

# The Improvement of Writing Teaching for English Major and the Intervention of Culture in Chinese Universities

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The new era context puts forward new requirements for the writing teaching for English majors in Chinese universities, and the intervention of culture has become a necessary content of writing teaching. Combined with the shortcomings of English writing teaching in universities in China, based on the analysis of the positive significance of cultural intervention in writing teaching, this paper focuses on the basic strategies of cultural intervention, that is, to clarify the cultural implication behind the complicated English vocabulary; collect relevant cultural materials according to the teaching content of writing class; for the idioms often used in writing, compare the cultural differences between China and the West. Cultural intervention contributes to the improvement of writing teaching, but it could not become the main content of writing teaching. Mastering the writing methods and skills of various styles is still the main goal of writing teaching.

*Keywords:* writing teaching for English major, cultural intervention, cross-cultural communication, cultural difference

## Introduction

Chinese English teaching for major is to improve students' language and knowledge application ability, and then realize the fundamental purpose of cross-cultural communication. However, in the context of cultural globalization, Chinese English teaching for major is mainly focused on the cultivation of students' language application ability as usual. Writing teaching is also regarded as a language skills course, which is still a long distance from the real teaching goal. Based on such writing teaching background, the intervention of literature and culture is particularly necessary, which not only helps to break the usual teaching mode of writing teaching, rich classroom teaching means and content, but also does good to the students' accumulation of literature and cultural knowledge, and cultivate compound talents with cross-cultural communication ability.

## The Important Significance of Cultural Intervention

### Cultural Intervention Can Optimize Writing Teaching for English Major in China

At present, English writing teaching still adopts the traditional teaching mode in many Chinese colleges and universities; teachers prepare the content of class around the requirements of Band 4 or 8 test for English major, one-sided pursuit of rate and emphasize the application of language and grammar knowledge, completely ignore the cultural language content, and also ignore the cultivation of students' cultural knowledge. Many students are influenced by traditional Chinese thinking habits and values when writing in English. Their

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English articles seem to meet grammar norms, but they deviate from their own expression habits and cultural customs.

### **Cultural Intervention Can Stimulate Students' Interest in Writing Course**

If the English writing course for major is just to allow students to standardize grammar and fluent language expression, the classroom atmosphere will undoubtedly be dull and boring, which is difficult for students to be full of passion or concentrate on the 90-minute course. On the contrary, if before the class or teaching process, the teachers properly insert cultural knowledge and have students understand the understanding of the British and American cultural background and customs, undoubtedly the classroom atmosphere will be better and students may have some curiosity about the classroom content. Besides this, if the teacher could compare western culture with Chinese culture and customs, students may have a strong interest in writing courses, and the teaching course could stimulate students' enthusiasm for learning.

### **Cultural Intervention Can Enrich the Teaching Effect of Writing Course**

Language is the product of social and cultural life, and is the carrier of human spiritual thought; English writing teaching in Chinese universities can not only just stay in improving the level of students' language application skills, but should be on the basis of fully understanding the English culture, and mobilize students' deep cultural cognition and cross-language communication practice ability, so as to write authentic and fluent English articles.

## **Basic Strategies for Cultural Intervention**

### **Clarify the Cultural Implication Behind the Complicated English Words**

In the writing teaching for English major, the choice of vocabulary often needs to make a cultural value judgment. Many American scholars as Kaplan (1966) had conducted comparative studies on English articles written by English and Chinese learners, and found that there are great differences between English and Chinese students' writing from writing strategies to viewpoint statements, from chapter structure to final words and sentences. In the process of English writing, Chinese students need to overcome the learning barriers caused by the negative migration of their native language, especially when encountering some words that are very different in Chinese and western cultural contexts, and the importance of culture is revealed. We can even say that if we do not understand the cultural meaning of language, we will not correctly employ the words to write. In this respect, as second language acquisition writers, they need to master the differences between Chinese and western cultures and understand the different meanings of specific words in different cultural backgrounds, so as to reasonably select and apply words in writing. For example, the use of "the milk way" fully reflects the importance of culture. In English culture, we can only translate it as a real "road", because in ancient Greek legend, the milk road is the heaven road paved with Hera's milk, and the gods can only return to Olympus by relying on this "road"; if it is translated into "galaxy" according to the meaning of Chinese culture, the gods will find it difficult to return to their place of residence because they have no road and are separated by a "River". However, in Chinese folklore, "the milk way" should be translated into a real "river". It is because of the "River" between Cowherd and Weaving Girl that they fall in love. They can only meet on the magpie bridge on the Tanabata Festival every year; if the phrase is translated into "milk road", the Cowherd and the Weaving Girl can meet every day, and the sad and beautiful love story will no longer happen. No wonder Lu Xun once created a poem: "Poor Vega turned into a wife of horse man. The black magpie doubted that he

would not come, all the way to the milk road” (2005, p. 459 ). This poem satirized Zhao Jingshen, a famous Chinese translator who translated the English “the milk way” as “milk road”, and misinterpreted the monster of “half man and half horse” in western mythology as “half man and half cow”. In Lu Xun’s poem, “poor weaving girl turned into a wife of a horse man” was used to laugh at Zhao Jingshen’s “regardless of cattle and horses”. “Weaving Girl” was originally married to “cowherd”, but according to Zhao Jingshen’s idea that is horse is the cow, then Weaving Girl’s husband should be “horse man”; “The black magpie doubted that he would not come, all the way to the milk road” referred to Zhao Jingshen’s mistranslation of “galaxy”. If you do not pay attention to the cultural implication of language when writing, the article will become a laughing stock; it can be seen that cultural factors are very important to the choice of vocabulary in writing. The teaching of English writing course should pay full attention to the introduction of cultural factors.

### **Collect Relevant Cultural Materials for the Content About the Teaching of Writing Course**

The cultural materials needed in the teaching of College English writing are disorderly and not as systematic as the cultural course; it is mainly to select different cultural materials and reading materials according to the content needs of the course, and organically integrate them into classroom teaching. It should be mentioned that the work of collecting cultural materials is not the full-time job of teachers. Teachers can extract the cultural elements that will be involved in the classroom, arrange students to study independently after class, and guide students to correctly understand and use the collected materials in class. This can have three positive effects: first, cultivate students’ ability to collect data, and then cultivate their ability of independent thinking and research; second, cultivate students’ reading ability and broaden their knowledge; the third is to cultivate students’ writing ability. Students acquire English expression and language organization ability in reading, and acquire English cultural knowledge, which in turn further promotes the improvement of writing ability. For example, when explaining poetry writing, teacher should assign students to understand the basic artistic elements of English poetry style, such as rhythm, voice caused by light and stress tone; at the same time, students are required to sort out the development context of English poetry and the basic characteristics of each historical period. Through reading after class, students know the form of English poetry, understand the history of English poetry, and have a deeply understanding of famous poets and their works in the history of English poetry. Some students directly created classical poetry in strict form by imitating the poem of British classical poet Pope. What students learned in or after writing class far exceeded the requirements of poetry writing teaching.

### **Compare the Cultural Differences Between China and the West According to the Idioms Often Used in Writing**

The differences between Chinese and western cultures determine that there are great differences in thinking and language. How to resolve cultural differences and correctly use conventional words or phrases in writing has become a very important step in English writing teaching. When writing an English article, Chinese students often organize their words according to the characteristics of their mother tongue culture. In case of language problems with special meaning or special expression, there will be great deviations, which will erase the quality of the article. In the process of writing class teaching, teachers should remind students to strengthen the understanding and memory of common sayings, and tell them not to choose words and phrases according to the Chinese way, and must strengthen the accumulation of these conventional words. For example, Qian Zhongshu, a famous Chinese scholar, once translated the sentence “三个臭皮匠顶个诸葛亮” as “Three

cobblers combined make a genius mind". Of course, we admire Qian Zhongshu's translation ability and English expression ability, but in fact, it's better to directly adopt the relevant idioms already in English, that is, "Two heads are better than one". Another example is that when students want to express their true feelings in writing, if they write "Misfortune tests the sincerity of friends" in the usual language, it is better to use English saying that is "A friend in need is a friend indeed". As some scholars said, "Cultivating cross-cultural awareness means understanding the members of another cultural group, including their behaviors, expectations, views, and values, and trying to understand the reasons why they do things" (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999, p.217 ). Only by deeply understanding westerners and their language expressions can Chinese students better engage in English writing. It can be seen that whether Chinese students can master the common sayings in English and apply them well in writing directly determines whether their English writing is authentic and in line with the cultural context. Therefore, knowing the differences between Chinese and western cultures and adopting common sayings that are more in line with English expression habits is an important content of writing teaching.

### Conclusion

Of course, the direct goal of writing teaching for English major in China is to make students master the conventional writing methods of articles of various genres and improve their ability of written expression. The intervention of literary and cultural elements can add literary grace to the articles, but it can only be used as an auxiliary means of writing teaching. Writing courses cannot be treated as literary or cultural courses; otherwise the cart of writing teaching will be put upside down. On the contrary, it is not conducive to the development of writing teaching and the improvement of students' writing ability.

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