

Application of Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) in College English Teaching^{*}

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Abstract - With the accelerated pace of college English teaching reform, the traditional English teaching mode is being phased out and will be replaced by a new one named task-based language teaching (TBLT). As a new mode, TBLT is being introduced into the English classroom. With this mode, teachers should associate teaching contents and creatively design learning tasks close to life, so that students can learn to communicate through the process of completing the tasks to improve the comprehensive ability in English. In this paper, from the aspects of the concept and meaning of TBLT, the problems of traditional English teaching mode, the meaning of the implementation of TBLT and the application of this mode were demonstrated.

Index Terms - Task-based language teaching, application, college English teaching.

1. Introduction

With the development of the situation, the reform of higher education is part of and closely related to the whole country's reform. The Ministry of Education of China issued the latest College English Curriculum Requirements (Trial). It pointed that "college English teaching goal is to develop students' English language proficiency, especially listening and speaking skills, so that they can use English in their future work and social interaction to effectively communicate in oral and written information exchange." Under the new situation, the new English curriculum standards advocate TBLT. Since the 1980s and 1990s, evolved from the communicative approach, TBLT has gradually become an international mainstream in foreign language education. Some well-known researchers of foreign language education methods have written books or articles to systematic illustrate relative theories of TBLT.

Foreign language syllabus or curriculum in many countries and regions have adopted TBLT and achieved good results. Ministry of Education in China has also developed a curriculum based on TBLT. In recent years, TBLT has been widely applied to the teaching of foreign languages in our country and has played a significant role in promoting the development of foreign language teaching. It will become the major foreign language teaching mode at present and in the future in China

2. About Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT)

Task-based language teaching (TBLT), proposed by Prabhu in the 1980s, is a teaching method to emphasize students' language proficiency. It's a developed pattern of a communicative language teaching idea. It transforms the basic concept of language use to classroom teaching with practical significance. TBLT is a task-core teaching method to plan and organize language teaching. In other words, in this mode, real and specific tasks being carriers, completing the tasks being the aim, combining English language knowledge with skills to use it and through classroom tasks, students do things with the learnt language and use the language in the process of doing things. Simply speaking, TBLT is learning by doing things, learning by using the language, doing things by learning and using the language by learning.

TBLT emphasizes learning by doing and it's the development of the communicative approach in language teaching, arousing extensive attention in language education home and abroad. In recent years, this teaching theory of doing things with the language has been gradually introduced into English classes in Chinese colleges and has become a new trend in foreign language teaching reform. It believes that mastering a language is mostly the result of language use in the activity rather than skills training and learning of language knowledge. Therefore, in teaching activities, focusing on specific communicative and language projects, teachers should design specific and actionable tasks, then students should complete the task through expression, communication, negotiation, interpretation and other language activities in order to achieve the purpose of learning and mastering the language. TBLT absorbs the benefits of the previous varieties of teaching methods and is not mutually exclusive. If used properly, they can complement each other

3. Disadvantages of Traditional College English Teaching Mode

A. *Students' ability to listen and speak is weak*

Traditional foreign language teaching believes that foreign language learning should rely on mother tongue. In foreign language teaching, base is emphasized, demanding the explanation and practice of vocabulary, grammar and sentences. Known as dumb English, China's English teaching

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has long been emphasizing grammar, vocabulary and reading, while ignoring the students' listening and speaking ability. "Indoctrination" teaching has always been going on. It's teacher-centred and always like this: teachers are explaining with a piece of chalk and a book; while students follow what teachers are reading and students copy what teachers are writing. Under this mode, most of the students are still denied in practice of using language because they are trained to get good grades in exams.

B. Students' ability to use the language is weak

In traditional foreign language teaching, there's a common phenomenon that students' ability to use the language is ignored. Most students have learnt English at an early age. But when they graduate from college, the result of years of English learning is just what's called "examination skills." The real reason for this is that from the very beginning, what students hear, see and learn is teachers' endless explanation and they do not have the opportunity to use English to communicate effectively.

C. Students lack interest in learning

Process of English learning should be interactive with real significance. Language is a communication tool with which students are able to feel the value of the knowledge and skills in communicative activities in order to achieve consciousness and initiative to enhance learning. Learning activities should be built on the basis of a genuine need of communication so as to permanently stimulate students' interest in learning and improve learning outcomes.

4. The Necessity for the Application of TBLT in College English Teaching

A. Teaching methods can be optimized by TBLT

TBLT can change the past practice that teachers talk during the whole class period. It can be a breakthrough to the status that students are ignored in bilateral teaching activities. By changing the teaching methods, students can really use the knowledge to participate, practice and experience in order to develop comprehensive ability to use language during the process of completing the tasks.

B. TBLT can promote students' thinking and inductive capacity

Various forms of tasks in English classroom allow students to fully develop language skills and consciously develop thinking and inductive habits with English, ultimately, to develop the capacity, which is one of the necessary capacities English learners should have.

C. Students can develop independent learning skills by TBLT

With the development of science and technology, some modern teaching facilities have entered the English class. TBLT can make full use of modern teaching facilities and ways to make the classroom atmosphere lively. If students' learning tasks can be combined with modern teaching facilities, students' interest in learning English will be developed, and the initiative and enthusiasm to learn English will be improved. So

in a relaxed atmosphere students actively learn English and their ability to use English in practice can also be improved.

5. Application of TBLT in College English Teaching According to Its Characteristics

A. Three Parts of Teaching Process of TBLT

1) *Pre-task*: In this part, teachers should do: a. introduce the topic; b. help students master the task-related words, phrases and expressions; c. help students become familiar with the task instruction.

2) *Task cycle*: In this part, there are three steps: task completion, preparation of the report and report.

In task completion stage, teachers play a monitoring role. Teachers should ensure that all the students understand the objectives of the tasks and try to get tasks done. Teachers should stimulate students to complete the tasks without excessive intervention. Teachers should observe and encourage students to ensure that each student to participate in the completion of the task activities and teachers should also give aid when students are unable to solve the difficulties.

In stage of preparation of the report, teachers play a role of language consultant. Teachers should clarify the purpose and form of report, recommending available resources, at the same time teachers should arouse the enthusiasm of all the students sometimes even assign roles according to students' different characteristics.

In the report stage, teachers act as moderators to enable students to understand the importance and objective of listening the report. Teachers arrange order of reports, comment on each report and summarize at the end of all the reports.

3) *Language focus*: At this stage, the language focus transfers from the meaning of language to the form of language. It includes two steps: language of analysis and language practice. Teachers organize and monitor then examine students' analysis activities.

B. Detailed Application

A text titled Cross-Cultural Communication is taken for an example to demonstrate how to design tasks and how to apply TBLT to teaching according to its characteristics.

1) *The designed tasks must have a purpose*: Here the "purpose" has a dual nature: one is that tasks contain non-teaching purposes and the other is that designers expect the participants to achieve certain purposes. So since the theme of this unit is a multi-cultural integration, students were allowed to watch a movie called Guasha Treatment that describes the differences and conflicts between Chinese and American culture. This unique arrangement made students overjoyed and they were attracted by it. At the same time students had a better understanding about the theme.

2) *Tasks usually produce non-verbal results*: Feedback from the students showed that the way to watch movies aroused students' interest in the content of this unit. Students were eager to learn more about cross-cultural communication that brought confusion and surprise. And they want to learn

more about the culture of other countries. These can be seen as non-verbal learning outcomes of the activities.

3) *Tasks are open*: That is performing the tasks do not have the predetermined pattern or set route, nor can a uniform result can be reached. The way to complete the tasks is optional, not fixed and non-limited. After watching the movie, students were immediately assigned tasks. They were arranged as groups to make a presentation with the theme of cross-cultural communication in the form of slides. Each group chose topics of interest to perform cross-cultural communication. Due to differences in individual students, the groups chose different themes covering many aspects such as society, economics, culture and military affairs. This task enhanced students' understanding of the multicultural society.

4) *Tasks are communicative and interactive*: Tasks are usually collective and cooperative activities and they need to be fulfilled in a communicative or interactive manner. This interaction is bilateral or multilateral that can be between students and students, between students and teachers, or between students and the input material interaction. In this task, students were given some advice and help when choosing topics to avoid similarity. In the preparation of tasks, group leaders played the role of co-ordination, arranging detailed tasks, such as finding information, processing pictures and words, producing slides and selecting background music. All members cooperated with each other, trying their best to make the presentation. After completing these tasks, students had a better understanding of the important knowledge and the context of this unit. So more comprehensive and thorough understanding of the text was straightforward.

In the design of tasks, it is necessary to make the tasks appropriate for the current level of language proficiency of students. Sometimes teachers should adjust the tasks. Tasks should have clear purposes for which students can communicate in English and finally students can complete the tasks and achieve communicative effects. One particular note is that the tasks should also be interesting and authentic because students' interest is closely related to learning effects. If activities are designed too far from their real life, students' interest can't be aroused and communicative purpose can't be achieved. Thus, in designing the tasks, the designers should

consider students' specific levels, comprehensively analyse different factors that affect the difficulty of different tasks, select carefully and take advantage of or provide necessary aid to adjust the tasks to the appropriate level of difficulty so that students can better fulfil them and achieve the best learning results

6. Conclusion

TBLT is a people-oriented language teaching mode, effectively reflecting the value of language and including the advanced teaching principles and concepts home and abroad. As a new mode of teaching, TBLT regards interest as a starting point, aiming to develop students' ability to use language. It can guide us to choose specific teaching methods and techniques. With TBLT, driven by clear tasks, students can take an active part in classroom practice so that a modern teaching mode is realized in which the topic is the core, tasks are clues, activities are carriers and students are the center of the activities. It is the primary task of college English teaching practitioners to explore how to effectively carry out TBLT according to the expertise of students from different majors, how to make students solve practical problems with mastered language, spontaneously take part in language practice and complete various tasks as well as experience the joy of learning.

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