

Reforming College English Listening and Speaking Teaching: Telling Chinese Stories Well with Task-Based Approach and Cross-Cultural Method

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Abstract: College English teaching in China should cultivate students to tell Chinese stories in a cross-cultural way and help promote the international spread of Chinese culture. Listening and speaking skills in college English education are crucial, in which the cultivation of cross-cultural communication skills and storytelling play important roles. This article proposes a task-based teaching model for English listening and speaking teaching, starting from the perspective of cultural confidence in telling Chinese stories in English, aiming to enhance students' cross-cultural communication skills and English proficiency, and improve the quality of English education. The model showcases the interaction between teachers and students, as well as the characteristics of active participation and self-directed learning of students in the process of storytelling. This model can provide new ideas and methods for college English listening and speaking teaching, promote the improvement of students' comprehensive literacy.

Keywords: College English listening and speaking; task-based teaching approach; cross-cultural competence; telling Chinese stories

1. Introduction

In the new era, as the globalization progresses, the construction of the Belt and Road Initiative becomes increasingly improved, and the concept and plan of building a "community with a shared future for mankind" is proposed, China has given higher missions and requirements to foreign language education and talent cultivation. College English, as a compulsory basic course for most non-English majors, should respond to the needs of the times, provide strong support for the construction of new disciplines such as new engineering, new agriculture, and new medicine, while being an organic part of the new liberal arts curriculum^[4] (Xiang Mingyou 2020:33), and make necessary reforms and adjustments to cultivate professional compound talents with cross-cultural communication abilities.

Listening and speaking skills in English play a vital role in cross-cultural communication, but good listening and speaking ability alone is not enough to ensure effective communication. Being aware of and understanding the cultural differences between the two parties in communication, showing respect for different cultures, helps achieve deeper communication and exchange. Therefore, making full use of English listening and speaking courses to enhance students' sensitivity to cultural differences, cultivate cross-cultural communication ability, and improve students' competence in telling Chinese stories, is essential in college English teaching.

However, the existing listening and speaking teaching mode are not satisfactory. Therefore, this paper takes the design of college English listening and speaking courses as the starting point, and explores the specific practices of integrating telling Chinese stories into college English listening and speaking teaching under the guidance of Task-based Language Teaching, combined with specific teaching practices, hoping to provide some inspiration and reference for teaching reform and cross-cultural communication ability cultivation in English listening and speaking courses.

2. Problems in College English Listening and Speaking Teaching

For a long time, influenced by the exam-oriented education, there have been many problems in English listening and speaking teaching. Many teachers still cannot accurately position English listening and speaking, especially in cultivating students' English application ability and enhancing their cross-cultural communication awareness and communication skills, the results are not satisfactory.

2.1 Heavy emphasis on listening comprehension and less emphasis on oral expression

Restricted by teaching concepts and equipment, the basic mode of college English listening and speaking teaching follows this mode: theme discussion – watching videos/listening to recordings – doing exercises – answering questions – watching videos/listening to recordings again. This mode focuses on listening, and does not attach importance to the organization of oral activities, which fail to guide students to exchange the input from listening to the output of speaking, resulting in students losing opportunities and enthusiasm for oral practice^[6](Yang Mei 2018 : 179).

2.2 Heavy emphasis on exam training and less emphasis on communicative pragmatics

In English listening and speaking teaching, listening is often regarded as an exam-oriented skill, and training students to understand listening materials is emphasized, while ignoring the cultural and communicative knowledge they carry and neglecting the learning of communicative skills and pragmatic context. Although teachers usually explain the new words, phrases and cultural background that will appear before playing the video/audio, these introductions are brief, making it difficult for students to understand and grasp the connotations and implications of the materials. Students find it hard to understand and to apply techniques without proper understanding of the materials, which is not ideal for teaching.

2.3 Heavy emphasis on foreign language culture and less emphasis on cultural comparison

The materials used in English listening and speaking teaching are often based on the culture of English-speaking countries, while the missing of mother tongue culture is common, and the comparative analysis of the differences between the two language cultures is lacking. In addition, the imparted cultural knowledge is superficial and difficult to penetrate the students' own cognitive system, making it difficult to serve communication effectively.

In response to the problems in college English listening and speaking teaching, it is necessary to break through the original listening training mode and adopt a task-based teaching mode. Through classroom teaching activities, students are encouraged to complete a variety of communication tasks similar to real-life situations in a cross-cultural context using English, thereby improving their comprehensive language skills and cross-cultural communication abilities and enhancing their cultural confidence.

3. Task-based Teaching Model for College English Listening and Speaking teaching

Task-based teaching is a teaching method that centers on tasks. Students take an active part in learning and develop their initiative of learning by completing tasks, which enhances their interest and motivation in learning and improves learning results. In college English teaching, task-based teaching methods provide teachers with a challenging and practical way to teach.

The task-based teaching model for collage English listening and speaking teaching centers on tasks, students, communication goals, and situational backgrounds to promote learning and practice through independent inquiry. In this teaching model, teachers guide students through tasks, allowing them to learn language points and language skills, and improving their English communication and cross-cultural skills. Tasks are specific and authentic activities that serve clear purposes and backgrounds, allowing students to appreciate and use language in context to promote language development^[2](Du Juan 2023: 104). Specifically, the task-based teaching model includes the following steps:

(1) Task setting: Teachers design tasks that are suitable for students' language levels and abilities, including listening comprehension tasks, speaking tasks, social communication tasks, situational communication tasks, and others based on students' actual situations and teaching objectives.

(2) Task presentation: Teachers present tasks and let students understand the task content, goals, and completion methods in class.

(3) Task analysis: Teachers analyze tasks, enabling students to understand the language skills and knowledge points involved in tasks.

(4) Student cooperative completion of tasks: With the guidance of teachers, students collaborate to

complete the tasks through communication, discussion, and cooperation.

(5) Feedback and evaluation: Teachers provide feedback and evaluation of task completion, enabling students to understand their shortcomings in completing tasks and further improving their English listening, speaking and cross-cultural communication skills.

4. Integrating the Telling of Chinese Stories into the Task-based Teaching Mode of College English Listening and Speaking Courses

Guidelines for College English Teaching (2020) points out that the selection of content for college English teaching should consciously integrate socialist core values and excellent traditional Chinese culture^[3]. Therefore, cultivating students to become cross-cultural communicators who can tell China's story well is necessarily a key issue of college English teaching.

To tell a Chinese story well, one should consider the following three dimensions:

(1) The dimension of content: To tell a Chinese story well, one must first have a deep understanding of the story itself, fully grasp the background, plot, characters, etc. One must be proficient in these aspects in order to tell the story vividly.

(2) The dimension of cultural background: To tell a Chinese story well, one also need to have an understanding of the cultural background involved in the story and the context of cultural exchange. Every story has a different background, so one need to understand aspects such as its ideas, cultural characteristics, and the role it played in the society at the time, in order to better grasp and convey the profound cultural connotations embedded in the story. Moreover, to make Chinese stories more relevant to the purpose and audience of the storytelling, one also needs to consider the audience's cultural background and differences, so that the story can become more grounded and meaningful.

(3) The dimension of language and expression: Good storytelling not only involves mastery of basic vocabulary and grammar, but also requires attention to the language skills used in storytelling, such as using rhetorical devices like metaphor, exaggeration, and reversal at appropriate times, which can make the story more lively and vivid.

Through these three dimensions, we can more comprehensively grasp the elements of the Chinese story, integrate various aspects of the story, and make the story better spread. Incorporating the storytelling of Chinese stories into audio-visual teaching can be done through the following steps:

(1) Design tasks

Firstly, it is necessary to determine the tasks, that is, the goals that students are required to achieve. For example, students can be required to improve their listening and speaking abilities and cultural background knowledge by telling, watching, and listening to Chinese stories. The teaching task needs to be close to students' lives, interests, and practical application scenarios.

(2) Choose appropriate Chinese stories

Secondly, it is necessary to choose appropriate Chinese stories. Representative, interesting, easy to understand, and close to life stories can be selected, such as "The Legend of the White Snake," "Dream of the Red Chamber," "Journey to the West," etc. At the same time, it is also necessary to ensure that the story and the cultural background involved in the story are meaningful for students.

(3) Provide sufficient language input

Providing sufficient language input is very important. Multiple forms, such as reading the story, listening to the audio, and watching the video, can be used. Supplementary materials related to the story, such as research papers, films, and music, can also be provided to deepen students' understanding and recognition of the cultural background.

(4) Design activities

Multiple methods can be used to tell the story in teaching activities, such as script performance, story fragment reproduction, and role play. Meanwhile, multiple activities, such as oral training, listening practice, and classroom presentations, can be designed to help students master the key language expressions in the story and improve their learning outcomes.

(5) Feedback and evaluation

Finally, feedback and evaluation need to be provided. Teachers can evaluate students' learning outcomes through aspects such as student presentations, listening comprehension, and oral communication abilities. At the same time, targeted feedback can be provided to help them further improve.

5. Telling Chinese Stories in a Cross-cultural Way

A cross-cultural way means communicating with cross-cultural consciousness, learning to see things from the perspective of the audience, and understanding the audience^[5] (Yue Hao and Zhuang Enping 2022:57). At the same time, when telling stories to foreign audiences, one should use speaker-directed and verbal language based expressions to make it easier for them to understand, and to reduce misunderstandings and misinterpretations^[7] (Zhuang Enping and Yang Ying 2016:45). In other words, the storyteller should speak in a way that the "audience" can understand and consider the differences of the audience, instead of talking to oneself. The storyteller needs to be exceptionally familiar with the audience's language and culture^[1] (Ferguson 2021).

Telling Chinese stories in a cross-cultural way means placing them within a cross-cultural framework for storytelling. The cross-cultural framework involves not only the translation and understanding of the language itself but also the close connection of Chinese stories with various cultural backgrounds, such as Western and Eastern cultures, and so on. In cross-cultural storytelling, it is necessary to consider audiences from different cultural backgrounds, understand the differences and similarities between different cultures, and avoid cultural conflicts and misunderstandings. Therefore, telling Chinese stories in a cross-cultural way requires paying attention to the accuracy of language expression and the transmission of cultural connotations, enabling the audience to understand better and increase their understanding and recognition of different cultures.

6. Teaching Design

This paper takes the course design and implementation of college English listening and speaking course as a case study, which is divided into three stages: pre-class, in-class, and post-class, to present the specific method of telling Chinese stories in the task-based teaching of college English listening and speaking.

6.1 Pre-class preparation

(1) Introduction to the topics: Provide bilingual videos of Romeo and Juliet and the Butterfly Lovers stories to students, and guide them to discuss these two stories to arouse their interest and curiosity.

(2) Introduction of background knowledge: Provide text materials for students to read and explore the origin, background, cultural value and other aspects of the two stories, to help them better understand the cultural background of the story.

(3) Preparation of language materials: prepare some templates for students, such as language templates for telling stories, emotional expression templates, etc., to help them organize language and express emotions better.

(4) Clear tasks: the final task is to prepare a 5-minute presentation, choosing a plot from the Butterfly Lovers story to tell in English, using the language expressions, cultural background, and storytelling skills learned in the course, clear logic, reasonable structure, vivid language are required, and the storytelling should take full account of the audiences' cultural background and acceptance.

6.2 In-class Design

(1) Task 1: Understanding the story. Play audio-visual materials related to Romeo and Juliet and Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai, providing a brief overview of the basic plot and explaining the cultural background. Help students fully understand the plot, characters, and cultural context of the story by listening and explaining while asking and answering questions, such as "What is the setting of the story Romeo and Juliet?" "What leads to the tragedy of Romeo and Juliet?" "Who are Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai?" "What was the fate of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai?" "What do these two stories have in common?" and so on. At the same time, students should be made aware of the cultural background,

including ancient marriage customs, social status, and scope in both Eastern and Western cultures, which is helpful for them to understand the plot and behavior of characters in the stories.

(2) Task 2: Role-playing. Students are divided into groups for role-playing according to the story plot, requiring them to express relevant statements about the story in English, such as "Juliet, did you fall in love with Romeo at first sight?" "Romeo, how did you feel after your first date with Juliet?" "Zhu Yingtai, can you tell me how you felt when you first met Liang Shanbo?" "Liang Shanbo, did you realize that Zhu Yingtai was a woman when you first met her?" and so on. At the same time, analyze the character traits and actions of the main characters to help students better understand the development of the story plot and emotional changes.

(3) Task 3: Language preparation. Provide relevant English phrases and sentence structures to help students practice expressing their views and emotions about the story, such as "Liang Shanbo is an idealistic character in the story" and "The ending of the story is bittersweet", etc. Emphasize the importance of language expression and cultural communication. When students tell the story of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai, they need to use correct English expression and understand which expressions contain cultural differences. In addition, consciously guide students to discuss different cultural backgrounds and values, which is a crucial step in promoting cross-cultural communication.

(4) Task 4: Skills preparation. Introduce how to select appropriate scenes, plot, language expressions, and storytelling techniques to attract the audience's interest, and how to use audio-visual materials and multimedia technologies to assist in storytelling, making the story more vivid and interesting. Through demonstration, practice, imitation, and other teaching methods, guide students to tell the story of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai, such as intonation, language expression, and rhythm. At the same time, it should focus on guiding students to pay attention to the cultural orientation and pay attention to the expression of the Chinese discourse system.

(5) Task 5: Oral presentation. Create a scenario that when listening to the violin concerto of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai with British friends at a music concert, the melodious melody is fascinating that your foreign friends are curious, you are required to introduce the story of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai with the necessary background knowledge, vocabulary, language expression, and storytelling skills, and use English oral expression confidently to share Chinese stories in cross-cultural communication. Encourage students to use their own language and methods to tell the story. The ultimate goal is to enable students to tell the story of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai in their own language and arrangement. At the same time, encourage students to present the story through different media such as images, videos, and audio. In addition, emphasize the need to respect the cultural background of the audience and avoid sensitive and controversial topics and expressions.

(6) Evaluation and feedback. Evaluate students' oral expression and provide specific feedback and suggestions to help them continuously improve.

6.3 After-class Reinforcement

(1) Review audio-visual materials: Let students reread the listening materials to help them understand the story content deeply and remember important language expressions.

(2) Writing tasks: Let students write about the story of the butterfly lovers, including the plot, cultural background, feelings, etc. It can be in the form of story notes, letters, or story retelling.

(3) Teamwork tasks: Let students collaborate in groups to create a video to tell the story of the butterfly lovers, to promote their understanding of the story and teamwork skills.

7. Conclusion

By analyzing the importance, current situation, and problems of college English listening and speaking teaching in China, as well as the relationship between task-based teaching methods and the telling of Chinese stories in listening and speaking teaching, this paper proposes a task-based teaching model that integrates cross-cultural teaching into listening and speaking teaching. In task design, relevant Chinese cultural stories are designed according to the needs for self-directed learning and interest of the students, so that through reading stories, listening to stories, learning stories, and telling stories, students can continuously deepen their understanding of Chinese culture and proceed self-examination, discover their learning potential, improve their learning ability and comprehensive quality, and enhance cross-cultural communication skills and English proficiency.

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