

The Application of Communicative Language Teaching to Listening and Speaking Teaching in Junior High School

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Abstract

With the deepening of globalization, English listening and speaking competence gains more attention of the whole society. And the New English Curriculum Standards put more emphasis on the cultivation of students' listening and speaking skills and place greater demands on students. The period of junior high school is extremely crucial for most students to develop the ability of cross-cultural communication. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), a language teaching approach, concerns about the promotion of learners' ability to achieve effective communication using the target language in real social contexts. Therefore, the application of CLT to English listening and speaking teaching is conducive to improving students' communicative competence. This paper aims to briefly introduce the theoretical basis of CLT, and then provide a practical case based on it in a bid to illustrate the application of CLT to listening and speaking teaching in junior high school.

Keywords

Communicative Language Teaching; English listening and speaking teaching; junior high school.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research background

English learning involves four basic language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Among them, listening and speaking are related with each other. Listening is the process of input, that is to say students' understanding of knowledge. And speaking involves the transmission and expression of information, which is the process of output. However, in the traditional exam-oriented education, grades always play the most important role in teaching and learning. So teachers often lay more stress on the teaching of reading and writing, which is indeed conducive to improving students' English grades. The neglect of cultivation and improvement of students' listening and speaking ability in junior high school plants the seed of dumb English.

According to English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (2022 edition), from the perspective of instrumentality, students can be able to master basic language knowledge through teaching activities, develop basic listening, speaking, reading, writing and viewing skills, and initially be equipped with the ability of communication in English. This means that junior middle school English teachers should not only focus on students' reading and writing skills, but also pay more attention to students' ability of listening and speaking.

In the 1970s, studies on the language syllabus proved that language learning in isolation from the social environment was undesirable (Huang Taiquan, 2001). The interactionist view of language acquisition held that language learning should start from the communicative purpose and learn and use language in a real communication environment. Thus, the communicative language approach came into being. In the early 1980s, Li Guanyi (1982) and others practiced communicative language teaching, and achieved more successful experiences and fruitful

research results in the theory and practice of it, which can be seen that CLT has been proved to be an effective teaching method in the field of second language teaching.

1.2. Purpose and significance of the study

Most of the research has focused on theoretical research and higher education research since the introduction of CLT into our country. According to Second Language Acquisition Theory, adolescence is the critical period of language acquisition. However, listening and speaking teaching and learning has been not valued for a long time with the influence of traditional education, thus students have not been given enough opportunities to practice the language in the classroom. Over time, a vicious spiral has been created in which the less students can speak, the less they dare to speak. The Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards (2022 edition) pointed out that the key competence of English courses to cultivate students includes language ability, cultural awareness, thinking quality and learning ability (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2022). Among them, the core of language ability is communicative competence. Therefore, it is very important and meaningful to find a suitable teaching method for junior middle school English listening and speaking teaching.

This paper aims to study the practice of CLT in English listening and speaking teaching, explore concrete and operable teaching strategies based on communicative teaching method, improve the quality of listening and speaking teaching, cultivate students' interest in English learning, and implement the requirements for the cultivation of students' communicative competence referred in Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards (2022 version).

2. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

2.1. Definition of CLT

Generally, American and British scholars regarded CLT as an approach rather than a specific method (Shen Yangyang, 2022). This study is mainly based on it which is regarded as a method. Although the researches on the connotation and characteristics of it are abundant, different schools and scholars have different definitions.

It was originally proposed by Hymes (1972) and Halliday (1973), who emphasized that the function of language was communication and thought that its main goal was to improve communication ability. Howatt (1984) believed that CLT generally had two versions: weak version and strong version. The weak version stressed the importance of providing learners with opportunities to use their English for communicative purposes, namely learning to use. The strong version claimed that language is acquired through communication (Howatt, 1984). This means that learners discover the structural system in the process of learning how to communicate (Wang Qiang, 2006). Richards and Rodgers (1986) put forward three principles of CLT, namely, the principle of communication, task and meaningfulness. Brown (1994) summarized the definition of it as follows: 1. The classroom activities should focus on communicative competence; 2. When involving language skills, it is necessary to set meaningful purposes for learners to conduct language training; 3. Communication skills should based on correctness and fluency; 4. Students can accept and apply the language for output.

2.2. Theoretical basis

2.2.1. The theory of language competence

In the 1950s, Chomsky proposed "language competence". He claimed that language competence is the knowledge of the language system in which native language learners have a set of grammatical rules for making words and sentences that enable them to communicate (Chomsky, 1965). That is to say, learners have the basic knowledge before learning the language which is called language competence and is also the basis of applying CLT in teaching.

For Chinese students, they lack in second language (English) learning environment, it is necessary to analyze learning situation in the actual teaching and involve the teaching of language knowledge when applying CLT so that students can be equipped with certain basic language ability.

2.2.2. The theory of communicative competence

Hymes proposed the communicative competence theory on the basis of Chomsky's linguistic competence theory. According to Hymes, communicative competence involves four aspects, namely able to identify and organize grammatical sentences; able to use different languages in different contexts; able to judge the acceptability of language forms; able to recognize whether the form of language is habitual or personal.

The application of CLT in listening and speaking teaching can not only help students consolidate their language knowledge and ability, but also enable them to master how to correctly use the language in different contexts, which is also the ultimate goal of English listening and speaking teaching.

2.2.3. The theory of functional linguistics

Halliday's theory of functional linguistics emphasizes the consistency of language and language use. He regarded language as a behavioral system, which can also be called "behavioral potential". People use different languages to maintain social interaction and use specific language behaviors in different contexts. That means the essence of language learning is to learn how to express meaning, and the lexical and grammatical system of language cannot be isolated from the meaning system of language.

According to this theory, teachers should consider the social environment and situation of language use, connect the structures of language with their meaning, and then teach students the language system that they can choose and use in practical communication and cultivate their ability to choose proper language forms.

3. Listening and speaking teaching procedures based on CLT

3.1. Choose the appropriate input material

Penny Ur (2000) suggested that teachers can convey information with their own words and ways, but they need to match students' cognitive level and provide a natural language model that can be understood." So when teachers choose listening materials, they should keep the principle that the goal of a class determines the type of material and the material should also be real. At the same time, the difficulty level of the material should be slightly higher than the students' English level, so that students can understand its meaning through the context which can help students output the language in the appropriate context.

3.2. Lead in based on interesting ways

A starter is a series of activities that do not take long but can develop early levels of engagement and motivation and can make use of students prior knowledge to introduce new topics. For example, teachers display some photos, pictures, models and other objects to help students understand the topics related to the listening materials, establish certain background knowledge, and determine the listening goals. Teachers should also guide students to talk about what they have known, and give them encouragement whether they express something good or bad.

3.3. Input by intensive listening

At the stage of input, students complete related tasks while listening to the material, which can help students improve their listening ability. Teachers should give easy tasks for the first time, and students will get the main idea, and the second and third times the difficulty will gradually

increase, which is more effective than giving them difficult tasks at the beginning and playing the recording over and over again. By this way, students will listen to the sentences they do not understand before and have a more comprehensive understanding of what they are listening to in a bid to complete the detailed exercises, and eventually complete most of the tasks.

3.4. Output and interact

At this stage, teachers can guide students practice speaking by designing oral activities. These activities may include: asking students to summarize what they have just listened to; ask students to outline the main plot they listen with the key words on the board and the teacher's prompts. Different students with different English levels should have different standards. If it is difficult for students to learn English, the teacher can ask students to tell only one point of information, and then give praise according to the content of students, and encourage students to express their own attitude according to the listening content. The forms of activity can be various, such as organizing students to carry out dialogues, group activities, role play, situational play and so on.

4. A practical case of listening and speaking teaching based on CLT

The following is an example of "Where Did You Go on Vacation" in unit 1 of grade eight (The People's Education Press). This unit is divided into two parts: section A and section B. The listening materials in Section A include 1b, 2a and 2b. Part 1b is simpler and has been omitted. The main task of section 2a and 2b is to complete the exercises of filling in the blanks and forms. The listening materials of section B include 1c and 1d parts, aiming to adapt this material to complete the exercise of missing words.

4.1. Leading-in with multimedia

Teachers can show some places they have been to during the holiday through Power Point to attract students' attention and arouse their interest in learning.

For example, if teachers visit many places of interest in Beijing, and broadcast PPT with multimedia, they can show some pictures about some places, such as Tiananmen Square, The Great Wall, and HuTong. This can help the students have a more intuitive feeling about the theme of going on vacation, and at the same time, they can also review the tenses learned before. After that, teachers can ask some new questions about the theme, such as T: You have known about my vacation, and then you can think about: Where did you go on vacation? Did you go out with anyone? Did you buy anything special? Did everyone have a good time? If you didn't go out, what did you do everyday?...

4.2. Guessing game

Students can fully participate in the class activities and learn in a relaxed atmosphere by playing games, and at the same time, the atmosphere will be increasingly active and students can be encouraged.

During listening, students need to concentrate on the tape and quickly write down the key points. Teachers will tell the students before listening to section 2a: You'll hear three conversations. In all three, they're talking about where did they go on vacation, and give different answers. And then complete the fill-in-the-blank exercise below.

Part 1c is more difficult than other parts, so teachers will provide the listening material with some missing words in order to let students fill in them while listening. The blanks should be moderate in difficulty, and involve the focus of the class, such as vacation, fun, exciting, expensive, good time and other words, which can help students understand, build confidence and believe themselves. After the students finish, teachers will show the answers on the power

point and then play the tape again, and the students follow it to read in order to help students practice correct pronunciation and intonation and prepare for the later communication.

4.3. Dialogue and role play

In the activity of dialogue, teachers should encourage students so that they have the confidence and the opportunity to speak English in certain contexts. Students work in pairs and have a conversation. Teachers will provide some contexts by providing examples, such as Where did you go on vacation? I went to the mountains. After that, some students will show their dialogues. Then teachers will ask students to interview group members. Each group has seven students, namely one interviewer and six strangers. In the process of interviewing, every student has a sense of role and participate in it. Meanwhile teachers will provide some prompts: a. Conduct interviews with the example of part 2a b. Every student should have a sense of role and responsibility, as well as full enthusiasm for communication and discussion. After the exercise, two groups of students will show for the whole class. After the performance, teachers will sum up students' performance, and encourage them to improve listening and speaking skills through daily communication and discussion in English. Finally, the teacher will summarize the main points of this class and give listening and speaking homework.

5. Conclusion

In a sense, the purpose of English teaching can be said to develop students' cross-cultural communication ability. And the main idea of communication competence is highly consistent with the fundamental purpose of foreign language teaching. Therefore, it is of great significance to carry out Communicative Language Teaching in English listening and speaking teaching to cultivate students' the ability of language use, improve their comprehensive English level and enhance their cross-cultural communication ability.

The introduction of CLT has exerted a profound influence on foreign language teaching in China. Although it is faced with many difficulties, it does not be abandoned, and teachers constantly explore ways to overcome these difficulties. The application of it to the teaching of English listening and speaking should consider many factors, such as students' learning interest and actual learning needs, different geographical conditions, and teachers' level and language proficiency. Any advanced teaching method should be based on practice, and teachers should keep in mind that there is no the best method, which can help them apply it to teaching more reasonable .

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