On Study of English Language Teaching from the Perspective of ICC

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Abstract: Training Chinese students' intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is one of the most important objectives for English teaching, which is also the need of the frequent international interactions. Based on the conception and connotations of the ICC, the present author makes some suggestions on how to train students' ICC in English language teaching in the thesis.

1. Introduction

With the development of new technology and global economy, various cultures of the world are far more accessible than ever before, and that the peoples of the cultures are coming into contact at an ever-increasing rate. Intercultural communication becomes one of the most prominent and significant activities in the twentieth century. In China, since the policy of reform and "opening up" is adopted, more and more transnational corporations have been crowding into China for investment. Exchange of culture, advanced science and technology becomes unprecedentedly frequent and important. Therefore, it is self-evident that a good command of intercultural communicative competence is of high necessity and significance. Then how should ICC be trained? What is the relationship between ICC training and English language teaching? These questions are the focus of this thesis which is divided into five parts.

Part one, introduction
Part two, intercultural communication and ICC
Part three, integrating ICC training and English language teaching
Part four, suggestions for intercultural communicative classrooms
Part five, conclusion

2. Intercultural communication and ICC

2.1 Intercultural communication

2.1.1 The definition of intercultural communication

In its most general sense, intercultural communication occurs when a member of one culture produces a massage for consumption by a member of another culture. More precisely, intercultural communication is communication between people whose cultural perceptions and symbol systems are distinct enough to alter the communication event. [1]

Frequently, the term cross-cultural communication is used when referring to communication between people from different cultures. Because this term implies a comparison between cultures, some scholars find it too restrictive. So the term intercultural communication is extensively used at present.

2.1.2 Forms of intercultural communication

Interracial communication
Interracial communication occurs when the source and the receiver exchanging message are from different races.
Interethnic communication
Interethnic communication refers to situations in which the parties are of the same race but of different ethnic origins.

Intracultural communication

Intracultural communication is communication between members of the same culture, including racial, ethnic, and other co-cultures.

2.1.3 Elements of intercultural communication

One element of intercultural communication is perception, the process by which an individual selects, evaluates, and organizes stimuli from the external world. Cultural perceptions are based on beliefs, values, and attitude systems.

Anther intercultural element is verbal processes: how we talk to each other and think.

Nonverbal processes, the third element, involve the use of actions to communicate. The meanings of these actions shift from culture to culture.

The context of the communication event is influenced by culture.

2.2 Intercultural communicative competence

2.2.1 Defining ICC

In general speaking，we would agree with Spitzberg when he suggests that ICC is simply "behavior that is appropriate and effective in a given context."[2].While Kim offers a more detailed definition when she notes that ICC is "the overall internal capability of an individual to manage key challenging features of intercultural communication [3]. What these two definitions, one is general and the other specific, are telling us is that being a competent communicator means analyzing the situation and selecting the correct mode of behavior.

2.2.2 Basic components of ICC

Communicative competence consists of the knowledge that users of language have internalized to enable them to understand and produce messages in the language. Broadly speaking, ICC is the ability to interact effectively with people of cultures other than one's own [4].

As ICC is the key to successful intercultural communication, and talking about ICC is to find out how to develop ICC, it is necessary for us to know what features contribute to ICC. Basically, ICC requires that the students acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and critical cultural awareness necessary to communicate interculturally. To achieve and improve the students' ICC means to develop their competence of knowledge, skills, attitudes and critical cultural awareness. Intercultural knowledge, intercultural skills, intercultural attitudes and critical cultural awareness are considered as four components [5].

2.2.2.1 Intercultural knowledge

Intercultural knowledge includes two types. The first is knowledge about social groups and cultures in one's own country and in the countries of one's interlocutors. The second type of knowledge is knowledge of the processes of interaction at societal and individual levels. The knowledge is essential for ICC, if students speak grammatically correct English but have no knowledge of the processes of interaction, communication will be a failure. Intercultural knowledge is an important consideration in culture teaching and plays a significant role in ELT.

1t may help learners perceive the cultural knowledge of English-speaking countries, such as customs, religions beliefs and ways of life in order to make fewer culture shocks, to widen their vision and to develop their awareness of cultural differences.

It may also help learners better understand the different cultural connotation and extension of vocabulary, pave the way for the understanding of contents of texts and make accurate evaluation and feed back for the theme of texts.

Finally it can help learners grasp language and put it into practice in order to achieve communicative objectives.

2.2.2.2 Intercultural skills

Byram divides skills into two categories. The first is the "ability to interpret a document or even

from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents from one's own" [5]. The second is "the ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction." Both sets of skills obviously require the development of language competence.

2.2.2.3 Intercultural attitudes

The intercultural attitudes refer to the learner's curiosity and openness to other cultures, their readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures as well as their belief about their own culture. Attitudes are crucial to ICC, as well as playing a very important part in motivation for foreign language learning. In order to be successful intercultural communicators, students need to develop attitudes of openness to other cultures and curiosity about other cultures and people.

2.2.2.4 Critical cultural awareness

Critical cultural awareness here doesn't have a negative meaning. In this sense, it means the ability to think about things actively and intelligently rather than just accept them passively without question. The development of critical awareness involves the ability to identify and interpret values in another culture, the ability to interact and mediate in intercultural exchanges, drawing on one's knowledge, skills and attitudes.

3. Integrating ICC training and English language teaching

Since the definitions of intercultural communication and ICC have been illustrated, how should ICC be trained? The present author suggests that based on the present situation of China, ICC training should be integrated with English language teaching. There are two reasons for the suggestion: on the one hand, English as a foreign language in China has been popularized for many years and until now most Chinese students have been attempting to study English well; on the other hand, culture has close relationship with language.

3.1 Relationship between language and culture

Language and culture are inseparable, which is strongly advocated by Byram et al, who have contended that cultural learning and language learning cannot take place independent of each other.

Language and culture interact, each influencing and shaping the other. They can never be separated. Language is the carrier of culture and a mirror of culture. Meanwhile culture enriches but influences language. Human knowledge and experience and competence such as thinking patterns, value system, customs, beliefs, music, dancing can be described and evaluated in language. When talking about culture and how it is integrated into language teaching and learning, Kramsch's keen observation should not go unnoticed.

Culture in language learning is not an expendable fifth skill, tacked on, so to speak, to the teaching of speaking, listening, reading and writing. It is always in the background, right from day one, ready to unsettle the good language learners when they expect it least, making evident the limitations of their hard-won communicative competence, challenging their ability to make sense of the world around them. [6] The cultural knowledge of certain language affects a great deal how the learner and user understand and choose to manipulate the language and adds to the appropriateness of his or her daily communication.

4. Suggestions for intercultural communicative classrooms

When learners are educated to understand a target language culture, they will gradually acquire capacity to adapt to or be tolerant of the new situation. Thus, this will help them gain successful cross-cultural communication as both their language expression and behaviors are acceptable in the target language culture. English teaching can only achieve efficient results with the integration of language and culture. Therefore, the best way to cultivate the students' cross-cultural communicative awareness and competence is to integrate culture teaching into language teaching.

The following sections will explore some measures of developing ICC aiming at improving the current situation of FLP in China.

4.1 Formulation of syllabus

To carry out the all-embracing both native culture and target language culture, it is essential to formulate the syllabus of foreign language education in which language and culture are integrated.

According to the function of culture in communication, culture can be divided into knowledge culture and communicative culture. Knowledge culture refers to the culture that makes indirect influence on communication. For example, there are a huge professional knowledge in Chinese painting, such as it is the essence of Chinese culture; it is the representative of the Oriental Painting; usually it is divided into three main kinds: the Mountain-and–waters painting, the Flower-and-birds Painting; and the Figure Painting; and so on. Except for specific group, the knowledge has not direct influence on communication. Communicative culture refers to the culture that makes direct influence on communication, such as titles, wish, shopping, congratulating, and so on. It is directly associated with communication. Communication culture is different from knowledge culture: the content of communicative culture is limited by the culture it relates to; knowledge culture is relatively stable, conversely, with the change of the social culture it relates to, communicative culture is changeable.

In view of the stages of cultural education and the practicality of culture programs, when we formulate syllabus we should design some communicative culture programs at primary stage. With the development of learners' language proficiency and the decreasing of learners' communicative failures, the proportion of knowledge culture to communicative culture will be increased step by step.

Since the chief goal of foreign language education is to develop learners' intercultural communicative competence, the syllabus should properly embody native language culture in order to meet the need of intercultural communication.

4.2 Selection and adaptation of textbooks

Because cultural education is in step with language education, when we select textbooks we should firstly consider the literature works that are rich in the essence of language, and the discourse that introduce two sides' customs for us. The materials should include both target language culture and native language culture.

However, if there are not proper texts available in the textbook, teachers can adapt it. He or she should use the same material, but do it from the purpose of intercultural communication. Even he or she can creatively add some activities and exercises in order to develop learners' communicative competence. For example, the materials that can reflect the contrast between two cultures should be introduced into classrooms.

4.3 Increasing the input of cultural knowledge by making use of multi-media and Internet resources

Nowadays not only charts and pictures can easily be shown. If needed, DVD and video tapes can be played in class. Or ever, messages from radio and TV can be added. These audiovisual materials can be used to provide large quantities of specific cultural information and insights. Meanwhile, with the rapid development of the Internet, we have a definitely more convenient way to find supplementary resources in a relatively short time. The Internet is really a great resource of detailed world cultural information. Besides maps, pictures, biographies of famous people, explanations of special terms and MP3 music can also be found. As students trained in this environment are more actively involved, what they are exposed to is easier to be internalized and tends to be long lasting. Student's cultural senses are extended further and wider. They see and hear what originally could not be seen and heard in class.

When teaching different types of music, the teacher may find it difficult to collect and display all types of music by playing CDs, and tape cassettes. However, with the help of Internet, work can be done much more easily. We teachers just type the key words and search for the information we need

on the Internet. The result will be on the screen in a second. However, not all the information on the Internet is real, useful and helpful. It is the teacher's responsibility to help the students make good use of the Internet and the web culture of virtual reality.

4.4 Organizing proper activities leading to culture-oriented learning

As we know, it is the teacher's responsibility to motivate the student's interest toward cultural knowledge. The teacher as the organizer designs various activities to stimulate their interest and to help establish the foreign language classroom "not so much as a place where the language is taught, but as one where opportunities for learning various kinds are provided through the interactions that take place between participants"[6]. The following are some activities which can be applied in teaching culture in SFLS.

4.4.1 Role-play

Role-play has used to make points about culturally appropriate or inappropriate behavior. In role-plays, students can act out a miscommunication that is based on cultural difference. For example, after learning about ways of addressing different groups of people in the target language, such as people of the same age and older people, students could role play a situation in which an inappropriate greeting is used. Other students observe the role-play and try to identify the reason for the miscommunication. They then act out the same situation using a culturally appropriate form of address. Students learn from each other by casting themselves into different roles.

4.4.2 Group work

The students of different abilities are formed into different groups, with an abler student as the leader of the group, taking the combination of students of different English levels into consideration. The way of grouping the students brings out the student's enthusiasm, activates their participation, and strengthens the communication among students themselves and their teacher as well. When the teacher assigns a more complicated or demanding task, students tend to accomplish it more easily and willingly within their teams. And the task assigned usually requires the students to look for relevant cultural information and make a PPT file or write a social report based on their survey. The learning of cultural knowledge can be fun and effective once it is conducted properly [7].

Other activities such as debating, problem solving, and brainstorming were also used in class according to the different content the students learned. They turned out to be effective ways of learning culture.

4.5 Digging into the core of culture

In Helen Spencer's of model of culture [8], culture is manifested at different layers. There is a link between layers and the inner one affects the outer one. We can better understand the core of target culture, that is, beliefs, attitudes and values through the observation of outer two layers of culture, such as artifacts and products rituals and behavior, systems and institutions. We won't easily understand the way Westerners address, greet, and behave unless we understand their beliefs, attitudes and values. Meanwhile a critical cultural awareness is developed to dig into the core of culture [9].

An example goes to teaching Manners. When someone praises us "You speak very good English." we Chinese will often say "No, not so good" to show our modesty, while Westerners reply `Thank you" with a big smile. As we know Chinese Mandarin is loaded with long and abundant Chinese culture, mainly Confucian culture. Chinese Confucius Theory puts an emphasis on benevolence, justice, ceremony, wisdom, confidence, honesty, humility, and politeness, while Western cultures emphasize loyalty and bravery. Consequently, we often hear sentences such as "My English is very poor." Whereas English native speakers only say "Thank you". Two different values behind the language cause the different answers. It also happens to greetings. When someone asks you "Have you had your lunch yet?", every Chinese understands that it doesn't mean this person wants to invite you to have lunch; it is a kind of greeting which is similar to "hello" in Western countries.

The students were taught in this way to cultivate their critical awareness and to know that two different values of cultures cause this phenomenon, not because one culture is superior to the other.

4.6 Extra-class activities

Obviously, in order to develop students' ICC, it is not adequate to teach in the classroom only. Extra-class activities are also necessary and should be well designed. The suggested extra-class activities may include; lecture on cultures, role-playing and task-based activities in different contexts, reading newspapers, making use of projected media, English corner, speech contest, and encouraging students to develop interpersonal contacts with native English speakers, etc. These are also the main sources for the students to develop their understanding of foreign culture.

4.7 Changing teachers' role

Teachers are the key for effective culture input, so they should change roles from knowledge transmission to the designer, organizer and participant of communication activities. The center of teaching should transmit from teacher to student. Class should be turned into a place which can provide students with communicative culture and where teacher can organize students to carry out activities to develop their ICC.

To achieve the purpose, teachers' self-development should also be stressed. It is vital that teachers should be aware of their own weakness and limitation, and seek self-development persistently. Language teachers should develop an understanding of the theoretical foundations underlying the learning and teaching of foreign language, become familiar with relevant work in linguistics, psycholinguistics, socio-linguistics, intercultural communication, etc [10]. If teachers themselves have ICC, they can help students to have a better command of ICC.

4.8 Improving the current testing system

Current English tests put much emphasis on written test rather than oral test. And what's more, a large part of testing items is about linguistic structures, with ICC being ignored. In order to encourage teachers and students to pay full attention to the development of ICC, the form and content of English test should be improved. First, a testing system of "written test+oral test" should be established to assess both students' linguistic knowledge and their ICC. Second, the content of written test should be enlarged to include psychological culture, pragmatic competence, communicative strategies, non-verbal communication, etc. Cultural item test can take such forms as multiple choices, true or false, demonstration, and discussion. By improving the current testing system, teachers and students will begin to focus on the teaching and learning of culture, and the cultivation of ICC will be carried out smoothly.

5. Conclusion

Language is a part of culture. Therefore, if we do not understand the cultural patterns and norms, it is impossible to truly learn language. Just like Folitzer said, "if we teach language without teaching at the same time the culture in which it operates, we are teaching meaningless symbols or symbols to which the student attaches the wrong meaning." In China, it is a necessary and urgent task to train and improve students' intercultural communication competence. In this thesis, according to the specific situation in China, it is suggested that training students' ICC should be combined with English language teaching. Several proposals are also presented on cultural instruction in classroom. It is believed that teachers can help students improve their ICC with these suggestions.

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