



# On a College English Listening and Speaking Textbook from the Perspective of Intercultural Communication

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**Abstract.** Intercultural communicative competence enables people from various cultural background to communicate in English as foreign language effectively. Therefore, intercultural communicative competence should be integrated in college English teaching. College English textbooks should put more emphasis on cultivating intercultural communicative competence. Therefore, it is significant to study the cultural content of college English textbooks, in order to analyze to what extent and in what way college English textbooks promote intercultural communicative competence, and to offer suggestions for college English teachers and textbook writers to improve the content of the textbooks. In this study, a college English listening and speaking textbook published by an influential foreign language teaching and research press will be analyzed. The purpose is to find out whether the textbook contains valuable elements of native culture, target culture and world culture, whether the proportion of these different cultural elements is appropriate, and whether the activities in the listening and speaking textbook are effective to improve students' knowledge, skills, attitude and behavior in intercultural communicative competence. Item frequency analysis and Byram's 8 criteria will be involved in the analysis. The author will examine the general trends of the textbook and study whether the frequently-used teaching elements are aimed at developing both linguistic competence and intercultural communicative competence. The results reveal the inclusion of cultural elements in the textbook. The results of this study provide feedback to improve the quality of the textbook related to the aspects of intercultural communicative competence.

**Keywords:** Intercultural communicative competence · College English textbook · Text analysis · Culture

## 1 Introduction

With the acceleration of globalization, there is more and more interaction between different countries. Therefore, communication between people with different cultural backgrounds has become an inevitable and necessary trend, and English has further established its status as the world's lingua franca.

This trend puts forward a new requirement for College English teaching in China, that is, cultivating high-quality talents with intercultural communication ability. Experts and

scholars at home and abroad generally believe that the most important purpose of English teaching is to cultivate and improve English learners' intercultural communication ability.

In order to successfully achieve the intercultural communicative goal, that is, successful intercultural communication, how to cultivate students' intercultural communication ability has become a very important issue in today's education. As an important medium of English teaching and learning, English teaching materials play an important role in college English teaching.

This study mainly adopts the research methods of a case study. First of all, through literature review, that is, referring to the research results and theories in related fields, the author takes Byram's theory of intercultural communicative competence and his classification standard of cultural elements as theoretical framework. Besides, according to the theoretical framework, a college English listening and speaking textbook published by FLTRP will be analyzed according to the classification standard of cultural elements proposed by Byram and Item Frequency Analysis. Finally, the author finds that native culture, target culture and world culture are not equally presented in New Vision College English Listening and Speaking Course 2. And the author proposes some problems existing in this textbook according to the different factors of intercultural communicative competence.

Therefore, this paper puts forward some useful suggestions for the compilation of college English textbooks which focus on the cultivation of intercultural communication competence. Through these studies, the author analyzes the target textbook based on Byram's cultural content classification standard and Item Frequency Analysis, the statistical results of cultural elements in the textbook show that native culture, target culture and world culture are not equally presented in textbooks, and analyse the reasons, and give some suggestions to improve teaching quality, inspire teachers to pay more attention to the cultivation of intercultural communication competence.

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Definition of Intercultural Communication Competence

As for the definition of intercultural communication competence, many scholars have expressed their own opinions. According to Ruben, intercultural communication competence is "the ability to achieve people's goals, characters, and expectations in certain environments.

The academic circle has basically reached a consensus on the definition of intercultural communication competence: "Intercultural communication competence refers to the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with people from different cultural backgrounds" (Perry & Southwell 2011), but there are different opinions on the content of intercultural communication competence. Byram (1997) pointed out that intercultural communication competence includes attitude, knowledge, interpretation/relevance skills, discovery/interaction skills, critical cultural awareness and other elements. Lustig & Koester (2007) argues that "intercultural communicative competence requires sufficient knowledge, appropriate motivation and well-trained actions, and none of these elements alone is sufficient to acquire intercultural communicative

competence”. Hu Wenzhong (2013) classifies intercultural communication competence into three levels: cognition, emotion (attitude) and behavior. Gu Xiaole (2017) concluded that the academic consensus on the dimensions of intercultural communication competence consists of three macro dimensions: attitude, knowledge and skills. Jia Yuxin (1997) believes that intercultural communicative competence should not only include cognitive ability, emotional ability and behavioral ability, but also pragmatic ability and plot ability.

## **2.2 The Components of Intercultural Communication Competence**

In 1997, Byram proposed that intercultural communicative competence should be based on linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence and discourse comprehension competence, and he also proposed that intercultural communicative competence includes five elements: knowledge element, attitude element, interpretation and relevance skill element, discovery and interaction skill element, and critical cultural awareness element. These abilities form intercultural communication skills.

Knowledge elements refer to an individual’s understanding of the cultural and social group of his or her own country and the knowledge of the country and social group of the target language, as well as the understanding of the process of mutual communication at the individual and social level. There are two kinds of understandings, one is the micro understanding of how individuals interact with each other, and the other is the macro understanding of how societies interact with each other.

Interpretive and relevant skill elements refer to the ability to interpret symbols and events in combination with different cultural experiences. Specifically, it refers to the ability of individuals to understand and discover the connotation of foreign things and literature by using existing information and a general knowledge framework. This ability to interpret foreign literature and things depends largely on knowledge of the self and others about the environment. Individuals need to use existing knowledge and analytical sensitivity to develop their interpretative and relational skills.

Discovery and interaction skill element refers to the ability to acquire new knowledge and practices in a culture, to process knowledge, attitudes, and skills in constrained real-time communication and interaction.

## **2.3 Relevant Empirical Study**

Textbooks are important carriers of language knowledge and cultural elements in foreign language teaching. The evaluation of English teaching materials began in the 1960s. In the 1980s, evaluation of teaching materials received more and more people attention. Seaton (1982) was one of the earliest foreign researchers who listed more than 10 lists for evaluating English textbooks. Though it did not meet the requirements of the times because it was lack of reality, it was truly one of the important starts for people to study. Sheldon (1988) believed that the evaluation of English textbooks should be divided into an overall impression and qualitative evaluation.

Since the 1980s, Chinese scholars have begun to study English textbooks published in China, many related findings and theories from foreign country have been introduced

into China. Gradually, Chinese scholars have explored their own criteria that is applicable to the evaluation of English textbooks used in China.

At present, there are few theoretical systems for evaluating English teaching materials in China. Authoritative experts in this field include Zhou Xuelin, Zhao Yong, Zheng Shutang and Wen Qiufang, etc. From the evaluation system proposed by these authoritative scholars, we can see a common evaluation criterion—the relationship between teaching materials and the cultivation of learners' actual intercultural communication competence. Therefore, the cultivation and acquisition of learners' actual intercultural communication competence is an important aspect of analyzing the success of college English textbooks. However, Liu and Laohawiriyanon (2013) found out that English textbooks in Chinese colleges contained many cultural information related to the target culture. But there was little place for world culture and native culture.

### **3 Theoretical Basis**

#### **3.1 The ICC Theory**

Among the intercultural communicative competence theories of foreign language teaching, the most influential one is professor Michael Byram's intercultural communicative competence theory. In 1997, Byram proposed that intercultural communicative competence should be based on linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence and discourse comprehension competence, and include five elements: knowledge element, attitude element, interpretation and relevance skill element, discovery and interaction skill element, and critical cultural awareness element. These abilities form intercultural communication skills. And critical awareness of self and other cultures, knowledge, positive attitudes, skills of explanation and association, and skills of discovery and interaction are important factors in intercultural communication (Byram, 1997).

#### **3.2 Byram's Classification Theory of Cultural Elements**

In the evaluation system of teaching materials established by Byram, cultural elements are divided into eight categories, and corresponding explanations are given to each cultural element. The classification is as follows:

1. Social identity and social group (social class, regional identity, ethnic minorities)
2. Social interaction (differing levels of formality; as outsider and insider)
3. Belief and behavior (moral, religious beliefs; daily routines)
4. Social and political institutions (state institutions, health care, law and order, social security, local government)
5. Socialization and the life cycle (families, schools, employment, rites of passage)
6. National history (historical and contemporary events seen as markers of national identity)
7. National geography (geographical factors seen as being significant by members)
8. Stereotypes and national identity (what is "typical" symbol of national stereotypes).

As we can see above, Byram's criterion seems to be more comprehensive and practical to cover almost every aspect of the culture. Therefore, data collection in this paper is carried out by utilizing these eight items.

## 4 Research Design

### 4.1 Research Questions

In this paper, the author tries to answer the following three questions:

1. Does the textbook contain valuable elements such as native culture, target culture, and world culture, and is the proportion of these different cultural elements appropriate?
2. Can the activities set in the listening and speaking textbook improve students' knowledge, skills and attitudes in intercultural communication?
3. Are the teaching elements involved in this textbook helpful for cultivating language competence and intercultural communication competence?

### 4.2 Research Subject

The research subject is the New Horizons College English (Second Edition) Listening and Speaking Course published by foreign language teaching and research press. The textbook of New Vision University is one of the key projects of the “New Century Network Course Construction Project” approved by The State Council of the Ministry of Education of the “Revitalizing action Plan for the 21st Century”. Professor Zheng Shutang is the general manager of the project and the chief editor. The compilation of teaching materials is student-centered and teacher-guided, intending to reform teaching methods, with quality as the guarantee, actively responding to the new challenges brought by the development of higher education and the internationalization of education. New Horizons College English (Second Edition) Listening and Speaking Course is a set of teaching materials which is one of the most widely used teaching material in college English teaching. Therefore, the research on this textbook is representative to some extent.

The compilation of “Listening and speaking course” emphasizes the organic combination of listening and speaking. The language is real and natural, and the communicative ideas and functions of language are systematically classified so as to comprehensively strengthen the cultivation of listening and speaking ability.

Listening and Speaking Course 2 consists of 10 units:

- Unit 1 The Fame Game
- Unit 2 One of a Kind
- Unit 3 Crushed by Misfortune
- Unit 4 Zooming up the Information Superhighway
- Unit 5 My Roommate, My Friend?
- Unit 6 Criminal Acts
- Unit 7 The Truth About Your Genes
- Unit 8 Inequality in Society
- Unit 9 Amusement Parks: Loads of Fun Coming to a Place near You
- Unit 10 EQ, More Important than IQ

Each unit contains the following sections:

*Focus:* The important points of listening and speaking in this unit.

*Warming Up:* A short and piquant introduction to a holiday on radio or TELEVISION.

*Listening:* Understanding Short Conversations/a Long Conversation/a Passage: It includes short dialogues, long dialogues and short articles related to the topic of the unit. Understanding a Radio Program: To provide a variety of content, moderate difficulty of English original materials, training students' listening skills, so as to further improve the practical ability of English.

*Speaking:* Practicing Conversational Skills: Design language function idea training, provide common communication expression, demonstration dialogue and corresponding oral activities. Students can learn various expressions, familiarize themselves with the context in which they are used, and master relevant common expressions by imitating dialogues and oral activities. Speaking Practice: Train students' ability to express their views on a topic. The practice of speaking is open and combined with the unit theme in a vivid form. T: Look at the pictures and listen to the tape. Then give your opinion or discuss the questions.

*Listening and Speaking:* Listen first and speak later. Complete listening comprehension, retelling, discussion and other activities with a short listening passage, organically combine input and output.

*Homework:* Provide students with extracurricular independent learning content.

### 4.3 Research Procedures

First of all, consult and review relevant literature review on the analysis of university textbooks from the perspective of intercultural communication competence at home and abroad. And then, the author explores whether there are some cultural elements in college English textbooks and to what extent they are embedded in texts and activities through relevant evaluation criteria and lists. Secondly, the cultural elements presented in New Horizons College English (Second Edition) Listening and Speaking Course are analyzed and summarized with the classification standard of cultural elements proposed by Byram. The inter-rater reliability of the two authors is 0.92, so the data are reliable.

In order to understand whether the textbook contains valuable cultural elements and whether the proportion of these different cultural elements is appropriate, the author will use Item Frequency Analysis (Iriskulova, 2012). In addition, it is necessary to do statistical analysis of the five factors of intercultural communication. And finally, the author can judge whether the teaching materials can improve students' intercultural communicative competence.

In order to make the analysis as comprehensive as possible, the minimum unit used in the content analysis of this study is discourse, such as reading, sentences and phrases involving different cultural elements in the textbook. Secondly, the author refers to the classification standard of cultural elements when cultural elements appear to ensure consistent classification standard. Finally, the paper analyzes the data obtained from the above research, reveals the cultural elements contained in the textbook, finds the existing problems and analyzes the causes, and puts forward some meaningful suggestions for the

**Table 1.** Cultural Elements in NHCELSC 2

Criteria for textbook	Native Culture		Target Culture		World Culture	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Social Identity and Social Group	8	4.90	18	11.02	3	1.84
Social Interaction	5	3.06	13	7.95	5	3.06
Belief and behaviour	12	7.36	16	9.81	2	1.22
Social and Political institutions	8	4.90	18	11.04	1	0.60
Socialization and the life cycle	15	9.20	17	10.42	2	1.22
National history	2	1.22	1	0.60	0	0
National Geography	3	1.84	2	1.22	2	1.22
Stereotypes and National Identity	4	2.42	3	1.84	3	1.84
Total	57	34.90	88	54.10	18	11.00

compilation of college English textbooks which focus on the cultivation of intercultural communication competence.

## 5 Results and Discussion

The data of this study mainly comes from the content analysis of an English textbook for Chinese college students. First of all, in terms of content analysis, the main research subject is New Horizons College English (Second Edition) Listening and Speaking Course. The author carefully studied this textbook, marked all the different cultural elements, and then classified the cultural elements according to the classification standard of cultural elements proposed by Byram. And then Item Frequency Analysis was used to quantify the data results and calculate the percentages of different cultural elements in different cultural categories. In order to judge whether the proportion of these different cultural elements is reasonable. Secondly, it is necessary to make statistics of the four dimensions of knowledge, skills, emotions and behavior factors related to intercultural communicative competence included in the passages and dialogues of the listening and speaking teaching materials, and finally the author can conclude whether the teaching materials can improve students' intercultural communicative competence.

Cultural elements in New Horizon College English Listening and Speaking Course 2 (NHCELSC2) are counted and classified according to the classification standard of cultural elements proposed by Byram and Item Frequency Analysis, the result is in Table 1

According to the data collected above, we can find that native culture, world culture and target culture are involved in each unit of this textbook. However, these three different kinds of culture unevenly distributed in the textbook. Especially, the target culture takes up the largest proportion in the whole book, and world culture takes up the least proportion, target culture is in the middle.

**Table 2.** Cultural Elements in Each Unit of NHCELSC 2

Units Items	Critical awareness of Self and Other cultures		Knowledge		Positive attitudes		Skills of explanation and association		Skills of discovery and interaction	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Unit1	14	2.16	18	2.78	13	2.01	8	1.23	8	1.23
Unit2	17	2.62	22	33.9	12	1.85	9	1.38	6	0.92
Unit3	16	2.47	19	2.93	13	2.01	8	1.23	8	1.23
Unit4	18	2.78	18	2.78	12	1.85	7	1.08	9	1.38
Unit5	19	2.93	20	3.08	14	2.16	8	1.23	7	1.08
Unit6	15	2.31	18	2.78	11	1.69	6	0.92	10	1.54
Unit7	16	2.47	19	2.93	15	2.31	7	1.08	9	1.38
Unit8	15	2.31	19	2.93	14	2.16	9	1.38	8	1.23
Unit9	17	2.62	20	3.08	13	2.01	8	1.23	7	1.08
Unit10	17	2.62	21	3.24	13	2.01	9	1.38	9	1.38
Total	164	25.3	194	29.7	130	20.4	79	12.1	81	12.5

Based on the factors of intercultural communicative competence, the author analyzes the cultural elements involved in each unit of Listening and speaking passages and dialogues in New Horizons College English. Knowledge level includes basic cross-cultural language knowledge and social and cultural knowledge, such as code of conduct, lifestyle, social etiquette, cultural taboos, values, religion, history, geography, and so on. Skill level includes basic verbal and non-verbal communication skills, cross-cultural communication strategies, etc. The emotional level refers to the basic understanding and tolerance of different cultures, the willingness to actively conduct cross-cultural communication, and the correct communicative motivation. At the behavioral level, it involves basic adaptive ability, psychological adjustment ability, and flexible ability to deal with communication barriers and conflicts. The result is in Table 2.

According to Byram's classification standard of cultural elements and Item Frequency Analysis, the statistical results of cultural elements in New Vision College English Listening and Speaking Course 2 show that native culture, target culture and world culture are not equally presented in textbooks. According to the Table 1, the number of cultural elements included in Social Identity and Social Group, Belief and Behaviour, Social and Political institutions and Socialization and the life cycle are more than cultural elements in others. But cultural element in some standards are a little bit less than others, especially cultural elements in National history, National Geography and Stereotypes and National Identity.

According to the table, we can find that these different factors of intercultural communication competence have been included in listening and speaking passages and dialogues of each unit. However, no unit contains many or few cultural elements, and

these different factors of intercultural communication are dispersed evenly. However, on the whole, the frequency of cultural elements related to knowledge level of intercultural communication competence in the textbook is relatively high. The frequency of knowledge related to knowledge level in practice in each unit is more than 18 times. Secondly, cultural elements of critical awareness of self and other cultures are designed in different materials to guide students to recognize different culture in an objective way which is less than the cultural elements of knowledge. Then comes the positive attitudes. The frequency of cultural elements in the positive attitudes related to intercultural communication competence in the textbook is lower than the first two levels. The positive attitudes are mainly designed in some open questions to guide students to discuss and explore. Finally, in terms of skills, the frequency of cultural elements related to intercultural communication skills in the textbook is slightly lower than that of knowledge, and the skills of explanation and association, and skills of discovery and interaction are also important in this textbook, are mainly designed in some situational conversations about different culture.

## 6 Conclusion and Implications

According to the analysis above, it can be seen that these criteria proposed by Byram to evaluate cultural elements of English textbooks are involved, but there is a certain degree of uneven distribution of different types of cultural elements. Compared with native culture and world culture, the information of target culture appears frequently. In the process of arranging teaching materials of textbooks, it is necessary to appropriately increase the content of native culture, so that students can understand Chinese traditional culture and realize different cultures at the same time so as to enhance their national pride and national self-confidence. Moreover, we should also pay attention to the arrangement of the content related to British and American culture, but we should also understand that intercultural communicative competence is not limited to British culture and American culture. Therefore, we should try to balance different teaching materials from each country in the selection of the teaching materials.

The gap between the teaching materials' cultural elements occupied by British and American culture and cultural elements occupied by other countries' cultures should not be too large, which is easy for students to develop the idea of intercultural communication ability.

At the same time, the design of teaching activities on college English textbooks can involve more elements related to the emotional level of cross-cultural communication competence so as to cultivate students understand that some cultures are different from their own culture, and cultivate students' basic understanding and tolerance of different cultures, and encourage students' willingness to actively engage in cross-cultural communication. The design of college English textbook, on the one hand, should help students understand the process of intercultural communication, realize the main factors affecting intercultural communication, get the basic strategies to deal with intercultural communication problems, and cultivate the practical significance of intercultural communication ability; On the other hand, it is necessary to show the diversity of culture to students and increase their understanding of multi-culture.

For college English teachers, first of all, teachers should establish a correct concept of English teaching, put cultural teaching and language teaching in an equally important position, and attach importance to not only cultivating students' language skills in the process of English teaching, but also paying attention to cultural teaching. When our teaching content comes to culture, we should not only teach the culture of the target language country, but also pay attention to the culture of our country, help students establish correct cultural values, and cultivate the cultural self-confidence of the students. Secondly, teachers themselves should pay attention to learning Chinese culture in their daily learning and life, and improve their own Chinese cultural literacy, so as to spread Chinese culture in English teaching better. And schools can pay attention on Chinese cultural element, such as holding activities related to traditional festivals, compiling school-based textbooks related to traditional culture in English, and so on. Finally, teachers should pay attention to excavating and supplementing the content of cross-cultural communication in teaching materials. In classroom teaching, teachers can organically integrate the content of intercultural communicative competence into teaching process by different teaching part, such as text comprehension, and exercises, based on the teaching materials.

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