



The Use of Cultural and Text Linguistics Theories in English Class

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Abstract. This paper explores the application of cultural and text linguistics theories in English instruction. Focusing on variations between Chinese and UK cultures, it highlights the significance of understanding cultural norms of politeness for effective communication. It proposes practical strategies to incorporate cultural understanding into the English learning process for Chinese students. The paper further introduces the theory of text linguistics and its application in teaching English writing skills. The approach involves the analysis of texts to guide learners in creating coherent and comprehensive texts. The combined use of cultural and text-linguistic theories provides a promising method for enhancing English language proficiency.

Keywords: text linguistics; cultural theory; English writing skill

1 Introduction

This essay will concentrate on two facets of applied linguistics. Firstly, it will provide an exposition of applied linguistic theories with an emphasis on cultural and text linguistics. Secondly, it will incorporate these theories into English pedagogy through a thorough analysis. The composition will be segmented into three distinct sections.

The inaugural section will encapsulate a broad definition of applied linguistics while also delineating the rationale for the selection of these theories. The ensuing segment will elucidate the concept of cultural theories, subsequently spotlighting a subset of this, the theory of politeness. An examination of the variances in decorum between China and the United Kingdom will serve to unearth the principal disparities in courteous conduct.

This understanding will prove instrumental in unearthing pedagogical methods tailored for Chinese learners of English, ensuring their adoption of polite behavior during English communication. The final section will introduce the theory of text linguistics and outline its application in English instruction.

2 Definition of Applied Linguistics

Applied linguistics is frequently perceived as a discipline aimed at mitigating social issues concerning language [5]. The evolution of applied linguistic theory is informed not solely by linguistic theory, but also by a range of other disciplines such as psychology, sociology, anthropology, ethnography, educational research, communication, among others [13]. Traditionally, applied linguistics has been primarily concerned with the interface between second language acquisition theory and second language teaching methodologies [14].

However, as Grabe suggests, the primary objective of applied linguistics is to address real-world language-related challenges encountered by various groups, ranging from learners, teachers, and academics to lawyers, service providers, policy developers, translators [6], and a wide spectrum of business clientele. Consequently, applied linguistics can be considered both in a broad and narrow sense [1]. In the narrow interpretation, applied linguistics primarily concerns the relationship between linguistic theory and pedagogy. Progress in applied linguistics, however, extends beyond its narrow definition as a theory and description of linguistic structure [16]. As Tomic and Shuy contend, in a broader understanding, language considerations permeate fields such as psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, discourse analysis, semiotics, and ethnography of communication [4]. These fields contribute novel concepts and insights concerning language production, comprehension and development, variations in language usage, text and discourse structures [8], and components of communicative scenarios. Subsequently, this essay will primarily concentrate on the cultural, communication [10], and text linguistic theories within applied linguistics, and will examine how to employ these theories in an English classroom context.

2.1 The Reasons for Choosing these Theories

Language is the principal medium and location of culture [15]. Silversteina [15] suggests that sociocultural unconsciousness resides in the mind, embodying not just the internal spirit but also manifesting through our language usage. Consequently, it becomes essential for English learners to comprehend Western culture. By acquiring knowledge of Western culture, English learners can exhibit appropriate etiquette within specific cultural contexts.

Furthermore, within a given culture, discourses or texts must comprise specific sequences or series of statements or questions that conform to a certain type. English learners must adhere to the politeness conventions of particular cultures, thus enhancing the relevance of studying text linguistics. This field proves beneficial in enabling individuals to generate texts that articulate their own ideas or explain certain concepts in a particular manner [18]. Therefore, the exploration of cultural theories and text linguistics is both crucial and insightful.

3 The Definition of Culture

The concept of culture has been defined and interpreted in various manners over extended periods. Although Cicero initially used 'culture mentis' in a figurative sense to denote philosophy, its etymological root is in 'cultivation,' akin to 'agriculture' (Jahoda, 1993). By the 18th century in France, the term 'culture' began to embody the connotations of intellectual enrichment or refinement. Subsequently, the term swiftly evolved to denote the attributes of an erudite individual, a definition that has been retained to the present day [9].

Furthermore, Tylor and Kluckhohn offer a comprehensive definition of culture. They posit that culture constitutes the human-made component of the environment and is characteristic of a society's manner of perceiving its social environment. It encompasses knowledge, language, economics, political and legal systems, religion, art, philosophy, customs, and other competencies acquired by humans as members of a society.

Alternatively, culture can also be conceived as an underlying system of values that dictate behavior [17]. This implies that culture is embodied in the values and beliefs mirrored in individuals' behaviors rather than in observable conduct [12]. The subsequent section will analyze politeness theory, a subset of cultural theory, and compare the norms of politeness in Chinese and British cultures.

3.1 Politeness Theory and the Difference of Politeness between China and the UK

Brown and Levinson [3] incorporate the concept of 'face' into their theory of politeness, partitioning it into two distinct components. "Negative face: the desire of every "competent adult member" of a culture that his or her actions be unimpeded by others.

Positive face: the desire of every member of a culture that his or her wants be desirable to at least some others. (p.67)" As we engage in social interactions, we inevitably provoke actions that inherently threaten either our own 'face' or that of others. For instance, when requiring someone to fulfill a task, we may inadvertently impose unpleasant obligations, thereby threatening their 'face.' Conversely, our 'face' might be threatened if our request is declined. Brown and Levinson propose that the severity of such 'Face Threatening Acts' (FTA) is determined by three parameters present in both the speaker (S) and the hearer (H), namely: the social distance (D) between S and H, the relative power (P) of S, and the absolute ranking (R) of impositions within the specific culture ([3], p. 79). The gravity of an FTA informs our choice of face-saving strategies. For instance, when faced with a challenging demand and the social distance and relative power between H and S are low, an expression such as "Hey, Amy, I'm awfully sorry to bother you..." could be used. This statement conveys S's reluctance to inconvenience H, thus demonstrating negative politeness. Meanwhile, the greeting "Hey, Amy" suggests familiarity with H, representing an instance of positive politeness ([3], p. 106). Politeness strategies are deployed differently across cultures. Therefore, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners must comprehend cultural variations to evade misunderstandings arising from divergent cultural patterns.

3.2 The Difference of Politeness between China and the UK

This discussion will analyze the cultural differences in politeness between English and Chinese speakers across five facets: addressing, greetings and farewells, compliments and responses, apologies, and taboos [11]. In terms of addressing, English speakers often refer to individuals based on their gender. For instance, 'Mr.' is used for adult males, 'Mrs.' for married women, 'Miss' for unmarried women, and 'Ms.' for women of unknown marital status. Conversely, Chinese speakers tend to address others based on their occupation; for instance, 'Li laoshi,' where 'laoshi' signifies a teacher, or 'Zhao xiaozhang,' where 'xiaozhang' means president. Moreover, the designations for familial relationships in Chinese are more explicit and intricate than in English, largely due to Confucian influence on the culture, which emphasizes kinship [19]. For greetings and farewells, English speakers commonly use phrases like "How are you?" "Hi," or "Hello." Chinese speakers, however, often ask "Have you eaten?" as a form of greeting, which may not be considered polite in English-speaking cultures. English speakers frequently initiate conversations by commenting on the weather, expecting affirmative responses as a form of polite interaction. Responses to compliments also vary between cultures. Chinese speakers typically respond with modesty, whereas English speakers often accept compliments graciously. Apology expressions like "sorry" or "excuse me" are also used differently. In China, these are mainly used for explicit apologies, while in English-speaking cultures, "sorry" is used in a wider range of situations, including requests or following a sneeze. Taboos also differ across cultures, with inappropriate usage potentially leading to communication difficulties. In the UK, respect for privacy is paramount; personal details such as age, income, marital status, and religion are typically avoided in conversation. In China, death is a topic generally avoided due to its similar pronunciation to the number four, which is considered unlucky.

3.3 How to Teach Politeness in English Class for Chinese English Learners

Considering the cultural differences in politeness between Chinese and British individuals across five facets, these theories can be strategically integrated into English language instruction for Chinese learners. It is imperative to ensure students are aware of the cultural framework of the target language during their English lessons. Authentic resources such as English television programs and films, which vividly illustrate local contexts and behaviors including gestures and facial expressions, can be utilized effectively in the classroom. To adequately prepare students for varying conversational scenarios, an array of expressive phrases should be taught. Role-playing serves as a valuable instructional technique for practising speaking and interactive skills in a context of polite behavior. This method enables students to model and replicate specific phrases within different scenarios such as asking the teacher a question, politely declining a peer's request, or apologizing for breaking a glass. Upon completion of these exercises, students should be given opportunities to practice these interactions further. For instance, pairing students to enact roles in different situations can reinforce their learning. Scenarios could be focused on everyday social interactions among acquaintances or friends in the UK, featuring short, personal conversations about daily life. The purpose

is to highlight the appropriate ways of congratulating, consoling, and supporting each other. These conversations should follow a coherent sequence of statement-question-response in an informal style of spoken English. The ultimate goal is to cultivate students' speaking, listening, and interactive skills. This teaching method can be organized in three stages. The initial stage involves helping students comprehend the text through visual aids, spoken texts, and transcripts. The second stage involves enabling students to complete text-based exercises. The final stage focuses on production, wherein students use cues to role-play.

4 Definition of Text Linguistics

Alotaibi (2010) posits that text linguistics, a subfield of linguistics, concerns itself with texts as modes of communication. Its foundational objectives revolve around the discovery and description of textual grammar. This field does not solely concentrate on defining textuality but also on categorizing texts based on their genre characteristics. Furthermore, it focuses on the cohesion, coherence, topical organization, illocutionary structure, and communicative functions of texts. Beaugrande and Dressler [2] delineated seven criteria for textuality, namely cohesion, coherence, intentionality, acceptability, informativity, situationality, and intertextuality. The investigation into how sentences interrelate in a variety of contexts assures that the text maintains its coherence [7]. These instruments are termed cohesive devices or ties, encompassing the use of repeated words, endophoric references, personal references, demonstrative references, comparative references, substitutions, ellipses, conjunctions, and lexical cohesion[7]. The deployment of these devices establishes logical relationships between sentences.

4.1 How to Use Text Linguistics Theory in English Class

The principles of text linguistics can be instrumental in enhancing English writing skills for learners. Specifically, employing these theories in teaching English writing can guide learners on creating lucid and comprehensive texts on diverse topics of their interest. In order to achieve this, teachers may utilize "cohesive devices or cohesive ties" to instruct students on incorporating linking words that establish logical relationships between sentences. For instance, in the genres of essays, reports, and letters, the context might encompass personal life, while the semantic content could be based on subjects tied to personal interests, events, and experiences. A three-step pedagogical approach can be adopted for teaching writing. Initially, students are presented with a detailed and lucid text. They are encouraged to read and discern the central idea of each paragraph. The teacher can employ a graphical analysis to delineate the text's structure, aiding students in understanding how to achieve coherence in their writing. Additionally, students are guided to identify repetitive words and reference items, such as "it" referring to "this study", and cohesive ties like "Firstly" and "Secondly". The subsequent stage involves students filling in blanks within the text, a technique designed to deepen their understanding. Finally, as a practical application, students are tasked with writing an essay either supporting or opposing a specific viewpoint.

5 Conclusion

This essay concentrates on elucidating the theories of culture, politeness, and text linguistics while analyzing their significance. By contrasting the cultural variations between China and the United Kingdom, suitable pedagogical strategies for teaching politeness to Chinese English learners have been identified. Furthermore, an exploration into the practical application of text linguistics theories within English classes reveals an effective teaching methodology: the analysis of texts. This approach presents a promising avenue for learners to enhance their writing skills.

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