

A Cross-cultural Communicative Syllabus for Chinese Non-English Majors' Spoken English Course

UN PROGRAMME COMMUNICATIF TRANSCULTUREL POUR LE COURS D'ANGLAIS ORAL DES CHINOIS NON SPÉCIALISTES D'ANGLAIS

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Abstract: An intensive summer spoken English training course is offered for freshmen of non-English majors in Huazhong University of Science and Technology (HUST) each summer vacation. This paper aims conducting a new and practical cross-cultural communicative teaching syllabus. At first, a needs analysis is done to determine the objectives of the syllabus. Then the proper type syllabus and teaching contents is chosen according to the results.

Key words: syllabus design, cross-cultural communication, needs analysis, spoken English course

Résumé: Un cours d'entraînement intense de l'anglais oral est offert, pendant les vacances d'été, pour les étudiants non spécialistes d'anglais de première année à l'Université de Sciences et Technologie de Huazhong. Le présent article vise à élaborer un nouveau et pratique programme d'enseignement communicatif transculturel. Tout d'abord, une analyse de besoin est accomplie pour déterminer les objectifs du programme. Puis, la catégorie de programme et le contenu d'enseignement convenables sont choisis selon les résultats.

Mots-Clés: conception de programme, communication transculturelle, analyse de besoin, cours d'anglais oral

INTRODUCTION

Language is learned for communication. And it is the school authority's responsibility to help students to get rid of the traditional "mute English learning" way to learn English. Thus, an intensive summer spoken English course is offered for freshmen of non-English major in Huazhong University of Science and Technology (HUST) each summer vacation. About 50 foreigners and 60 Chinese are invited as guest teachers, at the same time, 50 Chinese students are assigned as teaching assistants to help foreign teachers with their teaching activities. The course lasts for 20 days, and the students have oral English class during the day and go to English corner or watch English movie at night. Finally an oral English test supervised by a native speaker and a Chinese teacher is given to the students. The students' food performance proves the success of the training course.

However, several problems arise during the training

course. First, foreign teachers and Chinese teachers are lacking of communication and cooperation. They should have brought into play their own advantage, but due to lacking of a teaching syllabus, they teach their students different content that has no connection at all. Second, the students unconsciously think in a Chinese way to communicate in English. In class, many students show their linguistic competence a lot, that is to say, their talking is grammatically correct. But sometimes their conversation sounds improper, even strange. Lacking of cultural knowledge contributes a lot to this phenomenon. It is generally viewed that language is the carrier of culture. Without an extensive and accurate understanding of the culture, one can never use the language properly. Therefore, cultural factor should be a major point in the spoken English training course.

Thus, a new and practical cross-cultural communicative syllabus is urgent to be conducted. At first, a needs analysis is necessary to determine the objectives of the syllabus. Then the proper type syllabus and teaching contents is chosen according to the results.

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1. NEEDS ANALYSIS

According to Yalden(1987), needs analysis is the first step of syllabus design, and it can establish a close link between learners and the syllabus. Questionnaire is one of the principal tools. Here, a questionnaire of non-English majors' cross-cultural communicative competence is conducted.

Questionnaire

Layout:This questionnaire is composed of 4 parts:

1st. Personal data

2nd. Some materials (item a--p) about cross-cultural communication are listed, and the students are regarded to show their attitude towards a certain fact. In this part, the students attitude is represented by number, and the meaning of number is: 1=我絕對不同意或絕對不會; 2=我不太同意或一般不會; 3=我不知道; 4=我有些同意或通常會; 5=我完全同意或絕對會。

3rd. Item 1—6 is also some materials about cross-cultural communication. While this part is designed in a multiple-choice form. The students are

asked to choose one or more from several alternatives.

4th. This part contains an open-ended question about the students' own opinion toward cross-cultural communication.

The content of material concerns culture can be divided into five parts: value system (item b, d, j); way of thinking (item f, g, h, l, 1, 3, 5); Non-verbal behavior (item e, h, p); Speech act (item a, c, k, m, o, 1, 2, 4); Solution to cultural misunderstanding (item 6, 三)

Subjects: 90 trainees from 3 classes of the 2001 intensive summer spoken English course. They have finished one-year of study, and will become sophomore next semester. They are randomly selected from Law department, power department, public affair's management department and other department from HUST.

Procedure: Three Chinese English teachers worked as a group, they presented the questionnaire to the students in their class. Altogether 87 students returned their paper. Each teacher did their own analysis based on the 87 returned data.

RESULTS

Case Processing Summary ^a

	Cases					
	Included		Excluded		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
年齡	4	4.7%	82	95.3%	86	100.0%
工資收入	0	.0%	86	100.0%	86	100.0%
婚姻狀況	1	1.2%	85	98.8%	86	100.0%
家庭	20	23.3%	66	76.7%	86	100.0%
天氣	63	73.3%	23	26.7%	86	100.0%
工作職業	32	37.2%	54	62.8%	86	100.0%
宗教信仰	6	7.0%	80	93.0%	86	100.0%
興趣愛好	73	84.9%	13	15.1%	86	100.0%
為何來中	45	52.3%	41	47.7%	86	100.0%
對中國的	71	82.6%	15	17.4%	86	100.0%
經濟	8	9.3%	78	90.7%	86	100.0%
政治	3	3.5%	83	96.5%	86	100.0%
藝術	19	22.1%	67	77.9%	86	100.0%
娛樂	66	76.7%	20	23.3%	86	100.0%
文化	43	50.0%	43	50.0%	86	100.0%
體育	59	68.6%	27	31.4%	86	100.0%
其他	86	100.0%	0	.0%	86	100.0%
看法	86	100.0%	0	.0%	86	100.0%

a. Limited to first 100 cases.

2. ANALYSIS

The result of personal data shows that about 72% of the subjects have chances to communicate with foreigners, which indicates that it is necessary for them to acquire knowledge about cross-cultural communication.

Then, let's take a look on the subjects' cross-cultural communicative competence.

As for the value system, 29 subjects chose 3, 4 or 5 in item b, that is to say, about 33% don't know "dog" represents something good in western culture. In item d, which concerns value of time, only more than 80% of the subjects will come early or late. Actually, this is

considered to be not punctual. And modesty is traditional virtue in China while it is not the case in western culture. But 28 subjects still 3, 4, or 5 in item j, occupying 32%, form the analysis we can see that the subjects still have not a clear understanding of English speaking countries' value system.

As for the way of thinking, more than half of the subjects think in a typical Chinese way while talking in English. For instance, 23 subjects will use a lot of subjunctive mood when they contact with foreigners; 37 subjects will think that "The door is open" means a invitation when visiting foreign friend, and 20 subjects don't know what it means, together occupying 68%; And about 42% tend to use Chinese metaphors when talking with foreigner, which can easily cause misunderstanding. From the topics the subjects chose to talk with foreigners, we can also found that 23.3% will talk about family, 37.2% will concern others' job or career, 52.3% will ask foreigners the purpose they come to China and so on, from which we can see those subjects' Chinese way of thinking, they may unconsciously interfere others' privacy.

Then take a look on the subjects' non-verbal behavior. About 30 subjects' want to touch foreign child's head to show concern, occupying 34%; 53 subjects will not open presents they get until guest leave, occupying 60%; fortunately, only 7% chose to stand

very close to the foreigners. That is to say, their non-verbal behavior is not proper enough.

Here comes their speech act. The subjects do comparatively well in this part, but still contain a lot of mistakes. More than half subjects can properly greet people, response to gratitude. But about 33% still answer "Would you like some coffee?" with "Thank you." In item 2, 78.2% chose the improper way of talking.

Finally let's come to the subjects' opinion toward the solution to cultural misunderstanding. In item 6, 47 subjects think we Chinese should think in English way since we're talking in English occupying 54%. As for the open-ended question most subjects have no idea.

CONTENT

Based on the present course book, *the Amazing world of English*, the teacher ought to add more cultural factors to the book. When culture and communication related issues added to the supplementary content and topics for discussion, the students' intercultural communicative competence would be improve a lot.

Unit	Main topics	Supplementary content
Unit one	Greeting	The proper way to initiate a conversation
Unit tow	Invitation	The different ways of invitation between China and America
Unit three	At a shop	Offering help and making suggestions
Unit four	Borrowing	Value system: borrow and lend
Unit five	Education and student life	Introduction of American education system
Unit six	Describing places	Introduction of American famous places
Unit seven	Telling a plan	Value system: idea toward future
Unit eight	Making telephone call	Different custom of calling
Unit nine	Solving problem	Introduction of American social problem
Unit ten	The global village	Introduction of science in America
Unit eleven	Talking about other people	American's idea toward friendship
Unit twelve	Traveling	Introduction of famous American cities
Unit thirteen	Describing people	Stereotype of America people's character
Unit fourteen	Giving opinion	Proper way of comment
Unit fifteen	Taste and preference	American's tastes and preferences

Due to time limitation, it is impossible to cover all cultural factors in 20 days. Anyway, this course aims to

guide the students a right way to improve their cross-cultural communicative competence.

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