

An Analysis of the English Pre-class Language

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Abstract

The English pre-class language, as one of the educational languages, has a direct impact on realization of the objectives of a class. This paper gives a detailed analysis of the value of the English pre-class language, its related theoretical proof as well as its main characteristics, which proves the significance of the pre-class language.

Keywords: pre-class language, comprehensibility, flexibility, interesting and relevance, diversity

1. Introduction

Educational language (also called class language) is a kind of language for teachers who speak it in class. In the author's view, educational language can be divided into four parts: pre-class language, transitional language, instructional language and evaluated language. Whether the four educational languages are used properly or not has a direct impact on the realization of the objectives of a class. Among these four parts, the pre-class language, as the beginning part of English class, plays a most important role in English classes. To some extent, the pre-class language is very crucial for the class ongoing. Therefore, this article will focus its attention on this one, and mainly give an analysis about the values, theoretical foundations of the pre-class language, and the realization of it in classes.

2. The Definition of the Pre-class Language

So-called pre-class language, is mainly used by a teacher at the beginning of a class. Its purpose surely serves to the main task of a class and sets up an orderly and suitable leaning platform for students. According to this principle, it requires a teacher to try to build a bridge between the past and the present, from the outside to inside. By the pre-class language, students' attention will be drawn back to the class, and they will put their hearts into the content they will learn. For a teacher, he or she can have a basic understanding about students' performance, such as their comprehension and language basis, and then the teacher can choose a more suitable means and closer class words to organize the class.

3. The Value of English Pre-class Language

Firstly, according to the definition, pre-class language should be a kind of language used in classroom by teachers only for teaching purpose. From this point, a teacher should create a good language learning surroundings at the beginning of a class in order for better understandings of students. For this means, we also can get evidence from the famous linguist Krashen. Krashen claims there are two ways for the second language learners to approach learning a second language. They may acquire it or they may "learn" it. He believes that acquiring a language is more successful and longer lasting than learning (Krashen, 1981). On the basis of Krashen's acquisition-learning hypothesis, for this kind of language learners without natural language acquisition environment, who study the foreign language mainly depending on the class teaching, how to devote the classroom primarily to activities which foster acquisition at a very beginning of a class has become a key issue of language teaching. For this point, a good use of pre-class language can justly play such a role at a class.

What's more, in a language class, shortage of general knowledge, including the cross-cultural messages, is the main barrier for many learners. Thus it is important for a teacher to help the students construct knowledge except teaching general knowledge and generic concepts. A teacher plays an insignificant role in helping students build schemata and establish connections between ideas. The activities, such as role-play, pictures, movies, songs etc. must be helpful to strengthen connections. Owing to the importance of prior knowledge for the understanding of new messages, it's a great necessity to help students build the prerequisite knowledge before they learn new

materials. That is to say, to achieve the teaching objectives, a good teacher must help students activate and retrieve prior knowledge related to the topic, which they will be studying. If the learners know some background about this information, they will better understand what a teacher says and the content of the whole class. And if a teacher can give a proper guiding to stimulate some prior knowledge of the students and, naturally direct them to engage in learning the new knowledge, students can take in the new knowledge with the help what they have learned. And students can mobilize their existing schemata before teachers fill gaps or clarify misunderstanding to help in this process. It is necessary for a teacher to take some means so that learners can get the connections between new learning and prior knowledge. In this situation, the principal function of pre-class language is to bridge the unknown and the known leanings. Teachers should try to know the knowledge level of students (or we can say to know the existed schema and knowledge structure of them) by the practice of the pre-class language. To the extent, the pre-class language also can be called trying words towards students' conditions. Only on the basis and the actual case of students, a teacher can better organize the class from students existed knowledge structure. Likewise, as a teacher, if he or she wants to realize the comprehensible input, help students associate the learned new language materials with their own experience and related schema, and transfer "input" to "take in" actively, which all must depend on the use of the pre-class language. For believing that Information about this would obviously be of crucial value for improving teaching, more deep going research should be done on the value of pre-class language.

4. Key Points in the Practice of the Pre-class Language

The best language teaching, is not just for concious learning, but when transmitting messages. This implies whether students can understand the learning materials or not is the key point for a good class. Therefore, In English class, apparently, pre-class language as an important source of class input should also be comprehensible. And as an English teacher, he or she should estimate whether the students have also covered his or her words. What's more, a teacher also should try to mobilize the background of the student's mind and achieve an active organization of past action in order to help students to understand what they will learn. A good teacher should pay more attention to mental messages of past experiences, those stored in one's mind. These will be internalized only when students are able to represent the world in mental sense by the way of memory, imagery or symbolic language. For this purpose, an English teacher should try to choose simpler words as the class language, and the sentence structure of his or her words also should be simpler, which is much closer or just as light above to the existing knowledge structure or their past experiences of students, avoiding the complicated and complex sentences. More exactly speaking, the teachers' language should be strong characteristic of oral English and try to drop out the flavor of written English at the most. Since the language learning is a subject with practice, the students can own a good target language if the teacher sets a good example in this aspect.

However, if the teacher's language is too difficult to understand that far beyond the prior knowledge structure of students, even if his or her words are very wonderful, fluent, idiomatic and exact, his or class is still a completely failure. For that the learner cannot extract anything for which she or he does not have existing knowledge. More seriously to say, in this case, as a teacher, he or she just makes some noises for the class. And the teacher cannot attract the student's attention to the class. On the contrary, they may go to another extreme situation; students' confidence will be ruined.

Now, we can compare the efficiency of the following two descriptions about the same situation:

A. Good morning. everyone. I'm delighted to accumulate here in this golden fall. May I begin by sincerely thanking you for attending my class in my honor. I expected I could get supports from you since we are on the same boat.

B. Good morning everyone. I'm glad to have such a class to you. I hope I can get supports from you this term.

For the above introductory words, apparently, the second one is much easier than the first one to understand. In the first mode, you can find some points seldom be spoken in oral English, such as "delighted", "in my honor" etc. for these words, students will feel at loss at hearing them. More importantly, these expressions are far beyond their prior knowledge structure and they have no schema about them in their minds at all. As mentioned in the above article, the lack of general knowledge leads to the difficulty of the understanding.

In a word, the comprehensibility is the top priority we should pay attention to in the pre-class language. It is the comprehensive input at the beginning of a class that provides the necessary conditions for successful classroom second and foreign language acquisition. Therefore, in English classes, the teachers should avail themselves of the point to make a good class beginning.

4.1 Flexibility

Comprehensible input is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for successful acquisition. The affective filter is the principal source of individual differences in second language acquisition. That is to say, the attitudinal factors can play an important role in acquiring a second language. Anxious acquirers have a high affective filter, which prevents acquisition from taking place (Krashen, 1982). Take something for example, in English classes the learners often feel anxious. And the level of anxiety by learners is different respectively. Some learners become anxious more quickly than others, whatever the situation is. Others may have had experiences of failure, which cause them to become anxious quickly in classroom learning situation. In this case, it just requires that the English teacher should also pay much more attention to the affection and attitude of the students in class by flexible language, especially by flexible pre-class language, in order to create a lower affective surrounding and release the anxiety of the psychological barrier of students. Therefore, flexibility also deserves concerning for the pre-class language.

Still look at an example related with this point. Assume that one teacher requires his or her students to listen to the new words of every unit. The significance for enlarging and consolidating the vocabulary is out of doubt. However, if the teacher always asks the students to do the dictation at the beginning of a class in any situation, especially when the students are preparing for certain important task or exam so that they have no enough time to recite the words, the students will feel detestable or anxious. And also, if this kind of detestableness or anxiety rises above a certain level, it is an obstacle to the teaching and learning process. A good teacher can get something from the expressions of the students and change his or her pre-class language flexibly to create a less anxiety situation. The efficiency must be better such as this way:

“Before we do the main business, I want to announce a piece of news to you. Maybe it's a piece of good news for you. Today I want to make you relax yourselves, so I don't want to require you to listen to the words of this unit, but please remember we will listen to the words of the first three units together next time. I hope you will have a better preparation for that, all right?”. This is called “We can face a larger space if we step backward.”

To begin a class as the above way, the teacher can lay a series of suspense to the listeners. When students hear “relax and don't” listen to the new words they will feel at ease; while they will see the purpose of relaxation at hearing review the previous lessons next time”. They will begin their lessons at laughs; an unexpected situation keeps the students actively in class.

In English class, the flexibility of pre-class language also reflects on the flexible solutions to the sudden incidents at the beginning of a class. For instance, a small part of students are still sleeping on the desk after the bell has rung. At this time, a great deal of attention should be given to students feelings. As a teacher, he or she should handle this situation with a skillful way flexibly rather than only scold them rudely. For that, they know a good teacher must be one with enough patience, kindness, good-nature. And a good teacher can never contempt or look down upon any students in class. For the problems or mistakes of the students, a good teacher cannot only give a scolding to them. On the contrary, the teacher should give enough care and try to encourage them with fully warmth and expectation. Once a teacher notices the importance of affective factor of students and are good at adjust their language flexibly, it can help to remove the psychological barriers that students bring with them. And in this way, it can shorten the distance between a teacher and his or her students and enhance students' self-confidence and enthusiasm in language learning and acquiring. So we can say the flexible pre-class language can make a good class atmosphere successfully at the beginning of a class.

4.2 Relevance and Interesting

In language teaching, relevance and interesting of the pre-class language should be also attached much importance. About relevance, it requires that pre-class language should relate with the topic of the class closely. That is to say, whatever a teacher talks to students at the beginning of a class, his or her words should have some connection with the following content, instead of an aimless joke or story. According to the study by schema theorists, the newly learning must be based on the general knowledge and relevant interesting information is the precondition for the correct comprehension of abstract concepts. The more relevance it is, the better understanding it will be. So the pre-class language should take this kind role in class teaching that is to stimulate the relevant schema in students' mind. For example, when preparing students for literacy tasks, teachers often fail to address all of the principal forms of schemata. It is not enough to provide explanations for culturally loaned terms and key concepts, leaving students to wade through a complex text. Students also need assistance building formal schema. Spending class time familiarizing students with organizational frameworks will encourage them to read more purposely, rather than regressing to word-to-word analysis. On the basis of this point, if a teacher can introduce some culture tips, for example, history, economy and politics, culture and social

customs of the English-speaking countries, then students can feel easier when they learn the literacy.

At the same time, interesting is as important as relevance. In nature, interesting and relevance are indispensable unity. The more interesting and relevant of the pre-class language is, the more we can arouse the learners' enthusiasm or say, the more we can arouse the latent capacities of acquisition at the beginning of a class. Well begun is half done. Once we draw the interests of the learners at the beginning, the whole class can go smoothly and effectively.

Another factor cannot be ignored, either. That is the teacher and students almost have the same sources of information with the introduction of the mass media and the realization of multi-media technology in class. This change easily makes those new and interesting events become stale and uninteresting and a teacher's language design also will be easily involved in regulation and antiquation. Therefore, if a teacher wants his or her pre-class language interesting and relevant for the class, he or she must analyze her or his topic from different perspectives, try to break the mode of regulation, arouse and propel the thought of students on a unique point of view.

For the requirements of interesting and relevance, we can have a deeper understanding through checking the following example, which can be called the classic in this aspect:

American dream is one of core values of American culture. Actually, almost all the students have known this term when they were very young. But if the teacher just gives a brief introduction to its definition, it's highly possible that many students may feel bored and still be puzzled about the connotation of this term. However, if we begin our class in this way, the class must have a different atmosphere.

"We'll know that freedom and individualism are the basic elements valued in American dream. I guess many of you envy for them because you may find your freedom cannot get fulfilled and usually restricted. For instance, you are annoyed about your mummy's care for your study, or irritated about your parents' inquiry of the trivials of your own. You may think why you have no freedom though you have been 20 years old. One important factor is that you are not self-reliant up to now, particularly in the economic perspective. You cannot live without the financial support of your family. That's the fundamental reason why your parents have a decisive say on your issues and usually you have to subject to it. In American dream, there's no freedom if there's no self-reliance, which is also the core of American individualism. Apparently, different from the derogatory implication, individualism has a positive significance in American culture and being advocated from ancient to now. Therefore, if you are dissatisfied with your parents' interference for your personal affairs, you should try to be self-made and achieve self-reliance in economy and the other aspects."

So if a teacher begins his or her class in this way, students not only can have a better understanding on American dream, but also they can be clear for the roots that they have to tolerate the interference from the parents. And students will be aware that self-reliance is the pre-condition of freedom. This is beneficial for them to form a correct value of life and not to become a boomerang kid after graduation. In the author's view, this pre-class language is valuable in culture and practical significance.

4.3 Diversity

In language teaching, as a teacher, his or her language style usually is constant, which is accessible to students. However, students will feel boring if the same program is used again and again without any change. And even a useful pre-class language will also become stale after being repeated however wonderful it is. So the pre-class language should be filled with changes but not only adhere to one style, Hence diversity should also be cared in the pre-class language.

Firstly, pre-class language as one part of educational language, is really different from the real language in daily life, which is only a kind of language designed by teachers for language teaching. According to the Communication Approach, the best way for learning a language is to use it in social context. So in this respect, for the language learners without language acquisition environment whose sources of language mainly depend on the language which used by teachers in classroom, it is necessary for teacher that at any time, he or she should connect his or her class with the outside of the world (society). And he or she should let students feel the vitality of the world avoiding regarding the class as a segregated space. From this point, a good teacher should try to have a class one part of the word in order to make a class closer to the society in which more effective foreign language learning or acquisition can take place. Hence so-called diversity of pre-class language, it refers to the pre-class language should be changed with the turn of the world. Take the change of time, one respect of the world change for example, a good teacher should be good at guiding students move according to the change of time. By this way, the teachers can always make students keep a high spirit by observing the reactions of

students. For example, a teacher can do in this way when beginning the first class after the Winter Vacation:

“Hello, everyone. Nice to see you again. “New semester, now phenomenon”. I believe all of you had a wonderful Winter Vacation, didn’t you? However, I found most of you are somewhat fresh to me. Why? It’s because that some are plumper and some are stronger. Actually either plumper or stronger is just a euphemistic term. In other words, we’re fatter than before although we’re reluctant to bear such a word. For this case, we should try our best to control our weight and forget the delicious foods of the Spring Festival so the goal of this class is: Calling for our heart to the class”.

Beginning the class in this way, students will feel closely with the teacher and almost couldn’t help laughing. At the same time, students also can be drawn to the topic of the class, quite natural and logic. Surely the class atmosphere is far better than a simple sentence Class begins.”

For another example, suppose the class schedule has come to the April 1. On this day, when a teacher stands on the stage, he or she can begin the class as the follows:

“Well, as we all know, today is the first of April it’s Fool’s Day, a very popular festival in western countries, because people can find pleasure by playing ticks on others. Recently, many Chinese people in particular, the young men are more and more interested in it. However, I just want to say. I would never tell a lie in class. If any of you doesn’t believe what I said, then he or she would be a fool.”

For the above introductory remarks, students can be aware of the special day and get amusement from the words of the teacher. Naturally they will put their whole hearts into the class.

On the other hand, pre-class language is also different from the interlanguage and target language, which is only an intermediary language between them. So as an intermediary language, pre-class language is allowed to be and must to be diverse. For that, this kind of intermediary language is not a real language, but a demonstrating language, which only serves for language teaching in classroom. So in English classes, taking the speed of speaking for example, in order to let learners understand or easier to imitate, the pre-class language can be said slowly or repeatedly. And on the contrary, if the words of pre-class language are covered by the students, or it is easy to be understood or imitated, a faster speed can be used. In addition, as a teacher of language, his or her pre-class language should also be allowed to mix both inter c and target language in order to help the students finally acquiring the target language. So from above evidences, it is obviously that pre-class language should be diverse.

5. Conclusion

All in all, the realization of the good pre-class language can offer a creative study atmosphere beyond the book and benefit all needs of students. Most teaching approaches to date have been based on the assumption that the learner’s input should be carefully controlled and grade for structural complexity. However, it is now sometimes suggested that this assumption is mistaken. Indeed, it is now often proposed that the ideal input for acquiring a second language is similar to the input received by the child: comprehensible, relevant to their immediate interests, not too complex but strictly graded, either. And that classrooms should concentrate on providing the kind of input described above: comprehensible, interesting, relevant, and diverse. And a proper use of the pre-class language can create the best efficiency of a lass.

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