Culture Teaching in Second Language Teaching

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Abstract. Topics around language and culture have become increasingly popular in the discussion of foreign language teaching and learning. To date, it has been generally accepted that the learning of foreign language is the learning of target culture, and that language and culture are closely interwoven. This paper discusses the relationship between language and culture. It holds the thoughts that language and culture interact with each other. From the way that children acquire their native language, the author gets the idea that environment influences on both children's language and culture acquisition. In the end, the author puts forward the principles and strategies of second culture learning.

Introduction

In recent years, teaching target culture in foreign language classes and learning the culture while learning a second language have become new tasks in the field of foreign language teaching. But how to learn and what principles to base on remain problematic. The present paper suggests four principles and five strategies for second culture teaching by probing successful second language acquisition for the purpose of improving the approach of foreign language education and accelerating the realization of the goal of second language acquisition. Culture teaching derives from social and cultural anthropology that aims at providing a comprehensive description of the way of life in a society. Culture has formed part of most language curriculum. In Britain it is called "background studies", which defines its position as subordinate to language. In France it is often referred to as "civilization". In Germany, where the concept probably originated, it is more usual nowadays to describe culture teaching as "Landeskunde"(area study) rather than "Kulturkunde" (culture study). No matter whatever it is called, there has been a continuing history in the aspect of language teaching. A second language can really be learned without addressing the culture of the community in which it is used.

The Relationship Between Language and Culture

The Interaction between Language and Culture. Definitions of culture include patterns of both behavior and thought. Culture is a highly complex notion and a much-contested ground within contemporary anthropological theory. No matter how many definitions there may be listed, we argue for those with behavioral and value orientations. Culture is, then, a configuration of learned human behavior, results of behavior, and principles controlling behavior, which is shared and transmitted by people in a particular society.

Culture is learned. It is the single most important characteristic of culture. Without the advantages of knowledge from those who lived before us, we would not have culture. In fact, "the group's knowledge stored up (in memories, books and objects) for future use" is at the core of the concept of culture (Samovar, et al. 2000,38)

Culture is communicative and transmitted. Hall reminds us, Culture is communication and communication is culture (Hall,T.E. 1977,14). People learn to think, feel, believe, and act as they do

because of the messages that have been communicated to them, and those messages all bear the stamp of culture. When cultures differ, communication practices may also differ, Therefore, culture and communication are linked together.

Language is a part of culture and plays a very important role in it. Language is a cultural phenomenon, as well as a social phenomenon. Language and culture interweave and depend on each other. Therefore, language is being culturally transmitted.

The Importance of Culture Learning in Language Learning. Culture needs an environment to exist in. A particular language is acquired in a particular cultural setting. Without such a cultural environment, language acquisition is out of the question (Chen Linhua,1999, 285). Culture exerts an enormous influence on language because culture teaches not only the symbols and rules for using those symbols, but more important, the meaning associated with the symbols. Knowing a language without understanding the culture it carries will result in "seeing trees without the sight of forest" and will be impossible to understand a language completely and use it correctly. Ii has been widely agreed that goal of foreign language learning is the ability to use it, understanding its meaning and connotations in terms of the target language and culture, and the ability to understand the speech and writing of natives of the target culture in terms of their meanings as well as their great ideas and achievement. If we want to master a foreign language as flexible as a native speaker does, it is not enough to know pronunciations, word meanings or rules of usage. We must learn to use it appropriately in different environments or contexts.

Culture Acquisition in Language Learning

Environmental Influence on Language and Culture Acquisition. The environmental factors are important elements in children's language acquisition. Suppose that it is true that babies were born with language. One logical conclusion to be drawn is that all babies in the world would speak one and the same language, since we can assume that human brain is more or less the same in the human species. But obviously this conclusion is false. As we know, a Chinese baby born and growing up is Beijing, will speak Beijing dialect; it will speak Shanghai dialect if it is born in Shanghai and grows up there. Moreover, it will speak English if it is brought up in London in an English-speaking family. It can speak any language provided that the language environment is ready for it to grow up in.

Having A Language Having A Culture. Having a language means mastering a finite system by which linguistic creativity is achieved. Using the language in a suitable context with an acceptable manner is the concepts of linguistic competence and communicative competence and concerned. A person with communicative competence knows when to speak, when not, and what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner. It is evidently possible to acquire a language in a void, to learn the forms and words and play at speaking it. But the presence of a speech community quickly invalidates that knowledge. The learner either fails to speak entirely or confronts a set of requirements that seem to have nothing to do with language when trying to live in the community. Culture is not learned as language is; yet language is not learned until culture is. There is knowledge about and skill in language and culture learning Participation is a community means skills in both, mutually reinforcing and mutually different. In fact, having a language entails having the culture.

Second Language and Culture Learning. For a second language learner, the individual has possessed a certain language system that reflects language universal before he/she learn a second language. This language system allows for or even helps acquire a second language. In acquiring another culture, however, conflict may occur between the two languages, for culture has the characteristic of being shared in a certain social group and culture acquisition is to accept behavioral models, beliefs and ideologies of another group. People tend to believe language is a tightly interwoven system, while culture a loose collection of behaviors, attitudes and values, which is independent and unrelated. It is neither clear what one already does not have nor obvious what one is supposed to acquire. A bilingual can have a complete mastery of two different languages and switch between them with ease. But as for culture, one can seldom possess the two systems. The

best learner is to integrate the essence of the second culture into one's own in order to complete a process of personality growth.

Principles and Strategies of Second Culture Teaching

Principles of Second Culture Teaching. Here four principles are put forward:

Cognitive Principle. When we say cognitive principle, we mean to acquire knowledge about the target culture and society, which might further involve the development of certain skills: observing, discriminating, examining sociocultural phenomena or relating the second culture to the first culture, and etc.. Cognitive comprehension is important in the second culture learning. It is essential for language learners to put themselves in the shoes of the natives, which is an approach turned as empathy.

Comparative Principle. The comparative principle wants learners to compare the first culture with the second culture, so as to find out their similarities and differences. Nevertheless, to seek the similarities and differences is not the final purpose but only the means to get familiar with them, therefore, it is insufficient just to know the differences but better to accepting them as a way of establishing intercultural awareness. By accepting and appreciating both the similarities and differences, we can assess better the potential consequences of our acts and tolerate those of others. Comparison helps learners understand the second culture better, explain different cultural behaviors, form different cultural judgments, and avoid explaining the others behavior according to their own standards.

Assimilative Principle. Assimilative principle includes assimilation, preservation and adaptation. We have reasons in supporting of this principle. Firstly, according to culture's distinct character, every culture is national, belonging to its own nation and bearing its own national characteristics. Yet, every culture links up with other cultures to help each other to form a new culture. Secondly, to nourish its own culture, each culture needs to assimilate a good deal of foreign progressive culture. In essence, assimilation is for the sake of better developing and enriching one's own culture. This leads up to the third point, that every culture has its strong and weak points. Each culture must overcome its own weak points by learning from the others strong ones. Finally, with the development of the informational cultural exchange occurs more and more often. Cultures are developing in the direction of diverse ones.

Tolerant Principle. The tolerant principle is also important in culture acquisition. It claims that one needs not abandon one's own way of feeling or understanding and to accept completely that of the other culture in acquiring a second culture, but to appreciate, possible in a detached manner, the identity of another individual or culture. It is closely related to cultural relativity, which frees us from the conditioning of our own culture and helps us to recognize that our way of thinking or feeling is not the only way, and possibly not even the best way. The tolerant principle also includes no cultural discrimination. Cultural discrimination is the hodgepodge of ethnocentrism, cultural stereotypes and cultural prejudice.

Strategies to Embed Language Teaching in Culture Teaching. In accordance with our cultural principles, we put forward the five strategies to accelerate the realization of successful second culture teaching, which differ from those that have generally existed presently, with the argument that language teaching should be embedded in culture teaching. We regard language teaching as the purpose and culture teaching as a background, and suggest to teach language in a second culture environment and to define the objectives for both language and culture teaching.

How to integrate language and culture in the teaching process effectively? The present author tries to think of the problem from a new angle. The stress of these five strategies is to plan the whole process----from determining teaching objectives to designing teaching materials, classroom activities, n culture-based language acquisition process, the main purpose is language teaching, while culture activities serve as background contexts of a successful procedure. We determine definite objectives for both language teaching and culture teaching. In this objectives connotative objectives. Conceptual objectives contain the mastering of phonetic, vocabulary, word-formation,

sentence structure, grammar, semantic meaning, passage understanding, and etc.. Connotative objectives include studying a vocabulary for its cultural connotative meanings (such as the cultural history of the vocabulary, especially the domain of lexis, the important culture history of the vocabulary", semantics with cultural connotation, discourse analysis in different cultural connotation, content, style, pragmatic, cultural comparison, and etc.. Because of the internal relations of language and culture, some of the objectives in the two categories may appear overlapped on certain aspects. Seelye describes culture-teaching objectives as seven skills to be developed in the learner, which can be used for us to develop strategies: 1. The sense of culturally conditioned behavior; 2. Interaction of language and social variables; 3 conventional behavior in common situations; 4. Cultural connotations of words and phrases; 5. Evaluating statements about a culture; 6. Researching another culture; 7. Attitudes toward other societies. Cf. Stern, 1999, 212)

Designing Teaching Materials on a Culture-learned Basis. As most learners study a second language at a home environment and have little opportunity to practice it in the target reality, it is necessary for them to sense the culture through learning materials. Five norms are suggested to design teaching materials: individual and their way of life; people and society in general; history; political and economic institutions; art, music, literature, and other major achievements.

Designing Culture-based Classroom Activities. Teachers should design culture-based classroom activities, such as task-fulfilled activities, by raising questions related to the text from cultural angles, or by asking learners to make a comparison between the two cultures.

Designing Culture-based work assignments. With target-cultured language inputs, learners can produce cross-cultural language outputs.

Designing diverse methods of test. As we bring culture elements into language learning, new contents should be added to test. The method of test may present itself in the form of written work: quiz, final examination, term paper, investigating report and research project, among which the latter two items can be finished either individually or cooperatively. I t can also present itself orally: reciting excellent passages of a text; role-playing; giving speeches and making presentations; group-discussions or group arguments.

Summary

The first language acquisition is human beings' capacity and goes hand in hand with their cultural acquisition. And environment also plays a vital role in the acquisition process. In the process of second language teaching, teachers should try to create a second culture environment to help students improve their target language.

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