social, cultural, community, and linguistic domains of their lives so as to bilingual learners are placed at the center of the interaction and languages are used as a social resource without clear boundaries. As a theoretic basis, translanguaging aims to resolve the compound between Chinese pronunciation—pinyin and English letters and monograms from English-only Phonics class (teacher take Chinese as mother tongue) so that promote learners comprehensive of listening, reading, speaking, writing and viewing.

Then, personal practice: Only speaking English in a phonics classroom instruction put students confused and confounded between Chinese pronunciation — pinyin and English letters and monograms' pronunciation., such as letter "Aa" pronounces [æ], [ei], [ə:], etc. rather than "a" in Chinese; letter "Uu" stands for [ʌ], [ju], [u] or [o] rather than "ū" in Chinese. And additionally, they didn't know how to pronounce a-e, i-e, o-e, u-e. From the definition of translanguaging, we should change that kind of instruction into "2+1+1" (1/2 English, 1/4 Chinese and 1/4 material objects of pictures, video, radio, body languages and any other language signs), which is beneficial to resolve the problem and promote students' abilities of listening, speaking, reading, writing and viewing comprehensively and cultivate students' bilingual ability.

Finally, personal interest: As a Phonics teacher, trying my best to deal with parents' puzzles and students' problem is a duty and an attitude to Phonics classroom instruction.

B. The Motivation and Aims of the Research

To improve and solve the problem of Chinese pronunciation — *pinyin* and English letters and monograms' pronunciation, an experimental study was to be taken to compare and analyze the "2+1+1" and totally speaking English Phonics class so as to promote students'

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comprehensive ability of listening, speaking, reading, writing and viewing.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. *The Research of Phonics*

Phonics is rooted in the Rome text "The Doctrine of Littera" which describes that a letter consists of a sound, a written symbol and a name. It is also called phonetic method (Dai Weihua, 2007, p.628). [4] It is a national mainstream teaching method. Phonics is a way of teaching people to read based on the sounds of letters (Sally Wehmeier, 2004, p.128) [5]. The professor of Phonics, Wiley Blevins (1996) [6] said in the text what is phonics: "Phonics contains the relationship between the sound of letter and letter; the most common relationship between sounds and letters that is imparted to students so that students can read or spell words". Studies have shown that 85% English words can be spelled or written according to the rules of sounds and letters (Yu Chunlan, 2012. p.2-3) [7]. The basic principle of Phonics requests students to control the sound of 44 letters and monograms, namely their pronunciation, rather than the name of letters. In Phonics "Bb" pronounces [b] rather than [bi:], "Dd" stands for [d] rather than [di:] etc. "ay" pronounces [ei]. Some regulations of spelling and the relationship between sound and letters make students see words can spell or listen can write. Briefly speaking, learning the spelling rules of 26 letters and monograms; building perception of the sound and letters; mastering the law of English spelling will arrive at the standard of "seeing a word can read, listening a word can write".

Phonics has been broadly used in English subjects, especially the benefits to pedagogy of English subject by many authors who are both at home and abroad. But for a pure English atmosphere, totally and only speaking English in a phonics class for students who are from English Training School is particularly widespread. For the low-grade elementary students, however, it is really improve their English standard? Actually, it's not.

B. *The Research of Translanguaging*

Translanguaging is a new concept in the area of language education study. In 1980s, Welsh educator C. Williams put forward first. Translanguaging stem from Kymric "trawysieithu". It was be translated into "translinguifying", and then "translanguaging". It was the first time to be interpreted as a teaching method was that Kymric to be input and English to be output in a class (Lewis et al. 2012a,p.642)[8]. Later, translanguaging was expanded as a teaching strategy to learn language on the basis of learners' corpus. (Cenoz & Gorter, 2015) [1] pointed out translanguaging has broaden sense and narrow sense. The former is code transfer [9] code meshing and translation; the latter is a concrete teaching strategy (Lewis et al., 2013) [2]. As a teaching strategy, translanguaging has positive effect in encouraging learners to use corpus and multilingualism practice to strengthen their languages and multi-identity (Creese & Blackledge 2010, Garcia 2009, Garcia & Li2014, 2015) [3]. Because of the text Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism by Baker [10] and Ofelia

Garcia's text Bilingual Education in the 21st Century — a Global Perspective[11], translanguaging was disseminated. Lewis et al (2012b, p.655) [12] further explained that translanguaging is a way of the dynamic and functional integration of two languages to be used to organize and moderate the process of cognitive understanding and the development of literacy. Translanguaging is a flexible bilingual instruction in teaching and learning in bilingual classroom and a teaching strategy that teacher applies to facilitate language transfer, express ideas and cultivate multilingual identity (Blackledge & Creese 2010) [3]. Creese & Blackledge (2010, p.112) [3] thought that flexible pedagogy as learners' translanguaging, which can be social, cultural, community, and linguistic domains of their lives so as to bilingual learners are placed at the center of the interaction and languages are used as a social resource without clear boundaries. Therefore, translanguaging is a flexible bilingual teaching strategy that refers to code transfer, translation etc.

It is widespread to use translanguaging in different subjects abroad. However, it is just a beginning stage at home, which refers to conception, bilingual research of higher education, multilingualism of ethnic groups and the relationship between multilingualism and translanguaging, etc. Therefore, it is quite necessary to research the application of translanguaging in practice of Chinese culture.

III. THE DESIGN OF THE RESEARCH

A. *Research Questions*

During the practice of Phonics classroom instruction to low-grade elementary students, it is found that students always confound the sound of letters and monograms with the Chinese pronunciation — pinyin, which confused parents and students. Firstly, this thesis will improve the problem to enhance students' comprehensive development of listening, speaking, reading, writing and viewing. Then, answering whether a Phonics classroom instruction in English only is good for the low-grade elementary students and then promote the development of their listening, speaking, reading, writing and viewing ability.

B. *The Research Objects*

The purpose of this research is to construct an effective method which is suitable for Phonics classroom teaching in low-grade elementary students on the basis of theoretical assumptions, and test the method of "2+1+1" in English teaching of low-grade elementary students through experiments, and then to testify the theoretical assumptions. Therefore, taking research conditions into account is essential and necessary.

After on-the-spot investigation and interviewing findings: An English training school owns six branch campuses in Kunming, children who accepted Phonics training are the main members of it. It is a typical school to be researched. Thus, six low-grade elementary students were the objects of the research. The basic information is as follows ("Table I"):

TABLE I. COMPARISON BETWEEN THE RESEARCH OBJECTS

| Class | Grade | Male | Female | Phonics standard | Category | Total |
|-------|-------|------|--------|------------------|--------------------|-------|
| one | one | two | one | zero | Control group | Three |
| two | one | two | one | zero | Experimental group | Three |

From "Table I", the basic information is similar, and the specific information is as shown in "Table II".

TABLE II. BASIC INFORMATION OF OBJECTS

| | Objects | Sex | Ages | Grade | Phonics standard |
|---|---------|--------|-------|---------|------------------|
| 1 | Robin | male | seven | Grade 1 | zero |
| 2 | Hicks | male | seven | Grade 1 | zero |
| 3 | Lily | female | seven | Grade 1 | zero |
| 4 | Jack | male | seven | Grade 1 | zero |
| 5 | Grace | female | seven | Grade 1 | zero |
| 6 | Jerry | male | seven | Grade 1 | zero |

C. Research Methodology

Educational experiment requires the subjects to be grouped according to the scientific grouping method. The commonly used methods are randomization grouping, measurement grouping and matching grouping. But these are done without time constraints. If the experiment is carried out during normal teaching hours, any of the above methods will disrupt the normal teaching arrangement. In addition, English classes are not usually held at the same time. So these three groups are not feasible for this study. Some natural classes with some important features were selected as the experimental group and the control group (Wen Qiufang, 2001.P.169) [13].

The subjects were divided into control group and experimental group, and the pretest was carried out respectively. Then, the control group was taught Phonics in English-only classroom, and the experimental group was treated with "2+1+1". Four months later, the two groups were tested in a unified test paper.

D. Data Collection and Analysis

This thesis takes pretest and post-test, participation of class and interview. At first, collect the result of pretest and analyze the data between control group and experimental group.

TABLE III. THE PRETEST RESULT OF CONTROL GROUP AND EXPERIMENTAL GROUP

| Category | Name | Listening | Speaking | Reading | Writing | Viewing | Total | Mean | SD | p |
|--------------------|-------|-----------|----------|---------|---------|---------|-------|-------|----------|-------------|
| Control Group | Robin | 14 | 2 | 6.5 | 7 | 8 | 37.5 | 37.17 | 1.649916 | 0.929575711 |
| | Lily | 14 | 2 | 6 | 5 | 8 | 35 | | | |
| | Hicks | 13 | 2 | 4.5 | 11.5 | 8 | 39 | | | |
| Experimental Group | Jack | 12 | 2 | 6 | 8 | 8 | 36 | 36.67 | 1.885618 | |
| | Grace | 14 | 2 | 7 | 11 | 6 | 42 | | | |
| | Jerry | 10 | 2 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 38 | | | |

From "Table III", it can be seen that the mean of the control group is 37.17, the experimental group is 36.67; the standard deviation of the control group is 1.649916, the experimental group is 1.885618; $P = 0.929575711$ is more

than 0.05. Therefore, the overall gap between the two groups is not obvious.

Then, the research will apply "2+1+1" to the experimental group; while English-only classroom to the control group. Four months later, the objects will be tested.

TABLE IV. THE POST-TEST RESULT OF CONTROL GROUP AND EXPERIMENTAL GROUP

| Category | Name | Listening | Speaking | Reading | Writing | Viewing | Total | Mean | SD | p |
|--------------------|-------|-----------|----------|---------|---------|---------|-------|-------|----------|-------------|
| Control Group | Robin | 20 | 17 | 19 | 19.5 | 8 | 83.5 | 85.83 | 4.403282 | 0.025945315 |
| | Lily | 20 | 18 | 19 | 15 | 20 | 92 | | | |
| | Hicks | 17 | 14 | 19 | 20 | 12 | 82 | | | |
| Experimental Group | Jack | 20 | 19.5 | 18 | 20 | 20 | 97.5 | 96.83 | 0.942809 | |
| | Grace | 20 | 17.5 | 18 | 20 | 20 | 95.5 | | | |
| | Jerry | 20 | 20 | 17.5 | 20 | 20 | 97.5 | | | |

From "Table IV", it can be seen that the mean of the post-test of control group is 85.83, the standard deviation is 4.403282, the mean results of the experimental group is

96.83, the standard deviation is 0.942809, $P = 0.025945315 < 0.05$. Therefore, there is a significant difference between the two groups.

TABLE V. THE PRETEST AND POST-TEST COMPARISON BETWEEN THE CONTROL GROUP AND EXPERIMENTAL GROUP

| Achievement | Category | Maximum | Minimum | Mean | SD | P |
|-------------|--------------------|---------|---------|-------|----------|-------------|
| Pretest | Control Group | 39 | 35 | 37.17 | 1.649916 | 0.929575711 |
| | Experimental Group | 42 | 36 | 36.67 | 1.885618 | |
| Post-test | Control Group | 92 | 82 | 85.83 | 4.403282 | 0.025945315 |
| | Experimental Group | 97.5 | 95.5 | 96.83 | 0.942809 | |

From "Table V", it can be seen that the mean of the control group in the pretest has no obvious difference, P is equal to 0.929575711 > 0.05, so there is no significant difference between the two groups. From the post-test results, the mean of the experimental group was 11 points higher than the control group, and the standard deviation was smaller than that of the control group, which indicated that the experimental group was close to the average value, and the difference between the students in the control group was larger, and P is equal to 0.025945315 less than 0.05, which indicating that there is a significant difference between the two groups.

IV. RESEARCH RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Research Major Findings

Firstly, learners are more active, involved and have a better input and output in the Phonics classroom instruction of "2+1+1". The phenomenon of confusion is much less in the class or can correct it easier than the learners in English-only class.

Secondly, learners can understand what they have learned in "2+1+1"

B. Personal Speculation on the Reasons for the Result

Learners didn't know how to tell or even lack of the awareness of distinguish the confusion of Chinese pronunciation-pinyin with the sound of letter and monograms. For instance,

"Aa" pronounces [æ], [ei], [ə:], etc. rather than "a" in Chinese; "Uu" stands for [ʌ], [ju], [u] or [o] rather than "ü" in Chinese. Read "Qq" as "qi"; couldn't tell "p" or "b", "d" or "t", "k" or "t" read big as pig while guide as "quite" and read Vicky as "Victy", etc. And additionally, they didn't know how to pronounce a-e, i-e, o-e, u-e. They didn't know what the meaning it is when teacher spoke "a space e". The pronunciation of [æ], [e], [o] and [ʌ] are still used to spell words, for example, cake, kite, note, cute etc..

C. Judgment on the Research Significance

Translanguaging is a bilingual teaching method and strategy in language education area, and it owns code transfer and translation etc. For low-grade elementary students, therefore, "2+1+1" is more suitable for them to cultivate their bilingual ability. Kumaravadivelu, B. (2003, p.195) [14] pointed out the aim of bilingual support is to help learners access the curriculum until they develop sufficient English to move on to monolingual education through the medium of English. On occasions, it is easier to use L1 terms instead of attempting a confusing and misleading translation into the closest English equivalent. As observed by

Canagarajah [15], by encouraging to answer questions in the L1, the teacher is able to ensure that the lesson relates well to the cultural background of the learners. Elsa Auerbach (1993, p.12)[16] cites evidence from both research and practice to show that the use of the L1 in early L2 classes is critical not only to later success but also to a smooth transition to the target language. What she points out about the American context is also true of other contexts, that is, the insistence of using English only in the classroom "rests on untested assumptions, originates in the political agenda of dominant groups, and serves to reinforce existing relations of power".

And additionally, it is quite necessary to root in situational context to realize better communication for low-grade elementary students. Teacher should combine 1/4 situational context and other language signs (objects, pictures, video, radio, games etc.) with target language, the linguistic and extra-linguistic contexts. In a nutshell, Malinowski (1923, p.296-336) [17] argued that language is embedded within a context of situation and that the situation in which utterances are made cannot be ignored. In other words, words and utterances can have different meanings and functions in different contexts. Therefore, a true analysis and understanding of language communication is possible only if one goes beyond the linguistic and extra-linguistic contexts in which it occurs and considers the contextual context as well. For example,

"Ostrich", is more difficult for low-grade elementary students. Speaking English-only in Phonics class, students can not understand it at all, and it is difficult to imitate its pronunciation. However, if "Ostrich" is introduced with pictures or videos, animated scenes and other language signs, students will naturally understand what "Ostrich" is. After listening to audio, imitate, and then teach their pronunciation, students will have a better grasp of "Ostrich" and its pronunciation. If more difficulty questions for learners — What's this? (这是什么?), then it is not difficult for learners to say "Ostrich". During this process, the application of translanguaging realizes the teaching purpose of Phonics and improves the bilingual level of learners. What's more, when confusion pronunciation problem happens, the confused content will be written on the whiteboard firstly to guide the learners to find out the difference. Secondly, correct the sound. Finally, the method of "2+1+1" is used to strengthen the learners' learning content.

D. Possible Direction for Future Research

As a flexible bilingual teaching method, translanguaging plays an initial part in it. However, with the deep development of economic globalization, cross-cultural communication among countries, cross-language communication among nationalities and ethnic groups are

becoming more and more widespread. Therefore, it is valuable to consider translanguaging in multilingualism.

V. CONCLUSION

A. Major Findings

Firstly, learners are more active, involved and have a better input and output in the Phonics classroom instruction of "2+1+1". The phenomenon of confusion is much less in the class or can correct it easier than the learners in English-only class.

Secondly, learners can understand what they have learned in "2+1+1".

B. Research Significance

Theoretical significant, applying translanguaging into Phonics classroom instruction aims to resolve the confusion of learners and their parents, then provide a bilingual teaching method to enrich the English teaching methods of primary school.

Practical significant, experimental study and qualitative analysis aim to build a theoretical English teaching practice in Phonics classroom instruction of English training school, and hope it is beneficial to other training schools.

Methodological significant, the research rooted in real Phonics classroom to realize actual education goals.

C. Limitations of the Research

First, time is not enough to evaluate the teaching effect in only four months.

Second, objects are not very large for only 6 children in control and experimental group. Future research needs more objects.

Last but not the least, Phonics not just includes the sound of letters and monograms, so the test paper is not enough concrete and detail.

D. Recommendation for Future Research

It is needed to make the best use of the advantages of Phonics under translanguaging; Combining learners' standard and our cultural background to teach students. Longer time and more objects should be met the future research; unified test paper of Kunming and questionnaire can be used to strengthen the effect and learners' evaluation. What's more, some background information may influence on learners' Phonics learning, such as career of parents, family atmosphere or condition, characteristics of learners etc.

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