

# Culture–Teaching in Korean Language Education

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## I. Introduction

In teaching Korean as a foreign language, the importance of teaching culture has been widely recognized. However how to teach culture in foreign language education is a problem faced by language educators all over the world. In this paper, the concerning linguistic theories and various ways of teaching culture in the Korean classroom will be surveyed and studied in the light of Chinese situation. The present paper stresses that culture teaching is very essential in the Korean language education. The teaching of language as well as the teaching of culture are of the same importance in the Korean classroom.

Language and culture are closely related. In foreign language education, the definition of culture teaching should include all the human achievements of civilization and the ways of life and the different habits of people. Culture differences are reflected in languages and communicative activities. Furthermore it makes great difference in communication whether learners can understand or know the cultural differences, cultural rules, and even the cultural taboos.

As we know, communication is rule–governed. People expect culturally determined patterns of behaviour or rules to govern their interactions. In communication, rules prescribe behaviors by establishing appropriate and acceptable responses to communication stimuli for various social contexts within the larger culture. Social settings usually stimulate which rules are appropriate for a particular situation, but it is culture that constructs the rules, which are culturally diverse. Although cultures have many of the same social settings or contexts, they may employ different rules. To be successful in international communication, it is essential that you know not only your own culture's rules but also the cultural rules of the people with whom you are interacting.

However, in traditional approaches to language teaching, the degree of proficiency that a learner achieved is described in terms of his mastery of

“structures”—that is, of the phonology, syntax, and lexicon of the target language. The aims of a language teaching course are very often defined with reference to the four “language skills”: understanding speech, speaking, reading and writing. What matters is whether or not—or to what degree—he has learned the sounds of target language, a certain amount of grammar, and certain number of words. Culture teaching is not taken so important a teaching target as the above mentioned language skills.

The view is now questioned since it neglects appropriateness of various social and cultural situations, which are very essential to successful communication. And because of the lack of cultural knowledge, students often make cultural mistakes when they communicate with native speakers. From years of my experience in teaching Korean, I gradually realize the importance of culture teaching to Chinese students. Korean teaching should be aimed at developing students’ communicative competence so that they would be able to react freely and proper with native speakers of Korean in various social situations. Language should be taught in culture. The two are of the same importance.

## **II. Relationship between language and culture**

Language is the principal means whereby we conduct our social lives. When it is used in context of communication, the ways in which language is used reflect the culture of that society. Language and culture have a very close relationship.

A culture is a collection of beliefs, habits, living patterns and behaviors which are held more or less in common by people who occupy particular geographic areas; an integrated system of earned behavior patterns that are characteristic of the members of any given society. It includes everything that a group of people thinks, says, does, and makes. Language behavior is often based on cultural assumptions of what is appropriate for particular situations, and that these differ greatly across cultures (Nida, 1998).

Culture governs and defines the conditions and circumstances under which various messages may or may not be sent, noticed, or interpreted. From how much eye contact we employ in conversations to explanations of why we get sick, culture plays a dominant role in our lives. When cultures differ, communication practices may

also differ. In modern society different people communicate in different ways, as do people in different societies around the world; and the way people communicate is the way they live. Who talks with whom? How? and about what? These are questions of communication and culture. When the elements of communication differ or change, the elements of culture differ or change. Communication and culture are inseparable.

There is significant diversity among culture because of the different nation's history, geography, politics, economic development, and other background. The external objects may be the same yet the responses of different people are different. The reason is perception. Perception is the means by which we make sense of our physical and social world. Our perception gives all meaning to all those external forces. In this respect, culture is what makes social cognitions social. Therefore, we behave and communicate as we do primarily because of the ways in which our external world, which culture helps define, appears to us (Samovar and Porter, 1998). Culture provides us with a perceptual lens that greatly influence how we interpret and evaluate what we receive from the outside world (Eastman, 1998).

Most Chinese respond negatively to the white color because "white" is connected with death. While for Korean people and most people in the western countries, "white" represents "purity" and is the predominant color in some countries for wedding dresses. In China red color symbolizes joy and happiness, but in some other countries this color is used cautiously.

Every language is part of a culture. We are now to consider the dialectical relationship between language and culture. To begin with, language expresses cultural reality. The words people utter refer to common experience. Words also reflect speakers' attitudes, beliefs, and their point of view. Secondly, Language embodies cultural reality. Members of a community or social group also create experience through language. They give meaning to it through the medium they choose to communicate with one other, for example, speaking on the telephone or face-to-face, writing a letter or sending an e-mail message. Finally, language symbolizes cultural reality. Language is a system of signs that is seen as having itself a cultural value. Speakers identify themselves and others through their use of language; they view their language as a symbol of their social identity.

Before determining the goals of culture teaching, we have to make a systematic

understanding of studies of culture teaching. Before World War I, the study of the history, geography, and institutions of the country was regarded as background and complement to language and literary studies. Such cultural teaching also included the great accomplishments of the target community. After World War II, the growth of social science, in particular, anthropology and sociology, led to a different emphasis. Social science laid emphasis on way-of-life culture which refers to the whole of the shared social fabric that makes up a society. The traditional concept of culture as great achievements is widely referred to as “Culture with a capital C”. This contrasts with way-of-life culture is referred to as “Culture with a small C” (Stern, 1992).

The notion of culture in language education has been expanded from “culture with a capital C” to “culture with a small c”. That is, the focus transfers from the sum total of a people’s achievement and contributions to civilization to the behavior patterns of the life style of people (Chen Shen, 1999). There was a consensus between many language educators that a distinction between “Capital C” culture and “small c” culture should be made and that the priority should be shifted from the former to the latter in language education.

Since in the contemporary language teaching, much more attention is paid to the everyday life style of ordinary citizens and values, beliefs they share with fellows within their linguistic and social groups, this requires the consideration of the assimilated aspects of a culture which individuals are usually unable to describe in words.

In a short, culture is the core, the dominant factor in the relationship between language and culture. Accordingly, Korean teachers must reflect such perspectives in their teaching: through practice and real communicative activities, attempting to make students aware that mastering language skills alone is inadequate for the needs of communication; helping students to be observant and conscious of the differences between Chinese and Korean language and cultures.

### **III. Teaching culture in the Korean classroom**

#### **A. The content of culture teaching**

When the importance of culture was recognized in foreign language education, the conventional way to teach foreign culture was to add explicit content about foreign culture to the language curriculum the form of “cultural studies”. Here we will discuss

six topics covering the aspects of culture teaching which the average language learner is most likely to require.

#### (1). Places

The learners need an orientation to the geography of the country as a whole. In choosing a target area, out principal concern will be to describe how the geography is perceived by native speakers. If a language learner wants to familiar with the social setting, he needs to acquire this personal native speaker's geography. For language learning, this affectively tinged view of the physical environment is often as important as the objective study of street plans or maps. For the Korean language learners, it is necessary to know as well as to understand the cultural and political significance embodied in the place-names which are closely related to Korean culture and politics. For example: '경주', '안동', '부여', '영남', '호남' and so on.

#### (2). Individual persons and ways of life

As we have emphasized, the focus of culture teaching is primarily on how people live and what they think and do. Through teaching and personal contacts, the learners can get familiar with the customs of the community. Beyond that, they can gradually explore the prevailing thoughts, values, expectations, and problems of the individuals concerned. It is also strongly behavioral in that a foreigner will be expected to conform to certain customs and expectations, such as the etiquette of removing shoes on entering a house, or eating behavior at a meal.

#### (3). People and society in general

The learners should be led to identify significant groups indicative of social, professional, economic, and age differences, as well as those which reflect regional characteristics. If we adopt the native speaker's perspective, it is much more a matter of finding out how people view themselves in relation to various groups in society or in relation to society as a whole (Yule, 2000). For example: '종친회', '동창회', '혈연', '지연', '학연', etc.

#### (4). History

It is also necessary for the learners to get to know the significantly historical developments of the country, such as the historically significant symbols, notable events and the main historical personalities. But we should remember to look at the history from the viewpoint of native speakers whose historical perceptions, values,

political knowledge, and preferences provide the main basis for the historical understanding that is needed in a language learning context. For example: ‘단군’, ‘세종대왕’, ‘임진왜란’, ‘이순신’, ‘안중근’, ‘김구’, etc.

#### (5) Institutions

These include the system of government—central, regional, and local—the educational system, social welfare, economic institutions, religious institutions and the media including television, radio, and the press. The learners should familiarize themselves with these to an extent that corresponds to the knowledge that native speakers normally possess on the basis of their own experience. For example: ‘청와대’, ‘전경련’, ‘한국노총’, ‘민주노총’, ‘조계종’, ‘유림’, ‘KBS’, ‘조선일보’, etc.

#### (6) Art achievements

The learners should be able to acquire knowledge about an appreciation of artists, musicians, and writers and their works, and know of other great figures and their achievements to the extent that these are common knowledge in the speech community. In China, following the influence of ‘Korean Wave’, South Korean drama, movies, as well as renowned actors ‘김희선’, ‘안재욱’ and so on were already widely known. But Korean 판소리, ‘탈춤’ and some famous writers such as ‘고은’, ‘박경리’, ‘황석영’ are actually rarely known in China.

To summarize, the six topic areas and the approach we have proposed distinguish the teaching of culture within a language course from a fully fledged study of cultures and societies. In foreign language teaching, the content of culture teaching should provide learners with the content knowledge and linguistic and cultural skills which they need to communicate successfully with native speakers.

### B. Methodologies for culture teaching

#### (1). Studying the culturally-loaded words

Any language, because of its users’ special history, background, values, world view, bears very special cultural contents and meaning. The different words of different language manifest an important cultural characteristic of different people as well as an important cultural factor of intercommunication. Sometimes, students find it easy to understand the literal meanings of the words by looking up the dictionary, but they can’t understand the very rich cultural meanings implied, the ignorance of which hinders them from properly using or understanding the words in communication.

Therefore, in the Korean language classroom, we should pay attention on the equivalent words, its connotative meaning and its figure of speech. Otherwise, by students' arbitrary explanation, any type of misuses will have the possibility of appearance.

#### (2). Comparing cultural differences

It is also important to take every opportunity to compare cultural differences while teaching foreign language. It is likewise necessary to clarify certain concepts and understand some of the inherent problems in cross-cultural communication. On the other hand, the grammar system of different language has the common ground as well as the different spot. The different grammar systems often reflect different ways of thinking of different people. This is also a kind of cultural difference. As to the change of part of speech, the order of sentence organization, and so on, if teachers consciously make the comparison of these grammar features between target language and native language, students will be much easier to grasp them.

#### (3). Creating an authentic classroom environment

By classroom decorations and displays of all kinds, posters, cartoons, maps, newspaper cuttings, we should try to create a visual and tangible presence of the target community. This is particularly important in a foreign language setting where the reality of language use in the speech community is geographically and psychologically far removed from the classroom.

#### (4). Cultural syllabus design

The syllabus is a sub-set of a curriculum which is implemented by an education institution. One factor which has impeded progress in the teaching of culture is the problem of syllabus design. In language course, the emphasis is generally on language proficiency, and therefore other interests such as culture teaching tend to remain in the background. To improve culture teaching, much attention should be paid to the sequencing of a cultural program in language course.

At present there is no an ready-made, quantitative cultural syllabus for Korean language teaching, According to many domestic scholars' research and my learning practice, the cultural connotation of words, culturally appropriate behavior, and an interest in and understanding of culture can be developed in the fundamental stage of Korean language learning. An understanding of cross-cultural differences and the

study of cross-cultural institutions is more likely to occur at an intermediate level, while the development of an integrated view of the second culture, a critical appraisal of statements about it, and serious research on the culture are activities for advanced learners.

Although a strong case has been made for an increase in cultural emphasis, the general assumption seems to be that culture should still be secondary to language. Culture introduction in the language class is different from special culture class, and it merely serves as an assistant to the language teaching. The cultural content should neither isolate from the language, nor simply add the language knowledge together. Instead, language and culture should become integrated by shifting the weight of language teaching towards culture.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

Teaching target culture in foreign language education is a perplexing issue. Yet it is a matter that cannot be avoided. This paper aims at arousing the consciousness of Korean teachers and learners of the importance of culture teaching in the Korean learning classroom, and proposing some methods of culture teaching.

Generally speaking, there are three paradigms for how to teach target culture in foreign language education. Firstly, the conventional approach is to add explicit cultural studies to foreign language courses. The scope of teaching has been extended from the literature, history or geography of foreign countries to a study of the ways of life of foreign people. Secondly, this approach is to integrate the teaching of language and culture by focusing on language use. The scope of teaching concentrates on the social dimension of culture, or some specific area such as science and technology. Thirdly, the study of inter-cultural communication has emphasized the importance of understanding both target and native culture in order to get meaning across. What suggested in this paper is that no matter what approach we take, the teaching of language as communication should bring linguistic skills and communicative abilities into close association with each other.

This paper demonstrates some methods of culture teaching. That doesn't mean that these are the only methods which can be put into practice. His paper leaves an open end for further discussion rather than a definite. It is hoped that more and more

Korean language teachers will be stimulated to inquire into the pedagogic possibilities of other ideas in respect of teaching culture in the Korean language education.

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