THE APPLICATION OF THE INTERACTIVE APPROACH

TO COLLEGE ORAL ENGLISH IN CHINA

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Abstract

THE APPLICATION OF THE INTERACTIVE APPROACH

TO COLLEGE ORAL ENGLISH IN CHINA

Lan Zhou

Under the Supervision of Dr. Madelon Kohler Busch, Associated German Professor

With globalization, English has become a very useful communicative tool for Chinese people to communicate with people from other countries, especially for college students. English has become a mandatory course in China. However, in the Chinese traditional classroom, most college students have learned English from an elementary school, but their listening and speaking skills are underdeveloped. At present, the interactive approach is gradually changing the traditional teaching model in China. There is an introduction about the definition and theories of the Interactive Approach, and a comparison between the Interactive Approach and Chinese transnational teaching methods. This kind of teaching method makes up the shortcomings of Chinese traditional class. Moreover, the interactive approach can help to improve students' English proficiency. Finally, there are some practical suggestions about how teachers apply the Interactive teaching into classes.
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Chapter I Introduction

With globalization, English has become a very useful communicative tool for Chinese people to communicate with people from other countries, especially for college students. The environment of globalization requires us to pay more attention to English learning. However, in the Chinese traditional classroom, teachers always put more focus on reading and writing, rather than spoken English. Moreover, most of the time is spent on explaining definitions of words and phrases, rather than interactions between teachers and students. So this traditional kind of class is passive and inefficient for developing and increasing oral proficiency. The interactive approach stresses the interaction between teachers and students, and between students and speaking materials. Instructed by the interactive approach of speaking, students can activate and integrate their previous knowledge and make the most use of related background knowledge to improve their spoken English and their oral proficiency.

Statement of the Problem

In China, most college students have learned English from an elementary school, but their listening and speaking skills are underdeveloped. Is the Chinese traditional classroom the reason why students are struggling? And what is the interactive approach? Compared to the traditional methods, which way is better to teach speaking in a Chinese classroom?
Definition of Terms

The Interactive Approach: In 2001, Brown defines the definition of the concept of interaction as follows:

"Interaction is the collaborative exchange of thoughts, feelings, or ideas between two or more people resulting in a reciprocal effect on each other. Theories of communicative competence emphasize the importance of interaction as human beings use language in various contexts to ‘negotiate’ meaning, or simply stated, to get one idea out of your head and into the head of another person and vice versa"(p.159).

It is a kind of teaching and learning method based on information and affective communication between teachers and learners. This approach requires teachers and students to actively participate in the teaching process or express the interesting information among each other, and teacher should act as an organizer who organizes the classroom activities or a designer who designs the learning tasks in the teaching process.

The Principles of the Interactive Approach: In the process of teaching, teacher's ways of teaching are based on principles of language learning and teaching in published books. These principles form the basis of interactive approach in foreign language teaching and learning.

Brown (2001) lists seven interactive principles, which form the fundamentals of the interactive theory in the language classroom. The seven principles are the principle
of automation, the principle of interests, the principle of strategic investment, the
principle of risk-taking, the principle of language-culture connection, the principle of
inter-language and the principle of communicative competence.

Communicative Competence Theory: Dell Hymes's theory--Communicative
Competence (1974) provided the theoretical background of interactive language
teaching. Communicative language teaching is based on language functions and
learners can learn the teaching of Communicative Competence. This method insists that
the purpose of foreign teaching is to cultivate communicative competence in the special
social environments. Communicative competence is an important concept of English
teaching. When teaching is involved in some specific teaching activities, teachers
should regard the competence as the center of English teaching. Meanwhile, teachers
should consider the differences between native speakers and second language learners
in China. In this way, communicative competence can have great significance for
English teaching. That is because interaction is the core of communicative language
teaching, and the whole contents of communicative language teaching. (Xiaoyan Shi,
2013)

**Purpose of the Study**

Speaking is one of four basic English language skills. Although the majority of
Chinese Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) professionals and foreign
language teachers have taken great efforts in oral English teaching, yet speaking still
fails to achieve the desired results. I hope to change the traditional teaching model to
the interactive approach of English oral teaching in China. During oral teaching, the interactive teaching methods stimulate students' interests, which will make students pay more attention to speaking competency and promote students' speaking ability in daily life.

**Significance of the Study**

English has become a very important tool to communicate with people from other countries in the world. It is imperative to improve spoken English, especially for college students. Because the traditional methods of teaching oral English are not working well, it is necessary to look for a better method to teach oral English.

**Methodology**

Firstly, what is the interactive approach? I will expound on the explanation of the interactive approach more specific. Secondly, to analyze Chinese traditional method for English speaking, there will be a comparison between the previous methods and the interactive approach. Lastly, I will illustrate that the interactive approach can help to improve students' English speaking proficiency. In China, most of college students have learned English from an elementary school, but their listening and speaking are underdeveloped. Is the Chinese traditional classroom the reason why students are struggling? What is the interactive approach? Compared to the traditional methods, which ways to teach speaking is better in Chinese class? In order to figure out these questions, I did research on CNKL (China national knowledge internet) and some teaching materials and text from the United States to find out some related materials.
about the topic. Also, in the future, I will visit some college English teachers in China and observe the current English speaking class.
Chapter II Review of Literature

This literature review reflects the previous research of interactive approach in China and abroad. To begin with, this part presents the development of the interactive approach by analyzing several studies in America, such as the study of Harvard University Professor Wilga M. Rivers, the study of American linguist H. Douglas Brown and others. Also, it includes several studies of the interactive approach in China.

Previous Studies of the Interactive Approach Abroad

In the United States of America, the interactive approach to foreign language teaching is the accepted approach now, it has been put successfully into teaching practice. This interactive approach is presently gradually changing the traditional teaching model in China. Therefore, it will be fruitful to look at and analyze already existing studies concerning the interactive approach abroad.

Studies on Interactive Approach

Language is a tool of communication. When communicating with people, people send messages and people receive messages. Therefore, interaction is the heart of communication. At the very beginning of learning a foreign language, interaction is crucial. Gordon Wells (1981:46) states that "linguistic interaction is a collaborative activity... any act of linguistic communication involves the establishment of a triangular relationship between the sender, the receiver and the context of situation." In 1987, Wilga M. Rivers puts the definition of interaction in this way:
Through interaction, students can increase their language store as they listen to or read authentic linguistic material, or even the output of their fellow students in discussion, skits, joint problem-solving tasks, or dialogue journals. In interaction, students can use all they possess of the language—all they have learned or casually absorbed—in real-life exchanges. …Even at an elementary stage, they learn in this way to exploit the elasticity of language (1987:4-5).

And, in 2000, Rivers defines "interaction" as "students achieve facility in using a language when their attention is focused on conveying and receiving authentic messages." Rivers states that language teaching is a process of structuring interactive activity. The function of teachers is to create opportunities and the environment of using language effectively and freely.

The interactive approach originated in the 1970’s, and has developing into a widely used pedagogical system, which has gained considerable acceptance in European and North American countries. The interactive approach is a series of activities organized between teacher-students, student-student and student-text in order to fulfill different learning tasks cooperatively. From the cognitive psychology perspective, Wilga M. Rivers analyzes and emphasizes that the fundamental role is interest in the interactive activity. Rivers explains that the information feedback will be naturally produced if listeners are interested in the content of the conversation. Therefore, in foreign language teaching, teachers strive to motivate students and keep them actively participating in interactive activity. Students in interactive classroom will accumulate the language well
by listening to authentic language materials, or even by the language output from other students in the class. Students can absorb most of the useful information into their own knowledge. They can activate previous knowledge or gain new knowledge indirectly. In this way students can know the characteristics of a language in the authentic context.

Rivers stresses that the interactive approach is a process of information communication, most often between teachers and students. Through communication, teachers and students try to express their ideas and thoughts freely and naturally to each other. In the process of communication, the interactive approach also assists sharing ideas with another students. More students will gain more ideas from each other in language learning. The language environment is very important for students to receive more comprehensive knowledge and then put out more new and creative ideas. The interactive activities require students to participate in the whole teaching and learning process.

In addition, Ellis (1994) observes that the interactive approach is the main change and tendency in the language teaching process in the past twenty years. Ellis warns and emphasizes that students need to practice and communicate with each other during the language learning process. Therefore, Ellis comes to the conclusion that the interactive approach is a good teaching approach in second language acquisition for students. Learners can learn language more vividly and more quickly through interactive activities.

Susan M. Gass is another scholar to focus on interaction, in her book *Input,*
**Interaction, and the Second Language.** Gass analyzes the interaction effect, and explains that conversational interaction can promote the ability to communicate and also analyze the form and function of conversational interaction. Nunan (2000) points out that a new teaching model, which calls for students to participate in the teaching process is gradually changing the traditional teacher-centered pedagogy. The traditional teaching model does not meet the students' learning needs any more. Nunan states that students should actively participate in more activities in foreign language learning classrooms. Teachers encourage students to share and experience the learning process with the purpose to increase their cognition about the teaching approach. In other words, teachers should encourage students to be aware of the importance of subjective initiative in the language learning process. Learners can learn a language better and more rapidly through interactive activities.

**Studies on Interactive Principles**

A teaching principle is a general guideline and standard in the teaching process, which is based on the teaching subject, objective rules and teaching practice experiences with the purpose to effectively carry out teaching activities. How should we to judge a teaching technique’s effectiveness? In 1994, Brown listed twelve overarching principles of second language learning in his book *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*.

Firstly, it includes five principles from the point of cognitive principles. It includes Automaticity, Meaningful Learning, the Anticipation of Reward, the Intrinsic
Motivation Principle and Strategic Investment. The Principle of Automaticity may be stated as follows:

Efficient second language learning involves a timely movement of the control of a few language forms into the automatic processing of a relatively unlimited number of language forms. Overanalyzing language, thinking too much about its forms, and consciously lingering on rules of language all tend to impede this graduation to automaticity. Brown, 2001, p.17

In the other words, people should better avoid their propensity to pay too much attention to the bits and pieces of language and move on to the actual use of language for meaningful purposes.

“The Principle of Meaningful learning states that meaningful learning will lead toward better long-term retention than rote learning” (Brown, 2001, p.18). Indeed, understanding is more meaningful than reading. Another teaching principle is the Principle of the Anticipation of Reward. B. F. Skinner and others have clearly demonstrated the strength of rewards in both animal and human behavior. The principle behind Skinner’s operant conditioning paradigm might be summarized briefly as follows: “Human beings are universally driven to act, or “behave”, by the anticipation of some sort of reward—tangible or intangible, short term or long term—that will ensure as a result of the behavior” (Brown, 2001, p.19). Therefore, in a classroom, teachers’ praise and comments can help students understand why they are doing
something, and what the relevance of it is for example to their long-term goals in learning English.

As for the Intrinsic Motivation Principle, Brown states: “The most powerful rewards are those that are intrinsically motivated within the learner. Because the behavior stems from needs, wants, or desires within oneself, the behavior itself is self-rewarding; therefore, no externally administered reward is necessary at all” (Brown, 2001, p.20). In other words, if classroom techniques are self-rewarding in the perception of the learners, they are likely to be successful. Therefore, to motivate students’ interests is really important.

The last cognitive principle is Strategic Investment. Brown states: “Successful mastery of the second language will be due to a large extent to a learner’s own personal ‘investment’ of time, effort, and attention to the second language in the form of an individualized battery of strategies for comprehending and producing the language.” (p.20) The principle shows that it focuses on the importance of recognizing and dealing with the wide variety of styles and strategies that learners successfully bring to a foreign language learning process. Therefore, we need to pay attention to each separate individual in the classroom. The most difficult challenge for teachers is how to attend to each individual student in a class while reaching the class as a whole group.

There are also four principles related to the emotional processing of human beings. They are Language ego, Self-confidence, Risk-taking and the Language-Culture Connection. The Language ego principle can be summarized in this well-recognized
claim:

As human beings learn to use a second language, they also develop a new mode of thinking, feeling, and acting—a second identity. The new “language ego”, intertwined with the second language, can easily create within the learner a sense of fragility, a defensiveness, and a raising of inhibitions. Brown, 2001, p.22

Therefore, when learning English as a second language, Chinese students are likely to experience a moderate identity crisis as they develop a “second self”. In the learning process, teachers’ patience and understanding are necessary.

The second principle is Self-confidence. Brown states, “The eventual success that learners attain in a task is at least partially a factor of their belief that they indeed are fully capable of accomplishing the task.”(Brown, 2001, p.23)

A third affective principle interrelated with the previous two principles is the importance of getting learners to take calculated risks in attempting to use language—both productively and receptively. It’s called the Risk-taking Principle. Brown states the definition:

Successful language learners, in their realistic appraisal of themselves as vulnerable beings yet capable of accomplishing tasks, must be willing to become “gamblers” in the game of language, to attempt to produce and to interpret language that is a bit beyond their absolute certainly. Brown, 2001, p.23
This principle points out the heart of educational philosophy. Many instructional contexts around the world do not welcome risk-taking, instead they encourage correctness. Although, most educational research shows the opposite to be conducive to long-term retention and intrinsic motivations.

The last principle is the Language—Culture Connection. Language and culture are intricately intertwined. Brown explains:

Whenever you teach a language, you also teach a complex system of cultural customs, values, and ways of thinking, feeling, and acting. Especially in second language learning contexts, the success with which learners adapt to a new cultural milieu will affect their language acquisition success, and vice versa, in some possibly significant ways. Brown, 2001, p.25

Therefore, culture plays a big role into the formation of a language and a language reflects the style of the culture. Before learning a foreign language, people had better know about the background of the language and culture.

The last category of principles of language learning and teaching centers on language itself and on how learners deal with these complex linguistic systems. There are the Native Language Effect, Inter-language and Communicative Competence.

The principle of the Native Language Effect stresses the importance of the native system in the linguistic attempts of the second language learner. “The native language of learners will be a highly significant system on which learners will rely to predict the
target language system. While that native system will exercise both facilitating and interfering effects on the production and comprehension of the new language, the interfering effects are likely to be the most salient.” (Brown, 2001, p.27)

What is inter-language? Brown (2001) gave the answer. “Second language learners tend to go through a systematic or quasi systematic developmental process as they progress to full competence in the target language. Successful inter-language language development is partially a factor of utilizing feedback from others” (p.27).

Last but not the least, if grasping communicative competence is the goal of a language classroom, then instruction needs to point toward all of its components: organizational, pragmatic, and psychomotor. “Learning communicative goals are best achieved by giving due attention to language use and not just usage, to fluency and not just accuracy, to authentic language and contexts, and to students’ eventual need to apply classroom learning to heretofore unrehearsed contexts in the real world”. Brown, 2001, p.29

There are twelve principles in the interactive classroom. But in an interactive classroom, there are seven principles which are as following: Automaticity, the Intrinsic Motivation Principle, Strategic Investment, Risk-taking, the Language-culture connection, Inter-language and Communicative Competence.

**Studies on teachers’ roles in interactive classroom**

Just as parents are called upon to be many things to their children, teachers can play
many roles in the course of teaching. Brown (2001) wrote about several roles which are conducive to creating an interactive classroom and others less so in his book *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*.

Firstly, a teacher should be a controller. Just like in a traditional English class, teachers are always expected to be a master controller. Most controllers decide how to manage their class, what students learn, when they should speak, and what language forms they should use. They manage all the teaching steps because those steps are designed ahead of time.

Secondly, a teacher should be a director. A teacher is like the conductor of an orchestra or the director of a drama, and the time in interactive classroom can legitimately be structured well. The job is to keep the process going smoothly, naturally and efficiently.

Thirdly, a teacher needs to be a manager. Managers plan lessons and modules and whole courses and also structures the larger, longer segments of classroom time.

One more role of a teacher is that of a facilitator. Not like a controller or a manager, a facilitator should step away from a dominant role, a facilitator fulfills the requirement to make learning easier for students, to help students clear away roadblocks, to find shortcuts, to negotiate rough terrain.

Lastly, the role of a teacher can be a resource. It means that the teacher should act as a learning resource to students and always be there for advice and counsel when the students seek it. Therefore, it requires a teacher to keep learning all the time.
As an interactive teacher, one should be able to assume all five of the above roles of direction to non-direction teaching.

**Previous studies of the Interactive Approach in China**

At present, more and more studies of interactive theory and interactive language teaching are being gradually developing in foreign language teaching in China. The Interactive Approach emphasizes the importance of communication between teachers and students, and encourages students to use the foreign language as much as they can through interactive and cooperative activities.

Some researchers have had some success in the aspect of the theories of Interactive Approach. Li Huali studied the model of interactive teaching and the methods and strategies of carrying out the interactive activities in English classroom according to constructivism theory (2009.10). Cao, Li and Wang thought that the Interactive Approach can produce an effective way of happy learning, which stimulate students' interest and initiative ability based on the theories and principles of the Interactive Approach. So these researchers suggested that teachers should promote and perfect this method in English teaching practice.

Through the researches of the Interactive Approach in China, which are mentioned above, applying the Interactive Approach to oral English education is reliable and useful. On one hand, in the interactive classroom, teacher can create a relaxed atmosphere for English learners besides providing more comprehensibility according to interactive theories. On the other hand, students can improve their
communication ability in foreign language well and effectively.

Chapter III The Interactive Approach
Definition of The Interactive Approach

Interaction plays an important role in communication. When communicating with people, people send messages and people receive messages. People interpret messages in a context, then people try to negotiate meanings, and people collaborate to accomplish certain purposes. Therefore, interaction is the heart of communication. In 2001, Brown defines the definition of the concept of interaction as follows:

"Interaction is the collaborative exchange of thoughts, feelings, or ideas between two or more people resulting in a reciprocal effect on each other. Theories of communicative competence emphasize the importance of interaction as human beings use language in various contexts to ‘negotiate’ meaning, or simply stated, to get one idea out of your head and into the head of another person and vice versa"(p.159).

The Interactive Approach is a kind of language teaching method based on information and effective communication between teachers and students. This approach requires teachers to design an active and effective classroom, where students can participate in the teaching process actively or express the interesting information among students in this kind of classroom. Moreover, as an interactive teacher, one should be able to be a controller, director, manager, facilitator and resource in interactive classrooms. The roles of the Interactive Approach have been discussed in the literature review part above. In addition, the Interactive Approach can promote students overall and harmonious development by active communication and interacting with teachers.
and students in language learning.

The Theories of the Interactive Approach

Communicative Competence Theory provides good theoretical basis for guiding the Interactive Approach in English speaking. The concept of Communicative Competence was put forward by Dell Hymes which published in *On Communicative Competence* (1987). In the aspect of theoretical basis, Hymes and Hallide made great contributions to communication competence in the foreign language teaching.

The Communicative Competence holds the idea that language ability concludes language knowledge and pragmatic ability. Learners should appropriately use the language to communicate with each other. Language learners not only know which form is in accordance with language rules, but also know how to confirm to language culture. Communicative language teaching is based on language functions and improving the Communicative Competence by teaching methods. This method insists that the purpose of foreign language teaching is to cultivate communicative competence in the specific social environments. Communicative competence is an important concept of English teaching. Meanwhile, teachers should consider the differences between native speakers and second language learners in China. In this way, communicative competence can have great significance for English teaching. That is because interaction is the core of communicative language teaching, and the whole contents of communicative language teaching.

Long (1983) found that people's communication cooperates with each other in
order to communicate smoothly through the observation of speakers which forms interaction modification. The receivers who provide information continually modify their own forms of expressions to be sure to communicate smoothly. Learners participate in interactive activities which are beneficial to receive comprehensible input that can promote acquisition. Language is a tool for communication. The final goal of language teaching is that people can communicate with each other in foreign language.

The Shortcomings in Oral English Class in China

At present, English is becoming more and more important since it has become a communicative tool for Chinese people to communicate with people in other countries, especially for college students. Therefore, the situation requires Chinese students to improve their speaking ability to meet the development of the society. In China, most college students have learned English from elementary school, but their speaking skills are underdeveloped.

There are three main reasons why many Chinese students can’t grasp English speaking. Firstly, in the Chinese traditional classroom, teachers always put more concerns on reading and writing, rather than spoken English. Moreover, most of the time is spent on explaining definitions of words and phrases, rather than interactions between teachers and students. And, in ordinary colleges, there are only four or five English class once a week. The time for students to have English speaking classes is quite limited and insufficient.

Secondly, the traditional teaching approach is still popular in college English
teaching in China. The teacher-centered method is also a common practice in some English classes. Teachers have to explain sentence by sentence when confronting the large-size class, and what teachers do in class is a symbol of great authority among students. Teachers dominate the classroom by explaining the usage of language with less participation of the learners. Gradually, in the end, Chinese students just passively participate in teachers instructions with the traditional teaching model. Students have few chances to express their ideas and absorb good ideas from others in English classroom. More often, they do not want to express ideas in English, because they do not want to make mistakes in English; they think making mistakes will “lose face” which means shameful and incompetent. Hence, this traditional kind of class is passive and inefficient for developing and increasing oral proficiency. Lastly, Chinese students learn English without a good language environment. B.F.Skinner, a foundational American psychologist, viewed babies as “empty vessels” which language had to be “put in to”. And he (1957) believes that children will learn by imitation, reinforcement that comes from the environments. Though these points are proved to be absolute, his opinions pay much attention to environment and he ignores a person’s subjective initiative. But, it can conclude that environment plays an important role in foreign language learning. Wes, a Japanese artist, has said, “I’m never learning, I’m only just listening then talking.” Learning a foreign language is a way of understanding foreign people’s words, foreign people’s way of thinking, and foreign countries’ culture. There are many differences between Chinese culture and American culture, Chinese people and American people. Wherefore, it is difficult for Chinese students to grasp the
The Advantages of the Interactive Approach

Compared to the first shortcoming of Chinese traditional class, the first advantage is that the Interactive Approach enhances the awareness of students' speaking in English oral teaching. On the one hand, the Interactive Approach makes students fully participate in the speaking process in order to promote the language use ability in authentic contexts. On the other hand, the Interactive Approach enhances the integration skills including listening, speaking, reading and writing. Students will pay more attention to improve spoken English.

Secondly, the Interactive Approach is beneficial to eliminating the fear before students start to speak English. In an interactive class, students will be encouraged to express their own ideas freely, and students can share ideas with classmates. Gradually, students do no longer fear English speaking. Moreover, the Interactive Approach can, to some extent, extend students’ thinking, and broaden students’ horizon. Because the teacher creates a relaxed and free atmosphere for students in the interactive classroom, students can express ideas about the topic from textbooks as much as possible. Students have more chances to communicate among classmates and teachers. And then students can also absorb good ideas and creative ideas from other students in the process of some teaching technologies, such as presentation, correcting, and structural analysis. What’s more, the Interactive Approach can build students’ self-confidence and stimulate students’ speaking interests. H. Douglas Brown listed six factors which are affecting
pronunciation learning. The sixth factor is “motivation and concern for good pronunciation.” Brown (2001) gave the definition of motivation as this, “Motivation is the extent to which you make choices about goals to pursue and the effort you will devote to that pursuit” (p.34). To stimulate students’ desire to speak in English is really important in Chinese English class. Meanwhile, some students are not particularly concerned about their pronunciation while others are. Wherefore, if motivation and concern are high, then the necessary effort will be expended in pursuit of goals.

Last but not the least, the Interactive Approach is an appropriate and effective approach to apply in English oral classrooms. The Interactive Approach stimulates students to participate in the whole process of oral teaching and students can output more effective comprehensible language in the oral English. They have a positive attitude towards the Interactive Approach because of the active and free classrooms. Therefore, the Interactive Approach is a suitable and effective approach to apply in college English speaking.

Chapter IV Conclusion and Recommendations

With globalization, English has become a very useful communicative tool for Chinese people to communicate with people from other countries, especially for college students. The environment of globalization requires us to pay more attention
to English learning. In China, most college students have learned English from elementary school, but their listening and speaking skills are underdeveloped. Is the Chinese traditional classroom the reason why students are struggling?

In the Chapter Three, there are listed three main reasons which caused the phenomenon. Firstly, in the Chinese traditional classroom, teachers always put more concerns on reading and writing, rather than spoken English. Moreover, most of the time is spent on explaining definitions of words and phrases, rather than interactions between teachers and students. Meanwhile, many students do not realize the importance of oral English, because students usually have written English tests. Secondly, the traditional teaching approach is still popular in college English teaching in China. The teacher-centered method is also a common practice in some English classes. Teachers dominate the classroom by explaining the usage of language with little participation of the learners. Students depress their desire to learn foreign language and even do not want to express their ideas or opinions in English in the traditional English class for a long time. Lastly, Chinese students learn English without a supportive language environment. Though the language environment dose not dominate the whole learning process, it plays an important role in language learning. Moreover, there are many differences between Chinese culture and American culture. Wherefore, it is difficult for Chinese students to grasp the English language without an English language environment.

In the United States of America, the Interactive Approach to foreign language teaching is accepted now; it has been put successfully into teaching practice. This
interactive approach is gradually changing the traditional teaching model in China at present. What is the Interactive Approach? Why is this teaching method popular in China? As we known, and interaction plays an important role in communication. In 2001, Brown defines the concept of interaction as follows:

"Interaction is the collaborative exchange of thoughts, feelings, or ideas between two or more people resulting in a reciprocal effect on each other. Theories of communicative competence emphasize the importance of interaction as human beings use language in various contexts to ‘negotiate’ meaning, or simply stated, to get one idea out of your head and into the head of another person and vice versa" (p.159).

The Interactive Approach is a kind of language teaching method based on information and effective communication between teachers and students. This approach requires teachers to design an active and effective classroom, and students can participate in the teaching process actively or express the interesting information among students. Moreover, as an interactive teacher, one should be able to be a controller, director, manager, facilitator and resource in interactive classrooms. According to the theories of second language acquisition and the situation in Chinese English classes, the Interactive Approach can enhance the awareness of students' speaking in English oral teaching. Moreover, the teaching methods can make students fully participate in the speaking process in order to promote the language use ability in authentic contexts. The second advantage is eliminating the fear before students start to speak English. In an interactive class, students will be encouraged to express their own ideas freely, and
students can share ideas with classmates. Gradually, students do not fear English speaking. The teaching method can let students enjoy the act of learning. Finally, the Interactive Approach is an appropriate and effective approach to apply in English oral classrooms. The Interactive Approach stimulates students to participate in the whole process of oral teaching and students can output more effective comprehensible language in the oral English.


The first principle reads, “Techniques should cover the spectrum of learner needs, from language-based focus on accuracy to message-based focus on interaction, meaning, and fluency” (p.268). An interactive teacher, they need to know about their students, before having a class. When organizing some teaching technologies, such as playing games, discussing solutions to the environmental crisis, making sure that the tasks can help students to perceive and use the building blocks of language. The most important thing is to apply more meaningful drills into classes, instead of not to bore students to deal with lifeless drills.

Secondly, Brown’s book listed that techniques should be intrinsically motivated. As mentioned in Chapter Three, motivation plays a big part in the learning process. Accordingly, teachers should try at all times to appeal to students’ ultimate goals and
interests, to their need for knowledge, and for achieving competence and autonomy.

Thirdly, it points out that “techniques should encourage the use of authentic language in meaning contexts” (p.289). Indeed, it is not easy to keep coming up with meaningful interactions. Sometimes, teachers succumb to the temptation to apply, disconnected little grammar exercises. It really takes energy and creativity to devise authentic contexts and meaningful interaction.

Fourthly, the principle is that “Provide appropriate feedback and correction” (p.289). It is important to make use of appropriate, corrective feedback to improve teachers’ teaching and students’ learning. Meanwhile, it can strengthen the bond between teachers and students, and promote their academic interaction.

Fifthly, Brown stated, “Capitalize on the natural link between speaking and listening” (p.289). Many interaction techniques that involve speaking will of course include listening, because the input and the output affect each other closely. Since, when designing speaking goals, teachers should also pay attention to listening goals. The two skills can reinforce each other. Sometimes, skills in producing language are often initiated through comprehension.

The sixth principle is “Give students opportunities to initiate oral communication” (p.289). A good deal of typical classroom interaction is characterized by teacher initiation of language. Teachers ask questions, give directions, provide information. Part of oral communication competence is the ability to initiate conversations, to ask questions, to control conversations, and to change the subject.
Lastly, an interactive teacher should promote speaking strategies and keep pace with new teaching technologies and methods. Most teachers ignore the point. Things are always changing with time, so are students, so are the teaching methods. The teaching career is a way of learning and teaching during one’s whole life.

The final goal to learn a language is to use it in daily life. That is Communicative Competence. The Communicative Competence holds the idea that language ability includes language knowledge and pragmatic ability. Learners should appropriately use the language to communicate with each other. Language learners not only know which form is in accordance with language rules, but also know how to confirm to language culture. Communicative language teaching is based on language functions and improving the Communicative Competence by teaching methods. This method insists that the purpose of foreign language teaching is to cultivate communicative competence in the special social environments. Therefore, Communicative competence is an important concept of English teaching.

References


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