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外语教学与研究文集

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外语教学与研究文集

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前 言

教育学院作为我国成人高校的一棵新苗,在党的阳光雨露哺育下,正生机勃勃地茁壮成长。十多年来,教育学院的广大教师在办学层次多、工作任务重、办学条件差的情况下,发扬艰苦奋斗、开拓进取、勇于创新的精神,积极探索成人教育的教育教学规律,为我国的基础教育培养了大量的合格中学教师,还在繁重的教育、教学工作之余撰写了一批高质量的论文。为鼓励我省广大外语教师进行教学和学术研究,加强校际间的学术交流,进一步提高教学质量,推动我省外语教学的发展,受河南省教育学院系统外语教研中心的委托,我们选编了这本外语教学与研究论文集。

收入本书的论文,是我省辛勤工作在教学第一线的广大外语教师的教学经验的结晶和教研科研成果。论文涉及面较广,从教学方法和实践的研究到培养学生实际运用语言能力的探讨,从语言学理论的研究到文学、修辞学的专论等等,无不凝聚着广大外语教师的心血和汗水。这些作者中有从事外语教学数十个春秋的经验丰富的老教师,也有初露锋芒,头角峥嵘的中青年教学骨干。他们层次不同论题各异,但都是本着严肃认真的科学态度,把扎实的教学实践与严密的理论研究结合起来,广泛吸收他人的成果,认真总结自我的发现,通过创造性思维,提出自己的独特见解。把这些具有一定理论深

度和学术价值的论文汇集成册,无疑对我省的外语教学和研究有很大的指导意义和参考价值,也将进一步促进我省外语教学水平的提高。

本书为方便读者查阅分为三大部分:外语教学研究、语言研究和外语教学评估与测试。

本书在编写过程中得到省教委师训处的大力支持,河南省教育学院外语教研中心主任,郑州教育学院党委书记张怀廉同志,新乡教育学院外语系主任乔起平同志,对该书的安排和组织给予精心的指导。洛阳教育学院外语系的樊伟、张艳红等同志认真校对文稿,付出了大量的劳动,在此一并表示感谢。

编 者

1995.6.15

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Cultural Differences and English Language Teaching

高 兰 英

Introduction:

In today's world, English is rapidly becoming an international language. There are 700 million English users in the world, over fifty percent are non-native speakers. And China perhaps boasts the greatest number of English users. It's reported that more than 5 million Chinese are studying or working in the West countries. Some of them are sent by the Chinese government. And nowadays there is an ever-increasing number of Westerners travelling to China or living and working there. Opportunities for contact are growing, and a need has arisen for greater understanding of cultural differences. So more and more English teachers in China have come to realize that students learning a language do not have the ability to make and understand grammatically right sentences. They do need the ability to interact freely with native speakers of English in various social situations. It's necessary to change the focus in teaching and to rouse both English teachers and learners to an awareness of cultural differences so that they will notice the differences when exposed to the target language and culture and be able to find out for themselves what to say or do and what not to say or do.

Cultural differences

"A culture is a connection of beliefs, habits, living patterns and behaviors which are held more or less in common by people who occupy particular geographic areas" defined by Brown (1978). Each country has its dominant culture. And culture is a part of a language. When we study a language for communication purpose, we should compare the cultural differences, for two cultural differences often come into a depressing hurdle to both the teachers and learners. On the whole, there are three types of cultural differences.

1. What English-speaking countries have in their language and culture and what China has not. In English, as a matter of fact, there are many words which do not exist in Chinese culture at all, such as hot dog, haggis, rissole, putting, cheese, butter. They are not served in a typical Chinese restaurant; even the definition in the dictionary does not really help much. The student can understand the explanation literally, but he still can't know how to make them, what they taste like and when Americans or Britons have them. Of course, this would prove to be a handicap to his learning.

In the west, if a person goes to visit someone, he is almost at once asked whether he would like to put off his coat. If he does not put off the coat, it is assumed that he is only to stay a few minutes. But in China, people are not in the habit of taking off their coats or jackets because the

homes are poorly heated. This seems to have become a general habit because even when the rooms are not cold, they still seem unused to removing anything. If they have a chance to visit the Westerner's heated room, this could lead to some embarrassing situations. This would prove to be a difficulty in the communication between Chinese and Westerners.

2. What China has in its language and culture, and English-speaking countries have not. As we know, a native speaker of English would not understand on the word-for-word translations of such Chinese terms as a worker-peasant-soldier student, a barefoot doctor and a propaganda team, which were used during the "cultural revolution". Here even with the explanation, a native speaker of English could not know what kind of student he is; why the doctor never wears shoes when they are on call, and even might also harbour a most unfavourable feeling to wards propaganda team.

In greetings, Westerners don't know how to answer the question "Have you had your lunch?", because in British culture, this question would be regarded as an indirect invitation to lunch, and between unmarried young people it shows the young guy's interest in dating the girl.

3. There are things that both China and English-speaking countries have, but are expressed or used differently. For example, the expression "thank you" is used both in English

and in Chinese to show gratefulness for help or for a present, invitation or offer, but the exact way in which the expression is used in the two languages is somewhat different.

In Chinese, the frequency with which "thank you" is used is connected with the relationship between the speakers if the relationship is very close, such as between family members or close friends, it is not used so often. Therefore, the use of it implies some distance. But in English this is not the case, "thank you" is used extremely frequently and is just as common between close friends as between casual acquaintances. If it is not used, it seems that the other person is being taken for granted.

In the use of idioms and proverbs, the Chinese students always wonder the images intended by such idioms. Take for example the simile as cool as a cucumber. The Chinese students would not understand why coolness should be compared with cucumber, after all, there are other things that are much cooler than a cucumber. SO, although this simile has long become an old phrase in English, the Chinese student's might still find it hard to appreciate the freshness of it! On the other hand, the Chinese language is also rich in idioms and proverbs. It happens that, in nine out of ten cases, an English idiom or proverb can hardly find an equivalent in Chinese, especially in culture. The Chinese may guess that PEOPLE WHO LIVE IN GLASS HOUSES SHOULD NOT THROW STONES mainly suggests DANGER, Where as the

English saying shows that IF YOU MAKE THINGS EASY FOR OTHERS, YOU WILL FIND IT EASY FOR YOURSELF.

Problems on English language Teaching

Over the years, most of the Chinese teachers who teach English as second language (TEASL) are poor in handling the relationship of language and culture. They rest on Linguistic forms and not compare the differences between two languages and two cultures so as to help increase the students' cultural awareness. Consequently, there was a cultural gap between the Chinese students and the native English speakers. The students' "cultural mistakes" made most native English speakers uncomfortable.

According to Hu Wenzhong (1988), the students' "cultural mistakes" fall into four categories: sociolinguistically inappropriate, culturally unacceptable, conflict of different value systems and over-simplification or over-generalization.

Then, what are the causes of the students' "cultural mistakes"? Quyang Fasu (1988) notes:

1. Inadequate knowledge of the target culture and insufficient exposure are the fundamental causes of many cultural mistakes.

2. Giving no thought to the cultural factor is another cause. Some students take it for granted that basic matters in culture are universal. Therefore there is no need to pay so much attention to them.

3. Many a mistake is made due to ignorance of the phatic communion of the target culture.

4. In situations where there are no equivalents in Chinese culture, students tend to make mistakes by following their own 'logical' way. As a result, they are either rather blunt or downright rude.

5. Bringing Chinese culture into a western situation is another kind of mistake our students often make.

Of course, "spare the rod and spoil the child". The causes of the students' "cultural mistakes" came from their teachers' English language teaching. In fact, some of teachers TEASL have not been bicultural themselves, so they could not help students to be observant and conscious of the differences between Chinese and target languages and cultures. Second, most of TEASL teachers haven't made clear that language should be taught in culture, because in the relationship between language and culture, the latter is the core, the dominant factor. Third, part of TEASL teachers have not been culturally aware, therefore, they have not made students aware that knowing language forms alone is inadequate for the needs of communication.

How to Increase Awareness of Cultural Differences in English Language Teaching

As we know, it's a complicated process of psychological adaptation for the teachers and students to acquire awareness of cultural differences, though researchers and educa-

tors have suggested a number of methods to increase cross-cultural awareness, such as using films and video-tapes, studying literature for cultural information, producing culture Readers and interpersonal contact with native speakers of English in China etc. However, not everyone who is exposed to the culture learns. Man has to overcome a lot of difficulties if one is to acquire true empathy.

Professor Xu Guozhang presented a most thought-provoking paper entitled Culturally Loaded Words and English Language Teaching in which he distinguishes three cultural contexts:

C-1 English language teaching context

C-2 Chinese cultural context

C-3 English-speaking cultural context

then he further proposes an EFL program with three major components:

Teaching of English; Manipulative skills; (C-1)

Teaching of Chinese; Intellectual skills; history, literature, culture (C-2)

Teaching of English; Intellectual skills; history, Literature culture (C-3)

(Xu Guozhang; 1980)

Here, teaching must therefore not be limited to only cultural information about native English speaking cultures but should also include significant cultural information concerning non-native cultures. In fact, the second component,

teaching of Chinese is often overlooked, but it can be realized with little difficulty. The third component, however, is often realized with the fear that foreign culture acquisition might constitute a threat to the Chinese national identity. Of course, if learners lost their national identity, it certainly would be a bad result.

In order to increase awareness of cultural differences, for teaching and learning English as a second language in China, there are three essential things to keep in mind:

1. Studying ELL should be well versed in the worldly situation of the English speaking countries, that is, their customs and habits, life-styles, generally-accepted world outlook, etc. Culture is inextricably tied to language. It is often known as "a way of life", or as "a blueprint that guides the behaviour of people in a community and is incubated in family life" (Larson and Smalley, 1972: 38). In the most situations we find the most obvious cultural differences. For example, the common question in China is how much money a person earns. This is regarded as an extremely personal and private affair in the west, and even within families, people often do not know the exact salary of other family members. This lack of knowledge does not mean that the family is not a close one. In western culture to ask a person his age is considered as impolite. This is particularly true of women, and although individuals may vary as to how sensitive they are about this, on the whole it is better to avoid a direct question