

USING COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING (CLT) TO IMPROVE
SPEAKING ABILITY OF CHINESE NON-ENGLISH MAJOR STUDENTS

Approved: 

Date: April 28, 2009

Paper /Project Advisor

USING COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING (CLT) TO IMPROVE
SPEAKING ABILITY OF CHINESE NON-ENGLISH MAJOR STUDENTS

A Seminar Paper

Presented to

The Graduate Faculty

University of Wisconsin-Platteville

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirement for the Degree

Master of Science in Education

By

Cai Wenjie

2009

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my warmest gratitude to Prof. Gregory Imbur, my supervisor, for his instructive suggestions and valuable comments on the writing of this thesis. Without his invaluable help and generous encouragement, the present thesis would not have been accomplished.

At the same time, I am also grateful to Prof. Patrick Hagen for providing me with valuable advice and access to the related resources on my thesis.

Last my thanks would go to my beloved parents for their loving considerations and great confidence in me all through these years. I also owe my sincere gratitude to my friends and my fellow classmates who gave me their help and time in listening to me and helping me work out my problems during the difficult course of the thesis.

ABSTRACT

USING COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING (CLT) TO IMPROVE SPEAKING ABILITY OF CHINESE NON-ENGLISH MAJOR STUDENTS

Under the Supervision of Dr. Gregory Imbur

Statement of the Problem

The problem presented in this paper is to identify how Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) to improve the speaking ability of Chinese non-English major students. The main purpose of learning language is to communicate with native speakers. But the commonest teaching method in the university in China is the Grammar Teaching. This kind of teaching method emphasized the reading and writing skills. Also, it is a teacher-centered situation, students just need to listen. Students have no time to practice their speaking skill.

Methods and Procedures

A brief review of the literature related to the theory, research and application of CLT was conducted. At the beginning, the current teaching situation and speaking ability of non-English majors in China were demonstrated. Then, the definition and application of CLT was conducted.

Summary of Results

Through a review of the literature, it becomes evident that CLT can improve the speaking ability of non-English major students though communicate with each other.

The traditional teaching approach in the Chinese classroom over-emphasized the

reading and writing skills. With the development of economy, this traditional teaching method can not meet the society's demand.

In today's China, it is particularly necessary that we pay more attention to the communicative aspect of language and try the communicative approach in our teaching of English. In this way our students may be equipped with a better understanding of how language is used in the actual life, thus making use of this tool to make greater achievements in the face of more challenges and opportunities.

Meanwhile, CLT also is a new teaching approach to Chinese teacher. This kind of teaching approach also need to solve some problems in the improvement of Chinese non-English major's speaking ability.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In China, English was set as a basic course for non-English major students in the university and college. This language course is very important to these non-English major students. The reason is that if they want to get a graduation certificate of the university or college, they must to pass the College English Test (CET-4) – an examination to test the English ability of university students and Practical English Test For Colleges (PRETCO)—an examination to test the English ability of vocational college students. But, these two different kinds of examinations are focus on the ability of reading and writing. There is no part for speaking. Only the students who get the high score can have an opportunity for doing the oral part. Also, the middle or final examination in the university does not have oral part. And, most of the English teachers in the university are using the Grammar Teaching methodology to teach English. This kind of teaching method emphasize on the grammar. Therefore, this current teaching situation leads the students pay less attention to the speaking. The result is that the students can not do communication with a native speaker or someone who speaks English, even though they have already learned English for ten or more years. But, communication is a very important part in our daily life. So, we should to change this situation, firstly, to change the teaching methodology.

There are many ways to teach English, such as Grammar Teaching methodology, Task-based Approach etc. One is called Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). This methodology is learner-centered and emphasizes communication and real-life situations. In

the traditional methods of language teaching, the teacher is the expert and carries the responsibility for students learning. So, teacher is the most important role in the learning. Students only need to listen and write. They have no time to practice their speaking ability. In CLT, students can practice every situation in daily life. It is a good way for students use English as a tool to communicate with native speakers. In this way, students can improve their speaking ability.

Statement of Problem

The problem to be addressed is how to improve the speaking ability of non-English students according to adopt the CLT. The commonest teaching methodology in the university to non-English students is Grammar Teaching. This teaching method emphasizes on the grammar and teacher is the central in the classroom. It is not fit for students to improve their speaking ability. So, CLT should be adopted by teachers in the language teaching.

Purpose of the Research

With the development of the economy, this traditional teaching method can not meet the society's demand. Therefore, many teachers in the universities want to find a method to improve the students' speaking ability. The purpose of this research paper was to explain what CLT is and how to improve the non-English major students' speaking ability though it.

Significance of the Problem

It is believed that more corporate recruiters in the job market pay more attention to the job seeker's oral speaking ability. But, many students in China, especially non-English major

student can not talk to a foreigner directly, although they have studied English more than ten years. So, it is an urgent thing that students must improve their speaking ability.

Delimitations of the Research

The research was conducted in and through the Memorial Library at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the Karrmann Library at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville, over thirty (30) days. Primary searches were conducted via the Internet through EBSCO host with ERIC and Academic Search Elite as the primary sources. Key search topics included “communicative language teaching”, “non-English major”, “communicative competence”, “teaching foreign language”, “speaking ability”, and “language speaking ability”.

Research Methodology

A brief review of literature on the history of the CLT was conducted. A second review of literature relating to research, studies the current teaching situation for non-English major students in China was conducted. The findings were summarized and recommendations were made.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The Current Teaching Situation of Non-English Major Students in China

Worldwide, approximately 1.1 billion non-native speakers are developing their English language skills for study, work, travel, and personal enjoyment (Graddol, 1997). China is the world's largest market for language-study programs, with approximately 165 million children and adults studying English (Lingo Media, 2002). Modernization and China's economic and social development have spurred nationwide English language fever. With a growing economy and a widely practiced Open Door Policy, China is experiencing more and more communication with the outside world. Consequently, English now assumes an increasingly important position in the school curriculum as well as in people's daily lives. From the mid-1990s, English has become one of the three core elements in China's College Entrance Examinations (the other two being Chinese and Math). According to Ford (p.2, 1988), "there are more Chinese currently studying English than there are Americans. Estimates range as high as 250 million Chinese students of English". On November 10, 2001, after 15 years of effort, China finally succeeded in gaining entry to the World Trade Organization (WTO), becoming one of the 143 members of this international organization. It seems evident that the country's entry into the WTO will make a tremendous impact on all spheres of society. Therefore, the Ministry of Education also emphasize on the English teaching.

English is not an official language in China, yet it is the number one foreign language. This is reflected in the special importance the government attaches to English language teaching.

China has a nine-year compulsory education system, from elementary school to junior high school (Chinese Government, 1998). In this nine years period, the Ministry of Education of China requires that English education should start from the third grade at the elementary school level and that elementary school students should have at least four periods of English education per week.

The enthusiasm for learning English is contagious. Favorable events, such as China's entry to the World Trade Organization and the successful bid for the Olympics, have created a nationwide zeal for learning English (Ashmore, 2003). But, learning English in a Chinese language environment is a rather daunting task. Millions of English as a Foreign Language learners take regular English courses, 4 class hours a week, 18 weeks a term, for 12 terms in high school and 4-8 terms at university. For those not majoring in English, the goal is to function adequately in English at work, but not many have developed the necessary competence (Yi'an, Wu, 2001). In fact, although English language teaching (ELT) is a huge profession in the process of reform and renovation, it seems to fall far short of meeting the needs generated from the country's rapid developments in the economy, science, and technology, and from increasing contact with the outside world (Qin, 1999). A recent large-scale investigation (He, Yin, Huang, & Liu, 1999), initiated by the Higher Education Division of the Ministry of Education, reveals that in general the country's need for foreign language workers equipped with target language skills alone has dropped to zero. Programmers designed for majors face a different challenge. All foreign language majors are expected to develop knowledge of other areas in addition to competence in a foreign language. The Ministry of Education responded quickly to the need for English for students

across disciplines organizing major curriculum reviews for schools and for major and non-major English programmers at universities nationwide (Yi'an, Wu, 2001).

In college, English is taught according to Guidelines for the Teaching of College English, which specifies six levels or "bands" for English at college (Ministry of Education, 1993). All university students are required to pass at least tests at the College English Test Four Level before graduation. This kind of tests focus on the ability of reading and writing. There is no part for speaking. Only the students who get the high score can have an opportunity for doing the oral part. Consequently, the teachers in the university use the Grammar Teaching methodology to teach English. Because of this kind of teaching method focus on the grammar and vocabulary. It can meet the requirements of students.

The Current Situation of Speaking Ability of Non-English Major Students in China

Most of the English teachers in the university use the Grammar Teaching approach to teach English for non-English major students. This current situation leads the student who is not an English major to pay less attention to speaking. They cannot do communication with a native speaker or someone who speaks English, even though they have already learned English for six years.

The Definition of Communicative Language Teaching

At the end of the 1960s, the Audio-Lingual Method met a drastic attack from both American sociolinguistics and British functional linguistics based on the study of language from a wider perspective. Hymes (1970) put forward the term "communicative competence" to refer to appropriate language performance in contrast to "linguistic competence". At the same time,

Halliday (1970) Wilkins(1972, 1976) , Widdowson (1972, 1978) , and Brumfit and Johnson(1979) emphasized “the functional and communicative potential of language .They saw the need to focus on communicative proficiency rather than on mere mastery of structures"(Richards and Rodgers, 2001:153).Influenced by this view of language learning and teaching, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)came into existence with explicit attention on language in use" , which expanded the dimension of language from the previous linguistic forms to communicative function.

CLT was brought to China in the late 1970s by international ELT specialists working in some Chinese universities. Initially, it failed to receive support (L. M. Yu, 2001). In fact, there was strong resistance to it (Burnaby & Sun, 1989; X. J. Li, 1984). Until recently, Chinese and Western ELT specialists have had a heated and continual debate on the necessity, appropriateness, and effectiveness of adopting CLT in China (e.g., Anderson, 1993; Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Rao, 1996).

It has not been stereotyped in terms of theory of the Communicative Language Teaching, as it is based on the idea that learning a foreign language is not to master its structures for forms, but to develop students’ communicative competence.

The various pedagogical principles of a communicative approach to language teaching can be expressed in more or less detail. For example, Finocchario & Brumfit's detailed discussion (1983: 91-3) can be summarized as follows:

1. Teaching is learner-centered and responsive to learners' needs and interests.

2. The target language is acquired through interactive communicative use that encourages the negotiation of meaning.
3. Genuinely meaningful language use is emphasized, along with unpredictability, risk-taking, and choice-making.
4. There is exposure to examples of authentic language from the target language community.
5. The formal properties of language are never treated in isolation from use; language forms are always addressed within a communicative context.
6. Learners are encouraged to discover the forms and structures of language for themselves.
7. There is a whole-language approach in which the four traditional language skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) are integrated.

The Application of Communicative Language Teaching in Chinese Classroom

Despite a lack of consensus among researchers regarding in the appropriateness of CLT for China, the Ministry of Education (known as the State Education Commission between 1985 and 1997) was impressed by the high profile that the methodology enjoyed internationally and was convinced that it would provide the best solution for the widespread problem of students' low competence in using English for communication even after years of formal instruction in the language (Guangwei, Hu. 2005). Consequently, CLT was promoted

intensively in a top-down manner though syllabus design and materials production (Adamson & Morris, 1997; Hu, 2002b). Recent research (e.g. , Hu, 2003; Zheng & Adamson, 2003) suggest that CLT has gained some ground. However, indications also show that the adoption of CLT practices does not occur across the board but varies as a result of local contexts (Hu, 2003). Furthermore, it is important to note that certain quarters tend to equate CLT simplistically with so-called good and progressive pedagogy (e.g., Liao, 2004; L.M. Yu, 2001) .

Although English education may not be able to keep up with the need for it, over the years Chinese universities have provided tens of thousands of competent English users, a great majority of these having been English majors educated in over 300 intensive English programmers. However, this number is actually rather small relative to China's needs and compared with the huge number of young adults trying to master English in addition to their other areas of study (Yi'an, Wu. 2001).

In response to the demand of communicative competence, the college English teachers should do something accordingly. However, college English teaching at present is still pretty much reading-based, with about three fourths of the time devoted to reading comprehension and another one fourth to listening and speaking. How to adopt the communicative approach in most of our classes is a question under consideration now. Many teachers have tried to combine the traditional teaching of reading comprehension with the communicative teaching of oral proficiency and achieved some satisfactory effects. Thus we'll be able to make the process of learning English, or any other language, really fun. As Montaigne says, "Without methods, without a book, without grammar or rules, without a whip and without tears, I had

learned Latin as proper as that of my schoolmaster (Savignon 1983:47).

The call for the adoption of CLT was not accidental. It came as a response to discontent with the traditional grammar-translation method. In this teaching method, classroom teachers' focus on grammar and structure, this produced unsatisfactory results. Students had little ability to speak and understand English (Ng & Tang, 1997).

Due to the highly centralized Chinese system of education, this top-down intervention proved to be very effective in urging teachers to teach communicatively in classrooms. By the mid-1990s, CLT had become "a general approach in teaching and learning," or "a principle communicative approach" (Gong, 1999, p116).

In the college, English was considered a core course for non-English major student. They have no listening and oral class to cultivate their speaking ability. So, most teachers and learners tend to overly emphasize the knowledge of language itself in traditional ELT. Too much time and attention is spent on grammar, vocabulary and sentence structure (Jun, Yu, 2007), in order to get a good result on their final examination or a diploma. So, teachers should transform this old teaching method into CLT to meet the demand of the country.

Transfer the teachers' roles and create a harmonious student-teacher relationship.

Communicative Language Teaching theory holds that the acquisition and development of communicative competence mainly depend on students' internal factors. To meet the end, the teacher has to shift his or her role as a dominant teacher. In communicative language teaching classroom, teachers are no longer traditionally knowledge-transmitter. They play multiple roles in communicative activities- as an assessor. Students become the center of the class in

communicative language teaching. All of them take part in activities. The effective way to make students active participants is by designing and organizing a rich variety of student—centered activities, such as pair works, group works, role plays, story telling, cross-words, information gap activities, and even games.

Content is the soul of language. The classroom activities alone can not produce satisfactory result in English language teaching and learning. So it is suggested that teaching materials conveying more knowledge be introduced. Teaching materials should not be only textbook- based. It should be more flexible. Richard has suggested that over-reliance on a single textbook many militate against independence by both learner and teacher.

CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Misunderstanding and Analysis about CLT

The ultimate goal of CLT is to train the ability of students can use English to communicate, that is, oral communication and written language ability, such as cover letter, thank you letter, personal resume, letter of appointment, degree or academic writing, etc. In other words, the real communication should be the students skilled in use oral and written English to express ideas, to discuss issues. However, due to the lack of the monograph of CLT in China, teachers and scholars only can state the different views according to their own understanding. Different teachers are often using their own understanding of CLT to English teaching. So, those situations result in the following misconceptions:

Firstly, CLT is not taught grammar, oral teaching only. CLT has no objection to grammar, it is only against the grammatical structure teaching, which is not a question of education does not teach grammar, but rather how to teach, to learn the necessary syntax. CLT advocates the use of language to communicate, it will undoubtedly be more effective than just teach grammar to the students when they do not know the language. We know that communication is not limited to verbal communication. Communication is through written, verbal of the two media. In the process of communication, listening and speaking, reading and writing the role of always changing and therefore, language learners should be fully grasp the listening, speaking, reading and writing four skills. CLT is as much as possible to

encourage students to participate in various types of communication, not just oral communication.

Secondly, CLT is the approach to organize different kinds of teaching activities. These activities of each lesson only pair activities, group discussion, and role play, games, etc. Over time, some students lost freshness, not with the desire to participate in activities and interests. Dialogue, role-playing is a very useful skill. But you are wrong, if you think that dialogue, role-playing is confined to salespersons and customers, doctors and patients etc. In fact, its scope is much more widely available for all levels of society, various types of communication. At the same time, their role is not required, as some textbooks, only under the question text, answers the questions according to text content, reading dialogue. It seems students can use dialogue; in fact, students have no choice but to have done some things.

Thirdly, CLT is not to correct student's error. Exactly, teachers should help students to practice their dialogues, organize the group discussion. Also, teachers need to help students correct the common mistake in the activity.

Problems Might Occurs in the Teaching

1. The aspect of teacher.

For teachers, the biggest problem is the level of their spoken English is not high, despite that many English teachers have a strong grammar, reading and writing skills, but their listening and speaking ability is not sufficient to operate the entire teaching process. Sometimes, they can not use English to answer the questions raised by students, especially outside the textbook. Second, they are lack of understanding of CLT. Most teachers only

heard or read from the book, have not the opportunity of seeing the real CLT classroom, but also do not have the opportunity to participate in the training. They do not want to risk applying new teaching methods. And, because of unable to find suitable materials, they have to give up.

2. The number of students has influence on CLT.

Currently, English language teaching in China is in large classroom. In the college, the average number of students in one classroom is around 46-55, even if the English major classes are around 35-45. This state of affairs has led to great practical difficulties in CLT.

- 1) greatly reduces the opportunities of students in the classroom take part in the oral language practice;
- 2) teacher have difficulty in adjusting classroom atmosphere;
- 3) the interaction between teachers and students are reduced, not fully communication.

3. The incomplete examination system in China

Although the Quality Education in our country has been put forward for many years, the examination-oriented education continues to occupy the most important position. Chinese students have to study under the pressure of CET, Test for English Majors, Graduate Entrance Examination, Test of English as a Foreign Language and Graduate Record Examination etc, besides the Middle School Entrance Examination, High School Entrance Examination, and College Entrance Examination. The most questions in this kind of examination are multi-choice, which focus on language accuracy rather than fluency in the

language application. To some extent, this affected the effectiveness of CLT, and even hinders the promotion of CLT.

Recommendations

Due to the several problems which occurs in the CLT, the author believe that first of all, English teachers should continue to learn advanced teaching theory, improve their professional knowledge, know the correct meaning of communicative competence, understanding the substance of CLT , and master the ways and means of teaching. In the teaching process, teachers need to correctly handle the students' ability of listening and speaking and the relationship between reading and writing skills, to encourage students to participate in oral and written communication, not only to meet their current needs and meet the use of English in their future. In addition, teachers have to correct attitude towards grammar teaching in CLT. The appropriate classroom time to the systematic teaching of grammar knowledge, teachers should provide some meaningful opportunities for students to communicate in the real situation, so that students can learn grammar structures, while training their communicative competence.

Conclusions

CLT focus on teaching students the ability to make comprehensive use of language, the communicative ability as the ultimate goal of teaching. With the development of modern information technology, CLT has been applied to foreign language teaching in China. CLT continues to play an effective and active role. The author believes that CLT is an effective

approach to improve the student's speaking ability. Although, there are also some problems existed in the use of CLT, the effect of CLT in current teaching situation is undeniable.

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