

Research on English Teaching of Ph.D. Graduates Guided by Output-Driven Hypothesis

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Abstract: Many English teachers in Ph.D. education focus much on input of the language, making the students only good at listening and reading. The contemporary society needs all-around talents, so the English teachers can apply the theory of output-driven hypothesis to enhance students' speaking, writing, translating abilities. The traditional input-oriented teaching strategy has to be changed, and teachers should try to make students take part in language outputting actively, with students being the protagonist and the teacher being the director and guide. Meanwhile, teachers should make efforts to establish the output-oriented teaching notion and set up output-oriented curriculum system as soon as possible.

Keywords: Output; Output-driven hypothesis; Ph.D. graduates; Teaching notion

1. Introduction

To acquire a foreign language, or a second language, one has to input the basics of the target language. With the development of science and technology, especially with the advance of the Internet and communicative tools, the foreign language learners has contacted more information than ever before about foreign language and foreign cultures, thus their comprehensive capabilities should have reached a very high level. However, the learners' foreign language proficiency has not been improved much. The reason is that learners have indeed input much more information than ever, but they have not output the information by using the foreign language.

Language input is important in absorbing knowledge, but how to use the knowledge sometimes is more important than input. To use the language is to do output. According to acquire English language, input mainly means to listen and read, output mainly means to speak, write, and translate. Input involves acquiring the vocabulary, grammar, syntax, structure, discourse, rhetoric, etc. of the language, which are all concerned about knowledge; however, output involves applying the above knowledge into practice, which is concerned about skills. Only if the learners have grasped enough language output skills, can they use their knowledge of the language right.

Foreign language acquisition needs the learners to do both the input and output. Input is the premise of learning, output is the final purpose. In between input and output stands absorption. The foreign language teachers should balance the relationship among input, absorption, output[1]. With contemporary learning and teaching facilities improving, the learners have many means to contact and

learn a foreign language, thus, the teachers should be more focused on language output.

2. Theory of Output Hypothesis

The theory of Output Hypothesis was first put forward by Swain in 1985[2]. Based on her investigation on the teaching mode of Immersion Program in Canada, Swain points out that if a foreign language teacher has input much understandable information to his students, but the teaching effect is not satisfactory, he should pay much more attention of the students' output. As we all know, learners will make a lot of grammatical mistakes in second language acquisition. The main reason for those mistakes is that they seldom use the language to express themselves, because in the class session, most teachers are busy with language input. As a result, the students can hardly have a chance to utter a sentence or a phrase by the language. The teachers, thus, have no opportunity to find students' mistakes, let alone to correct the mistakes.

According to Krashen's theory (1981) about second language acquisition[3], the learners cannot acquire the language unless they are input amounts of understandable information. Swain thinks Krashen's theory emphasizes too much on language input, and ignores the function of language output. In Swain's idea, if a learner wants to be proficient in a language, he must use the language frequently. In fact, second language acquisition needs both understandable input and understandable output. Language output helps to change descriptive knowledge into productive knowledge, and helps the learners to enhance language proficiency[4]. Swain summarized the functions played by output in second language acquisition[5]. The

first is noticing function, i.e., in the process of expression, output helps the learners to notice the gap between what they express and what they want to express. The second is hypothesis function, i.e., in the process of expression, output helps the learners examine whether the initial hypothesis is correct; if not, they can modify the hypothesis. The third is metalingual function, i.e., in the process of expression, output helps the learners to use the language to analyze and describe the language itself and helps them to cultivate their reflective ability of the language.

3. Theory of Output-Driven Hypothesis

3.1. Cause of bringing forward output-driven hypothesis

The foreign language teaching (mainly English teaching) in China presently has some problems, especially in colleges.

First of all, the notion of English teaching is outdated. Many college English teachers still cling to the traditional teaching strategy in which the teacher mainly focuses on the language input and the teacher is the main actor of the whole teaching session. Actually, with the development of science, technology, education, information, Internet etc., college freshmen has studied English for almost ten years, and they have grasped a vocabulary of about three thousand words. Therefore, they have been equipped with the basis to do English reading and daily English communication. The college English teachers should teach the students how to use English during their study. If the English teacher still mainly teaches the college students about new words and grammar, one the one hand, they may lose their interest in English study; on the other hand, they may feel at a loss because they may think those difficult words and grammar are of no use. By and by, the effect of English teaching has been declining.

Secondly, the English teaching in many colleges are exam-oriented[6]. We know that before college, the purpose for students to study English is to pass China's College Entrance Examination. After they have entered college, they are no longer pressed by CEE, and English is not their major to most students; therefore, many of them may stop putting so many efforts in English. It is the English teacher's task to elevate the efficiency of English teaching and the English-studying interest of students. Many teachers resort to College English Test. Their teaching objective directs to CET and the English teacher will tell (or threaten) the students that if they didn't study English hard, they could not pass CET and they could not graduate smoothly. However, college students are adults, no longer middle school students; they have their own ideas. So the exam-oriented teaching strategy is of unsatisfactory effect.

Under the circumstances, Wen Qiufang, Professor of Beijing Foreign Language University, puts forward the theory of Output-Driven Hypothesis. The theory includes three hypotheses[7]. The first hypothesis is from the angle of psycholinguistics. This hypothesis thinks that output has more driving power than input, because during output, the students will do brain storming for what they have studied in English, and they can find the gap between what they want to output and what they actually output. This gap drives the students to think and try to fill the gap, thus it compels them to study more about English. The second hypothesis is from the angle of workplace. This hypothesis thinks that output is more concerned with speaking, writing, and translating, while input is more connected with listening and reading. Speaking, writing, and translating are more frequently used in workplace than listening and reading. Therefore output is more useful for students' future jobs than input. The third hypothesis is from the angle of English teaching. This hypothesis thinks that output-driven teaching is more efficient than input-driven teaching, especially for those students who have laid a sound English basis. College students and graduates have studied English for many years, they have the basis for further progress, so the teacher ought to employ output-driven hypothesis in English instruction.

3.2. The difference between Wen's output-driven hypothesis and Swain's output hypothesis

Both Wen's and Swain's output hypotheses are helpful for enhancing the learner's abilities of second language acquisition. Their hypotheses also have some differences[8]. Firstly, their hypotheses direct to different learners. Wen's theory is suitable for medium and high level learners, not for low level or beginning learners, while Swain's theory is suitable for all foreign language learners. Secondly, their hypotheses aim at different learning environments. Wen's is for foreign language teaching, not for learning in English-speaking countries, while Swain doesn't confine her theory to a certain environment. Thirdly, their hypotheses have different contents. Wen's involves speaking, writing, interpreting, translating, while Swain's does not include interpreting and translating.

4. Significance of Output-Driven Hypothesis to English Teaching of Ph.D. Graduates

Output-driven hypothesis is of great aid to China's foreign language teaching, especially to English teaching for Ph.D. graduates, because output-driven hypothesis aims at medium and high level learners[4]. Ph.D. graduates, as high level learners, have grasped a vast vocabulary and read a lot in English. But they are not proficient in spoken English. As Ph.D. graduates often attend international academic seminars, they need to make a report in Eng-

lish. Besides, Ph.D. graduates have to write novels, essays, research findings in English to publish internationally, so they should have a high ability of English writing. And Ph.D. graduates must read English books to obtain professional information and translate them into Chinese, so they should be equipped with translating skills. In a word, in English teaching of Ph.D. graduates, the teacher should use output-driven hypothesis to make them do language output; in the teaching session, the teacher plays the role of guide, director, and organizer.

To apply the theory of output-driven hypothesis in English teaching of Ph.D. graduates, the teacher can efficiently train their skills of speaking, writing, translating, which are what most Ph.D. graduates lack of. During the training, their vision of knowledge, thinking and reasoning ability, logic can also be greatly elevated. By using the theory of output-driven hypothesis, Ph.D. graduates can connect language input with output, making them have the feeling of fulfillment and motivating them to be more interested in English study; thus, the teaching efficiency is much higher than using traditional teaching strategy.

5. Teaching Strategies for Ph.D. Graduates Guided by Output-Driven Hypothesis

In teaching Ph.D. graduates English, the teacher should emphasize language output, form the output contexts from all aspects, and drive the students to use the language. Output is both the teaching aim and teaching means. Output enhances students' productive capability, and at the same time, improves the efficiency of input[9]. For Ph.D. graduates, the teacher should particularly practice their speaking and writing abilities.

5.1. Regard students as the protagonist of teaching

Ph.D. graduates, after years of education, have formed their own system of knowledge and value. Their knowledge, experiences, common senses may be as rich as the teacher's. As in English, they may have a larger vocabulary than their teacher; they may have read more English books than their teacher. What they do lack of are the means to use the language properly. Therefore, Ph.D. graduates and their teacher should set up equal relations. Never should the teacher regard Ph.D. graduates as the object to transform. In fact, under the guidance of output-driven hypothesis, the students should be the protagonist of teaching; the teacher acts as the director, who tells the students how to act (output).

5.2. Regard teacher as the director of teaching

With students as the protagonist of teaching, the teacher plays the role of director. The teacher directs the students to do language output. He mainly instructs the method and skills to help the students to do speaking, writing, translating. Anyway, the English teacher is more profi-

cient in using the language, so he controls the process of class, gives the students professional guidance, evaluates the performance of students, and encourages them to output[6], just like the role of a director for shooting a play. Besides professional knowledge, the teacher should perfect himself in all aspects, as he is teaching Ph.D. graduates who are advanced learners. The teacher and students should establish a studying community to make mutual promotion, and the teacher guides the students to realize language output.

5.3. Establish the output-oriented teaching notion

5.3.1. Set up the idea of open class

The first is to make teaching contents open. The teacher should not be confined by the textbook and the texts in the textbook. The textbook is only an assistant material of teaching, not the only material. He should find related topics for students to discuss in class, using the interesting and hot topics to arouse the students' desire to output. The second is to make teaching means open. Beside the traditional chalk and blackboard, the teacher should turn to modern technology and facilities, such as multi-media, Internet, microblog, microclass, Wechat, self-access learning center, to provide more means for students to output. The third is to make teaching space open. The teaching space is not confined to the classroom; it can extend to other places, as long as language output can be done. Language needs practicing and outputting. The teacher should provide more space and occasions for students to output their language[6]. For example, to practice speaking, the teacher can organize a spoken-English contest; to practice writing, the teacher can assign them to write diaries or short essays now and then; to practice translating, the teacher can select a book for students to translated in group.

5.3.2. Set up the idea of outputting for employment competitiveness

The purpose for students to study English is to use it as a tool for their future work or life, not for ornament. So the teacher should relate language output to their major or future jobs. Thus, they may be more concerned with the language usage. The teacher can set up some scenes of workplace for students to take part in. For example, if they are Ph.D. graduates of law, the teacher can devise the scene of international trial, some acting as judges, some as criminals, some as lawyers, some as jury. By outputting language in related workplace, the students can realize the role that English plays in their future work.

5.4. Establish output-oriented curriculum system

Output-driven hypothesis is a rather new theory; there is not a sound curriculum system for English teacher to follow. So it needs all English teachers who are interested in this theory to cooperate to work out a perfect curri-

curriculum system for graduates or Ph.D. graduates. The curriculum system can be roughly divided into common English curriculum system and academic English curriculum system[10]. Common English curriculum system centers on outputting students' all-around language skills, so it is appropriate for the first semester of Ph.D. graduates. Academic English curriculum system deals with outputting students' language skills related with their future job or their research, so it is appropriate for the second semester of Ph.D. graduates.

6. Conclusion

Swain's theory of output hypothesis helps the foreign language teachers to change their focus from input to output, and students' language skills can be enhanced through outputting practice. Wen Qiufang's output-driven hypothesis is suitable for teaching of medium and high level students, especially Ph.D. graduates. The output-driven hypothesis can greatly elevate the students' speaking, writing, translating abilities. In addition, in applying the theory of output-driven hypothesis, the English teacher should let the students act as the protagonist of teaching, should give the students necessary guidance, and should set up output-oriented teaching notion. Only if the students actively do language output in class will they think English is a useful and beautiful language.

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