

Research on the application and training of intercultural communication competences in German teaching

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Abstract— It is very common to stress on language rather than culture in the process of German language learning in China, and cultural differences are ignored, so that misunderstanding and conflict are often inevitably occurred. In this paper, the concept of culture and intercultural communication will be illustrated at first. Then cultural differences between Germany and China as well as the integration of culture and language in German language teaching will be also introduced and discussed. Finally, it attempts at training of intercultural communication competences for students in German teaching. Meanwhile, some specific communication strategies and skills will be provided, in order to improve language skills and intercultural communication competences for German language learners, and then to help them to achieve successful communication.

Keywords: *Intercultural communication competences, Sino-German cultural differences, German language teaching.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The process of learning a foreign language refers to a process of intercultural communication. "Language and culture look like a pair of twin sisters, have a close relationship".^[1] Language is not only the carrier of culture, but also reflects culture. Foreign language teaching would become a meaningless infusion full of language symbols without the culture. Hence, foreign language teaching will be full of vitality only by combining with language and culture. With the increasing communication and cooperation between Germany and China in many aspects, such as technology, culture, economy, trade and etc., German plays a much more significant role, and the number of students who learn German is increasingly

growing year by year. It is inevitable for all German language teachers to think about how to bring the cultural factors in the process of German teaching, how to organically combine the language teaching with culture, so as to cultivate the awareness of intercultural communication, and to master a certain intercultural communication standards for German learners.

2. CULTURE AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Culture is the core of intercultural communication study. The word "culture" is used very frequently, and also defined comprehensively. According to Holland sociologist Hofstede, culture refers to the collective programming of the mind distinguishing the members of one group or category of people from others.^[2] Kluckhohn, American human sociologist, defines culture as all life forms created by the history, involving everything explicit and implicit, reasonable and unreasonable, which are existed as a potential guide for people's behavior at one time.^[3]

Moreover, intercultural communication can be regarded as the communication between people with different cultural background. A plenty of intercultural communications, such as verbal and non-verbal communication (body language, paralanguage and utilization of time and space), social relations, interpersonal relationships, etc., are filled with the process of contact and integration between different ethnics.^[4] Intercultural communication focuses on social culture, psychology, environment, situation, and other factors that influence intercultural communication, reveals the relationship between some aspects including communication behavior and manners, discourse structure, and their underlying culture, in order that people will be

acquainted with various cultural differences deduced by intercultural communication.^[5] Who does not understand social customs and morality of other nations in learning a foreign language, often cannot adequately convey and receive all the information of this language while communicating, and accurately understand other's narrative, sometimes could misunderstand and lead to an unsuccessful communication. Therefore, cultural factors, especially factors of intercultural communication, should be emphasized and applied in German language teaching.

3. SINO-GERMAN CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

It is much easier for German language learners to use the Chinese expression habits and cultural understanding into the context of intercultural communication, so that misunderstanding and conflicts are often inevitably occurred. It is more seriously to misunderstand culture than language. In general, although foreigners can tolerant failures of pronunciation, grammar or syntax, they might not understand cultural misreading, which is always considered as an uneducated and ignorant behavior, and affects the communication negatively.^[6] For instance, Chinese students are often puzzled by German greeting style, because German people always ask "Wie geht's?" and answer "Danke, gut.", when they meet and greet with each other; while German teachers often feel strange, even more disgusted, that Chinese students always ask them "Wohin gehen Sie?" und "Haben Sie Schon gegessen?", so that they feel their privacy has been violated. But they do not know that this greeting form just expresses a concern for others in Chinese culture.

If different cultures of both sides can be recognized by each other in intercultural communication, cultural misunderstanding and conflicts will be reduced. Then some typical cultural differences between Germany and China will be listed following.

A. Explicitness & implicitness: Compared with Chinese, German people are more directly in both language and behavior. The Germans, who are deeply influenced by western culture, emphasize on individual freedom and are used to directly express their viewpoints for being honest; while Chinese people mainly stress on humility and harmony due to the impact of traditional culture. Therefore, the Germans are more talkative in the public occasions and willing to express their ideas and

opinions. On contrary, the Chinese people often choose silence, and pay attention to the harmonious communication to avoid conflicts.

B. Individualism & collectivism: In Germany, where individualism is dominated, individual freedom and rights are important, the value and the needs of their own are also attached more attention. This society is comprised by a loose structure. China with typical collectivism, which emphasizes on collective interests, has a close social structure. In China, face, social relationship, collective and other traditional cultures are regarded as a significant factor. The individual is more likely considered as a part of collective, and always belongs to a family, a community or a collective.

C. Unitary-system & multiple-system: Germany is a typical nation of unitary system. Most German people are punctually. Since time is viewed by the Germans as a straight line, they always stress on schedule and planning; while China tends to multiple system. In China time is more flexible, and plans often can be changed as well. Then we can understand why the Germans are always famous for punctuality, why an appointment should be arranged before visiting a German, why German buses can be accurately to minutes, and why Chinese people often complain that "changes always go beyond plans".

D. Low power distance & high power distance: Power distance is mainly to analyze the impact of culture on the organization from social perspective. Germany with low power distance tends to a dispersed power, and emphasizes on the equality, as a result privilege and status are uncommon; while China with high power distance is inclined to a more centralized power. Most Chinese people have a strict hierarchic sense, privilege and status are popular.^[2] For example: in China, parents and teachers have always occupied more power and higher status, so that Chinese students obey to parents at home and to teachers at school.

4. INTEGRATION OF LANGUAGE AND CULTURE IN GERMAN TEACHING

In the process of German teaching, teachers should not only pay attention to the language for students, but also transfer the cultural information and cultivate their intercultural communication competences on the basis of understanding Sino- German cultural differences.

A. The textbooks and teaching resources with good integration of language and culture should be adopted, so that students could enjoy the local customs and cultural connotation during learning German language. At the same time, some teaching materials involving lots of German culture and German language styles are also essential, such as pictures, encyclopedias, audios and videos, which are vivid and practical, closely related to the culture of target language, and conducive to improve students' language level and intercultural communication competences.

B. A learning environment similar to their mother tongue should be collectively established by both teachers and students for the purpose of increasing the opportunities of contact with German language. Teachers should speak in German as much as possible in the classroom, and encourage students communicate in German more. Furthermore, a variety of extra-curricular activities related to German language, which are full of contents, should be organized as much as possible, such as book club, speech contests, drama performances, spoken corner, German Culture Week, German film exhibition and so on. Hence, it not only effectively conveys the cultural information to create a thinking atmosphere for German language learners, but also allows them to experience personally and better to appreciate the German culture and charming.

C. Intercultural communication competences should be trained. In the teaching process, teachers should improve the sensitivity to cultural differences between their native culture and the target language for students through the integration of teaching language and culture in some specific communication scenarios. Students should objectively recognize their native cultures, tolerate and accept other cultures to form better intercultural communication skills. [7] So long as they appropriately know and recognize the cultures of native language and target language, words and behaviors of each other could be better understood, and misunderstandings or cultural conflicts could be avoided. Meanwhile, as language spreader and cultural communicators, teachers should not only strengthen their own awareness and research on the cultures of both native and target languages, but also continue their intercultural learning and exploration to

improve their own abilities of intercultural communication.

5. CONCLUSION

The German teaching should emphasize on cultivating students the awareness and certain standards of intercultural communication. Students, who are learning German, should not only communicate fluently, but also be able to objectively grasp characters of both cultures. In the process of intercultural communication, the ability to adapt to the culture shock and communication skills with different cultural background should be mastered and improved. Foreign language teachers can through the German teaching cultivate their students' intercultural communication competences, help them establish a good psychological quality to master the strategies and skills of intercultural communication, so as to improve their competences for resolving communication problems and troubles, and thus the fundamental purpose of foreign language teaching could be achieved. It is necessary to point out that it does not mean that Chinese students must comply with all sorts of thinking and behaviors of German culture during the training of intercultural abilities in German teaching. It is important for students to learn how to cooperate and to consult with each other jointly and constructively during communicating with German people, in order to achieve a successful intercultural communication.

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