The Role of Culture as a Social Construct in Chinese Learning as a Second Language

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Abstract. Learning of Chinese culture becomes the obstacle that restricts their language studying abroad. In the paper, firstly, importance of the culture teaching was introduced. Secondly, the goal of the culture teaching and the difficult points of the culture learning were summarized. Finally, the countermeasures for improving the Chinese culture learning were proposed. The study show that culture plays an important role in Chinese language teaching because it motivates student and facilitates communication. Studying culture exposes students to other cultures and encourages analysis of their own culture. Successfully integrating culture information in language class will help

Introduction

As the development of globalization, lots of foreigner students come to China for studying. While learning of Chinese culture becomes the obstacle that restricts their language studying abroad[1-6], As the key part of Chinese teaching, the Chinese culture teaching becomes the disaster to the western students. Chinese language. Teaching to foreigners has done much to remove cultural information from language class, and sometimes the culture what the teacher want to show in their class is different from what students need, this is disservice to students because they lose the context of the language, the large part of what they need to communicate. So when they are communicating with others, the counterparts are often confused. Especially, most of the foreign students could not differentiate the blade-alveolar and the cacuminal, so that they feel hard in their daily lives and studies. In order to change this phenomenon and improve the Chinese abilities of these western students, the research is grounded in language learning theories in second language education and identity theories in linguistics, sociology, and cultural studies. This dissertation is a qualitative case study exploring the process of culture learning in a Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) classroom. So as to improve the teaching efficient and the foreign students’ Chinese abilities.

The General Statement of Chinese Culture Teaching

Importance of the Culture Teaching

Foreign language learners are also culture learners, however, Chinese language teaching to foreigners has done much to remove cultural information from language class, and sometimes the culture what the teacher. wants to show in their class is different from what students need, this is disservice to students because they lose the context of the language, the large part of what they need to communicate they also lose one of the most motivating aspects of. foreign language study: learning their people and cultures, so How to design their Chinese language course grounding on social culture, how to improve students motivation to their Chinese language course, one preliminary concern is defining culture another concern are what. Culture the foreign students interested in their Chinese learning and. the benefits to the students of integrating language and culture. Culture plays an important role in Chinese language teaching because it motivates student and facilitates communication. Studying culture exposes students to other cultures and encourages analysis of their own culture. Successfully integrating culture information in language class will help
to increase student’s integrative and instrumental motivation which in turn will improve their attitudes toward foreign language study.

In general, linguists and anthropologists have long recognized that the forms and uses of a given language reflect the cultural values of the society in which the language is spoken. Language learners need to be aware of culture, including the culturally appropriate ways of how to address people, to greet people for the first time, and to make requests. In order to communicate successfully, language use must be associated with the appropriate use of culture.

**The Goal of the Culture Teaching**

Culture is said to be a concentration of all other meanings (social, spiritual, logical, emotional, moral, esthetic) of human existence”[7]. Culture can be seen as a special form or link of interaction between civilization and epochs. From the sociocultural perspective, culture is also defined as a system of symbols, meanings, and norms passed from one generation to the next, differentiating groups of people united by certain characteristics such as origin, race, ethnicity, gender, religion, socioeconomic class, or political views [7]. In essence, culture as a social construct is inseparable from human activity. According to Erickson, culture can be thought of as a construction: It constructs us and we construct it. Through initiatives such as the national standards for foreign language learning, U. S. language educators have made it a priority to incorporate the study of culture into their classroom curricula. Cultural knowledge is one of the five goal areas of the national standard as follows: Through the study of other languages students gain a knowledge and understanding of the cultures that use that language; in fact, students cannot truly master the language until they have also mastered the cultural contexts in which the language occurs. According to Kramsch [8], the culture associated with a language cannot be learned in a few lessons about celebrations, folk songs, or costumes of the area in which the language is spoken. Culture is a much broader concept that is inherently tied to many linguistic concepts taught in second language (L2) classes. The significance of culture in L2 study has been implied since Gardner’s social educational model [9] that introduced integrative and instrumental orientations of motivation. According to him, integrative orientation drives students to learn more to the point of eventually being accepted as a member of that other group, while instrumental orientation motivates them to derive a special benefit, such as career-based opportunities, from knowing the foreign language with little interest in the target culture. Here, integrative motivation seems to be more effective in terms of cultural acquisition or acculturation.

**The Difficult Points of the Culture Learning[10-12]**

However, in Gardner’s study, culture itself has not been treated significantly or independently. In other words, different from Gardner’s conception of culture as integrative orientation, the role of culture can be approached as the social construct of an instrument or a medium in the process of learning an L2. As long as we find its significance, it directly and practically contributes to improve L2 classes. in terms of curriculum or instructional design. For example, even though students can be motivated to learn an L2 with integrative orientation, they might not succeed in attaining its proficiency without depending on a proper medium or media that helps them develop their both linguistic and cultural competence while they are learning an L2 every day. In short, culture should be more than a mere subset as an orientation to research on the motivation of students who learn an L2. Few empirical studies describe the process of culture learning within the language. Curriculum from a classroom discourse perspective. The current study is aimed at filling this gap in the literature by delineating how the culture learning process is realized discursively in an advanced-level undergraduate Chinese course. Through a close look at the classroom discourse, the culture learning process in the language classroom is illustrated in the interactions between the students and the instructor, as well as among the students.
The Countermeasures for Improving the Chinese Culture Learning

There are two types of approaches to perceive the role of culture in L2 learning. The first is to regard culture as orientation of L2 learners or acculturation as their ultimate goal. It has led to research on the causal relationship between motivation and L2 proficiency or ethnic identity and acculturation. Different from this approach of educational psychology, the second regards culture as an instrumental construct or mediation in the process of L2 learning in terms of instructional design or sociocultural perspective. It is ultimately believed to lead to the development of the curriculum of L2 learning. The research is grounded in language learning theories in second language education and identity theories in linguistics, sociology, and cultural studies. This dissertation is a qualitative case study exploring the process of culture learning in a Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) classroom. Guided by a socioculturally based theoretical perspective and adopting the stance of the National Standards, which says that language students “cannot truly master the language until they have also mastered. the cultural contexts in which the language occurs” this study describes how culture learning is tied to class practices aimed at developing Students’ language proficiency by exploring how culture and language are integrated in spoken discourse and interactions in the classroom.

The purposes of this study are to explore how the discourse in an advanced-level CFL (learning in a Chinese as a foreign language), undergraduate course provides opportunities for culture learning and how culture learning actually happens in this language classroom what are the students really hope to know and use in their communicate with Chinese people, what are the difference between the Chinese teacher and foreigner students. focus on the culture, and if the teaching materials provide enough and interesting culture content to the students. This study will add theoretical and practical support to the premise that culture learning should be an integral part of language instruction in L2classrooms.

The result of this study will provide direction for the design of future culture- oriented and content-based language curricula. The research questions of the study focus on both the instructor’s and the students’ perspectives towards the interrelationship between language learning and culture learning and their actual practices in the dynamic, complex, and emerging speech community of classroom contexts.

Conclusion

Through classroom observations, instructor interview, and stimulated-recall sessions with students, this study examines the contexts of culture learning, illustrates how language classroom contexts shape and are shaped by all the class members, including both the instructor and the students, CFL course provides opportunities for culture learning and how culture learning actually happens in this language classroom. To the European and American students, it is difficult to learn Chinese to some extent, because there are lots of differences between their native language and the Chinese language on the culture and the phonetic habit, and the complexity of the Chinese. In order to let the students master the Chinese, it is necessary to do well in the culture teaching. The culture teaching is the key part of the Chinese teaching and the basic part as well, it determines if the European and American students could have the fluent oral abilities of Chinese, and it also determines if the students could build a solid foundation on Chinese learning. In order to let the European and American students have a good study conditions, the teachers must try their best to improve their teaching qualities, so as to constantly improve the students’ abilities of culture study. Because of the author’s limitation in this field, the viewpoint of the author of this thesis is not overall, so welcome all the scholars to research this issue together.

References


