

On the Cultivation of Intercultural Communication Competence in College English Teaching in Globalization

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Abstract—In the Outline of National Medium-and Long-Term Program for Education Reform and Development, the section of higher education pointed out that we should strengthen international communication and cooperation. Drawing lessons from advanced educational ideas and experience in the world, we could promote the education reform and development in China and increase our international status, influence and competitiveness. Adapting to the social and economic request of opening up, we should cultivate plenty of international talents with broad horizons who have a good understanding of international rules and can participate in international affairs and competitions. Meanwhile, we should reinforce the education for international understanding and promote the intercultural exchange, increasing students' cognition and understanding of different countries and cultures. [1]Thus, teachers, especially college English teachers, need to deeply understand the importance of culture, constantly enrich their intercultural knowledge, proactively change their teaching methods and set up a concept that language and culture is of equal importance. Besides, they also have to enhance students' cross-cultural communication competence with effective methods, through which we can keep pace with the times and increase their cultivation of foreign culture.

Keywords—College English; intercultural communication; education for international understanding; methods

I. INTRODUCTION

College English Curriculum Requirements, launched by Ministry of Education in 2007, indicated that the instruction of college English is part of higher education. College English, guided by foreign language teaching theory, mainly involves English knowledge and practical skills, cross-cultural communication and learning strategy. Its instructional goal is training students' comprehensive and practical ability, especially their listening and speaking skills. Thus, they can communicate with others in English in their study, work and social intercourse, increase their capacity of independent study and overall cultural awareness, so as to fit well with the demands of national development and international exchange. College English is not only a basic course to learn language, but also to expand knowledge and know global cultures. It is a tool with cultural connotation. Thus, we must take full

consideration of training students' cultural awareness and teaching worldwide cultural knowledge while designing the college English courses. [2]That means College English Curriculum Requirements attach importance to culture. It is an irresistible trend that language and culture is of equal significance. Therefore, Teachers must enhance their cultural cultivation, store cross-culture knowledge and draw lessons from advanced teaching theory. Through various teaching and extracurricular activities, they should enhance students' awareness of cross-culture and communication competence, as well as the cognition and understanding of different countries and cultures. In this way, we can cultivate graduates with both solid professional foundation and ability of international exchange.

II. CONCEPTS OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

A. Communicate

"Communicate" has a close relation with "commonality". "Communicate" derived from Latin word, *communis*, which means common. Obviously, "communicate" is closely related to "commonness", namely the latter or "share" is the premise of the former. Besides, only people from same culture can share in many aspects and conduct effective communication. That means the connotation of "commonness" is the same as the "communicate" and "culture". [3]Symbol is a main tool to communicate, any of which can be used. That means verbal, non-verbal symbol and any other signs all can be used to communicate. Symbol, a generalized concept, involves close ones like body and spoken language, and distant ones, such as signs depending on auditory and visual sense and smell, as well as symbols transcending time and space like pictures and characters. [4] "Communicate" is a process to code and decode, while exchange of information is the same activity happening in one's mind. Coding is a course to encode thoughts, feelings and ideas into symbols like verbal or non-verbal activities and written language; decoding is a process to give meaning to and explain the symbols and information from the outside. Communication, a cultural and social activity, definitely happens in the society and is affected and restricted by lots of factors in the society. These factors include: wide environment, such as values, cultural orientation and cosmology; social structure, psychological factors; physical factors and etc.. Context factor, including bilateral social status, character,

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relationship and the place, time and topics, subjects to the broad cultural environment and directly influences it. Due to the masses of variety, there always exists a distance between the message delivered by the one coding it and the meaning received by the one decoding it. In the cross-cultural communication, giving meaning to something is really a complex process because of the differences in various societies.

B. Communication and Culture

Communication is a part of culture, both of which are signal systems. The only difference is that communication is also a coding system of culture. In terms of the sociology, learning communicating ability and socialization is conducted simultaneously. Human build internal and external world through communicating—it is the most significant mechanism for people to survive, society to function and culture to inherit and store. [5]That is because, either culture based on nationality or group cultures in dominant culture, the majority of them enjoy their own cultural system. In most cases, thanks to the shared history and geographical conditions, they have a lot in common, such as world outlook, value system, life style and communication norms. These commonalities are the regulated and reinforced communication system of the culture. Once a group takes shape, a relevant cultural system comes into being. We all belong to several different cultural groups and have various identities. Each group has its own communication system, which is called communicative culture, namely “a set of normative system for communication shared by a group”. [6]Communication happens in certain cultural environment and situation and its behavior has fixed culture, pragmatics and linguistic rule. Thus, the process of communication is a procedure that two people predict the outcome of each other’s behavior, which can be conscious or unconscious. However, whether it is accurate or not depends on people’s understanding of the relationship between the social environment and interaction of their behavior, as well as the mastery of culture and pragmatic rules and whether we can use them flexibly. That means the more we know about the communicative factors, the better we can predict and associate with others. Therefore, the knowledge about relevant cultural background plays an important role in successful communication.

C. Intercultural Communication

Intercultural communication rose in the United States, Edward T. Hall, American anthropologist, is the founder of it. The Silent Language, published in 1959, put forward two nouns: intercultural communication and cross-cultural communication, both of which had same meaning. It referred to the communication between overseas Americans and local people. Then, it became the communication among people from different cultures. [7]In early 1980, intercultural communication was introduced into China. Therefore, it means association among people enjoy different backgrounds. With the rapid development of transportation and communication tools, people from all over world can contact with each other. However, there are differences of cross-cultural communication. Some people think everyone is unique in culture, so it exists between any two people. This reminds us that vague comparison should be avoided. However, while

researching it, we should focus on the nationality and the mainstream culture in one country. [8]Cross-cultural communication is the association in people with different ideas and signal system. Cultural diversity may lead to cultural misunderstandings, even conflicts, due to differences in communicative rules, thoughts and values. For example, Chinese people like to compliment senior people by saying “老当益壮，老骥伏枥”. This idiom means even an ambitious person is old, he still has great aspirations. In Chinese culture, it is a compliment showing respect to the old. However, in The Contemporary Chinese Dictionary [Chinese-English Edition] (revised edition) and Chinese-English Dictionary, it is translated into “You are old, but nonetheless vigorous and active. So you are really an aged hero who still cherishes high aspiration.”Hearing this, senior people in the West will only be strongly disgusted and irritated; because it offends the taboo of saying one is old.

One outstanding feature of intercultural communication is that different culture would bring many differences in aspects like language, society, history, living environment, custom, communicative rules, thinking mode and even values. Thus, in cross-cultural communication, people are used to the indigenous culture and extremely sensitive to other culture. So it is hard to avoid the difficulties while understanding and communicating.

III. IMPORTANCE OF CULTIVATING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE IN COLLEGE ENGLISH TEACHING

On account of the cultural diversity, every social phenomenon and communicative behavior looks so unfamiliar, while others’ actions seem so “weird”. Thus, it is difficult to conduct effective cross-cultural communication, which requires us to correctly handle complicated cultural misunderstanding, even conflicts. We must constantly eliminate the problems caused by cultural obstruction. In intercultural communication, we should not only pay attention to the correctness of our verbal and non-verbal behavior, but also the appropriateness of it. [9]So, college teachers must attach equal importance to language and culture and train students’ ability in cross-cultural communication.

A. Demand for Deeply Understanding the Culture of Target Language

As the study on cultural subjects like intercultural communication and second language teaching go further, people gradually know the significance of culture in association. Lack of knowledge about the cultural connotation in communicative language always causes social barriers, which is beyond count. Communication cannot do without language, so do the culture. The basic attribute of culture lies in its nationality. “Each nation has its own living habit, custom, religion, ethic and aesthetic sentiment, which constitute its cultural core.” [10] Applying to language and experiencing a long period, they gradually form a set of language communication rules. That means different culture and language leads to various rules to guide language communication behaviors. To someone shared same culture, he

acquires associative rules and language at the same pace. In cross-cultural communication, if one fails to have clear awareness of it, or the other one know little about the rules, he or she may get accustomed to it without understanding. So he would use his own rules to comprehend others, or impose his ideas upon others unconsciously, which leads to pragmatic failure or social barrier. Therefore, college English teachers should not only let students master our language communication rules, but also guide them to deeply understand the cultural habits and socio-cultural background of English-speaking countries and know various values and beliefs existing in different nations.

B. Demand for Adapting to the Development of Multicultural Times

We are in an era of diverse culture or postmodernism. Highly-advanced scientific technology, especially the highly-modernized media, makes our world change dramatically. Global village, a term raised by Marshall McLuhan, is used to describe the effect brought by the development of media. New social media has already expanded the dense of our social structure, while the new communication technology has surpassed our capacity as human being—the conversations with people from different cultures we might participate has surmounted our limitation. The people we have dialogue with are not only acquaintances, but also strangers belonging to various cultures, races and nationalities. What's more, the channel and tool of information also exceeds original scopes. So to speak, association between any two people is intercultural communication in varying degrees. In postmodern society, using single language to express one is beyond enough. It is, obviously, a society with diversified cultures and languages. Interpersonal communication is both hopeful and dangerous, because every conversation may become cross-cultural—we may walk to the edge of our own culture at any moment. The culture we encounter could be totally divergent from our own one. At that time, we must face the challenges whether we have common languages with others. [11] Hence, in college English class, teachers should guide students to understand and appreciate multi-culture and gradually train their intercultural communication ability.

IV. METHODS TO CULTIVATE INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE IN COLLEGE ENGLISH TEACHING

A. Strengthening Students' awareness of Cross-Culture

Intercultural awareness is no match for intercultural knowledge, but the latter is the foundation and premise of the former. In order to increase the awareness, we should learn and master abundant knowledge about foreign culture, deeply study and understand our indigenous culture and possess a wealth of knowledge and accurate discernment. Thanks to the differences between various cultures, it leads to cultural misunderstandings and even conflicts. To live in a world with diversified cultures, it is inevitable to feel confused about the expectation towards people from different countries. However, the experience would let us know that even same action, rule and symbol has disparate meanings. Renato Rosaldo pointed out that

encountering discrepancy is an innate and unavoidable part in modern urban life. It provides anecdotes and opportunities to describe normal experience. Then, how do we treat something we have while others not, or vice versa? And how do we regard our differences? What attitude should we hold? That requires college English teachers to encourage students to recognize cultural discrepancy. It means we should comprehensively understand foreign culture and accept it, while promote our traditional culture.

B. Guide Students to Comprehend the Connotation of Culture Shock

In the Introduction for Intercultural Communication, Professor Hu Wenzhong, Perking University, writes, "Culture Shock, first used by Oberg in one of his academic papers in 1960, summarizes plenty of uncomfortable symptoms of cross-culture and becomes popular then. He believes that there are 6 aspects of its behavior: 1) exhaustion out of constantly mental adjustment; 2) sense of loss from lack of friends, status, job and property; 3) failing to accept members from new culture or being rejected; 4) confusion over his own character, expectation, values, feelings and identification; 5) surprise, anxiety, disgust and anger after feeling cultural difference; 6) helplessness because he or she cannot deal with new environment. Culture shock is the mental reaction happening when someone faces a totally different cultural environment. In other words, a person migrates from one place to another, so his familiar symbol, custom, behavior, social relationship and values will be replaced, which will cause anxiety and tension, even depression. In serious circumstances, he or she would suffer from mental and physical illness or even psychosis and commit suicide. That is culture shock." [12] In a foreign country, the supports from relatives, friends and colleagues reduce dramatically. Meanwhile, culture shock has become an inevitable phenomenon, because every country has its own values and life style. As the society is developing, undergraduates are more and more likely to be sent to foreign countries for business after entering in work force. Thus, teachers must take the responsibility to encourage students to learn more about "culture shock".

C. Training Intercultural Communication Competence By Abundant Material and Activities

Teachers can select some reading materials and videos reflecting cultural discrepancy and conflicts and show them to students in the class. Then students can discuss in groups to deeply experience foreign culture, so their intercultural communication capacity can be cultivated. Besides, teachers, together with foreign teachers in school, could organize some activities, such as mountaineering and hiking. They could guide students to design questions that are opposite to the ideas and personality of people from Britain and America in advance. Then students exchange with foreign teachers and ask them the prepared questions concerning their privacy. At last, it would lead to many contradiction, even may depress or irritate foreign teachers. Then Chinese teachers should explain to them to eliminate misunderstanding and ask them about cultural differences. Through these activities, undergraduates could learn some feature about foreign culture, so as to increase their cultural sensitivity, know other cultural custom and master

communicative skills. Therefore, we can train their intercultural awareness and communication competence.

V. CONCLUSION

With the aggravated globalization process and increasing frequency of international exchange and cooperation, cross-cultural communication has become an irresistible trend of history. It is a significant part of the comprehensive quality of college students to master intercultural awareness and communication competence. Therefore, new mission and task are given to college English teachers by the times. They should not only cultivate the language knowledge and skill, but also encourage them to deeply understand the teaching concept that language and culture is of equal importance. Besides, teachers should work hard to train students' cross-cultural awareness and communication capacity. Only in this way can they keep pace with the times and adapt to the domestic and international demand in this multicultural epoch. Then Chinese college English instruction can advance with the times and get better.

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