

On Culture Infiltration and the Strategy Integrated with Specialty Characteristics in College English Teaching

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Abstract

Language is an indispensable part of culture, and it is also a major carrier and medium of culture communication and transmission. Learning a foreign language means not only learning basic language knowledge, training and improving the ability of listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating, but enriching the cross-cultural awareness, cultivating cross-cultural communication competence and making the voice of native culture to communicate with the outside world. Thus, more and more educators and teachers at home and abroad have come to realize the importance of culture teaching in language learning. This paper focuses on inputting culture teaching in College English teaching integrated with specialty characteristics. The importance of culture teaching in college English teaching is analyzed and emphasized and several inspirational and referential strategies of culture teaching integrated with specialty characteristics are also provided.

Keywords: culture infiltration, specialty characteristics, college English teaching

1. Introduction

Under the background of globalization, the communication among nations in the world is increasingly frequent. With the development of the economy and society, China is facing more and more opportunities and challenges to communicate with the outside world, to understand, to talk to other cultures and transmit her own unique culture as well. Learning and teaching English in China is not only to train such basic language skills as listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating, but more importantly to cultivate cross-cultural communication competence, to enrich cross-cultural awareness and to achieve effective communication to solve the global problems. As Inputting culture in College English teaching is imperative, educators and researchers begin to ponder over effective strategies of culture teaching at college. How to strengthen their cross-cultural awareness and cross-cultural communicative competence by culture teaching? How to make culture teaching more effective in class? How to apply these effective teaching strategies to the authentic class? The students of college English teaching are complicated, they are non-English majors, and they have different majors with different characteristics. Generally speaking, in general undergraduate colleges and universities in western China, students majoring in Chinese, law, accounting tend to be more interested in English studying and have definite learning motivation, while art students with worse English foundation tend to be less motivated and the thought of English uselessness is more popular among them. Culture teaching in college English should respect their individual characteristics and specialty features. According to these differences and features, effective and new teaching mode should be established to meet the needs of college students and fulfill the general target of college English teaching. Thus, culture teaching integrated with specialty features becomes a new teaching concept and suggestive approach.

2. Strategies of Culture Teaching Integrated with Specialty Features Suggested

2.1 Enriching Teachers' Professional Knowledge and Cultural Attainments

The coming of the 21st century and the era of "big data" set an even higher demand on foreign language education. College English teaching is facing unprecedented challenges. College English teachers, as Zhang pointed out, should "strive to be bicultural or at least familiar with the target culture". As the main force of foreign language education, English teachers are feeling greater pressure than before. For many years, the old-fashioned teaching concept holds that the principle responsibility of English teachers is teaching the pure

language knowledge. They concentrate on language learning itself and train students to grasp the basic grammars and skills, neglecting such aspects as social knowledge obtainment, cross-cultural awareness cultivation, and intercultural competence of students. Therefore, many students can understand the language but are unable to understand the culture behind the language. Lacking of deep understanding toward the culture behind the language leads communication failure. Now, they are aware of the importance of culture teaching and determined to improve the current situation. They decide to confront with the new challenges and seize the opportunities to develop. As mentioned before, to achieve the target of culture teaching in colleges, students' specialty characteristics should be taken into serious consideration. So, as a guide and instructor of language acquisition, English teachers should intensify their professional knowledge. The professional knowledge here refers to teachers' English professional knowledge and students' specialty knowledge as well. On the one hand, from teachers' perspective, professional knowledge refers to their professional qualities, English comprehensive competence, and intercultural awareness. From the students' perspective, teachers should know and learn basic knowledge about their majors in order to understand the needs of students and characteristics. While teaching culture in English class, teachers integrate specialty characteristics with culture teaching to meet students' different needs. On the other hand, to handle the class with high proficiency, teachers should possess certain knowledge about culture and intercultural communication. To promote teachers cultural accomplishment, first, teachers should establish a right cultural view. No matter it is a native culture or alien culture, it is "summation of material and spiritual wealth created by mankind in the process of history of social development." [1] Each culture should be respected and could be understood, it should not be judged by people which one is superior to others, and which one is inferior. As introducers of outside culture, disseminators and inheritors of indigenous culture, college teachers should keep a clear and objective mind avoiding from praising one culture and belittle the other while teaching. Second, language teachers need not only mastering basic language knowledge, but also have profound cultural accomplishment and a strong capability of cross-cultural competence. Consequently, foreign language teachers should read and learn more culture knowledge consciously and update their own knowledge structure timely. In addition, Teachers should improve their culture teaching skills through reading sociolinguistics, pragmatics and intercultural communication. Last but not least, educational administrative departments, universities and colleges should attach more importance to improving college teachers' cultural accomplishment. For one thing, encourage teachers to transfer the language-oriented teaching mode to culture-oriented one. Help teachers carry out application research about culture teaching integrated with students' different professionals. For another, establish a set of system to improve teachers' professional qualification and intercultural speculation awareness. Such good measures as sending teachers abroad as visiting scholars to experience the foreign culture in person, study new and effective teaching theories, and accumulate the necessary teaching references, inviting scholars aboard to hold lectures, etc.. In this way, teachers on the front have deep understanding of foreign culture and can apply western and eastern culture to their teaching. Effective culture teaching, or in other words, teaching language through culture can be achieved.

2.2 Establishment of Efficient Teacher-team and Development of High-quality Teaching Materials

Effective culture teaching also relies on the establishment of efficient teacher-team. Nowadays, teachers have realized the importance of culture teaching for college students, they abandoned the traditional misconception that one can communicate without any difficulty as long as he grasps grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and spelling. The ultimate purpose of learning foreign language is to understand the world, to communicate successfully and to solve the common problems human beings are facing. The failure to understand the culture of a nation will lead to the failure of grasp the language of that nation. Individual teacher cannot achieve the goal. Probably the better way is to establish a high-efficiency teacher-team. The suggested plan goes like this: 1) bringing the teachers' specialty into full play and dividing all teachers into several different teaching groups according to their specialties and personalities. Each teacher has their own specialties and different personalities. For instance, some are interested in literature, history and philosophy and read a lot. They are suitable to teach students majored in literature, history and even law. Some are good at art and music. They are enriched in knowledge on painting and music. They can be included into this teacher-team to teach students majored in art. They have a lot in common and communication between teachers and students can be much easier. While other teachers who have preference to knowledge about technology, computer, science etc., are suitable to teach science students. Apparently, this is a win-win solution. For teachers, they can exert their advantages and develop further in relevant field combined with English teaching, for students, it is easier for them to communicate with teachers and learn English and major well. 2) Developing high-quality teaching materials. After the establishment of teacher-team, all teaching faculty have a sense of belongings and clear teaching and researching goals, they who teach the same major students can cooperate with each other to develop or compile high-quality teaching materials, even textbooks combined with students' majors. For example, teachers who

teach Chinese literature students can discuss culture differences reflected in literary works in English and Chinese. For students majored in education, teachers can introduce western educational system and Chinese educational system to the class, and guide students to discuss, analyze and explore the similarities and differences between these two educational system and try to find a better one, to strike a balance between western education and Chinese education. Moreover, for music students, teachers can introduce both western and Chinese culture about music and lead students to discover, to understand and to create. In this way, students with different majors can not only have a better understanding of knowledge about their majors, but also, by putting language into use, they know how to discuss, to communicate and to explore problems in English. Furthermore, recent textbooks of college English are lack of Chinese culture and local cultures. Most materials are about western culture. Thus, most students can explain such popular western holidays as Valentine's Day, Halloween, Christmas, April Fool's Day, etc., but students find it pretty hard to free from their mother tongue while communicating with natives in English. They can't introduce Chinese traditional holidays like Spring Festival, Middle Autumn Day, Dragon Boat Festival, Lantern Festival, Tomb-sweeping Day, and Double Seventh Day to foreign friends clearly in English. To improve it, it is a good idea that teachers introduce the local culture on purpose in class and combine with students' different majors. Teachers and students can accumulate culture-related and major-related materials together and use them as teaching materials or references which can help students in English and majors as well. Teachers in each group work together as a team to explore the best teaching materials or textbooks which are suitable for the students' different majors and characteristics.

2.3 Flexible Teaching Methods and Approaches

2.3.1 Carrying out Comparative Teaching of Chinese and Western Cultures According to Different Majors Creatively

In college English teaching mode, about culture teaching, the teaching method – comparative teaching of Chinese and western cultures are mentioned several times by researchers as an effective way of culture teaching. This paper appeals for creative application of this method and demonstrate it as a reference for teachers. It will take a teaching activity for students majored in education and music for example to elaborate how this approach acts in authentic class. Firstly, teachers and students will discuss together to fix a topic and contents for the class, such as the similarities and differences between Chinese higher-education system and western higher-education system or the comparison between Chinese folk songs and American country music and so on. The participation of students in fixing the contents of teaching not only can reflect students-oriented teaching idea and bring students' initiatives into full play, but also can avoid that students would feel boring about some teaching contents and refuse to take part in the teaching activities in class. After fixing the teaching contents, teachers will divide the whole class into several groups and instruct them to explore the topic they choose. They can go online, ask for the internet, go to library or search for some reference books for more information and knowledge about the topic in order to learn, to understand, to discover, to analyze and to explore deeper in this field. They collect the information first, summarize it and get ready for the class. Next, in class, ask students in groups to present what they've found about the topic. They can present in many ways such as lecture, role-play, presentation with PPT, video dubbing, speech and even drama. During this process, students have got a better understanding about the topic and they usually display their other abilities and talents. After presentation, teachers can give students comments about their performance and explain far more about some difficulties related to the theme and encourage students to analyze and explore further. If students understand quite well, teachers can recommend and supplement more sources and activities for further study after class. In addition, in before-class and after-class phase, teachers can organize warming-up exercises to simulate authentic cultural setting to help students apply what they have learned in class. For art students, this approach can be more creative and inspiring. When the teacher talks about music, he can make his class more effective and motivated by applying this teaching method. Teachers and students can fix the topic and contents together, choosing the most interesting one for the class, music award ceremonies for instance. Before class, students search for information about the topic in English as much as possible. Then in class, teachers and students work together to create a western culture atmosphere to display what they have found before class about the topic. Next, teachers encourage students to bring their creativity and inspiration into full play. They can simulate music award ceremonies in west and China, such as Grammy Awards, American Music Awards, Billboard Music Awards, and Brit Awards in west, and MTV Asia Awards and Golden Melody Awards in Asia etc.. During the process of showing, students understand the music ceremonies better, the competence of cross-cultural communication is cultivated and their abilities of acting, singing or showing and communicating with others in English can be trained and improved. This kind of English class is not only a pure English class but also a big and shining stage, a great opportunity for students to show themselves and lighten their inspiration of art. English becomes a bridge between the students and the

world before them. That is the ultimate goal of learning English helping individuals to connect with the whole world. For students learning law as their majors, comparison between system of government in west and China also can be a good topic for culture teaching class. For students majored in history, they can find lots of themes to carry out comparative teaching of Chinese and western cultures. For students majored in science, teachers can introduce more English materials about science and technology or history of science development both in west countries and China. Students will benefit a lot from this kind of English class. Comparative teaching of Chinese and western cultures in college English class is motivational and inspiring, more effective culture teaching methods can be explored and expected with joint efforts by teachers and students.

2.3.2 Launching More Task-based Language Teaching Activities

Task-based language teaching (TBLT), known as task-based instruction (TBI) has its origins in communicative language teaching (CLT), also the development of it, which developed in 1980s and focused on “learning by doing”. It concentrates on the application of authentic language and on asking students to do meaningful tasks using the target language. This teaching method asks students to learn the target language by using it and assesses them by the outcomes of the task. Task-based language teaching is popular these years in English teaching classes. For culture teaching in college English, teachers can intentionally use this teaching method in teaching combined with the current state of students properly. Teachers organize more culture-related tasks for students to instruct them to compare and think the similarities and differences between Chinese and Western cultures. For example, at the end of one semester, teachers can give students such assignments in summer or winter vacations as writing papers about different holidays or festivals in China or west, watching TV programs or movies about how ordinary people celebrate their holidays, or carrying out a survey, summit reports about it and so on. The target is to make students understand the origin, the development, the customs and features of those significant holidays both in west and China and think about the similarities and differences. This is not only about language learning, it is also about training for innovation thinking. Thus, teachers and students should work together to make activities in class more interesting, effective and innovative.

2.3.3 Holding Abundant Extracurricular Activities

Colorful extracurricular activities, as an important supplement for English class, can make culture teaching more interesting and enrich students’ study at college. Suggested activities are as followed:

Firstly, organize students to watch the original English movies or video clips with culture topics. When teachers choose different movies for students, they should be carefully. Choose the typical, distinctive ones and different specialties should be taken serious consideration. Those movies and television programs, rich in cultural information, display almost every aspect of ordinary people in west. They not only unfold a social panorama before everyone’s eyes, but also help students understand the living habits, customs, and traditional ideas of western people vividly. When discussing the differences between Christmas and Spring Festival, the teacher can introduce some representative movies about Christmas for students for better understanding and deep thinking about the origin, customs and eating habits of these two holidays.

Secondly, conduct some culture activities for different majors and invite overseas students and foreign teachers to take part in. Try to create authentic cultural atmosphere for students. For music students, invite overseas students to show English pub culture and take music as another global language to help students communicate with natives and experience this different culture personally.

Thirdly, read literary works extensively. As literary works are just like a mirror of society and culture, reading them is an effective way to know the cultural background and social visage of a country and region. For students majored in literature, this is a perfect method of culture teaching. By reading different writers’ works, students know and understand the different cultural and social background reflected in those novels. For freshmen or sophomores, some simple and readable reading materials – The Oxford Bookworm serials, Bedtime Reading serials, for instance are good choices. For seniors, teachers can encourage them to read the original literary works. During reading, students can enlarge their vocabulary, broaden their horizon, and train their thinking pattern and even benefit a lot in their majors.

Fourthly, encourage students to make friends with native English speakers. There are some foreign teachers or overseas from English speaking countries. Encourage students to develop interpersonal contacts with them. Teachers also can invite casual visitors to class. It is this personal communication with natives that students can pick up cultural information they could not get from the books. It is also a good way to foster greater sensitivity to cultural details in daily life.

Last but not the least, more inspiring activities can be held in different forms, such as English and Chinese poetry

readings contest, English drama show, and English party with different cultural themes and so on. Students from different departments can benefit a lot from these activities mentioned above in English learning and their majors as well.

2.4 Establishment of Pluralistic Evaluation System

Recently, new round of college English teaching reform based on the application of multimedia and network draw more attention among researchers. Perfect educational evaluation system is an important and urgent task for this new round reform. According to different function in teaching, educational evaluation can be divided into two categories: summative evaluation and formative evaluation. For a long time, as a traditional evaluation system, summative evaluation holds a dominant position in educational evaluation. The summative evaluation focuses on the outcome of the program. It is widely used in college English teaching system. Scriven claims that while all assessment techniques can be summative, only some are formative, whose focus is the development and learning process of learners at a particular time. The summative evaluation usually happens after the whole teaching process and it always make a judgment on the result of education. Teachers can use different methods evaluate the outcome of the teaching and to summarize overall learning, such as testing, the most common one teachers used in college English teaching, questionnaires, surveys, interviews and so on. Teaching evaluation method in college English teaching relies on the summative evaluation too much. Teachers, students, school administrations and employing units assess students' English ability only according to examination results. Though this evaluation method has its own advantages, its disadvantages should not be neglected. It emphasizes the function of testing scores, which makes plenty of students hold impure learning motivation and studying goals. High scores become their own pursuit. Obviously, this learning motivation of instrumental value cannot motivate students to learn English and will undoubtedly turn students learning interests off eventually. On contrary, when students get low scores, they will feel anxious, self-abased, and self-denied. These negative feelings make students lose their faith in English studying. For teachers, seeking for high score also frustrate their innovation and creativities in exploring the teaching contexts. In a word, the summative evaluation, to a great extent, neglects the subjectivity, autonomy and creativity in learning and also goes against the reform of college English teaching. Thus, comprehensive college English evaluation model should be established and developed. As a key component of the curriculum of college English, this comprehensive college English evaluation system doesn't rely on only one model of evaluation, the summative or the formative, it synthesizes the advantages of both summative and formative evaluation methods, avoid their disadvantages as far as possible and as Jin said "be tailored to the needs of the types and levels of the institutions in which college English is provided." This new and pluralistic evaluation system should encourage the use of a variety of assessment methods and can adjust to the curriculum system of the institutions. Based on this new form of assessment system, integrating with students' different majors is suggested in this paper. Since culture teaching combined with students' different majors is used in college English teaching class, the factor of knowledge in students' majors should be taken into serious consideration in the process of assessment. Testing students' specialized knowledge in English, undoubtedly, is a good way to enhance not only students' comprehensive English abilities but also their professional knowledge. However, as Tang said "teacher factors, curriculum arrangement and the school reform climate inhibited the practice". We hold that the new assessment system certainly needs more researches and joint-efforts by teachers, students and institutions with more efficient teacher training and more supportive environment.

3. Conclusion

Nowadays, culture teaching is of great importance in college English teaching. New and challenging standards are set for college English in order to foster qualified professionals in every field in new century. Basic language skills are not the only purpose of college English teaching, more competences like intercultural communication abilities, life-long learning abilities, the ability of knowledge integration and the ability of obtaining information are absolutely indispensable for college students to survive in such a fierce society ahead. Therefore, cultivating students with strong cross-cultural awareness and sensitivity is essential to the success of college English teaching. English is not only a language for students, but more importantly, it is a window to look through, to discover and to communicate competently with the outside world; it is a solution to solve the global problems human beings are facing; it is an approach to develop in one's own specialties and it is also a chance to live a better life. All in all, only language study is not sufficient. New and creative teaching mode as integrating specialty characteristics with culture teaching is a necessary strategy to reach the goal. Hope more researchers and teachers will be enlightened by this paper and new situation will be created.

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