

The Teaching of Chinese Idioms in Teaching Chinese as Foreign Language(TCFL)

Yang Zhou¹, Jingyang Wang¹

¹*College of International Education, Bohai University, Liaoning, China*

Keywords: Chinese idiom, TCFL, teaching strategies.

Abstract: Chinese idiom is the essence of the combination between Chinese language and Chinese culture. It conveys rich cultural information and possesses a specific structural pattern as well as the cultural connotation. As a special group of Chinese vocabulary, Chinese idiom has always been the interest of foreign students who are studying Chinese. However, the Chinese idiom is both the focus point and difficult point of Chinese vocabulary studying for Chinese language learners. It usually takes considerable amount of time for the language learners to acquire the usage of the idioms completely. Chinese idiom, which plays an indispensable role in language learning and cultural communication, has a quite important and significant influence on the teaching process of TCFL. This paper aims to discuss the importance of Chinese idioms as well as the current situation of idioms teaching, and finally to propose the strategies of idioms teaching in TCFL.

1. The Importance of Teaching Chinese Idioms in TCFL

1.1. It is an Essential Language Knowledge of Chinese in Daily Communication

It is universally acknowledged that idioms exist in almost all types of languages in the world. The language learners, after a study of the pronunciation and some certain grammars, will involve in the study of the idioms sooner or later. As is known well, Chinese people have a special fondness for Chinese idioms. In their eyes, Chinese idioms are simple in form but rich in connotation. They can arouse people's associations with vivid images, inspire people's hearts with incisive implications, and move people's attitudes with beautiful rhythm. Therefore, whether in spoken or written language, Chinese people like to use some idioms to varying degrees. That is to say, the correct use of idioms is related to the success of daily communication with Chinese people. If language learners manage to master Chinese freely and expand their interpersonal communication, the idioms as a whole is an unavoidable task to be accomplished.

1.2. It is an Important and Difficult Part of Teaching Vocabulary in TCFL

On one hand, to Chinese learners, a large number of idioms is one of their inevitable tasks. The task of idiom teaching exists in various stages and different types of courses. The higher level learners reach, the more idioms they are supposed to study. The book '*Chinese Proficiency Test Syllabus (Advanced)* [1]' which was published by the National Chinese Proficiency Test Committee, has accordingly required 138 Chinese idioms to Chinese learners. Apart from this, the proportion of

idioms in Chinese vocabulary teaching is also gradually increasing these years , this means it is a key point to teach idioms when the teachers intend to teach Chinese vocabulary.

One the other hand, Chinese idiom is still a difficulty for learners due to their lack of knowledge of ancient Chinese and the interference of their culture from mother tongue. Firstly, the Idioms come from a variety of sources, such as ancient myths and legends, historical events, the original sentences of the ancients, people's proverbs, as well as foreign words, etc. The majority of Chinese idioms are based on the classical Chinese in ancient times while the Chinese learners study is focused on the modern Chinese. Such contradiction has brought about considerable difficulties in TCFL. Secondly, Idioms from different languages reflect their people's unique history, values and life experiences directly. A large number of words are difficult to find corresponding words in other languages. This distinctive national feature is also a major difficulty in idioms teaching in TCFL.

1.3. It is an Important Process in Cultural Communication and the Cultivation of Learners' Intercultural Communicative Competence.

Five thousand years of Chinese civilization, together with its rich cultural heritage and immortal charm, is the aspiration of many foreigners. As the essence of Chinese language, idioms embody the culture of the national language, reflect the cultural characteristics, habits, social structure, customs and other contents of the national language in an all-round way, and moreover contain a rich cultural characteristic. The study of idioms is an excellent way for the cultural communication to language learners. With the improvements of their language level, the learners will be aware of the differences between Chinese and their mother language from a cultural view. The more emphases they put on this, the more success they will get in intercultural communication in TCFL.

2. Some Noticeable Problems of Chinese Idioms in TCFL

2.1. The Problems in Learners' Study

For the learners, we can do the error analysis to see what the problems are in their learning process. According to Wang Meiling[2], there are four major errors: the error in writing, the error in understanding of semantics, the error in the use of syntax, and the error understanding of pragmatics. Additionally, Hong Bo[3] also states three difficulties for learners from the error analysis, they are the meaning of idioms, grammatical and syntactic functions of idioms, collocation of idioms.

As we all know, Chinese learners come from countries with different historical and cultural backgrounds. It is difficult for them to grasp the profound historical allusions and cultural connotations in a short period of time. This kind of cross-cultural learning makes their idiom learning more difficult. Apart from this, the short of the knowledge in ancient Chinese language is also an obstacle for learners since the Chinese idioms inherit a considerable number of ancient Chinese phonetics, semantics and grammar. Therefore, the difficulty of learning can be imagined if the language learners have no basis for ancient Chinese at all. What's more, the complexity of the Chinese idiom itself has forced the learners to simplify the usage in their own way, which turned out to be a mistake. All the above reasons lead to a confusion for the language learners. They think that idioms are difficult to learn and often take an evasive attitude, which is not conducive to improving their language level at all.

2.2. The Problems in Teaching Process

The first problem is the lack of attention of idioms teaching. For a long time, Chinese idioms teaching in TSCL have not been given much attention, this phenomenon can be obviously seen in

the syllabus, textbooks and dictionaries in Chinese language teaching. For example, Pan Xianjun[4] pointed out that in “*A Brief Study on the Idioms in TCFL*” that “*The Outline of Chinese Level Vocabulary and Chinese Character Level (Revised Version)*” contained 8822 words, while only 126 idioms, accounting for less than 1.7%. In terms of textbooks, Zhao Jiayou[5] counted 11 kinds of idioms in TCFL textbooks. Not only did it find that the number of idioms in different textbooks varied greatly, the repetition rate of the same idiom was low in each textbook, but it also found that many textbooks had the problem of collecting some obscure idioms. In terms of dictionary compilation, Hong Bo's[6] research found that most of them were obscure. The positioning of the dictionary of numeral idioms is not “second language learning”. It is not suitable for people who use Chinese as a second language because it does not take this as a starting point in the selection of words, definitions, examples and usage explanations.

Additionally, there are some problems in the teachers as well. Whether the quality of TCFL can be optimized depends on the quality of the TCFL teachers. Due to the lack of attention paid to Chinese idioms in current teaching, teachers are lack of accumulation of idiom knowledge and they cannot master the cultural concepts between Chinese and western which are embodied in idioms, and they are lack of deep understanding of their connotations, also they are inadequate in the teaching methods. In TCFL, we should not only teach students how to say, but also enable them to know why to say so. This requires the Chinese teachers to constantly broaden their knowledge and build bridges between language learners of different countries and cultural backgrounds. Only with a complete structure, good professional quality and strong teaching ability can the teachers be entirely competent in TCFL. However, many of our teachers in TCFL have not had any systematic professional training before, and only a few of them have rich language knowledge and strong cultural awareness. This is a common negative factor and drawback in cultivating students' intercultural communicative competence.

3. Teaching Strategy of Chinese Idioms in TCFL

3.1. Morpheme Analysis is also Applicable to Idiom Teaching.

The literal meaning of morphemes is a prerequisite for understanding the semantics of idioms. Therefore, we should master the idioms, and also understand the situation of phrases and sentences. Referring to the teaching method of morpheme analysis in vocabulary teaching, the morpheme analysis of idioms with high transparency starts with the literal meaning of the constituent morphemes of the idioms.

3.2. Teaching Idioms by Classifying and Summarizing Idioms and Comparing their Similarities and Differences

We can classify idioms from different angles, according to their meanings and forms. Idioms with tigers, dragons, cattle, horses and other animals are mostly praised, while those with wolves, rats and other animals are mostly derogatory. This kind of classified teaching helps learners to master the rules of the meaning of idioms.

3.3. Identify the Source of Idioms and Give Learners a Detailed Introduction of their Historical Features.

Chinese idioms mostly come from myths, fables, historical stories or articles written by the ancients. In addition, there are also some from the spoken language of the ancients and modern people. In specific teaching, we can selectively explain the source of some idioms and the stories behind them,

improve students' interest in learning idioms, and to a certain extent reduce learners' semantic errors in idioms.

3.4. Context Teaching Requires the Idioms to be Understood in Certain Context

Teachers can use multimedia to show in class and simulate the teaching of idioms in combination with the actual situation, so as to combine the teaching and application of idioms. Students can also participate in scenario simulation. Through the performances of students and teachers, deepen the learning impression. In this way, students' problems in the demonstration can be corrected in real time.

4. Conclusion

Chinese idioms have a strong expressive function. They have rich meanings, elegant style, strong sense of rhythm and expressive force. They contain rich philosophy. Those exquisite allusions are contained in four short words. Idiom teaching is an important part of TCFL. It has always been the interest of foreign students learning Chinese, but it is also a tough problem they have to deal with. If we can overcome a series of existing problems and effectively carry out idiom teaching in TCFL, we can not only stimulate students' learning enthusiasm, satisfy their learning desire, improve their Chinese level and expand their knowledge, but also open up a new world for vocabulary teaching, thus improving the quality of TCFL as a whole.

References

- [1] *Chinese Proficiency Test Syllabus (Advanced)* [M]. Beijing: Commercial Press, 2009.
- [2] Wang Meiling. *Error Analysis on Overseas Students Studying and Their Application of Idioms* [J]. *Journal of Hunan College of Humanities and Science*, 2009(2):22-25
- [3] [6] Hong Bo. *Study on Idioms Teaching in TCFL*[J]. *Sun Yatsen University Forum*, 2003(12): 152-157.
- [4] Pan Xianjun. *A Brief Study on the Idioms in TCFL*. [J]*Chinese Literature and Teaching* 2001(1):55-58
- [5] Zhao Jiayou. *Issues in Idioms Teaching in TCFL*. [J]*Teaching and Study* 2007(3): 32-38