



## English Language Teaching Based on Ecolinguistics

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### Abstract

Based on the basic connotation of ecolinguistics and the current situation of English language teaching in China, this study attempts to explore the ecological English teaching mode, abide by the law of language teaching, and analyze various factors in it. We regard the process of English learning as a complete ecological process, focus on English teaching and explore approaches from an ecological perspective so as to realize the significant integration of English education and the improvement of students’ learning ability.

**Key words:** English language teaching; Eco linguistics; Current English teaching situation; Teaching countermeasures

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The study of integration between linguistic theory and language teaching has always been a hot topic in

the field of language education. In recent years, the word “ecology” has been introduced into language teaching, which has inspired the wave of the theoretic reconstruction of second language teaching. Linguistic theory not only provides powerful theoretical support for foreign language teaching, but also enriches the teaching practice, especially in terms of the teaching concept and approaches. Many popular teaching approaches are actually derivatives of linguistic theoretical development. It is of great significance to build an ecological English teaching environment and realize the ecological balance of English education for the continuous improvement of English teaching quality.

### 2. THE ORIGIN OF ECOLINGUISTICS

The linguists’ early study of linguistic diversity and the relationship between language and environment laid the foundation for the rise of ecolinguistics. Foreign scholars have long recognized the positive role of ecolinguistics in foreign language teaching. Ecolinguistics is an ecological discipline born from the integration of ecology and linguistics, and is a discipline that studies the interaction between language and environment (Trampe, 2001). The concept of ecolinguistics was developed by professor Einar Haugen in his book *The Ecology of Language* which points out that “linguistic ecology can be defined as the study of the interaction between any given language and its environment” (Haugen, 1972). Ecolinguistics, also known as the ecology of language, is a field of language study developed by the combination of ecological science and linguistics. Ecolinguistics focuses on language ecology and the interaction between language and environment, which reflects the cognitive view of restoring the language system to the natural ecosystem. Ecolinguistics is a new interdisciplinary discipline that combines ecology and linguistics, and is a branch of linguistics, also known as linguistic ecology.

Halliday (2001) believed that ecological issues should be considered from the perspective of language, which emphasized the impact of language on the natural ecological environment on which human beings depended. The social ecosystem will be influenced by the language used by human beings, and ecolinguistics pays more attention to the ecological analysis of language system, the criticism of environmental discourse, the role of language on ecological environment, ecological grammar and other topics (Halliday, 2001). Halliday (2001) believed that grammar was universally constructed according to the mode of the social production and its relations, so attention should be paid to the non-ecological features and ecological features of the language system.

Domestic ecolinguistic research has experienced three stages of emergence, development and prosperity in China (Zhou, 2018). At present, the research fields of ecolinguistics are expanded, and the merging research paradigms are diversified. In terms of the ecosystem, language and communication, ecolinguistics develops not only as the core of modern linguistics, but also as the core of modern science. In the early 1990s, ecolinguistics began to involve the field of applied linguistics, and foreign language teaching shows the features of being ecological, paying attention to the ecological environment such as natural environment and social environment, and paying attention to language acquisition in the interaction (Zhu and Yang, 2018).

In the 1970s, structuralist linguists began to engage in the research field intertwined with biology and sociology. Since then, the idea of integrating languages into local and global ecosystems has begun to permeate the study of languages. Chinese scholars began to pay attention to ecolinguistics in the 1980s. Li Guozheng (1991) published a book “*Ecological Chinese Studies*”, trying to use ecological paradigms to study Chinese language. However, it has not aroused the due attention among domestic academic scholars. With the development of cognitive science, the human mind, and consciousness, the neurophysiological research are once again started. The language ecosystem can be understood not only metaphorically, but also literally. Language is not only the mental and cognitive process of abstract thought, but also investigated in terms of the material aspect, because language involves the combination of all physiological and biological resources that are employed. The scientific research of ecolinguistics is crucial because more insights are found in the language process as the language models begin to support and complement each other. In the field of ecolinguistic research, contemporary linguistics explores fundamental representations of reality regardless of paradigm orientation, and this also indicates that ecolinguistics need a set of conceptual terminological tools to fill the gaps between the more specific or fairly general models of language. In recent years, with the comprehensive emphasis on ecological environment

and the ideas of “harmonious society” and “building ecological civilization” put forward in China, more and more scholars began to pay attention to the research of ecolinguistics. Fan Junjun (2005) began to focus on and introduce the achievements of foreign ecolinguistic research. In addition to the theoretical introduction and comments on ecolinguistics, Chinese scholars also attach great importance to the applied research of ecolinguistics, which mainly focuses on language ecology, language protection, language policy and other aspects. However, the attempts to apply ecolinguistic theories to direct foreign language teaching practice are very bare. With the lasting development of ecolinguistics, more and more experts and scholars pay attention to its basic theoretic investigation and paradigm exploration, which also provide a new research perspective for foreign language teaching.

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### 3. ECOLINGUISTICS AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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As the newly developed branch of linguistics, ecolinguistics provides a new perspective for the study of language teaching. Linguistic theory not only provides powerful theoretical support for foreign language teaching, but also enriches the content and increases the approaches of teaching practice. According to the survey of the college English language teaching, due to the differences in the former middle school education as well as low English learning proficiency, there are great disparities between the students, and the students with low English foundation even occupy more than 50% of the whole. The relationship between linguistic theory and language teaching has always been a hot topic in the field of language education. English teaching is a part of the whole ecological environment. Participants (teachers, students, etc.), social environment (country, society, economic system, educational system, etc.) and natural environment form an organic circle, which shows a diversified and complex feature (Huang, 2016). Human beings and environment interact with each other. Ecolinguistics provides a new perspective for language teaching and learning. In the process of teaching, the teacher plays the role of knowledge producers by means of showing teaching materials, organizing the classroom activities. The ecological English teaching mode is composed of the teaching participants (teacher and student) and the teaching ecological environment. How to conduct English teaching from the ecological perspective and construct an ecological teaching model are the main tasks facing English teaching at present. It is necessary to pay attention to the interaction between various elements or factors, so as to make English teaching more ecological and build an ecological teaching environment. In the process of teaching preparation, the teacher’s reflection

on and accumulation of knowledge represents the role of ecological producers;

## 4. CURRENT ENGLISH TEACHING SITUATION

### 4.1 Students' low proficiency and the imbalance between the participants and the ecological environment

From the perspective of ecolinguistics, English classroom is a micro-ecosystem, in which teachers and students are important components of this micro-ecosystem. As more and more scholars began to pay attention to the emerging discipline of ecolinguistics, and with its continuous development, the basic views of ecolinguistics gradually penetrated into the field of second language acquisition, forming an ecological view of foreign language teaching. In this ecosystem, the teacher is the component who not only teaches the students knowledge, but more importantly teaches the students how to learn knowledge, that is, "it is better to teach him to fish better than to give him fish." In this case, small-class teaching mode or even one-to-one teaching mode can achieve the better educational effect and improve the English performance of students. After entering the university, the number of students increases, and the college teachers with the poor teaching abilities cannot cope with the large number of students, so they can only adopt the teaching mode featured large-class system. Such a mode cannot meet the different needs of students for English learning, violates the humanistic principle of ecological language teaching, and lacks the corresponding teaching activities, which cannot allow students to get adequate language practice. Therefore, it is difficult to apply the acquired knowledge to the real life, and then affect the overall quality of college English teaching.

### 4.2 Monotonous teaching mode and unscientific curriculum setting

Teachers and students are two ecological subjects in the classroom, which should cooperate with each other and constitute the main part of teaching system. However, faced with the society's high thirst for human talents, colleges and universities continue to expand enrollment, so the number of students rises sharply. The modern college English language classes, as an indispensable part of teaching ecology, provides a better platform for teachers and students to interact with each other. In many schools, there is a situation of "arranging the courses in terms of the school faculty" rather than "in terms of teaching needs and necessities". The number of selective English courses that each school can offer is limited, and the enthusiasm of students to choose courses is not high, so that the English curriculum system proposed by the school cannot meet the students' needs. The content that students want to learn cannot be obtained from classroom

teaching, so an imbalance exists between teaching content and students' needs as well as the practical application of language.

### 4.3 Lack of teaching faculty and imbalance between textbook knowledge and extracurricular knowledge

Students' learning state is at risk, and there is little communication between students in the learning process. The current teaching is limited to textbooks, which only shows the language usage and neglect the communicative function of English. In ecological language teaching, the reasonable setting of English courses prioritize over other factors, and will directly affect the ecological English teaching outcomes, and also affect the improvement of students' English ability, as well as their actual mastery and application of language. On the first hand, in order to solve the problem of teaching faculty shortage, many schools have gradually implemented program of large-class mode teaching system, but this problem still exists and has not been effectively solved. The phenomenon of lack of teachers is still a thorny problem for all schools. On the other hand, the form of testing students' language proficiency is out of date, and the means of acquiring language knowledge is only the examination. Because most of the English classroom teaching still adopt the traditional teaching mode, which leads to the decline of students' learning willingness. At the same time, the single and boring teaching mode inhibits the students' independent learning improvement.

With the development of science and technology, more and more flexible teaching mode featured by network and multimedia are being studied and promoted. However, the limitation of teaching resources makes it impossible for teachers and students to share the teaching environment freely and flexibly. This enriches the teaching materials to a certain extent, stimulates the enthusiasm of teachers and students, cultivates students' interest in language learning, and therefore the ecological components of teachers, students, language and language environment function more freely and harmoniously than before. At present, the English teaching overemphasizes the textbook knowledge in the classroom and relies too much on textbooks. However, the content of textbooks is updated slowly, which is generally out of touch with real life and not applicable. The proportion of teachers to students is gradually unbalanced. The supply of various equipment in schools also gradually fails to meet the needs of students, which affects the practical exercise of students and directly affects the effect of English language classes.

### 4.4 Imbalance between teaching effect and teaching objectives

Curriculum assessment should be the continuous inspection, feedback and adjustment in the whole process of teaching practice. Evaluation should not be a

unilateral static activity, but should be a continuous and dynamic circulation of teaching assessment. Teachers should supervise the teaching quality, adjust the teaching contents and approaches in the teaching reform, adjust the interaction of classroom ecological factors, and realize the harmony and balance in ecological classroom through ecological evaluation. For a long time, English teaching evaluation is a process of comparing the teaching results with the predetermined teaching objectives. The teacher should be transformed from the commander to the instructor who promotes students' learning, and the student should be transformed from the passive knowledge receiver to the active participator of learning. For example, the lack of physical and mental value development for teachers and students, and flexible and dynamic development for the environment. However, the single assessment of knowledge destroys the teaching equality and inhibits the mutual cooperation between students and teachers, which cannot stimulate the enthusiasm of teachers and students in English language teaching and learning.

## **5. ENGLISH TEACHING COUNTERMEASURES**

English learning should be guided by the notion of building a vibrant and dynamic ecological balance and promoting the dynamic and sustainable development of teaching and learning. It also features by creating an ecological teaching environment, optimizing the ecological content, improving the ecological teaching effects, constructing multi-dimensional value system, and promoting the comprehensive improvement of teachers' professional quality and students' cultural quality.

### **5.1 To establish ecological teaching approaches**

In the practice of English language teaching, in order to improve teaching efficiency and enhance students' English proficiency, new ecological teaching concept should be deeply explored and extensively established. The teaching evaluation overemphasizes the knowledge digesting as well as the end-term examination, and neglect the development of humanistic quality. There is a lack of dynamic evaluation methods featured by the multi-value representation of various ecological factors in English teaching. As is shown, the teachers should implement the new classroom teaching mode according to students' aptitude, attract their attention with new teaching theories and educational methods, enhance students' interest in English, and stimulate students' subjective initiative. As the carrier of culture, language carries the unique cultural features handed down by a nation in the course of historical development, in which each language shows the specific cultural characteristics of a nation. In addition, the teaching should be student-centered, and the one-way communication should be changed to two-way or

even multi-directional communication, so as to create an ecological environment for teacher-student interaction and student-student interaction, so that the learning process can be a real communication process rather than a meaningless mechanical training process. In this way, the ecological status of students is recognized, and the learning process will be meaningful. Teachers should change the outdated educational concepts, innovate the English language teaching mode, change the pattern of teachers' dominant role in the past, build a balanced relationship with students, and take students' individual differences into consideration.

### **5.2 To improve the ecological awareness and their professional abilities**

As the significant participant in classroom teaching, teachers should possess the awareness of ecological language protection while teaching English and transmitting English culture, and consider English as a tool for transmitting Chinese language and culture. If students' intrinsic motivation can be stimulated, the teaching effect will be gained. Firstly, in English teaching, if teachers and students are in a state of being interacting with each other, they will promote the effect of classroom teaching. Secondly, from the perspective of ecological feature, the evolution of one biological species will inevitably cause the spontaneous change of another species. From the point of view of dynamic balance, the function and structure of each component of the ecosystem are mutually influenced. Scientific teaching tests can not only stimulate students' enthusiasm in learning English to a certain extent, but also help English teachers improve their professional quality and teaching quality. Therefore, in the ecological teaching environment, the teachers' good performance in the classroom will definitely influence students, and the students' lack of enthusiasm in class will also cause teachers to be poorly engaged in teaching. In English class, teachers need to analyze students' learning situation and work out teaching approaches suitable for improving students' ability.

### **5.3 To set up multiple assessment mechanisms**

Assessment with multiple and multi-dimensional standards plays an important role in the growth of students. It emphasizes the applicable feature of an evaluation system that promotes the comprehensive and sustainable development of students' ability. "*English Curriculum Standards*" points out that the assessment system should show the diversification of the participants and the diversification of the evaluation form, and adopt the combination of formative assessment and summative assessment. In ecological classroom teaching, the English teaching process is transformed into the process of communication and interaction between learners and teachers in the teaching environment. In addition, teaching tests need to reflect students' learning achievements as

objectively and scientifically as possible, and teachers' process management and evaluation play a very important role in this process. First of all, the evaluation objects can be teachers, students or managers, who can carry out self-evaluation and interactive evaluation. The score evaluation of students is composed of three parts: the final evaluation, the formative evaluation and the three-dimensional evaluation. After the implementation of multiple evaluation, the course changes the past simple evaluation methods such as student attendance, classroom performance and tests, reflects the dynamic assessment, diversity and systemic features of the ecological classroom, and improves the differentiation of course results.

#### 5.4 To create an ecological environment for English teaching

Teachers should take the information-based education mode as the guidance to study the relationship between various components of classroom teaching, so as to maximize the teaching effects in classroom. The teacher-centered teaching mode is transformed into a new mode in which teacher is not only the instructor of students' learning, but the learning consultant, the organizer of the class, and the evaluator of the teaching effect, so that a relaxed, equal and pleasant classroom atmosphere can be created. For example, when learning English words, teachers may let students prepare the related content in advance, apply information technology to innovate the previous teaching mode and education concept, create an ecological and balanced teaching atmosphere for students, respect students' self-study spirit, take students' personality development as the goal, and enable students to actively participate in classroom teaching, thus improving the quality of English classroom teaching. At the same time, we also think about how to establish and develop the English classroom ecosystem. Such ecological teaching environment is more conducive to transfer the knowledge, provides a more favorable environment for the establishment of the relationship between teachers and students, and enables students to gain more experience and insights in the process of English learning.

## 6. CONCLUSION

From the perspective of ecolinguistics, English teaching is a complete and specific ecosystem. The concept of classroom ecological teaching provides a new insight

for the study of foreign language learning. We regard the English classroom as an educational ecosystem, and tend to further conduct in-depth research, summarizing the characteristics of the English classroom ecology, exploring the current imbalance in it and solving the problems in the English classroom ecosystem. Therefore, in the future school teachers should establish ecological teaching concepts, clarify ecological teaching objectives, adopt ecological teaching modes, comprehensively implement ecological English teaching plans for students, and build an ecological English classroom teaching system, so that students' English listening, speaking, reading and writing ability can be greatly improved, and their interest in English courses can be effectively enhanced. We will improve their comprehensive ability to use English, make English classroom full of vigor and vitality, and promote the sustainable development of their abilities.

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