Promote CALL applications to teach the speaking of English in University ESL Classrooms in China

----Take micro-lesson video for example

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Abstract: In order to teach the speaking of English more efficiently and effectively in University ESL classrooms in China, it is necessary fo r teachers to use CALL (computer-assisted language learning) applications to improve the speaking of ESL students. This essay will discuss the teaching context, learning and teaching theories, and e-learning principles. In the end, I will discuss the advantages of micro-lesson video and make a final conclusion.

Key words: CALL, ESL,Micro-lesson video, E-learnig ,SLA, TESOL

1. Introduction

New technologies are not merely in solitary confinement in daily life using but also have come to permeate in the field of education, especially TESOL. Nowadays, people prefer to use the more neutral term CALL which also emphasizes teachers'decision-making and direction. Meanwhile, the inherent advantages of computers bring benefits to both teachers and students in language classrooms. CALL practitioners use computers for administrative and organizational functions, blended practices and distance teaching. Furthermore, computer-enhanced learning environment can give Chinese students in a non-immersion context more opportunities to be engaged in authentic learning projects such as WebQuests, blogs, and video productions. Similarly, according to Blake, "the web, CD-ROM or hypermedia applications, and network-based communication or CMC (computer-mediated communication)" are considered as three important technological platforms which assist language learning and teaching. Moreover, micro-lesson video production as a medium which both teachers and students are familiar with can either be easily downloaded from the web or played in the DVD platforms. In second language learning and teaching, speaking as a crucial part, is used in a variety of contexts. However, teaching speaking has been a "Cinderella" area compared to writing, reading and listening. In order to pay more attention to teach speaking by using the integration of CALL, teachers can bring video productions into computer-mediated classes which can deploy contextualized language and foreign culture through visual dimension for efficient ESL-speaking teaching instead of teaching speaking by merely revolving around the textbook with audiocassettes and a workbook as supplementary.

In this essay, I will mainly discuss the application of micro-lesson video productions in teaching ESL speaking in University in China. Firstly, I will talk about the teaching context. The second part consists of teaching and learning theories about speaking. E-learning principles will be introduced in the third section. Fourthly, I will discuss the technology affordance of micro-lesson video in teaching speaking.

2. Teaching Context

I will mainly focus on teaching speaking to the Chinese students of ESL classroom in university which is a non-immersion context where the students seldom have the chance to communicate and interactive in English with native speakers outside the classroom. Fortunately, the application of CALL in classroom renders beneficial educational access to authentic L2 materials beyond the normal constrains of the place, the people and the culture which can virtually "travel"asynchronously or synchronously to see the scenery of English-speaking countries, observe the interactions between native speakers and know the western cultures. However, some of the current situations of teaching speaking in university in China are not optimistic for CALL application. Firstly, it appears that some of the Chinese teachers might think it is burdensome and complex to use the computers as they harbor an opinion that they are professional in linguistic teaching instead of computer science. It seems frightening for teachers because there is few education curriculums can prepare them for the swift and continuing changes in the development of new technology. Although many Chinese teachers are competent at technology, they seem to be less confident about themselves adopting ICT (information and communications technology) into their classrooms. Secondly, although nowadays most of university classrooms are equipped with computers, there is a tendency that teachers prefer to and get used to teach English in various contexts based on authorized textbooks which more emphasized on written discourse such as establishing textual cohesion instead of focusing on achieving authentic communicative competence. With the pressure of College English Tests (CET) which focus more on reading, writing and listening, it seems that Chinese teachers prefer to teach language test points directly from the textbooks by avoiding the trouble using computers which is time-consuming for curricular schedule. Consequently, the focus is more on the linguistic knowledge instead of the extralinguistic context such as gesture, background knowledge and the manner of speaking and communication which are also essential to learn ESL speaking. Thirdly, the impoverished and insufficient authentic input will bring unsuccessful L2 teaching. The more unconversant with the naturally authentic content-rich samples of the target language, the more nervous they will be when use L2. Under the circumstance of most people communicating in their mother tough: mandarin. A tremendous number of Chinese students feel frustrated and embarrassed when they communicate in English because the differences are exacerbated when people speak in a language different from their own. Therefore, it is necessary to have enough exposure to authenticity for L2 speaking learning to conquer the psychological barrier of speaking in real life.

All in all, although the fear of applying new technology, old habit of using textbooks and the pressure of time and exams can be obstacles of promoting CALL application in language teaching classroom, the extent and nature of the authentic input received are crucial to SLA (Second Language Acquisition) which need the new technology to enhance and enrich the L2 learners' contact with the target language which can assist SLA process. The correct and appropriate use of technology can fulfill different kinds of curricular goals to work more efficiently and provide greater educational access instead of time-wasting because every technology provides certain affordances. Accordingly, it can be quite threatening for language teachers to constant update and continue technology education. With the increased number of English-language video productions easily available from the internet, authentic videos provide students with an abundance of target language samples used in various contexts by native speakers which can help to increase authentic inputs in different discourse and promote improvements of the confidence in generating the outputs and the scope and breadth of their communicative discourse. Moreover, using micro-lesson video productions is a suitable and comfortable way for Chinese university students to become familiar with the authentic communications which is less demanding than synchronous face-to-face communication options at the first place. The application of micro-lesson videos is uncomplicated for teachers and can get Chinese students involved without nervousness and anxiety by bringing relaxed atmosphere, which is benefit for teaching speaking in the university classrooms in China.

3. Learning and teaching theories

3.1 Comprehensible inputs

I will mainly focus on teaching ESL speaking to students in university in China by using CALL so that the learning theories are most based on SLA. According to Krashen's input hypothesis, learners acquire language by exposure to comprehensible input: both comprehension and acquisition will occur if the new input is just beyond the learner's current level of competence in the language. Additionally, the exposure to comprehensible input is both necessary and sufficient for SLL (second language learning) to take place and speech cannot be taught directly but "emerges" from comprehensible input.

3.2 Teaching speaking

One of the first approaches to teach speaking is audiolingualism by engineering the repeated oral production of structures in the target language which was believed to help "memorisation, automacticity and the formation of associations between different elements of language". However, compared to the cognitive and sociolinguistic theory, audiolingualism neglected the relationship between language and meaning and lack of social contexts provided for different speaking situations. Thus, the CALL materials are supposed to contain not only repetitions of language, but also the combination of the social contextualized meaning and the language which in some way is calling for authenticity of language-speaking.

3.3 Development in L2 speech

There are four major processes in speech production: conceptualization by planning the messages in specific context; formulation by sequencing the words and phrases to express meanings; articulation by controlling the articulatory organs; self-motivation by identifying and self-correct mistakes. Additionally, according to Bygate, task repetition can help L2 speakers shift their attention from conceptualization to formulation.

Fortunately, CALL materials such as micro-lesson video can be repeated and replayed in class for different activities. It can provide comprehensible contextualized language input and close-up view of the articulation, and record learners' own speaking for self-correction which is beneficial for the development of L2 speech.

4. E-learning principles

E-learning is the use of technology to enable people to learn disregards time restrictions or geographic proximity. There are three important elements of an e-lesson: "the instructional methods, the instructional media, and media elements" which are either related to pedagogy or media. Therefore, I will discuss the e-learning principles mainly from the pedagogical aspect and media aspect.

4.1 E-learning principles from pedagogical aspect

Although principles of e-learning need to be extended to accommodate and keep pace with the rapid changes in technology, most of the pedagogical principles of the traditional classroom teaching are similar to e-learning and it will undermine the implementation process of e-learning without pedagogical considerations. In regard of the designers, teachers and learners, I will epitomize the main points which are relevant to my teaching context below according to Anderson and McCormick's pedagogical principles of e-learning.

4.1.1 Curriculum

Successful use of CALL depends heavily on what the teachers want to achieve. Unfocused e-learning is unlikely lead to any significant developments and technology alone does not create language learning. In order to be more efficient and effective, the e-learning should be matched with curricular objectives, cover the contents of the lesson and be aligned to time schedule through the appropriate combination of technological options and curriculum.

4.1.2 Learner

Although the younger generations of learners are inclined to use computers, multimedia for learning, the students' experience and ability with regard to technologies are different. Consequently, CALL practitioners need to be aware of what skills of the learners and what type of technological training is necessary for the e-learning. Apart from the students' technical competence, the needs, goals and perspectives of learners are also essential to e-learning by showing a learner-centered e-learning.

4.1.3 Teacher

English teachers as facilitators can be controllers, directors, promoters and participants: they can "control" the sequence of the teaching to be internally coherent and consistent within the objectives, content and student activities; they can "direct" the e-learning to be transparent in learning intention and open and accessible to the use of technology; they can "promote" effective e-learning by providing authentic materials through computers; they can also "participate" in the e-learning to scaffolding and give constructive and helpful summative and formative feedback during and after class.

4.2 E-learning principles from media aspect

According to Clark (2002), learning occurs in humans by way of working memory with two sub-storage area: visual information and phonetic information which has limited capacity. When the working memory becomes overloaded, learning is depressed. If the visuals and sounds described are separate from each other, the learner needs to expend extra cognitive resources to integrate them. In contrast, if in the teaching material, the texts, visuals and sounds placed contiguously, the integration is done for the learners which stretches the capacity of working memory by utilizing both of visuals and sounds. However, images added for entertainment or dramatic value not only do not improve learning but they can actually discourage learning. Thus, when choose and present the e-learning materials, it seems to be better for CALL users to combine the visual information and phonetic information together to optimize e-learning.

5. Technology affordance of micro-lesson video

5.1 Advantages of video itself

Video is the combination of sound and vision which present students both visual and phonetic information which helps working memory for ESL learning. Moreover, the sequence and content of the micro-lesson video can be watched and played again and again in slow motion or fast speed, with sound or without sound which is immensely flexible and ease of use according to the different teaching purposes as teaching material. With different teaching methodology, it can be repeated for practice, elicited for thinking, predicted for production and stopped for discussion. In regard to language teaching, micro-lesson video shows a contextualized language in various discourse contexts which the teacher can examine and explain in details by offering vicarious experience, alternative representations of ideas and recognizable reality.

5.2 Benefit for teaching ESL

Firstly, high-quality sound and visuals are motivating and help to maintain the interest of learning because ESL learners are experienced in a lively way through micro-lesson video. It combines the moving pictures and sound realistically, "being the next best thing to experience the sequence of real life" which is needed in language teaching by paying attention to the social contexts and the relationship between language and meaning. Secondly, according to Merabian, 80 percent of our communication is non-verbal, so that micro-lesson video can provide us a chance to freeze every movement to observe and study the paralanguage such as gestures, expression and posture to learn ESL authentically. Thirdly, micro-lesson video can enhance the linguistic, psychological and socio-cultural process of acquiring a L2 which encourages learning speaking in a natural imitative environment that combines language, meanings and different cultures. Fourthly, students can also learn and compare the culture of different English-speaking countries which provides different speaking topics and dynamic activities in the classroom. Lastly, micro-lesson video-texts can provide comprehensive authentic input for speaking which helps to increase oral proficiency and cultural awareness and accustom the leaner to the natural fluency of speaking and to different voice tonalities.

5.3 Benefit for the teachers

No matter non-native or native English teachers, there is inevitably some content area which they are unfamiliar with such as scientific and technical topics. Fortunately, they can use micro-lesson video programs to supply their inadequate linguistic skills and restricted knowledge especially for ESP (English for specific purposes). Secondly, it needs lots of teachers and time to conduct an oral test or give feedback to students' oral communication by one teacher observing one students. However, the use of micro-lesson video recording can bring much convenience to the teachers because the computer can record as many as possible at one time which only needs one teacher in the classroom(such as the teaching presentation in this module which used micro-lesson video cameras to record our teaching during the same two hours). These micro-lesson video recordings can be used as analysis not just the language but also the metalanguage and paralanguage which also contribute to the communication. Furthermore, the micro-lesson video recordings can also help teachers to keep track with the progress of students by juxtaposing the "before and after" speaking performance.

6. Conclusion

In this essay, I have attempted to discuss new technologies in language learning and the focus has been on using micro-lesson video to teach speaking of English in University ESL Classrooms in China. It is important for teachers to realize the effectiveness of CALL and micro-lesson video as one of the technologies, providing both visual and audio can facilitate learning speaking. With a tremendous number of advantages the technology can bring into the classroom, I believe there is a bright future in using micro-lesson video in teaching English.

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