

Investigation into Intercultural Sensitivity of College Non-English Majors

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ABSTRACT. *In this paper, Chen & Starosta's theory on intercultural sensitivity is introduced as the theoretical framework. The paper mainly focuses on the assessment of intercultural sensitivity of non-English majors in five dimensions with the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale designed by Chen & Starosta. That is intercultural engagement, respect for cultural differences, interaction confidence, interaction enjoyment and interaction attentiveness. Then, the author makes a further questionnaire survey to find out the obstacles of non-English majors to the effective intercultural communication and the factors affecting their intercultural sensitivity. Through the analysis of college students' performance on intercultural sensitivity, it is conducive to providing some implications for foreign language teaching so as to further enhance students' intercultural communication ability and awareness.*

KEYWORDS: *intercultural sensitivity; non-English majors; investigation*

1. Introduction

With the increasing cross-cultural communication in the world and rapid development of modern technology, national boundaries is tearing down and intercultural communication has become an indispensable part in our daily life. Moreover, intercultural sensitivity occupies a essential position in intercultural communication, so it has attracted many scholars' attention with the booming development of intercultural communication in process of globalization.

Chen and Starosta's study has contributed a lot to this field, Chen and Starosta defined intercultural sensitivity, and they pointed out that intercultural sensitivity is a dynamic and multidimensional concept, then specified six elements of intercultural sensitivity to account for the conception: self-esteem, self-monitoring, open-mindedness, empathy, interaction involvement and non-judgment [2]. During their later hard work, they have finally abstracted 24 items to consist of an assessment form after 4 times' successive tests [3].

In China, scholars also have done some relevant investigations and assessments from different aspects. For example, Mei & Jia investigates intercultural sensitivity from college students, English teachers and overseas students [6]. Jia & Wu studies

the relationship between intercultural sensitivity and Psychological happiness [4]. And many other scholars devoted themselves to this field to advance the development of intercultural communication.

Understanding other culture is necessary and needs for intercultural knowledge and skills that lead to intercultural communication competence become essential in our society. In terms of cultivating students' intercultural communication competence, improving their intercultural sensitivity to other cultures is considered to be a top priority. In the case of college English teaching, improving college students' intercultural sensitivity should begin with the assessment of their intercultural sensitivity. The investigation of intercultural sensitivity on the college non-English majors' specific representation of five dimensions, which can help subsequent researchers to know the fundamental state of intercultural sensitivity of Chinese college non-English majors, and offer a certain reference value for the amelioration of our instruction and teaching methods.

2. Intercultural Sensitivity

Milton Bennett came up with the concept "intercultural sensitivity", he defined it as "the construction of reality as capable of accommodating cultural difference that constitutes increasingly intercultural development." [1]

Then Chen and William Starosta went further to modify the definition during the incessant exploration, they propose that intercultural sensitivity is a "positive drive to accommodate, understand and appreciate cultural differences in promoting an appropriate and effective behaviour in intercultural communication" [3].

3. Methodology

A plentiful body of research demonstrates that high intercultural sensitivity appears to be beneficial for intercultural communication. However, few studies have measured or investigated Chinese students' intercultural sensitivity. Consequently, the researcher made evaluative efforts to get the hang of the college students' specific representation on five components, and conducted a questionnaire survey to know the barriers which obstruct students' intercultural communication successfully [7].

3.1 Participants

All participants in this study were freshman who were all non-English majors ranging from with their majors ranging from liberal art to science. The study was conducted in a normal university in southern China. And they have learned English for at least 9 years.

3.2 The Intercultural Sensitivity Scale

As it was mentioned above, the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) designed by Chen & Starosta has been proved as the valid scale in measurements of intercultural sensitivity [2]. ISS is adopted in this investigation to assess the subjects' level of intercultural sensitivity. It is involved in 24 items, for each item, there are 5 choices, namely, number 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 representing strongly disagree, disagree, uncertain, agree and strongly agree. The structure of ISS is specified in the following table.

Table1. Structure of Intercultural Sensitivity Scale

Factor	Names of Factors	Items
1	Interaction Engagement	1,11,13,21,22,23,24
2	Respect for Cultural Difference	2,7,8,16,18,20
3	Interaction Confidence	3,4,5,6,10
4	Interaction Enjoyment	9,12,15
5	Interaction Attentiveness	14,17,19

Items 2,4,7,9,12,15,18,20,and 22 are reverse-coded before summing the 24 items. Interaction Engagement items are 1,11,13,21, 22, 23,and 24. Respect for Cultural Differences items are 2,7,8,18,and 20. Interaction Confidence items are 3, 4, 5, 6, and 10. Interaction Enjoyment items are 9,12,and 15,and Interaction Attentiveness items are 14, 17, and 19.

3.3 The Questionnaire

In order to analyse and discuss the factors which may influence intercultural sensitivity. The questionnaires were utilized and distributed to the non-English majors. This questionnaire has 14 items, for each item, there are 5 choices, namely, number 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 representing strongly disagree, disagree, uncertain, agree and strongly agree. These items represent three aspects which may influence intercultural sensitivity, i.e., individual situation (including character, motivation and consequence), learning environment and teaching material.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Findings from ISS survey

After data collection, all the data are gathered and analyzed in details by SPSS in order to basically known students' level of intercultural sensitivity. Results of ISS are specified in the following table.

Table 2. Results of the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale

Item	N	Mean	Std. Error Mean	Sig.(2-tailed)
M(Sum)	99	86.25	.8392	.000
M1	99	26.27	.2867	.000
M2	99	23.16	.3131	.000
M3	99	15.63	.2448	.000
M4	99	10.35	.1970	.000
M5	99	10.84	.1577	.000

Note: M (Sum) = ISS

M1 = factor 1 (Interaction Engagement)

M2 = factor 2 (Respect for Cultural Difference)

M3 = factor 3 (Interaction Confidence)

M4 = factor 4 (Interaction Enjoyment)

M5 = factor 5 (Interaction Attentiveness)

From ISS survey, we can clearly know the overall level of the subjects' intercultural sensitivity. Among 99 subjects, the average score is 86.25, the standard error mean is 0.8392, and the significance level is far below 0.05, which indicates that there is significant difference about the level of non-English majors' intercultural sensitivity. On the whole, the general situation of intercultural sensitivity is great. And among five factors of ISS, M1 gets the highest score, but M4 gets the lowest score, which means students has shown great desire to communicate with people from different cultures, but they cannot gain positive reaction or enjoyment during communication, because of some barriers which prevent them from successful intercultural communication. What's more, subjects also do well in M2, which means they will understand and respect for the differences between other countries and their own country, devote their mind to the process of intercultural communication. However, subjects do not well in M3, which means they are not very confident when they are in the intercultural situations, so English teachers should attach more importance to help students build their confidence during their teaching procedure. As for M5, they are not very good at catch the subtle meaning in intercultural communication because they are not sensitive to other culture.

4.2 Findings from the questionnaire

After the assessment of intercultural sensitivity, the questionnaires were distributed to 99 subjects, college non-English majors. After data collection, all the data of the questionnaire are gathered and analyzed. The results of the questionnaire are specified in the following table (table 3, table4, table 5).

Table 3. Selections for Each Item in Individual Situation

Factor	Aspect	Item	Selections for Each Item				
			1	2	3	4	5
Individual Situation	Character	1	3	31	23	35	7
		2	1	23	31	38	6
	Motivation	3	2	18	19	50	10
		4	2	6	9	65	17
	Consequence	5	3	23	33	35	5
		6	3	32	34	27	3

This part of the questionnaire is an inquiry of the individual situation, from the table, we find that among these 99 subjects, about 42% of them think they are extroverts (item1), about 44% of them think they are self-confident (item2). As for their motivation of learning English, about 60% of them like English foreign films, music and culture, so they are willing to learn English (item3), but more 82% of the subjects want to learn English well because they believe English is very useful in life (item4). About the consequence, about 40% of them take active part in English classes (item5), but only about 30% of the subjects usually look for opportunities to speak English in their life (item6).

Table 4. Selections for Each Item in Learning Circumstance

Factor	Aspect	Item	Selections for Each Item				
			1	2	3	4	5
Learning Environment	In life	7	1	11	13	56	18
	In Class	8	0	9	12	69	9
		9	0	5	10	66	18
		10	2	8	23	55	11

This part of the questionnaire is to investigate the learning environment of these 99 subjects. From the table, we can find that over 74% of them usually have chances to expose themselves to foreign films, music and culture (item7). And in class, about 78% of them consider that their English teachers usually introduce cultural backgrounds of the text for them (item8), and about 84% of them recall that their teachers usually share some interesting foreign films or music, etc. (item9), about 66% of the subjects put forward that their teachers usually encourage them to discuss

cases which are caused by cultural diversity (item10).

Table 5. Selections for Each Item in Teaching Material

Factor	Aspect	Item	Selections for Each Item				
			1	2	3	4	5
Teaching Material	Objective	11	1	9	25	54	10
	Text	12	1	9	13	63	13
	Note	13	2	12	20	57	8
	Question	14	0	12	21	59	7

This part of the questionnaire is an investigation of the teaching material. From the table, we can find that, about 64% of them find that there are objectives about related request for cultivating intercultural communication competence in their college English text books (item11). And 76% of the subjects think that there are texts which introduce foreign cultures contained in their college English text books (item12), 65% find that notes about foreign cultures contained in their text books (item13). About 66% of the students find that in their college English text books, there are some questions about cultural diversity for students to think about or discuss (item14).

From the data analysis of questionnaire, it seems that most students think they are not extroverted and confident enough. This may influence their performance in intercultural communication. Because extroverted character may make them be more open-minded and active in intercultural communication. For teachers, it is necessary to help students build self-confidence. About motivation, out of the practical functions of English, nearly most students are willing to learn English. It is essential for teachers to enhance students' interest in English with various ways. From survey on the consequence, we can find that much less of them look for opportunities to speak English in their life.

In addition, it is obvious that it is much easier for college students to expose themselves to foreign films, music and culture as the popularization of computers and the Internet. And from the data, we can find that most college English teachers not only introduce cultural backgrounds of the text to students, but also make full use of all kinds of tools to lead students to think. As for teaching materials, it is evident that college English textbooks have attached more importance to culture education, but only 60% students think that there are introduction and questions about other cultures. Therefore, there is much space for improvement.

5. Conclusion and Suggestion for future research

Through the investigation, it is evident that the general situation of the

intercultural sensitivity of the non-English majors is beyond uncertain stage, as the College English teachers pay more and more attention to combine culture education with traditional language teaching. However, it doesn't mean that students are highly sensitive to intercultural communication. Still, great efforts are needed to be made by students for the purpose of being appropriate and effective in intercultural communication [5].

Through the questionnaire, barriers in intercultural communication of non-English majors have been summarized. According to the investigation, the main barriers are the deficiency of communication skills, the deficiency of culture knowledge, the deficiency of experience and the deficiency of confidence. And the factors which influence intercultural sensitivity of non-English majors mainly are individual situations, learning circumstance, teaching materials and intercultural communication experience.

Based on a small sample size, the findings should be expounded with caution in light of varied settings. Particularly, it is more multilingual and culturally diverse in nowadays. It is suggested that teachers should avail of multiple resources to cultivate students' intercultural sensitivity in effective and meaningful ways. It is recommended that more longitudinal and empirical studies can be delved in future to explore how intercultural sensitivity can provide a favorable environment for students to promote intercultural communication and how students are able to actively engage in the process with satisfaction and attainment.

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