

Integration of Chinese Culture into College English Teaching

Jie Du^a, Liao Runhua^b

School of foreign languages, Jingdezhen Ceramic Institute,
Jingdezhen 3330403, China.

^asallydj@126.com, ^bmaxlrh@126.com

Keywords: Integration; College English teaching; Traditional Chinese culture; Awareness; Cross-cultural communication.

Abstract. The ultimate purpose of learning a foreign language is to acquaint the learners with the culture of the target language and enhance the learners' cross-cultural communication competence. On the basis of analysis of the wide practice of inputting only Western cultures and severe absence of Chinese culture in college English teaching, this paper aims to analyze the necessity and significance of integrating traditional Chinese culture into college English teaching and it holds that English teachers should take effective measures to broaden students cultural visions and cultivate their consciousness of cross-cultural communication. Meanwhile, the paper also provides several suggestions of improving the present situation so as to improve the quality and efficiency of college English teaching.

1. Introduction: Language and Culture

Language, defined by Merriam Webster as the system of words or signs that people use to express thoughts and feelings to each other, is the most important means in human communication. Culture, an intriguing and ambiguous notion, is defined by different scholars from different perspectives for different purposes. Up to now, the most authoritative definition is from New Encyclopedia Britannica: peculiar to mankind together with material objects that are part of this behavior and consists of languages, ideas, beliefs, customs, codes, institutions, tools, techniques, works of arts rituals, ceremonies and so on. From the above definitions, it can be seen that language and culture are closely related to one another. Language, determined by culture, is the product of culture and the carrier of culture. American linguist E. Sapir said in *Language: An Introduction to the Study of Speech* that "language does not exist without culture." Meanwhile, culture restricts language. Claire Kramsch claims that "language expresses, embodies and symbolizes cultural reality. Culture is the product of socially and historically situated discourse communities that are to a large extent imagined communities, created and shaped by language". Therefore, learning a language doesn't simply mean the learning of words, pronunciation, and grammar. Similarly, English teaching involves more than the acquisition of merely basic language units, it should put more emphasis on the cultivation of students' cross-cultural awareness and enhancement of their competence of comprehensive language skills. So just as an American scholar Winston Brembeck claimed "teaching language without culture is the best way to cultivate a fool with fluent spoken language". Language and culture are interrelated, so culture teaching, as well as language teaching, should be included in college English teaching practice. Culture teaching contains the introduction of the Western cultures and the traditional Chinese culture.

2. Necessity of integrating Chinese culture into college English teaching

2.1 The significance of learning traditional Chinese culture in English teaching

China is a country with time-honored history. From the very ancient times, the ancestors labored, lived on this vast land and have created splendid culture. As one of the four cradles of the world's earliest civilization, it has recorded history of more than 4000 years. Traditional Chinese culture is the essence of thousands of years' creation and deposition. Chinese festivals, Chinese cuisine, Chinese Kung Fu, Chinese clothing, Chinese calligraphy, Chinese medicine, Chinese handicraft, Chinese religion, Chinese etiquette, Chinese tea culture etc. are the fine cultural heritage. It can

greatly enrich people's spiritual life and cultivate people's taste. In college English teaching, teachers should be aware of the fact that college students not only need to master a language proficiently, they also need to familiarize themselves with the cultures of both the target and source languages. More importantly, college student, the inheritors of gorgeous Chinese culture, need to shoulder the responsibility of disseminating our culture to others nations through the comparison of the two cultures. Traditional Chinese culture is the solid cornerstone and crucial foundation in English learning, but unfortunately it has been severely deficient in college curriculum design and students' textbooks.

2.2 General situation of Chinese college students' ability in expressing their culture in English

Chinese college English teachers have been endeavoring to improve Chinese students English language skills and understanding of the cultures of English- speaking countries for years and it seems that their efforts have been paid quite well. However a quite common phenomenon may thrust any student communicating with foreigners in an embarrassing situation when they can talk smoothly with their foreign friends about Western cultures they have learned in class and feel their ability falling short of their ambition when the conversation was steered to Chinese culture, what is worse, cultural miscommunication may frequently occur under the above circumstances. Actually the above occurrence is "*aphasia of Chinese culture*", which made its first appearance in an article entitled "Aphasia of Chinese Culture: the Deficit in our National English teaching" by Congcong, a professor from Nanjing University. It indicates that both Chinese college English teaching and learning have leaning too much on the learning of the English language and Western cultures that Chinese learners forgot that cross-cultural communication is a mutual process through which both cultures need to be heavily involved in when the culture exchanges occur. A very obvious instance is that Chinese college students have been enthusiastic in celebrating popular Western festivals such as Valentine's Day, Thanksgiving Day, Halloween, and Christmas. However, Some students know little about traditional Chinese culture and they even gave a blank stare when asked about the origins of traditional festivals like Chinese New Year, Mid-Autumn Festival, Dragon-Boat Festival, and Tomb-Sweeping Festivals.

However, in both teaching context and our textbooks, Chinese culture input is generally ignored and more stress is placed on the Western cultures. The severe cultural imbalance leads to the phenomenon "aphasia of Chinese culture". Both the teaching of the English culture and Chinese culture are called for in college English teaching.

3. Means of integrating Chinese culture into college English teaching

3.1 Balancing the proportion of English and Chinese culture materials in College English texts.

Textbooks are the major means for Chinese students acquiring English-related knowledge. Consequently, the proportion the Chinese culture related material in college English textbooks taken is of great significance in helping Chinese students learning to express their native culture via English language. However, that proportion is surprisingly low. For example, New Horizon College English series textbooks published by Foreign language Teaching and Research Press has taken all their sample texts from Western sources like newspapers, journals, magazines, short stories, or excerpts from novels. The same is true of the textbooks from Shanghai Foreign languages Press and some other influential publishing houses specialized in English language learning. Furthermore, traditional textbooks for college students in China are mostly grammar-oriented, giving little attention to cultural elements. Consequently, textbook compilers and curriculum designers are expected to take cultural awareness into account.

Yufeng Li holds in his Master dissertation: English Teaching and the Cultivation of Students' Cross-cultural Competence that: "The teaching materials should not be located only in the source culture and should be a constructive attempt to be explicit about intercultural behavior and communication, especially in view of the limited language available at this level, the text might be made more open by asking students how target culture members might interpret the Chinese examples mentioned (and vice versa) rather than simply teaching culture rules, this would help

students develop an interpretative framework.” Yufeng Li perfectly explained the necessity of inputting more Chinese culture related texts in college English teaching and highlighted the significance of doing so.

College English teaching should jump out the simple pursuit of learning a language and communicating with people from English-speaking countries about their cultures only. By cross-cultural communication, it means the interaction of both the source and target languages’ cultures. Given the prevailing popularity of Western cultures among Chinese youngsters, Chinese officials need to realize the urgency of rearranging the sample texts opted for widely used textbooks for Chinese college students: both English-majors and non-English-majors.

3.2 Strengthening the quality of teaching staff.

At present, most college English teaching relies heavily on teacher-oriented mode, which means teachers tend to dominate the most of the class time. In this case, if the teachers are not conscious of the significance of integrating traditional Chinese culture into teaching, students as a result have limited means to reach their native culture via English language in class. Some teachers even hold that as English teachers, their mere task is to familiarize their students with English language and its culture. Therefore, the related Chinese culture integration in English class teaching is to a large extent ignored. What is worse, some teachers themselves severely lack in knowledge about Chinese culture.

According to Straub, what educators should always have in mind when teaching culture is the need to raise their students’ awareness of their own culture, to provide them with some kind of meta-language in order to talk about culture, and to cultivate a degree of intellectual objectivity essential in cross-cultural analysis.

Thus the advisable way is that College English teachers should consciously equip themselves with extensive and profound native culture through various ways in the first place. For example, English teachers should be exposed to native culture sufficiently and strive to be bi-cultural. It is desirable that they get special training about their native culture and Western cultures so that they make better use of every possible means available to gain a deeper insight into both cultures via familiarizing themselves with the ways of thinking, ways of living, customs and habits. Then they should raise their self-awareness of integration of Chinese culture into English teaching and lead their students to the road of habitually learning English language with Chinese culture consciousness. Gradually, Chinese students will be at ease when they are engaged in the certain conversation or occasion and can overtake the mission of spreading our culture to foreigners.

3.3 Cultivate students’ cross-cultural awareness

Teachers need to consciously reflect cultural perspectives in teaching practice. They should let their students know that a good command of English alone is inadequate for effective communication. They should not lay all the stress on the explanation of the grammatical rules, but also referential meanings and social connotations. Besides, teachers should organize class activities and demonstrate the real-life practice of Chinese culture. For example, teachers can invite students to role-play or put-up performance about the traditional Chinese festivals and culture-related customs so as to encourage them to express their mother culture through English. Another good option is the debate on the comparison and contrast of Chinese and Western cultures, through which, students can search a host of information about the both parties and have a better understanding of both their native culture and Western culture.

3.4 Open more culture curriculum

To cultivate and enhance students’ awareness of traditional Chinese culture, reasonable curriculum must be arranged. Colleges and Universities should open some required or optional Chinese cultural courses, for instance, traditional Chinese festivals, Chinese literature and poems, Chinese cuisine, Chinese Martial Arts, paintings, Chinese medicine, Chinese architecture and society, history.

The above courses can be selectively taught in English so students can partially make up for a deficiency of Chinese culture in textbooks and learn our native culture in-depth. Besides, extensive reading assignment from the courses offers extra means for students to understand Chinese culture

more comprehensively. Thus talents with higher intercultural competence will be effectively trained.

4. Conclusion

Integration cultural teaching into college English teaching is one of the measures of optimizing language teaching. College English teaching should lay its stress on the cultivation of students' comprehensive language competence and cross-cultural communication ability. In teaching practice, teachers need to insist on the principle of attaching equal importance to the teaching of both Western and Chinese cultures. Before the introduction of new textbooks with Chinese culture, teacher should consciously add content of traditional culture in lead-in or warming-up activities and transfer college teaching from pure language teaching into language-relied cultural teaching so as to promote college students' artistic appreciation and cross-cultural communication competence. Both college English teachers and students should undertake the mission of inheriting and spreading traditional Chinese culture and let more and more people understand and share the rich spiritual resources of Chinese culture and civilization. All in all, the solutions suggested above are expected to shed new light on college English course design and syllabus formation and eventually enhance students' humanistic quality and real-life cross-cultural communication ability and naturally popularize splendid Chinese culture.

5. References

- [1]. Merriam Webster, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/language> retrieval date: July, 18th, 2016
- [2]. New Encyclopaedia Britannica, vol. 8. 2000, pp.1151.
- [3]. E. Sapir, Language: An Introduction to the Study of Speed, 2002.
- [4]. Kramsch Claire. Language and Culture. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 3.
- [5]. Brembeck L. Winston. Persuasion, a means of social influence. Prentice-Hall, 1976.
- [6]. Congcong, "Aphasia of Chinese Culture: The Deficit in our National English teaching. Guangming Daily Newspaper, 2000-10-19.
- [7]. Yufeng Li, "English Teaching and the Cultivation of Students' Cross-cultural Competence", Master Dissertation, Liaoning, Liaoning Normal University. 2009, pp. 31. (In Chinese)
- [8]. Stuart Chase, Power of Word, London: Phoenix House Ltd.1955.
- [9]. Yanchang Deng and Runqing Liu, Language and Culture, Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 1998. (In Chinese)