

A Literature Review of Situational Language Teaching Method

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Abstract

With the emphasis of language using ability, more authentic communicative situational activities should be created in class and the student-oriented classes should be advocated. At the same time, as a teaching method, situational language teaching method is popular in language teaching class all the time. And this paper reviews the theoretical basis and related researches of situation language teaching method to summarize the advantages and disadvantages, aiming to explore more efficient ways of the application of the teaching method in class.

Keywords

Situation Language Teaching Method; Language Teaching; Theoretical Basis; Related Studies.

1. Theoretical Basis

1.1. Situational Cognition Theory

The Situational Cognitive Theory is a learning theory that appeared at the end of 20th century and developed well at the beginning of 21th century. It views situation as the main attribute of knowledge, that is, knowledge is not an entity but an activity based on social situations, and knowing is interconnected with doing (Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989). The perspective of this theory on knowledge is that knowledge is part of activity, background and cultural product. In the process of interaction, it can be constructed between environment and individual, and it is also a kind of ability for people to make a coordination with a series of actions in a dynamically changing environment (Pu Xiangling & Li Yitao, 2005).

Therefore, in order to understand the knowledge in essence and learn to use it, learners need to devote themselves to a rich social practical life and repeatedly put knowledge into practice. Only by establishing appropriate situations that take students' characteristics into consideration can students learn effectively, or the effect of knowledge learning cannot be guaranteed. In short, the learning activity of one person is not just the accumulation of real knowledge but is achieved by learners putting their acquired knowledge into a certain interactive situation.

1.2. Behaviorist Theory

The Behaviorist Theory addresses the process of learning. As Palmer has pointed out, there are three processes in learning a language-receiving the knowledge or materials, fixing it in the memory by repetition, and using it in actual practice until it becomes a personal skill (Frisby, 1957). French (1950) saw language learning as habit formation: The fundamental is correct speech habits...The pupils should be able to put the words, without hesitation and almost without thought, into sentence patterns which are correct. Such speech habits can be cultivated by blind imitative drill.

According to these, explanation is therefore discouraged, and the learner is expected to deduce the knowledge from the presented situation. In short, teachers shouldn't just focus on the transmission of language knowledge but provide more choices for students to use language in context to practice.

1.3. Constructivist Theory

This theory was proposed by Swiss psychologist Piaget in the 1960s. Piaget (1970) suggested that with the help of the surrounding environment, such as interaction between people, children can use the necessary information to actively construct knowledge about the external world to promote the improvement and development of their cognitive structure. The constructivist system believes that the main way to cultivate children's learning ability is to create situations that are closely related to life and mobilize their own enthusiasm and initiative so that they can learn to think and cooperate. In addition, an emphasis is put on these four elements in constructivism, which contain "the construction of meaning", "interaction", "cooperation" and "situation" (Li Mang & Xu Xiaodong, 2007). Knowledge is not acquired through teachers' indoctrinated teaching but the way of constructing meaning, and when making the construction of meaning learners can also take advantage of the necessary learning materials under certain situations with the assistance of their teachers and partners (Zhang Dajun, 2008).

All in all, teachers should take the responsibility of designing and introducing situations for the purpose of helping students' learning, and the situation need to be related to students' real life and individual experience. At the same time, learners are supposed to solve learning problems on the basis of their own knowledge, experience and specific language situations so as to further construct their own language knowledge.

2. Studies on Situational Language Teaching Method

2.1. Studies on Situational Language Teaching Method Abroad

The origins of Situational Language Teaching began the work of British applied linguists in the 1920s and 1930s. Beginning at this time, a number of outstanding applied linguists developed the basis for a principle approach to methodology in language teaching. Two of the leaders in this movement are Harold Palmer and A. S. Hornby, and they attempted to develop a more scientific foundation for an oral approach. The result was a systematic study of the principles and procedures that could be applied to the selection and organization of the content of a language course. (Palmer 1917, 1921).

One of the first aspects of method design to receive attention was the role of vocabulary. In the 1920s and 1930s, several large-scale investigations of foreign language vocabulary were undertaken. The impetus for this research came from two quarters. First, there was a general consensus that vocabulary was one of the most important aspects of foreign language learning. A second influence was the increased emphasis on reading skills as the goal of foreign language study in some countries. This led to the development of principles of vocabulary control, which were to have a major practical impact on the teaching of English in subsequent decades. (Richard and Ridgers, 2008).

Parallel to the interest in developing rational principles for vocabulary selection was a focus on the grammatical content of a language course. Palmer (1921) had emphasized the problems of grammar for the foreign learner. Much of his work in Japan, where he directed the Institute for Research in English Teaching from 1922 until World War II, was directed toward developing classroom procedures suited to teaching basic grammatical patterns through an oral approach. He viewed grammar as the underlying sentence patterns of the spoken language.

Hornby (1965) explained in detail how to use the situational method to teach sentences patterns in class in his book *The Teaching of Structural Words and Sentence Patterns*. In his book, he described that the core of language teaching is classroom practice because there is few authentic situations in the classroom.

One of the most active proponents in the 1960s was Australian George Pittman. Pittman and his Colleagues were responsible for developing an influential set of teaching materials based on the Situational Approach, which were widely used in Australia, New Guinea, and the Pacific territories. Pittman was also responsible for the situationally based materials developed by the Commonwealth Office of Education in Sydney, Australia, used in the English programs for immigrants in Australia. These were published for worldwide use in 1965 as the series Situational English. Materials by Alexander and other leading British textbooks writers also reflected the principles of Situational Language Teaching as they had evolved over a 20-year period. The main characteristics of the approach were as follows:

- 1) Language teaching begins with the spoken language. Material is taught orally before it is presented in written form.
- 2) The target language is the language of classroom.
- 3) New language points are introduced and practiced situationally.
- 4) Vocabulary selection procedures are followed to ensure that an essential general service vocabulary is covered.
- 5) Items of grammar are graded following the principle that simple forms should be taught before complex ones.
- 6) Reading and writing are introduced once a sufficient lexical and grammatical basis is established. (Richard and Ridgers, 2008).

And Pittman (1963) summarized tasks of teachers in the situational teaching, such as controlling class time, arranging oral exercises, adjusting teaching content according to students' own situation, and exploring language activities other than from textbooks.

In the middle 1980s, Long, Crookes, Willis and Nunan put forward that language teaching should be proceeded in real situation as much as possible.

Brown, J. S., A. Collin & P. Duguid (1989), proposed that knowledge is in essence situational in an article Situated Cognition and the Culture of Learning. There exists knowledge in background. When learners participate in activities, it still exists. Meanwhile, it also comes from cultural product.

2.2. Studies on Situational Language Teaching Method in China

In the 1970s, the situational teaching method was introduced into Chinese classroom teaching. Subsequently, many scholars have carried out studies about it.

Li Jilin has greatly developed the situational teaching. She illustrated this method in her book Situational Teaching and Research in order to improve learning atmosphere of classroom in 1979 and carried out teaching experiments in language classroom by adopting this method. The purpose of creating situations is to combine students' emotional and cognitive factors so that their learning interest can be stimulated and their all-round development can be achieved in the end. It shows that students will not completely digest and apply what they have learned if there are no appropriate learning situations. Her teaching theory provides revelations for the following development of the situational teaching in English.

After 1980s, the country carried out a comprehensive study of foreign language teaching, emphasizing the organization of the classroom in English. Teachers should try to control the frequency of use of native language. And students grasp language knowledge starting from the basic language structure, and learn the actual communicative language skills through situational practice.

Zhang Qinghua (1996) advocated that the situational teaching method is to skillfully combine situation with contextualization and communication, that is, in the entire teaching process, teachers must spare no efforts to create one vivid and specific scene with a certain feature of language situation and a strong language learning environment, which can attain certain

emotional experience for students. As a result, they are able to understand the acquired knowledge, master skills of acquiring knowledge, and develop their psychological functions through the practice of situational and communicative language. The situational teaching method makes breakthrough in language teaching compared with the previous grammar translation teaching method, which is characterized by the integration of words, deeds and emotions. Its core purpose is to stimulate students' emotions, and its theoretical foundation is based on linguistics, psychology, and pedagogy.

In 21st century, the new English curriculum standards of basic education demanded teachers "to try to combine the characteristics of the student's age and real life, encourage students to actively participate in language practice and create rich communicative scenes to enlarge students' language experience, then students gradually acquire the ability to put language knowledge into communication, comprehensively "in English teaching process. According to this, many classroom teachers have launched some researches of situational teaching English, or even apply it to actual teaching practice under the guidance of experts.

Zhang Shuxian (2002) put forward that three characteristics of people-oriented new curriculum decide its need of situational teaching. Firstly, situational teaching need to be used in ideological and moral education to stimulate their emotional experience, help them to internalize the spirit of patriotism and collectivism and become their standard of behavior under new curriculum. Secondly, the ties between subject contents of new curriculum, and life and production of society are stronger and stronger, hence the classroom teaching, which is the major means of teaching activities in the school, also requires to utilize situational teaching to reach the goal of adaption of the teaching. Finally, emphasizing on practice includes not only teachers' teaching activity but also the teaching activities in which students participate as the major body. Teachers should create situations in classroom teaching so as to help students take part in classroom activity and join in social activity through its positive effects on students.

Long Wenzhen (2003) proposed that the situational teaching method can achieve the established teaching goals, the specific situation should be adapted to the teaching contents according to the learning needs of students, and the situational teaching method is a kind of emotional experience for students and can quickly improve their learning efficiency. And she also argued that students' thoughts can be well-organized only in authentic situations. As a result, the capability to speak out their ideas or thoughts in English can be developed.

Xu Wen (2007) put forward in his research that the situational teaching embodies the inner core and requirement of the integration and situation of English teaching reform, and also meets the need of China's English teaching reform. He also summarized the role of the situational teaching. First, it is beneficial to building a good language environment. As we all know, English is considered as a foreign language for Chinese students, so the main problem of developing their ability to communicate in English is the lack of language environment, and the key to solving this problem is to design classroom teaching with concrete situations reasonably. Second, it is conducive to enabling students to obtain emotional materials and link theory with practice. Finally, it is also instrumental in mobilizing students' non-intellectual factors to enable them to concentrate on the knowledge they are learning and consolidate the knowledge they have acquired.

Li Ping (2010) pointed out that the situational teaching of English in senior high schools is that teachers rely on textbooks, take senior high school students' psychological characteristics into account, and create a variety of real situations that are consistent with the psychological characteristics of students' learning and are close to their daily life to promote the coordinated development of logical and imaginal thinking and improve their thinking quality with the proper combination of cognitive and emotional activities. Therefore, she advocated that teachers should make good use of teaching situations to promote students' development.

Wang Hongyu (2017) proposed that under the multimedia environment, in order to meet the various needs of students' development, teachers can collect rich teaching resources and use the advantages of multimedia to improve their teaching and diversify their classroom teaching formats for creating a suitable learning atmosphere. Miscellaneous language learning situations can help students to continuously improve their cognitive level so as to achieve the purpose of the better mastery of language.

3. Conclusion

From the above views, we can know that situational language teaching could arouse students' interests, awaken their consciousness, and make them take part in activities actively. Moreover, it allows students to apply what they have learned to real communication, for the reason that students could enhance their confidence and interest in learning English. Therefore, during the teaching process, teachers should create situation before teaching to inspire students' thoughts. However, owing to the limitation of authentic foreign language learning environment, it is essential for teachers to make full use of situational teaching in daily English teaching and relate student' life to create vivid and interesting teaching situations. In this way, the effects of teaching can be improved.

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