

A Study on the Relationship Between Intercultural Communication Apprehension and Acquisition of Culturally Loaded Words of Chinese Students in UK

Jingchun Wang

English Department (Language and Literature), School of Foreign Language, Zhongnan University of Economics and Law, Wuhan, Hubei, 430070, China

202021110232@stu.zuel.edu.cn

Abstract. In recent years studying in the UK has become one of the popular options for Chinese students to enhance their academic qualifications. However, as the duration of studying in the UK is shorter than that of other English-speaking countries, it has become a problem whether Chinese students can adapt to the intercultural environment within a short time. In this paper, 63 Chinese students who are not majoring in English were tested on their mastery of culturally loaded words and their intercultural communication apprehension. The results were tested by Pearson's correlation test and concluded that there is no significant relationship between the two, and the reasons for this conclusion are discussed. Based on the questionnaires and random return interviews the authors believe that there are three reasons for this: firstly, due to the short period of study abroad students generally believe that learning culturally loaded words is not very important. Secondly, international students preferred to stay with people of the same race. Thirdly, even in intercultural interactions, people use fewer or no culturally loaded words to avoid ambiguity.

Keywords: Culturally loaded words, intercultural communication apprehension, second language acquisition, study abroad.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

Studying in the United Kingdom has long been a popular choice for Chinese students due to its short study period and high school rankings. According to the latest figures from the UK Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), the total number of Chinese students studying in the UK in the 2021/22 academic year was 88,755, with more than 60% of Chinese students studying at the QS World Top100 universities [1]. Nearly half a million UK study visas were issued in the year to June 2023, up 23% on the previous year and 108% on pre-pandemic levels. In a relatively short period of time, Chinese students in the UK need to complete heavy learning tasks, but also need to adapt to the intercultural environment faster. From the dimensions of individual, family, school and society, anxiety about the surrounding environment in daily life will affect students' learning ability and learning outcomes [2].

1.2. Research Question

In this research the author is going to answer the following questions. First, how are the culturally loaded words mastered among Chinese international students? Second, is the mastery of culturally loaded words correlated with the degree of intercultural anxiety? Third, will a lack of understanding of culturally loaded words bring inconvenience to intercultural communication?

The hypothesis of these question is 1. International students do not pay enough attention to culturally loaded words, and their overall test score is low. 2. The mastery of culturally loaded words is correlated with the apprehension of intercultural communication.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Culturally Loaded Words

Vocabulary is the most important part of learning both a native and a foreign language. The acquisition of language is inseparable from vocabulary learning, which has infinite meaning changes caused by various context changes. Culture-loaded words, also known as lexical gaps, refer to those words that carry certain cultural information in the source language but cannot be translated into equivalent words in the target language. Hu Wenzhong pointed out that culture-loaded vocabulary carries a specific culture and is a direct or indirect reflection of national culture in lexical structure. Culture-loaded vocabulary includes unique cultural phenomena, idioms, allusions and so on. So it doesn't just refer to words, it also refers to phrases, and usually, they have to be put together to have a specific meaning [3]. That is why the acquisition of culturally loaded words will bring some difficulties to second language learners. In addition to the literal meaning expressed by these words, there are often hidden meanings. These meanings are often contextualized and are difficult for second-language learners to detect. Therefore, the lack of mastery of culturally loaded words may lead to certain obstacles in EFL's communication with native speakers in their daily lives. There is a huge cultural difference between Asian lifestyles and English-speaking countries, so Asian students are more likely to face communication problems caused by the poor grasp of culturally loaded words [4]. Studies have shown that among different cultural groups, Asian learners have the highest level of language anxiety, followed by American learners, and European learners are the least anxious [5].

In recent years, researchers have paid more attention to culturally loaded words, but a large part of the research on culturally loaded words focuses on translation strategies. In the area of second language acquisition, there is still little research on the influence of culturally loaded words on second language acquisition. In China, amount of researchers focus on international students in China and they tested the acquisition of Chinese cultural loaded words of the foreigner students or teachers like Zhong in 2014 [6]. There are also researches that focus on the relationship between culturally loaded words and intercultural sensitivity like Dong in 2009 and Zhang in 2015 [7, 8]. This researches show that there are relevance between acquisition of culturally loaded words and intercultural sensitivity. However, these researches only focus on students in China but not the Chinese students in the intercultural environment.

2.2. Intercultural Communication Apprehension

In the past 30 years, there has been a lot of research on intercultural communication apprehension. Intercultural Communication Apprehension refers to the degree of fear or anxiety that an individual has when communicating with others, real or imagined, especially with people of different cultures and ethnicities [9].

In recent years, the concern about intercultural communication apprehension in second language acquisition has been rising. The relationship between intercultural sensitivity and the improvement of intercultural ability, the acquisition of culturally loaded words, and intercultural efficiency has always been a hot research topic for Chinese students' second language acquisition [8, 10, 11]. About the intercultural competence, a lot of researchers focus on intercultural sensitivity. In recent years, there are some important intercultural models that put intercultural sensitivity in a very important position. For example, Byram's five-factor constitutive model, Deardorff's Pyramid/process model, Bennett's intercultural Communicative Sensitivity Development Model (DMIS), which is believed that intercultural sensitivity reflects the communicator's ability to change from rejection to integration of emotion, cognition and behavior in the intercultural communication process [12-14]. Chen and Starosta holds that intercultural communication competence is embodied in cognition, emotion and behavior, while intercultural sensitivity reflects the emotional aspect of intercultural communication competence [15]. However, unlike intercultural sensitivity, which focuses on individual intercultural communication competence, intercultural communication apprehension pays more attention to individual characteristics such as anxiety and pressure in the intercultural communication process,

and is more likely to be an important mediating variable in the development of intercultural sensitivity. It is confirmed that there is inverse correlation between intercultural communication apprehension and intercultural sensitivity [15, 16]. Unlike intercultural sensitivity, which focuses on individual intercultural communication competence, intercultural communication apprehension pays more attention to individual characteristics such as anxiety and pressure in the intercultural communication process, and is more likely to be an important mediating variable in the development of intercultural sensitivity [16]. At present, the research on intercultural communicative competence does not involve the context of studying abroad, and most of them are still limited to the investigation of the status quo of domestic college students and teachers. For example, Wu et al. investigated intercultural sensitivity and intercultural communication apprehension among 33 Chinese college students who went to the United States and Australia for short-term exchange. The study found that the intercultural communication apprehension will be significantly reduced after short-term study abroad, and the extension of study abroad should not affect the further change of intercultural communication apprehension. In this research, they also investigated the relationship among intercultural sensitivity, intercultural communication apprehension and the length of study abroad. One of the results is learners with low intercultural communication apprehension have relatively high intercultural sensitivity [16]. Another example is the questionnaire survey and interview research conducted by Wang et al on 109 Chinese students and 49 American tutors about their performance and anxiety in class. The results showed that both teachers and students expressed higher levels of anxiety about language competence and communication in the classroom environment [17].

In this paper, the author assumes there is a negative correlation between intercultural communication apprehension and the acquisition of cultural loaded word. Compared with the performance in the classroom, this paper focuses more on the anxiety and apprehension of Chinese international students in UK when they communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds in daily life. intercultural communication is not only reflected in the classroom but also in daily life.

3. Methodology

3.1. Questionnaire

In the first part of the questionnaire, it will collect basic information about the subjects. For example, the English level of the respondents (IELTS score range, etc.), how long they have stayed in the UK. In this paper, a questionnaire survey will be adopted to investigate the current Chinese native-speaking overseas students in the UK, and the scale will be used to collect their degree of intercultural apprehension. In order to enable subjects to better understand the content of the scale, this part will use the subjects' native language Chinese.

The second part is the Test of culturally loaded words. The test is modified from Zhang's culturally loaded words test in 2006. Zhang's test has 50 questions, using vocabulary from test vocabulary such as TOEFL and CET-4. In addition, this set of questions has been verified by native English teachers, which confirms its representativeness and high credibility [18]. In this paper, the author specially selected 20 questions related to British English. The ten questions are entitled ABCD and choose the right words to put into the sentence from the four options. The remaining ten questions are based on choosing an alternate phrase from the three ABC options. The subjects will get one point for a correct answer, but no point for a wrong answer.

The third part is the scale of intercultural communication apprehension. ICA refers to the fear or anxiety associated with real or expected communication with people from a different group, especially a different cultural or ethnic group. PRICA is more reliable versions of McCroskey's existing research PRCA, PRCA24 and other scales, which were optimized by McCroskey in 1997 [9].

3.2. Subjects

The subjects of this experiment were 63 non-English major undergraduate and master's students currently studying in the UK for a period of three years. The questionnaire of the experiment was sent out through the questionnaire star platform and retrieved 5 days later.

3.3. Data Analysis

All the data will be put into the computer and SPSS27.0 will be used to analyse the data. Initially, the author will calculate the mean and variance of the test score and the result of the scale. It could show the situation that the subjects' mastery of culturally loaded words of English. Then test the Pearson Correlation and analyze the significant correlation between intercultural apprehension and culturally loaded vocabulary acquisition.

4. Result

The questionnaire consisted of 63 non-English Chinese students in universities in England now. Five of the questionnaires were judged to be invalid because they were completed too soon and the IP address was not in the UK, resulting in a valid sample of 58 questionnaires.

There were 18 undergraduate students (13%), and 40 postgraduate students (69%).

Table 1. Three Scheme comparing Data of Scores of Word Test and PIRCA

	Students (n=58)			
	max	min	M	SD
Word test	18	6	11.91	3.516
PRICA	53	41	46.64	3.161

Table 1 shows that students are not very proficient with culturally loaded words. The average score was low. In the post-test interviews, most of the students also said that "the questions were too difficult for me" and "sometimes I felt that I had seen the vocabulary before, but the impression was very vague", but some of them also said that "it was a very interesting cultural phenomenon and I wanted to know what the correct answers to the questions were". I want to know what the correct answers to these questions are".

In terms of intercultural communication apprehension, the data shows that most of the students were able to adjust their psychological state and present a positive outlook despite the fact that they had not been abroad for a long period of time. However, it is also possible that this result is due to the fact that they have not spent a lot of time in the UK.

The Pearson correlation analysis shows a no correlation between the score of words test and intercultural communication apprehension ($r_{\text{Word Test-PRICA}} = 0.161, p > 0.05$).

The weak correlation indicates that changes in the score of words test are only slightly associated with changes in intercultural communication apprehension. The non-significant p-value suggests that this observed correlation could be due to random chance rather than a true relationship between the variables. It is crucial to interpret these results with caution and consider potential factors influencing the lack of significance.

In conclusion, the analysis did not find sufficient evidence to support a significant correlation between the score of culturally loaded words and intercultural communication apprehension. Further research with a larger sample size or additional variables may provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship.

5. Discussion

Regarding the relationship between culturally loaded words and intercultural communication apprehension in this research different results emerged from the authors' hypothesis. After randomly interviewing the subjects, the authors concluded three reasons for this result. Firstly, the length of

study in the UK is relatively short and most of the Chinese students do not consider learning culturally loaded words is an important thing and learning English more just to complete their short-term studies. Secondly, Chinese students in the UK generally have a tend that they prefer staying with other Chinese students, which means that even in an intercultural environment, they prefer to live with Chinese students' group in their daily lives. Thirdly, the use of culturally loaded words is not very common in daily life. So even in intercultural communication, British people will consciously avoid using these words and adopt ways that are easier for foreigners to understand in order to avoid causing misunderstanding.

There are also considerable shortcomings in this experiment. Firstly, the number of valid questionnaires returned was too small to give an accurate conclusion as to whether there is a correlation between the mastery of culturally loaded words and the degree of intercultural communication apprehension. Secondly, 53 per cent of the experimental subjects had been in the UK for less than six months, which did not ensure that they were all culturally aware and adequately adapted to life in the UK. Thirdly, the lack of interaction with Chinese students from other English-speaking countries

6. Conclusion

Although this study could not prove the correlation between culturally loaded words and intercultural communication apprehension, this study has some understanding of the mastery of culturally loaded words and intercultural communication fear of Chinese students in the UK. In the long run, the factors that affect the degree of intercultural communication apprehension remain to be explored. Especially in the context of studying abroad, the fear of intercultural communication will be uncertain according to the environment around the students.

References

- [1] <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/19-01-2023/sb265-higher-education-student-statistics>.
- [2] Li Qiang & Lu Yaoxuan. A study on the influencing factors of Students' Learning Achievement and Learning ability: A Preliminary study on the four-dimension analysis framework. Journal of northwest normal university (social science edition), 2019, (3), 5-14.
- [3] Hu Wenzhong. Intercultural Communication and English Learning [M]. Shanghai Translation. 1988.
- [4] Liu, D. & Zhong, S. Acquisition of culturally loaded wordss in EFL, Foreign Language Annals, 1999, 32 (2), 177-188.
- [5] Horwitz, E.K. Preliminary Evidence for the Reliability and Validity of a Foreign Language Anxiety Scale [J]. TESOL Quarterly, 1986, 20 (3): 559-562.
- [6] Gao Yongchen. Construction of theoretical framework of intercultural Communication Competence Assessment System for Chinese College Students [J]. Foreign Languages, 2014, (4): 80-88.
- [7] Dong Bing. A study on the correlation between intercultural sensitivity and culture-loaded Vocabulary learning [D]. Harbin Institute of Technology. 2009.
- [8] Zhang Zhihua. A study on the correlation between intercultural sensitivity and English culture-loaded vocabulary acquisition. Foreign Language Teaching and Learning, 2015, (03), 60-63.
- [9] James W. Neuliep & James C. McCroskey, The development of intercultural and interethnic communication apprehension scales, Communication Research, 1997.
- [10] Jia M L. A study on the correlation between intercultural sensitivity and intercultural effectiveness of vocational college students. Foreign Languages, 2014 (03), 171-174.
- [11] Wang Shiyu. Research on intercultural sensitivity and improvement strategies of college students. Heilongjiang Higher Education Research, 2018, (09), 46-50.
- [12] Byram, M, Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters. 1997.

- [13] Deardorff, D. Assessing intercultural competence in study abroad students [A]. In M. Bryam&A. Feng (eds.). *Living and Studying Abroad: Research and Practice* [C]. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2006.
- [14] Bennett, M, Towards ethnorelativism: A developmental model of intercultural sensitivity [A]. In M.R. Paige (ed). *Education for the intercultural experience* [C].Yarmouth: Intercultural Press. 1993.
- [15] Chen G, &W Starosta. Intercultural communication competence: A synthesis [J]. *Communication Yearbook*, 1996, (19): 353-384.
- [16] Wu Jianshe, Liu Qing, Lang Jianguo, Rong Yongchang. The effects of short-term study abroad and language proficiency on intercultural communication fear and intercultural sensitivity [J]. *Foreign Languages and Foreign Language Teaching*, 2017, (03): 89-99+149.
- [17] Wang, S., Sun, X., & Liu, C. Intercultural analysis of communication anxieties encountered by international students in the United States. *Intercultural Communication Studies*, 2010, 19 (2), 217.
- [18] Zhang H. Culturally loaded words and their teaching methods. *Journal of School of Foreign Languages, Shandong Normal University (Basic English Education)*, 2007, (03), 52-55.