



The Influence of American TV Series on Spoken English from the Perspective of Constructivism

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Abstract

The reform and opening up policy has witnessed new developing opportunities of China. For example, the economic and political cooperation between different countries has also presented in various ways. Moreover, English, which is now in widespread use, has received close attention from different countries. However, the current education mode of English hardly satisfies people's requirement, because it mainly focuses on grammar and vocabulary and ignores the cultivation of students' spoken English ability. In the view of constructivism, this paper discusses the influence of American TV series on students' spoken English learning through literature research method and descriptive research method. In conclusion, this paper discusses the pitfalls of existing spoken English mode in the process between learning and teaching and the benefits of American drama as learning materials, which will help readers better realize the practical significance of this paper.

Subject Areas

Language Education

Keywords

Spoken English, American Series, Constructivism

1. Introduction

1.1. The Background Information

There is a rapid economic development in China since reform and opening. And

with the prospering of international contacts, our need for talents who are good at spoken English has become stronger and stronger. In this case, the fever of learning English has swept our country or even the whole world. However, as the case stands, some drawbacks of the English teaching have arisen. And the traditional teaching pattern is mainly to blame, which primarily puts emphasis upon the vocabulary and the grammar rather than spoken English and its assessment methods. In short, this kind of teaching mode that has prevailed in China for many years is not conducive to the students' development and cannot meet the needs of an increasingly technological society. If we still stick to it, we will never yield great result from that.

1.2. The Significance and Influence

Nevertheless, we have to admit that in today's information era, the Internet has a profound impact on our society, life, way of thinking and values. The web-based education, for instance, which not only breaks the spatial and temporal limitation, but also helps strengthen the mutual communication and information sharing between different groups [1]. Thanks to it, personalized independent learning can be truly realized.

Thus, we are supposed to conform to the trend of the times and apply the Internet to the oral English teaching. For students, it is the Internet that helps us learn native spoken English at any time and any where. For teachers, we should clearly recognize the importance of the Internet and be a qualified teacher who can adapt to these challenges, meet the requirements of the time and keep pace with it.

Generally speaking, changing the existing language teaching and learning methods and cultivating strong verbal communication skills are of superior importance for both personal progress and society's development. Thus, the main purpose of this paper is to show the significance of American TV series and constructivism in terms of improving students' spoken English.

1.3. The Current Situation of Spoken English Teaching

According to the author's investigation, interview and personal experience, we aim to emphasize the training of the overall language proficiency. That means we have already realized that the importance of the language output is greater than the language input. However, it is inevitable that there are still some drawbacks during the current spoken English teaching process. At first sight, quality-oriented education has less 'privileges' than exam-oriented education. The overall situation of students' spoken English is poor at present. On the one hand, they cannot speak English fluently because the materials they have is very limited. On the other hand, Students have lingering cognitive errors that exam result, which would affect admission test directly, is the most important. Under such a wrong learning mentality, students are liable to have strong resistance to spoken English and lose interest in spoken language. What's more, the traditional large-class

lectures are prevalent in China, so teachers cannot take each student's learning situation into consideration in class. It is no wonder that teaching activities cannot achieve the desired effect.

More regrettably, we have to admit the fact that the oral practice environment is still wanting. As we all known, the class time is so short that our English learners can only keep some words or simple sentences in their mind. And in terms of creating authentic language environment, Chinese teachers, most of whom are cultivated under the examination-oriented education system, just can't meet the needs of students for high quality language environment, which makes the students in learning spoken English is very vulnerable to the impact of Chinese way of thinking and unable to think in English for communication.

2. The Core Concept about the Constructivism

2.1. Assimilation and Adaptation

The constructivism plays a significant role in cognitive theory. And constructivism is traceable to Piaget's theory of children's cognitive development. After that, Kolberg, Sternberg, Katz, Vygotsky and others have enriched and improved the cognitive structure, its development, individual initiative, and social interaction. And all of these conceptions make up the so-called constructivism learning theory [2] [3].

It holds the position that the individual's adaptation to the environment includes two aspects, that is assimilation and adjustment [4]. Assimilation refers to integrate the information provided by external stimuli into existing cognitive structures of individuals, while adjustment means that the change of existing cognitive structures to acclimatize ourselves to external stimuli so as to establish new cognitive structures. Learning is just a cycle of assimilation, adjustment, re-assimilation and re-adjustment, rather than a simple behavioristic stimulus-response process [5].

2.2. Student-Centered Learning

The constructivism is a kind of teaching mode with students as the center, because students are the main characters of the cognition and the active constructors of knowledge, rather than the passive recipients of the external stimuli and the objects of knowledge indoctrination [6]. That is to say, teachers should be the helpers and promoters of students' active construction of meaning.

Anyway, constructivism considers that knowledge is acquired by learners themselves in a certain context, like social and cultural background [7]. And at the same time, we also cannot deny the significance of these three aspects: the help from others, the use of necessary learning materials and the means of meaning construction. So, teachers should be the organizers and constitutors of classroom teaching, rather than the 'masters' and indoctrinators of knowledge. Furthermore, students are required to learn by self-discovery, independently learning and controlling the content and process of learning on their own.

3. The Analysis of American Drama as Spoken English Material

3.1. The Advantages of American TV Series

3.1.1. Situated Teaching

Language, the tool for cultural expression and communication, which permeates all levels of culture and promotes the cultural development. So, it is obvious that language and culture are mutually related. And it is common for every nation to embody culture through language. In current English teaching, too much attention is paid to the principles of language learning and the construction of basic knowledge. And we ignore that English language knowledge must be combined with applied skills and cross-cultural communication. Therefore, in terms of English teaching, it is necessary to adopt a wide range of teaching methods and timely update the modes of teaching to better arouse students' interest in learning English. And American drama is such a kind of learning material that can be adopted [8].

The use of American drama is conducive to the creation of English classroom's situated teaching. Learning English is not just to get high grades in exams, but putting emphasis on these aspects, like the motivation, emotion and interest of learning. Learning environment is an effective combination of learning resources and interpersonal relationships [9]. It can stimulate students' thinking space and give them confidence in learning foreign languages. Teachers should also create language and cultural atmosphere and situation for students in the teaching process.

Due to the existence of class teaching system, it is difficult for teachers to understand all students' misunderstanding of language learning through a short contact. But teachers can arouse students' interest in learning through vivid images and sounds like American TV series. By showing the humanistic charm of English, we can not only arouse the emotional resonance of students, but also give students a lot of positive impetus and momentum to learn English well. The English classroom's situated teaching created by a great number of American TV series enable students to master and understand the English teaching content in a short period of time, and promote the teaching efficiency and teaching quality for teachers to better fulfill the mission of teaching as well. In situated teaching, teachers should pay attention to training students' good English language sense, enriching students' vocabulary, and combining with the traditional vocabulary and grammar teaching to achieve the ability of comprehensive use of language.

3.1.2. Stimulate Students' Interest and Broaden Their Horizon

The use of American TV series will make special contribution to spoken English teaching. In the traditional oral English class, teachers are likely to use outmoded materials which are more than ten years old. This kind of boring method of learning makes students gradually get bored or lose interest in spoken English. Most of students have a strong desire that they can speak English correctly and fluently. For this, they keep reciting words, phrases, articles, but in fact, oral ex-

pressing ability is still not good enough. They have no confidence in how to use vocabulary and grammar. And that's a challenge for both students and teachers. With the emergence popularity and application of networks in the whole wide social fields, it is necessary to effectively use American TV series to restore students' interest in spoken English [10]. The different themes of American TV series also offer more comprehensive information to spoken English teaching. In a variety of subjects, more language information and cultural information would appear constantly one after another, which allows teachers to consistently expand the relevant terms for students in different professional fields, and also allows students to choose the topic they are interested in to improve relevant knowledge. This program provides students with a non-grammar natural context, so the language we learn in this way is more close to the life, which can make students have a deep insight into the proper use of language and enrich students' oral English materials. All of these can lay a solid foundation to their extraordinary output or performance.

3.1.3. Improve the Ability of Cross-Cultural Communication

The American drama is conducive to enriching cross-cultural teaching. Students have little access to western culture beyond what their teachers impart them in the classroom. Many students are confused about the western culture and fail to notice the cross-cultural differences in their communication with foreigners, thus causing some unnecessary troubles. And American TV series, which contain humorous language, vivid story, attractive and lively characters, offers students nothing less than a true version of society in miniature. We will also make full use of the advantages of American TV series to develop the consciousness of cross cultural communication and avoid pragmatic errors. The distinctions between western culture and Chinese traditional culture are extremely various, such as daily communicative etiquette, table manners and taboo culture [11]. By virtue of American drama, students can integrate the English cultural atmosphere on the basis of learning the basic language knowledge of English and experiencing the differences of languages in different cultural atmosphere, which not only cultivates students' English cultural awareness, but also reduces the impact of Chinese way of thinking in terms of intercultural communication.

3.2. The Necessity for Students to Improve Speaking Ability

As time goes by, more and more people know that improving our spoken English is very vital. Both school and society have realized that point, which in return, ask the English learners to create changes in their spoken English. The figures showed in the picture indicate that many English learners will do mainly for job requirements and examinations. And here are some explanations to the necessities of perfecting our spoken English.

3.2.1. Correspond to the Objectives of English Teaching

English is gaining prominence along with economic development. This development trend puts forward higher demands for English teaching, especially for

spoken English teaching. English teaching is not only to help students to cope with various examinations, but also to continuously improve students' communication ability [12]. According to the *college English teaching guide* issued by the ministry of education, college English courses are the improvement and expansion of basic English teaching, whose main purpose is to further improve students' listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating abilities. The very basic language skills are that students can briefly speak with people about daily topics and general affairs; the structure of language is definitely clear, and the pronunciation, intonation or grammar are in line with communicative norms; the students know how to use basic speaking skills. Therefore, the cultivation of college students' spoken English ability is one of the objectives of English teaching, but also a long-term and pressing task.

3.2.2. Adapt to Globalization and Abandon "Dumb English"

The importance of oral ability is mainly shown in two aspects. First, it is the globalization that increases communication between countries in different fields, the more frequent exchanges between different countries, the more increasing demand for high-quality, international, and versatile personnel. From the employment trend in recent years, it can be seen that many enterprises and employers should not only focus on students' spoken English certificates, but also their oral English communication skills. Therefore, it is an urgent task to strengthen students' spoken English teaching practice and improve students' spoken English ability and communication ability. Second, in real life, students will find that after years of learning English, most of them do not know how to speak in a particular situation. Even if they interact with others, the mistakes still exist. So "dumb English" is common. For the students with satisfactory English foundation, they can only communicate with each other briefly, and cannot have in-depth and high-level communication. Over time, students will get bored and lose confidence in learning English. Therefore, improving spoken English output ability is an important role in college English teaching reform.

3.3. The Solution and Importance to Deal with Cultural Differences

World economic integrity is unstoppable, and the policy of the Belt and Road Initiative indicate that the economy between China and many other countries has a close cooperation. But we also need to realize that there are huge differences in ideology in various countries, which requires people in different countries to realize the cultural differences and can face up to these differences. When encountering problems caused by cultural differences, we should take effective measures to cope with those troubles. In fact, the main cause of cross-cultural communication conflicts is not language knowledge itself, but cultural differences, because the meaning can be understood even if the words are misused and the grammar is wrong. But the wrong expression in culture will cause misunderstanding. Therefore, the emphasis of teaching must be to enable students

to better understand the culture of different countries and the related knowledge of religions, customs, history, humanities and values [13]. In practice, we should regard the language and culture as an integrity. In education activities, each country's language and culture should be emphasized at the same time. It is time for us to teach language from a cultural perspective and enhance language skills to promote cultural understanding.

In a more specific context, people need to be sensitive and flexible in dealing with other cultures. Firstly, we should be sensitive of each others' emotions and messages. Secondly, we should be tolerant of the cultural differences from other countries, seeking common ground while reserving differences. Ultimately, dealing with emergencies flexibly is also an essential ability for us. Only on the basis of empathy can we better understand the culture of other countries, comprehend the people's feelings towards things, and then avoid misunderstandings and eliminate barriers in communication.

4. The Difficulties of Learning English by Means of American Series

4.1. Lack the Motivation of Learning English

Many experiments have showed that it is an effective way to improve students' listening and speaking abilities by means of American TV series. However, in practice, students will encounter many kinds of difficulties or problems.

Students' motivation of learning English is not very strong enough. We may agree with that watching American TV series is a good way for us to relax. The original intention of learning English by this way is very normal and beneficial, but for many students who are not motivated to learn English, it is easy to have a negative mentality. Because of the long-term influence of exam-oriented education, students are not suitable to combine leisure with learning. Some students may cannot study independently after class.

4.2. The Imperfections of Testing Students' Study Effect

The means of detection and the information platform are not perfect. Practicing spoken English through American TV series is mainly a part of students' autonomous learning after class, which requires students to have a high degree of self-awareness. If teachers want to further urge students, they need to take the necessary means of detection. At present, the most commonly used method is to take time to check feedback in class. The second method is handing in their recordings. However, the effect of these two methods is not ideal for the reason that students do not study independently and teachers have no measures to stop that kind of behavior. Thus, it's also hard to ensure that American TV series plays a significant role as a learning material.

4.3. The Failure of Perseverance

Unluckily, the students have poor persistence. This kind of using American TV series is very attractive to some students who are willing to improve their listen-

ing and speaking abilities. So it is likely for them to take actions immediately after class. But because American dramas need to be practiced repeatedly in order to make a breakthrough, many students are liable to give up halfway. At the end of the day, students probably only watch American TV series once and regard it as a way of entertainment.

5. The Measures to Overcome Difficulties Caused by American TV Series

5.1. Change the Teaching Form of Teachers

Under the guidance of Constructivism theory, spoken English teaching should give full priority to the principal role of students, take the construction of students' meaning of knowledge as the ultimate goal of the whole learning process, realize the status of students' meaning constructivism, guide students to study independently, and improve students' spoken English comprehensively.

In addition, we need to strengthen the interaction between teachers and students, which will be related to the realization of teaching objectives. This requires teachers to improve the interactive organizational ability for English classroom, master some effective teaching methods, be good at breaking the limitations of teaching materials, expand the amount of knowledge, and fully demonstrate their teaching ability in spoken English teaching class, so as to effectively improve the quality of effect of teaching, and achieve the goal of spoken English teaching.

5.2. Diversify the Forms of Evaluation

To perfect assessment methods. The evaluation of teaching effect should be continuous, not just include the evaluation of the results. The purpose of teaching is to improve the teaching mode according to the learning objectives and improve the quality of spoken English teaching. Build the "trinity evaluation system" of student self-evaluation + student mutual evaluation + teacher evaluation.

First, the students themselves are the best reviewers of teaching effectiveness. The results of spoken English learning are constructed by individuals. They practise more or do some tests, for example, do Phonepass SET. In this way, after practice, students can test themselves to achieve the purpose of self-assessment. Second, students' mutual evaluation is needed. Students can freely talk to each other or imitate a certain movie dialogue, so that mutual inspection and mutual supervision can promote the improvement of spoken English. Third, teachers' evaluation needs to be added. Teachers' evaluation is flexible and diverse, full of humanistic care for students. Positive encouragement and affirmation can greatly promote student's progress in many ways, such as extra points, gifts and language praise.

5.3. Stick to Step-by-Step Method

We should pay attention to the principle of gradual progress. Because the start-

ing level and appreciation habits of English learners are extremely different, we can not hope that the original American drama can be understood only once. When we choose plays, we should try our best to choose influential urban dramas and modern dramas, so as to avoid the trouble of oral and linguistic forms. Furthermore, we should watch the incomprehensible fragments repeatedly, in order to strengthen the understanding and learning of key paragraphs or weak links.

5.4. The Specific Ways of Making Use of American TV Series

Watching American TV series can achieve twice the result with half the effort. Given that language learning always pays attention to the principle of coordinated training of listening and reading, this of ability can be strengthened through the following three ways. At first sight, searching the standard script of American drama through the Internet and reinforcing the message through repeated reading in order to be familiar with the content. Moreover, watching English reviews or related posts of American dramas, analyzing the plot, understanding the meaning, refining the theme, and deepening the understanding of the content. Finally, listening to the dialogue without looking at the pictures, so that the learners can concentrate on the pronunciation, intonation and mood, so as to cultivate the students' sensitivity to the pronunciation and improve the ability to judge the speaker's real intention according to the intonation and mood.

All in all, when we regard TV series as learning material, we should pay attention to appreciate it from the perspective of language acquisition, instead of just regarding it as a way to relax. Otherwise, we are liable to fail to improve our spoken English ability.

6. Conclusions

The essence of constructivism theory is to pay full attention to students' principle role, individual differences among students and to turn them into favorable conditions for teaching in order to promote students to actively construct their own oral knowledge framework and improve communicative competence. More importantly, spoken English teaching should combine in-class with out-of-class, and make full use of students' position as the subject of study for cultivating students' autonomous learning ability and foster innovative spirit of finding and solving problems. In this process, teachers should carefully design the excellent teaching content and the diverse teaching activities.

American TV plays can provide a large number of pure English language contexts, that is to say, it can also offer students opportunities to practice, effectively improving students' listening and speaking ability, enhancing the mobility, interest and autonomy of spoken English teaching. At the same time, American TV plays can help students make more reasonable self-evaluation of their speaking ability, and also make special contribution to students' pronunciation and intonation, and fulfill their oral tasks. In spoken English teaching, teachers' supervi-

sion, guidance and emotional communication are irreplaceable. Therefore, the effective combination of American drama learning and teachers' lectures are bound to help us yield great result.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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