Enlightenment of Second Language Acquisition Theory on Exam-oriented English Spoken Teaching

Yinan Shen

Business School，University of Nottingham，Nottingham，United Kingdom

Abstract

The development of the Second Language Acquisition Theory is significance to the improvement on efficiency of English teaching. With the increasing development of globalization, the requirements of students' English ability in China has also been increasing. Of all items, the improvement of oral expression is particularly urgent, not only for the demand of daily spoken communication, but also for some students to achieve specific speaking ability through standardized tests. Traditional teaching methods that attach importance to grammatical functions and language structures can not meet the students' scoring needs in English spoken test. Therefore, through the research on the second language acquisition mechanism, the problems and schemes of exam-oriented English spoken teaching have been improved, and the methods to enhance exam-oriented spoken English teaching have been summarized as follows. First, teachers should pay attention to students' emotional motivation and create an environment conducive spoken spoken learning in classrooms. Second, teachers should optimize the appropriateness of contents and the flexibility of presentation of language materials for students. Third, teachers should give students time to digest the knowledge explained in class.

Key Words*: Second Language Acquisition, Teaching Methods, English Spoken Test*

1. Requirements in IELTS of Students' English Spoken Ability

1.1. The Fact That Examination has become the Social Background of Spoken English Teaching Orientation

With the increasing advancement of globalization, the demand for studying, working and emigrating abroad is increasing as the time going by. English learning for the purpose of meeting the examination requirements is more common among students in China. According to statistics [1], by 2023, the UK, the US, Singapore and other countries where English is the main language are still the first choice for most students to study abroad, and it is very realistic that students must pass the standardized language proficiency test to examine the four comprehensive foreign language abilities such as listening, speaking, reading and writing. For example, IELTS (International English Language Testing System) which has been approved by more than 140 countries ,such as corporate departments or government agencies in the UK, the US, Canada ,and so on[2]. So, IELTS has been regarded as a language ability testing system recognized by universitie, and the same as TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language), PTE (Pearson Tests of English) and so on.

In all the single subject examinations, we ilnd that students' spoken performance is worse than other subjects. According to the statistics of test performance in 2022 releases by IELTS official [3], the average score of China students in speaking test is lower than that of other subjects, which shows indirectly that the overall spoken ability of China mainland students is weak.

Table 1 ：Academic mean performance by nationality.

Academic mean performance by nationality						
Nationality	Statistics	Listening Band Score	Reading Band Score	Writing Band Score	Speaking Band Score	Overall result
China	MEAN	6.1	6.4	5.8	5.6	6.1

Brazil	MEAN	7.0	7.2	6.1	6.9	6.9
France	MEAN	7.0	7.1	6.2	6.6	6.8
India	MEAN	6.6	6.0	5.9	6.1	6.2
Korean	MEAN	6.5	6.4	5.9	5.9	6.2

Source: IELTS official website statistics table

https://ielts.org/researchers/our-research/test-statistics#Demographic

1.2. *Specific Requirements of Students' Spoken English in IELTS*

According to IELTS Scoring Standard Guidance [4], the Official IELTS Scoring Standards set that the total score of each single subject is 9 points, and the final score is the average of the sum of four subjects after rounding off. If a student wants to get a qualified language score, the total marl should be not less than 6.5 points, and the four subjects of listening, speaking, reading and writing should not be less than 6 points respectively, which the score corresponding to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages（CEFR）should be Grade B1.

The specific subjects of IELTS spoken examination include fluency and coherence, vocabulary resources, grammatical range and accuracy, and pronunciation. Generally speaking, students need to be able to communicate with each other in terms of vocabulary and syntactic structure in a fluent and not-too-stuck rhythm without major problems in the basic pronunciation of words. For specific scoring standards of four single subjects, please refer to the following form.

Table 2：IELTS Speaking Band Descriptiors - Scoring criteria for Academic and General Training tests.

IELTS Speaking Band Description				
Scoring Criteria for Academic and General Training tests				
Band Score	Fluency and coherence	Lexical resource	Grammatical range and accuracy	Pronunciation
6	Able to keep going and demonstrate a willingness to produce long turns. Coherence may be lost at times as a result of hesitation, repetition and/or self-correction. Uses a range of spoken discourse markers, connectives and cohesive features though not always appropriately.	Resource sufficient to dicuss topics at length. Vocabulary use may be inappropriate but meaning is clear. Generally able to paraphrase successfully.	Produces a mix of short and complex sentence forms and a variety of structures with limited flexibility. Though errors frequently occur in complex structures, these rarely impede communication.	Uses a range of phonological features, but control is variable. Chunking is generally appropriate, but rhythm may be affected by a lack of stress-timing and/or a rapid speech rate. Some effective use of intonation and stress, but this is not sustained. Individual words or phonemes may be mispronounced but this causes only occasional lack of clarity. Can generally be understood

				throughout without much effort.

Source: IELTS website

https://ielts.org/take-a-test/preparation-resources/understanding-your-score/ielts-scoring-in-detail

Although the overall level of Chinese students has been steadily enhancing with time in recent years, more than half of them have scored above 6 points. Compared with other subjects, spoken ability is still relatively weak, not only the overall average score is lower than other subjects, but also there is a certain gap with the global average [5].

In order to meet the requirements of standardized examination, the improvement of standardized scores is inseparable from affable teaching methods and learning strategies. The enhancement of spoken teaching is different from the improvement of spoken ability in the general sense. If the strategic details existing in exams are ignored in the teaching process, it will inevitably greatly reduce teachers' teaching ability and classroom design contents. How to improve students' overall speaking ability through theoretical instructions and practical requirements of exams is our common direction of efforts.

2. Overview of Second Language Acquisition Theory

As a branch of linguistics, Second Language Acquisition has a complete system in the history of linguistic development. Its theory has certain guiding meaning for language teaching, among them, which is the most discussed and mature monograph is Krashen's Second Language Acquisition model.[6]

He puts forward five hypotheses including the acquisition and learning hypothesis, the input hypothesis, the affective filter hypothesis, the natural order hypothesis and the monitor hypothesis. If these five hypotheses are applied to the Second Language Acquisition, they can be expressed as: language input—affective filter—language acquisition mechanism—language ability acquisition—language output.

2.1. Analysis of Acquisition Mode Theory

Based on Krashen's theory, the core element is "input hypothesis". As a learner, we should first start with the "comprehensive input", which is the so-called "i+1" theoretical model, that is, through a large number of language inputs, as the basis of language learning, and the contents of the input text should be slightly higher than the current level of language learning. Too high or too low text difficulty is not conducive to the learning level of learners. He believes that a large number of reasonable and understandable language inputs are the key to language acquisition [7].

Different from "learning", acquisition is the key factor for a student to use a language successfully and flexibly. Just like a baby learning his mother tongue, it is unconscious and subtle. However, learning only acts as a "monitor" to promote students' correct understanding of language grammar

patterns. The "learning-acquisition hypothesis" indirectly emphasizes the influence of comprehensible inputs on language acquisition in the process of language learning and the importance of learning as a monitor to promote correct understanding of the target language.

By properly exerting the monitoring mode of "learning", we can find that, after a period of language learning, students' attention to language forms and the learning of language rules and grammar knowledge can make students be tested and "edit" words well. The fluent presentation of words is caused by optimizing the comprehensibility, interest, relevance, non-grammatical program arrangement and sufficient input, and through internalizing the language learning ability.
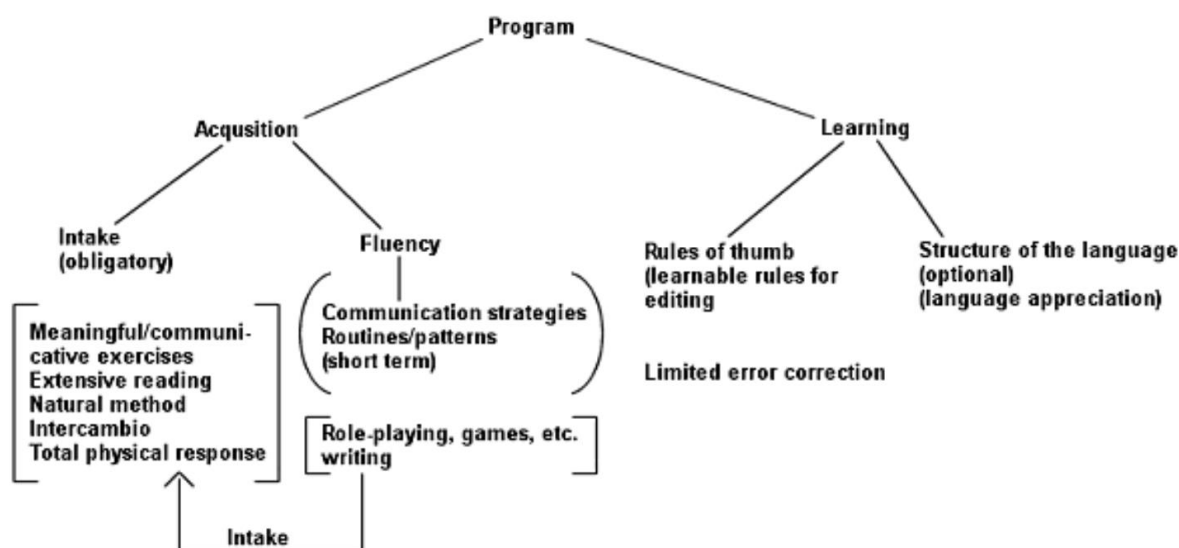
However, Krashen also stresses that, under such a mechanism, students' motivation, learning attitude and anxiety degree will also affect the output of the final learning results, which is "affective filter". If a person's attitude towards language is positive, it will help to understand the meaning of language format and content, otherwise, it may have negative effects.

Besides, we should not ignore objective factors. There is a certain order in learners' acceptance of language. Some forms of language are easy to be acquired first, while others are difficult to learn. As well as, because of the difference of individual cognitive level, the time required for understanding and digesting knowledge is different, which is called as the "silent period". Both children and adults may need to understand a certain vocabulary and accumulate enough confidence before they speak formally, so as to form a transitional period of language ability. Therefore, the concept of "natural order hypothesis" also points out the necessity of patience and waiting in language learning.

2.2. Guidance of Language Acquisition Theory to English Spoken Teaching

Language learning is complicated, so we are able to guide English or foreign language teaching through the Language Acquisition Theory, which provides a theoretical basis for English spoken teaching. We analyze the mechanism of language acquisition by learners or adults, which greatly promote the optimization of our classroom and learning methods. Krashen also mentioned a complete set of teaching mode using the Second Language Acquisition Theory in his works, and the detailed components are shown in the picture below[8]. Combining this theoretical framework with the problems in the actual teaching process can better improve the cultivation of students' spoken ability and guide students to get ideal scores in the exams.

Picture 3：A second language teaching program.

Source：Book：Second language acquisition and learning, p101

https://www.sdkrashen.com/content/books/sl_acquisition_and_learning.pdf

First of all, from the perspective of language acquisition mechanism, teachers need to focus on students' affective motivation and objective and realistic factors to improve their spoken expression level, such as, according to the current learners' ability level, better learning goals and directions from the perspective of affective filter should be set, and a positive and good atmosphere in the classroom should be created.

Moreover, clarifying the purpose and ability will help teachers to choose the appropriate input materials and quantity, and choose a reasonable processing method for the input materials, that is, output. Swain[9] indicates that output has three functions including noticing/trigger function, hypothesis-testing function and metalinguistic reflection function, which are the key factors for language acquisition under a large number of inputs. Idealistic output can help learners internalize the problems in interlanguage, so as to produce good acquisition results. Hence, the importance of students' practice in class should not be neglected. The input materials accepted by learners are supposed to be screened and sorted，and selecting appropriate learning materials that can match students' abilities is necessary, while avoiding using materials that are too difficult or too simple to learn. With more attention on diversified presentation of materials in the classroom and the various forms of students' contact with materials, a complete closed loop of learning could be formed through "second language input, attention input, comprehensible input, intake, integration and second language output"[10].

Language learning should be a process of constantly adjusting stimuli and giving appropriate feedbacks[11]. Eventually, in the procedure of continuous input and output, we could give full play to the brain's language "monitoring" mechanism to amend the inappropriate performance in oral expression, and be concerned with the "natural order of language acquisition" of learners through repeated imitation and retelling to adjust the learning content and progress, for the sake of students' progress in spoken utterance in a decent way.

3. Enlightenment to English spoken Teaching for Examination

The progress of language capacity is divided into many tiers and aspects, and English spoken is only one of the output plates in language learning, which also has higher requirements for students' comprehensive ability. Various from the traditional teaching, the teaching mode of spoken needs to involve more factors to acquire satisfactory outcomes. The traditional teaching mode has a strong exam-oriented character, and students usually lack a pleasant language learning atmosphere, where their awareness of cross-cultural communication is weak, not to mention the learning results when the output and the evaluation system of spoken teaching are not complete enough. Therefore, for students who expect to get excellent grades in exams, we use some theories to better tackle the problems in spoken teaching.

3.1. Early Stage: Goal Setting Under the Affective Filter

Compared with daily spoken training, which has specific scoring standards, the degree of students' ability is described elaborately in exams. According to various students' goal and the purpose of taking the exams, students' affective orientation in learning English could be affected into different extents. Thus, before determining the formal learning content, it is vital to confirm the students' current level of ability, such as the standard language ability test, vocabulary and other examination forms, so as to have a general understanding of the students' overall language ability, which can provide reference for the selection of input level of language content in classrooms and the matching of appropriate input materials.

In addition, we need to be clear about the target score. Teachers not only need to master the specific scoring rules of the exams, but also keep track of students' learning situation, sort out the reasons for students' poor performance and teach correct learning methods. In this way, students will have a better control over their learning progress and the formulation of their learning plans. As a result, setting distinct and executable aims is to pave the way for step-by-step learning progress and effects. It is beneficial to reduce students' fear of accepting new knowledge and practicing from the beginning, when a complete plan for the time and energy which students achieve the goals could be made.

3.2.   In Class: Improvement of the Ability to Combine Learning - Acquisition and Input

3.2.1. Selection and Presentation of Input Materials

Krashen believes that the ideal input should have the following characteristics including the comprehensibility, interest, necessity, relevance, non-grammatical program arrangement and adequate intake. Among them, the most important mode is the "i+1", "i" refers to the current learning level of learners, and "+1" is just a little more difficult than the existing level of learners. Most of the teaching for the purpose of examination only gives priority to the learning of language structure and test-taking skills in the classroom, but in the process of spoken teaching, the choice of input materials or the matching of teaching materials should add more interest, and enable students to satisfy the teaching objectives as well as be relatable to the theme of daily life.

   In the classroom, teachers need to create a positive learning atmosphere and environment, and take English as the main language to explain the course. Only explaining the target language in students' mother tongue when necessary can also increase students' contact to English. When accessing text materials that can be absorbed, we can also make a gradual transition from simple vocabulary to phrases, sentences and long-range texts. When students come into contact with spoken materials, they can start from many aspects, such as vision, hearing and kinesthetic, such as the use of listening materials, videos and pictures, instead of traditional classroom presentation in the form of words, which can let students boost their interest in learning materials while accumulating new knowledge.

3.2.2. Training Mode of Output

For sure, knowledge consolidation and review cannot be done well merely by a great amount of input. If we want students to speak meaningful sentences and achieve the purpose of fluent communication, we need to increase the time for students to speak. With regards to outputting, we can simulate the environment of the spoken exams and use the words that may be used in the exams, in order to let students adapt to the nervous feeling of the examination room in advance.

   After class, students need to carry out a lot of review, which points out the repetition and consolidation ability. Because the process of simple spoken repetition would be tedious, teachers are obligated to let students play a certain role and record or release videos to spur their interest. On the one hand, students can detect their expression and voice when observing videos, on the other hand, they are also able to find their mistakes in grammar or pronunciation and then correct them immediately. Furthermore, group activities are indispensable for students' studying, which let students build up their self-confidence in a relaxed and delighted atmosphere and give them more chances for speaking English [12].

3.3.   After Class: Review Mode under the Monitoring Function and Natural Learning Order

It is undeniable that language learning is a long-term accumulation process. Neither teachers nor students can expect to make rapid progress just through two hours of class a week. The improvement of students' language proficiency cannot be separated from the accumulation of time and repeated practice. Especially for exam-oriented students, students themselves and teachers should not only concentrate on the time for input and the time for students to understand and absorb the learning content, but also notice the "washback."[13] In other words, students who long for getting ideal scores in the exams need to participate in corresponding and reasonable simulation tests before the formal exams to consolidate the exam techniques and the knowledge they have learned.

4.   Conclusion

Acquiring excellent language expression skills can assist us think from different perspectives and get in touch with more diverse cultures. Nevertheless, language acquisition is an intricate and long process. Therefore, with the support of the Language Acquisition Theory, we proposed a benign reform for spoken teaching methods. From the theory, we are able to know that acquiring a language and achieving proficiency must follow certain objective laws. Furthermore, we can sum up in the exam-oriented spoken teaching as follows.

Firstly, teachers should pay attention to students' affective motivation and create an environment conducive to spoken learning in class. At the beginning, teachers need to encourage students to open their mouths as much as possible with a positive attitude, clearly list the efforts that students achieve the target scores, and try their best to make students be in the state of "off the defense" [14], which students can readily accept the process of language learning. Besides, teachers should optimize the appropriateness of language input and the flexibility of showing. As a crucial medium in communication function, in the process of selecting learning materials, the spoken should consider the appropriateness of spoken expression in the background of cross-cultural communication, avoiding failing to convey their meaning because of cultural differences. Lastly, teachers should give students time to digest the knowledge and improve their language ability in reasonable simulation tests.

In conclusion, the research on the theoretical framework of the Second Language Acquisition Theory allows teachers to better adjust their schemes in line with different goals and improve their teaching results and learning efficiency of students, which can enable students not only get good grades in the exams, but also conscientiously spark their interest in foreign language learning and communicative expression ability through spoken teaching.

REFERENCES

[1]   New Oriental Future Study Abroad 2023 China White paper. (2023), 25.

Retrieved from:

https://item.taobao.com/item.htm?spm=a21n57.1.0.0.70dc523cOHiRtw&id=730427594963&ns=1&abb ucket=17#detail

[2]   ILETS Chinese Official Website - Home page Retrieved from:

https://www.britishcouncil.cn/exams/ielts

[3]   IELTS Global official website Test Statistics - Test taker performance data(2022) Retrieved from:

https://ielts.org/researchers/our-research/test-statistics#Demographic

[4]   IELTS Global official website Test Statistics   IELTS scoring in details - IELTS speaking Band Description

Retrieved from:

https://s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/ielts-web-static/production/Guides/ielts-speaking-band-descripto rs.pdf

[5]   White Paper on Academic Performance of IELTS Candidates in Chinese Mainland. (2018) , 8, 19, 29

Retrieved from: https://www.chinaielts.org/sites/all/themes/newyasi/white_book/white_paper_2018.pdf

[6]   Krashen, S.P. (1981) Second Language Acquisition & Second Language Learning. Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Retrieved from:

https://www.sdkrashen.com/content/books/sl_acquisition_and_learning.pdf

[7]   Stephen Krashen (1982) Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition, 20-22.

Retrieved from: https://www.doc88.com/p-1788770758084.html

[8]   Krashen, S.P. (1981) Second Language Acquisition & Second Language Learning. Oxford: Pergamon Press, 101. Retrieved from:

https://d1wqtxts1xzle7.cloudfront.net/35238869/second_langue_acquisition_and_learning-libre. pdf?1414001683=&response-content-disposition=inline%3B+filename%3DSecond_Language_A cquisition_and_Second_L.pdf&Expires=1699856451&Signature=gs45b62woydH-3~O2ueuF42rm Tng~oQ7VTNPLp~OHpXBjF~ECXV-Q6vdKRH87P2Lm~v3XDwsLsM3LAiUNI6~~2cOLcg3glxIB8 89ZcbIFUQ~9JOve4SKeBIw3kb8pWFTelVrJrtayK4sstWqKlY7bFrwO1mSGunn2jj6FH2YeB-gKC boimhKDDZJkWnFBStiNO6H3Z4NYcck4K~pGMxeNOrETYtF9k1ZU3oPXcbkJMwvhormYtgyhvY

HivQSk-SFwCHrQbA9KQN1JoAgB3SYAk1zf5uVe~9vqmtAn~CK2ZXE3zKgrys3sLVF~fTBzq~z5
BG5gAgEMhYE8YIb4aW9QQ__&Key-Pair-Id=APKAJLOHF5GGSLRBV4ZA

[9] Swain M. (2005) The output hypothesis: Theory and research. Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning. Routledge, 471-483. Retrieved from: https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781410612700-34/output-hypothesis-merrill-swain

[10] Gass, S. (1988) Integrating Research Areas：A Framework for Second Language Studies. Applied Linguistics, 9. Retrieved from: https://academic.oup.com/applij/article-abstract/9/2/198/162620?login=false

[11] Rod Ellis(1999). Understanding Second Language Acquisition, 127. Retrieved from: https://www.amazon.co.uk/Understanding-Language-Acquisition-Applied-Linguistics/dp/0194422046

[12] Wang Jiali(2006) Enlightenment of Second Language Acquisition Theory on Oral English Teaching for English Majors, 30. Retrieved from: https://www.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbcode=CJFD&dbname=CJFD2006&filename=WYWJ200606008&uniplatform=OVERSEA&v=UE5-jTydL88Q-XTtTzW5amdOdXSUn48KEZ0nfdr1IHFoxaJdzdOiR25-Tx0vSsQe

[13] Lu Renshun(2002) Research on the "Output Hypothesis" and Its Implications for English Teaching in China. Foreign Languages and Foreign Language Teaching, 37. Retrieved from: https://kns.cnki.net/kcms2/article/abstract?v=5DzVwdTmeh8IL7cFhpNy9bkgrKxp2XBccNlEDzz_fPr36Qi7ue5Rcgqfq7O2GcWqgt-6XSG9qqAuyYuHw8sz5vrX1VuMwh3NRfrt-_HY6T6FRcgfTcmsSWAOQmoSioxr0p0p4-Yveb4=&uniplatform=NZKPT&language=CHS

[14] Li Panchi (2009)   Analysis of Krashen's Second Language Acquisition Theory, 95. Retrieved from: https://kns.cnki.net/kcms2/article/abstract?v=5DzVwdTmeh8BCzvAIwVX0Ckpa4HruysU0qhxVLpe1Hh59fMpNDTbL8S9W5aMZymHawNdkSZqlWfDK6mBa4xrkyv8YIymYaCyE3b56cMPzja38S1XA-GxmcQ0n1JOdCIh04w5Oc5IXKY=&uniplatform=NZKPT&language=CHS