

Possible Ways to Make Interpretation Teaching More Effective

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Abstract: Interpretation course aims to help students understand interpreting theories and master interpreting skills. Limited class hours make it difficult to achieve the expected goals. This paper therefore focuses on interpretation teaching and discusses the possible ways to make teaching more effective in the limited class hours.

Keywords: Interpretation teaching, The selection of practice materials; Affective factors; Autonomous learning; Simulated realistic environments

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1 Introduction

Interpretation course is a compulsory course for third/four year English-major students in universities and colleges. The course centers on the interpreting theories and skills (listening for messages, memory, note-taking, coping tactics, cross-cultural awareness, public speaking, etc.), and aims to help students understand interpreting procedures and links, build cross cultural awareness, and improve listening, speaking and interpreting skills. However, it is not uncommon that the set target is not achieved. Problems exist as follows:

First, students take interpretation class only once a week, only 2 class hours for one time. As is well known, it takes long-term practice to master interpreting skills. It is obvious that 2 class hours a week is far from enough for students' improvement in their interpreting skills. Second, most of the 2 class hours is spent on the introduction of interpreting theories and skills by the teacher. The teacher seems to be the center of the class, in which students are passive listeners without

thinking, creativity and digestion. Third, materials for interpretation practice lack variety as well as freshness, and interpretation activities have no interactiveness and realness, which is not useful for students' preparation for future participation in international communication. In order to solve the problems, the following four elements could be taken into account in interpretation teaching.

2 Possible Ways to Make Teaching Effective

2.1 The Selection of Practice Materials

The selection of practice materials is of great importance to the training of interpreting ability. Appropriate materials can provoke students' interest, enhance their activeness and promote their interpreting skills. The selection of practice materials will be discussed from the following aspects.

2.1.1 Genres

Interpretation practice materials could be divided into four categories: classroom speeches, audios, videos and internet videos^[1]. Combination of different kinds of materials is necessary in that each kind of material has its own advantages. For example, the teacher and students' involvement in the classroom speeches can create a realistic situation where interpreters work; video materials can present images which are helpful for students' comprehension and interpretation of the source speeches; internet videos are large in amount, have great variants in genre and contain timely information which can arouse students' interest and widen their horizon. Which kind of materials to use can depend on the stage of practice, practice objectives and students' needs.

2.1.2 Topic

The topic of the material is another consideration when choosing practice materials. The topics could range from foreign trade and tourism to education and technology. On one hand, materials with different topics could help students enlarge vocabulary and get familiar with the styles as well as the features of speeches of different topics, thus enhancing language proficiency in students. On the other, knowledge is one of the qualification requirements for interpreters. Materials with different topics can expose students to information and knowledge in different fields and therefore increase their encyclopedia knowledge and to some degree their subject knowledge. It is easier to understand something that one is familiar with. Exposure to speeches with different topics can equip students with knowledge in different subject areas.

2.1.3 Difficulty Level

Materials of too high or low difficulty level are not correct materials for training interpreting ability. Materials with high level of difficulty will make students lose self-confidence and patience while those with low level of difficulty are not challenging and interesting and far from helpful to the improvement in interpreting skills. For instance, materials about law and military may well not be suitable for students who have just started the interpretation training because the large amount of terms in law and military will affect the smoothness of their practice. Daily conversations and etiquette speeches, accordingly, could be selected as practice materials for starters. What's more, materials with different speaking rate and length should be considered at different stages of interpretation practice.

2.2 The Attention to Affective Factors

Affective factors are the emotions people have about themselves or the surrounding environment, including attitude, motivation, inhibition, self-esteem and anxiety. Affective factors play an important role in the learning process.

2.2.1 Self-esteem

Self-esteem is the feeling of being satisfied with one's own worth and abilities. Students with low self-esteem don't have confidence that their interpreting abilities are good and think they would never improve, which leads to the failure in the practice. By contrast, high self-esteem will positively influence students' feelings about themselves, their willingness to try again even though

they've failed the first time, and thus their performance in the interpretation practice.

2.2.2 Anxiety

Anxiety is a feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease. Many studies suggest that foreign language anxiety can have a negative effect on the language learning process^[2]. What gives rise to anxiety in students? Making mistakes, being laughed by classmates, comparing grades to others', teachers' overstrictness, etc. This kind of anxiety will cause misgivings, nervousness or fear, which will negatively influence leaning efficiency and outcomes^[3]. On the contrary, students with low level of anxiety actively participate in classroom activities, speak confidently and effectively communicate with others.

2.2.3 Attitude

Attitude towards language learning refers to learners' attitudes towards the language, the speakers of the language, the countries where people speak the language and attitudes towards learning environments, teachers and classmates, teaching and learning materials, etc. Depending on the learner's attitudes, learning a second language can be a source of enrichment or a source of resentment^[4]. Students with favorable attitudes tend to understand the importance of learning, maintain high enthusiasm for learning, and give all of themselves in learning. Students with negative attitudes, however, are more likely to be unwilling to accept the language input, refuse to volunteer an answer and avoid the participation in language activities.

Since affective factors exert great impacts on students' learning, teachers, for better impact on student learning, should take into consideration affective factors in planning, delivering lessons and managing the classroom. First, teachers could create a relaxing and delightful environment which could put students at ease. Next, teachers should be patient, encourage communication and give support to students. Then, when evaluating students, teachers should point out students' mistakes without harming their self-esteem. Finally, teachers should praise students' strengths, provide meaningful feedback and help them overcome weaknesses.

2.3 The Cultivation of Autonomous Learning Ability

Autonomous learning refers to a situation in which learners are responsible for their learning. They set

their own goals, develop their own plans, get involved actively, make individual decisions and evaluate their own performance, which contributes to students' good learning outcomes inside classroom and initiatives in learning outside classroom.

It has to be admitted that most students lack autonomous learning ability, thus not knowing what to do, when to do and how to do. They depend on their teachers or peers and they are not able to take charge of their learning. Teachers, as a result, should aim to cultivate autonomous learning ability in students.

First, teachers could create an environment that facilitates autonomous learning, in which student freedom will not be limited and student activeness is highly appreciated. In this kind of learning environment, students could think critically and express themselves freely. Second, classroom activities should be designed to encourage students' critical thinking and creativity. It is important that various kinds of fun and interactive student-centered classroom activities be carried out. Question asking and answering, individual presentation, group discussion, interpretation situation simulation, peer review, to name but a few. In addition, teachers should make changes in their roles in the teaching and learning. Teachers should encourage students to become the master of their leaning. They themselves could become the organizer, the guide and the helper^[5]. They could design tasks that call for students' responsibility and give advice as well as help when necessary to facilitate student autonomous learning. As mentioned above, students cannot have enough exercises in the classroom, it is best that they do exercises after class where autonomous learning ability is very important. Once students have developed autonomous learning ability in themselves, they could be able to take charge of their own learning, set their own goals, schedule their own time, and assess their own work.

2.4 The Creation of Simulated Realistic Environments

It is desirable that every time the teacher create an environment that is similar to the one where interpreters work^[6]. The simulated realistic environments would expose students to a real interpreting situation in which they have chances to think, to analyze, to solve problems and finally improve interpreting skills.

In the simulation, students could select a setting, design the scenes, and play the roles. If it is a product launch, one student would be the speaker who is formally dressed and delivers a passionate speech

introducing their new product to the market, and one student would be the interpreter who stands beside the speaker and as a secondary speaker gives the same passionate speech in the target language. If it is a guided tour to a group of foreign visitors, one student would be the guide, one student the interpreter and others the visitors. The guide and the visitors would have interactions with each other and they might encountered problems and difficulties. If it is a press conference, one student would be the speaker standing behind the speech table and officially distributing information and some students would be the journalists from different media and ask questions to the speaker, and one student would be the interpreter sitting in the simultaneous booth and converting messages from one language to another.

The interpretation practice in simulated realistic environments will benefit students enormously. It helps students understand the style and features of speeches, related terms, fixed expressions and commonly used interpretation methods in a given setting. For example, through the simulation of medical interpreting, students would know the relevant words and phrases such as routine analysis of blood, Chinese medicinal herbs and department of cerebral surgery. For another example, through the simulation of etiquette speeches, students would know that the method of omission sometimes could be used for the modest expressions and polite greetings in Chinese speeches.

The interpretation practice in simulated realistic environments facilitates the mastery of the coping tactics for managing problems in comprehension as well as reformulation and crisis when interpreting tasks are being carried out at the spot. For example, if the speaker tells a joke in the source language which may not be understood by the target audience, then the interpreter could think of a joke in the target-language culture which could make the audience laugh and avoid the embarrassment of the speaker.

The interpretation practice in simulated realistic environments, in addition, could make students aware that professionalism is a quality every interpreter should possess. For instance, interpreters should be punctual and appropriately dressed. Interpreters should follow the rules of confidentiality.

The simulation is not limited to the classroom though, and if possible a visit to a court, an international conference and a business negotiation would be extremely beneficial to student interpreters.

The purpose of creating a simulated realistic environment is that students could learn knowledge and acquire skills in a real and open environment and improve their logical thinking and problem solving abilities. Of course, there will be frustrations and mistakes for student interpreters, and teachers could mobilize the enthusiasm of students, encourage student participation, offer timely help, give constructive feedbacks, *etc.*

3 Conclusion

Interpretation is an activity which involves different language skills including listening, reading, speaking and interpreting, and interpretation course therefore is a course characteristic of practice. How to carry out the practice effectively? The above-mentioned elements could be taken into account. They are the correct selection of interpretation practice materials, the close attention to students' affective factors, the cultivation

of student autonomous learning ability and the creation of simulated realistic environments. These elements are the key points of interpretation teaching and could help promote interpreting skills in students.

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