

The Implement of 3D Situational English Learning Under a Task-based Approach

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Abstract: The purpose of this thesis is to implement a 3D situational English learning process which is based on Task-based approach. To achieve this goal, we created situational setting on Second Life and combined the framework of Task-Based Learning approach proposed by Jane Willis in 1996 to design a three-stage teaching process. Under the topic of daily basis English, we have designed an online 3D virtual English program for students to carry out situational English learning in the future.

Keywords: Second Life, Task-Based Learning, Virtual Environment

1. Introduction

While the Internet is in vogue, the patterns of teaching is proceeding a significant evolution. Traditional method of teaching in the classroom has evolved into teaching online. 2D platform was the main platform used in online meeting in early days, but it was more difficult to display the settings and the sense of immersive. Hence, some teachers use 3D platform to compensate for inadequacies in 2D platform. Among these 3D platforms, Second Life is widely used in teaching because its flexibility in design and complete functionality. Language learning appears most common in the application of Second Life.

We have studied the experience and advices from many scholars who had taught lessons through Second Life and focus on the suitable teaching methods for Second Life and the limit of Second Life. Savin-Baden(2009) pointed out that teaching activities in virtual world often lack the support of relative teaching theories, which makes students get lost easier in there. When teaching activities are combined with computer technology, it becomes quite different from traditional teaching patterns. It requires proper teaching process to make teaching more effective(Dexter, et al., 1999). Therefore, we need to examine even more cautiously on the relationship between the usage of virtual world and teaching theories, and how they work with each other(Girvan & Savage, 2010). Additionally, we have learned that it is inappropriate to let students learn by themselves without any guidance in Second Life. Although 3D virtual world provide a platform for learning along with sufficient freedom in operation, it lacks relevant guidance. So, it requires good teaching design to fully develop the advantage of virtual world(Mayrath, et al., 2007).

Currently, many researchers are still looking for suitable English teaching process for virtual world. We combined the framework of Task-Based Learning approach which was proposed by Jane Willis in 1996 to design a three-stage 3D English teaching process in the virtual environment in Second Life (Willis, 1996). We expect to provide a more suitable language teaching process for Second Life.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Learning English in Virtual

Virtual World is an interactive simulate environment which is constructed by many virtual objects. It contains a gigantic database in which stores data such as basic argument, attribute, sound track, movement, behavior of every virtual object. It also contains initial settings like console, background and windows(Biocca, 1997). Users can communicate and interact with others through controlling their Avatars. Recently, MMOG(Massively Multiplayer Online Game) was very popular and became the synonym of 3D virtual world. One kind of MMOG is called MMOSG which emphasizes the social interaction. The famous Second Life, BLUEMARS, IMVU are all MMOSGs.

Although the main purpose of playing MMOSG is to socialize instead of learn, teachers can design activities for their teaching purposes with its high flexibility, expandability and freedom. Many educators start to use virtual worlds to teach students (Boulos, et al., 2007; Prasolova-Førland, et al., 2006).

Language learning is the biggest in the field of education, especially English learning (2009). There are countless teaching methods in terms of English teaching. For example, the Direct Method, Situational Language Teaching, Cooperative Language Learning, Task-Based Learning, the Audio-Lingual Method, Competency-Based Language Teaching, etc.

2.2 Using Task-based Learning (TBL) in English learning

Task-Based Learning (TBL) is in the center of attention among all the teaching methods mentioned above in the educational community. TBL is a teaching method which constructed by learning tasks. Teachers use TBL to let their students learn languages spontaneously by executing tasks. During the process, students are able to maintain their motives to compete the tasks, to have high interest in learning and get a sense of achievement after they finish the tasks.

Jane Willis described the construction of Task-Based Learning theory further in the book "*A Framework for Task-Based Learning*"(1996). She came up with a three-stages teaching process (Figure 1) as following:

- The Pre-Task Stage: First, let students know the words, phrases, sentences and grammar relate to the course tasks. This stage is also in accordance with the Constructivist's ideas of the importance of Prior Knowledge for students' follow-up learning(Bischoff & Anderson, 1998; Novak & Gowin, 1984). Before entering the next stage, teachers also need to give students the instructions about the tasks in the next stage.
- The Task Cycle Stage: Students already have the prior knowledge in the first stage. Teachers would either divide students into groups or assign personal tasks and guide them to execute the assigned tasks. Students need to accomplish the tasks by using the prior knowledge they learned in the first stage and consider how to present their results. Their results would either be presented orally, in the paper, or in any designate way told by teachers. In this stage, teachers are supervisors and will not be involved in the tasks. But they can give feedbacks to students after they finish the tasks.
- The Language Focus Stage: In this stage, teachers and students discuss and analyze together about the language-relate problems such as vocabulary and grammar happened in the learning process in second stage. Teachers would correct students' language use with extra activities to improve their language proficiency.

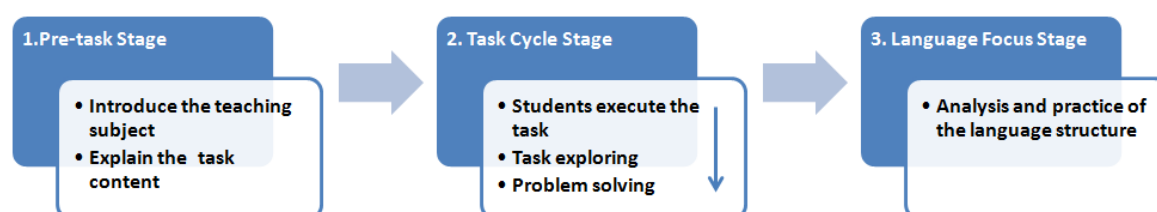


Figure 1. Willis' three stages of Task-Based Learning.

Since late 90s, Task-Based Learning is widely used by language educators until now. Harmer pointed out in his book that using TBL can improve outcomes in second language learning(Harmer, 2008). In 2009, TBL was proved again that it has positive effects on language learning. Because of the reasons mentioned above, we choose TBL as our teaching method and designed programs according to Willis' TBL structure.

3. Research Method and Design

3.1 Research Method

Scholars pointed out that students will easily get lost in virtual world when the learning activities are not designed on the basis of teaching theories(Savin-Baden, 2008). Computer-technology-basis teaching is different from traditional teaching pattern, and teachers need proper teaching process to have higher teaching effects (Dexter, Anderson, et al., 1999). Therefore, it needs cautious survey on the relationship between teaching theories and 3D virtual environment and the way they help each other. Other scholars also mentioned, although the 3D virtual environment provides a platform to learn at your will, it lacks of relative learning guidance. Teachers need a well-designed teaching process to fully develop the advantage of 3D virtual environments in teaching.

3.2 Framework Design

We designed a learning process based on Jane Willis' three stages of Task-Based Learning. Situations in supermarket are chosen to be an example. The learning process is as following:

- Step1. the Pre-Task Stage :

In this stage, teachers could use the Web PPT we designed on Second Life to instruct the students. The Web PPT is a 3D virtual 6-sided viewer. Teachers are able to teach prior knowledge like words, phrases, sentences, grammar which related to the tasks on Web PPT. After that, teachers would explain the following tasks to students.



Figure 2. Teacher uses Web PPT in teaching in the Pre-Task Stage.

- Step2. the Task Cycle Stage :

Task1 : Purchasing goods

Students are divided into groups and were informed the goods they need to buy by notecards or oral instructions. Students need to cooperate together to purchase the goods and tell their teacher what they have bought in English.



Figure 3. Task1 in the Task Cycle Stage : Students are purchasing the goods.

Task2 : Asking prices

Students are asked to tell teachers goods price orally or by notecard. They would enter supermarket to check and calculate prices. The fastest person to hit the buzzer and answer the questions correctly gets the points.



Figure 4. Task2 : Students answer the prices by hitting the red button.

Task3 : Group discussion

Teachers introduce all the commodity area to students. Afterwards, teachers would request students to discuss and answer which area is most suitable for these goods and explain their supportive reasons.



Figure 5. Task3 : Teacher leads students to visit supermarket.

- Step3. the Language Focus Stage :

In this stage, teachers discuss and analyze language-relate errors happened in prior stages with students. To strengthen practices, teachers will assign a suitable script for students and request

students to do additional role-play according to their weaker points. Students are able to improve themselves by using the vocabulary and phrases they learned in this program in the role-play. Students in different groups could cooperate together with team spirit. Beside teamwork, teachers could correct students' sentence structure and pronunciation during the role-play which in turns improves their English speaking more accurately.



Figure 6. The role-play game in the Language Focus Stage.

4. Conclusion and Future Research

Since Second Life has high extensibility and expansibility, it is worthy to be developed continually in language teaching (Kaplan & Haelein, 2009). Investigating what other suitable teaching methods should be applied in virtual worlds is also a topic worth further researches (Girvan & Savage, 2010). Our research designed a TBL situational learning process which could be developed, expanded and heightened its value. We hope it would be a foundation for further researches on this topic.

In the future, we will let students take virtual situational English learning lessons on Second Life to evaluate overall learning condition of students. We will find out if TBL's combination with the Second Life have effects on English learning. Most of learning-related literatures discusses results, methods or effects and rarely focus on motivations of learning and influences on attitudes (Lucia, 2008; Andreas, et al., 2010; Petrakou, 2009; Herold, 2009). As a result, we would execute researches on these two aspects in the futures.

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