

# *An Analysis of Audio-Lingual Method and Communicative Language Teaching in Chinese EFL Class*

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**Keywords:** Audio-lingual, communicative language teaching, EFL, application

**Abstract:** There has been a variety of teaching methods in English teaching. However, there is no doubt that audio-lingual method and communicative language teaching are more suitable for the increasingly close needs of communication between countries, and more conducive to improving students' English communicative ability. In fact, audio-lingual method and communicative language teaching can not only effectively improve students' English communicative ability, but also promote students' logical thinking ability. Therefore, they have been used for teaching English in Chinese EFL class since they were introduced to China. Audio-lingual method and communicative language teaching have been considered to have many advantages, but their disadvantages cannot be ignored. They should be applied for teaching English in Chinese EFL class.

## **1. Introduction**

It is common that the teacher will follow different theories to teach language. At the same time, Different teaching methods will be used based on different theories. "In the fifties and sixties language teaching represented a reasonably unified body of theory and practice" (Richards & Rodgers, 1987, p. 145) [7]. The characteristics and applications on English teaching of audio-lingual method and communicative language teaching will be discussed in this essay.

The essay is divided into three parts. In the first part, audio-lingual method will be discussed. When using this method to teach English, listening and oral expression rather than grammar rules and writing practice should be focused by the teacher. In the second part, the communicative language teaching will be discussed. Student-centered is the concept of this method and students' cultivate of communicative competence is focused. Despite all this, the grammar is ignored, leading to students making mistakes during communicating with others. The conclusion will be drawn in the last part.

## **2. Audio-lingual Method**

The audio-lingual method, also known as the "Saint Croix method", comes from the direct method and the listening method (Li Li & Zhou Yuanyuan, 2007) [5]. It is a teaching method emphasizes the combination of situational teaching. Therefore, it is the combination and

development of direct method, listening method, holistic language teaching method and situational teaching method (Feng Linzhuo, 2012) [1].

## 2.1 Basic theory of audio-lingual method

Listening and speaking are focused by the audio-lingual method, writing and translation are not very important. (Stern, 1983) [9]. According to Feng Linzhuo (2012) [1], the theoretical basis of audio-lingual method is based on modern linguistics and psychology. The teaching content of language learning should be language activities. Therefore, audio-lingual method emphasizes spoken language rather than reading and writing. At the same time, the audio-lingual method also uses situational teaching to enable students to form "stimulus-response" in situational practice and finally form language habits. Based on this, we can say that audio-lingual method is also based on psychology.

When using audio-lingual method to teaching English, the students can learn appropriate language expression through handouts or audio tapes from teachers. After that, the students should constantly repeat and imitate until they can use proficiently. The students cannot use their mother tongue to communicate with others. Therefore, the ideas of students cannot be expressed if they make mistakes, which will lead to form wrong language habits. Therefore, the teacher should correct students' mistakes so as to ensure the accuracy of language.

## 2.2 The advantages and disadvantages of audio-lingual method

When using audio-lingual method in the classroom, the teacher's need to shape correct language structure. When students imitate and learn, the teacher should give suggestions. At the same time, the teacher should control the whole learning process. The most important thing is that the structure of the language should be repeated constantly by students until they can form the ability to use this structure without thinking (Spiro, 2013) [8].

One of the greatest advantage of this method is that it helps students form perfect oral ability and learn authentic grammar structure. That is because it different from traditional teaching methods. It is well known that traditional teaching methods in Chinese EFL class usually focus on grammar rules and writing training, rather than listening and speaking. However, audio-lingual method focuses on the teaching of oral English and attaches importance to sentence pattern teaching (Feng Linzhuo, 2012) [1]. That means the students can master the skill of expressing ideas proficiently in daily life after learning. In addition, audio-lingual method focuses on the close combination of language and scene. According to Zhao Lixia (2009) [11], audio-lingual method not only pays attention to students' listening and speaking ability, but also puts students in a real language environment. Students are allowed to practice listening and speaking while watching pictures, and learn English immersively through modern teaching aids. At the same time, they can naturally link the scene they see and the sound they hear, so as to make students more impressed.

However, we cannot ignore the disadvantages of this method. First of all, the teacher should do a lot of things during teaching and the students just follow the steps of teacher. That means the role of teacher is more active than the students. Secondly, it's just a process of stimulus-response and the process of students' mechanical imitation and repetition. Although the students can remember sentence patterns that they've learned, they cannot use them proficiently. Nelson Brooks (1960, as cited in Johnson, 2008, p. 174) [6] pointed out: "the single paramount fact about language learning is that it concerns not problem-solving but the formation and performance of habits."

## **2.3 Application of audio-lingual method in Chinese EFL class**

Audio-lingual method can closely combine language and situation. At the same time, Audio-lingual method attaches importance to oral language teaching and sentence pattern teaching, it emphasizes the practice of sentence patterns through the situation to help students master common life language (Zhong Ling, 2018) [12].

### **2.3.1 Carefully design and skillfully introduce to stimulate students' interests in learning**

Interest is the best teacher. In English classroom teaching, if we want to mobilize students' enthusiasm, we should first stimulate students' interest in English learning. This requires teachers to carefully design the teaching process, skillfully introduce language materials, so that students can quickly grasp the teaching intent (Zhong Ling, 2018) [12]. On this basis, with the help of multimedia teaching methods, students can learn English words and sentences while watching animation, stories or videos, and master the teaching content with interest.

### **2.3.2 Strengthen situational teaching and improve understanding ability**

Dialogue is a common way of English teaching. The content of dialogue is mainly based on a certain scene or event. In this regard, teachers can use situational dialogue as the main line, task-based, audiovisual as the means of teaching throughout the English teaching (Zhong Ling, 2018) [12]. This teaching method is conducive to deepening students' memory and gradually improving students' English listening and understanding ability.

### **2.3.3 Combination of language and situation**

Multimedia teaching can mobilize the functions of various senses and help to cultivate language sense and be able to directly establish the connection between foreign language and objective things (Li Li & Zhou Yuanyuan, 2007) [5]. It can also be conducive to cultivate students' ability to think in foreign language, which can help students combine language and situation closely. The students can practice listening and speaking while watching the pictures, learn foreign languages immersively, and naturally connect the scene they see with the sound they hear, which is impressive.

## **2.4 Suggestions on the Application of audio-lingual method**

Audio-lingual method has been used in English teaching in China for many years. It still has various problems in English teaching in China because of uneven distribution of teaching quality, especially in areas with relatively weak economic power (Zhao Lixia, 2009) [11]. There are several suggestions for it.

### **2.4.1 Strengthen teacher training and improve teacher quality**

Teachers play a very important role in the teaching of communicative approach. The quality of teachers is directly related to the success of audio-lingual teaching method (Zhao Lixia, 2009) [11]. The training of teachers should be pay more attention. Teachers should receive regular training to improve their teaching skills. They should not only learn professional knowledge, but also learn psychology and pedagogy. In addition, excellent young and middle-aged teachers should be selected to study in English-speaking countries in order to have a deep exposure to the cultural customs of these countries.

### **2.4.2 Requirements for school hardware facilities**

In the process of English teaching, audio-lingual method aims to cultivate students' oral ability. Therefore, the requirements for students' preparation of learning materials should be much higher than traditional English teaching, such as more extracurricular reading materials and multimedia audio-lingual materials that match the new syllabus and teaching materials, such as some English novels, dramas, films and English songs. The preparation of these materials requires the school to invest a lot of financial resources (Zhao Lixia, 2009) [11].

## **3. Communicative language teaching**

As we all know, teachers should use different varieties of teaching methods to teach students to express their ideas and communicate with other by using the language which they are learning. Therefore, it is very important for educators to use an appropriate method in language teaching classroom. However, Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) [2] pointed that in the 1970s, the student have been noticed by the teachers noticed that they cannot use the second language they were learning even though they've already learned the rules of linguistic usage. That means the students' communicative competence should be improved.

### **3.1 The characteristics of Communicative language teaching**

It is generally believed that communicative language teaching should keep functional when used by the teachers. Therefore, we can know that language has the function medium between communication and expression (Richards&Rodgers, 1987) [7]. According to this teaching method, the students' ability to communicate by using language that they are learning should be cultivated during language teaching. The students' language communicative competence has been focused by communicative language teaching, so varieties of authentic language materials has been used in the class. At the same time, different types of teaching activities will be used in the process of teaching, such as dialogues, role playing and group games. The students' ability of communication can be improved well by using these activities. As Johnson (2008, p. 185) [6] pointed that “in role-play exercise, students act out parts in a small-scale ‘drama’ specifically set up practice chosen functions.”

#### **3.1.1 Emphasis of the communicative function of language.**

Language is a tool for communication. The purpose of learning language is to learn to communicate. Grammar is not a land for learning language. Li Fei&Yu Lu (2015) [4] pointed that language should be learned in the process of communication. Therefore, teachers should not ignore the explanation of language knowledge on the one hand, but also emphasize the role of communication on the other hand. The purpose of communicative language teaching is to let students experience the practicality of language and master language skills and strategies in practical application.

#### **3.1.2 The role of teachers has changed from a leader to an assistant**

In the traditional classroom, the teacher plays a leading role, is responsible for the learning process of all students, and is the imparter of knowledge. In the communicative approach, teachers are in an auxiliary position in teaching activities (Li Fei & Yu Lu, 2015) [4]. Teachers become organizers and organize students to arrange and distribute learning independently. Students' subjectivity is fully respected. At the same time, students' interest comprehensive English ability are

improved.

### **3.1.3 Great importance to the influence of context on communication.**

According to Li Fei & Yu Lu, (2015) [4], the communicative language teaching emphasizes language learning in the real context, and trains students to learn how to use language in different contexts. English is the practical course and the students can only acquire language skills and improve communicative competence through a lot of practice. Therefore, communicative language teaching can set English learning atmosphere to help students communicate with others.

### **3.2 The advantages and the disadvantages of communicative language teaching**

When using this teaching method, the dialogue scene should be set up by the teacher. At the same time, the teacher should guide the students to communicate and answer the questions by using the language they are learning. During communicative language teaching, the students are more important in the class, that is because the students are the center of the class. During the process of teaching, the students should participate actively, they need to correct their mistakes in the process of communicating with others to make sure that others can understand their ideas well. Therefore, students can discover language rules by themselves in this process.

Larsen-Freeman & Anderson (2011) [2] has once visited a class in Canada and communicative language teaching was applied in class. In this class, the teacher just divided the students and gave into several groups and asked them to read the stories that needed to perform. However, the teacher didn't bother them, just let them communicate with each other, leading to the students learn English actively and understand that communication is the aim of learning language. Secondly, the other strength of this method is that students' communicative competence has been focused and cultivated, thus, the students can communicate with others fluently in the real society. In the class that Larsen Freeman & Anderson (2011) [2] visited, the newspaper was sent to the students by the teacher firstly, and the students should read by themselves and then the contents of the newspaper should be repeated by them. That means the students need to paraphrase by using their own words after reading the newspaper. At the same time, different realistic scenes need to be built by the teacher, and the students should perform with their partners. The communication are more important than grammar in these teaching activities.

However, the weaknesses of this teaching method are also obvious. One of the most significant weakness is that the grammatical errors even though the students can express the meaning fluently. Because students' communicative competence rather than linguistic competence is focused by this method. Therefore, the teacher usually focuses on students' expression in classroom, rather than accurate translation and grammar by using communicative language teaching. It is allowed for teachers to ignore minor errors of students, thus, the students usually can express something fluently but not accurate. Larsen-Freeman & Anderson (2011) [2] found that students can be a good communicator after such teaching process. However, there are still some obstacles for them to learn English.

### **3.3 The Application of Communicative language teaching in English Teaching**

In the process of teaching English, teacher should use language correctly in real situations and use appropriate language to develop communicative activities in a variety of ways for different English levels to help students use their English knowledge to express their ideas freely and improve their comprehensive English communicative ability (Li Fei & Yu Lu, 2015) [4]. In English classes, the teacher sets the communication task scene. Students choose topics with the teacher,

participate in determining the communication content and form, and then carry out group activities or other forms of activities. In the process of teaching, the teacher should always focus on the content rather than the students' language expression form errors (Wang Qiaoxian, 2019) [10]. At the same time, communicative language teaching also pays attention to students' enthusiasm and subjective initiative in learning English.

### 3.3.1 Application in oral English teaching

During the past oral English teaching activities, Li Caihong (2020) [3] pointed that teachers have strengthened their understanding of teaching oral English and spend a lot of time and energy in this link. However, students' oral ability is still relatively weak. Therefore, in order to effectively improve this disadvantage, in the process of English teaching, teachers should scientifically apply the communicative language teaching, focus on the cultivation of students' subjective initiative and practicality, and pay more attention to students' oral communication practice. Therefore, students can truly master English knowledge, and actively use English to communicate with others (Li Caihong, 2020).

### 3.3.2 Application in teaching reading

During the application of communicative approach, teachers should focus on respecting students' subjectivity, effectively carry out teaching work, reasonably let students read and improve students' language communication ability. In addition, teachers can also carry out reading debate and other related activities to make sure that students can further understand the knowledge in textbooks and deepen their understanding of knowledge through these teaching activities (Li Caihong, 2020) [3].

## 4. Conclusion

The strengths and weaknesses and their application of the audio-lingual method and communicative language teaching are analyzed in this essay. Based on the discussion before, we can know that they have played a great role in promoting language teaching in China. However, they are not perfect. For their strengths, we need to use them better to teaching English in Chinese EFL class. But we need to ignore their weaknesses when we use them to teach students English in Chinese EFL class. In addition, when using these two methods, we need to follow the rules of each method and teach students authentic English. Meanwhile, every teaching method has their unique characteristics, the usage of each method just means we have different understanding of theories. (Johnson, 2008) [6]. As Spiro (2013, p. 16) [8] stated that “the teacher does not need to adopt just one approach; an eclectic teacher will find something interesting in each one. The class is taking place.” In view of this, we cannot simply use one method in the course of language teaching.

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