

An Analysis on the Application of Culture-Loaded Words in the 18th and 19th Chinese Bridge Chinese Proficiency Competition for Foreign College Students

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Abstract: Sense of Culture is crucial in the teaching of Chinese as a second language, and culture-loaded words are one of the tools for teaching culture. CHINESE BRIDGE Chinese Proficiency Competition for Foreign College Students has been very popular for learners from all over the world who learn Chinese as a second or a foreign language, and has contained more and more cultural sense in its sections of speech and debate. This study aims to analyze the use of culture-loaded words formulated by the contestants in the 18th and 19th CHINESE BRIDGE Chinese Proficiency Competition for Foreign College Students, adopting two methods: literature research and statistical analysis. In order to ensure the scientific nature of the study results, this research compares the use of culture-loaded words with the outline of The Graded Vocabulary for HSK, and finds that: Firstly, their use of more concrete and practical culture-loaded words prove to be similar to what HSK requires. Secondly, although they used more linguistic and ideological culture-loaded words, they show less frequencies of use of the linguistically culture-loaded words than that that HSK requires but more of the ideologically culture-loaded words. Thirdly, the culture-loaded words they used is commonly simple but relatively flexible and casual. Finally, the use and training of culture-loaded words with more linguistic properties should be strengthened and improved both in classes and by themselves, with the other types of culture-loaded words retaining current cultivation rhythms.

1. Introduction

Sense of culture is one of the important but hard sections in the teaching of Chinese as a foreign or second language. And one of the approaches to foster students' understanding and familiarity of culture is culture-loaded words. According to Chang Jingyu (1995), Gao Jianhua (2012), Chen Juan (2013) and Duan Liping (2020), culture-loaded words refer to the words which possess specific meanings only under certain cultural circumstances, directly or indirectly manifesting the characteristics of the culture. Studying culture-loaded words can benefit the teaching of Chinese as a foreign or second language. It helps students get to know the living and working modes as well as the emotional cognition of Chinese (Wang Yanjun, 2013; Duan Liping, 2020), and assists teachers to formulate a more effective lecture with a more rigorous design for imparting Chinese culture to foreign students.

CHINESE BRIDGE Chinese Proficiency Competition for Foreign College Students is a large-scale

Chinese competition for international students who learn Chinese as a foreign language. The participants of CHINESE BRIDGE come from five sub-contest areas in the six continents in the world except Antarctica, which allows a wide range and a large number of research objects. Therefore, this study decides to investigate, classify and analyze the use of culture-loaded words formulated by the contestants of CHINESE BRIDGE Chinese Proficiency Competition for Foreign College Students. In order to make the analysis results more closed to the current reality of international students' use of culture-loaded words, the study chooses the 18th and 19th CHINESE BRIDGE Chinese Proficiency Competition for Foreign College Students held in 2019 and 2020, as the study object.

The study proceeds in the sequence of introducing the research motives in the first section, discussing the literature background in the second section and performing the statistical analysis in the third section. The conclusion part is given in the fourth section in the study.

The study has the following values:

- 1) The study can offer some suggestions to the teaching of Chinese as a second or foreign language in respect of cultural lexicon by disclosing the usage of culture-loaded words by foreign students.
- 2) The study results can make international students clearer about their use of culture-loaded words, and thus make some adjustments and improvements.

2. Classification of Culture-Loaded Words

To observe and analyze the characteristics of use of culture-loaded words formulated by the contestants in the 18th and 19th CHINESE BRIDGE Chinese Proficiency Competition for Foreign College Students, classification of culture-loaded words should be clear first. Many scholars have given their own version of classification of culture-loaded words from diversified perspectives, but there has not been a much clear but concise one.

One type of classification focuses on the exertion of language functions. A good example is the study of Lv Boning (2016), which categorizes culture-loaded words in view of structural, semantic and pragmatic aspects of language itself. The structural aspect mainly embraces the cultural characteristics contained in the structure of language including quantifiers, modal category and retroflex finals; the semantic aspect refers to the culture sense in semantic system, including semantically specific vocabulary, words with semantically different connotations and idioms; the pragmatic aspect focuses on the conventional sense of culture, such as appellation, greeting words, gratitude words, honorific words, parting words, self-deprecatory expression and euphemisms. This type of classification is formulated in view of metalingual perspective but neglects that culture is injected in all aspects of life rather than only embedded in language itself.

Another kind of typology of culture-loaded words pay much attention to all the possible levels of culture. Wang Yanjun (2013) classifies culture-loaded words in the following aspects: material production (including geographical, agricultural, food, clothing, living and transportation branches), system and conducts (including life etiquette and custom, social system and conduct code branches) and psychology and mentality (including certain words in view of thinking patterns, emotions and values). Yang Jianguo (2012) deals with culture-loaded words in a similar way, listing the standard material culture, system culture, conduct culture and psychological culture. This type of classification takes all culture aspects into consideration, nevertheless, it gives little attention to the important role of language as the medium of culture presentation. For example, idioms in this kind of typology are not listed as an independent type together with material, system, conduct and psychology culture-loaded words. There truly exist words like idioms that can be classified into certain fields, for example, “礼尚往来 (lishang wanglai, ‘courtesy requires a return of visits received’)” can be included into the conduct type and “百家争鸣 (baijia zhengming, ‘contention of a hundred schools of thought’)” can be classified into the psychology type. However, some other idioms are generated conventionally as certain fixed language structures and do not

belong to any types of culture-loaded words mentioned above. For instance, “乱七八糟 (luanqi bazao, ‘be out of order’)” and “比上不足,比下有余 (bishang buzhu, bixia youyu, ‘There are a lot of people far worse off than a person but he/she still does not catch up with the group that is better than him/her.’)”. Besides, words with symbolic meaning are hard to be included by any types of culture-loaded words above, like “龙 (long, ‘dragon’)” as a sign of Chinese nation and “冰冻三尺,非一日之寒 (bingdong sanchi, fei yiri jihan, ‘Rome was not built in a day’)” whose implied sense is that it takes a long time to form a certain situation by accumulation.

The most popular classification is to combine culture sense with linguistic sense. Gao Jianhua (2012) classifies cultural words in view of certain environment, metaphorical senses, idioms and number and color senses. But this classification seems to be in a scattered rather than an integrated system. To be specific, some certain types can be blended into an integrity and some others can be distributed into several parts. Zhao Ming (2009) makes a classification in view of meaning, content and additional meaning of culture, but this typology is too abstract and broad, which is hard for language learners to understand Chinese culture-loaded words accurately and exactly. Duan Liping (2020) solves this problem, classifying cultural words in the aspect of material production, history and system, conduct, psychology and idioms. This typology is objective and relatively comprehensive, but it still lacks attention for certain items like symbolic culture-loaded words which is special in semantic and pragmatic sense and hard to be included into any certain type.

Taking all the strengths and shortcomings of previous literature into consideration, we offer a typology of culture-loaded words (shown at Table 1.).

Table 1 Classification of Culture-Loaded Words

Lexicon Name	Type	Branch	Examples
Culture-loaded Words	Material-Production Cultural Words	Food, clothing, housing and transportation	烤鸭 (kao ya, ‘roast duck’), 中山装 (Zhong shanzhuang,
		Architecture and geography	凉亭 (liang ting, ‘pavilion’), 五道口 (wu daokou, ‘Wudaokou’)
		Technology, medicine and creature	微信 (weixin, ‘WeChat’), 熊猫 (xiongmao, ‘panda’)
	Social-life Cultural Words	History	清朝 (qingchao, ‘Qing Dynasty’), 丝绸之路 (sichou zhilu, ‘the Silk Road’)
		System	人大代表 (renda daibiao, ‘Deputy to the National People's Congress’), 高考 (gaokao, ‘college entrance examination’)
		Code of conduct	中秋节 (Zhong qiujie, ‘Mid-Autumn Festival’)
	Structure and Rhetoric-specific Cultural Words	Idioms (idiomatic phrase, proverbs and common sayings, etc.)	独木不成林 (dumu bucheng lin, ‘a single tree does not make a forest’), 语重心长 (yuzhong xinchang, ‘sincere words

			and earnest wishes')
		Figurative and symbolic words	龙 (long, 'dragon'), 月亮 (yueliang, 'moon')
	Mental and Psychological Cultural Words	Art and Literature	李白 (li bai, 'Li Bai'), 四大名著 (sida mingzhu, 'four famous works')
		Religion and Philosophy	缘分 (yuanfen, 'fate'), 阴阳 (yin yang, 'yin-yang')
		Values	仁 (ren, 'benevolence'), 和为贵 (he weigui, 'harmony is precious')

In this typology we take all aspects of culture-loaded words' representations into consideration, blending the culture sense with language sense together and making words with fixed language structure and pragmatic sense an independent type. It divides culture-loaded words into material-production cultural words, social-life cultural words, structure and rhetoric-specific cultural words and mental and psychological cultural words. It formulates the structure and rhetoric-specific type to refer to those culture-loaded words which are fixed in structure and use of language, with other types regrouped according to the advantages and disadvantages of typologies by previous studies.

The typology is ready to extract and classify the culture-loaded words formulated by the contestants in the 18th and 19th CHINESE BRIDGE Chinese Proficiency Competition for Foreign College Students. However, the classification results cannot explain the features of their use of culture-loaded words independently, there must be an authoritative reference standard to form a comparison. In view of that, we choose the outline of The Graded Vocabulary for HSK as the comparison object, and formulate the following research questions:

1). What features does the use of culture-loaded words by the contestants in the 18th and 19th CHINESE BRIDGE Chinese Proficiency Competition for Foreign College Students show?

2). Compared with the outline of The Graded Vocabulary for HSK, are there any points to improve in the process of Chinese cultural vocabulary teaching and acquisition?

3. Analysis on Use of Culture-Loaded Words

3.1 Research Materials and Procedures

For the typology given above, culture-loaded words (CW for short) occurred in the speech and debate corpora in the 18th and 19th CHINESE BRIDGE Chinese Proficiency Competition for Foreign College Students are observed. The reason is that speech and debate require language learners formulate expressions sufficiently and adjust language output to fit the correct logic and grammar (Shao Yanyan, 2020).

For a more scientific nature, we checked all the videos of the speech and debate sections and found that these sections contained topics in many aspects, which ensures comprehensive and objective corpora sources. The 18th CHINESE BRIDGE Chinese Proficiency Competition for Foreign College Students contains speech section, and the topic is “天下一家 (tianxia yijia, 'all under heaven are of one family')”, which aims at 157 contestants from 5 continents, 122 countries. The meaning of this topic is to treat the world as a family and get along harmoniously, which is not limited in any certain branches of knowledge and allows contestants of a wide range of lexicon exertion.

The 19th Competition includes both topics of speech and of debates, which are shown in the following 2 tables:

Table 2 Topics and Forms of Each Competition Stage

Competition stage	Finals	Semifinals	America Division
Competition form	Speech	Speech	Debate
Topic	sharing a common fate	Recommendation of Chinese literary works	1. Which is the more important factor of success? Efforts or opportunities 2. At work, which is more persuasive? Details determine success or failure, or big things don't stick to the details?

Table 3 Topics and Forms of Each Competition Stage

Competition stage	Asian Division	African Division	Oceania Division	European Division
Competition form	Debate	Debate	Debate	Debate
Topic	1. Will the development of artificial intelligence cause more unemployment or create more employment opportunities? 2. Which is more important, the inheritance or innovation of traditional culture?	1. In today's society, women and men, who need more care? 2. Whether fragmented reading is good for learning	1. If you were the boss, Monkey King and monk Sha, who would you choose as your employee? 2. Is advanced consumption more beneficial or harmful?	1. Does the Internet make people closer or more distant? 2. When people first enter the workplace, which is more important, income or ideal?

For a more scientific nature, we have made each CW occur only once in the list, excluding all the other repeated ones from statistics. Then we analyze the exertion characteristics of CW by EXCEL and find that the total number of CW in the corpora is 835.

The outline of The Graded Vocabulary for HSK (HSK for short) is chosen to form a comparison with the use of CW by the contestants. The outline of HSK, which includes 8822 Chinese words, is one of the fundamental guidance of teaching Chinese vocabulary for international students. Of all the 8822 words, there are 1033 A-Grade words, 2018 B-Grade words, 2202 C-Grade words and 3569 D-Grade words. This procedure goes from comparing the frequencies of each type of CW in CHINESE BRIDGE and HSK, and then to the comparison in perspective of each grade. The latter comparison work means that we figure out the number of CW in each grade of HSK, and how many CW formulated in CHINESE BRIDGE are included in each grade, and then makes a comparison.

3.2 Percentage of Types

3.2.1 Proportional Results of Types

The authors adopt EXCEL as the statistical analysis tool, summarizing the frequency of each type in our classification standard, and find that the CW occur 672 times totally in the two-year competitions, of which the Material-production cultural words occur 82 times and occupy the percentage of 12.2% in all the occurred culture-loaded words in this study, Social-life cultural words 93 times and 13.84%, Structure and Rhetoric-specific cultural words 325 times and 48.36%, and Mental and Psychological cultural words 172 times and 25.6%. The data shows that foreign students tend to use Structure and Rhetoric-specific Type more than other branches of culture-loaded words, and Mental and Psychological cultural words are the second most frequently used, and Social-life cultural words and the Material-production cultural words are the third and the last. The details of frequency of each small branch and the smaller branches are shown in Table 4.

Table 4 Frequency of Each Small Branch

Culture-loaded Words	Material-Production Cultural Words	Food, clothing, housing and transportation	23	82	12.2%
		Architecture and geography	40		
		Technology, medicine and creature	19		
	Social-life Cultural Words	History	15	93	13.84%
		System	32		
		Code of conduct	46		
	Structure and Rhetoric-specific Type	Idioms(idiomatic phrase, proverbs and common sayings, etc.)	304	325	48.36%
		Figurative and symbolic words	21		
	Mental and Psychological Cultural Words	Art and Literature	122	172	25.6%
		Religion and Philosophy	5		
		Values	45		
	Total: 672				

The table above shows that the international students' exertion of culture-loaded words exhibits an imbalanced distribution of type proportions. The most frequently used type is Structure and Rhetoric-specific Type, which covers 48.36%, almost the half of all the appeared culture-loaded words. The second frequently used type is Mental and Psychological Type, with a percentage of 25.6%. Social-life Type and Material-Production Type successively rank the third and the last, the percentage being 13.84% and 12.2%. The data above manifests that the contestants' use of culture-loaded words focus more on the form and grammar of language itself and on the ideological aspect. However, fewer frequencies of use are given to the culture-loaded words that are more directly accessible in life.

3.2.2 Discussion of Type Proportion

This part has figured out the characteristics of contestants' use of CW in the 18th and 19th CHINESE BRIDGE Competition. In aspect of the overall conditions, their use presents an imbalanced distribution. The types from the most to the least frequently used are Structure and Rhetoric-specific Type, Mental and Psychological Type, Social-life Type and Material-Production Type. The sequence signals their focus of exerting Chinese culture-loaded words tend to be more linguistic and ideological but less practical and material.

3.3 Comparison with the Outline of Hsk

This section makes the comparison between the number of CW in the outline of HSK and the number of CW formulated by the 18th and 19th CHINESE BRIDGE contestants from two aspects: the perspective of types and of grades. The perspective of type treats the CW from HSK and those from CHINESE BRIDGE as two independent comparing subjects, but the perspective of grades makes a comparison between the CW in HSK and the CW in CHINESE BRIDGE which are included in the outline of HSK.

3.3.1 From the Perspective of Types

According to the classification of CW in this research, the authors make a statistical analysis to the comparison between the number of CW in the outline of HSK and of those formulated by the contestants in the 18th and 19th CHINESE BRIDGE Competition.

The first task is figuring out the total number of CW in the outline of HSK. Based on the definition of CW in this study, the authors look the outline of HSK through carefully and find 418

CW totally. Then the authors classify the 418 CW according to the classification standard of this research.

Table 5 Frequency of Each Small Branch in The Outline Of Hsk

Type	Branch	Number	Total number in the type	Percentage
Material-Production Cultural Words	Food, clothing, housing and transportation	20	29	6.94%
	Architecture and geography	2		
	Technology, medicine and creature	7		
Social-life Cultural Words	History	7	62	14.83%
	System	33		
	Code of conduct	22		
Structure and Rhetoric-specific Cultural Words	Idioms(idiomatic phrase, proverbs and common sayings, etc.)	276	292	69.86%
	Figurative and symbolic words	16		
Mental and Psychological Cultural Words	Art and Literature	23	35	8.37%
	Religion and Philosophy	6		
	Values	6		

The table above shows that the frequency of Material-production CW is 29 in all the 418 CW, and the percentage is 6.94%, and Social-life CW 62, 14.83%, Structure and Rhetoric-specific CW, 292, 69.86% and Mental and Psychological CW, 35, 8.37%.

Then at the second step the authors make a comparison of the percentage of each type of CW from the outline of HSK and that formulated by contestants in the 18th and 19th CHINESE BRIDGE Competition. The results are shown in the following by EXCEL (Fig 1).

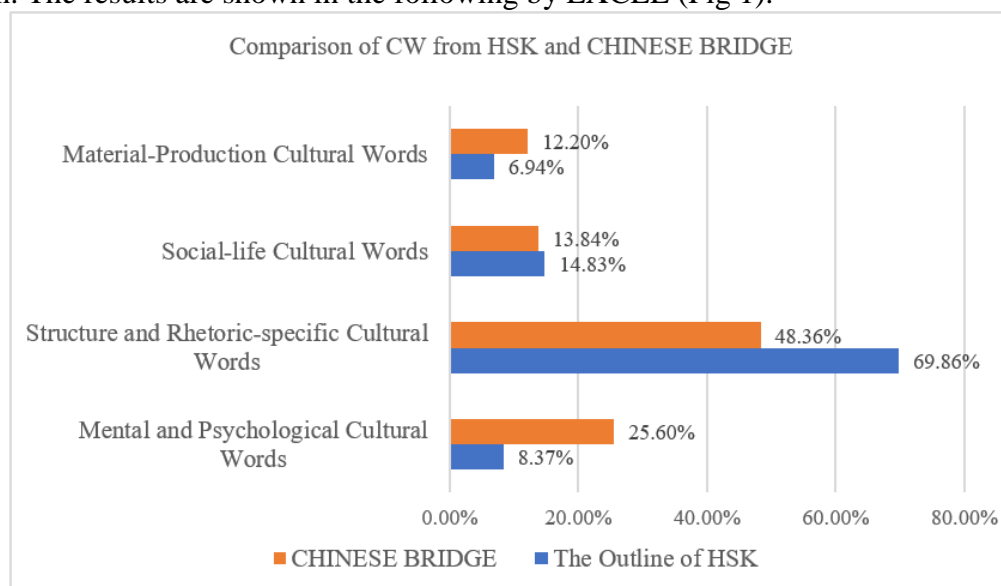


Fig.1 Comparison of Cw from Hsk and Chinese Bridge

Fig 1. shows that in respect of Social-life Type and Material-production Type, the percentages of CW from the outline of HSK and those of CW formulated by contestants in the 18th and 19th CHINESE BRIDGE Competition manifest an approximate accordance within either type, but that in respect of Mental and Psychological Type and Structure and Rhetoric-specific Type there are large discrepancies between the percentages within either type.

To be more specific, it is clear that in Material-production Type the percentage of CW in CHINESE BRIDGE CW is 12.20% and that of the outline of HSK is 6.94%, which are not very distant from each other. Besides, in Social-life Type, the two percentages, namely, 13.84% and 14.83%, are very closed too. However, in view of the Structure and Rhetoric-specific Type, which presents itself with 48.36% CW from CHINESE BRIDGE and 69.86% CW from the outline of HSK. Another discrepancy appears at Mental and Psychological Type, that is, the percentage from CHINESE BRIDGE, 25.60%, is much bigger than that from the outline of HSK, that is, 8.37%. The large discrepancies between the proportions show that the use of CW by these international students is not similar to that in the outline of HSK. Therefore, the distributional conditions of students' use of CW are not the epitome of original distribution of CW themselves, at least not of what CFL requires students to master. That addresses the doubt in 3.1.2.

Another finding is that the frequency order of the types is different from each other. In HSK the types sequence as, in a descending order of frequency, Structure and Rhetoric-specific Type, Social-life Type, Mental and Psychological Type and Material-Production Type. However, in CHINESE BRIDGE, the sequence is: Structure and Rhetoric-specific Type, Mental and Psychological Type, Social-life Type and Material-Production Type. And here the point is that the Mental and Psychological Type used by the contestants shows an over fulfillment.

The data from Table 3. and Fig. 1 above demonstrates that international students' handling of the more concrete and plainer CW, that is, the CW which contain more of the sense of life culture and society culture, just like the CW from Material-production Type and Social-life Type, correlates with the requirements of HSK pretty well. The reason is that life culture and society culture are more closed and accessible to international students and the CW from life culture and society culture always present themselves as plainer and more fixed in meaning. For example, under the condition that the topics given in this competition cover all aspects of life and thus allow activation of a wide range of lexical knowledge, the entity of the word “北京烤鸭 (beijing kaoya, 'Beijing Roast Duck')” is accessible in life to students, and it is fixed and plain in meaning, which allows students to retain the word without too much thinking about its extended collocation. Another good example is “丝绸之路 (sichou zhilu, 'the Silk Road')”, which specifically refers to the road from China to Europe in Chinese ancient times. It can be remembered by just knowing the name and the certain event fixedly without any other abstract association.

However, international students' handling of the CW embracing linguistic senses is a little bit weaker than the degree that the outline of HSK requires. This has been proved by the data of Structure and Rhetoric-specific Type, in which there is a visually clear big gap of the percentage from HSK and from CHINESE BRIDGE. An important point is that this type's focus is on language itself, with one branch presenting itself structurally (idioms) and the other rhetorically (figurative and symbolic words). According to Wang Yan (2012) and Wang Yuanxin (2017), idioms are fixed in language structure and language use, and must be treated as an unalterable whole in semantic senses. This leads to students' more attention on understanding and reciting the certain words rather than using them, because understanding and reciting them have been very hard for students, letting alone using them. A good example is “功夫不负有心人 (gongfu bufu youxin ren, 'hard work pays off')”. The semantic meaning of this idiom can be flexibly expressed by various language forms, but this certain idiom itself, if the target is to retain its original meaning, cannot be altered or distributed like other words or phrases. So, students have to try to recite its fixed expression form, and this process decides a slower handling of it than other words. Figurative and symbolic words are the results of rhetorical process. This sort of words are hard for students to master because as one of the rhetoric devices, they require the combination of language forms, colors and voices (Rhetoric editing group, 1978) according to certain expression purposes. For example, “单身狗 (danshen gou, a single dog)”

means being single or unmarried, but the word itself presents a funny and ironical color so that its using range has been limited.

Besides, it is obvious that students' use of Mental and Psychological Type shows an over fulfillment. For the reason that the authors have excluded the potential influence of the competition rules as much as possible, the current data shows in a relatively object fashion that students' master of this type is exceedingly good. The finding proves that students understand Chinese lexicons of ideological aspect pretty well. This implies the impartment and training for students in aspect of China's ideology and thinking during the process of CFL are sufficient.

3.3.2 From the Perspective of Grades

According to the classification criterion of this study, the authors have made a comparative quantitative analysis to the number of CW in the outline of HSK and to figure out how many CW formulated by the contestants in the 18th and 19th CHINESE BRIDGE Competition are included in the outline of HSK. The authors firstly count up the number of CW within the four levels respectively, and then search in Word for each CW in CHINESE BRIDGE within the range of the outline of HSK and record the number. The number of CW in the outline of HSK is 418 in total, of which there are 52 CW in A-Level, 71 in B-Level, 101 C-Level and 194 D-Level. Another statistical result is that there are totally 71 CWs which are formulated by the contestants of the 18th and 19th CHINESE BRIDGE Competition being included in the outline of HSK, of which there are 22 CW in A-Level, 19 in B-Level, 14 C-Level and 16 D-Level. For a clearer explanation of the relationship between these two numbers, a line chart is formulated in the following:

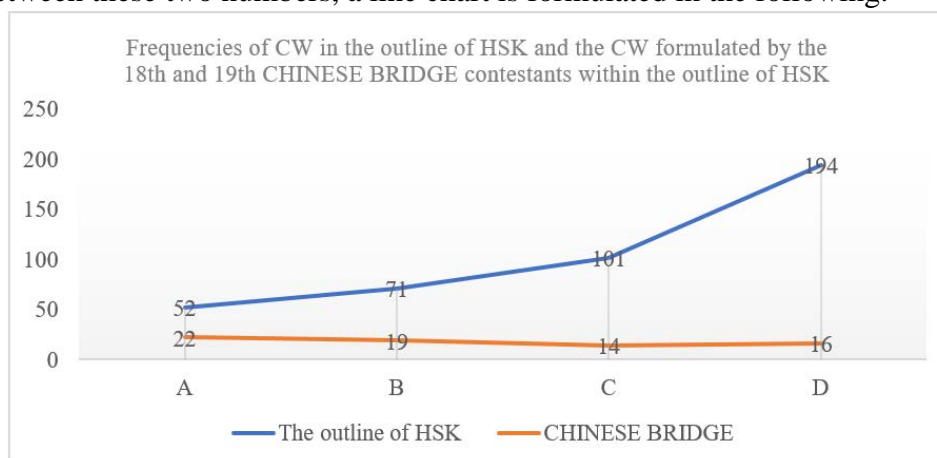


Fig.2 Frequencies of Cw in The Outline Of Hsk and Cw Included in The Outline Of Hsk in the 18th and 19th Chinese Bridge

Since the outline of HSK is the authoritative standard in teaching Chinese vocabulary, it is expected that the frequency of CW in each grade used by students should follows the trend of CW in HSK. However, what Fig. 2 shows is that from A-Level to D-Level there is a sharply growing trend of the number of CW in the outline of HSK, but an overall smoothly declining trend of that of CW formulated by the 18th and 19th CHINESE BRIDGE contestants within the outline of HSK. Besides, it is much clear that the number of the former line is always larger than the latter, and thus the gap between the number of these two lines are bigger and bigger from A to D.

The large discrepancy signals the not all-inclusive range of CW in HSK, and shows that the CW used by the contestants are commonly simple. It also implies that teachers who are responsible for teaching Chinese as a foreign language do not always follow the outline rigidly.

However, it does not mean that HSK bears no defects. Seeing from the above figure, we have

found that in all the 672 CW used by the contestants, there are only 71 CW are included in HSK. In the 601 CW which are not included in HSK, many are the newly born words stemming from Internet and technology, such as “菜鸟 (cainiao, ‘a green hand’)” and “朋友圈 (pengyouquan, ‘the friend circle’)”. Besides, the 601 CW also includes certain names of famous persons and places, such as “李白 (libai, ‘Li Bai’)” and 北京, beijing, ‘Beijing’). These CW should be included into the outline because they are also China’s commonly-used cultural representation forms and should be familiar to students. The fact implies that the outline of HSK has to some extent been out-of-date and does not keep up with the times. Therefore, the outline of HSK also should be flexibly supplemented and improved according to characteristics of times. Such fact also demonstrates that the contestants’ use of CW is relatively flexible and casual.

These findings imply that for international students the exertion and training of culture-loaded words with more linguistic properties should be strengthened both in classes and by themselves, with the other types of culture-loaded words retaining current cultivation rhythms.

4. Conclusion

This study aims at analyzing the use of culture-loaded words formulated by the contestants in the 18th and 19th CHINESE BRIDGE Chinese Proficiency Competition for Foreign College Students, adopting two methods: literature research and statistical analysis. The research results shows their use of more concrete and practical culture-loaded words proves to be similar to what HSK requires. Besides, they show less frequencies of use of the linguistically culture-loaded words than that that HSK requires but more of the ideologically culture-loaded words. Thirdly, the culture-loaded words they used is commonly simple but relatively flexible and casual. The data in this research shows that the use and training of culture-loaded words with more linguistic properties should be strengthened and improved both in classes and by themselves, with the other types of culture-loaded words retaining current cultivation rhythms.

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