

# Constructivist Design of Culture Teaching Mode in College English

Qi Liu<sup>a</sup> and Yidan Zhou<sup>b</sup>

School of English Language and Culture of Xiamen University Tan Kah Kee College, Zhangzhou 363105, China

<sup>a</sup>wwy2zoe@163.com, <sup>b</sup>2207183112@qq.com

**Abstract.** College English curriculum aims to equip students with certain knowledge and skills, improve the cultural accomplishment and enhance the conscience of cross-cultural communication. But, owing to class hour arrangement and course design and the like, college English teachers lay more emphasis on language rather than culture. Teaching idioms' origin and historical figures, closely related to daily use of English, are two usual modules in College English culture teaching. From the constructivist view, the thesis, on the basis of these two important modules of cultural teaching, introduces micro lesson to college English classroom, and discusses how micro video is produced and applied to inverted class, with the objectives that students can better command of English culture and make smooth, effective and depth dialogues with foreigners in the future.

**Keywords:** constructivism; culture teaching; micro lesson; inverted class.

## 1. Introduction

Following the mainstream of globalization, China has promoted its world status in culture, economy and politics, etc.. In the new era, while Chinese people utilize English, a global language, to conduct cross-cultural communication, they encounter some embarrassing moment due to the weak awareness and insufficient knowledge of foreign culture, thinking pattern and living background and so on.

College English curriculum aims to equip students with certain knowledge and skills, improve the cultural accomplishment and enhance the conscience of cross-cultural communication. But, owing to class hour arrangement and course design and the like, college English teachers lay more emphasis on language rather than culture. They focus more on vocabulary enlargement, syntactic analysis and problem-solving techniques rather than origin of those idioms, comparison and contrast between China and western countries, inspiring stories of historical figures in the world to name just a few. In the long term, the students coming from such teaching mode have less possibilities to flexibly employ English to convey correct information and express their real thoughts.

From the constructivist view, the thesis, on the basis of two important modules of cultural teaching, introduces micro lesson to college English classroom, and discusses how micro video is produced and applied to inverted class, with the objectives that students can better command of English culture and make smooth, effective and depth dialogues with foreigners in the future.

## 2. Constructivist Theory

As far as constructivists are concerned, "Knowledge does not result from a mere recording of observations without a structuring activity on the part of the subject" (Piaget, 1980:23). Students are the positive constructors of the meaning. They don't passively receive knowledge, but gradually think, understand and absorb it, based on their own experience and through various kinds of mutual connection and reaction to outer space, finally shaping the new meaning construction. Teachers need "make meaningful connections between prior knowledge, new knowledge, and the processes involved in learning" (Bada, 2015:69). Therefore, constructivist teaching theory holds the belief that students should be centered and teachers become advocators, organizers, instructors and promoters. Besides, sorts of learning contexts and advantages should be provided in order to help students build the meaning structure of the learned knowledge and finish a series of such learning

behaviors as receiving information, absorbing, exemplifying and interconnecting and so on. It lays the emphasis on students' active exploration, discovery and construction of the meaning in the knowledge they've learned. Vygotsy thought "social interactions within which culture meanings are shared by the group and eventually internalized by the individual" (Al Mahmud, 2013:240). The constructivist teaching mode pays more attention to context-creating and cooperative learning, tries to steer students to notice the thoughts in their minds and cultivates their divergent thinking ability and creativity.

### **3. Constructivism and Micro Lesson**

Compared with traditional one, micro lesson is more time-saving and target-oriented. Teacher assigns the task of watching micro video to students before class and lets them prepare for the questions coming up in the end of the video. Students make a full use of spare time to think over the questions and search for the relevant materials supporting their arguments, which to some extent will improve their self-choice of knowledge, sense of activity participation and awareness of being a host in class. More importantly, a few class hours are saved for more depth discussion revolving around the target of learning and such teaching mode as applying micro video to inverted class helps students discipline more practical abilities, like solving problem, connecting theory with reality and so on.

In universities, currently, there are a great number and various kinds of micro lessons collected by teaching contests for advancing teaching level and mostly produced only by teachers themselves to join the competition but barely used in the true classroom. College English also lacks the systematic research on application and development of micro lesson in relation to vocabulary, grammar or culture. Besides, the resource of micro video, neither study-focused nor developed from the angle of learners, is too scattered to be collected and converted into specialized micro course. Students are the objects of micro teaching, so their needs and thoughts about bringing in micro lesson, as well as factors influencing the design and use of micro video, for example, their different basic English knowledge, majors and colleges, should be taken into consideration to do researches on the available application mode of college English micro lesson and gradually constitute micro course system of college English conforming to the requirements of the new network age.

"Knowledge is gained when the learners take the lead in knowledge-constructing activities." (Tan, 2017: 240) In other words, students acquire the knowledge not through just being taught but a succession of initiative learning behaviors --- thinking and understanding, the study effect of which is intensified with favorable circumstances and ancillary resources. So it's reasonable to regard them as the center of learning process rather than teacher. Constructivism has the following instructions toward the research on the production of micro video. Firstly, in line with differed knowledge points, the time limit should be controlled from 5 to 20 ms. When audience have inadequate learning initiatives, the overlong vision impact cannot provide proper situation stimulus, making them lose interests and miss the important and difficult parts, and further disturbing their information fusing and meaning construction. Secondly, the theme would better be explicit and the content are supposed to be terse and forceful. There is a necessity to select a core conception and project the video around it. Thirdly, such assignments as debate, discussion, reading or reflecting must be shown in the end to let learners do more expansive learning in higher knowledge level on the foundation of the former core conception, which conforms to the constructivist comprehension of cognitive process, that is, assimilation and accommodation. Lastly, more and more instruments and software are advanced, convenient and optional. For instance, mobile phone or DV can be chosen to take the video. Camtasia studio or Screencast can record the screen. PPT or Flash is multipurpose editor. Teacher's vocal explanation and other existing audiovisual materials can be merged into the video, either. To sum up, in accordance with the above key points, college English micro lesson need a clarified gist, clear-cut details and exquisite form, aiming to attract students' attention, cultivate their interests of learning language and culture, inspire them and give full play to their positivity and enthusiasm.

## **4. Micro Culture Teaching Mode**

Language is culture's carrier, and culture also enriches language. Consequently, college English teaching is supposed to have culture emphasized in and out of class to meet the national and international requirements of cultivating a new generation of critical thinkers, intelligent speakers and problem solvers. Idioms and historical figures are two of the most difficult parts in cultural teaching. The following is the recommended design and try of applying micro video to inverted class of English culture.

### **4.1 Idiom Teaching**

Because of the difference between idioms' extensive and literal meanings, without any relevant background knowledge, students often have difficulties in understanding those seemingly obscure words and utilizing them to correctly express the inner thoughts. However, in college English classroom, teachers pay less attention to the input of cultural origin and focus more on the grammar structure and example sentence, when they encounter idioms in the textbooks. It is of little effect to help undergraduates grasp the usage and keep deep impression as well as flexibly employ the phrases like native English speakers.

#### **4.1.1 Micro Video Production**

Constructivist scholars deem that study is the mutual function of men's experience and objective knowledge. Human being receives the signals of the new knowledge and breaks the structure of the old one to reconstruct it. They collide, accommodate and blend with each other in the state of spiral escalation. That is to say, the brain does not mechanically and passively receive and send, or record and output information but gets the fresh understanding and results through the meaning reconstruction of the new knowledge with the already existing one and learning experience. In language teaching, if rigid methods of education are used to tell the vocabulary, grammar rules or cultural phenomenon, it is not beneficial for students to initiatively construct the explanation of the neo-input information and in a large degree refrains their activation and flexibility of language exportation.

Consequently, the first step of producing micro video in idiom teaching, is to provide relevant pictures and help audience gradually become familiar with the word combination, from abstract meaning to concrete sense or reference, which prepares them for making full use of the past experience and knowledge with the inspired interests and reflecting on the origin of idioms' literal and extensive meanings and their connection.

Secondly, in order to bring more interesting elements and possible answers, it can be followed by a discussion about the origin of the idiom's extensive meaning, which affords participants assistance and direction to ponder over the problem, voluntarily set up the conceptual framework and be more creative and critical on the basis of the prior experience and knowledge to accommodate or assimilate the textbook and related materials. Hence the key is to put up reasonable questions with some practical solutions and differed viewpoints to encourage students' creativity and imagination.

Thirdly, language study needs situation. Culture teaching prefers delicate arrangement. Apart from correlations with daily life, micro video ought to lay more emphasis on auditory and visual stimuli, and choose the familiar and typical materials as examples.

When learners' passion is lighted, interest aroused and initiative stimulated, they will invest more energy and time during the learning process. When they independently explore and speculate, they tend to make more achievement, have more smooth assimilation after sorting and analyzing a mass of new information, and finally get more impressive understanding. As a result, there is a necessity to do cultural comparison and contrast, leave questions and attach importance to students' active exploration, discovery and construction of knowledge meaning. When micro video is applied to inverted class, these expansive tasks link them together, guide performers to accomplish the study from single angle, dimension and layer to multi angles, dimensions and layers, and prompt them to effectively absorb, internalize and critically think over the knowledge.

### **4.1.2 The Design of Inverted Class**

Teacher should assign homework before class and ask students to watch the micro video of the idiom. First, there will be exercises to test their understanding about the meaning of the idiom. Secondly, translating Chinese sentence is added to check student's usage of the idiom; in the meantime, teacher can remind them of methods and techniques in translation from Chinese to English. Most importantly, teacher ought to observe their comprehension and commanding of the micro lesson, and on its basis, deepen and explore the relevant knowledge in order to stimulate students' meaning construction and creation. Constructing the meaning is conducted within the brain, but creating it is needed to be performed in the concrete activities. Therefore, the first step of the design of inverted class is to combine micro lesson through providing different questions in different layers in an effort to know students' absorbing and employing of those important and difficult knowledge.

Cooperation dialogue is the main form of language interaction in English learning. Learners gain the opportunities to learn and use English to express thoughts, find different linguistic forms or characteristics and come up with assumptions based on accumulated knowledge and experience to positively construct meaning and create discourse. However, in order to build new meaning of abstract language knowledge, learners must be clear about various changes of language forms first; otherwise, they cannot set up complete meaning which probably enables them to distinguish one language type from others, not mention generating authentic, correct and flexible utterance. Consequently, raising questions, group discussion and dialogue performance are the inevitable part of the design of applying micro video to culture teaching of idioms' origin. Through cooperation dialogues, learners constantly adjust their own choice of words, phrases and sentences as well as actions and behaviors in communication, thinking pattern, logics, value views and ideology and so on, in this way that they have a full stab at all kinds of usage of the idiom and prove them one by one under different contexts.

Then, teacher repeats the question in the end of the micro video and invites students who search for the relevant materials after watching to demonstrate what they prepare on the platform. Last but not the least, homework will be assigned to realize the multiple dimensions of language study in the inverted class, that is, speaking, translating and writing. English study needs reams of multi-aspect and multi-level language application practice to facilitate students' English construction and creation, the necessary process of language acquisition, promoted with self-affected, self-conscious and self-driven tendency. Meanwhile, language points need be fused into sorts of contexts to lead learners to take part in the edge of knowledge imparting, and provide them with better and more chances to accomplish construction and creation.

## **4.2 Historical Figures Teaching**

Theme culture teaching is commonly existed but complicatedly handled, among which historical figures must be the most difficult. There are sorts of people in each country worthy being commemorated and praised whose experiences differ from each other but whose merits are the same like courage, persistence, selflessness, humanity, confidence and optimism and so on. This thesis takes Unit 3 Audrey Hepburn - A true angel in this world for example in the 3rd edition of New Horizon College English Reading and Writing Book 3, and analyzes the methods of applying micro video to historical figures teaching as well as the ways of conducting inverted class.

### **4.2.1 Micro Video Production**

Constructivist study view emphasizes that "study is not a process of easily imparting knowledge from teacher to students, but a process of students themselves constructing their own knowledge; they do not passively receive the information in class, but take the initiative to build the meaning of the new information on the basis of changing and reorganizing the former experience, and then choose and dispose the external information. Study course is not simple information input, saving and extracting, but mutual interaction between new and old experience. Teaching process is not single knowledge transmission, but knowledge tackling and transformation." (Feng Yufang,

2006:34) Therefore, teacher need help students realize the organic connection between new and old knowledge. There are two main factors in turning the objective into reality, that is, situation stimulating and prior knowledge and experience. Given these principles, the point of penetration should steer clear of the concept of humanitarianism strange to students, and introduce Hepburn's well-known beautiful and elegant image of goddess as lead-in. The first section of the micro video aims at describing the concept of goddess misled by pop culture and mass media. An array of pictures or heated words of culture arouse students' former knowledge and experience. Their sensitiveness and enthusiasm toward the topic goddess will surely stimulate them to actively participate in the following activities. The second section of the micro video is transition with the question of the true essence of goddess, bridging old experience and new conception. The third section of the micro video focuses on Hepburn's dedication and contribution in the field of humanitarian cause, exemplifying the true essence of goddess by presenting some of her touching deeds. The micro video closes with a depth thinking question left to students: how do ordinary people relate to the spirit of Audrey Hepburn?

#### **4.2.2 The Design of Inverted Class**

The framework of the inverted class is based on comparison and generalization in the form of classroom discussion.

The title of this article --- Audrey Hepburn - A true angel in this world confines the inner core of the spirit of Audrey Hepburn that the author intended to present. Students are familiar with the word angel. It is not complex. But there is no image of angel in Chinese traditional culture. The most similar figure to angel is Chinese immortal. The common thing between them is the immortal life and great power. In Christian paintings, angels have the wings and are spiritual beings that some people believe are God's servants in heaven. However, in English the denotations of angel go far beyond that. Collins Advanced English-Chinese Dictionary gives the definitions as follows.

You can call someone you like very much an angel in order to show affection, especially when they have been kind to you or done you a favor.

Eg: Thank you a thousand times, you're an angel.

If you describe someone as an angel, you mean that they seem to be very kind and good.

Eg: He was such an angel to put up with it.

If you say that someone is on the side of the angels, you believe very strongly that what they are doing is right.

Eg: Billy is on the side of the angels when it comes to racial tolerance.

It can be inferred from above that angel can refer to someone who possesses the highest level of kindness, which cannot be achieved by ordinary people. It is in this sense that angel is a word more appropriate to generalize the spirit of Audrey Hepburn than the word goddess, which in modern pop culture, brings about more visual impact and less metal blast. So, the micro video's replacement of angel by goddess is only an attempt of the teacher to facilitate students to construct new meanings based on their old knowledge and it is proved that the design enables students to ponder over the true essence of the spirit of Audrey Hepburn. In the end, the inverted class echoes the micro video with this practical question --- is it possible that ordinary people can practice the spirit of Audrey Hepburn?

### **5. Questionnaire and Analysis**

Researcher chooses 117 students as the experimental group, adopts the above design of micro video and inverted class, and finishes teaching English culture in New Horizon College English Book. In order to better understand the effects of the new teaching mode and its defects, researcher hands out the questionnaire and does the survey among the students. In each question, 4 choices are provided --- A. No B. Not Very Good C. Yes D. Very Good. The statistics in the collected papers are analyzed through SPSS software. First, according to the Cronbach reliability analysis, the value of Calibration Item Total Correlation (CITC) are all bigger than 0.4, which states that there are good correlations among the analyzed items and those statistics are also in good reliability level. In

addition, the value of reliability coefficient is 0.809, which proves that the reliability quality of the statistics is high and they are worth of being further analyzed. Other results and corresponding explanations are listed one by one in the following Figures and letters.



Fig 1: Question 1 Does micro lesson meet your study needs?



Fig 2: Question 2 Does micro lesson inspire your passion toward study?

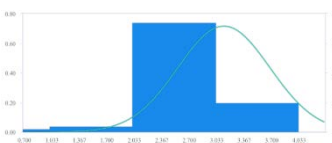


Fig 3: Question 3 Is the content clear enough in the micro lesson?

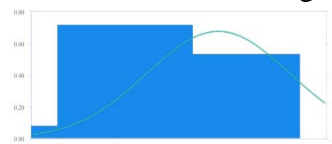


Fig 4: Question 4 Does micro lesson help you better command of English culture?



Fig5: Question5 Does micro lesson help you think actively and take initiatives to learn relevant culture?

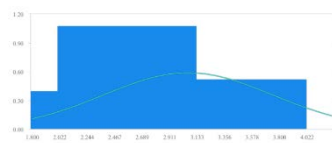


Fig 6: Question 6 Is micro lesson suitable to your current College English study?

More than 80% students think micro lesson can meet their study needs. Micro lesson inspires at least half of the students' passion toward study. The content is very clear in the micro lesson. Fewer than 10% students reckon that micro lesson is not able to help them better command of English culture. After having the micro lesson in this semester, 3/4 students do more active thinking and learn relevant culture more positively. Till now, no student rejects adding micro lesson to College English study. Most of them want to give it a try and find it more suitable to their current study life.

In accordance with the above illustrations, researcher concludes that most students support micro lesson and think the new teaching mode brings lots of advantages and enhances their learning initiatives, especially in the aspect of understanding English culture. Apart from it, in the end of the questionnaire, the students are invited to write some suggestions about the micro lesson. Some hope that flash and cartoon can be used to produce the video to increase the interests. Some deem that more culture expressions and detailed analysis should be included. Some others suggest that exercises in the inverted class are supposed to contain different levels, from simple word game and

oral English practice to difficult E-C or C-E translation and critical writing. These treasurable advices provide a better point of view and will be taken into consideration in the future study.

## 6. Summary

In the angle of constructivism, teacher is advocator and organizer of class activities, constructor of knowledge meaning, and assistant and promoter of knowledge digesting and absorbing. Bringing into the novel and convenient teaching tool --- micro video, has the possibilities to supply previous background materials and questions for discussing and thinking, expand students' horizons, stir their interests, get them ready with comparatively adequate preparation in psychology and information collection of video questions before class, and to a certain degree, enrich their minds and enhance their critical thinking abilities. Applied to inverted class, micro lesson realizes the true adjustment of learning process. In other words, traditionally, teachers pass on knowledge in class, and students digest and absorb knowledge, together with drawing inferences from one instance; currently, it's likely that students watch micro video to finish the learning part before class, while in class teachers design several activities to check and test their capabilities of digesting, absorbing and drawing inferences. In this way, learning efficiency is improved and teaching effect is promoted. What's more, discerning differences and discrepancy among students, teachers can teach in accordance of their aptitude reflected in the class performance. On the other hand, with enough preparation ahead of time, students could become more confident and more willing to participate in class activities, which further motivates their initiatives and creativity.

Teaching idioms' origin and historical figures, closely related to daily use of English, are two usual modules in College English culture teaching. Arousing students' learning enthusiasm, complete with deepening their impression and improving their flexibility and positivity, will push them forward during the process of integrating themselves into English speaking countries and realize a kind of depth, effective and smooth communication and cultural exchange. Teacher should produce micro video and apply it to inverted class, according to the characteristics and needs of the above two parts, and pay more attention to multiple dimensions of language study and conversion from language application practice to such spiritual aspects as thinking patterns, logics and value view, with the purpose of improving students' critical thinking ability and promoting the research and study on English language and culture as well as comparison and contrast between Chinese and English language and culture.

Nevertheless, there are still some defects in the thesis, for instance, not containing all the modules in culture teaching, providing just very few examples of the design of micro lesson and inverted class, limited questionnaire participants and small sample analysis to name but a few. A lot of problems are really supposed to be further discussed, investigated and researched. Hopefully, the thesis is likely to afford some new thoughts, cognition and angles of such English culture teaching as idioms' origin and historical figures for those educators working on the production of micro video and its application to inverted class. More importantly, there is a possibility that the research can evoke the interests and passion of other educational workers toward micro lesson, inverted class and constructivist theory, step by step, bringing them to the forefront of Chinese academic world and contributing a different voice and a slim chance to the innovation of Chinese high education teaching modes and reform of College English curriculum.

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