A Comparison of "Production-Oriented Approach" and "Task-Based Language Teaching": Teaching task and Task Design

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Abstract: This paper compares the similarities and differences between "Production-Oriented Approach" and "Task-Based Language Teaching". Both of these two teaching tasks focus on learners' needs and have clear communicative purposes with meaning-oriented. However, there are differences in its task design process. Based on this, this paper find out the problems in the task design of "TBLT" and put forward the methods to optimize the task design so as to promote the compilation and use of teaching materials of TBLT.

Keywords: Production-Oriented Approach; Task-Based Language Teaching; Teaching Task; Task Design; Optimization of Tasks Design.

1. Introduction

"Production-oriented Approach" (POA) is a foreign language teaching theory put forward by Professor Wen Qiufang to improve the quality of foreign language teaching in Chinese universities (Wen Qiufang 2015, 2016, 2017B,2018). "Task-based Language Teaching" (TBLT) refers to "a language teaching approach based on task" (Cheng Xiaotang 2004: 2). It mainly improves students' language communicative ability by organizing them to participate in meaningful communicative activities during the implementation of tasks (Ellis & Shin-Tani 2014:135). In view of the similarities between the two teaching approaches in theory and practice, many scholars have compared the two teaching approaches, but they only focus on the macro level, instead of the micro one. Therefore, this paper intends to discuss the similarities and differences between POA and TBLT teaching task, and tends to find out the existing problems in TBLT teaching task design and put forward methods to promote the compilation and use of teaching materials of TBLT.

2. Brief introduction of POA and TBLT teaching task

2.1 POA teaching task

The POA is a foreign language teaching approach proposed by Professor Wen Qiufang to solve the practical problems in foreign language teaching in China, officially confirmed in 2014. The basic unit of POA is communicative activities. It can be divided into two types: Comprehensive Unit Project which mainly tests students' unit learning effect; The Staged Small Output Activities which is used to build a ladder scaffold for students to complete the output activities.

2.2 TBLT teaching task

The TBLT arose in the 1980s, which is a task-oriented teaching approach with focus on "student-oriented". The basic teaching unit of TBLT is "task". The activities related to meaning and conveying new information are called task, that is, "what to do". Task can also be divided into target task(activities that people encounter in real life) and teaching task(teaching activities designed to imitate target task in teaching)(Long 2015:6).

3. Similarities and differences between POA and TBLT teaching task

3.1 Similarities between POA and TBLT teaching task

There are two similarities between POA and TBLT teaching task. Firstly, both POA and TBLT focus on the needs of learners. POA takes holistic education as a teaching concept and focuses on the all-round development of students. According to Long, TBLT advocates the education concept of integrity, whole person, and unity of mind and body (Long2015:66). It holds that task design should be student-oriented. Secondly, both POA and TBLT teaching task start from meaning. The output task of POA is the task with "potential communicative value" (Tang Meihua 2020:68). Driven by meaning, students have a strong willingness to communicate and will be more active in learning. TBLT puts language learning's communicative tasks in the first place, believes that compared with the rules of grammar and language structure, the meaning is more important. Also, there are also differences between them which mainly lies in its task design process.

3.2 Differences between POA and TBLT teaching task

The differences in task design process between the two teaching approaches, mainly reflected in several aspects, as shown in the following figure:

	Pre-task stage	Main task stage	Post-task stage
TBLT	1)Task demonstration 2)Pre-task language teaching 3)Schema construction 4)Strategic planning	1)Time limit 2)Situation to support 3)Explicit teaching 4)Unexpected elements	1)Practice the task repeatedly 2)Report the task results 3)practice language
	Driving stage	Facilitation stage	Assessment stage
POA	1)Teacher presents the communicative scene 2)Students try to complete the communicative tasks 3)The teacher states the teaching objectives	1)Teacher describes the output tasks 2)Students study selectively, teachers give guidance and check 3)Students practice the output, teachers give guidance and check	1)Teachers and students study assessment standards together 2)Students submit results 3)Teachers and students assess the results in class 4)Teachers and students assess
		(Ellis&Shintani 2014:142;Wen Qiufang 2015:553-556)	

Table 1 The differences in task design process between the two teaching approaches

First of all, the task design process of POA system is mainly divided into three steps: driving, facilitation and assessment. In the driving step, the teacher presented the communicative scene with the prepared materials, and the students try to complete the communicative tasks. In the facilitation step, teachers describe the output tasks and gives corresponding guidance, and the students learn the teaching materials selectively. In the assessment step, teachers and students jointly assess the output results, find out the problems and remedy them in time. The task process of TBLT can be divided into pre-task, main task and post-task. In the pre-task stage, the teacher demonstrates the task and give the pre-task language teaching. In the second stage, teachers conduct explicit language teaching and provide additional information, and students are required to complete the task within the limit time. In the post-task stage, students practiced the task repeatedly and reported the results in groups or pairs.

Secondly, there are significant differences in the assessment system. The POA advocates " Assessment for Learning" and believes that assessment itself is learning; while TBLT advocates the "separation of assessment and learning", and holds that assessment is not a necessary part of teaching (Ellis&Shintani 2014:142). The assessment subject of POA is various, including "teacher-student cooperative assessment", students' self-assessment and assessment among classmates; for the assessment subject of TBLT, only teachers are included, which is relatively single. It is only the comprehensive assessment of the group in the post-task stage, which is lack of pertinence, and the it is not timely.

Moreover, teachers play different roles in teaching task. POA advocates the teaching concept of "student-oriented and teacher-led". While admitting the main role of students, the POA system also focuses on the leading role of teachers in task design, management and professional guidance. TBLT advocates the "student-oriented" teaching concept. Teaching starts from the students' needs, and the teacher's role is reflected in responding to students' interests and spontaneous exploration

(Long 2015:76). In TBLT, teachers are only coordinators and consultants in the teaching process, but not knowledge imparts, and their role is marginalized.

4. Optimize task design

4.1 Problems in TBLT task design compared with POA

4.1.1 With "student-oriented", the role of teachers is weakened

The "student-oriented" of teaching concept is helpful to highlight the role of students, inspire students' creativity, but only emphasis on the leading role of students while ignoring the teacher's role in the classroom can make the students' language learning non-systemic and classroom easily out of disorder, which is not suitable for the formal education based on examination. After all, effective teaching is the goal of foreign language teaching activities (Sang Yuanfeng 2015:71).

4.1.2 Lack of complete assessment system

Assessment can not only enhance the motivation of students to complete the task, but also promote teachers to make teaching adjustment, and constantly polish their own teaching methods. Therefore, It is also necessary to build a relatively complete student learning assessment system to evaluate the output tasks of students from multiple aspects to improve their learning efficiency.

4.1.3 Insufficient endogenous motivation for learning

To truly improve the language ability of English learners in a second language environment, the first step is to cultivate their desire to communicate in English (Dornyei 2003:12). In the pre-task stage of TBLT, the main teaching contents are task demonstration, pre-task language teaching. At this stage, teachers are mainly responsible for language output, while students passively accept "input learning" without knowing their understanding and mastery of input knowledge, which will further affect their sensitivity to subsequent language knowledge points and cause them lack of endogenous motivation for further task practice.

4.2 The methods for improving TBLT task design

4.2.1 Attach more importance to the role of teachers

In order to ensure the efficiency of completing tasks and the realization of high-quality teaching objectives, it is far from enough to rely only on students' collaborative learning and independent inquiry, so the students' learning process needs teachers' guidance. In TBLT, teachers can adjust the difficulty of tasks according to students' level, decompose tasks appropriately or use auxiliary means to help poor performance. What's more, teachers can act as a supervisor for students, closely concerning about the important variables that affect learners' completion of tasks, such as learning motivation, learning strategy, metacognition, mental model.

4.2.2 Establish a complete TBLT assessment system

A complete assessment system should be added to the TBLT system. The assessment subjects should be diversified, such as the combination of students' self-assessment, assessment among classmates and the co-assessment between teachers and students. Parents can also be included in the assessment system to achieve multi-party assessment. It should give equal importance to the process assessment and result assessment. When assessing the final results of students' learning, students' learning process should also be assessed, which can fully feedback student's language learning condition; In addition to the assessment of language knowledge, students' emotion, attitude and comprehensive performance in completing task should also be considered in the assessment scope.

4.2.3 Improve task input mode to stimulate students' learning motivation

In order to stimulate students' learning motivation, teachers should concentrate on the interestingness and practical communicative value of tasks and also prepare a wide range of teaching tasks to ensure that every student can participate in the classroom and mobilize the enthusiasm of every student. What's more, teachers should adopt various modes such as

group discussion and role play to invigorate the classroom atmosphere, instead of using the single and self-acted language input mode.

5. Conclusion

This paper compares the similarities and differences between POA and TBLT. It is found that the two kinds of teaching task are different in the role positioning of teachers and students, assessment system and other aspects. Based on this, this paper finds out the shortcomings of TBLT task design and puts forward the improvement methods. But this article only concerns with the problems in TBLT task design, not with that of POA task design. It is inevitable that there will be some omissions in the comparison of teaching task between the two theories of language education, which are self-contained and have a large system. Therefore, I hope that more experts and scholars will do research on the POA and TBLT teaching task design in the future, so as to promote the design of teaching tasks and the compilation of teaching materials.

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