

# Teaching Culture in College English Course

## An Empirical Study of TCM Major Students

Li Zhang

Foreign Languages Department  
Shaanxi University of Chinese Medicine  
Xianyang, China

**Abstract**—Based on the theoretical background of culture teaching, this paper firstly emphasizes the necessity and significance of culture introduction on college English teaching. Meanwhile, the importance of TCM knowledge and culture is stressed further, and then a comprehensive investigation is conducted to obtain an overall picture of current situation in both target culture and native culture teaching for non-English major students in Shaanxi University of Chinese Medicine to discover the problems existing and find out the underlying causes and practical solutions to improve students' intercultural competence and expressiveness on TCM terms and culture. There are two classes including 100 students and 10 college English teachers of Shaanxi University of Chinese Medicine participate in this investigation. The author made a culture test consists of target culture and native culture knowledge and TCM terms expressiveness and case analysis for non-English major students, questionnaires for both students and teachers to investigate both' attitude toward integrating target culture and native culture into college English teaching. And then by an empirical study, the author testified the effectiveness of target and native culture teaching including TCM terms translation in cultivating the students' cultural awareness and develop their TCM culture protection consciousness. According to major findings of the empirical study, the author proposed pedagogical suggestions for both culture teaching in such aspects as approaches and techniques, teachers and students, teaching materials and evaluation. All the findings confirm that integrating both target culture and native culture and expressiveness of TCM terms and so on is not only improve the students' intercultural competence but also broaden their horizon toward the whole world and strengthen their native culture identification. Anyway, Communication is a two-way communication. It is of great significance for the college English teachers and students in Shaanxi University of Chinese Medicine to perform duties and responsibilities for the dissemination of TCM both at home and abroad.

**Keywords**—Chinese and western culture; college English; TCM major; intercultural competence; dissemination

### I. INTRODUCTION

Intercultural communication is a two-way activity. Acquisition of language knowledge and skills can be as a bridge for intercultural communication. Thus the aim of applying what they learn into practice can be realized. In this thesis, the author suggests that teachers can integrate TCM (Traditional Chinese Medicine) culture and translation into

college English teaching for specialized majors such as TCM. With the help of authentic and professional experts in TCM colleges and sense of ownership, English teachers can cooperate with TCM teachers to compile popular lectures and books and play an important role of disseminating Chinese traditional culture to the world.

Firstly, this thesis reports a quasi-experiment in college English teaching for about 25 weeks. The experiment was conducted in the 100 TCM majored students who are divided into two classes such as the control class and the experiment class. There are two objectives of experiment: the first is to cultivate students' culture awareness and intercultural competence and TCM terms translation. The second is to testify the effects of culture teaching in the experiment class. Meanwhile, this thesis takes 100 non-English major students and 10 college English teachers in Shaanxi University of Chinese Medicine as subjects, by the instruments of Chinese and western culture tests, questionnaire for students and teachers to examine learners' intercultural competence and TCM terms expressiveness. The analysis of survey used both quantitative and qualitative methods. Then the empirical data was put into computer and analyzed in Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS 19.0) by the method of descriptive research and exploratory research. At last, through the results analysis to reveal the causes which generate the poor intercultural competence and weak TCM expressiveness in college English teaching, and put forward the suggestions of improving intercultural competence.

The major findings of the study and two suggestions on English language teaching are discussed. According to current situations on the Students' attitude toward English culture teaching and their current situation on Intercultural Competence and Teachers' attitude toward English culture teaching and current TCM knowledge, the author puts forward related solutions and suggestions.

### II. MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

According to the results of socio-culture test and questionnaire, the author finds that the students' intercultural competence is far behind the requirement of college English. Their cultural awareness has not been developed. The deep reason should be traced to examination-oriented education system and grammar-centered English teaching class. The

other reason is students' immature attitude toward English learning and weak independent learning capability.

#### A. Students' Attitude Toward English Culture Teaching and Their Current Situation on Intercultural Competence

As for this discussion, we need to have a general understanding on the student subjects. The average English score of national entrance examination is 94.6. And the pass rate is 87%. The female student subjects take up 94%. According to their performances in the English class, the author gets the information that passing CET 4 is the aim of English study for all of the students. They heard the policy that CET 4 is the necessary condition of obtaining Bachelor Degree long time before. And they are accustomed to the examination-oriented education. As for college English study, they prefer teacher-centered classroom and passive learning to student-centered and independent learning cultivation. So their needs to the content of college English learning is still more grammar and vocabulary explanation than culture-orientated acquisition, more passage reading than pragmatic speaking practice. They are used to learning the content of English according to the requirements of examination. The above is the general situation of the students who were the freshmen at the time and began to be instructed in author's English class.

After two semesters' instruction and inter-exchange with the student subjects in college English class, the students began to rethink the English learning in the college. Passing CET 4 is not their only aim of English learning. And the proper ways of English learning should be target and native culture learning as well as cultivation of intercultural communication competence. The new idea toward English learning can be the guide to their English study. And the test and questionnaire in this thesis are just based on their new attitude toward the college English learning.

On the other hand, the students can realize the importance of intercultural communication, but many subjective and objective factors exist and influence their culture learning. The subjective factor is mainly their weak perseverance on English learning. Even though they know clearly that intercultural communication is very important

and they bear the responsibility of disseminating the TCM culture, they cannot overcome their weak points of unremitting and laziness. Some of the students still advocate grammar and vocabulary-centered teaching and ignore the English speaking practice and cultivation of intercultural communication. And some students show less interest in English learning. They have to take English class to obtain bachelor degree. The objective factors include limitation of college English class such as limited teaching time, limited textbook, teachers' limited intercultural competence and limited evaluation and so on. As far as limited college English teaching time is concerned, it is a popular and common fact to the colleges and universities around the whole country. There are 60 college English periods in one term and 4 college English periods in a week usually, but all the related language skills like listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating must be explained and practiced. Cultural introduction especially native cultural introduction is ignored naturally. For most of the students, the "ideal" English class should be full of teachers' English knowledge explanation and main-points writing on the blackboard. Students' tasks are sitting in the classroom taking notes from the blackboard and keeping silent. The content of cultural introduction and comparison as well as culture group discussion for the students is a kind of waste time, because of laziness, less knowledge of both English culture and native culture and weak intercultural communication competence. Meanwhile, English is not their major and their medicine courses occupied much of their study time. Most of them feel much pressured toward huge number of medicine knowledge and different kinds of medical experiments. Even weekends time is occupied.

As for the current textbook used in college English class, most of texts are excerpted from the original English novels or newspaper or magazine. And accordingly, western culture is only concerned in the textbook. There is no material about native culture introduction. It is easy for the students who are taught only with western culture orientation teaching material to lose interest in English learning, and lack of native culture identification. So the obstacle of intercultural communication must always exist if culture teaching could not be balanced.

TABLE I. CHINESE AND ENGLISH COMPONENT IN COLLEGE ENGLISH TEXTBOOK (NHCE)

Book 1	Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 3	Unit 4	Unit 5	Unit 6	Unit 7	Unit 8
Culture Topic	FLL experience	Generation gap	disability	Social impression	AIDS prevention	Job discrimination	crime of violence	Innovative thinking
Chinese culture	None	None	None	None	None	None	None	None

English teachers play an important role in culture teaching. There are subjective and objective factors impacting on culture teaching [1]. The subjective factor is concerning teachers' poor English and Chinese culture knowledge and weak intercultural competence which does not adapt to the development of current international situation. The objective factor is mainly limited teaching time and heavy college English teaching tasks, which make the English teachers have no enough time to prepare better teaching plan and renew teaching contents regularly. It is a

great challenge for most of college English teachers to study TCM, even though they could have better chance to acquire related training and taking lectures organized by school on weekends or summer holidays. Limited time, limited learning energy make the English teachers' TCM knowledge and culture acquisition less systematically unless the teachers have a chance to take the same courses with the students.

Evaluation is still the reason for students' poor intercultural competence. For such a long time, the content

of college English examination mainly consists of listening, reading, cloze, sentence translation and writing. There is no English and native culture items in the examination for the non-English major students. Therefore, intercultural knowledge and competence are naturally ignored by the students and some of the college English teachers. The implement of College English culture teaching needs evaluation reform accordingly. The students and teachers must be responsible for the English and native culture learning and teaching if cultural knowledge and competence are required contents and included in the examination.

#### *B. Teachers' Attitude Toward English Culture Teaching and Current TCM Knowledge and Culture*

By analyzing the questionnaire for teacher subjects, most college English teachers have an active and supportive attitude toward culture teaching and some of teachers have practiced cultural teaching to a certain degree in their classes. They encourage the college students to read more related books in the library and on the internet and so on. And they hope that more related teaching tools and hardware supports can be used in the class freely, and they have more right to control and plan their teaching practice such as teaching time, teaching place, teaching contents and so on. A small part of college English teachers hold a negative view toward culture teaching in the class. They think that CET 4 centered teaching should be practiced in the limited college English teaching periods which cater for the students' strong wish and high pass rate of CET4 brings the good prestige to the school. They believe that teaching items should follow the examination items. On the other hand, a huge number of English classes make them overburden and have no more energy and time to do some research on culture teaching reform and so on. Finally, the students' performances on college English do not meet the demand of what teachers require. And the students' poor understanding of English and native culture knowledge and their CET4 orientation earning habits make the teachers lose heart and give up.

As far as TCM is concerned, all the college English teachers firstly regard it as a difficult puzzle. It is not their major and they never have any systematical study experience of TCM. If not for TCM's English translation and dissemination, most English teachers are unwilling to touch this new field. With the policy of reforming and opening our door to the outside world, furthermore, under the guide of BAR strategy and Chinese dream, more and more Chinese medical works need to be translated into English to disseminate the excellence culture to the world and benefit the health of mankind. With a strong forward movement of globalization and frequent contacts between Chinese and Western cultures, the English translation of Chinese medicine has become a focus, such as the translation of natural Chinese medicine, the symptom, the treatment and the proprietary Chinese medicine. Those who want to translate TCM into English properly and reach the smooth intercultural communication must be familiar with TCM culture and related knowledge. That is to say, a solid mastery of basic Chinese medicine knowledge and culture provides possibility for English translation and then how to translate

for successful intercultural communication is the next problem for the translators to solve. Therefore, it is a great challenge for college English teachers to introduce and translate TCM in the class. While, as teachers in Chinese medicine colleges and universities, we should keep pace with the time and overall development to integrate Chinese medicine into college English teaching, and help the students to bear the responsibility for TCM development and dissemination and strengthen native culture identification. The current situation of college English teachers in Shaanxi university of Chinese Medicine is shown below: there are 40 teachers in English department. 82.5% of them obtain English-major degree, including 12.5% of teachers have bachelor degree of English major with the direction of TCM in Shaanxi university of Chinese medicine. The rest of teachers ever took some of TCM classes in their spare time or read related books by themselves. Two professors and 6 lecturers are presiding over the projects on TCM terms translation and ancient Chinese medicine classic translation and comparison. Under the influence of such academic atmosphere, every college English teacher forms a habit of paying more attention to TCM subject and its development home and abroad. It is a good chance for the students to broaden their horizon on TCM expressiveness and arouses their interest in college English learning.

### III. SUGGESTIONS ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

#### *A. Cultivation of Students' New Understanding of English Learning*

The students should form a new understanding and attitude to English learning: language learning is culture learning and successful intercultural communication is based on bilateral culture understanding and proper expressiveness [2]. Good mastery of grammatical rules plus huge number of vocabulary can not fulfill the intercultural communication. While, examination-oriented education is deeply rooted in the mind of Chinese students for a very long time; it is difficult to change the current situation in a short time. As a college English teacher in Shaanxi University of Chinese Medicine, the author has instructed the freshmen and sophomore of different levels and majors for 15 years. Generally speaking, the English score of students' national entrance examination is much better than before, including students' verbal communication becoming also better and better. This must be result of slight application of quality education. On the other hand, the fact the teachers and educators need to face is that students have formed a bad habit of strongly depending on teacher-centered classroom. And learning English for pass CET 4 is inertia. They continue to remember the vocabulary mechanically, and prefer to practice grammar and reading excises and are used to choose the best answer from the four choices. Once they are asked to do subjective test questions and oral work, everything becomes very difficult and embarrassed atmosphere is full of the English class. For example: the freshmen are usually invited to introduce his or her hometown or do a self- introduction at the beginning of English class. "Hi, teacher and classmate, my name is Mark, I'm from Xianyang, and that is all." This is a very common



phenomena happening to most of college students when they are asked to practice their oral English. What is the reason? There are two main parts. The first is that the students have less even no cultural knowledge about his or her hometown because these contents are not included in the national entrance examination. The second is even though some of students have a little or know clearly about his or her hometown, they are unable to express it in English. How to solve this problem? The author thinks cultivation of students' new understanding to English learning is the basic thing to do. Simply speaking, English should be used as a tool for learners to communicate freely and smoothly. Therefore, English pragmatic competence is the key point, and culture learning is key point to cultivate the pragmatic competence. After the development of new understanding to English learning, accordingly, students' English learning strategies, English leaning aim, learning habit, learning plan and so on must readjust to serve to both culture learning.

Basically, students should make themselves fit into new learning environment as fast as possible. They must regard themselves as centers in the English class. In the limited learning hours, trying to grasp every chance to practice their intercultural competence is a good way, taking part in different kinds of intercultural activities and making friends with foreign students and teachers to absorb essence from variety of cultures. Meanwhile, they must have a good mastery of TCM knowledge and proper English expressiveness of TCM culture. In the English class, students are required to form a habit of group discussion on a cultural topic and learn to express their own idea toward any given topic. Step by step, their cultural awareness and sensitivity will be developed, and their interest in English learning will be aroused greatly because of the acumination of their culture knowledge and improvement of English expressiveness. Accordingly, students' self-confidence of English learning and native culture identification are strengthened.

Finally, students should be suggested to make a good use of library and internet to broaden their horizon on culture knowledge and English expressiveness and obtain the renewed information in this field.

#### *B. Reinforcing Teachers' Culture Knowledge Training and Innovation of the Teaching Methodology and Curriculum Design*

College English teacher plays a vital role on culture teaching. Learners' cultural sensitivity and awareness of various cultures including native culture must be promoted by means of teachers' careful planning and typical culture material selection. That is to say, teachers' cultural knowledge and awareness have an effect on the output of learners' culture learning. There are many elements involving learners' disability to express native culture in English and less acumination of variety of culture knowledge. But only teachers are the executor of specific teaching process. Therefore, the training of teachers' culture knowledge and awareness is very necessary. With the acumination of variety of culture knowledge, teachers

themselves should avoid the prejudice to any culture in the world. Every culture should be respected and tolerated. It is much easier to understand the connotation of verbal and non-verbal communication and bridge the communicative gap for the people from different cultures by obtaining the enough foreign culture and native culture knowledge. What to teach and how to teach culture knowledge are decided by the teachers' capability of cultural knowledge and cultural awareness. Teachers' understanding of cultural knowledge and cultural awareness on native culture and foreign culture will directly and indirectly affect the outcome of culture teaching. Without teachers' guideline on culture learning, students' cultural awareness won't be aroused, and their intercultural communicative competence and target language expressiveness are not be cultivated.

The school should set up a native culture course including TCM knowledge and culture and comparison between western and Chinese culture for the English teachers. Given the limited free time of teachers, the training class can be opened in the summer holidays. Teachers are encouraged to take the culture training class by different kinds of intercultural activities with abroad students and foreign teachers in Shaanxi University of Chinese Medicine. And excellent teachers are encouraged to have chances to have a short time visit in English speaking countries. Which is best and direct way to learn target culture truly and disseminating native culture especially TCM culture to the outside world. When they come back to school, their intercultural experience can be great treasure to teach students on culture knowledge and English expressiveness on culture-specific items.

Concerning the innovation of teaching methodology, the classification of the students based on their English score should be firstly implemented by the school. According to different English level of each class, teachers make different teaching plan and content selection on cultural knowledge. The following is the specific teaching practice in three different English classes:

The average score of Class one is below the pass line 90 and their intercultural competence is very weak. It is very necessary for teachers to help the students to review the basic grammar and the uses of common verbs and Patten drills at beginning of teaching class regularly. Culture introduction should be based on the comparison between target language and native language. For example, the differences of connotation and extension meaning of vocabulary under different culture background. Meanwhile, for intercultural competence of the students in this class are weak, teachers should use simple and English plus a certain degree of native language to explain and illustrate some culture knowledge which are embodied in the specific words and context. For the students in this class, abstract culture introduction such as TCM culture and its English expressiveness is not proper content to teach, the textbook can be mainly used to practice their basic English knowledge and skills. Culture comparison between target language and native language such as food or festival and so on can be used to practice their intercultural competence.

TABLE II. THE CONTRAST BETWEEN CHINESE FOOD AND WESTERN FOOD

Chinese food	
<i>Chinese traditional staple food</i>	Rice (fried rice porridge) Noodles(Wuhan hot noodles, Beijing noodles with soybean paste, Shanxi Sliced Noodles, Henan Stewed Noodles, Lanzhou Ramen etc.)
<i>Chinese characteristic cuisine</i>	Shandong cuisine/ Sichuan cuisine/ Cantonese cuisine/ Jiangsu cuisine Anhui cuisine/ Fujian cuisine/ Hunan cuisine/ Zhejiang cuisine
<i>Chinese food for festival days</i>	Dumpling, rice dumpling, Zongzi, Moon cake, spring roll
Western food	
<i>Western staple food</i>	Meat bread salad
<i>western characteristic cuisine</i>	Italy cuisine/ French cuisine/ America cuisine
<i>Western food for festival days</i>	Turkey, Easter egg, goose liver paste, mince pie Christmas pudding

The average score of Class two is from 90-105 and their intercultural competence is better than class one. Teachers can choose both the contents from the textbook and supplement materials selected carefully from the internet and related books as their class explanation and discussion. Some simple TCM terms' English expressiveness including medical affix can be introduced in the college English class. The contrast between western medicine and Chinese medicine on the expressiveness of simple terms such as body organs and common disease and so on can also be included in the English class. Teachers should use more English and small part of Chinese in the class and encourage the students to do more group work and discussion on the cultural topic. Preview before class and review after class on the basic English knowledge and cultural introduction should be strictly conducted. Every group has a student in charge of one group and monitoring the whole process of tasks. When a new cultural topic will be discussed, a group of the students are required to conduct the duty report one by one according to their school number. Therefore, the learners need to search much more related materials in different aspects on one culture topic by themselves and try to organize the proper English expressiveness on Chinese part. After finish one

topic's explanation, some related books and articles will be suggested for the students to read in a limited period and must be tested by a quiz regularly. The contrast between Chinese culture and western culture in this class can be more complicated and deeper. For example, in the role-play, the students are guided to choose the doctor and patient involved play and different check procedure and diagnosis can be performed on the stage clearly and vividly. For example: watching the situation of patients' body (望), listening to the sound of patients (闻), asking the patients for their body's situation (问), feeling the pulse of patients (切). The process of TCM treating can be used to make a comparison with the western diagnostic procedures. This learning process is very close to learners' daily life and must arouse their English study interests. Therefore, their improvement on intercultural communication will be naturally enhanced day by day. Meanwhile, the comparatively deeper culture contrasts can also be conducted. For example, in the class one, simple contrasts between Chinese food and western food is used for cultural introduction, while, for class two, the different cook ways and its historical origin between Chinese and western food can be introduced.

TABLE III. THE COMPARISON BETWEEN CHINESE FOOD AND WESTERN FOOD

	In China	In the West
The Diet Idea	Diet therapy. Chinese seek delicious food, the actions during cooking may destroy the nutrition constituent.	They hold the rational diet idea. The nutrition is the first. They just pay attention to the quantity of heat, vitamin and protein
The Diet Structure	Five Cereals, cooked food	Salad, meat
The Cooking Way	There are more than 50 kinds of main cooking ways in China.	a)Grill /Broil (b)Roast (c)Bake (d)Pan Broil (e)Gratin

The average score of class three is greater than 105 and the learners have acquired rather degree of communicative competence and a certain accumulation of culture knowledge. Their basic English including grammar and structure and vocabulary are up to the standard of requirement of syllabus. In fact, all the basic knowledge on the English subject has been taught in the middle school, and enlarge the vocabulary and broaden the horizon on the specific majors are one of the learning parts. Most of the contents of this part actually can be learned by their own. Teachers can prepare teaching materials on intercultural theme discussion and contrast between foreign culture and native culture. The textbook can

be regarded as the reference according to the topic selection and used freely. Besides, TCM English and culture should be the main part of learning contents including more medical affix introduction and TCM terms expressiveness and translation methods from the perspective of culture. Some authentic English version of Chinese medical classics can be suggested to read to extend learners' intercultural competence. And learners in this class must set an example for the others on the effort of intercultural communication and identification of native culture. Group work and discussion and individual study can be practiced at the same time. The cultivation of learners' think for themselves and

cooperation will be strengthened in the process of culture learning and practice. Meanwhile, teachers are responsible to help students to take a right attitude of respecting and tolerating the varieties of culture. Some abstract contrasts between foreign and Chinese culture such as philosophy, classic and so on.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

For such a long time, English knowledge teaching has gotten much more priority than culture teaching, which definitely leads to poor intercultural competence. Obviously, this trend is not in accordance with the social requirement to the talents. Though many educators and scholars have presented a lot of suggestions on the innovation of college English teaching, the practice and the result are still far behind the satisfaction. As we all know, language is intertwined with culture, so, integrating both target culture and native culture into the language teaching is absolutely reasonable and scientific. But in reality, the current situation in the college English teaching is quite different. Rather, the author must admit that some English teachers do add the target culture introduction to the teaching plan and practice them in the class regularly. Let's take the NHCE (New Horizon College English) as an example. There is no introduction to native culture in this book. But it is used as the textbook for non-English major college students in many schools. Hence, target culture is naturally introduced in the English teaching and Chinese culture is ignored. So the first reason of no culture or unbalanced culture introduction in college English teaching is improper textbook. The second reason is about teachers' subjective factors such as limited time, heavy teaching tasks, poor capacity on cultures and so on result in ignorance of both culture' introduction. The third one is concerning the teaching syllabus and evaluation on college English. Mastery of both target culture and native culture knowledge and expressiveness in English should be set up into the teaching syllabus and to be one part of question types. Besides, intercultural competence can be tested by scenario simulation in the class regularly. Only do this, both culture knowledge acquisition and English expressiveness can be improved together.

However, there are still some limitations in this paper. The first limitation is the scope of participants. There are only 50 students in the experimental class and the student subjects' English proficiency is not at the same level, so the results obtained from the social-cultural test and case analysis can only represent the current situation of Shaanxi University of Chinese Medicine rather than the teaching state in other colleges and universities. The second inadequate is the scope of the culture test. Compare to the large scale of culture knowledge and phenomena in reality, the test the author selected in the thesis is tip of the iceberg. So to some extent, the result of socio-culture test cannot show the accurate situation of the students' cultural awareness. The third one is concerning the limitation of teaching materials including the textbook the author is using at present. There is no native culture introduction in the textbook, so the teachers need to prepare related native culture and TCM knowledge and expressiveness of TCM terms and so on. What's more,

the prepared content of native culture must be close to the topic the western culture embodied in the text from the textbook, so it can be useful for students to learn better by comparison with each other. In fact, selection of the culture knowledge and TCM translation and alternative of teaching methods to different level of class need much more time and energy. It is unavoidable to ignore some aspects of target culture and native culture. Hence, the author suggests that the further study on the culture teaching done by several or more brother TCM colleges and universities can be practiced and how to integrate native culture especially TCM culture into the college English teaching efficiently in the limited teaching hours is still a pending problem.

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