

Application of Constructivism to Attributive Clause in College English Teaching

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Abstract: There exists the phenomenon that college students display poor performance in English learning, especially in the aspect of clause learning. In order to address such problem, this paper would try to analyse the application of Constructivism to attributive clause in college English teaching, offering theory analysis and teaching examples. The teaching samples would include attributive clause learning and attributive clause writing.

Keywords: Constructivism; College English Teaching; Attributive Clause teaching; Attributive Clause Writing Teaching

1. Introduction

The attributive clauses are fundamentally critical in college English teaching, which would benefit students in the way that learners can utilize English comprehensively and effectively. College students who have been equipped with certain concept and understandings of attributive clause would own their knowledge web and pattern, therefore, teachers should assist students to modify and better their individual learning pattern by adopting Constructivism which can help students to grasp the essence of clauses.

This paper would critically summarize the literature review of Constructivism and then provide the teaching examples to illustrate the application to attributive clause in college English teaching, ending up with conclusion and recommendations.

2. Literature review

Constructivism is founded on cognitive development theory of children developed by famous psychologist Jean Piaget, who is one of the earliest researchers of contemporary constructivism. Later, the psychologist Vygotsky and other scholars enhance and promote its practical application for teaching and learning. Vygotsky (1978) stated that the growing environment would have great impact on the way the children think.

The core concept of Constructivism's is that students' individual cognition is formulated through building and upgrading perception map upon the foundation of previous one. Jerome Bruner (1990), one of the founding fathers of Constructivism, built a framework of Constructivism and believed that learners could form new ideas based on existing knowledge and understandings. Besides, the prior knowledge would influence modified knowledge from new learning experiences (Phillips, 1995). Reflection on old experience combining with original understandings allows learners to construct a concrete and complete world in which students are able to personalize regulations and mental models.

In the perspective of Constructivism, learning is a social activity in which students and teachers cooperate together with close relationship rather than isolated learners who only recite abstract concept (Dewey, 1938). Consequently, the primary obligation of tutors is to create a collaborative and mistake-friendly learning atmosphere where students are relaxed, so that they can combine old experience and new information to integrate a brand new conception map. During this process, educators act as facilitators but not instructors who just transfer knowledge and facts.

Such transformation implies that there is a huge distinction between teachers and facilitators (Brownstein, 2001). Firstly, teachers give a didactic lesson requiring students to listen and follow while facilitators help learners to use their own methods to recognize and interpret the learning materials. Secondly, teachers give the right answers directly but facilitators provide support and learning environment for students to achieve final conclusions by themselves. Last but not least, teachers usually give lectures of monologue, however, facilitators offer bi-directional dialogues with learners, receiving feedback immediately. (Rhodes & Bellamy, 1999).

3. Application of Constructivism in attributive clause teaching in college

3.1 Application of Constructivism in attributive clause teaching

According to theory of Constructivism, facilitators should be familiar with students' preexisting cognition, and then they can provide suitable learning activities for learners to upgrade their old cognitive framework (Oliver, 2000). In college English class, teachers, as facilitators should know students' basic understanding and existing knowledge. Take teaching of attributive clause as an example, when preparing to teach this clause, the author would give some simple attributive clauses as samples to ask some questions to check students' original recognition about this learning point. The author would detect whether students can understand the meaning of the given

clauses and whether they can realize the sample sentences include a clause.

After getting general idea about students' foundation about attributive clause, the author would give a scaffolding to assist students' knowledge to grow via linking with the well-known experience. Scaffolding is widely used in college English teaching such as modeling a skill or offering cues (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Scaffolding is a key functional tool of Constructivism, by which facilitators set a ladder to support learners to built up a bridge between old knowledge and new ones.

In the class of teaching attributive clause, the author would give a simple sentence "It is a big classroom", as a scaffolding. In the further step, the author would ask students to describe how big the classroom is. Later, when students give some more detailed information to depict such a big classroom, the author would encourage them to assemble the vocabulary into a sentence such as "The classroom has capability to accommodate 100 people". At this level, followed by analyzing the function of "big" and "The classroom has capability to accommodate 100 people", the author would illustrate that these two sections share the same function that is to describe the classroom, eventually reaching the conclusion about the essence of attributive clause—it can be viewed as a complicated adjective.

During this teaching process, the author utilizes scaffolding to decrease the level of complexity and difficulty of attributive clause, which provides an easy access for learners to perceive the fundamental function of attributive clause. What is more, the author adopts theory of Constructivism in the teaching process, facilitating learners to think and construct new cognitive structure by themselves.

3.2 Application of Constructivism in attributive clause writing teaching

Another main principle of Constructivism is learner-orientated, which emphasizes the active exploration and initiation to discover based on the original structure of knowledge.

In the English writing class of attributive clause, the author would offer the opportunity for students to experience the acquisition of new knowledge. Given the underprivileged writing performance of college students, the author would display two basic short sentence firstly, "Jack loves Rose." and "Rose is beautiful", with the question that whether the students can combine these two short sentences into one sentence. After some time of discussion, students frequently can make sentence such as "Jack loves Rose because Rose is beautiful." At this point, the author continue to send the hints by asking the questions step by step:

Q1: Is Rose the same person in the two original short sentences?

Q2: If she is the same person, can we use attributive clause to link the two short sentence into one sentence with a attributive clause?

Q3: If we can do question 2, what kind of the subordinating conjunctions should be used?

(If students can not give any feedback about Q3, the author would provide selections such as "which" "who" "when" for them to choose.)

During the process of above writing class, the author who utilizes Constructivism theory into the assistance of growing experience furnishes students with initiative learning and knowledge discovery step by step, which renders students an chance to explore and internalize this learning point.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, the application and adoption of Constructivism can help learners construct and upgrade their knowledge pattern, combining original experience and new concept. Besides, teachers act as facilitators who render scaffolding and opportunity for students to climb to the higher level by themselves. Additionally, during the teaching process, facilitators should ask questions to inspire students, creating relaxed learning environment with the free atmosphere in which students are able to think and reflect without any fear of making mistakes.

Application of Constructivism plays a significant role in English teaching, therefore, here are some recommendations for teachers. Firstly, teachers should adopt student-based principle, knowing students' cognitive map and thinking method. When teachers give a new learning point, we should start with existing knowledge of students, offering a linkage to connect old experience and new learning materials. In addition, when teachers ask questions, we should pay attention to give questions layer by layer, which can formulate a ladder for learners to arrive to the destination of learning point.

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