

# Way to Use Western Knowledge in China in English Teaching from the Perspective of Social Culture Theory

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**Abstract**—According to the innovative demand and trend of English teaching in the new era, the application of the existing English teaching model has been difficult to achieve the expected teaching effect. Therefore, this paper introduces the sociocultural theory of psycholinguistics to study its application in English teaching. From the Angle of sociocultural theory, this paper discusses how to use western knowledge to improve the effect of English teaching in Chinese colleges and universities.

**Keywords**—Social and cultural theory; English teaching; use western knowledge in China

## I. INTRODUCTION

WITH the increasing communication among countries, the society has gradually improved its requirements for college students' English ability, which also raises new challenges for Chinese English teaching effect. In the past, the task and goal of English teaching in our country has been to pass on knowledge to students in one direction, with teachers as the main part of imparting knowledge, so that students have a certain basic knowledge and skills [1]. However, this method does not focus on the cultivation of students' English application ability, and it is difficult to achieve the purpose of stimulating and cultivating students' interest in learning English, so as to improve students' autonomous learning ability. Therefore, today's English teaching is difficult to give full play to the maximum effect of language education. Sociocultural theory holds that language is a social and cultural phenomenon, which is the organic combination of language learning and language use [2]. Learners acquire language competence by learning and using language. The theory of social culture provides a new perspective for English teaching, and makes full use of western cultural knowledge to play its promoting role in English teaching in China [3]. Through the application of social and cultural theories, the quality of English teaching can be

improved and the development of English teaching can be promoted [4].

## II. AN ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT SITUATION OF ENGLISH TEACHING

At present, the English teaching mode in China still remains the single teaching mode that English teachers teach English knowledge and students learn according to the knowledge theories taught by teachers. Although multimedia teaching and network teaching are gradually emerging in the classroom assisted by modern science and technology, the situation of passive learning of English students by English teachers is not much improved [5]. The singleness of teaching mode makes students in the position of passive learning for a long time, which leads to the decrease of students' enthusiasm for English learning. The decrease of learning enthusiasm will affect students' English learning ability and internalization ability, and then affect the effect of English teaching.

In classroom teaching, English teachers consider the arrangement of teaching tasks, keep the teaching content consistent and ignore the differences of individual students' English proficiency [6]. Unified teaching content will make students with higher English proficiency feel that the teaching content is simple and their interest in learning English courses decreases gradually. Students with poor English skills showed the opposite. The single mode of English teaching affects both the quality of English teaching and the development of English teaching.

## III. THE INTRODUCTION OF SOCIOCULTURAL THEORY

After years of development, the theory of social culture has gradually become mature. Different from other education theories, social and cultural theories hold that language is a social and cultural phenomenon and organically integrates the two aspects of language learning and language use [7]. Social and cultural theories hold that learners can acquire corresponding language abilities by learning and applying language. Social culture theory provides a new perspective for

repositioning English teaching. The core theory of social culture theory includes several aspects, such as the theory of regulation theory, the theory of proximal development zone, the theory of activity theory and the theory of framework [8].

Regulation theory holds that human beings communicate indirectly with the external environment through physical things or abstract mental tools. Among them, physical things refer to concrete things such as table, mountain and mobile phone, while abstract spiritual tools refer to language art and so on. As an important tool of abstract spirit, language plays an important role in human cognition of the world and regulates human cognition of the world. Combining regulation theory with English teaching, it can be found that regulation theory has three important parts, which are: regulation of physical things, regulation of others and self-regulation [9]. The regulation of physical things refers to the regulation of students influenced by their own environment in the learning process. The regulation of others refers to the regulation of students' behavior with the help of others. Self-regulation refers to the adjustment of students' initiative to take action when facing problems.

The proximal development zone refers to the gap between the actual development level of students when facing problems and the potential development level with the help of teachers and classmates. The actual level of development refers to the development level of psychological function that students have at present, which is reflected in their ability to solve problems independently. Potential level of development refers to students' ability to solve problems under the guidance of teachers or working with classmates.

The proximal development zone theory is accompanied by the scaffolding theory, which refers to the behavior of students who solve problems with the help of others without proficiency in English. It can be a teacher or a student, or it can be a physical object. Scaffolding theory reflects the important supporting role of teachers in the process of students' difficulty in completing learning tasks. In the process of English teaching, the function of scaffolding is reflected as follows: arousing learning interest; simplify tasks; maintain English teaching and learning objectives; identify gaps between the current environment and solutions; reduce students' frustration; present solutions to students.

Human consciousness is embodied through behavior, and realistic activities can be used as a means to observe students' consciousness. Human behavior consists of three levels: behavior, action and implementation. Behaviors come from physiological and social needs, such as blinking and sneezing; action is behavior with a purpose; implementation refers to the practice adopted after referring to the current environment [10].

#### IV. SOCIAL AND CULTURAL THEORIES GUIDE ENGLISH TEACHING

Social cultural theory concerns the relationship between the individual and the environment. Language learning under the guidance of social and cultural theories is a learning method that requires the coordination and cooperation of students'

environment and framework [11]. Through the analysis of social and cultural theories, it can be found that social and cultural theories are quite different from other teaching methods: on the one hand, social and cultural theories focus on the process of language learning and use rather than the language itself. On the other hand, social and cultural theory emphasizes the influence of external factors on language learning. It is an important means to improve the quality of English teaching and promote the development of English teaching. As the core theories of social culture theory, regulation theory scaffolding theory, the theory of zone of proximal development, and activity theory also play an important guiding role in English teaching.

##### A. *The Application of Regulation Theory in English Teaching*

The regulating function of social and cultural theories can be divided into three parts: regulation of physical things, regulation of others and self-regulating. Therefore, the application of social and cultural theories in western learning can also start from these three aspects.

First of all, from the perspective of adjustment of social culture theory, the adjustment of physical things in English teaching process is reflected in students' love for English culture. The love of marvel films by the majority of students can just illustrate this point. The regulation of others mainly refers to the help of English teachers in the process of English teaching, which is reflected in the words teaching and other aspects. Self-regulation means that students can learn and use English independently after receiving basic English teaching. In the context of the current era, English teaching should make extensive use of the convenience brought by modern science and technology, give full play to the service function of modern science and technology in the process of English teaching, and enrich the ways for students to learn English so as to improve their independent learning ability. In the terms of spiritual tools, the importance of themes and texts has gradually increased [12]. In the process of English teaching, English teachers should grasp the language information contained in the text and make clear its integration with English teaching. For selected texts, English teachers should strictly control the difficulty of the content. Abstruse texts cannot effectively regulate students' interest in learning English, but affect their enthusiasm for learning English. In addition, in addition to teaching textbooks and selected texts, English teachers should also encourage students to actively engage in online learning and reading extracurricular books to increase their English learning.

Secondly, English learning from the perspective of social culture theory is a social activity, so it is particularly important to exert the moderating effect of others in the process of English teaching. On the one hand, as an important guide in the process of learning English, English teachers play the most basic regulating role in the process of students' learning and using English. The interactive mode between teachers and students in English class and the moderating effect of English teachers on students' English learning process will directly affect the

efficiency of students' English learning and mastering. Therefore, under the guidance of the theory of other-adjustment, an interactive teaching method is formed in the process of English teaching, which is conducive to the improvement of students' learning ability. On the other hand, the cooperation between students is also an indispensable means of adjusting others in the process of English teaching. Being good at using others to regulate means to promote students to learn English, will promote the improvement of English teaching quality.

Self-regulation in social culture theory includes two levels: self-talk and inner language. Self-talk enables students to orally express what they have learned by means of self-talk. Inner language refers to the language that occurs in students' brains. These two words can help students internalize and think about the English knowledge they have learned in the process of learning English, and effectively improve their ability to master and use English. Self-regulation plays an important role in the process of learning English.

In the process of English teaching, English teachers should create a relaxed and lively classroom atmosphere, avoid students' tension in English class, and encourage students to actively engage in self-talk and internal language. Under the influence of traditional educational concepts, students can't help but feel nervous in class. Especially for students with poor English scores, English class is the most easily nervous course. A relaxed and lively classroom environment can relieve students' tension, improve their motivation to learn English, and promote students' self-talk and inner language. In the process of English teaching, English teachers should first learn to create a classroom environment, and then encourage students to try their own dialogue and inner language to improve their language ability. Inner language is an important part to help students master English and use English, so we should pay more attention to the practice of inner language in the process of promoting students' self-talk. Compared with self-talk, inner language is more conducive to students' learning of grammar and text. In the process of English teaching, teachers should prepare enough time for students to carry out inner language activities, guide students to pay attention to their own English learning status and gradually internalize English.

#### *B. Students near the Construction of the Development Zone*

There are two very important concepts in the zone of proximal development, namely the actual level of development and the potential level of development. The actual development level is the current level of students, which refers to the level of problem solving that students can achieve when they are independently active. The potential development level refers to the possible development level of students, that is, the potential obtained through teaching. In the process of learning English, students' ability to master and proficiently use English is what they have been able to achieve in practical application, then this ability can be judged as the actual development level of students. The common external manifestation is the English test result. However, the English learning ability achieved under the guidance of teachers is their potential development level, which

also explains why some students are unable to get started in the process of English learning. In the process of English teaching, students are the subject and English teachers are the object. Students and English teachers form a community. Only when the subject, object and community work together can we achieve good teaching quality in the process of English teaching.

From the perspective of social and cultural theory, English teachers are an important scaffold to promote students to transfer from actual development level to potential development level in English teaching. English teachers should pay attention to the following points when playing the role of scaffolds:

First, the role of scaffolds should be gradual. From the macro point of view, the scaffold help gradually changes to the specific behavioral help, and the students stop needing help after they make a correct response to the help provided by the English teacher. The reason why scaffolds are provided for students step by step is that the actual and potential development levels of students are not constant, and the scaffolds need to be adjusted in time to adapt to the changes of students.

Secondly, in the process of English teaching, the help of English teachers should be targeted rather than blindly provided without considering the actual situation of students. In the process of providing help to different students, we should fully consider the differences between students and provide different help. Students who are good at learning should be provided with advanced thinking help to make them approach the potential level of development as soon as possible. For students with poor learning, practical help should be provided to improve their actual development level.

Finally, English teachers should pay attention to students' initiative in English teaching process. The help provided by English teachers can only be carried out in the form of dialogue between teachers and students. English learning and other activities need to be completed through the joint efforts of teachers and students. The form of dialogue is not only conducive to communication between teachers and students, but also allows students to unknowingly be guided by teachers to complete learning tasks during the dialogue so as to improve students' inner sense of achievement.

In the process of English teaching, English teachers should adhere to the principle of leading not lagging, supporting not hosting, evacuating not delaying. From the perspective of social and cultural theory, English teachers can help students when they are unable to complete learning tasks independently by putting up brackets. English teachers can also encourage students to support each other in the form of peer support. The mutual assistance between teachers and students is conducive to improving the quality of English teaching and promoting the development of English teaching.

#### *C. The Status of Students in English Teaching*

Classroom activities are composed of subject, object and community. Students are the subject of English teaching, the main analysis object of activity theory, and the receiver of English teaching process. English teachers help students learn.

Community refers to the participants (classmates and teachers) in the learning process excluding learners. Community is an important participant in the whole learning process and plays an important guiding role. Under the guidance of the activity theory of sociocultural theory, students, as the main body of English teaching, can acquire certain language and cultural knowledge by applying the English language they have learned to specific behavior and practice, thus eliminating the boundary between language use and language learning. In this process, teachers can identify the dynamic differences between different students in the learning process and different interactive activities through students' use of English language. Teachers should not only observe the whole process of classroom activities and analyze the classroom dynamics, but also understand the motivation behind the activities, rather than simply observing students' behaviors. By the above observation, teachers can more clearly understand the actual situation of the students in English learning to master, to be able to work out teaching plans, assigned to the student in accordance with its own ability and level of the corresponding learning task, establish the subject status of students in English teaching, and effectively improve the students' English teaching effect.

#### V. DISCUSSION

According to the above contents, this paper analyzes the practical effects of applying Western knowledge to English education in China based on socio-cultural theory.

After the analysis of the nowadays English teaching status quo of China, the result is that the current English teaching mode is relatively single, students as the main body of English teaching, more is in the passive accept the teacher imparting knowledge, and unified the teaching content, also makes the teachers ignore the students' individual differences, students of high and low for the acceptance of the learning content, It has seriously affected the teaching effect of English teaching. In order to break the current deadlock in English teaching, this paper introduces socio-cultural theories in the field of psycholinguistics, focusing on the core theories, such as adjustment theory, zone of proximal development theory, activity theory and frame theory. Then, the socio-cultural theory is applied to guide the research direction of English teaching in China.

This paper focuses on the application of the regulation theory in the social culture theory to English teaching in China. The regulation function is divided into three parts: the regulation of material things, the regulation of others and the self-regulation. In the process of research, this paper also divides its application in English teaching in China into three aspects to discuss: students' love for some aspects of English culture, English teachers' guiding role in English learning, and autonomy in learning and using English language. These three aspects should be fully integrated into English teaching to provide students with a better language environment for learning English. Paying attention to the construction of the nearest development area of students, English teachers in English teaching can play an

important role in promoting the transformation of students from the actual level of development to the potential level of development. English teachers should provide support for students' English learning step by step and help students to complete their English learning in a targeted way. In this process, they should pay attention to the observation of students' learning initiative and provide corresponding help accordingly. It is also necessary to clarify the dominant position of students in English teaching, give full play to the subjective initiative of students in the whole teaching process, abandon the past one-way transmission of knowledge, and then improve the effect of English teaching.

#### VI. CONCLUSION

In order to adapt to the innovative demand and trend of English teaching in the new era, the socio-cultural theory in the field of psycholinguistics is introduced to provide a new perspective for English teaching and analyze the application effect of Western culture in English teaching in China. In the process of using the theory of social culture to guide English teaching, English teachers need to organically integrate the theory of social culture into a whole, and systematically integrate the theory of social culture into English teaching. Discusses the regulating theory in the social and cultural theory to English teaching in China, the application of its application in English teaching in China can be divided into three aspects to discuss: students love for English culture in some ways, in the process of English learning English teachers play a guiding role, autonomous learning and using English language. Paying attention to the construction of the nearest development area of students, English teachers in English teaching can play an important role in promoting the transformation of students from the actual level of development to the potential level of development. It is also necessary to clarify the dominant position of students in English teaching and give full play to students' subjective initiative in the whole teaching process, so as to achieve the improvement of English teaching effect. In this study, the application of social culture theory in English teaching has realized the application of Western learning, which can not only give full play to the value of social culture theory, but also promote students' English learning, so as to achieve the purpose of improving the quality of English teaching.

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