An Investigation into the Culture-Loaded Words Learning by English Majors in a Vocational College in China

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Abstract

Culture-loaded words and expressions are loaded with specific national cultural information and indicate deep national culture. They are the direct and indirect reflection of national culture in the structure of words and expressions. The improper use of culture-loaded words often leads to misunderstanding in cross-cultural communication. However, few systematic researches on culture-loaded words learning and teaching in vocational college have been conducted in China. The study attempts to investigate the present situation of English culture-loaded words learning among vocational college English majors in vocational college; the attitude by students and teachers towards English culture-loaded words learning and teaching in vocational college; the differences and similarities in their opinions through culture-loaded words test and a questionnaire for students as well as an interview for teachers. Results showed that the vocational college English majors' learning of the English culture-loaded words is rather inadequate and unsatisfactory, which reflects that great attention should be paid to the cultivating of students' culture awareness and their acquisition of cultural knowledge.

Keywords: China, Culture-loaded words, cultural instruction, English learning, English majors, vocational college

1. Introduction

Vocabulary, as the most basic and active element of language, often embodies social life and the changes of social thoughts. Many words convey cultural-specific information and connotation. Culture-loaded words refer to the words, of which the connotation may be enlarged or diminished in the process of communication, and to the words of which some associated features are accumulated for its frequency in special occasions. They are culturally specific. Culture-loaded words can be regarded as words, idioms, or expressions which have a typical meaning in a particular culture. They are the words embedded in their distinctive culture and foreigners who want to learn them well need to know their cultural implications.

Nowadays scholars and language educators have been focusing their attention on the teaching of culture-loaded words, since the cross-cultural communication breakdown often results from the improper use of culture-loaded words. Successful second language acquisition is accompanied by second culture acquisition. A learners' acquisition of communicative competence involves more than the command of the grammatical structures of the target language. The learner must also acquire cultural background knowledge and a set of culture-specific constraints on linguistic behavior. (Brown, 2001)

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definition of Culture-Loaded Words

Culture and words have very intimate relationship. For instance, in English, the address "uncle" is used to call all male relatives who enjoy the same position with parents in family while in China "叔叔" (shushu)，"伯伯" (bobo)，"姨夫" (yifu) and "姑夫" (gufu)are used. And many terms like"太后吉祥" (taihoujixiang)and "请安" (qingan)used in royal court in ancient China have no exact equivalent in English. Hu Wenzhong (1999) defines culture-loaded words:

"Culturally-loaded words and expressions are loaded with specific national cultural information and indicate deep national culture. They are the direct and indirect reflection of national culture in the structure of words and

expressions." (Hu, 1999)

Culture-loaded words can be regarded as word, idioms, or expressions which have a typical meaning in a particular culture. They are the words embedded in their distinctive culture and foreigners need to understand their cultural implications. In Hu's opinion, he distinguishes culturally loaded words and expressions from non-culturally- loaded ones. He contends that in the process of communication, the connotation of culture-loaded words may be extended or diminished, because a person learns a foreign language usually for the purpose of acquiring the communicative ability across cultures (Hu, 1999). The other view on the definition of culture-loaded words comes from the widely-known linguist called Lado. He illustrates the definition in his work (1972): "Culture loaded words refer to those lexical items that are similar in primary meaning in both L1 and L2 but different meaning in connotation." However, this definition doesn't include some cultural specific words, which specifically is a part of culture-loaded words.

In addition, according to Professor Wang Dechun (1998), culture-loaded words are words which reflect the history, culture and folk customs of a country in which a certain language is used, and they bear the obvious characteristics of the national culture. According to Newmark (1998), culture-loaded words, whether single-unit lexemes, phrases or collocations are those which are particularly tied to the way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression.

Mona Baker (2000), Director of the Center for Translation and International Studies at the University of Manchester in England, also gives her vision about culture-loaded words. "The words from the source text may convey a concept utterly new for the target culture. Be it abstract or concrete, the concepts are culture-sensitive" In the Baker's definition, the concepts mentioned can be anything related to a culture.

To sum up, culture-loaded words are culturally specific. For example, when French people learn English, the word "red" may not be considered as a culture-loaded word for in these two languages the word "red" has the same connotation, while for Chinese English learners, "red" does not make people associate with evil, which may be regarded as a culture-loaded word. In English learning, learners should pay more attention to those culture-loaded words which have different cultural meanings from their culture.

2.2 Classification of Culture-Loaded Words

Different scholars categorize the classification of culture-loaded words differently based upon their perspectives and angles. Generally speaking, culture-loaded words can be classified according to two bases, one is on the basis of lexical semantics, and the other is in terms of categories.

2.2.1 Classification on the Basis of Lexical Semantics

Scholars from China have different classified culture-loaded words in terms of denotation and connotation, according to Jia's study (1997), culture-loaded words can be classified into four categories. (1) The words with the same denotation, but different or opposite connotations in both languages. (2) The words with the same denotation, and partially similar connotations in both languages. (3) The words with the same denotation, but only connotative reference in one language. (4) The words with different denotations and connotations in both languages. It is common that words have no correspondent denotation and connotation, because of the differences in geography, philosophy, religion and customs.

2.2.2 Classification in Terms of Categories

This classification is based on the categories of English vocabulary. According to Chen and Tan (1993), culture-loaded words can be divided into 24 types of categories: art, plant, animal, figure, military, architecture, kinship, medical and health, body, sport, time, education, machine, spirit, economy, color, space, traffic, metal/sand/soil, geography, natural phenomena, and number. In Lian Shuneng's view (1997), culture-loaded words can be grouped into as many as 26 types, which include: color, animal, plant, political, euphemism taboos, proverbs, idioms, allusions, etc. Wang Rongpei (2002) makes a more concrete classification and divides culture-loaded words into 8 categories: Animal, color, food, human body, legend and mythology, social life, politics and other words. Detailed information is as follows:

Animal words like black sheep, cold fish, a lame duck

Color words like red, white lie, black list, in the pink

Food words like doggy bag, in hot water, go bananas

Human body words like to get cold feet, up to one's ears, rubber neck

Legend and mythology words like cowboy, Uncle Tom, a kiss of death

Social life words like hippies, yuppies

Politics words like idealism, materialism, propaganda

Other words like D-day, to knock your socks off, poker face

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Questions

The present study attempts to find out the answer to the following questions:

Question 1: What's the present situation of English culture-loaded words learning among vocational college English majors in a Chinese vocational college?

Question 2: What's the attitude by students and teachers towards English culture-loaded words learning and teaching in this vocational college? What are the differences and similarities in their opinions?

3.2 Subjects

The students participating in the study are 140 English major students drawn from sophomores of grade 2012 in Jiangxi College of Foreign Studies in China. All of them are native speakers of Chinese who are in three natural different classes. Their ages range from 17 to 22, with the average age of 19.25. The majority of them have been exposed to English learning since they were in junior middle school, and some even in elementary school, which means that every one of them has at least seven years of experience in learning English. Besides, they have studied English as major for nearly three semesters in the same college English curriculum syllabus.

The teachers participating in the study are 12 English teachers selected from English Department of Jiangxi College of Foreign Studies in China who mainly teach English major students such courses as Intensive Reading, Extensive Reading, Oral English, Listening, Writing, Translation and other courses. Their ages range from 28 to 52, with the average age of 38.75. More than half of them have the teaching experience of fifteen years or so. They are sampled for opinions and attitudes towards culture-loaded words teaching in English class.

3.3 Instruments

In order to find out the status quo of the vocational college English majors' learning of culture-loaded words, this research consists of a culture-loaded words test, a questionnaire and an interview as the research instruments.

3.3.1 Culture-loaded Words Test

The culture-loaded words test used in the study is based upon the design and the classification of culture-loaded words by Wang Rongpei (2002). In order to examine the students' learning of culture-loaded words, 50 commonly-used culture-loaded words in daily life and communication are carefully chosen for the test according to Wang Rongpei's classification of culture-loaded words, consisting of animal words(Question 1-8), color words(Question 9-16), food words(Question 17-23), human body words(Question 24-30), legend and mythology words(Question 31-36), social life words(Question 37-41), politics words(Question 42-45) and other words(Question 46-50).

The test includes 50 questions and takes the form of multiple choices. Two points for each question and the total score is 100 with the passing line of 60. Each question has only one best answer, which could clearly reveal subjects' understanding and learning of culture-loaded words and knowledge of culture. Regarding to reliability, results showed that the alpha value is 0.730, which suggests that the test has an internal consistency.

3.3.2 Questionnaire

There are sixteen questions in the students' questionnaire altogether. The first part (Question 1) is about students' knowledge of culture-loaded words. The second part (Question 2-7) includes six multiple choices which aims at finding out students' view on teachers' instruction of culture-loaded words. The third part (Question 8-12) focuses on students' attitude and approaches to learn culture-loaded words. The last part (Question 13-16) consists of two multiple choices and two open-ended questions to explore students' difficulties and suggestions on culture-loaded words learning. Results showed that the alpha value is 0.721, which suggests that the questionnaire has an internal consistency. Since the last two questions are open-ended, they are not included in the reliability test.

3.3.3 Interview

In order to find out the present situation of culture-loaded words learning among vocational college English majors, an interview is designed for teachers besides the culture-loaded words test and questionnaire for students. The interview questions designed for teachers are: (1) How much do you know about culture-loaded words? (2)

What are your attitude and techniques adopted in culture-loaded words instruction? (3) What are the difficulties you meet in culture-loaded words instruction? (4) What are your suggestions in teaching culture-loaded words well?

3.4 Procedures

Culture-loaded words test was conducted firstly in 2014, followed by the questionnaire for students. The last comes to the interview for teachers.

3.5 Data Collection and Analysis

Data collected from the culture-loaded words test, questionnaire and interview are analyzed by SPSS and Microsoft Excel software.

4. Results and Discussion of the Research

4.1 Results and Analysis of Culture-loaded Words Test

In this part, based on the data collected, a specified analysis is presented on the students' understanding and learning of the English culture-loaded words.

4.1.1 General Description and Discussion of the Culture-loaded Words Test

Table 1. General Information on results of the culture-loaded words test

Number of Samples	Maximum Score	Minimum Score	Mean Score	Std. Deviation
140	88	22	41.743	12.184

Table 1 shows general information on results of the test. The minimum score is 22 while the maximum one is 88, which demonstrates that the students' understanding and learning of culture-loaded words is very different and there is a large gap between the top students and the one who gets the minimum score. The mean score of the total 140 students is 41.74, which is much lower than the passing line 60.

The general results of the test show that the vocational college English majors' understanding and learning of culture-loaded words are poor, which reflects that vocational college English majors have inadequate knowledge about culture-loaded words. Most of them do have problems on understanding and learning of the English culture-loaded words. Therefore, there is a lot we should do to improve students' understanding of cultural knowledge and enhance their learning of culture-loaded words.

Table 2. Distribution of the score of the culture-loaded words test

	The Score Continuum	Number of Subjects	Percentage
Failed	21~59	129	92.14%
Passed	60~90	11	7.86%

As it is shown in the Table 2, the scores of the students mainly range from 21-59, which accounts for the majority of the students. The number of the students who pass the test is rather small with a rate of 7.86%, which is less than 8%. The unsatisfactory results show the firm evidence that most of the vocational college English majors have poor understanding and learning of culture-loaded words.

4.1.2 Detailed Distribution and Discussion of the Culture-loaded Words Test

In addition to the general analysis of the results of the culture-loaded words test presented in the former part, a more detailed explanation in terms of score distribution of each category is presented in the following. The purpose is to figure out which category the students perform best, and which part the students perform worst and the reasons that cause the phenomenon.

Table 3. Distribution of correct responses across different categories

Number of Items	Categories	Number of Correct Responses	Percentage of Correct Responses
Questions1-8	Animal words	483	43.13%
Questions9-16	Color words	588	52.50%
Questions17-23	Food words	485	49.49%
Questions24-30	Human Body words	276	28.16%
Questions31-36	Legend and Mythology words	270	32.14%
Questions37-41	Social Life words	269	38.43%
Questions42-45	Politics words	214	38.21%
Questions46-50	Other words	337	48.14%

Table 3 indicates the status quo of students' understanding and learning of culture-loaded words from different aspects in eight categories. From the statistics we can find that the category of color words gets the highest percentage of correct responses of 52.50%. It means that the students' understanding and learning of color words are relatively better than the other seven categories, though the results are not so satisfactory. The category of food words and other words get the second and third rank with the percentage of correct responses of 49.49% and 48.14% respectively. Moreover, the category of human body words gets the poorest results with the percentage of correct responses of 28.16%, which demonstrates that students' understanding and learning of human body words are rather poor. It can be inferred from the table that students' knowledge of culture-loaded words is inadequate and students' understanding and learning of culture-loaded words are rather poor.

4.1.3 Further Distribution and Discussion on Each Item

From the previous analysis and distribution, it can be found that there exists a huge difference in the students' performance on each category of culture-loaded words and each item from the same category. The following section will provide the further detailed analysis on each item to figure out the differences.

4.1.3.1 The Items about Animal

Table 4. Distribution of correct responses on animal words

Questions	Animal Words	Number of Correct Responses	Percentage of Correct Responses
1	rain cats and dogs	105	75.0%
2	talk horse	21	15.0%
3	dragon lady	46	32.9%
4	like a duck to water	35	25.0%
5	as slow as a snail	90	64.3%
6	black sheep	60	42.9%
7	white elephant	78	55.7%
8	cold fish	48	34.3%

Table 4 tells the distribution of percentage of correct responses of animal words. Comparatively speaking, students do a relatively better job in this section. As it is shown in Table 4, there are 8 questions in this category. The students perform best on question 1, as 75% of them choose the correct answer. The phrase "rain cats and dogs" refers to "a heavy downpour", which has been taught in both intensive reading class and oral English class.

Then the results of question 5 are also satisfactory with the percentage of correct responses of 64.3%: "as slow as a snail" is often used to describe a slow, inefficient process. The apparent reason of the students' better

performance in this question is that the students' have already been instructed the expression in listening English class, from the textbook-New Horizon College English Viewing, Listening and Speaking II, Unit 2 Does your friend have four legs?

Besides 55.7%, 42.9%, 34.3% of the students choose right answers in questions 7, 6 and 8 respectively: "white elephant" means "vanity". It derives from the story that the kings of Siam were accustomed to make a present of one of these animals to courtiers who had rendered themselves obnoxious, in order to ruin the recipient by the cost of its maintenance. The lack of relevant western cultural background knowledge mainly accounts for the students' failure in this question.

Another example is question 6 "black sheep" with the meaning of "an odd or disreputable member of a group, especially within a family". This phrase originates from the traditional concept that black sheep are less valuable than white ones, since it's more difficult to dye their wool different colors. In 18th and 19th century England, the black color of the sheep was seen as the mark of the devil.

In addition, only 32.9%, 25% and 15% of the students give the right answers to the rest questions 3, 4, 2 respectively. Among them, the results of question 3 are a little better. "Dragon lady" means "women as strong, deceitful, domineering or mysterious"; "like a duck to water" refers to "doing things easily and naturally"; "talk horse" means "boast of". The results of these 3 questions reveal that a large number of students are not familiar with the connotative meaning of animals such as, dragon, duck, and horse in English language. They tend to connect the meaning of these culture-loaded words with their Chinese counterparts. That's why they use "tiger lady", "like fish to water", and "talk ox" instead.

4.1.3.2 The Items about Color

Table 5. Distribution of correct responses on color words

Questions	Color Words	Number of Correct Responses	Percentage of Correct Responses
9	black in the face	107	76.4%
10	green hand	73	52.1%
11	white feather	53	37.9%
12	blue mood	104	74.3%
13	in the red	69	49.3%
14	white lie	116	82.9%
15	blue with cold	30	21.4%
16	pink slip	36	25.7%

Table 5 demonstrates the distribution of correct responses on color words. Students under the study do the best in the color group of words among the 8 types of words. From the table we can find that except the percentage of correct responses 37.9% with question 11, 25.7% with question 16 and 21.4% with question 15, that of the other 5 questions surpasses 45%. Question 14 has the highest percentage of correct responses of 82.9%. "White lie" refers to "a deliberate untrue statement which does no harm or is intended to produce a favorable result". The phrase has been taught in English classes and it's commonly used in the daily communication. That's why most of the students not only know the conceptual meaning of the phrase, but also the cultural connotation of it.

In terms of the questions 9, 12 and 10, the percentage of correct responses is 76.4%, 74.3% and 52.1% respectively. "Black in the face" means "very angry"; "blue mood" refers to "sadness"; "green hand" is often used to describe anyone young, inexperienced, probably by the analogy to immature and unripe fruit. Green is the color most commonly associated in Europe and the U.S. with youth, nature, vivacity and life; while in China it is associated with the east, sunrise, life and growth. More than half of the students are correct in the question of the word "green", which reflects that they comprehend well the cultural meaning of the word. The cultural connotations of these color words are similar in English and Chinese, therefore they can be easily acquired by Chinese students.

The questions 13, 11 and 16 get comparatively lower percentage of correct responses of 49.3%, 37.9% and

25.7% respectively. Among them, the results of question 13 are a little better: "in the red" means "having net losses or in debt". The phrase originates from the standard accounting practice of using red ink to denote negative values, especially a net loss. Though the cultural connotation of "in the red" is similar with that of its Chinese counterpart "赤字"(chizi), the meaning of the word "red" in both cultures is different. In China, "red" is usually associated with concept of prosperity, auspiciousness, happiness and being popular. Moreover the meaning of the symbol of revolutions has been added since modern times. But the English word "red" doesn't have such meaning. In English, it often refers to blood and evil.

In addition, question 11 "white feather" means "a traditional symbol or mark of cowardice", which comes from cockfighting and the belief that a cock sporting a white feather in its tail is likely to be a poor fighter. The low percentage of correct responses of question 11 reveals students' poor mastery of cultural background knowledge.

Question 15 "blue with cold" suffers the lowest percentage of correct responses of 21.4%. Compared with the question 12 "blue mood" with the percentage of correct responses of 74.3%, the results of question 15 are rather unsatisfactory. Students' different performance on these two questions reflects that students grasp the cultural meaning of the word "blue" to some extent. In English, "blue" is often associated with harmony, faithfulness, confidence, distance, infinity, the imagination, sadness and cold. Most of the students are familiar with the meaning of "sadness". But only a few students grasp the meaning of "cold".

Generally speaking, students perform best in the category of color words. They realize the difference in cultural meaning of color words between Chinese and western culture and pay some attention to these words. Moreover, they have a comparatively better understanding of the frequently-used cultural connotations of color words.

4.1.3.3 The Items about Food

Table 6. Distribution of correct responses on food words

Questions	Food Words	Number of Correct Responses	Percentage of Correct Responses
17	couch potato	53	37.9%
18	as easy as pie	69	49.3%
19	big cheese	42	30.0%
20	sour grape	87	62.1%
21	daily bread	118	84.3%
22	in the soup	68	48.6%
23	spill the beans	48	34.3%

Table 6 shows the distribution of percentage of correct responses of food words. Food word group is the second best job done by students in this test. There are 7 questions in this category. Question 21 "daily bread" which refers to "all those things, such as regular food and water, needed to sustain physical life" gets the highest percentage of correct responses of 84.3%, because it has been mentioned in English classes. And the reason for the better results of the question 20 (62.1%) is that "sour grape" and its Chinese counterpart "酸葡萄" (suanputao) has almost the same connotation of "making a false pretense to form a rationalization".

Then 49.3% of the students choose the correct answers in question 18. "As easy as pie" means "a task or experience as pleasurable and simple". The factor that leads to the students' poor understanding and learning of the phrase is that while some food such as pie, cheese is popular in western countries, it's rarely eaten in China. As a result, it is rather difficult for Chinese students to understand such phrases. Another example is question 19. Only 30% of the students grasp the connotation of "big cheese" which refers to "a boss or other senior person".

Question 22 "in the soup" refers to "being in trouble". The reason why more than half of the students are wrong in this question is that the phrase is given peculiar meaning in English, while it doesn't exist in Chinese. The same situation goes with the question 23 "spill the beans" with the meaning of "to reveal a secret". This culture-loaded word is frequently used in western culture, but difficult for Chinese students. In summary, students have a better grasp of the commonly-used food words than that of rarely-used ones.

4.1.3.4 The Items about Human Body

Table 7. Distribution of correct responses on human body words

Questions	Human Body Words	Number of Correct Responses	Percentage of Correct Responses
24	cold shoulder	23	16.4%
25	an arm and a leg	34	24.3%
26	thumb up	50	35.7%
27	make one's hair stand on end	46	32.9%
28	play by ear	46	32.9%
29	an arm's length	47	33.6%
30	turn up one's nose	30	21.4%

Table 7 displays the distribution of correct responses of human body words from questions 24 to 30. From the table, we can see that students' scores in this category are quite low. Except the percentage of correct responses of 35.7% with question 26, that of the other 6 questions is below 35%. It reveals that most of the students don't understand the cultural connotative meaning of human body words, though many of the words are considered as the most commonly used ones in English. Compared with Chinese, English is abundant with body language, thus there are a lot of English words and idioms related with the part of human body, which usually become obstacles for Chinese students in English learning.

The results of the question 26 are comparatively better than those of the other questions, because "to thumb up" and its Chinese counterpart "竖起大拇指" (shuqidamuzhi) enjoy the same connotation of "to vote for". That's why it is not too hard for the students to answer the question. But students' performance on questions 24, 25 and 30 is rather poor. Take question 24 "cold shoulder" as an example. The phrase means "a deliberate act of disrespect; a slight or snub", even though it's frequently used in people's daily life in the British an American societies, it suffers the lowest percentage of correct responses of 16.4% in this category. Question 25 "an arm and a leg" is another example. It refers to "a high price to pay for something", which is a common word in English language.

Question 27 "make one's hair stand on end" and question 28 "play by ear" which mean "be scared" and "to do something randomly or unplanned" enjoy the same percentage of correct responses of as low as 32.9%. It indicates that most of the students don't know these expressions and the related cultural connotative meaning.

Generally speaking, many factors may lead to the students' poor performance in this section. First, English is full of culture-relevant human body words which are rarely-used in Chinese. Second, some of human body words are given peculiar meaning in western culture, while they don't exist in Chinese culture. Third, classroom English bears little connection with daily life English in which human body words are commonly-used. It loses its function of practicability and not helpful for students in their daily use.

4.1.3.5 The Items about Legend and Mythology

Table 8. Distribution of correct responses on legend and mythology words

Questions	Legend and Mythology Words	Number of Correct Responses	Percentage of Correct Responses
31	Pandora's box	52	37.1%
32	under the rose	65	46.4%
33	as false as Cressida	27	19.3%
34	the sword of Damocles	53	37.9%
35	a Penelope's web	25	17.9%
36	swan song	48	34.3%

Table 8 shows the distribution of percentage of correct responses of legend and mythology words. This category includes 6 questions. As Table 9 reveals, students do a comparatively worse job in this section. The highest percentage of correct responses among the six questions is only 46.4% with the question 32. Then 37.9%, 37.1% and 34.3% of the students' answers are right in the questions 34, 31 and 36 respectively. As for the rest questions 33 and 35, the percentage of correct responses only stands at 19.3% and 17.9% respectively.

The lack of relevant western cultural knowledge mainly accounts for the students' low scores in this category. Some of these questions are originated from popular stories in the west. For example, the question 31 "Pandora's box" originates from the Greek mythology, which refers to "an action that may seem small or innocent, but that turns out to have severely detrimental and far-reaching consequences", and the question 33 "as false as Cressida" from the story of Cressida and Troilus means "those who forsake their lovers".

Some other questions are in close connection with the deep-rooted belief in the western culture. Question 36 is an example, which means "a final theatrical or dramatic appearance, or any final work or accomplishment". The phrase comes from the ancient belief that swans sing a beautiful song in the moment just before death, having been silent during most of their lifetime.

There are mainly three factors for students' poor understanding of legend and mythology words. Firstly, teachers seldom introduce or explain these words in English classes, because there is only a few legend and mythology words in English textbooks and time is limited in class. Secondly, various versions of legend and mythology in western cultures make the learning of them much harder. Thirdly, most of the students are not interested in western legend and mythology, so they seldom read the related articles or books after class.

4.1.3.6 The Items about Social Life

Table 9. Distribution of correct responses on social life words

Questions	Social Life Words	Number of Correct Responses	Percentage of Correct Responses
37	face the music	59	42.1%
38	last straw	88	62.9%
39	get the sack	31	22.1%
40	go Dutch	57	40.7%
41	go through fire and water	34	24.3%

Questions 37 to 41 in Table 9 shows the distribution of percentage of correct responses of social life words. We can see from Table 4.10 that the results of each question are very different: the results of question 38 are the best with the percentage of correct responses of 62.9%; the results of questions 37 and 40 are relatively better with that of 42.1% and 40.7% respectively; the results of questions 41 and 39 are rather poor with that of 24.3% and 22.1% respectively.

Question 38 "last straw" means "the final irritation that stretches one's patience beyond the limit". The reason for the better results of the question 38 is that: first, "last straw" enjoy the same connotative meaning as its Chinese counterpart "最后一根稻草" (zuihouyigendaocao); second, it has been learned from the textbook-College English Intensive Reading II，Unit 3 My First Job.

And the question 37 "face the music" with the meaning of "to accept or confront the unpleasant consequences of one's actions" is also mentioned in English classes, but it is not from any textbook, thus many students still make mistakes in the question, which indicates that students tend to pay more attention to the words in textbooks than those from other resources. In addition, almost half of the students understand the meaning of "to go Dutch" due to its popularity among college students.

The main reason for the poor results of the other questions is that the words in this category cover an extremely wide area. For example, question 39 "get the sack" is an allusion to tradesmen who owned their own tools, taking them within a bag or sack when they were dismissed from employment, while the question 40 "to go fire and water" originates from the judgment used by Anglo-Saxon in Middle Ages.

4.1.3.7 The Items about Politics

Table 10. Distribution of correct response on politics words

Questions	Politics Words	Number of Correct Responses	Percentage of Correct Responses
42	Uncle Sam	35	25.0%
43	Downing Street	41	29.3%
44	the Declaration of Independence	71	50.7%
45	I have a dream	67	47.9%

Table 10 presents the distribution of percentage of correct responses of politics words in questions 42 to 45. The results of each question are very different: the results of the question 44 and 45 are comparatively satisfactory, with the percentage of correct responses of 50.7% and 47.9% respectively while those of the question 42 and 43 are rather poor, with the percentage of correct responses below 30%.

The reason for the better performance of the questions 44 and 45 is that question 44 "the Declaration of Independence" has been taught in the textbook College English Intensive Reading II Unit 2 Lessons From Thomas Jefferson and question 45 " I have a dream" is mentioned not only in intensive reading class, but also by other English teachers. Very few students give the correct answers to the questions 42 and 43, because "Uncle Sam" and "Downing Street" are not mentioned in textbooks or instructed by English teachers. Besides students themselves seldom read news or acquire historical knowledge after class.

From the students' performance in this category, it can be concluded that though it is difficult for students to understand politics words, cultural connotation of politics words can be acquired through effective and efficient instruction conducted by teachers in class.

4.1.3.8 The Items about Other Words

Table 11. Distribution of correct responses on other words

Questions	Other Words	Number of Correct Responses	Percentage of Correct Responses
46	on pins and needles	102	72.9%
47	at the eleventh hour	60	42.9%
48	go whole hog	56	40.0%
49	carry coals to Newcastle	39	27.9%
50	in a fog	80	57.1%

The results from Table 11 shows that students have a better command in this category, for the percentage of correct responses of question 46 is 72.9%, that of question 50 is 57.1%, that of questions 47 and 48 is 42.9% and 40% respectively, that of question 49 is 27.9%. The results of question 46 are much better than those of the other questions since "on pins and needles" and its Chinese counterpart "如坐针毡" (ruzuozhenzhan) share the same connotation "to feel sharp anticipation or anxiety". The same situation goes with the question 50 "in a fog" and its Chinese counterpart "迷雾重重" (miwuchongchong)have the same connotative meaning. At the same time, more than 70% of the students cannot understand question 49 "carry coals to Newcastle" with the meaning of "to do something that is unneeded or redundant", because they don't know Newcastle was a major coal exporting place.

4.2 Results and Analysis of the Students' Questionnaire

The questionnaire for the students consists of four main parts: The first part is about students' knowledge of culture-loaded words (Question 1). The second part includes 6 multiple choices which aims at finding out students' view on teachers' instruction of culture-loaded words (Questions 2-7). The third part focuses on

students' attitude and approaches to learn culture-loaded words (Questions 8-12). The last part consists of two multiple choices and two open-ended questions to explore students' difficulties and suggestions on culture-loaded words learning (Questions 13-16).

Table 12. Students' knowledge of culture-loaded words in part 1

	A. Rarely	B. Seldom	C. Sometimes	D. Often	E. Always
Question 1	You are familiar with culture-loaded words.				
	15.7%	52.9%	19.3%	12.1%	0.0%

From the statistics of question 1 in Table 12, we can find that 68.6%(15.7%+52.9%) of the students are rarely or seldom familiar with English culture-loaded words, 19.3% of them are sometimes familiar with culture-loaded words, and only 12.1% of the students know better and none of them are very familiar with English culture-loaded words. It indicates that students' inadequate knowledge about culture-laded words leads to their poor performance in the culture-loaded words test.

The probable reasons for the cause of students' poor knowledge of English culture-loaded words may be various, but inadequate instruction from teachers could become a major reason. Since students learn English in a non-native language environment, teachers' instruction is one of the most essential resources for students. Thus English teachers need to do more to help students acquire more knowledge of culture-loaded words.

The second part of the questionnaire is designed to deal with the students' view on teachers' teaching of culture-loaded words.

Table 13. Students' view on teachers' instruction of culture-loaded words in part 2

		A. Rarely	B. Seldom	C. Sometimes	D. Often	E. Always
Question	2	English teachers take vocabulary instruction as teaching focuses				
		0.7%	8.6%	27.1%	40.7%	22.9%
Question	3	English teachers teach vocabulary not only in the course of intensive reading, but also in the course of extensive reading, listening, speaking, etc				
		0.0%	2.9%	16.4%	53.6%	27.1%
Question	4	English teachers may teach culture-loaded words in vocabulary instruction				
		5.7%	16.4%	38.6%	27.9%	11.4%
Question	5	English teachers may choose culture-loaded words as teaching focuses in vocabulary instruction.				
		17.1%	42.9%	29.3%	7.9%	2.8%
Question	6	English teachers introduce a wide range of cultural background knowledge in vocabulary instruction, such as literature, history, politics, etc so as to improve students' understanding and learning of the cultural meaning of vocabulary.				
		0.0%	18.6%	41.4%	30.7%	9.3%
Question	7	English teachers encourage students to use extracurricular methods such as seeing movies, reading magazines, etc. to enlarge cultural background knowledge, strengthen cultural awareness and improve the acquisition of culture-loaded words.				
		0.0%	2.9%	10.0%	55.0%	32.1%

As Question 2 in Table 13 shows, most of the students think vocabulary instruction is the focus in classroom teaching and only 8.6% and 0.7% of them think teachers seldom or rarely teach vocabulary, that is to say, from the students' angle teachers attach great importance to vocabulary instruction. Meanwhile it can be seen in question 3 that 97.1% (16.4%+53.6%+27.1%) of the students also consider that the teachers sometimes, often and always teach vocabulary not only in the course of intensive reading, but also in other courses such as,

extensive reading, listening, speaking, etc.

The statistics of questions 4 and 5 show that 38.6%, 27.9% and 11.4% of the teachers sometimes, often and always instruct culture-loaded words while only 29.3%, 7.9% and 2.8% of them sometimes, often and always choose culture-loaded words as teaching focuses.

From the statistics of the questions 2 to 5, it can be indicated that in the students' eyes, most of the teachers do take vocabulary instruction as their teaching focus, but they fail to instruct students to acquire culture-loaded words or cultural connotative meaning of these words. From this perspective, it can be concluded that teachers don't pay much attention to cultural background knowledge of culture-loaded words or help students realize the importance of culture-loaded words in English learning.

As for teachers' approaches to teach culture-loaded words, the statistics of questions 6 and 7 show that from the students' perspective, most of the teachers introduce a wide range of cultural background knowledge in vocabulary instruction, such as literature, history, politics, etc. so as to improve students' understanding and learning of the cultural connotation of culture-loaded words. In addition, according to the results of question 7, 55% and 32.1% of the students admit that their teachers often or always encourage students to use extracurricular methods such as seeing movies, reading magazines, communicating with English native speakers to enlarge cultural knowledge and improve the learning of culture-loaded words.

In summary, from the students' angle, teachers don't attach much importance to culture-loaded words instruction though they introduce related cultural background knowledge to students when coming across culture-loaded words. On the other hand, teachers encourage students to enlarge cultural knowledge by themselves after class.

The third part intends to figure out the students' attitude and approaches to learn of culture-loaded words.

Table 14. Students' attitude and approaches to culture-loaded words learning in part 3

	A. Rarely	B. Seldom	C. Sometimes	D. Often	E. Always
Question 8	You are aware of the importance of culture-loaded words learning in vocabulary learning.				
	0.0%	10.7%	28.6%	40.7%	20.0%
Question 9	You ( ) accumulate cultural background knowledge and culture-loaded words self-consciously.				
	5.0%	48.6%	32.1%	12.9%	1.4%
Question 10	You ( ) learn cultural connotative meaning of words in textbook.				
	1.4%	11.4%	40.7%	39.3%	7.1%
Question 11	You ( ) dig up related cultural background information in textbook.				
	0.7%	6.4%	30.7%	45.7%	16.4%
Question 12	In your opinion, the acquisition of culture-loaded words is achieved in class.				
	1.4%	5.0%	12.9%	46.4%	34.3%

With regard to the students' attitudes toward English culture-loaded words, the statistics of question 8 show that 20%, 40.7% and 28.6% of the students always, often and sometimes realize that culture-loaded words learning is of importance in English learning as a whole, 10.7% of them seldom do so, and none of the students is rarely aware of that, which can be confirmed by the percentage 0.

According to the statistics of question 9, 32.1%, 12.9% and 1.4% of the students sometimes, often and always accumulate cultural background knowledge of culture-loaded words self-consciously after class, while 48.6% and 5.0% of them seldom or rarely do so. The two groups of statistics from questions 8 and 9 demonstrate that on one hand the students have largely realized culture-loaded words learning is helpful and important in English learning and on the other hand what they do in practice is quite another thing. They themselves don't pay enough attention to the cultural connotation of culture-loaded words and seldom accumulate cultural background knowledge of culture-loaded words.

In addition, it's shown in questions 10 and 11 that most of the students always, often, sometimes learn cultural connotative meaning of words in textbooks. Only 11.4% and 1.4% of them seldom or rarely do so. Meanwhile

92.8% (30.7%+45.7%+16.4%) of the students always, often, sometimes dig up related cultural background knowledge in textbooks, which reveals that compared with their comparatively poor performance on self-learning of culture-loaded words, they lay much more emphasis on the learning of culture-loaded words in textbooks. The same results can be drawn from the test, in which better job was done in culture-loaded words from textbooks than those from other resources.

The possible reasons accounting for the above situation may be: first, English teachers fully emphasize the importance of culture-loaded words in textbooks, which in turn influence students' attitude in this issue. Second, the students don't have the capacity in acquiring culture-loaded words by themselves. Third, the teaching syllabus (1998) for English majors has stipulated clearly that the second year English majors should grasp 5000-6000 English words and be proficient in using 3000-4000 of them. Catering for this requirement, most students focus on the vocabulary in the syllabus and neglect the culture-loaded words from other resources.

And according to the statistics of question 12, 93.6% (12.9%+46.4%+34.3%) of the students think culture-loaded words learning is achieved in class, which reflects that students depend a lot on teachers in promoting the acquisition of culture-loaded words. One possible reason is that although students largely realize the importance of culture-loaded words, they don't know how to put it into practice, since there is a great amount of cultural background knowledge and the accumulating process must be rather arduous. Another possible reason is that in exam-oriented learning, students have to devote most of their energy in enlarging vocabulary required in the teaching syllabus, thus they don't have enough time to learn culture-loaded words after class.

The last part of the questionnaire intends to collect students' difficulties and suggestions of culture-loaded words learning which are shown in Table 15.

Table 15. Students' difficulties and suggestions on culture-loaded words learning in part 4

	A. Rarely	B. Seldom	C. Sometimes	D. Often	E. Always
Question 13	You are desirous for the opening of more culture-relevant courses in which you can learn more cultural background knowledge.				
	2.1%	4.3%	25.0%	42.1%	26.4%
Question 14	You think there is lots of cultural information introduced in the textbook that you learn.				
	14.3%	48.6%	23.8%	6.4%	0.7%
Question 15	Your difficulties in culture-loaded words learning.				
Question 16	Your suggestions on culture-loaded words learning.				

This part consists of two multiple choice questions and two open-ended questions. As the statistics of question 13 indicate, 93.5% (25%+42.1%+26.4%) of the students are desirous for the opening of more courses related to western culture in which they can learn more cultural knowledge. According to question 14, most of the students hold that cultural knowledge introduced in textbooks is insufficient.

With regard to the open-ended question 15, the difficulties in culture-loaded words learning may be: first, the students don't understand western cultural knowledge or the difference between Chinese and western culture well, which is the biggest obstacle in culture-loaded words learning. Second, due to the insufficient instruction from teachers, the students don't know what to learn and how to learn. Third, the students are lack of culture-relevant materials and the access to them, thus it's difficult for them to figure out the cultural meaning of words. Fourth, since students are lack of communications with English native speakers, they don't have opportunity to put what have learned into practice; therefore it's hard for them to grasp the correct usage of culture-loaded words. Fifth, culture-loaded words learning is involved in a wide range of aspects, thus there is too much to learn. Sixth, students tend to learn those words can arouse their interests, but seldom acquire those words such as politics, legend and mythology, human body, etc. which bear no intimate relationship with their daily life. Seventh, in exam-oriented learning, students spend too much time in their exams. They don't memorize those culture-loaded words which won't be tested in exams.

Suggestions can be summarized into two parts.

Part One concerns with teachers' instruction in class. Firstly, in class many students suggest that more

culture-loaded words should be instructed by English teachers. Secondly, they argue that more culture-related materials such as reference books or magazines as well as English movies should be recommended by teachers. Thirdly, various culture-relevant activities such as culture-oriented lectures and contests should be held on a regular basis. Fourth, teachers should adopt innovative methods to teach cultural background knowledge and enhance the students' interest in this field.

Part Two is about students' self-learning. After class, students would like to improve their understanding and learning of culture-loaded words by reading books, seeing English movies, and communicating with English native speakers. Some of them think they also should make good use of internet to acquire cultural knowledge.

4.3 Results and Analysis of the Teachers' Interview

For testifying the conclusions in the culture-loaded test and explore the teachers' attitude toward culture-loaded words instruction, 12 English teachers are selected to take part in the interview.

Answers to question 1:

How much do you know about culture-loaded words?

Teacher 1: In fact, I am not familiar with culture-loaded words. In my opinion, culture-loaded words include color words and number words.

Teacher 2: I think culture-loaded words are those having specific cultural knowledge. But I'm not sure what kind of words can be called culture-loaded words.

Teacher 4, teacher 7…

Based upon the answers to question 1 in the interview, teachers' knowledge of culture-loaded words is not satisfactory, for 7 out of 12 teachers don't know much or don't know about culture-loaded words, and only 5 of them know better about it, but none of them is very familiar with it, which indicates that there is a long way to go to enhance teachers' knowledge of culture-loaded words.

Answers to question 2:

What are your attitude and techniques adopted in culture-loaded words instruction?

Teacher 3: I think the instruction of culture-loaded words is of great help in vocational college English teaching. In my class I usually take vocabulary instruction as the teaching focus in the course of intensive reading and listening as well.

Teacher 5, teacher 6…

Question 2 is about the teachers' attitude and techniques of culture-loaded words teaching. All of the teachers consider the instruction of culture-loaded words is of great help in vocational college English teaching. In English instruction, most of the teachers take vocabulary instruction as the teaching focus in English class which indicates that English teachers pay enough attention to the vocabulary instruction; meanwhile they don't confine vocabulary instruction to the course of intensive reading, but also teach vocabulary in the course of extensive reading, listening, speaking, translation, etc.

Besides, English teachers teach different aspects of vocabulary knowledge to the students consisting of pronunciation, spelling, collocation, grammar patterns, meaning, sense relation, register, and dialect etc. Among these aspects of vocabulary knowledge, meaning and sense relations are the emphasis of the vocabulary instruction for most of the English teachers. Here, one thing is worth mentioning. In terms of the instruction of word's meaning, 8 out of 12 teachers often lay emphasis on cultural meaning of words and culture-loaded words, while 4 of them seldom or rarely do so. The situation is quite different from the students' opinion shown in the question 5 from the students' questionnaire, in which students notice that teachers fail to instruct culture-loaded words as teaching focus.

The possible reasons for the difference may be as follow: first, English teachers don't have enough knowledge of culture-loaded words and find it difficult to make up the relevant knowledge or collect the cultural background information. Thus their instruction of culture-loaded words is not systematic, which consequently leads to students' neglect of these words.

Second, teachers don't frequently take measures to help students to consolidate culture-loaded words. They seldom ask students to do some relevant vocabulary exercises in class, nor do any summarization and reviews of the newly-learnt culture-loaded words for the students. Thus, students forget these words, especially the cultural meaning of culture-loaded words quickly.

Third, students themselves don't pay enough attention to culture-loaded words. Since some culture-loaded words are not required in the teaching syllabus and the learning of these words needs students' painstaking efforts due to its large amount of cultural background knowledge, most students are not willing to devote too much energy in the learning of culture-loaded words.

In addition, most of the teachers usually introduce a wide range of cultural knowledge in vocabulary instruction, such as literature, history, politics etc so as to improve students' understanding and learning of culture-loaded words. Meanwhile 9 out of 12 teachers often instruct students acquire cultural connotative meaning of words in textbooks. And 10 of them usually dig up related cultural background knowledge in textbooks to help students acquire culture-loaded words. It indicates that teachers attach great importance to cultural background knowledge of words in textbooks, which in turn influence students' attitude towards culture-loaded words and promote students' acquisition of cultural meaning of words from textbooks.

Moreover most teachers maintain that the acquisition of culture-loaded words mainly depend on students' self-study after class and only less than one third of them consider classroom instruction is the main channel of culture-loaded words learning. Thus most teachers frequently encourage students to use extracurricular methods such as seeing movies, reading magazines, etc. to enlarge students' cultural knowledge and improve the learning of culture-loaded words.

It reflects that while teachers realize the significance of culture-loaded words in English learning, most of them think the acquisition of culture-loaded words should be mainly achieved by students themselves after class, which runs counter to the students' opinions on this issue. One possible reason is that according to the teaching syllabus for English majors, the first and second year should focus on improving English majors' basic skills, while the specialized knowledge including cultural knowledge should be taught in the third year.

Another possible reason is that English teachers themselves are lack of knowledge of culture-loaded words and find it difficult to collect the relevant cultural knowledge for preparing the lesson, let alone make explicit and systematic explanation of these words. Moreover the systematic and standardized teaching materials and textbooks of culture-loaded words are not available to English teachers.

Answers to questions 3 and 4:

What are your difficulties and suggestions in culture-loaded words teaching?

Teacher 2: I think the biggest difficulty for me is the lack of cultural knowledge. Since I didn't have the experience of studying abroad, my knowledge of western culture is inadequate and limited. Teachers should be given more opportunities to study abroad.

Teacher 8, teacher 12…

Questions 3 and 4 deal with teachers' difficulties and suggestions on culture-loaded words instruction. According to teachers' answers, the difficulties of culture-loaded words teaching are mainly focused on 4 aspects: firstly, many teachers don't have good comprehension of English culture-loaded words themselves, let alone help students in the acquisition of the relevant cultural knowledge. Secondly, because teachers are lack of systematic and standardized teaching materials and textbooks for culture-loaded words, their instruction and explanation of culture-loaded words is random which depends largely on their personal experience. Thirdly, because many students are at a low level of English language skills, it is difficult for teachers to teach both basic language knowledge and cultural knowledge in very limited time. Fourthly, it is easy to explain cultural background knowledge of English words, but difficult to guide students to use them correctly.

Based on these difficulties, teachers suggest that they should enhance their own understanding of culture-loaded words and try to enlarge their knowledge of western culture. English teachers should be given more opportunities to study in western countries, through which they can have direct contact with foreign cultures and greatly improve their cultural awareness and sensitivity, make efforts to instruct cultural knowledge systematically and help students acquire culture-loaded words. At last, teachers need to utilize diversified media and assign tasks to improve students' cultural awareness and cultivate students' interest in western culture.

5. Conclusions

English major students' insufficient knowledge of culture-loaded words reflects that students' cultural awareness and their acquisition of cultural knowledge should be enhanced. To achieve this, more efforts should be made by both teachers and students. As far as the teachers are concerned, vocational college English teachers should be equipped themselves with basic theories, particularly theories related to the instruction of culture-loaded words, improve their own cultural awareness and enrich their cultural knowledge on both target language and native

language. Also vocational college English teachers should learn more teaching techniques to instill cultural background knowledge of culture-loaded words. Though English teachers can help students learn culture-loaded words and cultural knowledge, students themselves should make great efforts to improve their understanding and learning of culture-loaded words. Students should fully realize the importance of culture-loaded words learning, need to improve their interest in both target culture and native culture and enhance the learning of knowledge in both two cultures. Lastly, vocational college English majors should make good use of various resources and channels to learn culture-loaded words.

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