The Use of Variation Theory to Enhance Speech-Impaired Students' Learning of Putonghua

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This study aims to explore to what extent the variation theory can enhance the learning of the speech-impaired students in Putonghua speaking. Two speech-impaired students, John and Mary, participated in the study, a small scaled design-based research, conducted during the period from January to March 2011, by means of the activities including observation, interview, pre-test, post-test, and recordings collection. Variation Theory is derived from Phenomenography, which hypothesis is that some people are the better learners than others, as people see, experience, and learn things differently, i.e., people see the same phenomenon in qualitatively different ways (Marton, Hounsell & Entwistle, 1984; Marton, Husén & Postlethwaite, 1994; Marton & Pang, 2008). In order to experience something from the phenomena, the learner must go through the following three sections: discernment, variation, and simultaneity (Ki, Tse & Shum, 2005). In short, Valuation Theory is that, during the process of learning, students experience the variation of things, and then students would be able to discover the critical parts by themselves in due course.

According to Marton et al. (1984), there are four patterns of variation, namely: contrast, generalization, separation, and fusion:

The first pattern is contrast: to compare one thing with another to show the difference;

The second pattern is generalization: to give different examples of one particular thing. Students generate the idea of "one thing" among these examples; also students can separate the "one thing" from others.

The third pattern is separation: to separate one thing from the whole, that is, change "one thing" and keep the others invariant to see how "one thing" will affect the whole.

The fourth pattern is fusion: to combine the variation of one thing with the other at the same time to see how they will affect the whole.

The following conclusions are made according to the analysis of the results and observations:

(i)   How is the variation theory to be utilized to achieve the leaning goal?

The patterns of the variation help students discern the critical aspects of the object of learning during the learning process. In the case of Mary, she has difficulty in articulating "e" and "u", in the end "u" is fixed, and "e" is improved in terms of the shape of mouth and lips.

(ii)   To what extent can the variation theory enhance the learning?

The variation theory enhances the learning case by case. In this case study, it is evident that Mary's articulation improved more than that of John. However, the pattern of contrast in "o" and "e" indeed helps John's articulation in "e" from time to time.

As participation in this case study is limited to only two students, in the future, it is advised that a larger group of speech-impaired students participate in the pilot study to ascertain to what extent Valuation Theory could make their learning more effective. Further, the same could be also applied in the pilot study of Chinese Character learning for the Non-Chinese speaking students.

References :

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