

Teaching Methods of Spoken English — Taking Rural Areas in Southwest China for Example

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Abstract

Based on the theoretical knowledge of educational psychology and language specialization, and under the guidance of “Positive Psychology Theory”, this project develops a set of innovative spoken English programs for secondary school students that combines Wittgenstein’s “Language Game Theory” with positive psychology theory and the “Positive Psychology Theory”. The program is based on a new model of student-student interaction and teacher-led guidance to improve secondary school students’ English speaking ability through small group classes and a differentiated game program for the students. The program breaks the traditional spoken English teaching model, combines students’ physiological and psychological characteristics, and strives to promote students’ personalized development, help students achieve from passive reception to active participation, and effectively improve students’ English language skills; in addition, the program also provides assistance and reference for solving the uneven distribution of educational resources between urban and rural areas and promoting the revitalization of rural education.

Keywords: spoken English, teaching methods, Positive Psychology Theory, Language Game Theory, the revitalization of rural education

1. Analysis of the Current Situation of Spoken English Among Students in Rural Areas of Southwest China

1.1 Policy

Recently, the Guiyang Municipal Bureau of Education issued the “Implementation Program for Guiyang City Junior Middle School Academic Level Examination English Listening and Speaking Proficiency Test (for Trial Implementation)”, which specifies the basis for proposing the test, the requirements of the test’s ability, and the test’s question type and structure. The program mentions that the Guiyang City

Junior High School Academic Level Examination English Listening and Speaking Proficiency Examination is based on the Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards (2011 Edition) issued by the Ministry of Education, and based on the current secondary school English teaching materials in Guiyang City, it mainly examines the English listening comprehension and oral expression level of junior high school graduates, and focuses on examining the students’ ability to use the language in the listening and speaking tasks, which includes language knowledge, listening and speaking skills, cultural awareness, thinking

quality, learning ability, and so on. It focuses on students' ability to use the language in listening and speaking tasks, including language knowledge, listening and speaking skills, cultural awareness, thinking quality, and learning ability.

The English language reform in Guiyang means that students need to say goodbye to "mute English", and the human-machine dialogues, machine scoring, and other forms of tests have higher requirements for students' oral proficiency, comprehensive literacy, and flexible use of English. These examination settings require that more attention be paid to English phonetics in primary and secondary school teaching in Southwest China and that students be guided to systematic learning of phonetics knowledge, which will have a positive effect on students' lifelong learning.

In the context of the new reform in Guiyang City, reforms in other areas of Guizhou and even in the neighboring provinces in southwest China are imperative. However, the vast majority of rural areas in southwest China lag far behind the city in terms of education level, and there are many problems in the teaching of spoken English, which requires us to take effective countermeasures to solve.

1.2 Difficulties

In the past, most teachers in mountainous areas have various phonetic problems in pronunciation, such as incomplete bursting, assimilation, serialization, urbanization, and so on. Teachers' inability to regularly use English to communicate with students in the classroom has become a major factor limiting students' learning of spoken English. What's more, due to the lack of professional teachers, some schools also appoint teachers who are not majoring in English to teach English, and this kind of interdisciplinary teaching will greatly affect students' English learning, not to mention the learning of spoken English.

In addition, as the organizer and planner of classroom speaking activities, whether the classroom design is reasonable or not depends on whether the teacher can actively and effectively organize various activities according to the actual situation of the students and the content of the learning to guide the students to dare to speak and be happy to speak. In actual classroom teaching, some teachers over-emphasize the teaching of linguistic and

grammatical knowledge, turning the original speaking class into a written test class, which affects the improvement of students' speaking ability.

At the same time, the monotonous pattern of classroom exercises organized and planned by teachers and the unrealistic language environment created by teachers made students' participation low, while many in-depth topics were beyond the student's ability and difficult to be carried out adequately.

In response to the above difficulties, the project team prepared the lessons carefully and revised the lesson plans to create a set of interesting speaking lessons based on the "game theory" to stimulate the student's interest in learning English and to improve their acceptance of the content of the lessons. Considering the students' lack of self-confidence and their fear of speaking, in order to build up their self-confidence, the project team members were guided by the theory of positive psychology, and through language incentives, prizes, and other positive affirmative ways, the students were allowed to take the initiative to show themselves in the classroom, so that they could really participate in the classroom, learn speaking knowledge, and enjoy the classroom.

1.3 Pain Point

At present, the first thing most junior high school students have to deal with is the local junior high school academic level examination. And there is no special speaking test in the big exam. At present, Guiyang City has promoted the reform process of conducting listening tests, but some schools in remote and poor areas are not yet in a position to develop speaking due to the lack of hardware and equipment, venues to be improved, and the absence of professional teams.

In addition, due to the cognitive differences of students in poor areas, there is no opportunity to have to use English for oral communication in real life as an excuse to ignore the importance of spoken English and devote themselves to listening, reading, and writing. Over time, a large number of students with "high scores but low ability" and "mute English" have been trained. China's educational resources are currently skewed and unfairly distributed. In the remote areas of Southwest China, high-quality teacher resources are very scarce. Compared with developed areas, students in

remote areas in southwest China are more eager to obtain quality learning resources. Therefore, it is of great significance and value to help students in remote areas to break the geographical restrictions and resource limitations, so that they can grow up quickly.

2. Teaching Strategies and Theoretical Support for Improving Spoken English

2.1 Language Game Theory

The project team searched the core keyword “language game theory of English teaching” on Knowledge.com and collected relevant literature from 2015 to 2022. Through sorting and analyzing, it was found that the existing research mainly applies the theory to elementary school English teaching, and there are very few studies on secondary school English teaching, and they mainly focus on reading teaching. At present, although more and more scholars in China have paid attention to the “language game theory” and applied it to many practical fields, such as human-computer language games, translation, etc., there are only 63 documents that integrate the theory into English teaching, of which only 8 were produced in the last ten years, and all of the above studies explicitly proposed the application of the “language game theory” to the teaching of English in primary schools. All of these studies have clearly pointed out the benefits of applying the theory of language games to teaching practice. Therefore, the application of “Language Game Theory” to the teaching of spoken English to rural middle school students in Southwest China is highly innovative and a useful new attempt in the current practice of spoken English teaching in middle schools, which can effectively promote the progress and development of spoken English teaching in remote areas and alleviate the imbalance of educational resources.

The concept of “language game” put forward by British philosopher Wittgenstein refers to the interweaving of language and activity as a whole. Language games are creative activities based on language structure and pragmatics, which can strengthen language skills and language thinking ability to a certain extent. At the same time, a language game is a kind of metaphor that compares language to a game, so that the meaning and specific use of language are reflected in the game, and its fundamental claim is not to regard language as an isolated and static descriptive symbol, but as a dynamic

activity that embodies life. The most important feature of language game theory is its diversity, which is based on the selection of suitable language games for different groups of people, different language levels, and different cultural backgrounds.

Wittgenstein’s comparison of language to a game is very charming and apt. A game is an activity whose elements form colorful combinations according to certain rules, thus creating endless fascination, and the same is true for language. From the formal point of view, “language game” is only a metaphor comparing language to game, however, the significance of this concept in Wittgenstein’s later philosophy goes far beyond its metaphorical meaning, Wittgenstein shows the similarity between language and game by comparing the two, which reveals the important features of language game. (An Exploration of Wittgenstein’s Theory of Language Games, Yang Ningfang)

Wittgenstein emphasized the relevance of “obeying the rules” in the first language game and formulated relevant rules in the classroom, and the purpose of game teaching is to stimulate students’ interest in learning, so the theme and content of the game are closely related to the participants’ lives and interests, and should be of a certain degree of interest, and make use of the role of the change of the way to enhance the attractiveness of the game and the initiative of the students to participate in the game. The attractiveness of the game and the initiative of students’ participation; the game mode should be diversified to mobilize students’ enthusiasm, in addition, the game is also competitive and challenging, so that students are fully engaged in it, and then there is the “form of life” mentioned by Wittgenstein’s indivisibility, language is a means of communication, and all activities should be based on the things around us. All activities should incorporate the things around us, based on daily life, and be centered on the things around us to carry out the game teaching.

No matter from the point of view of pedagogy or teaching method, the content of teaching materials is fixed, but our learning can not be separated from life. Based on the theory of language games, this project proposes that teachers should use game teaching in primary and secondary English teaching classrooms, integrate language into games, and teach in a

way that is interesting to the students so that they can actively take part in it, and learn to understand the knowledge from the cooperation of the game.

2.2 Positive Psychology Theory

The theory of positive psychology is the work of the famous American psychologist Martin Seligman, Sheldon, and Laura King. They set off a wave of positive psychology research, according to the definition of the theory. Positive psychology is dedicated to the study of ordinary people's vitality and virtues of science. The object of study of positive psychology is the psychological activities of ordinary people, advocating the study of positive human qualities, focusing on human strengths, fully tapping into the potential constructive power inherent in human beings, promoting individual social development, and ultimately enabling human beings to achieve happiness.

According to Seligman, there is a difference, and an important one, between reducing suffering and creating happiness. The goal of traditional psychology is to repair trauma and transform extreme suffering into ordinary unhappiness, i.e., from -5 to 0, but they are still empty inside; the goal of positive psychology is to go from 0 to 5, to help ordinary people to increase their happiness and to transform shallow happiness into a deeper and more lasting sense of fulfillment.

In the field of spoken English education, it is of great significance to integrate the concept of positive psychology into teaching practice. First, positive psychology emphasizes individual self-knowledge and self-acceptance. Through positive psychology, teachers can encourage students to look positively at their English speaking ability and develop their self-confidence and self-esteem, so that they will be more willing to participate in speaking practice and expression.

Secondly, positive psychology focuses on identifying and cultivating individual strengths and specialties. In spoken English education, teachers can guide students to give full play to their potential by identifying their speaking strengths and stimulating their interest and enthusiasm in speaking practice. For example, for some students who may be good at expressing emotions, teachers can design emotion-expression speaking practice activities so that these students can improve their oral

expression skills in the process of expressing emotions.

In addition, positive psychology advocates positive emotion management and emotional experience. In spoken English education, teachers can create a positive learning atmosphere to guide students to maintain a positive emotional state and cultivate their love and commitment to speaking learning. By encouraging students to deal with challenges positively and face difficulties optimistically, teachers can help students establish a healthy learning attitude and enhance the effect and sense of achievement of oral learning.

In conclusion, combining the concepts of positive psychology with English oral education can not only promote students' positive mindset and self-growth but also enhance the effectiveness of oral teaching and students' oral expression ability. Teachers should give full play to the guiding role of positive psychology in teaching, guide students to establish positive learning concepts, stimulate their learning motivation and confidence, and help them achieve better results in spoken English learning. This integration can better develop students' oral communication skills and lay a solid foundation for their future learning and career development.

In this project, the project members face the rural elementary and middle school students in Southwest China according to the theory of positive psychology and teach knowledge in a way that creates a sense of happiness and fulfillment in the students. When students acquire interesting knowledge, the feeling of happiness lasts for a long time and will continue to bring spiritual fulfillment and pleasure.

3. Integration of Western Theories in the Context of China's Rural Revitalization

3.1 Western Theories

In the more than one hundred years since the emergence of foreign language spoken language teaching, there has been more awareness and research on foreign and spoken language teaching at home and abroad. Western scholars have significantly contributed to the development of theoretical frameworks and practical methodologies for teaching English as a second or foreign language. The main principles are as follows:

- 1) Communicative Competence: Western

scholars emphasize the development of communicative competence by focusing on real-life communication situations. The influential work of Dell Hymes (1971) and his concept of communicative competence has significantly shaped the field.

2) Authenticity: Language input should be authentic and meaningful to engage learners effectively. David Nunan (1991) emphasizes the use of authentic materials, such as videos, audio recordings, and real-life scenarios, to create a more realistic language learning environment.

3) Learner-Centered Approach: Western scholars emphasize the importance of considering learners' needs, interests, and goals in designing instruction. The learner-centered approach, advocated by Carl Rogers (1951), encourages learner autonomy, self-reflection, and self-directed learning.

4) Interaction and Collaboration: Western scholars emphasize the role of interaction and collaboration in language learning. The sociocultural theory proposed by Lev Vygotsky (1978) highlights the importance of social interaction in language development.

Under the guidance of the above principles, western scholars put forward the following methods:

1) Communicative Language Teaching (CLT): CLT, developed by Western scholars in the 1970s, focuses on meaningful communication rather than rote memorization of grammar rules. The approach emphasizes the integration of all language skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Prominent scholars in CLT include Canale and Swain (1980) and Richards and Rodgers (1986).

2) Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT): TBLT emphasizes the use of authentic tasks to promote language learning. Scholars such as Willis and Willis (2007) advocate for task-based activities that simulate real-life language use and encourage learners to use English for meaningful purposes.

3) Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL): CLIL combines language instruction with the teaching of subject-specific content. Western scholars such as Marsh (2002) argue that integrating language learning with other disciplines enhances both language proficiency and content knowledge.

4) English for Specific Purposes (ESP): ESP

focuses on teaching English tailored to specific professional or academic contexts. Western scholars like Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) emphasize the need for specialized language instruction catering to the learners' specific needs.

Western scholars have significantly contributed to the advancement of English oral instruction theory and practice. They have introduced principles such as communicative competence, authenticity, learner-centeredness, and interaction, which have shaped contemporary language teaching approaches. The prominent approaches of CLT, TBLT, CLIL, and ESP provide teachers with practical methodologies to develop learners' oral proficiency. By considering these principles and approaches, educators can design effective and engaging English oral instruction programs. Western theories have provided great inspiration for this project. According to these principles and methods, the project team has summarized and integrated them to create a set of efficient, interesting and professional teaching methods for the particularity of rural areas in Southwest China.

3.2 Integrating Western Theories into the Practice of Rural Revitalization

Based on the above research foundation, the research objectives of this project are as follows:

First, to study the application of "Language Game Theory" in the teaching of spoken English in rural secondary schools, to improve the curriculum model in practice, and finally to build a set of highly innovative, reproducible, and widely applicable oral language teaching programs.

Secondly, through this practical research, we will bring quality educational resources to students in rural secondary schools, alleviate the problem of uneven distribution of educational resources between urban and rural areas to a certain extent, and thus promote the balanced development of urban and rural education, thereby realizing the goal of rural revitalization.

The project team mainly adopts the following ways to integrate Western theories with the background of rural spoken English education in the actual promotion of the project process, so as to promote the development of rural-speaking education, and then promote the revitalization of the countryside:

1) Designing localized language games: Designing language games with Chinese rural characteristics according to the local culture, customs, and lifestyles of Southwest China, so that students can feel and learn local oral expressions through games.

2) Combine with practical activities: Combine the language games with field trips, farming experiences, and other rural activities, so that students can learn while playing and improve their oral expression and communication skills.

3) Stimulate learning interest: Utilize interesting game elements and competition mechanisms to stimulate students' interest and enthusiasm in learning, so that they can improve their speaking level in a relaxed and pleasant atmosphere.

4) Encourage interaction and communication: Design language games with multiple participants to encourage students to communicate and cooperate and improve their oral expression and teamwork.

5) Use modern technology: Combine modern technological means, such as voice recognition technology and online education platforms, to provide personalized oral learning support, so that students can practice speaking anytime and anywhere.

The following are some examples of games used by the project team in the teaching process:

1) Say According to the Instruction: If the teacher points out 1 with his hand, the students will say the word 1 time, and if 2 is shown, they will say it 2 times, and so on. You can also make this activity more difficult; the teacher taps the blackboard with a pen a few times, and the students will have to say the word a few times.

2) You do it, I guess: one student does the action and the other student guesses the word or sentence.

3) Describing people: Teachers make cards with nouns about "people around" such as family members, friends, etc. before the lesson. Before starting the game, explain how to play the game: One student goes to the front of the classroom and faces the other students. The teacher takes out a card and gives it to the student. The student describes the noun on the card in his or her own words, e.g., daughter, the student can say: It is a child of a family. It is a girl. (Hint: When instructing students to prepare, the teacher should suggest ways to illustrate the

word on the card from multiple perspectives, e.g., from gender, age, job, relationship to the individual, or the number of letters in the word, the first and last letters, etc.

4) Quiz Solitaire: Students prepare written materials that illustrate general information about the people around them. Some students come to the podium when the teacher says "go", the students close their eyes and walk around themselves, when the teacher says "stop", the students stop, open their eyes, and talk to the nearest classmate, the content of the communication starts with greeting each other, then they can talk about other people. Then they can talk about other people's situations. When the teacher says "go" again, the game continues. The winner of the game is based on the length of the conversation, with the winner being the person who stops talking the latest, provided that the conversation is not repeated. If this game is played in small groups, it can be more competitive and interesting.

In addition, inspired by the theory of Interaction and Collaboration proposed by Lev Vygotsky (1978) and Learner-Centered Approach advocated by Carl Rogers (1951), the project team also created a new curriculum model based on "student-student interaction", supplemented by teacher support, to increase student participation, enhance learning initiative and interest, promote students' thinking development, cultivate the spirit of teamwork, enrich the content of teaching and enhance students' self-confidence. Under the guidance of the "Language Game Theory", the project team will set up the rules of the speaking test and the reward mechanism to stimulate the students' sense of competition and increase their participation.

By combining the Western language game theory with the background of China's rural revitalization, the project team can effectively promote the development of speaking education in rural areas of Southwest China, improve students' oral expression ability, enhance their cultural self-confidence, and promote rural revitalization. At the same time, this innovative educational model can also help attract more excellent educational resources and talents to flow to rural areas and promote the overall development of rural education.

4. The Significance of the Project

4.1 Current Situation of Related Fields in China

Language game theory, as proposed by philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, has been recognized as a potential framework for promoting language learning and communication skills. In the field of English language teaching, the application of language game theory has garnered interest due to its interactive and engaging nature. However, within the scope of domestic scholarship, there is a notable absence of comparative research on the practical application of language game theory in spoken English teaching. This deficiency hinders the comprehensive understanding and utilization of this theoretical approach in the context of English language education in domestic settings. Therefore, it is imperative to address this research gap and explore the potential benefits and challenges associated with implementing language game theory in spoken English teaching.

In a small number of studies, some Chinese scholars have put forward their views. Li Fangfang (2015) applies “language games” to the teaching of spoken English in universities so that students can make language learning a game, deepen their memory of the language repeatedly in the process of doing the game, and understand the real meaning of the words in the practice of speaking. The practical results show that students’ learning motivation and speaking ability have been greatly improved.

Shen Minhui (2016) also used game theory as a guide, based on life experience, incorporated things around them into games, integrated them, and designed games familiar to children, so that students could more easily understand the connotation of the game, integrate into the game, and learn while reaping happiness. After practice, it is pointed out that the curriculum guided by game theory is more likely to mobilize students’ enthusiasm, enhance their sense of honor, and help promote their overall development.

Through reading the literature, the team members have a more comprehensive understanding of the application of “language game theory” in English teaching. However, judging from the results of the former’s practice, there are still deficiencies in the theoretical construction and teaching content of this field:

For one thing, most scholars do not have a clear understanding of “language game theory”, and they focus more on the argumentation of the

meaning and significance of “language game” spirit teaching, and the overall problem of “language game” and teaching. There is a lack of overall analysis of “language games” and teaching problems, and even less analysis of the effectiveness of the specific practice environment. At the same time, there is a lack of mutual understanding and communication between theoretical researchers and researchers in the field of practice due to the lack of a common research base. This further aggravates the problem of the disconnect between theory and practice.

Secondly, there is a lack of scientific methods and sound theories to guide the practical process. Although some scholars have interspersed games with teaching in the teaching process, they have only done so based on their own experience, without paying attention to the subjective needs of the students, and they have not yet constructed an effective curriculum model based on the “Language Game Theory”.

The existing literature review reveals a scarcity of comparative studies examining the application of language game theory in spoken English teaching by domestic scholars. While there are individual studies exploring the theoretical aspects of language game theory and its potential implications for language learning, the absence of comparative research limits the comprehensive understanding of its practical effectiveness in spoken English teaching. The majority of research in this area tends to focus on traditional teaching methods and lacks a comparative analysis with the application of language game theory. As a result, the specific benefits, challenges, and instructional strategies associated with integrating language game theory into spoken English teaching remain underexplored within the domestic academic landscape.

Based on the above situation, it is of great significance to carry out this project.

4.2 Theoretical Significance

As China’s national power continues to strengthen and global communication becomes more and more frequent, the importance of oral communication skills in English has become particularly prominent. In this context, English educators need to keep pace with the times, abandon the single teaching method and the duck-filling and indoctrination teaching mode in

the past, and actively explore innovative teaching methods that meet the physiological and psychological characteristics of contemporary students. The project team is convinced that “Language Game Theory” plays an important role in guiding the learning of spoken English. Through the integration of existing data and in-depth field research, we are committed to constructing a set of comprehensive teaching programs to fill the gaps in the current research and to promote the innovation of teaching methods and modes. Our goal is to provide teachers with effective guidance to motivate students and help them focus more effectively on learning English.

As education is the future of our country, it is important to spare no effort to help the progress of education and teaching. Through the leadership of Language Game Theory, we will not only bring new insights to the field of English education but also provide teachers with diversified teaching tools so that they can better guide their students and stimulate their interest and potential in learning. Only through the continuous innovation of teaching methods and models can we better meet the learning needs of students and improve their oral communication skills in English.

In the era full of challenges and opportunities, people engaged in the education career need to make continuous efforts to cultivate better English learners with their enthusiasm and sense of responsibility for education. Through continuous efforts and explorations, “Language Game Theory” will bring new vitality and inspiration to spoken English learning and inject more innovation and vitality into education.

4.3 Practical Significance

Under the background of China’s growing national strength and increasingly frequent exchanges in the world, the importance of oral communication skills in English has become more and more prominent. To cope with this challenge, English educators need to abandon the traditional single-teaching method and the duck-filling and indoctrination teaching and explore teaching methods that meet the physiological and psychological characteristics of contemporary students. It is against this background that the project team proposes a teaching plan based on the “language game theory”, which aims to make up for the shortcomings of existing research, realize the

innovative development of teaching methods and modes, effectively guide students, mobilize their motivation, and help them focus on learning English.

First of all, this project is based on professional knowledge and expert guidance, relying on the “Language Game Theory” and “Positive Psychology Theory”, and aims to break the traditional “dumb English” teaching mode and test-oriented education. The program is based on “Language Game Theory” and “Positive Psychology Theory”. The project adopts a game-based design and competition model, aiming to stimulate students’ enthusiasm and participation in learning, thus improving the fun and effectiveness of speaking practice. Through innovative teaching methods, the project is committed to enabling students to improve their English speaking ability in a relaxing and enjoyable atmosphere and to realize a higher level of communicative skills.

Second, the program has developed a curriculum that meets the needs of middle school students in Southwest China through adequate data collection and analysis. Through the use of differentiated teaching methodology, personalized learning plans are tailored to students’ levels and needs, providing each student with appropriate oral practice content and schedule. Such differentiated teaching not only effectively improves students’ learning efficiency, but also enhances the relevance of teaching and promotes the overall improvement of students’ performance. At the same time, the project team is also committed to providing rural English teachers with teaching experiences that can be used to promote the quality of education in rural secondary schools, narrow the gap between urban and rural education, and realize more equitable educational opportunities.

Finally, this project is committed to solving difficulties such as the lack of an authentic language environment and the weakness of professional teachers to a certain extent. By improving students’ fear and aversion to English, we hope to improve their English speaking skills and break away from the traditional “duck teaching” model. We encourage students to take the initiative and fully demonstrate their individual strengths and characteristics to improve the English speaking skills of rural secondary school students in Southwest China, enhance their self-confidence in learning, and

broaden their horizons. Through the implementation of this program, the exploration of innovative teaching methods will continue to move forward, providing students in rural areas with a broader space for development, promoting educational equity, and helping students to better meet the challenges of the future.

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