



AN ECOLOGICAL ANALYSIS ON LANGUAGE LEARNING AND CULTURE UNDERSTANDING AMONG CHINESE COLLEGE EFL LEARNERS

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Abstract: This research paper attempts to have an ecological analysis on the relationship between the learning of language and the understanding of culture among Chinese college EFL learners. As an analytical research paper, it employs mainly three research methods including method of theoretical analysis, ecological analysis and comparative analysis to acquire a full understanding of the relationship between language and culture among Chinese college EFL learners from an ecological view. Through understanding the process from language learning to culture understanding, the author thus tries to show an ecological view of how the learning of language matters with the understanding of culture as well as the ecological significance reflected by the interaction between language learning and culture understanding among Chinese college EFL learners.

With the help of an ecological view, this research paper also makes efforts to show how language learning, which is deeply rooted by the ecology of a natural environment, a humanistic community, a country and even a nation, promotes the development of culture understanding. Thus it is fully analyzed and concluded that there is a very close relationship between language learning and culture understanding, which is also an inseparable relationship.

Overall, this research paper also interprets that language is not just a tool or carrier of culture. In fact, language is not only a cultural phenomenon, but also a living fossil of history and culture of a country and a nation as well as a special and comprehensive cultural combination and aggregation. An ecological analysis from language learning to culture understanding among Chinese college EFL learners will definitely help to comprehend such a fact that, on the one hand, language plays an irreplaceable role in cultural construction, inheritance, and communication between different cultures; on the other hand, different cultural characteristics often lead to different language characteristics.

Index Terms - Language learning, culture understanding, Chinese college EFL learners, an ecological analysis.

I. INTRODUCTION

Entering the 21st century, we are faced with an interactive relationship between language and culture, which is also an area that urgently needs in-depth research. The biggest breakthrough in contemporary language teaching research is also to put culture into the language environment, especially from a cultural standpoint to understand language learning is the future, which is actually one of the key areas of future linguistic research.

The development of culture has historical continuity, and this continuity is achieved through language communication activities. Therefore, the issue of the relationship between language and culture has become an important issue that we cannot avoid. Regarding the relationship between language and culture, the world of academia has put forward a variety of views, one of which is the “Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis”, which believes that language structure is the origin and decisive factor of cultural structure; the opposite is from the Marxist viewpoint, which maintains that the social and cultural structure is the decisive factor of language.

At the same time, positivism believes that there is only “partnership” and correlation but no causality between language structure and social cultural structure. While there are also viewpoints that support such a theory that language is the carrier of culture, and that the basic characteristics of language and culture are consistent, and even that language is a tool for cultural transmission, and so on.

What mentioned above has shown that the issue is still quite complicated. In this research paper, by introducing the point of view of ecology, the author tries to analyze the deep relationship between language learning and cultural understanding among Chinese college EFL learners from the perspective of ecology. In other words, discussing the issue of this research paper from the

perspective of ecolinguistics will help readers understand more easily and directly the deep-seated relationship between language and culture.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will mainly review literatures about language and culture. Besides, some concepts related to the science of ecology will also be introduced and explained so as to help to fully understand the relationship between language learning and culture understanding among Chinese college EFL learners from an ecological perspective.

2.1 Connotation of Language

What exactly is language? General linguistics believes that language is a system composed of vocabulary and grammar. This is the most basic connotation of language. However, if you look at it from the perspectives of sociolinguistics, historical linguistics, cultural linguistics, etc., various interpretations will be drawn. It thus can be seen that it is not easy to define a language that everyone recognizes.

Language emerges and develops along with the development of human society. The connotation of language has different views due to different eras and different schools. Generally speaking, the connotation of language can be defined as the most important symbol system used by humans in communication and thinking. Language is unique to human beings. Humans can use a variety of tools for communication and thinking, but language is the most important tool that humans cannot leave.

When people speak, it is a compound phenomenon. Language is not equal to speaking. It is only one aspect of the compound phenomenon of speaking, that is, a set of symbols used in speaking, which is composed of voice, vocabulary, semantics, grammar and other subsystems, are called language. The connotation of language includes a relatively complete abstract symbol system that exists in the brains of all members of the community, which is universal, immaterial and abstract.

The connotation of language is also different from that of speech. Speech is the specific use and performance of language by individuals in specific situations, which is personal, material and specific. The speech mentioned here is the external speech used for communication, while the silent speech used for thinking is the internal speech. People can only directly observe the external language of speech, but cannot directly observe the language in silent speech. Linguists who want to study language can only find its traces in two places, one is in speech and the other is in the speaker's brain.

Through the above introduction of the connotation of language, we cannot have an overall but can have a general understanding of language. Besides, in reality, it is also necessary to discuss some of the important attributes of the language, which include the semiotic, systematic, generative and national ones.

2.2 Nature of Culture

In the past century, scholars have roughly defined the nature of culture from three different perspectives. First of all, from the perspective of anthropology, it is emphasized that the nature of culture is related to the nature of human beings. As the basic form of human beings different from animals, culture is essentially an artificial object relative to nature, and the nature of culture is creation. Secondly, from the perspective of social functions, it is emphasized that culture is productivity, information and knowledge, and a cultural mentality and symbol system. Finally, from the perspective of communication studies, it is emphasized that communication is the nature of culture. Without communication, there is no culture.

Anthropologist Edward Tylor once proposed an understanding of the nature of culture in his book *Primitive Culture*, which is very influential worldwide and is one of the most extensive and precise definitions. His famous definition is that the so-called culture and civilization is a combination that includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, laws, customs, and any other abilities and habits acquired by individuals as members of society. In his definition of the nature of culture, he has emphasized knowledge, customs, abilities, habits, etc., rather than concrete objects.

In addition, there is another definition of nature of culture, which refers to all the life styles created in history, including the explicit and the implicit, the reasonable and the unreasonable. Such life styles exist as a potential guide for human's behaviours in a certain period.

There is no fixed statement about the nature of culture. The discussion on the nature of culture at home and abroad has continued for a long time. There are general discussions and academic discussions, but in the end there is no conclusion. Understanding of culture is meaningful. When it comes to engaging in cross-cultural communication research, cultural comparison is a crucial issue. If there is a different understanding of the nature of culture, the comparison cannot be accurate, and even the things being compared may be different.

Besides, the definition of terminology is the prerequisite for studying any discipline. The accuracy of the definition of terminology for the positioning of the nature of culture is related to the scientificity and precision of the discipline itself. This is to say that we ought to have a substantive discussion of ideas without defining the concept and nature of culture.

In addition, discussing the nature of culture can help us further understand the nature and characteristics of culture. Scholars in various disciplines want to give accurate explanations of the nature of culture. However, their explanations have the characteristics of the discipline and have their own different focuses, so much so that they all reveal the nature of culture to varying degrees; nevertheless, they have already had a deep understanding of the nature of culture, which is actually necessarily needed.

2.3 An Ecological View

As for Ecology, it was first proposed in 1866 by a German biologist Ernst Haeckel. Haeckel defines ecology as all sciences that refer to the relationship between organisms and the external world environment, which in a broad sense also refers to a series of living conditions.

The concept of ecology of language was first proposed by Einar Haugen of Harvard University in the United States in 1972. It mainly studies the interaction between specific languages and environments, and is also used for most languages, which is accepted by most scientists. Therefore, it is generally believed that, originated from ecology of language, ecolinguistics is a

paradigm of linguistic science, and it can be regarded as a platform for studying languages. Based on this platform, human can study language phenomena from the same perspective.

Researches of ecolinguistics mainly cover the development of natural resources, the authorization of marginalized social groups, and the harmonious coexistence of languages and cultures in multicultural communities. Thus in this research paper, by introducing the point of view of ecology, the author tries to analyze the deep relationship between language learning and cultural understanding among Chinese college EFL learners from the perspective of ecology. Discussing the issue of this research paper from the perspective of ecolinguistics will help readers understand more easily and directly the deep-seated relationship between language and culture.

III. METHODOLOGY

This chapter mainly talks about methodology of the research. Since this is about an ecological analysis of the learning of language and the understanding of culture among Chinese college EFL learners, the author will focus on the analysis of the language learning and the interpretation of how the learning of language connects with culture understanding as well as how they interact with each other.

3.1 Method of Theoretical Analysis

The theoretical synthesis method is the most basic method used in this research paper. The author has read extensively domestic and foreign books and papers on language and culture, especially those that are latest published or known. This will make the research as theoretical and original as possible.

At the same time, the author reads and analyzes through a qualitative means in order to analyze the related theories of language and culture more realistically and rationally, and extract the view that the learning of language and the understanding of culture are closely integrated, and then draw the possible conclusions. By theoretically analyzing a large number of relevant documents and data, this research paper strives to demonstrate that the analytical processes and final conclusions about the relationship between the learning of language and the understanding of culture among Chinese college EFL learners are comprehensive and objective enough.

3.2 Method of Comparative Analysis

The comparative analysis method is also adopted for the research paper. On the one hand, this method can comprehensively sort out some necessary thoughts of the language and culture and unify these scattered thoughts into a systematic and complete theory. The related theories of language learning are combined with the related theories of culture understanding, so as to have a deeper understanding of the transition from language learning to culture understanding.

The use of comparative analysis methods is more conducive for the author of this research to accurately analyze the relationship between the learning of language and the understanding of culture, and to locate the roles of the learning of language and the understanding of culture from the perspective of ecology among Chinese college EFL learners. Specially, with the help of the ecological viewpoint, the learning of language will also incorporate elements of culture, thus promoting the development and understanding of culture, and at the same time allowing language and culture to better display a new face of the entire world.

Overall, the two analytical methods mentioned above will lay a solid theoretical and methodological foundation for the research and writing of this research paper. It will also provide a necessary and important premise for the writing of the findings which will be shown in the following chapter.

IV. FINDINGS

This chapter is about findings. In this chapter, the author will mainly show a brief description of the relationship between language and culture. Language can be taught and learned through a series of ways, the process of learning of language definitely reflects the way that culture behaves within the learning process. At the same time, an ecological view of the relationship between language and culture is also included within this chapter.

4.1 Language and Culture

Language and culture are closely related. It is because of the production and development of language that human culture can be produced and inherited. In a broad sense, culture includes language. At the same time, culture affects language all the time, making language more precise and more confidential in order to adapt to the needs of cultural development.

The relationship between language and culture is manifested in multiple levels, which is an integration of multiple levels of culture. Language permeates all levels of culture, which has warned us of such a fact that only mastering listening, speaking, reading, and writing can actually not really carry out cross-cultural communication. Many facts have also proved that many of us speak English very well and have a rich vocabulary, but as a matter of fact, we often have a great amount of misunderstandings in the process of interacting with people. This is because it is difficult for us to convey what we mean.

Language and culture are an inseparable whole. Language is a part of culture, which embodies culture and is subject to culture. Culture is the sum of material wealth and spiritual wealth created by human beings in the process of social development. Each nation will have cultural differences due to its different ecological and geographical locations as well as social customs. This is also the reason why people from different cultural areas have different native language backgrounds.

4.2 An Ecological View

For many centuries, from the perspective of traditional linguistics, there is basically no reason for the demise of endangered languages, and it is difficult to explain the process and speed of its demise, not to mention the corresponding measures and protection schemes. This is, to a great extent, because we only look at the language itself, regardless of other aspects or related dimensions.

However, from the perspective of ecology, the time we study language, we also consider culture and the relationship between language and culture. This is definitely reflecting the main research topic of ecolinguistics, which has the great potential to provide us with an in-depth investigation of the relationship between language and culture.

The study of ecolinguistics puts linguistics in the field of natural sciences for the study of language and human social development, language evolution and human culture. This has changed the research scope of traditional linguistics to a large extent. It is fully shown that the relationship between language and culture from the perspective of ecology is more worthy of research and exploration by scholars.

V. FINDINGS CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter concludes what has been discussed above the four chapters and gives a detailed interpretation of a transition from language learning to culture understanding among Chinese college EFL learners. Meanwhile, an ecological significance is also introduced, aiming to call for an application of the transition into language instruction and cultural communication in the domain of the present education all over the world.

5.1 From Language Learning to Culture Understanding

In the transition from language learning to culture understanding among Chinese college EFL learners, the factor of culture plays an important role in understanding and expression. The traditional cultural thoughts, national cultural meanings, and cultural differences in the pragmatic system have been affecting the understanding of culture all the time. For instance, the basic characteristics of the two languages of Chinese and English embody a different kind of psychological stereotype, value, aesthetics and morality of the respective nations. A correct understanding of culture depends on the comprehensive consideration of factors and contexts in language learning and language communication.

From language learning to culture understanding among Chinese college EFL learners, understanding is an important aspect of language learning. There are two aspects of understanding, one is the understanding of language form, and the other is the understanding of language content. The two complement each other, but they cannot replace each other. The understanding of form is not an end, but a means to accurately grasp the content of the information conveyed by the discourse of language.

In cross-cultural communication, there must be many restricting factors in truly realizing communication, which is, in accurately understanding the various kinds of information conveyed by the discourse of language. The understanding of language forms among Chinese college EFL learners is not the only means because cultural factors play a very important role in it. Understanding is a communicative act, which is the process of communicating cultural concepts between two parties. This means that if the original cultural concepts of the two parties are the same, the receiving subject will fully understand and the language communication will have the possibility of success.

5.2 An Ecological Significance

With the progress of human society, the development of science and technology and the increasingly close cultural exchanges, the exchanges between different countries, different ethnic groups and different cultural circles are increasing. In modern society, bilingualism and multilingualism are gradually becoming an important part of education.

From the perspective of ecology of language, the transition from language learning to culture understanding among Chinese college EFL learners helps us to better understand the ecological environment of languages all over the world, as well as the nature of language structures, and the language needs of social and cultural activities. Thus it definitely helps develop effective language instruction and the cultivation of local talents who can carry out language instruction.

Besides, since language is the carrier of culture dissemination and inheritance, under the research background of ecolinguistics, the transition from language learning to culture understanding is helpful for the understanding of language and cultural relations between countries and regions. More importantly, it is also beneficial for further mutual language learning and communication.

As a matter of fact, there are still many regional conflicts in the world today, many of which are caused by culture. The mutual exchange of cultures will definitely help the integration of different ethnic groups and cultures all over the world. Therefore, strengthening the study of ecolinguistics in language learning and learning instruction can, in the long run, help reduce cultural conflicts and promote social harmony and progress.

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