

Culture Teaching in English Teaching in Secondary Education

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Abstract—For a long time there is consensus that in order to improve English teaching, teachers should put great emphasis on grammar, diction, sentences, etc. Influenced by this, students put all their efforts in remembering words, grammar, etc. and are made to understand English in their own cultural background mechanically. Language is a key component of culture and it is the carrier and container of culture. With the development of economy, technology and society, cross-cultural communication is necessary for every country. As a result, English teaching aims at not only helping students master the language itself, but cultivate their cross-cultural communication abilities. So culture teaching in English teaching is drawing more and more attention, especially for student in secondary education, who are being in adolescence. Necessary culture education will make them understand the difference between Chinese and English and cultivate their civic awareness, which is important to help form healthy cross-cultural awareness. The paper demonstrates the relationship between language and culture. Then it illustrates the necessity and the contents of culture teaching in English teaching. At last, some suggestions for English teachers are provided in order to help achieve the teaching effect.

Index Terms—language teaching, culture teaching, cross-cultural communication

I. INTRODUCTION

For a long time in English teaching in secondary education, influenced by traditional teaching, it's common to emphasize teaching of language form and neglect teaching of cultural factors. As a result, a large number of teachers form quite fixed mode of thinking and teaching pattern. They lay stress on whether the students have properly grasped the language form or whether they can use language fluently. On the other hand, they don't pay enough attention to cultivating students' language application competence in cross-cultural circumstance. It should be noted that one of the important goal of English teaching is to cultivate students' English communication competence. In order to enable the students to use English appropriately, it's necessary to let them learn some necessary knowledge about English culture. In English teaching, culture teaching should be combined with language teaching to help achieve the goal of improving students' communication competence.

II. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

Language is created during the long time of labor, daily life and cultural creation. It is the product of culture and also the media to form and link up cultural components (Deng & Liu, 1989). Language is very essential to culture. It is the foundation of culture ---culture couldn't exist without language. During its process of creation, development and change, language is naturally restricted and influenced by its own cultural system, and embodies deep humane property. It is filled with national cultural consciousness and represents national world outlook. It reflects the history and cultural background of a nation and embodies a nation's life style, thinking mode and point of view toward life. So language couldn't be expounded without mentioning its cultural background and knowledge in foreign language teaching.

Language provides a communication system for people. On the other hand, since every nation has its own tradition, value system and custom, language restricts people's communication mode. Because of the difference on custom, social culture and tradition, each nation differs a lot on the way one gets along with people, language usage and logic thinking, etc (Hu & Gao, 1991). It occurs that when a person uses a foreign language, what he says may be grammatically right, but quite inappropriate. He may be even misunderstood by native speakers and this may lead to unexpected consequence. This is the reason why learning a foreign language needs to grasp not only the rule of its structure, including phonetics, vocabulary and grammar, etc, but the rule of its usage, including the related factors that determine the appropriateness of the language being used. The rule of language usage includes all the influential cultural factors (Wang & Hu, 1994). For example, Chinese and English differ a lot on greetings. When Chinese meet they usually ask “吃了没”, which is just verbal greeting and has no deep connotation. It doesn't mean the speaker does care about whether the listener has had his lunch (or the speaker wants to invite the listener to dinner). Expressions like “上哪儿去” “干什么去?” are verbal greetings frequently used by Chinese. If a Chinese greets an English speaker with the translated version of the expression mentioned above, such as “Where are you going?”, it would certainly lead to misunderstanding or make the native speaker uncomfortable. The native speaker may react like this: “You are meddlesome!”

In English there're various kinds of greetings, among which “Hello, Hi, How are you, (Good) Morning” are frequently used. But it doesn't mean these expressions could be used in any occasion. There used to be a TV commercial advertisement broadcasted by Dezhou Television Station which introduces the dining tables produced by Ningjin Dining Table factory. At

the end of the advertisement it says Ningjin Dining Table, How are you!" The designer of the advertisement wants to end it with "Ningjin Dining Table shows best regards to you". But the translator fails to grasp the rule of English language usage and just arrange the English words according to Chinese word order. So the original meaning is turned into "How are you, Ningjin Dining Table", which is not in accordance with the original intention of the designer of the advertisement. The examples listed above shows the importance of the rule of language usage in foreign language learning.

III. NECESSITY FOR CULTURE TEACHING IN ENGLISH TEACHING

Through the discussion on the relationship between language and culture, it could be concluded that it's impossible for a person to learn English well without learning about the culture of English speaking countries. Students' language competence is determined by not only how much English language knowledge they have grasped but how much necessary cultural knowledge he has learned.

A. *Culture Teaching Is a Necessity of Social Development*

With China's entrance of the WTO, China and other countries are becoming closer and closer in politics, economy and culture. It is undoubted that cross-cultural communication will play an important role in this process. With China's reform and opening-up, a large amount of western culture gets into our country. People can easily contact various kinds of absurd western culture from network, pop music, American movies, fashion magazines. For language learners such as middle school students, who are being in adolescence, how should they be properly guided to view western culture and promote their communication ability? This is an important aspect of secondary education.

B. *Culture Teaching Is a Necessity of Cultivating Students' Cross-cultural Communication Ability*

To combine cultural teaching with English class teaching aims to make students realize deeply that they must learn about English speakers' thinking mode, behavior style and speech habits, etc. in order to communicate successfully with native speakers (Deng & Liu, 1989). If a Chinese student ask a foreign teacher "How much do you earn?", the foreigner would certainly think the speaker is crazy. Chinese people permit others to ask about their salary or age, but this kind of subjects is forbidden for foreigners. They think these subjects are their privacy which cannot be violated. What's more, teachers should also let students learn about the speech features of people with different social background, social status or occupation. Please see the following:

Professor: Good Morning, Mike.

Student: Hi, Professor Wilson.

This happens between a professor and his Chinese student. It's improper for Mike, a student, to adopt the informal form of greeting "Hi" to greet the professor. It's quite necessary for this student to grasp the function of language in order to avoid misunderstanding. Teachers should help students establish direct link between English speech form and communication mode and learn them by heart in order to improve their communication ability. English teaching should make students understand what kind of language style and language form should be adopted in a certain circumstance, how to express their feeling properly, etc. in order to communicate successfully in cross-cultural communication.

C. *Culture Teaching Contributes to Cultivate Students' Civic Awareness*

Culture introduction in foreign language teaching is necessary and unavoidable for learning well a language. Moreover, cultivating healthy cross-cultural awareness of students plays the most important role in culture teaching, because good and healthy cultural awareness of citizens is inseparable to the prosperity of a nation. Culture is the soul and spiritual sustenance of a nation and a nation needs culture to condense. China has a long history and is the most populous nation in the world. Chinese should take on corresponding responsibilities and obligations that China should have in the world peace and development. It is the responsibility of contemporary Chinese to make China part of the world in order to let the world share China's advanced culture and China share the world's advanced culture. It is also the needs of the world.

D. *Culture Teaching Is a Clear Requirement of the Existing English Curriculum Standard*

When setting up curriculum contents and objectives, *English Curriculum Standard* puts the cultivation of students' cross-cultural awareness as one of teaching objectives and views cultural awareness as an integral part of language competence. The Standard requires students to have certain cultural awareness. It means that teachers should make students learn and use English to solve practical problems on the basis of understanding western culture and the differences between Chinese and western cultures. In a word, as the Standard points out, cross-cultural teaching plays an important role in effective international communication. It's no doubt that culture introduction is very necessary to improve students' communication ability.

IV. CONTENTS OF CULTURE TEACHING IN ENGLISH TEACHING

Linguistic competence alone is not enough for learners of a language to master that language. Cultural competence is indisputably an integral part of foreign language learning (Lin, Gu & Lu, 1990). It is goal for teachers to incorporate teaching of culture into English curriculum. Teachers should teach both language knowledge and cultural knowledge. Teaching of cultural knowledge should be combined with teaching of language points, language structure and background knowledge, etc.

This could help students grasp the standard of their language and behavior during language usage and understand native speakers' thinking mode, etc. All these would encourage students to observe the cultural difference between different languages.

The following aspects are provided to combine culture teaching into English teaching:

A. *Geography, Living Environment and Life Style*

The learner should know the location to which to relate the target language. They also should know the geography of the country as a whole. In choosing a target area, our main concern will be to describe how the geography is perceived by native speakers. For example, in Canada, it is the narrow fringe closest to the United States which is the most inhabited. "Going up north", as might be said by a person living in Toronto, suggests not only travel in a north direction but a trip to less inhabited parts of the country. "up north" is also 'cottage country', or it might also be expressed as "going to the cottage. Therefore, students must understand that native speaker's "cottage". "going to the cottage" or "going up north" have a specific meaning that would not necessarily be the same in London or New York. It is part of the psychological geography of Canada which an English learner who wants to familiarize himself with the social setting needs to know about.

Many English-speaking countries lie on the sea, so fishery and seafaring become the pillar industry of their economy. English language is characterized by ocean culture. There are lots of idioms related to sea, boat and so on. For example, drink like fish (狂喝), be all at sea (不知所措) and so on. The Great Britain is situated in North Temperate Zone, so animal husbandry has held the first place in agriculture and the main crop is wheat. So British live on bread and milk. As a result, there appear the idioms "to earn one's bread", "Don't quarrel with your bread and butter", etc.

By knowing the information about location, students can know about geographical conditions and weather conditions. Such information is useful for them to know about some aspects of character of native speakers and certain life habits of the native speakers.

B. *Historical Culture*

History is a mirror of one nation. The teachers should let their students know the significant historical developments of the country. Students should have an opportunity to know the historical important symbols, notable events and the main personalities as well as critical issues, past and present. But it needs to be looked at from the point of view of native speakers. History cannot be changed, and it reflects the process of a nation's growth. By knowing about the important persons in its history, the historical issues of it, students can not only get a rough idea about its past, but also explain the present issues or even anticipate the future of the country. So they can get a deep understanding about the culture of the nation.

Language comes into being through the long history with people's wisdom and efforts. Historical allusions are the treasure of a nation's history and culture with strong national features. Capitalism began to develop since the 16th century in Britain, which promoted the economic development and social progress in all-round way. Britain began its overseas expansion to plunder raw materials for the first capital accumulation. The proverb "Shoe-maker's wife goes bare feet" was born in that period. In order to scrape money, the shoe-maker even hesitates to make a pair of shoes for his wife. Historical allusions in English mainly come from Greek mythology, Holy Bible and Shakespeare's plays. People in English-speaking countries may say "That's all Greek to me", "He met his Waterloo" and so on. The proverb or allusion has profound historical and cultural connotation.

C. *People and Institutions*

About culture teaching, the focus should be mainly on people, how people live, and what they think, value and do. By personal contacts, visits with, such as foreign teachers etc, students can know something about the local life-style. Getting to know one individual can give the student an entry into this aspect of a culture, for every person is a member of the society. Teachers should give their students information about people of target country in order to increase the cultural knowledge of the students.

Next, institutions. Students should have a rough idea about the symbol of the government---central, regional and local educational system, social welfare, economic institutions, the military and the police, religious institutions (Hu, 1995). It's necessary for students to understand the cultural knowledge of the target country. It is also useful for them to analyze some political or some other important issues. Without such kind of information, learners cannot understand some issues happened in target countries. Different nations have different managing mode and different regulations. Foreign language learners should not analyze political issues of target country under their own cultural background. Teachers should introduce the information about institutions to students to help them deeply understand the target culture.

D. *Religious Belief*

Religion comes into being after human society and human mind developed to a certain level. And it has played a significant role in all aspects of social and cultural anthropology.

As we all know, the influence of religion to the western world is very profound, permeating every aspect of society. And Christian culture has a predominant position in the English-speaking countries. The basic spirit of Christian is industriousness, frugality, materialism and the pursuit of individualism which places much emphasis on the equal rights of individual, laissez-faire, equal opportunities and moral improvement. What's more, the Christian culture also has a great influence on their daily life and practice. For example, people in western world will not go out to take part in any activities in the date of 13.

According to Bible, Judah who kills Jesus is the 13th disciple of Jesus and the date of that dinner is also 13. So this number is very ominous in western world. Many words that appear in the Bible have been given specific culture connotations. For example, olive branch is the symbol of peace. And Friday is an unlucky day. Some people believe so because Jesus was killed on Friday. Some others believe so because Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden for eating the forbidden fruit on the Friday. All the taboo reflects the cultural psychology that people expect peace and good luck under the restriction of the religious belief.

E. Art, Literature, Music and so on

Art, Literature, Music, etc. are valuable wealth of the target country. They also reflect the culture of target country. For students, they should be able to have an appreciation of some artists, musicians, and writers and their works, and know about other great figures and their contributions, which are common knowledge of the target country. All these are real reflection of people's life. For example, the music of American black people can express the feeling or mood of black people. By listening to the music, students can not only enjoy the music, but also get some information about their culture.

V. SUGGESTIONS FOR LANGUAGE TEACHERS

How to improve culture teaching is a heated topic. The following suggestions are provided...

A. Adopting Role-play

The way of role-play is often used in culture teaching. After learning a conversation of foreign language, teachers can let students practice it in real communication. Teachers can divide the students into small groups, then let them practice the conversation one by one. By this way they can use what they have learned flexibly, and adjust to the foreign culture. In this way, students can be familiar with the cultural context of the conversations.

B. Establishing Target Culture Atmosphere

Try best to establish a teaching environment filled with target culture in order to let the students know well what appropriate expression should be used in a certain situation (Shu, Wang & Wu, 1994). This method can help prevent students from being interfered by their native culture during the process of foreign language learning. Authentic sources from the native community help to engage students in authentic cultural experiences. The sources include films, news broadcast, television shows, photographs, magazines, newspapers, restaurant menus, trip brochures, and other printed materials (Shen, 1990). The teachers can supply students with a detailed translation or give them explanation to help them understand. After they have viewed the relevant segments, teachers can engage the students in discussion of the cultural norms represented in the segment. Students can compare the behaviors they observe with their native culture.

English teaching programs on TV or Internet are suggested for the colorful cultural information and language material they provide. Usually, these programs not only teach appropriate language but present non-verbal communication, such as appropriate gesture, posture, movement, etc. Here an important step should be suggested for the teachers. After students have viewed the English teaching program, it's better for teachers to give students some guide and let them discuss on certain topic based on the contents in the program. This can help them understand the cultural difference between English and Chinese. For example, let them tell the difference about the way of apologizing between English and Chinese. At last teachers can give a certain topic and let the students make a conversation. They should design the plot and assign each partner's role. After students' presentation, teachers should make comments, point out the formally right but inappropriate expressions and give the right expression. This way can help make students be responsive to foreign culture.

C. Exposure to the Target Culture

It is an effective way of culture teaching. For English learning beginners, there is no doubt that it is a hard task. It needs the students to have some basic linguistic knowledge about the target countries. The exchange of letters is one of the simplest techniques by which a student can gain a sense of reality. Correspondence ranges over many aspects of personal concern. Pen-friends can compare notes on various aspects of their lives and in this way build up a picture of life in the target community.

Visit from native speakers to the target speech community is also very helpful for students. The native speakers provide a sense of authenticity, and move the foreign language from the textbook page into concrete reality. By listening to the native speaker's own experience, the students can enjoy their culture vividly. Foreign teachers are good partners for students to learn English. Through daily contact with foreign teachers, students can get vivid information that couldn't be obtained in the classroom. From their personal conversation with foreign teachers students can realize what kind of expression or behavior is appropriate and what isn't, and sense the cultural difference directly. Foreign teachers, as intermediary and explainer between two cultures, they can give lively explanation about the difference between students' native culture and target culture. This way can help prevent students from evaluating foreign culture in terms of the criteria of their native culture. From the foreign teachers' personal experience in China, students' cultural awareness can be cultivated to a large extent.

D. Organizing Activities

English teachers can organize some activities to create linguistic environment. They can organize English corner, English party, or English contest. Such activities can stimulate the interest of students. Through these activities, students can not only

deeply understand what they have learned at class, but also practice it in the real communication. For example, by organizing English party, students can get chances to enjoy the target culture in a relaxing way. English party can also improve students' oral English level and language communication competence. The repeated rehearsal before the presentation can be seen as a process to develop their language learning and culture learning. In this way, their interest for learning English language and English culture can be greatly aroused. Teachers' guidance is sometimes necessary in these activities

E. Guiding Students in Reading

Nowadays in English learning, for most English learners, to learn about the English society mainly depend on reading material, such as novels, magazines, newspapers, etc. Literary readings have an important place in culture teaching. In many cultures literature performs an important role in society. Literary works sometimes epitomize the thoughts, feelings, and values of the target culture in memorable ways. By enjoying literature, students can know many aspects of the English countries, including the cultural aspects. Magazines and newspaper give abundant information about current English society. When students read these materials, teachers should guide them collect the information about cultural background, customs, social relations, etc reflected in the material. It should be noticed that some students read only for fun or to enlarge their vocabulary while paying little attention to the cultural information embodied in the material. Guide the students to read in a correct way with necessary analysis and comparison is very helpful to enrich their knowledge about foreign culture.

VI. CONCLUSION

Culture must be fully incorporated as a vital component of language. Culture teaching plays an important role in fulfilling the goal of cultivating the cross-cultural communication abilities. English teaching should enable students to function effectively in another language and understand cultural context, including day-to-day conventions, giving or receiving presents, paying visits, etc (Hu & Gao, 1997). Teachers should identify the relationship between culture teaching and language teaching and realize the key culture items in English. They also should try to find out more useful strategies for culture teaching in the process of English teaching.

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