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## Comparative Research on the Dominant Culture in the Chinese College English Class Teaching

HE Dan<sup>[a],\*</sup><sup>[a]</sup>China West Normal University, Nanchong, China.

\*Corresponding author.

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### Abstract

The cross-cultural aspects and culture teaching in the College English class are very important. Neither the target language culture nor the mother language culture could be neglected. Therefore, we can find the Third Culture, which is a transitional culture between the two cultures, to be used as the dominant culture in class. The results of one year's comparative research show that there are the better teaching effects in the class which used the Third Culture as the dominant culture than the class which used the target language culture as the dominant culture.

**Key words:** Dominant culture; Target language culture; Mother language culture; The third culture

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### 1. THE IMPORTANCE OF DOMINANT CULTURE IN THE COLLEGE ENGLISH CLASS

Fundamentally, culture teaching is needed in the college English course because of the close relationship of language, culture and thought. It is believed that language and culture are inextricably bound to each other. Culture contains language and language is a part of culture. "A society's language is an aspect of its

culture.... The relation of language to culture is that of part to whole" (Goodenough, 1957, p.67). On the one hand, culture contains language and has strong influence on it. On the other hand, language reflects culture and traces of culture are found in the language. Therefore, a language learner can have a real command of a foreign language only when he knows its culture. In addition, some languages are used in more than one country, so different English-speaking countries cultures are different. Each of these countries belongs to a culture that is somewhat different from the others, in spite of their common language. So learners need to pay much attention to different cultural backgrounds in English learning.

In the English class, the dominant culture would have great impact on the language learning because of the close relationship between culture and language. In the English class where the mother language culture be used as the dominant culture, the teacher would concentrate on the language teaching and explain the target language by mother language, but neglect the cultural background. Then the students may be bored by the language learning due to the lack of real language environment. Besides, the meaning of language was depended not only by the language itself, but also the cultural background and context. Because of the great difference between the two cultures, students' English learning would be interfered by too much mother language in class. Chinese culture and cultures of English speaking countries are widely different branches of language. Those differences between two languages and cultures frequently lead to Chinglish, which refers to expressing in English words but in Chinese way. So the mother language culture can not be used as the dominant culture in college English class.

If the target language culture be used as the dominant culture in the English class, teachers should provide a real target language environment, which includes the language, facial impression, gesture, body language,

classroom activities and so on. Then there would be some cross-cultural communication problems, which cannot be answered or explained without native language and culture. Those problems would be skipped by teachers and they may barricade the students' understanding of target language. Therefore, it is not proper to use the target language culture as the dominant culture in the English class.

## 2. THE TRANSITIONAL THIRD CULTURE

As neither the target language culture nor the mother language culture appropriate to be used as the dominant culture in English class, we could find the transitional Third Culture. It is based on the mother language culture, and teachers provide students with a teaching mode and method which are familiar to them, and introduce some background knowledge of target language culture. With the improvement of students' language competence, teachers would introduce more target language culture gradually, and finally provide them with a dominant culture which is closed to target language culture.

Teachers may choose a dominant culture which is more close to mother language culture or target language culture according to students' language competence and style. Therefore, teachers can give the Third Culture different definitions, and it is variable in different English classes. In the intersection of two cultures, each learner' main task is to define their own Third Culture, which is different to each learner (Kramsch 1993, p.257)

## 3. THE COMPARATIVE RESEARCH ON THE DOMINANT CULTURE IN COLLEGE ENGLISH CLASS TEACHING

About which culture is more appropriate to English class, the target language culture or the Third Culture, author conducted a comparative research on the dominant culture in college English class.

There are two classes author was teaching, one is natural class, and the other one is experimental class. The following is the comparison of their grades of College Entrance Exams, and there is no significant difference between them. (The grades of natural class were a little higher than that of experimental class.)

**Table 1**  
**The Comparison of the College Entrance Exams Between Two Classes**

Class type	N	Mean	Std.deviation	t	Sig.
Experimental class	47	53.55	10.12	-1.60	0.11
Natural class	46	57.22	11.88		

## 3.1 The Design of the Research

The purpose of the research is to explore the effect of dominant culture in the English class. The research would compare the two kinds of English classes, one of which use the target language culture as the dominant culture, and the other one use the transitional Third Culture as the dominant culture.

The research subjects are the two natural classes with 47 students and 46 students respectively. The independent variable in this research is the dominant culture in English class. In the experimental class, author used the Third Culture as the dominant culture, while in the natural class, author used the target language culture as the dominant culture. In the natural class teaching, teacher would try to avoid the mother language and native culture, and try to use the teaching method which is familiar to the target language culture. At the end of two semesters, the students in the two classes would take part in the final examination together. Then, the author would compare the two classes' results of the examinations, and conduct a questionnaire in the two classes. Finally, author would explore whether there is significant difference in teaching effect between the two classes, which used the different dominant culture in English class.

## 3.2 Data Analysis of the Research

**Table 2**  
**The Comparison of the Grades of Final Exams Between Two Classes**

Item	Class	N	Mean	Std. deviation	t	Sig.
The first term	Experimental class	47	68.81	7.08	0.759	0.45
	Natural class	46	67.00	14.68		
The second term	Experimental class	47	68.28	6.55	2.109	0.04
	Natural class	46	63.50	14.04		

According to Table 2, in the first semester's final examination, the grades of experimental class were higher than the natural class, but without significant difference between them ( $t=0.759$ ,  $p=0.45$ ). And in the second semester's final examination, the grades of experimental class were obviously higher than that of natural class ( $t=2.109$ ,  $p=0.04$ ). Therefore, the author concluded that the teaching effect of the English class which used the Third Culture as the dominant culture is better than the class which used the target culture.

The author also concerned about the polarization of students' grades, so there is a further study of dispersion degree, as showed in Table 3.

The statistics in Table 3 show that the dispersion degree of the experimental class was lower than that of

**Table 3**  
**The Comparison of Dispersion Degree of Grades Between Two Classes**

Item	Class	N	Mean	Std.deviation	CV(%)
Entrance exam	Experimental class	47	53.55	10.12	18.90
	Natural class	46	57.22	11.88	20.76
The first term	Experimental class	47	68.81	7.08	10.29
	Natural class	46	67.00	14.63	21.91
The second term	Experimental class	47	68.28	6.55	9.59
	Natural class	46	63.50	14.04	22.11

natural class in both semesters' final exams. (The first semester: 10.29<21.91; the second semester: 9.59<22.11) According to the table 3, as time goes by, the dispersion degree of natural class was growing gradually (20.76<21.91<22.11); while the dispersion degree of experimental class was reducing gradually (18.90>10.29>9.59). The results show that there are a lot of students in the natural class who are not so adapted to the teaching mode which used the target culture as the dominant culture. Other the other hand, the teaching model which used the Third Culture as the dominant culture can satisfy most students in the class. Author concluded there is a fairly good effect in the English class which used the Third Culture as the dominant culture.

### 3.3 Questionnaire

In order to get to know students' attitudes to culture in the English learning, author conducted a questionnaire before and after the research respectively. One of the questions in the questionnaire is: In your opinion, which culture is more appropriate to be used as the dominant culture in the English class, target language culture or the Third Culture?

**Table 4**  
**Questionnaire**

Time	Class	Target language culture	The third culture
Before experiment	Experimental class	23	24
	Natural class	25	21
After experiment	Experimental class	13	34
	Natural class	9	37

According to the statistics in Table 4, students' attitudes to the dominant culture changed a lot after the research. By  $\chi^2$ -test, author found that there is no significant difference between students' choices of dominant culture before the research, while there is significant difference after the research (before the research:  $\chi^2=0.1$ ,  $p>0.05$ ;

after the research:  $\chi^2=25.8$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). The results show that there are mostly equal students chose the two kinds of dominant culture respectively, because they are interested in the target language culture and not very familiar to the Third Culture. After one year' study in English class, most students tend to choose the Third Culture to be used as the dominant culture in class, according to their own understanding of two kinds of culture. And there are only minor students who chose the target language culture. With regard to this, author did a correlation analysis, which compared the students' choices and their grades before the research and after that.

**Table 5**  
**Correlation Analysis of Questionnaire and Grades**

Item of relation	r	Sig.(two-tailed)
Grades of entrance exams before the experiment	0.13	0.03
Grades of second term after the experiment	0.56	0.02

Table 5 shows that there is no significant influence of students' grades of entrance examination on their choices ( $r=0.13$ ,  $p=0.03$ ). In fact, there are some students who chose the target language culture had low grades. In the interview with those students, author got to know that their choice of target culture only due to their interest and curiosity of the culture, but not considering of their language competence. However, there is much more influence of students' grades of the final examination on their choices ( $r=0.56$ ,  $p=0.02$ ). The correlation analysis indicates that students got to understand more about the two different cultures through one year's learning, and then they learned to choose the teaching mode which more appropriate to themselves.

## SUMMARY

Both the native culture and target language culture have great influence on the language learning, so neither of them could be ignored. Teachers should try to combine the two cultures in English teaching. On the one hand, teachers can make full use of native culture to help students' understanding of target language and culture. On the other hand, teachers should introduce the target language culture gradually according to students' learning situation, and make the English teaching closed to the target language culture step by step. Besides, the introducing of culture in the English class should be understood by students and can help their language learning. The culture teaching should not beyond students' language competence and understanding, which would cause their lost of confidence and interest in English learning.

According to the comparative research on the dominant culture in the English class, we can find the great influence

of culture on the language learning. Teachers should value the importance of culture introducing in the language teaching. In the introducing of target culture, teachers can not only make use of target language culture blindly and reject native culture. Teachers should use the transitional Third Culture as the dominant culture in English class, thus give students a proper culture environment to learn the language well.

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