

How to Cultivate Students' Humanity in English Teaching

-Taking *Advanced English Course* as an Example

Bu Xun

English Department, Shanghai Normal University Tianhua College
Shanghai, China

Abstract—Influenced by traditional exam-oriented education, English teaching tends to be more utilitarian, and its humanity and critical thinking are neglected. In view of this phenomenon, this paper explores how to cultivate humanistic spirit in English teaching through literature review, English teaching practice and taking *Advanced English for English majors* as an example. This paper discusses methods such as extended topic discussion, multi-perspective reading, rhetoric language appreciation and exploration of cultural connotation, all of which aim to expand students' humanistic vision, enhance their humanity qualities, and equip them with critical thinking.

Keywords—Humanity quality; Humanistic vision; Topic discussion; Appreciation of rhetoric; Cultural connotation

I. INTRODUCTION

When it comes to English education, the first thing that people think of is its instrumentality and practicality rather than its disciplinarity. On one hand, influenced by the traditional exam-oriented education, the current English teaching ignores students' emotional needs, thinking development and values formation because of taking the exam as a main focus. The humanistic connotation of English education is neglected and rarely used as a carrier of humanities education. In addition, the curriculum centering on skills training of listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translation also degrades students' depth of thought, knowledge structure, and ability to think and innovate. On the other hand, "against the impact of the market economy, humanistic courses have been cut, and their class hours have been greatly reduced" (Liu Wei), so humanistic cultivation and care has been greatly neglected. Zhang Zhongzai calls for "enhancing humanistic education of foreign language colleges and humanistic cultivation of students has been a priority that we must pay close attention to." However, in order to achieve differentiated competition, English major in private colleges has always focused on skills training, and implemented vocation-oriented compound English education. The main objectives of language skills and professional knowledge reflect the practicality and utilitarianism of such English education.

As the German educator Humboldt puts it, "The primary goal of education is to cultivate human spirit. Only a complete person can truly contribute to society." There exist technological development, environmental deterioration, and money worship in today's society. As such, under various pressures, students must have good humanity quality and

morals so as to properly handle the relationship between people, between people and society, and between man and nature. In summary, English teaching is not only a tool for students to learn language, but also helps them broaden their humanistic visions, expand their mental space, enrich their life experiences, and cultivate their humanistic spirits, thereby enhancing their realm of life.

II. THE CONNOTATION OF HUMANITY QUALITY

"Humanity" refers to various cultural phenomena in human society, while "quality", based on human acquisition and experience, emphasizes its internality. Due to the rich connotation of humanity quality, scholars also diversify their understandings: "The key to humanity quality is human emotions or feelings (Yang Shuzi)" and "humanity quality is the spirit formed by people internalizing the acquired culture as they are in contact with the outside world (Zhang Chuting)". Ultimately, humanity quality is the excellent culture and cultivation of the spiritual level, including noble ideology, ideal sentiment, psychological personality, values and cultural accomplishment. People-oriented humanity quality pays attention to the real existence and ultimate value of people. To cultivate students' humanity quality, that is, through the study of humanities, teachers help students obtain a more comprehensive knowledge of humanities, a more rigorous way of thinking, and a higher spiritual realm, as well as help them establish a correct value system and shape a spiritual home with wonders. Students' "self-improvement" is set as the starting point, and how to help learners achieve "self-realization" serves as the ultimate task of education.

Wang Shouren holds that "English is a part of humanities... The basic elements of English subject are English language, literature and culture." Language is the carrier of culture, so "there is always an inseparable inner connection between language and culture. Learning language without understanding the culture from bottom to top is equal to a tree without roots. In this way, language can never be mastered." The inheritance of language is the inheritance of culture, and the spread of language is the spread of culture. Han Baocheng and Liu Runqing believe that the purpose of English education is that students learn culture, know the world, and cultivate minds via English for laying foundations for their lifelong development. Qian Guanlian also puts forward a similar point of view, "The so-called education and cultivation function of foreign language refers to the thinking training of foreign language teaching to learners except utilitarianism, the

cultivation of personality, the instillation of the culture and spice of the foreign language, and the improvement of comprehensive quality. In a word, it aims to cultivate a person who will develop harmoniously and is suitable for a high degree of civilization.”

In fact, as students with English major of humanities, they must not only master the skills of using foreign languages, but also have profound professional and humanistic knowledge. They need to have the humanistic vision and critical thinking to integrate Chinese and Western cultures and cross Chinese and foreign cultural barriers. English itself is a cultural form, carrying a colorful human culture and humanistic spirit. Qin Xiubai points out, “Without humanity, language will not exist, and discarding humanity would never let you master language.”

III. THE MAJOR APPROACHES TO CULTIVATE HUMANITY QUALITY IN ENGLISH TEACHING

Advanced English is a compulsory course for English majors in their junior year. It is also a core course of comprehensive skills training for them to pass TEM 8. It has been the key course for English major since the founding of the college. The main teaching task is to improve the basic skills such as listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation on the basis of the first and second grades, and comprehensively enhance their integrated language skills. On this very note, students can communicate in English at a higher level, their ability of logic thinking and critical thinking and the ability to independently conduct research-based learning can be developed, their humanistic vision can be expanded, and their humanistic accomplishment can be enhanced.

Other than the basic stage of the first and second grades, the third and fourth grades should focus on improving literary appreciation, translation, writing, as well as logic and critical thinking on the basis of grammar and vocabulary learning. Theme understanding, writing strategies, rhetorical techniques, translation skills and cultural thinking serve as the key points of teaching. The difficult point of the course is how to combine English teaching with humanistic education. The significance of English teaching lies in infecting students through articles with excellent content and style, and makes students harbor humanistic spirit gradually. This course aims to not only improve students’ language proficiency but also enhance their humanistic accomplishment through the following ways:

First, it is advisable to reveal the author’s writing motivation and influence on the subject of a text through the introduction to his or her identity, cultural background and masterpieces. When introducing a writer, if teachers can let the writer show up by himself, using vivid words to introduce his or her life perception and writing motivation. In this way, students undoubtedly will have a more intuitive and in-depth understanding of the people behind the work. Taking the text *A Hanging* as an example, if teachers simply introduce the life story of its author George Orwell and list his main works, it is difficult for students to have a deep understanding of his language style, standpoint and writing motivation. But by introducing a classic description in Text II *Shooting An Elephant*, teachers let students find sentences which can express the author’s standpoint and motivation, such as “imperialism was an evil thing, all against their oppressors-the British, the

dirty work of Empire, an intolerable sense of guilt”. Through these words full of subjective feelings, the author’s point of view stands vividly on the paper and students obtain a specific and direct understanding of the view. Such a first-hand language is more powerful than teachers’ tedious second-hand introduction, impressing students more fundamentally. Based on the above warm-up introduction, teachers further introduce the author’s writing motivation, namely sheer egoism, aesthetic enthusiasm, historical impulse and political purpose, using Orwell’s representative work *Animal Farm* to explain and analyze.

The cultivation of the humanistic spirit is inseparable from the classic reading. Classic reading enables students to understand the common experience of human beings, helps students develop noble values, and guides students to think about what kind of person they want to be and what kind of life they should live. Due to the influence of fast food culture, the mentality of students is now impetuous. It is difficult for them to calm down and read classics, so they lack enough extracurricular reading and their humanistic vision is very limited. In response to this phenomenon, teachers select the most representative paragraph from *Animal Farm* for students to appreciate, extract the most classic and interesting part of the text, namely the seven laws before the animal uprising and the five laws after the animal uprising, and let students find differences via comparison and try to analyze the reason. In this way, students’ interest is stimulated and their enthusiasm is fully aroused. Some students buy the original work to study after class, and some go to the theater to watch the adapted version. Therefore, teachers are not only the imparters of knowledge in class, but also act as guides, thereby providing students with new perspectives and recommending and sharing classic works. Students’ reading amount may be large or small, and their humanistic vision may be wide or narrow, but they have a common perception of the classics. By excerpting representative and interesting segments and designing thought-provoking questions, teachers make students learn and think, and have the desire to rush to the library after class, stimulating students’ interest and curiosity and igniting their passion for reading.

Second, through the discussion of the text theme and extended topics, students’ critical thinking can be trained. The cultivation of students’ critical thinking serves as a critical part of improving humanity quality. After students understand the theme of *A Hanging* and the author’s disapproval of hanging, teachers guide the students on the topic to discuss and debate whether to abolish the death penalty. At the same time, the topic can be extended to discuss whether euthanasia should be legalized. Due to the limited life experience and reading volume, students take many opinions for granted without independent thinking, so they have nothing to say about many topics and cannot argue on a certain standpoint. At this time, teachers should give students some constructive opinions and tips, let students listen to some different voices, and encourage students to check relevant literature to demonstrate their positions. For example, when discussing euthanasia, teachers introduce a video from Boston Legal. In the video, the two lawyers conduct a heated court debate on whether it is legal that the doctor gives the patient euthanasia before major disasters.

When watching the video, students not only exercise their listening, hearing different opinions, and gain effective input, but also learn the logic techniques used by lawyers in their arguments, including exemplification, analogy, and comparison. Moreover, students acquire skills of impressing the audience in public speaking, including telling stories, citing personal experiences, and employing parallelism. In this sense, it can be said that watching the video has achieved the above purposes at one time.

Third, through the supplementary of the subject-related reading materials and the presentation of different perspectives, students are encouraged to conduct comparative analysis of the text, and use various ways to interpret the text, thus expanding students' humanistic vision. Taking *A Hanging* as an example, in addition to the author's point of view, teachers also encourage students to look at the article from the perspective of the man who should be hanged. Through his body language, students can try to figure out the inner world before his death and his attitude towards death. The supplementary reading materials are *Discus Thrower* and *The Graceful Hands*. Teachers set up three questions to consider: What are the similarities and differences among the protagonists' attitudes toward death in these three articles? What causes their attitudes towards death? What is the evidence in the text? In this way, it not only expands students' reading, but also provides different interpretations of the article, and exercises students' ability to make arguments based on evidence and to think logically via finding supporting information to prove their own viewpoints, thus stimulating students to explore the theme deeply and reflect on human nature.

Fourth, it is necessary to improve students' capability of literary appreciation and translation through the appreciation of rhetoric and the comparative analysis of translation versions. Literary appreciation ability allows students to experience the beauty of language and words in the process of reading, and feel the charm of language. In addition to guiding students to identify the rhetorical devices commonly used in literary works, such as simile, metaphor, metonymy, exaggeration, personification, alliteration, rhyme, oxymoron, pun, and irony, teachers also need to explain some more complicated rhetorical devices applied in the text, such as euphemism, transferred epithet, analogy, allusion, intertextuality, parody, separation of Chinese characters, anti-climax, and reduplicated words. In terms of these rhetorical devices, teachers intend to let students perceive the devices' subtleties and role as a promoter to enhance word expressiveness, encourage students to employ the devices for writing, and improve their writing ability. To improve the ability to appreciate texts, reading the original is a way and conducting comparative analysis of translation versions is also an effective means which can stimulate students' interest. Junior students majoring in English have already taken translation theory and practice classes, and have known and mastered some basic translation theories. Through the comparative analysis of text translations, students can use translation skills to compare language styles, wording techniques and translation methods of different target texts.

Fifth, through the in-depth exploration of the literary points and cultural connotations in the article, students' literary perception and cultural sensitivity can be cultivated. When students prepare lessons before class, they often just understand and translate words and phrases in the article. It is difficult for them to find some hidden literary points and understand the profound cultural connotations. At this time, teachers' humanistic vision work. Teachers should give students suggestions, encourage them to search for information, design progressive problems, and guide students to gradually explore the cultural implication of the article. For example, in the unit *Two Truths to Live By*, there is a sentence, that is, "Life is a paradox", in the first paragraph. Teachers can quote the famous saying from George Orwell's masterpiece 1984: "War is peace. Freedom is slavery. Ignorance is strength." And teachers ask students how to interpret these paradoxes so as to deepen their understanding of the word "paradox". "It was not a pleasant place", a sentence in the fourth paragraph of the article, seems to be simple and usual, but in fact it carries many connotations. It is a sentence that Henry James wrote to his sister in December 1876, describing the charm of London, which cannot be expressed in a few words. The letter sings the magnificent atmosphere of London and emphasizes the other side of it: darkness, dirtiness, poverty, and the absence of beauty. In addition, the French woman writer Flora Tristan described appalling conditions in London in *The London Journal of Flora Tristan*. The painter Monet also showed the parliament building under the smog of severe pollution through paintings. All these are vivid interpretations of "London, not a pleasant place". If teachers do not explain the intertextuality and cultural association of the sentence, students will not know what it is exactly and not know how to paraphrase the sentence. In this case, students can hardly understand the essence of the cultural connotation echoing the historical text like native readers; they will just understand the sentence superficially and miss the points.

On this basis, teachers can also encourage students to look through literary works after class so as to find out which places are the pleasant ones in the eyes of the writer. For example, E. M. Forster described Florence as a heavenly pleasant place in *A Room With A View*. Moreover, according to the description of sunlight in the sixth paragraph, teachers can also introduce the classic description of sunlight "In the sunlight, even death is sunny. The sun always shines." in D. H. Lawrence's works *Flowery Tuscany*, and let students do comparative analysis to find similarities of the two descriptions and their respective priorities and analyze reasons according to the context. Similarly, for the allusion "Seize each golden minute" in the ninth paragraph and the "flowing" in the fifteenth paragraph, teachers can explain the contents with corresponding cultural backgrounds, thereby expanding student's humanistic vision. If teachers are only satisfied with the simple text analysis, but they cannot understand the profound cultural connotations and pass on the nourishment of these humanistic spirits to students which will be a huge loss for students.

IV. CONCLUSION

To sum up, as a core course for senior English majors, Advanced English should not only focus on the teaching of language ability such as listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation, but also needs to combine professional connotations and talent training objectives to enhance students' humanity quality, including humanistic cultivation, humanistic feelings, humanistic spirit, cross-cultural communication skills, critical thinking, lifelong learning and sustainable development capabilities. Teachers should read more humanities classics, establish a more complete knowledge reserve, and improve their own language proficiency and awareness of cross-culture differences. Besides, teachers are supposed to explore and expand the content of teaching materials, enhance the humanistic connotation of teaching content, and broaden students' humanistic vision. Only when teachers have a profound knowledge of culture can they give lectures knowledgeably and skillfully. As such, students can learn from their teachers, experience a broader humanistic world, and open up their own humanistic thinking.

REFERENCES

- [1] Deng Yingling, Paying Attention to the Humanity of English Majors [J], *Foreign Language Teaching and Research*, 2013 (3), 436-441.
- [2] Feng Dezheng, Humanistic and Moral Education in English Teaching: Multimodal Discourse Construction of Positive Values [J], *Foreign Language World*, 2015, (5), 27-34.
- [3] Hu Wenzhong, Preface [A]. Sun Youzhong (edition), *English Education and Literal Education* [C] 2008. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 1-2.
- [4] Hu Wenzhong, Sun Youzhong, Highlighting the Characteristics of the Discipline, Strengthening the Humanity Education—— On the Current Teaching Reform of English Major [J], *Foreign Language Teaching and Research*, 2006 (5): 243-247.
- [5] Wang Shouren, Strengthening the “Discipline” Construction of Undergraduate English major [J], *Foreign Language and Foreign Language Teaching* 2001, (2): 42-43.
- [6] Wen Qiufang, Research on the Status Quo of Chinese Foreign Language Students' Thinking Ability [M], Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2012.
- [7] Zhang Zhongzai, Utility and Humanism in Foreign Language Education [J], *Foreign Language Teaching and Research*, 2003 (6): 453-457.