

## Role-play:

### An Effective Approach to Learning EFL for Chinese Students from the Perspective of Psychodynamics and Pedagogy

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**Abstract:** EFL learning in China is very popular; however, the effect of learning seems to be unsatisfactory all the time. This article analyzes three major obstacles of Chinese students in EFL learning and believes the role-play, a common approach to learning EFL, can help eliminate the three obstacles from the perspectives of psychodynamics and pedagogy. It believes the approach can stimulate the enthusiasm and initiative of Chinese students to express their ideas in English in the class if a teacher can fully make the advantage of the inborn instinct of show desire of human being, adopt the approach of role-play, and get rid of the traditional way of English teaching.

**Key words:** obstacles of learning EFL; role-play approach; show desire; proper EFL learning environment and atmosphere; students as the leading role

## 1. INTRODUCTION

With the globalization of and economic development in the world, EFL learning is so popular as the world people have to use a common language to communicate in the fields of business, politics, culture, science and technology and so on. The upsurge of English learning in China has last for many years. Chinese kids usually begin to learn English at six or seven years old even earlier for the kids in coastal cities. However, the EFL study in China seems to be unsatisfactory all the time. There are some long-lasting obstacles in the regard.

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## **2. THREE OBSTACLES OF CHINESE STUDENTS EFL LEARNING**

### **2.1 The introversive character of Chinese students**

Chinese people have many good characters and personalities such as cleverness, diligence, persistence and so on. However, his most typical adverse characters are discussed here for avoiding the obstacle to EFL teaching and learning, which are introversion, quietness and loneliness, humility, and cowardliness. Bertrand Russell, a British philosopher, logician, mathematician, historian, socialist, pacifist, and social critic, said in his book *The Problem of China* (1922) Chinese people have a false sense of pride, like to compromise and yield to the pressure of public opinion. That means Chinese people are greatly afraid of making mistakes in wording and behavior because those make them loose face in the public eye. Therefore, Chinese people usually do not intend to express their ideas loudly in public and they always keep silent and wait for other people's comments. Further, "loosing face" leads to people's shyness, quietness, introversion and silence. The impact of the adverse character can be found anywhere in Chinese elementary, middle schools and colleges, which is a serious obstacle for Chinese students to learn English.

### **2.2 The lack of English-speaking environment and atmosphere**

The lack of English-speaking environment and atmosphere greatly affects the substantial leap of English study of Chinese students though they begin to study English from the elementary school. As we know in many western countries even some countries in Southeast Asia, English media are very popular. People in these countries have many opportunities to contact and use English language. However, in China, Chinese language is dominant since China is located in a relatively self-closed region isolated from the western countries with mountainous ranges and oceans and foreign languages are rarely used in public. This brings a great obstacle to Chinese students to contact and use English language, let alone communicating with western people.

### **2.3 The traditional way of "teacher as the center"**

From the elementary school to college school in China, the teacher is always the center of the class and holds the absolute dominant position in the class. The way of teaching is always the presentation of the teacher, in which he/she presents the whole facts, methods and ideas to the students in a most logical way, while students acquire the knowledge by means of continuous repetition, memory and examination. Chinese people call it a way of "force-fed duck" or "spoon-feeding students". Under this environment, students learn passively and do not have many chances to express their own perspective on real life phenomena. The trainees do no have a strong ability to apply the knowledge and have no new construction of their own, especially in the field of language learning.

## **3. ROLE-PLAY--AN EFFECTIVE APPROACH TO ELIMINATE THE THREE OBSTACLES**

### **3.1 To stimulate the inborn instinct of show desire of students via role-play**

Psychodynamics believes the psychological power system determines the human individual's perception of and attitudes to the real world and choice and preference of objects of activities. All the activities of human being, no matter what are simple or complicated, spiritual or physical, are driven by a certain internally psychological power and people make arduous efforts to reach the certain object. It also believes human being has an inborn instinctive motivation of expressing themselves, showing themselves, asking for social recognition and make unremitting efforts to achieve the target. Like all the young students in other countries, Chinese students own the same instinct. They also have the desire to show their ideas and

abilities. They know the modern world needs the talents of boldness, braveness, and openness. People should not always consider their “face” and forget the courage of taking responsibilities. Chinese students have the potential desire to learn English well so as to get a skill to communicate with the world. Only simply due to a very conservative atmosphere in English class, they dare not express their ideas. Therefore, it can be feasible to make use of this kind of psychological power to break the psychological obstacle and lead students to learn EFL boldly and actively. The role-play can present students a chance to show their perspectives concerning a certain argument, topic or situation.

### **3.2 To form a proper English-speaking atmosphere via role-play**

Morry van Ments, a well-known author in the field of simulation and gaming, believes role is dynamic. If we are to help individuals grow, you need to play through situations like the drama in order to allow individuals to realize the real life and learn how to solve the problem. Through this process, students cannot only express their emotions via performance but also can learn new behaviors to adapt to the future life. Therefore, the main purpose of role-play is to provide opportunities for students to play a role not of his own, and through the continuous exercise, they can learn more roles in response to a variety of environment more flexibly. In EFL learning, the role-play approach can provide students with such a dynamic atmosphere. The teacher is advised to find out a common interesting subject, matter, or situation and students are required to work out their own script in English to express their own vision on the subject and use their own imagination to observe the matter. The students will surely take the opportunity to express themselves and positively to do the job. In the whole process, English is the only language to be used. In such a way, the teacher can create as much as possible an English-speaking environment for the students. In EFL teaching practice, students can play the role of interpreters, teachers, tour guides, tourists, journalists, lecturers, government officials, business managers, business people and other appropriate roles. Students can get a positive impact through these roles, devote to a well-designed situation, fully mobilize their thinking, and develop their imagination and creativity. This will not only temper the thinking ability of students, but also make the classroom atmosphere animate. Therefore, role-play can be such an ideal approach to create a “foreign” environment, in which students can “apply” English rather than “recite or memorize” English language taught by the teacher, the previous and traditional practice.

### **3.3 To put students as the leading role via role-play**

The contemporary teaching theory attaches great importance to students’ leading role in study, emphasizes to fully mobilize the enthusiasm, self-awareness, initiative of students’, and enables students to fully participate in teaching and learning activities and really play a dominate role in the class. The development of modern society makes the education circle have more and more awareness of the focus of teaching students to understand the curriculum, thoughts, innovation and practice, and should allow students to participate in various kinds of activities so that they can learn matters related to real life. Again Morry Van Ments believes teaching is both a role-playing related to real life situations and a method that can be adopted in the classroom. It enables to meet the demand of students to understand exactly, think, and put forward innovation and practice. Role-play is a teaching strategy of applying the role-playing skills to discuss the issue and explore the human relationship. Dr. Van Kelly of University of Kansas considers what the most likely causes a person’s construction change is the “role-play”, because this method allows people to interpret matter through the eyes of other people’s. When standing at a different position of the other’s, it will be much easier for him to understand the ideas of the other’s and further forms his new construction. When learners attempt to set up the new construction, if they can get positive results and consider the new construction is effective, then they can have a new construction change. When the theory is used in EFL teaching, it means students should be the leading role in the English-learning class and let themselves to experience the real role of English language in the real life, accumulate the experience of language knowledge and its application for their future life. Further, they can form a new English language construction of their own rather than a teacher tells them repeatedly the usage of English language.

## 4. CONCLUSION

Role-playing can be classified as a way of "situational teaching". It means taking a task as the focus of a goal, setting a goal of teaching to enable students to experience the simulated real situation by themselves or observe from the sidelines. Students should focus on the activities of the process so that they can learn and acquire knowledge of English in the course through their own experiences. Role-playing allows students to gain a deeper understanding of the English language problem, a new experience to the characteristics of English under different roles.

Performance can bring happiness and interest to students and enhance their strong motivation and desire of language learning. Particularly for Chinese students who are relatively introversive, role-play can awaken their potential desire of performance and success and break the obstacle of shyness, timidity and passiveness in EFL learning.

## 5. A CASE OF ROLE-PLAY IN EFL LEARNING BY AN ENGLISH MAJOR CLASS

**Title:** simulated business English negotiation

**Purpose of practice:** business etiquettes, business English language and English-Chinese interpreting

**Case background description:** Mr. Smith from Company A in Australia and Mr. Muller from Company B in Germany have a long-term partnership. They intend to cooperate with Mr. Huang from Company C in China jointly to exploit the Vanadium Titanium (V-Ti) mine at the site of Company C. Company C does not want to have capital contribution, and intends to use invisible assets as contribution. Now, people from Company A and B come to the site of Company C to have an investigation and initial discussion.

**Play design requirements:**

- a). Each team appoints one student as the representative of the three Companies respectively, and one student as the interpreter
- b). Please imagine the issues concerning investment and ore exploitation in China and try to achieve the target of the Chinese Company
- c). Try to use the proper English language in a friendly discussion
- d). Try to find out the basic abilities for a qualified Chinese-English interpreter

**An excerpt of one team's script:**

Smith (S): Mr. Huang, thank you very much for your full consideration for the reception and investigation to the Vanadium Titanium (V-Ti) mine site. We have really enjoyed the trip.

Interpreter (I): 黄先生, 非常感谢您的接待安排以及到钒钛矿场的考察, 您考虑得十分周到。我们一路的行程十分愉快。

Muller (M): Ya, I completely agree with Mr. Smith. Everything is perfect. Particularly, your driver is as excellent as a car-racer. You know driving on such zigzag paths looks really dangerous and exciting and requires very good skills.

I: 是的, 我完全同意史密斯先生的说法。事事都很完美, 尤其是您的司机, 太棒了, 像赛车手一样棒。在如此曲折的山道上驾驶看起来真的很危险, 不过也让人兴奋, 它要求很高的驾驶技巧。

Mr. Huang (H): 谢谢! 你们是我们的尊贵客人。我们中国古代的教育学家、中国的教育之父孔子有句名言“有朋自远方来, 不亦乐乎”。你们的到来, 让我们非常高兴。你们的满意也是我们的快乐。我希望我们今后会有更多合作的机会, 让这种快乐延续。

I: Thanks! You are our distinguished guests. You know the ancient Chinese educationist and the father of Chinese education Confucius once said 'Friends have come from afar, how happy we are!' It's our pleasure

to have a chance to meet you. I wish we would have more cooperation in future and make the happiness last longer.

S&M: Thank you! We believe we can.

I: 谢谢你，我们相信我们会有机会的。

H: 请问你们需要喝点什么？中国茶还是咖啡、矿泉水或是别的什么？

I: Would you like some drinks? Chinese tea, coffee or mineral water or something else?

M: I would like to have a cup of black coffee, thanks.

S: I prefer a cup of white coffee, thanks.

I: 穆勒先生要杯黑咖啡，史密斯先生要杯白咖啡。

H: 好的。下面我们进入讨论的正题：关于我们三方合资合作的问题。

I: Okay. Now let's come to our formal discussion: joint venture and cooperation issue.

S: Please let me introduce my company a little. My company is specialized in the business of V-Ti products in Australia and has got a relatively big market share in both Asia and the world. My products mainly include vanadium pentoxide, Ferrovandium, vanadate and coatings.

I: 请允许我介绍一下我公司的情况。我公司是经营钒钛产品的专业公司，产品在澳大利亚、亚洲以及国际市场都占有相当份额。我公司经销的产品主要有五氧化二钒、钒铁合金 钒酸盐和涂料。

M: Yes, I am an old friend of Mr. Smith. Muller Company is mainly engaged in the processing of V-Ti ores, Mr. Smith is my client, and we have had a long and successful cooperation in the past years. Mr. Smith once had a Chinese partner and invested in China, but the cooperation wasn't a successful one. They are still in dispute.

I: 是的，我和史密斯先生是老朋友了。穆勒公司主要从事于钒钛矿的加工，史密斯先生是我的客户，我们在过去的几年里有着长期的、成功的合作。史密斯先生曾有一个中国合作伙伴，在中国投资过，但失败了，目前仍处在纠纷中。

S: Yes, it's true. But I think China is rich in V-Ti ores and there is a big potential market, so I decide to find a new partner and continue my investment in China.

I: 是的，那是事实。但是，我想中国钒钛资源丰富，潜在市场大，因此，我决定再找一个合作伙伴，继续在中国投资。

H: 贵公司算找对了人了。谢谢贵方这么看重我公司，贵方欲与我公司怎么合作呢？

I: You have just found a right partner. Thank you for your respect to my Company. And I would like to know in what way you would cooperate with me.

S: I primarily think we set up a joint venture to export V-Ti products made in China. I contribute 51% of the capital and you 49%.

I: 我初步的想法是我们建立一个合资公司，出口中国生产的钒钛产品。我方出资资本的 51%，贵方出资 49%。

H: 哦，但是如果新的投资，需我公司总部审批。据公司总部的近期发展规划看这个行业不是投资重点。

I: Well, I see. But if I have a new investment, I have to get the approval from the headquarter of mine. As I know my headquarter does not have the plan to invest in V-Ti products in the near future.

M: We understand the policy of your Company. However, Mr. Smith is determined to invest in China despite of the first failure.

I: 贵公司的情况，我们理解，不过 A 公司有决心在中国投资，尽管有第一次的失败。

H: 的确，中国是个投资环境不平衡的地方。有的地区发达，有的地区不发达。要钱时，说的很好，钱倒手后就不是那么回事了。尤其是采矿投资，与地质条件关系很大，而当矿床跨越不同村镇时，还发生所有权的问题。过去，我们已遇到这类的问题，作为外国投资者需要解决：地质探测，矿山合伙人选择，国家政策，人文，商务法律，市场等问题。这些均影响投资成本和成败。

I: It's true. The investment environment in China is not balanced. Some regions are developed but some are not. When the local partner needs money, he will make many promises to benefit the investor. Once he has got the money, he may forget his promises. Particularly for the investment in mine exploration, it is greatly related to the geological conditions. If a mineral deposit extends to several jurisdictions, there may have the issue of ownership. In the past, such dispute took place. Being a foreign investor, you must solve the following issues: geological exploration, selection of partner(s), state policies, and humane, business law and market matters and so on. All the factors may have a great impact on the success or failure of your investment.

M: That's absolutely correct. What you have said is exactly our concerns. I really hope Mr. Huang and your company can help us to solve all the issues.

I: 那完全正确。刚才您讲的正是我们所担忧的。我希望黄先生和贵公司可以帮助我解决这些问题。

H: 我公司是国际化的公司，按国际规范进行工作。中国人已经意识到中国企业按国际范例与外国投资者合作是中国经济发展的重要条件。

I: My Company is an internationalized one, and follows the international business rules. Nowadays, Chinese are aware that Chinese enterprises must follow the international practice to cooperate with foreign investors. This is a critical condition for Chinese economical development.

M: Right, if your Company can be engaged in the cooperation, it would be wonderful.

I: 是的，若贵公司能参与合作，那就太好了。

H: 刚才我们已谈到贵方这样投资的问题所在，但我们十分赞赏贵公司对中国投资的勇气。作为中国公司，我们很愿意提供帮助。不过，我方将不以现金投入，而以我们的商誉和协助解决上述问题的义务投入。

I: Just now, I have pointed out the issues happened on you. I am greatly appreciated your courage to invest in China. As for us, we are willingly to offer our help, but my Company may not invest directly with money. We would like to cooperate under the name of our business reputation and services to solve above-mentioned disputes.

S: Okay, it is of great significant to do so.

I: 好的，贵方的这种投入也是有意义的。

H: 如贵方认为是有价值的，那么我建议贵方可以将它罗列出来，并予以作价。当贵方与中方矿山谈判合资时，我方可与贵方作为一方谈判。我方在合资企业的股份，将从贵方所占份额中划出。

I: If you think it is worthy of doing so, I suggest you make a list of all the jobs and offer a price. When you are negotiating with the V-Ti mine party, we may form a party and attend the negotiation. For the share we hold, I hope it can be independent from your proportion.

S: Okay, I will consider your proposal.

I: 贵方的建议可以考虑。

H: 若贵方同意我方合作的方式，那么，请贵方提供协议方案以确定双方关系，便于以后的工作。

I: In case you agree to my cooperative way, please provide us with a written scheme to determine our cooperative partnership for the convenience of our future work.

S: Okay, after my report to the headquarter of mine, I offer a written plan to you.

I: 行，待我回国汇报后，将书面回答贵方。

After three weeks, Mr. Smith and Muller called Mr. Huang and told him they agreed Company C to contribute with business credit and services. Company C successfully achieved the aim of contributing no cash.

### **Comments and analysis from the teacher:**

- a). The performance reflects a typical business English negotiation.
- b). The script covers a wide range of knowledge, such as international business etiquettes, Sino-western culture, mine industry, sales, finance, Chinese economy and so on.
- c). Due to the various specialties, it is a challenge to the interpreter.
- d). From the script, it is obvious to see students study very actively. Only after their hard working can they work out such an in-depth script.
- e). The purpose of stimulating students' motivity, initiative and creativity has been reached. The performance of the students is full of enthusiasm without any timidness.

**Feedbacks from students to the approach:**

- a). The teaching approach put the initiative of students into full play, and they have a strong desire to show their understanding to the international business despite of superficialness, breaking the long time form of the teacher's presentation and simple teacher-student interaction.
- b). Students have collected a large number of cutting-edge knowledge in the preparation of the play and fully used the network resources, and updated the knowledge structure. For English major students, to understand some economic and industry knowledge is essential.
- c). Students have got a full exercise in spoken English and interpreting skills.
- d). Each student has the opportunity to express his ideas, can design his own lines to select the optimal solution, avoiding the usual situation that only a few students can show their abilities.
- e). Team spirit among the students has been fully reflected, making learning more harmoniously and effectively.
- f). In the process of preparation, the most difficult problem is the lack of business and industrial knowledge, which will stimulate them to study much harder and wiser in the future. Expertise in various industries and the corresponding English vocabularies are seriously short. They are aware each student will play his "social role" and need to have a wealth of knowledge and experience.

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