

Cultural Analysis of the Chinese Junior Middle School English Textbook ----Based on the New Curriculum Standards

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Published: 28 February 2020

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Abstract

Culture with a growing proportion in modern teaching, has been realized its importance in English teaching in recent tens of years. However, there are still many problems in cultural teaching, which has led many students unable to use language correctly. In teaching, teachers, especially teachers in towns and villages, often teach just according to the textbooks without paying much attentions to the culture. What's worse, some teachers even know nothing about the new curriculum standards, and they only teach in accordance with traditional teaching methods to help students pass the entrance exam, which is called the exam-oriented education. This study aims to analyze whether the cultural contents of junior high school English textbooks meet the requirements according to the new curriculum standards, by analyzing the cultural contents of the textbooks from the seventh to the ninth grades one by one, and propose some suggestions for cultural teaching to English teachers.

Key Words: cultural teaching; textbooks; new curriculum standards

1. Background to the Research

In recent decades, although people have realized the importance of culture in teaching, they have encountered many obstacles and difficulties in the cultural integration teaching. Researchers have also been trying to solve the cultural integration problems in teaching and have reached some improvements, but there are still some unresolved issues. The new curriculum standards give specific requirements in cultural teaching. In English teaching, teachers should consciously meet the requirements of the new curriculum standards. However, there are still some teachers who still teach according to the contents of textbooks without any other addition. Therefore, it is important and urgent to know whether the cultural content in the textbook meets the requirements for English teaching to give those teachers more suggestions.

2. Theoretical Overview

2.1 The Importance of Culture and Cultural Teaching

Culture is a way of life. Culture is the context within which we exist, think, feel, and relate to others. It is the “glue” that binds a group of people together. Culture might be defined as the ideas, customs, skills, arts, and tools that characterize a given group of people in a given period of time. (Brown, 1996:164-165). Culture and life are closely related, life is closely related to language, which lead to these three a inseparable whole. Some scholars believe that the way people see the world depends entirely or in part on the structure of their mother tongue. Wang Guirong (2011) pointed out the importance of cultural education in English teaching and the significance of cultural teaching. The cultural worldview is subtly constrained by its linguistic structure. Language can shape and “determine” human thoughts, and further shape human culture. On the contrary, culture also affects the study of language. If one learns a language without learning culture, it will be impossible to succeed.

2.2 The Importance of Textbook

Textbooks are the main materials which are prepared in line with the requirements of the curriculum standards for teachers and students to use. Therefore, the content of the textbook has a great impact on teaching. Rao Bin(2018) proposed three major problems facing intercultural teaching are teachers, learners, and textbooks.

2.3 Existing Researches about Culture in Textbooks

Liu Baojun (2006) analyzed the status quo of cultural teaching and discussed the purpose and significance of cultural teaching. Gu Tingting (2018) analyzed the causes of today's cultural imbalances and gave some suggestions on how to rationally distribute the cultural content in English textbooks. Wang Yan (2015) pointed out the problem of the lack of Chinese traditional culture in the current middle school English teaching, and analyzed the penetration of middle school English teaching. On the basis of the basic values of Chinese traditional culture, it expounds the necessity of integrating Chinese teaching into Chinese traditional culture, and proposes an effective strategy for infiltrating Chinese traditional culture in teaching; Zhao Shumin (2013) mentioned that based on the Compulsory English Curriculum Standards (2011 Year edition), to eliminate the phenomenon of Chinese cultural aphasia,

should adjust the English textbooks, teachers' cultural teaching concepts and test propositions as well. Cultural teaching has affected many aspects.

3. Measures Taken to Help with Cultural Teaching

3.1 Requirements of the New Curriculum Standards and Embodiment in Textbooks

Two important things for us to finish the survey are on the one hand having a clear understanding of the cultural requirements in the new curriculum standards, on the other hand figuring out the cultural parts in the English textbooks.

3.1.1 Cultural Requirements in the Textbooks According to the New Curriculum Standards

In the new curriculum standards, there are fourteen requirements about the cultural teaching:

- Understand the body language commonly used in English communication, such as gestures, expressions, etc.
- Use different greetings and farewells in English properly.
- Understand, distinguish the names commonly used by different genders in English and the names of relatives.
- Learn about the eating habits of English-speaking countries.
- Response appropriately to praise, request, apology, etc.
- Express praise, request, etc. in an appropriate manner.
- Make a preliminary understanding of the geographical location of English-speaking countries, climate characteristics and history, etc.
- Learn about traditional entertainments and sporting activities in English-speaking countries.
- Learn about the world's important holidays and major celebrations.
- Pay attention to the similarities and differences between Chinese and foreign cultures and deepen their understanding of Chinese culture.
- Learn about the customs of interpersonal communication in English-speaking countries.
- Be able to introduce the main festivals and typical cultural customs of the China in English.

3.1.2 Cultural Analysis of the Junior Middle School English Textbook People's Education Edition(2013)

English textbooks are edited according to the curriculum standards of course, but there are still some unreasonable aspects. We need to find out the questions and then deal with them. That's what we should do. After summering the English textbooks, we got a chart as figure 1.

Figure 1 cultural survey in textbooks

	Grade7	Grade8	Grade9
Body language	0	0	1
Greetings	6	2	0
Names	2	2	1
Eating habits	2	3	0
Express and Response to praise and request	1	2	1
Location, climate characteristics and history	2	10	8
Traditional cultural and sporting activities	4	1	0
Important holidays and major celebrations	0	1	2
Customs of interpersonal communication	8	9	14
Cultural differences and Chinese culture	2	7	5

As we can see, all the requirements in the curriculum standards have been redacted into the textbooks, however, the proportion of them seems unreasonable. Some of the requirements such as names and cultural differences showed in all three grades, while some others like body language and important holidays and major celebrations only appeared in two grades even only in one grade. Another issue is that the low repetitive rate will let the students feel harder to remember them.

3.2 Suggestions Given to English Teachers

According to the analysis about the cultural parts of the textbooks above, some advice can be introduced to English teachers. Many researchers have made some achievements on this area before.

3.2.1 Measures Had Been Given Before

Liu Baojun (2006) notified two ways to help English teachers in cultural teaching: a. Cultural infiltration in classroom teaching; b. Use the teaching methods other than classroom teaching to understand foreign cultures from multiple channels and perspectives. Li Guping (2013) mentioned four measures: a. Enhance awareness of intercultural communication; b. Use reading comprehension materials to expand students' knowledge of Chinese and Western culture; c. Organize students to communicate with each other about the differences between Chinese and Western customs; d. Use different media such as CDs and networks. And Song Yun (2016) proposed two accesses: First, teachers

should use textbooks flexibly, and they should not limit their opinions to books; Second, entertaining and learning, encourage students to make full use of the various learning resources around them.

3.2.2 Measures Given to English Teachers in Cultural Teaching

In the teaching of culture, scholars have already made great achievements, so the teaching opinions given in this paper are mainly about the use of textbooks. This paper analyzes the textbooks of junior high school people's edition according to the cultural requirements of the new curriculum standards, aiming to give English teachers some opinions on the use of textbooks in cultural teaching:

a. Supplement the cultural content missing from the textbook

From Table 1, we can see that the body language is less involved in the textbooks. Only in the unit 10 of ninth grade, there are some body languages which are related to the greetings, such as shaking hands and kissing. We all know that Chinese and foreign body languages have a big difference, "OK" gesture for example, in the United States and China, everyone will be happy to see it. Because it stands for "good", "doing beautiful", "no problem" and so on; in Japan, it looks like a coin, so it is used to represent money; in Brazil and Germany, this symbolizes a very hidden hole in the human body. For them, it's a indecent gesture; and in France, it means "zero" or "no value". Therefore, English teachers should supply the necessary knowledge of body language in teaching, because in today's intercultural environment, interactions between China and foreign countries are more and more frequent. The teaching and popularization of the body languages have also become very important. In other areas such as important festivals and festival celebrations, teachers should also pay more attention to them.

b. Duplication of cultural content

Repetition is a good way to promote memory. In the teaching of culture, we should also make appropriate repetitions in order to make students more deeply impressed, so as to maximize the achievements of cultural teaching. From Table 1, we can see that some content appears in every grade in junior textbooks, and some content is only mentioned in two or even one grade with small proportion. Therefore, in the process of English teaching, teachers can lead the students to recall the content they have learned before, but for the smaller proportion, they should lead the students to learn to associate knowledge together.

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