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ON STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING AN ELEMENTARY CHINESE LISTENING COURSE IN A TARGET LANGUAGE ENVIRONMENT

Тил чөйрөсүндө башталгыч кытай тил курстарын максаттуу окутуунун методдору

О стратегиях преподавания элементарного курса китайского аудирования в целевой языковой среде

Abstract. *Target-Language environment provides unique learning conditions for international students in China. In Chinese elementary listening class, teachers should make full use of the target-language environment to improve the learners' listening ability both in the classroom and outside of the classroom through effective teaching strategies.*

Аннотация. *Максаттуу тил чөйрөсү Кытайга келип кытай тилин үйрөнүүчү чет өлкөлүк студенттер үчүн уникалдуу окуу шарттарын камсыздайт. Ошондуктан, кытай тили угуу сабагынын мугалимдер максаттуу тил чөйрөсүн жана ресурстарын толук колдонушу керек. Класстагы формалдуу окутуунун негизинде, окуучулардын тил деңгээлине жана муктаждыктарына жараша, сабакта жана сабактан тышкары убактарда эффективдүү аргаларды колдонуш зарыл жана сабакты жакшыртуу үчүн кытай чөйрөсүн толук пайдаланып студенттердин угуу деңгээлин жогору көтөрүү керек.*

Аннотация. *Целевая языковая среда обеспечивает уникальные условия обучения для иностранных студентов, которые приезжают в Китай для изучения китайского языка. Поэтому при начальном обучении слуху по-китайски учителя должны в полной мере использовать целевую языковую среду и ресурсы. На основе формального обучения в классе, в соответствии с языковым уровнем и потребностями учащихся, в классе и вне класса следует применять эффективные стратегии, чтобы в полной мере использовать китайскую среду для улучшения навыков слушания учащихся.*

Keywords: *target-language environment; Chinese elementary listening class; learning in class; learning outside of classroom; teaching strategies*

Урунттуу сөздөр: *максаттуу тил чөйрөсү; башталгыч кытай тили угуу курсу; класстык окуу; класстан тышкаркы окуу; окутуу методдору*

Ключевые слова: *целевая языковая среда; начальный курс китайского аудирования; обучение в классе; внеклассное обучение; стратегии преподавания*

1. Introduction. Listening plays an extremely important role in communication and language learning. Yang Huiyuan (1992) believes that all language teaching and learning process is from listening to speaking, and from reading to writing, and that listening is the foundation for other language abilities. However, since the 1970s when Chinese listening class gradually developed into an independent class, “we have to admit that the research on teaching listening does not match the rapid development of Chinese language teaching, and the current situation is not optimistic,” says Liu Songhao (2001). We find that many international students

often have a little enthusiasm for their participation in listening courses. At present, listening teaching is still the weakness of international Chinese teaching, and listening is also the difficult point and weak point for many international students. The author, through the observation on international students' classroom learning and after-class life, as well as the close communication with them, found that although some international students can make full use of the environment to learn Chinese, a considerable number of international students lack the awareness of taking advantage of the Chinese environment to promote Chinese learning. This paper aims to discuss how to effectively utilize the target language environment, combining classroom and extracurricular learning, to effectively improve international students' Chinese listening level.

2. Theoretical Background of the Research

Acquisition and learning are important terms in second language learning theory. Krashen (1985) believes that acquisition, namely subconscious, daily, and implicit learning, is the way that children naturally acquire their first language, while learning is conscious, formal, and linguistic-focused in the language classroom. The terms are distinguished by learning settings: one is in natural setting, the other is school setting. By this definition, learning generally refers to foreign language learning in school setting, while acquisition refers to children learning their mother tongue naturally outside of schools.

This theory provides a strong support for TCSOL (teaching Chinese to speakers of other languages). TCSOL in China is the combination of learning at school and acquisition after school in the target language environment. Those international students are learning and acquiring Chinese in China. To be specific, in the classroom language environment, learners are trained on grammar, vocabulary, structure, reading and formal language, which is conducive for learners' reading and writing ability. On the contrary, speaking ability is easier to be improved in natural language environments. To conclude, both the natural language environment and the classroom language environment cannot be ignored. For international students in China, Chinese language learning should not only focus on the formal learning in classrooms, but also on guiding students to consciously use the natural language environment to learn Chinese more effectively.

3. Characteristics of the Target Language Environment and its Role on Language Learning

Liu Xun (1993) appeals to make full use of the language environment to establish a new teaching system of learning and acquisition inside and outside of school. Given the unique advantages of the target language environment, it can play a great role in promoting Chinese learning. First of all, in the target language environment, Chinese is everywhere at anytime, and learners can immerse themselves in it. They can use audio-visual materials and all other channels like books, newspapers, magazines, advertisement, news, radio and television, movies, computers, conversation, network and so on to constantly contact with various language materials. Secondly, language in the target language environment is authentic, so learners can participate in authentic communication activities emotionally and personally, and contact with vivid and natural language. In this way, they can not only recognize and consolidate what they have learned in the classroom, but learn new knowledge and enhance their sense of the language. Finally, the target language environment can greatly enhance the acculturation of international students. Studying in the environment, they can feel the cultural differences personally, better their understanding of Chinese language and culture, and then promote their Chinese language proficiency.

4. Approaches to Use Target Language Environment in Chinese Elementary Listening Classroom

As discussed above, there are two main approaches for international students to learn Chinese: one is to learn the language naturally in the target language environment; the other is to learn it in language classroom under teacher's instruction with effective teaching methods and learning skills. In the target language environment, learners could naturally learn some

everyday vocabulary and simple grammar, although authentic, not accurate and comprehensive enough. As a result, learners only obtain some basic communication ability and their language learning mainly relies on classroom teaching. BreeCh&Robinson (1995) points out that the formal classroom teaching has important influence on students' language acquisition. It helps students deal with a large number of daily language and cultural information input, encourage them, give them opportunities to correct their mistakes, and at the same time guarantee that the students do not easily get lost in a foreign environment. Therefore, the first point we will discuss is how to maximize the advantage of the target language and promote international students' Chinese learning in the classroom.

4.1 Task-Based Listening Class

Task-based teaching method is a widely adopted teaching method in Chinese teaching field in recent years. Its purpose is to enable learners to complete a series of communication tasks with the target language and in the process learn the application of the language, so as to achieve the ultimate goal of communication ability. With task-based teaching, teachers design activities from the learners-centered perspective, assign tasks, and guide students; students, no longer learning passively, participate in the communication process with an active and positive attitude, and greatly improve the teaching and learning efficiency.

Task-based listening teaching can be divided into three stages: pre-listening task, listening task, and post-listening task. In pre-listening task, teacher introduces the task to the students and gets them motivated to solve it. At this stage, in order to motivate students and reduce the difficulty of listening, teacher should introduce the background, explain the type, structure, and new words of the material. Once everyone is engaged, teacher explains what is expected for the task and guides students to discuss the task and predict the content, and finally arouses students' enthusiasm for participation. The teacher can then give further instructions if needed and offer advice on how to approach the task. In the listening task, students listen to the material and complete the task as required. The goal of this stage is to cultivate students' ability to get main idea and key facts of the material under the premise of adapting to Chinese pronunciation and rate. Students can work on the task in groups or pairs. The teacher doesn't usually join in the work process. Instead, he or she will monitor the students and offer hints if students really need support. In post-listening task, also known as review stage, teacher evaluates the students' task. In this stage, teacher does not simply give the answer, but analyzes the frequently-made errors in the task, and provides effective guidance to students. In addition, teacher should further explain the important language points and expressions in the listening material and give more language output tasks to reinforce students' understanding. With these tasks, students transform the knowledge learned in listening materials into language application ability. Students could not only understand what the speaker says in actual communication, but respond properly with the knowledge learned in class. The post-listening stage offers students the opportunity to reflect on their work and analyze it in order to improve their skills for the future.

Although task-based teaching method works well, it does not suit the whole classroom teaching process. As a large number of tasks occupies the time for formal language input, students, for most of the time, could only contact language input from peers, so it is hard to guarantee both the quality and quantity of the input. In terms of output, learners often adopt avoidance and simplification strategies to accomplish communication tasks, which may result in tasks without the required linguistic form. In other words, communicative tasks enhance student language fluency, but often do not guarantee students' accuracy of language output.

4.2 Authentic, Accurate and Practical Language Input in Listening Classroom

The acquisition of Chinese in TCSOL begins with classroom language input. At present, in many Chinese elementary listening classes, the teaching process is based on the textbook, and teachers focus on students' grasp of vocabulary and grammar in the textbook. Therefore, teaching activities lay particular stress on practice of knowledge in the textbook, while ignoring the use of the target language environment. As has mentioned in the first part, teachers should

try their best to use authentic language materials in the classroom to create a target language environment, and to promote students' learning to the maximum extent.

First, teachers can use network resources as authentic language material in the classroom. As elementary Chinese learners have very limited language abilities, teachers can select suitable materials for students to learn, such as CCTV news, Happy Chinese and other online programs. Teachers can guide the students to listen to the material, and at the same time, get a preliminary understanding of the content based on the information from the picture and the script. Teachers could also encourage students to answer questions or participate in class discussion, and consolidate the words and sentences students have learned.

Secondly, teachers can introduce authentic material in daily life into the listening classroom. These audio or video recordings can intuitively reproduce the scenes that students have learned in their textbooks. This method is particularly effective in elementary learning stage. In this stage, teachers can record or screen some scenes that are closely related to the lives of international students, e.g. to exchange money in bank, to send or receive a package, to book hotel or tickets by telephone, etc. Students, especially those new ones, need all the information in their daily life, but could not find that in elementary textbooks. In the listening class, students watch and imitate the performance. They find the authentic material useful and could apply it in real life. With all the application and achievement, students are more motivated to learn Chinese.

In addition, teachers can use Chinese movies and TV dramas in their listening class. Traditional listening teaching requires students to pay more attention to listening but ignores the participation of other sense organs, but Chinese film and TV dramas integrate audiovisual and speaking, thus reproduce communication scenes in real life. To make best use of Chinese film and TV series, first, teachers should carefully choose the material. Because most of the international students have more or less problems in pronunciation, so the first concern for teachers is pronunciation, rate, and intonation. Teachers should select interesting Chinese film and TV dramas with positive Chinese culture, with standard Mandarin, clear pronunciation, moderate speed, and without sensitive topics on politics or religion. Before playing the film, teacher should first briefly introduce the social and cultural background of the story, and if necessary set suspense to arouse students' interest. Teachers can also sort out the key lines and mark the key words and sentences for students. When the film is played for the first time, students are given some simple questions and usually they are expected to understand the story. In order to make students enjoy the whole film and experience the language, culture and art, teachers should play the whole film as long as time permits. When the film is played for the second time, the main teaching goal is to encourage students to use the new expressions in the film. Therefore, the film is played in sections according to the plots and scenes. After watching the film, students can choose a plot they are most interested in and work in groups for dubbing exercises. Compared with traditional listening class, this task-based listening class provides abundant activities for students.

5. Approaches to Use Target Language Environment outside of Chinese Elementary Listening Classroom

At present, Chinese elementary listening teaching does not make full use of the target language environment outside of the classroom. Many international students do not contact with Chinese after class and they tend to surf the Internet with their first language in their dormitory. These students seldom actively go out to learn about Chinese social life. Even if they go out on weekends, they are with other international students. We can imagine how much progress they can make with their Chinese learning. So, how can we guide these learners to make good use of the language environment after class, to adopt effective learning strategies, and to encourage their learning enthusiasm in spare time, so as to improve their learning efficiency and Chinese level?

First of all, teachers can give students some tasks after class. Based on learning in classroom, teachers can assign more practical homework and encourage learners to make better

use of the target language resources. The tasks can be done in groups or pairs, or individually. These tasks are closely related to their daily life and to what they have learned in class, for example: to chat with the taxi driver when taking a taxi, and record the driver's day; to chat with some old Chinese people and record their life style today; to get to know a Chinese friend on campus; to order dishes in a Chinese restaurant; to visit a Chinese family, etc. After students finish their tasks, they are then asked to make a report or to present their tasks, which stimulate students' participation in the tasks, and create a real Chinese environment. Teacher can also give further instructions if needed and offer advice on how to approach the task.

Secondly, teachers can arrange some TV programs and audio material for students, and organize regular discussions on the relevant topics. For beginners, TV series with interesting plot and good story are easier for them to understand, such as Big Head Son and Small Head Dad, I Love My Family, etc. These TV series about Chinese people's daily life are easy to be understood with Chinese subtitles. Teachers can also assign some influential audio materials of newspapers and magazines for beginners, such as China Daily and Reader. With the audio material, learners can consolidate what they have learned in class, and understand China and the world better. Students can also watch Focus Interview, Legal Report, and Closer to China. These programs reflect the hot issues in China today. They have fixed broadcasting time and reflect Chinese society timely and authentically with rich information, interesting story, and authentic language. Teachers can organize regular discussions on the information and language obtained from the media to promote students' information exchange and language practice.

Finally, teachers should make students understand that the most important thing is to keep listening practice every day, and that beginners should spend at least an hour a day watching TV and listening to Chinese. The key to success is to insist on listening practice everyday.

To sum up, the author believes that for Chinese elementary listening teaching in the target language environment, whether in the classroom or outside of the classroom, teachers should try to provide all kinds of opportunities and approaches to help learners contact authentic and accurate Chinese, thus help the learners make the best use of the target language environment and promote their learning results.

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