Exploration of Teaching Innovation for Basic Language Courses in Universities from the Perspective of New Liberal Arts

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Abstract: *New Liberal Arts is an important concept in China's higher education reform. In recent years, the Ministry of Education has repeatedly issued documents calling for the accelerated development of New Liberal Arts. Grounded in the emphasis on interdisciplinary integration inherent in New Liberal Arts, this paper explores innovations in teaching methods for university language courses, proposing primarily the comparative teaching method, corpus substitution method, comprehensive method, reverse method, reasoning method, and expansion method. Practice demonstrates that innovating teaching methods for university language courses can effectively enhance students' language application ability, interdisciplinary thinking, and innovative practical competence.*

Keywords: *New Liberal Arts; university language courses; teaching methods*

Introduction

It is impossible to ignore that we need linguistics knowledge in our life. By studying linguistic knowledge, we can understand and learn language rules as well as the culture embedded in language. The New Liberal Arts aims at highlighting Chinese characteristics, innovativeness and interdisciplinary integration for cultivating intercultural communication talents with humanistic literacy, an innovative spirit, and have both Chinese sentiment and a global vision[1]. In terms of the New Liberal Arts, it goes beyond just memorizing theoretical knowledge by studying language courses; instead, it emphasizes cross-issue awareness, interdisciplinary integration, local resources, practical transformation and using digital tools. It should not only consolidate the foundation of basic language knowledge, but break down disciplinary barriers.

1. Introduction to Language Courses in Colleges and Universities

The main courses are Modern Chinese, Introduction to Linguistics, Applied Linguistics, Ancient Chinese, History of Chinese Grammar, and Exegetics taught in colleges and universities. Modern Chinese adopts Modern Chinese (5th Edition), which was written by Huang Borong and Liao Xudong. It mainly teaches the basic knowledge of phonetics, vocabulary, grammar, and rhetoric. The book An Outline of Linguistics (Revised Edition), written by Ye Feisheng and Xu Tongqiang, serves as our textbook for Introduction to Linguistics. This course mainly teaches knowledge such as the functions of language, the symbolic nature of language, phonetics, grammar, semantics, pragmatics, writing, and language contact. Introduction to Linguistics mainly cultivates students' rational understanding of language. Our textbook for History of Chinese Grammar is Wang Li's A Draft History of the Chinese Language. This course mainly teaches the development of nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc. Generally speaking, the methods adopted by Modern Chinese and History of Chinese Grammar in teaching are: comparative teaching method, corpus substitution method, and comprehensive method. Because the Introduction to Linguistics course is somewhat difficult for undergraduate students majoring in Chinese Language and Literature, during the teaching process, I will focus more on students' understanding of basic linguistic knowledge and use reverse thinking, the reasoning method, and the expansion method to teach them so as to change the perception held by most students that this Introduction to Linguistics course is very difficult and irrelevant to them. There are new ideas appearing constantly when we teach the Introduction to Linguistics course. How can we teach and guide students with a vivid and interesting manner, stimulate their interest in linguistics, but also cultivate their ability to think about,

analyze and solve problems, and their ability to actively pay attention to self-improvement and development? These have become issues of concern.

2. Teaching Methods

2.1 Comparative Teaching Method

The comparative teaching method is to compare Chinese with other languages to better understand and master the phonetics, vocabulary, grammar, etc. of different languages. In my teaching of phonetics in a Modern Chinese course to Chinese students, I was also teaching Elementary Spoken Chinese to Russian international students, which provided me an opportunity to make comparison. In the teaching of pronunciation during the phonetics teaching, I invited Russian students into the phonetics teaching class for Chinese students. By making comparative teaching between the two groups while teaching pronunciation, we guided students to perceive the similarity and difference of sounds more accurately, so that they can understand the place and manner of articulation more accurately, such as the different places of articulation of /d/, /t/ in Chinese and Russian. As for grammar, I compared international students' grammatical errors with Chinese grammar, which aroused students' thinking and laid a certain foundation for their future work in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language. When talking about the national character of language, I compared and analyzed the word orders of Chinese and Korean. The word order of "I am Lili" in Chinese is "subject + predicate + object"; however, that of "□ □ Lily □ □ □ "(in Korean) is "subject + object + predicate.". Furthermore, I compared the connections and differences between Latin and English, such as using "Romā in Italiā est. Italiā in Europā est. Romā et Italiā in Europā sunt." to analyze "gender" in Latin, thus analyzing that the frequent ending of English feminine names in "-a" (e.g. Julia) originates from the Latin "-a", which indicates femininity, whereas "-us" indicates masculinity; therefore, many male names in ancient Greek and Roman literary works end with "斯" (si), e.g. Julius. Moreover, I supplemented some relevant knowledge, like the pronunciation of Caesar is transliterated directly from Latin instead of the English /['si:zə], and the name of the Sina website, "sina," comes from a combination of "sino" (Latin for China), "cina" (the ancient Indian word for China), and "China" (the English word for China); "sina" means "China". When explaining the rhetoric of parallelism, besides choosing classic examples of parallelism expressed in Chinese, I chose English examples too, such as Audrey Hepburn's classic quote: "For attractive lips, speak words of kindness. For lovely eyes, seek out the good in people. For a slim figure, share your food with the hungry. For beautiful hair, let a child run his or her fingers through it once a day. For poise, walk with the knowledge that you never walk alone.", which gave moral education to students and at the same time cultivating their aesthetic sentiments.

2.2 Corpus Substitution Method

Corpus Substitution Method: Substitute the examples given by language textbooks for the latest language data. Classic language data examples in currently used textbooks will help students understand the theory knowledge thoroughly, however, there exist some language data examples which are far away from students' current real lives, whose usage might not arouse students' interest. Under this circumstance, during the teaching process, on the basis of using the original textbooks' classic language data examples (e.g. stating principles) I also added new language data closely related to students' daily lives. Most of the language data is from new media like WeChat, Douyin, and Xiaohongshu, popular expressions, dictionaries of new words, currently popular bestsellers, Internet buzzwords, etc. When explaining prefixes and suffixes, we can add language phenomena such as Internet buzzwords "爱你老己" ("love your old self"), "老铁" ("old iron; close buddy"), "老登" ("old geezer"), "老司机" ("old driver; experienced person"), "班味" ("workplace vibe"), "土味" ("rustic flavor"), "爹味" ("mansplaining vibe") and "妈味" ("maternal vibe"); analyze its evolution. When explaining loanwords, replace the "沙发" ("sofa"), "扑克" ("poker"), "咖喱" ("curry"), "可可" ("cocoa"), and "拷贝" ("copy") in the textbook *An Outline of Linguistics* with "搭子" ("dazi; activity partner"), "emo," "AI," "元宇宙" ("metaverse"), "区块链" ("blockchain"), etc., etc. By contrast between teaching old and new language data, the author guides students to think in reverse about what rules Chinese follows when it absorbs loanwords, what new changes appear after entering into Chinese, e.g. Traditional loanwords are mainly based on transliteration and free translation while loanwords in recent years show letter embedding and hybrid word formation, these are new features of language contact in the digital age; After loanwords enter Chinese, their parts of speech change, etc.

When studying semantic fields, I can study these words: 土豪 (tuhao, nouveau riche) , 屌丝 (diaosi, loser), 矮穷矬 (aiqiongcuo, short, poor, and ugly), 文艺青年 (wenyi qingnian, artsy youth), 高富帅/白富美 (gaofushuai/baifemei, tall, rich, and handsome / fair, rich, and beautiful), and 男神/女神 (nanshen/nüshen, male god/goddess), that are a bit familiar for students and attract more attention; e.g.,

土豪 (tuhao, nouveau riche)[±appearance, +money, −thought];

屌丝 (diaosi, loser)[±appearance, −money, ±thought];

矮穷矬 (aiqiongcuo, short, poor, and ugly)[−appearance, −money, −thought];

文艺青年 (wenyi qingnian, artsy youth)[±appearance, −money, +thought];

高富帅/白富美 (gaofushuai/baifumei, tall, rich, and handsome / fair, rich, and beautiful)[+appearance, +money, ±thought];

男神/女神 (nanshen/nüshen, male god/goddess)[+appearance, +money, +thought].

These kinds of examples will attract students' attention easily; they have a relatively high degree of enthusiasm towards these words. The author keeps some language data in the textbook while explaining Modern Chinese syntax, replacing some language data which has nothing to do with students' real lives by language data closely related to their daily life and study. The author mainly selects some classic sentences inspiring students as an example when explaining complex sentences: For the complex sentence pattern "不是……而是……" ("not...but..."), the author chooses the sentence "每天早晨叫醒我的，不是闹钟，而是梦想"("What wakes me up every morning is not the alarm clock, but my dream); For "既……也……", the author chooses the sentence from Maupassant's *A Life* (Une Vie): "人这一生，既不像想的那么好，也不像想的那么坏" ("In this life, things are neither as good as one imagines nor as bad as one imagines")…etc., stimulating students' interest in learning during the explanation process and raise students' awareness of pursuing dreams, meanwhile subtly influence students' worldview, outlook on life and values, cultivate students' understanding of the world and experience of life.

2.3 The Comprehensive Method

Another method I often use in language teaching is the comprehensive method. If there's no overall coherence if you explain every part according to the textbook, then, in order to have a holistic view, the author tries to find out the commonalities between the parts so as to make connections between the parts. When teaching the chapter on rhetoric, the author mostly adopted the comprehensive method for rhetoric instruction. There are twenty figures of speech[2] according to the textbook Modern Chinese. The author found that the twenty figures of speech can be divided into themes like the figures of speech used in advertising slogans (the figures of speech frequently used in advertising slogans are: pun, anadiplosis, rhyme, antimetabole, metaphor, homophony, contrast, personification, repetition, hyperbole, quotation, antithesis, parallelism, etc), the figures of speech used in cellphone text messages (the figures of speech frequently used in cellphone text messages are: hyperbole, parallelism, metaphor, analogy, metonymy, zeugma, anadiplosis, pun, etc) and the figures of speech used in popular expressions (the figures of speech frequently used in Internet buzzwords are: metaphor, pun, zeugma, metonymy, personification, quotation, parody, rhyme, hyperbole, anadiplosis, parallelism, antithesis, etc). So during teaching, the author used the method of thematic synthesis by letting students preview the concept of the twenty figures of speech and its main rhetorical effect first. Then in class, the author asks students to practice and consolidate them through special topics including figures of speech in advertising slogans, figures of speech used in cellphone text messages, and figures of speech used in popular expressions. Since those language data such as advertising slogans, cellphone text messages, and popular expressions are relatively new and closely related to our daily life, while we learned rhetoric, students were relatively active in class, they were able to learn, analyze, and think actively, and the atmosphere in class was also very lively.

2.4 The Reverse Method

Applying the method of reverse thinking in teaching has produced remarkable results in the teaching of the Introduction to Linguistics course. While teaching human language, I introduced animal

language and plant language: bees use the figure-eight waggle dance to tell its companions where and how far away there are sources of nectar; adult male katydids use songs to attract the opposite sex; male birds of paradise use beautiful feathers to attract the opposite sex...I guided my students to think about the differences between human language and animal language, the fact that language is an insurmountable gap between humans and other animals, etc.; When teaching the relationship between the brain, thought, and language, I described the various language-related disorders due to brain injuries (such as aphasia, word deafness, selective impairment of semantic categories, short-term memory impairment, syntactic comprehension impairment, agrammatism, repetition difficulty, naming errors, reading and writing disorders) etc., guiding my students to think backward on the close relationship between the brain and human language, guide students to explore the causes of aphasia and reading and writing disorders and how to prevent them; when teaching phonetics, I showed the students the sign language for "Grateful Heart" let students feel how deaf-mutes express themselves, help students understand the different feelings given by spoken language and body language, respectively have advantages and disadvantages, lead students to care for their own speech organs, cherish their own ability to speak, protect their own physical health while using language in a civilized and polite way, respect language, and respect themselves.

2.5 The Reasoning Method

Also, Reasoning ability is one of the main abilities which the author wants to train in his Introduction to Linguistics course. He mostly trains students' logical thinking, dialectical thinking, and reasoning ability while explaining "The Thinking Function of Language". In order to explain human language, the author first leads students to think about the hardware conditions for the emergence of human language: lungs, larynx, and vocal cords; the software condition: the brain and the thought produced by the brain. Different types of sounds are generated through various speech organs cooperating with each other. So, there exists the feature of phonetic diversity among the approximately 6,820 languages in the world. As regards the software conditions for the emergence of language, the author leads students to think about the functional areas of the brain responsible for their language ability – the speech center, writing center, visual language center, and auditory language center, then leads them to think about "the language and thought of deaf-mute people", the students all agree that the deaf-mute people have normal brains and can produce thought, because of the defect in other aspects they do not produce spoken language. They cannot use auditory symbols to transmit information and express thoughts but they can fully utilize sign language as a way of communication and get compensation from other sensory organs.

2.6 The Expansion Method

The expansion method has been widely used in teaching the Introduction to Linguistics course which surpasses the basic knowledge in the textbook. Firstly, When explaining "the relationship between language and thought"[3]I briefly introduce the basic knowledge about the human brain. The left brain is rational and mainly responsible for logic, language, mathematics, writing, reasoning, and analysis; it is called the abstract brain (academic brain), while the right brain is emotional and mainly responsible for pictures, music, rhythm, emotion, imagination, and creation; it is called the artistic brain (creative brain). By understanding the basic knowledge about the brain, we help us understand that if we use our brain unhealthily, then the probability of developing Alzheimer's syndrome later increases. Arouses students' attention to brain health, and we hope to guide students by understanding the left and right brains to find out their own strength so they can better give play to their advantages. Secondly, when explaining the national character of language, I used the research data of Quentin Atkinson and others, scientists at the University of Auckland, New Zealand, on the origin of human language.[4]. We explain the national and diverse characteristics of human language. They manifest themselves in phonetics: With Africa as the center, there is a decreasing trend in the number of phonemes. Many African dialects have more than 100 phonemes, but the local language of Hawaii contains only 13 phonemes, and English, French, and German all contain over 40 phonemes. The author integrates the academic frontier of linguistics into classroom teaching, cultivating students' attention to and thinking about the academic frontier of linguistics. Thirdly, when explaining writing, the author explains that the world's ancient writing systems include Chinese pictographs, Egyptian hieroglyphs, Babylonian cuneiform, Indus seal inscriptions, etc. Other ancient writing systems except Chinese characters were buried in the long river of history. Only Chinese characters continue until now, remaining vigorous today. Its history starts from the Jiahu inscribed symbols dated back 8,600 years, the Mianchi Bancun pottery inscriptions, the stone inscriptions at the Bashidang site of the Pengtoushan culture, and the

painted symbols of the Laoguantai culture[5], etc., up to the oracle bone script dating back more than 3,000 years. The content of the textbook on writing only mentioned the oracle bone script. Tracing the history of Chinese characters according to the archaeological research findings cultivates students' awareness of tracing the roots of Chinese civilization, enhance their cultural confidence and cultural consciousness. Besides, when explaining Chinese characters, the author can combine the evolution of form and meaning in oracle bone script. For example, the character "伐"in oracle bone script means "cutting a person's neck with a ge (dagger-axe)". The original meaning of "示"in oracle bone script is "a sacrificial altar". Characters such as "神","祈","祷","祝","福"in modern Chinese are all related to the original meaning of "示". Besides, when explaining Chinese characters, the author can also start from radicals. For example, the author can examine the ancient yingqie system (the system of accompanying concubines) from Chinese characters with the "女"radical, examine ancient punishments from the structure of Chinese characters[6], etc. Through the expansion explanation, the author train students' ability to think deeply and look at things from different perspectives. And through a profound understanding of linguistic phenomena, deepen their cultural perception and cultivate their ability to engage in independent inquiry-based learning. The teacher gives direction for expansion, students consult materials and think independently after class, change from passively listening to actively engaging in inquiries.

3. Teaching Effects

We focus on interdisciplinary connection, value guidance, practical empowerment, digital transformation and serving society (rather than memorizing knowledge of traditional language and writing) with New Liberal Arts. We have achieved positive results for our implementation of college language courses such as Modern Chinese, Introduction to Linguistics, and Applied Linguistics.

3.1 Students' Knowledge Structure Has Moved from Singular to Interdisciplinary and Composite

It broke through the traditional language course focusing on theory and combined disciplines such as literature, sociology, archaeology and computer science. The incorporation of relevant knowledge in other disciplines can help students not only memorizing theories of phonetics, vocabulary and grammar but also analyze linguistic phenomena based on social reality; connect their knowledge of language with other related disciplines into a system; establish an interdisciplinary knowledge perspective, conforming to the training goal of composite talents under the New Liberal Arts.

3.2 Critical Thinking and Problem-Inquiry Abilities Have Been Enhanced

We adopted the teaching method based on problems in The New Liberal Arts. I chose social language hotspots, dialect protection, online language, regional cultural language resources as the discussion materials in class for students to transform from passive acceptance of the conclusion in textbooks to actively discover problems and analyze linguistic phenomena. Students' critical thinking and academic inquiry awareness has been greatly improved. Some student presentations like: refusing online vulgar memes and protecting the roots of language; e-commerce livestreaming language; "crazy literature", using emojis in online communication; popular language in exploration games; protection and inheritance of Henan dialect were selected by some students during the topic presentation section.

3.3 Language Application and Practical Abilities Have Been Enhanced

From books to real scenarios: Choosing topics with practical tasks such as dialect surveys, language services, organize local cultural language resources etc. to convert linguistic theories into practical skills; Training on language output and social service ability change the situation that understand theory but not able to use. Students studying topics such as Linzhou dialect (living fossil of language at the foot of the Taihang Mountains), the beauty of Cantonese, dialects entering narrative literature, faithfulness, expressiveness, elegance in film and television translation, apply linguistic theories to practice.

3.4 The Effects of Cultural Identity and Value Guidance Have Become Prominent

He utilizes good Chinese language and cultural resources teaching well with this course, excavates the linguistic connotation of Chinese characters, dialects and traditional classics, strengthens the

cultural confidence and cultural consciousness of students. Students choose the topics on topography and some naming rules for place names, historical roots of Putonghua, Henan dialect characters, ancient culture of choosing a courtesy name in course assignments; researches them, understands the ethnic culture carried by language, improves their ability to interpret and disseminate culture.

3.5 Digital Literacy Has Been Cultivated

But at the same time, with the New Liberal Arts, corporas, language big data, digital language tools, computational linguistics, etc., we apply them into our language course: Teaching students how to retrieve and analyze language materials using digital resources; adapting ourselves to the digital teaching reform of the New Liberal Arts; improving our skills through application of modern academic tools.

Through the practical teaching of linguistics courses for the Chinese Language and Literature major, we have realized the importance of linguistics as a science. Learning language courses not only provides knowledge but also integrates different disciplines to impart moral education to students, cultivating their problem awareness, language awareness, critical thinking, and practical ability to understand and improve themselves. Based on the concept of the New Liberal Arts, considering some issues such as single teaching method, lack of classroom interaction, emphasizing theory rather than practice, and lacking disciplinary integration in traditional language courses, focusing on innovating our teaching methods, conducting innovative exploratory practice in language courses: adopt the comparative teaching method, the corpus substitution method, the comprehensive method, the reverse method, the reasoning method, the expansion method, etc., guiding students to independently inquire and work together to solve professional problems through innovation of teaching methods, stimulating vitality in class and improving students' language application ability, innovative thinking and interdisciplinary practical literacy greatly. There are still some problems (insufficiently in-depth application of digital and intelligent teaching), in the future, we will integrate deeply with disciplines, technology, and practice, comprehensively improving the educational quality of language courses.

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