Exploration of Italian Zero-Based Short-Term Intensive Teaching Model

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Abstract

Based on summarizing domestic and overseas SLA (second language acquisition) theory and Italian zero-based short-term intensive teaching practice, under Web3.0 technical background, this paper has conducted tentative teaching reform of teaching concept, process, technique and teaching management of Italian zero-based short-term intensive education, introduced Production Oriented Approach (POA), to lead the teaching purpose of "help me and let me learn", integrate "holistic education" into teaching, optimize each procedures of class, and extend students' learning space and time by means of "flipped classroom", progressively introduce grammar knowledge points based on language transfer theory, optimize vocabulary and oral English textbook based on the comparative research result between auditory channel input and visual channel input; meanwhile the paper has followed up students' learning process through teaching practice and conducted comparative research by dividing into experiment group and control group. Based on data analysis, the paper has verified the effect of this Italian teaching model, and proposed prospects for further perfection of future Italian teaching model based on limitations and defects in experiments.

Key words: Italian; Zero-based; Short-term intensive teaching; Teaching model

INTRODUCTION

In 2012, according to National Program for Medium and Long-term Talent Development (2010-2020), China Scholarship Council established *Government-Supported High Level Overseas Study Program* (hereinafter referred to as high level) by selecting graduate students and doctoral students among universities for further study in Italy ad providing 200 credit hours' Italian language training before going abroad. Italian teaching and research office in the faculty of international education, Beijing Language and Culture University as the only unit providing Italian training for government-sponsored overseas students in China, shoulders heavy responsibility. It is a huge challenge for zero-based students and front-line teachers to improve students' Italian level to A2 within six weeks. All people have deeply realized how hard it is to race against time.

From the perspective of linguistic economics, we must obtain the max output with the min input which includes capital input (physical capital and human capital), teaching labor, teaching time, and student individual (students' intelligence and non-intelligence factors). To obtain the max output, we must allocate optimal resources effectively during teaching, i.e. input optimal learning resources to students in an optimal way. Under the optimal classroom teaching organization and management, through the optimal course presentation mode, students can gain the optimal learning effect in an optimal study condition.

1. TEACHING MODEL EXPLORATION PROCESS

During the teaching process, we must select appropriate teaching model for teaching guidance by combing with our teaching objective, students' characteristics and teaching environment.

Characteristics of Italian zero-based short-term intensive teaching are as below:

(a) Teaching duration is short. Take high level program as the example. From 2012, with the second week of each July as the starting date, there are totally six weeks including 4 classes in the morning and 2 classes in the afternoon, 200 credit hours totally, which is far shorter than traditional four years' undergraduate schooling in Italian language specialty, also different with the previous one-year training for visiting scholars to Italy.

(b) Teaching task is heavy. According to "Guideline", trainees are required to acquire pronunciation rules, spelling methods, basic vocabulary and grammar knowledge of Italian language through 200 hours' intensive training. Also trainees should cultivate self-study ability and improve their inter-cultural communicative awareness.

(c) Students are zero-based without Italian language foundation. It is worth mentioning that students in high level program have good English foundation, strong self-study ability and good learning habit with clear learning objectives. But they must use Italian in their daily life even they can use English during work and study.

Under this background, based on teaching and students' characteristics, we have introduced "Production Oriented Approach" (hereinafter referred to as POA)[1] which combines Input Hypothesis by Krashen (1985), Output Hypothesis by Swain (1985) and the essence of Interaction Hypothesis, to systematize each teaching procedure (drive- facilitate-evaluate) and take actions comprehensively, and supervise each links of teaching activity so as to put teaching into practice.

Teaching can be divided into three stages: "Drive", "facilitate" and "evaluate", which connect with each other without strict limits. Each teaching unit teaching contains several cycles in three stages and there are several sub-activities in each stage.

2. ESTABLISHMENT OF TEACHING MODEL

By applying POA method in Italian zero-based short-term intensive training, we can gradually optimize each teaching procedure on the basis of practice.

2.1 Teaching Purpose of "Help Me and Let Me Learn"

Each teaching procedure and teaching activity is conducted for the purpose of stimulating students'

activity and facilitating students' initiative learning. Teacher as the collaborator, guide and cooperator should help students become the real learning subject. According to Mind Flow proposed by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, mind flow will occur when a people is completely devoted into a certain activity with strong sense of excitement and fulfillment. Students will obtain the best learning effect when they are fully concentrated in study (Chen, 2014).

According to Affective Filter Hypothesis proposed by Krashen, a great amount of appropriate input environment does not mean that students can master the target language as the course of second language acquisition is affected by a lot of emotional factors. Language input can only achieve language intake only through affective filter. A log of educational psychologists also believe that some active teaching methods and patterns which can stimulate students to take initiative attitude should be used. For example, in the stage of consonant pronunciation, we will elaborately select some words such as Gucci, Moschino, Giorgio Armani and Lamborghini as the reciting and dictation contents, and examine students one by one to pass. These nouns containing special pronunciation rules are also vocabularies that students are interested and hope to learn. Apart from memorizing the form, we have input stories behind to students so as to increase their interest in Italian learning and understanding of Italian culture.

2.2 Integrate "Holistic Education" Concept Into Teaching

"Holistic education" combining "society-based" and "human-oriented" educational concepts emphasizes both social values of education and people's values. Ron Miller in US was the first one to propose "holistic education" concept in a modern sense. In addition, he has also proposed the concept of "holistic paradigm" and believed spirituality should be superior to materiality in holistic essence.

Therefore, during the teaching process, except for introduction of Italian culture, we should focus on students' internal emotional experience, stimulate students' curiosity, imagination and creativity while imparting language knowledge and cultivating language skills. We have also picked some quintessence of traditional Chinese culture and made into relevant Italian courseware, which can strengthen students' national self-confidence and sense of pride, and also can enhance students' sense of urgency and responsibility for language "output".

2.3 Optimize Each Procedure of Course

2.3.1 Extend Students' Learning Space and Time by Means of Flipped Classroom

Digital revolution determines the reform of teaching methods, the most innovative one among which is

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[1] Output-oriented approach is constituted by three parts: Teaching concept, teaching hypothesis and teaching procedure, which is an important manifestation of Chinese foreign language teaching and research has obtained the power of the academic discourse in international foreign language circle.

"Flipping Classroom".[2] We have reformed course teaching by using "Flipping Classroom" by conducting experiments in successive three years and dividing students into experiment group and control group each year mainly by means of teachers' classroom teaching. When course is over, we compare two teaching models based on students' academic record tracking and students' satisfaction survey. It can be seen from our experiment data that both full mark rate and scoring rate in control group are far lower than experiment. Thus we combined with "Flipping Classroom" and used blended learning method to guide classroom teaching.

2.3.2 Reform Curriculum Design

We have increased the proportion of communicative oral language course and canceled independent listening class and reading class, which has changed the conventional cognition that "students should learn how to speak and write as long as they have read and listened at class". Also, each teacher should realize that it takes enough training time from listening comprehension and reading comprehension to know how to speak and write. It also requires for teachers' systematic and effective guidance. With own rules in foreign language teaching, a certain objective can be achieved within limited teaching time.

2.3.3 Reform Teaching Materials

(a) Grammar textbook: According to Chomsky's language transfer theory, we should follow three principles when arranging and instructing grammar knowledge points: Contrast principle, i.e. contrast grammars of Chinese, Italian and English; step-by-step principle and principle of first learning for first utilization, i.e. arrange the sequence of grammar knowledge points learning according to the difficulty and students' demands of using Italian in their life and study; principle of sufficient examples, i.e. provide a large amount of example sentence and words of grammar knowledge points for students for their better understanding and practice.

Based on this theory, we have re-compiled textbooks by absorbing quintessence of current excellent Italian language textbooks[3] and uniting different terms of one knowledge point in different kinds of Italian grammar textbooks, sorting out knowledge points, and extracting knowledge points to be mastered in zero-based short-term intensive teaching based on teaching practice, and tried to explain Italian grammars with the simplest words and plain expressions. Based on language transfer theory, in contrast teaching method, by virtue of Chinese and English grammar, in witty and humorous language with metaphor and personification, we try to help students to rapidly understand and master a certain knowledge point for better and easier language "output".

(b) Vocabulary and oral teaching book: Our objective of vocabulary teaching is to help "students memorize maximum vocabularies in the shortest time" based on the principle of linguistic economics.

Our students get used to memorize words by silent reading but Nation (1990) believes whether initial word input is through the auditory channel or visual channel is an important factor influencing vocabulary learning. Channell (1988) has found that the visual channel is not the best input mode for learning new words. Feitelson, Goldstein, Iraq and Share (1993) have found that inputting new words through auditory channel can help students learn new words and grammar at the same time (Wang, 2002).

Particularly, based on characteristics of Italy which should be pronounced similar with its writing, students should write correctly after training if they have listened correctly as one pronunciation will not correspond to two different ways of writing. To achieve the objective of vocabulary teaching, we have recorded vocabularies through "Mobil phone app ximalaya FM" according to different topics in forms of slow Italian and comparison of Chinese to help students' vocabulary learning and on this basis we have also conducted contrast experiments.

Experiment result shows that listening input group is better than reading input group in word phonetic memorization and differentiation, which conforms to relevant psychological theories. Different external stimulus for two learning methods lead to different sensory memory presentations formed in the human brain. One is phonic and the other is formal. According the general principle of memory, human brain records and stores information in sensor presentation. Input through auditory channel will lead to a sound presentation in the test result. Input through visual channel will result in image memories. Psychologists believe sound image lasts longer than image (Zhu, 1994, p.188).

Based on theoretical support and experiment data, we recorded all Italian vocabularies in experiment method in November 2015 and put into the platform of "Mobil phone app ximalaya FM". Up to April 1st 2017, primary vocabulary broadcasting rate reached 156 thousand times. Italian as a minority language without any publicity and promotion in this teaching program, the number has preliminarily verified our experiment hypothesis: Listening input vocabulary teaching mode is more effective than reading input vocabulary teaching mode and it is more popular among students. So we have achieved the objective of "gaining larger output with less input".

(c) Digitization of teaching material and teaching resources: Traditional Italian teaching materials usually limited by the lagged and scattered traditional information

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[2] "Flipping Classroom" is a new type teaching model by flipping traditional classroom teaching structure to help students complete knowledge learning before class and complete knowledge absorption and mastery in class (Pan, 2015).
[3] Include "Italian Grammar" edited by Professor Liu Shanqiang and Professor Xiao Tianyou, "Intensive Italian" by Professor Zhao Xiuying, "Italian Grammar" by Professor Shen Emei, and "Italian Grammar" by Professor Wang Jun, "Nuovo Progetto Italiano" by Professor Wen Zheng.

network cannot be used for effective aggregation. Under Web3.0 network technical environment, Italian teaching can match with various teaching materials based on teachers' demands to establish individualized teaching content customization.

Breaking through the limitation of previous fixed classroom and time, students can freely select learning materials based on their own requirements and interests, discuss and communicate their learning results, and submit schoolwork online. Teachers can "drive, facilitate and evaluate" by digitalizing teaching program, teaching scheme, teaching courseware, instructional guidance and homework assignment, panel discussion, course review, management and notification.

3. ESTABLISH AND PERFECT TEACHING EVALUATION SYSTEM

Flexibly apply class evaluation, unit output task evaluation, diagnostic test and other evaluation methods, focus on students' learning process and learning behaviors, and evaluate students' ability of communicating and solving practical problems in specific context. Testing contents should include theoretical knowledge, communication skills, information gathering and concluding ability, teamwork spirit, etc. Meanwhile, students can conduct regular and unscheduled evaluation on teachers in anonymity to achieve teacher-student and students' mutual evaluation, and help us improve teaching quality and perfect teaching management.

For example, we have found in the survey in 2015 and 2016 that the frequency that students used "Mobil phone app ximalaya FM" was far higher than teaching materials presented in other forms. Reasons roughly include following aspects:

(a) It will consume more traffic to download video materials and cost higher than audios.

(b) Students can complete learning any time by putting on headsets by using "Mobil phone app ximalaya FM" meanwhile they are free to use both hands. In this way, students can use "fragmented" time more frequently.

"Mobil phone app ximalaya FM" with simple interface and easy for operation can help students to interact with teachers at lower operating cost.

Through the investigation and data analysis, we can keep improving our work. For example, use Camtasia studio[4] to record video resources to replace previous videos and cooperate with professional teaching video recording teams to record new videos; use WeChat to replace QQ for communicating and discussing with students; use Mikecrm[5] form to replace paper questionnaire to collect data and feedback; use "Mobil phone app ximalaya FM" more frequently to listen and record video teaching programs.

4. INADEQUACIES AND PROSPECTS

Due to heavy teaching tasks, bottlenecks in educational technology utilization, differences of students' learning habits, cognitive differences between cooperating teachers, and lack of R&D teams, especially my own theoretical and practical limitations, the actual result is far from the expected effect in practice. A lot of work of Italian intensive teaching should be completed. We need to keep exploring and perfecting our work, especially teacher training, team building, teaching management, tracking and return visit survey after students' going abroad.

There is a long way for us to go to complete the task of Italian zero-based short-term intensive teaching. We must adhere to the spirit of unremitting exploration, keep perfecting each work so as to carry out Italian zero-based short-term intensive teaching in a more systematic and scientific way.

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[4] Camtasia Studio as a tool specially for recording screen motions, supportive for momentary to output files in various formats, can be used in different systems of computer or mobile devices for preservation and output.

[5] Mikecrm as an online form making tool and a powerful client information processing and relationship management system can help users easily complete information collection and organization, achieve customer mining and notification push, and carry out sustainability marketing.

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