

Non-Verbal Signal under the Multi-Cultural Background: A Teaching Case Study

Gao Yan

*School of Foreign Languages, Huzhou University, Huzhou, Zhejiang, 313000, China
spss11@163.com*

Keywords: Multi-Culture, Non-Verbal Signal, Cultural Education, Comprehensive Quality

Abstract: In the new era of globalization and digitalization, cultural education is very necessary. The cultural education for graduate students meet the needs of cultivating graduate students' critical cross-cultural thinking, and the teaching should focus on digitalization and localization elements to keep pace with the times. This paper follows the CREED principle of intercultural communication teaching, takes students as the center and uses problem-based approach as the theoretical basis, proposes an combination of cultural education with students' English learning, so as to carry forward traditional Chinese culture in graduate English teaching under the multicultural background. The teaching evaluation data show that this model can achieve the teaching goal of effectively improving students' intercultural communication ability, and also meet the teaching requirements of cultivating students' comprehensive qualities such as political literacy, humanistic literacy and academic literacy in higher education.

1. Introduction

In recent years, ideological and political education in colleges and universities has been promoted to a very important position. As a public course for postgraduates in colleges and universities, English courses for postgraduates should play an important role in the all-round education[1]. Integrating holistic education into English teaching is the most important part of postgraduate education. English teachers should change their ideas, improve their own cultural accomplishment and strengthen their cultural consciousness so as to guide the students in their study[2]. As an English teacher, in teaching public English courses for graduate students in Huzhou University in the academic year of 2020-2021, I persistently integrate the cultural education into the teaching practice. In the teaching process of "Why So Much Is Beyond Words", I combine "cultural education" with language teaching, so as to improve students' cross-cultural communication ability and promote their all-round development[3].

2. Introduction to the text "Why So Much Is beyond Words"

"Why So Much Is Beyond Words" is an article about nonverbal communication written by Frank Trippett, associate editor of Newsweek. He argues that nonverbal signals should never be relied on in international events, because the chances of misunderstanding are high and frequent. As Roger

Fisher, a Harvard law professor, puts it, “The chance of properly understanding signals in the midst of conflict is always very slight.” During the Iran hostage negotiations, for example, US Secretary of State Cyrus Vance tried to signal to The Iranians that a solution was possible and talked of restoring “normal” diplomatic relations. The Iranians have misinterpreted this as a return to the days of their despised Shah. “Sending diplomatic signals is like sending smoke signals in a high wind,” says Fisher[4]. But why does this happen? Nonverbal signals can easily fail, and the results can be either significant or disastrous. As a result, the danger of misunderstanding for the most basic nonverbal signals increases dramatically when used in different cultures[5].

Through the text, students can understand that the meaning of each nonverbal expression depends on two variables: the user and the culture[6]. As Michele Lieberen, a tenured professor at the British Columbia School of Law, puts it, there is an ongoing dialogue among Middle Eastern countries, notably Iran and Egypt, to balance Islamic cultural traditions and the memory of Western modernity with the reality of the global village[7]. In terms of how to balance the relationship between religious forces and non-religious forces, it is impossible to impose a unified cultural norm as there are many different viewpoints and various forces in the world. So what should we do in the face of cultures that are different from our own? First, try to understand these differences, rather than belittle traits that are different from you, or mock choices that you don't understand. The choice of each group is the result of the interaction of environment and culture. Compassionate understanding is much more difficult and important than rash value judgments. Nothing promotes the peace more than a genuine understanding of one another[8]. Second, only by breaking through the artificial boundaries drawn on the map, allowing the free exchange of information and goods, and encouraging people to understand different or even opposing viewpoints, can we go out of narrow worldviews and shallow pride and understand this diverse world with an open and modest attitude[9].

3. The Description of the Teaching Case

3.1 The Integration of Text-Language Information and Cultural Education

Through word cloud analysis by Wordsift, we can see that the word frequency of the text “Why So Much Is Beyond Words” is signal(18)+person(11)+language(10)+word (8)+like(8), These are the key words used in the text. The word cloud shows the relationship of signals to people and language. At the same time, students can master some phrases and words related to signals through vocabulary network, as shown in Figure 1 and 2.



Figure 1: Word Cloud of The Text

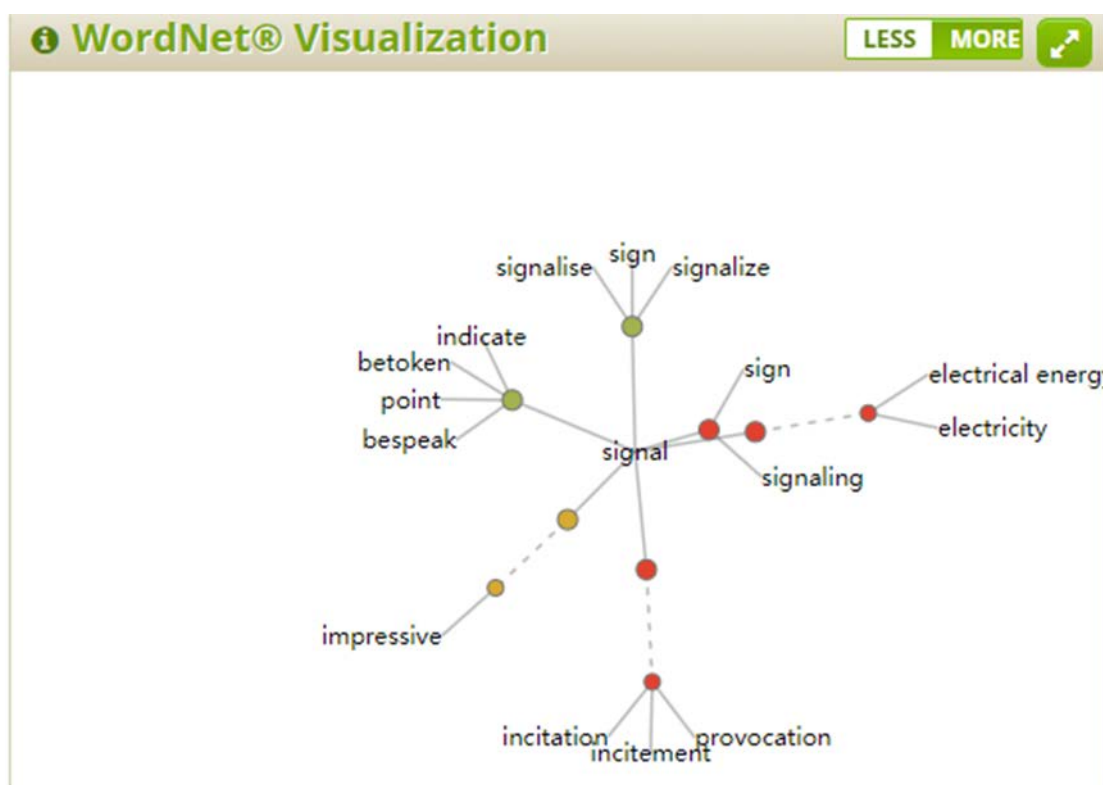


Figure 2: Word Net Of the Text

Writing Purpose

Through the preview of the text, let the students find out the author's purpose of writing, i. e. Why So Much Is Beyond Words? How can these meanings be understood and expressed correctly?

3.2 The Integration of Understanding text Content and Cultural Education

3.2.1 Text Information Arrangement (Pre-Class Assignment and Classroom Inspiration)

In teaching the text “Why So Much Is Beyond Words”, students were asked to use their own experiences as examples to explain why some meanings are so hard to put into words for them. Zhang said that it sbecause people rarely rely on language in their daily interactions; Li said that most communication is through various forms of body movements and facial expressions. Wang said he often blinks his eyes to communicate, speaks with his feet and teaches with his fingers. Because the dimensions of life practice are different for everyone, their understanding of the expression of meaning is also different[10].

According to students' different understandings of communicating with non-verbal signals, students are allowed to use the Internet to obtain non-verbal signals and interpret language signals differently in different cultures before class. Students' answers were grouped into the following ten categories: posture, facial expression, eye contact, gesture, tone of voice, personal space, touch, appearance, objects and images[11]. They believe that different cultures have different meanings for the same signal, so even the most basic signal can be easily misunderstood.

After the students realize that there are different ways of understanding the same non-verbal signals in Chinese and western cultures, ask the students to find out the specific manifestations of non-verbal signals in Chinese culture and history through literature search. Then let the students find out the differences between Chinese and Western understanding of non-verbal signals and their roots[12].

According to the students' understanding of nonverbal signals, their answers focus on superficial phenomena, and they do not understand why these misunderstandings occur from the connotation. How to form a correct cultural view? This is what we should think deeply about when we study this text[13].

3.2.2 Appreciation of Language Rhetoric (Class Explanation)

In appreciation of good sentences, ask students to find out which sentence in the passage impresses us the most.

Students answer:

Urged Archer: "We must unshackle ourselves from the tendency to ignore silent behaviour and to prefer words over everything else."

The bloody history of the world ought to be the first item of evidence in any case against relying on wordless signaling in international affairs. The opportunities for death are immense and constant.

Sending diplomatic signals is like Sending smoke signals in a high wind.

Then, ask the students to find out which paragraph of the passage impresses them most.

Students answer:

The happiest of overt American signals, the circled thumb and index finger, unless accompanied by a smile, amounts to an insult in France. The innocent American habit of propping a foot on a table or crossing a leg in Figure-four style could cause hard feelings among Arabs, to whom the showing of a shoe sole is offensive.

The human creature has fallen short as a user of language, employing it so duplicitously that even in ancient times the wise advised that people should be judged not by what they said but by what they did. That such advice holds good for today goes without saying.

By asking students to identify the sentences and paragraphs that impressed them most, ask them to reflect on what appealed to them most? They were asked to appreciate the sentences, as well as the title of the article, until they understand the entire article.

3.2.3 Reflection on Text Content (Class Discussion and Reflection after Class)

By reading the text, students have a certain understanding of the different meanings of non-verbal signals in different cultures, but they have not formed a unified understanding of the cultural differences of non-verbal signals. Therefore, in order to make the students think critically about the content of the text and form a correct cultural view, the students watched a short video of body language in different cultures, the content of the video was: "How much do you know about body language in different cultures?" Videos include how Chinese and Europeans make the number two and six gestures; OK means "good" in North America, Europe and China, while it means "insult" in Russia, Brazil and Turkey. In France, it means "0" and in Japan it means "money". The "V" gesture with the index and middle fingers held out means "2" in China, "victory" in Germany, "peace" in France, "up yours" in Britain, Australia and New Zealand and "go to hell" in Greece. The thumbs-up usually means "great" and in Europe it means the number "1" and can be used for hitchhiking, but in Greece it means "up with you" and in Japan it means "man" or the number "5". In the process of watching the video, the students gave full play to their imagination and analyzed the body language of different cultures with their own quick thinking and rich language. After in-depth analysis, the students also fell into meditation. Under the trend of globalization, is culture diversified or unitary? After students' dialectical thinking, the students of the two classes of art major carried out group discussions with "my view on culture" as the theme respectively in class. At the same time, comparing with the author's point of view, the students find out the similarities and differences between Chinese and Western cultures. Debate and group discussion improve

students' critical thinking ability. In addition, through the difference between Chinese and Western nonverbal signals, students can improve their understanding of Chinese culture, imperceptibly strengthen their understanding and confidence in Chinese traditional culture, and enhance their cultural confidence.

3.2.4 Overview

After the students listed the similarities and differences between Chinese and Western cultures, a questionnaire was made according to the students' listed understanding of the concept of culture, and the teacher asked the students to vote on the Chaoxing learning platform, and according to the results of the students' votes, data analysis were carried out, and finally statistics were made to recognize the concept of culture that was shared by the students. Under the guidance of the teachers, the following conclusions are drawn: globalization is the basis and premise of cultural diversity. Since the 1980s, the trend of cultural diversity in the world has developed rapidly. The age of information network makes people communicate more quickly, which makes people's national consciousness and national cultural identity continuously enhanced. Cultural diversity also makes all nationalities learn from each other in exchanges and live together in interdependence.

3.2.5 Comparison between Chinese and Western cultures

There are differences between Chinese and Western civilizations in philosophy, basic cultural spirit, mode of thinking, language and rhetoric, religious belief, social norms, literature and art.

(1) Cultures in different countries are not completely different. Taking the dimension of power distance as an example, cultures with high power distance and low power distance are not at two extremes, but distributed in different positions of the continuum from high to low. For example, Chinese culture is a typical collectivist cultural value dimension, while American culture is a typical individualistic value-oriented cultural model. The difference between these two cultural models is clearly reflected in the aspect of deep values. However, Chinese culture is not entirely collectivist in social relations, there are similar but some different tendencies from individualism. Similarly, American individualistic culture also includes the consciousness of cooperation and mutual sharing of collectivism factors.

(2) With the frequent international communication and the economic changes of different countries, the differences in cultural dimensions of each country are also changing. The historical traditions of different countries are the source of the differences in uncertainty avoidance indexes of different countries. The national cultural dimension model helps people to understand the cultural differences of different countries, but it also tends to form an "alien stereotype" on the culture of that country, and all the people in the country are classified into the frame of this stereotype. We should treat the change of cultural dimension by keeping pace with the times. For example, with the continuous growth of China's economy, many changes have taken place in China's family, school and social norms in terms of the cultural dimension of power distance: the student-centered teaching concept is advocated in classroom teaching, the relationship between teachers and students and family members tends to be equal, and the public's awareness of participating in political affairs is gradually improved.

(3) In cross-cultural communication, each dimension of cultural values should be based on the national level rather than the individual level. The national cultural dimension model helps people to understand the cultural differences of different countries. Neither can we have our view of the important overshadowed by the trivial, nor can the overall national cultural differences at the national level be taken into account treating each individual in the culture, so as to consider cultural differences with an alien stereotype. For example, China is a collectivist country with a high power

distance and a strong long-term orientation. On the other hand, The United States is the country with the strongest individualism, the lowest power distance and the short-term focus.

3.4 Assessment

The thought of how to set up the correct cultural values is introduced into the English classroom teaching. The cultural education should be combined with English education effectively. English education should play the role of the fortress, at the same time, the cultural values, language knowledge and critical thinking ability training should be considered in the teaching goal assessment. The course assessment is to ask students to write an essay on the differences between Chinese and Western cultures. The examination fully excavates cultural elements contained in the text. In the examination, not only students' language ability is examined, but also whether students can have their own cultural knowledge and understanding of how to carry forward traditional Chinese culture in the context of multi-culture, so as to help students establish correct outlook on life and values.

4. Conclusions

The purpose of this teaching case is to distinguish the differences between Chinese and Western cultures and carry forward traditional Chinese culture. Although Frank Trippett and we live in two countries with different cultural values, people should have the same understanding of the existence of multiculturalism in the context of globalization, no matter in the West or the East. In the multicultural context of this case, the impact of non-verbal signal differences on the country and individuals is of great enlightenment to students. Therefore, English courses for graduate students should not only impart knowledge and cultivate language ability, but also carry out ideological and political education for students, so as to realize the importance of ideological and political education and form the overall synergistic effect. Through the teaching of texts, not only the students' comprehensive ability of using English, but also their comprehensive cultural accomplishment should be improved. Teachers should accurately grasp the cultural connotation of the text, grasp the significance of the integration of "cultural education" and English curriculum, explore the key points of English "cultural education", construct a scientific teaching assessment system, and realize the holistic education goals.

Acknowledgements

2021 Huzhou University Graduate Excellent Teaching Case Project (Project No: YJGX210022)

References

- [1] Hofstede, Geert. *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions and Organizations across Nations*. Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2008: 7-9
- [2] Rajabl, Soraya, *Aspects of Cultural Elements in Prominent English Textbook for EFL Setting. Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 2012. <https://doi.org/10.4304/tpls.2.4.705-712>
- [3] Gao Yihong. "1 + 1 > 2" in *Foreign Language Learning*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2001
- [4] Liu Yanhong et al. *Research on Teaching Material Culture based on National Planning College English Teaching Material Corpus*. *Foreign Language World*, 2015(6):85-93
- [5] Kang Li, Xu Jinfen. *Cultural Consciousness in College English Teaching Materials and Its Realization*. *Foreign Language Research*, 2018 (2):70-75
- [6] Peng Shiyong. *Hofstadter's Theory of Cultural Value and its Research Methods*. *Journal PLA University of Foreign Languages*, 2004, (6): 95-99

- [7] Liu Jinling, Li Nan. *Creating a Good Language Environment to Promote College English Classroom Teaching*. *Education and Occupation*, 2009(23): 113-114.
- [8] Liu Zhicheng. *Linguistic Rationale for the Differences between Chinese and Western Cultures*. *Journal of Yunnan Nationalities University (Philosophy and Social Sciences edition)*, 2019, (2):59-65
- [9] Zhang Hong. *The Influence of Culture on Learners' learning style from the Perspective of Hofstede culture*. *Education and Teaching Forum*, 2015, (51):5-6.
- [10] Lin Qian. *Research on the effective organizational strategies of junior middle school English teachers' classroom*. *Middle School English*, 2017 (38): 1. DOI: 10. ssss/j.issn.1003-6822.2017.38.088
- [11] Yang Bie. *Research on the classroom teaching organization strategies of junior middle school English teachers*. *Course guidance for middle schools: Teacher Communication*, 2015 (7): 1
- [12] Zhang Mingliang. *The cultivation and exploration of cooperative learning mode in junior high school English teaching under the new curriculum reform -- On the specific strategies of developing group cooperative learning*. *Academic Weekly*, 2012 DOI: CNKI: SUN:XZHK.0.2012-16-177
- [13] Wang Xiaona. *On Group Cooperative Learning in Junior English Teaching under the New Curriculum Reform*. *Software: Teaching*, 2013 (7): 1