

Original Research Article

On Cross-Cultural Communicative Competence in College English Teaching

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Abstract: It is an important part of improving college students' comprehensive quality to cultivate cross-cultural communicative competence and it should be prioritized in college English teaching. Only with communicative competence can students effectively communicate and convey messages with others in English. This paper introduces cross-cultural communication and points out problems in it among non-English major students. It finally put forward some ways to improve their communicative competence.

Keywords: Comprehensive Quality; Communicative Competence; Cross-Cultural Communication

In the context of fast growth of economic, social and cultural globalization, cross-cultural communication has attracted widespread attention from experts and scholars. The main subjects in the field of cross-cultural communication generally include cross-cultural awareness, cross-cultural sensitiveness and cross-cultural communicative skills^[1]. Cross-cultural sensitiveness is the crucial factor in deciding success or failure of cross-cultural communication.

1. Cross-cultural communication

Cross-cultural communication is defined as communicative activities carried out among people with diversified cultural background. As cross-cultural communicative competence is closely linked with cross-cultural sensitiveness, one has to know well the latter before getting to know the former. Cross-cultural communicative competence rests upon sensitiveness to different cultures and the former has a direct impact on the latter. As a result, there is no doubt about the importance of cross-cultural sensitiveness.

2. Cross-cultural sensitiveness

Sensitiveness, as an interpersonal skill, can be used to gain insight into other people's behaviors and feelings as well as cognitive differences. In 1996, Bennett put forward the conceptual framework of cross-cultural sensitiveness which was defined as an ability to constantly adapt to cultural differences. Those who are highly sensitive in cross-cultural communication tend to have much self esteem when communicating with people from different cultural background. Strong-willed in dealing with setbacks, they can deliberately handle cultural differences in cross-cultural communication. A little knowledge about cross-cultural sensitiveness can promote cultural exchanges and reduce cultural bias.

Scholars from both home and abroad have conducted quite a few researches about cross-cultural communicative competence, but there is little information about cross-cultural sensitiveness. Many scholars are consistent in the view that cross-cultural sensitiveness, as an important part of cross-cultural communicative competence, can be acquired through learning.

3. Problems in cross-cultural communication among non-English majors

English language teaching is intended not only to impart language knowledge but more importantly to help students develop cross-cultural communicative competence in English. One of the purposes of cross-cultural communication is for people to take positive and understanding attitudes towards different cultures. In cross-cultural communication, people gain deeper insight to their own culture after finding it different from other cultures. In this process, merits are drawn on and weak points are overcome. With the progress of reform and opening up, the ability is needed to develop to deal with people with different cultural background. Therefore, college English teaching should place English teaching in the context of cross-cultural communication so as to help students develop cross-cultural communicative competence^[2].

3.1 Ignorance about differences between China and the western countries

College students' cross-cultural communicative competence has a direct impact on their capability in English learning and use. Cultural differences between China and the western countries to a large extent decide whether students can have a good command of English language forms and functions. Students are expected to use language appropriately on different occasions,

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under diversified cultural environment and in accordance with varied requirements, which explains why priority is given to the cultivation of cross-cultural communicative competence. Language is the carrier of culture, so learners can get to know other countries' culture through language learning. Meanwhile, the deeper they know about the connotations of language and culture, the better their ability in language learning becomes. Cross-cultural communicative competence consists of language ability and sociocultural ability. The former refers to the degree to which one learns about words, grammar and phonetic system while the latter includes the ability to deal with affairs, interpersonal skills and the ability to use language.

Due to differences in such fields as religious beliefs, cultural traditions, values and thinking patterns, it is not uncommon that students know little about western cultures. In traditional teaching, teachers focus too much on describing language knowledge and neglect the instruction of cultural background knowledge.

3.2 Insufficient participation in social communication

Evidently, it is not easy for non-English majors to communicate with others in English. English competence is one important factor deciding whether a communicator can derive pleasure. If a person can not understand messages others convey, there is no way to talk about communication, not to mention deriving pleasure from communication. Proficient English learners can make sense of what others talk about with little effort or attention and tend to be more willing to use the language. On the contrary, those with less competent language skills tend to speak less and fix their attention in communication or they will miss the information. Only through participating in cross-cultural communication can one find and embrace cultural differences. The more pleasure a person can derive from communication, the more willing he is to accept cultural differences and participate in communication.

For non-English majors, communicative confidence are closely linked with involvement in communication. More participation can strengthen confidence and help derive more pleasure in communication. If they take an active part in various activities to present themselves and get fun in the process, good results can be achieved^[3].

4. Necessity in integrating cross-cultural communication into college English teaching

If one desires to learn a language well, it is necessary to get to know the culture the language carries. Only through comparing source culture and target culture can one get a better ideas of cultural features and system of target culture^[4]. The improvement of communicative competence is actually the prerequisite and means to further acquire cultural knowledge. In college English teaching, appropriately introducing culture in English-speaking Countries can not only arouse students' interest in language learning but also meet their needs to adjust their knowledge structure.

College students have lots of opportunities to engage in international communication. As cultural mediators, they should not only have a good command of language but also familiarize themselves with their own culture and target culture as well as have an open mind.

Some of them have to acquire cross-cultural communicative skills on campus in order to adapt to future job requirements. These jobs tend to require their employees to know about customs and traditions of target countries.

5. Ways to integrate cross-cultural communication into college English teaching

Cross-cultural communication is closely tied to college English teaching because the latter involves not only imparting language knowledge, but more importantly it focuses on helping students develop the ability to communicate in English. Among the ways in cross-cultural communicative teaching, classroom teaching is the main one. However, due to limited time, it can not meet the needs for students to learn and master English. The following ways can also be used to achieve the goal of cross-cultural communicative teaching so as to help students absorb cultural knowledge from English speaking countries.

First, urge students to read more English materials. Such materials as British or American literary works, English newspapers and magazines can be recommended to them. In reading these materials they can accumulate knowledge about cultural background, arts, social customs or history, which can be applied in communication. Second, organize such activities as English talk shows. When students take part in such activities, they can communicate with each other in English without feeling embarrassed.

Third, organize students to watch English movies without subtitles. Watching English movies is a good way to help students know about target culture. Fourth, encourage students to practice monologue. They can imagine all kinds of situations and do role plays themselves.

6. Conclusion

In cross-cultural communication, non-English major undergraduates tend to identify with western culture, but due to differences in culture and language, they are not confident or active in communication.

Teachers should revolutionize the traditional way of teaching and put more emphasis on improving students' multicultural awareness, creating more authentic situations for cross-cultural communication. Students should take an active part in cross-cultural communication and place cultural learning and language learning on an equal footing.

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