

Prerequisites of Culture Teaching in CET

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Abstract

The rapid development in communication technology and the economic globalization have made intercultural communication of different countries very common today. Therefore, the intercultural communication has become the thing that we have to face in daily life. So we should pay more attention to intercultural education. And it will naturally become a unavoidable issue in each countries' cultural education. Before incorporating cultural knowledge, college teachers should prepare his/her students for some prerequisites. In this thesis, the author will make a short discussion about how college English teachers help students to acquire the prerequisites.

Keywords

prerequisites; culture teaching; college English teaching.

1. Helping Students to Foster Proper Motivation

In college English teaching, learners are motivated by different objectives to learn English. Some learners come to English class because they need English immediately for study or work, or because they learn it since they love Anglo American culture. Others may be more reluctant, but know they are likely to need English in the future. Yet others are obliged to attend English class, but have no desire to learn English. In a word, different learners have different motivations to learn English. During the course of culture teaching, teachers should consider motivation essential and indispensable for successful language learning.

1.1 Notion of motivation

Motivation refers to the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning plus favorable attitudes towards learning the language. Motivation itself is a complex construct, as Gardner and Lambert (1959) remark: "motivation involves four aspects, a goal, effortful behavior, a desire to attain the goal and favorable attitudes towards the activity in question and the motivation to learn a second language is controlled by his attitudes towards the other group in particular and by his orientation to the learning task itself".

1.2 Types of motivation

There are two kinds of motivations: one is integrative motivation, the other is instrumental motivation.

Integrative motivation refers to the motivation of the persons whose intention is to become a part of the target culture as well as speaking the target language, which is characterized by those who learn the second language in order to identify themselves with the second language speaking group and ultimately join it, and instrumental motivation refers to the motivation of the persons whose intention is to learn the language for serving a purpose, such as getting a job, with no wish to mix socially with speakers of the language. Gardner later has a modified definition:

Integrative motivation is defined as that which indicates an interest in learning the language in order to meet and communicate with members of the second language community. Instrumental motivation refers to that which stresses the pragmatic aspects of learning the second language, without any particular interest in communicating with the second language community.

1.3 Ways of fostering students' proper motivation

To arouse students' interest in learning English and foster their proper motivation, teachers should make students set up a positive attitude to learning English.

It is widely believed that attitudes are directly related to motivation, which in turn is directly related to second language learning. In other words, attitudes should be viewed as motivational supports. When students' attitude to learning is positive, their interest in learning English is aroused and their proper motivation is increased.

2. Helping Students to Rid of Ethnocentrism

2.1 Notion of ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism is the negative attitudes towards the cultural differences contrasting to ethno-relativism. Ethnocentrism refers to the assumption that the worldview of one's own culture is central to all reality. (Bennett, 1984) That means ethnocentric persons may use the standard of their own values to explain or to judge the whole world. Just as a photographer uses a green or yellow filter when taking pictures, many people also wear "cultural filters" to see the world around them.

Ethnocentrism is one of such filters which bias people's judgment of cultural difference by seeing through their culture values.

Although ethnocentrism isn't a good thing, it is very likely that everyone has this bias more or less, for we are all brought up in a particular culture and thus develop it unconsciously in varying degrees.

2.2 Negative effect on intercultural communication

Ethnocentrism may cause us to think narrowly so that the following problems may occur in the process of intercultural communication. First, one may tend to have defensive or superior feeling about his/her own culture. Second, one may develop stereotyped generalizations about other people without noticing the individual differences. For instance, a person with an ethnocentric attitude may think all Americans are outgoing and aggressive or think all Chinese are reserved and indirect. Third, ethnocentrism will also make one feel his own culture as normal and other cultures are unbelievably strange. (Stewart&Buoyant, 1991) In this way, excessive ethnocentrism would make one reject others' points of view and have restrictive and limited thoughts. Furthermore, ethnocentrism would also cause consequent affective responses like discrimination or prejudice against people whose culture norms are different from one's own.

2.3 Ways of ridding of ethnocentrism

Simply speaking, in order to avoid or rid of ethnocentrism, one should take an ethnorelative attitude towards different cultures.

Ethnorelativism concerns the attitudes of the evaluation about cultural differences. It indicates that "cultures can only be understood relative to one another, there is no absolute standard of rightness or goodness that can be applied to cultural behavior; cultural difference is neither good nor bad; it is just different". (Buoyant, 1984) People with an ethnorelative mentality will understand that there is certain kind of reason that some culture should behave in this way or that and they do not evaluate cultural differences only by their own culture values. They accept the fact that difference is inevitable and would not be bothered by it so much. In a word, ethnorelativism can help students make intercultural communication which is full of differences an enjoyment rather than a painful experience. Furthermore, it can help students to avoid or rid of ethnocentrism.

Yet to accept differences in cultures is only the initial step to avoid ethnocentrism. One also needs to learn to respect and appreciate cultural differences in various ways. There can be unlimited levels of cultural differences. For the convenience of discussion here the author would like to present two kinds of cultural differences that one should respect in intercultural communication. One is behavioral differences and the other is cultural value differences.

Behavior differences

Behavior differences refer to superficial and manifestive differences such as verbal and nonverbal language and other forms of communication. As for verbal communication, apart from the differences in language between different cultures, the communication style is obviously different between cultures. For example, some cultures prefer linear reasoning to circular ones, or inductive arguments to deductive ones, or explicit ways of expressing feelings to implicit ways of expressing feelings, etc. As for nonverbal language, the same nonverbal language may express meanings quite differently in different cultures. For example, the action "nodding" expresses "yes" or "agreement" in most of the countries, while in some African countries, the action refers to "no" or "disagreement" meaning.

Cultural Value differences

A value may be defined as "an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or existence is personally or socially preferable to another". (Rokeach, 1973) That is to say, a value dictates what one ought to do or ought not to do. It is the basis on which we choose our way of acting and making our decisions. A value can be individual and cultural. Culture values are characteristic to one culture and are the guiding force for the behaviors of that culture.

From the discussion above we can see that both behavior differences and cultural value differences are the most important variables in the process of intercultural communication (Sitaram, K. S.&Haapanen, L.W., 1979), so in culture teaching, teachers should help students to form an ethnocentric attitude towards these two kinds of differences to avoid an ethnocentric attitude towards other cultures.

3. Helping Students to Build up Intercultural Sensitivity

Sensitivity is very important in an intercultural communication. To succeed in communicating with a culturally different person we have to be sensitive to a variety of factors, such as the situation we are placed in, the person we are communicating with, the possible consequence or response the communication may generate, etc.

This kind of sensitivity has been named by scholars as intercultural sensitivity or open-mindedness. (ChenShen, 1998) Whatever the name is, it refers to individual's concern about something besides him/herself. To build up students' intercultural sensitivity, these ways are suggested:

Pay attention to the situational demands. It needs us to think about such questions like what kind of role we should perform, what kind of communication would suit it and so forth. The communicator must try to be flexible according to the new context in order to produce appropriate responses to various situations. Scholars have identified that everyone has multi-selves. (Hart, Carlson&Eadie, 1980) Here self is something like the role the society demands from us. Being sensitive is to be able to choose the role which is recognizable and acceptable by a certain intercultural communication context.

Acknowledge the other person's different experience, have a willingness to participate in that experience and behave in ways appropriate to it. This way leads to understanding and consideration toward others, and consequently a better relationship between the culturally different inter-actants. It is sometimes difficult to be considerate and to understand because one has to be selfless or one may even disagree or have no good feelings towards the others' experience. However, when one is really concerned for the person's feelings and reactions, he or she would find it rewarding since understanding and concern is mutual. (Buoyant, 1979)

Don't rush to a judgment or evaluation based on one's own perspective. Communicators must learn to listen more and judge less, and not be eager to jump to a conclusion without support of sufficient information. With this kind of sensitivity, the person communicated with may feel more satisfied for having been patiently treated and listened to. This way of building up sensitivity surely leaves the

relationship between the persons involved in the communication at a higher level of satisfaction in spite of differences.

4. Helping Students to Develop Empathy&Adaptation

As one of the important factors in improving ICC, empathy is needed to develop so that we can better know and adjust to the other people. Many researchers in the area of interpersonal and intercultural competence believe that our success as communicators depends, to a large extent, on our "skill at establishing and maintaining desired identities for both self and others".

As to the reasons of developing empathy, there are two. First, we are facing the fact that however similar we may appear to be, there is something distinctive and unique about each of us. Second, although we have focused primarily on culture, we also are concerned with the "interpersonal aspects" of intercultural communication. Perhaps the interpersonal dimension of communication is most evident in the area of empathy.

There are a few characteristics that can impede empathy. (1) Perhaps the most common of all barriers to empathy is a constant self-focus. It is difficult to gather information about other persons. (2) Stereotyped notions concerning gender, race, and culture also serve as potential stumbling blocks to empathy. (3) The lack of interest in other people's feeling and ideas will not lead to empathy. (4) An attitude of superiority, which produces defensive behavior, still cannot develop empathy. (5) A lack of motivation is one of the hindrances to develop empathy, (Samovar, Porter&Stefani, 2000)

To make intercultural communication successful, we must learn to go beyond personal boundaries and try to learn about the experiences of people who are not part of our daily lives. We must realize that we live in an interconnected world, and we must therefore be motivated to understand everyone---regardless of how much we are separated from them by either distance or culture. In the foreign language teaching, first of all, students should pay attention to the spontaneous emotional expressions of others, because high level of attention is strenuous when applied to empathy, and put themselves into the real situation. By doing so, the problems associated with concentration can be overcome, therefore, students should be more accurate in reading others' emotional state, besides, empathy can be cultivated only if students become sensitive to the values and customs of the culture with which the students are interacting. Furthermore, empathy can be increased if the communicator resists the tendency to interpret the other's verbal and nonverbal actions from their own culture's orientation.

5. Helping Students to Appreciate Their Native Culture

To study a foreign language is an action of cross-culture between mother tongue and target language, and between native culture and target culture. The principal purpose of language teaching is to train students' communicative competence.

Although foreign language teaching is concerned with target language, the native culture can not be largely neglected. Intercultural communication is not exclusively a single activity, so the awareness of not only other cultures but also of one's own culture can help mediate some of the problems of intercultural communication.

To help students appreciate their native culture, an ethnorelative attitude to the native language and culture is also very important. When students hold an ethnorelative attitude to all the cultures, they regard every cultural phenomenon to be normal and every culture to be equal. They will realize that our native culture is not inferior to any other culture.

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