JoLaCE

Journal of Language and Cultural Education, 2023, 11(1)
ISSN 1339-4584

sciendo

DOI: 10.2478/jolace-2023-0005

Philosophical inquiry into intercultural communication and the teaching of culture in foreign language teaching

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Abstract

Based upon meaning holism in the philosophy of language, this article discusses issues of intercultural communication and explores the philosophical basis of cultural difference, pointing out that cultural difference does have its necessity, but can be bridged through language exchange and education under the guidance of a holistic view of language. This is so because culture essentially consists of a system of beliefs that a language user has of the world, life and society. Such being the case, this article proposes an independent, systematic and specialised curriculum for the teaching of culture so as to help students enrich their system of cultural beliefs, by virtue of questioning and speculating in an effort to find the rationale for foreign culture beliefs.

Keywords: intercultural communication; meaning holism; system of beliefs; foreign language teaching; the teaching of culture

Introduction

The teaching of culture plays an indispensable part in foreign language teaching, which has long been recognised as a consensus in foreign language education circles. With the growth and expansion of foreign exchanges, issues in intercultural communication have become increasingly prominent. Accordingly, this field is continuously confronted by more fundamental issues of pragmatic failures, religious conflicts, cultural identity challenges and ethnocentrism. The relationship between culture teaching and foreign language teaching is still a significant topic in foreign language teaching research.

Fundamentally, issues in intercultural communication are caused by the fact that language rules are set by the public while meaning is individuated. Thus, humans express or understand individual meanings by public means and individual meanings differ. That's where the essence of linguistic and cultural problems lies. This article intends to discuss discrepancies in intercultural communication and the nature of intercultural communication from the perspective of meaning holism in the philosophy of language. We hope it can provide a theoretical basis for 'intercultural communicative competence' cultivation research and practice in foreign language teaching.

Philosophical basis of cultural difference

Unquestionably, language can be used to express meaning; otherwise it is just a string of noises. For example, 'Hoe is het met du vantag' sounds like noise to a person who does not know Dutch and therefore an appropriate response will not be made (except the response of 'what are you talking about?'). Basically, words are able to express meanings, and words are structured around syntax so as to convey thoughts. If linguistic communication is simply based on communicators' ideal linguistic competence, then problems would not be caused in communication. In this way, the speaker merely needs

to select words with definite meaning from mental lexicon and a meaningful sentence is bound to be produced according to transformational generative grammar (Chomsky, 1965), while the hearer is able to understand the meaning by dividing and decoding the meaningful sentence according to these rules. Therefore, no problem will be posed in cross-linguistic communication. However, this is not the case in real life. Take a common expression from Chinese and its typical equivalence in English as an example. The Chinese expression 'wan can you jiu' (晚餐有酒) can be usually expressed in English as 'There is wine for dinner'. If the meaning of 'wan can' (晚餐) equates with that of 'dinner' and the meaning of 'jiu' (酒) is the same as 'wine', there would be no barriers in intercultural communication. However, things will not always go this way. It becomes difficult and complicated because of 'meaning'. The semantic features of the concept 'dinner' that are represented in Chinese people's brains are different from those of western people, such as the way of cooking, the tools for dining and the dishes. The only thing in common might well be 'the last meal of a day, served in the evening'. This is the case of a specific example, but it holds true for an abstract thought. For instance, Chinese fishermen might say that 'mou sheng jian nan' (谋生艰难), while truck drivers in Britain and America may utter that 'it's hard to make a living'. They share the same meaning that 'it is not easy to get food and clothing through hard work', but there are big differences in living conditions, requirements and ways of earning a living. The same differences exist in a more abstract spirit realm. Is the English word 'God' an accurate expression of 'shen,shang di' (神、上帝) in Chinese? What exactly is the Chinese equivalence of 'ontology' in western philosophy? 'cun zai lun'(存在论), 'cun you lun'(存有论), 'wan you lun'(万有论) or 'shi lun'(是论) in Chinese have been the translations of 'ontology'. The main reason seems to be the fact that the English copula 'be' has conceptual meanings of a trinity. Specifically, it can serve as a copula, an assertion of truth and an expression of existence. However, the Chinese copula 'shi' (是) does not have these properties. If we keep exploring these kinds of questions, we are bound to get a depressing understanding that none of the conceptual meanings that English and Chinese words express are completely equivalent. Thus, it is entirely impossible that there are no barriers in communication between different cultures; huge cultural differences do exist objectively.

It is concluded that the root of differences can be generalised to say that human beings communicate only by using public linguistic means while the concepts expressed are individuated. Being public is one of the prominent features of language. Pronunciations and grammatical rules of language which are shared and abided by humans are explicit and observable. However, semantic concepts are inherent in everyone's mind (brain). Due to individual differences, concepts that individuals possess will certainly differ, this is also the case of different nations. Even if people use the same language, individuals may give different interpretations on concepts which an expression has conveyed, because interpretations rely on knowledge and belief that each individual have. This is exactly what W. V. Quine reflects on in 'semantic holism' (the term 'semantic holism' has variants like 'meaning holism' and 'linguistic holism' that have been used in many more or less closely interrelated ideas) and relevant theories. Meaning holism is a momentous doctrine in the philosophy of language. In terms of one general view, meaning holism is the thesis that the meaning of a linguistic expression depends on its relations to many or all other expressions within the same totality. In this sense, it's not possible fully to explain the nature of any individual part without looking at the whole to which it belongs. It is the idea that linguistic content cannot be distributed among the individual sentence of a language. On this view, the meaning of any individual word or sentence derives from

its role in the language, and words or sentences are not units of meaning bearers, whereas meanings are borne by the whole linguistic system (Quine, 1974, 1986, 1960/2013). The core idea of his theory can be summarised as that the meaning of any sentence is not isolated, but a part of a belief system (also named as 'web of belief'); an individual sentence can only be fully explained or defined in its relation to other sentences in the web of belief. In other words, the meaning of an individual sentence must be consistent with one's whole belief about the world and life. The periphery of web of belief is observation sentence and its core is logical principle. Scientific theory goes between them. To give a simple example, 'John is a bachelor' is an observation sentence. But when it comes to the uttering and understanding of this sentence, the premise is that we believe that 'John is an adult and unmarried'. And this depends on whether we know what adulthood is, what marriage is and even the core logical belief, such as '$\forall_x [M_X \rightarrow B_X]$' (this can be read as "for every entity x, if x is an unmarried man then x is a bachelor, which means 'all unmarried men are bachelors' in natural language"). Generally speaking, the contents that words or sentences contain are far beyond those contents per se. (Wang, 2014).

Quine's theory might lead to a serious consequence that each individual is able to give a completely different interpretation (or at least different interpretation) of the same sentence by virtue of their own web of belief, although a sentence is equally objective for all humans. This in turn serves as the fundamental reason for different viewpoints and disputes. It is true of communication within the same language, and especially true of communication between different languages. It's simply that individuals from the same culture have the same or similar cultural-specific knowledge and belief. For example, can the meaning of 'you shall not kill me' in English be fully interpreted as 'bu sha sheng' (不杀生, literally, it means 'not kill life') in Chinese? It does not work according to Quine's theory, because the interpretation of the meaning of sentences involves the differences in their webs of belief. British and American people possess the belief in God's commandments in western Christian culture, while the Buddhist believers in China hold the belief in equality and reincarnation of all beings and the secular Chinese may only have the belief that those who kill will repay with life. I once saw a butcher with a knife walk towards a pig to be slaughtered as he repeatedly said 'Don't blame me after you are dead. I wouldn't kill you if others didn't eat you'. This is different from the implied belief when westerners go to church to confess. It can be seen that the understanding and interpretation of 'not kill life' are different in various webs of belief, thus the differences in meaning cannot be fully illustrated only from the sentence itself.

If 'bu sha sheng' can be understood literally at least and can be translated between different languages, then sometimes we can't even understand and translate in the literal sense. If the phrase 'ni shen xu' (你肾虚, literally, it means 'you kidney weak') in traditional Chinese medicine is translated as 'your kidney is weak', then there are sharp distinction in meaning between Chinese expression and English expression. On the packaging box of a Chinese patent medicine, 'zi yin bu shen' (滋阴补肾, literally, it means 'nourish yin and reinforce kidney') is translated as 'nurture the negative and compensate the kidney', which will definitely confuse British and American people. The Chinese word 'shen' (肾, kidney) is synonymous with the English word 'kidney' only in the referential meaning of 'kidney' so the expression 'shen xu, bu shen'(肾虚, kidney weak, 补肾, reinforce kidney) can only be understood in the belief system of traditional Chinese medicine. The belief system of traditional Chinese medicine itself needs to be placed in the belief system of traditional Chinese philosophy, such as the unity of nature and man,

yin and yang and five elements, so as to be fully explained. The interpretation of the meaning of a simple sentence involves people's whole knowledge and belief, up to the ultimate world outlook and outlook on life (Liu, 2014).

No wonder Quine put forward further viewpoints, as he put it,

'Two men could be just alike in all their dispositions to verbal behaviour under all possible sensory stimulations, and yet the meanings or ideas expressed in their identically triggered and identically sounded utterances could diverge radically, for the two men, in a wide range of cases' (Quine, 1960/2013, p. 23).

He proposed a thought experiment to illustrate this viewpoint. Imagine that an English linguist examines a language tribe that has never been studied. There are no dictionaries or reference books he can refer to and all help from interpreters is excluded. Thus a manual of translation needs to be established only by observing verbal behaviour responses of the tribal natives by observing what the natives say under what circumstances. If a white rabbit scurries by, the native says 'Gavagai'. What corresponding English sentence can the linguist translate this as? If several different linguists translate it as 'a rabbit ran past', 'that rabbit is white' or 'that is an adult rabbit', then which one is the correct translation? Is there an objective fact on the spot to help translators judge the correctness of different translations? It's likely that every translator's translation is a useful translation of the phrase 'Gavagai' in the current stimulating environment, because they can all make reasonable explanations based on their own webs of belief. However, it is impossible for translators to get the natives' webs of belief directly, because all the translations are based on the verbal behaviour responses observed under external stimulus, thus the objective criteria for judging the correctness of translation are virtually impossible. This is the indeterminacy of translation thesis put forward by Quine, namely, that there is a fundamental indeterminacy in the translation of sentences between two languages and mutual translation or interpretation of two sentences of the same language; moreover, there is no objective fact that can be used as a criterion to judge the correctness of different versions of translations. The indeterminacy of translation thesis is an essential part of meaning holism. In fact, the task of translation becomes harder the longer you stay with the tribe, as you realise that every hypothesis you form about meaning is related to your translation of every other word or sentence you encounter. We can clearly recognise this in Quine's meaning holism. Our decisions about the meaning of each expression of the language we are studying depend on those we make about all other expressions. In a word, there are no objective facts of the matter to enable us to distinguish between various alternative ways of translating a given language and hence there is bound to be a radical indeterminacy or inconclusiveness in any translation from one language to another or from one sentence to another in the same language (Quine, 1960/2013).

Quine does not deny the value of translation. What he wants to illustrate is that our interpretation must be inadequate if we interpret any individual sentence in isolation. As for the theme of this paper, no matter how we define 'culture', the cultural web of belief held by humans cannot be objectively recognised because it is individuated, but humans have to communicate by public observable language, thus communication between cultures (in both a broad and narrow sense) is doomed to a fundamental indeterminacy of meaning. Linguistic and cultural differences have the property of epistemological necessity.

Philosophical approaches to bridging cultural differences

According to the indeterminacy of translation thesis, words don't have determinate meaning. There is no single and determinate way of explaining the semantics of a language, or of translating it into another language. Based on this idea, an inevitably disastrous consequence is that there is no such thing as meaning and semantics is impossible. This denial of meaning facts makes it impossible for language exchange between different cultures or even between two individuals from the same culture. However, the fact that language exchange and translation do happen in actuality nullifies the above consequence. Otherwise, how can we explain the development of human civilization and how can we understand the facts of interpersonal and intercultural communication?

Donald Davidson, a philosopher of language, has provided us with a way to solve the problem. Davidson admits holism, but he is more optimistic than Quine, believing that there exists a foundation that makes communication/translation/interpretation possible. According to Davidson, a correct semantic theory for the language of a speaker is a theory that results from methodologically correct interpretation of the utterances of that speaker. Such interpretation is holistic in the sense that only whole theories can be tested by the interpretation method. His view that the meaning of a sentence depends on the meaning of other sentences in the language is his chief reason for the adoption of the 'principle of charity'. Davidson does not deny the indeterminacy of translation thesis, but he argues that people who speak different languages are able to establish understanding and communication through 'radical interpretation'. 'Radical interpretation' applies to the interpretation of one's own language as well as to the translation of foreign, previously unknown languages. This approach allows us to spell out the requirements and the preconditions for learning/translating/interpreting a language (Davidson, 1998). On this view, to know a sentence's meaning is to know the conditions under which that sentence would be true, rather than to know how to tell whether the sentence is actually true, and this amounts to the understanding of the language. In other words, to be able to identify an expression as a belief, we must be able to interpret it and in order to be able to interpret it or to assign meaning to it, we have to regard the speaker's belief as generally being true or being consistent with our own. The radical interpreter has to begin constructing her/his manual of translation by applying what Davidson calls the 'principle of charity' (Davidson, 2001). Generally speaking, it is assumed that the belief of the interpreter and the interpreted is consistent to the maximum extent; whenever possible, the interpreter interprets on the premise that the interpreted hold true belief.

When there is a language barrier, if we want to understand utterance meaning of others, we must assume that his or her knowledge about the world and belief in life and so on are roughly the same as ours. Therefore, under certain objective circumstances (environment, time, and events), we know that for a proposition uttered by a speaker to be true amounts to the understanding of his or her utterance meaning. A typical example goes like this. We are guests in a German family, but we do not speak German. When we are going to say goodbye to leave, it is raining outside, and the host says 'Es regnet' to us. At this time, we know that the host takes 'it is raining' as a true proposition just as we do due to the same circumstances by virtue of the objective conditions of the events happening near the Germans at present. In this way, we know the meaning of 'Es regnet', although we don't know German. Similarly, if we help an Italian and she says 'Grazie!' with a smile; we are able to know the meaning of this exclamation, although we don't know Italian. That's because we put ourselves into others' shoes and feel for others, we believe that we should express our gratitude if we get help from others under the same

circumstances. The logical rationality of principle of charity lies in the fact that humans have the same physiological and neural structure and they live in the same world, although people all over the world speak different languages and live in diverse cultures. Therefore, humans' feelings and experiences of the world are arguably the same, so they share the same knowledge and understanding of the world. 'Charity' means that 'people feel for others and put themselves into others' shoes and vice versa'. This is the rationale for mutual understanding and interpretation between different cultures and among individuals in the same culture, and it is also the logical starting point for translation and semantics.

Facts also support this principle. A large number of values and practices show a great deal of biological and cultural common traits in their members' behaviours, psychology, language, logic, norms, politics, economy and even superstition (Baghramian, 2004, p. 71). It can be illustrated as follows:

> *At the behavioural level, a smile is used as a friendly greeting by human beings from all cultural backgrounds. They shed tears and display affection. They are good at interpreting facial expressions of sadness, happiness, fear, anger, disgust, surprise and contempt. At the psychological level, human beings can differentiate between a sense of self versus other, and of normal versus abnormal mental states. They are aware of joy and sorrow, love and hate, jealousy and envy, and also intention, empathy, and responsibility. At the linguistic level, all human languages have words for time, space, motion, state, flora, fauna, tools, location, speed, spatial dimensions as well as parts of speech like nouns and verbs. At the logical level, reasoning is common to human beings, for instance, conjunction, negation and identity. Numerous cultures have a series of binary opposites in their concepts, such as male and female, black and white, right and wrong, general and particular, part and whole, affirmation and negation. At the normative level, human beings recognise normative rules like family, crime, law, power, conflict, violence, murder, sex and etiquette. At the political and economic level, decisions on public affairs need following procedures in all societies. A large number of societies have a division of labour and economic inequality. Superstition and supernatural beliefs are common in all societies, fortune telling, disease and death explanation, dream interpretation, magic to span life, and rituals are common to all cultures* (pp.71-72).

Commonality between cultures is greater than individuality. This makes it possible for different cultures to have a very solid rationale for mutual understanding. In fact, we are able to realise and recognise the differences between various cultures, which mean that we have noticed the differences between other cultures and our own cultures, and this is based on certain common belief. For a long time, western philosophy and Chinese philosophy have been thought as incompatible, but this is not the case. The truth is that western and Chinese philosophy can be integrated in the form perhaps of a 'world philosophy'. The western philosophical concepts, such as empathy, compassion, belief and desire can be integrated with Chinese philosophical concepts of 'yin/yang' (阴/阳) and 'qi' (气). Thus, they seem to be perfectly compatible because " 'yin/yang' and 'qi' pervade all aspects of the cosmos and a universal necessary metaphysical harmony and unity that arises out of modern science rather than being opposed to it" (Slote, 2020).

An interesting example of how cultural input of language can be used to illustrate that cultural gap is certainly to be bridged. Generally speaking, the appellation of 'elder brother's wife' in Chinese is 'sao zi' (嫂子), and the most corresponding equivalence is 'sister-in-law' in English. The Chinese expression 'sao zi' appropriately reflects traditional

Chinese culture which values family greatly. Although 'sao zi' was not a family member originally, she became a family member and a well-respected one of the family because the relationship with elder brother was obviously different from that of 'elder sister'. This is the meaning of the so-called 'eldest brother is like father and eldest sister-in-law is like mother'. However, this is not the case in English. The English expression 'sister-in-law' is a compound word, in which 'sister' means 'sisters' and 'in law' expresses that it is justified by law. Therefore, the meaning of 'sister-in-law' should be 'the sister relationship is established by a certain legal relationship', which demonstrates a culture that values legal rules a lot. On the other hand, the Ontong people on Java Island have different cultural concepts from both Chinese and English people. In Ontong Javanese, the appellations of brothers and sisters are shown in the following table:

	sisters	brothers
male	ave	kainga
female	kainga	ave

Table 1. The appellations of brothers and sisters in Ontong language

Men call their brothers 'kainga' and their sisters 'ave', while women call their brothers 'ave' and their sisters 'kainga' (Lee, 1950, p. 14). Obviously, this divide is not based on gender; meanwhile, blood relationship and legal relationship are not criteria either, because 'ave' can be used to address all peers of the opposite sex such as wife's sister, husband's brother, man's sister-in-law and woman's brother-in-law. On the contrary, 'kainga' is used to address all people of peers and the same sex. Actually, these appellations in Ontong language are divided according to norms of daily behaviour (p.15). 'Ave' refers to a restrained and strictly constrained social behavioural norm, while 'kainga' involves a social behavioural norm that can be relaxed at will and share the inner world. This criterion closely matches the strict norms of communication between the sexes of Ontong people. However, no matter Chinese, British or Ontong people, there is no difference in their understanding of the core meaning of the concept of 'sister-in-law', namely, the definition of 'elder brother's wife' is shared by them. On the basis of this basic definition, people of these three nationalities have added their own interpretations of this concept according to their own cultural knowledge and belief system. The Chinese emphasise that sister-in-law is a family member, the British add a legal relationship, and the Ontong people pay attention to what kind of behaviour they should behave in front of her. These three nationalities have a common core in their understanding of the same concept, and the difference between them is only an additional interpretation of the common core meaning based on their own belief systems.

This means that the gaps between cultures can be bridged and the approach to bridging them is to add additional meaning interpretations of the same concept. It can be achieved through experience or even linguistic clarification. Here I might as well use my own experience to illustrate it. When I was a junior in college, a foreign language teacher who was from Australia sneezed during English writing class, and I said to her, 'Are you ok?'. As a result, she flushed with anger and rushed out of the door. We didn't know what was going on, and it almost caused a 'diplomatic crisis'. Later, it was explained by another professor in the department that we, the students, knew that sneezing for Australians might mean catching a cold. The teacher, as an Australian, also believed that God was helping them exorcise the devil because of their religious belief. Therefore, the

appropriate response should be 'Bless you!' After explanation and clarification, the foreign language teacher also understood why I did that verbal response and I understood why that utterance made her angry when she sneezed. We had a common understanding of sneezing itself, but there were differences in the additional interpretation of the meaning of sneezing. Consequently, 'indeterminacy of translation' generates and there are huge gaps in interpretation systems of meaning. We can't judge who is right and who is wrong, because responses of both sides are appropriate in terms of their own belief systems. However, by adding different meaning statements about the same event to belief systems of both sides, each one can assume that the behaviour to be explained is roughly in concordance with one's own belief, and then conflict can be resolved. Later, in order to further help Chinese students, the foreign language teacher explained their cultural belief in detail, in particular, why they should say 'bless you' when others are sneezing, while they cannot do the same thing when others are coughing, because coughing means they are really sick. In this regard, their cultural beliefs are consistent with ours. We also told the foreign language teacher that Chinese people know what sneezing means. Chinese people also believe that 'the first sneeze means missing, the second scold and the third cold' in a humorous manner, specifically, the first sneeze means someone is missing you; the second one indicates someone is scolding you, and the third one suggests you are catching a cold. Therefore, when others are sneezing, our response might go as 'who is missing you?', 'who is scolding you' or we can express our concern for physical health directly. The foreign language teacher understood this fully and found it interesting. After all, 'sneezing caused by colds' is also a belief constituent in her culture. This indicates that there is a common basis of communication and understanding between different cultures. Cultural conflicts in this kind of linguistic communication typically reflect the differences of belief systems between two sides. Their interpretations of meanings differ because it is based on their own belief systems. If both sides already had different interpretations about each other's cultural customs for sneezing which were not similar with their own, then this misunderstanding would have been avoided.

People feel for others and put themselves into others' shoes and vice versa. Human beings share a basic common experience of the same world, thus they have generally the same understanding and knowledge. No matter what specific knowledge and belief a particular culture have, the universality concept of objective things is common to mankind. In other words, no matter what cultural environment he/she lives in, every member of mankind always has a common understanding of the world and life. Cultural differences are additional cultural-specific explanations based on the core semantics, which can be expressed as concepts and propositions. Cultural connotation refers to knowledge that can be represented and described by language. In this case, belief systems of different cultures can be established or revised through learning, because culture as a knowledge-based system can be adjusted and supplemented by content items.

Enlightenment of philosophical understanding on intercultural communication teaching in foreign language teaching

There is a complex relationship between language and culture because they are closely tied to each other. It is impossible to understand a culture without language and vice versa. However, from our viewpoints, language and culture belong to two systems, the former pertaining to a system of behaviour rules, while the latter consisting of a system of belief, and meaning (semantics) acts as the interface between the two systems. Specifically, beliefs assign meaning to behaviour and thus verbal behaviour is formed, which means that the understanding of meaning is built upon a system of belief and

manifested as verbal behaviour. This is valuable for us in thinking about problems of cultural communication teaching in foreign language teaching. Meanwhile, the genetic epistemology principle put forward by Piaget can be combined to solve these problems.

Human's knowledge of the world originates from the interaction between subject and object, where the subject adapts to the object to reach cognitive equilibrium, thus constructing a schema of knowledge of the world and adapting to it (Piaget, 1972, p. 21). There are two ways to form schema: assimilation and accommodation. Assimilation refers to receiving information relying on existing cognitive structure and making it become a part of knowledge and belief (p. 20), while accommodation involves adding or revising existing structure of knowledge and belief to accommodate new information (p. 21). For instance, children construct a schema about the motion of birds which is not on the ground when they see birds flying, and then they have been able to use this schema to understand all objects that do not move on the ground as 'birds'. In short, they have an understanding of knowledge that 'birds can fly' and that 'not all objects move on the ground'. However, when they see butterflies that do not move on the ground, they still use the schema of birds to interpret and regard butterflies as birds. When told that birds can not only fly, but also chirp, while butterflies do not chirp, they revise the original schema by adding a new dimension of 'sound' and gained a new understanding of knowledge. Therefore, 'being able to fly' plus 'being able to chirp' constitute their knowledge about birds. At the same time, 'being able to fly' and 'not being able to chirp' makes up their knowledge about butterflies. Later, a new understanding of knowledge about airplanes is acquired through the same process (adding 'motionless wings and different sounds'.). Although this process seems to be concise, it is able to illustrate how our system of knowledge and belief are constructed. More complex system of knowledge and belief about the world, society and life are enriched step by step through experience and education.

This can explain why 'pragmatic failures' always occur in young children. They are able to understand literal meaning, instead of pragmatic implication. The cartoon 'Dennis the Menace' provides an interesting example. Dennis, a young child, is naughty at neighbour Wilson's house. Wilson intends to make him leave, but it is not appropriate for Wilson to tell him so bluntly. So Wilson says to Dennis, 'Did you get a home'. But Dennis replies, 'Yes, of course, I got a home. You know that, don't you?' Obviously, there is no 'illocutionary force' constituent in the belief system of Dennis's utterance, thus he is not able to grasp the pragmatic implication when Wilson was euphemistically telling him to leave. However, as Dennis grows up, he will construct relevant schemas and gain the belief of 'listen between the lines' through experience and education, so that he will be able to make verbal behaviour responses which conform to customs of his community. This suggests that children have relevant 'cultural' belief and 'cultural' gaps between children and adults are bridged, thus similar pragmatic failures will no longer occur.

The developing of cultural communicative competence is exactly the same as children's acquisition of pragmatic competence, because culture is actually a system of knowledge and belief that regulates and controls behaviour patterns of human beings. There is a shared grasp of the world in all social cultures, but members of different social cultures have gradually developed various additional belief of interpretation through their experiences and practices in environment, life and education on the basis of this universal grasp. Therefore, communication between cultures is essentially equivalent to adjust and supplement belief contents in their own cultural belief systems. This can be achieved through linguistic communication and education.

If so, adding contents of cultural knowledge to the study of language itself may serve as the most ideal way in foreign language teaching. The teaching of culture is supposed to be regarded as an essential procedure in foreign language teaching. Approaches like reasonable curriculum planning, teaching content organizing, teachers from both home and abroad arranging, and extracurricular activity designing can be adopted. This applies to both specialised and public foreign language teaching. On the one hand, cultural characters are one of the most essential constituents of key competency in foreign language discipline, and on the other, intercultural communicative awareness and competency is required by foreign language communication from one of the eight key qualities in the framework of the European Union (Cheng & Zhao, 2016).

As previous discussion has shown, the relationship between culture and language is closely intertwined and interdependent, while on the other hand, culture refers to a system of knowledge and belief and language relates to a system of behaviour rules. To have a good command of rules requires language skills training. In foreign language teaching, the training of language skills and the teaching of cultural knowledge can be separated. Foreign language skills training courses, such as listening, speaking, reading and writing, definitely involve teaching of culture, because teaching texts and materials might contain cultural knowledge. Reading original foreign language texts, for instance, requires understanding the original author's intention, which certainly concerns his/her cultural consciousness. However, the acquisition of language skills is much more difficult than the understanding of cultural knowledge. Particularly in the absence of foreign languages and cultural environments, language training in listening, speaking, reading and writing is not an easy job. One of the most important tasks of foreign language courses is to help students have good command of foreign languages and develop new patterns of language behaviour through repeated practice. Hence, culture teaching can be embedded into vocabulary and text teaching in practice, but it is much less effective than expected, since the embedded knowledge will be unsystematic and fragmented. Unsystematic and fragmented learning may lead to certain damages to organizational sequence and integrity of learning content, which will cause problems such as loose logical system of learning resources and reduced difficulty of learning contents (Huang, 2018; Dong, 2020). A survey on unsystematic and fragmented learning for college students also shows that although college students prefer this method of learning, 43% of students still believe that this method will affect their overall understanding of knowledge as well as their learning effect (Li et al., 2020). However, Unsystematic and fragmented learning is ubiquitous and unavoidable in the network age. This is also true for culture teaching and cultural knowledge acquisition.

How to solve this problem? According to previous discussion, culture is essentially a system of belief and knowledge. Thus the teaching content of foreign culture can be planned in a specialised course without restricting the type of teaching language. We can provide foreign culture courses in native language and to teach historical traditions and social culture. It is likely to be more effective to offer courses in native language, because students who take foreign language courses need to spend much more energy and time figuring out foreign language itself before they have a good command of it. After that, they will master contents of the courses. This practice may make students attend to one thing and lose sight of another. When foreign culture courses are provided in native language, students' primary attention and concentration are on contents of the courses, so their understanding is much clearer and more accurate. This is conducive for students to acquire the knowledge of foreign culture as much as possible, quickly and effectively, and add belief contents about foreign culture to their own established cultural belief system.

Approaches to solving this problem really count. The teaching of culture in foreign language teaching is supposed to aim at constructing coherence among various systems of belief and knowledge. This actually sets higher requirements for curriculum planning, quality of teachers and teaching models of foreign language. Introductory courses may end in course examination. In this way, students simply gain fragmented knowledge by means of memorizing and reciting, but may not be able to achieve a thorough grasp of intercultural belief and knowledge systematically. Therefore, the teaching of culture courses should be planned to promote students to take the initiative to explore similarities and differences between foreign culture and native culture, focusing on the cultivation of critical thinking and problem awareness, and adopting inquiry-based and discussion-based teaching. Only in this way can students acquire foreign cultural knowledge through questions, discussions and arguments, at the same time as they are able to get a reasonable interpretation for foreign cultural beliefs that are different from those of their own culture, so as to construct their own coherent belief system about the similarities and differences between native and foreign cultures. A firm and thorough grasp of cultural knowledge rests with interpreting it with reasons and explaining why it is so. In other words, 'knowing what is like this and why it is like so (knowing what is going on and why)'. This is the essence of culture teaching, which can be regarded as the contribution of this paper.

Conclusion

A large quantity of treatises have been devoted to working on culture and foreign language teaching as well as their relationship, but numerous controversies still exist. So far, the academic circles have reached a consensus that culture teaching is an essential part of foreign language teaching. What this paper has done is demonstrate this consensus from a new perspective that has rarely been discussed until now. Cultural difference is inevitable and does have its necessity, but communication between various cultures also has its logical possibility. Culture is indeed ubiquitous and it affects our speech and actions all the time, but culture is not mysterious or elusive, it is an additional concept interpretation based on humans' core understanding about the world, society and life. In essence, culture consists of a system of beliefs. Hence culture can be taught, and the focus of teaching is to find rational interpretation for different cultural beliefs through learners' thinking on the acquired information, thereby supplementing and enriching their own system of beliefs.

Acknowledgements

We thank Dr. Liu Limin from the English Department of College of Foreign Languages and Cultures, Sichuan University, for his useful comments and language editing which have greatly improved the manuscript.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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