

Ecological Linguistics--a New Research Perspective on College English Teaching

Xueyu Sun

School of Foreign Languages , Jiangsu Open University, Nanjing, Jiangsu, China

Keywords: Ecolinguistics, College english teaching and learning, Evaluation system

Abstract: With the universal education of English language in China for the past decades, the college students have acquired the language knowledge at different levels after years of English education, but there exists a common phenomenon that most of them lack the ability to use the language and can not conduct smooth intercultural communication. Researchers of different disciplines have tried to find a solution to the problem from different perspectives such as linguistics, pedagogy or brain science, but the problem still cannot be solved effectively. Ecological linguistics focuses on the dynamics and systematicness of language learning, which provides a new perspective for language teaching research and a theoretical support for the construction of a positively more developed model of language teaching. So it can provide a certain enlightenment for changing the current situation of college English teaching in China.

1. Introduction

Ecology, originated in Greek, was first proposed by the German biologist Ernst Haeckel. It refers to the overall science of studying the complex relationship between organisms and their surrounding organic and inorganic environments. In the late 1920s, western scholars introduced ecology into the field of education. In 1932, American scholar Willard Waller put forward the concept "Ecology of Classroom" in his book *sociology of teaching*. In 1972, Einar Haugen, a Norwegian linguist, put forward the concept "Language Ecology" in his article *Ecology of Language*, which mainly focuses on three aspects: language, language use and social environment. In 1976, Lawrence Creming, president of Columbia Teachers College in the United States, proposed the term "Educational Ecology" in his book *Public Education*. The ecology of education refers to the science of using ecological methods and principles to explore educational laws and study educational phenomena. Subsequently, Eggleston(1977), Bronfenbrenner(1979), Goodlad(1987) have studied educational resources, school development, and human beings. The research on behavior and ecological environment has greatly expanded the research scope of ecology of education. Atkiss, Burns(2011) based on the principles of ecology, explores the problems related to human growth and social environment, the utilization of resources inside and outside the school, and the development of schools, aiming to realize the in-depth development of ecology of education in application field.

Ecological linguistics takes language learning as a micro ecosystem and studies the interactional factors among learners, language teachers and language in the system from multiple perspectives and

language learning environment, and also its influence on language acquisition. In other words, English teaching is no longer a simple teaching behavior, but a language teaching ecosystem. In this ecosystem, the main factors are: teacher-centered language professors, language teaching and learning environment in a specific language ecological environment, student-centered language learners, and English language culture. Learners learn English culture and language knowledge through English language, and interact with various elements in the system. The process of English teaching from the perspective of ecolinguistics is the micro-system of English language knowledge and cultural communication constructed by language teachers and language learners in the dynamic interaction process of teaching. In the process of the system construction, language teachers pass on language knowledge and cultural knowledge to the language learners; language learners acquire and consolidate language and cultural knowledge by participating in the construction of systems. The process of English learning is as follows: under the guidance of language teachers, the learners acquire English language and cultural knowledge and adapt to the English cultural communication mode through the communication and interaction with the language teachers and other learners in a specific language ecological environment. Learners not only learn language knowledge, but also participate in the construction of micro English cultural system, promoting both knowledge and cultural literacy. Therefore, they tend to have new talents on the requirements of global economic integration. Ecological English teaching is a dynamic and unified process including teaching objectives design, creating ecological teaching environment and adopting ecological teaching methods. For the learners, it is a process of adapting themselves into English culture in a specific culture context.

2. English Teaching Design from the Perspective of Ecolinguistics

From the perspective of ecolinguistics, English teaching mode should combine English teaching, language culture, language learning environment and learners' psychological environment organically, so as to construct a comprehensive and harmonious ecological language teaching mode.

2.1 Teaching Objectives

To set up teaching objectives is the first step of the ecological English teaching model. The teaching aim of college English is to cultivate students' English comprehensive ability in language use, especially listening and speaking skills. In order to make them communicate effectively in English in their future work and social activities both in written and spoken language, their autonomous learning abilities and comprehensive cultural literacy should be also improved to meet the requirements of the economic development in our country and international communication in the world. From the perspective of ecolinguistics, English teaching no longer aims at learning language knowledge, but at cultivating students' comprehensive abilities with "multiple goals", namely, language skills training, language knowledge broadening, emotional attitude cultivating, learning strategies exploring, cultural awareness training, and cultural literacy improving.

2.2 Teaching Content

The core of English teaching has always been English language knowledge. Therefore, from the perspective of ecological linguistics, the teaching content should not only include language knowledge such as pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar in a narrow sense, but also include cultural knowledge such as history, geography and literature of different cultures. The teaching materials should not only include the formal written language of knowledge and literature, but also the informal oral language of daily communication, which provides students with more colorful

learning materials. Though textbook is a carrier of teaching content, it goes far beyond a textbook. Otherwise, the teaching content should not only provides students with materials for language knowledge and language skills training, but also combine language knowledge, language skills, students' emotions and attitudes, learning strategies and cross-cultural communication ability training, so as to develop students' all-round talents in the new era.

2.3 Teaching Methods

The content of teaching materials from the perspective of ecolinguistics can be diversified. Therefore, the teaching method should be flexible and variable according to the content, adhering to the concept of "teaching students according to their aptitude". Various teaching methods can be adopted in specific teaching, such as traditional grammar translation method, demonstration method, immersive situational teaching method, task-based teaching method, ecological language teaching method and so on.

An active classroom atmosphere should be created by the teacher to guide students to the language learning and cultural acquisition context as follows: first, a harmonious learning atmosphere is a prerequisite for cultural immersion, which means that students will try to express themselves in English classroom actively and boldly in a harmonious and relaxed learning atmosphere filled with cultural elements; secondly, in a harmonious teaching atmosphere, teaching objectives can achieved by creating specific cultural scenes, so that classroom teaching can become the exhibition center of westerners' life and customs or local customs. In a given social and cultural atmosphere, students will use cultural and language knowledge to perform role plays, actively participate in teaching activities, experience and absorb western culture knowledge. Moreover, teachers should enrich the cultural knowledge in classroom teaching that is always glossed over in most textbooks. While making full use of teaching materials, teachers can depend more on modern multimedia teaching technology. For example, learning materials can include pictures, audio, video and other multimedia materials to add more comparison of Chinese and western culture.

2.4 Ecological Learning Evaluation System

Based on the concept that language is an ecosystem, ecolinguists believe that the evaluation system should cover various elements in the system, including teachers, learners, language and its culture environment. The purpose of this multiple evaluation system is to make teachers reflect on the rationality and pertinence of teaching design, and make students reflect on their language and culture learning initiative and effect. As for school's administrative departments, they should ensure a healthy language and culture learning environment, and provide reference points to test students' development degree instead of traditional evaluation indexes. From the perspective of ecological linguistics, learning evaluation not only focus on students' academic performance, such as the English language and culture knowledge, but also students' potential development abilities. In addition, students' self-adjustment ability in specific English cultural context and intercultural communication abilities should also be evaluated in the evaluation system.

3. Conclusion

Ecolinguistics considers the ecological environment of language comprehensively and regards English teaching as a dynamic ecosystem. In this system, teachers and students are the subjects of activities, English language as the carrier, and Chinese and western social cultures as the living environment. All elements in the system are interrelated. The sustainable development of the

system needs appropriate ecological environment, namely classroom environment, campus cultural atmosphere, social cultural atmosphere, policies and regulations, etc.

References

- [1] Atkiss K, Moyer M, Desai M & Roland M.(2011). *Positive youth development: An integration of the developmental assets theory and the socio-ecological model. American Journal of Health Education, (3): 171-180.*
- [2] Bronfenbrenner U.(1979). *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design. Cambridge,MA: Harvard University Press.*
- [3] Burns M K.(2011). *School psychology research: Combining ecological theory and prevention science. School Psychology Review, (1):132-139.*
- [4] Eggleston J. (1977). *The Ecology of the School. London: Methuen.*
- [5] Goodlad J I.(1987). *The Ecology of School Renewal. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.*
- [6] Haugen, E. (1972). *The Ecology of Language. Standford: Standford University Press.*