

Research and Practice of Visual Image in Task-Based Foreign Language Teaching

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Task-based language teaching (TBLT) emphasizes the relevance of classroom tasks to real-life scenarios, while focusing on the learner's personal life experiences as an important resource for classroom learning. This article is a teaching experiment based on task-based teaching method, which requires learners to complete a picture story about their daily life. The pictures are taken in real life scenes. Teachers plan to combine different task phases with visual images to closely link the tasks to the learner's personal life and enhance the authenticity of the task. After the task is completed, the teacher understands the learner's attitude and evaluation of the whole task through questionnaires, and analyzes the feasibility of the visual image applied to the foreign language classroom, the problems worthy of reflection, and suggestions for improvement.

Keywords: task-based language teaching (TBLT), visual image, foreign language teaching

Introduction

Visual images have a long history in foreign language classrooms. As early as the 17th century, Czech theologian and educator Johann Amos Comenius had proposed to promote the learning of primary and secondary school students through sensory impressions and imagery. *Orbis Sensualium Pictus*, a Latin course textbook published in 1658, uses a large number of pictures as a teaching aid. The combination of words, scenes, and behavioral processes (wort/situation/handlungsablauf) has brought new breakthroughs to foreign language teaching in Europe. Visual images can bring real images into the classroom to meet the requirements of task-based language teaching (TBLT) for real-life scenarios. At the level of memory psychology, pictures also help to transfer, receive, store, and reactivate existing knowledge. This article takes the German classroom in a university as an example, trying to combine visual images with task-based foreign language classrooms, first introducing and teaching vocabulary with pictures, and then assigning students a "picture + essay" assignment. Students need to take pictures of their daily life and then complete a short essay based on the content of the picture to introduce their daily life. Finally, the students' attitudes and feedbacks on this type of task are collected by means of questionnaires, and the application effect analysis is carried out to propose suggestions for improvement in future teaching.

The Basis of Memory Psychology

Vision is the perceived behavior of the human core. Raab (1997) believed that half of the knowledge of

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human learning is through vision. Unlike hearing, the process of visually receiving different information can occur simultaneously and does not have to be in a particular order. In many cases, our brains store image information much more than textual information. Pavio's (1971) dual processing theory (duale Kodierungstheorie) argued that the human brain has two different processing systems—images and text. On this basis, Edelman (1993) proposed the “hypothese der doppelten kodierung”: The two systems may not be independent of each other, but connected to each other, and the information presented through images and language is more easily remembered by the brain. In the face of abstract tasks, language processing (verbale Kodierung) is more likely to work. In specific scenarios, image and language processing may occur simultaneously. In other words, the more specific the information, the more likely it is that image processing (bildhafte Kodierung) will work. Through multiple processing, it is possible to present things more accurately and specifically, and to determine their meaning. In addition, the brain will automatically process the image, the consumption of attention is likely to be less, the fatigue of thinking is reduced, and the absorption of text information is better.

TBLT and Visual Images

TBLT emphasizes the ability of students to apply language to solve real-life problems. In the classroom, students need to face one or a series of tasks, often in the form of a double or group to complete the task, and finally acquire the language knowledge contained in the task, and reconstruct it to achieve the purpose of language acquisition. Teachers can map visual images into the classroom in a targeted and natural way, and can also guide students to take personalized photos with their smartphones. This helps to bring real life scenes into the classroom and provide support for task-based classes.

Willis (1996) distinguished six types of tasks: listing, ordering and sorting, comparison, problem-solving, sharing personal experiences, and creative tasks. How to use the picture naturally and properly for the task types, and let the students have more content to express is worthy of the teacher's thinking. Willis (1996) suggested that output should be taken into account when applying images. If the task given to a student is “describe the picture in four sentences”, then the students' language output is limited. Teachers may wish to try a comparative task: displaying the picture in a short time, then removing the picture and give the task, that is, the students writes two truths and two false words in pairs based on the memory of the picture. Read the sentences to other groups to see if they can identify the real information. When you write a sentence, you first need to recall the details in the picture and express it. The students will try the best to challenge the memory of other pairs. When communicating with other pairs, they should understand each other's language descriptions, compare them with their memories, and then express the results. Skilful display of images can increase the complexity of the task and also stimulate students' sense of competition and participation.

Another type of task that is often used to activate a students' existing knowledge and experience is brainstorming, a classic enumeration task. In the expansion of amateur life (freizeit) theme vocabulary, in order to help students activate existing knowledge, the teacher can first display a combination of pictures that embody different amateur life in a slide, which can stimulate students to imagine more, even if they cannot think of new content for the time being. The process of translating the content of the picture into a foreign language is also a good review, especially for students with a weaker learning foundation.

Types and Functions of Visual Images

Types and Selections of Visual Images

Pure pictures (reine bildmedien) include sketches, oil paintings, photos, photo stories, and more. The rich picture resources in the real life can increase the vividness and fun of the foreign language classroom. Comics, comics and photo books, and even advertising posters can be used for foreign language classroom teaching. The comic book *Vater-Sohn Geschichten*, which was wrote by German painter Erich Ohser with his pen name E. O. Plauen, has been widely used in the German language teaching so far. The questions worth considering are: How to choose the appropriate visual image from a large number of resources? Can the selected image function as a secondary memory? What factors determine the choice of images for foreign language teachers? These problems directly affect the effectiveness of classroom teaching.

For the choice of visual image, foreign language classrooms usually follow seven universal standards (allgemeine auswahlkriterien) and five special standards (spezifische auswahlkriterien). Common standards include: technical quality, aesthetic enjoyment, information content, student interests and experience, openness of images, detail filling, and language premise. Special criteria include: the students' existing knowledge, picture authenticity, timeliness, perspective and representation, and the closeness of his/her own culture.

The Functions of Visual Images

All pictures have the function of activating existing knowledge, that is, letting the learner's cognitive structure (kognitive struktur) enter the preparatory state. The functions of the picture include: motivation function (bilder zur motivation/dekoration), information carriers (bilder als informationsträger), oral expression and writing promotion (bilder als sprechanlass/als schreibanlass), visual function (bilder zur veranschaulichung), assisted memory (bilder zur gedächtnisstütze/mnemotechnik), and graphic association (bild-text-bezug). In the teaching, select the pictures related to the article, the pictures and texts complement each other, avoid choosing only decorative pictures. The more features an image has, the better it is suitable for classroom instruction (Macaire & Hosch, 1999).

Fusion Design of Visual Image and Task-Based Foreign Language Teaching

Research Object

This study is based on the class of German as second foreign language for English majors in a science and engineering university. The teaching objective of this lesson is: Students can describe their daily life. The final form of language production is to complete a picture story that introduces one's own life. After the end of the task, the students were informed about the feedback of the task in the form of questionnaires. Thirty-two valid questionnaires were distributed and collected in the classroom, including two male students and 30 female students.

Tool

The research tool is a questionnaire. The questionnaire was written in Chinese and consisted of two parts. The first part investigated gender and the questionnaire used anonymous. The second part asks students about the overall attitude of this form of work, using the 5-point Likert scale, namely, 1 = "Very disagree", 2 = "Disapproval", 3 = "General", 4 = "Agree", and 5 = "Very agree". Containing four questionnaire items, the measured internal consistency reliability (Cronbach α) was 0.907. The third part is an open question and answer, asking students for advice and evaluation.

The questionnaire was issued by the class teacher in the classroom in April 2018. The purpose of the survey was fully explained to the respondents before the release, and the questionnaire materials were used for research purposes only. All information was strictly confidential.

Instructional Design

Pre-task. The teacher first activates the existing language knowledge with a set of pictures and pictures related to daily life. Students need to express the behavior in the picture in German, such as getting up (aufstehen), making breakfast (das frühstück machen), cleaning the room (das zimmer aufräumen), brewing coffee (kaffee kochen), and so on. Then, arrange the enumeration tasks and ask the students to write down related activities around the theme of “tagesablauf (daily life)”, which can be displayed on the pictures or extended by themselves. The teacher simply summarizes the contents written by the students on the blackboard and begins to guide the students to express the complete sentences. For example, one or two questions are asked according to each picture: “Um wie viel Uhr stehst du täglich auf? Er steht um sieben Uhr auf, du auch?” By answering questions, students can review the already learned point of expression (die uhrzeit). On the other hand, it also improves oral fluency and accuracy by repeating the same sentence structure.

The questioning process in the process of displaying pictures conforms to the two principles of task design proposed by Skehan (1999): 1) considering a series of grammatical structures, not just a grammatical structure; 2) from the perspective of the use of grammatical structures, rather than the grammatical structure taught is chosen according to the criteria that must be taught. That is to say, when designing tasks, not only the current language structure but also the combination and connection between the current learning and the previously learned grammatical structure should be considered, and how these language structures are used in actual communication.

During the task (during-task). Dividing the students into four groups and completing a sharing personal experiences task chain in groups of three tasks. Task 1: Taking a group of photos related to daily life and the team members must leave the country. Task 2: Using a photo to create a vocabulary card to achieve the association between the image and the text (bild-text-bezug). Task 3: Each team member independently completes an essay based on this set of photos to describe his/her life. Students have one day to complete these three tasks. They should carry their smartphones with them and take pictures of their lives at a few points. The process of finalizing the photo is also a review process that reactivates the vocabulary learned in the class. If a group member has a large vocabulary, it is a good vocabulary extension for other members. The team members submit through the on-campus network teaching platform, which facilitates language knowledge extraction and homework display in the post-mission stage. Different from the inherent discourse structure of “question-answer-feedback” in traditional education focusing on form, in the middle stage of the task, a loose discourse structure is formed between the members of the group, students use time outside the classroom to understand and remember words. The final process of completing the essay is to internalize the words, language forms and structures as a whole. This kind of activity not only takes the output language as the ultimate goal of the activity, but also exchanges ideas and opinions and cooperates to achieve a goal.

Post-task. The teacher selects a representative group to report. At the time of reporting, the photos are always displayed through slides, and the students who report are reading their own essays to assist the visual image in understanding the text. The audience is more likely to understand the content of the essay with the aid of visual images. After the report is completed, the teacher will perform key language point analysis and

common error summary. Finally, the questionnaire was distributed on the spot, and the students reflected on the completion process of the whole operation, and feedback and evaluation of the task form as the basis for teaching improvement.

Results and Discussion

Effectiveness Analysis

According to the questionnaire survey, the feedback given by the students is as follows: First, the task form of “picture + essay” allows students to experience more sense of accomplishment. Ninety-three point eight percent of the students strongly agree or agree that “the completion of the homework will bring more sense of learning achievement.” Second, compared with the plain text assignment, 93.6% of the students are more interested in completing such writing tasks. Third, the picture can deepen the memory of the learning content. Students generally agree with this form of task. Ninety percent of the respondents strongly agree or agree that “this type of task is meaningful for German learning.” The third part of the questionnaire is an open-ended question asking students how to evaluate and think about the “picture-vocabulary-essay” mode of operation. According to the feedback from the questionnaire, the students think that with the help of the pictures, they can help to understand and memorize the knowledge, and can also expand the extracurricular content.

Observation and Reflection

Teachers should observe whether the picture can arouse the interest of the students; whether the students can think more about the information they have learned under the guidance of the pictures; the form of the picture story is very important to the students’ creativity and self-learning desires.

The question of reflection is:

- (1) Which criteria are met by the selected image?
- (2) What specific functions are selected by the selected image?
- (3) In what form the picture taken by the student related to his/her real life can be used again in the classroom in the future?
- (4) Does student work have better accuracy?
- (5) What are the recommendations for the improvement of existing task forms?
- (6) How to further improve language output?

In the pre-task stage, the teacher uses the picture as an aid while arranging the listing task, mainly using the information carrier function and the image function of the picture. The personal experience-type tasks in the middle stage of the mission, based on the principle of taking students’ life experience as the starting point, require them to photograph their daily life and enhance the “authenticity” of the task. Here, Breen’s (1985) four-layer interpretation of the task’s “authenticity” is considered: (1) the authenticity of the language input; (2) the learner’s understanding of the language input; (3) the authenticity of the practice activities; and (4) the authenticity of the social context that the language classroom needs to reproduce.

Conclusions

1. Visual imagery is applied to the feasibility analysis of task-based classrooms. First, visual image is the teaching concept of task-based teaching method.

The implementation provides effective support to introduce real-life scenarios into the classroom. Secondly, based on feedback from students, the combination of visual images and tasks makes the learning

process more interesting and enhances the spirit of teamwork. Third, visual images can enhance students' understanding and memory of learning content, improving learning efficiency and learning achievement; Fourth, the continuous improvement and upgrading of the school's online teaching platform, providing information technology guarantee for the combination of graphic and textual work; Fifth, the popularity of smart phones, for students to observe records anytime, anywhere life provides conditions that are conducive to the improvement of information literacy.

2. Visual images should be noted, reflected, and continuously improved when applied to a task-based classroom. First, when selecting a picture should try to satisfy more functions, achieve complementary graphics and avoid decorative images; second, pay attention to strategy when using image design tasks, different usage skills of the same image will affect task execution and language output; the third is based on the principle of recycling (Nunan, 2004). Teachers should collect and save personalized pictures taken by students, think about how to use them in subsequent classrooms, realize circular contact with related language points through pictures; fourth, according to the principle of task dependence (Nunan, 1999), using the pictures taken by students to design productive tasks (such as filling the dialogue with the characters in the picture), can also create a relaxed and enjoyable learning atmosphere. Fifth, in the during-task phase, the team members are emphasized to evaluate each other, enhance the participation of all members, promote the development of mutual evaluation and self-evaluation, and stimulate students' motivation.

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