The Cultivation of Cross-cultural Awareness in College English Teaching from the Perspective of Cultural Differences Between Chinese and Western

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Abstract

Languages are sort of carrier of different cultures, and the process of language learning is a part of culture learning as well. Once students have a deep understanding of the culture behind a foreign language, language learning might be a piece of cake for them. In this paper, facing the English teaching ways from the perspective of the cultural difference, we analyze the language differences caused by cultural differences, in order to help college students master the cultural background of the foreign languages. The cross-cultural communicative competence is a paramount ability to students, thus college teachers should practice students' intercultural awareness before they teach some grammar. In the following sections, we analyze the connotation of cross-culture, and discuss the importance of the cultivation of cross-cultural awareness.

Keywords: Cultural Differences, English Language Teaching, Cross-cultural, Consciousness Cultivation.

Introduction

As different countries continue to increase their economic ties and interdependence, a blueprint for economic globalization is a trend which cannot be halted spread throughout the earth. Tylor, a British scholar, put forward the definition of word "culture": Culture or civilization which is sort of complex whole, universally, includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, etc. Culture is a whole, not only contains ideas, inventions, artifacts, values, beliefs and works of art, but also contains economic system, social structure and customs of the political system of religious belief, actually, it includes everything we can imagine.

Between the East and the west, because of their different historical conditions and social conditions, diversified cultures are formed. The conflict between cultural differences and values is directly reflected in a foreign language classroom. Chinese and Western cultures have different traditions, and belong to different cultural systems. These differences inevitably appear in their respective language systems, and lead to pragmatic failures in the cross-cultural communication between China and the west. Different cultures just like an iceberg which contains two parts, visible part and invisible part. In general, we usually understand the surface meaning of language, and don't understand its deep meaning. Therefore, it is very important to understand the cultural background behind the language.
The Proposed Methodology

The Cultural Differences between Chinese and Western. Language is the carrier of culture, and is a part of cultural as well, and each nation has its own unique history, culture, science and religion. Everyone's way of life, customs and morals are reflected in the application of languages, thus, when studying the relationship between language and culture, different culture should be defined and classified. Broadly, culture means material wealth and spiritual wealth created by human society; narrowly, culture is sort of social mentality of mankind. In general, culture can be divided into three levels: custom culture, ethical culture, and mental culture. Interdependence relationship of language and culture determines the important role of cross-cultural awareness in English teaching. Namely, learning western culture and developing cultural differences between Chinese and Western cultures are paramount to Chinese learners, because Chinese and Western cultures belong to different civilizations. Therefore, learning the cultural background of different languages, and cultivating cultural insight should be put into the whole process of college English teaching. Ladow, a famous linguist once said, we can't learn the language well without mastering the cultural background, because language is a part of culture.

The ultimate goal of language learning is social contact, once languages came into communication, the problems of understanding and expression of cultural connotation may remain, especially in cross-cultural communication. Although different cultures have common ground, more prominent parts are the differences. In order to have a clearer understanding of the differences between Chinese and Western cultures, we need to explain the meaning of "culture".
• The classical definition of culture is introduced in <Primitive Culture>, which is written by Edward Tylor, a British anthropologist, in 1871. Culture is sort of "complex whole", including knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, customs, and social members' abilities and habits.

• Bronislaw Malinowski, the English master of functional theory of anthropology, suggested that culture is obviously an integral whole, including tools, consumer goods, constitution, people's ideas, processes, beliefs and habits, etc.

These two scholars respectively represent the narrow sense of culture and the broad sense of culture, but these two ideas admit that culture is a kind of whole. The differences between Chinese and English are reflected in the social and cultural level, and Chinese and Americans tend to have different perceptions of the same thing. For instance, Chinese people think modesty is virtue, and they have polite, stilted conversation; for Americans, they think praise is for appreciation and affirmation, thus they feel glad and show gratitude. By the way, Chinese show respect to the world "old", whereas, American may think "old" is a sign of decay. In all, cultural differences are reflected in many aspects.

![Figure 2. The Process of Cross-cultural Communication.](image)

The necessity of the cultivation of cross-cultural awareness. Cultural differences, including differences in customs and habits, ethical culture, and mental culture, which determine the importance of cultural education in foreign language teaching, English, for example. If the foreign language teaching only focus on knowledge and language skills training, ignoring the cultivation of cross-cultural thinking, students may be able to generate a standard language sentence, however, they lack of practical ability of language communication, even have no idea how to use appropriate language in proper places. We cannot regard English as a social tool, even though teaching students language knowledge system and skills is the main purpose, teachers should cultivate students' cross-cultural awareness at first. Since 1960, affected by the structuralist view of language, Chinese students have a good command of grammar and advanced vocabulary, nevertheless, when facing a real social occasion, they cannot use words accurately.

In intercultural communication, because of the different cultural background, information transmission often appears deviation, this eventually leads to the pragmatic failures in cross-cultural communication, which can be broadly divided into two categories: linguistic failure and socio-pragmatic failure. In social communication, if you do not realize the difference in the meaning of the word, it is possible to cause some unnecessary misunderstanding. For instance, a female student sent an invitation to an American male teacher: "Please come to my bedroom when you have leisure time", apparently, this student does not realize that "dorm" does not mean "bedroom". Because Chinese students are
influenced by the national culture tradition, they use the expression of Chinese habit in cross-cultural communication pretty often, but this habit can sometimes cause bad effects. When talking to Americans, Chinese students always like to ask questions like that: "Where are you going?", "How many children do you have?", "How much money do you earn?", "Have you got married?", "Do you often write to you wife?", etc., these questions sound friendly and polite for most Chinese people, but they are pretty rude for Americans.

From some of the examples above we can clearly figure out: cross-cultural communication is definitely not simply based on language ability. D.H. Hymes proposed that communicative competence includes four aspects:

- Possibility: Knowledge of pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and so on.
- Feasibility: Acceptability of language use.
- Appropriateness: Language use is appropriate or not.
- Usefulness: Whether we use the language in real life.

In order to express appropriately in cross-cultural communication, it is necessary to consider our communication position, and pay attention to the relationship between ourselves and communicative objects.

**How can the same Gestures be treated differently in different cultures**

![Figure 3. Different Meaning of the Same Gesture in Different Cultures.](image)

**Cultivation of College Students' Cross-cultural Awareness.** With the continuous development of the global integration process, cultural exchanges have become an inevitable trend. In the promotion of this trend, human's thinking, languages, action are constantly changing. Therefore, cross-cultural communication has to be aroused our attention and reflection. Edward Sapir, an American linguist, once said: Language requires an environment, it cannot be separated from the culture and exist individually, and cannot be divorced from the social tradition and beliefs either. Namely, language is an important part of human culture, which is closely related to culture.
Conclusion

Language and culture are mutually integrated and inseparable, and learning only a set of language symbols is not the purpose of our study. In order to better communicate with native English speaker, we try to learn more about the culture connotation behind the language. During the process of teaching, learning a language is not an isolated process, and culture teaching needs combining with language teaching to cultivate students' sensitivity and insight, eventually improve the students' cross-cultural awareness and comprehensive use of language. In this paper, we propose several ways to help students improve their sense of cross-culture communication:

- Read classic literary works, and improve cultural literacy.
- Organize comparative lectures about Chinese and Western cultures which reflect the cultural differences.
- Teachers should teach cultural background information in language teaching, and cultivate students' cultural sensitivity.
- Carry out several theme activities which helps students feel the exotic culture.
- Make full use of multimedia resources to enrich the classroom content.

References


