

Cultural Input in English Vocabulary Teaching

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The close relationship between the English words and culture is analyzed in this article. Only by understanding the hidden cultural meanings in the English words, can college students truly have a good command of them and can their communicative ability be improved.

Keywords: cultural background, implied meaning, communicative competence

Introduction

It is now an era of global cross-cultural communication. With the acceleration of the process of global economic integration, the opportunities of China's communication with foreign countries have greatly increased in the process of its integration with the world. It is an important task for education to train talents with cross-cultural communication ability. Cross-cultural communication needs two kinds of abilities, namely, language ability and cultural understanding ability, which we usually call language ability and cultural ability. It is well known that we cannot communicate without language ability, but without understanding the foreign culture, we cannot correctly understand and use foreign languages, and we cannot carry out proper communication. For a long time, foreign language teaching in China has mainly focused on the imparting of language knowledge and the training of language skills. As a result, most students are unable to communicate effectively with foreigners. One of the root causes lies in the ignorance of the cultural background knowledge behind the forms of foreign languages. Students are unable to use their language knowledge properly and effectively. In fact, students expect teachers to impart their language knowledge as well as their related cultural knowledge. Cultural learning makes language learning more active and can free students from the simple study of grammar and vocabulary. Therefore, culture teaching should become one of the emphases of college foreign language teaching.

The Relationship Between Culture and Language

Language is not only an integral part of culture, but also the carrier of the whole culture. Vocabulary, sentence structure, discourse structure, and text structure of language are all tools to carry cultural information and reflect the cultural life of human society. It is precisely because of language that a nation's culture can be preserved. On the other hand, the emergence, development, and evolution of language are carried out in a certain cultural background. Language directly reflects the reality of a culture. As a special part of culture, language everywhere reflects the cultural color of a nation, reflecting the regional characteristics, economic development, local customs, and social customs. In other words, the relationship between language and culture is inseparable, just like the two sides of a copper coin. Language contains a nation's rich cultural value and its unique cultural

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significance. Therefore, the use of language is always showing the cultural characteristics. Vocabulary is one of the three elements of language and the pillar of language. Language is the carrier of culture, so vocabulary also plays an important role in transmitting culture. People communicate with each other through language. Due to differences in historical background, religious belief, way of thinking, and values, different ethnic groups have differences in language and culture. Language without culture does not exist, and vocabulary without culture is meaningless. Therefore, when learning a language, we must learn the cultural background behind it. Otherwise we will not grasp the soul of the language, and we will not be able to improve our communicative ability through language learning.

In recent years, our college foreign language teachers pay less and less attention to vocabulary teaching. They think that students can grasp the meaning of words only through dictionaries. But the fact is that students only memorize the corresponding Chinese meaning in the dictionary, and only copy it by rote when they want to use it in reading comprehension, translation, or writing. This kind of superficial vocabulary learning even fails to understand the most basic meaning of words, let alone its cultural meaning.

The meaning of words is generally divided into conceptual meaning and implied meaning. The conceptual meaning is the literal meaning of the word itself, while the implied meaning is the meaning with communicative function beyond the conceptual meaning. For example, the concept of head refers to the top of a person's body. It can also be the head of stairs or the head of company. Due to the differences between Chinese and English, it is very rare for Chinese and English words to be exactly equivalent.

Different Cultures With Same Meanings

A large number of English words have corresponding words in Chinese, and there are also many striking similarities in their metaphorical usage. For example, both use sheep metaphorically to mean meek, use steel metaphorically to mean strong, use fox metaphorically to mean cunning, etc. But in "Your wife is a fox", in Western culture, fox means a woman is beautiful and lovely, and it is a word of praise for women. But in Chinese culture, if you use fox to describe a woman, it represents "coquettish" and has a derogatory meaning.

The English words "face", losing face and saving face have a lot in common in Chinese. Heart-breaking can also be found in Chinese "shang xin" etc. This phenomenon of linguistic cultural overlap can be fully explained from the perspective of today's cognitive science. Because the common sense of human physiological function and cognitive structure have their interconnection, and both the external environment that human beings rely on for survival and even the whole human cultural background have a variety of consensus, so that the English and Chinese languages in different cultural backgrounds, sometimes adopt the same ontology and metaphorical body, and even have the same cultural connotation. For example, in English and Chinese, "fox" not only has the same conceptual meaning, but also the implied meaning can express the meaning of "cunning".

The leader or person in charge of an organization or group can be referred to as the English term "head" or the Chinese word "tou". Similarly, both the English word "heart" and its Chinese equivalent "xinzang" can denote the crucial and central part of an organization or group. Additionally, the accomplishments achieved through diligent efforts can be expressed using either the English term "fruit" or its Chinese counterpart "guoshi".

Different Cultures With Different Meanings

Because of the differences in history, geography, lifestyle, customs, and habits, the Chinese and the British and Americans have different understandings and opinions on the same thing. For example, propaganda, in

Chinese, means positive educational dissemination (commendatory), while in English, it means spreading exaggerated or false information (derogatory). For ambition, Chinese translation is “yexinbobo” (negative), while English translation is “xiongxinzhuangzhi” (positive). If you do not pay attention to the hidden meaning of these words, it may cause the misunderstanding of “the listener’s intention” in the communication.

In vocabulary teaching, we should consciously incorporate phrases with knowledge of different cultural backgrounds. Otherwise, all kinds of jokes will be made. For example, in talking you are really something, Chinese translation is “niu”, but students translate it as “You’re a real thing”. The cow is a symbol of hard work in Chinese culture. In ancient times, there was the application of using cows to pull plows to prepare the land, and later people knew that the strength of cows was huge, and there were various applications. The Chinese word for bragging is “talk horse” and the English word for “to cast pearls before swine”. Cattles are known for their stupid loyalty, and people often call those who are not wise and ignoble “stupid cows” or “feed cows”. Cattles have four sacs; after eating food they can ruminate, eat a lot of food; people sneer at people who eat a lot of food as “niu du”, and call people who are good at drinking “niu yin”, while its correct translation is “drink like a fish”. There is also an English sentence written by a student: John becomes a night cat every time the examination is coming. However, this is not a good way to learn. A night cat should be changed to a night owl. Although the owl in Chinese culture represents death, darkness, and mystery, but in Western mainstream culture, it has a very different view of him. Owls are not only nocturnal animals in the West, but also a symbol of wisdom. In English, there is a saying “as wise as owl”, which is the best explanation. There is a lion in the path; lion is equivalent to “tiger” in Chinese. When “shepherds quarrel, the wolf has a winning game”; Chinese translation is “a snipe and a clam locked in combat, the fisherman wins”. In “spend money like water”, water is equivalent to “dirt” in Chinese.

Different Cultures With Different Literary Allusions

Siren’s call refers to a group of beautiful sirens in Greek mythology, who are half human and half demon, with a human head and a fish body (or a bird head and even similar to a mermaid) with a heavenly singing voice, which makes the past sailors listen to be lost. The ship hit the rocks and sank. According to Homer, only Odysseus survived. To deal with the Sirens, he took careful precautions. Before the ship could reach the place where the song could be heard, Odysseus had him tied to the mast and ordered his men to plug their ears with wax. When his ship passed, the eldest of the three sisters threw herself into the sea. Now, Siren call refers to an appeal that is hard to resist but that, if heeded, will lead to a bad result.

Many words and phrases in English are related to Greek mythology and Christianity, such as “turn the other’s cheek, Good Samaritan”; “Rob Peter to Pay Paul”; and so on. If students are taught the relevant allusions when they learn the vocabulary, they will be more interested and remember it better.

Integrating Culture Teaching Into Language Learning

The quality of teachers themselves plays a crucial role in cultural teaching. Teachers should expand the quality and quantity of exposure to foreign culture, try their best to participate in relevant cultural teaching ability training, strengthen their cross-cultural communication ability, introduce Western culture while making a comparison between Chinese and Western cultures, guide students to overcome the stereotype and prejudice of foreign culture, and cultivate students’ tolerance to foreign cultural phenomena, to enable learners to have cross-cultural awareness and understanding, and to achieve the interaction between the mother tongue culture and the

second culture. On the one hand, it is helpful to cultivate learners' learning skills and on the other hand, it is helpful to enhance learners' sensitivity to target language culture. At present, the teaching materials in use pay more attention to the introduction of the cultural background of the target language. Teachers can further deepen and expand the relevant cultures involved in the text based on the teaching materials. They should achieve that "where language knowledge is spoken, cultural knowledge will be interpreted". At the same time, we can use foreign original teaching materials with better quality as a supplement. In addition to the compulsory intensive reading and listening classes, English and American profile, European and American culture, and cultural anthropology can also be set up.

Conclusion

To sum up, language without cultural background does not exist. Therefore, for college English students, in order to learn English well, it is necessary to convey the cultural meaning behind words to students. Teachers need to constantly collect and summarize them in daily teaching, not just limit teaching to the conceptual meaning of words, but also gradually penetrate and input their cultural meanings. We can organize classroom activities, role play, interviews and other activities under various cultural backgrounds, so that they can use the language appropriately according to the specific social and cultural background, read Chinese and foreign classics, and enjoy the original movies and other ways to subtly let them understand the cultural significance of words. In this way, students' enthusiasm can be stimulated, their language communication ability can be promoted, and learning efficiency can be really improved.

References

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