



## Relationship between Teachers and Students Based on New Curriculum-Face and Politeness in the Chinese English Teaching

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### Abstract

The paper objectively reviews the current situation of English teachers' face and politeness unconsciousness in the Chinese English language classroom teaching. At the same time it analyzes the reasons for the lack of face and politeness. *English Curriculum Standard* calls for human concern that teachers should give students a complete respect, pay more attention to affective education from view of teachers, view of students and view of evaluation. Face and politeness principles in the second language acquisition also need teachers to protect students' self-esteem, give students a suitable evaluation and encourage their autonomous English learning. On this basis, the paper probes into the relationship between students and teachers, and several suggestions on how to give students' face and politeness are raised.

**Keywords:** Face, Politeness, Chinese English teaching

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1 Background of writing

##### 1.1.1 English teachers' face and politeness unconsciousness

English language education is in a major concern for China's policy-makers, teachers, parents, and students. They focuses on the important issue of what constitutes subject knowledge of English teaching, especially parents and students, who need teachers to have high qualities almost in all kinds of aspects of English language education. Some students are not interested in English or they are weak in active learning. One of the important reasons is that they lack or lose confidence in class, which has much connection with English teachers. Some of them don't realize the face and politeness of the students, namely their face unconsciousness. However, it is essential to students in their English learning.

##### 1.1.2 Human concern in English language teaching

*English Curriculum Standard* calls for human concern that teachers should give students a complete respect. Affective education is an essential project in curriculum reform. It pays close attention to students' emotion, attitude and values. Virtue and wisdom, feeling experience and perfect personality have a close connection with the development of emotion. It can make students develop better from a natural person to a social person. Students can treat kindly, understand and tolerate others; they are full of confidence and overcome difficulties bravely; they love nature, life and human beings. So, it's said that affective education is happiness education, pleasure education. It is the true essence of education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Humanistic curriculum (McNeil, 2006) lays stress on students' thought, emotion and action. However, in some Chinese English classroom teaching, students get little education concern that is badly needed. The classroom teaching is not student-centered but teacher-centered, so students and teachers don't equal in many speech acts. More or less, students have submissive and oppressed feeling in class, so they can't get enough face and politeness.

##### 1.1.3 Views of new curriculum

###### 1.1.3.1 View of teaching

View of teaching in the past only coped with examination, which only concerned language skills and language knowledge, and neglected students' affective education. Examination is the center of all teaching activities. In class, teachers poured down knowledge to students, so this kind of teaching caused students' emotions of boring learning. However, in the notions of new curriculum, knowledge and affection have the same position. In teaching, teachers play a leading role while students are main part. Teachers should develop students' main part sufficiently because valuing

students' main part is inspiring students' learning interest, which is a key to students' learning happily. Carrying out the view of teaching can help students' affective education develop better.

### 1.1.3.2 View of students

Over a long period of time, people think that students who obey and have high marks are good students while students who get lower marks and disobey are weak students. This view of students neglects students' main part. But the perspective of affective education believes that in the world, almost everyone can learn anything that can be learnt as long as they have suitable precondition and current learning factors. Weak students appear because of blunders accumulation during the learning. As long as teachers remedy the blunders in good time and gradually eliminate them, the appearance of weak students may be evitable. The view of students shows that education must face all the students, which just embodies the essential of the notions of *English Curriculum Standard*. So teachers should strengthen the devotion of affective factors, do their best in students' ideological work, give each student's appropriate chances and make everyone learning happily. So, the personality of students can be developed very well.

### 1.1.3.3 View of evaluation

When teachers evaluate students, they shouldn't regard score to be the only standard. The diversity of evaluation has gradually come into the students' evaluation system. More persons with noble aspirations begin to pay attention to improving the learning condition of students and affective experience. In the view of evaluation of *New Curriculum Standard*, the function of affective factors used very well can really encourage students to study hard, help students form good mentality and do very good to students' further learning. In teaching, the inspiration evaluation should be adopted more and the opportunity and experience of learning success should be given to each student in order that they can see their bright future and strengthen their self-confidence.

## 1.2 Face and politeness principles in linguistics

In the study of politeness, the most relevant concept is 'Face'. Your face, in pragmatics, is your public self-image (George Yule, 2000:134). This is the emotional and social sense of self that every person has and expects everyone else to recognize. Politeness is showing awareness of another person's face. Face is used in much the same way as in the expressions to lose face and to save face, meaning something like 'self-respect' or 'dignity'.

The basic ideas of the two concepts are that: we lead unavoidably social lives, since we depend on each other, but as far as possible we try to lead our lives without losing our own face. However, our face is a very fragile thing which other people can very easily change, so we lead our social lives according to the Golden Rule ('Do to others as you would like them to do to you!') by looking after other people's faces in the hope that they will look after ours. Face is something that other people give to us, which is why we have to be so careful to give it to them (unless we consciously choose to insult them, which is exceptional behavior.) In conversation, we will be involved in what Goffman (1967) has called face-work, the work of presenting faces to each other, protecting our own face, and protecting the other's face.

For sociolinguists the most relevant discussion of face is by Brown and Levinson (1987), who distinguish two kinds of face. They call them 'positive' and 'negative'. Positive face is the desire to gain the approval of others while negative face is the desire to be unimpeded by others in one's action, but these terms can be misleading because both kinds of face are valuable; they are called 'solidarity-face' and 'power-face'. Both kinds could be described as 'respect' but this word has a different sense in each case. Solidarity-face is respect as in I respect you for..., i.e. the appreciation and approval that others show for the kind of person we are, for our behavior, for our values and so on. If something threatens our solidarity-face we feel embarrassment or shame. Power-face is respect as in I respect your right to..., which is a 'negative' agreement not to interfere. When our power-face is threatened, we feel offended. Each kind of face is the basis for a different kind of 'politeness'. Solidarity-face shows respect for the person, whereas power-politeness respects their rights.

## 2. Studies

### 2.1 Material collection

Here are some dialogues between teachers and students in the Chinese English language classroom teaching, which often happen in middle school.

Extract 1, T: Silence! Order! The lesson will begin.

S: May I come in?

T: Come in! (Bob comes in out of breath) Oh, Bob! You are late.

S: (His face turns red.) I'm sorry. I was caught in the traffic jam on my way to school.

T: (Strictly) Come earlier next time! Do you finish your homework?

S: I'm sorry but there is only one left. I spent enough time doing it but I can't, it is difficult for me to do.

T: Really? Never speak to me like that again. You must hand in your homework today. Don't late next time!  
Go to your seat.

Extract 2, T: (After having a dictation) Mary, give me your paper.

S: Yes, Sir.

T: Six words are wrong. So many! (In all, 20 words are given to students.)

S: (The rest students look at Mary. Mary's tears fall down her cheeks.) Sorry!

T: You must remember new words every day. Do exactly as I say. Linda has got one hundred. You should learn English like Linda. I believe all of you will get a very good result.

Linda: But Sir, this time Mary is better than last time. She's got 70.

T: Be quiet! Boys and girls, that's not enough.

Extract 3, T: I want you to listen carefully to what I'm going to say. Please make a sentence by using the phrase 'call on'.

S1: I called on my aunt last week.

T: Good!

S2: He calls on my father tomorrow and I am...

T: Stop! You are wrong. You shouldn't say so. You should say: He will call on my father tomorrow, anyone else?

S3: We are going to call on Mr. Zhang on Saturday.

T: Good! (Point to another student who is handing up.) You go ahead.

S4: Sir, I recently read a story. There is a phrase 'drop in on', I looked up it in my dictionary. It has the same meaning as 'call on'. Can I say: I dropped in on my grandpa yesterday?

T: Right! But today what we learn is the phrase 'call on'. You can use the phrase 'call on' to make a sentence. That's OK.

## 2.2. Material analysis

In the three extracts, we can find teachers frequently using the imperative sentence, direct sentences, more sentences in which 'must', 'should' are used and also encouragement lack as well as euphemism lack.

If you say something that represents a threat to another person's self-image, that is called a face-threatening act. For example, in the extracts above, teachers use direct speech acts to order students to do something or not to do something. "Come earlier next time." "Never speak to me like that again." "Give me your paper." "You must remember new words every day." "Do exactly as I say." "I want you to listen carefully to what I'm going to say." Teachers are acting as if they have more social power than students. But, in fact, they don't actually have that social power, so they are performing a face-threatening act. An indirect speech act, in the form of a question (Could you pass me that paper, please?), removes the assumption of social power. This makes teachers request less threatening to the students' sense of self. Whenever we say something that lessens the possible threat to another's face, our speech act is a face-saving act.

In extracts above, it's obvious that teachers threaten students' solidarity-face and power-face. For solidarity-face we have a wide range of ways of showing intimacy and affection-words used for addressing the other person and others used to show solidarity-politeness towards the person referred to. For showing power-politeness there are different 'address' words and all the euphemisms that protect the other person from being offended. We need to save our own face by saving the face of everyone we talk to, so we need to manage our behavior, both verbal and non-verbal, very carefully. If we see speech and interaction, as skilled work, we may see that failure like teachers in extracts are due to lack of either skill or motivation. As a matter of a fact, a lot of speech acts are face-threatening acts. We, however, can lighten or eliminate the threat. When we interact with others, we must be aware of both kinds of face and therefore have a choice of two kinds of politeness, especially in our English language teaching.

## 2.3. Reasons for the lack of face and politeness

In the Chinese English language classroom teaching, why does the phenomenon exist that teachers violate the face and politeness principles? China is a country with a long history. In the Chinese traditional culture, teachers are superiors. In the Chinese long feudal society, people regarded students either adults who narrowed or small people who didn't know at all, meanwhile they drew the relationship between the monarch and his subjects of the feudalism into teacher-student relation. The teacher-student relation even evolved into 'clan relations'. The stretch of social system makes teachers the embodiment of truth, the model of action and absolute authority. The classroom teaching is not student-centered but teacher-centered. This unequal relation of lack of humanity naturally contains the factors of power and autocracy. In the

teacher-student relation of teacher 'supremacy', students' freedom is deprived; body and mind are fettered; interests are stifled. The originality of life can't be respected and there is not creativity at all. Stepping out of traditional boundaries in the development of English language teaching is an urgent need.

### 3. Instruction

*English Curriculum Standard* advocates that teacher 'supremacy' should be broken and change teacher-student relationship. Its education model is certainly inspiration, motivation and encouragement. Students' status and role are taken seriously. It's especially important in our classroom teaching. We should adopt the student-centered classroom teaching model in which teachers are no longer the sage on the stage and at the same time students are no longer negative accepters of language knowledge. Students and teachers are equal in interaction, transmitting information, getting knowledge, experiencing language and acquiring the feel of language.

In order to protect students' self-respect and encourage their autonomy, with *English Curriculum Standard* promulgated it is necessary to talk about how to use the face and politeness principles correctly in our English classroom teaching. The paper provides several suggestions.

#### 3.1 Improve teachers' personal quality

There has been a growing worldwide concern about not only the subject competence of teachers but also their personal quality. It is essential for teachers to treat students sincerely and respect them. There is a kind of education that is called 'smile'. Criticizing and punishing students can make teacher-student relationship become unharmonious in class, which is not helpful to classroom teaching. Teachers should tolerate students, satisfy students' psychology and reduce their contradictory feeling during the teaching. Toleration is a kind of virtue that teachers should have, and also it is a kind of education art. Teachers need do an encouraging education to students, develop their successful feel for the language and cultivate them a whole person. The quality of teaching art is not impartation but encouragement, awakening and inspiration. Teachers, never regard ourselves sculptors, let's understand the diversity of students and respect uniqueness of each life, so in our English language teaching, we will get enjoyment based on equality, understanding and respect.

#### 3.2 Do positive and suitable evaluation

It is a common belief that teacher reinforces students' good conduct effectively and enhances their academic learning. Praise has positive effects on students' learning and motivation. Evaluating learning emotion is mentioned in new curriculum evaluation reform. Evaluation plays a regulatory role in the students' learning emotion. Students need teachers' positive evaluation because the younger people are, the stronger desire they have in order to make others notice them. The evaluation from teachers can make them feel that teachers respect and care for them, so evaluation must be valued in the classroom teaching. But teachers' evaluation must be correct and suitable, especially after students answer questions in class. Teachers should use words that are encouraging. For instance, if students answer correctly, teachers had better give a positive definite response, "Good/ Very good/ Excellent, Thank you"; if students can't give a clear answer, teachers also have a positive response and encourage him, "That's almost correct./ Better than last time./ The first part of your answer is right, but..."; if students give an answer that is not right, don't negate their answer completely or scold, satirize students but dig their good qualities, "Your answer is not right, but your pronunciation is very good./ No, it's not the right answer to this question, but it's also very important. Thank you." Teachers not only cultivate students' interests but also pay more attention to protect their self-respect and confidence. Besides, teachers can accept students' evaluation, admit bravely and correct their mistakes and do self-reflective for themselves. If so, teachers' prestige and deep feelings between students and teachers can be built.

#### 3.3 Make students feel very warm like spring rain

##### 3.3.1 Care for students

Teachers should care for students sincerely, especially concern the common students. I know a student who is considered to be mentally deficient. Because he was short of training of image memory for a long time, it caused him to forget something quickly. Besides, sarcasm from his classmates made him feel very inferior. In view of this situation, I made a plan for his remembering words with him privately. Because every week I would give a dictation of one unit, I want to make him get his self-esteem by this chance. At the beginning he felt nervous. After repeatedly training, the rate of word consolidation is up to fifty percent. One day, facing all the other students, I made him first taste success. Since then, his English learning has gradually improved and he also gets his respect from his classmates. As long as teachers love students, they can go into students' innermost being, understand students' demands, inspire students' thirst for knowledge and develop students' intellectual resources.

##### 3.3.2 Understand students

Teachers should understand students. When students demand something from teachers, teachers should consider more for students by putting themselves in students' place. In English teaching, teachers should give lessons to students in accordance with their characteristics and make each student grasp knowledge as much as possible.

### 3.3.3 Trust students

Teachers should trust each student. However, trust has a precondition, which is respect. Teachers need to have the same attitude to different students and dig the advantage of each student. In English teaching, chances that show students' intellect should be given each student. Teachers' duty is not only teaching but also protecting students' self-respect and creating a relaxed learning atmosphere. In the teachers' trustful eyes, students learn happily and in the students' trustful eyes, teachers teach happily.

## 4. Conclusion

*English Curriculum Standard* puts forward higher requirements for teachers' qualities in all kinds of aspects, especially affective education. Teacher-student relationship and language classroom teaching have a kind of bilateral and interactive relation. Concerning affection can improve the quality and effect of language teaching. On the contrary, language teaching helps students develop positive and healthy affection. This shows that studying affective factors in class has great significance for both theory and practice of SLA. Stepping out of traditional boundaries of classroom teaching, teachers should give students face and politeness, and they are equal. It will be conducive to classroom teaching, and students can grasp knowledge very well, meanwhile teachers can get great pleasure from teaching. It presents human concern in *English Curriculum Standard*.

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