Practice of POA-based Translation-driven College English Teaching

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Abstract. Production-Oriented Approach (POA) is an innovative theory put forward by Wen Qiufang to improve the effect of college English teaching in China. Aiming to find out how to integrate POA into practice and how to make translation a driving force to stimulate students’ learning enthusiasm, the research group applied POA theory to college English teaching, with translation as a motivating productive task, listening and reading as the enabling means. This paper presents the design and basic teaching process of a unit of teaching practice, and students’ feedback and teacher’s reflection as well, through which the POA-based translation-driven teaching proves to be feasible and effective.

Introduction

Nowadays, with economy developing rapidly, foreign trade and communication expanding continuously, and especially with the Belt and Road Initiative proposed, our society increasingly raises demands for English communicative competence of college students. Meanwhile, college English teaching objectives are being improved for the comprehensive development of students’ abilities of English listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation. These abilities are mutually restricted and promoted. As an advanced skill in foreign language learning, translation not only affects other aspects, but also serves as a necessity for college students to obtain employment or to sustain their studies. Additionally, the reform of the cet-4 and cet-6 examination also shows that more importance is given to the cultivation of translation ability.

POA (Production-Oriented Approach), a new theory put forward by Wen Qiufang on college foreign language teaching to intermediate and advanced students in China, is based on the principles of “learning-centered teaching”, “learning-using integration” and “whole-person education”, with the “output-driven, input-enabled hypothesis” as the core and teachers as the medium. It aims at the close integration and effective interaction of input activities and productive activities, which should be involved in a classroom instruction of high-quality learning. It breaks the time-consuming and inefficient traditional teaching patterns, which have been “teaching-centered but practice-neglected” and “linguistic-knowledge-based but communicative-ability-ignored” in college English classes.

After eight years of development, POA has become a sound theoretical system and drawn much attention of scholars and teachers. Continually, many researchers began to explore the application of the theory in teaching, most of which were only based on the original papers. As is shown from CNKI website, till September 30, 2016, there were only 34 papers discussing the latest theories of POA, and only 9 articles on teaching practice and application [1, 2, 3]. The related research has mainly focused on the cultivation of listening, speaking, reading and writing skills, with only two papers dealing with translation teaching. Less attention is paid to translation teaching based on POA.

How to integrate this innovative teaching theory into the practice of college English teaching, how to make translation serve as the driving force to stimulate students’ enthusiasm for learning, and what feedback and evaluation will be produced by students and teachers, are still needed to be tested through practice. Based on these issues, the research group sets cultivating students’ translating ability as the main goal, and listening and reading as the enabling approaches to achieve the goal, to
apply POA theory to college English classroom instruction. Based on the research group’s teaching practice, this paper presents the design and basic teaching process of a unit, and the students’ feedback on the new form of teaching and the reflection of the teacher giving the lesson.

Production-Oriented Approach (POA)

The predecessors of POA are the “output-driven hypothesis”[4] and the “output-driven, input-enabled hypothesis”[5]. As a “local” theory of foreign language teaching, POA has employed the achievement of SLA theories, on the basis of “output hypothesis”[6] and social and cultural perspective of language learning[7]. The paper puts forward the new “learning-using integrated”, “output-driven” and “input-enabled” teaching idea to improve the efficiency of college English classroom instruction.

POA contains three core phases[8, 9]: First, motivating, in which teachers design appropriate communication scenarios and tasks with potential communicative value, in an attempt to stimulate students’ initiative for the task and enhance their learning motivation; Second, enabling, in which teachers provide the necessary input materials to guide students to select and process listening and reading materials, get access to the task-required information of language, content, text structure, etc., in order to enable the accomplishment of production; Third, assessing, in which teachers make immediate assessment and remedial teaching after students complete the basic productive task. The three phases would be the basis of the research group’s teaching design and practice.

POA-Based Translation-Driven Teaching Practice

The research group has designed the teaching program of a semester and applied it to teaching practice after modification and improvement. This paper only shows teaching of one unit at the beginning of the program, which lasted two weeks with 2 hours per week. The teaching object is a class of non-English majors with 55 students in size. Aiming at the freshmen of an independent college, the design of the motivating task for this unit selected translation of public signs. Through the open questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and reflective journals, the research group collected students and the author’s feedback and evaluation of POA-based teaching.

Teaching Themes and Objectives.

The process of translation requires that when the original language is translated into the target language, the information in the original language should remain and the cultural differences should be considered, so that the target language readers can correctly understand the information and at the same time what the original language conveys can be achieved. This process conforms to the dual objectives of “the ability of comprehensive use of language” and “the ability of intercultural communication” in College English Curriculum Requirements[10]. Therefore, the Research Group designed the theme of “English around Us” based on the first unit Learning A Foreign Language of New Horizon College English (Second Edition), focusing on translation of the public signs in daily life especially on campus through finding out the errors in the translation and differences between Chinese and English as well. Public signs are selected as the translation target because of their accessibility in daily life even on campus, which are very close to the students’ language environment. Additionally, the expressions of public signs are simple, but contain information of both language and culture, which usually leads to errors in translated version. Through the process of students identifying and correcting the mistaken translation of public signs around themselves, they are expected to realize the practicality and necessity of English learning and to raise their interest in translation.

Teaching objectives include two aspects: language and culture. Cultural objective is defined as the cultivation of students’ cross-cultural communication ability, that is, the awareness of cultural differences in translation and competence to appropriately introduce their own culture. Language objectives include identifying and correcting the errors in translation of public signs, understanding the language features of public signs and employing proper language in translation.
**Task Design.** The task was achieved through three steps in form of oral presentation, situational communication and written translation. First of all, students were asked to search on campus for public signs with English translation. Each group selected 2 or 3 signs to discuss in class about the accuracy and fluency of the translation, analyzed and corrected errors, and generated an oral report. Then the teacher assigned situational communication, requiring the students to simulate the communicative situation of showing foreign friends around the college and interpreting the signs on campus. Finally, the teacher assigned a task of written translation, for students to translate the campus public signs into English.

**Teaching Procedures.** Teaching with the POA consists of three phases: motivating, enabling, and assessing.

The basic aspects of POA motivating are: teachers presenting communication scenarios, students trying to produce, and teachers explaining teaching objectives and productive tasks. So designing a task with potential communicative value and stimulating students’ initiative is the starting point. Before assigning the task, the teacher, starting from the necessity of learning English, guided students to conceive the possibility of intercultural communication in their future life and study. And then the teacher adopted the real example of Yang Jiechi who in 2001 corrected a mistake of interpretation during the meeting of US Premier Zhu Rongji with US senators[11], so that the students recognized the impact of translation errors or improper use of language. And then the teacher presented the mistranslated examples of Chinese signs *xiao xin di hua* (Caution: wet floor.), *xiao xin peng tou* (Watch your head.), *xiao xin luo shui* (Be careful not to fall into water.), *xiao xin bo li* (Caution: glass door.) and a public sign in the classroom *qing wei hei ban xie zhuang* (Please clean the blackboard.), requiring students to analyze and revise in class as an initial attempt, to arouse a hunger of the students for more information and stimulate students’ enthusiasm for learning. Even students have not experienced this kind of communicative scenario, they can truly feel the possibility of its existence and the challenges of these scenarios to their cognition. Finally, the teacher assigned the productive task, requiring students to translate public signs of the college campus in groups.

In the phase of enabling, the teacher must give full play to his mediating role of guiding students to select the appropriate input materials based on the productive task and enabling the completion of the task. First of all, before class the teacher required students to search for the public signs with English translation around the campus, aiming to promote students’ interest and passion through the English language that exists around them. And in class students were guided to discuss on the translation of public signs they have collected, analyzed and corrected the mistranslated ones. Through this process, the teacher instructed the students to generalize the language features of public signs, differences between Chinese and English in both language and culture. Then, the teacher designed a communicative scenario in which students would show some foreign visitors around the campus, they would select an occasion such as supermarket, canteen, library, teaching building, etc. and make a dialogue or a role play to explain the public signs in these places to the visitors. In order to provide students with appropriate input materials, the teacher recorded a short video beforehand to show a dialogue between a foreign teacher and a student who were talking about the menu shown in the dining hall, which was shared through the Internet for students to preview. Some reading materials about Chinese dishes and American public signs were handed out to students for them to make selective learning under instruction of the teacher. To seek from the materials for necessary information, students were guided to integrate what has been accumulated through the preview and previous discussion, select the expressions needed, and design the occasion and dialogue, in which translating public signs got involved. After the two phases, the teacher finally gave a list of campus public signs for students to translate in a written form.

The phase of assessing aims to help the teacher recognize the teaching effect through assessing students’ products. At the same time it helps the students see their achievement of learning and then further improve the quality of their productive activities. Therefore, the phase of assessing plays a role of promoting learning. In this phase done by the research group, each group of students actively completed the discussion, dialogue and translation task in class, and uploaded to the online forum.
their translated public signs to share with other groups. The teacher still arranged discussion in groups, designating one to assess the product of another group, find out the highlights and shortcomings of their translation and make recommendations for revision. Then teacher re-evaluated the translation based on students’ statements. When making the summing-up assessment, the teacher affirmed the students’ efforts made inside and outside the classroom, and pointed out some common grammatical errors (such as the misuse of part of speech, etc.) and the cultural awareness default in translation (such as translation of *xian ren mian jin* (No admittance.), with correction and remedial teaching. Finally, the students were required to revise the translation of their group and submit to the teacher.

**Teaching Feedback**

After the teaching practice of this unit, the research group collected the students’ learning experience and evaluation of teaching through an open questionnaire and their reflective journals. The questionnaire included five aspects: “learning achievement of the unit”, “self-evaluation of task fulfillment”, “difficulties in learning process” and “evaluation of the teaching method”. A total of 49 valid questionnaires were collected and 16 journals were taken.

As for the evaluation of the teaching method, 44 students held a positive attitude, reckoning “it was a practical and vivid way of teaching and learning”. Some students even realized the difference of new method from the traditional classes, commenting “it was done through a specific task to promote enthusiasm of learning” and “everything done revolved the tasks”. As for the learning achievement, a vast majority of students (86%) thought “having achieved a great deal”, in terms of language knowledge, cultural awareness, and communication skills. As for the difficulties in learning, nearly half of the students indicated that they were “basically satisfied” with their learning performance, and felt that they had “paid and learned equally”. But there were still some difficulties. The difficulties concerning teaching design involved “not designating the task and responsibility to the individuals, which caused idling or absence of some students.”

In the reflective journals of the teacher who implemented teaching practice, POA was given a high remark for the vitality it has brought about to the class. First, it can stimulate students’ positive emotional experience of learning. On the one hand, a motivating productive task aroused the students’ motivation for translation. Students felt that they had learned something useful, through finding out errors, revising and translating the public signs which are very close to their life, which promoted their interest and more investment in learning. Second, students got more opportunities to use English. In the implementation of POA-based teaching, translation of public signs was involved throughout the process, with various productive forms of discussion, speaking, situational communication, written translation, which greatly increased the opportunities for students to apply the language.

**Summary**

The teaching method of POA has introduced the idea of “learning-using integration” into college English teaching instruction, adopted a latest “motivating-enabling-assessing” form, and created a “localized” theory for college English teaching. The research group has made a preliminary attempt in class to try this theory and develop students’ competence of applying English through more focus on their translating abilities, which can confirm the feasibility of its implementation. However, the teaching design still has many aspects to improve, such as how to make the design and textbook more closely related, and how to accurately control the level of task difficulties directed at students of independent colleges. This paper only involves teaching practice of one unit at the beginning of the research. As for the effect of the teaching experiment, the data and result of comparative analysis would be reported in other papers.
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References


