

Methods of Promoting Interaction in College English Classes

Fuhua Liu

School of Foreign Languages, Dalian Jiaotong University, Dalian, Liaoning 116028, China

Abstract

The present paper highlights the importance of interaction and the lack of it in college English classes. Then three methods to promote interaction in class are offered so that the goal of sustaining students' attention and interests can be achieved.

Keywords

methods, interaction, college English classes.

1. Introduction

It is not uncommon for students to get distracted and bored in college English classes. Occasionally, we can see students talk with their peers, play with their phones or even sleep in class. Of course, there are the external factors accounting for these phenomena. For instance, to reduce costs, a large number of universities in China have relatively larger classes than those in the U. S. and other developed countries. Large-sized classes usually have over 50 students, so large that it is virtually impossible for teachers to communicate effectively with each individual student in class and check all the homework assignments after class. But the reality is that even in smaller classes, students can easily get distracted and absent-minded. Therefore, how to sustain students' attention and interest through the whole class has become a hot issue among college teachers. As far as I am concerned, the key lies in interaction.

2. The Importance of Interaction in College English Classes

Why is interaction so important in a language class? Interaction in an English class is of vital importance for its innate characteristics. First, unlike science classes like math which needs the students' flow of thought to keep track of what the teacher is saying or chemistry which requires students to be alert along the way while doing experiments, language classes have no stimulus to sustain students' attention for its seemingly boring teaching contents, which proves to be especially true if teachers choose to teach vocabulary, grammar, listening, writing etc. Furthermore, being part of culture, language is not all about the learning of language structure and language skills, it is something more about communicating with real human beings, so it is of vital significance to put language learning in the social context. Interaction in class is the key to meeting the above two requirements.

What should an English teacher do to stimulate students to actively interact in class so that they can benefit both linguistically and socially? The key is to reform teachers' teaching methods. There are abundant teaching resources available, both in the libraries and online, so English teachers never lack "what to teach". What they lack is "how to teach". That is, "how to teach" in order to arouse and sustain students' attention in class. So teaching methods count.

3. Methods of Enhancing Interaction in College English Classes

3.1. Method 1: Combine Traditional and Modern Teaching

A large number of English teachers still adopt the traditional way of teaching. For them, a typical English class should be teacher-centered, and a teacher's major responsibility to instill into

students knowledge. For example, teacher D employs the question-asking strategy in class. She keeps on asking students questions in class to sustain students' attention. This teaching method does work in some classes where super achievers predominate. Students in such classes have no difficulty responding to teachers' questions, even tough ones. The classes can go on smoothly with the students' active response and excellent performance. However, in an average class, students have difficulty answering tough questions, and the class just cannot go on. Some absent-minded students even do not know where they are when asked to answer a certain question. There is no denying that the traditional teaching methods have their own advantages, but there is also the defect in it for its lack of active interaction. In the modern society, teaching methods should also advance with the times. To promote interaction, a combination of the traditional and modern teaching methods should be adopted. For instance, teachers may use PowerPoint to aid their teaching, or occasionally show students a video clip to warm up the class.

3.2. Method 2: Employ Content-based Instruction

We should first admit that some teaching contents facilitate interaction, while others don't. English teachers should well understand what the teaching focus should be in class so that students can better interact. College English textbooks for students can be roughly divided into two parts, text and exercises after the text. To our disappointment, too many teachers, especially senior ones, attach too much importance to the exercises that follow the text, elaborating on exercises such as word or phrase blank-filling, reading in depth, writing skills, translation etc. Students get easily bored by doing these exercises. These are obviously not the suitable teaching contents that can sustain students' attention and interests and keep them interactive in class because they are not content-based. Therefore, in class the teaching focus should be the text itself. Teachers may give students some English news or background information about the text at the beginning of the class to warm up. Then a detailed analysis of the text is necessary so that the students can keep track of the teachers' flow of thought. Teachers may ask students to write essays after class to enhance their understanding of the text. By focusing on the text, students tend to better interact with their teachers, classmates, books, themselves, and most importantly, meaning. Actually, the above is the content-based instruction or CBI teaching method. By ignoring the study of language structure and language skills, these students will devote all their energy to interaction in class. That is, they will listen to and talk about a certain topic in English in class, and write short essays in English after class. In a word, the CBI teaching method is really a good means of promoting interaction both in and after class.

3.3. Conduct Various Activities in and after Class

Interaction exists in the form of various learning activities, and it is a very good way of creating an active learning atmosphere. Actually, a wide range of activities can be planned and organized both in and after class. Take teacher M for example, she divides her class of about 50 students into 10 groups, enabling students to interact with one another with their groups. Teacher M distributes learning materials to the 10 groups. Students within each group have to prepare and discuss before they give the presentation based on the material in class. These activities have really stimulated interaction among students. Through cooperation and coordination both in and after class, students have cultivated their abilities in an all-round manner.

4. Summary

In summary, due attention should be paid to interaction in college English classes so that students' attention and interests can be sustained. Three methods can be adopted to enhance interaction from the perspective of teachers. First, a combination of the traditional and modern teaching methods should be adopted. Second, content-based instruction teaching methods can

be employed. That is, the teaching focus should be the text itself rather than exercises following the text. Third, various learning activities should be conducted both in and after class. Only by employing the above three methods can interaction be promoted in class, and only by promoting interaction can students' attention and interests be sustained.

References

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