

The Exploration in Spoken Chinese Teaching Models of Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language in the Post-Pandemic Era

—From the Perspective of Sociocultural Theory

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Abstract: With its convenience and sharing, online Chinese teaching is gradually becoming the main method of international Chinese teaching in the context of the epidemic. However, at the same time, online Chinese teaching also has some drawbacks, such as poor interactivity, being gradually exam-oriented, and insufficient experience of teaching online. This paper uses the method of literature analysis to analyze the spoken Chinese teaching in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language under the perspective of sociocultural theory, and comes up with several pedagogical implications for teaching foreigners Chinese on the Internet. It can be concluded that sociocultural theory can guide the teaching of Chinese as a Foreign Language online and contributes to the development of its teaching mode. From the perspective of sociocultural theory, teachers should insist the principle of taking the student as the main role of class, help them taste specific culture through simulated situational teaching, and accumulate teaching experience, which can also be beneficial to online platform construction.

Keywords: Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (TCFL), Sociocultural theory, Teaching strategy, Spoken Chinese teaching, Post-pandemic era

1. Introduction

As China's international status rises, more and more people have an interest in learning about China and learning Chinese. In 2020, the COVID-19 outbreak has hindered offline teaching at Confucius Institutes abroad. The Internet could, however, bring great convenience to international Chinese teaching. Nowadays, online classes are emerging to be more important and effective in teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (TCFL for short) worldwide. However, it cannot be overlooked that more efforts must be made to improve interactivity, teach more than just exams, and strengthen the theoretical foundation of platform construction.

Starting from the perspective of the sociocultural theory, which is an essential and foundational theory in the field of second language acquisition, this article concentrates on the predominant weakness of the poor interaction in TCFL classes, and would like to give targeted suggestions for

online Chinese teaching through the analysis of spoken Chinese teaching strategies. In addition, aiming at strengthen the impact of online Chinese teaching in the post-epidemic era and stimulate the development of international Chinese teaching, this paper uses the literature research method to search and review literature related to TCFL and online teaching, and the sociocultural theory are taken as the theoretical principle. This essay will be written from the problems existing in the teaching of Chinese as a Foreign Language to develop discussions and come up with solutions.

2. Overview of Sociocultural Theory Research

Sociocultural theory was proposed by Vygotsky and afterwards introduced into the second language acquisition domain by Lantolf. The theory holds that language learning is a kind of social activity, and human cognition develops through social interactions, so the influence of various social factors on language learning should be fully considered. Its predominant contents include mediation, ZPD, internalization and etc.

2.1. Mediation

Mediation theory is the core of sociocultural theory. Human cognitive development depends on symbolic tools (such as language), and language can act as a regulation between human beings and the social material world. During children's developing process, conscious control and personality are acquired through three stages of object regulation, other regulation, and self-regulation. Object regulation means that an individual is directly controlled by the surroundings and objects. Other regulation implies that a learner is guided by others who are with more experience and knowledge (e. g., adults, peers, and teachers) in a common social community. In other words, when children reach this level, they are able to execute several tasks with the help of linguistic mediation or non-linguistic features from parents, teachers, or more competent peers. And Self-regulation is not a stable phenomenon, relatively speaking, it generally occurs after object regulation and other regulation.

Vygotsky has claimed that the mystery of effective learning occurs in the nature process of the social interaction with other people with different levels of knowledge and ability [1]. Only when learners actively use the target language in practice or dialogue, can they make progress in mediation, which is able to reflect the learner's learning state. The process of language using helps people to understand the new knowledge deeper and master it more faster.

And Vygotsky's self-regulation framework has been applied to the Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom by some analysts. For instance, Foley notes that in traditional EFL object regulation and other regulations are its dominating parts. In traditional language classrooms, it can be noticed that instead of using self-regulation when speaking the target language, object regulation and other regulation are taking place unconsciously because teachers always ask students to speak and write [2]. In order to promote learners' self regulation, TCFL teachers should guide students to engage in their dialogues and discussions in Chinese. Students use personal speech to maintain or restore self-regulation, which is often manifested as diversion, simplified syntax, and repeated repetition [3].

2.2. ZPD

Vygotsky's definition states that the ZPD (Zone of Proximal Development) is "the distance between the real level of development which reflect his independent problem-solving skills and the potential level of development when there are assistance from adult or competent peers"[4]. So the ZPD can be used to observe and understand how mediational tools are applied and internalized[1]. In other words, the ZPD is dynamic and can awaken much progress when the learner interact with peers and

adults. Once the new knowledge is internalized, it will become a part of their independent development achievement.

Regarding SLL, ZPD means that "the difference between the level of development of L2 learners determined by independent language use, and the higher level of potential development determined by how the language works with a more competent interlocutors" [5]. Therefore, social interaction is the best way to stimulate proximal development zones.

Besides, ZPD is not only a dynamic model of the developmental course, but also a useful conceptual means, which can be used to diagnose learners' skills and create conditions for their potential. From object regulation, other regulation to self-regulation, mediating changes reflect learner ability changes, which is called Dynamic Assessment. For example, "Han Yu Shui Ping Kao Shi (HSK)" exams can be used to test the current status of students' learning of Chinese, and clarify the direction of continuous efforts in the future. Both teaching and learning will be more targeted. "Let HSK test become an important means to test teaching results, truly serve our Chinese teaching." [6].

2.3. Internalization

Kozulin claims that the process in which cultural relics, including language, exert their psychological functions is called internalization [7]. For SLL, internalization refers to the process in which learners gradually reduce their dependence on external mediators and increase their dependence on internal mediators through their interactions with peers and teachers, eventually transforming external unfamiliar physical pronunciation and complex cognitive abilities into personal internal knowledge. And they have the ability to use the new language flexibly, express their own psychological ideas in the target language for communication.

Aiming at helping students internalize the new language, in the online teaching of Chinese as a Foreign Language, teachers should intentionally build cognitive scaffolding to activate the language knowledge that learners can not independently use in the recent development areas. On the one hand, encourage students to discuss and share their views actively, and on the other hand, organize student-led practical activities, for example reading aloud, online learning groups and speech contests [8].

In the communication and interaction, students achieve independent learning from cooperative learning step by step, and internalize the language characteristics into their own language system finally.

3. The Current Situation and Problems of Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language

The research and experience summary of distance network teaching is worth the time of the front-line teachers to do and share, because it not only involves the future trend of teaching mode, but also involves whether the educational goals can be better realized [9]. There are a lot of research results on the teaching content of Chinese language ontology in the field of teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language, such as Chinese character teaching, existing sentences, function words, ambiguity, etc., but there is less attention paid to the summary of overall teaching methods and teaching strategies. The use of appropriate pedagogy can get twice the result with half the effort in classroom teaching. Even though, nowadays, students have easy access to share, manipulate, save, and even create materials or resources in groups and plenary in synchronous environments, several problems have emerged in online classrooms at the same time.

3.1. The Poor Interactivity of Online Classes

Under the epidemic situation, the classroom of speaking Chinese as a foreign language had to be turned to the Internet. Many teachers use the form of online classes, teachers and students can not really meet, so as not to achieve effective interactions, which may easily hurt students' enthusiasm for learning. In the survey of Peking University, the top 10 keywords in the online teaching work are ranked from high to low in frequency, respectively: students, interaction, teaching, practice, classroom, skills, online class, courseware, learning and increase. It can be seen that "students" and "interaction" have the greatest influence on online Chinese teaching. From the perspective of teachers, they believe that their online teaching work needs to be improved, and "to enrich the forms of interaction and improve the quality of interaction" is first emphasized [8].

Teaching online has great potential as well as limitations. On one hand, thanks to synchronous environments, it is easy for teachers and learners to share, process and save materials and digital data whenever in groups or in the class. Students have easy access to text, images, videos and information in other forms to create their own material both individually and jointly. On the other hand, the fact that should be taken into account is that some learners can not bear the strong virtualization architecture of network and overwhelming digital resources, which may weaken their motivation and aggravate their unease [10].

3.2. Contradiction between HSK and Daily Teaching & Cultural Background Teaching

The HSK is a standardized test that can help foreign students test their Chinese proficiency. "The significance of HSK teaching is to improve students' level of Chinese application. Including the listening, speaking, reading and writing ability, the course setting and arrangement should be conducted around this purpose." [6]. But in order to take the test, many teaching Chinese as a foreign language lessons appear just to assist learners get high marks in the exam, but ignore the embarrassing situation of daily Chinese teaching and cultural teaching. Many students achieve high HSK scores but are unable to communicate in Chinese in everyday situations, and they also lack an understanding of Chinese culture. This runs counter to the HSK's original targets.

In some cases, teachers avoid teaching complex language features to learners because they are useless for the exam and teachers fear that these patterns or meanings may confuse the learners. It seems is a 'protection' for the learners, rather actually this choice puts them in a more 'dangerous' situation, for the reason that they will encounter these problems in the future, and need to face, misunderstand, and correct them by themselves, which will take a longer time to acquire.

3.3. Network Restriction and Immature Platforms Construction

Network technology problems cannot be ignored in online teaching. At present, based on the online teaching feedback from international students from a dozen countries, students in some regions are greatly restricted by the quality of local network, especially those from the pastoral areas of Mongolia, some islands of Indonesia and some parts of Africa. Sound and screen lag, network drops and lag, inability to synchronize teaching courseware, and other issues occur frequently. These problems will directly influence the teaching continuity of the whole class and even force it off, which may disrupt the teachers' curriculum arrangement and disrupt the learners' interest in learning [11].

Meanwhile, many online teaching platforms have come into being along with the trend of online teaching of Chinese as a foreign language, but most of them are still in the initial stage of construction. According to a survey conducted by Beijing Foreign Studies University, it is found that the current development of online teaching platforms is arbitrary, which "lacks the theory of acquiring and teaching Chinese as a second language based on" Internet + " [12]. In other words, it

is urgent to deeply combine theory of Chinese as a second language acquisition and teaching with Internet innovative thinking and technology, carry out theoretical innovation, and form a theory of Chinese as a second language acquisition and teaching based on "Internet +".

4. The Strategies of Spoken Chinese Teaching in Online TCFL

The ultimate objective of language is to serve the users' communicative and psychological needs. In recent years, sociocultural theory has contributed to the design of online education technologies. Amounts of research on learning's social context has proved that traditional approaches which are teacher-centered need to change when it comes to online teaching. And building a virtual classroom community is urgent but has enormous challenge, because students are often not together virtually. What efforts need to be done to realize the ideal online learning environments in which students feel close to classmates and teachers behind the screen deserves more consideration [13].

4.1. Accountable Talk

By definition, accountable talk is relevant to the discipline, has good reasoning, and aims to develop everyone's knowledge in the classroom. Vygotsky attaches importance to the learning of the new signs, symbols and concepts, because they would be applied in the new learning context by learners. Thus, explaining these tools clearly to students is necessary in the initial stage of teaching new knowledge or skills [14].

The teacher can ask the text dependent questions, for example, "please make a sentence with this new word", or "Can you explain the phrase in your own words?" These problems can help to increase students' attention to the teaching context, promoting the connection and transfer of old knowledge and new words so that they can both understand the new knowledge in their own mindset and have opportunities to practice oral Chinese.

Meanwhile, teachers can organize online group discussions and encourage each group to share their opinions. Learners discuss their understanding of the vocabulary, passages, cultural phenomena and so on. Rich and evidence-based discussions among peers and between students and the teacher can be promoted by the use of Accountable talk, which can lead the students to use Chinese.

According to the Emotional Filter theory [15], Students' own emotions and enthusiasm will also affect the effect of Chinese learning. The traditional teaching mode is that the teacher speaks, students listen, in this way vocabulary learning is boring. Students lack the time to think independently and express their personal opinions, and over time, it is easy to produce boredom and negative emotions. Only by transforming students from passive acceptance to active exploration, participating more in practical communication, and ensuring students' attention and confidence in learning, can spoken Chinese teaching achieve good results in the Internet environment.

4.2. Task-Based Learning

According to Vygotsky, cognitive development takes place during the process of learners use and internalize these symbolic tools [14]. In task-based learning, students communicate with their peers using the target language being learned to solve the task. Rather than "learning a language", they are absorbed on the present task at this time.

Liu notes that the basic principles that teachers should follow in designing tasks are the principle of authenticity (authenticity principle), form-function (form-function principle), step by step (task dependency and the task chain principle) and so on [16]. In terms of the number of tasks, teachers can assign multiple small tasks in a class, such as "in what scenario did this conversation occur," "what is this poem about," and so on, to form a task line. The task line can be shown to the students

ahead of the class, which will be beneficial in reducing the students' sense of passive learning and promoting their active participation in the curriculum. And multiple classes can also be used to solve a big task step by step. In this process, the students' understanding of the language will also deepen with the group cooperation and interaction.

It is worth mentioning that creating scenarios, which is a special task form, is a good way for learners to think in the target language mindset and experience the history and culture in the immersive environment. Images, descriptions, videos and tools in other forms can help teachers to do this. Students are guaranteed to play the main role in the classroom, and the diversity of classroom activities are enriched to attract learners more effectively.

During the tasks, the teacher should monitor and provide feedback. When noting students' difficulties, they can promote the dialogue by asking questions. Personal efforts and group cooperation need affirmation and encouragement after students complete their task, and teachers point out what can be improved.

4.3. Flipped Classroom

Flipped Classroom is an emerging teaching mode developed with the Internet in recent years. It refers to a mode in which teachers record videos of the key and difficult points on the Internet before teaching, and students complete their learning through mobile phones and computers ahead of classes. In the process of learning, learners can consult the teacher or other students online for any problems, and complete the online homework assigned by the teacher. Receiving feedback from students' learning situation and homework, teachers would have opportunities to grasp students' learning problems in time, and then carry out targeted teaching in the classroom, help students to absorb the key and difficult points better, and improve the general quality of teaching. Besides, based on the flipped over classroom teaching mode, teachers can adopt PPT teaching display and use situational setting, game playing and other teaching methods to, making full use of computer and multimedia to raise students' interests and leave them a direct impression.

Firstly, this model reconstructs the learning process, helps teachers to modify the traditional teaching concept, establish the student-oriented teaching consciousness, and lets students give full play to their subjective initiative in online Chinese learning. As we can observe that because of the lack of private conversation and body language like face expression and gestures, people have risk being depressed by the virtuality of the Internet environment.[10] When teaching online, teachers and students are more free and easy to be distracted, especially when students are not interested in the course or when it is too difficult for them.

Secondly, targeted explanation can be designed in class according to where students do not understand and save time to interact with others. Students possess more opportunities for oral practice, especially in the second language.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, sociocultural theory attaches great importance to students and interaction, which can help the online teaching of Chinese as a Foreign Language to solve the current problems such as poor interaction, becoming increasingly exam-oriented, and other difficulties that the Internet has brought. This theory is useful to inspire the adjustment of teaching methods, improve the teaching effect, and achieve better development. Some experts predict that online teaching will be deeply rooted in Chinese language teaching, and will occupy a more and more proportion, playing an increasingly important role. Although the learners' ages, learning goals, cultural background, and learning degrees are different, all teachers can learn from the sociocultural theories and apply them into their own classroom teaching. First of all, teachers need to sum up the experience from online

classroom practice and communicate them with others, updating pedagogy in online classroom. At the same time, teachers should cultivate their computer ability and enhance their digital information literacy intentionally.

Due to the author's personal ability limitations, this paper only builds on the reading of relevant literature, and relevant empirical studies and data are vacant. In the future, we need to constantly sum up experience, make up for shortcomings and innovate in the field of Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language.

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