

IDENTITY STUDIES IN COLLEGE ENGLISH CULTURE
TEACHING IN CHINA

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Culture teaching is an important discipline in Chinese college English teaching. English culture teaching mainly refers to English language and custom teaching. Identity is an important term in sociolinguistic studies. Under sociolinguistic frame, identity mainly contains three parts: gender, social class and ethnicity. These social factors are related to language variation and language variety. Gender is one of the most important social factors that do appear to be related directly to language variation and language variety, and the study of language and gender is one of the major topics of sociolinguistics. This thesis examines the identity study in cultural teaching and argues that questions of gender have a significant place in this domain. The paper concludes with some suggestions on college English culture teaching.

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Chapter I Introduction

Language is a social phenomenon and plays an important part in social life. People use language differently according to their class, status, education, occupation, age, gender, ethnicity etc. All these social factors are related to language variation and language variety. At the linguistic level, language variation and language variety are reflected in phonology, intonation, vocabulary, grammar, speech style and so on.

Identity is an important term in sociolinguistic studies. People prefer to use language related to their identity. Under the frame of sociolinguistic, identity mainly consists of three parts: gender, social class and ethnicity. People's behavior construct certain identities; and language, as a kind of behavior, constructs certain identity. In class Chinese English teachers should speak English and introduce western culture. So the communication between teacher and students can be seen as intercultural communication. This a hindrance or challenge for Chinese teachers. But it can be seen an opportunity as well. With the help of identity theory, teachers can strengthen the teacher-student relationship and improve the quality of language teaching.

Statement of the Problem

1. What are related studies on identity from sociolinguistic perspective?
2. How does language construct identity?
3. What is the relation between language and gender?

Definition of Terms

Identity is mainly views in a communal frame as something held by a group of people and bonds the group together. (Hecht, M. L. 1993, p.69)

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. (D. Brown ,1978, p.43)

Gender is socially constructed. It is the basis of distinguishing roles, rules and expectations in all societies.(Eckert ,1996,p.117)

Gender stereotypes is the fixed expectation of appropriate behavior of both sexes traceable in many aspects of community life.(Song, 1998, p.7)

Purpose of the Study

The paper aims to provide some implication for foreign language teaching and learning through analyzing relationships between culture and identity.

Significance of the Study

This research explores Chinese college English learners' identity based on sociolinguistics. It can enrich the current research on language and identity in second language acquisition field. It also provides a new perspective on the research of language and identity.

Methodology

The thesis focuses on college English learners' identity from the perspective of Sociolinguistics and gender differences in the process of cultural learning under qualitative methods. The findings of the research will be summarized.

Chapter II Review of Literature

1. Studies on identity from sociolinguistic perspective

There have been decades of identity research in sociolinguistics, the early research explores the relationship between linguistics and social identity to analyze the impact of linguistics. Social identity is an important concept in our social context, it “encompasses participant roles, positions, relationships, reputation, and other dimensions of social personae, which are conventionally linked to epistemic affective stances” (Ochs,1993, p.287). Hecht (1993) mainly views identity in a communal frame and defines it as something held by a group of people which, in turn, bonds the group together. Identity can help us make sense of the world from the perspectives of similarities and differences. We understand differences within a context of similarities, and we appreciate similarities as juxtaposed with differences. Social identity can be seen as the diverse ways in which people perceive themselves in connection to others, and how they view their past and future (Peirce,1995). According to Thomas and Wareing (1999), the use of language is one of the most fundamental ways to establish our identity and shape other people’s views of who we are. Identity, whether it is on an individual, social or institutional level, is something which we are constantly building and negotiating all our lives through our interaction with others (Thomas and Wareing, 1999). Miller (2000) holds that “Identity is also multifaceted in complex ways”(p.72). All of these definitions are important in helping us understand ourselves and others. Since there are so many kinds of overlapping identities, during concrete interactions we should know about the dimensions of them to understand them better. The most

prevailing dimensions are put forward by Collier and Thomas (1988), who explained the complexity of identity by using three dimensions: scope, salience, and intensity.

Gradually, people began to develop in-depth study, through the phenomenon to see the essence nature. This help to find language can play a role in the construction of personal identity and social identity. Identity can be expressed through specific language, at the same time, language is also the representative of identity. Therefore, the direct way to judge a person's identity is to talk with him, observe his communication skills and establish social relations in the process of social action. Labov(1966) to carry out a detailed field survey of urban dialects, trying to reveal the interrelationship between various social factors such as race, class, education level, occupation, sex, age and communicative situations and linguistic variations by analyzing the survey results. A trend of development is to microscopically examine the speaker's identity construction from the perspective of language and its variation.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, Thomas Ziehe (2003) holds that today it is up to the individual him to create his own world (Ziehe, 2003, p.88). This means that one is the architect of his own identity. The constructed “private world” hence becomes a collection of private and contemporary culture’s norms and values, in which the individual will see it as the foremost important one. The individual alone has to ascribe artefacts and situations to different values, interpret signs within culture in order to understand the worth of oneself, and furthermore, what does it stand for and represent. Giddens (1991) draws attention to the fact that the construction of identity is a process that constantly must be created and developed by the individual. Individual will

continuously face new decision in his life. The results of those decisions is pre-calculated or unpredictable. Furthermore, Giddens (1991) argues that the close relations become the object of reflexivity. He holds that “a person only becomes committed to another when, for whatever reason, she or he decides to be so” (p.91). These are the “pure relations” according to Giddens (1991). Giddens also distinguishes between two kinds of reflexivity. The first one is a common trait in people that called a reflexive act regulation. The other is a distinctive characteristic concerning modernity, which occurs at two levels: at an institutional and at a personal level. **2.Language as a kind of behavior constructing identity**

In recent years, in the field of language and gender study, many scholars (Ochs, 1993; Bergvall and Freed, (1996) state that gender refers to behavior or identity (including language) that has been socially acquired rather than biologically innate, i.e., gender roles are learned and constructed in society (Zhang, 2004, p.2). If a person talks like a woman, such phenomenon is not the inherent nature of a woman, but a kind of social expression of being a woman (Li, 2001).Cameron (1996, p.45) proposes that it is the practice undertaken by people that cultivates the gender features, not vice versa. Gender roles are produced, reproduced, and actualized through context-specific gender-distinct activities in communication. People's language mode occurs in habitual practical activities, and benefits from the relationship among the members related to common practice. Many sociolinguists think that one's social identity (including gender) decides one's language behavior, in other words, people consciously or unconsciously mark fixed identity through language. Instead, constructionists think that

people's behavior constitutes specific identity, and language itself is a kind of behavior constructing certain identity. In addition, they mention that people's behavior is not free and arbitrary, but is limited by social regulations. What constructionists concern is that how certain language behaviors help to produce or engender males and females.

Identity can be comprehended as self-defined. It is through interaction and hereby language that one identify himself, and thus constitutes one's identity. In this relationship, language plays an essential part, given that it is through language we can explain to others who we are and what we represent, but also understand how others perceive us. People strive to achieve the acceptance of others. At the same time this acceptance creates breeding ground for the development and construction of identity.

Ethnographer Gerry Philipsen (1992) holds that ascribing a cultural identity to someone will lead to attributing motives. Because certain types of identities are associated with certain communicative actions, we naturally try to make sense of what others do through the ascription of certain identities. The Communication Theory of Identity sees identity as being communicative. Identity is formed, maintained, and modified in a communicative process and thus reflects communication (Hecht, 1993). Identity, in turn, is manifested in social interaction through expectations and motivations. Hecht (1993) believes that identity lies in both the individual and social interaction. Identity resides in an individual as interprets the a cognitive schema by which the individual understands and social world (Markus&Semis, 1982). From the perspective of social interaction, identity is regarded as a social process. It exists in the social world among people, and resides in interaction.

Lastly, language and identity remain as two terms constantly interacting within every aspect of everyday life (university, job, sport activities etc.). Social communities within specific contexts (language school, among friends or family etc.) play a great part for the individual's usage of language as well as for the construction of identity (Uldal, 2004). As mentioned above, language inevitably contributes to defining a person's identity through interactions. Language is therefore a symbolic marker of identity, and constructed through language. Identity is thus socially constructed. Within one language, it is possible to have several identities, or roles, as they also can be seen. For instance, certain words or a certain language are used with parents, while another is used among friends. This exemplifies how one undertakes different roles during the day in just one language and often without even noticing it. Nevertheless, one might develop a completely different identity when expressing something through another language than one's mother tongue. In relation to that, David Block (2007) defines language identity as "...the assumed and/or attributed relationship between one's sense of self and a means of communication which might be known as a language, a dialect or a sociolect" (Block, 2007, p.40).

3.The relation between language and gender

Comments about language and gender in our written records could be dated as far back as the Bible, but the scientific and systematic study of language and gender started in the middle of 1970s. The idea of a deficit model of females' language was presented at a time when females in the Western world were fighting for their equality and

liberation. As a result, lots of attention was focused on the sexist bias reflected in the language and the devastating social consequences. Lakoff is among the first scholars to establish theories for explaining gender difference in language use. Her assumptions are based on personal observations, and her fundamental source of data is the one used in the analysis of abstract syntax from her own speech and that of her acquaintances. Her study is simply restricted to the levels of phonology, morphology, and syntax. However, Lakoff ignores the fact that females' social position and role will change with the development of society, and the difference in language use will take great changes correspondingly. Two later influential publications - Thorne and Henley's *Language and Sex-Differences and Dominance* (1975) and Spender's *Man Made Language* (1980) shifted the focus away from females as somehow deficient users of language towards males as dominating and controlling users. Since then, emphasizing males' dominance had become the most influential theoretical framework in which the gender-language issue was explored. Why does sexist language matter? Words are the tools of thought. Language reflects reality. Sexist language reinforces the superiority of men and perpetuates male privilege in society (Kleinman, 2002).

There are many research between language and gender, which cross disciplinary boundaries, such as applied linguistics, linguistic anthropology, conversation analysis, cultural studies, feminist media studies, feminist psychology, gender studies, interactional sociolinguistics, linguistics, mediated stylistics, sociolinguistics and media studies. Discursive, poststructural, ethnomethodological, ethnographic, phenomenological, positivist and experimental approaches can all be seen during the

study of language and gender, producing and reproducing what Susan Speer(2005) has described as “different, and often competing, theoretical and political assumptions about the way discourse, ideology and gender identity should be conceived and understood”(p.7). As a result, research in this area can perhaps most usefully be divided into three main areas of study: first, there is a broad and sustained interest in the varieties of speech associated with a particular gender; second, there is a related interest in the social norms and conventions that (re)produce gender language use (a variety of speech or sociolect associated with a particular gender is sometimes called a genderlect) (Deborah Tannen, 1996, p.343); and third, there are studies that focus on the contextually specific and locally situated ways in which gender is constructed and operationalized (Frederick, 2014, p.137). The study of gender and language in sociolinguistics and gender studies is often said to have begun with the book written by Robin Lakoff(1975), *Language and Woman's Place*, as well as some earlier studies by Lakoff. The study of language and gender has developed greatly since the 1970s.

The relationship between Language and Gender is an intrinsically attractive way to engage students' interest in a number of linguistic issues. *Men's and Women's Talk* have arguably been demonstrated to show differences at the phonetic, syntactic, lexical and discourse levels. Both the personal and political aspects of the topic ensure lively discussion in seminars. Starting from stereotypes and the early feminist literature, Lakoff (1975) and Spender (1980) proposed preliminary discussions focus on creating non-sexist alternatives for masculine words and on the possible biological differences which might lead to gender-asymmetrical language(Kimura, 1999).Project work on

language and gender can involve a variety of sociolinguistic field-work techniques. Data-collection can include the use of recording equipment and the designing and conducting of sociolinguistic interviews or other elicitation procedures, the devising of questionnaires or the judicious selection of written evidence or electronic corpus material. Analysis of data may be at a phonetic, syntactic, lexical or discourse level and is often quantitative, involving the use of statistical packages such as SPSS or CLAN.

Here is the discussion of why would women use standard variants more often than men. Several authors (Trudgill, 1983; Eckert, 1996) argue that women use linguistic style shifting to position themselves with respect to social groups. Men have access to some ways of marking their social status (e.g., jobs), so women are encouraged to be more aware of other ways of doing that, including language (Chambers,1980). This argument actually works the way whether women are shifting toward the standard or away from language (and “away” is closer to what Eckert explores in the article in question).

It may also be that there are no social or economic advantages for women in sounding local (which in many studies is set up as the opposite of using standard language). In rural Newfoundland, for example, there are still high-paying or steady jobs in forestry, fishing, and mining available for men, but the traditional female equivalents (like fish processing) are disappearing. All the good jobs for women require higher education and Standard English, and so it’s no surprise that we find women using more standard language in the rural communities that we study. Nichols (1983) describes a similar situation among Gullah speakers in coastal South Carolina. Fasold

(1984, p.96) makes progress by speculating that “By sounding less local, female speakers might be subtly and subliminally protesting traditional community norms which place them in a subordinate position to men in favor of a more egalitarian social order in which women are treated more nearly equal to men.” The argument is that women favor standard forms because the standard is more closely associated with increased status or opportunities for women than it is for men.

Women lead changes above the level of awareness, which tend to be toward higher-prestige forms. But they also lead changes below the level of awareness (like vowel shifts), which are not necessarily toward higher-prestige forms. This is sometimes known as the gender paradox (Labov, 1966). Now, women lead all successful change, because their role as primary caregivers for children means that the innovations that they adopt are passed on to the next generation (this argument seems to go way back – Gauchat, 1905; Brun, 1946). But that’s an argument about transmission across generations, not about adopting a change in the first place. You could also repeat the argument from the previous paragraph that women use language to do things, and thus notice and adopt incoming variants sooner. Then, once women get a little ahead in rates of use, the new variant becomes associated with them, and men retreat or resist (Kroch, 1978), so that the gap between genders grows. Interpreting the gender gap as men resisting change (rather than women adopting it) is appealing for those of us who work in changing rural communities, where we often see young men keeping or reviving traditional forms. And some of the male-led changes described in earlier sociolinguistic literature seem to be of this revival/resistance type, notably the Martha’s

Vineyard study, where a traditional pronunciation was most popular with young men who had left and returned, and didn't want to have anything to do with the influx of outsiders to the community (Labov, 1966). Or you could argue that "women" and "men" are big, catch-all categories that flatten out a whole lot of things that people do with language and identity (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992; Ochs, 1993; Meyerhoff, 2006). Maybe the women who lead one change are not the same ones who lead another change. A lot of our uncertainty about this actually may result from the way we do things. For one thing, we usually study variables one at a time, so it's hard to see how they relate to each other, or whether the same speakers behave the same way from one variable to the next. For another, our studies usually divide people into two groups on the basis of biological sex. As a result, we miss out on the reality that male/femaleness is gradient rather than absolute. In fact, studies that use even really simple gradient measures, such as asking people how female or male they consider themselves (Boberg, 1957), seem to better model the frequency of use of gender-identified language features than just splitting respondents into males and females. More crucially, we miss out on the fact that a study participant identified as a woman might also be a parent, a communist, a guitarist, an Aspie, and a participant in a whole pile of social networks and communities of practice, and that all those things interact and contribute to language choices, and because of that those interactions themselves become something worth studying (Meyerhoff, 2006, p.222).

Despite these findings of gender differences, Tannen(1996) questioned the conclusion made by both researchers in the field of family therapy and women who

interact with men in everyday life that, because the boys and men are less directly aligned with their interlocutors in posture and gaze, they are not “engaged” or “involved”. Furthermore, she questioned the conclusion that, “because the boys produce small accounts of talk about each of a large number of topics, they are evidencing a failure or lack.”(Tannen, 1996, p.99) Rather, Tannen(1996) subscribed to a cross-cultural approach to cross-gender conversation by which women, boys and girls, can be seen to accomplish and display coherence in conversation in different but equally valid ways.

To sum up, sociolinguistics is a discipline, and language and society are objects of study. As Wardhaugh (1970) reminds us, language is complex because it’s a social thing, and society is complex. So any attempts to reduce it to formulas or approaches that don’t acknowledge all that complexity seem a little suspicious. Nowadays people began to develop in-depth study on identity, through the phenomenon to see the essence nature. This help to find language can play a role in the construction of personal identity and social identity.

Chapter III Conclusion and Recommendations

Culture teaching, as an inseparable part of EFL teaching, has caught more and more teachers' attention. But the integration of culture teaching in the college English teaching practice encounters with many problems. A better understanding of identity and relevant theories may shed light on this. It could enable both teachers and students to understand their roles and the expectations of them. Thus, they may behave rationally and systematically.

The EFL teachers, with the strong bond of relational identities, often do not give too much thought to their identities. They often take their identities for granted. A careful thinking about their cultural identities is necessary and helpful. Knowing their own self-image as well as the students' expectations, they can form a clear picture of their identities, and can organize their teaching in an appropriate and effective way instead of making random and subconscious choices. Those identity theories also show them what the teaching and learning processes will be like, so that they may promote the students' intercultural competence with the guidance of identity theories..

The objective of culture teaching is to enhance students' intercultural identity competence. First of all, students should clear what this competence contains. Then they may direct their energy to the acquisition of cultural strategic thinking which is crucial in the competence. It is certain that some identity theories will help them when they are faced with the conflict of cultures.

A thorough understanding of identity theories will help EFL teachers reflect on their identities. In doing so, they may renew their concepts towards culture teaching

and reshape their practices. After students have understood their identities as citizens of the global village, they may see the importance of promoting intercultural competence. The learning models of identity theories will help them make great progress on this. School authorities also play important roles in shaping teachers' and students' identities. They may provide all the facilities and opportunities for teaching and learning. And their guidance points the direction for teachers and students to strive for.

1. Teachers—Reshaping Teaching Practice

With the firm bond of teacher-student relational identities, many teachers take their identities for granted. Now it is time for them to reflect on their own conceptions and teaching practice. That is the renegotiation part of the forming of their identity. It is clear that, in order to support the intercultural learning process, EFL teachers need additional knowledge, attitudes, competencies and skills as necessary and sufficient for cultivating students' communicative competence. Their belief that teaching and learning a foreign language is always an intercultural process will provide them a basis for reshaping their teaching practice..

2. Students—Learning Culture Systematically

Based on the general knowledge of learning, we have realized that learning with integrative motives can bring desirable outcome. As to the culture learning process, several pieces of advice has been put forward.

In order to make cultural adaptation process a successful and rewarding experience, students have to acquire knowledge about the host culture, learn to be open and flexible,

and increase contact with the mainstream culture. That is, they should purposefully accumulate culture knowledge and be ready to embrace changes.

After the study, we get to know identity is closely connected with language development. Identity is an important part in culture learning. English teaching cannot ignore this important factor. In Chinese college teaching, it is necessary to adopt fitness method to teach English culture related with identity especially gender. As English teacher, we should make full use of the benefit of the original culture. Explore the gender and language teaching could help Chinese student have a better understanding of western culture.

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