

A Study of Culture Input at the Flipped Classroom in College English Instruction

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Abstract—Flipped classroom has become an effective means of college English instruction, in which, however, culture has never gained its due weight. In order to analyze the feasibility of culture input in college English class in the form of flipped class, comparison and literature study have been employed to research into various respects of culture input in college English class. Findings are that culture input is highly feasible in flipped classroom and it is advisable to implement culture input due to the importance of cultural soft power: Chinese culture alongside English culture is supposed to be input in English class equally.

Keywords—Flipped classroom; college English instruction; culture input; aphasia

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Language Teaching and Culture

Modern language teaching boasts more than one hundred years of history, to whose development psychology, sociology, anthropology, especially linguistics, have made their due contributions. Linguistics argues that language is the carrier of culture, and culture is rooted in the corresponding language, therefore, any act of dividing the two will lead to the incompleteness in the sense of the language and culture.

At present, cultural exchanges are growing rapidly among countries, leading to increased culture contact and culture collision; therefore, successful intercultural interaction depends not only on the mastery of the languages of both sides, but also on the understanding the cultures of each side, which further highlights the importance of cultural factors in language instruction.

The necessity of culture input in language instruction is based on the theory of Sapir, E. a famous sociolinguist. He claims that language is unable to exist without its culture root. While teaching the language, the culture is the self-evident truth. Language and culture are a unified, organic whole; they are interrelated, mutual penetrating and indivisible [1].

It is universally believed that culture absence contributes to the interaction failure among people from different cultures. So in recent years, culture input has become a hot topic in the college English instruction.

B. About the Flipped Classroom

Lage, Platt, Treglia assert in their book that one can leverage the class time that becomes available from the

inversion of the classroom (moving information presentation to media such as computers or VCRs) to meet the needs of students with a wide variety of learning styles [2]. Perhaps the most recognizable contributor to the flipped classroom is Salman Khan who began recording videos at the request of a child he was tutoring because she felt that recorded lessons would let her skip parts she had mastered and replay parts that were troubling her. Based on this model, Salman Khan founded Khan Academy in 2007. To some extent, Khan Academy has become the synonym of the flipped classroom.

II. SIGNIFICANCE OF CULTURE INPUT IN LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

Kramersch indicates that the teaching of culture implicitly or explicitly permeates the teaching of social interaction, and the spoken and the written language [3]. In her view, foreign language learners necessarily become learners of its culture, for the reason that a language cannot be learned without a thorough understanding of the culture context in which it is used.

A. Stimulating Students Interests in English Learning

Inputting culture in language instruction can stimulate students' interest in English study, which is the most important point in guaranteeing the learning efficiency, for interest is the best teacher. What makes English instruction and Chinese instruction different is that English teaching and learning doesn't have a good language environment compared with that of Chinese. As students grow up, the majority of these students begin to lose interest in English after years of tedious learning. At this time, culture introduction in language instruction can be a panacea in reshaping students' interest in English study, as language with cultural touch is closer to students' life than just a strange foreign language alone.

B. Decreasing and Avoiding the Culture Shock and Accidental Offense

As we all know that English and Chinese belong to different language families, i.e. the former is classified into Indo-European language family while the latter Sino-Tibetan family. When English people and Chinese people go into each other's culture, they will be bound to suffer from culture shock. For example, in English language context, the connotative meaning of the word "dog" means hospitality and loyalty. While in Chinese language context, it contains a sense of insult. However, if language teachers are always making effort to

introduce the related culture in language class, such culture shock can be easily avoided.

C. Improving Students Fundamental Linguistic Skills

Traditionally, language teachers have paid too much attention to students' ability in ontology, such as listening, speaking, reading, writing, translation, etc.. To make the matters worse, these abilities are often trained separately. However, truth is that if one cannot have a good command of the corresponding culture background, it would not be easy for him to understand, memorize, translate the foreign languages. On the contrary, if one is frequently exposed to foreign culture, he would behave more appropriately when he communicates with native speakers.

The relationship between language and culture determines a fact that English teaching and culture input cannot be separated. The principal factors that influence people's perception and thinking are their language habits and culture experience. In different culture and language groups, people usually have different perception and thinking modes.

In one word, people's linguistic skill and capability will be substantially boosted if cultural elements are incorporated into English class, which can be achieved through the form of flipped classroom.

III. WESTERN CULTURE INPUT AT THE FLIPPED CLASSROOM IN COLLEGE ENGLISH INSTRUCTION

Traditional teaching mode only emphasizes the first step in the process of study-information transmission and puts it at the most important part in the class. However, the second step-assimilation and internalization have been skipped and it is left to students after class when they lack the necessary help. Consequently, the class time is always occupied by teachers in transmitting the knowledge, though it should have been a place where teachers and students have interactions, cooperation and discussions in the form of flipped class [4].

A. Imparting Western Culture at Listening Class at the Flipped Classroom

Savignon makes it clear that the acquisition of the second language will become possible only if the learner and the target language culture establish a sympathetic identification [5]. The cultural background knowledge plays an important role in listening comprehension. Many of the difficulties in listening understanding are caused by the lack of western culture. For example, the word "Halloween" refers to "Holy" and "even", the shortened form of evening. Legend has it that on October 31, the ancient Celtic tribes of Scotland, Wales and Ireland celebrate the festival of Samhain, the lord of the dead. They believed that the souls of the dead would come back to mingle with the living on this day. In order to ward off evil spirits, they light up bonfires and wear masks. At the flipped classroom, teachers can assign the students Internet collection or reading about the history of Halloween before listening, and when the students listen to the passage, the existing knowledge will be activated to help the listeners associate and predict so as to reduce the difficulty of hearing and improve the efficiency.

B. Inputting Western Culture at Reading Class at the Flipped Classroom

According to some scholars, the aim of culture teaching is to increase students' culture awareness and to develop their curiosity towards the culture of the target language as well as their own, helping them to make comparisons among cultures [6]. In college extensive English reading class, students are usually faced with problems in understanding the gist of the text they read. The principal reason causing that phenomenon is that the text contains a certain culture background but students lack it. Luckily, the flipped classroom is able to compensate the shortage effectively. In reading class at the flipped classroom, teachers can do a lot in introducing western culture.

The teaching and learning of the tenth lesson "Cowboy" in the college extensive English (Book One, published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press) is a case in point as to illustrate how to introduce western culture at the flipped classroom to help the students have a thorough understanding of the culture of American cowboys. Before the class, the teacher is expected to give students a short instructional video which introduces the life of American cowboys, and the dangers and hardships that make American cowboys drive cattle hundreds or even thousands of kilometers to the market to sell [7]. During the class, the teacher organizes students to have a discussion on American cowboys, encouraging them to air their own viewpoints. At the end of the class, the teacher concludes these various opinions. In this way, it's very likely that the goal to make students have a thorough understanding of the culture of American cowboys can be realized.

C. Introducing Western Culture in Lexical Teaching at the Flipped Classroom

As a matter of fact, the language teaching profession has gradually formed a consensus, that is, the successful and effective teaching must have the corresponding cultural input. The same word in one culture may have its connotation but not in another culture, which we call "glossary vacancy".

People in Britain and the United States are deeply influenced by Christianity and its classics—the Bible which is regarded as an important pillar of the western spiritual civilization, elements from it are still constantly employed to describe contemporary people or things. For example, in phrases like "as poor as Job", "as patient as Job", "Job" is a figure from the Bible, if teachers want to make students understand the these phrases taking root in the Bible, they are supposed to make students have access to these cultural elements in advance, they can ask students to do some related reading, and also, they can recommend movies to them. In this way, it will not be so difficult for students to learn vocabulary of this type in class.

D. Imparting Western Culture at Translation Class at the Flipped Classroom

As is known to all, the European literary world has a title "laurels poet", which originates from the love story of Apollo and Daphne. In fact, many names in English are derived from the Greek and Roman Mythology. Another example is Helen, in the phrase "Helen of Troy". At first, it would be very elusive

for students to translate correctly if they don't know the Greek and Roman Mythology. So, it is necessary for teachers to guide students to read culture-related books in depth before the class as the flipped part, which can distinctly facilitate translation class.

E. Inputting Western Culture at Speaking and Writing Class at the Flipped Classroom

A writing class can be a good place for inputting western culture in the form of flipped classroom.

For example, in Exercise IV of Unit Five in The New Edition of the Integrated English Course (published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press), there is a writing assignment: writing an essay on how Americans observe Thanksgiving Day. To achieve the goal of culture input, the writing teacher is supposed to record a brief video (ten minutes or so) which contains the interpretation of the theoretical knowledge about writing, phrasal templates, appreciation of similar Chinese occasions and the like; nevertheless, the most important part in this video should be the corresponding background knowledge of Thanksgiving Day and its customs. Then the video is provided to the students and they are asked to watch it at home. Then when students are back in class, the teacher holds a discussion among students on the topic. In this way, it not only helps students accumulate opinions and understanding on the writing topic, broaden their horizons, but also exposes students to western culture behind the Thanksgiving Day. Similarly, at the speaking class, the teacher can have a video clip corresponding to the speaking class in advance and give it to students to learn. Then the class time is used to help student assimilate, internalize and apply the content they have learned before class.

Professor Berret indicates that owing to the new network technology, teachers should change the traditional teaching mode and place the teaching center of the gravity at the second step: assimilation and internalization [8]. The carryout of the flipped classroom complies with the trend.

IV. NATIVE CULTURE INPUT AT THE FLIPPED CLASSROOM IN COLLEGE ENGLISH INSTRUCTION

A. The Current Situation of the Native Culture Input at the Flipped Classroom in College English Instruction

In recent years, foreign language teaching in China has been attaching more and more attention to culture; Ministry of Education of China even issues policies to ensure that culture has been included in lectures.

However, in practical English teaching, teachers only introduce culture about English speaking countries, while Chinese culture, our own culture, is rarely involved. As a result, numerous students are short of the ability in expressing Chinese concepts in English, which consequently will fail the cultural exchanges between China and the West. In other words, the foreign language field ignores the cultural background of the other party as the main body of communication, that is, the English expression of Chinese culture. This is a big problem that we must call our attention to, because currently the "Belt and Road Initiative" urgently calls for talents who know both foreign culture as well as Chinese

culture, and the solution for it is to encode our own culture in the flipped part of lectures.

B. The Importance of Native Culture Introduction in College English Instruction

First, a good knowledge of Chinese culture can facilitate English study in that it can have positive transfer in foreign language learning, or, negative transfer would occur.

According to Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, language, culture and thought are mutually shaped or determined, so culture is an indispensable part of the foreign language learning, and if we have similar cultural phenomenon in our culture, we can apply it in understanding foreign culture and language, which is termed as "positive transfer" in TEFL. If we put it another way, Chinese culture input in class is conducive to English language learning.

Due to the universality of human knowledge and thinking, English learners can use the Chinese and Chinese culture to understand the common things in English language learning. Only when English learners understand the national culture, they can make a thorough analysis of the target language culture.

Secondly, a good mastery of native culture can elevate students' competence in cross-cultural interaction which is a two-way process between two different cultures.

Both Chinese and English should understand and respect each other's distinctive customs and cultural characteristics. Only in this way can cross-cultural communication be smooth. The purpose of English teaching is to cultivate the competence of English learners in cross-cultural communication. Communication ignoring our own national culture is incomplete and not the real sense of two-way communication. So in college English class, we should not only emphasize the input of western culture, but also pay attention to the infusing of Chinese culture. In short, to increase the input of Chinese culture, is not only helpful for English learners to deepen the understanding of Chinese culture, but conducive to students better understanding of western culture through cultural comparison and contrast. If both Chinese culture and English culture has been encoded in class, people will be more aware of intercultural communication, thus improving the competence of cross-cultural communication.

Thirdly, a good mastery of native culture can help inherit and transmit Chinese Culture because there is not one aspect of human life that is not touched and altered by culture. The goal of English teaching is not only to learn and understand the English culture, but also to spread the Chinese culture. The capability of English expression of Chinese culture is an urgent must for the national culture spread. We learn the essence of western culture; at the same time we should also actively use English to spread our own culture worldwide. At present, every country goes to great lengths to carve out a place in the world culturally, Chinese college students are supposed to learn both English and Chinese well so as to fulfill their own historical missions.

C. Measures for Increasing Native Culture Input at the Flipped Classroom in College English Instruction

To begin with, students' interest in traditional Chinese culture should be stimulated. China is a huge country boasting a long history. Teachers should tell students the importance and necessity of learning and understanding traditional Chinese culture to stimulate their patriotic feelings, sense of national pride.

Next, more Chinese culture should be included in textbooks. To achieve the aim of equal communication, textbook compilers are expected to increase the content of traditional Chinese culture in college English textbooks, for textbooks are major sources for knowledge. At the same time, more optional courses should be offered. Only in this way can students have more opportunities to understand traditional Chinese culture and enrich their cultural knowledge.

Thirdly, culture confidence should be cultivated in students. It is undeniable that China's traditional culture has its dregs which need to be attended to promptly, but traditional Chinese culture that has been tested through thousands of years also has incomparable merits, for example, we have so much peerless cultural heritage. Adhering to Westernization reveals that we are unconfident in our own culture. So it is important to establish a correct view of culture in classroom teaching. Cultural interaction is a two-way process, and cultural exchanges should be equal too.

Furthermore, teachers should also improve and cultivate their own cultural competence, because their cultural competence will directly affect students' competence of cross-cultural communication.

Foreign language learning is not only to learn another language, but also to spread our native culture. Only when teachers consciously learn traditional Chinese culture and integrate it with English teaching can they develop students' cross-cultural communicative competence [9].

V. SUMMARY

Valuing culture input in the flipped classroom intends to make the cultivation of cultural awareness a part of the whole teaching and learning activities, enable students speak with appropriate language according to the specific language rules and context, and enhance students' communicative competence. Although great effort has been made to improve culture input in college English class, we need to notice some unsatisfactory aspects:

The first aspect is the "Aphasia" for Chinese culture at the college English instruction. Originally Aphasia is a medical term, and it refers to the partial or total loss of articulation and the comprehending ability of speech and written language due to brain injury. Experts argue that in China, the foreign language teaching has greatly ignored the significance of Chinese culture in English class, that is to say, the English expression of Chinese culture has never gained any attention. Therefore, in flipped classroom, English teachers should have a sense of proportion; they should know that the weight of Chinese culture should have been lifted.

Secondly, as for flipped classroom, students need equipment, but they are from families with different financial situations, which will absolutely lead to digital gap among students, and how to address this problem needs our consideration.

Lastly, in flipped classroom, what should be the right proportion of culture input and language input is supposed to be speculated.

Flipped classroom has been extensively discussed and applied currently. In light of the absence of culture in English class, it is advisable for us to employ the flipped classroom to make up.

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