

论外语教学课堂中信息差任务的原理与设计

王松美

(北京教育学院 外语系, 北京 100011)

摘要: 交际语言教学的重要原则之一就是重视学习者在课堂学习过程中的实际互动作用。这种互动必须是有意义的, 使学习者有机会在现实生活的情境中使用真实有效的语言进行交际。目前在外语界颇受欢迎的任务型教学途径正是基于这种理念。而在课堂教学任务中, 信息差任务是很重要的任务类型之一。由于“信息差”的存在使交际活动变得更有意义。本文主要从信息差任务的基本原理以及在课堂听说读写教学中的实际应用阐明教师应如何创设带有信息差的任务活动, 帮助学生树立正确的内在学习动机, 在形式多样的言语交际活动中有效地促进语言习得。

关键词: 信息差任务; 交际语言教学; 真实语境; 合作学习

中图分类号: H319 **文献标识码:** A **文章编号:** 1002-2643(2003)03-0033-06

交际语言教学的重要原则之一就是重视学习者在课堂学习过程中的实际互动作用。这种互动必须是有意义的, 使学习者有机会在现实生活的情境中使用真实语言进行交际。目前在外语教学界颇受欢迎的任务型教学途径正是基于这种理念。任务型教学途径是近 20 年来交际教学思想的一种发展态势, 它把语言应用的基本概念转化为具有实践意义的课堂教学方式。任务型教学的理论基础可以溯源到对基础教育产生深刻影响的认知心理学理论。学习者在完成任务, 即“做事”的过程中始终处于一种积极的、主动的学习心理状态。任务的参与者之间的交际过程也是一种互动的过程。为了完成任务, 学习者以“意义”为中心, 尽力调动各种语言的和非语言的资源进行“意义”共建, 以达到解决某种交际问题的目的。正如 Skehan 在他的 *A Cognitive Approach to Language Learning* 一书中对任务(task)作的如下定义:

- meaning is primary;
- there is some communication problem to solve;
- there is some sort of relationship to comparable real-world activities;
- task completion has some priority
- the assessment of the task is in terms of outcome.

David Nunan 也对任务作了如下定义: “A task is a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the

target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than on form.”

中华人民共和国教育部最新颁发的《英语课程标准》明确指出: 要提倡任务型的教学模式, 倡导体验、参与、交流与合作的学习方式。从学生学习的角度来说, 任务型教学任务就转换成了任务驱动型学习。这种驱动型学习是交互性的。采用任务驱动型学习的方式可以改变目前教学中依旧存在的知识传授比重过大, 语言实践不足甚至单纯讲授语言知识的现状。而在课堂教学任务中, 信息差任务则是很重要的任务类型之一。

1.0 “信息差任务活动”的基本原理

在信息差活动中, 教师(或教材)向交际双方提供不同片段的信息, 学生们通过交流传递信息去填补信息差, 以达到完成特定任务的目的。并在此过程中, 提高用英语进行实际表达解决问题的能力。

信息差任务活动的主要原理是:

1) 信息差任务能使交际能力得到有效提高

交际语言教学的原则是培养学习者的交际能力。而交际能力只有在真实的言语交际过程中才能得到最有效的提高。而真实的言语交际是建立在“信息差”的基础上的。没有信息差, 就没有真实的语言交际。所谓信息差, 是指交流双方因各自掌握的信息不同而产生差距。信息差的存在是传递信息和获取信息的动力, 也使交际任务变得更有意义。Doughty 和 Pica 指出: 信息差任务可以促进真实的语

收稿时间: 2003-04-17

作者简介: 王松美(1955—), 北京人, 系主任, 副教授。研究方向: 英语语言学、教学法。

言交际, 加快语言习得的进程。Brown 也在他的 *Teaching by Principles* 一书中谈到: 信息差任务的两个主要特征是: (a) 对信息而不是对语言形式的关注; (b) 为交流信息完成任务而产生的交际式互动的必要性。

2) 信息差任务可帮助学生在大量语言输入中自然习得语言结构

信息差任务的原理在很大程度上溯源于 Krashen 的语言输入假设 (the input hypothesis)。Krashen 的语言输入假设强调语言的掌握大多是在交际活动中使用语言的结果, 而不是单纯训练语言技能和学习语言知识的结果。他认为当学习者能够理解略微超出其语言水平的语言输入时即 $i+1$ (i 为学习者现有的语言水平, 1 表示略高于学习者学习水平的输入), 自然语言习得就会产生。正如 Krashen 所说: “A necessary condition to move from stage i to stage $i+1$ is that the acquirer understands input that contains $i+1$, where “understand” means that acquirer is focused on the meaning and not the form of the utterance.” 在信息差活动中, 学生要完成任务, 必须在一起协商切磋意义并保证使用的目的语能被对方理解 (comprehensible)。而传统的英语课堂中大量使用的为了操练某种语言形式而设计的机械模仿与练习就不存在需要填补的信息差。同时教学中教师为了练习某个句型而明知故问的 display questions (例如举着一支笔问学生: What's this?) 也不存在任何信息上的差距。这样的练习活动着眼点是在 “usage” 而不是 “use”。过多地使用 display questions 对提高学生的语言交际能力, 培养学生语言的创造力是不利的。信息差任务所带来的语言交际的 “自发性” 和 “不可预知性” 正是英语课堂教学要解决的难点。因此教师在教学中应当有意识地设计信息差活动, 引导学生在填补信息差的同时达到真实交际的目的。Prabhu 指出: “For genuine communication to occur in the language classroom, teacher-student (and student-student) exchanges must go beyond display questions and should be based on the gap that occurs between interlocutors when one does not know in advance what the other is going to say.”

3) 信息差任务教学可优化课堂教学环境, 降低学生焦虑程度

Krashen 监察模式中的 “情感过滤假设” 把情感因素看作第二语言习得的关键因素之一。信息差任务教学从信息交流的角度去促进语言形式的掌握, 激发学生传递信息, 表达思想, 进行交际的愿望, 有利于降低学生学习中的焦虑程度, 激发内在学习动

机。

Penny Ur 曾列举出以下成功的口语活动所具备的特征:

- Learners talk a lot
- Participation is even
- Motivation is high
- Language is of acceptable level

一个好的 “信息差” 任务是同时具备上述几点特征的。真正做到重视学生之间的互动作用。保证每个学生都有机会开口说话, 而不是只有几个人说, 其他人听, 或者是教师说, 学生听。因此最大限度地保证了学生的练习时间和练习量, 有益于发挥学生的学习潜能, 培养学生自主学习、合作学习的能力。同时, 课堂教学以任务为中心, 而不是以单纯的语言教学为中心。第二语言习得研究成果表明信息差这样的双向的任务比单向的例如讲故事这样的任务对学习者的语言能力发展更有益。

2.0 信息差任务的设计及在课堂教学中的运用

2.1 信息差任务的设计

教师在使用信息差任务进行教学时, 会发现缺少可以直接使用的教学材料, 这就需要教师认真钻研教材, 对教材进行二次加工设计。总体上讲, 教师在设计信息差任务时应努力作到以下几点:

1) 根据学生现有实际语言水平, 提供可理解的语言输入, 确保设计的 “信息差” 能给学生提供运用多种语言功能进行交际的机会。任务的设计要具有一定的挑战性, 促使学生向 “最近发展区” 靠近。

2) 任务的设计要与学生的兴趣爱好相结合, 符合中学生的心理特点及认知特点, 贴近学生生活实际。语言输入的最佳项目是学习者身边的事物和思想, 因为这些地方的知识和概念最具有可理解性、复现率和突显性, 同时也最能引起学生的兴趣、共鸣和参与热情。(邹为成, 2000)

3) 引入合作学习的理念。教师在设计分组活动方式时应考虑学生的智能强项, 优势互补。充分发挥学生学生潜能, 培养团队精神。发挥优化组合的整体功能。

4) 创设成功的体验的机会。教学过程是师生、生生互动的过程。教师在设计任务时, 应考虑如何最大限度地体现以人为本, 以学生为主体的课堂教学理念。在任务的不同阶段, 教师应做好设计者、组织者、指导者、参与者和鼓励评价者, 教师对学生在任务完成的过程中出现的错误不予以苛求, 多用、巧用赞扬语。使学生获得成功的体验, 形成良好的心理倾向。

要实现上述原则,教师应对交际语言教学的理念、任务型教学的框架以及设计原则进行研究和积极的课堂教学实践。

2.2 信息差任务在教学中的应用

2.2.1 信息差任务在口语教学中的应用

例1: Work in pairs. One of you must look at chart A and the other must look at chart B. Do not look at your partner's chart. Ask each other questions about Charlie Chaplin and complete the missing information in your chart. Use some of the questions/phrases given.

CHART A

Name: Charlie Chaplin

Born in: London (_____)

Lived in: England (_____)

_____ (1910 — 1952)

Switzerland (1952 — 1977)

Career: film actor, director, producer, composer

Most successful films: *The kid* (1921),

_____ (1925)

City Lights (1931)

Modern Times (_____)

Most famous role: _____

Awards: Oscar for music in *Limelight* (1952)

Special Academy Award (_____)

Number of children: 9

Died in: _____, (1977)

CHART B

Name: Charlie Chaplin

Born in: _____, (1889)

Lived in: England (1889 — 1910),

U. S. A. (1910 — 1952),

Switzerland (_____)

Career: film actor, director, producer, composer

Most successful films: *The kid* (_____)

The Gold Rush (1925)

_____ (1931)

Modern Times (1936)

Most famous role: The Little tramp

Awards: _____ for music in *Limelight* (1952)

Special Academy Award (1972)

Number of children: 9

Died in: Switzerland (_____)

教师在活动前可以引导学生思考应当从哪些方面了解 Charlie Chaplin 的生平并如何用英语进行提问。

Where/When was Charlie Chaplin born ... ?

Where/When did he ... ?

Where was he between ... and ... ?

What was his ... ?

Which film did he make ... ?

What award/When did he get ... ?

例2: 找出图片中的不同点 (spot the difference)

学生成对活动,教师发到两个人手中的图片基本上是相同的,但是有十个地方有差别,要求学生通过描述各自的图片把这十个地方找出来。例如学生各持有一张某个房间的照片,房间里的摆设大体上相同,但也有一些细微的差别。比如第一张图中门是开着的,而第二张图中门却关着。第一张图中桌子上放着台灯,第二张图中桌子上放着电话等等。教师要求学生不要看对方的图片,而要通过提问完成任务:

Student A: In my picture, there is a waste paper basket under the desk.

Student B: In my picture, there is a pair of slippers under the desk.

...

2.2.2 信息差任务在阅读教学中的应用

例1: 错格填充法

错格填充法常用于阅读理解练习,是信息差活动中最容易设计的活动方法。这种方法把听说读写几种技能有机地结合起来,学生在完成任务中运用真实的语言进行交流,相互“切磋”,合作学习,自我完善。

具体做法是,教师把学生分为 A 和 B 两大组,分别发给两组学生相应的两套练习纸进行填空练习。要求填充的内容可以是一个单词,也可以是一个词组或一个短句。学生所读的语篇的内容是一样的,但所要求填充的格子是交错不同的。学生 A 要填充的内容在学生 B 的练习纸上,而学生 B 要填充的内容在学生 A 的练习纸上。只有将两套练习的内容拼在一起才能得到完整的内容。举例如下:

Worksheet for Student A:

Dolphins are _____. They live in groups, and they use their own language to speak to each other. In this, they are like other animals, such as bees and birds. Actually dolphins are very different from almost all land animals because their brain is nearly the same size as our own, and they can live for _____.

...

Worksheet for Student B

Dolphins are warm-blooded mammals. They live in groups and they use _____ language to speak to each other. In this, they are like other animals. Actually, dol-

phins are very different from almost all land animals because _____ and they can live for at least twenty or thirty years.

...

例2: 拼板阅读法

在信息差阅读任务活动中, 教师可以把一篇文章分成几部分, 学生分组阅读不同的内容, 由此产生信息差, 继而要求学生通过语言交际活动把所缺少的信息补充完整, 达到对课文内容的全面的了解。

信息差阅读活动可以分为三个阶段:

1) 介绍、引入阶段

教师向学生介绍要读的文章的题目, 或让学生通过文章的标题和插图等预测文章的主要内容。也可以全班一起阅读文章的前一、两段含背景知识或概括性信息的段落。在这个阶段可以预先给出少量词汇(有些词的词义可以从上下文中推测), 为后面的阅读扫除障碍。

2) 阅读阶段

教师把全班学生分为三个大组。每组读文章的一部分, 并按教师的要求记笔记或回答问题, 学生先自己读, 然后在组内讨论所读部分的内容和问题的答案。

3) 讨论阶段

教师把学生重新组合, 让学生三人一组活动。三个人来自三个不同的大组, 读的内容不同, 他们在一起讨论、问答, 交换信息, 在这个过程中, 听、说、读、写几种技能有机地结合到了一起。

下面以人教社初中英语第三册第 课为例, 对任务型阅读教学作更具体的说明(教师可选用教材外的补充读物开展这样的活动):

Stage 1: Introduction

教师把课文标题 Christmas Day 写在黑板上, 然后问几个阅读前的问题, 例如: When is Christmas? Why do people celebrate Christmas? Do you celebrate Christmas? If so, what do you do?

Stage 2: Reading

一组阅读部分:

During the Christmas season friends get together and go from house to house singing Christmas songs. They do this for fun and to bring the spirit of Christmas to the people in each house. Then on Christmas Eve — the night before Christmas Day — children put stockings at the end of their beds before they go to sleep. Their parents usually tell them that Father Christmas will come during the night. Some people even put up stockings for their pets as

well.

对一组阅读部分提的问题:

1. Do friends sing Christmas songs only on Christmas Eve or during the whole Christmas season?
2. What do friends bring to the people in each house on Christmas?
3. What do children do on Christmas Eve?
4. Why do children put stockings at the end of their beds?
5. Do only children put stockings at the end of their beds?

二组阅读部分

Father Christmas is a very kind-hearted man. He lands on top of each house all over the world and climbs down the chimney. He then fills the stockings with Christmas presents. But who is Father Christmas? Can a man really climb down the chimney of every house in the world in a single night? Of course not.

Father Christmas is based on a real person in history. In Turkey, there once was a man named Saint Nicholas. He was a very shy person. He wanted to give money to the poor. But he did not want them to know that the money came from him. He didn't know what to do. It is said that one day he climbed to the top of a house and dropped some money down a chimney. It went into a stocking that a little girl had hung by the fireplace to dry! Even though Father Christmas is no longer living, his spirit of generosity lives on today.

问题(略)

三组阅读部分

Christmas Day always begins before breakfast. Children wake up very early, and can't wait to open the presents in their stockings and under the tree. They wake up the other family members calling, "Merry Christmas!" After all the presents are opened, the family will usually have a delicious breakfast. They spend the day playing with the new toys and visiting their relatives and friends. They greet each other with a hug and say, "Merry Christmas!"

问题(略)

教师把三个大组的问题都放在一张纸上, 发给各组。这样每个大组在第二阶段 Reading 中只能回答和自己所读部分有关的问题, 其他部分的问题留待第三阶段讨论时用, 帮助学生询问所缺少的信息。

2. 2.3 信息差任务活动在听力教学中的应用

在听力教学中,同样可以设计信息差的活动。例如下面这段听力对话较长,教师可以从下面的一些思路出发,帮助学生提高听的效率,同时把听说技能有机地结合起来。

听力原文:

David is twelve years old tomorrow. His grandmother wants to buy him a birthday present. David loves animals. He's already got a dog and a mouse. His grandmother wants to give him another pet. He telephones his mother and asks for her opinion.

Grandmother: Hi, Jean!

Jean: Hi, mother.

Grandmother: I want to buy something for David's birthday. What shall I give him?

Mother: Why don't you buy him a dog? Dogs are friendly.

Grandmother: Yes, I know. But he's already got a dog.

Mother: How about a cat? Cats eat mice and they are friendly, too.

Grandmother: But he's got a pet mouse.

Mother: How about a parrot? They are very lovely and they can talk.

Grandmother: Yes, that's true. But they fly everywhere and they are very noisy. How about a snake?

Mother: No, please no snakes.

Grandmother: Snakes are unusual pets and I'm sure David will like it.

Mother: But I don't. I don't want to open my bedroom and find a snake. Why not buy him a rabbit? He can play with it and build a house for it.

Grandmother: I don't think David will like the idea. Oh, it's so difficult to decide.

在处理这篇听力材料的时候,教师可按以下步骤进行。

第一遍让学生带着一个 general (gist) question 听: Has the grandmother decided what present to buy for David?

第二遍听力可以给学生一组动物名称,例如 cat, tiger, dog, parrot, monkey, rabbit, elephant, snake, mouse, fish 等,让学生圈出听到的动物名称。然后让学生成对活动核对答案,教师可以再给学生放一遍录音在全班进行核对。

由于这篇听力材料较长较难,在前两项活动的基础上,教师可以组织信息差任务教学活动以减轻

学生听的负担。例如让单行学生听对话中提到的应选择几种宠物的理由,双行学生听不同意选择这几种宠物的意见。然后两个人在一起交流。最后可以让学生再换过来听。即单行学生听否定的意见,双行学生听肯定的意见。

任务型教学活动的一项重要原则就是把学生课内所学的知识 and 学生的个人学习生活经验结合起来。因此接下来教师还可以给学生布置一项任务,即由学生给 David 选择一个宠物作为 birthday present. 可以让学生 3—4 人小组活动,每个学生想一个宠物,但不要直接说出其英文名称,而是要用自己的语言形容这个宠物,直到小组的其他成员猜出来所描述的动物为止。

2. 2.4 信息差任务教学活动在写作教学中的应用

例 1: 看图写话

看图写作是中考及高考写作主要命题形式之一。在让学生分别看图写话之前,教师可以通过设计信息差任务活动先让学生口头练习要写的内容,使学生在心理上、语言上都有较充分的准备。例如有六张图片分别表达了下面的内容:

(第一张图片中的内容) One evening Maria was sitting at home. She was watching a horror film on TV until late at night.

(第二张图片中的内容) The next morning she woke up late and as a result, she missed the school bus.

(第三张图片中的内容) She had to walk to school, and when she arrived, she was very late.

(第四张图片中的内容) In class, Maria was so tired that she fell asleep during the lesson. Suddenly, the teacher saw her sleeping.

(第五张图片中的内容) Maria's teacher became angry and woke her up. The teacher told her that she shouldn't sleep in class.

(第六张图片中的内容) Maria was punished. She had to clean all the desks in the classroom.

教师给 Student A 单数图片,即第一、三、五张图片。Student B 双数图片即第二、四、六张图片。学生各自观察本组的图片,准备进行描述图片的语言,以及询问所缺信息的问题,然后在一起进行问答。最后在共同写出所有图片的内容。

例 2: 学生自行设计“信息差”活动

教师除了设计组织信息差任务活动外,还可以让学生利用他们所写的短文自行设计信息差活动。事实上,学生所写的有关自己的经历的话题的短文,哪么只有一两段,都可以用来帮助学生自己设计信

息差任务活动。例如 my hometown, my best friend, my family, my favorite animal, my free time activities, my house 等等。同时,利用学生自己的习作进行信息差活动的设计也进一步体现了以学生为主体的教学原则。整个活动可以按以下步骤进行:

1)教师布置任务,让学生知道他们写出的作品将会用于后面的口语活动。

2)学生写出短文。教师阅后发还给学生,要求学生根据教师的要求修改。

3)教师指导学生删除一些词或词组,甚至整个句子。

举例:删除词或词组

My two best friends are John and Ann. John lives

口语活动中其他学生可以提的问题:Where does John live?

举例:删除整个句子

I like autumn in Beijing. It's cool and suitable for mountain-climbing, camping and travelling. I don't like spring in Beijing at all. I enjoy the ice and snow world in winter and sunshine on the beach in summer.

口语活动中其他学生可以提的问题:Why don't you like spring in Beijing?

4)同伴阅读带有信息差的短文,并准备必要的问题。除了填补空白信息所需要的问题外,教师要鼓励学生提出其他任何与短文有关的问题。

5)口头问答活动。作者回答同伴提出的问题。活动结束后,作者把完整的短文拿给同伴看,检查对方是否记下了相同的信息。

在教学实践中笔者深深体会到教师在教学中创设的带有“信息差”的交际语境对激发学生运用外语获取信息,进行交际的内在学习动机起了重要的作用,使外语学习表现出生动性、创造性,使课堂交际活动真实而富有情趣。事实上,交际活动就是不断

地填补旧的信息差,建立新的信息差的交替过程。众所周知的 PPP 模式即 presentation (呈现), practice (练习) production (运用)中的练习只能被称作“准交际”活动,从形式上看这些活动具有交际性,但学生在进行这些活动时,并无真正的交际愿望,其目的还是为了操练语言。当然准交际活动也不能忽视,这是学生积累语言材料的必经阶段。但又不宜长期停留在这个阶段上。“信息差”活动把语言的形式(form)意义(meaning)以及用法(use)有机地结合起来,使学生有机会在信息交流的过程中自然地习得语言结构。由于信息差活动着重获取信息及交际本身,教师在指导过程中对学生在语言使用中出现的错误不过于苛求,因此增强了学生的自信心,降低了焦虑程度,加速了语言习得的进程。

参考文献

- [1] Adrian Doff. *Teach English* [M]. Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- [2] David Nunan. *Designing Tasks for the Communicative Classroom* [M]. Cambridge University press, 1989.
- [3] Brown H. *Teaching by Principles: A Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy* [M]. Prentice Hall Regents, 1994.
- [4] Krashen, S. *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition* [M]. Pergamon Institute of English, 1983.
- [5] Skehan, P. *A Cognitive Approach to Language Learning* [M]. Oxford University Press, 1998.
- [6] Willis, J. *A Framework for Task-Based Learning* [M]. Longman, 1996.
- [7] 邹为成. 语言输入的机会和条件[J]. 外语界, 2000, (1).

On the Principles and Designing of Information Task in FLT Classroom

WANG Song-mei

Abstract: One of the most important principles in communicative language teaching is the interaction between the learners in the language teaching classroom. This interaction must be meaningful and enable the learners to have the opportunity to communicate with each other using authentic and effective language in real life situations. One of the most popular approaches in the foreign language teaching world today is “task-based learning”. And “information gap activities” is one type of the tasks. This article starts from the rationale of “information gap activities” and proceeds to the practical suggestions for teachers in designing the “information gap activities” in the training of students’ four skills. Namely: listening, speaking, reading and writing, while at the same time bring along students’ intrinsic motivation and facilitate their language acquisition in the learning process.

Key words: information-gap tasks; communicative language teaching; authentic context; cooperative learning