

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34069/AI/2023.72.12.1>

How to Cite:

Luan, L. (2023). Cultural factors in foreign language teaching and their linguistic interpretation. *Amazonia Investiga*, 12(72), 9-16.
<https://doi.org/10.34069/AI/2023.72.12.1>

Cultural factors in foreign language teaching and their linguistic interpretation

外语教学中的文化因素及其语言学阐释

Received: November 1, 2023

Accepted: December 29, 2023

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Abstract

Systemic functional linguistics, intercultural communication and linguoculturology systematically explain the relationship between language, culture and communication. They are the main theoretical basis for modern foreign language teaching research. Based on the framework of the relationship between language and culture from the perspective of three disciplines, their cultural views are analyzed. General scientific methods of analysis and comparative study are utilized for conducting research. We propose that foreign language teaching includes three kinds of cultural factors, namely, symbolic resource culture, communicative norm culture and cognitive psychology culture, and point out the adaptation relationship between different theories and foreign language teaching research directions. Each subject has its emphasis, and the combination of the three can form a closed-loop research on language teaching and culture teaching in foreign language teaching.

Keywords: cultural teaching, foreign language teaching, intercultural communication, linguoculturology, systemic functional linguistics.

Introduction

The relationship between language and culture has been discussed in the research of many philosophers, linguists, and anthropologists, but the real systematic and scientific argumentation on the cultural characteristics and attributes of language, the role and influence of culture on language, as well as the relationship between

摘要

系统功能语言学、跨文化交际学和语言文化学理论系统地阐释了语言、文化、交际之间的关系，是现代外语教学研究的主要理论依据。本文基于三个学科视域内对语言和文化关系的架构，分析其文化观。在研究中使用了分析和归纳的一般科学方法以及比较研究方法。提出外语教学包含三种文化因素，即符号资源文化、交际规范文化和认知心理文化，指出不同学科理论与外语教学研究方向的适配关系。学理差异使得学科研究方向各有侧重，三者结合可以形成外语教学中语言教学与文化教学的闭环研究。

关键字: 跨文化交际学，外语教学，文化教学，系统功能语言学，语言文化学

language and culture in communicative activities began in the 1960s and 1970s. The representative theories are Systemic functional linguistics proposed by British scholar Firth and British-born Australian linguist Halliday, Intercultural communication studies emerging in the United States, Linguocountry studies

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(лингвострановедение) proposed by Russian scholars Vereshchagin and Kostomarov, and Linguoculturology (лингвокультурология), which has been developed based on them. There are many similarities between the theories of these disciplines, such as the emphasis on the communicative function of language, i.e., the distinction between “language” and “speech”; the focus on non-linguistic factors in the study of language, i.e., “context” and “culture”; the exploration of the breadth of semantics, i.e., “meaning potential”, “decoding language information”, “lexical context”, etc. Different theories have different perspectives and focus on language and culture, which makes Systemic functional linguistics sociolinguistic and Linguocountry applied linguistics. Linguoculturology explores the multi-dimensional relationship between language and culture. Intercultural communication involves inter-ethnic cultural communication, inter-subcultural communication, and even communication between individuals with very small cultural differences in their standpoints or perspectives. The interpretation of the relationship between language and culture in the above disciplines has both commonality and distinctive features. On the one hand, it systematically demonstrates the cultural attributes of language and the influence of culture on speech; on the other hand, the different theoretical constructs reflect the differences in the disciplines’ ideological origins, social backgrounds, and fields of application.

Like two wheels of a bicycle, language teaching and culture teaching are two equally important elements in foreign language teaching, and they are interrelated and interdependent. Different linguistic theories on the relationship between language and culture provide the theoretical basis for research on foreign language teaching and pedagogy. In the research on cultural factors in foreign language teaching, the theories of Systemic functional linguistics (Zhang, 2004, 2005; Feng, 2012; Zhao, 2023), Intercultural communication studies (Gao, 2001; Gu, 2017; Yang & Zhuang, 2007) and Linguoculturology (Liu, 2002; Zhao & Jiang, 2003) have been widely used, but few studies comprehensively analyze the views of language and culture constructed under the perspectives of different theories. This paper attempts to analyze the similarities and differences of the cultural viewpoints of different linguistic theories through a comparative analysis of the frameworks of Systemic functional linguistics, Intercultural communication, Linguocountry and Linguoculturology studies, and to expound on

the relationship between language and culture from multiple perspectives. It points out three kinds of cultural factors in foreign language teaching, demonstrates the focus of each theory, presents a relatively complete picture of language and culture, and explains the scope of application of different theories in foreign language teaching research from the perspective of the nature and characteristics of the discipline, to provide a reference for the research on second language acquisition and foreign language teaching methodology.

Theoretical framework or literature review

The symbolic, instrumental, and informational nature of language essentially reflects the communicative function of language. Language is a symbolic system combining sound and meaning. As symbols have the common characteristics of materiality, denotation and conventionality, language establishes a link between “significant” and “signified”, laying the foundation for realizing the communicative function. As a tool, language is an important way to realize communication, and at the same time, as a carrier and intermediary, language transmits information such as thoughts and knowledge through the conversion of sound and meaning. However, exploring the communicative function of language from its basic attributes remains in the field of structural linguistics, i.e., “language for language’s sake”. Although Saussure ignored the importance of speech, his distinction between language and speech and his interpretation of the two concepts is the initial point of language and culture research. According to Saussure, to distinguish between language and speech is to distinguish between the “social” and the “individual”, the obligatory and the optional (de Saussure, 1959). This point of view has been extended in the theoretical systems of Systemic functional linguistics (SFL), Intercultural communication studies, and Linguoculturology, which further reveal the communicative function of language, the cultural factors of language and speech through systematic studies of speech activities.

SFL recognizes the view that language is a system, but it is different from Structural linguistics in that the “system” here goes beyond the scope of linguistic structure to include the view that “language is a part of the social system” (Halliday, 1974, p. 85), and that “the semantic system is itself a realization of something beyond language; a higher-level semiotic which we may define as a behavioral system or more generally as a social semiotic” (Halliday, 1978, p. 39). SFL



regards language as a system with social functions, and its metafunctions include ideational, interpersonal and textual functions, which are realized by the “meaning potential” of language, depending on the participants in speech activities and the context, i.e., cultural factors. The ideational function is the communication between human beings and the material world, reflecting the knowledge, perception, and understanding of the real world by the participants in the speech activity, and reflecting “the meaning potential of the communicator as an observer” (Zhao & Jiang, 2003, p. 181). Interpersonal function and textual function are person-to-person communication. The former reflects the social relations between participants in speech activities and their attitudes towards events (objects), reflecting the meaning potential of the different identities of the communicators. The latter reflects the relationship between grammatical forms and encoded meanings, reflecting the meaning potential of communicative forms and expressions. According to the theory of SFL, language is a “meaning potential” system to realize social functions and its meaning is determined by the context of communicative activities. This idea of context-constrained meaning began with Malinowski.

Malinowski pioneered the concepts of “context of situation” and “context of culture” (Malinowski, 1923). He believes that context of situation mainly refers to the immediate context of the utterance, including the participants of the speech activity, non-linguistic factors, the general context of the situation, etc. While outside the context of situation, there is the context of culture, which refers to the communicator's living environment and cultural background, etc. “Malinowski’s concept of contexts has a more obvious cross-cultural awareness as the concept of context of culture is proposed in response to the need for the study of foreign languages” (Peng, 2008, p. 109). The study of any foreign language must be carried out in conjunction with its situation and culture. However, Malinowski did not explicitly point out the relationship between language and culture. Halliday further explored context of situation and context of culture within the framework of SFL, arguing that the two are relations between the instance and the system, the part and the whole, with the former being a specific meaning potential system linked to the situation of a particular speech activity, and the latter being the entire meaning potential system of the language. Although Halliday pointed out that culture as a context includes “traditional lifestyles, beliefs

and value systems of a language community” (Halliday, 1999, p. 284), his research focused on the same kind of language and the social nature of language, which did not break through the boundaries of cross-linguistic culture. In this case, his concept of “context of culture” refers to the socio-cultural factors of different social groups within the same nation. From this point of view, the “context of culture” is not unrelated to the age, gender and class of the communicators, which are also important factors in characterizing the participants in speech activities within a given “context of situation”.

It can be seen that SFL makes it clear that the two kinds of contexts are related to each other, but it does not explain the difference between the two clearly, and the exploration of the relationship between language and culture has the characteristics of sociolinguistics, i.e., it recognizes the relationship between language, society and culture. SFL emphasizes the role of context of situation and believes that context determines semantics. Its research focuses on specific communicative activities, including the influence of communicators, field, tenor and mode on the meaning of the discourse.

Intercultural communication studies emerged in the United States. Three factors contributed to the development of the discipline. Firstly, with the increasingly significant trend of globalization, a large number of Americans went overseas to live, work and study. There was an urgent need to adapt to the local culture in order to achieve effective communication. Secondly, the United States is a multi-ethnic country, so how to achieve inter-ethnic communication and mutual understanding is the common concern of anthropologists, sociologists, linguists, ethnologists and culturalists. At the same time, the US is also a multicultural country, and the friction between subcultural groups and their collision with the mainstream culture is becoming more and more prominent. Thirdly, the communicative character and individual consciousness of Americans. Influenced by individual consciousness, each individual can be regarded as a carrier of “a small culture”, and the communicative behavior between people can be regarded as cross-cultural communication. While the communicative character constitutes the original demand for the development of cross-cultural communication. These three factors also determine the theoretical construction and research scope of the discipline. Intercultural communication is “a transactional, symbolic process involving the attribution of meaning between people from different cultures”

(Gudykunst & Kim, 2003, p. 17) or “the exchange of information between individuals who are unlike culturally” (Rogers & Steinfatt, 1999, p. 1), which includes “communication between different countries, ethnic groups, races, social groups, tributaries or subcultures, different linguistic associations, and even strangers or individuals” (Jia, 1992, p. 53). The view of culture in the field of Intercultural communication is broad, the “culture” here not only covers the factors of national context in the perspective of Linguocountry studies, but also includes the cultural and context of situations concerned by SFL, and also involves the values, worldviews, thinking, cognition and emotions of the communicating individuals.

In terms of the scope of research, the context of culture in SFL studies the socio-context of culture, and the context of situation includes the objective factors of specific communicative situations and the “subjective factors related to the communicator, such as age, gender, occupation, cultural literacy, emotion, etc.” (Zhao & Jiang, 2003, p. 180), which is similar with the study of subcultural group communication and interpersonal communication in Intercultural communication. In terms of theoretical structure, the former’s view of culture is vertically structured (Figure 1), while the latter is horizontally structured (Figure 2).

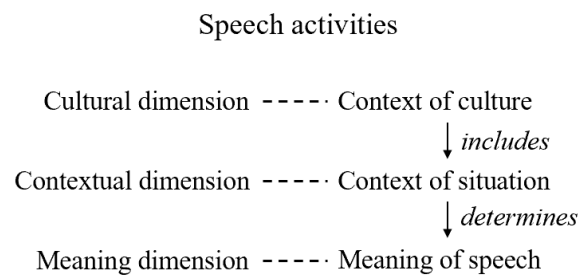


Figure 1. The relationship of speech activities and culture in the framework of SFL.

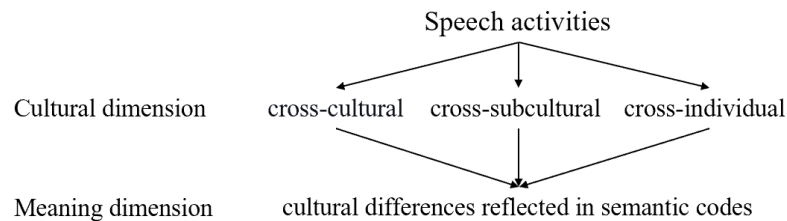


Figure 2. The relationship of speech activities and culture in the framework of Intercultural communication studies.

SFL argues that there are two different levels of context: the context of culture and the context of situation. In the context of situation, subjective factors and identity factors of the participants of speech activities are influenced by the higher level of context of culture. This higher level includes ideologies, thinking patterns, living habits, communicative traditions, and other cultural factors. The context of situation determines the meaning potential of discourse. In the theoretical framework of Intercultural communication study, intercultural communication, communication between subcultural groups, and interpersonal communication are three types of speech activities, which are juxtaposed at the same level. Participants in speech activities are regarded as representatives of a kind of “culture”, and the

focus of the study is on “cultural” communication. Regardless of the scope of the “culture”, the variables involved in the three types of communication activities are the same and have the same characteristics with a cross-cultural nature. Communicative language produces different semantics because it carries different cultural information and meanings.

In terms of research content, the cultural differences involved in Intercultural communication studies include cultural differences in verbal communication, cultural differences in non-verbal communication, cultural differences in social structure, ideology and values, which are also at the same level, i.e., effective intercultural communication activities benefit from understanding the cultural

differences between the two sides of the communication, which include verbal, non-verbal, and ideological differences. They correspond to the meaning of speech, context of situation and context of culture in the structure of SFL.

Linguocountry is a sub-discipline of linguistics based on the development of foreign language teaching. It was born in the late 1960s and early 1970s by the Soviet scholars Vereshchagin and Kostomarov and was positioned as “an aspect of the teaching of the Russian language to foreigners”, to realize “the culture-bearing and culture-accepting function of Russian as a foreign language” (Vereshchagin & Kostomarov, 1990, p. 5) in the educational process. Similar to SFL, the theory of Linguocountry proposes three functions of language: communicative function, culture-carrying function and instructional function. The theoretical basis of these three functions reflects the discipline’s research ideas and echoes its definition, which believes that foreign language teaching is essentially a communicative activity, teachers and students use language to realize the communicative purposes of teaching and learning, language carries national culture, collective and individual experiences, and in the process of foreign language teaching, the culture-carrying function of language is explored and utilized to play the instructional function of language, to make the students aware of the Russian national culture and national conditions, and to realize the cultural importation.

The Linguocountry study focuses on the culture-carrying function of language, and more specifically, on the culture of words, i.e., the theory of lexical context. According to the theory of lexical context, words consist of lexemes, which represent symbolic features, and sememes, which reflect semantic features. Sememe consists of conceptual and non-conceptual morphemes, the former reflecting the attribute characteristics of things or phenomena represented by the word, which is the basic and rational meaning of the word. The latter includes the associative, rhetorical and cultural meanings associated with the word, which can be divided into social and individual morphemes according to their nature. Social morphemes can be subdivided into national cultural morphemes and cross-language morphemes.

As the research scope of Linguocountry was limited to the field of pedagogy, and the content of research was focused on the vocabulary reflecting the culture and lifestyle of the Soviet

Union, it was not possible to systematically explain the relationship between language and culture within the framework of the discipline. The research contents were fragmented linguistic phenomena. At the end of the twentieth century, based on the continuation and refinement of Linguocountry studies, Linguoculturology opened up a new way of thinking for the study of language and culture, and the research contents included both the culture in language or “people in language” (человек в языке) and language in culture or “language spoken by people” (язык в человеке). The most representative is “linguistic personality” (языковая личность) theory, which “truly finds the mediator between language and culture, both perfecting the understanding of the language itself and deeply revealing the ethnicity of the people who speak the language” (Wu & Peng, 2001, p. 205). The expansion of the research object and scope of Linguoculturology determines its cross-disciplinary nature, analyzing the interaction and mutual constraints between language and culture from multiple dimensions and directions. Linguoculturology studies regard language and culture as a juxtaposition rather than a subordinate or inclusive relationship.

Methodology

This is a qualitative study that aims to analyze the various disciplines related to language, culture, communication and their relationship. The study employs general scientific methods of analysis and comparative research to achieve its objectives.

The research comprises three main steps. Firstly, the study analyzes the disciplinary ideological origin, social background and theoretical structure of Systemic functional linguistics, Intercultural communication, Linguocountry and Linguoculturology studies. It explains how each of these disciplines understands language, culture, communication and their relationship.

Secondly, the study carries out a comparative analysis of the theoretical frameworks and cultural viewpoints of the different disciplines. The aim is to summarize the differences and similarities in the perspectives of the language and culture research of the various disciplines.

By doing so, the research helps to establish a clear picture of the theoretical landscape of language and culture research.

Finally, the paper points out that foreign language teaching involves three kinds of

cultural factors: symbolic resources, communicative norms and cognitive psychology. The study explains the research perspectives and research focuses of various disciplines from a doctrinal point of view. The aim is to organize the theoretical picture for the research on foreign language teaching and to provide a theoretical basis for the further development of more specific pedagogical research.

The study's reliability is confirmed by an in-depth analysis of a large number of research works on the topic, which provides a significant amount of analyzed theoretical material. Additionally, the study conducts a multidimensional and complex analysis of the relationship and interaction of language and culture within different disciplines.

Results and discussion

In this study, disciplines – Systemic functional linguistics (SFL), Intercultural communication, Linguocountry and Linguoculturology – have been compared to identify their distinctive approaches to language and culture. SFL emphasizes the functions of language and asserts that social culture determines the meaning of discourse. It regards linguistic analysis as a study of meaning and defines it as a function in context (Firth, 1964, p. 19). SFL studies language in culture. On the other hand, both Intercultural communication and Linguocountry emphasize the cultural aspects of language and believe that language reflects culture. While Intercultural communication focuses on applied research and linguistic and cultural differences in communicative activities, Linguocountry emphasizes theoretical research and linguistic and cultural differences in the lexical and grammatical levels of linguistic structures. Although there are differences between these disciplines, they all share the common use of advancing the research on the theory and methods of foreign language teaching.

Foreign language teaching is a communicative activity that involves the transfer of linguistic and cultural information through linguistic and non-linguistic tools. It consists of four factors – language, culture, communication and teaching. From the cultural view and theoretical structure of SFL, Intercultural communication, Linguoculturology, and taking into account the cultural factors in foreign language teaching, it is possible to broadly classify the directions of pedagogical research that are compatible with different theories.

SFL focuses its perspective on the relationship between the context of situation and meaning potential. Its disciplinary nature is to study the realization of language functions in the social system, emphasizing the ideational, interpersonal and textual functions of language. From the perspective of foreign language teaching, pedagogical research can start from the situational and textual contexts, by setting up specific scenarios to enable students to master the semantic and pragmatic norms in the situation, and by utilizing the influence of the field, tenor and mode on the discourse domain to carry out foreign language teaching.

The theoretical core of Intercultural communication is the communicative theory in general communicative studies. The focus of its attention is the communicative culture, i.e., the differences between different cultures in terms of language, non-language, cognition, and ideology that are manifested in communicative activities. Scholars argue that intercultural communication competence consists of global awareness, cultural adaptation, knowledge and communicative practice (Yang & Zhuang, 2007, p. 16). From the perspective of foreign language teaching, intercultural communicative competence is the highest level of communicative competence and the ultimate goal of foreign language teaching. The first three competencies, i.e., global awareness, cultural adaptation and knowledge, are the basis and prerequisite for the realization of communicative competence. The “knowledge” here does not mean linguistic knowledge such as phonetics, vocabulary, grammar, etc., but cultural knowledge including values, social customs, history, and religion in communication. The theory of Intercultural communication can be applied to research centered on communicative normative culture and cognitive psychological culture in foreign language teaching.

Linguoculturology studies are developed based on Linguocountry studies, which were proposed for the study of teaching Russian as a foreign language. Linguoculturology focuses on the study of language and culture and how they interact with each other. Within the theoretical framework of the discipline, the theoretical and practical research on pedagogy can be carried out from the perspectives of cultural comparison, cross-cultural training, cultural adaptation and the model of cultivating cross-cultural communicative competence. The practical research can include the preparation of teaching materials with knowledge of the cultural background of the national context and the

teaching materials for communicative training including audio-visual and speaking.

In summary, these linguistic disciplines have distinct theoretical structures that can be utilized in pedagogical research. SFL's perspective can be applied to research centered on symbolic resources and communicative norms,

Intercultural communication theory can be applied to research centered on communicative normative culture and cognitive psychological culture, and Linguoculturology can be used to study the relationship between symbolic resources and culture of cognition and psychology (Figure 3).

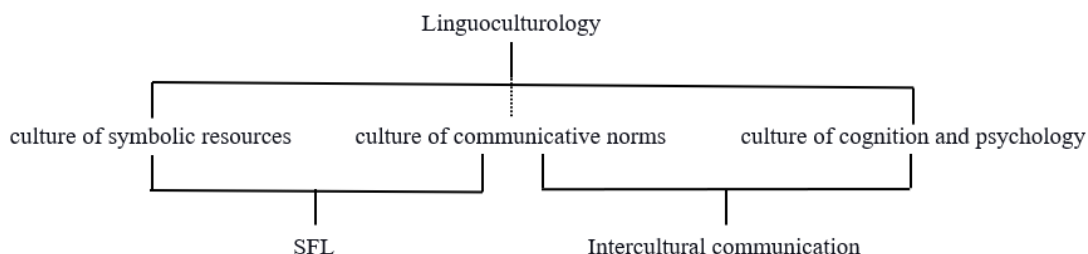


Figure 3. The fitting relationship between the disciplines and the study of cultural teaching in foreign language teaching.

Conclusions

The present research examines the theoretical structures of three linguistic disciplines, namely Systemic functional linguistics (SFL), Intercultural communication and Linguoculturology, and their implications for foreign language pedagogy. SFL primarily emphasizes the functions of language and how social culture shapes the meaning of discourse. Linguistic analysis within the framework of SFL is defined as a study of contextualized meaning, whereby meaning is construed as a function in context. SFL studies the relationship between language and culture and is particularly concerned with the ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions of language. Pedagogical research under the aegis of SFL may begin by focusing on situational and textual contexts and utilizing the field, tenor and mode to convey foreign language teaching. The theory of Intercultural communication, on the other hand, emphasizes communicative culture and differences between cultures in terms of language, non-language, cognition and ideology. Foreign language pedagogy may benefit from the theoretical underpinnings of Intercultural communication by emphasizing the cultivation of intercultural communication competence, which is composed of global awareness, cultural adaptation, knowledge and communicative practice. Linguoculturology, a field developed based on Linguocountry studies, emphasizes the cultural aspects of language and how they reflect culture. The theoretical foundations of Linguoculturology may be applied to foreign language pedagogy by focusing on cultural

adaptation, cross-cultural training and the model of cultivating cross-cultural communicative competence.

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