Ways to Apply Body Language to English Teaching in the Third Grade in Primary School

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Abstract. In this paper, the author firstly attaches the importance and necessity to the application of body language in primary school. Then the author points out the problems in using body language and puts forward four ways to promote the application of body language to English teaching in the third grade in primary school towards.

Introduction

Body language, as the most important nonverbal communication method, is a kind of silent knowledge that people use their appearances, actions, gestures to show their thoughts and feelings. It plays a crucial role in the success of the English teaching class. However, the research shows that China has a late start on body language. Therefore, it is more urgent for our country to explore the application of the body language to the English teaching. By searching China National Knowledge Internet (CNKI), it is easy to find that the current researches about the teachers’ body language in English teaching of primary school still have various limitations, let alone the third grade in primary school. So the purpose of the paper is to explore the ways to apply the body language to English teaching in the third-grade primary school.

1. Definitions of Body Language

Body language has been paid tremendous attention since 1950s and the notion of body language is not easy to confine. Benjamin Bloom [1] proposed that body language refers to the gestures, poses, movements, and expressions that a person uses to communicate. Andrew D. Cohen [2] described the body language as a kind of nonverbal communication, by which thoughts, intentions, or feelings are expressed by physical behaviors, such as facial expressions, body posture, gestures, eye movement, touch and the use of space. In addition, Li Ang [3] pointed out that body language, just like verbal expression in essential nature, was an important way to deliver information.

In the author’s opinion, body language is an important tool for people to communicate with each other in their daily life via facial expressions, eye behavior, gestures, posture, space and distance

2. The Necessity of Using Body Language

The researches show that at least 60\% of our communication with others is body language. In school, body language always plays a positive role in promoting the students’ characters. Due to the limitation of students’ capacity of understanding and poor vocabularies, the teachers have to use the concrete body language to be understood clearly.

In the book of Attention and Memory: An Integrated Framework, Cowan N [4] explained two characteristics of attention: selection and concentration. Selection is the former stage of the attention, which represents the certain objects focused on by students while the concentration is the extension of the attention as the latter stage. The time of the concentration depends on the characteristics of the objects. Only when the objects are concrete and vivid, it can be much easier to attract students’ attention and last longer. During the teaching, the teachers can attract the students through changing body language.
Secondly, the concrete image thinking of the students in primary school gradually changes into the abstract logical thinking, which is the basic characteristic of students’ mental development. “And the abstract logical thinking is closely linked to perceptual experience” [5]. For example, as for “monkey” and “dog”, these two words only can be recognized by students’ direct sense for real objects. Therefore, it is difficult for primary students to memorize abstract things. Teachers ought to turn abstract words into specific forms via all kinds of body languages. Then it will be very convenient for students in low grades to remember the words. So in English teaching, teachers should pay enough attention to body language and use it properly.

3. Problems of Using the Body Language in English Teaching in the Third Grade in Primary School

3.1 Teachers’ awareness of using body language is weak

Most novice teachers and a small number of skilled teachers’ body language can be performed in various ways, but it is a common phenomenon that a specific or fixed meaning hardly can match a certain body language, which will lead the students to have different understanding towards teacher’s same body language. It means that teachers often use their body language at random rather than have a series of designed body language directing at the specific teaching content. For example, when a student gives an excellent answer towards the question that the teacher asked, the teacher gave thumbs up to praise him that made the student feel satisfied. But the next time the teacher gave the same posture although the student made a mistake, which would make students confused that what it exactly means to give a thumb up and what should they do to get the nod. The worse thing is that the teachers do not take care of the students’ reaction to their body language.

3.2 Teachers’ awareness of reflection is lacking

For most novice teachers, their awareness of self-reflection is serious lacking. In their ideas, their only responsibility is to teach. Hardly will they think about questions after class such as “Do the students understand me very well during the class? Whether my verbal language is reasonable and properly? What else can I do to change and improve my teaching? Why not apply body language to attract the students’ interests?” In reality, not many teachers often make reflection on their teaching process, which easily make teachers use the improper body language or mismatch the body language while they are not conscious of it.

3.3 Negative body language is often used

Negative Eye Contact. “Eye contact must be delivered coordinating with teaching content and classroom atmosphere.” [6] Teachers’ disparaging eye contact will hurt the self-esteem of the students and hit their passion. For example, some teachers sometimes stare at students with negative emotions, and some teachers are used to looking outside of the classroom, which will disperse student’s attention. In addition, some teachers rarely interact with students via eye contact. All those negative eye contact will bring passive impact on students. The teacher should cast the eye contact in all directions of the classroom. Meanwhile, they ought to take students’ feelings into consideration during the lessons, which can help to increase the interaction between teachers and students.

Negative Gestures. Zhao Rong [7] describes that the teacher’s negative gestures not only damage the teacher’s image but also affect the student’s mood. So it is hard to build a harmony relationship between teachers and students. For example, when the teacher points at a student, it gives the impression that the teacher does not respect the students. Sometimes the teacher even points to students’ heads to scold them, which makes students feel shame, and the atmosphere of the class will become awkward. What’s more, if the teacher always uses the erase to hit the table during the class, it will make the students feel anxious. At the same time, some teachers are accustomed to putting their hands into the pocket, which give students a sense of laziness as well as arrogance. And it looks like that the teacher is too offish to approach. It is not conductive to narrow the distance between teachers and students.
4. Ways to Apply Body Language to English Teaching in the Third Grade in Primary School

Primary students are generally under 12 years old, who are full of energy and curiosity in class, and the attention of the students in primary schools is unstable and inconsistent, so body language can help them fix their attention and make the time of their attention longer. Based on the analysis of these characteristics, the author tempts to put forwards some useful ways of applying the body language in English teaching in the third grade in primary school.

4.1 Strengthen the awareness of using body language

It is necessary for English teachers in primary school to receive the professional knowledge related to body language since almost every teacher takes at least 18 class hours each week, which makes the teacher have a great influence on students who are in different classes. There are three aspects of professional knowledge training to follow: The first one is to learn history and basic concepts of body language, so that the teacher can have overall and fundamental understanding on the development of body language. The second is to learn different types of body language to match certain and fixed meanings since it is a common phenomenon that teachers often mismatch their body language with their verbal language, which will make the students feel confused. And the third one is to have a good command of different functions of body language. Based on different teaching targets, the applications of the body language should be adjusted. It can help them reach better teaching efficiency.

4.2 Improve teachers’ awareness of reflection on teaching

In order to improving teachers’ reflection level, the teachers can take these three effective methods into consideration on teaching. Firstly, the teachers can write teaching diary, thus he can reflect teaching details as frequent as possible. Secondly, one can set up a certain teaching objectives before the class, thus he can check out whether the goals are achieved after the class. The significance of teaching objectives lies in improving teaching quality and monitoring teaching efficiency. It can help teacher adopt proper and effective body language to active the class atmosphere. Finally, with the innovation of modern education, the teacher should renew teaching ideas, which can make teachers turn the idea of teacher-centered theory into children-centered theory and help the students win subjective status in teaching.

4.3 Use the positive body language

**Eye contact.** Liu Yongfa & Wang Xuan’en [8] illustrate that in classroom teaching, teachers should not only have a good command of eye contact but also learn to get information from students’ eye contact. Since students often show that they are listening to the teacher through looking at their teachers’ eyes or faces, but if they often look outside of the window or avoid the teacher’s eyes, it implies that the student is distracted. The teacher should look at every student’s face or eyes occasionally to tell the students that he is keeping a watchful eye on them. It can help to increase the interaction of eye contact between the students and teachers.

**Gestures.** Gestures can contain lots of information since a slight difference in the gestures may bring totally opposite meanings. While the teacher has a class, he should take a proper wander around the classroom instead of standing on the platform all the time. For instance, while teaching them “Nice to meet you!” the teacher should walk around the classroom and greet to some students with a smile and say: “Hello! Nice to meet you!” The student will also give him a smile and say “Hi, nice to meet you, too!” Then the teacher will do in a natural way to shake hands with the students. And the students can work in pairs to follow what the teacher did. By this kind of practice, pupils will have fundamental understanding about the sentence and know how and when to use such sentence. What’s more, the teacher can extended the application of shaking hands to a pair of pupil. In this way, the students can learn a lot in a joy atmosphere.

**Facial Expression.** An USA psychologist in *A Course in English Language Teaching* points out that 55% information that people gains come from facial expression. One thing teachers should keep in minds is that some positive and active types of facial expressions have positive impact on
English teaching. If teachers can make use of facial expressions according to actual situations, it will be easier to build a harmony and effective class atmosphere. And smile plays a key role in the facial expression. For example, smiling is a great way to give students great encouragement while facing them.

**Distance.** Generally speaking, in order to interact with more students, the teacher should keep intimate distance with students. But in reality, most of teachers are accustomed to standing on the platform and keep a long distance with students. Distance is an important factor to impact the relationship between teachers and students. For example, if the student feels upset and discouraged when he fails the exam, the teacher can approach to the student and tap his back to encourage him. This action will be more powerful than any words.

**Conclusion**

With the limitation of the students’ cognitive ability and comprehensive ability, the students in primary school can not understand what the teacher say totally without body language to assist it. So the functions of teachers’ body language in English class should not be underestimated. It not only can make the teachers understood better but also help younger students participate in the class actively. In addition, it may help to improve the students’ listening, speaking, reading and writing, which enable teachers to build a kind of active and harmony class atmosphere. It can not only attract the students’ attention, but also deepen their impression and imagination. And through the use of body language, students are no longer wordless, but are willing to express their own opinions actively.

**References**


