

Research on the Application of POA Theory in the Cultivation of English Listening and Speaking Abilities in Universities

Yanting Zhao

Beijing Union University, Beijing, China

Abstract: The "Production-oriented Approach" (POA) Theory is widely used in the English teaching in Chinese high schools and universities. Guided by this theory, taking "Unit 6 Architecture" in "Listening Critically :Savoring Culture" as an example, this article explores its applicability and positive effects in teaching practice and reflection, combined with the teaching of English majors in our college. It has been proven that English teaching guided by the POA theory has adaptability in our teaching and can be used in a wider range.

Keywords: POA Theory; English Listening; Speaking Output

1. POA Theory

The "Production-oriented Approach" (POA) is a foreign language teaching theory with Chinese characteristics proposed by Professor Wen Qiufang and her team in 2007 after eight years of discussion and practice. This theory integrates the essence of multiple foreign language teaching concepts and has strong guiding significance for the current foreign language teaching reform in China, attracting widespread attention in the field of foreign language education. The theory mainly includes three teaching concepts: learning-centered, integrated learning and application, and holistic education; three teaching hypotheses: output-driven hypothesis, input-enabled hypothesis, and selective learning hypothesis; and a three-step teaching process: motivating, enabling, and assessing. From macro concepts to micro-specific operations, it is highly integrated, targeted, and operable. The macro-level teaching concepts are the guiding principles of the POA, which are proposed by absorbing the essence of Western advanced teaching concepts, compensating for deficiencies, and combining with the actual situation of foreign language teaching in China.

Among them, the "learning-centered" concept proposes that foreign language teaching should not blindly be "student-centered," but should promote the occurrence of effective learning; the "integrated learning and application" concept addresses the phenomenon of emphasizing learning and neglecting application in foreign language teaching, arguing that students' application of knowledge and skills is equally important to teaching activities; and the "holistic education" concept advocates that education should serve the comprehensive development of human beings. The theoretical content of POA mainly includes the "output-driven" hypothesis, "input-enabled" hypothesis, and "selective learning" hypothesis, which reflect the entire foreign language teaching process, including motivation, enabling, and assessment stages. [1]

2. Literature Review

The current domestic research on the application of POA theory in English teaching covers the four aspects of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Not only have college English teachers applied POA theory to practical teaching, but English teachers in junior and high schools have also been inspired to use this theory to guide their English teaching and organize teaching processes.

From the perspective of research content, research in the past decade has mainly focused on several aspects: the application of POA in translation classes, such as Wang Haimei's research on the application of POA in college English translation teaching [2]; the application of POA in English writing, such as Zeng Hong's study on the application of POA in the English Basic Writing course for English majors [3], and Pan Sirui's research on the application of POA in high school English writing teaching [4]; the application of POA in English reading, such as Ma Lili and Lan Xin's research on the application of POA in junior

high school English reading teaching^[5-6], and Guo Miaomiao and Zhang Shuo's research on the application of POA in high school English reading teaching^[7-8]; and the application of POA in vocabulary teaching, such as Feng Bin's research on multimodal discourse teaching strategies for high school English vocabulary based on POA in 2024^[9], Shao Rongqing's research on blended teaching of college English vocabulary based on POA in 2022, and many others studying the application of POA in junior and high school English vocabulary teaching^[10]. Zhang Chun, Shen Qi, Xu Jiaping et al.^[11-13] also focused on the application of POA in college English listening classes.

A comprehensive review of POA-related research on college English reveals that most studies focus on comprehensive college English courses (reading and writing courses). On one hand, Bi Zheng^[14] et al. specifically explained the implementation of POA theory in all aspects of the teaching process based on comprehensive college English courses. On the other hand, Zhang Wenjuan^[15], Zhang Lingli^[16], Fan Zucheng^[17], and others have discussed how to apply POA to classroom teaching in college English comprehensive courses to improve the overall effectiveness of implementation. In contrast, there are not many teaching or empirical studies examining the application of POA in college English audio-visual-oral courses. Taking journal articles indexed by CNKI as an example, by the end of December 2023, there were less than ten articles published in core journals of Peking University or CSSCI sources (including expanded editions) based on POA's audio-visual-oral classroom teaching research in college English.

3. The Practice of Advanced Listening and Speaking under the Guidance of POA Theory

Newly enrolled English majors for bachelor's did not receive specialized listening courses and systematic listening and speaking training during their junior college education, which indeed poses a challenge. Especially for those whose original major was Bilingual Preschool education, although they can engage in simple conversational interactions in English, they may not be able to meet higher standards in terms of the depth and complexity of language

output. Considering that the teaching target of the POA (Product-Oriented Approach) theory is primarily intermediate to advanced foreign language learners with an English proficiency level of A2 or above (referring to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages), which corresponds to the English proficiency level of third-year English majors, we need to develop an appropriate teaching plan to help them improve their listening comprehension and spoken English proficiency.^[18]

Based on the cultivation objectives of applied undergraduate education and the POA (Product-Oriented Approach) theory, and taking into account the characteristics of English major students in our college, the author has set teaching goals for the advanced English listening and speaking course from the perspectives of language and communication: 1) Language goal: The two aspects of listening and speaking complement each other and promote each other, implementing an "integrated listening and speaking" teaching approach that combines input and output. 2) Communication goal: According to the POA theory, the teaching output tasks must support communication scenarios, providing assistance for students' future daily communication and reflecting the purpose of applied undergraduate education. Therefore, each unit is designed with a general output task, which is a communication activity that may occur now or in the future, and all teaching activities serve the overall output goal^[19].

To better understand the current English listening and speaking abilities of students, the author conducted a survey on the listening scores of the December 2023 CET-4 (College English Test Band 4) among the students in the taught classes. The listening section of the CET-4 is scored out of 248.5 points, and only two English major students scored above 200, seven scored above 150, and nearly half of the students failed the listening section. By analyzing the test questions, the author identified the following issues. Firstly, students do not consult phonetic symbols when memorizing words, nor do they read and remember simultaneously. Some students only memorize the Chinese meanings, and their pronunciation is not entirely accurate. This results in their inability to recognize the words when they hear them, let alone understand the

sentence meaning. Secondly, students' knowledge is not wide enough, and they pay insufficient attention to news, obtaining knowledge in a one-sided manner, which affects their listening comprehension. Additionally, improving English listening and speaking abilities requires a significant amount of language input and output, but currently, students cannot guarantee at least half an hour of listening input daily, relying heavily on the once-weekly listening class, which is far from sufficient. In class, teachers may not dedicate more than an hour to actual listening practice within the limited 90-minute class, and such training intensity is hardly sufficient to achieve the goal of improving listening proficiency.

Addressing the above issues, the author divides the teaching of the advanced English listening and speaking course for English majors into three parts: pre-class autonomous learning, classroom activities, and post-class autonomous learning (as shown in Figure 1), and explores the teaching practice under the guidance of POA using "Unit 6 Architecture" in "Listening Critically :Savoring Culture" as an example.

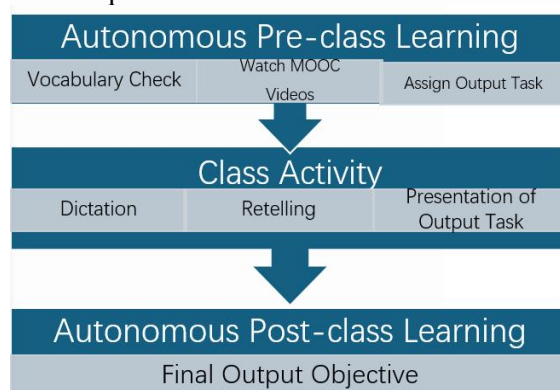


Figure 1. Advanced Listening Teaching Process Guided by POA Theory

In the pre-class preparation section, students are first divided into several groups of four based on their listening and speaking abilities, with students with better listening and speaking skills serving as group leaders. The teacher assigns vocabulary-related tasks related to the topic of the lesson before each class, and the group leaders establish a WeChat voice check-in group. Group members independently look up words, practice pronunciation, grasp word meanings, and finally complete the voice check-in. Members then evaluate each other, and finally, the group leader provides feedback on the

overall situation of the group. This check-in activity not only allows students to understand the relevant topic, but more importantly, it effectively transforms these words into "listening vocabulary" to avoid "comprehension barriers" in class and completes the "language" aspect of facilitation. The check-in vocabulary for this lesson includes Cottage, Authentic, in terms of, layout, architectural components, prefabricated, long-acclaimed, intersect, and calligraphy. Secondly, the lack of necessary background knowledge can affect students' understanding of the listening content. Therefore, relevant tasks are also assigned regarding background knowledge before class. The teacher will require students to watch the "Chapter 7 Architecture 7.3 Garden Architecture" video from "The Inheritance of Chinese Culture and Technological Innovation" course on China University MOOC. The teacher will send the Part 1 Lead-in video and practice questions to students through the cloud-based classroom platform. Students watch the MOOC video and then complete the related exercises to accumulate relevant vocabulary and background knowledge related to architecture. After previewing the vocabulary and understanding the relevant background knowledge, students attempt to complete the output task. They search for Chinese traditional architecture abroad, compare it with domestic gardens, create a PPT, and prepare for classroom presentation. This output task is related to the final output task, and students improve their learning by continuously attempting to complete sub-tasks during pre-class autonomous learning.

According to the POA theory, classroom activities consist of "motivating—enabling—assessing" and other steps. The "enabling" step guides students to shift their learning focus from input-oriented "listening" to output-oriented "speaking". The teacher's instruction will accomplish the enabling phase of POA (Product-Oriented Approach) from three perspectives: content, language, and structure. Classroom teaching will primarily rely on teacher evaluation, supplemented by student self-evaluation.

During the classroom teaching, the first activity will be "dictation." The teacher will provide an article containing the key vocabulary for the lesson, with the vocabulary

positions left blank. The teacher will give the initial letters, and students will complete the spelling of the words. The second classroom activity is "retelling." Students watched related MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) from Chinese universities during their autonomous pre-class learning and completed the post-lecture multiple-choice questions to accumulate background knowledge on the relevant topic. In class, the teacher will further explore the content of the video. After playing it once, students will use their existing knowledge to organize the logical structure of the passage and retell its content in their own words, fulfilling the enabling of "language" and "structure." The third activity is the presentation of pre-class assignments. Since this unit introduces the topic of Chinese architecture, the task before class was to collect information on Chinese-style architecture abroad. Due to the influence of historical background and cultural customs, a simple comparison between Chinese and Western architecture is not very meaningful. Therefore, the teacher has chosen a unique perspective, namely Chinese-style architecture abroad, which can effectively spark students' interest and provoke cross-cultural thinking. After that, students will make a presentation and showcase it in class. This teaching segment integrates the previous activities and drives and enables the overall output task from the perspectives of "content," "language," and "structure."

For post-class independent learning, students will complete the overall output task based on the scaffolding built for sub-output goals in class and adjust their pre-class autonomous learning strategies for subsequent units through self-evaluation. At the same time, the teacher will evaluate students' output results, summarize the overall level, and make appropriate adjustments to the subsequent teaching plan.

4. Teaching Reflection

The teaching guided by the POA (Production-oriented Approach) theory has effectively improved students' language and communication skills. The results of the end-of-semester questionnaire show that 90% of students believe that the POA teaching method makes the listening class "more interesting and vivid," "effectively improves language

expression ability," "the classroom is no longer just about doing exercises," and "cultivates students' cooperative learning," achieving the purpose of applying what they have learned. Additionally, the accomplishment of sub-tasks and the final output task reduces students' anxiety and gives them a sense of achievement in English learning.

Furthermore, POA places higher demands on teachers. POA focuses on cultivating students' communication skills. When setting output tasks, teachers need to combine teaching objectives, supplement the teaching content, and integrate more with current political hotspots and ideological and political content to meet the training requirements of applied undergraduate talents. Before class, teachers need to carefully design teaching objectives and teaching processes suitable for the level of students pursuing bachelor's degrees, conduct more collective lesson preparation and exchange activities, pool collective wisdom, and assess students' learning levels, so that the classroom design can not only meet the students' actual needs but also stimulate their learning motivation. During classroom teaching, teachers should closely monitor students' reactions, grasp their progress, and dynamically adjust the teaching process. At the same time, diverse evaluation methods should be adopted in the teaching process, among which self-evaluation and peer evaluation can stimulate students' learning enthusiasm, otherwise, some students may easily be distracted when others present their output tasks ^[20].

5. Conclusion

After two years of teaching research, it has been found that in the teaching of English majors pursuing bachelor's degrees through adult higher education, the teaching guided by the POA theory can effectively mobilize students' enthusiasm, enable them to actively acquire knowledge while improving their autonomous learning ability and efficiency, maximize their oral practice, and thus effectively improve the effect of language output. However, due to the small number of English majors in our institute, further exploration and accumulation of teaching experience are still needed in future teaching, so as to achieve universal promotion of POA

theory in practical teaching.

References

- [1] Wen Qiufang. Constructing the Theoretical System of the Production-oriented Approach. *Foreign Language Teaching and Research*, 2015, 47 (4): 547-558, 640.
- [2] Wang Haimei. A Study on the Application of the Production-oriented Approach in College English Translation Teaching. *English Teachers*, 2022, 22 (9): 81.
- [3] Zeng Hong. The Application of the Production-oriented Approach in the Course of Basic English Writing. *Overseas English*, 2020, (15): 35-36.
- [4] Pan Sirui. Exploring the Application of the Production-oriented Approach in High School English Writing Teaching. *Modern Communication*, 2020, (17):181-183.
- [5] Ma Lili. Action Research on the Application of the Production-oriented Approach in Junior High School English Reading Teaching. *Changchun Normal University*, 2022. DOI: 10.27709/d.cnki.gccsf.2022.000200.
- [6] Lan Xin. Research on the Application of the Production-oriented Approach in Junior High School English Reading Teaching. *Harbin Normal University*, 2022. DOI: 10.27064/d.cnki.ghasu.2022.001375.
- [7] Guo Miaomiao. A Study on the Application of the Production-Oriented Approach in High School English Reading Teaching. *Intelligence*, 2020, (03): 43-44.
- [8] Zhang Shuo. A Study on the Effectiveness of the Enabling Phase in the Production-Oriented Approach in Cultivating High School Students' English Reading Ability. *Harbin Normal University*, 2020. DOI:10.27064/d.cnki.ghasu.2020.001136.
- [9] Feng Bin. Exploring Multimodal Discourse Teaching Strategies for High School English Vocabulary Based on the Production-Oriented Approach: Taking the Reading Text "Understanding ideas" in Unit 1 as an Example. *English Teachers*, 2024, 24(01): 37-41.
- [10] Shao Rongqing. Blended Teaching Design of College English Vocabulary Based on the Production-Oriented Approach. *English Square*, 2022, (21): 106-109.
- [11] Zhang Chun. A Study on the Teaching Paradigm of the "Production-Oriented Approach" in the Course of "English Audio-Visual-Oral Communication". *Journal of Guizhou Normal University*, 2023, 39(01): 36-41.
- [12] Shen Qi, Yang Qing. College English Listening Teaching Guided by the Production-Oriented Approach: Taking Bohai College of Hebei Agricultural University as an Example. *Modern English*, 2020, (04): 28-30.
- [13] Xu Jiaping, Cao Xinyu, Yin Wei. A Study on English Listening and Speaking Teaching for Agricultural Science Graduate Students Based on the "Production-Oriented Approach". *College English Language Studies*, 2020, (00): 55-62+181-182.
- [14] Bi Zheng. A Study on the Use of POA Teaching Materials: Evaluating the Achievement of Production Objectives. *Foreign Language Education in China*, 2017, 10(2): 40-46, 96-97.
- [15] Zhang Wenjuan. Classroom Teaching Practice of College English Based on the "Production-Oriented Approach". *Foreign Languages and Their Teaching*, 2016(2): 106-114, 147.
- [16] Zhang Lingli. A Study on the Teaching Effectiveness of the "Production-Oriented Approach". *Modern Foreign Languages*, 2017, 40(3): 369-376, 438.
- [17] Fan Zucheng. The Application of the Theory of Material Usage in the Production-Oriented Approach to Critical Reading and Writing in College English. *Foreign Language Education Frontiers*, 2019, 2(1): 38-43, 88.
- [18] Wen Qiufang. The Chinese Characteristics of the "Production-Oriented Approach". *Modern Foreign Languages*, 2017, 40(3): 348-358, 438.
- [19] Qiu Lin. Process-oriented Design of the Language-enabling Phase in the Production-Oriented Approach. *Modern Foreign Languages*, 2017, 40(3): 386-396, 439.
- [20] Sun Shuguang. Reflective Practice on the Classroom of "Teacher-Student Collaborative Assessment". *Modern Foreign Languages*, 2017, 40(3): 397-406, 439.