

A Brief Discussion on the Application of Situational Language Teaching under the Three Noval Backgrounds

Rong Zhi

China West Normal University, Nanchong, Sichuan, China

Abstract

Great changes have taken place in foreign language teaching methodology over these years due to the changes of language teaching's goals and concepts or the development of technologies. As we know, our ultimate teaching goal is to help students become a whole person. Despite the popularity and dominance of communicative language teaching and task-based language teaching in these days, situational language teaching is still implemented by teachers for various education levels to achieve teaching objectives. Even though these days considerable scholars hold a sharp criticism on this teaching method, situational language teaching still has its potential educational value to facilitate language teaching. Faced with three new challenges: new curriculum, new textbooks and new college entrance examination, teachers should explore how to utilize this method to adapt to the requirement of modern language teaching. This paper follows six parts to briefly demonstrate the present author's comprehension about situational language teaching. The first part is a brief introduction including the background, definition and distinctive features of situational language teaching. The second part is some classic literature review from home and abroad. Next part, opinions on this method will be given and followed by demonstrating the application of this method. The last part is about some pedagogical implications.

Keywords

Situational Language Teaching; English Teaching; Views and Application; Pedagogical Implications.

1. Introduction

Under the background of new teaching textbooks, new college entrance examination reform and new curriculum standards, the traditional English teaching method has gradually been replaced by new teaching methods in English class. However, the traditionally teacher-centered, grammar-translation method still dominates class. Situational language teaching method as a traditional English teaching method is perceived as unfashionable. As a matter of fact, it's also an effective way to facilitate teaching, particularly vocabulary and grammar learning with appropriate ways through the design of authentic and concrete situation. At present, language researchers and teachers in the world attach great importance to the teaching situation. The core idea of situational teaching is the impetus of learning. The present paper aims to research the situational language teaching method and try to tap its educational value to foster English learners.

1.1. Background of Situational Language Teaching

Situational Language Teaching was an approach that developed by British applied linguists in the 1930s to the 1960s, which was derived from the Direct Method. British Harold Palmer and A.S. Hornby developed the foundation for more scientific approach when the Direct Method unfavored by scholars. As the first language teaching method, it has exerted profound impact on learners in Britain at that time. The theoretical basis of situational language teaching consists

of two facets. One is the theory of language that is British structuralism, and the other is the theory of learning that is behaviorist habit- learning theory.

1.2. Definition of Situational Language Teaching

Situational Language Teaching refers to the teaching method that teachers purposefully introduce or create vivid and specific scenes with a certain emotions and images in the process of teaching, in order to help students understand the textbooks and enable students' psychological function to develop. The core of the situational teaching method is to stimulate students' emotions. Li Jilin deems that situational teaching method is a teaching model that makes full use of images, creates typical scenes, stimulates students' emotions and combine cognitive and emotional activities.

By situation Pittman means the use of concrete objects, pictures, and realia, which together with actions and gestures can be used to demonstrate the meaning of new language items. Li Jilin sees the situation as a sentiment environment created through teaching and education process, and it's a kind of artificially optimized typical environment suitable for children's needs. In my opinion, situation means some visual aids or something closely related to students' experience are used to activate learners' interest and motivation.

1.3. Main Features of Situational Language Teaching

Different from other teaching methods, situational teaching method has its distinctive and major characteristics. Firstly, language teaching begins with the spoken language and the target language is the medium to convey contents. Besides, new language items are taught situationally and service vocabulary is covered. Meanwhile, grammatical items are graded and taught from simple to complex ones. Lastly, reading and writing are introduced on the basis of sufficient vocabulary and grammar.

2. Literature Review

In the two decades after 2000, situational pedagogy has aroused extensive research in China, which is significantly more than foreign researches. The volume of related literature has reached to its peak, especially from 2015 to 2020.

The abroad literatures about SLT are quite abundant. Scholars have researched it from theoretical perspectives, like affection and culture. Lazarus proposes affection and recognition are closely connected. Isen believed that positive emotion is conducive to creativity, innovative feedback and flexible recognition. Meirovich deemed that sound emotional classroom atmospheres fosters learners' performance. Claudia Patricia Franco conducted a comparative study on word memory under situational and non-situational conditions. Obdalova emphasized the importance of authentic situation input for Russian non-verbal professional English learners [1]. There is also application research. Nation comprehensively thought about vocabulary teaching and defined the main trend of vocabulary teaching, that is exposing learners to meaning-centered activities.

Li Jilin is the first one in 1998 to explore SLT and takes an initiative to clarify its theory. Kong analyzes the reasons of plateau phenomenon in SLT and proposes relevant research trends measures [2]. Liu and Zhou present concrete application of SLT in English classroom from the aspects of situation construction, classroom role transformation, cooperative learning [3]. Li and Liang explore the method in terms of content construction, situation setting and task development to cultivate the key competence of secondary vocational students from a whole unit perspective [4]. Most articles are written from the application of SLT to diverse skills, offering practical measures.

3. Views on Situational Language Teaching

Although plenty of researchers have done relevant research about this method and clarify their opinions. There is no doubt that every coin has two sides. Therefore, I will illustrate my opinions concerning Situational Language Teaching in detail.

3.1. Merits of Situational Language Teaching

On the one hand, while some people today hold sharp criticism about Situational Language Teaching for its unsuitability, as far as I am concerned, it can be still a supplementary tool for language teaching and is helpful for improving the teaching quality and efficiency with innovative design.

First and foremost, the method attaches great importance to the function of situation which can help students to apply what they have learned to real-life practice. Throughout the history, lots of classic and educative examples concerning situations are widely known. The earliest story: "Mencius mother moving three times", "Socrates' Midwifery" are fully demonstrating the importance of situations. Socio-constructivist theory represented by Vygotsky emphasizes interaction and engagement with the target language in a social context or situations. Dewey holds setting difficult situations can trigger students' curiosity and emotion so as to arouse the motivation of exploration. Kebocco put forward The Project Method, which aimed to imagine and create situational problems for learners to solve problems on their own. The latest elementary education curriculum and senior high school English curriculum stresses creating authentic context, setting, situations to convey core notional knowledge, develop learners' exploratory ability and cultivate their key competence. From all those aforementioned examples, they all lay emphasis on situations. Therefore, teachers should design or create real and authentic situations to improve students' interest and promote their practical ability.

Besides, Situational Language Teaching can help learners improve thinking quality and facilitate students' cooperation. Learners learn the language by completing tasks, solving problems through teamwork or role-play in the simulation of actual scenarios closer to real life, which can cultivate learners' cooperative spirit and strengthen their practical ability. It goes without saying that the class is learner-centered in situational language teaching, learner explore the essence of problem through continuous thinking and discussion. By means of such learning, they can eventually improve thinking ability. Concrete objects, pictures, and realia, which together with actions and gestures can be used to demonstrate the meanings of new language items. Vivid images and actions can entertain the classroom atmosphere and trigger more active participation, which will initiate response and ask each other questions.

Furthermore, the teaching content is graded, and the students will not suffer from the difficulties of a flow of ungraded speech in target language. Teaching contents are arranged based on students' acceptable aptitude and the zone of proximal development. If a teacher present the difficult points focusing on a same period, it's not easy enough for students to understand and internalize the contents. For instance, when teaching vocabulary or grammar, teachers present the language points starting from easy points to difficult ones so that learners will not endure the language anxiety. The former taught contents will lay a foundation for latter ones. Therefore, when teachers design or prepare the teaching contents, they should make sure those contents are accessible and understandable for learners. Too easy or difficult presentation or lecture is not beneficial to promote learners' language motivation, confidence and development. In a word, those contents should not only help learners master language knowledge, but also develop their transfer ability that they can utilize what they have learned before to random situations in future life.

Last but not least, situational language teaching is conducive to developing learners' language accuracy and cultivating autonomous learners, which is still useful for grammar and vocabulary

teaching. New sentence patterns or vocabulary presented in situations instead of being shown fractionally, this will aid learners master language systematically. More systematic in terms of the principles and procedures that could be applied and the selection of the content of a language course. Generally speaking, learners practice the language from controlled to freer practice of structures and from oral use of sentence patterns to their automatic use in speech, reading and writing. Errors or incorrect habits are avoided at all cost, which to a large extent can guarantee the accuracy of language. Learners at first know and learn different kind of practicing techniques, like repetition, substitution activities and then they try to apply these techniques in latter learning gradually until eventually they can apply skills flexibly and freely.

3.2. Shortcomings of Situational Language Teaching

Situational language teaching has some merits in facilitating students' language knowledge, especially it can ensure the accuracy of grammar and vocabulary learning. Meanwhile, the teaching method is able to cultivate students' key competence in particular the thinking quality and learning ability. Most importantly, the situations are emphasized in this teaching method, which can trigger learners' interest, motivation and participation and activate the classroom atmosphere. However, this method has also its shortcomings. As language teachers, we should fully recognize its deficiency and make full use of benefits to supplement the teaching. In my opinion, situational language teaching has the following drawbacks, we should pay attention to them when we apply this method.

To begin with, the teaching method is time-consuming and demanding for teachers and equipment. It takes a great amount of time to design the situations and prepare the visual teaching aids. As we all know, finding a proper situation or supplementary aids suited the contents is not easy, teachers may feel it strenuous. Therefore, when use this method, teachers should consider the necessity and feasibility of situations and teaching aids. Bloom (1989) proposed that successful language classroom teaching should create more real-life scenarios, so that students have the opportunity to apply what they have learned. In fact, teachers may spend considerable efforts choosing appropriate and facilitative teaching aids to foster the teaching. In spite of this, it's still imperative to design relevant authentic situations and vivid teaching facilities.

Besides, situational language teaching tends to apply deductive method to present grammar or vocabulary, which will lead to confusion on the part of learner and misunderstanding. As far as I am concerned, this mainly arises from situations. Learners will experience difficulties and anxieties if the designed situation is beyond their schema or prior experience. The most part of learning is learner deduction, students gradually comprehend and internalize the language points under the guidance and the assistance of teachers. When teachers demonstrate the aids or situations in an inappropriate way, students will feel confused and anxious. From long run, this is not helpful for future learning, because the already learnt is the basis of new contents in situational language teaching.

At last, situational language teaching method centers on accuracy, which is perceived as crucial in both pronunciation and grammar. Errors are not tolerated and communicative ability is not mentioned. Different from other teaching methods, situational language teaching thinks highly of the accuracy. Once learners make some mistakes, teachers will correct them at once to ensure the language accuracy. From my point view, in pronunciation and oral practice, over emphasize the accuracy can discourage the confidence, self-efficacy. Although the accuracy and fluency are equally significant for learners, we should keep a balance between the two relationships. For example, when we want to develop learners' language accuracy, teachers can utilize the formative assessment and performance assessment to evaluate the students' performance to supplement the feedback. That's to say, expression, courage, confidence, and the comprehensiveness and property of contents can be all used to assess the learners performance

instead of caring about the accuracy itself. Most importantly, the method focuses on speech, less to other abilities. Automatic control of basic structure and sentence patterns through speech work. Strong teacher control in this teaching method before students really understand something.

4. The Application of Situational Language Teaching in English

Any teaching method can be changed flexibly according to the teaching objectives, teaching contents, students' proficiency. It goes without saying that this method isn't frequently used under the background of new English curriculum. From my point of view, this method can exert profound impact on teaching if designed with innovation and creation. Admittedly, situational language teaching is more suitable for teaching students at lower levels, such as primary or middle school students. With regard to the contents, I deem the method is applicable to phonetics, vocabulary and grammar teaching. It doesn't mean that situational language teaching can't be utilized in any other type class. As a matter of fact, this teaching method is greatly beneficial to strengthen the accuracy of pronunciation and vocabulary, which facilitate the language output and develop the authentic accent. Because the earliest gained pronunciation, vocabulary and sentence patterns is the foundation of latter learning. Therefore, language teachers teaching lower levers should make full use of its merits to help students develop language accuracy in particular accent and vocabulary.

5. Pedagogical Implications

Situational language teaching still has its educative value in today even though some teachers or scholars think it outdated. The following suggestions are educative and enlightening that can be applied to teaching.

First of all, it's necessary for teachers to strengthen the learning of relevant situational knowledge and change their ideas as well as roles. Situations can inject vitality for the class and entertain the atmosphere. Different sorts of situations can be chosen to supplement the teaching, like songs, charts, videos, objects and so on. It should be borne in mind that providing sufficient practicing opportunities to drill the language and putting the students at the center of class. When learners present the outcome or performance, formative and effective feedback should be given to them. At the same time, we should hold a dialectical attitude towards different teaching methods and make full use of their advantages to promote teaching.

Next, it's worth noting that situations should be selective in situational language teaching. The creation of situation should be based on the teaching contents and the analysis of the students' learning situation. The selection of the situational materials should be as real as possible and close to the students' life. The situation creation activities should be carried out to serve teaching and avoid flashy activities. The setting of situations should be in line with the students' existing proficiency, individual differences and also should be creative and inspiring.

In addition, the size of the class in situational language teaching should not be too large. Generally, the number of students isn't more than forty, because a large number of people will make it more difficult to set up situations and carry out activities. As a result, we may find it difficult to guarantee the teaching effect. More importantly, students will have more practice opportunities on their own with fewer students in a class. Teachers can monitor the whole class and have more engagement and participation with students. In a word, a small number of students both benefit for teaching and active learning.

Furthermore, situational language teaching takes up lots of classroom time. It is necessary to fully consider the requirements of the syllabus for teaching tasks and allocate time reasonably so as not to affect the teaching progress. Sometimes, it's hard to design or come up with a proper

situation concerning the teaching contents. Therefore, teachers should enrich their theoretical knowledge to enhance their teaching quality.

In the end, using the problem situation to stimulate students to think and creating an intuitive teaching situation combination with contents. If students see something that they are familiar with, they will have a sense of intimacy, which encourages them to apply experience to solve problems in specific situations. Besides, Teachers can actively use models or objects to create situations, which can ensure the vividness and intuitiveness of the situation. Using this method can make students have the desire to express and consolidate their understanding of English vocabulary and grammatical expression.

6. Conclusion

Situational teaching method is still widely used in language teaching at present, and it is also an important and effective teaching method. The application of situational teaching methods in English can fully reflect the dominant position of students, which contributes to improving students' learning interest and English ability, enhancing their awareness of participation and cooperation. Creating or introducing the situations should conform to the teaching objectives, teaching contents, students' experience. Situations should be also motivating, innovative, unique and enlightening. In recent years, considerable efforts have been constantly made to improve the effectiveness of English teaching by designing real and authentic contexts or situations. I believe situational language teaching can facilitate the teaching in spite of its potential problem. What I want to say is that although the classroom offers rather artificial conditions, there are numerous ways in which the teacher may create and effectively use real situations. As language teachers, we should change our concepts, strengthen life-long learning consciousness in order to improve our theoretical knowledge and practical ability of teaching.

References

- [1] O. Obdalova and E. Gulbinskaya: Cross-Cultural Component in Non-Linguistics Students Teaching, *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, Vol.200 (2015) No.8, p.53-61.
- [2] F.C. Kong: The Development Trend of Contextual Teaching Research, *Education Review*, (2005) No.8, p 45-48.
- [3] Rong. Li and X.J. Liang: Research on large Unit Teaching Design of Vocational English Based on Situational Approach, *Educational Science Forum*, (2023) No.9, p.51-54.
- [4] H.L. Liu and Y. Zhou: Situational Approach: An Exploration of English Classroom Teaching, *China Science and Technology Information*, (2007) No.9, p. 211-212.
- [5] J. Du: On the application of situational language teaching method to Mongolian English majors, *English Language and Literature Studies*, Vol.7 (2017) No.4, p.98-104.
- [6] S. Hussain and S. Sajid: Oral approach and situational language teaching: A short review. *Paripex-Indian Journal of Research*, Vol.4 (2015) No.6, p.196-199.
- [7] U.E. Magner, R. Schwonke, V. Aleven, et al. Triggering Situational Interest by Decorative Illustrations Both Fosters and Hinders Learning in Computer-Based Learning Environments, *Learning and Instruction*, Vol.29 (2014), p.141-152.
- [8] S. Suanda, N. Mugwanya and L. Namy: Cross-Situational Statistical Word Learning in Young Children, *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, (2014) No.126, p.395-411.
- [9] X.T. Cheng: *The Concept and Practice of English Teaching under Core Literacy* (Guangxi Education Press, China 2021).
- [10] Y.R. Cui and C.Y. Shao: On the Curriculum Significance of Core Literacy, *Global Education Outlook*, (2017) No.10, p. 24-33.
- [11] Ministry of Education: *English Curriculum Standards for Senior High Schools* (2017 edition, 2020 revision) (People's Education Press, China 2020).

- [12] Ministry of Education: English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (2022 edition) (Beijing Normal University Press, China 2022).
- [13] D.M. Mei and Q. Wang: New Development of English Curriculum for Compulsory Education in the New Era: Interpretation of the Standard of English Curriculum for Compulsory Education (2022 edition), Basic Education Curriculum, (2022) No.10, p.19-25.
- [14] J.K. Mi: Discussion on the Theory of Situational Teaching Method, Educational Research and Experiment, (1990) No.3, p.24-28.
- [15] Y.M. Wu: Study on the Application of Situational Approach to English Teaching in China, English on Campus, (2015) No.27, p. 91-92.