On Methods to Eliminate Chinese Cultural Aphasia in China’s English Teaching

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Abstract. In cross-cultural communication, majority of Chinese college English learners laterally learn and acquire English cultural, but cannot effectively and correspondingly introduce Chinese traditional cultural to foreigners, which has caused Chinese cultural Aphasia. The paper attempts to observe and analyze Chinese cultural aphasia in college English teaching in China in order to find effective methods to eliminate it.

Introduction

With the rising of globalization, cross-cultural communication is unprecedentedly wide-spread, therefore it is of great significance to conduct cultural teaching in the process of English teaching in order to guarantee the success of cross-cultural communication. According to Tavaves and Cavalcanti, the purpose of cultural teaching is to arouse students’ cultural awareness and foster their curiosity towards both the target culture and their native one, which can aid them to sense the cultural differences (Tavaves & Cavalcanti, 1996:19). Willems proposes that cultural teaching should attempt to foster “empathy with the cultural norms of the target language community and an increased awareness of one’s own ‘cultural logic’ in relation to others” (Willems, 1992, cited in Byram, Morgan et al, 1994: 67). And in Killick and Poveda’s opinion, the “cultural logic” can only be acquired by recognizing ‘otherness’ as well as one’s own cultural identity (Killick & Poveda, 1997). All the scholars have emphasized the equal importance of target culture and native culture in cultural teaching. Unfortunately, native cultural integration has been neglected intentionally or unintentionally in China’s English teaching, which leads to Chinese cultural aphasia. As a result, it is of great importance to eliminate Chinese cultural aphasia in China’s college English teaching in order to strengthen Chinese culture and enable successful cross-cultural communication.

Analysis of Chinese Cultural Aphasia

Chinese Cultural Aphasia

Aphasia is an inability to comprehend and formulate language because of dysfunction in specific brain regions according to the Oxford English dictionary. Chinese Professor Cong Cong has borrowed the term “aphasia” to refer to the phenomenon that students are incompetent to convey Chinese culture in English in cross-cultural communication. He definitely pointed out the existence of Chinese cultural Aphasia in China’s college English Teaching. Professor Cong Cong maintained that owing to unremitting efforts of Chinese scholars in cultural teaching, it has already come to the census that it is significant to incorporate cultural teaching in English teaching, however the integration of culture has long been confined to the culture of English-speaking countries, especially the American and British culture. He holds the view that Chinese culture, which, as the native culture, assumes the equal importance in cross-cultural communication, should not be ignored, but be integrated into every level of English Teaching so as to foster English learners’ cultural subjectivity and integrity.

Since then, numerous researches have been carried out concerning the very existence of “Chinese cultural aphasia”. For example, Professor Zhang Weimin and Zhu Hongmei conducted a survey on 126 students of non-English major at Tsinghua University in the format of questionnaires and interviews in order to reveal how well college English education of that period in China qualified students to translate typical Chinese food, folklores, names of historical monuments and sites, as
well as the other elements of Chinese culture.\[^5\] It indicated that as high as 70% of the subjects 
failed to convey Chinese culture in proper English and drew the conclusion that the lack of 
sufficient Chinese cultural elements in China’s English course-books and classroom teaching is to 
blame for that. And the researches, which adopted students of English majors as subjects, came to 
the similar conclusion that Chinese cultural aphasia did exist among them. For instance, Liu Shiwen 
chose 157 students of English majors at Jimei University as subjects in a language test of translating 
40 Chinese idioms into English and answering questions concerning Chinese culture.\[^6\] The 
outcomes of the research demonstrated that students of English majors performed poorly in 
conveying Chinese culture in English. It was of lower than 30% that juniors could achieve the 
accuracy rate in word translation part. In conclusion, it is no doubt that Chinese cultural aphasia 
does exist in China’s English teaching.

**Importance of Incorporating Chinese Culture in China’s English Teaching**

In a narrow sense, incorporation of Chinese culture in China’s English teaching cannot only 
promote the English learners’ mastery of the language, but also improve the cross-cultural 
communicative competence of English learners. Kramsch has held the view that the interaction of 
target culture and native culture in English learning could enable the learners to have new insights 
into the target culture and native culture.\[^7\] In other words, by comparisons and contrasts of two 
cultures, the learners can be acquainted with both cultures, which can enable them to perceive new 
things in their native culture and target culture so that their perception of the world will be widened, 
which will improve their ability to learn the language and communicate cross-culturally.

In a broad sense, incorporation of Chinese culture in China’s English teaching can boost the pride 
of Chinese English learners in their own culture and promote the cultural output of China. When the 
learners have the capability to express Chinese culture in English, they will no long be the passive 
recipients in the cross-cultural communication, which means that they no longer passively receive 
the culture from English-speaking countries. Instead, they are active participants for they take the 
initiative to introduce Chinese culture to native English speakers. By means of this, Chinese cultural 
export has been conducted naturally, which will boost not only the Chinese English learners’ pride 
in Chinese culture, but also strengthen the influence of Chinese culture.

**China English and Chinese English**

China English and Chinese English are two different terms although so many people have 
misunderstood then as the same thing. China English is unfamiliar to common people, but Chinese 
English, which is also called Chinglish, is very familiar to them. Since the two terms seem quite 
alike, it is really necessary to distinguish them.

The term of China English was first put forward by Professor Ge Chuangui in 1980, which 
referred to the localized English conveying unique Chinese culture.\[^8\] China English is the localized 
English used in China in accordance with English grammar and custom, which conveys unique 
Chinese culture and reflects the influence of Chinese grammar on English. Chinese cultural 
influences on English can be reflected from the vocabulary. For example, the vocabulary freely 
translated into English like Four Books and Five Classics, Three Representatives, Four 
Modernization, Cultural Revolution and words transliterated into English like jiaozi, fengshui, taiji, 
putonghua, falungong. These English words may confuse foreigners if they have no idea of Chinese 
culture. For instance, some even consider Cultural Revolution as European Renaissance. And 
Syntax can also demonstrate Chinese features in China English. For instance, the sentences like 
“We have taken all kinds of measures to provide jobs to laid-off workers” often appear in China 
English instead of “All kinds of measures have been taken to provide jobs to laid-off workers” in 
native English for Chinese attaches importance to the performer of the action, thus personal subjects 
are frequently used in China English while impersonal subjects are usually adopted in native 
English, resulting in high-frequent application of passive voice in native English. In 1993, Li 
Wenzhong put forward a more specific definition of China English: China English, with the features 
of the Chinese language, is the vocabularies, sentence patterns and discourses, which are applied to 
convey the unique Chinese culture, in accordance with Standard English.\[^10\]
On the other hand, Chinese English is a deformed English created by Chinese under the effects of Chinese thinking mode and sentence patterns, which apparently violates the standard English norms. For example, people mountain and people sea, and Sichuan people like eat spicy food. It is obvious that Chinese English is harmful to the publicity of Chinese culture and the promotion of cross-cultural communication. As a result, China English should be accepted and adopted in cross-cultural communication for it contains a large amount of China’s culture and conveys it in acceptable standard English while Chinese English should be avoided at any cost for it is wrong English which is unaccepted by foreigners.

Methods to Eliminate Chinese Cultural Aphasia in English Teaching in China

Compilation of New English Course-Books Containing both Chinese and English Culture

There are three kinds of college English course-books widely used in China, namely, 21st Century College English, Innovative College English, New College English, which share the same characteristics that there are only a few materials concerning Chinese culture while a lot on English culture in them. And meanwhile, the course-books are the foundation for the teachers to carry out their English instruction, thus the English teachers in China seldom touches on Chinese culture in their classes. As a result, there is imbalance between Chinese and English cultural input into English-learning students. Naturally, Chinese English learners have very limited resources to convey Chinese culture in English, which leads to their unwillingness and lack of confidence to express Chinese culture in English, thus hindering the cross-cultural communication. Given the current situation of English course-books, it is advisable to amass the foreign language experts who are interested and proficient in Chinese culture and the Chinese ones who are acquainted with English and Chinese culture and proficient in both Chinese and English to compile course-books containing both Chinese and English culture. In that case, the teachers have reliable cultural introductions available in the course-books, which can enable them to teach culture in their classes systematically. And the students can easily get cultural input, which can improve their cross-cultural communicative competence.

Massive Reading of China’s English Newspapers and Magazines

Since the compilation of new English course-books cannot be achieved within one day, it is recommended that Chinese English learners read English newspapers and magazines issued in China for they contains a large number of typical Chinese cultural elements. For example, China Daily, English World, English Salon, 21st-Century English Newspaper. They introduce many unique cultural factors. China Daily contains tremendous Chinese political elements, which will equip the readers with vocabularies conveying Chinese political culture. With the command of the vocabularies, it is relatively easy for English learners to express Chinese politics in English. 21-st Century English Newspaper can acquaint the learners with words concerning fashion in China or in English-speaking countries.

Foundation of Chinese Cultural Corpus in English

When it comes to English culture, Chinese English learners have easy access to tremendous English materials online. But it is a different story when it comes to Chinese culture. With the development of computer science, it is technologically possible to found Chinese cultural corpus in English. A corpus is a collection of written or spoken material in machine-readable form, assembled for the purpose of linguistic research according to Oxford English Dictionary. There are numerous English newspapers and periodicals with over-20-year history and great influence in English-speaking countries, so the materials from the newspapers and periodicals can be amassed to build a Chinese cultural corpus. In that case, Chinese English learners will have a better reference book concerning Chinese culture, which will not only boost the integration of Chinese culture in English learning, but promote the publicity of Chinese culture to the world.
Improvement of English Teachers’ Chinese Cultural Acquisition

Chinese English Teachers, just like their students, are also poor in their command of the English version of Chinese cultures. They often confine their teachings to the elaboration of language points such as the usage of words, the sentence patterns and the grammar. Since Chinese English teachers play a very significant role in promoting the learning of Chinese cultures, it is really necessary to integrate Chinese Cultural Curriculum in English into the teachers’ training courses. The School of English in the universities should invite experts to give the English teachers regular lectures on Chinese culture. Teachers present in the lectures are required to discuss the issues mentioned in the lecture with each other. And it is proven that lectures given by famous Chinese cultural scholars and in-service training are effective ways to improve English teachers’ Chinese cultural mastery.

That a good command of Chinese culture in English is required as a must for English-majors to become a qualified teacher is another good suggestion to improve the English teachers’ acquisition of Chinese culture in English. Specifically speaking, the test on Chinese culture in English should be covered in the qualification test for English teachers. In that case, when they are qualified as English teachers, they have already had a good command of Chinese Culture in English. Only with more deposit of knowledge in the field, can the teachers feel confident and become willing to include cultural education in their daily teaching.

In order to have a better understanding of one’s native culture, one needs to know the target culture, and then compare them with one’s native one. But presently, English teachers in China generally lack the opportunities to sense the foreign culture in person and most of their knowledge about the English culture is from books. Since the knowledge in the relevant books may lag behind the times, the cultural information obtain by the teachers may have already been out-of-date, which will result in serious mistakes in their English instruction. One method to improve the situation is to send more English teachers in China for further education. In that case, the teachers can experience the target culture in person, perceive the differences between Chinese and English cultures specifically and vividly, and then deepen their understanding of their native culture. In addition, they can find more proper expressions to convey Chinese culture through their interactions with English speakers during their process of studying abroad.

Addition of Chinese Culture in English Tests

Since Chinese English learners are accustomed to studying hard the things checked in the exams, they will lack motivation to study them if they are not tested in the exams. In other words, if Chinese culture is tested in English tests, English learners will attach more importance to it. Therefore, the English learners in China will spare no efforts to learn Chinese culture in English even if there is lack of such resources in their course-books. Unfortunately, little materials with regards to Chinese culture have been covered in current English tests. Therefore, in order to demonstrate the significance of Chinese culture, it is necessary to establish a Chinese cultural evaluation system gradually. At the beginning, materials involved in Chinese culture can be included in the listening and reading, even the translating parts of the popular College English Test Band 4 or 6. The materials about Chinese historical figures, traditions, custom, etc. can be added in the listening part. The reading part can include materials about China’s current policies, economy, education which has aroused great attention of public, such as the population policy like Two-child Policy, the reform of China’s College Entrance Exam, the change of recruiting policy in China’s general secondary school, ect. Gradually, a separate test system concerning Chinese culture in English will be established, and the test should be compulsory. In order to pass the test, it is without doubt that Chinese English learners will definitely study the Chinese culture hard in their English learning, then the purpose of Chinese culture input in English teaching can be reached.

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References


