

# Application of TBLT in Classroom Teaching of *Viewing, Listening, and Speaking* Taking *Book 3 Unit 4 What's the Big Idea* for Example

Hongmei Chen

School of Foreign Languages  
Huaiyin Institute of Technology  
Huai'an, China 223003

**Abstract**—Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) is an effective teaching method widely used in China's English teaching. But for those undergraduates who are poor in English, is this method still effective? This paper explores the application of TBLT in the classroom teaching of *Viewing, Listening and Speaking* for Chinese non-English-major students, with the aim of testing the effectiveness of TBLT in College English teaching, cultivating students' interest in learning English and encouraging them to participate actively in classroom activities and use English freely.

**Keywords**—TBLT; application; College English; classroom teaching

## I. INTRODUCTION

Task-based Language Teaching (or TBLT) is a teaching method proposed by the British Linguist Howatt in the 1980s. It has gained a lot of attention in teaching practice over a past decade (Willis, 1996). It is also an effective teaching method widely used in China's English teaching. It emphasizes the understanding of learning materials and the completion of a series of learning tasks and at last presents the results of tasks through mutual communication and cooperative activities among group members. Its purpose is to learn by using language to complete tasks. But for those undergraduates who are poor in English, is this method still effective? This article takes *Unit 4 What's the Big Idea in New Horizon English 3 (Viewing, Listening and Speaking)* for example and explores into the application of TBLT into the course of *Viewing, Listening and Speaking* and the teaching effect of using this method, with the aim of testing the effectiveness of TBLT in College English teaching and helping Chinese non-English-major students, especially those poor in English find out an appropriate way of learning English well and cultivate their interest in English.

### A. Task-based Language Teaching

Howatt (1984) believes that language learning should not only focus on the form of language, but also on the meaning and learning process of language. TBLT attaches great importance to the cultivation of students' learning abilities and learning strategies in the process of carrying out tasks, their participation and communication activities in the

process of completing individual tasks. Willis (1996) holds that a task is an activity where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose in order to achieve an outcome. And Ellis (2003) believes that the design of activity within task-based approach will not only promote students' acquisition but also engage students in a rich interaction hence the opportunity to learn is created. When designing tasks, teachers should adhere to some principles. First, teachers should obey the student-centred principle. Task designers should provide learners with more opportunities to use language in different situations and enable them to further understand the target language according to the feedback information of their own actions. Second, teachers should obey easy-to-difficult task principle. The design of tasks should be able to reflect the gradation from simple to complex and from easy to difficult, and easy for students to participate in. Third, teachers should obey collaborative principle. Under the guidance of the teachers, students are able to discuss questions and communicate with each other in a small group. Through collaborative learning, the whole learning group completes the meaning construction of the knowledge and use language freely.

### B. Current Situation of Students' Learning and Textbook Characteristics

The targeted students are non-English-major sophomores in a Chinese ordinary Institute of Technology, with the course of *Viewing, Listening and Speaking* as one of their follow-up courses. Most of these students are poor in English and haven't passed CET-4. Many of them lack interest in English and also confidence in themselves. Usually there are as many as 75 students in a class. With so many students in such a big class, how to carry out classroom activities and how to arouse students' interest and activate their creativity is a question worth pondering. The textbook being employed is *New Horizon College English (the 3rd Edition) Viewing, Listening and Speaking* edited by Zheng Shutang (2015). The 3rd Edition of this textbook embodies the teaching idea of "student-oriented classroom teaching with the teacher as a guide". Varieties of classroom activities are designed to stimulate students' interest in learning and cultivate the students' learning ability and learning strategies. It is aimed to guide students to think actively and innovate through

inquiry and cooperative activities, so as to achieve the transformation of the teaching activity from "teaching" to "learning".

## II. APPLICATION OF TBLT IN CLASSROOM TEACHING OF VIEWING, LISTENING AND SPEAKING

The course of *Viewing, Listening and Speaking* is a course of language practice integrating activities of viewing, listening and speaking. According to the principle of task-based teaching design, *Unit 4 What's the Big Idea in Book 3 is taken* as the teaching content and combined with classroom teaching practice to discuss how TBLT is applied in college English *viewing, listening and speaking*.

Before class, teachers need to set up clear teaching objectives, design a series of manageable tasks, organize students to participate in these activities one by one, give them guidance if necessary, and finally achieve the teaching goals by presenting their results of learning tasks and evaluating their learning effects by themselves.

Firstly, it is necessary to set up clear and manageable teaching goals. Since a task in TBLT is a goal-oriented activity that facilitates learners to communicate in the target language (Willis, 1996), for each lesson, the teacher should set up clear and manageable teaching goals for students to understand and achieve. As to the textbook, each unit is divided into five parts: Opening-up, Listening to the World, Viewing, Speaking and Further Practice for Listening. And the second part *Listening to the World* is the most important one of each unit, which includes Sharing and Listening (listening skills). The teaching objectives of this unit consists of five ones: first, talk about inventions and creative ideas; second, predict the theme and relevant vocabulary before you listen; third, propose ideas and comment on ideas while brainstorming; fourth, present your business idea; fifth, learn to use voice, body language and visual aids effectively in speech delivery. Due to the limited class time, Opening-up, sharing and listening skills will be discussed as the teaching contents and the first two objectives will be set up as the teaching objectives for the first period (90 minutes) and the rest three ones for next periods.

Secondly, it is necessary to design clear manageable tasks and break large ones into smaller ones. David Willis & Jane Willis (2007) hold that the task in TBLT is well designed to help students to practice the language and develop their communication skills without being overanxious about the possible grammar mistake they may make when conveying the message. If the teacher designs clear and manageable tasks, and be able to break those large tasks into smaller ones, it will be much easier for students to understand and carry them out. And students will feel a positive sense of accomplishment as they finish each small task. Based on the teaching objectives, classroom activities will be organized around the following teaching procedures: first, opening up (talk about inventions); second, listening to the world (listening skills); third, listening to the world (sharing); fourth, summary and assignments. Such design is easy for students to understand but difficult to carry out, because each procedure is a little obscure and too

generalized. So as a teacher, you need to break big tasks into smaller ones and guide students to complete each task one by one, and after that students will feel a sense of accomplishment and motivated to learn more.

Usually, the whole teaching task is to be completed through three phases: Pre-task Phase (before class), While-task Phase (in class) and Post-task Phase (after class) (Willis, 1996). Before teaching the new unit (Pre-task Phase), the teacher needs to assign Task 1 (questions) for students to discuss in small groups (4-6 students in each group) and provide pictures, key words and clues for their reference. During this phase, students are encouraged to use the Internet, newspapers, books and other resources to collection information related to the theme. When they come back in class, each group may share their information with each other and then choose one to report the discussion result to the whole class. Such design of tasks is to cultivate students' communication skills and collaborative learning ability. For example: Students are expected to discuss the following question (Task 1) in groups: Cars, fast food, mobile phones and cigarettes are voted among the most hated inventions of all time according to a survey. Are they good or bad inventions in your opinion and why? During the pre-task period, relevant pictures and the following clues will be given to students beforehand for their reference:

Cars: Advantages: /comfortable/ convenient /shorten the distance /save time /flexible...; Disadvantages: waste gas...pollute the air) /roads ... more crowded /more traffic jams /more traffic accidents

Fast food: Advantages: fast / convenient...; Disadvantages: little nutrition /be high in fat, sugar, salt, and calories /unhealthy /obesity 肥胖(症)

Mobile phones: Advantages: convenient/ useful/ helpful /connect the world /keep in touch with /surf the internet...Disadvantages: radiation /be harmful to /reduce intimacy (亲密; 亲近)

Cigarettes: Advantages: refresh oneself /relax oneself /shorten the psychological distance /promote friendship... Disadvantages: be harmful to health /nicotine /heart attacks /stroke /lung cancer

With these clues and key words given to them for help before class, students will find it much easier to organize their group discussion and feel more confident to communicate with each other in class (While-task Phase) and the teaching effect is therefore more satisfactory.

To combine listening skills with teaching activities, the teacher can design Task 2: Predict the theme and relevant vocabulary before you listen (listening skill) Before listening, ask students to predict the theme and relevant vocabulary according to the title (What's the big idea?) and the pictures on PPT (cars, mobile phones, fast food, cigarettes, four ancient inventions: compass, paper-making, printing and powder). Students are greatly motivated by the pictures on PPT and guess the possible theme (inventions/ creative ideas) and possible vocabulary (invent /invention /inventive; create /creative /creativity; innovate /innovation /innovative). Meanwhile, introduce the listening skill of this unit:

Predicting the theme and vocabulary before you listen. After discussing the two tips to follow in predicting the theme and vocabulary (*First, look at the title of the material or any other clues (photos, maps, charts, outlines, given words, etc.) and predict the theme which will be talked about in the speaking. Second, try to predict vocabulary that you think will appear in the speaking. Based on the theme you predicted just now, you can pick out in your mind vocabulary relating to the theme. After the listening, you can check whether the vocabulary you predicted appears or not.*), attention should be turned to fine listening (Sharing). Sharing is divided into four parts, and in fact four tasks. The first part can work as the listening material to practise using the listening skills discussed just now and check whether their prediction is right or wrong. Also it is used to summarize the main idea of the podcast. To make it easier for students to understand and summarize, three small tasks are designed:

- Task 3: Listen for questions and write down some key words while listening (some clues are given).
- Task 4: Listen again for questions and check what you've written down.
- Task 5: Summarize the general idea according to the questions you've heard.

These three tasks (Tasks 3-5) are designed from easy to difficult, and students are required to catch key words for the first time, sentences for the second time and summary for the last time, therefore they are clear, manageable and much easier for students to carry out step by step.

Thirdly, it is necessary to carry out tasks together with students and give guidance when necessary. The next three parts of Sharing serve as three tasks (Tasks 6-8, See P69-70) for students to watch and listen carefully and do some relevant exercises (i.e. matching questions, true or false questions, and filling in the blanks). During this period, the teacher should watch over the whole class and try to find out whether any student has any difficulty in listening and note-making. The teacher should make sure that students understand each part thoroughly and write down key words and expressions correctly. Meanwhile, some new words and expressions like innovative, on impulse, good value for money, fantasy, etc. should be emphasized and need to be learned by heart by students.

After that, students are asked to discuss one of the three questions (P70) in small groups, using the language learned just now and then choose one representative to report their discussion result (Task 9). At this point, students are encouraged to speak and use language freely and meanwhile increase their ability of communication and expressing themselves in English. To fully arouse student's interest in English, a more interesting question is designed (Task 10) like this: According to a survey, High-speed railway, Alipay, shared bicycle and online shopping are considered to be the "four new great inventions", which do you think is the best invention and why? For their effective discussion, the teacher provides pictures of the four new inventions and key words to each new invention for students' reference:

High-speed railway: fast /convenient /comfortable /short the distance /connect the country, even the world...

Alipay: a third-party payment platform /simple /fast /safe /convenient...

Shared Bicycle: cheap /convenient /be friendly to environment...

Online Shopping: convenient /cheap /comfortable /have sth. delivered to the door...

These four great inventions are popular among Chinese people, especially young people. Upon seeing these pictures on PPT, students become extremely excited. With the clues and key words given to them for reference, the group members start to discuss the question immediately. From their excited face, we can find each of them has something to say and therefore achieve the expected teaching effects.

Finally, it is necessary to provide more tasks for students' after-class discussion. To encourage more students to participate in group activities and motivate them to be more creative, a thought-provoking question is assigned to them for their group discussion after class (Post-task Phase), "If you could start a business or invent a product or service, what would it be?" This question serves as the after-class work and each group has to make a PPT with pictures and creative ideas on it and then report their inventions or creative ideas to the class when coming back for the next class. This has to be done during the third phase to consolidate the language they have learned in class and communicate more with their group members.

### III. CONCLUSION

According to the teaching practice and students' feedback, task-based language teaching (TBLT) is a highly effective teaching method. It embodies the modern teaching idea of dynamic integration of independent learning and cooperative learning with the student-centered belief. Under the guidance of the teacher, students can undertake the given tasks one by one. In such classroom setting, students are the masters of learning and the participants of classroom activities. Before class (Pre-task Phase) they collect information, discuss in groups and sometimes make PPT together to present their ideas, while in class they share their ideas with group members and then report their outcome to the whole class. They also watch videos, listen to speakers talking and do relevant exercises so as to improve their listening comprehension and master listening skills. With more questions to discuss and more tasks to carry out, communication activities move on after class (Post-task Phase) and finally students' interest is aroused and they desire to learn more and speak more. However, such teaching method requires teachers to be well prepared for each class and design more activities for all the students to participate in. Only in this way will those poor in English be motivated to participate in each activity and ultimately use English freely.

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