



跨文化交际

简明英语教程

郑 莉 胡湘辉 编 著



甘肃教育出版社

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INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION: A CONCISE COURSE

郑 莉 胡湘辉 编 著

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前言

古往今来,文化的定义一直都是人们争论的焦点。著名人类学家泰勒(Edward Burnett Tylor)认为“文化或者文明就是由作为社会成员的人所获得的、包括知识、信念、艺术、道德法则、法律、风俗以及其他能力和习惯的复杂整体。”人类的生活,无论是物质的还是精神的,始终是发生在特定的文化氛围中,而文化反过来又影响和形成人们的所思所想、所作所为。文化教给我们如何看待世界,如何判断美丑和正误,如何待人接物,如何表达情感。文化因素隐含在我们生活的各个方面,小到怎样见面打招呼,大到如何处理国际间事务。

文化的主要载体是语言和意识。语言与文化之间始终存在着不可分割的内在联系。语言能够折射出一种文化对世界的感悟和认识程度,透过语言则能窥见一个民族绚丽多彩的文化。

可以说,语言能反映一个民族的特征,它不仅包含着该民族的历史和文化背景,还蕴藏着该民族对人生的看法、生活方式和思维方式。语言与文化互相影响,互相作用,因此,语言不能脱离文化而存在,语言教学也不能忽视传授目的语文化。理解语言必须了解文化,理解文化必须了解语言。由于文化和语言上的差别,互相了解不是一件容易的事,不同文化间的交流常常遇到困难,因此进行语言学习的同时,更应该注重对文化的学习,只有这样才能提高学习者跨文化交际的能力。

学习一种语言不仅要掌握语音、语法、词汇和习语,而且要知道使用这种语言的人如何看待事物,如何观察世界;要了解他们如何用自己的语言来反映他们社会的思想、行为、习惯;要懂得他们的“心灵之语言”,即了解他们社会的文化。实际上,学习语言与了解语言所反映的文化是分不开的。跨文化交际是一个包括语言、文化、社会、心理等因素相互联系的综合系统,交际双方的语言行为和交流方式均受到双方共有的交际系统的影响和制约。如果中国的英语学习者用英语同以英语为母语的人交流,他需要尽可能多的了解讲英语民族在交际中所遵循的规则和准则,以及隐含在这些规则和准则背后的社会文化,尤其是民族文化心理、价值观等因

素,才能保证跨文化交际的顺利进行。同样,文化作为交际中的无声语言,也支配和制约着人们的交际活动。

文化教学的重要性自 20 世纪四五十年代以来逐渐凸显,并日益受到语言学者的重视。随着社会科学,尤其是人类学和社会学的发展和影响,人们逐渐认识到,了解和分析一个民族的居住环境、生活方式以及他们的思维方式对于学习该民族的语言十分重要。跨文化交际学,作为一门新兴的交叉学科正日益受到外语教育界的广泛关注。国内越来越多的高等院校已开设跨文化交际类的课程,并受到学生的普遍欢迎。

西部地区受地理位置和经济条件的限制,国际交流较少,而学习外语的学生又大都来自西部落后地区,很多学生在进入大学前从未见过外国人,更谈不上与他们交流了。为了适应西部地区外语学习者在跨文化交际中的需求,解决学生当中存在的各种交际问题,同时也为了弥补西部高校跨文化交际课堂教学教材的空白,我们编写了这本《跨文化交际简明英语教程》,旨在通过对本教程的研习,提高学生的跨文化交际意识,培养他们的跨文化交际能力。

本教程以大量的具体事例,结合多样性的课内外活动,并辅助以相关背景知识以增加学生的跨文化交际体验,从而实现学生跨文化交际能力的形成和提高。根据西部各高校学生的具体情况和东西方文化的异同,教程选取简单易懂却又非常典型的跨文化交际实例,通过角色体验、表演反馈、文化介绍及训练巩固等实现跨文化交际的教学目的。

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Unit 1 Introduction

Warm-up Activities

Same language, different Behavior

(An American traveled to England and was staying with a friend. During his stay, the American decided to talk to the Englishman about some things that were bothering him.)

American: I feel uncomfortable with many of the people here, but I'm not sure why. I speak the same language, so there shouldn't be any problem. Back home, I usually get along with people. You know that I'm friendly.

Englishman: Yes, that's true, but you're friendly in the way that Americans are friendly.

American: I'm not sure I understand.

Englishman: Well, for example, at the meeting the other night, you immediately called people by their first names. We do that here, but not when we first meet someone.

American: That's how we make people feel comfortable. People feel friendlier toward each other when they use first names.

Englishman: It's different here. For example, when you met my boss you should have used his last name. Also there's something else that you do that English people don't often do.

American: What's that?

Englishman: You touch people on the shoulder quite a bit, especially when you compliment them.

American: I guess I've never thought about that before. I suppose that is what I do at home.

Comments: This is an important lesson for the American that though they speak the same language problems may still exist when communicating with English people. He doesn't stop to think that he may have to do things differently. Luckily, he has someone who can help him understand and quickly learns that in England he needs to be able to do more than just speak English.

Diagnosing problems in intercultural communication

Litz, a Finnish, once told me a story about her mother-in-law.

Ten year ago, I met a Taiwan Chinese doctor in the States, and fell in love with him. In less than 6 months we got married. After my graduation we returned to Finland. My husband had long wished to bring his mother to stay with us for a while. Last summer, after we redecorated our house, we invited her over. You can well imagined how happy my husband was! And I was just as happy. I know being filial to parents is a great value Chinese people cherish. As wife of a Chinese, I try to be as filial as my husband.

Two days after my mother-in-law's arrival, I talked to my husband while his mother was sitting in the garden enjoying the sunshine.

Litz: Dick, how long is your mum going to stay?

Dick: I don't know. I haven't asked her.

Litz: Why not ask her?

Dick: What do you mean by asking her?

Litz: I mean what I said. Just ask her how long she's going to stay.

Can you guess what was going to happen the next day? My mother-in-law overheard

our conversation, and decided to leave for Taiwan the very afternoon, I had never expected that her visit should be so short; I tried very hard to persuade her to change her mind, but in vain.

Questions for discussion:

A. Do you suspect any connection between the mother-in-law's unexpected departure and the conversation Litz had with her husband?

B. Litz's meaning:

C. The mother-in-law's meaning:

(When she said "How long is she going to stay?", she meant to say that if she knew how long her mother-in-law was going to stay in Finland, she would be able to make arrangements for her such as taking her out to do some sightseeing. Her mother-in-law overheard the conversation, and took Litz's question to mean "Litz does not want me to stay for long".)

Showing Concern

In China:

Xiao Li (an interpreter): You must be very tired. You're old.

Catherine (an elderly American): Oh, I'm NOT old, and I'm NOT tired.

In the West:

A. How are you doing now? Would you like to rest?

B. No, not a bit.

Comment: What the interpreter said is quite courteous in China. It means, "If you are tired, we can take a little rest, since you are getting on in years." Unfortunately, his translation is too literal and misleading. This clearly shows that translation is an intercultural communication which requires the translator/interpreter to possess both English cultural knowledge and language competence. The interpreter gave the impression

that he thought the elderly lady would collapse any minute if she doesn't rest immediately. However, in the West, there is a value placed in being young that many people consciously, or subconsciously, are not willing to accept that they are growing old. In addition, the western way of showing concern is generally different from the Chinese way. The former is mainly displayed with question while the latter is usually expressed by statement. For these reasons the foreign lady felt offended. Of course, age is a state of mind, especially with the baby boomers who don't accept society's expectation of how old people should think and behave.

Language and Culture

Different linguistic scholars viewed language from different perspectives and gave different definitions of language. The most accepted definition of language is that language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols used for human communication. Language is not only a set of vocal symbols, but also a medium of human interaction. The Linguistics in the early 19 century represented by Herman Paul hold a rather primitive view of language and regarded language as a living organism.

The traditional linguistics often defined language by comparing it to some living creatures and studied languages from their primitive form to the present use. Linguistics at the turn of the century defined language by comparing it with physical objects. They attempted to describe and explain language synchronically and paid less attention to the early stage of language.

The structuralists in the late 19th century and 20th century such as F. de Saussure considered language as an "edifice" or a "well-defined object". (Saussure, 1959: 26) They emphasized the structure of language. Saussure's central idea was the arbitrary way of organizing the world into concepts and categories. The behaviorist in the 1940s like B. F. Skinner saw language in terms of "operant behavior" and "equate human beings with

pigeons or mice". (Skinner, 1957: 129) Skinner described language as a publicly observable human behavior and a system of verbal operant.

The transformation lists represented by N. Chomsky viewed language as an internalized system of rules and equate human beings with automata. He emphasized that human language is creative and able to arrange an infinitely large number of sentences that we have never heard. So language is a system of knowledge manifested in linguistic forms but innate and universal.

The sociolinguistics or functional linguistics like M.A.K.Halliday regarded language as an "instrument used to perform various functions in social interaction". (Halliday, 1978: 167) Functionalists viewed language as a dynamic, open system by means of which members of a community exchange information and communication.

The information theorists view language as a code for communication. Both the sender and the receiver must be familiar with the code. The message is encoded at the source text and decoded by the receiver. A language is a system of code shared by individuals for the purpose of transmitting messages and communication. As Kramsch remarked, "language is the principal means we conduct our social lives. When it is used in context of communication, it is bound up with culture in multiple and complex ways". (Kramsch, 1998:3) Apparently, the understanding of culture is inseparably related to the understanding of language. So, it can be summarized that language, in essence, is a system of symbols designed for the purpose of human communication.

What is the relationship between language and culture? What role does culture play with language? In any culture or region, language is much more than semantics, much more than what the written page or the spoken word can contain. This especially becomes clear when studying a foreign language and learning the ways of a particular culture. For example, the use of introductions, salutations, everyday sayings, etc. This area in particular gives more weight to culture than to the words themselves. Anyone studying a foreign language has to be bicultural as well as bilingual to speak the new language in a way that

it is not disparaging to the culture and its origin. Language does not end at the meaning or the use of words associated to a culture “ words represent beliefs, history, and the culture of their origin and they must be used accordingly.

We begin our preview of language by noticing that it is impossible to separate our use of language from our culture. In its most basic sense, language is a set of symbols and the rules for combining those symbols that are used and understood by a large community of people. When we study a language, we soon discovered that not only are the symbols and sounds for those symbols different, but so are the rules (phonology, grammar, syntax, and intonation) for using those symbols and sounds.

As we all know, language is closely related to culture and can be said as a part of culture. From a dynamic view, language and culture interact with each other and shape each other. Language is the carrier of culture which in turn is the content of language. We can dig out cultural features from language and explain language phenomena with culture.

Idioms as a special form of language exist in both of them and carry a large amount of cultural information such as history, geography, and religion, custom, nationality psychology, thought pattern and etc, and therefore are closely related to culture. They are the heritage of history and product of cultural evolvement. Consequently, we can know much about culture through studying idioms and in turn get better understanding of idioms by learning the cultural background behind them.

Language is a part of culture. It provides a useful link between inner thought and behavior. As defined by such anthropologists as Geertz and Douglas, cultures are systems of symbols in this network. The linguistic system interpenetrates all other systems within the culture by connecting people to their past, present and future.

Malinowski argues that the meaning of language cannot be separated from their language contexts. If one wants to understand what is said, he or she has to know the cultural background and life manner of the speaker. From the perspective of language functions, he points out further that linguistic act, like social acts, are under the control of

social culture.

Functional linguists regard language as a social phenomenon. They claim that the reason why language has its present form is due to its need to achieve its social functions. They describe and explicate the different linguistic features of phonology, grammar, and semantics of different languages by means of the functions that languages have in social communication.

Halliday's systemic linguistics gives us a unified theoretical framework to view the traditional dichotomy. By calling grammar a theory of human experience and the linguistic form of social interaction, Halliday anchors culture in the very grammar we use, the very vocabulary we choose, and the very metaphors we live by. He considers the society as a semantic system, a system of codes and rules. Language is a part of the whole system. The interpretation of the language code system lies in the interpretation of the social and cultural semantic system on which the former relies. (Halliday, 1978:167)

Anthropological linguists make use of field methods. They utilize a typical technique known as elicitation for gathering speech samples from respondents. They simply point out at objects and elicit their names from the respondents. But this fieldwork may produce inaccurate results if the respondents misinterpret the objects they are pointing at. Whorf's great contribution to the hypothesis of linguistic relativism was his attempt to work out the interrelationship between language and worldview of a non-western group, and to compare it with the "Standard Average European" worldview and linguistic categories. He strongly believed that the way people view the world is determined wholly or partially by the structure of their native language. It appears that speakers of different languages have to attend to and encode strikingly different aspects of the world in order to use their languages properly. The idea that thought is shaped by language is most commonly associated with the writings of Whorf, who, impressed by linguistic diversity, proposed that "the categories and distinctions of each language enshrine a way of perceiving, analyzing and acting in the world. In so far as language differs, their speakers should differ in how

they perceive and act in objectively similar situations". (Sapir & Whorf, 1921:195-196)

The relationship between language and culture has been a controversial issue, among which the theory of linguistic relativity influences the viewpoints of most of the scholars. The work of Sapir and Whorf has, in this respect, brought about two main different views. One is that language reflects culture and constrains one's way of thinking. Another is that language cannot be decontextualized and culture is expressed through the actual use of the language.

We would, in fact, describe a culture. Members of a particular culture have certain things in common, e.g. certain values and beliefs, certain customs, certain gestures and certain foods. They may also share distinctive artifacts, distinctive art, distinctive music, literature and folk stories.

The way of regarding cultures as an observable pattern of behavior is a useful one but one that has its limitations. One question that tends to remain unanswered is, "What leads members of a particular culture to agree that certain meanings." For example, how does an Australian man know that when another man approaches him in a pub, pats him on the back and says "How ya goin' you ol' bastard", he is expressing friendship and intimacy.

Members of a culture share patterns of behavior, and they also share models of how the world works and how its myriads of aspects relate to each other. These models are crucial not only in deciding how to interpret what is going on in any given situation, but also in molding actions and responses. In other words, culture can be seen as shared knowledge, what people need to know in order to act appropriately in a given culture.

However, it is also important to remember that culture is not a static entity. It is constantly changing and evolving under the impact of and as a result of contact with other cultures. Changes in certain aspects of culture, especially in the area of behavior and customs, can occur rapidly. Changes in the underlying values, e.g. in ways of looking at the world, tend to be much slower.