

## The Current Situation of Culture Teaching in College English

Yifei Li\*

Bohai University, 19 Keji Road Jinzhou, Liaoning, China

Email: liyifei1982@126.com

**Keywords:** College English; Culture Teaching; Current Situation; Suggestions

**Abstract:** Based on Constructivism, Input Theory and other linguistic and pedagogical theory, the paper analyzes the current situation of culture teaching in College English, and points out the problems in culture teaching. On this basis, the paper explores how to integrate the culture teaching into language teaching, and enhance students cross-cultural communicative competence.

### Introduction

In recent years, the foreign language teaching field in China has been generally aware of the importance of cultural factors in language teaching. It is recognized and supported by more and more relevant people that cultural factors should be integrated in language teaching. According to *Requirements for College English Teaching* [1] formulated by the Ministry of Education in 2007, college English teaching should focus on English language knowledge and application skills, learning strategies and cross-cultural communication. The purpose of it is to make students be able to communicate in a effective way in their future work. According to the conclusion of American sociolinguist Hyme (1972) [2], communicative competence of language should be grammatical, feasible, appropriate and realistic. Among them, appropriate and realistic parts are directly related to culture. The teaching objectives of college English highlight the cultivation of students' overall competence, emphasize the communicative function of language and students' communicative competence. And the teaching objectives integrate the cultural factors of language into the cultivation of students' language foundation, learning skills and strategies. Therefore, the cultural teaching of college English is of great significance in improving students' social and cultural competence, intercultural communication competence and achieving the goal of college English teaching requirements.

### The Relationship of Culture, Language and Culture Teaching

In ancient Chinese books, “文” (Wen) refers not only to characters, articles and literary talent, but also to rites and music system, legal provisions, etc. “化” (Hua) means to enlightenment. Liu xiang of the Han Dynasty said in *Shuoyuan* that “all the prosperity of martial arts, for the sake of disobedience; the culture does not change, then adds punishment”, in which “culture” and “martial arts” are antithesis, and both of them contains the meaning of enlightenment. However, the word “culture” that we use now is from the German word “kultur”, which originally refers to the cultivation of land and crops, and later refers to the cultivation of people, especially the cultivation of people's artistic, moral and natural abilities. With the development of culture, people have reached a consensus on the classification of culture: information culture, native speakers' understanding of the general facts in their social culture; behavior culture, the daily behavior habits and values of native speakers; achievement culture, the artistic and cultural achievements of the nation.

Culture, as a social phenomenon, needs to communicate among social members, and language is the most important tool for social communication. Therefore, language is a cultural phenomenon, which is characterized by its function of cultural mirroring and cultural inheritance. Language is not only a “living fossil” of history, which can reflect the face of history and culture, but also a “booster” of social progress, playing a prominent role in cultural communication.[3] Language, as one of the tools to express, is inevitably marked with the cultural brand.

Language and culture influence and interact with each other. One must understand culture to understand language; one must understand language to understand culture. Malinowski, a British social anthropologist, said that language is deeply rooted in cultural display and the customs and life of the native people. Language research cannot be separated from this broad linguistic behavior environment. Linguist Mcleod (1976) also pointed out that while teaching language, teachers have unconsciously taught culture, which is inevitable.[4] English teaching is language teaching, and cultural teaching should be integrated into it. In this way, students can better cultivate their cultural awareness, improve their English language quality, understand cultural differences, broaden their horizons, and improve their cultural communication ability.

### **Theoretical Basis of Cultural Teaching**

**Cultural Input Theory.** Krashen's language input hypothesis is the core of language acquisition theory. According to his opinion, acquisition can only occur when the learner is exposed to the accessible language input, that is, the second language input slightly higher than his current level of language skills, and he can focus on the understanding of meaning or information rather than the understanding of form. This is the famous formula "i+1" (i stands for the learner's current level, and 1 stands for the language material slightly higher than the learner's current level).[5]

Cultural factors are an indispensable part of language teaching. By introducing cultural factors into foreign language teaching, language learners can become familiar with the target language culture, and develop a sense of identity and affinity for the target language culture. This theory indicates that students' attitude towards the target language will affect their learning effect, and the formation of their attitude will be influenced by the culture of the target language. Therefore, cultural input can help students acquire language better.

**Constructivism.** Constructivist learning theory has been gradually popular in the west since the 1990s. Piaget's cognitive development theory of children, namely activity internalization theory, influences Constructivist learning theory. In Piaget's view, it is neither objective nor subjective, but the result of the gradual construction of individuals in the process of interacting with the environment. Learning is self-construction. [6] After Piaget, Vygotsky believed that learning is a kind of social construction, emphasizing the role of the social, cultural and historical background of learners in the cognitive process, and paying attention to the role of activities and social interaction in the development of human psychological function. Constructivism combines Piaget's "self-construction" with Vygotsky's "social construction".

According to the above theories, Murray, a constructivist, believes that the learning process is the process of constructing one's own meaning through unique information processing activities with the help of teachers and others. Learners build new understandings by interacting with the outside world on the basis of existing experience.

### **Reflections on the Current Situation of Cultural Teaching**

The world in the 21st century is a world in which different nations and countries communicate and collide with each other. College education must train interdisciplinary talents in the new century with intercultural communication ability to meet the requirements of the new era.[7] However, looking back at the current situation of culture teaching in college English, we find that there are still some urgent problems to be solved.

Firstly, there are defects in the knowledge structure of English teachers, and their comprehensive cultural quality needs to be improved. Modern English teaching, whose purpose is to cultivate intercultural communicative competence, has a high requirement on teachers' quality. Teachers should not only have profound language skills, but also know both Chinese and western languages. However, most of the current English teachers graduated from English major, but the cultural foundation is relatively weak, and the teaching task is quite heavy, generally overload work, teachers do not have the time and energy to engage in teaching research, and also have little opportunity for further study or training, which has become a block to the development of cultural

teaching.

Secondly, the phenomenon of exam-oriented education is serious, which hinders the development and implementation of cultural teaching. The results of CET4 and CET6 are important standards to measure teaching, which is very necessary to promote college English teaching. But the problem is that too much emphasis on CET4 and CET6 will inevitably turn college English teaching into teaching for examination and learning for examination. The quality-oriented education of English will gradually be replaced by exam-oriented education, let alone cultural teaching.

Thirdly, cultural teaching content is one-sided. Many teachers think that culture teaching is to add a certain amount of background culture in language teaching, but it is not proper. The contents of cultural teaching are extensive and complex, so it is impossible to include all aspects of culture in teaching. Teaching students how to use English appropriately in a particular cultural context is an easy way to do it, but it tends to instill more than enlighten.

Fourth, there is no clear definition of the importance and specific requirements of cultural education in college English syllabus. For example, the teaching purpose proposed in college English syllabus (for undergraduates of arts and sciences) is to cultivate students' strong reading ability, listening ability, preliminary writing and speaking ability, so that students can use English as a tool to obtain professional information. The four language abilities of listening, speaking, reading and writing are emphasized here, without mentioning another indispensable ability in language -- sociocultural ability.[8]

Last, there is a lack of purposeful and planned cultural teaching in college English. In the past for a long time, due to people's narrow understanding of language, college English teaching treated the English only as isolated symbol system, grammar and vocabulary learning become all contents of a foreign language.[9] In the English class, there is no enough self-consciousness, plan and system.

### **Some Suggestions on the Implementation of Culture Teaching in College English**

To start with, pay more attention to the cultural differences in the teaching process. It is to strengthen the contrast between Chinese and Western cultures and understand the differences between English and Chinese. English culture and Chinese culture have something in common, but there are also great differences in meaning and application. Therefore, during discourse analysis, teachers should guide students to strengthen cultural comparison, understand the commonness and individuality of Chinese and Western cultures, and guide students to master the comparative significance of different cultures at the level of language, nonverbal communication, mode of thinking and values in cross-cultural communication. At the same time, teachers should emphasize the mutual infiltration of mother tongue culture and English culture instead of the replacement and coverage of the former by the latter, so that English becomes explicit, easy to accept and understand.

Next, take advantage of native English speakers. Through direct communication, such as dialogue and exchange with native English teachers, foreign guests and international students, students can directly participate in the real and natural communication activities, understand the use of a variety of behavior patterns and rules restricting these behaviors. In the classroom of language teaching, foreign teachers have incomparable advantages that Chinese teachers cannot match, because English is the language of their own nation, and they have the deepest feeling for all ethnic things outside the language, which can be said that they are the embodiment of the characteristics of this national culture. Therefore, when they communicate with students in and after class, they exert a subtle influence on students' thinking and behavior patterns, so that students can taste and experience the similarities and differences between Chinese and Western cultures.

In addition, improve teachers' own cultural quality. Teachers must improve their own cultural quality and ability to identify cultural teaching permeate into the whole process of teaching and classroom. While introducing, introducing and studying the Western culture, we should also be familiar with the traditional culture of our country. On the one hand, teachers themselves should timely supplement supplies, professional, academic and other aspects of learning. On the other hand, in order to improve cultural teaching, schools should provide more training opportunities for

teachers, so that teachers can go abroad and experience the language and cultural environment of British and American countries.

Finally, extend the teaching space and broaden the channels for students to learn and use English. The cultural teaching should be student-centered with task-based teaching and students are given the opportunity to write comments, make observations and present their ideas. Teachers are supposed to encourage students to read western literary works, newspapers and magazines and current affairs reviews, absorb knowledge, improve literacy and broaden their horizons. The evaluation is to focus on process, not results. On the basis of traditional teaching methods, cultural teaching should make full use of modern teaching methods to diversify teaching forms, not only to cultivate students' interest in learning English, but also to have an intuitive and perceptual understanding of the customs of the target language countries.

## Summary

Hymes. D. H. pointed out that it is far from enough to just learn a certain language, we must also learn how to use the language properly, that is, we must master the ability to use the language for communication. Successful foreign language teaching must equip students with social and cultural abilities. Therefore, as English teachers, we should not only impart language knowledge to students, but also carry out cultural teaching in and out of class consciously and purposefully, so as to cultivate students' cultural awareness. Only in this way, can students expand their scope of knowledge, enhance their interest in learning English, learn English well, and be able to put what they learn to practical use, to achieve the cultural teaching goal of *Requirements for College English Teaching*.

## Acknowledgements

The Teaching Reform Research Project of Bohai University in 2019 with A-class (Grant No. 20191034), *The Ways to Shape College Students' Cultural Confidence in College English*.

General scientific research project of education department of liaoning province in 2018 (Grant No. 10167513) *Research on "UGE" Type Internal Power Construction of Innovation and Entrepreneurship Education in Colleges and Universities*.

## Reference

- [1] Ministry of Education in China: *Requirements for College English Teaching*, Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, Beijing, 2007.
- [2] Hymes. D. H: *On Communicative Competence*, (Oxford: OUP, British, 1972).
- [3] Zhu Jiake: *Cultural teaching in college English teaching*, Huazhong University of Science and Technology Press, Wuhan, 2009.
- [4] R.J. Ong, J.T. Dawley and P.G. Clem: submitted to *Journal of Materials Research* (2003)
- [5] David W. Carroll: *Psychology of Language*, Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, Beijing, 2000.
- [6] Rod Eills: *Second Language Acquisition*, Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, Shanghai, 2000.
- [7] Chen Shen: *Research on Teaching Strategies of Language and Culture*. Beijing Language and Culture University Press, Beijing, 2001.
- [8] Wang Guoxue: Some thoughts on college English culture teaching: Economic and social development, Vol. 401 (2006) No.3, p.17.
- [9] Deng Xiaoyu: On the Role of Cultural Input in Foreign Language Teaching: Education and Occupation, Vol. 108 (2006) No. 4, p. 98.