

Research on the Application of the Production-Oriented Approach in Teaching Chinese Culture as a Foreign Language

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Abstract: In recent years, the production-oriented approach has been applied in the field of teaching Chinese as a foreign language, providing a new perspective for language and cultural instruction. Currently, several issues exist in cultural teaching, such as the lack of in-depth cultural input, insufficient training in cross-cultural communication skills, and the over-stylization of cultural teaching in the classroom. The production-oriented approach offers a solution to these challenges. This paper seeks to introduce the production-oriented method into the teaching of Chinese culture as a foreign language, using silk culture as a case study for teaching design. The aim is to implement cultural teaching through a new instructional model and to promote the spread of Chinese silk culture.

Keywords: Production-oriented approach; Cultural teaching; Silk culture; Teaching design

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1. Introduction

The production-oriented approach (POA), proposed by Professor Qiufang Wen, has been widely applied in foreign language teaching in China. Its primary goal is to address the “disconnection between learning and use” in language education^[1]. Significant progress has been made in the application of POA in Chinese university foreign language teaching. POA has also been increasingly utilized in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (TCFL). For instance, Li demonstrated that POA significantly improves learners’ writing abilities through its effectiveness in teaching^[2]; Lu and Zhu observed that the driving phase of POA encourages learners to engage in discovery-based learning, and they proposed strategies for addressing challenges in this phase during actual teaching^[3]. Zhuo suggested that POA provides more opportunities for learners to use language in communication, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of listening instruction^[4]. Overall, POA holds significant implications for TCFL. As an integral component of TCFL, cultural instruction can also benefit from this approach, prompting the exploration of new teaching models under the guidance of POA theory^[5].

2. Overview of the production-oriented approach

2.1. Teaching philosophy

The production-oriented approach emphasizes that teaching activities should be centered on “learning,” ensuring students are provided with ample time to input language materials and participate in language output activities. Cultural learning is advocated to be integrated with language teaching, where Chinese cultural elements are incorporated into Chinese language classrooms. This integration is believed to facilitate mutual dialogue, respect, understanding, and learning among different civilizations ^[5]. It is asserted by POA that learners of Chinese possess varying key abilities. The “key ability theory” is designed not only to ensure effective language use but also to cultivate learners’ ability for independent learning.

2.2. Teaching assumptions

POA is centered on output and prioritizes learners’ ability to apply knowledge, particularly focusing on their communicative competence in Chinese. The Output-Driven Hypothesis proposed by POA is designed to challenge traditional teaching sequences, advocating for a progression of “identifying knowledge gaps” followed by “acquiring new knowledge.” Learning materials are selected by learners based on the requirements of output tasks, which are then completed through diverse training methods. Additionally, significant emphasis is placed on assessment, wherein students are encouraged to evaluate their own work and engage in peer evaluations.

2.3. Teaching phases

POA is structured into three distinct phases: “driving,” “facilitating,” and “evaluating.” This approach is intended to deviate from the traditional teaching sequence of “lesson introduction, vocabulary explanation, text explanation, and practice,” offering new perspectives for TCFL ^[6]. In the driving phase, output tasks are assigned by teachers to assist learners in identifying their output topic. During the facilitating phase, the primary objective is to provide input learning materials, enabling learners to engage in selective learning and transform receptive knowledge into productive skills. The evaluation phase adopts a “teacher-student joint evaluation” mode, where learners participate in self-assessment and peer evaluation under teacher guidance ^[7].

3. Issues in teaching Chinese culture as a foreign language

3.1. Insufficient input of deep culture

The input of deep cultural content in teaching has been found to be insufficient, particularly for intermediate and advanced Chinese learners who are eager to explore deeper cultural dimensions. Classroom content is often focused on superficial aspects such as festivals and dietary habits, while deeper elements, including ways of thinking and aesthetic values, are frequently neglected.

Cultural courses have been observed to emphasize easily comprehensible, intuitive cultural phenomena, while the cultural connotations and historical backgrounds behind them remain unexplored. For instance, the introduction to Confucianism is typically limited to basic concepts such as “benevolence, propriety, righteousness, and honesty,” without delving into their specific connotations or practical applications. As a result, learners are unable to fully grasp the value of concepts like “benevolence,” which hinders their ability to engage in meaningful intercultural exchanges.

3.2. Insufficient cultivation of intercultural communication skills

The cultivation of intercultural communication skills has been found to be inadequate in cultural teaching.

Learners are often provided with fragmented knowledge of Chinese culture without being given a comprehensive understanding, which limits their ability to participate effectively in real-world intercultural communication.

Cultural textbooks have been predominantly designed with input goals in mind, while output goals remain almost negligible^[8]. Teaching methods have been centered on knowledge transmission and theoretical explanations, failing to address the essence of cultural learning—experiencing, understanding, and applying culture. Consequently, students are rarely given opportunities to practice their knowledge in simulated intercultural communication scenarios, leading to a significant gap between theoretical knowledge and practical skills. Furthermore, the absence of cultural experience activities has prevented students from forming profound cultural perceptions and recognitions.

3.3. The routine nature of cultural teaching

Cultural teaching in TCFL has become overly formulaic, failing to meet the diverse needs of students. The organization of cultural teaching has been found to overemphasize the systematic and logical aspects of knowledge, while the uniqueness and contextual nature of cultural teaching is often overlooked.

In terms of methodology, a heavy reliance on teacher-centered lectures has been observed, placing students in a passive learning role. This approach has transformed the classroom into a teacher-dominated “monologue,” resulting in low levels of student engagement and interaction.

4. Feasibility of applying POA to TCFL cultural instruction

4.1. Emphasizing the introduction of deep cultural knowledge

Deep cultural knowledge is understood to include not only aspects such as Chinese aesthetic values, ways of thinking, and worldviews but also the deeper meanings underlying surface-level cultural elements. The theories of cultural exchange and teacher-guided instruction in POA are considered essential for addressing the insufficient input of deep cultural knowledge in TCFL.

The theory of cultural exchange is promoted as advocating mutual respect and equality in intercultural dialogue, emphasizing the integration of linguistic knowledge and cultural connotations in alignment with learners’ actual circumstances. This approach is believed to assist learners in navigating the relationship between the target language culture and their own, thereby fostering bidirectional cultural exchange. The teacher-guided theory posits that teachers are instrumental in selecting materials for cultural input. Materials are suggested to be carefully curated and presented based on learners’ output goals and language proficiency. Simultaneously, teachers are encouraged to employ a variety of teaching activities to engage learners in intercultural interactions with Chinese-speaking peers and instructors.

4.2. Enhancing intercultural communication competence

The cultivation of learners’ Chinese communication skills is regarded as the fundamental goal. As a teaching approach that emphasizes output and practical application, POA is noted for its focus on enhancing learners’ intercultural communication competence.

According to POA, the aim of cultural teaching is not to compel learners to simply accept Chinese culture but to enable them to understand and respect it, thereby fostering mutual learning and intercultural exchange between Chinese culture and their own. Learners are encouraged to interact with native Chinese speakers through activities such as group discussions, role-playing, and simulated debates. These activities are

recognized not only for improving language expression skills but also for providing learners with opportunities to directly confront and resolve conflicts in intercultural communication. Through such practical experiences, their intercultural communication competence is expected to improve significantly.

4.3. Breaking free from routine cultural teaching models

It is suggested that TCFL requires flexible, diverse, and creative teaching methods to enhance both the practicality and enjoyment of the learning process. POA is promoted as advocating an integrated approach that combines language learning with practical application to improve communication skills through interaction, thereby addressing the limitations of rigid teaching models. Under POA, teachers are encouraged to adjust content and activities based on students' needs, avoiding a one-size-fits-all approach. Selective learning opportunities tailored to students' interests are recommended. In the evaluation phase, diverse assessment methods are proposed to better understand students' progress and needs, facilitating more effective and personalized learning experiences.

5. Cultural teaching design for TCFL based on the POA

Silk culture is recognized as an integral part of traditional Chinese culture, enriched by its historical depth and national wisdom. The Silk Road has been utilized as a bridge for cultural exchange between China and other countries. By incorporating silk culture into Chinese language teaching, greater cross-cultural understanding and communication can be promoted, while the dissemination of Chinese culture is facilitated. In this paper, the POA is introduced into the classroom as a theoretical framework for designing lessons on silk culture, aiming to provide new perspectives for addressing current challenges in cultural teaching.

5.1. Drive phase

5.1.1. Teacher's output activity requirements

A video introducing silk clothing, accessories, and related elements is shown to students through multimedia. Students are then asked to share additional topics or items related to silk culture.

5.1.2. Student's attempt to complete the output task

As students respond to questions, their weaknesses are identified, allowing for selective language input to be provided by the teacher during the lesson.

5.1.3. Teacher's clarification of output goals

The objectives of the lesson are outlined by the teacher: gaining an understanding of silk's raw materials, historical legends, and the Silk Road, sharing aspects of silk culture, and exploring its cultural significance. The ultimate goal is defined as writing a 200-word essay on the topic of "Silk."

5.2. Facilitation phase

During this phase, language materials are provided by the teacher to enable students to transform their input into output, with an emphasis on expressing ideas related to silk in Chinese.

5.2.1. Retelling the history and legends of silk (subtask 1)

(1) A video about the history of silk is shown, accompanied by a Chinese dynastic timeline to aid students

in understanding the development of silk in China.

- (2) A video or narrative of the story of Lei Zu is presented by the teacher.
- (3) Students are instructed to retell the story. Groups of four students collaborate, with each group selecting a representative to present their retelling to the class. This task, while challenging, is designed to help students identify their weaknesses, engage actively, and select more practical materials for their output.

5.2.2. Understanding the raw materials and silk products (subtask 2)

- (1) Words such as “silkworm,” “mulberry silk,” “mulberry leaves,” “silk,” and “spun silk” are written on the board, and their meanings and cultural connotations are explained by the teacher using multimedia tools.
- (2) The texture of silk is experienced by the students. Questions such as “How is a silk handkerchief different from an ordinary one? Is it similar to the handkerchiefs used in your country?” are asked by the teacher. Students are then invited to touch various handkerchiefs and describe the differences.
- (3) Words such as “soft,” “smooth,” “thin,” and “light” are attempted by the students. These words are written on the board by the teacher, additional vocabulary is provided, and students are encouraged to form sentences such as “The silk handkerchief feels smoother.” The sentence structure is summarized by the teacher for reference.

5.2.3. Exploring the silk road (subtask 3)

- (1) Teacher’s questions
 - (a) The question “In ancient times, when transportation was not convenient, how was Chinese silk transported to Europe?” is posed by the teacher.
 - (b) A Treasure Hunt Game is conducted with the question, “Where did Chinese goods go? What items were brought to China?” Maps of the Land Silk Road and images of trade goods exchanged between China and the West are shown, guiding students to “speak based on the images.”
 - (c) A role-playing activity is introduced, with the prompt, “If you were a merchant in Dunhuang, how would you conduct trade?”
- (2) Student’s output attempts
 - (a) Routes are described, such as Chang’an → Hexi Corridor → Western Regions → Central Asia → Western Asia → Europe.
 - (b) Trade items are listed: From China to the West: Silk, tea, porcelain, well-digging techniques, ironworking techniques, etc. From the West to China: Walnuts, grapes, glass, gemstones, fine horses, etc. Assistance is provided by the teacher as required.
- (3) Teacher’s supplementary information

Additional details are provided about silk as a Chinese invention symbolizing Chinese culture. The Silk Road is highlighted as a significant trade route linking China and the West, promoting cultural exchange and fostering friendly relations.

After completing the above tasks, a homework output task is assigned by the teacher: writing a short essay on Chinese silk culture.

5.3. Assessment phase

5.3.1. Immediate evaluation

Immediate evaluation is conducted by providing real-time feedback to students, helping them improve their

expression and correct vocabulary and sentence structure during the learning process.

5.3.2. Delayed evaluation

Delayed evaluation is carried out after students have completed their post-class tasks. This evaluation involves three stages:

- (1) Pre-class preparation: Students are instructed to write a short essay based on the output goals, incorporating content learned in class and relevant materials they have researched. Once the essays are submitted, two representative samples are selected by the teacher for further analysis.
- (2) In-class implementation: The selected samples are presented to the entire class, and group discussions are facilitated by the teacher around questions such as: “Are there any inappropriate word or sentence choices?” and “Are there unclear expressions?” Following the discussion, a representative from each group is invited to share the group’s insights, after which the teacher provides a summary evaluation.
- (3) Post-class activities: Students revise their essays based on the teacher’s feedback and resubmit them for review. Outstanding essays are selected and presented to the class as exemplary works.

6. Conclusion

Traditional TCFL cultural teaching has been challenged by issues such as insufficient deep cultural input, inadequate emphasis on cultivating intercultural communication skills, and formulaic teaching methods. Using silk culture as an example, this paper demonstrates a teaching plan designed according to POA, illustrating its practical application in TCFL cultural instruction. The proposed approach serves as a reference for TCFL practices and encourages the adoption of POA to enhance learners’ appreciation of Chinese culture and promote its global dissemination.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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