



Teaching Chinese Culture in English-a CLIL approach

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Abstract— *This paper explores the integration of content and language learning in the context of teaching Chinese culture to English majors. Drawing on literature from Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), the paper proposes three key considerations for effective integration: identifying and justifying integration methods, addressing mismatches between language proficiency and cognitive ability, and adopting an inquiry-based approach to teaching and learning. The paper argues that successful integration depends on a symbiotic relationship between content, cognition, communication, and language, as well as the development of intercultural awareness. The paper concludes that while integration is a complex process that requires strategic planning and reflective evaluation, it can enhance the effectiveness of language learning and content acquisition, providing learners with a meaningful context for language and culture learning.*

Keywords— *CLIL, Chinese culture, English majors, integration*

I. INTRODUCTION

The importance of preserving and promoting Chinese cultural traditions has been repeatedly emphasized in President Xi Jinping's speeches. During the 95th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China (CPC) on July 1, 2016, he introduced the phrase "cultural confidence", a concept intended to supplement the CPC's previous declaration at the 18th National Congress that China should maintain confidence in its ideological and theoretical systems and institutions, along with socialism with Chinese characteristics. Cultural confidence is a systematic concept that encompasses a country or nation's confidence in its cultural values and vitality, emphasizing traditional values and all the material and spiritual wealth that the people have created throughout the country's history. To uphold the concept of cultural confidence, the CPC demands a strong conviction in the historical, traditional, and current socialist culture. Given this context, significant importance has been attributed to the instruction of Chinese culture within higher education institutions. Following the

proposition of the concept of cultural confidence, the matter of effectively implementing Chinese culture teaching while enhancing the language skills of English majors has become an urgent issue that needs to be addressed. Content and Language Integrated Learning, or CLIL is "an approach to teaching the content of curricular subjects through the medium of a non-native language" (Llinares & Murcia, 2013, p.2). A CLIL course enables learners to acquire knowledge and comprehension of the curricular topic while also learning and utilizing the target language. It is worth noting that the term "content" takes precedence in CLIL, as it is the foundation on which language learning is built. By studying a certain subject, learners acquire knowledge and comprehension of various aspects in this subject. This teaching approach aligns well with the nature of teaching Chinese culture as a course for English majors and CLIL has the potential to provide valuable insights and ideas for the effective teaching of Chinese culture. This paper provides an overview of the current state of teaching Chinese culture through English as a part of curriculum for English majors,

and draws on relevant research on CLIL to explore the alignment between CLIL and Chinese culture teaching. Based on this exploration, a theoretical framework for teaching Chinese culture using CLIL is proposed, and the practical implementation of this framework is discussed.

II. CURRENT STATE OF CHINESE CULTURE TEACHING IN ENGLISH IN CHINESE UNIVERSITIES

In this part, the state quo of Chinese Culture teaching to English majors in Chinese Universities will be analyzed through the “cultural aphasia” among English Majors and the Guide for teaching Chinese Culture in English.

2.1 “Cultural Aphasia” among English Majors

The curriculum for English majors in most universities in China has long been criticized for its neglect of Chinese culture as there are clear indications that the teaching of Western cultures has been given top priority. Most researchers of foreign language education in Chinese universities have pointed out the symptom of “cultural aphasia” among English majors, a term referring to the phenomenon of one-way cultural exchange in English teaching, where learners can easily talk about Christmas but struggle to express Chinese New Year in their daily communication due to limited exposure to their own culture through English. The concept was first proposed by Professor Cong from Nanjing University, who believed that there is a one-sided understanding of intercultural communication in English teaching in China. Cong (2000) pointed out that “the multilevel English teaching in our country has only strengthened the introduction of material culture, institutional customs, and various levels of spiritual culture from English-speaking countries, while the English expression of Chinese culture as a communicative subject is basically ignored.” It’s common to find that many students are well-versed in the history and celebration of Western holidays and can express themselves fluently in English. This phenomenon is due to the detailed description of Western history and holidays in English teaching. In contrast, there is little mention of Chinese history, such as the Silk Road, Peking Opera, calligraphy, folk culture, and other traditional Chinese cultural essences. Most textbooks for English majors in China lack content related to Chinese culture. There are few resources available for developing

and writing textbooks on Chinese and local culture. A review of more than 20 years of textbooks from two of China's leading publishers of foreign language materials, the Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press and the Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, found that there are very few textbooks available for teaching Chinese culture in foreign language programs. Most of the existing resources are intended for translation majors. This suggests that there is relatively little demand for Chinese culture content in foreign language programs at most universities in China, and limited research has been conducted on this topic. As a result, textbooks of Chinese culture in English are in a large demand in Chinese colleges in recent years.

2.2 Guide for teaching Chinese Culture in English

However, there is also a lack of a clear system for teaching Chinese culture in terms of objectives, content, methods, and evaluation in English teaching syllabus, which has resulted in insufficient attention to the content of Chinese culture in teaching design, textbook compilation, and assessment. Therefore, it is necessary to clarify the system for teaching Chinese culture in English to improve students' understanding of Chinese culture and cross-cultural communication skills. In 2020, the "Teaching Guide for Undergraduate Foreign Language and Literature Majors in General Higher Education Institutions" (Guide hereafter) was formulated as a top-down framework of curriculum for English majors in Chinese universities. The Guide (2020:19) provides fundamental theoretical support for teaching Chinese culture. The first principle is to foster virtue and talent, which requires improving the English education system with Chinese characteristics, style, and grandeur. The second principle is to serve the national development strategy, where English majors must meet the needs of Chinese culture going global and the Belt and Road Initiative by learning Chinese and local cultures. The third principle emphasizes the path of connotative development, requiring English teaching to value humanities and social sciences and lay a solid foundation in Chinese language and culture. Lastly, the fourth principle emphasizes continuous innovation in teaching methods, which requires teachers to enhance their own cultural literacy and constantly innovate teaching content and methods. In particular, the Guide includes "Chinese Culture Overview" as a core course for English majors. It also establishes the "Comparative and

Cross-Cultural Studies" and "National and Regional Studies" as directions of development. They provide courses related to Chinese culture such as "Comparative Study of Chinese and Western Cultures," "Introduction to Chinese Classical Thought," "Special Topics in Chinese and Western Comparative Literature Studies," "Special Topics in Cross-Cultural Communication between China and the World," and "Contemporary Chinese Diplomacy." Additionally, the Guide also adds Chinese classics to the English major reading list, such as the English translation of "Dream of the Red Chamber," "Analects," "A Short History of Chinese Philosophy" and so on. Moreover, based on the Guide, each university can construct relevant local cultural courses for English majors in various forms, combined with the regional culture on which the university relies. The construction of such courses is of practical significance for improving the Chinese culture curriculum for English majors, promoting Chinese culture as well as building local culture, and effectively integrating English teaching and Chinese culture teaching.

III. CLIL AS A THEORETICAL CONCEPT IN TEACHING CHINESE CULTURE

CLIL is an approach to language teaching that involves teaching content and language simultaneously, with the goal of improving students' language proficiency while also deepening their understanding of academic content. In China, there is a common misconception that some teaching practices are considered CLIL even though they do not meet its requirements. For instance, some English teachers use the term "CLIL" to describe content-based language teaching (CBL), which involves incorporating subject matter into language instruction. However, CBL is typically taught by language teachers, assessed as language teaching, and does not make any formal contribution to the subject curriculum, which is not in line with the principles of CLIL. However, even within Europe, CLIL is a broad term which embraces a variety of different school practice. Ball et al. (2015, p.2) suggested the "hard" and "soft" CLIL programs as key versions, with "hard" CLIL taught by subject teachers with a strong emphasis on the acquisition of subject knowledge, "soft" CLIL taking up only part of the curriculum time allocated to the subject, valued for its language benefits and often involving language teachers.

The teaching of Chinese culture to English majors, offered for a short period-usually half a year certainly belongs to the soft type. Therefore, it involves language teachers in several possible roles and highlight collaboration between subject and language.

3.1 Connecting culture learning and language learning

A useful starting point is to consider the content of learning Chinese culture. In a CLIL context, the definition of content is not as rigid as selecting a subject from a conventional school curriculum. The concept of content is more adaptable and accommodating to different disciplines and topics. Factors such as teacher availability, language support and social demands of the learning environment may require a different selection of content. Therefore, the definition of "content" in CLIL varies depending on the context of the learning institution. In a CLIL context, content can encompass a wide range of approaches, from directly incorporating elements of a statutory national curriculum to developing a project centered around topical issues that integrate various aspects of the curriculum (such as Chinese festivals, Chinese buildings, or Chinese geography). Content in CLIL can also be thematic, interdisciplinary, cross-curricular, or emphasize citizenship education. CLIL presents prospects for learning and enhancing skills that extend beyond the conventional curriculum. The nature of these opportunities varies based on whether the CLIL context prioritizes a content-led, language-led, or a combination approach. Nevertheless, it is essential to acknowledge that neither the content nor the language aspect should be disregarded or overshadowed, and the interrelationship between them must be recognized. More often than not, syllabuses and programs all have their aims and objectives, often with articulated goals and outcomes for teaching and learning. For example, the Chinese culture course would include almost all the following subjects, such as historical figures and stories, traditional Chinese festivals, the four Great/major inventions, traditional Chinese medicine and Chinese culinary culture. But these alone do not address the how of content learning - only the what of content teaching. Vygotsky (1978) introduced the term 'zone of proximal development' (ZPD) to describe the kind of learning which is always challenging yet potentially within reach of individual learners on condition that appropriate support, scaffolding and guidance are provided.

In educational settings influenced by social-constructivist theories, the teacher's primary responsibility is to facilitate cognitive challenge within each student's ZPD. This requires the teacher to strike a balance between providing cognitive challenge and gradually decreasing support as the learners advance in their learning. Therefore, for content learning to be effective learning, students must be cognitively engaged.

In a CLIL class, teachers will have to consider how to actively involve learners to enable them to think through and articulate their own learning of Chinese culture. This in turn implies that learners need to be made aware of their own learning through developing metacognitive skills such as learning to learn. CLIL classrooms that foster interaction are characterized by collaborative activities, student-led inquiries, and critical thinking. In such classrooms, students are expected to work together, utilizing their individual strengths and compensating for weaknesses. Therefore, they must acquire the skills necessary to collaborate effectively and operate successfully in groups.

3.2 Language Learning in Chinese Culture Courses

In a conventional foreign language learning environment, the instruction of language is traditionally focused on studying grammar rules and reading written materials. In the latter part of the 20th century, second language acquisition theories influenced a range of approaches used for learning foreign languages (Richards and Rodgers, 2001). Recent investigations into broader theories of learning have begun to influence the way we think about effective language learning and teaching. Such theories include socio-cultural theory, interactionism, and connectionism. Savignon (2004) identifies principles of communicative language learning that are applicable to CLIL, as language acquisition is perceived to occur in authentic contexts for practical use. Savignon's argument stresses the significance of using language in genuine interactive situations to enhance communicative abilities, rather than excessively emphasizing grammar, thereby indicating that the objective of language learning includes language use. In other words, to be considered CLIL, students must be capable of utilizing the language of instruction to learn content beyond just grammatical structure. But the question still stands: if learners lack the necessary proficiency in a second or additional language, how can they effectively use it for this

purpose? As previously discussed, it is essential for learners in CLIL settings to make progress in both their content and language learning in a systematic manner. Therefore, using language for learning and learning to use language are both necessary. However, there may be a discrepancy between the cognitive abilities of learners and their language proficiency in many CLIL settings. Snow, Met, and Genesee (1989: 205) proposed a helpful approach of differentiating between content-obligatory language (crucial for understanding the content) and content-compatible language (which supports both the content and language goals of the curriculum) to facilitate teachers in sequencing their language and content aims. To plan strategically in this way, teachers must clarify the correlation between content and language objectives. A conceptual representation - the Language Triptych - makes these connections. It has been constructed to take account of the need to integrate cognitively demanding content with language learning and using (Coyle, 2000, 2002). It supports learners in language using through the analysis of the CLIL vehicular language from three interrelated perspectives: language of learning, language for learning and language through learning.

Language of learning refers to the language necessary for students to comprehend fundamental concepts and skills related to a particular subject matter or theme. Using the framework of systemic functional linguistics (Halliday, 2004), genre is defined as a "social activity in a particular culture" that is expressed through language, which forms a register (Llinares and Whittaker, 2006:28). As a result, language teachers need to focus on functional and notional levels of difficulty that align with the content, rather than solely relying on grammatical complexity. For example, students need to use the subjunctive mood in theme of Chinese art. In a CLIL environment, the learner needs to be supported in understanding the concept of "subjunctive mood". This can be achieved through using certain examples sentences involving Chinese art. The selection of example sentences used will depend on the content. Using the subjunctive mood for authentic purposes in a CLIL class arguably enables the learners to use language appropriate to the content in a meaningful way, which can then be further explored for grammatical cohesion in the language class.

The concept of language for learning pertains to the language skills required to function in a foreign language

context. Mastering the use of this language can prove to be a challenging task for both the teacher and the student, as each one has their respective responsibilities to fulfill. To be able to use the foreign language proficiently, learners need to adopt effective strategies. In a CLIL environment, it is important to help learners acquire the necessary skills for effective communication, including working in pairs or groups, asking questions, debating, chatting, thinking, and memorizing. Without the ability to use language to support their learning and collaborate with others, learners will struggle to achieve quality learning outcomes. Developing a range of language functions related to the content, such as describing, evaluating, and drawing conclusions, is crucial for successful completion of tasks. It is important to incorporate strategies for promoting independent use of the CLIL language, such as group discussions and debates, into both the teaching and learning processes.

Language through learning asserts that language and thinking are essential for effective learning. When learners are prompted to express their comprehension, a more profound level of learning can occur. The CLIL classroom requires a higher level of discourse, interaction, and dialogic engagement compared to traditional language or content-based classrooms. In CLIL environments, as new concepts and ideas emerge, they often require new language to express them. This language needs to be recognized, revisited, and strategically developed by both teachers and learners. In other words, learners require language to facilitate and enhance their thinking processes as they acquire new knowledge, as well as to advance their language proficiency.

3.3 Integrating content and language learning

The 4Cs Framework in CLIL integrates four contextualized building blocks: content (subject matter), communication (language learning and using), cognition (learning and thinking processes) and culture (developing intercultural understanding and global citizenship) (Coyle, 1999). According to Crandall (1994: p. 256), Students cannot develop academic knowledge and skills without access to the language in which that knowledge is embedded, discussed, constructed, or evaluated. Nor can they acquire academic language skills in a context devoid of [academic] content. The 4Cs Framework emphasizes the interdependence of content, cognition, communication, and

language in effective CLIL instruction. According to this framework, successful CLIL takes place when there is a symbiotic relationship between these four elements. Firstly, students must progress in their knowledge, skills, and understanding of the content being taught. This means that they are not only learning the language, but they are also acquiring new knowledge in a specific subject area. Secondly, engagement in associated cognitive processing is necessary for effective CLIL. This refers to the mental processes involved in understanding and processing new information in the target language. Thirdly, interaction in the communicative context is crucial. Students need to interact with one another and with the teacher in order to use the language in authentic situations. This includes cooperative group work, discussions, debates, and other communicative activities that allow for language use in context. Fourthly, development of appropriate language knowledge and skills is essential. Students need to develop the language skills necessary to understand and express themselves in the target language in order to engage in the cognitive and communicative processes. Finally, the acquisition of a deepening intercultural awareness is critical in CLIL. This involves an understanding and appreciation of different cultures and perspectives, and how they relate to the content being taught. This awareness is developed through the positioning of self and 'otherness' in the context of the content being taught. Overall, the 4Cs Framework provides a comprehensive approach to effective CLIL instruction by highlighting the importance of content, cognition, communication, and language, as well as intercultural awareness.

IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I propose three key considerations for the integration of content and language learning in teaching Chinese culture to English majors. Firstly, educators must identify and justify the means by which integration will be achieved, taking into account individual learning contexts and projected outcomes. This may seem like an obvious point, but the reality is that integrating content and language learning is a complex process that requires strategic planning and reflective evaluation. There are no easy solutions or formulas for success. Secondly, whatever the capability of learners, effective learning demands cognitive

engagement at the appropriate level for individuals. In the CLIL classroom, it is probable that the language proficiency of learners may not correspond to their cognitive abilities. As a result, mismatches may occur, where either the language level is too challenging or not challenging enough when compared to their cognitive level. If the language level is too complex, it may impede effective learning. Conversely, if the cognitive level is too low for the given language level, learning may be limited. The third implication for integration in the CLIL classroom is the adoption of an inquiry-based approach to teaching and learning. In some cases, language practitioners may lead the CLIL program, and there is a risk of neglecting or diluting the specific content demands. Conversely, in other cases, content teachers may lead the program, and the linguistic demands may be at risk of being undermined. To address this issue, an inquiry-based approach can be used to strike a balance between content and language demands. This approach involves encouraging learners to inquire, explore, and discover, enabling them to construct their knowledge and make connections between different areas of learning. This approach provides a meaningful context for language learning and content acquisition, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of the CLIL approach.

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