

Teaching Chinese as a Second Language and Chinese Culture

Luo Duoduo

Confucius Institute at North South University of Bangladesh, Dhaka, 1229, Bangladesh

Keywords: Teaching Chinese as a second language, Chinese culture, Cultural integration

Abstract: Teaching Chinese as a second language is not only the teaching of language, but also the teaching of integration of language and culture. Language is a symbol system of recording culture as well as the main carrier of culture. It is of great significance to introduce cultural elements into Chinese teaching class properly. Through the combination of culture and language students can have a good command of both language and culture. Meanwhile, they will know how to use the language appropriately. Based on the teaching experience of Confucius Institute at North-South University of Bangladesh, the author puts forward several feasible methods for integrating Chinese culture into language teaching. And hope to provide some references to others to promote cultural teaching in class.

1. Introduction

From the teaching experience, the author discovered that though some foreign students do not speak Chinese, they still know Chinese culture more or less, such as Chinese movies, Chinese songs, and Chinese food. They are very interested in Chinese culture and want to learn more about the culture via learning Chinese. However, due to the limitation of the textbook or the content of the class, students are not able to speak authentic Chinese even after three or four months learning. For example, their greetings are limited to the simple words like “Hello(你好)” and “good morning(早上好)” and they know nothing about the authentic greetings. In view of that, teaching Chinese as a second language can not just focus on the material of the textbook. Teachers also need to make the Chinese culture as a supplement to help students have a more comprehensive and deep understanding of both language and culture.

2. The Relationship between Language and Culture

Edward Tylor defined culture in his book “Primitive Culture” in 1871 as: “The so-called culture and civilization include knowledge, belief, art, morality, law, customs, and individuals who are members of society. And any other abilities and habits acquired.”^[1] Here is a very close relationship between culture and language. Language is a vital part of culture and they are inseparable and can affect and restrict each other. The enlightenment of the relationship between language and culture is: in order to truly understand a culture, it is necessary to master the language; and to use a target language properly, it is also essential to learn the culture.^[2]

3. Effective Combination of Teaching Chinese as a Second Language and Chinese Culture

Zhang Zhanyi divided the knowledge of cultural background into two categories. The first one is the communicative culture. This type of culture is inseparable from language teaching. Usually, the native people are unconscious of it but it may be the main reason of cross-cultural misunderstandings. While knowledge culture will not affect the understanding of specific words and sentences in the cross-culture communication even if you don't understand such a culture.^[3] The basic consensus reached by the academic circles is that "communicative culture is the content that must be included in language teaching, but knowledge culture can be separated from language classes. It is not necessary to teach knowledge culture in language classes because it can be shared in dependent lectures or activities."^[4] How to figure out a better way to combine language teaching and culture transferring effectively? The author thinks that the following aspects may provide some inspirations.

3.1 Chinese Characters and Culture

As for the first class in Bangladesh, in order to make it attractive and successful, the author prepared so many materials which include Chinese characters, phonetics and culture. Meanwhile, "Xi'an" is introduced as the representative historical culture of China wishing that students can feel the charm of Chinese history and culture. However, the class was not as active as imagined and students also did not have a very good feedback. It seemed that they were not able to comprehend the class very well and did not learn many new things from it. After class the author did a profound self-reflection and communicated with some experienced teachers then realized that the meaning of the first lesson should not be arranged to transfer so many things. On the contrary, the teacher should highlight the key parts and focus on the main aspects so that the learners can concentrate well.

The main adjustments about first lesson are as follows. Firstly, to narrow the content and focus on pronunciation, Chinese characters and Chinese names. As for the pronunciation, the key point is the brief introduction about initials, vowels and tones which can be illustrated by the author's Chinese name. Secondly, to integrate culture while teaching Chinese characters and Chinese names. And Chinese characters are the main part to explain. To clarify the teaching process, the first step is to present the origin of simple characters such as "人(person), 口(mouth), 火(fire), 木(wood), 山(mountain), 日(sun), 月(moon)" via pictures. The second step is to tell the composition rules of Chinese characters by exhibiting "从(follow), 众(crowd), 囚(Prison); 林(wood)s, 森(fores)t; 炎(hot); 明(brightness); 旦(sunrise)" and so on. Apart from the basic characters, the author also explained how to use characters to create words like "火山(volcano), 人人(everyone), 大人(adults), 大火(big fire), 火大(fire big),".

By organizing the first lesson like this, the Chinese beginners can know both the basic rules about characters and simple but interesting Chinese culture. The author recognized that a designed lesson like this can impress Chinese beginners profoundly. The students are able to remember some simple characters and they also have a elementary understanding of the culture included in characters. Meanwhile, they will be quite excited to explore the mysterious Chinese culture by studying Chinese. Regarding the section of Chinese names, the author took her own name as an example to illustrate the culture contained within it. And introduced how to create a Chinese name. The activity was encouraging students to make themselves a Chinese name. They were very enthusiastic about applying what they have learned to name themselves. Some students would like to use the simple Chinese characters like "Lin Ming" for their Chinese name. The class was very active and students were satisfied as well since they were not only understand a new culture but also

know how to use the basic rules of the culture.

3.2 Prepare the Culture Content According to the Students Level

Although Chinese culture and Chinese teaching are closely related, they are not completely equivalent. The different characteristics of the two mean that culture teaching cannot replace language teaching, while language teaching can not do the same either. This requires various emphasis at different stages of teaching. Different teaching methods should be chosen to ensure that the ratio between cultural and language teaching is reasonable.^[5]

For example, there can be some supplements with “relative title” in lesson six of Experiencing Chinese “How many people are there in your family?”. The vocabulary part of the textbook mainly include “姐姐(sister), 妹妹(younger sister), 哥哥(elder brother), 弟弟(younger brother)”.^[6] If the teaching target is elementary Chinese proficiency, the teachers can add titles such as “爷爷 (grandfather), 奶奶 (grandmother), 姥姥 (grandma), 姥爷 (grandpa), 叔叔 (uncle), 阿姨 (aunt)”. However, for the intermediate and advanced learners who want to have a deep understanding of Chinese culture, they need to expand the culture in breadth and depth. Therefore, teacher can supplement the language and cultural knowledge related to “Proposed designation of relatives”. The content can include the source of the phenomenon of “Proposed designation of relatives” and the characteristics of Chinese address terms. To explain the greetings frequently used in Chinese communication, such as “大爷 (big master)”, “叔叔 (uncle)” and “大姐 (elder sister)”.^[7] In addition, students can practice the use of greeting words through role-playing in the classroom to avoid the occurrence of “referring to their dean as “先生 (sir)” and their friend's mother as “夫人 (madam)” in real life.

3.3 Enrich Classroom Teaching Methods with Props That Carry Chinese Culture

Chen Changlai believes that the principles of assimilation and adaptation of cognitive psychology should be followed in teaching. Teacher should pay attention to the quote the new knowledge from students' existing knowledge and use audio-visual teaching aids to make the class contextualized and cultivate students' listening, speaking, reading, writing, translating and other language skills.^[8] Thus, to use a variety of teaching methods flexibly to attract students' concentration and complete the lesson in a relaxed and animated atmosphere is one of the key ways to improve teaching effectiveness. For example, when talking about the fourth lesson “Which country are you from” teachers can prepare hand-painted postcards about major cities in China and invite students to share which cities in China they have been to or want to go to. After sharing, teachers can send the relevant city postcard to the students as a gift. In addition, when it comes to seventh lesson “What's the date today”, teacher can prepare an animated video about the Chinese zodiac and prepare maobi, paper cutting. Then ask the students to guess the animal on the paper-cut, and at the same time let them try to write their zodiac signs with maobi. Finally, to give paper-cut as a reward to the students who write well. By increasing the interest and diversity of the classroom, it can stimulate students' motivation in learning to the greatest extent.

3.4 Teaching a Culture That Keeps Pace with the Times

China has a long history and culture. Traditional culture is the foundation of Chinese culture, but it is not the whole of Chinese culture. The cultural teaching of Chinese as a second language should be linked to the current reality, so that the history and culture of thousands of years ago can be integrated into today's life. Therefore, in the Chinese teaching class, apart from introducing

excellent traditional culture to students, it is also necessary to teach students the current vivid culture. For example, compare the daily terms “Alipay”, “WeChat Pay”, “QR code” and traditional payment methods “cash” and “card”. It is also possible to use the payment method of the country where the student is located, such as the emerging “M-Pesa” in Kenya to introduce the contemporary popular payment method in China.

In addition, with the popularity of the Internet, people’s social networking has become increasingly frequent. Many online languages have emerged and become popular. If students do not have a certain understanding of Chinese online language, it will easily lead to a disconnection of communication and fail to integrate well with modern real life.^[9] Hence, teachers should also pay attention to collecting online vocabulary and communicative terms which are highly acceptable. Most of the online language is humorous and interesting which can make Chinese learning active and colorful.

4. Conclusion

In general, it is essential to introduce exercises related to cultural projects in the Chinese teaching class. It is also needful to transform cultural knowledge into pragmatic skills. The best teaching ways should melt cultural elements into language teaching according to students’ Chinese proficiency and adjust the depth and breadth of cultural introduction to help students master language and culture in a subtle way.

References

- [1] Hu Wenzhong. (2014). *Intercultural Communications Series [M]. Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, pp.48-50*
- [2] Liu Xun. (2014). *Introduction to Teaching Chinese as a second Language[M].Beijing: Beijing Language and Culture University Press, pp.66-67*
- [3] Zhang Zhanyi. (1990). *Communication culture and knowledge culture[J] Language Teaching and Research, 10(3), pp.89-91*
- [4] Zhu Yong. (2013). *International Chinese Teaching Cases and Analyses[M] Beijing: Higher Education Press, p.120*
- [5] Jiang Liping, Wei Xinhong, DongZheng. (2014). *Experiencing Chinese[M] Beijing: Higher Education Press, p.156*
- [6] Chen Changlai. (2005). *An Introduction to Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language.[M] Shanghai: Fudan University Press, p.256*