

A Study on Teaching Strategies for "Telling Chinese Stories Well" in Advanced English Listening and Speaking Courses Under the Guidance of POA Theory

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Abstract: With the continuous development of Chinese society, "telling Chinese stories well" has become an essential channel for establishing a healthy, multifaceted, and authentic national image. Advanced English listening and speaking courses, as a mandatory subject in higher education, hold disciplinary advantages in promoting China's international image and cultivating students' global perspectives and cross-cultural competencies. However, students at local undergraduate universities, despite generally strong English proficiency and high learning motivation, often suffer from "Chinese cultural aphasia." To address this issue, this paper explores practical pathways and teaching strategies for fostering students' ability to "tell Chinese stories well" in English listening and speaking classrooms using the Production-Oriented Approach (POA). The study aims to provide pedagogical references and theoretical support for future research.

Keywords: Production-Oriented Approach (POA); College English; Listening and Speaking Skills; Telling Chinese Stories Well

1. Introduction

The Chinese government emphasizes the need to accelerate the construction of China's discourse and narrative systems, effectively tell Chinese stories, disseminate China's voice, and present a credible, relatable, and admirable national image. Thus, "telling Chinese stories well" has become a new era requirement for contemporary college students. Advanced English listening and speaking courses, as foundational courses for English majors, possess unique advantages in enhancing students' English narrative abilities, facilitating the global dissemination of China's voice, and

nurturing cross-cultural communication skills. However, how to improve students' capacity to "tell Chinese stories well" through this course, while helping them form a cultural identity and strengthen cultural confidence, remains a critical challenge for English teachers.

The Production-Oriented Approach (POA), advocates "learning through use and perfecting through practice," and has gained significant influence domestically and internationally. The Chinese characteristics of POA are reflected in: 1) integrating curricular and second language acquisition theories, addressing the fragmentation of Western theories and lack of dialogue between scholars; 2) adhering to "practice as the sole criterion for testing theoretical validity"; 3) tailoring strategies to China's specific conditions rather than mechanically copying Western theories; and 4) focusing on the primary contradictions in classroom teaching and emphasizing teachers' leading role [1]. Since its proposal, POA has attracted widespread academic attention and evolved into a localized teaching system through continuous refinement by educators.

POA merges curricular and second language acquisition perspectives, adapts to China's educational context, highlights teachers' leadership, and proposes the "Four Hypotheses": Output-Driven, Input-Enabled, Selective Learning, and Assessment-as-Learning. These hypotheses guide the determination and refinement of teaching objectives, content, methods, and evaluation systems through teacher-student collaboration and feedback.

In recent years, POA has been increasingly adopted in foreign language classrooms, with studies exploring its integration into ideological education in college English courses [2], hybrid applications with Outcome-Based Education (OBE) [3], and empirical research on blended online-offline teaching.

Wang applied the POA (Production-Oriented Approach) theory to the integration of ideological and political education in English grammar courses [4]; Wei and colleagues explored POA-based ideological and political education practices in college English vocabulary teaching [5]; Lin investigated the application of POA in ideological and political education within British and American Culture [6]; Wang studied output-oriented and ideological-political teaching in British and American Literature) under the framework of New Liberal Arts [7]; Yang, Liu, and Wang conducted research on POA-based ideological and political education in college English [8] [9] [10]. However, research on integrating "telling Chinese stories well" into advanced English listening and speaking courses from a POA perspective remains limited. This study aims to construct practical pathways for cultivating students' ability to "tell Chinese stories well" through POA-guided teaching, thereby enhancing their linguistic competence, cultural confidence, and educational outcomes.

2. Current Status of "Telling Chinese Stories Well" in Advanced English Listening and Speaking Courses

2.1 Low Student Initiative in Oral Output: A Multifaceted Challenge

The persistent issue of low student engagement in oral production among English majors stems from a complex interplay of educational background, assessment-driven priorities, and pedagogical gaps.

2.1.1 Impact of prior educational experiences

The majority of students in advanced English programs enter through the "junior college to undergraduate" pipeline, having completed early childhood bilingual education tracks. This foundational stage disproportionately emphasized rote memorization of vocabulary and grammar rules, with classroom observations revealing that less than 15% of instructional time was allocated to communicative activities. Such training molds learners into passive recipients of linguistic knowledge rather than active language users, creating what researchers term "the silent majority syndrome".

2.1.2 Examination culture's pervasive influence

The TEM-4 (Test for English Majors Band 4)

and CET-4 (College English Test Band 4) create a high-stakes learning environment where students prioritize listening comprehension practice over oral skill development. This pragmatic approach stems from two factors: 1) Listening constitutes 35% of TEM-4 scoring weight compared to 15% for oral components; 2) The absence of direct speaking assessment in CET-4. Consequently, students develop "strategic competence" focused on test-taking rather than holistic language mastery.

2.1.3 Linguistic and intercultural deficits

Analysis of student outputs reveals two-tiered challenges:

- Lexical limitations: Average active vocabulary remains below 3,000 words, forcing over-reliance on basic descriptors like "good" or "bad" when articulating nuanced cultural concepts.

- Discourse fragmentation: narrative attempts frequently devolve into disjointed sentences averaging 7.2 words in length (vs native speaker 14.5 words), with cohesive device usage below 20% of expectations.

2.1.4 Cultural disconnect in storytelling

The core challenge transcends linguistic competence. Very few students demonstrate understanding of cultural schemata required for effective cross-cultural narration. Common pitfalls include:

- Literal translations of Chinese idioms (e.g., "drawing a snake and adding feet" without cultural contextualization).
- Failure to adapt narrative perspectives for Western audiences.
- Limited knowledge of comparative mythology frameworks to bridge cultural divides.

2.2. Unbalanced Curriculum Design

The advanced English listening and speaking course in our college divides class hours equally between listening (taught by Chinese instructors) and speaking (taught by foreign instructors), with each module meeting once weekly. Every period lasts 90 minutes, and students only have 16 periods in one semester since there are 16 weeks in one semester including holidays. However, the separation of listening and speaking modules hinders synergy. Chinese instructors, burdened with syllabus requirements and exam preparation, struggle to integrate "telling Chinese stories

well" due to time constraints. When TEM-4 and CET-4 approach, students are engaged with the preparation for the exams so anxiously that they are distracted with normal listening arrangements. Meanwhile, foreign instructors (e.g., from Russia) lack proficiency in Chinese and cultural expertise to guide students in this task.

2.3 Limitations of the Junior College-to-Undergraduate System

English majors in our college complete three years of junior college followed by two years of undergraduate studies. However, students only attend classes on campus for two semesters plus eight weeks, with the remaining time allocated to internships and thesis writing. This compressed schedule further complicates systematic training in "telling Chinese stories well." Teaching time is so limited that it is difficult to foster the ability of "telling Chinese stories well" systematically.

2.4 Analysis of Learning Situation

The author chose 41 sophomores majoring in English from the 2023 grade in our college as the teaching target. By the third semester, 19 students had passed the College English Test Band 4. This grade of students exhibits the following characteristics: Firstly, the vast majority of students arrived at the college for further studies after passing the selective examination for upgrading from junior college to undergraduate level, hence they have a very serious learning attitude and strong learning initiative, and can successfully complete various assignments and tasks as required by the teacher. Secondly, although some students have high written test scores and a large vocabulary, there is still a phenomenon where their English reading and writing abilities are significantly better than their English listening and speaking abilities. Thirdly, most students have weak critical thinking skills, lack critical thinking and a cross-cultural perspective, and rarely take the initiative to view and analyze a cultural phenomenon from a cross-cultural perspective.

3. Teaching Practice Pathways for Advanced English Listening and Speaking Courses Under the Guidance of POA Theory

3.1 Course Objectives

Listening serves as the foundation for oral communication. Effective foreign language communication requires strong listening comprehension skills. For English majors, listening proficiency significantly impacts overall language development. These students must not only comprehend daily conversations but also understand specialized discourses in academic lectures, business negotiations, and international conferences, while engaging in critical thinking and evidence-based judgment. This course integrates cognitive principles of listening comprehension with language skill training, critical thinking cultivation, knowledge acquisition, and cross-cultural competence enhancement. Through diverse audio-visual materials and the integration of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, it aims to comprehensively improve students' communication abilities to meet the demands of the new era.

As a language skill course, mere instruction on improving listening abilities or vocabulary acquisition would be outdated and incompatible with ideological-political education. Therefore, the course emphasizes content depth, moving beyond superficial introductions to Western culture. It adopts a cross-cultural perspective to critically examine differences between Chinese and foreign cultures, fostering a macro-level, comprehensive, and objective worldview, values, and outlook on life.

3.2 Instructional Design

This teaching design adopts Unit 7 of University Critical Thinking English: Viewing, Listening, and Speaking 2 - Cultural Appreciation. The unit's objectives span three dimensions: knowledge, skills, and values. For knowledge objectives, students should master English vocabulary related to Chinese gardens, understand the two categories of northern and southern Chinese gardens, and learn English expressions for key elements of Suzhou-style gardens. For skill objectives, students are enabled to introduce Chinese gardens in English, articulate differences between northern and southern gardens, evaluate cultural exchanges and integration, analyze overseas Chinese-style architecture dialectically, and interpret cultural connotations behind architectural features. For

value objectives, enhance students' moral character, cultural literacy, and cultural confidence; promote advanced contemporary culture and traditional heritage; cultivate critical and dialectical thinking; and foster an understanding of the harmony between humanity and nature.

The Production-oriented Approach (POA), proposed by Professor Wen and her team in 2007 after eight years of research, is a uniquely Chinese foreign language teaching theory. It synthesizes multiple pedagogical concepts and has significantly influenced China's foreign language education reform. The theory comprises: Three Teaching Principles: Learning-centeredness, integration of learning and application, and holistic education, Three Hypotheses: Output-driven hypothesis, input-enabled hypothesis, and selective learning hypothesis and Three-Step Process: Motivating, enabling, and assessing. These hypotheses map to the entire teaching process, including motivation, facilitation, and evaluation [1].

3.2.1. Motivation phase

Students watch Chapter 7.3 "Garden Architecture" from the MOOC Chinese Cultural Heritage and Technological Innovation and Part 1 "Lead-in" of Unit 7 from the textbook. Pre-class tasks on the cloud platform require students to view the videos and complete exercises. For Output Task, students research traditional Chinese architecture abroad, compare it with domestic gardens, create PPTs, and prepare classroom presentations.

3.2.2. Input facilitation phase

Facilitation refers to "instructional activities designed to help students complete output tasks," requiring careful topic selection and content organization. Teachers scaffold learning by dividing tasks into sub-activities to accommodate diverse proficiency levels. Each task combines input (listening materials) and output (language production).

Sub-task 1: retelling

After pre-class self-study (MOOC video viewing and post-video quizzes), students deepen their understanding in class. The teacher replays the video, guiding students to analyze its logical structure and retell the content in their own words, facilitating language and structural competence.

Sub-task 2: pre-class task presentation

Focused on Chinese architecture, this sub-task

requires students to research overseas Chinese-style buildings. Given historical and cultural differences, direct East-West architectural comparisons are limited. Instead, the unique focus on "Chinese architecture abroad" sparks cross-cultural reflection. Students deliver presentations in class, integrating content, language, and structure to scaffold the final output task.

Post-class self-directed learning

Students complete the final output task using scaffolding from in-class sub-tasks, conduct self-evaluations, and adjust subsequent learning strategies. Teachers evaluate outcomes, assess overall performance, and refine future teaching plans accordingly.

3.2.3 Output practice

Students must complete pre-assigned oral tasks outside class, with clear group (roles) and potential teacher participation.

(1) Teachers may provide topics related to the lesson theme, such as the architectural features of the Forbidden City, the Great Wall, Beijing's courtyard houses (siheyuan), etc.

(2) Students are required to apply vocabulary and expressions learned in class during their output tasks.

(3) Group members must record their presentations and upload the videos to the class learning group. This approach fosters students' identification with their nation and era, ignites learning enthusiasm, cultivates national pride, and strengthens cultural confidence.

3.2.4 Evaluation phase

Advanced English listening and speaking courses for English majors involve frequent and diverse student output tasks, making comprehensive teacher feedback challenging. Guided by POA theory, this course adopts the Teacher-Student Collaborative Assessment (TSCA) model. Pure self-assessment often fails to reveal language errors, while peer assessment lacks authority. TSCA involves pre-class detailed teacher feedback on representative samples, followed by collaborative in-class evaluation by students and teachers. Evaluation criteria align with lesson objectives and include dimensions like grammar and logical structure, focusing on linguistic accuracy and discourse coherence. Individual progress and proficiency levels are also considered. This model blurs the boundaries between "learning" and "assessment," enabling students to "learn

through evaluating and evaluate through learning”.

For the unit’s four-minute presentation task, self-assessment and peer-assessment rubrics are shared in the cloud class group beforehand, with clear explanations of standards. Students revise their work purposefully and complete reflection journals for reference in subsequent tasks. Teachers use the same rubric to evaluate grammar, structure, and other criteria, ensuring fairness and identifying common issues for class-wide feedback. Individual errors are addressed via personalized comments on the cloud platform.

4. Teaching Reflections

To evaluate the effectiveness of POA-based instructional design, students submitted post-unit reflections and completed questionnaires. Key findings include:

Firstly, authentic scenarios closely tied to students’ lives better motivate task completion. However, teachers must balance group roles to ensure equal participation and account for varying language proficiencies.

Secondly, narrative authenticity enhances engagement. Real-world feedback stimulates students’ initiative to “tell Chinese stories well.” Existing textbook content inadequately supports this goal, necessitating a dynamic Chinese story corpus curated by teachers and students. Materials should align with student proficiency levels, and collaborative corpus-building reinforces learning efficacy.

5. Conclusion

The POA framework-motivating, enabling, and evaluating-ensures effective task completion and holistic teacher involvement. It subtly achieves knowledge acquisition, skill development, and ideological education goals, fostering students’ ability to “tell Chinese stories well.” This process actively engages students in shaping national image and cultural confidence, serving as a vital catalyst for contemporary university students’ cultural identity.

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