Exploring the Effects of Shadowing on Chinese College Students' English Listening and Speaking Skills

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Abstract. With the development of economic globalization and world integration, people are paying more and more attention to the learning of English. Listening, speaking, reading, and writing are all important aspects in English learning. Although Chinese college students are good at reading and writing, they have great problems in listening and speaking. Both listening and speaking play an important role in the learning of English and should not be ignored. However, there are many problems in listening and speaking classes in Chinese universities, which have a significant impact on students' learning of listening and speaking. Facing various difficulties when learning English, good learning methods and strategies are important. In recent years, the shadowing has been mentioned several times, but most teachers do not apply this method in their teaching, and there is a growing concern whether the shadowing can be applied to English teaching. This article is to investigate whether shadowing can be used to guide the listening and speaking learning of Chinese college students.

Keywords: shadowing · learning strategy · Chinese college students · listening and speaking skills

1 Introduction

To facilitate the exchange of resources and ideas among people in all regions of the world, it is necessary to use a common language. English as an international language is increasingly being learned and used by more and more people [1]. English is learned by many Chinese students, and they receive compulsory education from an early age in China, and English has been a compulsory subject that needs to be learned from the third grade in Chinese elementary school since 2003 [2]. Chinese students span from elementary school to university age, where university studies are different from other age groups because other age groups are mainly test-based and need to study many subjects and cannot allocate a lot of time to one subject of English. University starts to study professional English and has a lot of disposable time compared to middle and high school students. The main problems Chinese students have in learning English are: "mute English" and poor listening skills. This is because English teaching in schools takes learning grammar

as an introductory way, and emphasizes the centrality of grammar in teaching. And the past pedagogical system advocated teaching foreign languages in the mother tongue, emphasized the memorization of vocabulary and grammar rules, neglected the overall development of listening, reading, writing, and the cultivation of communicative competence, and paid too much attention to the structural form of language and neglects the content and meaning of language. With the reform of English teaching, more emphasis is placed on giving full play to students' initiative, student-centeredness, and cultivating students' ability to use language creatively and communicatively. Hedge believes that communicative competence includes the following five aspects: linguistic competence, pragmatic competence, discourse competence, communicative strategies, and fluency. Based on these two deficiencies, correct learning methods and strategies are needed to improve both listening and speaking at this stage of college.

At the university stage, the main teaching methods include grammar translation method, direct method, audio-lingual method, situational approach, cognitive approach, communicative approach, natural approach, total physical response, task-based language teaching, elicitation method of teaching, shadowing, and so on. Shadowing arose first with concept of shadowing, which first appeared in 1953 in cherry's speech recognition study [3]. Then, shadowing was mainly applied to simultaneous interpreting, and Lambert in his research mainly discussed the benefits of shadowing as a training tool for simultaneous interpreting, which could well improve the ability to listen and speak at the same time. Later, shadowing was widely used in second language acquisition, where the learner repeats what he or she hears and is required to copy what he or she hears without a written script, a method that involves the ability to listen and speak English. The advantages of shadowing are as follows. 1) It promotes the acquisition of English intonation. Because English learners lack opportunities to practice English intonation in their daily lives and underestimate the importance of intonation training. The university of Taiwan conducted a study to determine whether shadowing could facilitate the acquisition of English intonation. The results showed that shadowing facilitated learners' adjustment to phonological intonation. 2) It promotes spoken fluency. In an experiment in which shadowing was used as a tool to improve oral fluency, the results of the study showed that shadowing had a positive effect on English learners' oral fluency, indicating that shadowing is applicable to general English classrooms that focus on oral fluency development [4].

In recent years, people have started to pay attention to whether shadowing can be applied to English teaching, some people think it can be applied to English teaching, while others think it cannot, and many questions have been raised about this method. Some believe that the shadow-following method is constant repetition and will not do much; others believe that this method is similar to the listening method in ELT [5]. The Audio-lingual method is an English teaching method based on structuralist linguistics and behaviorist stimulus-response theory, which emphasizes the firstness of speaking and the cultivation of oral ability. The main focus is on sentence patterns, repeated drills, learning by imitation, repetition, and memory, forming habits, and achieving automatic use through extensive practice, which is similar to shadowing. Most teachers rarely use the shadow-following method in actual teaching, and use dictation and constant practice questions to practice English listening skills; only a small number of students often

use this method for self-experimentation in their independent study after school, which also has a significant impact on their English speaking and listening skills. Based on the uncertainty of whether shadowing can be well applied to teaching, this article is to discuss whether shadowing can be used to guide Chinese university students' speaking and listening learning.

2   The Role of Shadowing for English Speaking

Ur believes that speaking, as one output of language, is intuitively the most important of all the listening, speaking, reading, and writing in English. Some studies have found that learners put more attention and effort into learning to speak because the primary motivation for people to learn a second foreign language is to communicate with native speakers, followed by reasons such as entertainment. Learning a foreign language for communication, facilitating effective communication between people, and meeting different communication needs and goals can motivate learners to learn a foreign language. But speaking is also the most challenging of all the listening, reading, writing, and speaking skills in English, and can be a daunting task for many learners. Truly mastering speaking skills requires paying more attention to details, such as proper pronunciation, correct intonation, colloquial expressions, and language used in formal situations, all of which are obstacles that learners need to face and overcome. These details will have a decisive role in whether the learner can speak authentic English or not.

2.1   Difficulties Confronted by Chinese College Student in English Speaking

The biggest problem Chinese college students have in speaking is mute English, which C.M. Wang defines as many English learners in China have the following experiences: they started learning English in elementary school, have accumulated more than ten years of the learning experience, have studied English texts, memorized words, learned grammar knowledge, and even passed the college English Test Band 4 and Band 6 and got good scores, and have invested a lot of time on it. But they still can't speak English, and even if they do, it's not authentic English. People call this phenomenon "mute English". There are many reasons for this phenomenon. 1) Chinese college students lack a full English context. There is not an all-English context in their daily lives, and there is no place where they need to use English to communicate except in the English classroom. For the average Chinese child, learning English can easily turn into "mute English". This is because the Chinese way of education is extremely focused on written English and severely neglects oral expression. They do not pay much attention to the output of oral expression but only make students learn grammar, expressions, writing skills, and other test-taking skills to be able to cope with the test. Therefore, most students are unable to express their thoughts in English and cannot communicate properly. 2) English education in China has long neglected the communicative ability of speaking. The grammar-translation method often used in the previous foreign language teaching method is the most representative. The teaching content is based on systematic grammatical knowledge, focusing on the analysis of grammatical forms and the mastery of grammatical rules, and neglecting the cultivation of students' listening

and speaking skills. The teaching method is to test the mastery of grammar rules with a lot of written translations and writing exercises. The teaching method used is teaching in the native language, both grammatical knowledge and text content are explained in the native language, which is not conducive to the active use of the foreign language. The teacher-centered approach to presenting and explaining grammar rules and concepts in the language, followed by translation, ignores the students' subjective initiative and neglects the role of context. 3) Chinese workers in English education often neglect the importance of pronunciation, even their own pronunciation is wrong and inaccurate. They are too interested in learning grammatical structures and vocabulary, ignoring pronunciation as a key factor in oral learning. Pronunciation should be seen as a major component as well as grammar and vocabulary. In addition to mute English, Chinese college students still have many problems in speaking. For example, psychological barriers can make them feel unconfident about their phonetic intonation, leading to the problem of being afraid to speak and reluctant to speak English in public. Or they do not have English thinking and need to translate and convert to Chinese first when speaking English.

2.2 Shadowing is a Method to Improve English Speaking

Facing these problems in speaking, most students use methods that suit their situation to improve their speaking skills, such as watching British and American dramas, imitating the lines of the characters in the dramas, or using their free time to retell their day's experiences in English, or using the shadow-reading method. The use of shadow following can be a good solution to the problem of mute English and incoherent intonation, so that students are willing to speak and dare to speak. The reasons are as follows. 1) The shadow reading method can be used to train English listening and speaking skills by selecting appropriate English learning materials according to English learners at different levels and repeating what the speaker says by imitating the voice and intonation of a native English speaker, which helps develop a sense of English language, adapts to the rhythm of the language, and helps with oral output. 2) It is a bottom-up learning technique by listening to words, phrases, and subordinate clauses in a continuous cascade so as to understand the meaning of the whole sentence heard. 3) One of the goals of learning a language is to be able to communicate with native speakers in that language. However, the dilemma that Chinese university students face is that they are not surrounded by native English speakers, but that does not mean that there is no solution. Shadowing is a great way for learners to create their own language environment.

3   The Role of Shadowing for English Learning

The importance of listening as the input side of language in English learning cannot be ignored either. According to D. Renukadevi, "listening is not only the main way of communication, but it also helps the learner to understand the beauty of the language". It is only through listening that one can go well adapted to the pronunciation, rhythm, intonation, and accent of the language. Listening also plays a prominent role in communication. Listening is the basis of communicative competence and is a very significant

part of communication. Listening provides the auditory input for learners to interact in oral communication. Without proper comprehension of the input, communication cannot be achieved. Listening can also facilitate learners' learning of spoken language because if learners' confidence in listening comprehension increases, it can promote their motivation to learn spoken language.

3.1 Difficulties Confronted by Chinese College Student in English Learning

Listening skills are an integral part of language learning and a difficult part for many Chinese learners, who find listening skills difficult skill to master. And the ability to understand what they are listening to is difficult in listening skills. Some researchers have summarized the following points about Chinese students' problems in listening, 1) Chinese students' lack of vocabulary and basic grammar knowledge. Because the proficiency of grammar knowledge and adequate vocabulary largely affect the acquisition of English listening skills. Encountering raw words during listening or not understanding grammatical structures can hinder the comprehension of listening materials. 2) Many learners' own pronunciation is inaccurate and far from the standard sound. Or they ignore pronunciation details such as alliteration, weak pronunciation, assimilation of sounds, and loss of blast sounds in their daily study, which leads to failure to hear these sounds when they appear in listening materials, and thus lead to the failure to understand the materials. Or even the ignorance and unfamiliarity with different accents and pronunciations, and only a specific kind of pronunciation input in learning, such as standard British, standard American. 3) The listener's concentration can also have a great impact on listening skills. If a student's concentration is not focused or is disturbed, it can cause a pause in concentration and thus disrupt the comprehension of the listening content. 4) Cultural differences have a great impact on the comprehension of listening material. If learners do not have knowledge of the cultural background of the language they are learning, it will affect their comprehension of the context. For example, the content of listening material is about the history of Europe, without the teacher's supplementary relevant background knowledge, students will be distracted by a large number of new words so that they cannot grasp the gist. 5) The influence of the external environment is not to be ignored. For example, whether the learning environment is quiet, the temperature in the classroom, or the size of the classroom may have a certain impact on students' listening comprehension.

3.2 Problems in Teaching English Listening in Chinese College

Although the English teaching in Chinese universities has gradually focused on the improvement of listening skills in recent years, as shown in some English professional exams, such as College English Test Band 4 and Band 6, Test for English Major Band 4 and Band 8 and IELTS, which have enhanced the difficulty of listening, there are still many problems in the teaching of listening in university English classes. According to the study, Krashen's Input Hypothesis has a guiding role in teaching English listening in college and has wide applicability in teaching, which can greatly increase the effectiveness of English listening teaching [6].

According to the characteristics of Krashen's Input Hypothesis, it emphasizes four principles: comprehension, interest and relevance, sufficiently comprehensive input, and sufficient quantity. 1) The listening materials are not up-to-date and still use old and outdated materials. The content is old and single, boring and does not arouse students' interest in learning; it is detached from current social issues and hot topics and does not integrate with the actual situation. It violates the hypothetical principle of interest and relevance. 2) The teacher's teaching methods are rigid. In the classroom, the traditional teaching methods are still used, which mechanically play the recording over and over again according to the textbook and let students listen to it over and over again to select the correct option. For the sake of test-taking requirements, students are only required to be able to select the correct answer and are not required to fully understand the entire reading material. The principle of comprehension of the hypothesis is violated. 3) The amount of listening practice is not enough and there is not enough input. The time available in class is limited and the amount of listening material that the teacher can lead the students to practice is also limited. Listening practice outside of class needs to test the students' self-awareness.

3.3   Shadowing is a Method to Improve English Listening

The method of shadowing effectively targets these problems and contributes to the improvement of college students' English listening. It is mainly reflected in the following aspects. 1) When using shadowing, Hamada states that learners need to first perceive the incoming sound and then copy the heard sound. In the process of following, learners' phoneme perception improves and continuous shadowing training keeps improving. 2) When using shadowing, the process of continuous repetition of listening material is considered to be effective in improving listening skills [7]. Repetition maintains the learner's ability to perceive phonemes so that this ability is retained. However, repetition needs to be based on the perceptual process.

4   Conclusion

In conclusion, listening and speaking are very important in English learning, but there are many problems in teaching English listening and speaking in China. It is also a difficult task for Chinese college students to learn listening and speaking.

In terms of speaking, the lack of a full English context for Chinese students, the long-term neglect of the communicative role of speaking in Chinese English education, and the excessive focus on grammatical structures and vocabulary by Chinese English educators have led to the problem of mute English for Chinese students. In terms of listening, because of Chinese students' lack of vocabulary, lack of basic grammar knowledge, neglect of pronunciation details such as consecutive reading, weak reading, assimilation of sounds, loss of blast sounds, etc. in daily learning, lack of understanding and unfamiliarity with different accents and pronunciations, cultural differences and the influence of the external environment, all have an impact on the comprehension of English listening, leading to the problem of unintelligible listening.

Shadowing can be used to improve the listening and speaking skills of Chinese college students, and can be used to instruct college students in listening and speaking. Shadowing can effectively improve and enhance learners' speaking skills. By imitating the intonation of native speakers, learners can improve intonation, develop a sense of English, and improve speaking fluency and the communicative function of spoken language. Shadowing has a positive impact on learners' listening skills. When using shadowing, learners need to first perceive the incoming sound and then copy the heard sound. In the process of following, learners' phoneme perception improves, and continuous shadowing training keeps improving. And repetition maintains the learner's phoneme perception ability, so that this ability is retained. The process of continuous repetition of listening material is considered to be effective in improving listening ability.

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