Second Language Acquisition Theory and English Speaking Teaching

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Abstract: Based on the second language acquisition theory, this paper simply introduced Krashen's the "Acquisition-Input" Hypothesis and the Affective Filter Hypothesis, and proposed to apply the second language acquisition theory to English speaking teaching, considering the status quo and existing problems of English speaking teaching in colleges and universities, in order to improve the students' English speaking competence by means of comprehensible input, good teacher-student relationship, and efficient output training and thus enhance the quality of English speaking teaching.
Keywords: Second Language Acquisition; English Speaking Teaching; Input-output; Affective Filter

1. Introduction

The *College English Curriculum Requirements,* published by Tsinghus University Press on June 2004, stipulated that "the purpose of college English teaching is to improve students' English proficiency, especially in listening and speaking, so that they can skillfully use English in later work and life, improve their self-regulated learning competence, and adapt themselves to globalization." In 2007, the Ministry of Education specified in revision of *Requirement* that college English teaching aims at improving students' English proficiency, especially in listening and speaking, their self-regulated learning competency, and their comprehensible cultural quality. Therefore, it's obvious that communication ability is top priority in college English speaking teaching. The key to improve students' communication ability is to reform English speaking teaching.

2. The status quo and existing problems of English speaking teaching

So far, most of students speak very poor English and have rare initiative in learning it. First of all, due to lack of teaching funds, some colleges and universities are still using language labs with out-of-date teaching facilities, and classrooms too poorly equipped to meet the needs for English speaking teaching of the entire school; students can hardly speak in class among such a big crowd and during short teaching hours; both foreign teachers and Chinese students fail to talk to every student in class, so students can't practice to improve their communication skills; after school, students seldom practice with each other to use the knowledge they learned. Hence, schools should provide more language input and output opportunities by building more language labs, narrowing down size of classes, and offering optional courses, such as, British and American Culture, Movie Review, Cross-cultural Business Communication, and so on.

Second, after working in colleges and universities, a few teachers ignore to enhance their professional quality, to make good plans about their career path, to study and discuss the depth of teaching. Similar to students, they are also in desperate

need for a positive environment of language training. In addition, there are only a small number of foreign teachers and less of them have international teacher qualification certificates. As a result, they are not entirely good at teaching with just the advantage of language, instead of systematic teaching training.

Third, some students are admitted with low English test scores, and their psychological health, learning motives and interests vary. The lower the score is, the less confident and active they are in class. Furthermore, most of students learn English for CET 4 and CET 6. Once passed, they will never access to it. Besides, lacking interest in English and initiative in learning it, students scarcely participate in class activities to practice.

3. Second language acquisition theory and foreign language learning

For starters, we need to understand two totally different concepts, foreign language learning and second language acquisition theory. The former means to learn foreign languages not widely used in daily life in school or training center. Second language is the language often heard in daily life to an extent second to mother tongue in bilingual countries, for example, both Chinese and English apply in Singapore.

Based on exploration of the second language acquisition process and its laws, the second language acquisition theory is of certain importance to solving the existing problems in foreign language teaching in China and guiding the English teaching in colleges and universities. Since the 1970s, researchers have been working on the second language acquisition from multiple point of views. In the past 30 years, theories one after another were proposed due to the research pattern with multiple dimensions and methods. Among that, an American linguist Krashen's the adult monitoring theory provided important theoretical basis for Chinese foreign language teaching. This theory centered on the input hypothesis. Krashen said that the "comprehensible input" is an essential condition for language acquisition, and learner can actually acquire language only when he is exposed in the "comprehensible input", namely, the second language input with proficiency slightly higher than what he masters now, and focuses 100% on comprehending its meaning rather than form. This hypothesis can be interpreted as "i+1", where i refers to the present language proficiency of learner and 1 the "minimum" degree of difficulty. The input material itself and method will have an impact on the results of affective filter and the quality of input. Secondly, the "affective filter hypothesis" advocated that the affective factors directly affect the second language acquisition. Krashen believed that, during the second language acquisition, learner accepting the comprehensible input is an essential other than necessary condition. The language acquisition should be evaluated as per the performance difference of learners, in addition to the input. The performance difference of learners is manifested in the variance of affective factors - their attitude towards learning. Whether positive or negative, it has direct influence on the absorption and comprehension of the comprehensible input, namely, knowledge.

4. Application of second language acquisition theory to English speaking teaching

The second language acquisition theory explained that learner acquires knowledge by means of unconscious learning and conscious acquisition. In the first case, students merely realize the process of learning, for example, they watch movies or sing English songs. Under the second circumstance, teachers teach, with purposeful training and repeating. It also pointed out that the input of language has to be comprehensible, otherwise it's no more than noise. Therefore, teachers need to improve the input environment, the teacher-student relationship, and the quality of English speaking.

4.1 Building up a favorable input environment

According to Krashen, learner should pay enough attention to the language input and be capable of understanding it, so that it can be transformed into knowledge to be accepted by learner, and a fully comprehensible language input environment can be established by integrating unconscious learning and conscious acquisition. To enhance students' interests, teachers can play English songs or movies in break time or simple videos in class. Meanwhile, plenty of time has to be available for the comprehensible input, and the input must be appealing to students or relevant to daily life. In other words, the input has to be fun so that students can easily accept. As a result, teachers need to select proper teaching materials, and impart to students the English speaking knowledge in simple words and in flexible ways by gradually increasing difficulty. Moreover, the "internet+" information technology can be used to create situational teaching scenes and organize teaching activities, such as role play and

simulation practice, so that students can understand the application of language in living environment and improve their self-regulated learning ability.

4.2 Establishing a good teacher-student relationship

Krashen's affective filter hypothesis indicated that human brain has an affective filter that controls language input and has to be developed for language acquisition. Confident learner experiences low affective filtering, capable of processing more input. In order to create a kind of environment with low affective filtering, teachers should care about students' life, besides academic performance, listen to their problems, and always be their helper and guide in school. More pep talks should be heard in class, in case of negative thoughts, such as lack of confidence, anxiety, and improper attitude towards learning.

4.3 Encouraging students to speak English

As a supplement to Krashen's "comprehensible input", Swain's "comprehensible output" stresses on the meaningful output and application of target language based on input. Input and output are complementary and interactive to each other during the process of language acquisition. It's impossible to improve students' spoken English if without training on comprehensible output.

In the first place, teachers need to understand students are living souls with thoughts and emotions. Corder once said, "effective language teaching has to be natural and conducive to learning, teachers and teaching materials need to adapt to the needs of students." For this, instead of being the controller and center in class, teachers should play a role of director leading students to perform in class activities. Next, both input and output, as an indivisible whole, are extremely important in the process of language acquisition. As much as the comprehensible input is assured, quality output must be guaranteed to the maximum extent, which is essential to improve the proficiency of students in English speaking. In consequence, teachers should precisely select fun teaching materials moderate in difficulty, and design class activities with topics students enjoy, leading students to participate in class activities, motivating them to speak and practice. In class, students make evaluation of each other, and teachers as guide of class activities give absolute freedom to students to avoid anxiety. This kind of transition from "negative learning" to "positive learning" contributes to language output of students.

5. Conclusion

Learning second language is a course that learner processes, absorbs, and practices knowledge. In college English teaching, teachers must ensure the integration of comprehensible input with quality output, create free language environment, and closely connect with students. It is of guiding significance for both teachers and students to applying the second language acquisition theory to college English speaking teaching.

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