

*Culture Education on College Language Teaching:
A Study on Language Acquisition and Culture Awareness*

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Abstract

As language and culture are interdependent dual unity, they can't be separated from each other. However, it is a common practice in a large number of Chinese universities that the second language teaching only attaches importance to the acquisition of the target language without sufficient and systematical introduction to its cultural background; or though it also shows its concerns about culture, the culture awareness is only one-way ---the target culture is emphasized, but the native culture is absent. This paper analyzes the ties of language acquisition and culture awareness. In the meanwhile, it reveals the relevant problems brought about by the separation of language and culture in foreign language teaching in Chinese universities. In the end, the paper proposes some solutions to the problem from both the perspective of the second language administration level and instructors. It points out that on the basis that the level of administration pays close attention to the matter and sets up policies to ensure the two-way culture education in the second language teaching, the instructors can attempt to realize the two-way culture education in the second language teaching by means of both Classroom and Extra-curricular activities as explicit and implicit education fields. What's more, the comparison between the target and the native culture is an emphasis in the two-way culture education. By doing so, the second language learners (Chinese college students) can be expected to acquire the second language properly.

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I. Relation between Language and Culture

As language is a kind of social phenomenon, Language system can't exist and develop when isolating itself from social system, whose components it establishes a sophisticated relation with.

“Culture” refers to a general mode specific to believes, customs, objectives and technology of a society. 【1】

Culture is associated with language closely. Social linguist Goodenough notes in his book Cultural Anthology and Linguistics that the language of a society is one of the components of the social culture.

As part of culture, language is unique in its nature which can serves as a tool to acquire the whole culture when people are studying and using language

“Language and culture cannot be independent from each other, for language can reflect culture, and culture needs language. Culture is all-inclusive. The acquisition of the target language's culture (western culture) and the native culture (Chinese culture) both are of great help for college students to gain the practical ability to use language. 【2】

Culture can be reflected, and what's more, cognized by language.

One links, influences as well as restrains the other.

Without enough attention to its cultural implication or enough knowledge of the culture of the mother tongue and target language, we will fail to master the nature of language so that we won't acquire and apply a language truly.

II. Purpose of Cultural Education in Chinese University's

Second language Teaching (College English Teaching)

1. The requirement of realizing the goal of college English teaching

The ultimate goal of English teaching is to realize the function of communication---cross-cultural communication.

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By doing so, college students cannot only master the basic language skill of English, but also learn of the cultural background of mother tongue and target language---English so as to broaden horizon and bring up cross-culture awareness.

As a result, colleague students probably avoid making communicative mistakes and improve their ability of language application and two-way culture awareness.

2. The requirement of globalization

In an era of a globalization in economy and fast-developing communication technology, different nations and cultures are trying to communicate and cooperate with each other increasingly in more and more aspects.

In such background, it's very important and necessary to strengthen the cultural education in language teaching in order to understand each other well and achieve successful communication.

3. The requirement of bringing up Chinese college students with sharp awareness of native culture

As for college students, the ultimate goal of the second language acquisition is to make successful two-way communication, to be specific, not only to "import the western" but also to "export China".

Two-way culture education can help to cultivate Chinese college students the native culture awareness, and spread out the essence of Chinese tradition to the world, helping the world know China well, which is one of their responsibilities.

III. Problems in culture education of Chinese college English teaching

1. The absence of culture education of the second language

Influenced by the limitation of correspondent theoretical knowledge and pressure of examination, it's a fact that Chinese college English teaching has been stressing the teaching of linguistic knowledge such as pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, etc.

■ There is a lack of of systematic and conscious education on the cultural factors of the second language. 【3】

As a result, many Chinese students has got some knowledge of linguistics without enough knowledge of cultural implication of the second language.

Besides, there is no enough or even no textbook on culture in college English teaching.

There seems to be only some casual culture education, or there is some simple

introduction to the exterior culture phenomenon. The interior or profound factors of culture are neglected.

Hence many college students fail to catch the differences between the English and Chinese cultures in the way of addressing, introduction, expressing habits and thinking patterns and privacy, which brings about a mode of communication “Chinese thinking pattern+ English language”.

Consequently, students may offend the customs of the western culture and the people from this culture by improper expressions; On the other hand, even the expression itself is proper, it may be a shallow one.

The college English teaching without cultural education will hinder the realization of college English teaching, and also cannot satisfy the requirements of the era of cultural globalization.

2. Neglect of native culture education

In the meanwhile, Chinese college English teaching also may go to another extreme: put too much emphasis on the target language's culture but without Chinese culture education.

Some Chinese scholars have stated that “Chinese culture is neglected obviously.” [4] Chinese traditional culture need English to introduce itself to the world. If Chinese college students, the future elite of China don't have enough native culture awareness, then Chinese excellent culture would be obscure in the time of culture diversity.

What's more, little awareness of native culture and little knowledge will lead to the alienation of college students' value. They will be hard to establish the national cultural identity to some degree.

IV. Strategies

1. The relevant administrative departments should intensify the macro management of the culture education

In a world where diverse cultures are communicating with each other increasingly, faced with the current situation of two-way culture education, Chinese administrative departments of college English teaching should have insight into the problems and the requirements of the times and take measures to strengthen the culture education in college English teaching. This will guarantee the interaction of Chinese college English language teaching and two-way cultural education.

First, revise the college English teaching outline and impose requests of cultural

education on English teaching.

Second, make the textbooks of cultural education scientific, standardized and systematic.

Arrange scholars and experts to rewrite textbooks: add vocabulary and expressions of culture, and introduction and comparison of two cultures.

Edit specific cultural textbooks in English for college students to learn of philosophy, history, religion, literature, arts and social customs of the cultures of both target language and mother language.

Third, require the universities and college where conditions permit to offer elective courses on culture comparison, such as “Cross-culture communication”, “Language and Culture”, “Selected Readings of American and European Literature”, “Appreciation of Traditional Chinese Literature”.

It would help to form a pattern of college English teaching combining language and culture, and Chinese culture education and English culture education.

2. Improve the professional qualification of college English teachers

In order to satisfy the requirement of dual strategy of “Globalization” and “Localization”, a qualified college English teacher should not only acquire the knowledge linguistics but also has cultural awareness and cultivation, especially the central cultural factors such as value, thinking patterns, and so on.

What’s more, teacher should change their teaching pattern from the transmission of pure language to the education of both language and culture, avoiding discriminating against one and favouring the other between culture and language as well as the culture of the target language and mother language.

Only in this way can we educate college students who can exchange with people from foreign culture successfully and equally.

3. Combine explicit and implicit cultural education to achieve interactive education of language and culture

1) Bring the function of explicit education in college English teaching into full play

Explicit cultural education refers to the pointed and effective cultural education by correspondent courses, which serves as the main battlefield for cultural education.

College English teachers should study and sum up the teaching experiences and make college English teaching the interactive teaching of both language and culture, melting the cultural knowledge of English speaking countries’ literature, history, geography, customs, religions and way of living into language classes.

Teaching methods

Cultivate culture awareness with the introduction of basic units of language, for example, idioms, proverbs, sayings, colloquialisms, and allusions, for the concrete language expressions are supposed to interpret the cultural ideas and semantic so as to help students to reveal the rich cultural implication of language.

When giving lectures on grammar and articles, teachers should try to find out the differences by making a comparison of these aspects such as grammar, sentence structure, and article structure;

Teaching methods

The cultural differences about specific communicative environments can be introduced into college English teaching, for example, ways of addressing, expressing thanks, being humble, praise others, and introduction to people, habits of wording, expressions, taboo, privacy, how to shown concern, time consciousness and thinking patterns;

introduce college students the customs and habits of society and living style in order to broaden their' horizon and grasp the interior cultural implication;

Teaching methods

When analyzing the theme of an article and author's points of views, teacher should introduce the relevant values and background of the target language's culture, and make proper comparison between the Chinese culture and the English culture so as to make clear the respective characteristics and values of the two cultures.

Introduced from different aspects, such cultural education can cultivate a systematic and objective ability of the target language English and two-way cultures, and apply language properly, realizing the language teaching and pragmatic teaching.

Teaching techniques

Diverse teaching techniques will promote the learning and understanding of cultural knowledge.

In class, teacher can make full use of multimedia devices to present the courseware, showing students relevant cultural feature films or other audio and video materials to make the class more lively and artistic so as to motivate students' curiosity and interest and realize the interactive language and cultural teaching directly and fully.

Teaching techniques

In the meanwhile teacher should initiate students' to learn of culture and raise their own learning and studying ability by these techniques: assign some cultural topics for students to study.

They can be encouraged to cooperate in groups, look for the sources of relevant materials in library and internet beyond the confines of textbooks, thus write or edit research paper and investigation reports, or hold keynote speeches or debates.



Such profound study and analysis on culture can deepen their knowledge of cultures and lay a solid foundation for cross-cultural communication and transmission of native culture.

2) Make active use of the function of **extracurricular** activities as **implicit cultural education**

Culture affects an individual in an unconscious way, for culture “can never be conscious of fully...What it embodies is larger than what we are aware of; Moreover, it cannot be designed because it is an unconscious background for all we have designed.” 【6】

Supporting the major battlefield of cultural education---classroom, extracurricular activities exercise its function of implicit cultural education to achieve a penetrating, artistic and indirect cultural education unconsciously and naturally.

College English teachers can instruct these intelligent and active young students to take part in various entertainment activities, such as

performing self-directing,

watching both Chinese and English classical plays and movies;

holding debates and speech contest;

inviting experts to give lectures on customs, history, music, fine arts, and masterpieces. etc..

With the unconscious but enjoyable influence of these extracurricular activities, students can cultivate ability of language and awareness of culture, and become an inheritor of Chinese cultural traditions, as well as a new generation with broad horizon and spirit of times.

V. Conclusion

The language of English cannot be separated from its cultural background, where it is brought up.

It is the only way to train Chinese college students to be English learner and achieve cross-communication successfully that Chinese college teaching attach great importance to interactive education of both language and culture, and that of the second Language's culture and mother culture, which can cultivate college students' awareness of the two cultures and ability of cognition.

Two-way Cultural Education in the second Language Teaching is the demand of nature of English language, demand of Chinese development, and also the demand of the era of globalization

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