

# The Adaptation Approach to College Foreign Language Teaching

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**Abstract.** This paper tentatively employs Verschuren's adaptation theory to study the integral dynamic processes of college foreign language teaching and the specific applications of this theory to college foreign language teaching, aiming at exploring what communicative contexts foreign teachers need to adapt to in teaching practice, studying how to better improve the quality of college foreign language teaching and how to cultivate students' comprehensive ability of using language through the adaptable method, thus providing a new approach and reference to college foreign language teaching.

## 1. Introduction

In 1987, Jef Verschueren proposed the "adaptation" theory in the book named *Pragmatics as a Theory of Linguistic Adaptation* [1]. The theory gives a completely new insight and approach to language use. Verschueren further developed and improved the theory in the book *Understanding pragmatics* in 1999. According to Verschueren, the study on language use must integrate linguistic phenomena with their usage in forms of behavior from a general cognitive, social, and cultural perspective [2].

Since the 1990's, the adaptation theory has become the research focus in many countries. Many Chinese scholars have devoted to studying the relationship between the theory and foreign language teaching such as Xie Shaowan's thesis *The Adaptation Theory and Foreign Language Teaching* [3], Luo Dihong and Yang Hua's thesis *The Linguistic Adaptation Theory and Foreign Language* [4], Pan Tingtong's thesis *The Enlightenment of Theory of Adaptation on Lexical Teaching* [5], Shang Dan's thesis *The Adaptation Approach to Oral English Teaching of Higher Vocational College* [6] and so on.

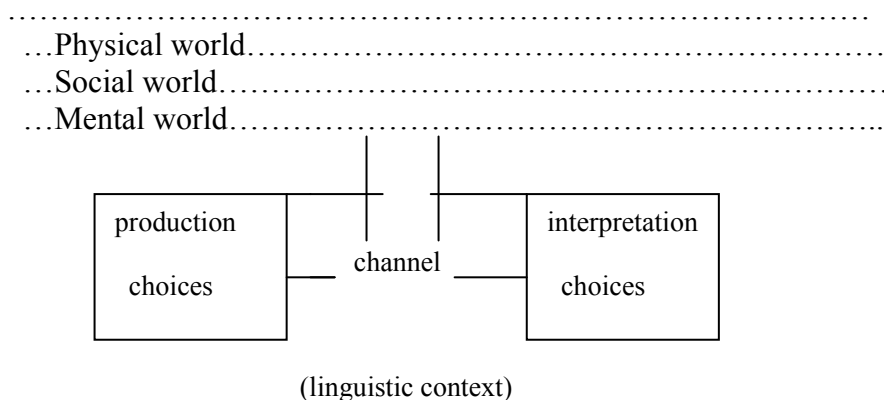
From above all, we know that many scholars have made great achievements in many aspects. In spite of their achievements, the present studies are mostly limited to applying the adaptation theory to explaining foreign language teaching from a macro perspective and lack the study on teaching practice. What specific contexts are needed to adapt to in the process of foreign language teaching practice? How can college foreign language teachers use communicative contexts' adaptation to optimize the quality of college foreign language teaching and promote the communicative ability of foreign language learners more effectively? Such aspects need to be studied further. As a result, this thesis tentatively applies Verschueren's adaptation theory to study the integral dynamic process of college foreign language teaching practice, aiming at providing a new approach and vision to college foreign language teaching.

## 2. The Adaptation Theory

According to Verschueren, language use is a kind of "behavior" which is different from "act" and is more with the sociological significance, also a social action. Pragmatics studies language use, namely, the process of linguistic choice which is the dynamics of adaptability according to different salience of the adaptation processes from the two aspects of contextual correlates and structural objects [2].

Language use is the process of making choices continuously in verbal communication.

Verschueren claims that linguistic choices include three important concepts which make great influence on the process of making choices and thus contribute to the communication's accomplishment smoothly. Contextual correlates of adaptability in this theory means that linguistic choice must be adaptable with the context. We can see the relationship of these factors in verbal communication as the following figure [2]:



**Fig.3.1** Contextual correlates of adaptability

In Fig.3.1, The context in the adaptation theory includes the communicative context and linguistic context. The former includes four aspects: the first one is the utterer and the interpreter which are the most important roles in the production and the interpretation of the utterance. The second one is the mental world. The third one is the social world. The last one is the physical world. The latter is also called linguistic channel. The linguistic context mainly includes some linguistic methods which play important roles in understanding the text [2].

### **3. Feasibility and Necessity of Integrating the Adaptation Theory with College Foreign Language Teaching**

The adaptation theory proposes that language use is actually the dynamic process of language choice in order to meet communicative needs. So, every foreign language class can be regarded as a context, and teachers and students are both involved in the process of communication. It is a kind of interactive relationship between them, which is a dynamic process of choosing language and adapting to communicative contexts. Therefore, it is feasible to integrate the adaptation theory with college foreign language teaching.

College foreign language teaching is subordinate to the language teaching, which is not only the concrete embodiment of linguistics, but also the embodiment of pragmatics. The pragmatic theory should be put into language practice to test so as to be sublimated, including the practice of college foreign language teaching. The pragmatic adaptation theory observes language phenomenon from a general cognitive, social, and cultural perspective, so it has a strong explanatory power to the universal issues and special phenomenon of college foreign language teaching practice. Therefore, it is necessary to integrate the theory with college foreign language teaching.

### **4. The Application of the Adaption Theory to College Foreign Language Teaching**

The goal of college foreign language teaching in our country is to cultivate the students' comprehensive ability of using language, which requires foreign language teachers to grasp the integral dynamic process of foreign language teaching and cultivate students' ability of comprehensive application, especially the ability of language communication. Therefore, the choice of teaching language, the design of teaching activities and the use of teaching methods and strategies in the college foreign language teaching all need to consider the communicative contexts of teachers and students (that is, the mental world, social world and physical world) and make

proper dynamic choice to complete the teaching tasks better. This part will display the specific application of the communicative contexts to college foreign language teaching from the following aspects.

#### **4.1. The adaptation of college foreign teaching to the mental world**

The mental world mainly refers to the mental factors of the persons in communication such as personality, emotions, beliefs, intentions, wishes, motivations and so on [2].

The adaptation of college foreign teachers to the students' mental world is mainly embodied in the study of students' cognitive state and emotional factors of learning foreign language. College foreign language teaching can adopt hierarchical teaching mode to adapt to the students' cognitive factors since students have different English levels. Furthermore, teachers can divide the whole class into several groups to adapt to the students' mental factors. Students' motivation can also play a very important role in learning foreign language. Therefore, teachers should strengthen the teaching feedback and use the incentive evaluation to stir the students' motivation. Feedback is an indispensable link in the process of college foreign language teaching. Timely and positive feedback can make students gain confidence, thus enhance the effect of classroom teaching. Third, teachers can use appropriate language transformation in the process of language teaching, which can not only make students better understand teacher's teaching content but also increase students' power of speaking foreign language, thus adapting to students' mental context. Last, teachers can have a psychological transposition with students and always communicate with students to make friends with them. On the one hand, teachers should adapt to students' mental context to regulating classroom atmosphere. On the contrary, students should adapt to mental context of teachers to learn foreign language more effectively.

#### **4.2 The adaptation of college foreign teaching to the social world**

The social world mainly includes social settings or institutions or community-specific communicative norms that have to be observed. In addition, culture is also one of the key contents in the social world [2].

Culture is an important part of college foreign language teaching. Therefore, the choice of teaching language, the design of teaching activities and the use of teaching methods and strategies in the college foreign language teaching all need to consider the cultural contexts of teachers and students to optimize the quality of language teaching. Based on the current teaching conditions, teachers can mainly adopt the following ways to adapt to the social world. Firstly, teachers can provide students with foreign videos, movies and other video materials to make cultural infiltration. The purpose is to make the students personally experience life scenes of English speaking countries and understand cultural background knowledge. Secondly, teachers can carry out the culture seminar. Lectures can take the flexible forms. Teachers and students can make cultural lectures alternatively. Thirdly, with the increase of the need of cross-cultural talents, colleges should keep pace with the times and open the courses related to western cultures according to the needs of our teachers and students such as American culture and film appreciation, the curriculum setting is aiming at deepening students' understanding the difference between Chinese and Western culture.

#### **4.3 The adaptation of college foreign teaching to the physical world**

The physical world is a tangible, visible and tangible context, including specific subject, object, time, space and topic elements [7]. To improve the quality of college foreign language teaching, teachers should choose different teaching methods and teaching contents according to different times, different teaching places and different teaching objects.

Combining with specific situations, universities can implement hierarchical teaching to adapt to the main object. The aim is to take care of the poor students, improve the secondary students and optimize the top students. Based on this mode, teachers can use different teaching materials to adapt to different levels of students. In order to make better communication between students and teachers, universities can change the layout of the traditional classroom and improve teaching environment to adapt to the physical world on both communicative sides. Shortening the original teaching space between teachers and students can achieve a real face-to-face communication. Students can look at the teacher's body language, facial expressions closely so as to better speculate teachers' real

meaning. What's more, students and teachers can better use foreign language to communicate with each other under the more open conditions, thus improve the quality of foreign language teaching and students' comprehensive ability of using language.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper tentatively employs Verschuren's adaptation theory to study the integral dynamic processes of college foreign language teaching and the specific applications of this theory to college foreign language teaching practice. Some teaching modes of the research have been applied to the author's university and given recognition. The students' interests of studying foreign language have been improved largely. Some new teaching methods and strategies of adapting to the mental, social and physical world spring forth constantly. To some extent, the quality of college foreign language teaching and students' comprehensive ability of applying language have been improved. Thus, the adaptation theory provides a new approach and reference to college foreign language teaching.

In spite of these achievements, research limitations are still in the existence in many aspects because of the limited time and the inadequacy of the author's academic level. For instance, the discussion about the specific implementation is far from enough. What's more, the thesis only refers to the adaptation approach to college foreign language teaching practice, while it doesn't touch the foreign language teaching in middle school. The future research may attempt to apply the theory to more broad fields.

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