

# Study of Lexical Teaching in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language from the Perspective of Culture

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**ABSTRACT.** *In this thesis, the lexical teaching of TCFL is analyzed from the aspect of culture to provide Chinese teachers with some clues on how to improve the efficiency of lexical teaching of TCFL. The important cultural knowledge to be presented in lexical teaching is divided into four parts: material culture, behavioral culture, regulation culture and conceptual culture. The suggestions on how to present those cultural knowledge in lexical teaching of TCFL are provided.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Lexical teaching, Teaching chinese as a foreign language, Culture*

## 1. Introduction

At present many foreigners complain that it's extremely difficult for foreigners to grasp the complicated Chinese language because there is rich cultural information conveyed by Chinese figures and vocabularies. Therefore, plenty of researchers have investigated the teaching approaches that are applicable for Chinese teaching as foreign language (which is hereby referred to as TCFL). Shi Lingyu focuses on the comparison between the unique cultural connotations conveyed by animal words like cows and horses in Chinese and English to provide advice on how to present the cultural connotations of Chinese vocabularies (Shi Lingyu, 2020: 385). Besides, Kuai Linlin analyzes how to present the unique Chinese tea culture in TCFL, including following the general roles of teaching, highlighting the core parts of Chinese tea culture and combining the cultural presentation with practical communications (Kuai Linlin, 2020: 147). In addition, Liu Han points out that Chinese teachers ought to observe the principles of adding appropriate amount of cultural information in warm-up, considering the present proficiency of Chinese learners and showing adequate respect for the unique culture of Chinese learners (Liu Han, 2020: 176). However, the studies to focus on the application of cultural knowledge in lexical teaching of TCFL are limited and that is exactly why this research topic is selected

The analysis in this paper is important because the analysis of the crucial cultural knowledge in this paper will help Chinese learners in other countries realize the importance of cultural background knowledge in Chinese learning. The advice on the presentation of cultural information and lexical teaching in TCFL in this thesis

will help Chinese teachers obtain some clues on how to improve the teaching efficiency of TCFL via cultural knowledge presentation.

## 2. Theoretical Basis

### 2.1 Definition of Tcfl

The term TCFL (Teaching Chinese as Foreign Language) indicates “the teaching and learning activities to present Chinese knowledge for the persons, whose mother tongue is not Chinese but intend to learn Chinese for the sake of occupations that requires them to speak or write Chinese(Zhou Xiaobing, Li Xiaou, 2003: 27). The learners of TCFL are normally teenagers and adults who have already grasped their mother tongue, which adds to the negative transfer of mother tongue in Chinese learning. TCFL is normally characterized by practicability, complexity and professionalism.

### 2.2 Categorization of Culture

The term culture means “the customs and beliefs, art, way of life and social organization of a particular country or group”(Bownes, W., 1988: 89). Culture is characterized by complexity and uniqueness. In accordance with the content of culture, culture could be categorized into the following four parts.

#### 2.2.1 Material Culture

The first part of culture is material culture, which indicates “the products or objects that are invented or created by humans, including the aesthetic concept, producing technology and skills that are closely related to the creation and production of those products or objects(Fromkin V. Rodman R., 1998: 39). Material culture covers the diversified food, relevant table manners, clothing, transportation, construction and others. The analysis of material culture depends on the relevant materials and it is in vain to analyze material culture without consideration of relevant materials.

The long history allows Chinese for creating diversified material culture, including the unique food to be made via complicated procedures, the charming costume of various dynasties and minority nations, the complicated ceremonies at weddings and important festivals etc. In accordance with those material culture, Chinese have created large numbers of Chinese vocabularies for the sake of convenient communications about material culture. The example Chinese vocabularies related to food include “糍粑”, “饅頭” and others. The example Chinese words about costumes include “袴褶”, etc. The example Chinese vocabularies about constructions include “四合院” and others.

### 2.2.2 Behavioral Culture

Behavioral culture means “the sum of the fixed behaviors and the result of such behaviors in the daily productive activities that shows the value and regulations to be accepted by most members of their nation”(Wardhaugh R., 2009: 61). The behavioral culture primarily refers to the behaviors of the models, leaders and successful persons whose behaviors are consistent with the moral and legal regulations and should be imitated by the public. Some of the behavioral culture is originated from the famous celebrities in history or the contemporary successful persons. A typical example celebrity is “雷锋”, who has been making his best to help others. The behavioral culture is the normally sum of the model behaviors of famous persons and plays a crucial role in family education and the education at school.

### 2.2.3 Regulation Culture

The third noticeable component of culture is the regulation culture, which refers to “the system of rules and regulations that are created intentionally by the leaders and managers in a nation or an organization for the sake of the existence and development of the whole organization, clan and a nation”(Hu Zhuanglin, 2001: 103). The regulation culture primarily indicates the administrative system, talent selecting regulations, legislative regulations, moral rules, occupational regulations and others.

The unique regulation culture in China is deeply influenced by masculinity and the status of females has been much lower than males in China for a long time. Such social system has profound influence on the Chinese vocabularies and there are many Chinese words and idioms related to those regulations of feudalism and masculinity. For instance, the sum of the rules to be observed by females is called “sān cóng sì dé 三从四德“. There are some new vocabularies created in accordance with the socialism at present. The word “bā róng bā chǐ 八荣八耻“ is the idiom to describe the set of regulations about how Chinese people should behave themselves in social activities, which are further divided into the rules about what behaviors are regarded as shameful and what behaviors are thought to be glorious.

### 2.2.4 Conceptual Culture

Conceptual culture means “the mental state that is based on the experiences of humans in the past and dominates how humans cope with cultural communications”(Wang Jun, 2017: 22). The conceptual culture is characterized by the self-adjustment, criticalness, and directivity. Self-adjustment means that the conceptual culture is adjusted by humans continuously in accordance with the external environment. The criticalness of conceptual culture means that conceptual culture enables humans to provide negative evaluation of the behaviors or activities that are not consistent with their values. The directivity of conceptual culture means that such culture is normally observed by specific types of members of the society.

The Chinese regulation culture is established base on the productive and social activities in China, as well as the political and legal system. Since ancient time, Chinese have established the complex system of regulations to be observed by various social status. In accordance with such regulations, many Chinese vocabularies and proverbs are created to describe the unique regulation culture. A noticeable example of such Chinese vocabulary is “休养生息<sup>xiū yǎng shēng xī</sup>“, which refers to the political policies adopted by the emperors in Han Dynasty by which the ruling class encourages the public to increase consumption to promote the economic development.

### 3. Application of Culture in Lexical Teaching in Tefl

#### 3.1 Adopting Relevant Objects in Lexical Presentation

The first important part of culture is material culture, which is comparatively simple to be perceived by learners because such cultural information is normally presented via concrete materials or objects. However, the presentation of material cultural information requires that Chinese teachers should select the most important representative objects in the teaching of the vocabularies about Chinese material culture. This method is employed in the following types of lexical teaching. At first, Chinese teachers need to choose the representative objects related to some Chinese vocabularies. It's important to select this method in the explanation for the meaning of Chinese figures that reflect the unique Chinese material culture. For instance, in case of introducing the vocabularies about unique Chinese food culture, teachers could select some typical food originated from different regions in China such as “叉烧包<sup>chā shāo bāo</sup>“, and “烤鸭<sup>kǎo yā</sup>“ etc. Secondly, Chinese teachers could select the most typical objects to establish the advantageous environment for Chinese learners to practice speaking Chinese. For instance, when leading learners to practice speaking the Chinese vocabularies about typical Chinese costumes, teachers could decorate the classroom with some traditional Chinese costumes to make learners feel as if they were purchasing clothes from clothing shops in China.

#### 3.2 Using Videos to Vividly Present Cultural Connotation

The Chinese behavioral culture is normally complicated so Chinese teachers need to use some relevant videos to make sure concrete presentation of the vocabularies. The videos to introduce the vocabularies about Chinese behavioral culture could be selected in accordance with the following two principles: at first, the videos should be the miniature of specific parts of Chinese behavioral culture so that Chinese learners could obtain the central knowledge about the specific parts of the behavioral culture. The videos should take less than 5 minutes so teachers could lead learners to do relevant language practice to ensure that they have grasped the vocabularies about behavioral culture.

Secondly, after playing the videos about behavioral culture, teachers need to lead learners to practice using the key Chinese vocabularies to describe what they have learned from the videos. For instance, after playing the short videos about Yuan Longping, teachers could ask learners to describe the important lessons that they learned from Yuan's deeds and to present the important behavioral culture that is reflected from his achievements.

### ***3.3 Comparing Different Regulations to Present Cultural Difference***

The third important part of the cultural knowledge to be presented in the lexical teaching of TCFL is the regulation culture, which requires that Chinese teachers should compare the regulations in different nations to ensure that Chinese learners should understand the uniqueness of Chinese regulation culture. It's necessary to compare the regulation culture of the mother country of the learners with the Chinese regulation culture so as to find out the distinctions between them. For instance, when teaching Americans the Chinese regulation culture about corporation culture, teachers need to compare the Chinese regulations at workplace with the rules in American workplace. Teachers should specify the most important distinctions between the regulations at the workplace in the two nations so as to make sure that learners could understand the unique Chinese regulation culture at workplaces. Besides, teachers could lead learners to practice using the Chinese vocabularies about regulation culture via asking learners to predict how Chinese reacts to certain problems at work place in accordance with the Chinese regulation culture.

### ***3.4 Comparing to Concrete Phenomena to Show Cultural Distinctions about Concept***

At last, the conceptual culture should be presented reasonably in lexical teaching of TCFL and teachers need to compare such abstract cultural information to concrete phenomena to show cultural distinctions about various concept. Since conceptual culture is presented in the daily communication, the explanation for the Chinese vocabularies about conceptual culture should be based on the actual Chinese communication. Teachers should extract some actual Chinese conversations to illustrate with the explanation for Chinese vocabularies about conceptual culture. For instance, when explaining for the unique aesthetic concept of literature, teachers could present learners with the classical Chinese poems or essays to show how the aesthetic concept affect Chinese literature.

## **4. Conclusion**

In this thesis, the most important categories of culture that should be taken into the consideration of lexical teaching are analyzed. Besides, the suggestions on how to improve the efficiency of lexical teaching in TCFL are provided.

The analysis in this thesis could lead to the following conclusions: at first, the most important types of culture that should be taken into the consideration of lexical teaching of TCFL include material culture, behavioral culture, regulation culture and conceptual culture, which interact with each other to promote the development of culture. Secondly, the presentation of cultural knowledge in lexical teaching in TCFL requires that teachers should adopt the following suggestions: teachers should choose the most representative objects to present unique Chinese material culture in lexical teaching; teacher should select the relevant videos to ensure concrete presentation of behavioral culture; teachers need to compare the different regulation culture in China and the mother country of learners so that learners could understand the unique Chinese regulation culture; teachers should compare the abstract Chinese conceptual culture to concrete objects or images to help learners with thorough understanding of the abstract cultural knowledge. The analysis in this thesis is important because it helps Chinese teachers of TCFL obtain some clues on how to combine the presentation of Chinese culture with lexical teaching of TCFL.

Despite of the importance of the analysis in this thesis, there are still some defects with this research since the researcher has not obtain adequate time to provide further thorough analysis of the cultural presentation in lexical teaching of TCFL. In this thesis, only the lexical teaching of TCFL is taken into the consideration of this thesis and the other parts of TCFL are not analyzed in this thesis. However, the presentation of cultural knowledge is equally important in other parts of Chinese teaching such as reading classes and oral class. To make up for that defect, other researchers should make more efforts to analyze how to present cultural knowledge in other types of Chinese teaching such as the teaching in reading and oral classes of TCFL in the future.

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