

The attached seminar paper, by Chen Chang (CiCi) , entitled A STUDY OF DEVELOPING THE ORAL ENGLISH COMPETENCE OF CHINESE NON-ENGLISH MAJORS IN COLLEGE BY IMPLEMENTING COMMUNICATIVE ACTIVITIES, when completed, is to be submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the University of Wisconsin-Platteville in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the (type either Master of Science OR Master of Science in Education) degree, for which 3 credits shall be allowed is hereby:

Approved:

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A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dennis CiCi". The signature is written in black ink on a white background.

A STUDY OF DEVELOPING THE ORAL ENGLISH COMPETENCE OF
CHINESE NON-ENGLISH MAJORS IN COLLEGE BY IMPLEMENTING
COMMUNICATIVE ACTIVITIES

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Abstract

A STUDY OF DEVELOPING THE ORAL ENGLISH COMPETENCE OF CHINESE NON-ENGLISH MAJORS IN COLLEGE BY IMPLEMENTING COMMUNICATIVE ACTIVITIES

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With increasingly frequent international communication with many foreign countries, society sets an even higher demand on contemporary college students' oral communication ability. According to this trend, most colleges have changed their English curriculum, adding some oral English classes. However, the application of the communicative approach brings great challenges to teachers and students. They often meet all kinds of obstacles impeding their further attempt. So it is very important to know more about the factors that influence the application of communicative activities in class for both teachers and students, especially non-English majors.

In the communicative-based approach, the author studies carefully about some existing problems in EFL teaching and factors that affect Chinese non-English majors' oral English in college, and moreover introduces some communicative activities to us. competence if they are properly implemented.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

With China opening up and marching into international markets, China's education has also caught the attention of people throughout the world. People are beginning to rethink the existing problems of Chinese education, and modern universities have set out to make teaching reforms. Thus, there are changes in some of the traditional teacher-centered teaching methods. Exploring the new student-centered teaching models is receiving great attention. However, the “traditional grammar-focused teaching method is still prevailing in China” (N. Sun & D. W. Sun, 2008, p. 558). Teachers should try to apply Communicative Language Teaching into the traditional method and include communicative activities which will be integrated into the grammatical lecture. (N. Sun & D. W. Sun, 2008)

The most serious concern is that Chinese teachers still have no explicit ideas of how to make good use of communicative strategies. Also, there is still not any standard of conducting and evaluating the oral English level of college students. In college, there are many non-English major students so it is a difficult task for Chinese educators to take all of students into account. Said simply, college teachers must improve their own teaching ability in tracking students' oral English progress and find ways to more broadly use communication strategies, through increasing exploration and study.

One researcher (Ma, 2004) points out that “any effective teaching and classroom

activities are based on the teachers' experience and his/her understanding of linguistics and the essence of CLT" (p. 102). Communication activities are an essential part of communicative strategies, which is the key to optimize college oral English teaching and to help students achieve their communication goal and improve their oral English. More language practice will improve communication skills. In the communication process, teachers should adopt and implement varieties of communicative activities to promote students' interest in oral English teaching and enhance students' oral English competence, thereby achieving the ultimate goal of language teaching.

Statement of the Problem

The problem expressed as questions are as follows:

1. What communicative activities are going to be used in improving the oral English competence of Chinese non-English majors in college?
2. How do professors make use of communicative activities to improve oral English competence?
3. What problems should be paid attention to in the process of implementing communicative activities?

Delimitations of the Research

The research was conducted in and through the Karrmann Library at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville, over ninety (90) days. Primary searches were

conducted via the Internet through EBSCO host with ERIC, Academic Search Elite, the Library of SCUN and Google/Google Scholar as the primary sources. Key search topics included “communicative activities”, “oral English competence”, and “Chinese college English teaching”.

Definition of Terms

EFL: Abbreviation for the term English as a Foreign Language.

Learning Strategy: [A]ny set of operations or steps used by a learner that will facilitate the acquisition, storage, retrieval or use of information” (O'Malley, J. M., Chamot, A. U., Stewner-Manzanares, G., Kupper, L.J. & Russo, R.P., 1985, p. 23).

Strategic Competence (SC): “The learner’s ability to use language strategies to compensate for gaps in skills and knowledge” (Bailey, 2007, p. 3).

Communicative Competence: “The ability of language learners to interact with other speakers, to make meaning, as distinct from their ability to perform on discrete-point tests of grammatical knowledge” (Savignon, 1991, p. 264).

Communication Strategies (CSs): “Verbal and/or nonverbal procedures for compensating for gaps in speaking competence” (Bailey, 2007, p. 19).

Communicative Language Ability (CLA): “The ability to use language communicatively involves both knowledge of language and the capacity for implementing this knowledge in communicative language use” (Zhen, 2009, pp.

39-40).

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT): “A way of language teaching which features the application of communicative activities and target language with the aim to develop learners’ competence of understanding and exchanging different ideas, behavioral modes, values, beliefs and cultures” (Ma, 2004, p. 101).

Communicative Activity: “Any activities that encourage and require a learner to speak with and listen to other learners, as well as with people in the program and community” (“Activities”).

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Research on some basic competence and communication strategies

The definition of strategic competence

As a very important element of communicative competence, strategic competence plays an important role in interaction. According to Canale & Swain (1980), strategic competence is an ability of compensating the breakdowns which frequently arise from performance diversity and a lack of competence in verbal and nonverbal communication. A contemporary scholar (Zhen, 2009) says that “strategic competence is generally viewed as a set of compensatory strategies or interactional tactics used to handle specific communicative problems” (p. 83). In a similar vein, another scholar (Bailey, 2007) defines strategic competence as “the learner’s ability to use language strategies to compensate for gaps in skills and knowledge” (p. 3). Previously, another scholar (Bachman, 1990) says, “the function of strategic competence is to match the new information to be processed with relevant information that is available (including presuppositional and real world knowledge) and map this onto the maximally efficient use of existing language abilities”. (p. 102)

The definition of communicative competence

An older but well known scholar (Savignon, 1991) describes communicative competence as “the ability of language learners to interact with other speakers, to make meaning, as distinct from their ability to perform on discrete-point tests of grammatical knowledge”. (p. 264). More recently, Bailey (2007) has written that

communicative competence embraces four important elements—that is, linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, strategic competence and discourse competence. Oral communicative ability is the dialogue, one of speaking types, which derives from interaction between the listener and the speaker (Zhen, 2009). To quote “the ability to use language communicatively involves both knowledge of language and the capacity for implementing this knowledge in communicative language use.” (Zhen, 2009, pp. 39-40)

The components of communicative ability

There are four essential components of oral communicative ability, namely the ability to use PCs, the ability to manipulate schemata, pragmatic competence and strategic competence that Zhen (2009) investigated. Furthermore, Bachman (1990) provides us a diagram of components of CLA in communicative language use. (see figure 1)

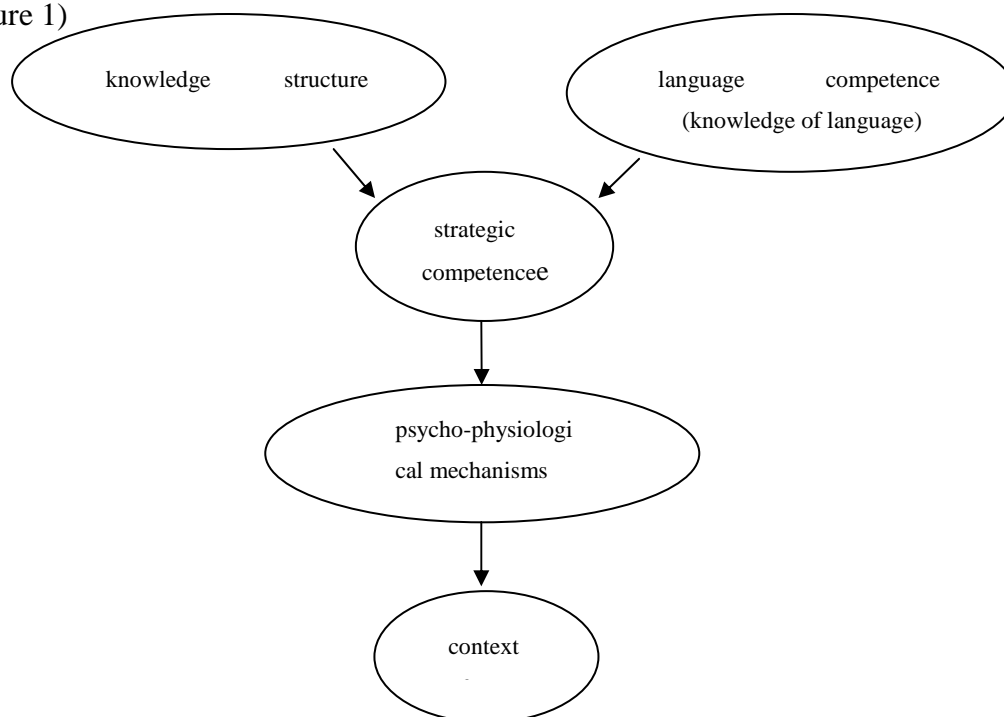


Figure 1: Components of CLA in communicative language use (Bachman, 1990, p. 85)

The basic characteristics of oral communication

In order to define oral communicative ability, one must know clearly about special features of oral communication. There are five special characteristics of oral communication. They are separately the verbal use of language, a “real-time” phenomenon, a complicated cognitive act, an interactive and dynamic process, and effective oral communication in a FL (Zhen, 2009, pp. 45-47). There are also the basic characteristics of speech communication, such as interactiveness, directness, spontaneity, purposefulness, inseparability, and para-linguistic features and non-linguistic features (Liu, 2010, p. 13-15). “Communication takes place in two forms: the spoken and the written. Both of them include two linguistic activities: encoding and decoding” (Liu, 2010, p. 13).

Figure 2 (adapted from Zhen 2009, p. 47) shows a model for communication interaction.

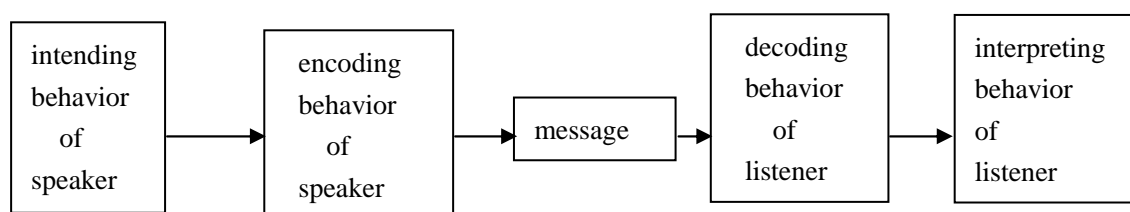


Figure 2 A model for communication interaction

The definition of communication strategies (CSs)

There has been a continuing discussion regarding the definition of communication strategies at least since the 1980s (Tarone, 1983). One early definition is that communication strategies “attempt to bridge the gap between the linguistic knowledge of the SL learner, and the linguistic knowledge of the TL interlocutors in

real communication situations” (Tarone, 1983, p. 65). In order to guarantee the smooth proceeding of communication, mere linguistic knowledge cannot reach long-term goals. So only when combined with some social practices can achieve good effect.

More recently, communicative strategies have been viewed as procedures, verbal and nonverbal, for gaps in speaking competence (Bailey, 2007). The strategies are plans for solving problems to reach a communicative goal (Faerch and Kasper, 1983). “CSs are tactics used by the non-fluent learner during SL interaction in order to overcome specific communicative problems” (Mitchell & Myles, 1998, p. 94). “Not all CSs are used to compensate for breakdowns in oral communication” (Zhen, 2009, p. 83). EFL learners take advantage of some of CSs not because of their language deficiency but because of their communication goals. (Zhen, 2009)

Some existing problems in EFL teaching

Chinese scholars often state a belief that there are some specific problems in China with respect to learning English (e.g. Jing, 2008). Mute English and low efficiency are prevalent in students’ spoken language. Chinese students spent six years or more on learning English before entering the university, but they have been learning by rote method, and increasingly accumulating vocabularies and learning grammar rules. Therefore, the application of communication methods in China is still confronted with many problems and difficulties.

The problems in learning English include the following:

- Problems in verbal learning, such as poor accuracy, lack of logic, and poor

continuity. (Bai, 2007)

- Chinese students share a common character----introversion. They are afraid of expressing their ideas about something in public because they do not want to lose face. (Huang & Xia, 2010)
- Chinese students are mainly associated with Chinese-speaking instead of English-speaking. (Huang & Xia, 2010)
- Teaching methods in China. Chinese traditional education model—teacher-centered, which limits the development of students' initiative and independence. (Huang & Xia, 2010)
- Students' concept of the necessity of learning English. They may ignore the importance of English and think it is rarely used in daily life and work. (Miao, 2010)
- Students are used to learning passively and the content of the textbook is deficient in practical instruction. Therefore, students lose many chances to make full use of the language in reality. (Miao, 2010)

Some factors that affect college non-English majors' oral English in China

Universities usually examine students' ability of reading and writing through CET4 and CET6, but oral communication skills are not included in these tests, which results in college English teaching's focus on vocabulary, reading and writing. So the implementation of communicative teaching approach becomes irrelevant. Another factor is college enrollment. There are too many students in a class so that English teachers are incapable of taking care of each student and classroom discipline is

difficult to maintain. It is difficult to operate spoken language training and understand the effects of teaching for teachers (J. Li, 2007).

Although college students have been learning English for at least seven years, their spoken English is still very poor. Another Chinese researcher (Kou, 2010) further states that there exist some shortcomings in our college English education. Because the college curriculum, such as intensive reading, extensive reading, speaking, listening courses, etc., contributes to English majors' exposure to English every day, of course they have a lot of opportunity to practice their English. Compared with English majors, non-English majors have only two or four English classes a week, which results in relatively few opportunities to practice spoken English. In addition, the traditional public English course teaching focuses on teachers' teaching and students have little chance to participate, which leads to non-English majors' relatively poor English.

There are no specialized oral-English classes for non-English majors in most colleges at present and spoken language training for students is mostly attached to the intensive reading so that most of non-English majors cannot use English to communicate with each other in real life. Actually, they know the importance of oral English, which will probably become one of the employment requirements for companies, and they really want to improve this condition (Zhao and Wang, 2006; S. H. Zhang, 2010). However, there are many problems hindering the realization of their oral-English improvement.

There are five categories of these problems (S. H. Zhang, 2010). The first one is

the large classes which gives fewer opportunities to students to speak. The second one is a lack of true foreign language context in classes. The third one is students' lack of vocabularies. The fourth one is students' psychological anxiety. The fifth one is traditional teaching mode—teacher-centered and students' preparation for Chinese English Test (CET) ignoring oral English practice. Although both teachers and students all think spoken English is extremely important, it is always difficult to achieve the desired effect in the classroom activities. According to some researchers' study (e.g. Wang, 2008), communicative competence can be regarded as one's ability to use language in social activities, not merely acquainted with language structure. Therefore, the development of non-English majors' oral English competence must be taken seriously.

The necessity of implementing Communicative Language Teaching approach

Actually, communicative activities, as one of the important parts of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), are indispensable in CLT. So knowing more about CLT is very necessary for us to do further research into communicative activities. There have been a number of studies that are informative.

Lin (2004) finds that the communicative language teaching focuses on the student-centered teaching mode, which fully cultivates students' self-consciousness and positivity, rather than the teacher-centered one. CLT pays more attention to the language function instead of the language knowledge system, but in the aspect of students' communicative ability development and the efficiency of their learning, CLT, if applied appropriately, plays an important role.

One researcher (Bailey, 2007) introduces three methods of language teaching to us in detail. The first one is the Grammar-translation method, which can improve students' reading skills but hinders students' mind and their true feelings about speaking English. The second one is the direct method, which concentrates on speaking. The third one is the audio-lingual method. It needs students to repeat sentences and recite memorized dialogues from the textbook. It aims at letting students speak automatically and fluently by practicing grammatical structures. The final goal it wants to achieve is conducive to establishing students' good speaking habits by studying language lessons containing frequent repetition and correction. Speaking is a productive human oral skill applied to produce systematic verbal utterances (Bailey, 2007).

Research on communicative tasks and communicative activities

Communicative tasks

Communicative task is a key element in CLT; therefore, the characteristics of the communicative task need to be discussed. Communicative task can be defined as "a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form" (Nunan, 1989, p. 10).

A language learning task consists of six components: goals, input, activities, teacher role, learner role and settings, which has its respective features (Sung, 2010). Take activities for example: Activities are what learners are expected to do with the input for the task. Three characteristics are emphasized for activities in a

communicative task. First, the activities must be authentic in terms of reflecting real world tasks. Second, the activities should stimulate learners to apply newly acquired linguistic knowledge to real communication. Finally, the activities are designed to help develop the accuracy and fluency of learners' target language (Sung, 2010, pp. 705-706).

Communicative activities

The general description of communicative activities.

Communicative activities can be defined as any activities through which learners can communicate with each other freely with target language. At the same time, some criteria can best embody the spirit of communicative activities (Harmer, 1991; Nolasco & Arthur, 1988). They are as follows:

- a desire to communicate (they want to, not someone else tells them to)
- a communicative purpose (there must be a gap which learners have to bridge)
- content not form (the focus is on meaning of the message rather than accuracy of expression)
- variety of language (either receptive or productive rather than grammatical construction)
- no teacher intervention (characterized by greater tolerance of error)
- no materials control (with the characteristic of language variety) (as cited in Deng, 2000, pp. 71-72)

The classification of communicative activities.

Although EFL teachers tend to realize that the importance of developing the

competence of students' communication, many communicative assignments are not real which cannot be correspondent with students' identity and do not obey the context and the communicative effect is very hard to achieve (Xu, 2009). There is one way of dealing with this problem that is "to design activities that appeal to students' interests, creativity and intelligence" (Xu, 2009, p. 134). Activities can be classified into five categories, such as realistic role plays, challenging language games, guided interviews, small group discussions, and other activities that motivate students to speak, and furthermore, there are several types of communicative activities, such as open-ended scenarios, community interview panel reports, informative visual talks and sociodrama (Xu, 2009).

When teachers teach by the application of the communicative approach, teachers can design teaching activities in many ways, such as role playing, debates, discussions, repeating stories, etc. When teachers are going to teach language points, they can combine language form and its function to enable students to actively participate in meaningful language communicative activities in order to develop students' communicative competence (Zhou, 2007).

As to role-play, more about this effective approach to improving Chinese EFL learners' oral English are studied by some researchers. And even human's psychological power is taken into consideration to analyze how strongly role-play affects the students. "Role-playing can be classified as a way of 'situational teaching'". It means taking a task as the focus of a goal, setting a goal of teaching to enable students to experience the simulated real situation by themselves or observe from the

sidelines” (Huang & Xia, 2010, P. 35).

And moreover three advantages of role-play have been put forward. Firstly, it can inspire students to show themselves with psychological power instead of being afraid of losing face and ashamed of expressing what they think. Everyone is born with infinite imagination and curiosity about the world, especially for students who are in a very special period when their brains and minds rapidly develop. So they have a sharp insight into the world, distinctive ideas, and strong desire for expressing themselves. But influenced by our Chinese traditional concepts, students have inherited Confucianism—compromise. They became more and more modest and more inclined to accept others’ opinions not because they have no particular thinking style. What they need is just a catalyst that can activate their “timid” cell. So role-play plays its important role in developing students’ potential of speaking. Secondly, it can create a real foreign environment for students to boldly practice English and actively take part in the role-play activity. Here, teachers should provide varieties of roles for students to perform so that they can accommodate themselves to different communicative situations and their thinking ability will be enhanced to a great extent. The friendly interaction between teachers and students will be beneficial to creating a sound and pleasant atmosphere which can lessen students’ tense emotion and can lay a strong foundation for further communication. Thirdly, it will focus on students rather than teachers. Students in role-play will be able to freely exchange their mind, increasingly accumulate life experience, cultivate their innovative spirit and self-consciousness and establish good relationships with each other (Huang & Xia,

2010).

The application of communicative activities.

Teaching methods and class activities play an important role in communicative approach (Wang, 2008). “Communicative activities have real purposes: to find information, break down barriers, talk about self, and learn about the culture” (“Activities”, n.d. p.41). However, the application of communicative activities is very difficult for both teachers and students. So teachers must do their utmost to change the traditional teaching style, strive for making good preparation for their English class, and design communicative tasks and activities, while students should try their best to integrate themselves into the real English-speaking class, showing their personality and vigor. So it is unavoidable to face enormous challenges in the process of applying communicative activities.

Existing problems in classroom communicative activities and solutions.

Based on many researchers’ studies, it is well known that the efficiency of communicative activities is closely related to how to design activities. But before designing the classroom communicative activities, enough attention must be paid to some existing problems. The approaches to dealing with these problems are listed below. For example, how to maximize the effectiveness of activities? One article (“Activities”, n.d.) presents us three tips for answering this question.

The first one is the arrangement or allocation of teachers’ talk time. The oral English class belongs to students. To a large extent, teachers often play a helpful role. The true class should bring students’ self-confidence, creativity and interaction into

full play. The second one is the policy of encouragement. Teachers should give some corresponding recognition and praise to students, because during many years of learning English, they have surmounted all kinds of difficulties. But what they really would like to get is just one sentence of encouragement from their teachers. The third one is enjoying the activities. Creating a relatively comfortable and vivid environment is helpful for students to exchange each other's good ideas and positively take part in the activities ("Activities", n.d.).

Some difficulties will be frequently confronted when teachers try to employ these activities in classes; because the proceeding of communicative approach is influenced by a lot of factors, especially students' individual differences, such as language basis, emotion, awareness, learning ability, and personality (Wang, 2008). The difficulties can be concluded as unsuitable material for designing and organizing activities, limited time, large classes, students' habit of taking notes and keeping quiet, and some suburban students' lack of confidence and spoken English competence (L. Li & Song, 2003). As to large classes, teachers may come across a series of problems in the course of teaching. They are separately effective learning for all (heterogeneous, either too difficult or too easy), materials (homogeneous textbooks, with no options or flexibility), participation (cannot activate all, only top learners respond actively), interest (insufficient resources of topics and activities), discipline (difficult to control), individual awareness (too many different learners for the teachers to follow the progress), and correcting written assignment (heavy marking load) (Deng, 2000, p. 72).

These problems often let those positive teachers back down. Therefore, there are four suggestions for dealing with above problems (L. Li & Song, 2003). The first one is the teaching plan should conform to students' needs, teaching materials teaching situation and teaching tasks. The second one is "Communicative Language Teaching procedures often require teachers to acquire more students centered classroom management skills" (p. 78). The third one is "emphasis should be laid on students' initiative and interaction rather than involves large sum of language input" (p. 78). The fourth one is classroom communicative activities design and practice should correspond to students' knowledge and real life experience.

It needs to be pointed out that although large classes are problematical, they have their advantages and some can be made use of to help solve those problems when applied in communicative activities. According to Ur's research, they are as follows:

- They have a much richer pool of human resources, far more life experience and knowledge, more varied opinions, more interests and ideas, all of which can be used in communicative classroom interaction (as cited in Deng, 2000, p. 72).
- There is educational value in the actual contact between very different kinds of people: co-students get to know each other's values, and thereby increase their own knowledge and awareness of others, as well as tolerance and understanding (as cited in Deng, 2000, p. 72).
- They allow the learners themselves to help by teaching each other and working together: peer teaching and cooperation are likely to be fairly common, fostering an atmosphere of cooperation (as cited in Deng, 2000, p. 72).

- And for the teachers, these classes can be seen as very much more challenging and interesting to teach, and provide greater opportunity for creativity, innovation and general professional development (as cited in Deng, 2000, p. 72).

Students suffered great anxiety during the process of English learning. For example, when the tasks are too difficult or students do not make some necessary preparation for the tasks, students' positivity in classroom communication is greatly influenced; when teachers frequently correct students' faults, the speed and fluency of students' oral language will be greatly reduced; when there exists individual competition, many students will choose to be silent, withdrawn and avoidant; when teachers drop on unprepared students to answer questions, most students feel very nervous so that many answers are less satisfactory than expected (Zhao & Wang, 2006).

In order to reduce students' anxiety, four approaches are provided here. They are as follows:

- Reasonably pointing out students' mistakes:

In order to let students completely believe in teachers, teachers should establish a sense of security among students, tolerating some of students' errors in interaction and correcting faults in their written work rather than oral communication or correcting after students' conversation. Actually, students are more likely to desire the teachers' recognition. If teachers effectively explain errors and evaluate students for their achievements, the students will feel that the teacher is honest and approachable and they will gain confidence instead of feeling anxiety (Zhao & Wang, 2006, p. 131).

- Establishing a good relationship between teachers and students:

Different education concepts and cultural backgrounds will lead to diverse relationships between students and teachers. The success of contemporary foreign language teaching largely depends on the united, cooperative and mutually supportive relationship between students and teachers. In order to realize this goal, teachers should change from the traditional role to the new one. Teachers' new role should be converted from the traditional luminary to controllers of classroom teaching, organizers, edifiers, participants, bystanders in classroom communicative activities, and fair evaluators. (Zhao & Wang, 2006, p. 131). Furthermore, the communicative language teaching method requires teachers to change their roles from people who are responsible for imparting knowledge to students into a helper and a promoter. Under this new and stringent requirement, teachers must be equipped with the ability of insight, analysis and organization. During the language teaching, teachers should focus on the creation of a teaching scenario and atmosphere. (Lin, 2004)

- Creating a relaxed classroom atmosphere

The classroom is the main place provided for both teachers and students to conduct activities and also is their interpersonal social environment. A harmonious classroom atmosphere is the important psychological environment beneficial to students' creative and free performance, while an undesirable classroom atmosphere will create a sense of depression and insecurity among students. Therefore, teachers should create a relaxed classroom atmosphere for students (Zhao & Wang, 2006, p. 131).

- Advocating the cooperative learning strategy in English teaching

Cooperative learning is a teaching mode which supplements and improves the classroom-based teaching system. The cooperative learning strategy emphasizes the necessity of carrying out classroom activities and the importance of interaction, which changes individual competition into sound group cooperation and reduces the students' anxiety (Zhao & Wang, 2006, p. 131).

The design of classroom communicative activities.

Some kinds of learner-groupings in activities, such as individual work, pair work, group work, teamwork, lockstep and project, are introduced by one researcher (Deng, 2000). Among them, individual work and lockstep are traditional, and “teamwork and project are too demanding and time-consuming for the ELT reality in China at the moment as far as the teachers, learners, syllabus, exams and schools are concerned.” (Deng, 2000, p. 72). Only the group work and pair work can contribute to students' information exchange and practice. However, there exists an opposite view. Only when these activities, such as individual activities, pair activities, group activities and the whole class activities, are designed properly, can they stimulate students' positivity and adjust the atmosphere of the classroom.

The design of these activities is listed one by one. The first one is “Individual activities”. In the design of individual activities, teachers should pay attention to build comfortable and relaxed class atmosphere and train students' courage of speaking English, which can mobilize students' enthusiasm. Individual activity is mainly used when reporting to the class, such as freely talking about the events one experienced and humorous stories, reciting poetry, singing English songs and so on. Teachers can

also allow students to speak on a given topic. Those topics should arouse students' interests, such as the popular social phenomenon— "Attending TV PK Shows", "College Graduates Work as Village Officials", etc. In this individual activity, students have something to say and everybody fall over each other to talk about their opinions, so the classroom atmosphere is very active (S. H. Zhang, 2010).

The second one is "Pair activities". Conversation between two students is the most basic oral English teaching mode at the university level. In classes, the teacher will let the students to do cooperative learning tasks after asking some questions, which can train students to boldly express their views and teach students how to listen to and learn from the points of view of others. Teachers can organize some scenarios and let students and their companions make dialogue. Afterwards, teachers can encourage or invite two or three groups to show their talents. This means students must not only have a certain basis of language, but also quickly select and organize appropriate words to express their opinions. As time passes, students' oral expression ability and thinking ability will be improved. (S. H. Zhang, 2010)

The third one is "Group activities". Group activities will be conducted by dividing a class into several study groups. Students perform actions according to the given topic activity. Because the class time is very limited, especially for those classes with a large number of students, it is rarely realistic to let every student to speak for a few minutes. In order to provide students with more opportunities for practice, using the form of small group discussion is the best choice. Firstly, let team members discuss, and then let the group members recommend a person to make a concluding

statement. Teachers should move among groups in order to provide advice and help to students at any time. Teachers can also achieve the goal of showing interpersonal communication by setting up a specific scene and playing roles. Another example is the debate in class. Teachers can give the debate subject in advance. Each group searches for materials after class and discusses among groups when they clearly know their own viewpoint. Each member of the team airs his own views. The process can expand the learners' knowledge and let every student have something to say, thus mobilizing students' enthusiasm of learning oral English. (S. H. Zhang, 2010)

The fourth one is “the whole class activities”. The whole class activities, such as the word game, story extendibility, brainstorming, and so on, can relax students and create a warm classroom atmosphere. Take the word game for example. Let two students stand on the platform to face the other students, and the teacher will show some cards written with English words or phrases to the rest of the students, asking them to explain it in English. Students on the platform guess. In such a loose and comfortable classroom atmosphere, students will gradually take delight in communicating in English to improve students' interests in oral English. (S. H. Zhang, 2010)

And then several types of activities, such as brainstorming, communication games, reaching consensus, role-play & simulation, information gap & opinion gap, problem solving & decision-making, and discussion, are analyzed by one researcher (Deng, 2000). And moreover, another researcher (Zhou, 2007) uses one part of a novel as material for classroom design. The design is as follows: Teachers can

classify students into several groups to discuss and mainly make use of the 3P (presentation, practice, and production) mode to teach in class. Classroom activities are composed of summarizing, describing characters' features, and role-playing.

Starting a new lesson by students' report of the news or movie reviews and combining teachers' explanation and students' discussion can serve as the classroom teaching practice activities. Besides classroom activities, there are some extracurricular practice activities' designs. Organizing students to go out and practice hands-on job simulation, organizing a rich and colorful English evening party or an English debate tournament can be used as the extracurricular English practice activities. (S. D. Li, 2011)

Among the CLT-based projects, the video-making project can stimulate students' interests and develop their oral language competence (Sung, 2010). The below diagram will visually illustrate it.

TASK COMPONENTS OF THE VIDEO-MAKING PROJECT

Video-Making Project
Goals: Use newly learned language knowledge in simulated real-world situations
Input: Linguistic knowledge learned in class
Activities: (1) Write a three to four minute skit or a song (2) Act out the skit and make a video or sing the song and make a music video
Learner roles: Skit/song writer, actor/singer, video director, good team member
Teacher roles: Facilitator, confidence booster
Settings: small groups of two to four people/in and outside the classroom

(Sung, 2010, p. 710)

Some problems needed to be paid attention to in the design of classroom communicative activities.

Tag questions are frequently asked in communicative activities. So a better understanding of the existing problems in tag questions should be paid more attention and taken seriously by both teachers and students before activities. However, errors in tag questions are unavoidable (Q. Y. Zhang, 2010). Chinese English learners may commit errors when coping with tag questions. The errors are composed of negative transfer of the mother tongue, overgeneralization of the formation rule, ignorance of rule restriction, incomplete application of rules, and false concepts hypothesized (Q. Y. Zhang, 2010, p. 578), which will be taken into consideration by some professors interested in communicative activities. There are ways to avoid these errors; comparing tag questions in both languages, increasing target language input and output and giving effective feedback of learners' errors (Q. Y. Zhang, 2010, p. 580-581). Through the better understanding of how to refrain from committing those errors in tag questions, Chinese students will be more confident and active in taking part in communicative activities in our classes.

At the same time, in communicative activities, teachers must pay close attention to how some questions are phrased to arouse students' interests. Some skills of questioning are involved for teachers to receive strong answers from their students. Teachers should ask some easy-understood questions within students' knowledge and those questions must be challenging which can strengthen students' thinking skills and produce further questioning to make students more active during discussion (Gao,

2008). But all of this must be on the basis of students' interests and relevant experiences. As an old saying goes, "Interests are the best teachers." Related topics can attract students to bravely open their mouths to state their ideas and through the process of discussion and their own particular way of thinking, students' ability of solving problems on their own is brought into full play.

Evaluating students' answers is also a very important aspect of communicative activities. The skills of evaluation are focusing on praising and encouraging students, quoting students' word, and gestures as well as facial expressions. The application of gestures include; hand gestures, facial expressions and body movements which are frequently used by teachers while teaching. The gestures are of typical functions such as cognitive, emotional and organizational (Gao, 2008).

Some problems need to be paid attention to in the design of classroom communicative activities. These include the classroom atmosphere, teachers' role, organization of group discussion and the reflection of activities (Chen, 2009). The challenges CLT brought to the traditional teaching method, namely the transition of English teachers' role (Lin, 2004).

Although communicative teaching class is not teacher-centered classroom, teachers still play an indispensable role. Teachers should help and support students in knowledge and mental aspect, observe and analyze students' activities, understand and analyze the strengths and weaknesses of each student, and find their weaknesses in teaching and timely make up. Therefore, the requirements for teachers will be higher. Students should advocate autonomous learning and learn how to cooperate

rather than complete the study task alone. China's college English teachers should increasingly receive training, because communicative approach teaching needs a high level of teachers' language, similar to native speakers. At the same time, they should also understand the cultural background, pedagogy, psychology, linguistics and other aspects of the target language, and should also be able to handle and coordinate interpersonal relationships. The role of teachers should be transformed from imparting language knowledge to developing students' communicative abilities. In addition to training students how to clearly express their meaning through the target language, teachers should also teach students cultural background knowledge of target language so that students can gracefully communicate with others. They should concentrate on task-based learning and teaching and the use of multimedia teaching tools. In the classroom, creating communication situations for students should also be paid more attention to, as well as providing real and meaningful communication content, which can enhance students' attention, is convenient to explain student work, and increases students' input. All of these are aiming at internalizing into students' communicative competence. (J. Li, 2007). The communicative approach puts forward higher requirements for teachers. Teachers should be student-centered, not only imparting knowledge, but integrating into the student's communicative activities in the classroom as designers, organizers, and participants. Teachers must have a solid foundation in English, and a strong ability of using English (Zhou, 2007).

CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Through these researchers' studies, the concept of communicative activities is very obvious, which is one element of communicative language teaching. These studies provide more convenience for us to cultivate Chinese non-English majors' oral English competence. Actually, there are many problems in Chinese oral English teaching and teachers turned out to be very confused about EFL teaching. Although many researchers have done many studies on CLT and provided applicable methods, only a few researchers provided effective solutions to evaluate students' oral skills and even worse, few colleges take those actions studied by researchers to solve students' barriers of English speaking. Chinese college oral English teaching will probably go through a long period of implementing their communicative activities in classes. After all, the literature review in chapter two is valuable for us to contemplate and make further and more intensive studies.

In the end, it is worth mentioning that a teacher's role in communicative classes is not diminished but rather strengthened. Under the implementation of communicative activities, the teacher has to prepare for the lessons more carefully and conduct the class more flexibly since unexpected problems might emerge at any time. They also have to face more challenges on organizing skills as well as language and communicative competence.

For the limits of the author's knowledge and capability, the discussion on

implementing communicative activities in oral English class is far from expectation.

Even though the final results of the implementation of this model is encouraging,

there are still a lot of problems which remain for further research.

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