

Problems and Countermeasures of Senior High School English Vocabulary Teaching in the “Post-Method” Era

Yilei Dong

College of Foreign Languages, Zhejiang Normal University, Jinhua, China

Email: 19511316061@163.com

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Abstract—Vocabulary is the most basic material of language and the key to learn English well. Vocabulary teaching is the most difficult but also the most basic part of English teaching. However, in the traditional high school English vocabulary teaching, teachers and students are still limited by the shackles of “method”, and the phenomena of indoctrination and rote memorization are widespread. As the traditional teaching method system has been criticized and the “eclectic method” has been questioned as lacking a reliable theoretical basis, the field of foreign language teaching has come to the “post-method” stage proposed by Kumaravadivelu. This paper will be based on the three characteristics of the “post-method” teaching concept, and put forward corresponding countermeasures to the problems in high school English vocabulary teaching, in order to find a more concrete, real and dynamic approach to foreign language vocabulary teaching.

Keywords—post-methodology, vocabulary teaching, pedagogical problems, countermeasures research

I. INTRODUCTION

As a global language, English is very important for students’ learning and life. The study of English in high school takes up a large portion of a student’s learning time. Without vocabulary, any form of communication is impossible. Mastering the huge vocabulary system of English is the most basic and difficult task in students’ English learning. In addition, the English Curriculum Standards for General High Schools (2017 Edition) requires teachers to focus on students’ expression and application of English, context and cultural differences in their teaching work. However, in reality, vocabulary teaching still exists the phenomenon of “duck-filling”, vocabulary teaching is detached from the subject context, and mechanical memorization has become the main way for students to master vocabulary. Although English educators have always been committed to exploring effective vocabulary teaching methods, neither theory nor practice has proved that a certain teaching method has outstanding advantages. With Kumaravadivelu’s concept of transcending traditional teaching methods being recognized by more and more foreign language teachers in the mid-to-late 20th century, the theory of foreign language teaching has formally entered the era of “post-method”. In this study, it will discuss the two main questions about vocabulary teaching according to the philosophy of “post-method”:

- (1) What kinds of problems are existing in senior high schools’ vocabulary teaching?
- (2) What are the countermeasures of English vocabulary teaching in senior high schools under the philosophy of “post-method”?

II. PEDAGOGICAL PROPOSITIONS AND CORE ELEMENTS OF “POST-METHOD” FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

The concept of “post-method” teaching, which was developed by the American scholar Kumaravadivelu as the main representative of this theory [1], redefines the identity of the decision-maker in teaching. First of all, teachers are the reflectors and innovators of teaching and learning, and they are autonomous “post-method” teachers. Teachers need to constantly reflect on various elements of the teaching and learning process, such as the design of the curriculum and its objectives. Teachers need to ensure that they minimize perceptual mismatches and intervene effectively in classroom activities, as indicated in the ten macro-strategic frameworks. Teachers also need to consciously continue to improve their quality and incorporate new ideas as appropriate [2]. Stern [3] found that if English teachers continue to learn on-the-job, it will facilitate them to develop a set of concepts, principles and strategies that match their own teaching practice, and to develop their own pedagogical theoretical literacy, which can be used to guide their own teaching practice. Secondly, as autonomous “post-method” learners, learners have to maximize their own potential. Learners take responsibility for their own learning content and methods, maximize learning opportunities given by teachers, engage in negotiated interactions, and master personalized learning strategies to enhance autonomy. Third, as dialogic “post-method” teacher educators, they should change the traditional top-down indoctrination model of teacher preparation. Teacher educators should take into account the values, beliefs, and knowledge of future teachers, and allow future teachers to bring their own linguistic, cultural, and educational capital into dialogic, inquiry-based, and critical reflection-involved teacher education [4].

In addition, unlike traditional teaching methods, “post-method” teaching ideology is no longer obsessed with a “one-size-fits-all” approach and is no longer based on a single assumption, but rather emphasizes the three dimensions of specificity, practicability, and contextualization as the basic principles for organizing foreign language teaching [1, 3].

- (1) Specificity. Specificity is the most important of the three parameters of the “post-method” philosophy of teaching and learning. It emphasizes that the sociocultural environment of teaching is specific, with specific teachers educating a specific group of learners in a specific educational context for a specific educational purpose. Therefore, this

educational philosophy no longer ignores the external environmental factors of education, abandons the stereotypes inherent in traditional teaching methods, breaks through established theoretical principles and procedures, and seeks specific countermeasures based on specific environments, specific educational goals, and specific cognitive factors and affective needs of learners in order to enhance the effectiveness of teaching.

- (2) **Practicality.** Traditionally, there is a disconnect between the theoretical knowledge of a large number of teachers and their practical operations. Teachers may have mastered a large number of teaching methods in their training, but they are unable to apply them to their teaching practice and link theory to practice. In addition, there is an artificial dichotomy between teaching theory and teaching practice in the field of foreign language teaching, believing that theorists develop methods and teachers implement them, and that frontline teachers can only accept ready-made methods that are not sufficient for them to cope with the challenges of daily teaching practice [4]. Practicality encourages teachers to create and validate theories in their daily educational practice, and requires them to think about the feasibility of teaching methods in the context of practice. Through the active cycle of “practice-knowledge-practice” and reflection on the teaching process, teachers can gradually develop their own good understanding of teaching, and these theories and practices are dynamically evolving.
- (3) **Life contextualization.** Foreign language teaching should be linked to students’ real life, not limited to book knowledge and teachers’ oral teaching. “Post-methodological teaching requires educators to be sensitive to external social and cultural environments and to emphasize the enhancement of learners’ cultural awareness, so as not to separate the learners’ language knowledge needs from social needs.

III. ANALYSIS OF PROBLEMS IN TEACHING ENGLISH VOCABULARY IN HIGH SCHOOLS

A. *Vocabulary Teaching in Serious “Filler” Phenomenon*

The new curriculum standard requires students to master more than 3,000 English words and about 400 phrases, and also adopts a hierarchical approach to put forward specific requirements for the mastery of different words and phrases. This requires that high school English teaching must improve the efficiency of English vocabulary teaching so as to ensure that students’ English ability can be effectively improved [5]. In such a context, the amount of vocabulary that students need to master gradually increases, and teachers feel pressure in vocabulary teaching. Thus, in order to fulfill the vocabulary required to be achieved by the college entrance examination and to meet the needs of test-taking, it is necessary to accelerate the teaching progress through undifferentiated vocabulary inculcation. For students with a good foundation in English, digesting a large number of vocabulary input may only be a matter of time, and will not affect their construction of their own knowledge structure; however, for students with a weak foundation in English, the huge number of vocabulary words creates an even heavier academic burden, and the task of learning is

even bigger and tougher, which leads to insufficient motivation and loss of interest in learning, and ultimately is not in line with the teacher’s teaching goals, the school’s cultivation goals and the national education goals. This leads to a vicious circle of lack of motivation and loss of interest in learning, which is ultimately out of line with the teaching goals of teachers, the cultivation goals of schools, and the national education goals.

B. *Vocabulary Teaching Lacks Phonetics and Grammar*

Due to the high pressure of high school, it is common for English courses to be rushed in secondary schools in China, and some teachers may only focus on the meaning and form of words in the process of teaching vocabulary, ignoring the importance of vocabulary pronunciation and grammar. As a result, some students may only know the words but not their usage, and they can only use the vocabulary in written form but shy away from oral expression. In addition, compared with the grammar of vocabulary, the lack of pronunciation teaching seems to be more serious in China. The teaching of phonetic symbols should start as early as the third or fourth grade of elementary school, so as to lay the most solid foundation for students’ foreign language learning. However, some students do not know how to pronounce the phonetic symbols until the end of the college entrance examination, and they still make mistakes in pronouncing basic words such as “child” and “children”, which is a clear indication of the omission of vocabulary pronunciation teaching.

C. *Vocabulary Teaching out of Thematic Context and Lack of Social Relevance*

The current English vocabulary teaching in high school is mainly carried out by rote memorization and mechanical memorization, and some teachers think that there is no need to devote too much time to vocabulary teaching, and there is no need to teach vocabulary in connection with the contexts and the actual life of the students. This leads to greater resistance to memorizing vocabulary, and there is no point of memory for vocabulary [5]. However, learners themselves and external environmental factors are two important factors that affect the learning effect, and are the driving force that promotes learners to construct new cognitive structures on the basis of their previous knowledge and experience. Teaching divorced from contextualization is not conducive to students’ linking their original knowledge with new knowledge. In addition, English, as a foreign language, represents another different culture behind it. When Chinese students learn English, they will naturally find the cultural differences between the East and the West, and even cause misunderstanding. Therefore, when teaching English vocabulary in high school, we must not simply explain word meanings and word shapes without involving culture and hot issues in society, and the teaching content should be comprehensive and positive.

D. *Vocabulary Teaching Neglects the Teaching of Learning Strategies*

Most students say that memorizing English vocabulary can only be achieved through repeated practice, which takes relatively more time. The reason for this is that teachers ignore the teaching of word memorization in the teaching process and do not teach students the skills and methods of word memorization [6]. It is better to teach a man to fish than to teach him to fish. Vocabulary memorized by students relying on rote memorization does not remain in

their cognitive structure for a long time, and if there is no regular review and revision, it will be replaced by new knowledge or forgotten with the extension of time. Vocabulary practice with the help of the teacher's homework is only one-sided, and students do not become independent learners in the true sense of the word, but still rely on the teacher and on mechanical repetition. Counseling on learning strategies is even more important. Independent learning does not mean that teachers directly throw students into the sea of knowledge and let them float and sink, but it is crucial to teach students how to swim beforehand [7].

IV. RESEARCH ON COUNTERMEASURES OF ENGLISH VOCABULARY TEACHING IN HIGH SCHOOLS UNDER THE THREE DIMENSIONS OF "POST-METHOD"

According to the specificity of the "post-method", a specific teacher needs to teach a specific content to a specific learner in a specific teaching environment. Teachers need to break away from rigid and dogmatic teaching methods in the process of teaching vocabulary. In the huge vocabulary system of English, there are bound to be words that are close in meaning, so it becomes an important task for teachers to help students distinguish between these near-synonyms and deepen their cognitive structure.

Example 1: The words "aggravate", "irritate" and "annoy" all mean "irritate" and "annoyed", but the word "aggravate" is used only when the state is serious or worsening. "The word "aggravate" is used only when the situation is serious or worsening.

Example 2: The words "ambiguous" and "equivocal" both mean "vague" and "ambiguous". "but they are used differently. "Ambiguous" means "unconscious" and "unplanned", while "equivocal" "equivocal" is "purposeful", to deceive.

Example 3: When learning the synonym "creature", the teacher can instruct students to use brainstorming to stimulate their thinking, to associate words related to "creature" and to draw a related network.

"In the past, we talked basically about how to teach a foreign language and seldom cared about how students learned it. That is why we are always so keen on all kinds of so-called new pedagogies, on such-and-such textbooks and tutorials, and seldom study the actual needs of the students, seldom formulate teaching plans according to the actual needs of the students". [8] The practical nature of the "post-method" tells teachers to create and verify theories in practice, to think about the feasibility of teaching operations according to specific teaching environments and the actual needs of students, and to reflect on the process of teaching with the help of the virtuous circle from practice to understanding, and then from understanding to practice until they form their own understanding of good teaching and develop their own knowledge of good teaching in the context of their own practice. Teachers should reflect on the teaching process with the help of a virtuous cycle from practice to knowledge and then from knowledge to practice until they form their own understanding of good teaching and improve their teaching level in the dynamic process to meet the needs of students. There are many similar words in the vocabulary of the college entrance examination, such as "crazy", "lazy", "crazy" and so on [9]. The number of letters

composing these words is similar, and the order of letters is also close, then it may have an effect on students' memorization of these words. The words that are easy for students to memorize are often the ones that they have association points or are close to real life, so teachers can help students master the vocabulary words through some methods such as the associative memory method and the song method [10].

Example 4: brick, brisk, brink.

[Associative memory method]—Take "brick=brick" as the core, when the original c-type bricks become s-type bricks, it means that the bricks are made of foam, and become lighter and faster. When the original c-type bricks become n-type bricks, it means that the bricklaying work has come to the top, and the bricks are laid to the edge.

Example 5:

[Song method]—"Britain's Past"

The British Empire had no boundaries, the commonwealth countries were abound, and the currency in circulation was the pound.

English sounds everywhere, gentlemen's hounds all around.

The life context dimension of the "post-method" reminds us that in the process of teaching vocabulary, teachers should always be reflective, asking themselves "Does the content fit the students' lives?" and "Do the students use what they learn to communicate and interact in their daily lives?" "Do students use what they have learned to communicate and interact with each other in their daily lives?" etc. [11]. Therefore, in the process of teaching, teachers can guide students to learn vocabulary in specific contexts. For example, when distinguishing the meanings of the words "extravagant" and "expansive", teachers can set up two specific contexts to guide students to make the distinction.

Example 6:

S1: Do you know the American singer Nicki Minaj? Her songs are extremely brilliant!

S2: Yes! Of course I know her! I love her ways of dressing and singing very much.

S1: Huh...But don't you think she is a little extravagant? She spends millions of dollars on purchasing luxuries and clothes every year. And I think she is somewhat extravagant in her behaviors, which should not be admired by young teenagers.

S2: Alright, I think you are on the point. Extravagant life style should not be promoted and imitated.

V. CONCLUSION

"Without grammar, very little can be conveyed; without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed." Vocabulary teaching plays a pivotal role in the whole English teaching. role in the whole English teaching [12]. However, the teaching of English vocabulary in high schools today is not satisfactory. The concept of "post-methodology" fundamentally transcends traditional teaching methods and does not seek to pursue the "best" teaching methods. Under the cultivation of the "post-method" era, the roles of teachers and educators in China have been greatly changed and improved. It is hoped that under the leadership of advanced and excellent concepts,

the majority of English teachers and English education researchers in China can explore vocabulary teaching methods that are more in line with the national conditions and the specific situation of the students, and enrich the teaching practice of the “post-method” teaching concepts in China, so that they can be combined with the actual situation in China, improve the quality of talents, and promote the development of the country. To improve the quality of talents and promote the development of the country.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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