

The New Progress of Text Analysis for College English Teaching in China --Commentary on Liu Yuhong's In and Beyond the Text(2018)

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Abstract: College English teaching in China is shouldering the responsibilities of helping the all-around growth and development of students and serving both the country and the society, so college English teaching becomes a complicated task which requires a lot on the part of the teachers. Liu Yuhong, scholar and professor at Guangxi Normal University, published a monograph entitled “In and Beyond the Text: Rethinking about EFL Teaching” in May, 2018. It offers a unique perspective of text analysis for college English teaching in China, which can be of great help to implement meaningful, purposeful and instructive college English teaching, and to cultivate independent, efficient and competent college English learners.

1. Introduction

As China is a populated country with a large number of English learners, researches on college English teaching are very necessary. The scholar and professor-Liu Yuhong with Guangxi Normal University put forward the concept of “san yi san xiang (or three yis and three xiangs)” in her monograph *In and Beyond the Text: Rethinking About EFL Teaching* published in May, 2018. Liu has engaged in teaching of English language and literature teaching and paid close attention to the reform of college English teaching in China. Yi and xiang in the Chinese language refer to “meaning or significance” and “orientation or direction” respectively in English. The three yi by Liu are contextualized meaning (yujing yi), figures of speech (xiuci yi) and skills of making coherence (moupian yi). The three xiang by Liu are lateral thinking (hengxiang siwei), multi-dimensional thinking (duoxiang siwei) and reverse thinking (nixiang siwei). Liu's book provides a unique perspective of text analysis from the textbook and outside the textbook. She divided the term “text” into “In the Text (nei wenben)” and “Beyond the Text (wai wenben)”. The book also points out that text analysis by three yi and three xiang makes teachers and students become a pair of “waltz dancer” who are inseparable from each other[1].

2. Brief Description

There are mainly two parts for the book *In and Beyond the Text: Rethinking About EFL Teaching*. Part A is Teaching Philosophy of “Three Yi and Three Xiang” Text Analysis Method, while Part B is Teaching Practice of “Three Yi and Three Xiang” Text Analysis Method. Part A is classified into four chapters and Part B contains two chapters.

The first chapter in Part A gives a brief introduction to the author's concept of “Three Yi and Three Xiang”: Section One reviews basic concepts on the term “text”; Section Two comments on the relevant researches on text analysis and Section Three is the theoretic foundation for the book. The second chapter in Part A describes the motivation behind the author's concept of “Three Yi and Three Xiang”: Section one elaborates the nature of language is humanity and Section Two points out the purpose of language teaching is the development of the human nature. The third chapter in Part A is about the ways and means of “Three Yi and Three Xiang”: Section One is about the basic aim, Section Two gives a detailed introduction of the three yi for in-text analysis, and Section Three gives a detailed introduction of the three xiang for beyond-text analysis. The fourth chapter in Part A talks about “Three Yi and Three Xiang” and development of teachers: Section One is about the role of teachers and Section B is about the development of teachers.

Part B focuses on the teaching practices of “Three Yi and Three Xiang”. The first chapter in Part B is mainly about teaching ideas and principles. The second chapter in Part B is mainly about teaching practice and experience: Section One is about the practice of text analysis; Section Two is teaching case using text analysis; Section Three is teaching experience of text analysis and Section Four displays comments and documentation of teachers’ teaching skills competitions.

3. Brief Comment

From the teaching practices in the book, it is clear that the three yi and three xiang put forward by Prof. Liu Yuhong is worthy of being promoted and tried in college English teaching. Prof. Liu Yuhong is currently the president of the School of Foreign Languages, Guangxi Normal University, a member of the Foreign Literature Committee of the Chinese Association of Higher Education, and a member of the Guangxi Translators Association[2]. She has published several essays on foreign literatures and she has also published about 18 literary translations. Because of her profound understanding of literatures, she stresses “wenxue li(literary competence)” in the book and points out that “wenxue li” is very important for teachers to dig into and beyond the text .

3.1 Theoretic Foundation

The theoretic foundation of Liu’s theory of text analysis is on the basis of behaviorist theory, constructivism, second language acquisition input theory, cognitive information processing theory, task-based teaching theory, activity theory, dialogue theory, theory of motivation.

Liu’s theory is mainly around the two core concepts of “wenxue li(literary competence)” and “sikao li(thinking ability)”. The three yi are corresponding to “wenxue li” while the three xiang are correlated with “sikao li”. As teachers of college English, it is equally important to possess both “wenxue li” and “sikao li”. By “wenxue li”, it means the literary competence of analyzing college English texts by teachers and students alike. It doesn’t mean that teachers and students alike only focus on literary works, it is necessary to learn from and absorb the close reading ideas for short stories. However, literary studies for college English texts are not pure literature all the time and do not have to study literature theories or give theoretical guidance. Instead it requires the cognitive potential for teachers and students to do literary studies, and teachers’ deep understanding of related texts will pave the way for students’ interests of the texts so as to effectively guide students to thinki meaningfully. By “wenxue li” it implies contextualized meaning(yujing yi), figures of speech(xiuci yi) and skills of making coherence(moupiian yi). By “sikao li”, it does not simply means the thinking ability in the ordinary sense, instead it refers to lateral think(hengxiang siwei) which suggests teachers to break the original text arrangement of textbooks and connect related texts across different units, volumes and textbooks; multi-dimensional thinking(duoxiang siwei) which encourages teachers to break through the teaching texts in line with the real life, nationalization and localization so as to enrich the connotation of the certain theme in a certain unit; and reverse thinking(nixiang siwei) which recommends teachers to motivate students to think from the opposite direction self-consistently so as to develop the vitality of thinking and the spirit of innovation.

3.2 Notable Changes of College English Teaching in China

Over the past 20 years, China has been taking measures to reform college English, such as computer aided teaching, multimedia network teaching, autonomous learning, content based instruction (CBI) academic English, micro class, flipped class model and taking advantage of various kinds of teaching applications.

A few years ago, many colleges stipulated that if an undergraduate failed to pass College English Test before graduation, he or she couldn’t apply for a bachelor’s degree. Nowadays, many colleges have canceled the regulation, and students just enter for College English Test to testify their English proficiency. As for the Post-graduate Entrance Examination, it has always been a practice that, in addition to the requirement of total points, the candidates’ English grades must pass the minimum passing score, though not necessarily over 60 scores.

In October, 2015, the Guideline on Guiding Some Local Universities to Transform into Application-oriented Universities was jointly issued by the Ministry of Education, the National Development and Reform Commission and the Ministry of Finance in China. Since then, it has become a general trend in China that the credits of college English curriculum are compressed and the class hours are reduced greatly. The compressing for the credits of college English curriculum and the reduction of the class hours may give outsiders an impression that English learning is no longer important at colleges in China. It's not correct to think like that, because the test questions for College English Test and Post-graduate Entrance Examination are not becoming simpler. At the same time, the society's requirement for graduates' English proficiency hasn't been lowered. As China wants to "go out", voice its views and tell its story on the world stage, it has put forwards new requirements for English learners' language competence.

3.3 Enlightenment on College English Teaching in China

Although the class hours for college English curriculum are reduced greatly at many colleges in China, it doesn't mean that English teaching and English study are not important any more, instead, it reveals that English teaching and English study are being viewed more rationally. The reduction of class hours has both positive and negative effects on the teaching and learning of college English. The reduction of class hours, the reform of college English entrance examination, the reform of College English Test, the reform of English Test for National Post-graduate Entrance Examination and the society's new requirement for graduates' English proficiency have brought a new impact on college English classroom teaching.

As time changes rapidly, college students in China now have easier access to the Internet especially by smartphones than those a decade ago. College students in China can search information anytime and anywhere as long as they connect their smartphones to the Internet. Teachers can't depend on teaching resources too much, instead, the role for a college English teacher needs to be shifted from "teacher" to "reader" so as to carefully read and dig into the teaching texts[3]. As students can easily find the Chinese translation and keys to the exercises for their textbooks, teachers need to dig deeper into the textbooks and Prof. Liu's text analysis can be a guideline for teachers to bring students back to classroom and arouse their long-term interest in English learning. The students must be taught how to approach and consider the text in order to become independent and efficient readers[4]. In this sense, Liu's perspective of text analysis can help college English teachers to cultivate the students to become independent, efficient and competent college English learners.

4. Conclusion

The demand for foreign language learners changes with the time. Within the context of China's One Belt and One Road Initiative, the competence of English will bring great opportunities for Chinese people to communicate with the outside, voice their views and tell stories of China with the voice of China. No one can say that there is only one effective way to carry out college English teaching in China. As Prof. Liu pointed out in the conclusion of her book, "san yi san xiang" still has a long way to go: firstly, its fusion with exercises of the teaching materials needs to be further strengthened; secondly, the quantitative evaluation of students' progress needs to be strengthened[5]. With the help of Prof. Liu's perspective of text analysis, college English teachers in China can arouse the students' interest, dig deeper into teaching texts combining various teaching approaches flexibly according to specific circumstances related to different colleges, teachers, students and textbooks.

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