



Cognitive Apprenticeship --- An Effective Learning Mode In the College English Listening Teaching

Guoqian Shan

Naval Aeronautical Engineering Academy

Yantai 264001, China

E-mail: 13156932639_131@sina.com

Abstract

An analysis has been made on the existing problems in the traditional process of foreign language teaching in China; and with the help of the theory of cognitive apprenticeship, a further study has been conducted on the effective learning mode in the process of college English listening teaching. An empirical study on the graded English teaching, conducted in the university where the author works, has been made to indicate that the use of multi-media and network technology in the English listening teaching can, to a large extent, improve the language learning environment, develop the student language competence and boost college English teaching in China.

Keywords: Cognitive Apprenticeship, Situation cognition and learning, Graded English teaching, Learning mode

1. Introduction

The past ten years have witnessed great changes and improvement in china's language learning for students and language teaching for teachers. Yet there still exists a large room to be improved. Many teachers and students think of foreign language examinations as the end of language learning and language teaching, and the passing rate as the only standard to value the teaching quality. More attention in language teaching is paid to the cultivation of the students' language competence and less attention to the ability for the students to use the language, which leads to the fact that many students cannot use what they have learned to practical situations. Additionally, the content of teaching focuses on the explanations of the language points, ignoring the teaching of culture of the target language. Besides, words are taught in a passive way far away from the real situation. Many students find the words learned in class dead but not alive. Language teaching and language application go in the opposite directions. Such language teaching activities cannot offer insights for students into the real activities of the members in the target language culture. This, however, is what the language learners --- the students --- actually need.

2. Theory

Cognitive apprenticeship, first put forward by Brown, Collins, and Duguid(1989), means combining the core technology of traditional apprenticeship with school education to cultivate the students' cognitive skills, namely the ability needed by the experts to think, to solve problems and deal with sophisticated tasks. Its focus is to make the design of teaching methods helpful to the students to acquire cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies and at the same time to combine these strategies and conception with factual knowledge, solving problem and fulfilling complex tasks. Cognitive apprenticeship supports the students' study in certain field through allowing the students to acquire, develop and utilize activity tools of real situation. Apprenticeship puts emphasis on the importance of experience activity in studies. Steps to finish the tasks are easy to observe in traditional apprenticeship while in cognitive apprenticeship thinking processes are made more obvious.

Cognitive apprenticeship is a kind of situational cognition. Jonassen (1994) thinks that situational learning is the learning in which the students carry out the tasks reflecting the real world. Knowledge is determined by the corresponding matters and situation. Knowledge becomes nothing when remaining in a decontextualized state. The students learn a new concept but fail to use it for lack of real situation. Situation is the basis of all kinds of cognition.

3. Methodology

3.1 Subjects

The 140 subjects, divided into two classes at random, were second-year non-English major undergraduates of 2006

class in Yantai Naval Aeronautical and Astronautical University. To avoid the Hawthorn effect, the subjects were not told of the experiment and they did not seem to be aware of any unusual “experimental” situation.

3.2 Procedures

Listening teaching for the two classes was taught by the author simultaneously. Listening for Class A was carried out in the classroom with the help of a recorder while listening for Class B was carried out in the computer room.

The teacher played the recorder one time after another to let the students practice their listening in Class A. The students did their listening practice in a passive way. They listened to the recording, seeing nothing and hearing the sound only. While the students in Class B, each one with a computer, learned what they are watching and listening and know exactly how the language is used in a special situation in an active way.

4. Results

One year later, the results presented what the teacher expected. The students in Class B was more interested in English learning than before and their academic achievements went a further step. They made greater progress not only in their oral English but also in other aspects such as writing, reading and did a good job in their final examination. Their pronunciation and intonation is more native like. Three students from Class B won first prize in our university’s English Speech Contest in 2007. In contrast, the students in Class A also made progress in their English study, but not as fast as those in Class B. Their academic achievements went forward slowly.

5. Findings & Analysis

The study shows that knowledge from a special situation is more powerful and useful than that from a general case, and the memory lasts longer. Just as Aristotle said: What I am told, I will forget; what I am shown, I will remember; what I participate in, I will understand. That is to say, using all the senses can make learning most rewarding. On the other hand, Only when learning takes place in a natural situation where what is learned is used can meaningful learning be expected. Moreover, words, expressions and sentences are not isolated from each other; they always exist in a certain communication and situation. True activities are of great importance to learners in that learners can act as an apprentice to do something meaningful just like the experts, namely the native speakers. Only in a true situation and by improving traditional teaching environment can the students adapt themselves to a certain culture. One important thing, the students in Class B has much more cultural awareness than those in Class A

6. Conclusion

From what is conducted, a conclusion can be reached that language learning is not only an acquisition of knowledge, but also conveys an idea and a kind of emotion and a culture. Learning environment should be characterized by the true world where what is learned is used. Native language users are the experts in the language learning process for Chinese students and what English teachers should do is to prepare what is needed by their students---a situated environment in which language is truly used.

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