



From "Language Loss" to "Bilingualism" — Discussing the Cultural Dimension in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language

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Abstract: The term "culture" originates from "The Book of Changes". Western culture is derived from the Latin word "Culture," originally referring to practices such as farming, dwelling, and training, among others. British cultural scholar E. Tylor defined "culture" in "Primitive Culture" as a complex group of abilities and habits acquired by any member that includes knowledge, beliefs, morals, and customs. In the context of teaching Chinese as a foreign language, "culture" can be extended to the understanding of "culture" in "Primitive Culture." The culture of teaching Chinese as a foreign language encompasses the knowledge, beliefs, and morals of both parties. This article discusses "cultural language loss" and "bilingualism," exploring strategies for the development of teaching Chinese as a foreign language.

Keywords: cultural language loss, bilingualism, culture, teaching Chinese as a foreign language

1. Introduction

Teaching Chinese as a foreign language in China is a relatively emerging discipline. However, the cultural education of Chinese as a foreign language has undergone a similar development process as domestic education and Western cultural education. This involves the transition from pure language-based teaching to specialized cultural courses that integrate language and culture. In the 1980s, scholars of teaching Chinese as a foreign language proposed the concepts of "knowledge culture" and "communicative culture." They took cultural factors involved in communication as a starting point, divided functions and attributes, and changed old concepts in language teaching. "Cultural knowledge" refers to sentences generated in communication between two different cultural backgrounds, which may affect normal communication. Cultural background knowledge that influences communication is defined as "communicative culture."

2. Understanding the Phenomenon of "Cultural Language Loss"

In the 20th century, theorists used the medical term "aphasia" to criticize and reflect on the impact of Western literary theories and thoughts on ancient Chinese philosophy and literature. The root cause is the loss of Eastern philosophy and literature under the influence of Western culture and philosophy. At the same time, some scholars pointed out that there is also a situation of "Chinese cultural aphasia" in English teaching in China. This is due to the emphasis on language learning in English teaching, which results in English-speaking professionals who can communicate fluently but find it difficult to engage in in-depth discussions on deeper topics. Among English-speaking talents, there are many highly educated scholars in terms of cultural literacy, but they struggle to use high-quality expressions that demonstrate their cultural accomplishments, which fails to highlight the demeanor and character of scholars from a culturally significant nation. However, there has been less attention to the phenomenon of "cultural language loss" in teaching Chinese as a foreign language.

This situation does exist, mainly manifested in teaching and learning. On the one hand, teachers engaged in this field do not have a profound understanding of Chinese culture, and their ability to express Chinese culture in English is very limited, leading to biased cross-cultural communication, misunderstandings between different cultures, and even conflicts [1]. On the other hand, foreign students learning Chinese tend to focus on learning Chinese culture and neglect the integration of their own culture with Chinese culture, such as learning to express their local culture proficiently in Chinese. Teaching Chinese as a foreign language is not just simple language learning; it is also a cross-cultural communication activity involving participants from different cultural backgrounds, influenced by both parties' cognition, social organization, and ideas. In reality, there are significant cultural differences between countries. If there is a lack of understanding of cultural backgrounds, people may unconsciously regard their own culture as the value standard to examine and judge foreign cultures, forming preconceived notions. This attitude is prevalent both domestically and internationally, and it is not conducive to cross-cultural communication and dissemination. It may even hinder normal cultural exchange.

3. Causes of "Cultural Language Loss" in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language

There are two main factors contributing to the phenomenon of "cultural language loss," in addition to issues in teaching and learning. First, there has been a long-term neglect of positive transfer. Positive transfer refers to the impact of prior learning on subsequent learning. In contrast, if the impact is negative, it is called negative transfer. For a long time, people have focused too much on the negative transfer between languages and overlooked the impact of positive transfer. Foreign language learning must be based on a certain foundation in one's native language. Learning any foreign language cannot be completely detached from one's native language. Languages share universal characteristics; without referring to and comparing with one's native language, language learning can be inconvenient [2]. Secondly, there are significant misunderstandings about the concept of culture. With the continuous development of linguistic theories, more and more people realize that foreign language teaching is not just about language teaching but also requires the integration of culture. However, many problems arise in this process. Researchers focus too much on the introduction of the target language culture, ignoring the native language culture. For example, when teaching holidays, most of the materials chosen by teachers are traditional holidays, such as Spring Festival and Lantern Festival, teaching students about glutinous rice balls, putting up Spring Festival couplets, and learning about historical figures like Qu Yuan during the Dragon Boat Festival. However, it is challenging for foreign students to talk about their Christmas and Halloween celebrations in Chinese. Likewise, Chinese students can discuss foreign holidays in English but cannot express Chinese traditional holidays and culture. When Western counterparts explore the essence of Confucianism and Taoism with goodwill and try to conduct in-depth research on Chinese literature, they ultimately find it difficult to achieve. For instance, Confucius, a well-known representative of the Confucian school, is translated as "KONGFUZI" instead of the correct term "Confucius"; some scholars have translated "富贵不能淫" into "Be rich, but not sexy," demonstrating the shortcomings of bilingual learning. If reasonable measures are not taken to solve the "cultural language loss" between Chinese and Western cultures in learning Chinese as a foreign language, language learning will be ineffective, and teachers of Chinese as a foreign language will be unable to play the role of cultural ambassadors effectively. In the long run, this will even lead to unprecedented disdain and impact on the native language, which is not conducive to China's foreign development [3].

4. Cultural Dimensions in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language: From "Cultural Language Loss" to "Bilingualism and Biculturalism"

4.1 Encouraging a Positive Shift towards "Bilingualism and Biculturalism"

The occurrence of "cultural language loss" is caused by "unidirectional thinking." In the past, most cultural teachings in teaching Chinese as a foreign language were understood as the teaching of Chinese culture. Some scholars believe that this culture is what foreigners need to learn and understand to communicate with Chinese people, and it is the culture involved in language learning and usage. Scholars and teachers have viewed teaching Chinese as a foreign language from different angles as a platform for promoting and spreading Chinese culture, advocating that students should unconditionally rely on Chinese culture. However, with the continuous development of modern society, people have realized the drawbacks of this understanding and shifted their focus to attaching equal importance to both Chinese and native language cultures, which is an important direction for development in the new era.

4.2 Emphasizing Bilingualism and Biculturalism

Considering the causes of "cultural language loss," it is essential for us to give equal importance to the target language and native language, as well as target language culture and native language culture in daily language learning, emphasizing "bilingualism and biculturalism." Scholars in our country advocate that "students should not only understand Western culture but also be familiar with their own national culture." Some even believe that it is necessary in cross-cultural communication to "allow both parties to express their own cultural voices as much as possible, and facilitate the highest degree of closeness and understanding between them." The necessity of emphasizing bilingualism and biculturalism in teaching is reflected in the following aspects:

Firstly, based on the context of globalization, cultural exchanges between countries are becoming more frequent under the background of economic integration, and various cultures mutually complement and influence each other. Teaching Chinese as a foreign language should not only learn from other countries' outstanding cultures but also promote our splendid Chinese culture. Therefore, using bilingualism to disseminate our national culture can elevate our country's cultural exchanges to a new dimension. For foreign learners of Chinese, learning Chinese can facilitate better communication while also passing on their own country's culture, creating sparks in cross-cultural exchanges and rejuvenating cultures. World culture should

pursue harmony and allow various cultures to coexist harmoniously and inherit and develop [4].

Secondly, it is essential to improve the level of teaching Chinese as a foreign language and enhance the effectiveness of such teaching. The goal of teaching Chinese as a foreign language is to cultivate students' cross-cultural communication abilities. Therefore, teachers should pay attention to the equal importance of target language and native language, as well as target language culture and native language culture in teaching, to avoid imbalance during the learning process.

4.3 Emphasizing Innovation in Teaching

Bilingual and bicultural teaching refers to the emphasis on both native language and culture as well as foreign language and culture in teaching. The development of teaching Chinese as a foreign language involves curriculum design, faculty development, and improvement of teaching content. A reasonable framework should be set up in teaching, ensuring that the proportions of native language and culture, and foreign language and culture meet certain standards in talent cultivation, rather than merely piling up cultural courses. When the teaching content is framed, teachers need to adjust their teaching accordingly. Good teachers can make up for the deficiencies of the syllabus and even compensate for unreasonable course settings.

Firstly, excellent "bilingual and bicultural" talents are needed. In our country, there is no bilingual environment, so it is challenging to carry out bilingual and bicultural teaching, and the teaching methods vary among individuals. In recent years, some scholars have proposed the concept of "productive bilingualism," a new foreign language learning model that emphasizes the interaction between the two language cultures, highlighting their mutual integration and promotion of each other's development. "Reduced learning" refers to the lack of new learning outcomes, while "productive" indicates the mutual promotion between students' native language abilities and the target language, enhancing the learning quality of both cultures. That is to say, learners should be familiar with both the theme culture and the foreign culture, allowing the two cultures to interact with each other and better interpret foreign cultures. This model enables learners to not only fully tap their potential but also overcome narrow-minded ethnocentrism [5].

4.4 Engaging in Equal Dialogue through Bilingual Learning

In the current learning model, scholars are required to have a proper cultural attitude. On the one hand, they should decenter themselves, and on the other hand, they should embrace new cultures with an open-minded attitude. It is suggested to acknowledge the position of the dominant culture and abandon ethnocentrism, maintain the uniqueness of the dominant culture, and neither blindly worship foreign cultures nor arrogantly promote their own culture. At this stage, many nationalists expect the rise of the Confucius Institute craze. In the development of modernization, we should advocate for equal cultural dialogue, which does not rely on either side, allowing students to understand foreign cultures while recognizing their own national culture's position and maintaining a balance between cultural exchange and dialogue.

In teaching Chinese as a foreign language, cultural teaching emphasizes the mutual achievements of both sides, but it does not mean that cultural teaching does not have its own system and hierarchy. In teaching Chinese as a foreign language, we need to follow certain levels and principles, firmly grasp the role of cultural elements according to different teaching contexts, and emphasize the independence of cultural factors. Teachers need to fully understand the cultural connotations, select representative mainstream cultures to reflect Chinese core values and cultural concepts, combine target language learning and target language culture, be familiar with both cultures, and facilitate mutual learning of the two cultures to achieve ideal educational outcomes.

5. Conclusion

In summary, the transition from "language loss" to "bilingualism" reflects the change in talent demand in the context of the times and is a recognition of multiculturalism in cultural exchange. For a long time, our country has advocated tolerance, openness, and peaceful coexistence in interactions. In bilingual and bicultural learning, we should maximize this concept, innovate teaching based on respect for each other's cultures, and create a harmonious and symbiotic cultural exchange environment.

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