

Interactive Discourse and National Consciousness in College English: A “Threefold Integration” Perspective

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Abstract: Under the “Three Entries” initiative, the cultivation of national consciousness in foreign language education has gradually shifted from macro-level policy orientation to micro-level classroom discourse practices. Drawing on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and pragmatics, this study constructs an analytical framework for examining the discursive generation of national consciousness in foreign language classrooms. It investigates the mechanisms through which classroom discourse contributes to meaning-making and value orientation. The findings indicate that national consciousness is not an external add-on to language teaching but a pragmatically generated process embedded in classroom interactional structures. In task-based speaking classes, conceptual construction and the internalization of social responsibility are achieved through the organization of question chains; in text-based reading classes, meaning is reinterpreted and identity is reinforced through discourse analysis and cultural comparison; and in translation practice classes, national discourse is pragmatically reconstructed and articulated for international audiences through language transformation and contextual supplementation. These three classroom types jointly constitute multidimensional interactive discourse pathways for the construction of national consciousness. Furthermore, the study reveals that the core of classroom discourse lies in its pragmatic regulatory mechanisms manifested through patterns of meaning organization. Therefore, foreign language classrooms function not only as sites for language skill development but also as micro-discursive spaces where national consciousness is continuously constructed and reinforced.

Keywords: Three Entries initiative; College English; interactive discourse; national consciousness; pragmatic mechanisms

1. Introduction

Foreign language education in China has traditionally emphasized the cultivation of global competence and international perspectives. However, in the context of globalization, it is equally imperative to foster students’ sense of national identity and emotional affiliation with their country. National consciousness embodies a dual dimension: it refers both to the construction of national identity shaped by one’s affiliation with a nation-state and to the belief system underpinning national identification^[1]. At the individual level, national identity and national identification are structurally intertwined, manifesting as a sense of belonging to the national community and a shared value orientation. As Hebert^[2] argues, neglecting history, political traditions, and social values in education would undermine both national progress and intellectual development. Language, linguistic practices, language policies, and classroom discourse are all closely related to national identity formation. Traditionally, foreign language education in China has focused on language proficiency and intercultural communicative competence, with insufficient attention paid to the cultivation of national consciousness. There is thus an urgent need to integrate national consciousness into foreign language education reform and classroom practice.

Recent studies have tended to approach this issue from a macro-level perspective, particularly within the framework of curriculum-based ideological and political education, often adopting grand narrative approaches. However, in-depth analyses from the perspective of educational discourse practices remain limited. This study addresses this gap by examining the pragmatic mechanisms and interactional pathways through which national consciousness is constructed in foreign language classrooms, with a view to providing methodological insights and practical implications for foreign language education in China.

2. Connotations of National Consciousness and the Theoretical Framework of Interactive Discourse

From the perspective of discourse theory, explicating the nature of national consciousness and constructing a corresponding analytical framework has become a key issue in contemporary educational discourse studies in China. This section addresses the topic from two dimensions: national consciousness and the framework of interactive discourse analysis.

2.1 National Consciousness

National consciousness is inherently multidimensional. It can be understood as a sense of belonging to a particular nation-state and its traditions, institutions, and culture, through which individuals share a common history, emotions, beliefs, and ways of life^[3]. It has also been defined as the aggregate of citizens' cognitive and affective orientations toward the nation, formed through long-term shared experiences of living, production, and social practice, encompassing understanding, identification, and expectations regarding the state^[4].

Synthesizing existing studies, national consciousness can be broadly divided into two interrelated dimensions: cognitive awareness and affective identification. The former refers to individuals' understanding of fundamental national conditions, including history, culture, territory, ethnicity, and institutional systems; the latter denotes a sense of emotional attachment that links personal destiny with national development, giving rise to responsibility and value identification^{[5][6]}. In this sense, national consciousness is not a singular cognitive outcome but a comprehensive construct integrating knowledge, attitudes, and behavioral orientations. From an ontological perspective, national consciousness provides an important source of legitimacy for the formation and continuity of modern nation-states, while also responding to the universal human need for belonging and security. It is rooted in individual psychological processes, yet continuously reproduced through collective beliefs in situated contexts, and can therefore be regarded as a socially embedded discursive formation with a strong practical orientation. Accordingly, its generation and dissemination are fundamentally mediated by discourse. Discourse functions not only as a medium of meaning expression but also as a mechanism for constructing social reality and cognitive structures. Discourse analysis, by examining language and its organization, reveals the processes of meaning-making and their behavioral implications^[7]. Existing research has shown that discourse not only represents social reality but also actively constructs social order and shapes interactional practices and identity formation^{[8][9]}. From this perspective, ideology and discourse are not related in a unidirectional manner; rather, they are co-constructed across individual, collective, and national levels. Through the reconfiguration of knowledge and power relations, discourse exerts a profound influence on subjectivity and patterns of action. Within the field of education, the cultivation of national consciousness is primarily realized through curriculum design, instructional content, and classroom discourse. Beyond knowledge transmission, educational discourse performs crucial functions in value guidance and identity construction. Its operation generally follows a progressive logic from curriculum to classroom, knowledge, civilization, and ultimately the nation, thereby shaping individuals' understanding of and identification with the nation in subtle ways. In this sense, discourse is not merely a tool for communication but a key vehicle for the construction of national consciousness. Furthermore, the cultivation of national consciousness ultimately points to the continuous reinforcement of national identity, which can be viewed as a process of subject reconstruction within a political context. Previous studies have identified political discourse as a crucial pathway for the formation of national identity^[10]. In this process, discourse connects individual experience with collective narratives, reshaping subjectivity and embedding it within broader social structures^[11]. In the Chinese context, the construction of national consciousness must be grounded in specific historical traditions and contemporary practices, and strengthened through the coordinated functioning of language policy, educational systems, and cultural narratives. In sum, discourse plays a foundational role in the generation, dissemination, and consolidation of national consciousness. A systematic analysis of educational discourse not only helps reveal its underlying mechanisms but also provides important theoretical and practical insights for enhancing national identity and social cohesion.

2.2 Analytical Perspective and Research Framework

This study develops an analytical framework for classroom interaction based on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and a pragmatic perspective. Rather than focusing solely on linguistic forms or

instructional content, classroom discourse is conceptualized here as an interaction-centered pragmatic practice. The analysis therefore concentrates on the mechanisms of meaning-making and the value-orienting functions of discourse in situated teaching contexts.

At the theoretical level, the study integrates Fairclough's^[12] three-dimensional model of discourse (text–discursive practice–social practice) with Pinar's^[13] view of curriculum as discourse. The foreign language classroom is thus understood as a micro-social space constituted by multiple discursive resources. Within this space, classroom discourse not only reproduces existing knowledge and cultural meanings but also continuously generates new understandings and forms of identification through interaction. Accordingly, national consciousness is treated not as a pre-given cognitive outcome, but as a dynamic construct that is constantly produced and recontextualized through discursive practice in classroom settings. In terms of analytical procedures, drawing on the notion of the “stratification” of discursive practice, this study examines classroom interaction across three interrelated levels. First, the structural level focuses on the organization of classroom discourse, including the design of question chains, turn-taking patterns, teacher–student talk distribution, and modes of discourse control. This level aims to identify who initiates meaning and how it is guided, thereby revealing the structural conditions underpinning the formation of national consciousness. Second, the processual level centers on the unfolding of pragmatic actions, examining teachers' mediating strategies (e.g., questioning, probing, reformulation, and evaluation) and students' response patterns (e.g., elaboration, modification, and reconstruction). Through this lens, the study explores how meaning is gradually generated and deepened through iterative negotiation. Third, the functional level addresses the role of classroom discourse in value construction, analyzing how national consciousness is implicitly embedded and internalized through language use. This level goes beyond explicit content to highlight the pragmatic orientation embedded in modes of discourse organization.

Based on this three-tier analytical framework, the study investigates three types of classroom contexts: task-based speaking classes, text interpretation classes, and translation practice classes. Each corresponds to a distinct mode of discursive operation: speaking classes foreground interactional progression and conceptual construction; text-based classes emphasize discourse comprehension and cultural interpretation; and translation classes center on linguistic transformation and discursive reconstruction. Through a comparative analysis of these interactional settings, the study aims to demonstrate how different pragmatic pathways operate in concert within pedagogical practice, forming a multidimensional mechanism for the construction of national consciousness.

3. The Pragmatic Orientation of Foreign Language Education in Cultivating National Consciousness

The report of the 20th National Congress explicitly proposes the need to “strengthen China's capacity for international communication, comprehensively enhance the effectiveness of international communication, and develop an international discourse system commensurate with China's comprehensive national strength and international status.” This statement indicates that the external discourse system is not only a form of expressing national will, but also an important mechanism through which a country participates in international engagement and constructs its global image. At its core, it reflects a pragmatic logic in which meaning-making and the expression of power are realized through linguistic practice.

In the context of globalization, the capacity for external discourse has become a crucial pillar for shaping national image, enhancing international discursive power, and safeguarding national interests. Against this backdrop, foreign language education is no longer merely a process of language knowledge transmission; rather, it has become a significant arena for the cultivation of national consciousness and communicative competence for international dissemination. From a pragmatic perspective, foreign language education embeds national consciousness into concrete communicative actions through the organization of language use contexts and the construction of discursive practices, thereby endowing language learning with the dual functions of knowledge acquisition and value formation. This process facilitates the integrated development of national identity, cultural awareness, and linguistic competence through dynamic interaction.

From the perspective of curriculum discourse theory, foreign language education can be understood as a form of discursive practice structure^[14]. The curriculum is not a neutral transmission of knowledge, but a medium through which values and ideologies are generated and disseminated. Teaching materials, classroom interaction, and multimedia resources collectively constitute a “textual system” of meaning

production that continuously shapes students' cultural cognition and national consciousness. Meanwhile, curriculum practice itself is inherently dialogic: through multiple interactions among teachers, students, and instructional materials, a continuously evolving pragmatic space of meaning-making is formed, within which national consciousness is internalized and reinforced through reflection and exchange. Within this discursive structure, foreign language curricula serve an important pragmatic function in expressing national consciousness. Its core lies in constructing an expressive framework characterized by both openness and subjectivity: one that enables China to articulate its voice, narrate its experiences, and convey its values in multicultural interactions, while simultaneously maintaining an understanding of and respect for other cultures in cross-cultural contexts. In this way, it contributes to the effective articulation of national narratives and the enhancement of cultural soft power. In specific teaching practice, teachers and students constitute the key agents in the pragmatic construction of national consciousness. Through curriculum design, classroom discourse, and assessment systems, teachers integrate Chinese culture, historical experiences, and developmental achievements into the teaching process, guiding students to develop cultural awareness and national identity through comparison and reflection. At the same time, the role of teachers shifts from traditional knowledge transmitters to discourse facilitators and meaning constructors, organizing value-oriented pragmatic practices within multicultural interactions. Students, in turn, transition from passive recipients of knowledge to active participants in meaning-making. Through language practice, they engage in cross-cultural communication, and in the process of understanding other cultures, continuously reconstruct their own cultural identity and sense of national belonging. Foreign language learning, therefore, is not only the development of linguistic competence, but also a cognitive process of internalizing and strengthening national consciousness through pragmatic interaction.

In summary, from a pragmatic perspective, foreign language education constructs a multi-layered mechanism for the generation and dissemination of national consciousness through curriculum discourse, classroom interaction, and cross-cultural communicative practice, thereby enabling national identity to be continuously constructed and reinforced in the process of language use.

4. A Micro-Discourse Analysis of Classroom Talk and the Construction of National Consciousness

“The cultivation of national consciousness does not simply mean fostering a China-centered awareness; rather, it entails developing a China-oriented awareness within a global perspective, or a national perspective embedded in Chinese consciousness. This aligns with “the educational objective of foreign language education to cultivate talents who possess both a sense of national commitment and an international outlook”^[15]. Accordingly, foreign language classrooms are uniquely positioned to foster international awareness. As a structured form of linguistic practice, classroom discourse provides learners with a multi-layered space for meaning construction. From both cognitive and cultural perspectives, foreign language education has gradually moved beyond the mere transmission of knowledge and skills, entering a deeper realm involving the formation of cultural identity and value generation^[16]. In this process, national consciousness is not an externally imposed component; rather, it is embedded as an implicit meaning structure within language use and classroom interaction, enabling learners to simultaneously develop a sense of social responsibility and cultural identification in the course of language acquisition.

From a theoretical standpoint, classroom teaching is essentially a form of social discursive practice. Teacher–student interaction, classroom organization, and patterns of language use together constitute a specific ecological configuration of educational discourse^[12]. Kumaravadivelu^[17] further argues that language teaching should transcend the confines of the classroom and conceptualize language as a medium embedded within social and ideological structures. Thus, classroom discourse not only serves the function of knowledge transmission but also participates, at the micro level, in shaping subjectivity and value systems.

Within this framework, the classroom-based construction of national consciousness can be understood as a process of “pragmatically embedded meaning construction.” Its key lies not in explicit indoctrination but in guiding meaning and restructuring cognition through discourse organization. Specifically, this process is realized through classroom interaction patterns, modes of textual interpretation, and the logic of task design.

(1) Speaking Task–Driven Classroom: Concept Construction and the Formation of Responsibility Awareness

Teacher: “Today, let’s discuss a question: What makes a responsible member of society in today’s

world? You may give examples from real life or recent events.”

Student 1: “I think a responsible person is someone who contributes to society. For example, during the pandemic, many volunteers helped their communities.”

Teacher: “That’s a meaningful example. Besides helping others in difficult times, what other forms of responsibility can you think of?”

Student 2: “It can also be shown through professional dedication, like scientists or engineers working to improve technology.”

Teacher: “Good point. How about at the individual level—what can students do?”

Student 3: “We should study hard and prepare ourselves for future contributions, and also be honest and follow rules.”

Teacher: “Thank you. Now try to summarize your ideas into a clear and structured response.”

This excerpt exemplifies a typical discourse pattern of “guidance–extension–reconstruction.” Through successive probing questions, the teacher continuously expands the semantic space, enabling the abstract concept of “social responsibility” to become increasingly specified and multidimensional within a concrete context. Value expression does not appear in the form of explicit evaluation; rather, it is embedded in the organization of questions and responses, allowing students to naturally construct meaning during language production. In this way, the development of linguistic competence and the formation of value understanding proceed in tandem.

(2) Text-Interpretation Classroom: Cultural Elucidation and the Re-Pragmatization of Meaning

In an English reading course, the teacher conducts a discussion based on a text concerning traditional Chinese festivals:

Teacher: “In the passage, the Spring Festival is described as a time for family reunion. What cultural values do you think are reflected here?”

Student 1: “It shows the importance of family and togetherness in Chinese culture.”

Teacher: “Good. Compared with similar festivals in other cultures, what is distinctive here?”

Student 2: “It seems more focused on family unity rather than just celebration or entertainment.”

Teacher: “Yes. So how would you explain this value to an international audience?”

Student 3: “I would say it reflects a cultural emphasis on kinship and continuity of tradition.”

This interaction illustrates another discourse mechanism, namely a pragmatic pathway of “text interpretation–cultural comparison–cross-cultural rearticulation.” In this process, students are not only guided to comprehend textual meaning but also encouraged to transform cultural content into linguistic resources suitable for external communication, thereby achieving a cognitive shift from “text comprehension” to “cultural interpretation.” This mechanism strengthens national cultural identity in cross-contextual expression and facilitates its reproduction at the pragmatic level.

(3) Translation-Oriented Classroom: Discursive Transformation and the Pragmatic Re-Encoding of National Consciousness

In translation teaching, national consciousness is more prominently manifested in the pragmatic regulation and reconstruction of meaning during language transfer:

Teacher: “Good. But does it fully convey the institutional and developmental meaning behind it?”

Student 1: “Perhaps we can explain it as ‘a modernization path with Chinese characteristics’.”

Teacher: “Yes, and how can we make it clearer for international readers?”

Student 2: “We may need to add context, like emphasizing China’s development experience and governance model.”

This excerpt demonstrates that translation is not merely a process of linguistic transfer but also one of pragmatic re-encoding and cultural positioning. Under the teacher’s guidance, students gradually become aware of the contextual meanings and value orientations embedded in lexical choices, and they reconstruct meaning across cultures through strategies such as elaboration and contextualization. In this

way, nationally relevant concepts are transformed from “linguistic units” into “discursive strategies,” exhibiting salient features of pragmatic regulation.

5. A Micro-Integrative Analysis of Classroom Interactional Discourse Mechanisms

Despite differences in task formats, the three types of classrooms share a structural isomorphism in their interactional discourse mechanisms; that is, all realize meaning construction through iterative cycles of “guidance–response–reconstruction.” These classroom types correspond to distinct pragmatic pathways for the realization of national consciousness in foreign language education. Speaking task–driven classrooms emphasize the gradual construction of abstract concepts and the internalization of responsibility through question chains and interactional progression; text-interpretation classrooms facilitate meaning re-interpretation and the development of cross-cultural expressive competence through discourse analysis and cultural comparison^[18]; translation-oriented classrooms achieve the pragmatic reconstruction of national discourse and the adjustment of outward-facing communicative strategies through language transfer and contextual supplementation. While differing in pedagogical focus, all three converge on the interactive and constructive nature of meaning-making in classroom discourse.

From a micro-discursive perspective, classroom teaching is not a unidirectional process of knowledge transmission but a dynamic space characterized by ongoing semantic negotiation and value reconfiguration. Within this space, teachers guide the flow of meaning through question design, discursive scaffolding, and reformulative feedback, while students continuously adjust their cognitive frameworks through responding, explaining, and rearticulating. National consciousness emerges gradually within this cyclical process of “guided input–interactive negotiation–expressive reconstruction,” eventually stabilizing into relatively enduring cognitive structures and value orientations.

This process indicates that the key to classroom discourse lies not in explicit content, but in the pragmatic regulatory mechanisms embedded in its organization. Differences across classroom types essentially reflect different configurations of pragmatic pathways: conceptual construction, cultural interpretation, and discursive reconstruction together form a multidimensional mechanism network for the generation of national consciousness. In this sense, the foreign language classroom is not merely a site for developing linguistic competence, but also a micro-social space in which national consciousness is continuously produced and reinforced through discursive practice.

6. Conclusion

This study adopts a micro-discursive perspective on classroom interaction to examine the pragmatic mechanisms underlying the formation of national consciousness in foreign language education. The findings suggest that the cultivation of national consciousness is not an external add-on to language instruction; rather, it is a dynamic, emergent process embedded within classroom discourse practices, realized through patterns of discourse organization and interaction in specific pedagogical contexts. An analysis of speaking task–based classrooms, text-interpretation classrooms, and translation-oriented classrooms reveals that different types of classroom discourse correspond to multiple pragmatic pathways for the construction of national consciousness: concept formation and the internalization of responsibility are achieved through question chain–driven interaction; the reinterpretation of cultural meanings and the reinforcement of cultural identification are realized through discourse-based textual analysis; and the pragmatic reconstruction of nationally relevant discourse, along with its outward-oriented expression, is facilitated through translation practices. Collectively, these mechanisms demonstrate that classroom discourse is not merely a vehicle for the transmission of linguistic knowledge, but also a key micro-level site for the ongoing production and reinforcement of national consciousness.

Accordingly, the cultivation of national consciousness in foreign language education can be understood, in essence, as a form of pragmatically oriented practice centered on classroom discourse. Its effectiveness hinges on the integration of meaning-making and value guidance through pedagogical interaction. Future reforms in foreign language teaching should place greater emphasis on the organization and pragmatic orientation of classroom discourse, so as to translate the cultivation of national consciousness from an abstract pedagogical ideal into a set of operationalizable and observable instructional practices.

Acknowledgments

This work was financially supported by the fund of 2023 Hunan Provincial Regular Higher Education Institutions Teaching Reform Research Project “A Study on Interactional Discourse in College English Classrooms under the Background of ‘Three Enters’ Initiative” (No. HNJJG-20230623).

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