

The Language Talents Cultivation Study in Communicative Teaching From Cultural Cognition Perspective: Cultural Default Phenomenon and Its Countermeasures

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Abstract

With the increase of international cultural exchange, in today's colleges and universities training and strengthening students' exotic cultures cognitive ability are more and more important. Cultural cognitive ability in foreign language teaching profession gradually receives attention. Cross-cultural communication competence and cultural cognition competence have become an important measure for the ability of modern foreign language talents. From the perspective of cultural cognition, this paper studies the English cultural learning disabilities caused by cultural default and through the corresponding empirical research, it suggests reasonable and effective coping strategies to solve the difficulties of English culture learning, to cultivate Students' exotic culture cognitive ability, to readjust students' cultural cognition construction and satisfy the requirement for communicative foreign language talents under the global cultural context. To investigate the reasons for the phenomenon of cultural default and develop a set of practical coping strategies can play a valuable reference and guidance for the future foreign language education and teaching.

Key words: Communicative teaching; Cultural cognition; Cultural default

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INTRODUCTION

With the increase of international cultural exchange, in today's colleges and universities training and strengthening students' exotic cultures cognitive ability are more and more important. Cultural cognitive ability in foreign language teaching profession gradually receives attention. Cross-cultural communication competence and cultural cognition competence have become an important measure for the ability of modern talents. But for a long time, due to China's traditional English teaching model influence, the students cannot successfully apply what they learned in the classroom to the practical communicative contexts. Non-English major undergraduates in universities are the main object of college English teaching and they have learned some culture knowledge in high school, but in general their cultural cognitive ability is relatively poor. In the actual pragmatic occasions, there is a lack of actual pragmatic appropriateness of language and there often occurs Chinese-style English. In the globalization of cultural context, we need to cultivate communicative foreign language talents with awareness of cross-cultural communication who can actively learn culture and customs of other countries and continuously improve the cross-cultural communication ability to meet the needs of the society. In the application of international language talents training, cultural default phenomenon leads to a lot of language and cultural learning obstacles, so how to solve cultural barriers to learning and find the appropriate strategy are the focus of this research.

From the perspective of cultural cognition, based on the cultural default theory, the paper aims to study barriers caused by cultural default phenomenon in the process of communicative language talents cultivation and tries to reduce background understanding deviation of learning material caused by cultural default phenomenon or different cultural background. It also tries to improve students' cultural background knowledge to deal with the culture default phenomenon in learning materials. This paper conducts a relevant empirical research and based

on the results of empirical research, it puts forward the corresponding solutions to the cultural default phenomenon.

1. AN OVERVIEW OF CULTURAL COGNITION THEORY AND CULTURAL DEFAULT THEORY

1.1 Cultural Cognition Theory

The concept of cultural cognition firstly appeared in the 1920s and the American linguist Sapir pointed out in his book *Language*: “Language needs an environment and cannot exist without culture or separate from the tradition and belief society inherits”. Successful language learners need not only good language skills, but also must understand the difference between foreign and native cultures. They should also flexibly use cultural knowledge in the actual cross-cultural communication. Being familiar with cultures would be conducive to the proper use of language, because culture is often a precursor of language.

Wu Guohua (1990) pointed out that in foreign language teaching, cultural interference is one of the “problems” recognized by all, and some even think it is more terrible than “not understanding”. Inspiring students to build panoramic cultural awareness will help students get rid of communicative language learning difficulties. With the increasing communication context in college language teaching, college students should not only have the basic language skills, but also need to understand the differences between their culture and the target language culture.

1.2 Cultural Default Theory

Cultural default phenomenon is an important branch of cultural cognitive theory, but also a challenge the foreign language learners face in the process of communicative teaching. Cultural default is defined as the absence of relevant cultural background information shared by the two sides in communication, and it is also a linguistic phenomenon in communication reflected in literary works. This phenomenon exists widely in learning materials, which causes great difficulties to the English learners. Cultural default elements generally have distinctive cultural characteristics, exist outside discourse, and thus lead to vacuum for the readers from a different language and cultural background. The readers cannot get a coherent understanding of the text due to the lack of proper schema.

The culture default concept was firstly proposed by Wang Dongfeng in his “*Cultural Default and Coherent Reconstruction in Translation*” in 1997, which caused widespread concern in the domestic and foreign scholars. But most domestic and foreign scholars regard the translation as the research objects; they studied cultural default phenomenon and its resulting semantic vacuum caused by traditional cultural values, historical and cultural background in translation. But in English language learning, cultural default of the learning

materials also turns out to be a tough nut to crack due to the difference of cultures. It challenges the learners’ ability to tackle the problem of the cultural default reconstruction in the target language. Also in communicative language teaching, cultural background knowledge is the soil and space for language to survive and it exists throughout the whole process of listening, speaking, reading and writing, closely related to language teaching at every level.

1.3 Communicative Foreign Language Teaching Theory

The goal of communicative language teaching is to cultivate and improve the communicative competence of English learners. Communicative language teaching theory states that: In the communicative language teaching, teachers should not only enable students to master the proper language form, depending on the different object, according to different needs and with the appropriate language form, they should also consider the function of language form, allowing them to conduct cross-cultural communication activities in different occasions. This theory requires that foreign language teachers must raise their cultural accomplishment. They also not only analyze the phenomenon of language in foreign language teaching, but also to analyze its cultural context and the students’ cultural cognitive structure, guiding students to consciously form a cultural cognition mode. The culture default phenomenon exists in a variety of teaching materials, but in the process of communicative foreign language talents cultivation, the studies about culture default phenomenon and the learning obstacles caused by culture default are very few. How to solve this culture learning barriers and find the appropriate strategies should be the focus of future research.

2. THE PROCESS AND RESULTS OF THE EMPIRICAL STUDY

Empirical studies are as follows: First, the research group determine the study objects of empirical research and divides them into experimental class and control class. The relevant research group members conduct a cultural training to the experimental class and allow all the students to understand the relevant cultures they might meet in the process of the reading or listening, but for the control class, the research group only provides them the learning materials and the teachers will not teach anything about hidden or omitted cultural phenomenon to the control class. The research group not only collects all the corresponding questionnaire and test papers, but also analyzes the reading and listening comprehension of both classes to the learning materials. Based on the test results, the paper analyzes the cultural learning disabilities caused by cultural default phenomenon and proposes effective strategies to solve problems of cultural default in order to adapt to the requirement of cultivating communicative

foreign languages talents. The research results of paper not only plays an important role in the development and guiding of foreign language subject, but also provides a variety of powerful methods for the reform of classroom teaching and international foreign language talent cultivation.

From a global cultural cognition perspective and based on cultural default theory, this paper studies cultural learning barrier caused by the cultural default phenomena in the process of communicative foreign language talents and proposes corresponding and effective ways to solve the problems. It also solves the difficulty of foreign language talents cultivation in communicative language teaching with a focus on the context of global cultural cognition.

2.1 Participant and Methods

(a) Participant: In this empirical research, the research group chooses 120 non-English major students as the objects who came from the same department and taught by the same English teacher. The participants come from 4 classes which are respectively 2013 ALPS 1-2 classes and 2013 ALPS 3-4 classes of non-English majors in Qingdao University of Science and Technology. They all have completed two semesters of college English learning. They did not receive any formal cultural training before and all have to improve their cross-cultural communication ability. With a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, the participants are respectively divided into an experimental group and a control group, and each group includes 60 students.

(b) Methods: Relevant culture background knowledge training. This research instruments mainly include 3 sets of English CET4 listening tests, 3 sets of English CET4 reading tests and a cultural training strategies questionnaire. Questions of CET4 listening tests and reading tests are extracted from the real CET4 tests papers. The cultural training strategies questionnaire would be distributed after cultural training to reflect students' cultural learning problem and evaluate their cross-cultural communication abilities. (4 stands for 'strongly agree', 3 stands for "agree", 2 stands for "disagree" and 1 stands for "strongly disagree").

Firstly, select 6 sets of CET4 tests papers (3 sets of English CET4 listening tests papers and 3 sets of English CET4 reading tests papers). Typical cultural default phenomenon exists in all the listening and reading materials. Then the cultural training was conducted six times to the experimental group in one semester (3 in listening class and 3 in reading class). The English teacher taught and explained the relevant cultural background knowledge in the test papers to the experimental group and allowed the students to better understand the culture in the process of listening and reading test. After the cultural training, the students were asked to practice the listening and reading comprehension exercises. However, the control class did not receive any cultural training before they practiced the listening and reading tests and the

English teachers did not teach anything about hidden or omitted cultural phenomenon of the test materials. Every time, the set of questions both the experimental group and control group students had to finish were exactly same.

Next, collect test results of two groups of students and the corresponding questionnaires. The research group analyzed the achievements and results of the questionnaires. The group also compared the results of the test papers each time to learn the gap between the two groups of students and to analyze the two group students' reading and listening comprehension abilities.

Finally, based on the test results and analysis of cultural learning disabilities caused by cultural default phenomenon, the paper puts forward the effective strategies to solve problems of culture learning difficulty and emphasizes the importance of foreign culture learning in the communicative foreign language talents cultivation. This provides an important evidence and reference value for the reform of English teaching and training of international communicative foreign language talents.

2.2 Results and Analysis

Questionnaires were distributed among the participants in both groups of students. The results are as follows. (4 stands for "strongly agree", 3 stands for "agree", 2 stands for "disagree" and 1 stands for "strongly disagree").

**Table 1
Experimental Class**

Cultural training strategies	1	2	3	4
Cultural training can help me learn English better	0%	4%	28%	68%
Cultural training can improve my cultural cognition ability	0%	6%	42%	52%
Cultural training can improve my across-cultural communication ability	3%	7%	44%	46%
Cultural training can promote my eastern and western cultures comparison study	10%	28%	26%	36%

**Table 2
Control Class**

Cultural training strategies	1	2	3	4
Cultural training can help me learn English better	10%	33%	31%	26%
Cultural training can improve my cultural cognition ability	9%	37%	26%	28%
Cultural training can improve my across-cultural communication ability	7%	42%	34%	17%
Cultural training can promote my eastern and western cultures comparison study	7%	40%	35%	18%

After the cultural training, most of the students of experimental class admit that cultural training can definitely help them study English and improve their cultural cognition and across-cultural communication

ability. However, most of the students of experimental class doubt these statements.

The CET4 listening and reading tests were utilized as the post-training assessment and the total scores are 35 points. The scores of participants in both groups were collected every time in order to explore the possible impact of cultural training on their listening and reading comprehension and to compare the gap between the experimental group and control group. The questions and difficulties of CET4 listening and reading tests conducted to the two groups are the same and the test results are available and shown in the table 3. The first three tests are CET4 listening tests and the last three tests are CET4 reading tests.

Table 3
Test Results of Experimental Class and Control Class

	Test 1	Test 2	Test 3	Test 4	Test 5	Test 6
Average score of experimental group	23.3	16.2	18.4	19.7	22.1	20.62
Average score of control group	20.2	16.3	20.1	16.6	18.1	18.24
Difference	3.1	-0.1	-1.7	3.1	4	2.38

From the Table 3, we can see the total average scores of experimental group are generally higher than the total average score of control group and only in test two and three, the average score of experimental group is lower than the average score of control group. The exotic culture cognition ability of experimental group with cultural training is higher than the control group without cultural training.

COCLUSION

From the above analysis of the empirical findings, we can draw a conclusion that in communicative language teaching, the exotic culture cognition ability of students could be greatly improved and the interest in learning also could be greatly stimulated if English teachers could consciously introduce the exotic culture, explain the cultural background knowledge involved in the listening and reading materials and point out the potential of cultural meaning. Cultural explanation or introduction in English class or before learning or testing could readjust students' cultural cognition structure and foster students' culture cognitive ability and cross-cultural communication ability, satisfying the requirement of English language teaching mode under the global cultural context and the cultivation of international communicative language talents.

The studies of cultural default phenomena are more concentrated in the translation and cultural functions. The studies of cultural default phenomena in cultivation of international communicative language talents are very few and the studies about the reasons of analysis and the solutions of causes are even fewer. Cultural default phenomenon will bring a lot of learning disabilities and difficulties in culture learning and intercultural

communication studies. The original author's intent readers tend to be the family audience, common background knowledge easily activate the related vocabulary and semantic links stored in the reader's brain, making up for the void left by cultural default. However, the culture default of these learning materials will cause students understanding deviation about the learning materials, resulting in the exchange of vacuum (semantic vacuum). To foster the international foreign language talents means that we must first solve the cultural learning disability problems brought by cultural default phenomenon.

Suggestions: As a cultural messenger, the English teachers should help students overcome this obstacle. On the one hand, teachers should be able to discern the cultural default phenomenon of the original learning materials; on the other hand, they also should make right judgments about the student's knowledge structure. According to the characteristics of learning materials, they should adopt effective strategies to resolve difficulties in international application-oriented talents cultivation caused by the cultural default phenomenon in order to enhance teaching effectiveness and foster truly cross-century English talents under the global cultural context. Though many scholars have summed up some effective compensation strategies and principles for cultural default in their translation practice, there still remains some room for the necessary studies in the cultivation of international application-oriented English talents. This paper unlocks the doors of the research and can more or less give a certain inspiration to those who are interested in cultural default phenomenon. Based on the results of empirical study and with the focus of the cultural default phenomenon appeared in listening and reading materials, this paper presents the following series of corresponding solutions. They are:

(a) Cultural integration method in class or cultural prediction method before class. With the traditional teaching in class, English teachers could introduce and explain the relevant cultural background knowledge involved in textbooks in order to better address language and culture learning disabilities brought by the culture default phenomenon. Teachers can let students have an exercise about the western culture knowledge appeared in the content of the textbooks for a few minutes before class and also let students compare Chinese and western cultures in the form of discussion or debate with a especial focus on the cultural differences between China and western countries.

(b) Direct interpretation method. English teachers can directly explain or interpret the cultural default phenomenon which is likely to lead students the difficulties of understanding, especially those words, text, stories and customs with rich cultural significance. As for this type of cultural knowledge, direct interpretation method is more effective.

(c) Compensation outside the text or cultural annotation. This is the literal translation of the text or this is to copy the target language culture schema with footnotes or endnotes to present detailed explanation outside the text. When teachers present students the learning materials with rich historical allusions or unique cultural characteristics, they could use this cultural annotation method. This method can compensate the readers with the proper target background knowledge and can resolve the meaning vacuum problem by reading comments, associate context, establish discourse coherence, and then better understand and appreciate the text.

Of course, teachers could choose various methods of compensation to solve the cultural default phenomenon, but they should carefully examine the various cultural factors involved in texts and, choose the best method of dealing with cultural default compensation, reproduce the original cultural meaning in the text, enable students to appreciate more colorful alien culture and improve students' cultural cognitive abilities and intercultural communication skills. Meanwhile, according to the original texts and practical acceptance ability of students, teachers should also flexibly choose the right culture compensation methods to maximize inherent cultural information conveyed in texts.

The purposes of the empirical research are to put forward better solutions to cultural learning disabilities caused by cultural default phenomenon, to train students' exotic culture cognitive ability, to adjust students' cultural cognition structure and to develop social and cultural abilities through listening, reading, writing and translating skills exercises. This will not only train the students' language skills, but also develop students' cross-cultural communication ability, promoting the development of English teaching and adapting to the requirements of international communicative language talents cultivation.

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