



Research on the Cultural Contents of New Senior English for China

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Supported by Guangdong Province Teacher Development Center of Middle and Primary Teachers of Lingnan Normal University Year 2017 General Topi "Research on the Presentation Mode of Cultural Contents of New Senior English for China" (LSZXXJSFZZX-2017-Y-111).

Received 4 January 2018; accepted 8 March 2018
 Published online 26 April 2018

Abstract

Curriculum reform of Senior English has been for 17 years, but there are still many problems. The cultural contents of New Senior English for China will be researched, which will begin with the analysis of cultural connotation of Senior English Curriculum Standard. It analyzes the classification standard of Senior English textbook cultural contents. And further analyses of the cultural contents of these textbooks will be studied as well.

Key words: Senior English curriculum standard; New senior English for China; Cultural contents

Li, X. B. (2018). Research on the Cultural Contents of New Senior English for China. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 16(2), 63-67. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/view/10286>
 DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/10286>

INTRODUCTION

New English Language Curriculum Standard of Senior High School (2017 Edition) emphasizes the cultural characteristics of students. In the academic context, debates about cultural concept have never ended. To combine their ideas, most of them have several core factors in common, such as socialization, valuation, humanization and so on. Socialization stresses much of the common living habits, lifestyles and values which

formed in groups; values, focuses on emphasizing the realistic function of culture; and humanization mainly refers to the natural humanization. This article focuses on the field of education, so it is necessary for us to analyze the characteristics and nature of culture in the context of education. The author thinks that in New Senior English for China (NSEFC), its present culture can be divided into clothing, food, music, history, geography, religion, art, values, lifestyles, nonverbal communication, festivals and way of thinking, etc.

1. NSEFC CLASSIFICATION STANDARDS OF CULTURAL CONTENT

In order to facilitate the study of cultural contents of NSEFC, based on the definition of culture in senior English curriculum standard, there are three dimensions involved in the classification of culture: cultural region, cultural structure and cultural functions. The corresponding classifications of culture, specifically as follows.

1.1 Cultural Region

From the dimension of cultural region in senior English textbook, what the culture it presents can be divided into: the target language culture and native culture and international culture. This standard is based on the content of Cortazzi and Jin (1999). From the perspective of culture in the region, culture can be divided into three types: the source culture, the target culture and an international culture of a much wider range of all kinds of English and non-English speaking countries (Kang, 2009).

1.2 Cultural Structure

From the dimension of cultural structure in the senior English textbook, what the culture it presents can be divided into: The big C culture and the culture of small c, according to the classification of culture which made by Allen and Valette (1977), Ovando and Collier (1985). And

according to the structure and category of culture, H. H. Stern (1992, p.208) divided culture into the generalized (namely culture with a big C) and the narrow (culture with a small c) (Kang, 2009).

1.3 Cultural Functions

From the dimension of cultural functions in the senior English textbook, what the culture it presents can be respectively studied from the two aspects, one is the function of what the cultural factors play its role in the process of communication and the other is the scope of the communicative functions. The domestic representative scholars such as Zhao Xianzhou, Zhang Zhanyi, Wei Chunmu, Zhang Chunlan, Su Dingfang and so on, they analyzed about the cultural contents. In early times, based on the function of what the cultural factors play its role in the process of communication, Zhang Zhanyi and Zhao Xianzhou put forward that the cultural stratification in foreign language teaching should be knowledge culture and communicative culture.

Learning a kind of culture, everyone inevitably begins from its place of regionality, and the region in regional culture is the geographical background of forming a kind of culture. It can be a big or small range. The culture of regional culture can be a single element or multiple elements. In short, the cultural regions are those regions that have the unique and continuous customs, tradition, habits and they still play an important role in locality.

Culture is not a single phenomenon, but a unitary system, in which all the qualities interact with and affect each other. Cultural essence of life is the cultural structure (Luo, 2004). Kroeber and Kluckhohn put surface cultural structure and deep cultural structure into two levels—explicit culture and implicit culture.

In addition to social material production, in a sense, culture is the most important driving force of human society. Without culture, human society will not make gradually develop. Culture is not composed of a single element, but a unity which makes up of many elements, and these elements contact and interact with each other, thus it has the function of culture.

Cultural function can promote the development of the society, and culture structure not only embodies the essence of national culture, but also decides the cultural function. As a result, this also explains why a large number of researchers use three frameworks above to classify culture.

2. THE CULTURAL CONTENT OF NSEFC

Based on the understanding of cultural meaning, referred to the classification of scholars of 3 culture researches framework and combined with high school English curriculum standard to the definition of culture, this research will be the corresponding choice in the cultural content of NSEFC that mainly from the two dimensions of culture structure and cultural region. Now the research results of the category of cultural content in NSEFC will be shown as follows:

2.1 The Cultural Content in NSEFC Based on the Dimension of Cultural Structure

According to the category of the big C culture and the small c culture, the author combines the lists of the cultural contents which based on the dimension of the cultural structure in NSEFC (see Table 1) to summary and analyze the cultural content from compulsory Book 1 to optional Book 11 of NSEFC.

Table 1
The Cultural Content in NSEFC Based on the Dimension of Cultural Structure

		Classification	Examples
Cultural structure	Big C culture 15	History and geography	Introduces cultural heritage of the related country
		Scientific and technological achievements	The invention of the computer and achievements
		Literature and art	The love story of Chinese cowherd weaver
		Values	To discuss what cultural relics are
		Way of thinking	Introduce linguistic views
		Dress and building	Introduce the future theme park architecture
		Transportation	Introduce the related inventions of robots
		Diet and cooking	Introduce the western food culture
		Social system	Introduce social structure in British
		Family system	Introduced the western condition of family life
		Life system	Introduce the ways of holiday celebrations of small cities and towns in the west
		Aesthetic taste	The introduction of the Beijing Olympic mascots
		Philosophy	To discuss how life begin
		Physics	The introduction of the constitution of British leaders
		Religious belief	The religious interpretation of the problem of the earth origin

To be Continued

Continued

		Classification	Examples
Cultural Structure	Small c culture 8	Language communication	To discuss what the purpose of language is
		Non-language communication	Body language
		Ways of life	How to quit smoking
		Manners and customs	Ways of celebrating Western festival
		Code of conduct	The key to go on with others
		Clothes, food, shelter and travel	Healthy diet habits
		Social organization	Organizations of wildlife protection
		The psychological quality	Questions about psychological quality communication

According to the dimensions of cultural structure, Table 1 is the result of the system classification of the cultural content of NSEFC. There are 15 kinds of big C culture and 8 kinds of small C culture. From the perspective of cultural subjects, it can be said to try to be all things. It is informative, from the fields of the culture concept to the system culture and the behavior culture, from the fields of the philosophy to art and literature, from the fields of language communication to the nonverbal communication. In five units, the system fully introduces cultural geography of five English-speaking countries in the world. They are the United States, Britain, Australia, Canada and New Zealand. Another 5 modules are used to describe the western literary style, from the drama script King Lear, Millions of Pound, Fair Lady to the western novels, Pride and Prejudice and western poetry styles. When introduce western social celebrities and heroes, it covers various fields and social strata which are of different levels, such as sports stars, music singers, medicine, aviation pioneer, performing celebrities, all of their life and personal achievements are introduced in details. This complete cultural content structure is advantageous for the students to get a comprehensive

understanding of the cultural background of the target language countries. As a whole, the content covers a wide range of areas, enabling students to acquire enough information and to cultivate students' cultural awareness with basic intercultural communicative competence.

2.2 Cultural Contents Based on the Dimensions of Regional Structure in NSEFC

The author believes that the cultural contents of the entire textbook of NSEC is dependent on a modules that topics form blocks and triggered by topic themes, and then connect all kinds of cultural contents or subjects.

2.2.1 Topics Classification in NSEFC's Cultural Content

In order to get further understanding of the cultural content that presented by those topics, some of the topics of reading and sing language are divided into the following five categories based on the dimensions of cultural region (see Table 2). From Table 2, we can see that the author divided the topics in NSEFC into 5 categories: the topics of English-speaking countries, national topics, the international cultural topic, global topics and other topics.

Table 2
Based on the Dimension of Cultural Region, Distribution of Some Topics of Reading and Using Language

Types of topics	Examples	Occurrences	Allocation
Topics of English-speaking countries	Compulsory Book1 Unit2 English around the world—The road to modern English	38	26.4
National topics	Compulsory Book4 Unt2 Working the land— A pioneer for all people	17	11.8
The international cultural topic	Compulsory Book4 Unit4 Body language—communication: No Problem?	23	16
Global topics	Take 8 Unit2 Cloning-Cloning: Where is it learning us?	54	37.5
Other topics(mainly refers to the identity of the character or the location of the incident is unknown)	Take 10 Unit14 learning efficiently—how to become a successful reader	12	8.3
	In all	144	100

First, the global topics take up the largest proportion, accounting for 37.5%, which more than the proportion of English-speaking countries. Then the order of priority comes as follows: the English-speaking countries, international cultural topics, national topics, other topics. One of the most attractive statistics here is that the global topics account for more than one-third of the total, an

unprecedented reform in previous English textbooks. This shows that textbook writers have extended their tentacles to universal cultural topics such as nature multiplication, environmental protection, development of science and technology, origin of life and so on. These are common values of mankind in the world which regardless of state or race. The goal of the course written

in cultural content in NSEFC is to cultivate students' awareness of intercultural communication and basic intercultural communication skills so as to broaden their international horizons. The core issue of foreign language education and even the fundamental problem is that the cross-cultural practice problems. As long as there are intercultural activities, there will be a unified relationship between the world culture and ethnic cultures, and only a better understanding of the topics of universal concern to human beings and the common cultural appeal of human beings can it find a place in the future international cultural exchanges.

Second, the proportion of topics in international culture in NSEFC reaches 16%. NSEFC has devoted a great deal of effort to the introduction of different cultures and customs in different countries and cultures, not only in several major English-speaking countries, but also in non-English-speaking countries. In order to cultivate intercultural understanding and intercultural communication skills, it is not enough to have universal cultural awareness, for it is easy to fall into the danger of cultural homogeneity. So it also needs to understand the cultural differences between different countries. Only in this way can we understand other cultures easily.

English-speaking countries accounted for 26.4% of the topic contents, about a quarter, which is less than the global topic contents. The author believes this is a breakthrough. We should not take it for granted that English textbooks do mean English culture is dominant. Of course, we cannot deny that it is an extremely crucial part. NSEFC has done a good job in this respect. It has chosen the typical cultural connotation of the western world in selecting the cultural contents. And it has restored the authentic English cultural background as much as possible through the reformation according to the habit of Chinese students. In the language expression, NSEFC retained many original English expression habits, and it is prominent in intercultural communication in cultural and communicative functions of language. So, to a certain extent, it dilutes the nature of English grammar structure. Finally, on the development of topics, it embodies a larger world inclusion. Based on different opinions on different cultural topics, it will guide students to think and have extra-curricular study. It will give people a full imagination space and embody the cultural world identity. At the meanwhile, it will help students to practice divergent thinking through the collision of native culture and the target culture to improve their intercultural communicative competence and help them become world citizens with Chinese characteristics.

2.2.2 Countries Involved in the Topics of the Cultural Contents in NSEFC

The author divided those countries that involved in cultural topics into three regions: The inner circle—those

countries in which English is the first language (inner circle, e.g. the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia etc.); the outer circle—those countries in which English is the public language (out circle, e.g. Singapore, India etc.); the expanding circle—those countries regard English as a foreign language (expanding circle, e.g. Japan, Korea, China, Thailand etc.). The number of occurrences of countries involved in the cultural contents of textbooks in all grades is divided into three regions. If there are repeated occurrences of a certain region in the same lesson, the count will be double counted.

According to the statistics, the United Kingdom accounts for 107 times, which is the highest number of occurrences in the English-speaking countries. Then America follows. In the non-English-speaking countries, China holds the largest number of occurrences, 91 times. Then Greece, Russia, Japan and India follow. Here the author introduces these countries and their related cultural content:

The United Kingdom, it introduces the British culture in a more comprehensive way, which involves its literature, politics, history, geography, politics and some tourist attractions, such as London's Buckingham Palace, Piccadilly Circus and so on. Besides, it also introduces modern football, the origins of tennis, etc.; and in the textbooks, contents about British people self-introductions often involve their hobbies like football and tennis. Some texts mentioned that Britain is composed of four countries: England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. Each country has its own characteristics.

The United States takes the second place in the number of occurrences in English-speaking countries. There are also many America cultures in the textbooks. Popular cities which listed by tourism introduction are large cities such as New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco and so on. And some heroes and typical America culture, numbers, jet lag, school life, Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day also frequently occur in the textbook. Some chapters introduce that America is a multi-ethnic society, including blacks, Russian immigrants, Vietnamese immigrants and other minorities.

Other countries of those English-speaking countries, except Britain and the United States, are Canada, New Zealand and Australia. A simple summary and introduction to the composition and historical geography of the three countries are also been introduced.

China is the country which occurs in the textbook most frequently among those non-English-speaking countries. As a cultural country of native language, its cultural characteristics often occur in the textbooks, such as the Great Wall of China, Chinese Festival, Chinese history and so on. As for famous people, Qian Xuesen, Yuan Longping also appear in English textbooks. At the meanwhile, in textbooks, it also introduces Chinese

traditional customs, festivals and etiquettes as well as differences of western customs.

South Africa is the country which occurs in the textbook most frequently among those countries of the outer circle. And to begin with, it introduces the legendary character—Mandela who comes from South Africa. Besides, countries of the outer circle like Mauritius, Zimbabwe, Trinidad and Tobago, Colombia, Tanzania also occur in the textbooks.

Some of these outsiders, like Mauritius, Zimbabwe, Trinidad and Tobago, Colombia, and Tanzania, are also reflected in the Debate.

Country of expanding circle, except China, Greece takes up the highest proportion, which accounts for 6.17%. In the textbooks, it introduces the Greek myths and legends as well as some Greek cultural stories wrote by George Bernard Shaw; the second is Peru. There is a unit introducing the journey about Peru, and cultural contents of other countries, such as South Korea, Japan, India, France, Russia and so on, also be focused.

In addition, the author also studies the cultural contents of the proportion of all grades involved in NSEFC. We can clearly see that the inner circle of topics of cultural contents and the extending circle of the topics of cultural contents occupied a major part of the topic of cultural contents. As to the senior one of the cultural contents, the inner circle compares to the extending circle, there is a margin of 9 percentage points. As to senior two, there is a margin of 13 percentage points. And the proportion of the third grade almost is equal. The proportion of the overall cultural contents just has a difference of 8 percentage points. These data show that cultural contents topics in the NSEFC have set in line with the trend of the reform of the national teaching of English curriculum: to make English as an international language to education, to reduce the proposition of the cultural contents of English-speaking countries while increase the proposition of the cultural contents of those countries in extending circle with the rising of grade level.

In addition, the author found out that the cultural contents from the first grade to the third grade can be focused to choose purposefully through researches. For example, the selection of cultural content of “Friendship” in compulsory book1 unit1 not only considers the connection between primary and secondary high schools, but also focuses on modern students, especially those who have just passed the psychological weaning period and have the problem of students’ moral qualities dropping in various degrees. To improve students’ awareness of interpersonal communication and learn to communicate with others and care for each other, this part of Friendship may play an important role.

Among them, the training objectives of cultural awareness include cultural knowledge and cultural understanding, cross-cultural communication awareness

and intercultural communication skills. Different scholars have put forward their own views on cultivating cultural awareness. The author prefers the views of Cao Wen who comes from Peking University

to cultivate learners to recognize the similarities and differences between native cultures and exotic cultures. It is necessary to think and understand these cultures from multiple perspectives. Learning cultural knowledge is a beginning of this goal. The educational goal of cultural awareness is to enable learners to understand in cultural teaching. (Cao, 1998)

The selection of cultural contents and distribution in NSEFC has fulfilled the principle of people-oriented and it also paid attention to the individual’s cognitive level, individual psychological characteristics, personal interests, hobbies and learning styles. The selection of cultural contents in NSEFC, to a certain extent, implemented the objectives of cultural awareness of the standard of curriculum that “students should have a rough understanding of similarities and differences between English-speaking countries”¹ and “Sino-foreign cultures in the initial stage and to enable them to raise their sensitivity and ability to identify similarities and differences between Chinese and foreign cultures”.² Language is subject to culture, which depends on culture and serves culture; at the same time, language reflects culture and forms culture and spread culture. And language also has some influence on culture. From a macro and overall perspective, language and culture are in a complete harmony.

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¹ English Language Curriculum of Senior High School for Full-time Compulsory Education of the Ministry of Education of The People’s Republic of China (Trial Edition). (2002). Beijing: Beijing Normal University Press.

² English Language Curriculum of Senior High School for Full-time Compulsory Education of the Ministry of Education of The People’s Republic of China (Trial Edition). (2002). Beijing: Beijing Normal University Press.