



Language Norm in Various Stages of English Learning in Mainland China

Xianjun Tan

International Cooperation and Exchange Office, Sichuan University of Science and Engineering, Zigong,
China 643000

Abstract: The concept of norm itself means certain restriction, restraint and guidance. Due to the role of norm, people can correctly understand and use the language, abide by the social behavioral norms and obtain effective knowledge. Language norm as a social phenomenon, just like other social phenomena, such as morality, consciousness and custom, is a natural presentation of the convergence of the social group behaviors. Different stages of English learning have different teaching objectives and the emphasis of language norm should be different. Research on the language norms in various stages of English learning is based on the aim of conducting effective communication. Corresponding restriction, restraint and guidance based on the real situation of the students is to help the students conduct the cross-cultural communication more smoothly.

Key words: Norm; Language norm; English; Cross-cultural Communication

According to the Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards formulated by Ministry of Education of China, English course in the stage of compulsory education can lay a foundation for improving the people's literacy, cultivating talents with the ability of innovation and cross-cultural communication^[1]. According to the Senior High School English Curriculum Standards formulated by Ministry of Education of China, English course is a main course in the senior high school and is beneficial for the opening up and international exchange of China, for improving national quality and for enhancing overall national strength^[2]. According to the College English Curriculum Requirements formulated by Ministry of Education of China, the objective of college English teaching is to cultivate students' comprehensive ability of using English, especially listening and speaking ability, make students use English to communicate effectively in learning, working and social exchange, improve students' comprehensive cultural quality and make them meet the needs of social development and international exchange^[3]. Communication or exchange is mentioned explicitly in different stages of English learning. Hence, cultivating the cross cultural communication ability of students is a main task of the English courses. In order to communicate successfully in a second language, language learners should respect the pragmatic principles and national culture and customs of the second language. Thus, language norm needs to be studied in different stages of English learning.

1. Norm

The word *Norm* derives from the Latin word *Norma*. Originally, *Norm* refers to the

carpenter's square. Then, it means the standard and model of the behavior. The concept of norm itself means certain restriction, restraint and guidance. Norm consistently has an effect of restraint or regulation on the subjects. Due to the role of norm, people can correctly understand and use the language, abide by the social behavioral norms and obtain effective knowledge^[4].

In terms of language norm, in order to communicate successfully, uncorrected things should be corrected, which is a conduct of norm. Language norm as a social phenomenon, just like other social phenomenon, such as morality, consciousness and custom, is a natural presentation of the convergence of the social group behaviors^[5].

Research on the language norms in various stages of English learning is based on the aim of conducting effective communication. Corresponding restriction, restraint and guidance in English courses is to help the students conduct the cross-cultural communication and international exchange successfully.

2. Stage of Compulsory Education

The general objective of English course in the stage of compulsory education is to make students form preliminary comprehensive language application ability, promote the development of mind and improve humanities accomplishment through English learning. The formation of comprehensive language application ability is based on language skill, language knowledge, emotional attitude, learning strategy and cultural consciousness^[1].

2.1 Language Norm in the Stage of Primary School

In the 21st century, economic globalization makes the competition in the world more intense, which poses a new challenge for the countries in cultivating talents. Every government makes the spread and improvement of foreign language education as a strategy to respond to the economic globalization. In mainland China, students of Grade Three in primary school begin to learn English and it caters for the strategic needs of national development.

According to the physiological and psychological characteristics of primary school students, the objective of English course is to motivate the learning interest of students, cultivate active learning attitude, establish confidence, cultivate certain language sense and good pronunciation and intonation and make the students form preliminary ability to conduct simple daily communication in English^[6].

From the perspective of language norm, language norm involves phonetic rules, spelling rules and grammatical rules, etc. According to the characteristics of primary school students, the aim of English learning is to obtain the language communicative ability, that is, to use language other than to grasp the language forms. Hence, it is not advisable to restrain students with phonetic rules and grammatical rules. The vocal organ and muscle of children is not finalized, hence, the children have strong imitation ability, accept new things quickly and learn authentic pronunciation easily. If the teachers can offer natural and standard pronunciation and intonation, it will lay a good foundation for the students to conduct effective oral communication. If the teachers have difficulty in pronunciation and intonation, it not only misleads the initiative stage

of English learning, but also has a result that the incorrect pronunciation of the students in the initiative stage may be very difficult to be corrected in the later stages of English learning. Therefore, English teachers must strengthen basic training of pronunciation, intonation and oral English by themselves and must have strict English language norm.

2.2 Language Norm in the Stage of Junior High School

In the stage of junior high school, teachers should gradually improve students' English language awareness and English learning ability based on the real situation.

The objective of English course in the stage of compulsory education is based on five aspects, including language skill, language knowledge, emotional attitude, learning strategy and cultural consciousness. The five aspects concentrate on cultivating the basic language knowledge and skills and optimizing learning process as well. The students are guided to form effective learning strategies and certain cultural consciousness, own active emotional attitude and values^[1].

Language skills mainly include listening, speaking, reading and writing skills and the comprehensive application of these skills. Graduates from junior high school should have the following English language skills: understand what is talked about the familiar topics and be able to take part in the discussion, exchange information about the relevant topic in daily life and express one's own opinion, be able to read newspapers or magazines of corresponding level , overcoming the obstacle of new words and understanding the main idea, use appropriate reading strategy according to the purpose of reading, write or revise a composition independently according to tips^[1].

From the perspective of language norm, teachers should have strict requirements on the students regarding phonetic rules, spelling rules, grammatical rules, etc, guiding students to distinguish between Chinese and English. English belongs to Indo-European language; it has many differences with Chinese which belongs to Sino-Tibetan language. Due to the differences between Chinese and English, in order to make students listen, speak, read and write effectively in English, teacher must have restraint and limit on students regarding the English language rules. It must be noted that the stage of junior high school is also an important stage for students to learn ancient Chinese and modern Chinese; therefore, teachers should guide students to cultivate strict English language norms and strict Chinese language norms as well. English and Chinese should be mutually reinforced, *attending to one and losing another* or *emphasizing one and neglecting another* is not advisable. In terms of emotional attitude, learning strategy and cultural consciousness, teachers should cultivate the active learning attitude and confidence, guide students to finish the task through cooperating with others, and summarize learning methods, finish the learning with various resources in and out of class, cultivate the understanding of the cultural differences.

3. Stage of Senior High School

With the development of economic globalization, foreign language is a basic for the citizens all over the world. Hence, learning and grasping a foreign language, especially English, becomes very important. English course in senior high school should help students lay a good language foundation, help them to further study, find a job and

conduct lifelong learning in later life, equip them with basic English literacy which is indispensable for a citizen in the 21st century^[2].

English course in senior high school should be the combination of compulsory course and elective course. The objective of compulsory course makes the students have English language ability, active learning attitude, flexible learning strategy, cross-cultural communication awareness and ability, lay a foundation for lifelong learning. In terms of cultivating English language skills, teaching listening skills is to cultivate the listening strategy and language sense, laying special stress on the ability to obtain and process information during listening. Teaching oral English skills is to improve the accuracy, appropriateness, fluency and consistency of speaking and to strengthen language sense. Teaching reading skills is to cultivate reading strategy and language sense, laying special stress on the ability to obtain and process information during reading. Teaching writing skills is to express facts, opinions, emotion, and imagination, exchange information and cultivate normative writing customs. Compared with the English learning in junior high school, teachers should have restraint and limit on students with English language rules more strictly and help students to use language normatively. Language norms should include guidance, except restraint and limit. In the senior high school, teachers should guide students in the following aspects: gradually strengthen the consciousness of patriotism, broaden international perspective, form learning strategy suitable for students' own need, develop autonomous learning ability, expand the scope of contacting with other cultures, expand horizons, improve

the sensibility and distinguish ability regarding similarities and differences between Chinese culture and foreign cultures.

The objective of elective course is to meet the needs of employment choice, further study and personal interests and development of different students. Hence, if the students take the English learning as an interest and hobby, there is no need to restrain students with strict grammatical rules and spelling rules, but to let the students experience the charm of English language in different English language activities. If the students choose to go abroad for further study, students should learn phonetic rules, spelling rules and conversation rules in detail in order to pass English language proficiency tests, such as IELTS and TOEFL. If the students have few or no contacts with foreigners in their future employment, there is no need to restrain or limit students with various English language norms, but to guide them to finish the required English learning.

4. Stage of College English

In mainland China, college English course is a compulsory course for college students. The objective of college English teaching is to cultivate students' comprehensive English ability, especially listening and speaking ability, make them use English to conduct oral and writing exchange effectively, strengthen their autonomous learning ability, improve comprehensive cultural accomplishment, meet the needs of China's economic development and international exchange^[3].

According to the English curriculum standards, after three years' learning in primary

school and six years' learning in high school, students should grasp the basic knowledge of English phonetics, vocabulary and grammar, listening, speaking, reading and writing skills in various language practices, gradually form their own English learning strategies and cross-cultural communication awareness. However, due to the differences between urban areas and rural areas, the English levels of freshmen vary widely. Even in the top universities of mainland China, the English level of a certain number of freshmen is still unsatisfying. There is a particular concern that many freshmen are not good at English writing and cross-cultural communicative awareness. Therefore, for the freshmen who have a relatively low English level, the priority is to strengthen the foundation and they need to learn the English language rules, such as phonetic rules, spelling rules and grammatical rules again. English language norms should be emphasized.

Students are able to conduct cross-cultural communication when they have a solid foundation of English. According to the *College English Curriculum Requirements*, the listening and speaking ability of students should be cultivated with attention, which is used frequently in the cross-cultural communication. After the reform and opening-up policy of China, with the improvement of hardware, college English teaching supported by multi-media and internet helps to arouse students' enthusiasm, improve students' listening and speaking ability. In terms of language norm, college English teachers should guide students to form individualized learning methods and develop autonomous learning ability. Teachers should lay special stress on process evaluation,

strengthening the observation, evaluation and supervision during the process of students' learning.

In terms of listening and speaking ability, even the English teachers have some problems, especially the ability of speaking English. Although at the present time, English teachers are good at expressing opinions, daring to express opinions and having improved the fluency; language quality is not high, expression is not very authentic and Chinglish often appears in the English class [7]. Hence, firstly, teachers themselves should pay much attention to cultivating English language skills and learn the English language norms widely. Without necessary language norms, one can not understand the intention of the speaker or infer the contextual implications of the utterance; one is liable to have pragmatic failure and can not conduct cross-cultural communication successfully. When teachers have satisfying English pragmatic ability, they can input various useful pragmatic information, make the students learn about the pragmatic differences between Chinese and English, improve students' English pragmatic awareness, help students conduct cross-cultural communication more smoothly.

When college students learn the English language norm, they should pay attention to the practice of Chinese skills as well. Language learning is interlinked. Understanding a language is helpful to understand another language, vice versa, if one can not grasp a language well, he or she may not grasp another language well either. Generally, if a student has a solid foundation in Chinese learning, he or she is good at English learning,

too^[7]. President Xi Jinping emphasizes many times that we should promote excellent Chinese traditional culture, cultivate core socialist values and draw the spiritual power from excellent traditional culture to realize the Chinese Dream. Therefore, in the practice of cross-cultural communication, college students should respect the English pragmatic principle and cultures of English speaking countries, at the same time; they should actively spread the Chinese culture and pay attention to the learning and improvement of Chinese language norms.

5. Conclusion

English curriculum standards and English curriculum requirements in mainland China pay attention to the cultivating of students' cross-cultural communication. In order to eliminate communication barriers and establish new norms, research on the language norm in various stages of English learning in mainland China is essential. This paper points out what should be emphasized regarding English language norms in various stages. If teachers use corresponding English language norms to restrain or guide students in various stages of English learning in mainland China, they will help the students conduct cross-cultural communication more smoothly.

References

- [1] Ministry of Education of People's Republic of China. *Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards (2011 Edition)*. Beijing: Beijing Normal University Press,2012.
- [2] Ministry of Education of People's Republic of China. *Senior High School Education English Curriculum Standards (2011 Edition)*. Beijing: People's Education Press,2004.
- [3] Department of Higher Education of China's Ministry of Education. *College English Curriculum Requirements*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press,2007.12.
- [4] Guichun Guo, Xiaodan Zhao. *Normative Questions: Semantic Transformation and the Pragmatic Approach*. *Social Sciences in China*.2014.8:69-90.
- [5] Zhaoming Dai, *A Study of Normative Linguistics*. *Language Planning*.1989.3:38-43.
- [6] Daoyi Liu. Features of Primary School English Teaching and Challenges Facing Primary School English. *Educational Practice and Research*.2001.7:36-38.
- [7] Yuanshen Huang. *Language Skills of English Teachers: A Problem Demanding Immediate Attention*. *Foreign Language World*.2014.1:35-39.