

An Analysis of Culture-Related Content in the New Horizon College English (SLV)

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Abstract: The teaching of culture in foreign language education has been changing a lot in recent years, the increasing enthusiasm toward cultural study and intercultural communication had become a heated topic. Moreover, English listening skill is the basic skill among the five linguistic skills. Under this background, this thesis aims to look into the evaluation of how to impart cultural knowledge and cultivate students' cultural competence, in order to broaden students' knowledge, strengthen their ability of appreciation, ability of understanding the culture of English-speaking countries, improve students' observation, analysis and problem-solving proficiency. This paper analysis the multi-culture content in one series of textbooks-- New Horizon College English(Speaking, Listening and Viewing) (Second Edition)(hence after HNCE(SLV)), which is published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press and widely used in colleges and universities in China. It is hoped that this study will be helpful for the users both teachers and students in culture teaching. The study investigate the cultural themes in NHCE. It adopts Risager's for cultural themes to categorize and evaluate the selection of the culture themes in NHCE. This research is aim to answer the following questions: do the ideology, content structure, pictures etc. in the textbook reflect the cultural pluralism?

1. Introduction

Language and culture have a close relationship. It is emphasized by many experts home and abroad. According to Brown (1994), "culture and language are so intricately interwoven that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture."

Textbooks, as the most accessible resources to students, are one of the vital items in language teaching in China, and most teachers and students rely heavily on textbooks. By far, for a long time, culture-related content of English will be the essential factor of culture teaching and learning. Though, there are various kinds of English textbooks can be bought in the market, such as *New Horizontal College English* (foreign language teaching and research press, 2002), *New College English* (Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press)...As a college English teacher, the author wonder whether the most used college English textbooks--*New Horizontal College English* textbooks can meet the requirements of Syllabus and reflect the needs of students or not.

2. Theories of Criteria for Textbook Evaluation

2.1 Cunningsworth's Criteria for Evaluation

From the point of view of the aims of textbook evaluations, Cunningsworth (2002) introduce two approaches: in-depth evaluation and impressionistic overview. He listed a checklist for the evaluation of the former, ranging from aims, approaches and organizations to teachers and books.

As for the latter, people can get a general impression by looking through it quickly, to get some basic information, such as the quality, the lay out and how the sections included in the textbooks.

2.2 Byram's Criteria for Evaluation

Byram (1993) argues that the content and manner can be shown as eight dimensions as followed: social identity and social group (social class, regional identity, ethnic minorities), social

interaction(differing levels of formality; as outsider and insider), belief and behavior(moral, religious beliefs; daily routines), social and political institutions, (state institutions, health care, law and order, social security, local government), socialization and the life phase(families, schools, employment, rites of passages), national history(historical and contemporary events seen as markers of national identity), national geography (geographic factors seen as being significant by members) and stereotypes and national identity (what is “typical “, symbols of national stereotypes).

3. Research Questions and Textbooks

The following research is based on account of the cultural related content in NHCE (SLV), which has been widely used in Lijiang College of Guangxi Normal University for more than 7 years. This study attempts to answer the following questions:

(1) To what extent does *NHCE (SLV)* cover the different cultures (native, target, other countries, common culture)?

(2) To what extent does *NHCE (SLV)* meet the needs of students and teachers in Lijiang College?

The subjects of this study include: Firstly, the New Horizontal College English (SLV) course-book (New Edition) series, which was published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press in 2007. It is the widely used English course-books whose chief editor is Zheng Shutang. The set of textbooks has been used in Guangxi Normal University Lijiang College for more than six years, since the author has become a teacher in this college. These course-book series include listening and reading books. Here, the author in this thesis uses the listening textbooks as subject. Though this set of textbooks can not represent all kinds of material for all non-English majors, the evaluation of these materials still has its significance to the students and teachers who use these materials. Secondly, a total of 4 levels of NHCE textbooks, there are 427 culture tips in students' books are also checked because they are the obvious culture-related content in the textbooks. A total of 40 units in the 4 levels of NHCE (SLV), and each unit consist of six parts.

4. Result of Evaluation

4.1 Content Structure

The structure of students' book of speaking, listening and viewing textbook of NHCE: Students' book of Speaking, Listening and Viewing of NHCE includes ten units, each with a distinct theme, providing materials for about one term's study in a whole. Every unit consists of seven parts: Lead in, Listening skills, Listening in, Speaking out, Let's talk, further listening and Word file.

As the figure has shown, the first part and the second part are belonging to the input section and speaking belongs to output. Further listening and speaking is left to be assignment after class. In detail, in the first part, there will be some picture-matching, questions-answering and brainstorm exercise to give the students some comprehensive, interesting or relevant information. Then, in the listening part, there are basic-listening practice (usually 5 short dialogues), listening in, which includes short dialogues and long dialogues and passages, from easy to hard. According to Krashen (1982), four essential factors are required to attained comprehensive input: Input should be comprehensible; Input should be interesting and/or relevant; Input should not grammatically sequence; Input should be in sufficient quantity.

In conclusion, the input section in NHCE (SLV) is comprehensive, interesting and relevant. Its exercises are from easy to hard, and usually, 8 listening materials are involved.

For the second part, output section-Speaking, which includes Speaking Out, which will provide three model dialogues for students to read and follow and then learn to imitate. And then comes the Let's Talk part. In this part, for 1-2 level students a long conversation is presented, for level 3-4 students, a original video which is related to the unit theme is provided. And all the video clips are all original English-speaking countries materials, such BBC, VOA and some interviews. Totally 4 listening materials are involved, but the materials in the output section are more difficult than the input materials.

Cummins and Swain (1986) pointed out that, interaction in the language is needed in order for learners to communicate personal meaning in the target language. Language practice which takes place in relevant context will then result in the acquisition of the language.

As for Further Listening and Speaking part, it is the assignment left to students after class for a better review of the related topic. And it has three listening materials and one original video clip. And the last part is word file, which is attach to the back of the textbook to list the new terms, vocabularies and expressions related to each unit in order to improve students' ability to build up their storage of vocabulary.

In summary, the input and output of NHCE (SLV) are of suitable quality and quantity; however, the materials in the output section are more difficult than the input materials.

4.2 Culture Focus

As the author has mentioned in chapter III, the macro culture can help learners know about the political and historical background of the target language culture, and micro culture help students get a clear picture of the life style and people's activities in the target language countries.

29 topics are culture at "micro-level" and the other 11 topics at "macro-level" in the four textbooks. As the author have discussed before in chapter III, culture at micro-level is represented in people's life and activities. Culture at macro-level is represented in historical, political and social dimensions. According to Zhang Hongling, it is important to involve information about micro and macro culture and intercultural issues in textbook. However, as the above tables present topics of culture at macro level are mainly related to social security, pollution, and employment. Rarely in science and technology and political, history and geography, those are very important part of culture and will help students' to build up their perspectives to the world. Because of the lack of this macro culture, students would lack the awareness of the comparison between the Chinese and the target language countries' macro impression. At last, only 1 out of 40 units related to cultural comparison, which is far from enough.

5. Implications

It is no doubt that, materials are the most important elements for students to learn language in recent China. And the other vital factor is language teacher. But a smart language teacher can adapt the textbooks for better use. According to Cunningsworth, (1984): if teachers or students find their textbooks not satisfied in methods, language content, subject matter, balance of skills, progression and grading, it can be adapted by leaving out some parts of the materials; adding materials; replacing materials with something more suitable and changing the published materials to make it more suitable for use, etc.

It is also the language teachers' responsibility to balance the biased culture in the textbooks by adding listening materials, such as films, video clips, and interviews about Chinese culture or other countries' culture. And then make culture comparison and contrast, which are good ways for students to respect every culture in the world, and no culture is inferior to another.

In a word, no matter how many times of the textbook revised, it can never meet all the students' need, in this case, teachers should play a positive role in making the most use of the textbooks. And it is also the teachers' responsibility to utilized textbook in the most beneficial way.

Secondly, teachers' own cultural sensitivity need to be promoted. Most teachers do not deal with the culture content efficiently and effectively because of the lack of culture knowledge themselves. In this situation, most of the culture were ignored and passed. So for language teachers, culture trainings are necessary, which can include target culture, native culture, culture in common and other countries' culture. Only language teachers' culture awareness and knowledge are enhanced, students' intercultural competence can be improved. What's more, some culture-related questions should put more weight on the test. CET-4&6 have already reformed its way to test translation, which is a challenge for teachers and students.

Last but not the least, for English listening course (also speaking, listening and viewing course), teachers have multi-media to support their teaching. As an English proverb says: "A picture is worth

a thousand words.” it means that pictures or video contains more information and connotation than words have, especially for students who are young and energetic and full of imagination. Language teachers can provide some authentic materials according to the learning theme of the unit. When talking about food, teachers can choose some films and videos, introducing different eating habits and how to making western food. And at the same time, Chinese “A Bite of China” can also present to find out the difference of the food culture in China and western countries. In a word, teachers should be alternative enough to discover the culture elements in the textbooks.

Acknowledgment

Research on flipped classroom practice of College English teaching based on mainstream mobile instant messaging platform (2019jgb445).

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