THE CONSTRUCTION OF CULTURAL IDENTITIES IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION—FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ADAPTATION THEORY

Yuxin Li

Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, School of English for International Business, Bayun Road 2, Guangzhou, China, 510420

ABSTRACT

This article is situated in a reality that lots of splendid culture or languages are faced with the risk of disappearing from the world owing to the problem of inequity. It seems that since when people get used to evaluate a culture based the development of its economy and politics. Hence, it is of significance to appropriately construct cultural identities in intercultural communication (ICC). Rather than sticking to or giving up original culture, people should learn to show reverence to various existence and absorb their advantages and essence. In this research, the author is going to analyze cultural conflicts emerging from a BBC documentary called "The School That Turned Chinese" and give an explanation for the presence of those disharmony, and provide a illustration to the construction of mother-tongue identity, target identity, and the multicultural identity, specifically adapting to people's mental world, physical world and social world with the Adaptation Theory, which implies that people should not only be confident of their own culture but also make attempts to integrate with other outstanding ones to make the world a good container for diversity.

KEYWORDS: Intercultural communication, cultural identity, cultural conflicts, Adaptation Theory

1. INTRODUCTION

People from the whole world exclaim that we're living in an open era. It seems that there are less and less boundaries between different countries and this variation doesn't just take place in the area of economy and politics, but culture too. At the very beginning, it's America and other major European countries that call for globalization because of the purpose of maximizing economic profits in international trade. Globalization gains attention in the world for it could benefit all the traders whoever get involved. However, just as people always say, every coin has two sides, globalization has its own downsides too. The negative issues coming with globalization mainly affect culture. An example of language will be given. Language itself, is the carrier of culture. It's estimated by UNESCO (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization) that one thirds of the world's 6000 types of language have users less than 1000. Someone made a assumption declaring that 80 percent of the 6000 one will lose its users and disappear from the earth. Every disappearing of a specific language represents a lost of culture. It is a so true and terrifying conclusion.

This awful truth results from globalization. It did decrease cultural diversity because globalization is a concept of unification and integration. To conduct trade and business with others, a language needs to be chosen as a communicating tool. English is obviously the most impactive one and it is widely used in the globe given some historic and political reasons. Thus, English plays a key role in the stage of globalization as a lingua franca. American linguist BrajKackru divided English-using countries in the whole world by three concentric circles. The core countries include the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and New Zealand and those countries use English as mother language. The second group uses English as second language, such as Singapore and India. The last group of countries consists of China, France, Russia, Japan, Greece etc. English is used as official language in those countries but they have already realized the importance of English and students start to learn it from a young age in school. The information above indicates that nearly two thirds of the whole world population could speak English, which means the same amount of people are influenced by English culture. Though this communicating tool, they have access to English history, politics, trade, religion, science, and literature.

As the greater popularity of globalization, the crisis of lack for cultural diversity emerges from the situation. As a consequence, in intercultural communication, it is of importance to construct cultural identity. Germany philosopher Jürgen Habermas put forward with the Theory of Communication (Habermas, 1998) to discuss some rules during the identity construction in intercultural communication. He claims that language users are supposed to show respect to the other party's cultural identity and comply the rules of "being sincere, considerable, fair and equal". Only when communicators conduct intercultural communication by equalizing people's various cultural identities and stance, discourse behaviour that is mastered by the thought of culture hegemony could be avoided as much (Guan, 2014).

To respond to the Chinese policy of "Reform and Opening Up" in this new era, the "One Belt One Road Initiative" gains much attention. Hence, it is significant to disseminate Chinese culture to the outside world and loads of Chinese school are built up in foreign countries or Chinese teachers go abroad to teach as volunteers.

During the process of ICC, cultural conflicts sometimes hinder the understanding of both parties. To better carry out sino-foreign cooperative education, researchers are responsible to do some analysis. For example, BBC made a documentary called "The School That Turned Chinese" where five Chinese teachers taught in Bohunt: a British public school.

In this four-week experiment, five Chinese teachers take over a class of 50 British students together. The teaching is mainly based on the traditional Chinese style which requests teachers to infuse knowledge directly to students and demands students to take notes and do mechanic-memorizing. However, owing to the cultural conflicts between the two different countries, both teachers and students find it hard to teach and learn. As a result, students ignore all the rules set by teachers and

interrupt the class. Even worse, there are some students skip classes. To conduct the regular study, the management group of Bohunt join the class, assist Chinese teachers and help those students to get back on track. Eventually, those 50 British students get better grades that the students learned in British way in the final exam and Chinese style of teaching worked in British school.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Adaptation Theory is used to illustrate the choices making of language adapting to the physical world, mental world, social world and linguistic context mainly in pragmatics. Considering that ICC is a type of communication in intercultural environment, this theory could be utilized to analyze people's behaviour. The author is going to investigate that how the cultural conflicts arise and what strategies have been wielded to construct their cultural identities through their language or speaking behaviour.

The reason why speakers is allowed to make all those selections is language's variability, negotiability and adaptability. Firstly, variability is the property of language which defines the range of possibilities from which choices can be made (Verschueren, 1999:59). Hymes also stressed that "in the study of language as a mode of action, variation is a clue and key" (1974:75). This variation means that language users are able to choose among a series of forms and words when communicating with others. Actually, the process of making choices itself is dynamic. It is because the range of possible choices are regularly changing that the communication process could be flexible and dynamic. "Variability" implies that there are divergent choices towards same communicative intention. Then it comes to the negotiability, according to Verschueren (1999:59), negotiability is the property of language responsible for the fact that choices are not made mechanically or according to strict rules or fixed form-function relationships, but rather on the basis of highly flexible principles and strategies, which means that the negotiation of those language choices is based eminently on flexibility of conventions and propositions. Fundamentally speaking, the essence of the negotiation relies on and adapts to the context, which spotlights the importance of adaptability. Adaptability, in Verschueren (1999:61)'s words, is the property of language which enables human beings to make negotiable linguistic choices from a variable range of possibilities in such a way as to approach points of satisfaction for communicative needs. Specifically, this communicative needs that mentioned by adaptability are not the general needs but very distinct communicative needs appearing in actual context.

In intercultural communications, speakers make choices of their language to construct cultural identities and those choices are supposed to adapt to the communicative context.

If the Adaptability Theory is put forward to explain communicator's intention and purpose in intercultural context, then questions like "what exactly does those choices adapt to?" should be answered. Verschueren (1999:75) made a sketch of the ingredients of communicative context showing the factors involved. After viewing the sketch of general picture of what is involved, ingredients of the communicative context could be summarized as language users, physical world, mental world and social world. To be specific, language users refer to the utter (U) and interpreter (I). For mental world,

aspects like personality, emotions, beliefs, desire, and wishes are covered. Physical world consists of elements such as temporal reference, spatial reference and utter and interpreter in the physical world, as well as the gesture, physical appearance and biological property. The social world is composed of power, distance, rights and obligation, social setting or associations. Also, some other parts such as religion, level of education, gender or social class.

It is obvious that verbal interaction is in fact a type of communication conducted from mind to mind. That's why the reality of social, physical and mental is based on the utter and interpreter's perspective. All those elements could only be activated by people's mental perspective. The mental world introduces the communicator's personality, beliefs, desires and wishes.

There is no principled boundary to the array of the social elements that language choices are interadaptable with. Most of them need to do with properties of social settings and institutions. In other words, the choices of language have to be legitimated. For example, it won't be allowed for employees to make orders to directors in companies. Also, judges have the right to make final announcements in the court according to the basic rules in law.

Verschueren's Adaptation Theory (1999) attaches great importance the correlated context, which is expected to explain the relationship of the construction of cultural identities and the intercultural environment. Hence, the author will firstly evaluate the cultural conflicts into positive ones and negative ones and gives an explanation about the reason that leads to the conflicts, then will outline the construction of cultural identities adapting to the elements of Mental World (Values), Physical World (Modes of Thinking) and Social World (Social Norms).

This study will analyze the intercultural conflicts that take place in this documentary and discuss the five Chinese teachers' construction of cultural identities from the perspective of Adaptation Theory (Verschueren, 1999). Three questions will be answered in this article:

(1) What cultural conflicts do the five teachers meet during their teaching in British?
(2) What are the reasons for those cultural conflicts?
(3) During the process of getting over the intercultural conflicts, what kind of cultural identities do they construct?

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
3.1 Cultural conflicts met by the five Chinese teachers

Cultural conflicts could be categorized into two types according to the consequences they bring in. It is referred to positive cultural conflicts it the they are beneficial to the improvement of participants and the participants acknowledge them as a event that could bring them personal progress. Also, when facing this kind of cultural conflicts, people are able to get along well with it and obtain a lot from the process. The other one is negative cultural conflicts. By contrast, these conflicts could cause unpleasant

consequences. Possibly, they could affect the mental and physical health and generate some negative moods such as tensions, anxiety and worries. Even worse, serious negative cultural conflicts might bring about sequela. In this documentary, both positive and negative cultural conflicts turn up, several examples will be given as follows.

3.1.1 Positive cultural conflicts
(a) The integration of Chinese and British style of teaching

In this documentary, after the rise of cultural conflicts, the daily teaching process is terribly disturbed. Thus, Chinese teachers comes to British teachers for help. Taking Chemistry teacher Yang for example, she is a persistent advocator for Chinese style of teaching. Just like other chemistry teachers at home, she herself hardly makes chemical experiment at class but tells students the conclusion directly in order to save time, let alone she could leads the students to do so. But, to cater to the British education system, which spotlights students' practical ability, she makes a compromise and demonstrates the operation in front of the class. Besides, when realizing that most of the students could not follow her teaching up after the quiz, she turned to the British chemical teachers for suggestion, expecting to make her class more easily understood and accepted by the British students.

The other integration is successfully handled by Math teacher Zou. Owing to the poor foundation in Maths, a part of the class falls behind too much. To enhance this situation, he organized an after-class group with several students, which is less likely to happen in China because both students and teachers barely have extra time after class. Zou's strategy reminds the audience of British Math teacher's statement that one of the merits of British educational system is to put students in different groups according to their level and ability of understanding. Consequently, students in the small group pick up their interest in Math because they find it much easier to catch up and they make some progress. What's more, student like Luke becomes friend with Zou and begins to share his trouble and worries with him, which boosters the communication between them and speeds up the integration of the two cultures.

(b) The building of close teacher-student relationship

Some peculiar scene makes a deep impression on Chinese audience for the five teachers often do chatting with British students like an equal in break or self-study time. This kind of picture is not usually seen at home. When teachers tend to talk with someone, in China, students will feel a sense of uneasiness and recall what mistake have they made recently. However, for the reason that British students don't view teachers as authority, it is common for them to pass on their true feelings to teachers at any time. For instance, in this documentary, English teacher Li builds an image of being soft, friendly and easy-going. Thus, one of the students says to her, "I think you are a really nice person and you should keep that". To respond him, Li shares some her own insights of the variation of the two cultures. By unfolding personal perception with each other, it makes the building of their connection more accessible and accelerates study process.

3.1.2 Negative cultural conflicts

(a) The discontinuity of class

In China, students in high school could control themselves very well and dare not to interrupt teachers in class. In some cases, they even do the preparation job in silence and wait for the teacher to come before two or three minutes of the class. Generally, teachers represent the highest power and very little time will be wasted in keeping students well-behaved and concentrated. By contrast, British educational system is student-centered so it's hard to keep them focused in Chinese way of teaching. From the documentary, teachers lose control of some rather intricate subject like math and chemistry considering that students have trouble to catch up and start to chatting around.

(b) The disunity of Chinese teacher and British parents

There is a typical student Josh who is criticized for boiling hot water and drinking tea in classroom. Several teachers spot Josh's inappropriate behaviour and warn him of the aftermath. But Josh still does things in his own way. Finally, the Chinese teacher Zou adopts a Unique Skill which is the last-minute approach in China—calling the parents to school. That's what Zou does in this documentary—calling Josh's parents to talk about their child. Nevertheless, things don't work out in the expected way. Josh's mother confesses that taking the kettle to school is her idea for it is too suffering and unhuman if people are not allowed to drink tea in a whole day. Anyway, Josh's mother does take the kettle home and Josh's naughtiness is terminated but it seems that Chinese teacher's doing doesn't get support from Josh's parents.

3.2 Reasons and causes for the cultural conflicts

3.2.1 Different values in mental world

In accordance with Hofstede cultural dimensions, China is a society which holds collectivism value and British society is inclined to be individualistic. As a matter of fact, for China, this is tightly related to the traditional thought of Confucianism. Chinese always put the interest of country, community and group ahead of themselves. That's the reason for the existence of "heroic story" where the characters usually end up suffering but the safety and happiness of the country or a group of people is guaranteed. In this documentary, Chemical teacher Yang sets a typical example.

Though having many experiences of teaching in Britain, Yang is always an enthusiastic advocator for Chinese educational system, which is clearly shown in the documentary. For instance, facing with the fact that the academic level of high school students in China is far higher than in Britain, she proudly announced it is owing to Chinese students' hard work and good behaviour in class. Yang is sincerely glad for her own country's progress. However, she was hit so hard when the Chinese teacher's lose control of the fifty British students and the Chinese style of teaching is likely to clash. There is a moving scene where Yang cries into tears and feels depressed because she doesn't make it to demonstrate the essence and merits of Chinese style of teaching in a foreign country. In spite of the fact that she nearly couldn't properly speak because her throat gets hurt for keeping talking in a high voice just to keep as many as students focused in class, she sounds extremely determined. But she is

not the kind of person to give up easily. In the rest of time, she and other teachers come up with ideas to improve the situation. By teaching students Chinese traditional dance and making dumplings, they hope to spread diverse culture in China to those British students and make them accept Chinese culture and education system. To conclude, when Chinese culture and education is questioned and challenged, Yang takes over her responsibility to let others recognize the beauty and charm of Chinese culture. Being raised up in a collectivism-oriented society, her own belief and desire in mental world, in a strange environment like intercultural context, usually comply with the whole country's interest.

But in Britain, an individualism-oriented society, personal interests get more attention than the whole country's benefits, which could illustrate the fact that British students take nation flag rising as a funny and meaningless activity. Hence, it's the different value of collectivism and individualism in the two countries that leads to cultural conflicts.

3.2.2 Different modes of thinking in physical world

Inspired from Hall's analysis of cultural dimensions, the differentiating cultural context of China and Britain cause people's distinguishing style of speaking. For high-context society like China, a most part of information is implanted in the material or physical context so only a small quantity of message needs to be conveyed vocally. Specifically speaking, people's speaking style tend to be implicit in a high-context country and some physical elements of the communicators such as bodily postures, gestures, gaze, even physical appearance could indicate some information. In this documentary, English teacher Li's behaviour provides some evidence for this.

During one day's self-study time, Li takes charge of the discipline of the class. Being not used to the rules of keeping silent during self-study, the students continue talking to each other. There is a detail in the documentary, Li came to the front of a pair of desk mates who are babbling with each other and stops there. She stands there for like half an minute with her arms crossed and her eyes focusing on the two students. Not until Li starts to interrupt this conversation did the two end their topic. It turns out that Li means to warn them of breaking the students' rules. "In my school, when I look at my students in this way, they will follow me but you don't." She says to the two of them. Apparently, Chinese teachers who are influenced by the high culture context, are accustomed of transferring information by some physical context like bodily gestures.

Things in a low-context society are completely different. After watching this documentary, British people's directness leaves a deep impression on Chinese audience. Firstly, the management members don't hide their relief and happiness when they realize the Chinese school is not on the right track and may lose in this competition. Besides, students sometimes make some comments on teachers or in a straightforward way. For example, Student Sophie thinks Chemical teacher Yang looks funny with the goggles during the experiment and says "She reminds me of my nanna", which is a little bit rude from the Chinese perspective though Sophie means no harm.

All in all, comparing to the low-context society, the physical world in high-context society usually contains much connotation, which induces some misunderstanding or cultural conflicts.

3.2.3 Characteristic social norms in social world

China is a country which has history of five thousand years. Thus, it is apparent that people's social behaviour gets affected by some traditional thoughts. For instance, there is a prevailing saying that goes like "The ocean is vast for it refuses no rivers", which sum up a crucial Chinese thought as being open and tolerant. In fact, China always plays a open and tolerant rule in the world's stage and this thoughts guide Chinese people to make correct decision in the social world. In this documentary, deeds of the teacher are also influenced by this thought such as their attempts to integrate the Chinese and British style of teaching.

In a word, it's just this attitude of being open and tolerant in Chinese social world that makes the five Chinese teachers transform some cultural conflicts into positive ones, which in a way enhance their understanding about the power of openness.

3.3 The construction of cultural identities based on Adaptation Theory

In the first part of this chapter, the author sums up some positive and negative cultural conflicts met by the five Chinese teachers during their stay in Britain. And then in the second part, reasons for the existence of these conflicts are given by the order of values in mental world, mode of thinking in physical world and norms in social world. For this part, the key role of mental, physical and social world will be stressed given that the three factors make up a communicative context. Furthermore, according to Adaptation Theory, the construction of cultural identities is in line with the adaptation of communicative context.

3.3.1 The construction of mother-tongue identity

To construct people's mother-tongue identity is to focus on the uniqueness of original cultural identity and maximize its merit in a new or intercultural environment. For this documentary, to ask for parents' help for supervising students study after school time, the five Chinese teachers hold a parents-teaching meeting in the way just as they does in China. Actually, this way of communication with parents is pretty China-style. It works well in China given the fact that Chinese parents see teachers and school as authority and will basically follow their orders. To their surprise, this activity also get extremely positive response. British parents are greatly touched by the sincerity of the Chinese teachers and are willing to trust them with their children.

According to Adaptation Theory, this successful of practice is on account of the adaptation of people's mental world. Just as it is mentioned in the second part, Chinese teachers recognizes that Chinese educational system has troubles with this new environment and even needs assistance from the management group. At this situation, the common desire and belief in their mental world is to make

full use of their advantage and back for Chinese style of teaching. Eventually, by adapting to their mental world, a mother-tongue cultural identity is favorably constructed.

3.3.2 The construction of target-language identity

To construct people's target-language identity is to forsake some old habits or constraints of their original identity and take in some new concepts. Only in this way, a more efficient and harmonious intercultural communication could be conducted. In this documentary, Chinese teachers develop a British mode of thinking such as treating students like an equal and enjoy sharing ideas about teaching with students in a very direct way.

Based on the analysis of Adaptation Theory, this effective adjustment results from the adaptation of the physical world. The author explains in the second part about the relation between the distinction of two modes of communicating or thinking and the cultural context (high or low), which could display in people's verbal and bodily speech acts. Thus, owing to the adaptation to the physical world, Chinese teachers make a adjustment of their speech behaviour and construct a target-language cultural identity.

3.3.3 The construction of multicultural identity

In intercultural communication, constructing multicultural identity is the most ideal and desired consequence. It refers to the background information that the author brought up in the first chapter. To avoid the tragedy of losing a particular language or culture, people should not make assessment among various culture. Basically speaking, there is no such a thing as good or bad culture. People have responsibility to respect and protect any of them. In the author's point of view, it is necessary for all global citizens to hold an open and tolerant notion in today's intercultural communication. In this documentary, both Chinese and British teachers absorbs something from each other and they clearly see the strengths and drawbacks in their own educational system, which implies the success of this experiment.

It is known from the Adaptation Theory that Chinese teacher's philosophy of being open and tolerant adapts to the Chinese social world. The author connects it with the traditional idea of China. Hence, five Chinese teachers construct a friendly multicultural identity adapting to the social world.

4. CONCLUSION

This study investigates the construction of cultural identities from the perspective of Adaptation Theory which spotlights the importance of communicative context in intercultural communication. In today's world, the diversity of culture should be advocated and protected thus it is significant for communicators to properly construct their cultural identities. After the research, the author makes the following observations:

Firstly, cultural conflicts people come across in ICC could be outlined into two types: positive and negative cultural conflicts. And positive ones improve personal development while negative ones do

the opposite. Secondly, there are many reasons for the presence of those conflicts, such as variation of values in mental world, difference of mode of thinking in physical world and distinctions of norms in social world. Thirdly, all those influential factors are likely to affect the construction of cultural identities. According to Adaptation Theory, the construction of mother-tongue identity, target identity, and the multicultural identity adapts to people's mental world, physical world and social world specifically. In ICC, people are supposed to respect all cultures and protect them from being marginalized in this fast-speed world. During communication, it is vital to be confident of their own culture and learn from other culture. Hopefully, this world could be a place where every culture gets equal treatment and flourish.

REFERENCES

[1] Guan, S. "Ji yu zhu ti jian li lun de kua wen hua jiao ji yu yong yuan ze yan jiu [The Pragmatic Principles of Inter-subjective Theory-based Intercultural Communication]", Hai nan shi fan da xue xue bao, 27(07), 111-117, 2014.

[2] Kang, Y. "Kua wen hua jiao ji zhong de wen hua chong tu dui wai yu jiao xue de ying xiang ji dui ce [The Influence of Cultural Conflicts in Cross-cultural Communication on Foreign Language Teaching and Countermeasures]", An hui wen xue, (03), 149-150+152, 2014.

[3] Mao, H. Kua wen hua jiao ji zhong wen hua shen fen de xuan ze [The Choice of Cultural Identity in Intercultural Communication], Bei fang lun cong, (02), 67-69, 2004.

[4] Habermas, J. On the Pragmatics of Communication, Cambridge Press, Cambridge, 1998.

[5] Su, L. "Lun BBC ji lu pian de chuang zuo li nian—yi 《wo men de hai zi zu gou jian qiang ma》 wei li [On the Creative Concept of BBC Documentary Film—Take "Are Our Children Strong enough? "as An Example]", Xin wen yan jiu dao kan, 6(17), 168-169, 2015.

[6] Verschueren, J. Understanding Pragmatics, Edward Arnold, London, 1999.

[7] Wang, L. Yi da li xue sheng han yu xi de wen hua zhang ai fen xi ji dui ce [Analysis and Countermeasures of Cultural Obstacles in Italian Students' Chinese Acquisition], Liaoning shi fan da xue, 2011.

[8] Wang, K. Da xue sheng kua wen hua jiao ji zhong de wen hua yi qing neng li pei yang [Research on Cultivating the Ability of Cultural Empathy in College Students' Cross-cultural Communication], Heilongjiang da xue, 2011.

[9] Yang, Y. & Tian, Y. Wen hua quan qiu hua bei jing xia kua wen hua shen fen de jian gou [The Construction of Cross-cultural Identity under the Background of Cultural Globalization], Hangzhou dian zi ke ji da xue xue bao, 5(04), 46-49, 2009.