The Application of Communicative Approach in College Oral English Teaching

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Supported by the Fund Project of Social Science of Jilin Province (Research on the Assessment System of Spoken English Based on the Evaluation Theory) in 2013. Project Number: 2013wy33.

Received 15 October 2014; accepted 10 December 2014 Published online 31 January 2015

Abstract
English is a tool for communication. English teaching aims to nurture the students’ ability to use the language. This ability is mainly reflected by their spoken ability. Based on communicative approach, this article touches upon how to apply the communicative approach in college oral English teaching. Firstly, the author introduces the development of communicative approach in English teaching. Then the author discusses the disadvantages of the application of communicative approach and how to solve this problem. To sum up, the author believes that the application of communicative approach will surely have a positive effect on oral English teaching and will be quite effective to improve the students’ communicative competence.

Key words: Oral English teaching; Communicative competence; Communicative approach; Language

INTRODUCTION
In the past, the English education in China was called the dumb English, even for the students who have learned English for many years. Perhaps their academic results are very good, but not in normal English communication. Department of Education discovered the disadvantages and has been promoting English teaching reform, and adding content in a variety of oral test to check students' English proficiency. In this background, this paper introduces the communicative approach to college oral English classroom in order to improve the quality of teaching, and some problems that may occur in the application, finally put forward some suggestions on using this teaching method.

1. THE MEANING OF THE THEORY OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

Dell Hymes put it forward firstly in 1972 in the article "On Communicative Competence", the notion of communicative competence brings a revolution to linguistics. The notion of communicative competence is the theory based on which the teaching approach using communicative ways is developed. Hymes (1972) defined communicative competence as "a knowledge of the rules for understanding and producing both the referential and social meaning of language". According to Hymes, the rules of grammar are based on the rules of use. He viewed communicative competence as grammatical, psycholinguistic, sociocultural, and probabilistic systems of competence. In 1979, Hymes elaborated the four aspects of a language learner’s communicative competence, namely, grammaticality, feasibility, appropriateness, and performance. Grammaticality means the learner knows
whether or not something is grammatically correct, or whether something is possible and acceptable in form. Feasibility means that the learner knows whether something is feasible or not; that is, whether something is comprehensive to human beings. If something is feasible, the learner also knows the degree to which something is feasible. Appropriateness means the learner knows whether something is conforming to certain social norms and whether it is suitable to be used in certain kind of social context. Performance means the learner knows whether or not something is in fact done in reality and the degree of performance.

Hymes is not the only researcher in this area. Because Communicative approach reflects the essence of language as a communication tool, its ultimate aim is to cultivate learning ability (Communicative Competence), so in the past nearly three decades it has been in considerable development, and has evolved into a world-scale foreign language teaching theory and teaching methods, and has become the basic principles generally recognized and accepted by the world language teaching field. Later, many linguists studied communicative competence and have new progress, making the theory of language teaching, more significant, especially in oral English teaching. In 1980, Canale and Swain made the definition of communicative competence. They put it into the following three components: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence (Canale & Swain, 1980). Grammatical competence means the speaker should learn about the words and grammatical rules about the language. Sociolinguistic competence means the speaker pays attention to the appropriateness of language usage, knowing how to use the language in an appropriate way. Strategic competence means that the speaker has the appropriate use of communication strategies in order to communicate successfully. In 1990, Bachman made a survey about communicative competence and divided it into organizational competence and pragmatic competence. The former means the speaker should have both grammatical and discourse or textual competence and the latter includes sociolinguistic and illocutionary competence. In 2002, Olivares and Lemberger state that communication in the classroom is the most important component in teaching. They claim that the communicative approach can overcome the traditional teaching method of laying particular stress on imparting of knowledge and the value of cultivating the ability of using teaching method in teaching profession ignoring the disadvantages of verbal skills training. Purpose of college English teaching is to cultivate students' English verbal expression and communication ability, and the nature of oral English teaching is not only to learn a foreign language but also to understand the cultural differences. Foreign language is a carrier to improve the ability of communication, cognitive thinking. Communicative teaching attaches great importance to cultivating the students' foreign language communication ability, emphasizes the intercourse of teaching process and encourages and motivates the students' learning enthusiasm, it is easier to achieve the purpose of oral English teaching, to cultivate foreign language talents to adapt to the social demand, therefore, the application of communicative teaching method in oral English teaching has profound practical significance.

2. THE FEASIBILITY OF APPLYING THE COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH TO COLLEGE ORAL ENGLISH TEACHING

Communicative Approach to language teaching reform began in Britain in the late 1960s, which was developed by Wilkins, Widowson, Brumfit, Johnson and Littlewood. Based on Hymes's theory of "communicative competence" and Halliday's theory of "function", the main idea of the communicative teaching lies in using the foreign language as a communication tool to master and to learn a foreign language according to each specific communicative purpose in fixed linguistic environment, so that the students eventually master the ability of communicating in a foreign language. The cultivation of communicative ability is conceived to be the main goal of foreign language teaching, paying attention to the students, paying attention to student activities, and emphasizing student-centered setting. Therefore, the communicative approach can overcome the traditional teaching method of laying particular stress on imparting of knowledge and the value of cultivating the ability of using teaching method in teaching profession ignoring the disadvantages of verbal skills training. Purpose of college English teaching is to cultivate students' English verbal expression and communication ability, and the nature of oral English teaching is not only to learn a foreign language but also to understand the cultural differences. Foreign language is a carrier to improve the ability of communication, cognitive thinking. Communicative teaching attaches great importance to cultivating the students' foreign language communication ability, emphasizes the intercourse of teaching process and encourages and motivates the students' learning enthusiasm, it is easier to achieve the purpose of oral English teaching, to cultivate foreign language talents to adapt to the social demand, therefore, the application of communicative teaching method in oral English teaching has profound practical significance.

3. PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS IN THE APPLICATION OF COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH IN ORAL ENGLISH

Communicative approach is conducive to the formation of new teaching idea. Traditional classroom is teacher-centered, giving priority to teacher's explanation. How much the students have mastered and whether they can be applied in practice are uncertain problems. Communicative approach is helpful to stimulate students' learning enthusiasm, classroom activity provides opportunities for students, creating an atmosphere of competition, the competition consciousness is undoubtedly a kind of driving force, and the teaching content can meet the needs of the learners, further stimulate learning motivation. Communicative approach can improve students' oral
English skills, help students to have confidence in themselves, and give the students more opportunities of oral exercise, but there are many disadvantages in the practical application of communicative approach. First of all, the influence of the traditional teaching method can't be eliminated in a short period of time. The traditional teaching method in the country has been in use for many years, the teaching method has been mature, and there are many essences, under the condition of the communicative approach is not mature and tenacious vitality. Secondly, the communicative approach has been used in English teaching for many years, but did not achieve the desired effect. Some people think that communicative approach can't correct students' mistakes, there will be a one-sided emphasis on fluency and ignore the problem of correctness, which is not conducive to the students' English learning. Thirdly, hardware devices in the Chinese colleges and universities also can't satisfy the requirements. Since the years of enrollment expansion, universities of undergraduate are swelling, only a few students can get practice and guidance in the application of communicative approach in the teaching, this greatly affected the teaching effect. Moreover, the teaching features of the communicative approach put forward high requirements for teachers: Because the communicative approach has not been introduced to Chinese teachers for a long time, not only the teachers but also the learners cannot get used to this kind of teaching method easily. Therefore, teachers should make the preparation before going to the classroom. In order to change the traditional passive learners into the active learners in Oral English class, teachers should act a good organizer and guider the teachers should not only have high academic and teaching level, but also should have a strong ability of organization and can create a rich and colorful classroom environment. These requirements can enhance teaching effect of this method. Finally, there are many differences between students' English level, which also has brought great difficulties to the application of communicative approach. There is no denying the fact that the communicative approach is far away from the teaching reality. Most of the English learners are only compelled to speak English in the class. When the class comes to an end, they immediately come back into the Chinese environment, because people around them are all speaking Chinese. Teachers should try their best to create a better communicative environment for using the language.

The solutions to these difficulties are as follows:

First of all, teachers should play a positive role. Examination system hinders the application of communicative approach in teaching practice. Though communicative approach cannot completely overcome these side effects, teachers can try to organize the teaching process in a more challenging way, change the classroom from teacher-centered to student-centered. For example, before revealing the answer, simply ask the students "do you agree or disagree? What's your opinion?" Doing this not only exercises the students' ability in oral expression, but also can help students sum up their own ideas, encourage them to exchange views with other classmates. Secondly, teachers should consider students' actual level of English (according to the students' practical level to question and list the key words, and students can have a better performance in oral practice, on the contrary, if it is too difficult, students cannot carry out oral training; if it is too easy, the enthusiasm of students will also be lost. Thirdly, the teacher must pay attention to students' oral fluency and accuracy. According to the university English teaching plan, spoken English fluency and accuracy are the two integral parts. Without accuracy, fluency is no foundation; without oral fluency, it is difficult to achieve effective communication. Finally, teachers should grasp the method and the time to correct students' mistakes.

4. THE COMMUNICATIVE TEACHING OF COLLEGE ENGLISH ORAL ENGLISH TEACHING PRACTICE

4.1 Teaching Procedures

For oral English teaching procedures, first of all, the teacher should organize teaching. Focus the attention of students, put forward new problems, discuss the oral subjects step by step; secondly, the teacher should organize students to solve new problems, let the student do the role reading in conversation, give simple tips, explain the new language points, point out to students sentence patterns of dialogues which are frequently used; thirdly, the teacher should involve the students in communicative activities to strengthen practice, such as processing communication simulation exercises, about 5 conversation practice, students can be divided into several groups, each group for a dialogue, the content can be a textbook to recite, it can be a free session, complete teacher assigned tasks; Then, undertake to the student evaluation, and homework assignments, after the completion of the entire communication activity, correct the students' problems, at the same time assign oral practice after class.

4.2 The Activity Form

In the group activities, the level of students in each group should be different, so that the students can inspire each other, help each other, and offer them very good learning opportunities especially for students whose learning level is not high. Group members can discuss the content together according to the teaching materials. If the students are interested in the theme of the discussion, their interests can be stimulated in open discussion. Students are relatively relaxed and there is no excessive tension, so that the students' ability of autonomous learning can be
improved. In addition, the groups activities are based on students-center, the teacher observe and guide effect, and correct students' mistakes at the end of the whole event. The role play is not influenced by time, space, classroom and other factors play a different role in the activity, and students can express different emotions in different tones, complete tasks arranged by teachers easily. In this process, students can change the language according to the identity of the characters, emotions, and other factors, so as to realize the real communication purpose. In addition, the students usually use the language of life, such as exclamation, repetitive language to naturally express the idea. This form is not only easy, but also can effectively promote students' oral English ability.

5. THE APPLICATION OF THE COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH IN ORAL ENGLISH TEACHING

5.1 Take the Student as the Center
The teaching mode can be based on tasks in communicative approach. Different tasks are designed either by the teacher or by the students themselves. Whatever the form, the students function as the main body in class. The concrete examples are the imitation of dialogues from videos, the performing of roles in stories related to text information, and the group discussion in any creative form that may come from the students themselves. In the teaching process, teachers and students can influence each other. Teachers should give students a sufficiently free space. In the process of students' discussions, the teacher shouldn't give too much intervention, and shouldn't rush to criticism when they see mistakes. They should guide properly, and correct students' mistakes at the end of the activity, so as not to blow the enthusiasm of students, at the same time can effectively inspire the students' ability of autonomous learning. The expression ability of students is limited, so teachers should use different way to student's information to supplement, the ability to quickly into the actual communication. Rich class design should be flexible, not only the teacher can be entertaining, and students will be studying in the music, thus increasing the enthusiasm of students learning, improving oral English ability.

5.2 Create a Real Learning Atmosphere
English teaching is different from teaching other subjects. Its biggest characteristic is that English is not only the teaching means but also the teaching content. This requires the teacher to know how to teach English by using English on the basis of mastering English, so as to let the students master English by using English. If the teacher insists on English teaching, on the one hand, it can improve students' listening; on the other hand, the teacher's pronunciation and intonation will directly affect the students' learning. Second, teachers use different ways to organize and make full use of classroom interaction activities to create a real scene for students, combined with the multimedia teaching. Rich flexible interactive teaching can increase students' interest in learning.

5.3 Make Full Use of Audio-visual Materials
Audio-visual materials can effectively improve the students' learning interest and learning results. By listening to music, watching movies and other forms, for example, every student likes this form. Most of the students hope to watch the original English movies in oral English class, listening to English songs. Teachers can make full use of the audio-visual material; arouse the enthusiasm of learning. The key is in the selection of the material to be fully prepared before class, such as to ensure the material content healthy and enthusiastic; you can choose something about life, and the relatively simple content. You can select from a period to the actual teaching and classroom situations. For example, the students will come out with such a good idea as to shoot videos or make PPT when they make discussion after class on topics from the teacher. In class, they report to the whole class what they have made and present the video as evidence of their extracurricular activities. The rest of the students are impressed by their creative ideas.

6. THE EVALUATION OF THE COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH
The author makes a survey of about 150 students who have attended English classes with communicative approach as the center for four semesters and summarizes the good points of communicative approach as follows: It stimulates the students in oral English study; the students are more active and enthusiastic in language learning and task performing; it achieves the variety of language teaching methods, using Internet, electronic products, and computers as teaching accessory means and using pictures, audio, and video English materials as multimedia assistance to language teaching so the effects of communication will be enhanced; it correlates classroom interaction with post class self-learning and preview and review, cultivating the self-learning abilities of students; it provides the students with lots of opportunities to practice colloquial as well as listening abilities and fast ways of imitating and designing conversations and other activities to communicate with each other. To the use of new communicative approach in teaching, 70% of the students express their satisfaction and interest in this approach; less than 5% students say they feel anxious in this mode of learning.
CONCLUSION

To sum up, although communicative approach may not be suitable for all the students in China, it meets the needs of development of society and has great positive effects on oral English teaching in China. Therefore, no matter it is for the teachers, students or it is for the universities or colleges, only by the investigation of communicative approach and the combination with oral English teaching can a better learning environment be cultivated. The application of communicative approach will surely have a positive effect on oral English teaching and will be quite effective to improve the students’ communicative competence. Only in such kinds of manners can the oral English abilities of the students be improved in multiple levels and aspects. It is as well able to open up a new world for the improvement of oral English teaching qualities in university English classroom.

REFERENCES


