

The Approaches to Cultivating Cross-Cultural Competence of Bachelors of Translation and Interpreting in the Chinese Universities

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Keywords: Cross-cultural competence, Curriculum system, Teaching mode, Cultivation approach

Abstract: The globalization indicates the more contacts with the people from different countries, the more chances people will have to communicate with each other. Along with the problems arising in communication, cross-cultural competence training is indeed needed for the research, to promote the understanding of different peoples. For the Chinese institutions of higher education in the new era, the guideline issued by the Ministry of Education has led the higher education to orient and adjust the aims of talents cultivation in some aspects. In order to promote the quality of BTI undergraduates, the rational methods analysis and inference will be used in the paper, to find the good ways to cultivate more qualified talents and solve the problem of lacking translation talents, so as to meet the demands of the society, even the international communities. This article attempts to give a definition of cross-cultural competence, that is, cross-cultural knowledge at the cognitive level, language accommodation at the functional level, creativity and initiative at the behavioral level, the moral sense of responsibility and speculative consciousness, and then discusses the approaches to cultivating cross-cultural competence of bachelors of translation and interpreting (BTI): optimizing the curriculum system and integrating China elements into the teaching content; from language skills training to the mastery of discourse mode, integrating Chinese and foreign languages, cultures and ideas; realizing cross-border integration of training methods and means. The approaches are suggested and recommended to enhance BTI undergraduates' cross-cultural competence. Therefore, it is very significant for Chinese universities to deepen the teaching reform with cross-cultural competence as the core in cultivating high-quality BTI talents.

1. Introduction

Specifically, this study suggests a possible cause for institutions of higher education to place greater emphasis upon the cross-cultural competence training of bachelors of translation and interpreting (BTI). Although the researches on cross-cultural competence are conducted from different disciplines, the undergraduates' competence has not been targeted. In the following, the paper will start with the conception of cross-cultural competence, and some effective approaches will be discussed so that they can be adopted by more universities to apply into enhancing cross-cultural competence. The aim of this paper is to improve the BTI undergraduates' cross-cultural competence. The tasks are to make clear the definition of cross-cultural competence, to analyze the current situation of the Chinese undergraduates' abilities in the aspect of cross-cultural competence, and to comprehensively improve the approaches to training their competence in communicating effectively.

Cross-cultural competence (CC) is the fundamental issue for the Chinese institutions of higher education to improve the bachelors of translation and interpreting in their communication activities. In the era of globalization nowadays, the cultures of countries across the world are competitive in the ways of spreading their respective impacts on the others. Though cultures are rich and diverse, culture as a soft power has a lament or obvious influence on each other. With the deepening of China's reform and opening up to the outside world, China has contacts with the outside world more frequently. The opportunities provided by the Chinese government for equal dialogue among

different cultures are very beneficial to eliminate prejudice, misunderstanding and even hostility caused by cultural differences. China has been advocating that a community with a shared future for mankind shall be constructed, thus, to carry out this goal, the key task is to enhance cross-cultural competence in the process of communicating with other cultures.

In 2018, China's Ministry of Education issued the *National Standard for the Teaching Quality of Undergraduate Degree Programs in General Institutions of Higher Education*, which pointed out that foreign language majors should have the ability to use foreign languages, to appreciate literature, to cross culture, to think, to research, to innovate, to apply information technology, to learn independently and to practice ^[1]. For the first time, the Ministry has put forward the requirements of cross-cultural competence for foreign language majors, which will have a profound impact on the teaching in colleges and universities. This involves changing the teaching concept and understanding the connotation of talents for university teachers. Hence, students' possessing cross-cultural competence is their unique main ability and necessary accomplishment in their competent training through their college study and life.

2. Literature Review: Definition of Cross-Cultural Competence

The quest for a definition of 'CC' led the author to search two literature databases: EBSCO (2680 journals) and ABI-INFORM (1976–2004). Several different keywords were used, forming combinations of the terms 'competence' or 'competency', and 'cultural', 'intercultural', 'cross-cultural', 'global', 'international', or 'transnational'. The results of the review of how these terms defined in the literature are presented, grouped into three categories: international business; workplace diversity; intercultural communications. Based on the literature review, Hofstede (2001) proposes a process of intercultural communication competence that involves awareness, knowledge, and skills. Cross-cultural competence is one of the core concepts of cross-cultural communication, including the ability combination of internal cultural awareness, attitude, external knowledge and skills. And cross-cultural communication competence involves knowledge, attitude and skills. It includes three basic elements: emotion, cognition and behavior, which should not only be reflected in the realization of communicative purpose, but also in the appropriateness of communicative methods and behavior. Hofstede (2001) suggests that intercultural competence can be taught, but he indicates that personality factors also affect the levels of intercultural competence that individuals can attain. To some extent, cross-cultural competence is not only a personal characteristic, but also a behavioral skill. It is a dynamic process of development. In a word, cross-cultural competence occupies a pivotal position in promoting one's ability of cross-cultural communication.

The literature review revealed that the field of intercultural communications offers an overlapping set of definitions with a set of shared elements (Collier, 1989; Imahori and Lanigan, 1989; Kealey, 1989; Wiseman et al., 1989; Redmond and Bunyi, 1993; Miller, 1994; Lustig and Koester, 1999). The consensus is that 'competence' in this field of study means to be appropriate and effective in interactions between individuals from different national cultures.

3. Methodology

As for the literature review, the researches have been done mainly from the macro-study angle of interaction. The main methods used in the paper will be to analyze the approaches to solve the interaction competence in BTI undergraduates in their training from the micro-level. Relevant tests through Psycinfo, Google Scholar, and search engines of primary journals publishing in the cross-cultural and intercultural areas in psychology and business/management are researched. Sources were obtained and tests mentioned in the sources that had not originally been uncovered in the searches were researched manually. In several cases (BASIC, Cultural Intelligence Scale [CQ], IBA, Intercultural Sensitivity Inventory [ICSI], Intercultural Development Inventory [IDI], and Multicultural Personality Inventory [MPQ]), originating authors of the tests were contacted and requested to provide references concerning the documentation of the validity and reliability of the test.

In the process of training their cross-cultural competence in communication, the students should firstly master the relevant cultural knowledge, including the understanding of the similarities and differences between Chinese and foreign cultures. Secondly, an open and inclusive attitude towards foreign cultures must be taken. Knowledge and attitude are beneficial to form cross-cultural sensitivity. Thirdly, the skill refers to the ability to adopt the appropriate way and adjust communication strategies in cross-cultural communication. There are two standards to measure cross-cultural competence, that is, effectiveness and appropriateness. Sun Youzhong has pointed out the core connotations of cross-cultural competence: to respect the world cultural diversity with cross-cultural empathy and critical cultural awareness; to master the basic cross-cultural research theoretical knowledge and analytical methods; to be familiar with the history and current situation of the target country of the language to be learned, understanding the basic characteristics and similarities and differences between Chinese and foreign cultures; to interpret and evaluate different cultural phenomena, texts and products; to communicate appropriately and effectively; to help people of different languages and cultures to communicate effectively^[2]. These expressions have gone beyond the boundary of communicative competence, which calls for the foreign language community to attach great importance to the cultivation of cross-cultural competence in the new round of education and teaching reform. In recent years, universities in China have paid attention to the relationship between foreign language education and cross-cultural competence, and explored the effective approaches of training based on the reality of talent training.

In 2009, UNESCO released the report of “investing in cultural diversity and cross-cultural dialogue”, which said the concept of “cultural literacy”, believing that cultural literacy has become the lifeline of today’s world and is an indispensable tool beyond the “clash of ignorance”^[3]. In 2013, UNESCO further released the concept and operational framework of cross-cultural competence. In the report, the tree model is used to connect 25 core concepts related to cross-cultural competence into an organic unit. The report regards culture and communication as the roots of cross-cultural competence. Culture includes identity, value, attitude and belief, and communication includes language, dialogue and non-verbal behavior. “Cross-cultural Dialogue” is a part of trunk, involving dialogue in professional and non-professional fields. It is worth noting that cross-cultural communication competence in the model is only a leaf of the tree^[4]. Therefore, when discussing the cultivation of cross-cultural competence, it is very vital to distinguish the cross-cultural communication competence from cross-cultural competence.

Based on the research of cross-cultural connotation and the practical experience of BTI talents cultivation, the researchers attempt to give the definition of cross-cultural competence from four dimensions: cross-cultural knowledge at the cognitive level; language integration at the functional level; creativity and initiative at the behavioral level; the moral sense of responsibility and speculative consciousness. In terms of its broader sense, the more comprehensive definitions can be referred in the *SAGE Handbook of Intercultural Competence* by D. K. Deardorff (2009)^[5].

The understanding of foreign culture is the foundation of cross-cultural communication at the cognitive level. To understand the western world, the Chinese people need to do much work at the cognitive level. Ren Zhengfei, President of Huawei Corporation, once said: “at present, we still lack a deep understanding of the western world (power structure, culture and conflict, values, social psychology, etc.)”^[6]. The human beings are the common community shared for mankind. In an era when China integrate into the world, one task of the Chinese people is to tell Chinese stories, spread Chinese voice and interpret Chinese characteristics. Therefore, the people from various countries can communicate with each other effectively on the basis of the effective understanding of their own cultures.

Language accommodation refers to the transformation of discourse mode, that is, transposition thinking, familiarity with western thinking mode, cultural tradition and value orientation, and sharing information, expressing opinions, and reaching consensus.

Creativity and initiative at the behavioral level means to play a leading role in cross-cultural communication. In the process of building a community of shared future for mankind, we need have cross-cultural leadership. China’s participation in global governance needs an advocate, a role of

inspiration, building and influence in international affairs rather than following others.

The moral sense of responsibility and speculative consciousness in cross-cultural communication mainly involve the exchange, confrontation and integration of Chinese and foreign cultures, which requires us to have critical thinking, compare, analyze, and adhere to our own cultural position.

As the base of national spirit, culture is the soul of a country and a nation. The 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China proposed to “strengthen cultural confidence” and “stick to the position of Chinese culture”^[7]. Under the guidance of this thought, we have determined to take “strengthening cultural confidence and enhancing cross-cultural competence” as the core concept to promote the reform and innovation of BTI talent training system.

Nowadays, some problems arise in foreign language education in China. First, we should pay more attention to foreign countries and local areas, teach the western history, social and cultural knowledge, and highlight and interpret Chinese elements in the curriculum system. Secondly, we should pay more attention to language micro-skills, emphasize much on instrumental skills training, which lacks sufficient understanding of the importance of Chinese and foreign cultural integration and the transformation of the way of discourse. Thirdly, we should pay more attention to knowledge accumulation, and neglect people’s literary and ideological discrimination. Generally, teaching is based on knowledge explanation and accumulation, and it is not enough to cultivate cross-cultural critical reflection ability. Looking at these problems from the perspective of cross-cultural competence, transforming teaching concepts, reconstructing teaching contents, updating teaching methods and means, solutions must be found to make a proposal for other universities to acknowledge.

The basic principles of foreign language classroom teaching based on the cross-cultural ability training are: critical, reflective, exploring, empathizing, and experiencing. In order to fundamentally change the translation teaching in universities and improve the quality of education, the concept of cross-cultural competence training needs to permeate and adjust the curriculum system, the teaching mode and the teaching link. Specifically, it can be thought and explored from three aspects of “fusion”: First, changing the traditional foreign language teaching concept, and integrate the excellent Chinese culture into the course content of foreign language translation. Second, transferring from the training of language skills to the transformation of discourse mode. In brief, “accommodation” as the core is taken to form the characteristics of cross-culture. Third, to realize the cross-border of ways and means, integrate the first and second classrooms, online and offline modes, home learning and oversea research, optimize the open and interactive environment of BTI talent training at a high level of internationalization, help BTI form a world vision, enhance their comparative awareness, develop their critical thinking, and effectively cultivate their cross-cultural competence in the real situation.

4. Discussion

To cultivate more talents of BTI effectively, the following measures will be discussed and suggested to take to improve BTI’s cross-cultural competence:

First, by optimizing the curriculum system, we will create cross-cultural high-quality courses such as “Chinese classics” and “western classics”, fully integrate Chinese elements into the teaching content, integrate Chinese and foreign cultures, help students enhance their cultural identity awareness, and enhance their understandings of cultural diversity. In the survey of 65 BTI students from one university in Sichuan, 90% percent of them think they need further know the Chinese and western cultures. The statistics shows that students establish a certain sense of positive attitude and have a strong desire to hone their skills in communication.

Second, through building the mode of cross-cultural competence training, we must start with narration, learn how to tell stories. In accordance with the requirements of cross-cultural competence in cognition, function, behavior and others, the focus of teaching has shifted from strengthening language skills to mastering the way of discourse, and the emphasis has been placed on the realization of diachronic and synchronic inter-textual connection with each other at the level of cognition and emotional experience.

Third, we advocate research-based teaching, by studying cultural classics, using the multi-disciplinary resources and platform, and implementing the “classic reading program”, which helps cultivate the students’ ability of critical thinking and enhance their cultural confidence and cultural consciousness.

Fourth, through innovative training methods and means, we will build more excellent online open courses, integrate information technology and course content, interact classroom learning and practice exploration, connect domestic learning with overseas research, rely on first-class teaching teams and international cooperation projects, carry out the exchange learning, joint cultivation and courses for BTI students, highlighting characteristics and effectiveness in developing the BTI students’ cross-cultural competence.

5. Summary

In general, therefore, it seems that cross-cultural competence originates from cross-cultural communication competence, and has exceeded the traditional sense of cross-cultural communication competence with more connotations. In order to understand and study cross-cultural competence, the author offered a definition of CC as it applies to the field of foreign language education that focuses on performance (doing) rather than on a set of knowledge, abilities and skills (knowing). The knowledge, skills and personal attributes constitute cross-cultural competencies. Overall, this study strengthens the idea that foreign language education in Chinese universities attaches great importance to the cultivation of cross-cultural competence, which requires us to think about the training objectives, training specifications and curriculum system of BTI from a new perspective, so as to promote the changes of teaching concepts, teaching models, teaching contents and methods and means. It is of great significance for BTI to actively adapt to the new situation, new changes and new challenges of higher education in the new era. The approaches are suggested and discussed to help Chinese universities to better enhance BTI’s competence from four viewpoints (globe, country, university, teachers-students). Cross-cultural competence can help students expand their international vision, witness the world in a broader way, and have the global competence to deal with social challenges in the future. To promote and deepen the teaching reform with cross-cultural competence as the core is undoubtedly an effective approach to cultivate more high-quality BTI talents. One weakness in this study which could have affected the measurements of cross-cultural competence for BTI was that some internal factors such as personal motivations may be taken into consideration. Another important practical implication is whether to apply these approaches into all undergraduates bachelors’ programs, which will be given evidence in further research.

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