

## Learners' Cultural Awareness in College English Teaching

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**Abstract.** This paper mainly discusses the relationship among language, culture and intercultural communication, expounds the significance of the cultivation of English learners' cross-cultural awareness and feasible strategies to help learners to develop their cross-cultural communication. With the the global economic integration and the increasingly frequent exchanges between China and western countries, effective communication has become high-profile topic in cross-cultural communication. Foreign language teaching is no longer a simple language knowledge impart, but it also should develop the students' English cultural awareness, that is, the communicative ability in different cultural background. Language is the carrier of culture, which is deeply rooted in a language, and there are differences between any two languages. Cultural knowledge is an indispensable and integral part of language learning, so language learners must master the culture of a country of the target language. However, many English teachers in college English lectures often ignore the cultivation of the learners' cross-cultural awareness and ability. With the acceleration of globalization process and the increase of international communication, the cultivation of cross-cultural awareness is becoming more and more important, especially for foreign language learners, which is a new challenge for foreign language teaching in China.

### Introduction

Language is a tool for communication. The teaching aim of college English is to cultivate learners' integrative competence of using English, especially listening and speaking skills. English learners can conduct information exchange in oral and written English effectively in the future work, study and social interaction. Meanwhile, cultivating learners' cultural awareness can help to improve their ability of autonomous learning and the comprehensive cultural quality and to adapt to fast development of global economy. In short, both learners' cultural awareness and English communication ability are equally of vital importance in college English teaching and learning. Therefore, foreign language teaching and learning should attach importance to the integration of developing learners' abilities in acquiring language structures with implied meanings, underlying cultural norms and pragmatic rules. To make this accomplished, special efforts should be made such as linguistic forms and verbal behaviors should be analyzed and introduced to learners from the concept of culture, major factors that influences intercultural communication are worth analyzing for the awareness of national culture and the consciousness of other culture. Most important of all, learners' qualities of their own national culture need to be nurtured together with their sensitivity and tolerance to the target culture and cultural differences, so as to perform appropriately in intercultural communication.

Cross-cultural awareness is the result of cross-cultural communication. The concept of cross-cultural comes from translating English phrase intercultural communication, which refers to communication or interaction between people from different cultural background. It is essential and avoidable to train learners' intercultural communicative ability. To be specific, it has the following three aims: First, it can help to cultivate learners to understand and accept different cultures positively. By comparing with a foreign culture, learners can have better and deeper understanding in their own culture and grasp the similar or different characteristics of each culture. Secondly, intercultural communication ability can help learners adapt to a new culture easily. It is very common the have collision or conflict when exposing to a foreign culture, however, intercultural

awareness can erase or lessen the feeling of discomfort or unnecessary conflict effectively. Thirdly, it is of great significance to train learners' some communicating basic skills, especially to improve communication ability in a foreign language, due to to reform and opening up and the rising frequency of communication between Chinese and foreigners from totally different cultural background.

### **Language、 culture and communication**

As a tool of communication, language is the carrier of culture and also the most important pattern of manifestation for culture. Language and culture are inseparable and interdependent. Language is not hung up there, but rooted in a particular national culture, and it is an important part of culture. A language reflects the ethnic cultural characteristics of the language speakers, also expresses people's ways of thinking, so it can be said that culture is the soul of language. For Chinese students learning English in class, the phenomena of wrong understanding caused by cultural differences are common occurrence. Therefore, during the process of language teaching, the English teachers must consciously teach the relevant cultural background knowledge, namely the cultural teaching. We often say that English learners should learn to think in English, to express and think in the way of English native speakers. It is no doubt that good cross-cultural awareness can help language learners to overcome communication potential obstacles encountered in the communicative process so as to achieve effective communication

Culture consciousness includes understanding and mastering of alien culture knowledge, the consciousness and the ability of intercultural communication. It is a kind of cognitive activity of cultural subconscious and comprehension of cultural content for foreign language learners in the process of language learning. In English teaching, it is English teachers' responsibility to cultivate students' cross-cultural awareness together with language knowledge teaching and skill training to help student to inherit and carry forward the traditional culture as well as to absorb the essence of English culture and finally improve the ability of cross-cultural communication.

### **Feasible strategies to cultivate learners' cultural awareness**

At present, more and more applied linguists and English teachers have realized the importance of cultural factors in English teaching. Language and culture can be seen as the relationship between part and whole. If one can not grasp the overall connotation, it is hard to learn the language itself well. Language and culture tend to complement each other and they both will develop at the same pace. Their close relationship determines either language or culture cannot be in existence independently. The ultimate goal of language teaching is to improve the learners' cultural quality, and to improve learners' integral applying ability, that is, communicative competence, so simple language knowledge teaching cannot satisfy the teaching goal. The cultural knowledge teaching in classroom has become necessary and indispensable. There are no exactly same two cultures in the world, thus, people in a special culture will find it difficult to understand or even accept the other alien culture, which is caused by the lack of the understanding of cultural knowledge.

In order to attain effective communication, it is essential to understand the differences of two or more cultures. Foreign language teachers must bear the duty in the process of foreign language teaching according to different stages of teaching contents to makes the language teaching and culture teaching supplement each other, complement each other. How to cultivate the students' cultural awareness when teaching and learning language knowledge in English class? This article will elaborate this problem from three perspective of teachers, students and curriculum successively.

From the perspective of teaching, teachers play a leading role in class and take control of the teaching contents. For a college English teacher, it is far from enough to teach students only language knowledge in textbook in order to improve the learners' cultural quality. Teachers are required to have correct understanding about language and culture by updating the teaching idea and by enriching their own language and cultural knowledge through various means to help students understand the language communication style and features of native English speakers. Language

teachers should read a lot about the cultural knowledge in the target language country, and make practical teaching plan and design to arouse learners' interest even by differentiating each word, sentence and discourse contained in the cultural differences and cultural awareness in the process of careful preparation. Teachers should conduct the cultivation of cultural awareness throughout each lesson, which can not be independent from language teaching or culture teaching, to achieve organic combination of the two, that is, both communication culture teaching and cultural knowledge teaching go forward hand in hand.

The teachers must keep on learning Chinese and foreign knowledge to have the dual cultural understanding ability and tell learners languages development and the differences in aspects of customs and etiquette to make them understand western values, ways of thinking and social behavior. English teachers should explain properly the cultural knowledge with combination of the teaching material contents and make the lead-in of foreign culture by contrasting Chinese and western cultural differences and idioms allusions. As a saying goes, teachers should have a bucket of water before they give learners a glass of water. Universities or colleges should attach importance to teachers' English cultural awareness training and promotion and organize teachers to have short-term foreign visit, thus, teachers are provided opportunities of cross-cultural communication with natives to master the differences in Chinese and English from their own personal experiences. To be short, teachers can take advantage of their own experiences to stimulate students interest in learning of British and American culture in the English class and help to broaden learners' cultural awareness horizon and make students have certain cross-cultural awareness.

Learners should be the center of the classroom teaching and learning and should be clearly aware of the relationship between language learning and cultural knowledge. Language learners should have a strong desire to be able to communicate in English accurately and correctly and it is impossible to learn English well if one can not understand English culture. One can not really master a language if one does not understand the cultural pattern and standards. On the basis of language knowledge from the textbook, learners should have the consciousness to explore potential cultural knowledge, such as playing the roles of the English culture knowledge and learning to use English cultural knowledge. In addition to the limited class time, after class learners should read British and American general situation, British and American culture and customs and other related contents of the book to understand the similarities and differences in Chinese and English and to grasp the commonness and individuality of different things, and then learners can discuss and exchange their ideas, and gradually the students are trained to study the skills and techniques of the English culture with analysis method based on making contrast with their native culture. In reading, learners should pay special attention to the social and cultural background of the works and form the unique cultural insight to gain the cultural knowledge by analyzing the context.

In order to get better understanding on the foreign culture, learners can also research on the original teaching materials associated with the British and American culture systematically in extracurricular time, especially some audio and video materials, the foreign newspaper magazine and the original film. Thus with the acquisition of language knowledge learners can experience the real language scene and gradually they can be familiar with the customs and habits of the target language speakers. If learners keep a watchful eye on the language in the latest fashion, they can understand the cultural factors behind the language accurately and profoundly.

For English majors, in order to help them develop better language and culture consciousness, the curriculum design for college English should be more scientific and effective. Except for those common European history, British and American and British and American national history, the curriculum should add more culture-related courses such as the linguistic ethnology, language and culture and cross-cultural communication. Through the study of national culture, learners can have a better understanding on the language itself and grasp the connotation of the language well. The ultimate goal of the curriculum reform is to make use of the research results of the language and culture, social linguistics directly into foreign language teaching and thus presenting the objective existence of cultural differences objectively to learners.

## Summary

It is an objective fact of the existence of the cultural differences. If one wants to learn English well, he or she must master English culture background knowledge. Except for as a communication tool, English learners can also understand the culture of the English-speaking countries by learning English to promote cultural exchanges between the different ethnic groups. This is an important mission for foreign language teachers and such research topic that cannot be ignored, so the cultivation of learners' cultural awareness is an important content in foreign language teaching. Importation the cross-cultural contents in English teaching has its necessity and feasibility and comparison between different cultures and thoughts will provide the language learners knowledge and skills to communicate effectively. Gradually learners can learn to use English in different occasions correctly and effectively. foreign language teaching will achieve a higher standard by improving English learners' language skills and cross-cultural communicative competence.

Teachers and learners should renew the idea and pay attention to the importance of cultural awareness training through various methods to improve their knowledge level and related cultural knowledge in foreign language teaching and learning. Teachers can lead in cultural content in the teaching from basic cultural background, cultural connotation of words, social customs and values to make students understand the social background of the target language, social culture, customs and habits and customs. By this way can learners understand the cultural differences and cross cultural gap correctly or avoid the mistakes due to cultural differences, instead they can achieve intercultural communication significantly. Cultivating the learners' cultural awareness can improve the learners' cultural quality and ability to use English integrally. With the basis of understanding cultural patterns and principles, learners can communicate in English appropriately.

The acquisition of language and communicative ability in target language means cultivation of culture awareness, acceptance of values, reshape of personality and development of a new thinking way. Foreign language teaching is faced with the challenge from the new century, and intercultural communicative competence becomes particularly important. With the development of linguistics, Chinese and foreign scholars' exploration in language teaching and learning, especially those relative interdisciplinary subjects, is bound to shift from teaching methods to main participants of learning. However, it is not good enough for learners' practical communicative ability. As for the problem about the relationship among language, culture and communication, and how to deal with the relationship between language knowledge teaching and culture lead-in, linguistics and experts in language teaching need more thinking and exploring.

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