

A Study on constructing “golden class” for international Chinese undergraduate teaching with classroom interactive habiventions

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Abstract: One of the core issues in constructing the “golden class” of undergraduate teaching is to create high-level teacher-student interactive habiventions (habitual-conventions). Through the classroom observation and discourse analysis of international Chinese teaching, it was found that the proficient teachers’ lessons have the characteristics of high fluency of interaction, high student involvement, large language output of students, concise teacher talk, high frequency in class and favored by both teachers and students. The interactive models with such characteristics are named interactive habitual-conventions through years’ research with Grounded Theory. Chinese L2 teachers can continuously optimize their classroom interaction models by promoting their awareness of building interactive habitual-conventions, observing the interactive models of expert teachers, and constantly reflecting on their own interaction process through their own classroom recordings, and finally create a “golden classes” for international Chinese undergraduate teaching which is suitable for students’ age, culture, and Chinese proficiency.

Keywords: Classroom interaction, interactive habitual-conventions, international Chinese education, undergraduate teaching, golden class

1. Introduction

In 2018, when the Ministry of Education held the Undergraduate Education Work Conference of Higher Education Institutions, it put forward the important proposition of building first-class undergraduate education. Since then, “creating golden classes and eliminating water classes (low-level classes)” has become one of the primary goals of undergraduate teaching reform and evaluation in the universities of China.

In the information age where knowledge is growing explosively and very convenient to obtain, how to cultivate students’ interactive ability, critical thinking and collaboration ability through sufficient and in-depth interaction is undoubtedly an important criterion of the “golden class” of undergraduate teaching.

Proficient interaction is also one of the important standards of the “golden class” of Chinese L2 undergraduate teaching. So, what the basic characteristics of proficient teachers’ classroom interaction and how to improve the effect of interaction in Chinese L2 classroom teaching are the major question of this research.

2. Methodology

Wu Yan (2018) proposed that the characteristics of the “golden class” can be summed up as: “high-level, innovative and challenging.” Wu Yan (2018) also summarized the teaching level from his own extensive classroom teaching evaluation practice. There are five levels: quiet class, student-answering class, interactive class, critically interactive class, and debating class.[1] It is not difficult to see from Wu’s statement that one of the core features of the “golden class” is the degree of interaction between teachers and students, or between students. The lowest-level class is a teacher-centered “teacher-talk class”, where students just take notes or sit silently without thinking. Such “lecture-style” teaching can also allow students to gain knowledge, but it is unlikely to cultivate critical and innovative new-era talents.

In order to explore the basic characteristics of proficient teachers' classroom interaction, Grounded Theory was employed. Classroom observation and Grounded Theory were employed in this study. Grounded theory was first proposed by Glaser and Strauss in 1967. [2] It is a kind of qualitative research method with which researchers collect first-hand data, and constantly compare, analyze, summarize, and conceptualize the data, and abstract theories from them.

30 periods (each period is 45 minutes) of 10 proficient teachers' classes were selected for classroom observation, and the recordings of the 30 periods were transcribed into text to construct a Chinese L2 class discourse corpus for classroom discourse analysis. The 10 proficient teachers were from three first-class universities in Beijing and Hainan provinces. They all had more than 5 years' teaching experience, and their teaching work had been highly evaluated by peers. The characteristics of their teaching are the tacit cooperation between teachers and students, and the highly smooth classroom interaction.

Through classroom observation of 30 periods of the international Chinese lessons and continuous analysis of the transcription data, we carried out primary, secondary and third-grade coding on the characteristics of the ten teachers' classroom interactive discourse. After 8 years of repeated observation, analysis and refinement, we found that proficient teachers' classroom interaction has at least the following six characteristics: smooth teacher-student interaction, concise teacher talk, large student language output, high student involvement, the high frequency of the interactive models, and teachers and students fond of the interactive models. The specific encoding results are as follows shown in Table 1:

Table 1: Main features of proficient teachers' classroom interaction

Third-grade coding	Classroom interactive habitual-conventions					
Secondary coding	Fluent interaction	Concise T talk	Large S linguistic output	High S involvement	High frequency of interactive models	T and Ss fond of the interactive models
Primary coding	1. Quick answers 2. Few pauses of T 3. Few pauses of S 4. Few pauses between T and S's turns	1. Concise directions; 2. Many one-sentence directions; 3. Short directions; 4. Frequent omission of directions; 5. S knowing T's intention before T's directions	1. S's output of multi-expressions; 2. Many Ss' output of sentences; 3. Many long sentences in Ss' output; 4. The continuous Ss output;	1. Many Ss answer the collective questions; 2. Loud response to the individual questions; 3. Many proactive responses; 4. Ss' questioning T 5. Volunteer dictation	1. Being used in each lessons; 2. frequent use in one period;	1. T satisfied with the interaction; 2. S likes the interactive activities

(Notes: T: teacher; S: students)

3. Characteristics of classroom interactive habitual-conventions

Through the classroom observation and discourse analysis of 30 periods of 10 proficient Chinese L2 teachers, the characteristics of their classroom interaction are continuously extracted through Grounded method. The study found that different proficient teachers had different classroom interaction models in line with their teaching style, but these classroom interaction models had at least the following six characteristics.

3.1 Both the teacher and students fond of the interactive models

Classroom interaction often involves the behavior of both teachers and students. During the long-term classroom interaction, teachers and students usually form some interactive models with which both parties are relatively satisfied. If one party does not like it, they may resist this interaction method. In this case, even if the interaction model is used repeatedly, it is unlikely to become a smooth interaction model for them. For example, the interactive model of "teacher lead in reading aloud" is widely accepted by beginner students in the Chinese L2 class, but it may cause students' resistance in the advanced Chinese class because it is too simple for them.

3.2 Frequent use of the interactive models

In the rich classroom teaching practices, once teachers find that a certain interactive model is effective and students like it, they usually use this model to form a tacit cooperation between teachers and students.

For example, the proficient teacher M's interactive model "building words with morphemes" is used in almost every lesson, and the frequency is relatively high. In the third period of her lessons we observed, the teacher used this model 18 times, and the teaching effect was very good.

3.3 Concise teacher talk

The primary goal of international Chinese education is to cultivate students' Chinese communicative ability, i.e., the ability to use Chinese language to conduct real cross-cultural communication. The cultivation of the ability can only be effectively carried out in a large number of exercises that simulate authentic communication. So the teacher's preachment and long explanations are not suitable for Chinese L2 teaching.

The characteristics of the Chinese L2 lessons determine that Chinese L2 classroom teaching should focus on teacher-student interaction and student-student interaction, supplemented by teacher's concise explanation. "Concise explanation and rich practice" is one of the most important teaching principles. How to reduce the proportion of teacher talk in class is the key to the success of Chinese L2 teaching.

In classroom observation, we found that the proficient teachers' talk was very concise. Without repeated explanations, teachers and students interacted with each other tacitly. With only a simple sentence from the teacher, students know what the teacher wanted them to do; even with a gesture or a look, students could understand their teachers' intention. For example, in Example 1 above, the teacher's instruction was "As usual, you can say the words immediately when you see the character", the students understood the direction: every time the teacher gives a morpheme, the students are required to form words with it freely, the more words they form, the better, including the works they have learned in class and those they haven't.

In addition to the teacher's concise instructions, the teacher's questions were effective. The fewer questions are asked in each teaching exchange, the better the effect of the teacher's questioning, and the more successful is the interaction model. Proficient teachers usually only need to ask a question once to elicit answers from students, and even elicit multiple rounds of answers from students.

3.4 High fluency of interaction

Another characteristic of the proficient teachers' class interaction was that the interaction was very fluent. There were almost no pauses that were long enough to cause embarrassment. Through the observation of 30 periods of 10 proficient Chinese L2 teachers, it was found that there were almost no pauses exceeding 3 seconds; pauses exceeding 2 seconds were relatively rare. In many cases, the teacher had not finished the question, but the students already blurted out their answers. The interaction fluency was very high. This also reflected the high enthusiasm of students to participate in the classroom. Berliner (1988) found that fluid performance is the important characteristics of proficient teachers. [3]

3.5 Large linguistic output from students

The research team extracted 100 classroom interaction clips respectively from 5 proficient teachers and 5 intern teachers' classes, and counted the length of the students' answers (the response moves). The result was that the average length of the students' answers in the proficient teachers' classroom was 4.1861 characters, and the mean length of the students' response moves in the intern teachers' classroom was 2.9685 characters. The language output of students in proficient teachers' classrooms was significantly greater than that of intern teachers.

In Chinese L2 classroom teaching, the amount of students' language output can reflect the amount of language practice of students and the effectiveness of students' classroom learning. The amount of students' language output can be measured by counting the words of students' response move. The larger the length of students' response move, the stronger the willingness and ability of students to participate in the interaction, and the better the teaching effect.

3.6 High involvement of students

Students' classroom involvement was defined as the proportion of students participating in the interaction, and the willingness and depth of their participation in this study. The more engaged are the students, the more likely will the classroom be effective.

Student involvement will be judged differently depending on the type of interaction. For teacher-class interaction (such as teacher's lead in reading aloud), student-student interaction (such as dialogue exercise, group discussion), the proportion of students participating in the interaction or the number of students answering questions can be used to index students' engagement level. If it is a teacher-individual interaction (such as when a teacher asking a question, one student answers individually), or a student-student interaction display (usually two students show a dialogue), the evaluation of student participation is mainly based on the initiative level of students to participate in interaction.

Students engagement involves multiple dimensions such as students' emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and academic participation, including the sense of belonging to the class, teacher-student relationship, participation in classroom activities, self-regulation, listening, and many other aspects.[4-6]

According to the observation and discourse analysis of 30 periods of 10 proficient teachers, the common characteristics was found: when the teacher interacted with the whole class, the proportion of students who participated in answering questions was very high, and there were almost no students who were silent or played with mobile phones; Students could take the initiative to answer questions, and their voices were loud and confident when answering questions, and some students even took the initiative to ask questions from time to time.

By means of the Grounded method, we got the third-grade code "interactive habitual-convention". It refers to the classroom interaction model of which both the teacher and students are fond, programmed due to frequent use, and shared by teachers and students, which is conducive to the formation of orderly and smooth classroom interaction and improve classroom teaching efficiency.

4. Construction of interactive habitual-conventions

4.1 Cultivating the awareness of interactive habitual-conventions

The awareness of interactive habitual-conventions means that teachers have a clear concept in their minds: the ideal classroom interactions are interaction models with a high degree of tacit understanding between teachers and students, favored by students, and having high interaction fluency. The interview survey found that proficient teachers usually had a strong awareness of constructing interactive habitual-conventions.

In the interview, Teacher M said, "During the second semester of teaching the elementary class, the students' vocabulary is large enough, and I thought it was time to let the students do the exercise of forming words with morphemes, so I used it. I found that the students liked it very much, and the effect was not bad. Later on I often use it." Teacher L said, "At the beginning, students procrastinated in answering questions, so I asked them to think quickly and express themselves confidently. In addition, I encourage the students who actively answer questions and the students who answer questions with a loud voice, and then the efficiency of asking questions increased." Teacher L also mentioned another of her interactive requirements in class: "Sometimes students only say one word when answering questions. There is no problem with one word in daily communication. But it is the language class, I repeatedly asked my students to 'say sentences', and bit by bit, students developed the habit of saying sentences."

Through the teacher-student cooperation and negotiation, teachers and students form consensus on classroom interaction models and requirements, and the highly tacit interactive models are habitual-conventions, which are used to achieve better classroom teaching effects. This is the goal that the Chinese L2 teachers should consciously pursue.

4.2 Observing and following the interactive habitual-conventions of proficient teachers

Constructing classroom interactive habitual-conventions through personal practice is a necessary

way for novice teachers to grow into expert teachers. However, only relying on personal practical experience, a teacher develops slowly. Actively observing the classroom interactive habitual-conventions of proficient teachers can shorten the growth cycle of teacher development. Learning from other Chinese L2 proficient teachers' mature interactive habitual-conventions, and modifying them according to actual situations can enrich one's own repository of interactive habitual-conventions.

4.3 Improving interactive models by recording the lessons and reflecting on them

In the long-term research, it is found that some teachers who have more than 30 years of teaching experience still give relatively dull lessons with little interaction with the students, while some young teachers who only have 3 or 4 years of teaching experience give lively lessons, have a strong sense of classroom interaction, and their students have a high degree of engagement.

A typical case in the interview is the young teacher A, who only had 3 years of teaching experience. She had already won the first prize in a provincial teaching competition. She developed a habit: after each class, no matter how late it was, she must calm down and spend 15-30 minutes reflecting on her classroom teaching, evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of each teaching step, and thinking about the ways of improvement. During the first 3 years of teaching, she wrote 6 thick volumes of classroom reflection notes. It is the reflection and continuous optimization of the classroom interaction model that allows Teacher A to accumulate rich classroom interactive habitual-conventions. Therefore, her classes were full of tacit cooperation between teachers and students, and the active participation of students.

In addition, in the interview surveys, it was found that by listening to their own classroom recordings or watching their own classroom videos, most teachers could significantly improve their reflection awareness and promote the evaluation on their own classroom teaching practice. In the interview, teacher F talked about an experience of his own: "At that time, I still felt good about my own teaching work. All my students liked me. But when I listened to the recordings of my own lessons, I was shocked. I felt something like a fever, and sweated, heart beating fast. Only then did I realize that I was so wordy in class. My class was filled by my chattering, and students had very few opportunities to speak! Since then, I always remind myself: talk less, ask more questions, ask good questions. Class recordings or videos are like mirrors for teachers. Looking in the mirror can help teachers understand and reflect on themselves more accurately.

5. Conclusion

Through years of classroom observation and Grounded Theory study, an important phenomenon of classroom interactive habitual-conventions emerged. It could help create a "golden class" for Chinese L2 undergraduate teaching. The Chinese L2 classroom interactive habitual-conventions have the characteristics of high interaction fluency, high student involvement, large student language output, concise teacher talk, high frequency in class, and favored by both teachers and students. In the process of career development, Chinese L2 teachers can improve their awareness of constructing interactive habitual-conventions, observing the classroom interactive habitual-conventions of expert teachers, and constantly reflecting on their own classroom interaction through listening to their own classroom recordings, optimizing classroom interaction models. Classroom interactive habitual-conventions based on the characteristics of students' age, local culture and students' Chinese level will eventually create "golden classes" for international Chinese undergraduate teaching.

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