

TEACHING METHOD INVESTIGATION OF LI YANG'S CRAZY ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

Calls for more holistic research, especially ones that deal with English teaching and learning have increased in recent years. Through critical literature review, this study examines Li Yang's crazy English, as a trend of English teaching in China. More specifically, it aims to discuss whether Li Yang's crazy English is one of the "designer" methods and will produce proficient English speakers by proposing two research questions: (1) what is the nature of the "designer" methods? and (2) what specific strategies and what approach to foreign language teaching have the potential to improve learners' communicative competence in Li Yang's teaching method? The data have been analyzed and it is found that Li Yang's crazy English can be categorized as one of the "designers" methods, which is, Total Physical Response (TPR) and failed to build learners' communicative competence as the ultimate goal of foreign language teaching. The study recommends, therefore, the use of communicative approach in English teaching and learning processes to produce proficient English speakers.

Keywords: Approach; Communicative Competence; Designer Methods; English Teaching; Strategy

INTRODUCTION

The popularity of English study is widespread in China, started in the 1960s. It is believed that foreign language skills could raise self-reliance (Macternan, 2013). Private enterprise becomes a new trend of English teaching and Li's Crazy English, which has been implementing for a couple of decades, can be an example.

In Li's crazy English, Li Yang travels all over China and gathers learners as his audiences in school halls or even in sports ground. In his teaching, Li Yang primarily focuses on phonetics and intonation. In the attempt to give an example of good pronunciation, he works with his partner, a native English teacher. They make a short conversation in front of the audiences. Li Yang then uses hand gestures, exaggerated lip and tongue movement to teach the phonetic symbols. Learners act based on the commands given

and mimic him properly. In addition, they have to say phonetic symbols in chorus.

Li Yang also combines sounds into words and words into phrases. Then, he invites his English-speaking partner to say these phrases in competition with him. When learners are motivated, Li Yang starts to invite some of them to compete with him, as his English-speaking partner did. The three most important points which are considered as Li's rules are speak English fast, clearly, and loudly.

Drawing from the above explanation, it seems that Li Yang's teaching method can be categorized in one of the "designer" methods, that is Total Physical Response (TPR), as he emphasizes on words connected with actions. The main purpose of this study is, therefore, to discuss whether Li Yang's crazy English is one of the "designer" methods. Whether it can produce proficient English speakers also will be examined. In short, this study

sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the nature of the “designer” methods?
2. What specific strategies and what approach to foreign language teaching have the potential to improve learners’ communicative competence in Li Yang’s teaching method?

Furthermore, this study aims to investigate Li Yang’s crazy English, as a trend of language teaching and obtain insights into strategies and approaches for producing proficient English speakers. This study, therefore, addresses a significant issue related to specific strategies and approaches that best suit learners’ communicative improvement. Since this study will add to the body of knowledge of English teaching method, its findings have the potential to enable English as foreign language (EFL) teachers to view Li’s crazy English from a different perspective and gain valuable insights into modifying it. Such a method would not be regarded only as a trend. Instead, it would be considered as an innovation in promoting and teaching English.

The early studies in English language teaching practice in Asia have identified the effective learning strategies where learners are guided to become autonomous learners. In addition, the role of English in Asian countries is also considered as an essential topic needs to be discussed. Ly, Chea, & Sou (as cited in Stroupe & Kimura, 2011), for instance, revealed that Guided Individual Learning (GIL) Center implemented in the Australian Center for Education, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, could create proactive learning attitudes. Kirkpatrick’s study (2014) focused more on the role of English as a lingua franca in Southeast Asian countries. He maintained that the direction of English in the region remains unpredictable, as some governments tend to

change the language education and policy. Here, researchers explained the significant growth of English language education in Asian countries. However, it seems that the future of the language would be more complex and uncertain.

Furthermore, globalization and the use of specific teaching strategies to meet the needs of learners was scientifically discussed (Hungyo, 2015). The results revealed that metacognitive strategies, which focus more on learners’ capability to understand their own thinking and learning processes, including planning their own learning, monitoring whether their current learning strategies are successful, and evaluating results of their learning, became the most popular strategy among successful language learners at Asia-Pacific International University, Thailand. Nakamura (2016), on the other hand, was interested in examining the relationship between globalization and the position of English in Japan. His study concluded that English language policy makers and teachers need to work together to bridge the gap between language policy and classroom teaching practice. In short, Hungyo and Nakamura emphasized on learners’ autonomy and the importance of collaboration between the government and language education practitioners in the attempt to develop English teaching quality in the global era.

Researchers were also interested in analyzing early childhood English education (Davis & Fan, 2016; Kuan, 2017). Their investigation found that songs can be used as a medium to improve Chinese kindergarten students’ vocabulary acquisition. Moreover, creating a curriculum for South Korean, Chinese, and Japanese kindergarten teachers which focuses more on teaching speaking and listening skills through games is crucial in the attempt to help learners acquire English ability naturally. Their findings suggest that teaching English in early childhood using

enjoyable activities would be beneficial in terms of learners' communicative competence development.

Researchers have gone further to state that the process of English promotion in the 21st century is related to economics and political driven. Reviewing English teacher professional development (TPD) is then crucial, as new teaching methods are needed to develop learners' competencies. Han (2018), for example, revealed that South Asian societies believe that mastering English is a prerequisite of individual economic achievement that give them high socio-cultural values. This would then develop national economy and competitiveness. Moreover, Setiawan & Kuswandono (2020) stated that the job-embedded type is an effective TPD, as this focuses more on teachers' competencies in completing their responsibilities and teaching English using the technological pedagogical content. In other words, teachers are expected to be able to implement technology and interesting pedagogical approaches during English teaching and learning processes. This is based on the fact that in general, mastering English is considered as a medium to develop both individual and national prestige.

Drawing from the above discussion, it can be concluded that the previous studies have emphasized more on investigating English teaching and learning in a wider context rather than in specific details or in a particular method. This study will, therefore, be able to fill this gap. Analyzing Li Yang's crazy English in order to find out its strengths and weaknesses is essential. This phenomenon needs to be framed within critical literature review to provide an objective conclusion.

METHOD

Research Design

The method adopted to answer the problems of the study is literature review. This study intensively investigates current literature, which is selected for synthesis based on its relevance to the topic under study and confined to theories and methods of English teaching. The literature investigation is designed to establish knowledge of the goal of foreign language teaching. More specifically, a discussion of the "designer" methods will be used to establish whether or not Li Yang's crazy English could produce proficient English speakers.

Snyder (2019) maintains that literature review is commonly used as a method for conducting research and the most important step needs to be done is choosing the appropriate review methodology for the problems of the study. Snyder further argues that literature investigation is usually used "to evaluate the state of knowledge on a particular topic or simply discuss a particular matter" (p. 334). In general, there are different types of literature reviews, such as narrative, critical, and realist reviews (Paré & Kitsau, 2017; Snyder, 2019; Pillai, 2020).

Pillai (2020) explains that narrative review aims to summarize what has been analyzed or done on a specific topic without seeking a general knowledge from what is investigated. Critical review, on the other hand, is designed to provide a critical investigation and interpretive analysis of existing literature on a particular matter in order to find out strengths, weaknesses, and other essential issues without ignoring theories, research methodologies, or findings. Paré & Kitsau (2017) define realist review as a type of literature review that focuses more on establishing direct causal links between intervention and outcomes. This type of review is considered as an appropriate methodology to conduct research, for instance, on medical field to

see whether a new treatment improves outcomes.

Based on the explanation made so far, it can be argued that critical review is the most appropriate research method to be implemented in this study in order to reveal strengths and weaknesses of Li Yang's crazy English.

Data Collection and Analysis

Based on Snyder's guidelines (2019), the data collection included two main phases, namely (1) data abstraction and analysis; (2) structuring and writing the review. In the first phase, several activities need to be accomplished, such as:

- a. Describing abstracted data accurately.
- b. Ensuring data abstraction quality.
- c. Determining the chosen data analysis technique.
- d. Describing the analysis process properly and transparently.

There are three essential activities in the second phase, namely:

- a. Organizing the review article coherently in relation to research problems.
- b. Reporting the result of the review in an appropriate and clear way.
- c. Synthesizing the findings of the literature review into a clear and valuable contribution to the topic.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Nature of the "Designer" Methods

The "designer" methods are methods of a second or foreign language learning and teaching which emphasize on the importance of psychological factors in language learners' success. There are five of the most popular of the "designer" methods, namely Community Language Learning (CLL), Suggestopedia, The Silent Way, Total Physical Response (TPR) and The Natural Approach. Basic methodologies of these five methods will

be explained briefly so that we comprehend the core of the "designer" methods.

In CLL, learners are seen as a group of clients and seated in a circle, whereas teacher is as a counselor who stands up outside of the circle. When one of learners wants to say something to the group, he or she uses the native language (for example English) and teacher translates the utterance back to the learner in the target language (for instance Chinese). This translation should be repeated by the learner as accurately as possible and another learner then responds in English and the teacher translates it. The learner repeats it and the conversation continues, as the focus of CLL is "the mastery of the language" (Castro, 2015, p. 7).

The next method is Suggestopedia. This is a method for learning a second language which its emphasis is on relaxed states of mind for maximum retention of material and music is played during learning processes. Richards & Rogers (1999, as cited in Castro, 2015, p. 9) state that "a most conspicuous feature of Suggestopedia is the centrality of music and musical rhythm to learning, Suggestopedia thus has a kindship with other functional uses of music, particularly therapy". This statement implies that in this method, music could help learners to be relaxed and build their self-confidence.

The third method is The Silent Way. In this method, learners should develop independence, autonomy, responsibility and work together to solve language problems. Castro (2015, p. 8) explains that The Silent Way is considered as "humanistic approaches". Problem-solving approach is the emphasis of this method and teacher acts more as a stimulator who is silent much of the time and simply provides some slight guidance.

Total Physical Response (TPR) created by James Asher is different. In TPR classroom, speech and action are essential (Castro, 2015; Nuraeni, 2019). Learners

have to listen to what the teacher says. Both imperative and interrogative moods are used. Here, verbal responses are unnecessary because learners respond the questions given by doing action. After repeating a few times, learners are asked to say the words or phrases as they do the action which helps them to build self-confidence.

The last method is The Natural Approach, developed by Tracy Terrell and Stephen Krashen. According to Terrell & Krashen (as cited in Mendoza, 2016, p. 20), there are three principles in The Natural Approach, namely “emphasis on instruction as a type of communication rather than a form; oral production is never forced to come out, but rather in due time; early speech goes through ‘natural stages’ “. These principles imply that this method primarily focuses on basic interpersonal communication skills. The teacher’s task is providing understandable comprehensible spoken language which also contains something new to learners. Here, learners simply need to listen to the explanation and there is no interactive process until they are ready to communicate.

We now have an insight into the basic methodologies of five of the most popular of the “designer” methods. It is quite clear that they are concerned with psychological factors in the second or foreign language learning process. Relaxed situation combined with affective way of teaching are considered as important elements to help learners to master the target language.

How about Li Yang’s teaching method? It seems that it can be classified in one of the “designer” methods, that is Total Physical Response (TPR). Detailed discussion about this will be presented below.

Li Yang’s Teaching Method and TPR

On the basis of the explanation made so far, it can be seen that there is a

resemblance between Li Yang’s teaching method and TPR in terms of methodological principles. They emphasize on words connected with actions. The teacher gives instructions and learners respond physically. In other words, these methods focus on language-body conversations. These conversations continue for a few times until learners are confident enough to produce words or phrases as they do the action.

The other similarity is that both Li Yang’s teaching method and TPR are very memorable because they really help learners to remember words or phrases of the target language. It can be concluded that Li Yang attempts to mirror the basic methodology of TPR in his English teaching process.

Although Li Yang’s teaching method is able to make learners confident to learn English, it has raised a critical question: Will it produce proficient English speakers? It seems not straightforward to find answer to this question. It is essential to examine what goal of foreign language teaching is and what kind of teaching approach should be applied. This examination will lead to a valid answer.

Strategies and Approach to Improve Learners’ Communicative Competence in Li Yang’s Teaching Method

Ellis (1996, as cited in Juanggo, 2017, p. 103) argues that the main objective of foreign language teaching is being able “to use it in a communicative way”. This means that communicative competence is considered as a final product of language teaching. In other words, at the end of the learning process, learners are expected to be able to use language to communicate appropriately with others in naturalistic settings. The term communicative competence is not limited to spoken language but includes writing as well. In this study, however, communicative competence which is related to writing will

not be explained for the sake of maintaining a flow of discussion.

Communicative competence in spoken language is considered more important than grammatical competence, as such a competence can help learners to be able to communicate effectively (Rombe, 2017). This suggests that knowledge of how to use language appropriately is vital to help learners to be able to choose what sort of language should be used, depending on situations and interlocutors.

It seems that developing learners' communicative competence is not an easy task for teachers of English as a foreign language. The succeeding part of this study will examine more fully this issue, in order to describe the most suitable approach that can be used to increase learners' communicative competence: a communicative approach.

The Communicative Approach: Definition and Implementation

The communicative approach relates to foreign language teaching methodology that can provide opportunities for learners "to learn in the language and to learn to use the language, but not learn the knowledge of the language" (Savignon, 1987, Savignon, 2002, as cited in Dos Santos, 2020, p. 105). This suggests that the communicative approach will enable learners to express themselves creatively. Their communicative competence will then develop because the word 'creatively' here refers to freedom for learners to use their knowledge of the target language in communication.

However, there is an essential point needs to be considered in the attempt to increase this competence, which is, the ability to compose sentences is not the only ability needed to communicate using the target language. This concept was developed by Widdowson in the seventies and what is now called communicative language teaching (as cited in Ibrahim,

2017). It means that in order to develop their communicative competence, learners do not need to communicate by composing sentences. Instead, they need to use sentences to make statements of different kinds, to depict, to ask questions or give commands. In other words, learners' communicative competence can be seen when they are able to use sentences to perform a variety of different acts.

Li Yang's Teaching Method: Is it the Communicative Approach?

Before we analyze whether or not Li Yang implements the communicative approach in his English teaching, the researcher would like to summarize the main characteristics of this approach. There are three main characteristics, namely providing the opportunities for learners to use language to communicate meanings, accuracy is not important, and enabling learners to express themselves creatively. All these characteristics lead to the development of the communicative competence.

There are significant differences if we compare Li Yang's teaching method with the three characteristics mentioned. Li Yang does not afford the opportunities for learners to use English creatively. He focuses more on teaching phonetics and intonation rather than on giving freedom to learners to act and express themselves. He also combines sounds into words and words into phrases. It means that he focuses on form, not on meaning. In addition, in Li Yang's teaching method 'language-body conversation' is essential and learners have to mimic him properly for a few times.

It is quite clear that Li Yang does not implement the communicative approach in his English teaching. What about the question mentioned earlier: *will it produce proficient English speakers?* Detailed discussion about this will be presented below.

Will Li Yang's Teaching Method Produce Proficient English Speakers?

The words 'proficient English speakers' here refer to communicative competence. Therefore, we can paraphrase the question above: *Will Li Yang's teaching method improve learners' communicative competence?*

If we take a closer look at Li Yang's teaching method, we may find that it can motivate learners to build self-confidence. However, if we relate this method to the goal of foreign language teaching and its final product, communication and communicative competence, there is a possibility that he guides learners in the wrong direction.

In his English teaching, Li Yang emphasizes on explaining phonetics and intonation and also combining sounds into words and words into phrases. In addition, he asks learners to mimic him properly. He teaches them how to manipulate the structures of English and does not explain how to relate these structures to their communicative functions in real life situations. It means that he fails to achieve the proper aim of foreign language teaching, that is communication. In order to achieve this goal, he must provide opportunities for learners to use English for communicative purposes. It is generally accepted that knowledge of the structures is not enough to understand how language is used as a means of communication.

Furthermore, there is no interaction. The reason for making this statement is due to the fact that learners simply do the actions based on the commands given. It is generally accepted that "human communication is a complex process. Persons need communication when they want to say something and transmit information" (Harmer, 2007, Gilakjani, 2016, as cited in Leong & Ahmadi, 2017, p. 34). This statement implies that in the attempt to communicate interactively,

learners need to be able to express their own ideas as well as understanding those of interlocutors.

The other important point is that Li Yang focuses on inviting learners to compete with him to say some phrases. Although we may find that this activity can help learners to increase their vocabularies, it does not afford the opportunities for them to communicate interactively. They compete with him and not communicate. It is, therefore, difficult for learners to be able to achieve or even develop their communicative competence.

Based on the explanation given, it can be concluded that Li Yang's teaching method may help learners to build self-confidence but it cannot assist them to be proficient English speakers.

CONCLUSION

Li's Crazy English which is designed by Li Yang can be the example of teaching English as a private enterprise in China. His teaching method in this program is categorized in one of the "designer" methods, that is Total Physical Response (TPR). Both methods have the similar methodological principles. They primarily focus on language-body conversations. Learners are asked to do the actions based on the commands given.

Although the proper aim of foreign language teaching is communication, Li Yang does not provide the opportunities for learners to use English to communicate interactively. He focuses more on competition by inviting learners to compete with him to venture some phrases. In this activity, accuracy is seen as the important factor in the English learning process. In addition, there is no opportunity for learners to communicate meanings which enables them to express themselves creatively. Here, the communicative approach is not applied. It leads to the failure of producing proficient English speakers.

As mentioned in the introduction, the study is significant in terms of filling the gap in research in the area of English teaching and learning with a particular method due to the limited literature on this area. At this stage, it can reasonably be assumed that investigating English teaching and learning in specific details might not be regarded as a major issue. Knowledge of effective English teaching strategies is vital in terms of providing an in-depth understanding of how teachers can choose an appropriate teaching method. Further study in this area would be beneficial in helping teachers to teach English as a foreign language effectively.

Additional study that compares and contrasts teaching methods which can be implemented to develop learners' communicative competence would also be beneficial in terms of broadening knowledge of how a specific method may play a crucial role in assisting learners to be able to communicate using English interactively.

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