A Study on the Ways to Improve Cross-cultural Critical Thinking Ability with English Speech as the Carrier—Based on a Survey of English Majors in China

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Abstract: *English speech is an important part of English learning, with strong cultural, communicative, and artistic characteristics. In the context of cultural integration, English speech also serves as a dispensable tool for effective communication with groups from different cultural backgrounds. Cultivating high-quality foreign language talents with global perspective has become an urgent task in foreign language teaching. The purpose of this article is to enhance the speaker's cross-cultural thinking ability, thereby effectively disseminating the domestic culture. It also aims to explore reasonable methods of improving English speech preparation, layout, citing examples, themes, thus enhancing resonance with the audience and providing effective reference for the teaching and learning of English speech.*

Keywords: *Cross-cultural thinking ability, English speech, English majors*

1. Introduction

Speech is an effective means of expressing opinions, expanding one's influence, and persuading others. In the background of cultural integration and the intricacies of international public opinion, it is necessary to strengthen the construction of international communication capacity by accelerating the construction of discourse power to connect with the world and display domestic culture and spirit more truly and effectively. Cross-cultural thinking ability plays an important role in cross-cultural communication. Those with this ability can integrate multiple cultural information, understand cultural differences correctly, as well as evaluate them. They can innovate the use of knowledge, integrate ideas, and grasp the key points, thereby successfully communicating in a cross-cultural context. [1] English speech is an optimal carrier for cultural exchanges, which not only demands the personal charm of the speaker, but is also a more convenient, direct, and vivid way of cultural dissemination. Speakers can take advantage of it to highlight the image of their country and manifest cultural confidence through the speaker. [2] Previous studies have mainly focused on the terms and application of cross-cultural thinking ability, based on which this article focuses more on investigating the current situation of Chinese English majors through examining the barriers to cross-cultural thinking ability in their English speeches with specific criteria, by which we analyzed the root causes, and have found ways to improve their cross-cultural thinking ability based on English speech, thus effectively disseminating domestic culture.

2. Literature review

There has been a long history of researches on cross-cultural thinking abilities. Reflecting on previous studies, British professor Byram (1997) [3] proposed that cross-cultural ability encompasses four elements: knowledge, attitude, skills, and critical cultural awareness. Foreign language skills are the foundation, while critical cultural awareness plays a central role. J.M. Bennett (2013) illustrated that the relationship between the development process of cross-cultural ability and critical thinking ability are not parallel but intertwined. John W. Millera and Jennifer S. Tucker (2015) conducted a study with teaching experiments and found that cross-cultural ability is significantly related to the overall criteria of critical thinking ability, and self-regulated metacognitive ability is a "mindset" skill under the synergy of the former two abilities. The research results of Jana Martincová and Michaela Lukesová (2015) indicated that critical thinking ability plays a decisive part in handling cross-cultural conflicts. [4] Similarly, Shen Juming and Gao Yongchen (2015) also proposed that some aspects of critical thinking ability are indispensable in cross-

cultural communication ability. [5]

"College English Teaching Curriculum" stipulates that students should be able to effectively conduct oral and written communication in English during work and social interaction. [6] However, in most cases, students often perform poorly when it requires thinking with sufficient sensitivity and depth, such as debate, reasoning, etc. Their language lacks logic and their thoughts are relatively limited. There exists a fear of difficulty in deeply exploring and expressing ideas.

This phenomenon caused by a lack of ability to analyze, synthesize, judge, reason, think, and discriminate, which is known as the "speculative lack" phenomenon (Huang Sheng, 1998:19). Based on previous researches, this study has targeted the subjects concretely and visualized the critical thinking ability, thus promoting the two-way integration of thinking and culture: that is, which perspectives to think from, how to get a deeper insight into the content, and how to conduct a more humanistic layout of writing so as to achieve effective communication in face of different cultures.

3. Research methods

3.1. Test method

The present study took Jiangsu Province, a major educational province, as a sample and randomly selected English majors in this province. Students completed this test without external assistance. The test questions were divided into 7 objective questions (multiple choice questions), mainly investigating the knowledge of culture home and abroad, plus three subjective questions (open ended questions), covering cultural differences between China and the West and students' cross-cultural awareness. This is a general test of students' cross-culture thinking ability. Researches on cross-cultural communication ability at home and abroad have gone through more than 50 years, and it has been agreed that cross-cultural communication ability includes three basic elements: cross-cultural sensitivity (emotion), cross-cultural cognitive ability (knowledge), and cross-cultural behavioral ability (skills). [7] Accordingly, this cross-cultural thinking ability test was mainly condensed into three dimensions: cross-cultural knowledge, conflict coping strategies, and empathy. There were 10 questions in total, with a score of 100. Among them, those with scores of 80 or above were considered excellent, those who scored 60-79 were considered passed, and those scored below 60 failed. See Table 1.

Table 1: Scoring criteria for subjective questions

Evaluation Dimension	Evaluation Content	Grading Criteria			Actual Score
		I	II	III	
Diversity and Appropriateness of Speech Content (10)	1. Diversity of examples (>=3, 1-2, 0) 2. Degree of appropriateness	10-8	7-4	3-0	
Appropriateness of Methods (10)	1. Considering communication objects' background and requirement 2. Showing an inclusive attitude	10-8	7-4	3-0	

3.2. Observational method

A random selection of 20 English majors from a university in Jiangsu Province was conducted to perform a three-minute English speech with a set topic for an in-depth experimental observation. After that, a comprehensive evaluation of the speech was given by foreign teachers (judges) of the university, which examined the students' cross-cultural thinking ability that showed in their speeches.

3.3. The comparative analysis method

On a basis of the representative works of the "FLTRP Cup" English competition series, speeches of contestants who won the first three prizes in the past five years have been analyzed from the aspects of article composition, theme, connotation, and techniques. Taking example by actual performance of cross-cultural thinking in their speeches, students can find effective references for high-quality English speeches.

4. Findings

4.1. The Situation of China's Foreign Language Majors' Cross-cultutal Thinking Ability

4.1.1. Lack of cross-cultural knowledge

In this survey, a total of 558 questionnaires were distributed and 558 were retrieved, of which 516 were valid. The survey focused on the current situation of English majors' cross-cultural thinking abilities. The results of the questionnaires showed that 69.23% of students believe that the West prefers abstract thinking (correct answers), while 30.77% of students think they prefer image thinking; 53.85% of students consider that "the result of the event" matters more in Western culture, while 46.15% of students choose "process" (correct answers); 92.31% of students believe that Western thinking is biased towards linear thinking (correct answers), while 7.69% of students think that it is biased towards curved mode of thinking. According to the result, English majors do not have an enough clear understanding of Western thinking patterns.

Regarding issues related to the cultural connotation represented by different objects in Chinese and foreign cultures, 84.62% of students believe that in Western culture, the emotional attitude represented by **"goat"** is negative (correct answer), while 15.38% of students consider it in the opposite; 53.85% of students believed that the lion (correct answer) has the same emotional meaning in Chinese and the West, 38.46% believe it is "dog", and 7.69% think it is " dragon." Their understanding of the meaning of imagery is incomprehensive.

The answers to open-ended questions are as follows: Students' perceptions of cultural differences were reflected in "consumption", "marriage", "attitude towards life", and "education"; In the face of conceptual conflicts between people from different cultural backgrounds, students' solutions mainly focused on "avoiding problems", "presenting facts and reasoning", "trying to identify with each other's ideas", " attempt to communicate". The students show an inclusive attitude towards cross-culture issues , coming up approaches from several dimensions.

In terms of personal scores, "excellent" accounted for 58.3% and "pass" constituted 35.7%. It can be seen that English majors have a certain basic understanding of Western culture, but their cross-cultural knowledge and ability still need to be improved.

4.1.2. English speech content lacks depth and diversity

The theme of this set speech is "My role in building a community with a shared future for human kind", which is a topic that connects with the world. On the whole, the enthusiasm of students was high, and their attitudes were positive. In terms of stage performing, although most students were slightly nervous, the overall completion of the speech was acceptable, and their oral English was at a moderate level. However, from the perspective of content, most students only focused on large and empty discussions, lacking their own relevant examples or unique experiences, which were basically related to volunteers in the current epidemic era. Their goals could also be attributed to personal efforts to enable the world to become better. Admittedly, theme like this was rather positive but lacking speculation and diversity, making it difficult to truly impress the audience. As far as the lecturers in this experiment were concerned, their thinking was relatively limited.

4.2. Cross-cultural barriers in English Speech by foreign language majors in China

English Speech is an important part of English teaching. The cultivation of oral English expression ability and critical thinking ability is indispensable. The appearance and demeanor of a speaker will profoundly affect the effectiveness of a speech, and the evaluation of the effectiveness of a speech depends on whether the content of the speech can strike the hearts of the audience and resonate with them. This requires a certain understanding of the cultural background of the audience, and on this basis, do more work. The teaching model adopted in the English major speech course of this experiment is mainly to train students repeatedly in the state and the completion of speech content, but it does not focus on cultivating students' international vision and cultural awareness, lacking the procedure of leading students to deeply analyze the connotation, conduct multi-dimensional thinking, and establish their own connection of the world. When speaking, those students mainly pay attention to issues such as their self-confidence and fluency on the stage.

4.2.1 The impact of local culture

The impact of local culture exerted on the acquisition of language and culture of other countries is mainly reflected in thinking patterns, cultural images , and outlook on life.

Most students, influenced by the "emphasis on results over processes" in traditional Chinese education, tend to believe that Westerners also value the results of events, which shows that students haven't altered their mindset when in cross-cultural occasions. Faced with issues related to the cultural connotations represented by different objects in Chinese and foreign cultures, some students are influenced by the "gentle and kind" image of goats in local culture and may believe that the same is true of the allegorical meaning of goats in Western culture. However, goats in Western culture are related to some metaphors in the Bible, which in most cases represent evil and ominous omens. These cognitive biases in images reflect the incomplete understanding of cross-cultural connotations by English majors. Chinese students grow up in their own cultural environment, when learning English, they inevitably suffer from stereotypical mindset and the pursuit of standard answers in an exam-oriented environment. Lacking authentic language environment and with fixed thinking patterns, [8] directly applying the mindset in Chinese style to practice English communication can lead to errors in cross-cultural occasion.

4.3. Discovery of excellent speeches in China's authoritative foreign language competitions

Table 2: Analysis of excellent speeches

Year	The Title of Speech	Chinese Cultural Image	Core Value
2018	Chess Board	Chess Board	Facing the world's injustices, one needs aspirations and perseverance in life.
	Hotpot	Hotpot	Generosity, inclusivity, and respect for diversity.
2019	Round Table	Round Table	The introduction of the sense of security and cohesion in Chinese families.
	Tea	Tea	Tea culture bridges East and West, expressing China's spirit of openness and tolerance.
	He	The Chinese Character 和	Unity of Heaven, Earth, and Humanity; Respect for Nature; Love for Peace.
2020	Education for Future	Shennong Tasting Hundred herbs	The significance of education to the human world.
	The Year of the Ox	Chinese Zodiac sign of the Ox	Praise of the diligence and the quality of bearing hardships of Chinese people.
2021	Benevolence	The Chinese Character 仁	Respect, mutual assistance, and kindness among people.
	Resilience, Docility, Confidence	The Quality of Resilience, Docility, Confidence	The three most important qualities of the Chinese people.
2022	Leadership	Construction of the Dujiangyan Irrigation System and the Three Gorges Dam	People create history.
	People-Centered Philosophy	A straw hat indicates the support in poverty alleviation	All activities should prioritize the people's interests.
	Striving in Unity	Confucius	Forging ahead in unity is not only the traditional virtue of the Chinese nation, but also theme of times.

By comparing and analyzing the excellent speeches in the final 2of the "FLTRP Cup" National Speech Contest from 2019 to 2022, it is found that with the increasing emphasis placed on external publicity by the country, the theme of the final has become increasingly closely related to Chinese culture. The contestants incorporated Chinese culture into their speech theme, and the core concepts transmitted

by the contestants are rooted in the spiritual connotation of excellent Chinese culture. Representative speeches possess three similar characteristics: First, speakers have made good use of images that embody Chinese culture. Whether it is the image of "tea", "round table", "chess", or the historical story of "Shennong tasting hundreds of herbs", "building Dujiangyan Irrigation Project", "Confucius lecturing", and "harmony", "people-oriented", etc. they all enriched the connotation of the speeches and made them more intriguing.

Secondly, they have contrived to find resonance. Choosing the value that the theme implies, which is also the common belief of foreigners, can naturally resonate with audiences. For example, in the speech "Hotpot' in 2018, the world is metaphorically represented by the traditional Chinese food hot pot. "The world is a big hot pot," which highlights the diversity and openness of the ideal world through the inclusiveness of the ingredients in the hot pot. Nowadays, different cultures, races, and countries coexist harmoniously in the world, and the culture: "harmony" in China can also be extended to the world. The story of Chinese cattle that the speech "The Year of the Ox" in 2020 showed also enumerated stories of cattle in Greek mythology and Hinduism, establishing a connection between "cattle" in Chinese culture and that in others, enabling foreign audience to better understand the uniqueness of Chinese "cattle", which was a huge success in promoting the international dissemination of Chinese culture.

Thirdly, at the end of the speech, the connotation and core values of Chinese culture were refined through reasonable sublimation. In the 2019 speech "Round Table", the image "round table" was sublimated from a Chinese characteristic gathering prop at dinner to a place with a sense of belonging and security. It is a bond that connects family members, blending Chinese food and affection. The speaker extended the significance of the round table from the family to the society and country, and even to the world.

In the speech "Benevolence" in 2021, the story of an enthusiastic old woman helping tourists trapped in a strange land without seeking any reward was naturally followed by the discussion of "benevolence", and then the theme of this speech was introduced, which embodies the love between people, functioning as an important link to unite the human community with a shared future.

5. Ways to Improve Cross-cultural Thinking Ability in English Speech

5.1 Improve cross-cultural awareness

5.1.1. Speech audience analysis before giving a speech.

Speakers should first conduct a thorough analysis of the audience. Speech is a two-way communication process between the speaker and the audience, which emphasizes the effectiveness. Speakers' analysis of the audience can be divided into two parts.

(1) Background investigation. First of all, speakers should investigate the country where the audience come from before making a speech and make sure that a basic understanding of their cultural background is prepared. Speakers need to appropriately understand the audience's thinking patterns, value systems, and behavioral norms based on different cultural backgrounds. In this manner, speakers can effectively avoid conflicts caused by cultural differences by learning cultural taboos.

(2) Demands analysis. Before giving a speech, the speaker is also supposed to understand the needs of the audience and what they expect to acquire from the speech. According to the "emotional appeal" in Aristotle's Three Principles of Persuasion, speakers first select a topic that will arouse the audience's interest based on their cultural background and. Secondly, collect more information about the purpose of this gathering and carry out targeted speech with handy assistance.

5.1.2. Analysis of speech content

(1) Highlight the "equality" of communication. After having a basic understanding of the audience, speakers should continue to polish up the content. The purpose and significance of the speech is to enable the audience to understand it and generate certain feedback. In this two-way communication process, speakers ought to pay attention to the equality of communication. If the speech is difficult for the audience to comprehend, the speaker should apply facts that they easily understand as many as possible, by which means they can respond to the speaker's words. Speakers are in equal position with audience, not arrogant leaders.

(2) The structural design of the speech is also vital. It is advisable for speakers to adjust the narrative logic appropriately. For example, people from different cultural backgrounds have distinct cognitive styles. Chinese people tend to think in a curved way, that is, starting with details, then drawing conclusions, generally they focus on the overall picture. However, people from Western English-speaking countries tend to think more directly, they go straight to the topic, and then explain the details,

which focuses on analysis. Chinese reflects holistic thinking while English presents analytical thinking.[9] Therefore, it is better to use Western oriented thinking patterns for logical argumentation in the process of delivering English speeches to suit their thinking habit for better understanding and harvest good speech results.

5.2. Enhance cultural understanding

5.2.1. Reject mandatory output

Speakers should consciously avoid conflicts caused by cultural taboos as well as avoid invalid mandatory output. Start with the topic from a perspective that the audience can both accept and approve so that the they can effectively understand the content of the speech and grasp the idea the speaker is trying to convey.

5.2.2. Seek common ground while reserving differences

(1) Integrate multiple cultures. Based on John Bailey's theory of cultural adaptation, speakers should adopt an integrated strategy in the process of speaking, which means, in order to enhance the cultural understanding of the speech for the audience, speakers need to maintain their own cultural traditions as well as balance and integrate other diverse cultures, also keeping a tendency to communicate with other ethnic cultural groups. For instance, speakers should avoid the output of a monocultural perspective during the process of speaking, on the contrary, speakers are supposed to integrate multicultural elements and combine the commonalities of diverse cultures.

(2) Creating cultural relevance. It is suggested that speakers seek common ground between their own cultural field and that of their audience as well as select topics that have connections with them. For example, when giving a speech on the topic of "canal", speakers can start from the angle of the Chinese Grand Canal, and then extend the topic to the World Heritage Canal. By comparing the Chinese Grand Canal with other canals around the world from multiple dimensions, more common aspects where international cooperation has been made such as canal development and canal protection can be elaborated.

5.3. Making full use of domestic cultural resources

Chinese university students who major in English are responsible for disseminating Chinese culture. Therefore, as speakers, they should make full use of Chinese cultural resources to improve the quality and profundity of their speeches on the basis of cultural speculation.

First and foremost, being exposed to diverse cultural backgrounds, students majoring in English shouldn't disregard the study of traditional Chinese culture. They should thoroughly research and comprehend China's rich cultural resources, which include historic myths, Chinese ancient artifacts, and distinctive Chinese images.

China has a long history and offers a variety of choices. Cultural barriers, however, may make it difficult for people to comprehend one another. Speakers should therefore choose representative images with Chinese features and describe them more clearly when promoting Chinese culture, the effect of generating audience interest and achieving the goal of diffusion can both be achieved by choosing distinctive legends, cultural artifacts, or images that can represent China. [10]

6. Conclusion

In the context of accelerated globalization and cultural integration, countries with different cultural backgrounds have more opportunities for communication, exchanges, and cooperation. The application of cross-cultural communication and English-speaking skills among English majors is becoming increasingly necessary, and cross-cultural thinking ability calls for more attention. In order to strengthen the recognition of domestic culture around the world and disseminate it more effectively, foreign language practitioners, especially English majors, should not only learn English language and foreign cultural knowledge systematically , but also have the awareness to think in others' shoes and integrate different cultures as well as select the appropriate content for communication and skillfully plan the layout of it. More importantly, it is crucial to organically combine humanity and critical thinking, stand on the perspective of human community with a shared future, seek common ground while reserving differences with profound and unique perspectives, thus finding resonance in the depths of the human soul.

7. Acknowledgements

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