

## Cross-Cultural Competence Cultivation in English Reading Teaching

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Received 6 November 2014; accepted 15 February 2015

Published online 26 March 2015

### Abstract

With the rapid development of science and technology, a variety of modern communication, transportation, and the pattern of global economic integration, cross-cultural exchange is becoming increasingly important and more frequently than before. Successful intercultural communication requires students not only with language skills, but also intercultural competence. Reading as one of the essential social-cultural skills helps people to live and develop in modern society. The purpose of foreign language teaching is to train students to master the practical application of the target language ability, so how to develop students' cross-cultural competence in English reading class is essential.

**Key word:** Intercultural communication; Reading; Cross-cultural competence

Chen, Y. H., & Gao, X. (2015). Cross-Cultural Competence Cultivation in English Reading Teaching. *Cross-Cultural Communication*, 11(3), 84-87. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/ecc/article/view/6605> DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/6605>

### INTRODUCTION

It seems that many people are considering cultivating students' cross-cultural communicative competence as one of the ultimate goals of foreign language teaching since reading is regarded as one of the most important skills in college English teaching. However, the traditional

teaching pedagogy has dominated China's foreign language teaching for a long time. Under the influence of traditional teaching pedagogy, teachers pay more attention to grammar and sentence analysis in reading teaching but ignore the use of the language in real situations and the culture hidden inside the text, which finally results in the inefficiency of Chinese college English reading teaching. Although it is generally accepted that language teaching should not only focus on language form but also attaches importance to social rules and pragmatic rules of the language. In fact, students' cross-cultural communication ability cultivation in reading teaching in middle school is seldom concerned. Therefore, students may fail in formal cross-culture communication occasion for lack of practical experience in spite of the fact that they have accepted formal English education for many years. The purpose of foreign language teaching is to cultivate students' ability to use the target language in real communication, so how to cultivate students' cross-cultural communication competence in the reading class is important.

### 1. ENGLISH READING AND CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

With the arrival of the information age and globalization, English teaching has entered the era of cross-cultural communication. Cross-cultural communicative competence has become the important training goal in English teaching. Cross-cultural Communication, or Intercultural Communication, refers to the Communication between people of different languages and culture backgrounds. In actual teaching, teachers train students' cross-cultural communicative competence through oral English teaching. However the purpose of cross-cultural communication is not only for effective communication but also for a full understanding of their culture. Communication involves in oral speech and reading comprehension. Reading is not a one-way and passively

accepting information process. It is a highly active and creative behavior. It is the process readers screening, classifying and interpreting knowledge according to what they have got. It is the interaction between the reader and the text. Reading ability is the comprehensive expression of vocabulary, language structure, cultural background knowledge and reading speed. In the process of reading comprehension, readers have to use their cultural background knowledge to fill the blank and to join the context so as to effectively understand the connotation of the article. From the above, it is clear that cross-cultural communication can be seen in English reading. It happens each time the reader begins to read.

But nowadays in China, English reading teaching emphasizes more on the interpretation of language, such as vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure analysis, while the non-language information (cross-cultural consciousness, cultural background) is relatively in lack. In English reading, cultural differences become a high-level obstacle restricting second language learners' reading speed and comprehension for that the sender and the receiver of the information come from different cultural background. So the teacher should understand the contrast value between Chinese culture and Western culture on language level and master the English reading teaching strategies and techniques "In reading class, the teacher should cultivate cross-cultural awareness.

## 2. THE OBSTACLES IN ENGLISH READING COMPREHENSION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF CROSS-CULTURE

Environment, history, economic and other factors cause the cultural difference between different countries. These differences may lead to cross-cultural confusion. Language is the carrier of culture, while culture is the soil of language. In order to cope with the exam, most students only focus on words and grammar in the reality of foreign language learning but ignore the connotation behind the language. However, many students can't make sense of the reading comprehension for lack of the cultural background knowledge. They fail in doing reading exercises but still don't know the reason. If students understand relevant cultural background of the vocabulary, phrases, sentences and discourse while using reading skills, then they can effectively improve their ability in reading comprehension. In the following part, this paper will discuss the obstacles in English reading from the perspective of cross-culture in the below 3 levels: the vocabulary level, the idiom level and sentence and discourse structure level.

### 2.1 In Vocabulary Level

Vocabulary, as the basic language structure and the main pillar of the language system, must be the most prominent and widely reflection of the cultural differences.

Grammar barriers in vocabulary level are mainly reflected in denotation and connotation. Denotation direct responses to the objective world and won't change in spite of man's will and emotion. Each culture has words that describe its unique local conditions and customs. These words in other culture systems generally lack of peer denotation object, such as Montage, the Rouble, Ballet, Hostel, etc., thus they are unfamiliar to us. Connotation of words is attached to the subjective sense of language sense, expressing people's emotion and attitude, referring to the actual communication of communicative value and reflecting the social cultural psychology, attitudes, and emotional color. The same words may have different cultural implications in different cultures. Some words is good in western culture, but really derogatory in Chinese culture, such as "farmers" in Chinese meaning the person who engages in the field of physical labor without a derogatory sense while in English "peasant" with a derogatory sense, referring to "not bred, lowly, rude people". Both English and Chinese have the concept of "dragon". The metaphors of Chinese "dragon" are the emperor of China and the dragon represents "supreme, noble"; but in English, it represents "evil", eg: "You old dragon!" Is a derogatory term called "old things, old devil".

### 2.2 In Idiom Level

The English language abounds in idioms like any other highly developed tongue. Idioms have grown out of the linguistic practice of the people ever since the language came into being. They consist of set phrases and short sentences, which are peculiar to the language in question and steeped in the national and regional cultural and ideas, thus being colorful, forcible and thought-provoking. Strictly speaking, idioms are expressions that are not readily understandable from their literal meanings of individual constituents, for example, *fly off the handle* (being excessively angry) and *put up with* (tolerate). In a broad sense, idioms may include colloquialisms, catchphrases, slang expressions, proverbs, etc..

Some Idioms may contain several means so its meaning depends on the context. We should correctly understand the meaning for that they all contain rich cultural information with distinct geographical and ethnic color, eg: *all at sea* (blankly), *in low water* (stranding, extended as lack of money), *on the rocks* (strike a reef, extended as encountering failure). These idioms are with geographical background related to the sea for that the Great Britain is a county made up of England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. Many idioms descript life for sailing and fishing. From these it can be seen that the range of idioms is wide. It requires students to observe, accumulate and expand the reading quantity so as to increase their corpus.

### 2.3 In Sentence and Discourse Structure Level

Good control of English sentences and discourse structure will benefit the promotion of reading speed. Chinese emphasizes comprehensive thinking while the western people concentrate on analysis. Chinese express themselves euphemistic while the western people are more direct. Chinese verb has only one prototype form, and doesn't change with person, tense and number; but verb forms in English include infinitive, participle structure, etc.. It is clear that English verbs are more complex and Chinese verbs are relatively easy. The Chinese people pay attention to parataxis which regards a complete meaning as a sentence, while English speaking people focus on parataxis. In their opinion, as long as the sentence structure is intact, there is a sentence. All these lead English discourse to be a "deductive type" structure that all sentences demonstrate and result in the topic sentence.

## 3. CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE CULTIVATION IN READING TEACHING

Learner can feel alienation in the process of learning a second language, alienation from people in their home culture, the target culture, and from themselves. These situations also occur while students are doing reading exercises. In teaching an "alien" language, teachers should be sensitive to the fragile of students by using techniques that promote cultural understanding. Teachers should endeavor to help the student to turn such experience in reading into one of increased cultural and awareness. They can also perceive cultural connotations by means of role-play.

### 3.1 Cross-Cultural Awareness Cultivation Through Cultural Import

First of all, teachers should undertake effective culture introduction. The introduction can be chosen according to the text in order to let the student to have a deeper understanding of the cross-cultural differences. Culture introduction can be a variety of forms. Teachers chose the form according to students' needs and the situations they encounter. In this way, students can learn language as well as different culture. Through comparing the communication differences between China and the west, students can have a better understanding of the major differences in social relationship. Thus, in the process of teaching, teachers should make the necessary explanation to the relevant cultural background and comparing them to the current cultural background so as to improve their intercultural communicative competence.

### 3.2 Perceiving Cultural Connotations By Means of Role-Play

Chinese students all lack of the English-speaking environment to practice what they have learned in English

class. Many people agree that a natural setting of situation may provide the best environment needed. Teachers can dig the situation found in the English reading and let the students practice. Like artificially culture environment in role-play can let the student carry on the specific language practice and develop the ability to solve problems in this environment. Students act the role-play according to some materials or real communication scene experience so as to experience the difficulties and problems of intercultural communication. Donahue and Parsons examined the use of role-play in English Class as a means of helping students to overcome cultural "fatigue"; role-play promotes the process of cross-cultural dialog while at the same time it provides opportunities for oral communication.

Role-play can be a short dialogue. For example, how do two people greet, how to send an invitation, how to say goodbye etc.. It can also be a little short play. While acting in the play, students' cooperation spirit and their ability in cross-cultural communication will be gradually enhanced. After the performance, Teacher organize students to discuss and finally guide the student to clearly recognize that how to use English to communicate in the different social backgrounds, identity and age.

## CONCLUSION

Culture and language are symbiotic and blended. Several aspects of culture knowledge are involved in English Reading Teaching, such as social status, state system, social customs, thinking mode etc.. The learning of social and cultural in the language is very important for that foreign language learning is also culture learning and those who don't understand its culture can't understand its language, either. Culture is all-inclusive, the learning of culture should not be confined inside the classroom. In order to train students' cross-cultural communication competence, English reading teaching should change the traditional teaching methods to make students as the center and teachers as the guide. Teacher should motivate students to collect materials and consciously absorb the nutrition of Chinese and western culture. Teachers should have the ability to inspire students' cross-cultural awareness in the process of reading teaching, to arouse the enthusiasm of students in English reading learning, to effectively organize the student-centered English reading teaching and to improve students' humanistic quality and English intercultural communication competence.

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