A Study on the Improvement of Listening and Speaking Ability of Non-English Majors in the Information-Based Ecological Language Environment

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As internationalization continues to evolve, English plays an increasingly important role in our country. Accordingly, the society requires more and more talents with a good master of English, especially with good listening and speaking ability of English. Universities, the important base for training talents, should bear the related responsibilities. Under the information-based ecological language environment, the author studies the current situation and problems for non-English majors to learn English, analyzes the factors that affect their listening and speaking ability, and provides the methods to improve it.

Keywords: information-based ecological language environment, English listening and speaking, ability improvement

Introduction

At present, with the rapid development of the Internet, informatization is gradually strengthening, and all kinds of network resources are available. In view of the prevalent flipped classroom, MOOC, and micro courses, the big data is having a significant impact on education. In 2012, the United Nations issued a white paper themed *Big Data for Development: Challenges & Opportunities*, pointing out that the era of big data has come. It aims to highlight the opportunity, as well as some of the main concerns and challenges, raised by utilizing new, digital data sources in the field of international development, as concretely and openly as possible, and to suggest some ways forward. To a certain extent, this document has enriched the language ecological environment for students to learn in an all-round way. Universities play a vital role in improving students’ abilities in all aspects as they often take part in all kinds of activities there. As a pivotal language communication tool, English puts great emphasis on its listening and speaking. Therefore, the focus of this paper is how to make full use of Internet resources within limited time to cultivate students’ good listening and speaking awareness so as to improve their English listening and speaking ability under the environment of information language ecology.

Literature Review

The term “ecology” was first proposed by German naturalist H. D. Thoreau in 1858. In 1868, German naturalist Ernst Haeckel (p. 125) first defined ecology. He emphasized that ecology is a science which studies...
the relationship between organisms or organic groups and their surroundings. Since 1960s and 1970s, education researchers have applied ecology to the recording researches. The linguistic community is actively exploring the relationship between language and ecological environment. As early as 1921, the noted linguist and anthropologist Edward Sapir wrote his work *Language: An Introduction to the Study of Speech* to show language in “relation to other fundamental interests—the problem of thought, the nature of the historical process, race, culture, art” (1921, p. 226). He studied the relationship between language and the natural, social environment from the speaker and pointed out that Language is not only a study of language and culture, but ultimately on the world of relations and influence. Linguists C. F. Voegelin and F. M. Voegelin (1964, pp. 2-45) are the first to use the term “language ecology”. They regard this language environment, which embodies the intricate relationship between language and the outside world, as “language ecology”. In 1972, Einar Haugen (p. 11), an American sociolinguist, analogized the relationship between animals, plants, and the environment to describe the interaction between language and its surroundings. Thus he defined the concept of “language ecology” as studying the interaction between any particular language and the environment. Language ecology focuses on the interaction between language and environment, which embodies the philosophy of returning language system to natural ecosystem.

Well, “information ecosystem” was coined by sociologists Bonnie Nardi and Vicki O’Day (1999). It refers to a system of people, practice, value, and technology in a specific environment, which means the information ecosystem is composed of human, practice, value and technology, and other elements, influencing and restricting each other. Technology is an indispensable organic part of information ecology, but the core element is human practice, which is a human-oriented activity supported by technology. At the same time, there must be a core value in the information ecology, and all elements and activities should serve this value. Systematically and ecologically, the concept of information ecology provides a good perspective for us to establish the information-based teaching.

**The Current Situation and Problems of Non-English Majors in English Learning**

As early as 2004, Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China issued *College English Curriculum Requirements* and proposed that students’ comprehensive ability of using English be strengthened, especially their listening and speaking ability, striving to cultivate practical foreign language talents with good listening and speaking foundation. However, the English level of non-English majors in China is far from satisfaction, which has also become an indisputable fact (Zhang, 2011, p. 11). For a long time, College English in China tends to be taught in a traditional way, neglecting the cultivation of students’ listening and speaking ability, which leads to the common phenomenon of “dumb English learning”—unable to understand and speak (Fan, 2018, pp. 154-157). Students spend a lot of energy reciting basic knowledge such as words, phrases, grammar, etc., and mistakenly think that they can cope with various occasions such as examinations and communication, without awareness of practicing listening and speaking. During the class, students only focus on fixed collocation and memorize vocabulary. For some complex sentences that are difficult to understand, the inability to analyze the internal logic and explore the thinking behind between different languages has made their input and output of English language become extremely difficult, worsening their listening and speaking ability. In general, it’s commonly agreed that English learning is particularly significant, just for the examination instead. As a result, many students with high marks in English exams cannot speak English well;
neither can they understand English speakers well. What makes us feel gratifying is that our modern education is turning quality-oriented and how to improve college English listening and speaking ability has become the focus of college English education (Huang & Guo, 2017, pp. 3, 92-96).

Factors Influencing the Listening and Speaking Ability of Non-English Majors

College English, as a public compulsory course, should be paid attention to in universities. In addition to preparing for CET-4 and CET-6, college students should learn English for the long run. However, based on the current situation, many of them are short-sighted with poor listening and speaking ability, and the phenomenon of “dumb English learning” is still common. The main reasons can be listed as follows:

The Low Information Literacy Level of Teachers and Students

A considerable number of teachers have a sense of dependence on the traditional handout-based teaching, and think that the interactive learning makes no difference. Teachers still generally pay attention to the learning concept of knowledge and answers, unable to fully accept the group cooperative learning pattern (Chu, 2019, pp. 211-214).

On the one hand, the rise of information technology should speed up the role transformation of teachers in modern universities. Guided by information-based teaching mode, teachers should attach importance to the application of independent learning systems such as laboratories, encourage and inspire students to participate in activities, and carry out autonomous learning. At the same time, teachers should abandon the traditional teaching mode and replace it with the student-oriented teaching one, enabling students to learn English listening and speaking courses independently and improve their interest in learning. On the other hand, as the main body of learning, students should consciously enhance the awareness of information literacy. In addition to the content learned in textbooks, students should also learn to use the network platform to positively explore extra-curricular knowledge, and strive to improve their knowledge reserves in an all-round way.

The Poor Awareness of Cultural Differences Between China and the West

A complex logic system is existed behind language which serves as an important part of culture. Different languages are given different meanings as cultural backgrounds vary in countries. At the beginning, poor English foundation has caused non-English majors to fail to catch the class, who mistakenly emphasize language itself and lack the spirit of exploring cultural differences behind. Finally, it is impossible to analyze the specific problems combined with the context, producing the insensitivity of bilingual thinking conversion and inability to conduct language input and output in a quick and correct way.

The Insufficient Practice of Students

As the saying goes that practice makes perfect, results can be seen at the end as long as numerous operations are put into practice for countless times. Due to the limited time and large number of students, it’s hard for teachers to organize the classroom oral training with every student involved. After class, in addition to the knowledge taught by teachers, students will hardly spend time to consolidate knowledge to sublimate, and the insufficient practice has finally led to students’ weak listening and speaking ability.

Methods to Improve the Listening and Speaking Ability of Non-English Majors

As we have seen, some English majors are poor in listening and speaking for various reasons. It’s necessary and urgent to find out ways to improve it.
Making Full Use of Internet Resources to Improve Students’ English Listening and Speaking Abilities

With the development of science and technology, more and more education companies have come into being, such as the Beijing FiF Education Technology Co., Ltd, Superstar Information Technology Co., Ltd, Beijing Word Network Technology Co., Ltd, and so on. They have provided teachers and students with all kinds of rich Internet resources. It is important for teachers to take full advantage of them to cultivate students’ good listening and speaking awareness so as to improve their English listening and speaking abilities.

Strengthening the Information Literacy Construction of Teachers and Students in Universities

In July 2010, The Outline of the National Medium and Long Term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020) stipulates that the application of information technology should be intensified, as is the teachers’ application of information technology. Meanwhile, teaching concepts should be updated, and teaching methods should be improved, as well as the teaching effects (Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, 2012). It can be seen that teachers should make full use of information technology to support classroom teaching, extra-curricular guidance and strengthen the relationship between teachers and students, guiding students to learn independently and cooperatively with the help of network platforms (Gao, 2016, pp. 174-175). At the same time, students should improve their awareness of information literacy and make full use of various resources, such as FIF cloud platform and other methods for audio-visual practice.

Diversifying the Classroom Form to Promote the Students’ Interest in Learning

As we know, interest is the best teacher and good habits can improve and double our learning efficiency. At the same time environment can affect the learning habits of a person. To our joy, the current information-based ecological language environment has provided teachers and students with more resources and opportunities to learn and practice English. Teachers should combine students’ learning needs and laws to diversify classroom teaching forms, such as organizing speech contests, debates, programs, and other forms to practice students’ oral English. Also, students can be inspired to learn English through dubbing. In a word, information technology can be fully applied to help students reduce pressure, enhance self-confidence, and expand their horizons. As a result, English language input and output will be conducted more naturally and smoothly.

Matching Classroom Training With Extracurricular Learning Content

The development of information technology can facilitate college students with independent learning, which is also the general trend when there are fewer English classes (Chen, Lin, Wu, Ma, & Xu, 2019, pp. 133-136). Teachers should considerate the difficulty and breadth of contents according to the different characteristics of students, and try to create an atmosphere in which all the students participate in class with that enthusiasm still remained after class. Under this situation, students can not only gain certain knowledge through active participation in oral training in class, but also keep this passion to go deep outside the classroom, to explore more and accumulate listening and speaking training materials as a way to strengthen listening and speaking ability.

Selecting Interesting Teaching Content and Integrating It to Achieve the Optimization of Listening and Speaking Courses

College English listening and speaking practice is such a change from college English course teaching. The latter mainly focuses on knowledge acquiring as well as the training of reading and writing ability, while
the former can be identified as skill training. At present, some universities have fragmented the college students’
listening and speaking training by putting it into various teaching links or courses, which impairs the
systematicness, integrity, and efficiency of college English listening and speaking teaching. Therefore, it is
imperative to integrate the teaching contents of college English listening and speaking and establish an
integrated, complete, and systematic course, studying and designing training approaches, methods as well as
models that conform to the rules of skill formation. In order to stimulate students’ enthusiasm for learning,
most college English listening and speaking textbooks involve the content of daily life, work, learning, and so
on. Combined with the teacher’s guidance and students’ autonomous training, students can basically master the
vocabulary and common sentence patterns necessary for daily conversation, be familiar with English listening
and speaking skills, and express their ideas clearly in English.

Conclusion

In the age of Big Data, informatization is the general trend of social development, which has a profound,
all-round impact upon education and students respectively. As an important task of college English teaching as
well as a crucial skill for students to move towards the society, English listening and speaking play an
important part and they should not be undervalued only to examinations. At the same time, the wide spread and
rapid development of the Internet has reformed English mobile learning (Dai, 2019, pp. 106-107). Under the
information-based ecological language environment, it is quite necessary and urgent that non-English
majors update their ideas as soon as possible, improve their information literacy level, and strengthen their
autonomous learning. Of course college teachers should also strive to diversify their teaching models, make full
use of Internet resources, match the classroom training with extracurricular learning content, and establish a
good relationship between teachers and students so as to promote the students’ English listening and speaking
ability.

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