



A Study of Efficiently Figuring Out the Teaching Contents in English Class---From the Respective of Nature of Language

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Abstract: What to teach in English class is a long-discussed topic in English teaching field in China. Great achievements are offering the guidance to English teachers and learners. However, efficient teaching is still on the way because of different teaching texts, teaching objects as well as different teachers. Here, investigating the nature of language, we hold a view that no matter what stage of teaching you are at, no matter who you are teaching, no matter what kind of English text you are teaching, as teacher, you should consider sound, form and meaning of useful words, sentences involved in the text and text itself as your teaching contents so that an efficient lesson plan can be designed.

Keywords: nature of language; sound; form; meaning

1. INTRODUCTION

How to teach English is a long-discussed topic in English teaching field in non-native English countries and many experts abroad and at home displayed their achievements on that topic, including teaching concepts, teaching methods, teaching approaches and teaching skills. Of those achievements, English teachers at different stages of education in China have been trying to make good use of those findings in their teaching design. However, because students are different and teaching texts are different, the teaching effects are not achieved as we teachers expected. Therefore how to teach English is still worth studying, especially how to efficiently figure out what you are going to teaching in English class is really a tough work. From those literature review so far and the teachers teaching contest training and teaching experiments of over 10 years, the author found that teaching contents lie in sound, form and meaning based on the nature of language itself. Therefore, in this paper, investigating the nature of language, we hold a view that no matter what stage of teaching you are at, no matter who you are teaching, no matter what kind of English text you are teaching, as teacher, you should consider sound, form and meaning of useful words, sentences involved in the text and text itself as your teaching contents so that an efficient lesson plan can be designed.

2. NATURE OF LANGUAGE

In linguistic study, language is defined as a system of arbitrary vocal symbols for human communication and interaction. Here, system refers to the system of sound, form and meaning of language. Symbols refer to linguistic units which indicate that the smallest unit is word and the largest text via sentence according to grammatical layers (胡壮麟, 2015 ; H.G. Widdowson, 2000). English, as one type of language, also includes sound, form and meaning. Therefore, in English class, we need to teach the sound, form and meaning of useful words, sentences and the texts.

3. TEACHING CONTENTS IN ENGLISH CLASS

According to the above Section 1, in English class, those elements like sound, form and meaning of words, sentences and texts should be made clear to students in each unit of English course and those are also teaching contents in English class.

As we know, in China the full accomplishment of English class is universally cut into 3 periods such as pre-teaching, while-teaching and after-teaching. And each period bears its own teaching contents, for example, in the pre-teaching period, English teacher must get familiar with coming text, in which

useful language points, typical grammar points and the layout of the text should be pointed out. Then in the while-teaching period, English teacher must use the appropriate teaching methods to involve students to illustrate the recognized language points, typical grammar points in the text and the text itself. Finally, in the after-teaching period, students' presentation will be done with their competences of language as well as with the aim at fostering their critical thinking on the text as a whole. As teaching contents, how those words, sentences and texts are taught efficiently in class will be the focus in the following subsections.

3.1. Teaching Words Based on Sound, form and Meaning

From the sound point of view, we teach the word generally indicating, first of all, the vowels and consonants which compose of the words; secondly, how many syllables there are in the word and where the primary stress or secondary stress is if there is. After that, students make sure to master all about the pronunciation of the word. For example, the word “teacher” is going to be learnt from the angle of its sound element. Steps can go in this way: “teacher” is composed of consonants [t, tʃ] and vowels [i:, ə], and the first syllable should be stress like ‘teacher. This analysis can be summed up in Table 1.

Table1. *Sound teaching of word*

Item	Teaching Contents
Word	- vowels and consonants - syllable and stress
Example <i>teacher</i>	- vowels [i:; ə] and consonants [t; tʃ] - two syllables [ti:]; [ti:tʃə] ['ti:tʃə]

From the form point of view, we teach the word generally indicating, first of all, the structure of the word which means how the word is formed, secondly, what’s the grammatical function of the word?In this way, students are sure to know how to understand the spelling and usage of the word. For example, the word“ teacher” is going to be learnt from the angle of its form element. Steps can go in this way: teacher is formed by two parts: teach + er in which teach is the root and -er is the suffix and it is a noun which can be functioned as Subject or Object in a sentence in generally. This analysis can be summed up in Table 2.

Table2. *Form teaching of word*

Item	Teaching Contents
Word	- Structure of the word or the spelling of the word - Grammatical function: Word class or part of speech of the word
Example <i>Teacher</i>	- Structure : Root(teach-) + Suffix(-er) - Grammatical function: noun, role as subject or object in a sentence e.g. <i>1. Our teacher is very interesting.</i> <i>2. I bought a book for our teacher. Or I bought our teacher a book.</i>

From the meaning point of view, we teach the word generally indicating, first of all, the literal meaning of the word which means the lexical meaning or dictionary meaning de-contextually, secondly, what the contextual meaning of the word in the text is. In this way, students are sure to know how to interpret the meaning of word both literally and contextually. For example, the word “teacher” is going to be learnt from the angle of its meaning element. Steps can go in this way: teacher is a professional title for a person in the sentence “I am a teacher, not a student” which refers to the lexical meaning of the word teacher while the word “teacher” is a contextual meaning in the sentence “Teacher is a candle”, referring to a spirit of being a teacher. This analysis can be summed up in Table 3.

Table3. *Meaning teaching of word*

Item	Teaching Contents
Word	- Literal meaning: lexical meaning or dictionary meaning - Contextual meaning: it depends on its usage
Example <i>Teacher</i>	- Literal meaning: a professional title in sentence <i>“I am a teacher, not a student.”</i> - Contextual meaning: a kind of spirit of being a teacher in sentence <i>“Teacher is a candle.”</i>

3.2. Teaching Sentences Based on Sound, Form and Meaning

From the viewpoint of sound, we teach the sentence generally indicating, first of all, the liaison between words in the sentence and then intonation of the sentence. In this way, students are sure to know how to read the sentence correctly. For example, the sentence “I am a teacher” is going to be learnt from the angle of its sound element. Steps can go in this way: words am and a should be linked together in pronunciation, i.e. “I am a teacher” and the sentence should be read in a falling tone in its intonation because this is a declarative sentence. This analysis can be summed up in Table 4.

Table4. *Sound teaching of sentence*

Item	Teaching Contents
sentence	- Liaison between words in the sentence - Intonation of the sentence
Example <i>I am a teacher</i>	- Liaison: words am and a should be linked like I <u>am</u> a teacher. - Intonation: falling tone because it is a statement

From the viewpoint of form, we teach the sentence generally indicating, first of all, the structure of the sentence which means how this sentence is formed by words which compose it and then recognize what type of sentence it is in its formation. In this way, students are sure to know how to recognize what a sentence structure is or how a sentence is made by putting words together correctly. For example, the sentence “I am a teacher” is going to be learnt from the angle of its form element. We may say “I am a teacher” is a simple sentence which is formed by subject (I) + be (am)+ predicative(a teacher). This analysis can be summed up in Table5

Table5. *Form teaching of sentence*

Item	Teaching Contents
sentence	- structure of sentence: 3 types in its formation Simple, Compound and Complex sentence
Example <i>I am a teacher</i>	- Simple sentence: formed by subject (I) + be(am)+ predicative(a teacher)

From the viewpoint of meaning, we teach the sentence generally indicating, first of all, we need to know what the literal meaning of the sentence is, i.e, what lexical function of the sentence plays in the text. And normally a sentence is lexically functioned as affirmative, informative, negative or imperative. Secondly, what the contextual meaning of it is should be discussed. Normally the contextual meaning of the sentence means what the implied meaning the sentence in the text conveys. For example the sentence “I am a teacher” is going to be learnt from the angle of its meaning element. We can first come to how this sentence is uttered by the speaker in the communication, for example, if two speakers are in a conversation about the different professions, they are communicating like “what are you?-I am a teacher.”Here, the sentence I am a teacher displays its lexical function, meaning it is an affirmative sentence about profession, no more other meaning at all. However, if two speakers are in a conversation arguing something about right or wrong saying “what are you?” and then the teacher comes up and say “I am a teacher”. Here, the sentence I am a teacher doesn’t mean a professional title and now it has got its implied meaning which implies I am a teacher who has the power to tell you about the matter wrong or right. This analysis can be summed up in Table 6.

Table6. *Meaning teaching of sentence*

Item	Teaching Contents
sentence	--- literal meaning of sentence=lexical function of sentence: 4 types Affirmative: statement or truth Informative: question or doubt Negative : negation Imperative: order or command --- contextual meaning of sentence =implied meaning=illocutionary speech act
Example -What are you? - <i>I am a teacher</i>	--- literal meaning of <i>I am a teacher</i> : it is an affirmative sentence, meaning a profession - contextual meaning of <i>I am a teacher</i> : it is a kind of reminding, meaning the power of the speaker

3.3. Teaching Text Based on Sound, form and Meaning

Text teaching is the final goal in English class teaching because words and sentences are the basic linguistic units used for text construction. It is known to us that different styles of text should be taught in different ways. Therefore, here, we use the same title of text but with different contents as example to illustrate the teaching of sound, form and meaning of text. That is, suppose that we have a text entitled as “My Teacher”. Now we can imagine the contents involved in the text like: 1) the text is about the discussion on the devoted spirit of my teacher in education cause after his/her death or 2) the text is about my teacher’s special teaching style or 3) the text is about the story of my teacher in his/her teaching career. The following will discuss how to teach the text from the angle of sound, form and meaning.

From the viewpoint of sound, we teach the text mainly focusing on the tone and mood of the author, such as the tone of happiness or sadness; anger or pleasant and the high or low mood. After that, we can read the text in corresponding mood and tone. With different contents, we teachers should use different tones and moods in teaching sound reading of those different texts, which can be generally analyzed in Table 7.

Table7. Sound teaching of text

Item	Teaching Contents
1) the text is about the discussion on the devoted spirit of <i>my teacher</i> in education cause after his/her death	- major tone: sad and pitiful - major mood: low
2) the text is about <i>my teacher</i> ’s special teaching style	- major tone: happy and advocating - major mood: high
3) the text is about the story of <i>my teacher</i> in his/her teaching career	- major tone: calm and normal - major mood: high

From the viewpoint of form, we teach the text generally indicating the layout of the text, which means how the text is structured and how the cohesion is functioned in the text. Based on the above imagined texts, the form teaching of text can be generally analyzed in Table 8.

Table8. Form teaching of text

Item	Teaching Contents
1) the text is about the discussion on the devoted spirit of <i>my teacher</i> in education cause after his/her death	- layout: mainly in the form of narration and argumentation - cohesion: grammatical conjunctions in the style of narration and argumentation
2) the text is about my teacher’s special teaching style	- layout: mainly in the form of description ,narration and exposition - cohesion: grammatical conjunctions in the style of description, narration and exposition
3) the text is about the story of <i>my teacher</i> in his/her teaching career	- layout: mainly in the form of narration, description and argumentation - cohesion: grammatical conjunctions in the style of narration, description, and argumentation

From the viewpoint of meaning, we teach the text generally indicating, first of all, we need to know what the literal meaning of the text is, i.e. what the main idea of the text is. The main idea often can be inferred from the idea of each paragraph in the text. Secondly, the contextual meaning of the text should be discussed. Normally the contextual meaning of the text means what the author wants to imply for the readers. Often the contextual meaning of the text can be inferred from the angle of the cultural, societal and cognitive meaning in the text. In Table 9, detail analysis can be presented.

Table9. Meaning teaching of text

Item	Teaching Contents
1) the text is about the discussion on the devoted spirit of <i>my teacher</i> in education cause after his/her death	- literal meaning: about the discussion on the devoted spirit of <i>my teacher</i> in education cause after his/her death - contextual meaning: author’s attitude and meaning: 1) <i>my teacher</i> ’s spirit as teacher should be learnt in our education field and society. 2) Teacher like <i>my teacher</i> should be taken good care of in our society.

A Study of Efficiently Figuring Out the Teaching Contents in English Class---From the Respective of Nature of Language

2) the text is about my teacher's specially appreciated teaching style	-literal meaning: about <i>my teacher's</i> special teaching style -contextual meaning: author's attitude and meaning: 1) <i>my teacher's</i> teaching style should be appreciated and advocated. 2) It's more important for teacher to concern with teaching style in class teaching.
3) the text is about the story of <i>my teacher</i> in his/her teaching career	- literal meaning: the story of <i>my teacher</i> in his/her career -contextual meaning: author's attitude and meaning: 1) It is difficult for people to choose their career and more difficult for people to make great progress in their career. 2) The qualities for good teacher are instructive, kind and humorous, and helpful.

All in all, it is much easier for teachers to figure out the teaching contents based on the nature of language in the pre-teaching period. Meanwhile, from the above discussion, it is obvious to find out that those teaching contents are exactly corresponding with the four-dimensional core competence of English indicating the ability of language knowledge, cultural character, thinking quality and learning skills. Therefore, this study meets with today's quality-based requirements of English teaching and the results of this study are feasible and flexible.

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