The Application of Task-based Language Teaching in Senior High School English Reading: A Case Study of *An Encounter with Nature*

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Abstract
The application of Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) in senior high school English reading teaching is becoming more and more widespread. Teachers should pay attention to its application principles and strategies when using this teaching method. Taking *An Encounter with Nature* as an example, a text from FLTSRP Book 1, unit 5, this study divided the reading class into three phases: Pre-reading task phase, While-reading task phase and Post-reading task phase with tasks set in each phase. TBLT can decompose the difficulty of senior high school students’ English reading learning, help students experience the fun of collaboration in the way of group cooperation, activate the classroom atmosphere, and make the classroom connected closely. Through the case study of a reading class, this paper mainly discusses how to effectively apply Task-based teaching method in reading class to improve students’ reading ability and achieve efficient classroom.

Keywords
Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT), Senior high school English, Reading Teaching

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background
Reading is one of the four basic skills in English learning, which is the foundation for students to acquire knowledge and develop skills. Besides, reading comprehension occupies a large proportion in the examination, which requires senior high school students to master certain reading skills. In senior high school English reading teaching, the traditional model of teachers speaking and students listening does not meet the requirements of the new curriculum standards, and the learning effect is not obvious. In this case, the advantages of TBLT in reading teaching gradually emerge. In order to improve students’ reading ability and improve the teaching efficiency of reading class, it is necessary for English teachers of senior high school to understand the connotation and application principles and application strategies of
Therefore, this paper attempts to explore the effective application of TBLT in senior high school reading teaching through a case study of a reading class.

1.2. Research Purpose and Significance

Task-based teaching method can fully demonstrate students’ personalized development, improve students’ humanistic quality, cultivate students’ innovative ability, enhance students’ comprehensive ability to use language, and accelerate the process of quality education in senior high school English. The task-based reading activity classroom teaching model is a flexible and strong and evolves gradually on the basis of observing students participating in various learning activities in class. It will have a positive impact on the cultivation of students’ comprehensive language ability and English cultural literacy, provide theoretical support for teachers to form new teaching ideas and unique teaching styles, and make English reading teaching more prominent in students’ subjectivity and the interaction of language learning.

1.3. The Structure of the Paper

This paper includes mainly 5 parts. The first part is introduction, which explains the research background, research purpose and significance, also the structure of the paper. The second part is literature review, which elaborates the relevant definition and theoretical basis of Task-based Language Teaching, the limitations of current English reading teaching in senior high school. The third part is research design, which describes the process of exploring the effective application of TBLT in senior high school English reading. The fourth part is research results and discussion. The final part is the conclusion of the paper, including the major findings, implications and the limitations of the study and suggestion for future research.

2. Literature review

2.1. Definition of Key concepts

2.1.1 Task-based Language Teaching

Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) is a relatively advanced foreign Language Teaching method, gradually developed in the 1980s, which organizes teaching activities through tasks (Feng Yufang & Tang Xiaoyan, 2004). Under the guidance of teachers, students accomplish purposeful, open and communicative tasks to achieve learning objectives and reflect learning effects. The learning tasks set by teachers are gradual from easy to difficult, which is in line with the cognitive level of senior high school students and conducive to guiding students to better achieve the expected goals. TBLT emphasizes “Learning as the center”, “students as the main body” and mastering target language through the way of “Learning by doing”.

The traditional teaching mode of reading is no longer suitable for today’s classroom. The rise of task-based teaching method requires senior middle school teachers to master and be able to skillfully use this teaching method. In addition, English teaching in junior high school is quite different from that in primary school. Textbooks in junior high school add a lot of text reading. In order to help students better adapt to senior high school English classes and improve their reading ability, it is particularly important for teachers to correctly use TBLT according to their learning situation and teaching materials.

2.1.2. Application Principles of Task-based Language Teaching

(1) Authenticity

The principle of authenticity is that the materials and situations used in designing tasks should come from life and be close to reality. Because students learn a language not to take the test, but to better use the language in life, which reflects the communicative significance of the language. Language materials divorced from real life are not communicative and practical, which requires teachers to reflect the authenticity and life of the task when designing teaching tasks.

(2) Function

The application of functional principle is based on the principle of authenticity, so that students can experience the function of language form and function in daily situations, and master how to use language appropriately. To learn a language is not only to learn the knowledge of the language, but also to learn how to apply the knowledge correctly.

(3) Moderate Difficulty

The task assigned by the teacher should be moderate in difficulty. If the task is too difficult, the students cannot complete the task smoothly, which will not only affect the classroom efficiency, but also hit the students’ self-confidence in the long run. If the task is too simple, then the task loses its pedagogical meaning, and the teacher is wasting his or her time by setting up such tasks.
(4) Practicality
The setting of tasks is to serve the classroom. Teachers should design practical teaching tasks, not for the purpose of designing tasks. The task should exist for the students to carry on the language communication, so it can help the classroom achieve the teaching goal to a greater extent.

(5) Relevance
The tasks should be related to each other, and the tasks should be set to make the teaching process smooth and hierarchical. The teaching task should be from easy to difficult step by step, in line with the students’ cognitive level, and can not rush to success. The use of one or two tasks in the whole teaching activities can not be called task-based teaching, a series of interrelated and hierarchical task is the correct interpretation of Task-based teaching.

(6) Operability
Tasks are completed by students in the classroom, which should be simple in procedures and high operability. Too complex activities do not have practical significance and are not suitable for classroom environment.

(7) Appropriate teacher participation
The teacher should not stand by and do nothing after the assignment of tasks to the students, but should walk around the classroom, always pay attention to each group of students to complete the task, when necessary, can give students hints, discuss with students appropriately.

2.1.3. The three stages of TBLT
Jane Willis proposed three stages of task-based teaching, namely, pre-task phase, task-cycle phase and post-task phase (Jane Willis, 1996).

The pre-task stage is an introduction step. The teacher determines the content, objective, operation method of task and the arrangement of student. Teacher guide students by playing videos, telling stories, showing pictures and other forms for students, which will help students to complete the preparation work. In addition, teachers should explain to students the linguistic knowledge needed to complete the task, so as to clear obstacles for students to complete the task.

Task implementation stage is the central part of task-based teaching, which is mainly divided into three parts: Assignment and Plan and Report. Among them, performing tasks means that students complete tasks through activities such as role-playing debates and news interviews. The arrangement plan means that the group members report their own views in the group, and the group leader summarizes the conclusions, findings or decisions of the task, and he or she is ready to report to the whole class; Report results means that the team leaders report the results of task in the class and form the final report.

The post-task stage includes three steps: evaluation, analysis and practice. Among them, the evaluation is a comprehensive assessment of the completion of task by means of students’ self-evaluation, mutual evaluation and teacher’s evaluation, so as to verify whether the task goal is completed, and make the members of each group have a rational understanding of their task completion, so as to clarify the direction of future efforts. Analysis refers to the teacher’s explanation of the students’ mistakes in the process of performing a task, and teacher will give a correct demonstration. Practice means that teachers strengthen corresponding exercises of the language difficulties encountered by students, so as to consolidate knowledge.

2.2. The theoretical basis of the research

2.2.1. Theory of Cultural and Historical Development
The task-based approach is based on the Soviet psycho-linguist Vygosky’ theory of language and learning. He emphasizes the social nature of learning and the important role that teachers and peers play in facilitating individual learning. They believed that the acquisition of cultural knowledge is first and foremost the result of people’s interaction, and then it becomes your own knowledge. Higher level thinking arises from the actual interaction between people and the development of student knowledge goes through two processes: first at the social level, then at the individual level; first there is the interaction between people, and then there is the role of individuals.

2.2.2. Input and Interaction Hypothesis
Both Krashen (1985) and Ellis (2003) proposed the input and interaction hypothesis Theory. It is considered that comprehensible language input is a necessary condition for second language acquisition. The mastery of language is mostly the result of using language in communicative activities rather than simply training language skills and learning the result of language knowledge. The ultimate goal of language learners is to use understandable language input materials for output, use language knowledge learned in class and books to express and communicate so as to promote the improvement of the ability to communicate in the target language. According to the above theory, language acquisition can only be acquired through conversational interaction, and language acquisition is a variable interaction, which can
make input comprehensible, while comprehensible input is conducive to language acquisition, and variable interaction is conducive to language acquisition.

2.3. The limitations of current reading teaching in high school

The emphasis of English teaching in Chinese senior high school mainly focuses on reading teaching. This feature is based on the fact that during this period, students’ ability of listening, speaking, reading and writing to learn English is strengthened compared with that in middle school, which is more suitable for reading and practicing a large number of sentences in paragraphs. Then it will help students gradually form the overall understanding of English, which is convenient for the future to link the learned knowledge together to form an organic whole (Tian Liu, 2017).

Although Chinese senior high school English teachers have been emphasizing the importance of reading in the whole English teaching, this phenomenon of high input and low output is still prevalent. The main reasons include: first, we pay too much attention to the language content and neglect the cultivation of reading skills. High school English textbooks include various types of articles. However, learning different types of articles requires students to master different skills and strategies, and these articles have obvious deficiencies in the cultivation of their skills and strategies. Secondly, influenced by traditional teaching concepts, in the whole teaching process of English reading, all teaching activities are carried out with the teacher as the center, and the knowledge is simply presented with information, and the students are neglected to be guided to deal with the knowledge and transform the application of new knowledge. Third, the resources of foreign language teachers are still deficient in China, some teachers cannot form a system of scientific and effective teaching mode. In the whole process of reading teaching, students pay too much attention to the details and ignore the overall understanding of reading materials, which increases the burden of students and eliminates their enthusiasm for English learning.

In order to solve these problems fundamentally, senior high school reading teaching must keep up with the new teaching requirements and constantly explore effective teaching methods.

3. Research design

3.1. Research Question

This paper mainly explores and discusses how to effectively use Task-based teaching method in reading class so as to improve students’ reading ability and achieve efficient teaching.

3.2. Research Method

Taking *An Encounter with Nature* as an example, a text from FLTSRP Book 1, unit 5 Into The Wild, this study divided the reading class into three phases: pre-reading task phase, while-reading task phase and post-reading task phase with task. Through the case study of a reading class, this paper mainly discusses how to effectively use Task-based teaching method in reading class to improve students’ reading ability and achieve efficient classroom.

3.3. The application strategy of TBLT in reading

This paper analyzes the application of task-based teaching method in senior high school English reading based on the text, *An Encounter With Nature*.

3.3.1. General description of this reading class

Teaching Objectives: students are able to understand the theme of the story and master the structure of a story. By finishing designed tasks, students are able to develop ability of grasping, inferring, analyzing, and evaluating the information.

Teaching key and difficult points: students can grasp the main idea of the text, and master the genre of the text.

Teaching and Learning Method: Task-based Language Teaching, cooperative learning, theme-based Reading Teaching and so on.

3.3.2. Teaching Procedure

(1) Pre-reading task phase

The pre-reading task phase is equivalent to the pre-class introduction phase. Teachers are supposed to use video, pictures, songs and other forms to help students create a relaxed classroom atmosphere and mobilize the enthusiasm of students to participate in the class. In this class, some tasks are designed as follows:

Task1: Play a short video and raise questions.

In this lesson, the teacher plays a short video about the Yellowstone National Park. Before the start of the video, the
teacher can ask students several questions:

- *What do you see in the video?*
- *Do you know where it is?*

Task 2: Predict the content of the text.

Besides, teacher will guide students to predict what happened in the story by showing them the title of the text and some pictures about the text.

The purpose of the above teaching activities is to help students pay attention to something about the nature, so as to trigger students’ interest about the nature on the one hand, introduce the Yellow National Park on the other hand. Moreover, students will complete the brainstorming successfully, predict the main content and frame structure of the text successfully according to the text title *An Encounter with Nature* and some pictures about of the story, which lays a good foundation for learning the text.

(2) While-reading task phase

This phase aims to help students focus on main points and effectively transform information to sort out and simplify the main content of the text for students to understand, memorize and output orally. The While-reading task phase mainly includes three steps, namely, the assignment of task, the arrangement of plan and the report of results. This stage is the focus of classroom activities and takes up 3/4 of the classroom time (Song Binxia, 2019). In this class, the tasks are designed as follows.

Task 1: Finish the story line

Students need to work in groups to finish the uncompleted story line presented by teacher. The story line of the text involves the change of the author’s feeling and action, so students will figure out the author’s different feeling and movement during different stage of the story.

Stage 1: The assignment of task. After students grasp the main idea of the story and the main idea of each paragraph of the story by skimming. Then teacher tells students that they should work together to finish the story line presented on blackboard by scanning the text to get specific information in each paragraph.

Stage 2: The arrangement of task. Students work in group of four. At the very beginning, they should try their best to finish the task by themselves and then each one reports his or her answer to the group leader, who sorts it out and finishes the task together with the group members. Each group elects representatives to report the task results in the class.

Stage 3: The report of the task. The teacher invites representatives from each group to show their story line and give reasons for it.

Through the task of finishing the storyline, students will have a clear understanding of the development of the story. It will improve their logic thinking ability, analyzing ability and inference ability. In the process of cooperative discussion, students exercised their own cooperative thinking and communicative ability, which reflected the principle of subjectivity and cooperation of task.

Task 2: Retell the story based on the storyline.

Stage 1: The assignment of task. This task is the continue of the above one, students are asked to work in group of four, each student should retell one part of the story, then finish the whole story involving the change of the author’s feeling and movement.

Stage 2: The arrangement of task.

Each member of the group choose one part of the storyline to retell, meanwhile, the group leader should guide members to help each other in the process of retelling. Then, some group are invited to report their retelling.

Stage 3: The report of the task.

The group invited to report is random, so they will be care about their own group’s report. Retelling is aimed to cultivate students’ expression ability, at the same time, they will have a better understanding of the story, which puts a road for the following deeper thinking about the text. Moreover, it can enhance students’ self-confidence, cultivate students’ sense of cooperation and maximize the learning effect in limited time.

(3) Post-reading task phase

This phase aims to help students respond to the text by integrating the reading material and existing knowledge structure to break through the inherent thinking mode, build new concepts and put forward new ideas. In this class, the tasks are designed as follows.

Task 1: Making a policy

Teacher asks students to think the author’s purpose of writing, which is calling for showing the respect to the animal. Then, students will be played the role of leaders of relevant department to make a policy for protecting animals. This task is used to evaluate students if they have a deep understanding of the theme of text, meanwhile, it is able to evaluate students’ expression ability based on teacher’s observation.
Task 2: Writing based on the storyline
Teacher introduces a new material to master the structure of the narrative. For example: the elephants in Yunnan walked out of their habitat and wondered into the human world. Students are required to imagine that they have an encounter with elephants and continue the story based on the newly learned storyline. This task is to evaluate if students have already mastered the structure of a story, meanwhile, writing is to help them practice using the newly learned structure of a story.

During the completion of these tasks, teacher are always paying attention to and analyzing students’ mistakes or errors. The teacher summarizes the mistakes made by students in the process of task completion, excavates the knowledge behind these mistakes, analyzes relevant knowledge, and helps students internalize knowledge through questioning and interaction. In a word, evaluation, analyzing and practicing should be reflected in the post-reading task.

4. Results and discussion
Practice has proved that TBLT can be flexibly applied to all aspects of English reading teaching. Dick All Wright, a famous British linguist, proposed in 1977 that language learning would occur naturally if language teachers could organize some activities to attract students to focus on the meaning of language and use the foreign language they have learned to solve problems through communication. As we all know, in the traditional teacher-centered classroom teaching model, students are always in a relatively passive situation and become the passive receivers of language knowledge. It is difficult to cultivate language communication ability because of the lack of practical space. At the same time, students have no pleasant experience in the learning process and only feel pressure and burden. Task-based teaching method is generally considered as a practical teaching method to overcome this phenomenon.

Through the application of Task-based Language Teaching Method in English reading, students are able to take the task to think, then engage in meaningful communication and reading and writing. Tasks are close to the reality of students’ life, so students have strong interest and high enthusiasm. Moreover, in the use of language, students notice the transfer and processing of information, and learn to use language in the process of completing tasks.

5. Conclusion
5.1. Major findings
In TBLT, many tasks are completed through the cooperation of pair work and group work, which transforms the original competition between individuals into the competition between groups. This helps to cultivate the spirit of cooperation and competition among students, helps to teach students in accordance with their aptitude. At the same time, it can make up for a teacher who is difficult to face the difference of many students, so as to truly achieve the goal of making every student get development. Therefore, the process of completing the task is the process of cooperative interaction and innovation. In this process, we should change the role of teachers, teachers should become the collaborators and participants of students’ learning, so as to form a new teacher-student relationship. A harmonious relationship formed between teachers and students is able to create an atmosphere conducive to English learning.

5.2. Implications
In the process of the implementation of task-based teaching method, we should pay attention to the following several points. First, the task-based teaching method should take communication as the drive and the setting of task should be close to the learner’s knowledge level. The situation designed should be realistic and true, it helps to master the language structure, to achieve the re-establishment of knowledge structure, and is conducive to the successful completion of the task. Besides, task-based teaching method should pay attention to the correct input, internalization and output of information, and make up for the information gap properly. Moreover, task-based teaching should pay attention to the preparation before the task, the guidance during the task and the summary after the task, especially to summarize the mistakes in the process of completing task and correct them in time so that the task can be successfully completed in the teaching.

5.3. Limitations of the study and suggestion for future research
This selected text is a narrative, telling a story of thrilling shooting experience of a nature photographer in Yellowstone National Park. Therefore, this is a special case, which only involves the similar text type, so it has limited reference value. Moreover, the designed tasks can be more attractive and various, it will be improved in the further research.

In a word, the task-based teaching method really reflects the concept of student-centered teaching (Lu Yanhua, 2014). The implementation of Task-based teaching method in senior high school English reading can effectively improve the
students’ ability to use English in real life.

References