

# Research on British and American Culture Introduction in College English Teaching

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**Abstract.** Language is a part of culture, which acts as carrier of culture. It not only reflects culture, but also is influenced by culture. Human culture is diversified and varied, which is the same as human language. If learners learn a language only without comprehension on culture as basis of its survival, they can not master and apply language well like water without source and tree without root. Research on relationship between language and culture in foreign language teaching was started in the 1980s, but the theory research is always different from practice teaching of college English to certain extent, thereby it is necessary to reform college English education. Culture is the indispensable part for students in learning English, which is also the most most overlooked aspect in English teaching. The author is involved in college English teaching for more than ten years, and realizes a common phenomenon among students, namely foreign language learning effect is affected due to insufficient comprehension on western culture. Therefore, teachers should train and improve the students' language level on one hand, meanwhile they should pay attention to cultivate students' ability of cross-cultural communication in English consciously on the other hand in English teaching. In the paper, necessity of British and American culture introduction is studied, reasons for Chinese students to make mistakes in British and American culture learning are analyzed, several implementation methods of introducing culture into English teaching as well as requirements on the role of teachers are proposed.

## I. Introduction

Chinese and foreign cultural exchanges reached unprecedented level at the beginning of the 21st century. We have to correct English teaching ideas and make English teaching adapt to the requirements and demands in the new era. Cultural information transferred by language is regarded as an important part in English teaching content. Many credit hours and high investment are spent in foreign language, which are not consistent with actual effect of learning due to reasons in many aspects. However, the author believes that college English teaching has been oriented by examination in China. The target language cultural factors are ignored. Artificial separation of the relationship between language and culture is one of the cruxes in college English classroom teaching. Students' language skills should be trained, in addition students' ability of social culture must be developed by successful foreign language teaching method. English communication skill refers to cross-cultural communicative ability aiming at Chinese students. It is difficult to cultivate students into successful masters of cross-cultural communication if they only have excellent language skills without culture deposit of target language. Learners can reach the purpose of communication effectively only through being familiar with differences among different cultures in cross-cultural communication. Therefore, it is required that teacher must pay attention to culture information input in language teaching in order to achieve excellent effect in college English teaching. Culture input should penetrate through all links of language teaching. Students can learn language easily after they comprehend culture knowledge.

Therefore, teachers not only should train and improve the students' language level, but also should pay attention to cultivate students' ability of cross-cultural communication in English consciously at the same time in English teaching.

## **II .Necessity of British and American Culture Introduction**

### **(1) Demand of Era Progress and Social Development**

Economy is highly globalized, and information is integrated in the 21st century. People from different countries and different races can contact and communicate frequently due to progress of transportation and development of communication means. People all over the world are tightly linked through the computer network with rapid development of the Internet, therefore the earth becomes a global village. Human beings achieve more and more global consciousness due to all these changes. Therefore, globalization of cross-cultural communication has become a striking feature in our era. 'Communication among various cultures' is called 'intercultural communication' or 'cross-cultural communication' in English. It refers to communication between native speakers and non-native speakers. It also indicates any communication among people with differences in language and culture background. Respective language environments lead to different language habits, social cultures, local conditions and customs as well as various contextual factors. Since different nations enjoy different ecological, physical, social and religious environment environments. People acquire different speaking modes or habits due to different culture backgrounds. Therefore, people always like to explain words from other people in own speaking mode in communication, thereby leading to incorrect inference on words of the opponent and further producing conflict and failure.

Many language teachers are deeply interested in changes and requirements of times. It has great practical significance for our English teaching to study these failures in cross-cultural communication since language knowledge can be taught in English teaching on one hand, students' communication ability, and cross-cultural communication ability with English should be cultivated more importantly on the other hand. Students do not sufficiently learn one foreign language and can not communicate smoothly only by learning phonetics and grammar rules, and mastering a certain amount of vocabulary.

### **(2) Demand of Foreign Language Teaching Practice**

American Linguist E.Sapir said that culture is social practice and thought, and language is the concrete form of thought'. We can understand culture from two aspects: one is the culture in a broad sense, namely capital letter "C" culture usually called by people (literature, history, philosophy, politics, etc.). The other is culture in a narrow sense, namely the lowercase letter "c" culture, namely ordinary social habits or ability of one social member to adapt to culture thereof. Language and culture depend on each other like twin brothers. They are also mutually affected for mutual promotion like two sides of a coin. Language is carrier, crystallization and important part of culture. Language form is restricted by culture. Language learning cannot be independent of culture learning. Similarly, culture learning cannot be independent of language learning. Synchronous learning of culture and language forms a shortcut to master language.

Linguist Hu Wenzhong proposed that two kinds of ability should be developed at the same time in learning one language: linguistic competence and sociolinguistic competence. Sociolinguistic competence is also known as cultural competence. Then cross-cultural communicative competence can be formed so as to achieve successful exchanges and cooperation between people from different cultural backgrounds finally.

In summary, teaching of social and cultural background knowledge in English nations has become an important subject that can not be ignored.

## **III. Reasons for Chinese Students to Make Mistakes in Learning British and American Culture**

It is well known that Chinese students' English ability has always been characterized by high accuracy. Many students can answer grammar questions correctly, but their ability in learning culture is quite insufficiently.

(1) Chinese way of thinking is transplanted into English expression or Chinese culture is equivalent to western culture, thereby ignoring the cultural differences. When a member of a culture

observes another culture, he often understands and explains the observed phenomenon with own native culture model, and believes that opponent cultural behaviors and own native cultural behavior express the same purpose and meaning. Students can understand, think and express easily according to own native culture mode when expression modes and significance of two cultures are different, thereby producing misunderstanding frequently. □

(2) Real language environment is insufficient. English does not act as a tool for people in daily communication in China. Students use English only in class, who are lack of real language environment. English classroom teaching becomes 'one-man show' of teacher in China due to influence of traditional teaching method-translation. Teachers repeat what the book says, and students just take notes blindly and accept the language information passively. English should be full of vitality, rich and colorful as an international language, but students feel boring in learning.

(3) Culture introduction is ignored in preparation and use of traditional teaching materials in China. Traditional English teaching materials are prepared aiming at training students' ability in examination without consideration of cultivating students' ability in actual application. In the end, students learn isolated grammar knowledge, which is deviated from practical application. They do not understand the cultural background and have no courage to communicate with foreigners in English.

#### **IV. Several Strategies of Introducing British and American Culture in English Teaching**

##### **(1) Exploring Teaching Materials and Enhancing Students' Cultural Awareness**

English teachers should develop and utilize current English teaching materials fully. Classroom pragmatic consciousness should be improved in classroom teaching. They should attach great importance to teaching communication culture and strengthening students' sensitivity to culture.

Teachers should explain cultural background knowledge about target language in the teaching materials. Therefore, students can achieve a general understanding on related culture background before learning the text. Teachers can obtain excellent effect by teaching through combining cultural connotation. For example, one food festival can be held when hamburger is taught. Students and teachers can produce some western food jointly, such as apple pie, etc. Some traditional Chinese food also can be produced such as dumplings, etc. Therefore, students can compare Chinese and western diets in order to choose a healthy diet. Students also can be taught for using western tableware so as to avoid mistake in real life. When students learn unit about festivals, teachers can explain the origins of Christmas, Halloween and other holidays as well as some festival celebration activities. The contents can be compared with traditional Chinese festivals so that students can feel festival atmosphere and improve their interest in learning English.

Most information in internet is in English. Its language can actually reflect language in real life. The teacher can assign preparation task, and ask students to search materials related to text content before formal lesson is started. Therefore, students can understand related background knowledge about text content and deepen the understanding of the text on one hand, they also can expand their knowledge on the other hand. Teachers can make use of infinite resources of network in designing multimedia course-ware. Multimedia teaching means can play an unexpected effect in introduction of geography. Maps of Britain, America and other countries can be displayed visually. In addition, teachers also can make full use of pictures, slides, and other visual teaching tools.

##### **(2) Comparing Cross-cultural Differences**

Both parties of foreign language communication come from different cultural backgrounds so that foreign language communication refers to communication between two cultures. People do not pay enough attention to the relationship between language and culture in English teaching for long time. It is seemingly believed that students can comprehend English and communicate in English only by training abilities in listening, speaking, reading and writing, and mastering pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar rules in teaching practice. In fact, ambiguity and misunderstanding frequently occur in English learning and communication in English since students do not comprehend culture background of language and differences between Chinese and western cultures. Therefore, it is difficult to correctly understand culture difference in learning English.

### (3) Actively create the cultural atmosphere

In accordance to the language acquisition theory: Only when the language learner have contact with the understandable language import, which means the learner's language level of second language is slightly higher than his present one, can the language be really facilitated. Thus, excepting for digging the culture out of the books during the class, we must expand the channels of the students to gain more information about the culture of English countries after class as well as provide actively the culture atmosphere to enhance the students' understandings. So the writer lists three aspects of works which should be concerned: Firstly, teachers should expand the extracurricular reading to know the sense of values and the newest slangs by reading the selected current passages. For example ,the teacher can invite the students to subscribe some English newspapers such as *The 21st Century*, and also select some graceful passages from the *China Daily*, *Times* and *Digest*. These measures will help to improve the culture appreciation ability through appreciating the masterpieces and reading the graceful sentences. Secondly, teachers should make full use of media of television、broadcast and Internet. Students should take advantage of the internet to collect materials relating to the lessons, which can be provided as supplements for class discussions and lessons' contents. We can also enable the students to enjoy the lecture films such as *Family Album*, *USA*, some native films like *Sound of Music* which is suitable for English learners , and English songs. Thirdly, teachers should establish the English atmosphere on campus . Some English indicators 、maxims and proverbs can be pinned on the classroom buildings , laboratory buildings ,classroom and corridors. We can launch some English activities like English corners ,lectures and debates to introduce the English culture . Schools if permitted can provide places to develop scenes enabling the students to communicate in English in a rather real environment. What's more, we can host some English parties according to some major holidays of the western countries.

## V. Requirements for the Teachers in Culture Introduction.

In the process of teaching a foreign language, the cultivation of cultural awareness and the formation of intercultural communication competence are undoubtedly the important projects in the process of foreign language teaching of china in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In addition to teaching foreign language, teachers should also be the introducers of foreign culture and promoters of education reform. Obviously, the task will be put in the shoulder of all the foreign language education workers. And higher requirements and expectation are demanded for foreign language teachers.

First and foremost, teachers need to continuously enhance their awareness of intercultural communication, understand the close relations between language and culture, language teaching and culture teaching. Also, they should have a clear understanding that cultural awareness is a major respect in the formation of comprehensive language application ability. Besides, they need to know the ultimate goal of foreign language teaching is to bring up talents who can communicate and cooperate with others from different cultural background.

Secondly, teachers should continue to strengthen their cultural attainment, master the comprehensive ability of two cultures. Meanwhile, teachers should notice their deficiencies, pay attention to the cultivation and enhancement of cultural awareness. They need to read more modern English literary books, watch some foreign films and TV series. And they can read some articles and academic magazines about western culture, draw conclusions from the text materials in the aspect of differences between Chinese and western culture in order to improve their English quality and communicative ability and meet the new requirements for the foreign language teaching.

Last but not least, teachers should grasp the strategy and skill in the process of cultivating cultural awareness so as to facilitate and accelerate the pace of course reform. As for foreign language teachers, the greatest challenge is not to explain a foreign language and cultural information or to open another course, it is how to teach in combining language and culture.

## **VI. Conclusion**

This passage discuss about the relationship between cultural introduction and language teaching and how to permeate British and American culture in the process of language teaching. The author thinks that culture is an indispensable part in the English learning for students whereas the easiest part to be ignored in the language teaching currently. Apart from raising the attention of language teachers, new methods are to be found to motivate the interests of students and fulfill the English knowledge structure of students.

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