

A Lesson Design With an English Textbook for College Students in China

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the design of teaching a section chosen from an English textbook to Chinese college students. The criteria for evaluating language lesson designs are the communicative effect and students’ participation. This is chosen according to changing beliefs about language and various language teaching approaches as well as Larsen-Freeman’s form-meaning-use framework.

Key words: Lesson design; College English textbook; China

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1. INTRODUCTION

To begin with, debates on the understanding of language indicate different concerns in language teaching process. The debates of cognitive and sociocultural perspectives are influential. The cognitive understanding of language has played a main role for many years. Dekeyser and Juffs believed that no one would disagree that language

is one part of human cognition (Dekeyser and Juffs, 2005, p.437). On the contrary, the social perspective on language learning “view language use in real-world situations as fundamental, not ancillary, to learning” (Zuengler, J & Miller, E.R., 2006, p.37). Different from the cognitive perspective, this one emphasizes using language to participate in daily activities. As Vygotsky said, the social aspect of mental processes came first while the individual aspect second (Vygotsky, 1979, p.30). It is through participation in communicative situations that learners understand language. According to Toohey, in the language learning process, learners are influenced implicitly by others’ utterances, which can help express their own ideas (Toohey, 2000, p.13). It can be concluded that communication, interaction and participation are essential elements in foreign language learning process. So the cognition only seems not enough. The cognitive perspective is criticized by Firth and Wagne that meaning did not come from one’s personal thoughts but a product of social interaction (Firth and Wagne, 1998, p.290). However, with the development of SLA field, the line between cognitive and sociocultural perspectives is not that clear-cut. Watson-Gegeo said that cognition “originates in social interaction and is shaped by cultural and sociopolitical processes” (Watson-Gegeo, 2004, p.331). From these points discussed, the importance of learners’ participation by using foreign language in real-world context or situation can be seen. Moreover, students’ cognitive level and individual need are also essential factors in a lesson design.

Besides, language teaching approaches can reflect expectations presented on students. In “Language Teaching Approaches: An Overview”, Celce-Murcia (2001) lists nine approaches to foreign language teaching. They are Grammar-Translation, Direct, Reading, Audiolingualism, Oral-Situational, Cognitive, Affective-Humanistic; Comprehension-Based, and Communicative approach. Each one of these approaches particularly

emphasizes one aspect of language teaching, such as grammar, reading, speaking or communication.

With the transition of times, language teaching approach has experienced various stages. For example, an inductive approach that focused on language use came into being when European vernaculars become popular and frequently used, which made it necessary to learn a foreign language. The reading approach stressed the most important role of reading skill for the reason that international travel was not popular those days. However, now we are living in a global village where communication is common and necessary. Language use should be emphasized in choosing the language teaching approach.

However, in order to clearly express one's opinion and communicate with others, grammatical competence should not be ignored. There have been a lot of discussions on the importance of grammatical and sociolinguistic competence. The former one refers to knowledge of rules of language while the latter refers to knowledge of use of language (Canale & Swain, 2001, p.4). Different from Chomsky who claims that competence is only about the knowledge of grammar, Hymes broadens the notion of competence to include knowledge of language rules and language use. He asserts that "there are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless" (Hymes, 1972, p.247). He takes sociolinguistic competence to be more important than grammatical competence. However, Canale and Swain use an example that one having sociolinguistic competence but no grammatical competence of French could not communicate successfully with one who only speaks French to show the importance of grammatical competence in communication (Canale and Swain, 2001, p.5).

Apart from grammatical and sociolinguistic competences, strategic competence is also an important aspect of communicative competence. According to Canale and Swain, communication strategies that speakers use to solve problems in communication are considered to be a necessary part of communicative competence (Canale and Swain, 2001, p.25).

The communicative competence has almost involved all the elements needed in the approaches mentioned above. But one approach, the affective-humanistic approach has not been illustrated. Psycholinguistic factors are related to this approach. They are considered by Canale and Swain as "general psychological constraints on actual communication" and omitted from the notion of communicative competence (Canale and Swain, 2001, p.8). But they are closely related to language learning.

Therefore, in order to make language teaching effective, communicative approach has to be implemented and the affective-humanistic approach should be considered. Correspondingly, grammatical, sociolinguistic and strategic competences as well as motivation are expected from language learners.

Influenced by those two perspectives on language learning and various approaches developed, this paper takes the communicative effect and students' participation as criteria of lesson design. Additionally, students' cognition, need and grammatical competence should also be considered in achieving the main teaching purpose. But this does not mean that other factors can be ignored. According to Larsen-Freeman's form-meaning-use framework, "learning is a gradual process involving the mapping of form, meaning, and use" (Larsen-Freeman, 2001, p.255). In the teaching process, form, meaning and use should also be considered. A good lesson can weave these three elements effectively into the communicative teaching process. Therefore, form, meaning and use all count in achieving the communicative effect.

Specifically, the criteria are described as follows. Firstly, learners are active and motivated to use the language. A good class can activate their motivation and interest to enjoy and participate in the class. They will make great efforts to communicate. Even those who are introvert or often silent would become excitedly involved in activities if the class is designed well. Secondly, their language used is understandable, accurate in terms of information and appropriate for the situation. These can reflect their grammatical and sociolinguistic competences. In communication, grammatical form is not required to be exactly correct or ideal. The standard here is comprehensibility. But some grammatical points stressed should be grasped and the meaning should be expressed accurately. Thirdly, learners can effectively handle breakdowns in communication and use what they learned solve problems in new situations. These can reflect their strategic competence. Last but not least, learners' needs have been considered first and can be met. These needs come from education system, course requirement, personal development and psychological expectations. Then, students involved in my lesson will be introduced in order to make the class design suitable to the needs of this general group.

The section I will use in this class is the second unit in the compulsory English textbook. This unit focuses on the United Kingdom, including its geography, historical attractions and traditional festivals. On the whole, there are seven parts in this unit. They are reading, learning about language, using language, listening practice, speaking, writing and summing up. In the reading part, students can learn about the historical influence upon UK geography and the process of the combination of the UK. The second part is the learning about language lexically and grammatically. The third one is made of a reading passage about Sightseeing in London. The fourth one is a listening practice, which can provide students with more information of UK. The fifth part is a speaking activity and the sixth one is writing a tourist attraction poster. The last part is an assessment or reflection on important points learned.

2. LESSON DESIGN

2.1 Objectives

Objectives of this lesson are divided into grammatical, reading, listening, sociolinguistic, and strategic objectives, which are listed as follows:

Grammatical:

To successfully identify the root of a root word.

To begin to divergently think about various formations of root words

To begin to recognize the past participle that is used as the attribute.

To begin to recognize the pattern “verb+ object+ past participle”.

Reading:

To begin to grasp techniques of writing an introduction of a country.

To begin to identify the root and formation of a root word.

To begin to recognize the past participle that is used as the attribute.

To begin to recognize the pattern “verb+ object+ past participle”.

To begin to use the schematic strategy while reading.

Sociolinguistic:

To use the schematic strategy while introducing to their peers one tourist attraction in their hometown.

To use the pattern “verb+ object+ past participle” in introducing one tourist attraction.

To use expressions that can help when there are problems of understanding in communication.

Strategic:

To use techniques of writing an introduction of a country to write an introduction of a tourist attraction.

To use the schematic strategy while writing an introduction of a tourist attraction.

To use past participles flexibly as attributes or object complements in writing the introduction of a tourist attraction.

To successfully identify the root and formation of some root words in a new text.

These objectives are closely connected with each other. If they can be reached, the lesson can meet the criteria listed in the introduction of this paper. Firstly, because of the grammatical objective, students can learn and identify the root words as well as their various formations. Moreover, their previous knowledge of vocabulary can be activated. Besides, they can identify some grammatical patterns of past participles. Then, the reading, sociolinguistic and strategic objectives all give students the opportunity to discover and use the grammatical patterns they have learned. Through the explanation, personal discovery, understanding and actual usage of them in concrete context, students can use these grammatical patterns appropriately. Secondly,

the reading objective can help students in three aspects. The first one is that they can discover and understand those grammatical patterns personally while reading. The second one is that they can learn how to read by using the schematic strategy. The third one is that once they find those grammatical patterns familiar and the passage easy to understand with a schema constructed, they will be more confident and active in learning language. Thirdly, the sociolinguistic objective mainly concerns the output and interaction. Learners can use what they have learned to communicate with others. On the one hand, for the guide, the knowledge like the schematic strategy they used in reading, grammatical patterns learned can help their expression. For the listener, they can use expressions they learned when there are problems of understanding. On the other hand, this kind of interaction makes the language learning vivid and interesting. They are all participants. Their initiative and motivation as well as interest on using and learning language can be motivated. Fourthly, the strategic objective demands their ability to use what they have learned in a new context. They can practice using schematic strategy, grammatical patterns, and techniques of writing an introduction of a country learned in writing. Besides, given a wholly different passage, they can still identify root and formations of root words. Through achieving these objectives as planned, learners' usage of foreign language and participation in learning language can be improved. In addition, some grammatical points are stressed and their cognitive is considered. Therefore, the class can be said to be good. Even so, the last point in the objectives has to be stressed, that is considering students' needs.

Generally, their needs mainly come from the final exam and daily communication. As to the former one, they need to accumulate grammatical knowledge and practice listening, reading as well as writing abilities in English. As to the latter one, they need to practice speaking and learn strategies on how to handle situations when the conversation breaks down. These needs can be met if those objectives listed can be achieved.

However, individually, the needs may be various. Students with different interest, language learning experience or English level, may have different needs on one lesson. Some objectives may be easy for some students who want to learn more, but difficult for others. So in achieving these objectives, teachers should consider different students' needs.

2.2 Textbook Evaluation

On the whole, the unit in this textbook is well designed and organized. Most criteria on a good class can be met. To begin with, many activities in this unit can arouse students' interest. For example, the warming-up activity can activate students' previous knowledge and motivation to do the reading. The speaking activity can involve them in the interaction with classmates. Secondly, students

can learn grammatical patterns, new vocabularies and appropriate expressions from the reading passage, learning about language and using language parts. Thirdly, students can practice their ability to solve problems in interaction through the speaking activity. Fourthly, various practices are provided for students to drill their learned grammatical patterns and expressions. The using language part can also activate their learned knowledge.

However, some criteria are not met. Firstly, some parts in this unit are not meaningful enough or overlapping with another part. For instance, in the comprehending part, the first activity only tests students' geographical knowledge after reading. Without reading the passage, some students can also do this. But the third activity in this part, the map division can better test students' understanding of geographical knowledge. Secondly, many grammatical patterns in learning about language part are shown in sentences, which cannot give the context of usage. This is difficult for students to know how to use them appropriately in concrete situations.

Generally, in terms of students' development, the textbook-as-designed can be helpful in the following ways. Linguistically, all new grammatical patterns, vocabularies and phrases are marked and related practices are given in the learning about language part. Besides, there are reading, listening, writing, and speaking tasks in each unit. By doing these exercises, students can practice and grasp some techniques on reading, listening, writing and speaking. This is not only helpful for their exam preparation, but also significant in improving their communicative ability. Moreover, these various activities can provide students with different contexts of using

language, which is helpful for their understanding of using language. Culturally, each unit focuses on one cultural perspective. Taking the unit chosen in this paper as an example, an introduction is made on the United Kingdom, including historical, geographical, political backgrounds and some tourist attractions. So this textbook-as-designed can help widen students' cultural knowledge. Emotionally, each unit begins with a warming-up activity, in which they can get support and learn from each other by interacting with partners. At the same time, the atmosphere in class becomes relaxed. This can help better exert each one's potential. Through interaction and some related games, they can think actively and make some personal inference. This kind of discovery learning makes learning interesting and improves their teamwork spirit. More importantly, knowledge learned in this way is better understood than being given directly by others.

Specifically, the warming-up, pre-reading, reading, and using language parts are mostly well designed. Students can learn language and knowledge in context and specific situations. But the learning about language part is a little mechanic. The gap-filling exercises provide no context beyond sentences. Students only practice the form rather than using language in specific context. Even though they can complete these exercises successfully, they may not know how to use them in other contexts. This is not helpful for students' development.

2.3 Overview of the Lesson Design

I will teach this unit in 5 classes. Each class is about 45 minutes. So totally, this unit will take about 225 minutes. The arrangement of each class is presented in the following table.

Table 1
The arrangement of each class

Type	First class Comprehending and Form	Second class Meaning and Usage	Third class Meaning and Usage	Fourth class Comprehending and Usage	Fifth class Reflection
Activities	1. Warming-up interaction 2. Pre-reading questions. 3. Presentation of relevant information and pictures 4. Reading (schematic strategy). 5. Comprehending-map division and structure analysis	1. Group discussion on meaning of the reading passage, new vocabulary, and root words found. 2. Instruction on new vocabularies meaning and usage 3. Exercise on root words usage. Giving answers and comparing. Talking and finding problems. Solving problems	1. Group discussion on patterns “verb+object+past participle” found, including meaning and usage. 2. Action activity on understanding of this pattern 3. Reading the “using language” passage. Understand and discuss root words and patterns found.	1. Do the listening part, understand and discuss the meaning and usage of root words and patterns in it. 2. Speaking Game. Tourist attraction introduction and discussion. Using root words and the pattern. 3. Writing Game. Write a tourist poster to each other.	1. Summing-up and reflection 2. Group discussion 3. Questions and answers
Homework	Find new vocabularies and various forms of root words	Find the pattern “verb+object+past participle” in the reading and find more in other resources. Bring resources found to class	Thinking about how to use various forms of root words and the pattern.	Summing up knowledge learned and write a reflection	

2.4 Language System Teaching Design

In the first class, students are mainly expected to know the background information of the following reading passage

and use the schematic strategy to help comprehend the reading. The schematic strategy here means constructing images of related events and locations in the mind in the

reading process. For example, the map of United Kingdom is provided beside the reading passage on the textbook. When students read something that is related to countries or locations on this map, they can note something down on the map. As to comparisons of different countries, a table can be drawn to show their similarities and differences. In this way, the content of the reading passage can be talked about from the noted map and the comparison table. Actually, the map and table can be constructed in the mind to make it a mental activity. Moreover, some concepts can be understood by constructing images of them. Then, the map division activity and passage structure analysis in the comprehending part can help revise students' understanding of the reading. So all these can help construct the context of the language system.

In the second class, students are expected to grasp the meaning and usage of new vocabularies and various forms of root words. Firstly, I divide them into groups and let them talk about their understanding of the meaning and usage of new vocabularies and root words based on their previous knowledge and this reading context. Secondly, they are given an instruction on some new vocabularies and words they feel confused. In addition, some paragraphs or texts contending those words are presented for students to further understand their meaning and usage. After this, they are asked to do the exercise 1 in learning about language part. They should choose the correct words and use the appropriate form. Then, after a comparison with correct answers, they will discuss their problems with each other. Finally, a feedback is given on their exercise and understanding.

In the third class, students are expected to master the meaning and usage of the pattern "verb+ object+ past participle". Firstly, they are divided into groups and present resources contending this pattern. They are asked to mark this pattern in those resources before this class. I will let them talk about the meaning and usage of this pattern and then let some students show their understanding to the whole class. Then I will give feedback on their discussion and further explain this pattern. Next comes to an action activity, in which present participle, past participle and root form of the verb are used to help students understand their difference. For instance, "I saw him opening the window." "I saw the window opened." "I saw him open the window." I will let a student do the action of opening the window and ask another student to choose from these three sentences to describe different stages of the action accordingly. Then they can discuss or play this action activity in groups and I will give a further explanation. The last part of this class is to read the passage in the using language part. Students can practice the schematic strategy in comprehending the meaning and context. Most importantly, they can find various forms of root words and the grammatical patterns learned. This can help them review and further understand their meaning and usage. Moreover, students can improve

their strategic competence in applying their knowledge in understanding a new passage.

In the fourth class, students are expected to further comprehend and use their learned knowledge. Firstly, I will let them do the listening part activity but not follow the textbook. The main purposes of listening to it are getting more background information and understanding knowledge learned in the listening context. Then, they will play two games, which are similar to the first and second activities in the speaking and writing part. What is different is that they should also use knowledge learned in this unit. These games can help them further understand how to use language knowledge learned and practice the strategic competence.

In the fifth class, students are expected to further master knowledge learned and solve questions they are still confused about. I will let students show their summing-up of knowledge learned in this unit and their personal reflections. They will talk in groups and between groups. Then each group has one representative to show their thoughts and confusions. Other groups can show their understandings and discussions are made. Through this, I can identify the root of problems, challenging dimensions and their different degrees of understanding. Finally, I will point out some misunderstandings of them and further explain their questions.

These five classes are closely connected with each other in constructing the language system in students' mind.

2.5 One Activity Design

I will specifically describe and explain the design of the game activity in the fourth class. In the first game, three people are in a group, one being the tourist guide and the other two being tourists. The guides can use the schematic strategy to help their organizing of the introduction and should use language forms learned like root words or participle patterns. Tourists should find those words and patterns used by the guide. When they are confused about their usage or cannot follow the guide, they should use expressions help solve the problem. In the second game, students are divided into pairs. They are asked to write a poster introducing a tourist attraction in their hometown. They can also practice the schematic strategy and should use forms learned in this unit as more as possible. Then they swap with their partner to find the forms used and show their feedbacks to each other. The feedback includes the writing technique, style, brilliant expressions, forms used and confusions.

This activity can not only contribute to achieving those teaching objectives, but also helping students understand and use language systems. As to the objectives, grammatically, students can practice identifying root words, the usage of past participles and the pattern "verb+ object+ past participle". For the reading objective, students can practice the writing techniques they grasped in the

reading part. They can further understand the schematic strategy in speaking and writing context. Sociolinguistically, they can use the schematic strategy and expressions that help handle conversation breakdowns in interactions. Strategically, they can practice techniques of writing an introduction of a country in introducing a tourist attraction and use past participles flexibly as attributes or object complements in writing the introduction of a tourist attraction. Moreover, they can identify the formation of some root words and grammatical patterns in new contexts, speaking and writing.

As to students' understanding and use of language systems, this activity can be meaningful in the following three ways. Firstly, students may know that language systems are not only rules and rules cannot be wholly presented and grasped. Even though they can remember all the rules, but do not know how to use them, that means nothing. As Larsen-Freeman said, what teachers expect is students' using grammatical forms accurately in concrete situations (2001, p.255). Through this activity, students can integrate their previous knowledge with the new forms they see or hear and discover the meaning as well as usage by themselves. At the same time, they can practice using them in specific contexts. Grammar has become a kind of skill for them to grasp rather than mechanical rules. Secondly, in the interaction and writing activity, students can get feedbacks from each other. They can talk about problems found by others and discover problems in their understanding of some grammatical forms. Some research (Swain and Lapkin, 1998) has shown the value of interaction on grammatical development. Additionally, students may be more attentive and motivated in interaction and team work. This can promote their use of language system. Thirdly, the shift from speaking context to writing context can help students better understand the usage of language systems and the influence of context. In the writing activity, they cannot get hints from each other when writing or reading, the discourse context becomes important and necessary for them to consider. However, in the speaking context, guides and tourists can communicate with each other anytime, what influences their language form is the social context.

3. REFLECTION

While writing this paper, I read and ponder over perspectives on language learning and various approaches put forward as well as Larsen-Freeman's form-meaning-use framework. Comparing to my own language learning experience, I think this framework is really meaningful in guiding language system teaching and learning. Language is a kind of social skill rather than a series of mechanical rules. We should not take any of them separately. This framework can help teachers decide what to teach, which approach is better and find gaps in their own knowledge frame. In this way, they can plan and make the teaching

process systematic. As to objectives of a class, they should be closely linked horizontally and vertically, including grammatical, sociolinguistic and strategic ones. Therefore, students will not be presented with a series of rules but real language in concrete context or situation. So language system becomes live in their minds. The context here should be text or paragraph rather than a single sentence. Rules presented in sentences are isolated, which is difficult to retrieve in concrete contexts. Furthermore, as Larsen-Freeman indicates that language is constantly changing, rules set cannot tell everything and exceptions always exist. So, we should focus on "reasons, not rules" (2001, p.265). It is better for students to discover the grammatical patterns and make a generalization from their own thoughts if they have the ability to do so. This inductive learning can activate students' previous knowledge and stimulate them to think deeply. After this discovery generalization, teachers can find the challenging dimensions in their understanding from their output. This helps teachers change plan and give effective feedbacks. In addition, students' needs should be considered first in making a plan or designing lessons. Students having different language learning experience, aptitude, ability or interest may understand differently on a single grammatical pattern or strategies learned. Teaching all the students in the same way is not scientific. Someone needs more while some others take it a waste of time. Therefore, students' output becomes necessary for teachers to find their needs. Here, group work can contribute a lot. For example, students can discuss freely in groups. Those who are shy or introvert will also like to express their thoughts. Then some problems can be solved inside some groups. Those cannot be solved will be discussed in the class and teachers will give feedbacks. Moreover, interaction in groups can activate students' interest and motivation in learning language. They can focus their attention on the meaning and usage of language system in specific communicative interactions.

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