

Methods to Cultivate Students' Intercultural Perception in the Course of Taishan Cultural Communication with the World

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Abstract

Taishan Cultural Communication with the World is a course for the English major junior students to know how Taishan Culture was transmitted to the world from the ancient times up to now. For a semester, students had read selected articles from 1665 to 2018. In order to evaluate whether students had grasped the basic expressions of Taishan Culture or not, they were asked to translate and write paper on their interested topics in English. As for the teacher, the essential point is to cultivate students' intercultural perceptive abilities so as to understand and express Taishan culture deeply and comprehensively, at the same time, to understand why the authors would express in their ways in the background of intercultural communication.

Keywords

Taishan Culture, Intercultural Perception, Methods

1. Theoretical Basis

The study of applying intercultural communication ability into teaching requires much attention. And researchers are keen on how to improve students' abilities in real intercultural environment when meeting with people with various cultural backgrounds. As to the abilities needed to form, Sun (2016) proposes that "from the angle of constituent, elements of the core connotation of intercultural abilities are: respect the diversity of world culture, intercultural empathy and critical cultural awareness; master basic knowledge of cross-cultural research theory and analysis method; be familiar with the language representing the history and present situation of understanding the basic characteristics and similarities and differences between the Chinese and foreign culture; interpret and evaluate on the text

and products of different cultures; communicate appropriately and effectively in intercultural environment; help people with different language and culture background for effective intercultural communication”. Furthermore, as to the course to cultivate students’ abilities in intercultural background, Wen (2022) holds that “the course on intercultural communication is an academic course for juniors, which should have rich content for moral education and play a more important role in fostering integrity and promoting rounded development of students”.

The above introduction forms theoretical basis that in certain cultural courses, it is necessary to foster students’ abilities in intercultural communication, to combine culture with language and form the communication of co-orientation, as well as the perspectives. According to literature review from CNKI, scholars have conducted research in areas of intercultural studies or application of theories into practice. Up to now there are 7348 articles based on theoretical intercultural communication, 4951 are with the title Intercultural Communication, 3159 are application into English teaching, but none is in international Taishan cultural communication course. Initially and locally, Taishan university carried out the research to combine intercultural communication with Taishan culture and English teaching.

The following is to take “Course of Taishan Cultural Communication with the World” for example. Under the global environment, and with the development of closely-joint communication among people from different cultural backgrounds, Taishan Culture is getting more and more attention from people at home and abroad, and English majored students at the foot of Taishan are especially required more professional knowledge and ability to broaden their view and master certain skills in transmitting Taishan Culture. Hence our university decided to offer a course “Taishan Cultural Communication with the World”.

2. Course Introduction

The course Taishan Cultural Communication with the World is for the junior students in the English major to know how Taishan Culture was transmitted to the world from the ancient times up to now via the media of articles, photos, and books etc. The purpose of the course is to foster students’ abilities in reading literary articles, forming critical thinking, and cultivating their intercultural perception of retrospectively the influences of Taishan Culture. The basic requirement for the students is to express the corresponding contents associated with Taishan culture such as historical status, beliefs, plants and even geology etc., in English, the language in which they majored.

For a semester, students had read selected articles from 1665 to 2018, with the writers from Germany, France, Britain, USA, the Netherlands etc. and their careers from writers, sinologists, travelers, scientists and painters and so on. One of the ways to evaluate if the students had grasped the basic expressions of Taishan Culture or not is via their translations and explanatory thesis in English. For the teacher, the most frequently asked questions are:

- 1) Did the students pay attention to the intercultural and linguistic aspects?

What are they?

2) What have been mistranslated? And why?

3) How to cultivate students' perceptive abilities to express clearly and efficiently in typical English?

3. Answers to and Analysis of the Questions Considered

As to the first question, it is easy to see that students are more or less cautious to the intercultural and linguistic points met in the articles, such as the comparison of Wuzibei (the tablet without inscriptions) to obelisk (Williamson, 1884) and later to Cleopatra's Needle (a famous obelisk named after Cleopatra; Baker, 1925) indicating the similar function of honor, grandness, glory of almighty power. Generally speaking, the typical terms and phrases are usually containing the intercultural connotation as the writers would like to make them easier to understand in their corresponding culture. The awareness to these phenomena is not hard to notice. The western interpretation of terms with certain cultural background should be noticed too. Take the "return of the souls" (魂归) for example. Joseph Edkins stated in 1889, "it is said that among the Ohwan people the souls of the dead go to the red mountain several thousand li to the north-west of Liau-tuog, just as the souls of the dead go to T'ai-shan" (Edkins, 1889). Here the commonly believed "souls of the dead go to T'ai-shan" and "souls of the dead go to the red mountain" for the Ohwan people have similar belief background. Furthermore, Rolf Stein talked about the same question, saying that "Mais elle n'est pas la seule. Pour la dynastie des Leao, la Montagne Noire était considérée de la même façon, comme la Montagne Rouge l'avait été par les Wou-houan" (Stein, 1943). So this phenomenon of "the return of souls" is similar in different cultural backgrounds, and needs more attention. More examples such as comparing Chinese Goddess-Tai shan Nai Nai to Hannah of old (Elterich, 1894) is based on their similar great compassion; comparing T'aishan to Jerusalem (Bynner, 1919); comparing the holy mountain to Chinese Mecca (1900); the holy land of China being the Mecca of devout pilgrims (1921); regarding Shi Huangdi as Chinese Napoleon hoping he has the power to burn all the treaties on China (Ford, 1919); and the Gods of Thunder with beaks and claws of birds may modelling upon the likeness of the Hindu gods Garuda (Baker, 1925) and so on so forth can be found elsewhere in different articles.

Some hinted or hidden points with specific meanings in history at that time are not those should be mistranslated. Take "Wudaifu Song" (五大夫松) for example. This term had been attached historical information background of official rank (the fifth Daifu) in Qin Dynasty, which was regarded as an official title but not the so-called doctor as in traditional dynasties, Chinese doctors were called Daifu. So Daifu (nowadays also called Dafu, 大夫) meant differently in different times. Improper translations such as "commit suicide" to express She Shen (舍身, a willingly sacrifice of oneself for the sake of saving their parents to realize filial piety in ancient times) usually occur in students' works. When students meet

terms such as Bixia Shengdan (碧霞圣诞), Shigandang (石敢当), Taishan Shen (泰山神), She Shen and so on, they would think of the literal translation first, less attention would be on paraphrases, meanings or historical and cultural backgrounds. Conversely, the authors' corresponding version of typical terms in English can also be found misinterpreted or even wrongly understood, thus intercultural misunderstandings arise. The following are typical examples. **William Edgar Geil (1926)** described Taishan Shigandang (泰山石敢当) as Kan Tang, and regarded him as "a scholar named Kan Tang" although generally Shigandang is regarded as a warrior who protects, and stones from Taishan are named Taishan Shigandang to express the meaning that the stones can take responsibility to ward off evil spirits. Emily Kemp translated Taishan Shigandang into "the stones from Tai Shan accept the responsibility" (Kemp, 1909) which is much closer to the original meaning. Interestingly, Kemp used the word phrase the Conqueror Ch'in Shih-Nuang to refer to Qin Shihuang which easily arouses the intertextuality of William the Conqueror. Hence, this kind of intercultural information should take into teacher's consideration. Furthermore, this moves to the third question, the key topic of this paper.

4. Methods to Cultivate Students' Perceptive Abilities

Now that we have discussed what intercultural information have students met and what have they mistranslated, simultaneously, what have the authors translated and mistranslated with certain cultural background, so how to cultivate students' perceptive abilities to express clearly and efficiently in typical English?

When reading texts in English language, it is a common experience of meeting with culture shock. This is a key word in intercultural communication usually caused by the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols or social contact. However less severely is that this happens in text reading but not a real communication abroad. Therefore, this is easier to deal with than in real communication from the aspect of a course study. Based on "Two views of Cultural Shock" by **R. L. Oxford & R. C. Scarcella (1994)**, certain positive cross-cultural learning experiences had been proposed. And from the positive learning strategies, there are some methods can be drawn from:

Firstly, cultivate the self-awareness of cultural shocks or differences to recognize and to acknowledge that there are cultural differences, which is quite similar to meeting with real cultural shocks abroad. Try to adapt to the new cultural expressive way although it is in text. Being cautious to the cultural differences is always help.

Secondly, cultivate the self-retrospection ability to give oneself a second thought so as to have a clear understanding of both cultural expressions. Try to understand the target language expressions with certain cultural and linguistic indication so as to have a thorough understanding of the expressions. Simultaneously, try to re-think our own culture and the "should-be" expressions. To understand our own culture further and comprehensively.

Thirdly, improve the intercultural competence in reading and translating texts.

This requires a profound and mastery of English language which is the medium of carrying culture. According to L. A. Samovar & R. Porter (2003), language is more than a vehicle of communication, it teaches one a culture's lifestyle, ways of thinking and different patterns of interacting. So English language is not only a language but has patterns of expressing, ways of interacting and culture of a nation etc. A mastery of the language and its culture is of great importance.

Fourthly, develop empathy in both own culture and the target culture. According to L. A. Samovar & R. Porter, empathy is able to see things from the point of view of others so that we can better know and adjust to the other people. And Guoming Chen (1998), "empathic persons know how to show understanding by projecting themselves into their partner's position. This means that to be empathic in intercultural interactions we need to be open-minded in terms of information sharing, to be imaginative in correctly drawing the picture of other's situation, and to show a commitment or strong willingness to understand our culturally different partners in any kind of situation." Thus, when reading or translating Taishan culture in foreign language, it is necessary to think why the author thought in that way and understanding on the author's part would give more easy-to-understand answers so the intercultural abilities can be cultivated.

5. Further Objectives

For teachers:

For an effective international communication with the world, it requires that misunderstandings be minimized or similarities be maximized in the ways message is interpreted. Thus teachers will have to be well-prepared with different aspects of cultural knowledge before class teaching, and lead students in thinking interculturally.

For students:

In order to accomplish better understanding of culture and language, to interpret clearly and effectively Taishan culture, students have to be equipped with abilities of intercultural perception and competence.

Besides, critical thinking and evaluation are usually helpful to cultivate abilities. So further attention should be in this study.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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