

Exploring Oral English Teaching Strategies of Chinese Senior High School through Schema Theory

Author Details: Xuelian Lei

Foreign Languages Department, Nanchang Normal University, No. 889 Ruixiang Road, Changbei Economic and Technological Development Zone, Nanchang city, Jiangxi Province, China

Abstract: *In oral English teaching of Chinese high school, oral discourse production and understanding have not been paid due attention, nor could it meet the required curriculum standard of spoken English. In this study, Schema Theory Survey is adopted to measure oral English skills of 116 senior high school students in mainland China. Furthermore, software SPSS 20.0 is used to analyze the data collected, and the explanation is given to the results. The results of Schema Theory Survey shows that learners always apply schema theory consciously or unconsciously to their English learning, and the construction, regulation, and activation of students' linguistic schema, text schema, and content schema can promote the students' oral English level, simultaneously teachers can employ Schema theory to help improve students' oral English ability by strengthening the preparing work before speaking, and designing spoken activities with strong applicability. Further research is warranted to make more improvement in oral English teaching.*

Key Words: *schema theory, oral English teaching, high school English*

1. Introduction

1.1 Schema Theory

Schema theory, first proposed by German psychologist Kant, I. In 1781, was a theory that cognitive psychologists explain and understand the process of the heart. In 1932, British cognitive psychologist Bartlett, F.C. defined the schema as the dynamic organization of past experience in the human brain, which was a positive model, and applied schema concept to the study of memory and knowledge structure. Therefore, the schema was also called cognitive framework. In the 1960s, the Swiss educationist Piaget put forward the concepts of “assimilation” and “adaptation,” and the concept of schema again attracted the attention of experts. Since the 1970s, schema theory has been widely used in linguistics, anthropology, psychology, and artificial intelligence. Many linguistics researchers and psychologists tried to use it to explain the psychological process of foreign language reading, and others tried to use it to study the psychological process of foreign language listening, which formed the modern schema theory. Schank and Abelson use “script” to describe the sequence of events (Li Ping, 2008:11). De Beaugrande and Dressler use “global concept” to represent schema (Xiaoguang Zhao & Lei Zhu, 2012:112); Rumelhart (Tang Yunyun, 2013:120) pointed out that schema had recognition function and could recognize itself in the process of information processing. Cook defines schema as “mental representation of typical instances” (Chang Jiao, 2014:4); Artificial intelligence expert Rumelhart believes that schema is a set of “interactive” knowledge structure or “building block” that is stored in a hierarchical form in long-term memory (Chang Jiao, 2014:7); Mckeown and Mann refer to schema in the theory of discourse production by means of “rhetorical device” in a narrow sense (Yunning Chen, 2014:442);

From the above, it is obvious that schema can be viewed as a “mental model,” although the interpretation of schema theory is different, in essence, the schema is taken as “mental representation of typical instances,” which shows storage of certain knowledge organized around one theme. It's a cognitive mode of knowledge showing the way that everyone gets knowledge in his mind. It is a response or active organization of the brain to past experience, and it is a process that learners develop new knowledge into their own database. In short, schema theory studies how knowledge can be expressed, how it represents knowledge, and how to apply knowledge in its own way.

Schema is also an important factor in developing the speaking ability, and its effect on speaking was greater than that of foreign language ability, which also forms the author's basic stance here.

1.2 Problems of Chinese Spoken English Teaching in high schools

Influenced by examination-oriented education, Chinese high school students shoulder the heavy academic burden and have spared few time to communicate with the outside world in a foreign language. Many students hold the view that as long as they do well in the college entrance examination, it does not matter whether they are good at speaking English or not. So they paid little attention to the improvement and development of oral English skills. And increasing requirements and standards for English learning greatly affect students' learning enthusiasm, some students show negative attitudes towards oral English learning, and they are rarely involved in the classroom. Instead, they still focus on words and grammar and spend a little time and energy on oral training, which causes low efficiency in oral English teaching in Chinese senior high school.

2. An Investigation on Schema Theory of Oral English Learning in Senior High School

2.1 Purpose

In order to investigate the current situation of oral English learning in senior high school and explore effective ways to improve teachers' teaching quality, the author attempts to conduct an investigation on schema theory about the students' learning attitude and views on their English speaking, then finds the relevant factors and explores significant strategies of schema theory on guiding oral English teaching, and the way in improve students' speaking ability by helping them to construct, accumulate and activate their linguistic, content and formal schema.

2.2 Subjects

This thesis focuses on an investigation on schema theory of oral English teaching in senior high school. The author conducts a questionnaire survey, 116 students from Grade 2 of certain Second Middle Schools in Nanchang city, Jiangxi province are chosen as subjects of the investigation.

2.3 Instruments

The researcher designed questionnaires relevant to the learning of oral English, which aims to learn the current situation of students' oral English learning and some of the evaluation for the speaking class.

2.4 Procedures

2.4.1 Design of the Questionnaires

Referring to the oral English questionnaires online, the questionnaire can be divided into five parts: the learning of linguistic schema, the learning of content schema, the learning of formal schema, the learning of background knowledge, and the learning on the use of context.

2.4.2 Distribute the Questionnaires

The survey was conducted in March 2018. The subjects of the survey are the students and the teachers from Grade two of certain Middle Schools in Nanchang city. Before the distribution of the questionnaires, the author explained certain parts to the teachers and the students to ensure that their answers would be based on their full understanding of each question in the questionnaire, thus making the results more valid. A total of 150 questionnaires were sent out, and 125 questionnaires were collected, of which 116 were valid. The effective rate was 92.8%. The number of highly effective samples is ideal. Through content induction and data statistics, the author is to collect the students' learning situation on the speaking skills and some factors affecting the improvement of it. Thus provides an objective basis for grasping the current high school students' learning psychology and teachers' teaching tendencies more accurately, strengthening the pertinence of education.

3. Data Analysis and Discussion of the Questionnaire

3.1 Results of the Questionnaire

The study is mainly based on the quantitative research of the questionnaire. The author used SPSS 20 software to analyze the data of the two questionnaires. As is shown below, the teacher's questionnaire is divided into five parts.

As shown below, the learner's questionnaire is divided into four parts.

| Items | Main content | Correlation |
|-------|------------------------------------|-------------|
| 1-7 | The learning of linguistic schema | 0.4899 |
| 8-12 | The learning of content schema | 0.6748 |
| 13-17 | The learning on the use of context | 0.6681 |
| 18-20 | The learning of formal schema | 0.9974 |

Descriptive statistics of each option are shown in the following tables:

Descriptive statistics

| Option | N | Minimum value | Maximum value | Mean value | Standard deviation |
|--------|----|---------------|---------------|------------|--------------------|
| A | 20 | 5 | 20 | 8.30 | 3.097 |
| B | 20 | 10 | 20 | 13.80 | 2.167 |
| C | 20 | 0 | 10 | 5.40 | 2.371 |
| D | 20 | 0 | 4 | 2.45 | 1.317 |

* A, B, C, D represents the choice of each question.

The frequency distribution histogram of each option is shown below:

The correlation analysis is as follows:

Correlation

| | | A | B | C | D |
|---|--------------------------|---------|-------|---------|---------|
| A | Pearson correlation | 1 | -.234 | -.741** | -.603** |
| | Significance (bilateral) | | .321 | .000 | .005 |
| | N | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 |
| B | Pearson correlation | -.234 | 1 | -.383 | -.391 |
| | Significance (bilateral) | .321 | | .095 | .088 |
| | N | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 |
| C | Pearson correlation | -.741** | -.383 | 1 | .563** |
| | Significance (bilateral) | .000 | .095 | | .010 |
| | N | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 |
| D | Pearson correlation | -.603** | -.391 | .563** | 1 |
| | Significance (bilateral) | .005 | .088 | .010 | |
| | N | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 |

** . There was a significant correlation at 0.1 level (bilateral).

3.2 Analysis of the Questionnaire

The emphasis of linguistic schema input is on pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. Phonetic input is inseparable from deliberate listening training. Since Chinese students do not have a natural environment for language learning, it is particularly important to distinguish the sounds and meanings of native English languages, and it is also necessary to distinguish America sounds from English sounds. The attention in intonation and word-formation is beneficial to the construction of linguistic schema. From the choices of

question 1 to question 7, it can be seen that 46.67% of the students often have regular listening training to increase their language knowledge and improve their reading ability. 23.33% of the students never exercise their ability to distinguish the loss of sounds, such as blasting, retelling, assimilation and so on. Most of the students agree that listening to native speakers can facilitate the improvement of their oral English. But 20% of the students never pay attention to the differences between America sounds and English sounds when they read new words. Only 20% of the students know a lot about the composition of English words, such as composition, derivation, conversion, abbreviations, and logogram. The correlation between the seven questions is 0.4899, which means a weak correlation. It can be concluded that most of the students know the importance of imitating the native language; they also pay attention to listening training and have some understanding of word-formation. But it is not enough to distinguish the loss of sounds, such as blasting, retelling, assimilation. The distinction between British sounds and American sounds still needs to be strengthened.

The emphasis of content schema input is the introduction of background culture. Whether students can use various multimedia to expand their horizons, enrich the background knowledge, as well as their grasp and use of previous knowledge, to a large extent, affect the construction of content schema. From the choices of question 8 to question 12, it can be seen that 23.33% of the students never pay attention to different backgrounds, such as the way of thinking, values, religious beliefs, ethics, lifestyle, customs, and other background knowledge and 16.67% of the students never make full use of modern media after class to check the background culture of spoken language topics. The correlation between the five questions is 0.6748, which means a medium correlation. It can be concluded that students understand that prior knowledge is better for them to organize a monologue or dialogue. However, most students pay less attention to background knowledge and the usage of multimedia.

Communicative strategies in oral communication are stored in the human brain in schematic form. It is very important for students to construct formal schema to fully grasp the various situations in the classroom, stimulate their own interest and play the role actively, or understand the functional meaning of language in context and react instinctively to different contexts. From the choices of question 13 to question 16, it can be seen that 40% of the students think the speaking activities in each module of their textbooks are interesting and practical. While 20% of the students can never fully grasp the various situations in the classroom, stimulate their own interest and enter the role actively. The correlation between the four questions is 0.6681, which means a medium correlation. It can be concluded that most students accept the topic activities of each unit of the textbook, but fail to make full use of them. In addition, the effect of entering context and the functional meaning of language in context is not well understood by students.

Oral communication cannot be separated from appropriate words. A complete vocabulary teaching also includes the learning of vocabularies in the context of teaching, the awakening of the schema, and the construction of the new schema. In addition, discourse is inseparable from the specific context. Adjusting students' discourse according to different tasks, objects, scenes and ways of communication can help students construct and consolidate the formal schema in their brains and improve their communicative ability in oral English. From the choices of question 17 to question 20, it can be seen that 46.67% of the students can learn new words in context and wake up schema that already exists in their mind, they can build and consolidate formal schema in their brain by role-playing, mocking discussions, debating and making improvisation in different situations. And 16.67% of the students can never adjust their discourse according to different tasks, objects, scenes and ways of communication. The correlation between the four questions is 0.9974, which means a strong correlation. It can be concluded that most students can learn new words in context and activate existing schema in their minds, and can build and consolidate formal schema in their brain by role-playing, mocking discussions, debating and making improvisation in a different situation. But there are still some students who can't guess the meaning of the words based on the context and they cannot adjust their discourse according to different tasks, objects, scenes and ways of communication.

3.3 Summary of the Data Analysis

To sum up, it can be concluded that most teachers have realized that the construction of phonetic, lexical and grammatical schema can help students to build linguistic schema. They can also pay attention to the enrichment of content schema with background knowledge and the creation of context to train students' oral expression ability. However, there are still some shortcomings in the specific teaching practice especially in the classroom activities, such as group activities, dialogue exercises, and question design. The construction of formal schema needs to be improved. And the application of schema theory in oral English teaching has not been systematically grasped. Moreover, students' application of schema theory is relatively simple and mostly unconscious, which is mainly reflected in the weak understanding of word-formation and background knowledge. Although they are interested in teaching material resources, they can seldom use them. The classroom environment cannot be used properly to activate and construct schema, and it is not proficient in the self-adjustment of the situation change.

4. Suggestions for Teaching Strategies

Based on the characteristics of schema and the way of information processing based on schema theory, it has the following enlightenment for oral English teaching in senior high school.

4.1 Enriching Linguistic Schema

Therefore, in order to improve the students' oral expression ability, teachers must enrich students' linguistic schema. Influenced by regional differences and dialects, there are many problems in senior high school students' English expression. First of all, to correct students' substandard pronunciation, students must appropriately master the International Phonetic Alphabet. Second, let students follow the standard pronunciation, do more imitation and practice to make pronunciation more standardized. In response to this situation, teachers should instruct students to form groups to use existing audio-visual materials to imitate and make them perceive the pure pronunciation of English, including pronunciation of words, sentence stress, strong reading, weak reading, and continuous reading, assimilation, and rhythm. It is necessary to spit clearly when imitating, to put the mouth in place, to restrain the learning of phoneme which is easy to transfer from native tongue to English, to make the mouth and brain gradually harmonize, to establish a new movement pattern of oral muscles, and to promote the standard of pronunciation and intonation. In addition, students can record their own dialogues and compare them with the original recording, analyze the rules of English pronunciation and intonation, and improve their own pronunciation. Students can use divergent thinking to brainstorming and find a topic and associate relevant words; teachers guide students to master a large number of common vocabulary and idioms and recite some famous works. Meanwhile, teachers can also recommend some beautiful English songs for students to enjoy and learn.

4.2 Strengthening Content Schema

Language should not be separated from culture. In order to help students master a language, teachers must also let students understand these words, the cultural connotations of sentences, the common sense of culture, religious ideas, customs and habits, values and so on in English countries.

Therefore, in oral English teaching, teachers should guide students to compare and analyze the cultural customs of different nationalities and regions and construct accurate content schema. The following teaching steps can be taken: First of all, teachers should dig out the materials as much as possible in the teaching, and provide students with vocabularies, phrases, and articles related to the topic of this unit; secondly, in the classroom teaching, teachers can use multimedia, slides and so on to transfer some new knowledge to students to help maximize their horizons. For example, introduce the western countries' cultural common sense, the religious idea, the custom, the value and so on through some intuitive movies, songs, short films, pictures, etc. In addition, teachers should guide students to make extensive inquiries about relevant materials and topics by means of the Internet after class, and read extensively, broaden their knowledge, enrich and accumulate their content schema. In addition, various activities such as group discussion and small performance can enrich the existing content schema in the students' brains, construct the new content schema needed for application, and improve the ability of oral expression.

4.3 Constructing Formal Schema

Different genres use different forms of language. The language of the speech should be passionate. Students should master the characteristics of the speech; The language of the debate should be incisive, the usage of language should support one's own point of view, refute the opinion of the other party, etc. It is essential to understand the language forms used in different genres. In oral teaching, the teacher can make the learner master the text structure and the commonly used paragraph logic relation through the input of text structure. Like examples, comparisons, classifications, causality, time, turning points, etc. The understanding of genre and textual schema can help students adopt different ways of expression, genre or logical relationship according to the purpose of speaking.

5. Conclusion

This study explored the current situation of oral English learning in senior high school, and the author attempts to analyze significant strategies of schema theory about oral English teaching, aims to improve the ability of students' oral output by helping them construct the linguistic, formal and content schema. As a practitioner of foreign language teaching in high schools, the teacher should explore more practical ways to strengthen students' oral English ability by applying the relevant principles of schema theory in the process of English teaching. In addition, the author hopes to further this study on the effects of some factors about listening and speaking and explore the interrelationship between one's comprehensive English ability.

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Author Profile

Xuelian Lei, an associate professor from the Nanchang Normal University of China, received a postgraduate degree in English Curriculum and Teaching Theory from the Hangzhou Normal University of China in 2009. Since 2009, the author has been teaching English in the foreign languages department of Nanchang Normal University.