Research on the Design of Online Oral English Learning Application Based on Task-Based Learning and Communicative Language Teaching

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Abstract. As a communicative tool, the fluency of oral English and the ability to communicative with foreigners in real daily situations play the significant roles in English learning. Due to the lack of the limited time of English courses on campus, learning and practicing oral English online becomes a good choice for English Learners. Especially during the pandemic, more and more people get used to studying online at home, therefore, mobile learning shows its huge advantage and potential. In order to make the online oral English learning efficient, appropriate pedagogies need to be used, and in order to improve learners' concentration and interest, gamification in the design of the online oral English learning application should not be ignored. This study will illustrate two appropriate teaching methods and design a demo of an online application for oral English learning, hoping that it can provide some insights for online English education.

Keywords: Task-based Language Teaching Approach (TBLT) · Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) · Educational Gamification · Oral English Learning · Mobile Learning · Application

1 Introduction

English, as one of the six working language in the United Nations, is the official language of more than 60 countries in the world [1]. It is both the language with the worldwide largest number of speakers and the language of international communication [1]. With the rapid development of Media in the world, especially in recent years, short video platforms like TikTok are spreading rapidly around the world. According to Sensor Tower Intelligence, TikTok and Douyin (the Chinese version of Tiktok) have been downloaded over 3 billion times on the App Store and Google Play worldwide. Meanwhile, culture and trade communication between different countries become more frequently, and cross-border e-commerce has also become an emerging profession with huge market potential. According to the "14th Five-Year Plan for E-commerce Development" released by the Ministry of Commerce of China, the number of e-commerce related employees in China will reach 70 million by 2025. With cross-border e-commerce transactions growing

to 2.5 trillion yuan, the importance of oral English has become even more important. However, although most of the students in China have learned English for many years, they are unable to communicate in English fluently in situations. It is also still a difficult task for many college students. Some scholars conclude the reason for this problem is that the English teaching pays more attention to English knowledge, such as grammar, but ignores the training of oral expression in the compulsory education stage in China [2, 3]. Due to the limited time of English courses on campus and the large number of each class, students are short of the opportunities to practice their oral English in real communicative situations [2]. Therefore, an oral English practicing mobile application with virtual practicing partners or real learning peers plays a significant role in improving the ability of oral English. Additionally, the number of people who learned languages online during the pandemic period has grown very fast. According to Liu, starting from February 10, 2020, it would be about 1.8 hundreds millions of students of primary and secondary schools have participated in online learning in China [4]. This massive online educational practice means that China may be experiencing one of the world's largest information education social experiment and an open educational resource campaign, which plays an revolutionary role in advancing education teaching methods [4].

However, which pedagogy is appropriate for learning and practicing spoken English online? The answer may lie in the Speaking Scale of the China Standards of English (CSE-SS), in which oral English proficiency is described by three categories of can-do descriptions: oral English communication activities, oral English communication strategies and typical linguistic features. Additionally, interaction, meaning negotiation and output are keys of language acquisition and only by completing tasks, the interaction, meaning negotiation and output can be proceeded. Therefore, the combination of Task-based Language Teaching Approach (TBLT) and the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is the ideal solution for learning oral English. In addition, gamification in the design of this application should not be ignored, because appropriate gamified learning and practicing activities can help learners reach the mental states of Flow, which can improve the interests and concentration of learners, thereby raising the learning efficiency. This study will show a design model of an online oral English learning application based on TBL and CLT, as well as some gamified oral practicing activities. It hopes that it can provide a possible method for online oral English teaching.

2   Literature Review

2.1   Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

Chomsky stated that the communicative competence is the ability on how people can communicate effectively with language. In this part, the definition and the teaching process of CLT will be shown.

2.1.1   The Brief Introduction of CLT

In the Book *A Course in English Language Teaching*, Wang claimed that "The CLT has been one of the most influential language teaching approaches in recent decades and it has proven to be effective in a variety of language teaching context." It is a pedagogy,

which is aimed to train students' communicative competence in real communicative situations, and the most typical feature of CLT is contextual learning and learning in activities [5].

2.1.2 The Main Activities of CLT

Communicative activities are the main parts of CLT, which provide real and appropriate contexts for students to learn and practice language. In the book *Communicative Language Teaching*, Littlewood summarized and classified communicative activities in two categories: Functional communicative activities, which include identifying, discovering, reconstructing and problem-solving activities; and social interaction activities, which include role-playing, simulation and improvisation activities [6].

2.2 TBLT

According to Hu, the national English Language Standards in Mainland China consider the TBLT as the latest methodological realization of communicative pedagogy [7]. This part will illustrate the brief definition and the teaching process of TBLT.

2.2.1 The Brief Introduction of TBLT

Prabhu first proposed the concept of TBLT in 1987 [8]. Skehan define that the TBLT generally specifies teaching methods, which can be divided into pre-task, while-task and post-task [9]. In the process of TBLT, teachers asks students to finish one or more tasks and provide the best language learning-improving environment. Teachers hope to improve the language ability of learners during the tasks. In summary, the aim of TBLT is to improve the language ability by carrying out tasks and using target language during this process [8].

2.2.2 The Teaching Process of TBLT

According to Ding, the key of TBLT is "learning by doing" [10]. Willis mentioned the three steps of TBLT in his book *A Framework for Task-based Learning* [11]*:*

1) Pre-task: teachers introduce tasks;
2) Task-cycle: a. task--students execute tasks; b. planing--the preparation of the task report; c. reporting--reporting the task completion;
3) Language-focus: a. analysis--analyzing the result of task by radio or other methods; b. practice--practicing language under teachers' guidance.

2.3 Educational Gamification

Liu mentioned that educational games use network technology or intelligent tools as interactive media to assist learning, improve learning participation and interactivity, enhance the diversity of learning methods and interactive learning process [12]. The design of an appropriate and ingenious gamified learning process in language learning apps can help users reach the situation of flow and then achieve the best learning experience.

2.4 The Flow Theory

The flow theory was first developed by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, an American psychologist, in his book *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety* in 1975 [13]. When people focus on something they are interested in, they may reach a best experiencing mental states, which is known as "Flow", and some positive emotions, such as excitement and fulfillment at a high level can be generated at the same time.

Csikszentmihalyi summarized nine key factors which can create "Flow": clear goals; unambiguous and immediate feedback; skills that just match challenges; merging of action and awareness; concentration and focus; a sense of potential control; a loss of self consciousness; an altered sense of time and auto-telic experience. The first three factors are the antecedent conditions of Flow, the fourth, fifth and sixth are the process of Flow, and the last three factors are the effects after the Flow achieved. If an online language learning app can make users lose themselves in learning and practicing, just like immersing in computer games, the initiative and effect of learning will be largely improved.

3 The Design for Methodological Framework of Online Oral English Learning Application

TBLT is a strong version of CLT. In the process of pre-task, some basic English knowledge about the oral task can be taught and the various activities in CLT are perfect communication forms which can be designed in the process of task-cycle. In this way, the advantages of CLT and TBLT can be taken maximally. In this part, a design for methodological framework of online oral English Learning app based on TBLT and CLT will be shown, and some gamified online language practing activities will be involved:

This app is followed by the design principle of online games. It is a virtual English parallel universe, and every learner can choose an unique virtual identity in this English world (users can wear 3D glasses to enhance the sense of reality). Each oral lesson they learn is a task. Once they finish an oral task, their level will upgrade. Learners can go shopping, go to the hospital, go to the park or museum…in this English metaverse and also can make friends, find a job. The most important living skill in this world is the fluent oral English. The role of teacher in this app is transformed into a non-player character (NPC), who can introduce every task and give the timely guidance when learners meet problems of language, as well as give the feedback when users finish tasks.

1 Pre- task:
a. Introducing the oral task: A short video can be used in this part. The background information and the aim of this task should be shown.
b. Corpus input: In order to make sure learners acquire enough language competence to finish the following oral task, some necessary English knowledge, such as vocabulary, sentences and grammar should be learned and tested before the task cycle. Related movies or cartoon clips can be used instead of traditional teaching way to increase learners' interest. The way of test can also transformed into console games instead of paper-formed quiz.

2 Task-cycle (While-task):

This is the main part of the whole single task, and the scaffolding instruction can be used during each activity to decrease the difficulty of the task and narrow learners' sense of anxiety.

a. Functional activities: Guessing the appropriate words or sentences (an online You perform, I guess game.) Online users are matched by system. The performer only can use his or her body language or other ways to describe the target vocabulary or sentence and the guesser needs to respond by the appropriate words or sentence. In this way, the words and sentences they learned during the pre-task period can be practiced, and the "perform-guess" situation is a normal communicative situation occurred in daily life when people forget an accurate expression suddenly.

b. Social interaction activities: An online role-play interaction communicative game will be performed in this part. Users can choose a partner who is matched by system automatically or invite their friends who also have the ID of this app to finish this final oral practice. Their virtual IP will give the appropriate response based on the context and users should play their virtual IP to finish the communication. If they forget some words or expressions, there is a "help" button on the screen, then the NPC online tutor will show the language tips in time.

3 Language-focus (Post-task): According to the performance of users in the task, the level of users will be upgraded. And also the system will show a report on the language skills learners acquire and the key points they need to improve based on the task in order to help learners to review and gain the timely achievement.

4   Conclusion

The design in Sect. 3 is only a theoretical framework, and there are still many details to be considered, including but not limited to:

1 How to select the appropriate corpus difficulty: according to the i+1 theory of Krashen, comprehensible input is a key to ensure the effectiveness of input, but in the selection of corpus, which data can make the corpus meet the "i+1" standard needs further demonstration;

2 How to set the recommended learning time and frequency for different learners:

Assuming that the learning steps of the app are rigorous and scientific enough, how long should users use it each time to achieve the goal of improving learners' oral fluency? Should the app sets recommended learning time for different age groups of users? How to determine this time standard? What frequency of use is scientific? These problems need to be demonstrated in detail through experiments, etc.

With the progress of educational technology and the development of CALL, as well as the habit of online learning and personalized learning needs formed by people during the long epidemic period, the way of language learning has undergone many changes. Online language learning will undoubtedly form a huge commercial market, which has strong research value and commercial potential. Teaching method, as the core of scientific development of any teaching activity, ensures the efficient and reasonable

development of teaching activities, and still plays a key position in the field of online language learning. Moreover, the related research and practice are worthy of further research and demonstration.

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