

The Culture Study in Foreign Language Education

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Abstract

Culture study plays an important role in language education. Actually, language education seems a sort of cultural heritage. The severe lack of culture education in the current foreign learning inflects that we always pursue the language form but neglect the practical application. Basing on two- year investigation, the author summarizes several language teaching methods on culture learning and assembles some strategies for learning to help students improve their application abilities.

Keywords: Culture, Culture Teaching, Language Teaching, Application Ability.

Introduction

There is a close relationship among culture, language and foreign language teaching, they are inseparable during language teaching and learning. Actually, foreign language teaching is a cultural heritage that we should protect and a practice activity of culture on which we need focus, which contains a rich cultural connotation and value of academic research. The biggest breakthrough in modern foreign language teaching and research lies in the activities that we put the culture into the language environment and attract foreign language teaching content from a cultural point. The culture education, as a part of language teaching, is an important aspect, which will not be ignored. We can neither learn language only as a tool language, nor for understanding the grammatical rules for explaining the verbal behaviors. We should use the culture as a basement in the process of learning and communicate with people by your expression to realize the meaning of language. Simultaneously, corrected by the outside world, our verbal behaviors could be built, tested, and perfected to the essence of language teaching.

Since the mid-20th century, the studies on foreign language aboard and in China have started to search for the effective teaching approaches to satisfy the continuously changeable communicative needs. The cultural learning abroad only focused on target culture in the beginning and then reconciled both target and native language with the great achievements obtained later, now numerous scholars carried out the relevant investigations and studies subsequently. The early studies mainly focused on testing students' capabilities of translating vocabularies on Chinese culture, so ignored the investigation into Chinese cultural knowledge which should precisely belong to students' cultural accomplishment. However, whether Chinese culture was contained in English classroom teaching was always the point in early

studies, it is necessary to study the proportion of Chinese culture in extracurricular learning and examination, the attitude of students and English teachers toward the phenomenon of Chinese Culture Aphasia existing in English learning as well as their expectation of improvement and so forth. Responsible to the Chinese Culture Aphasia, educators raised effective methods to deal with this phenomenon which are not systematical or targeted. Meanwhile, there is no concrete demonstration of using the relevant learning approaches to overcome the Chinese Culture Aphasia during the foreign language education.

Language and Culture

To define the term Culture should be considered an integral part of the study on cultural learning. A large amount of scholars have focused on the definitions of Culture, some of which are representative. Culture refers to knowledge, which is the knowledge shared and negotiated between people. There was a great linguist before who has divided it into two forms--"C" and "c", with which the capital letter "C" stands for the culture of English, including the economic, society, politics, history, heroes, writers, and artists in English speaking countries. From aesthetic perspective, they described Culture in terms of observable practices and behaviors. Culture is the sum of material and spiritual civilization created throughout the history. Its creation is inseparable from language, while the language development can be altered as its culture develops. The two complement each other in perfect harmony. Personally, culture is a system of societal rules and behavior. It has been used to mean the more sophisticated or refined etiquette of a time. It is what people believe, how they act and interact, and the way they live, with specific traits, behaviors, attitudes, and traditions passed on through the generations of families. It is some element that closely linked with language with which it has dependent relationship.

Language and culture are closely related with each other. On the one hand, language is the carrier and container of culture. All the components of culture, such as beliefs, customs, objects, arts and techniques, can be described, analyzed and evaluated by language. People's experience about them is stored and transmitted by language as well. On the other hand, language is influenced and shaped by culture; it reflects culture. The two interact, and the understanding of one requires understanding of the other. The emergence and development of language and culture are simultaneous in human history.

Language is the principal means by which we conduct our social lives. When it is used in contexts of communication, it is bound up with culture in multiple and complex ways. Generally speaking, language has three basic functions in terms of Culture: 1) language expresses cultural reality. People utter words to express facts, ideas or events that are communicable because they refer to a stock of knowledge about the world that other people share. Words also reflect their authors' attitudes and beliefs their point of view; 2) language embodies cultural reality. That is to say, people create experience through language. They give meaning to it through the medium they choose to communicate with one another, for example, speaking on the telephone, reading the newspaper or interpreting a graph or a chart. The way in which people use the spoken, written, or visual medium itself creates meanings that are understandable to the group they belong to through, for example, a speaker's tone of voice, accent, conversational style, gestures, and facial expressions; 3) language symbolizes cultural reality. Language is a system of signs that is seen as having itself a cultural value. Speakers identify themselves and others through their use of language. They view their language as a symbol of their social identity. The prohibition of its use is often perceived by its speakers as a rejection of their social group and their culture.

The influence of culture to language can be detected from these ways: 1) Cultural concepts underlie the variety of languages. The vocabulary of a language highlights those aspects of culture that are important to the social members, such as 'snow' to Eskimos, and 'blood relations' to Chinese. There are many specific words for Eskimos to describe the heavy snow or light snow. Even more the Eskimos have words to describe the snow in different shapes. Just as Chinese 'blood relations' cannot be explained clearly through addressing aunt or uncle; 2) Different approaches to life of people of different cultures bring about different denotative

meaning of words, such as peasant, intellectual, human right, comrade, etc. as well as different connotative meaning of words, such as colors, trees, and flowers, in different languages. 3) The culture of philosophy and religion can deeply affect the language of a nation. For example, in Chinese philosophy 'heaven' is above everything and is a dominating power, so there are lots of expressions concerning 'heaven' in Chinese sayings. While the counterpart of 'heaven' in the West is either 'God' or 'Jesus'; 4) Different cultures possess different taboos which give rise to different euphemisms. In Chinese and English there are many words to replace the word 'to die', yet each demonstrating different beliefs or conception?

In a word, culture is dynamic, and so is language. When culture is changed, language will be changed. Culture would be difficult to be transmitted from place to place and from generation to generation if there were no language. Because we need to be able to express ourselves and to communicate with, members of the culture as we engage with them in the myriad practices and products that make up their way of life should be acquainted well. We need to do this appropriately, using the right language in the right way, according to the expectations of the members of the culture. This is the language of self-expression, communication, and social interaction. It is based on direct experience in the culture and interactions with members of the culture. Moreover, language would be impossible to be understood without constant reference to the cultural context which has produced it, because language is a product of the culture and it embodies the products, practices perspectives, communities, and persons of a culture. Members of the culture have created the language to carry out all their cultural practices, to identify and organize all their cultural products, and to name the underlying cultural perspectives in all the various communities that comprise their culture. The words of the language, its expressions, structures, sounds, and scripts reflect the culture, just as the cultural products and practices reflect the language.

Cultural Infiltration in English Language

Chinese Cultural Infiltration, also called Chinese Cultural Penetration, means to penetrate Chinese culture into other culture through communication, celebration, propaganda, and teaching, etc. The below chapters will have a close look at current situation of Chinese cultural infiltration, comparative study on Chinese and Western culture and significance of infiltrating Chinese culture in English learning, taking English language learning in Chinese colleges and universities for example.

After the phenomenon of Chinese Culture Aphasia was brought into the public, it triggered a great response in the foreign language education. Professors from plexus in language education had conducted empirical researches: Zhang Weimin from Qinghua University had ever made a survey among non-English major students in 126 different schools about the ability to express Chinese culture with national characteristics in English. The test results showed that most of the testes cannot better expressed Chinese local culture in English; and Liu Shiwen had got the same disappointing results, after conducting a similar survey at the school where he studied. He made an investigation into English majors' expressiveness of Chinese culture in English. He chose 157 English majors for test. The result of the test revealed that students were poor to present Chinese culture in English due to the deficient input of Chinese culture. All these studies and results together with the research presented in his paper have indicated enough evidence to the prevalent Chinese culture aphasia among China's English learners. In other words, the Chinese cultural infiltration in the process of English learning is not good in current.

Although there is the fact that learners lack the competence to communicate with native speakers regardless of their good command of the target language and its culture, particularly when they are talking about those specific to Chinese culture, it's relieved to see that in recent years some scholars and researchers have been already aware of the problem and conducted a series of empirical studies on this topic. And step by step, teachers' and students' sense of Chinese cultural infiltration in English education become stronger. It is proposed that more Chinese cultural knowledge should be presented in English in order to improve learners' ability of two-side cross-cultural communication.

Infiltrating Chinese culture into the English learning has the following significance: cultivating students' critical cultural awareness; motivating students in English study; building up Chinese English learners' cultural confidence; exporting Chinese culture.

Critical cultural awareness is the ability to evaluate critically other cultures and countries on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices and product in one's own. It involves both high sensitivity to cultural diversity and the ability to make an unbiased evaluation of both one's own and other cultural groups. Chinese culture imparting in English can help learners get better understanding of target culture by cultural comparison and contrast between home and target culture and thus develop a right attitude towards cultural difference and cultural diversity. On the one hand, learning home culture knowledge and developing self-culture awareness will serve as the basis, as well as the necessary supplement to foreign language learners learning of their target language and the development of their competence with target culture. On the other hand, the process of target language learning and target cultural competence development will help language learners reflect and better understand their home culture, and learn about their own identity. What's more, the self-awareness and reflection on one's home culture can help learners get rid of ethnocentrism, and develop an open and tolerate value system. Only with this intercultural awareness can Chinese English learners surpass the barrier of communication and achieve successful intercultural communication.

Culture can be an educational lubricant, just as Byram put it. By contextualizing language and language learning, relating English language to the real life of learners and traditional culture they are deeply rooted in, language learning is sure to capture the interest of learners. Instead of dealing exclusively and exhaustively with discreet language points the text contains, the English learners can put themselves into materials and devise classroom activities based on Chinese culture which are familiar to them. To try to express those very familiar things with Chinese characteristics in English is fresh and challenging to Chinese learner, which will greatly arouse their interests in English study. Meanwhile, these interactive activities can create a lively and relaxed classroom atmosphere and thus further promote the harmonious teacher-student relations. Chinese culture provides colorful and vivid learning materials and context for language learning while English learning becomes an effective means to express their cultural knowledge. The combination of Chinese culture learning and English language learning will heighten motivation on the part of students and thus facilitates their language learning.

When Chinese students learn the western cultures, many of them would admire western ways of life gradually, as well as the political and economic systems. Then they might radically show a critical attitude towards their traditional culture and values. It is believed that culture learning is inseparable from language learning, but it doesn't follow that we have to change learners' value systems, customs and persuade them to mold their personal behavior on native speakers. In other words, Chinese learners don't need to be more American or British in order to use English well. Learning a language doesn't involve a change of one's cultural identity. Different cultures have different norms of behavior, but there is no inferiority or superiority in any of these norms. The Chinese conventions of greeting, apologizing, showing gratitude, giving advice and accepting compliments are neither better nor worse than any other countries. On the contrary, they should be encouraged to be confident when using English to express Chinese culture. If our culture is well understood and appreciated by people from other cultures, some pragmatic failures can be avoided and won't be failures. Furthermore, there is a growing awareness that through studies of one's own culture in foreign language, learners may be more aware of it and it is useful to help them to keep their cultural identity in intercultural communication. We want the world to know us, to understand us, so it is important and necessary that we speak out the cultural peculiarities of our nation. The people in other cultures could be able to understand, be glad to accept or at least to tolerate the existence of these norms, as what we have done to their cultures.

As a growing great country in the international political and economic area, China is not a country to be ignored. With 5,000 years of civilization, Chinese culture is one of the most brilliant cultures in the world and has contributed a great deal to world civilization. Education

in China has the initial task of transmitting Chinese culture to the world. Since communication is a two-way process, with more and more intercultural interactions occurring in the Chinese cultural context, one thing we should not neglect is that while we are communicating with people from different cultural background, the others might be trying at the same time to enter our own cultural context. Brilliant Chinese culture arouses the interest and curiosity of more and more foreigners, who show a great amount of demand for Chinese culture. At this time, Chinese people should be encouraged to use English to communicate with them when they are talking about Chinese things. It will require us to have certain knowledge and understanding of our own cultural context to facilitate intercultural communication. Cultural exportation has become a hot issue of many sensitive scholars. The emergence and wide spreading of Confucius Institute around the world is strong evidence to this.

To sum up, penetrating Chinese culture in English learning is a method to increase students' ability to differentiate varied culture; a means to enhance students' interest in learning English; a way to protect and develop outstanding Chinese culture; a necessity to improve cross-cultural communication. Just as Yang Hongying put it, penetrating Chinese culture in the college English teaching and learning was conducive to helping deepen students' understanding of Chinese culture, to improve cultural judging ability so as to culture a dialectical view of the differences of Chinese and Western cultures, avoiding blindly worship and acceptance of Western culture, and to establish confidence in the their own fine traditional Chinese culture, thereby enhancing national pride and confidence and achieve a win-win in cross-cultural communication and cultural exchange between China and the West.

Cultural Requirement in Language Teaching

Ye Shengtao said: "A major task of the language education is to enable students to understand the phenomenon of language, master the language rules, learn how to use the language proficiency correctly." The famous linguist Lv Shuxiang said: "When you open any language book, only to see the 'tools', but no 'people'. Language, grammar, vocabulary, shows with a lot of components and structures of the tools, there is no stresses on the method how people handle this tool. "" teach the English, the Arabs, or the Japanese, the Pakistanis, the problems appear in the teaching will not be the same ", the same conclusion in learn English, is also suitable.

Language is the tool for human thinking and the carrier of the culture. "Teaching language equals to teaching culture" is an indisputable fact in the foreign language teaching profession. The current serious deficiencies in our foreign language teaching reflect the phenomenon that we are rigid in pursuing form but not the practical application; we pursue the cultural knowledge framework but not the understanding of culture; we focus on the perfect use of grammar but ignore the affect on language which the cultural difference bring about. Therefore, foreign language education is not the pile of simple words based on some grammatical rules, but let the students master the communication skills and understand the cultural meaning, form their abilities to communicate with the outside world.

But the current situation is that we must face up to the limitation of the cultural education mode. The foreign language teaching came into China from the 1840s, nearly 200 years viewed the four major stages in our country: the stage to input grammatical knowledge and cultivate reading proficiency; the stage to train students' listening and speaking ability according to law of children learned language; the stage to train interpersonal skills and integrated application based on cognitive language; the stage to train social cultural ability and cross-cultural communicative competence phase on the input of language and culture. And two teaching methods were formed: the law of cultural knowledge transferring and the law of cultural process approach. Four main teaching modes appeared: foreign cultural models, cross-cultural mode, multi-cultural patterns and super cultural modes. Culture teaching in foreign language teaching has been included among the cultural content of foreign language teaching has always been a part of, but we were not clearly aware of it which is covered in grammatical form below.

The discussion on cultural teaching appeared in China in the early 1980s, but at that time, the cultural tradition in China is rigid and political attitude is serious cautious. We checked the

foreign cultures by the string trials, which hampered the people from learning foreign culture. The political selective context resulted in wrecked cultural and educational policy in China, which not only destroyed the integrated education but also distorted the normal understanding on cultures, so branded the culture with mark of good or evil. We learn culture for learning the differences not for judging it bad or well, so this selective studying would mislead the understanding of students, they have no way to settle the intercultural communication problems. The language education in those years was not satisfied, and teachers only involved some culture topics according to his interests in class, the class activities and presentations were rare. We had no real cultural teaching at that time.

The cross-cultural communication theory came into China in the 1990s. The majority of linguists and language teachers reached a consensus quickly: cultural education in foreign language teaching is indispensable; the numerous foreign language teachers practice the theory in cultural teaching and explore the teaching methods, however, however, the existing syllabus, whether "college English syllabus" by the Ministry of Education or "college English Curriculum requirements", both emphasized the learning of foreign culture, cultivation of cultural quality and importance of comprehensive application capacity, but they developed around language teaching without the relative cultural educational requests, contents and methods, even no exact teaching test and target, as well as the discussion on cross-communication. So there is no quality training and cultural training in the foreign language teaching as before, the teachers introduced some relevant cultural background information in the limited class with their own experience to students and organized some simple language cultural activities in lessons. Comparing the language abilities, the students have a low level in their cultural skills and cross-culture communication skills.

With the moving of society, the inevitability of cultural teaching came into sights of linguists. The people came to know it is necessary to combine the cultural education with language education deeply, because we wasted hundreds of years in ignoring the cultural factors in education with emphasizing the language form and language skills simultaneously. It is evitable to switch the core to ability of intercultural basement. Language education has its tendency to build an effective contrast between Chinese culture and the western.

Intercultural communication research on foreign language education had a huge impact. Intercultural reveals the relationship among language, culture, communicative, so that linguists recognize that language teaching as an inseparable part from cultural factors. Verbal communication is cross-cultural communication; foreign language teaching is the culture teaching and the training for intercultural communication ability. Foreign language teaching should aim at cultural communicative competence; language teaching is the comprehensive training on learners' language proficiency and language skills, ability of language and cultural. Intercultural communication is the necessity of cultural teaching theory.

Although intercultural communication in the past two decades has injected Chinese language education with fresh blood, foreign language teaching methods and models in our country are also significantly changed, there are still some concepts related to language teaching has been popular essence, the decision focus on foreign language curriculum are not changed. Those effects determine the slow pace in language culture teaching; weaken the communicative capacity of students. Language is an ability, which can't be ignored in the cultural education. We should pay attention to cultivating students on their language cultural awareness, emphasizing their abilities to use language appropriately in different communication situations and letting them understand the cultural contains for the specific social context. Learners should know not only the grammatical competence but also the implicit cultural significance for effective communication and rational usage. The two abilities combine with each other to form the final communicative capability (language proficiency). Those are the alarm which warned all the teachers to take proper cultural educational methods during teaching.

Cultural Teaching Strategies

There are many signs for the shortcomings in our cultural education, such as the various genres

which neglect the cultural factors in the foreign teaching, the pedagogy theory with significant deficiencies, the foreign languages curriculum without cross-communication, lack of cultural awareness and language practice, etc. How to cultivate students with their cultural cognitive ability? How to import Chinese and western culture during teaching? Those are the problems which need educators to think over and explore deeply.

First, generally speaking, foreign language teachers should focus on language teaching from a cultural point of view, to improve students' cultural sensitivity, cultural acceptance, understanding cultural differences, the correct use of language and cultural support this capability. To achieve this requirement, foreign language teachers should do the following five points. The first, foreign language teachers should introduce English cultural connotation of words: language, carrying the nation's cultural information, is a microcosm of culture, which is the nation's clues to understand foreign land and infrastructure. Second, language teachers need introduce students the Western cultural background: Background knowledge is an important part of Western culture, so called cultural origins. Third, foreign language teachers should pay attention to explain the English syntax, discourse structure characteristics and the Western way of thinking. Comparing with the parataxis, without strict syntax constraints, the short sentence style of Chinese sentences, the clear logical thinking is closely related to the cultural background, which includes the reanalysis of English sentences, the cautious grammar structure and the logical relationships. Fourth, foreign language teachers must enable students to understand the western style and behavior patterns of language use: there is a huge difference in the communicative habits and behavior patterns among China with Western countries. so many different effects lie in the verbal and non-verbal behavior as behavior euphemism taboos, clothing, apparel, physical distance, which barrier the communication. In addition, foreign language teachers also need to introduce Western values in classes, such as American culture, American people never stop pursuing the change, they are outgoing, aggressive and adventurous. The spirits derived from their values, which differ from the doctrine of the mean in China stretches for thousands.

Secondly, from the details in class, foreign language teachers should use some culture teaching strategies in the teaching process properly, the author wants to share with you some points based on her two-year teaching research.

Hometown physical display: Let the students demonstrate a representative of the home culture items, such as costumes, handicrafts, home of famous buildings photographs, pictures or home living situations such as commercials. Show hometown cultural activities can broaden students' horizons and increase the geographical and cultural knowledge and experience of regional cultural differences.

Foreign Culture Introduction

Student volunteers form into groups representing the UK, France, USA, Canada, Germany, Italy respectively, assuming they were from there, with the network resource collection "hometown" message within the specified time to complete presentation 'home' history, customs, food specialties, ethnic customs and other content PPT. Through this activity, students could learn about different countries, the cultures similarities and differences, which could make students aware of the differences between Chinese and Western cultures and the difference in countries under the same language and cultural.

Hometown Food Show

Let students make PPT to demonstrate the home delicacies and the legend behind encourage them do bilingual introduction. Chinese food culture has a long history, each of which there is always a special delicacy behind a moving story, we use English to introduce for more distinctive flavor, in author's classes, this activity in the classroom reached the stirring effect, students learned the knowledge and the understood of the different regional different ethnic customs.

Idioms comparison

Compare understanding among the same or similar meaning English idioms through cultural idioms and proverbs; thus explain the system of English idioms and proverbs, parsing the implicit cultural values.

Reflections on Cultural Identity: make the appropriate psychological tests, the test results serve students the chances to reflect on their own cultural values, to determine their own cultural identity, and thus in-depth understanding of their characteristics and cultural groups where cultural values.

Feel Cultural Distance

Presumed the different locale (through time), so that students could communicate with different communicative identity of verbal communication, understand the different cultures in different historical periods of the language by the requirements, the experience of time, culture, social environment and roles relations and the different expectations on different social roles.

Feel the culture-set: show pictures of people in different countries to the students, let them describe photographs or scenes photos taken by imagining reproduction photo background. The description and comparison could help them understand their own cultural sense, the experience the culture-set causes, summarize the impact of verbal communication.

Foreign Teacher Crafts Exhibition

In cooperation with the foreign teachers, show students cultural arts and crafts. Foreign teachers maybe purchase some things when traveling in China; maybe bring some things from his own country. Those things could guide them to discover the cultural significance of the exhibits in the implication, train their ability to observe things, cultivate students' cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity.

Discussion on Cultural Differences

Students read an article cultural cognitive differences in (for example, interracial marriages are common occurrences in recent years), and guide students to discuss issues which appeared in the article to enhance their awareness of intercultural communication, help students find more many ways to improve language skills and methods.

Interview with Foreigner

Issue assignments to encourage students to interview foreign teachers or foreign students on some particular occasions, and then let them do reporting showing the activity allow students to learn about different cultures in the classroom, help them treat certain things by different views and attitudes.

In addition, foreign language teachers should also constantly improve their cultural accomplishment, to read a lot of foreign libraries and books related to culture as a must item preparation. Not only to master the English language structure, but also understand the western cultural connotation, so as to handy to carry on the contrast between Chinese and western culture in the teaching, thus imparting knowledge to students and English learning method.

Summary

A foreign language is a language, if you want to learn the language well, you must learn culture it conveys. For a nation, language is the carrier of cultural heritage, which is able to construct and inherit its culture. For a nation, it is one of the important of its historical development and cultural strength carried by the language and its culture; To a person, language is the foundation of its cultural identity. Language is the carrier of culture, culture is the kernel of language; Language is the transmission of culture, culture is the foundation of language development.

Foreign language teaching should not only transfer knowledge of language, and also should be based on culture the fundamental, Foreign language teachers should set up a kind of language in the teaching of culture, as well as the cultural values and thinking system, the cultural differences in language teaching, those help students grasp language knowledge connotation, understand the cultural differences between Chinese and western rapidly and carry on the reasonable and effective application of language. Consequently, foreign language teachers should attach importance to the input of culture in foreign language teaching and cultural comparison, set up the consciousness in culture teaching, cultivate students' cultural cognition and cross-cultural awareness, by doing those can we really reach the teaching goal

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