

Observation and Reflection of Foreign Teachers' Class

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Abstract: Trough observing the English teaching of two foreign teachers at college, the author find that even the foreign teachers are very motivating and inspiring, most Chinese college students remain as reluctant as in Chinese teachers' classroom because of their culture and educational training history.

Keywords: Foreign teachers; English classroom; College; Observation

1. Introduction

During this semester, I have attended two classes of two foreign teachers at our Zhongshan College, which is a faculty of UESTC (University of Electronic science and technology of China). Two classes are oral English classes. The students of Paul Wegerson (We call him Paul), an American young man in his twenties, are non-English majors, junior while another American teacher RC Shikles (We call him RC) teaches English majors, freshman.

2. Observation and Comment

2.1 Teaching material

Both of the foreign teachers do bring their textbooks, 《Medium-level Spoken English》, which is asked by the English Department Administrator to use in the class, but they never use them.

2.2 Lesson plan

They always teach according to their own teaching plan, although no written plan for each class and they like to change depending on the situation. For example, during the second class from RC, after the teaching of pronunciation for about 20 minutes, he did a few puzzles with the students for around 5 minutes and then go on to finish the pronunciation teaching plan. As in the second class from Paul, with the students' agreement, he cancelled the break time and let the students off 10 minutes earlier.

2.3 Lesson activity

2.3.1 Lesson starting

Both of them started their class by greeting the students with loud and clear voice which attracts the students' attention and brings them into the English environment immediately. And Paul can call all the students' English names without referring to the namelist when asking them questions. This is very helpful to bring the teacher and the students closer, bring them into play and take the whole class under control.

2.3.2 Lesson development

When it comes to the classroom activities, Paul inclines to adopt group work, pair work, playing games, telling stories, singing a song and he always introduces the topics by drawing pictures on blackboard. When talking about the difference between the past and the present, he drew two pictures: one is the neighborhood area when he was a little kid and another is the neighborhood area at present so that the students can easily know what they are asked to do before they plunge into the pair practice.

On the other hand, RC, the elder teacher, prefers using the lecture and presentation interweaving with singing a song or some puzzle but without so many activities. His class seems to be less exciting than Paul's but the students are still involved. And there are presentations which is also a good method to check the students' performance, and as a experienced teacher, he can immediately points out the problem. Although RC seems to be strict, he can also be flexible if he thinks it is beneficial to the students. For example, while he gives lecture to the whole class, he will split the class into two parts doing the presentations so as not to waste too much of the other students' time, which is real inspiration to me.

2.4 Assessment

As to the evaluation of the students' performance, Paul maybe gives it from impression through oral talk in class, no homework to check while RC, who is also a computer expert, always create a scientific and rigid evaluation form. With these about ten times of evaluation, he can give a scientific final performance mark to the students, which is another favorable experience I would like to learn.

2.5 Degree of Difficulty

When it comes to the content and difficulty of the lesson, both are moderate and suitable for the students. When Paul asked his class to describe the neighborhoods at past and at present, he told the students not to just stay at the stage of superficial description and asked them to add VALUE statements. For example, decade ago during the childhood, there were grocery stores around neighborhood, no supermarket. Paul reminded the students of the VALUE of this change, and some students burst out "convenient" "buy everything in the same supermarket". After recognition of this, Paul added that although shopping became convenient, personal contact was lost, which has led the students to touch the point of humanity. With this inspiration, when students talked about the traffic, they consciously added that although there were less cars in the past which was inconvenient but people could enjoy less traffic noise,

cleaner air and the pleasure of bicycling together to the swimming pool. As college students, they should learn to further their oral English into a more deeply level, otherwise the learning and the teaching will come to a stalemate and the students themselves will lose interest in English when they can't use English to express their more and more mature thoughts.

2.6 Teaching Style

Foreign teachers are famous for their fascinating personality such as humorous, creative, outgoing, energetic, amiable and their smart use of their native language. Paul and RC are no exception. It is very normal to hear the students burst into laughter from their foreign teachers' cute sentences.

Take Paul for example, his originality is very impressive to me. When he introduced the assignment for the final exam, he drew a strange instrument on the blackboard and then started to bring all the expressions into play such as his facial expression, body language and a variety of his voice to sell this weird machine to the students. His acting is so vivid that everybody was impressed. While the students were still in excitement, he gave his assignment which is designing a product and sell it to the whole class.

2.7 Problem

Although all the students are actively involved in the pair work or group work, the volunteers for oral report are always very few, the same dilemma as in Chinese teachers' class. Usually there is only one or two whose English is obviously more fluent keeps answering questions. The other students were attentive and broke into laughter when Paul gave an very humorous answer, but still reluctant to initiate the next question.

The same situation happened to RC's class. After reading after RC of the English Tongue Twisters for several times, and after the competitive encouragement from the teacher, only a very few students volunteered to stand up to read aloud to the whole class.

I don't think it is the teachers' fault. The reason for the passiveness mostly lies in the Chinese students themselves. For class I whose first major is not English, the oral English for most of the students is not so good so they are not confident enough to volunteer. Some students are introverted and even shy at speaking Chinese in public. After so many years of traditional teacher-centered education which has been deeply rooted in students' mind, it is really hard for the students to change their learning habit, even with the powerful motivation from the energetic foreign teachers. It has to take at least several decades to improve the Chinese education system and bring the students into active play in the classroom. A long way to go for the Chinese education and the Chinese teachers.

3. Theoretical framework

By definition, Communicative language teaching (CLT) puts the focus on the learner (Yu, 2005:25). The essence of CLT is the engagement of learners in communication to allow them to develop their communicative competence (Yu, 2005:28). Current efforts at educational reform favour essay writing, in-class presentations, and other more holistic assessments of learner competence. Some programmes have initiated portfolio assessment, the collection and evaluation of learner poems, reports, stories, videotapes and similar projects, in an effort to better represent and encourage learner achievement (Yu, 2005:25).

CLT is not exclusively concerned with face-to-face oral communication. CLT does not necessarily require small group or pair work. Group tasks have been found helpful in many contexts as a way of providing increased opportunity and motivation for communication, but classroom group or pair work should not be considered an essential feature and may well be inappropriate in some contexts (Yu, 2005:28).

4. Discussion and Reflection

Based on the above theoretical framework, both teachers adopt communicative language teaching. Class is student-centered and the teacher is just the organizer and facilitator. With the detailed classroom observation, we can have a better understanding why the students are strongly attracted by the foreign teachers' class and there are many ideas we can borrow from the foreign teachers, especially their ability to create the active classroom atmosphere.

Unfortunately, some of their teaching performance is definitely beyond our Chinese teachers although I really admire it. It is true that not all the foreign teachers can do this, and it has much to do with the teachers' personality, but it cannot be denied that the ability of the foreign teachers to create living learning environment is much better than their Chinese counterpart. This kind of advantage does originate from their culture which is very hard to learn. However, we can try our best to work in this way and I do know there are some Chinese teachers whose teaching styles are also very appealing.

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