

Optimization of Cultural Elements in Language Teaching Mechanism

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Abstract. Internet gives rise to the blended teaching, the teaching philosophy of which is student-centered and teacher-guiding. Therefore, the teaching reform team conducted a two-year study and practice on the integration of cultural elements into college English classrooms. This teaching reform project adheres to the concept of “student-centered”, “whole person education” and aligns with the goals and requirements of the new version of the "College English Teaching Guide". Based on the textbook "New Horizon College English", the teaching content is restructured, and the teaching scaffold is based on language and culture comparison to improve the effectiveness of students' second language acquisition. At the same time, the teaching reform team has created a multidimensional teaching evaluation system that combines formative evaluation with process evaluation, self-evaluation with other evaluations, which not only comprehensively and objectively reflects the learning process, but also has a backwash effect on teaching. This teaching mode builds a college English scaffold to cultivate students' objective and comprehensive understanding of the external world and enhance their cross-cultural communication skills. After two years of teaching reform practice, the teaching reform team has achieved excellent results in teaching effectiveness and academic research.

Keywords: Cultural elements; Comparison; Teaching scaffold; Information Age

1. Introduction

As the public basic course with the largest number of students and the longest teaching time in university learning, College English has a responsibility to fully utilize cultural elements into classroom and help students cultivate correct outlook. Effective curriculum design of cultural elements into college English classrooms is beneficial for expanding young students' understanding of Western culture, history, and ideas, and plays a positive role in cultivating students' cross-cultural communication abilities.

At present, there are two major problems in college English teaching: ①There are significant differences between Chinese and English in pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, discourse, and many other aspects. Students are influenced by some rules of their mother tongue during language learning, resulting in negative transfer in SLA. ②The goal of English teaching still remains to improve students' language proficiency and language application ability. The input and output of culture-oriented classroom have not formed an organic mechanism, neglecting students' output in the classroom and after class, making it difficult to improve students' overall abilities.

2. Research Objectives

To solve the above-mentioned problems, the teaching reform team employs the method of comparison since there are huge differences in Chinese and Western Culture and Ways of Thinking which cause great barriers in Chinese students' English learning

2.1 Differences in Values. Values are unavoidable in any society or culture, and are the rules of people's behavior and the norms of their thoughts. The linear route of Western culture is like a straight line, emphasizing the realization of personal potential, personal goals, and the pursuit of personal interests. Under the guidance of this linear value system, everyone values self-reliance, self-struggle, and freedom to strive, which have become the principles of behavior that westerners advocate. The circularity of Chinese culture is manifested in the overall centripetal orientation of the circle, emphasizing the harmony of group relationships, the command of group goals, and the

maintenance of group interests. So Chinese people advocate putting collective interests first in everything.

2.2 Differences in Ways of Thinking. The way of thinking is a fixed thinking pattern or inertia formed by people of a nation or region in the long-term historical development process, which is a relatively fixed pattern. The way of thinking is a bridge between culture and language. On the one hand, the way of thinking is closely related to culture, which is a concentrated reflection of various elements of culture and has a restrictive effect on them.

S. N. Lian (2002) comprehensively and deeply discussed the characteristics of Chinese and Western thinking modes, and wrote *On Chinese and Western Thinking Modes*. Traditional Chinese philosophy fundamentally stipulates that human nature is ethical, and Chinese thinking has characteristics such as introversion, seeking sameness, wholeness, ambiguity, and induction; However, Western philosophy stipulates that human nature is cognitive, and their way of thinking is characterized by extroversion, seeking diversity, individuality, accuracy, deduction etc.

2.3 Comparison between Chinese and English. Each language is a representation of its local culture and thinking pattern, and its research is an important field for exploring human civilization and wisdom. Due to the unique national history, psychological background, and cultural geography of each culture and language, there are often significant differences in linguistic structure, language background, thinking pattern, and ways of expression among different languages and dialects, especially languages belonging to different language families.

As we all know, language is the main means of expressing thoughts and emotions, and is an important communication tool. Language, as a part of culture, is also a mirror reflecting culture. Through language, one can glimpse the colorful cultural forms of a nation. Due to the distinct ethnic characteristics of culture, the cultures of different ethnic groups naturally differ greatly. These cultural differences inevitably manifest at different levels of the language system.

2.3.1 Differences in Word Formation. There are many differences in word formation between English and Chinese. The major methods of word formation in English include synthesis, classification, and derivation. In addition, it also includes acronym abbreviation, spelling, truncation, reversion, and repetition. Despite that, if we carefully observe and compare, it can be found that almost all word formation in English can find the corresponding methods in Chinese, but there are differences in people's accustomed classification and naming. Words in Chinese are generally divided into simple words and compound words. The word formation of compound words in English is the same as that of compound words in Chinese. The derivation method in English corresponds to the additional component in Chinese. The acronyms, blendings, and truncations in English are actually defined as the process of forming new words by omitting some letters, similar to abbreviations in Chinese. The repetition method in English is very similar to the formation of overlapping compound words in Chinese. The difference is that in Chinese, the same Chinese characters are repeated, while in English, words with the same beginning or vowel sound are also referred to as words formed by repetition method.

2.3.2 Syntactic Differences. Chinese is a paratactic language, and its circular characteristics are reflected in the flow of language segments in a circular pattern, with irregular waves and scattered expression. This characteristic of Chinese language is inseparable from the long-standing cultural tradition of the Han people's emphasis on understanding rather than formal argumentation in philosophy, and their advocacy of "similarity in spirit" in art. Unlike Indo-European languages, there are no complex inflections, positions, or morphological changes, so the combination of Chinese is not constrained by morphological components, but mainly depends on whether the semantic collocation is reasonable.

In contrast, the Indo-European language is hypotactic language, a combination of form and meaning, with the intention of expressing meaning in rigid form. The sentence structure is relatively rigorous, like a lush tree. So English is a language dominated by hypotaxis, and in sentence structure, the subject and predicate form the main axis that upholds the entire sentence; If there are object and other complementary elements, they can be extended along the axis; The attributive and adverbial components form the branches and are connected to the main axis through relative words.

Therefore, English has rich forms, high accuracy, strong objectivity, and forms a solid logical foundation.

2.3.3 Differences in Discourse Structure. In the process of writing, Westerners tend to prioritize linear thinking, prefer deductive reasoning, and focus on tracing causality; Chinese people tend to prioritize circular thinking, prefer inductive cognition, and focus on the overall understanding. The West tend to come straight to the point, stating the theme and key points as soon as they start writing, and then elaborating and analyzing reasoning layer by layer. Generally, paragraph layout follows the principles of from general to specific, and from overall to individual. Chinese people are more accustomed to explaining the context from multiple perspectives, explaining various situations, twists and turns, spiraling around, allowing the audience to gradually understand the speaker's meaning, and finally summarize and point out the main idea or theme.

2.3.4 Differences in Contextual Dependencies. The degree of influence of context on varies depending on culture. Chinese belongs to a high contextual language. When people communicate, a lot of information is not clearly conveyed. They often place the information in a communicative environment, allowing the other party to figure out its meaning, and everything is understood silently; On the contrary, low contextual language emphasizes that the meaning is conveyed in words explicitly, and any information must be clearly expressed through language. English is a representative of low contextual language. It emphasizes perfect logic and clear meanings. Thus English-speakers believe that the main purpose of communication is to accomplish tangible tasks, not to establish pleasant relationships, and they believe that public and private life should have clear boundary.

3. Teaching Reform Process

In 2021, the program was initiated to study the feasibility of integrating cultural elements into college English classrooms under the background of blended learning. The whole project was based on the textbook - New Horizon College English, and designed a blended online and offline teaching approach for each class, with students as the center and teachers as the guide. The teaching reform focuses on the comparison of languages and cultures as the teaching content, and adopts various teaching methods based on teaching objectives and teaching design, such as lecturing, TBI, project-based, and inspiring method. The corresponding teaching evaluation system focuses on process evaluation and acknowledges students' every effort.

3.1 Comparison of Chinese and English as a Scaffold. As mentioned above, there are similarities and differences between Chinese and English in terms of phonetics, vocabulary, semantics, syntax, and discourse, rhetorical devices, logic, stylistics, and pragmatic aspects. In terms of language learning proficiency the teaching reform team focused on analyzing syntactic level.

The characteristics of English and Chinese grammar reflect the differences between Chinese and Western cultures and ways of thinking. For example, the "rule of law" reflected in Western rational thinking emphasizes "hypotaxis" in English grammar, that is, you can always find formal cohesion, complete sentence structure, strict and standardized sentence segments. Therefore, it is said that "English grammar is hard and inflexible", and almost every sentence in English relies on these functional words or "glue words" to form a sentence. The "rule of man" reflected in Chinese cognitive thinking emphasizes the importance of "coherence and smoothness of meaning" in Chinese grammar, which sometimes sacrifices the completeness of a sentence structure. Sentences are formed in the form of meaning and are arranged in the form of divine order, with scattered syntax. Therefore, people conclude "Chinese grammar is soft, full of elasticity and flexibility".

The position of the core of a sentence in English and Chinese sentences is different. The key information of English sentences is often contained in the main body of a sentence, with other complementary information placed after it. On the contrary, influenced by forward thinking pattern, Chinese sentences are often arranged in logical and chronological order. In Chinese sentences, almost all modifiers are placed before the key word. So, the core information of Chinese is mostly at the end of sentences. English is mainly composed of linguistic components to express meanings;

Chinese structure, on the other hand, is primarily based on meaning, complemented by other components. In short, the order of English and Chinese is influenced by different ways of thinking.

Although functional words do not have a separate and complete lexical meaning and only have grammatical meaning or functions, and the number of functional words in English is far less than that of substantive words. The high frequency of use of functional words can be seen in any English sentence. They usually play a role in syntactic construction and play an extremely important role in sentence cohesion and internal logic of a sentence, even between sentences and paragraphs. However, Chinese relies more on the conveying of “meaning” and emphasizes the coherence of meaning rather than the coherence of form. Similarly, Chinese uses less passive voice, with only a few words expressing passive meanings. However, English is a language that requires “hypotaxis”, and the passive voice appears more frequently. When translating such sentences, it is necessary to fully consider the characteristics of the target language - Chinese, and make the passive voice active. As a semantic language that emphasizes meaning, Chinese usually completely omit the subject, free from the constraints of form to express pure ideas.

3.2 Comparison of Chinese and Western Thinking Pattern. The most typical ways of thinking of the two cultures are collectivism and individualism, which respectively represent two social concepts (or social values), specifically referring to the degree of closeness between individuals and groups. Due to the different levels of social closeness, there are significant differences in the social structure and social concepts reflected by the two, which are highlighted by the differences in the relationship between personal interests and national interests. Collectivism advocates that individuals subordinate to the state, with a relatively tight social structure, and emphasizes that individual interest should yield to national interests. The people of English speaking countries believe in individualism, with a relatively loose structure and a greater emphasis on individual interests and roles. In face of any conflicts, human interests must prioritize.

In short, the cultural differences between China and the West have led to different ways of thinking, such as individual analysis vs. holistic synthesis, logical abstraction vs. intuitive imagery, three-stage reasoning vs. dialectical unity, object thinking vs. subject thinking, spatial concepts vs. temporal order, linear deduction vs. spiral induction, accuracy vs. fuzziness, etc. This comparative analysis, combined with social, cultural, psychological, contextual, actual situations, has entered the realm of macro cultural linguistics and is a high-level domain of language learning. From such comparing perspectives as production methods, life styles, historical traditions, philosophical ideas, values, national psychology, aesthetic tastes, etc., we can easily explain the different ways of thinking and their different ways of expression in Chinese and English languages, which can help college students understand the language, the culture and themselves.

4. Research Results

4.1 Scaffolds of Chinese EFL Classrooms. After two years of teaching reform, the team has perfected the teaching design from two perspectives: language comparison and culture comparison in and after the class, building a natural integration. We have systematically designed a scaffold for College English. To be specific, it includes:

① Pre-reading tasks for elementary memorization and understanding. In order to ensure the effectiveness of learning with MOOC before class, the teaching reform team carefully designed a “preview list” for each period, which generally includes 6 questions, including language itself, logic of the text, theme understanding, and culture. At present, a preview list of 40 articles in the four volumes of New Horizon College English has been designed and completed, which serves as a scaffold to help students efficiently preview and cultivate their autonomic learning ability.

② In-Class Internalization and Analysis. College English, as a humanity discipline, contains a certain philosophy in every article. The teaching reform team breaks the traditional teaching model of teacher analysis and explanation. In class, teachers constantly ask questions based on the completion of students’ preview lists, triggering students to think, discuss, and internalize language and culture related information. The entire classroom is extremely attractive, with student’s head-up rate of almost 100%.

③ Post-class Improvement and Expansion. Our university is a science and engineering university, with most students majoring in science and engineering. They are good at analyzing and thinking, but their memory is somewhat weak. Comparative linguists reach a consensus that English is a rational and analytical language, while Chinese is a comprehensive and holistic language. Based on the above two reasons, the teaching reform team has built a second scaffold, with a comparison of Chinese and English languages and the comparison of Chinese and American culture. Each group will conduct an exploration project to deeply explore the internal laws of language and the cultural elements behind it, which helps students understand and master the language. The specific themes include: individualism vs. collectivism, deductive thinking vs. inductive thinking, comparison of Chinese and English in word formation, comparison of Chinese and English pronunciation, syntax comparison - hypotaxis and parataxis, syntax comparison - static and dynamic, comparison of higher education systems between China and the United States, consumption views between China and the United States, discourse comparison - linear and circuitous, exploration of racial discrimination in the United States, discourse comparison - cohesion and coherence etc.

4.2 Teaching Management System. Teaching Management has a significant impact on the teaching efficiency. Coordinating, controlling, and integrating all the teaching and learning factors will help to form a controllable and orderly teaching system, thus ensuring the smooth progress of teaching activities. In the context of blended learning, the teaching management is of great significance.

① Multi-party management team. Involving students themselves into teaching management, allowing them to actively participate in management and carry out self-management at the same time can not only reduce the burden and pressure on teachers, but also promote harmonious relationships between teachers and students. In order to refine the management system, the curriculum reform team has formed a management system guided by teachers, assisted by class monitor, further assisted by team leaders, and self disciplined by each student. The system has a responsibility to supervise both online and offline learning process Here is one of the teaching management attempts: In view of the reduction of offline class hours in college English, we require all students learn English for half an hour every day and summarize on weekends to keep a learning atmosphere both in and out of class and to promptly identify and solve problems.

② Infotech-assisted management. In the information era, online education has become an important part of college English education. A blended online and offline teaching model is the key to promoting talent cultivation. Firstly, the teaching reform team fully utilizes several English learning platforms to organize student learning, and all platforms can offer in-time online evaluation, and allow students to evaluate mutually, and teachers can also evaluate students' homework anywhere and anytime. These platforms also provide big data analysis to analyze students' learning habits and abilities, offer a chart for each student to show his English application ability, and it also helps to set targeted education management plans. With the help of these data, teachers can directly understand students' self-learning situation and enjoy more teaching management channels. In a word, infotech-assisted management system not only greatly saves teachers' time, but also improves teaching management efficiency.

③ Combining process evaluation with outcome evaluation. The assessment of the course "College English" adopts a comprehensive evaluation system, including process evaluation and outcome evaluation. The evaluation system covers 24 indicators, comprehensively recording, assessing, and providing feedback on students' participation and knowledge mastery during the learning process. Process evaluation accounts for 40%, including assessment of online learning such as MOOC, oral English, dictation, online tests, daily assignments, as well as classroom presentations, group collaboration, and language practice etc.; The outcome evaluation accounts for 60%, the form of which is a language proficiency test, including mid-term exam, final exam, and oral exam.

4.3 Teaching Effectiveness. This program has created a three-dimensional and systematic integration of cultural elements into the college English teaching system, which has significantly

improved teaching effectiveness. The teaching reform team collected the passing rate of the CET exams last year, with an average passing rate being 29.76% for the grade. However, the passing rate of the 8 experimental classes was 37.4%. The data from the mid-term and final exams of grade-one students show that the score of the experimental class has a significant advantage over the corresponding class (see Table 1).

Table 1. Test Scores of the Teaching Reform Program

Class Grade	Mid term (1 st term)	Final (1 st term)	pass rate (1 st term)	Mid term (2 nd term)	pass rate (2 nd term)
Experimental Class	52.79	70.43	84.1%	59.77	53.67%
Corresponding Class	50.5	66.8	76.13%	57.08	41.87%

5. Conclusions

In short, comparative analysis is an important means of language teaching and research. Many famous domestic and international linguists have always attached great importance to the comparative study of language. Therefore, in the teaching process, the teachers guide the students to discuss the similarities and differences between their mother language and the target language, and reveal the common and special laws of the languages through comparative analysis. This teaching method is of high academic and practical value. Continuously strengthen the comparison of cultural backgrounds, ways of thinking, historical customs, living habits, language analysis, and other aspects between Chinese and Western countries in the teaching process, students can clarify the relationship between language and culture, establish their own cultural identity, establish cultural confidence. What's more, students will no longer separate language learning from cultural literacy. In this way, English learning is no longer limited to endless word memorization and grammar consolidation. Comparative exploration enlightens the process of language learning and culture understanding and promotes teachers' and students' personal growth.

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