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Zhang, Lihua

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Teaching Chinese Cultural Perspectives through Film

LIHUA ZHANG

University of California, Berkeley

E-mail: zhanglihua@berkeley.edu

Teaching Chinese cultural perspectives in CFL instruction is more challenging than teaching about Chinese cultural products and behavior. It is challenging because most textbooks do not orient their approach to it, because native-Chinese-speaking teachers tend to overlook it as it is so much a part of them that it presents no peculiarities, and because it is believed cultural understanding comes naturally once language is learned. Studies on cross-cultural communication demonstrate that cultural ignorance causes misperceptions and misunderstandings. In a global community, as people of different cultures interact with one another, awareness of different cultural perspectives is urgently needed. Since language and culture go hand in hand, learning a language is a fortunate opportunity to learn culture through language. Employing a critical language pedagogy, this paper provides an example for teaching Chinese cultural perspectives through discourse from film clips. It shows how students can be taught differences, alternatives, and critical language and cultural awareness using comparative, reflective, and interpretive methodologies. It employs a variety of situated activities to help students explore and discover the Chinese cultural mind.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to share the author's experiences teaching Chinese cultural perspectives in a Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) class. Teaching cultural perspectives requires a critical language pedagogy that problematizes language use in a socio-cultural context. Drawing on the knowledge of critical discourse analysis, various tasks are designed to guide students to analyze language use and to interpret

cultural perspectives using film clips that provide natural and contextual language material. This paper begins with a discussion of the teaching of culture in the field of CFL, more specifically the challenges of teaching Chinese cultural perspectives. This is followed by a discussion of critical language pedagogy as applied to designing lesson plans. It ends with a demonstration of how teaching Chinese cultural perspectives can be operationalized in a classroom.

CULTURE INSTRUCTION IN THE CFL FIELD

It is generally acknowledged that language competence cannot develop without cultural competence. As Kramsch (1993) expresses it, “if...language is seen as social practice, culture becomes the very core of language teaching. Cultural awareness must then be viewed both as enabling language proficiency and as being the outcome of reflection on language proficiency” (p. 8). In the CFL field the importance of teaching cultural perspectives in the CFL classroom was addressed almost twenty-five years ago when Zhang (1988) emphasized that “priority should be given to the cultural elements that affect communication rather than to the general cultural elements which deal with facts about the culture” (p. 107). Then in the late nineteen-nineties Walton (1996) and Kubler et al. (1997) noted that Chinese language learners’ primary motivation and goal had shifted to include effective cross-cultural communication and an understanding of the world portrayed in Chinese culture. The two of them called for an effort to be made to integrate cultural perspectives into CFL. Then about another 15 years went by and today the cultural elements in language teaching still are somewhat lacking. Everson (2009) remarks that CFL pedagogy has been “less successful as a profession in operationalizing the teaching of culture in our classrooms, often resorting to the teaching of what is known as ‘achievement culture’ or ‘Big C’ culture...” (p. 10). Teaching Chinese culture is limited to showing cultural practices without exploring them from a Chinese perspective. Whereas in the past language pedagogy focused on linguistic forms and the four skills, the culture component has begun to enter into discussions of language teaching and CFL instruction despite the fact that there are still conflicting views on how to integrate it.¹ This advancement is shown in Yu’s (2009) quantitative

¹ There are three different views on teaching language and culture. One is that culture and language are two separate subjects. Language teachers should teach linguistic forms, while cultural knowledge should be taught in a separate “culture” course. Another view is that culturally specific linguistic forms, such as expressions to show one is unreceptive to compliments “nǎlǐ” (primary meaning: where?) and for greeting “nǐ qù nǎr?” (Where are you going?), are taught in lower level courses, and

and qualitative case study evaluating culture instruction in seven leading beginning-level Chinese language textbooks.

However, Yu's (2009) study also finds major shortcomings in the culture instructions in textbooks. In her statistical analysis, Yu assigns "cultural instruction points" (CI points) meaning "itemized and highlighted instruction of elements of the target culture" for instances of cultural instruction (p. 88). She analyzes the distribution of CI points among three categories: behavioral culture (what people do in a target culture, such as expressing their concerns for someone), informational culture (what people know, e.g., history, geography), and achievement culture (what people value, e.g., calligraphy art, music, the Great Wall) (p. 89). Her finding shows that within the category of behavioral culture the percentage of CI points of cultural perspective/cultural mind (why people do what they do, i.e., underlying attitudes, beliefs, values, and worldviews that shape people's behavior) is only 5.1% and within all of the three categories of culture it is only 4.3% (p. 96). This finding also confirms that CFL textbooks and classroom instruction pay almost no attention to cultural perspectives, a phenomenon observed by other scholars as well. The second shortcoming Yu demonstrates is that about half of the behavioral CI points appear in the main dialogues as models for learners to imitate but no explanations are provided. A quarter of the behavioral CI points are merely explained as added-on cultural notes, and as such they do not appear in the main dialogues. Only the remaining quarter of the behavioral CI points are presented in both the main dialogues and in the cultural notes. Yu advocates using this strategy, which is labeled the "dual track" mode, "more predominantly in all textbooks" (p. 98). The third shortcoming involves the quality of cultural behavior instructions in the main

nothing is left for upper level courses. Still another view is that culture does not need to be taught explicitly since it is embedded in the primary texts of each lesson. Teaching the text created with language is already teaching culture. The term "culture" can have different connotations in different languages. The original name of Beijing Language and Culture University was Beijing Language College. It was changed to Beijing Language and Culture University in 1996 and it was shortened to Beijing Language University in 2002. Out of curiosity I asked someone from Beijing about the reason for the removal of the word "culture", and was greeted with the answer that the word "culture" seems to lower the status of the university. At a recent Chinese Language Education Forum, one scholar from that university raised the question "Why should culture be taught?" This question might have represented the position that culture is in language and does not need to be taught separately. It may also explain why the word "culture" has disappeared from the university's name. Moreover, both English "culture" and Chinese "wénhuà" are polysemous words with each of them having multiple meanings. Many of them are not equivalent. For example, one of the meanings of the Chinese "wénhuà" is in the category of education: schooling; literacy, e.g., xuéxí wénhuà 'acquire an elementary education; learn to read and write; wénhuá shuǐpíng 'educational level'. With this meaning, the removal of the word "culture" provided by the answer makes sense.

dialogues. Yu finds many dialogues are set in a non-Chinese cultural background, which results in “unrealistic Chinese-language conversations between two native English speakers for no apparent reason” (p. 99). Many other dialogues are also not framed in realistic contexts.² Speech events and speech acts presented in most textbooks do not represent authentic cultural behavior in real life. Consequently, the misled students merely produce unnatural and decontextualized sentences.

There are several reasons why teaching Chinese cultural perspectives in CFL classrooms has reached an impasse. First, native speakers tend to be insensitive to the cultural contexts in which they grew up and in which they live. This is because native cultural perspectives are intangible and they have already shaped an individual’s behavior and value system (Kramsch, Cain, & Murphy-Lejeune, 1996, p. 102; Morain, 1997, p. 36). McCarthy and Carter (1994) observed that people react to their native language “mainly unconsciously and unreflectingly” (p. 160) and, in fact, people react to their native culture in much the same way. CFL teachers are primarily native speakers. Their cultural perspectives govern what they do and how they do it; recognizing the difference between their culture and another culture through language requires substantial effort. Second, as discussed above, there is a lack of adequate textbooks that provide effective instruction on cultural perspectives (Tang, 2006; Yu, 2009). Chinese culture instruction in the language classroom tends to center on Chinese products and their origins, such as moon cakes, red envelopes, and festivals, that do not delve into a deeper layer of Chinese ways of thinking or their mentality, values, and ideology. For culturally-specific language behavior, considerable emphasis is placed on teaching formulaic expressions, such as those used for greeting, parting, and expressing gratitude, but this approach leaves other spoken and written discourse unexplored. Third, there is a significant shortage of practical pedagogical examples for teachers to model and to develop. Teachers realize the importance of teaching cultural perspectives in the language classroom, but it takes a well-developed process to break away from their habitual linguistic-form-only methods and to integrate a new teaching approach. Thus, a pedagogical resource that provides concrete teaching scripts can scaffold teachers’ transformation and can serve as a turning point for future development.

² The lack of authenticity is also demonstrated by Tao (2005) by comparing the textbook dialogue with the natural conversation. He notes that the lack of authenticity “is manifested in various forms including inattentiveness to authentic spoken structural features, discourse interactive strategies, and the role of context” (p. 1).

There are scattered mentions of how to teach Chinese perspectives in the CFL field. Everson (2009) advocates teaching Chinese cultural perspectives on language behavior and provides an example of how to do so with the example of receiving praise (cited in Ross & Ma, 2006). He suggests that rather than just teaching the difference between receiving praise from Americans who say “thank you” and Chinese who do not say “thank you”, the teacher should teach what Chinese people think about accepting praise. Students can be told, “In Chinese culture, accepting a personal compliment can be interpreted as showing conceit. Thus, it is customary in China for people to reject rather than to accept compliments” (Ross & Ma, 2006, p. 364 cited by Everson, 2009, p. 11). Then students can be shown how this Chinese mindset is reflected in Chinese declining responses, such as 哪里, 哪里 (nǎli, nǎli Where, where?), 没什么 (méishénme It’s nothing), and 不好, 不好 (bùhǎo, bùhǎo Not good, not good). To integrate culture education with language education, Myers (2000), using key word methodology developed by Williams (1983) and others, promotes “teach[ing] key words—salient, distinctive words in the target language which lack one-word equivalents in the students’ first language, but which also carry significant cultural loads” (p. 1). This is to say that key words or polysemes in the target language involve a categorization that is culturally distinctive from the native language due to different meaning-making systems. To illustrate the different ways of categorizing English and Chinese, Myers (2009) gives an example of the Chinese morpheme 私 (sī) which is glossed as “private” in English.³ The Chinese 私 (sī) can be used in *sīrén jiàoshī* 私人教师 to mean ‘private teacher, tutor’. “However, it can also express other negative meanings, such as ‘selfish,’ as in *zìsī* 自私 ‘selfish,’ and ‘illegal,’ as *sīhuò* 私货 ‘smuggled good.’ Consequently, *sī* is not the equivalent of the English word *private*” (Myers, 2009, p. 6). His survey of 10 textbooks finds that many of them give little attention to culturally significant polysemes and oversimplify them with one-word glosses and by teaching them without social and cultural traits. In the example of 私 (sī), if students only learn it as the equivalent of English “private”, they misinterpret the Chinese words for “selfish” and “smuggled good” and would be bewildered when they learn that “private”, “selfish”, and “illegal” can be related. Myers supports the explicit teaching (explaining) of key words/polysemes from the beginning of CFL. This way of teaching not only sensitizes students to key words/polysemes associated with cultural values, beliefs, and various facets of social

³ See also Bien, this volume.

life, but it also helps students to conceptualize different systems of categorization between their language and the target language.

This paper contributes further to the research on the teaching of Chinese cultural perspectives. It does so by framing this teaching in critical language pedagogy and by utilizing discourse analysis. The paper provides teaching activities demonstrating how cultural perspectives can be taught through a critical analysis of language use obtained from film clips.

IN NEED OF CRITICAL LANGUAGE PEDAGOGY

To meet the challenges brought about by a changed world, the Modern Language Association (MLA) in its Ad Hoc Committee 2007 report called attention to developing language learners' translingual and transcultural competence. That is, students are educated to:

1. “function as informed and capable interlocutors with educated native speakers in the target language”;
2. “reflect on the world and themselves through the lens of another language and culture”;
3. “comprehend speakers of the target language as members of foreign societies and to grasp themselves as Americans—that is, as members of a society that is foreign to others”; and
4. “relate to fellow members of their own society who speak languages other than English” (p. 237).

The functional goal of effective cross-cultural communication with others stated in the first goal is familiar to language teachers. Goals 2 and 3 emphasize an understanding of others and self through contact with others and through critical reflection on the learning process. Goal 4 stresses an understanding of others who form part of the same society but are from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. These four goals emphasize language education that cultivates students to become language users of a dialogic nature, namely, toward “intercultural speakers” rather than native speakers (Kramersch, 1998b).

To meet these goals, the MLA report (2007) advocates a language curriculum that “systematically teaches differences in meaning, mentality, and worldview as expressed in American English and in the target language”; “challenge[s] students’

imaginations and...help[s] them consider alternative ways of seeing, feeling, and understanding things” through literature, film, and other media; and teaches “critical language awareness, interpretation and translation, historical and political consciousness, social sensibility, and aesthetic perception” while acquiring functional language abilities (p. 238). The students’ learning goals and the recommendations for the language curriculum both suggest the need for a language pedagogy that ensures their implementation and realization. Critical language pedagogy represents a means to achieve these goals because, according to Kramersch (2006), it “sees language as problematic and in need of analysis and interpretation” (p. 44). Kramersch (1995) explains that “[a] critical foreign language pedagogy focused on the social process of enunciation has the potential both of revealing the codes under which speakers in cross-cultural encounters operate, and of constructing something different and hybrid from these cross-cultural encounters” (p. 89). The critical language pedagogy as such exhorts language learners to perceive differences in cross-cultural encounters and promotes the development of higher-order cognitive thinking skills and the language that goes with them.

Cultural perspective, cultural assumptions, and ideologies

A cultural perspective refers to the ways in which people with particular lifestyles, customs, beliefs, values, and attitudes view the world. Cultural perspectives vary from one culture to another; something assumed to be normal and acceptable in one culture may be strange and unacceptable in another. In this sense, cultural perspectives are shared by particular cultural groups.

Kramersch (1998a) maintains that, “through all its verbal and non-verbal aspects, *language embodies cultural reality*” (p. 3). The relationship between language and cultural reality is demonstrated through people who use language from a perspective that creates meanings understandable to their cultural group. Thus, according to McCarthy and Carter (1994), “[t]o adopt a cultural view of language is to explore the ways in which forms of language, from individual words to complete discourse structures, encode something of the beliefs and values held by the language user” (p. 150).

In using language, people often make assumptions on the basis of their cultural perspective. In Fairclough’s (2001) critical language study, these cultural assumptions are “common-sense assumptions” that:

control both the actions of members of a society and their interpretation of the actions of others. Such assumptions and expectations are implicit, backgrounded, taken for granted, not things that people are consciously aware of, rarely explicitly formulated or examined or questioned. (p. 64)

Therefore, native speakers are generally not consciously aware of common-sense assumptions that are implicit in the conventions governing how they interact linguistically. Moreover, in each society a dominant class imposes ideologies that represent its worldview and perspectives. Assumptions often encode these ideologies. According to Fairclough (2001), "...the effectiveness of ideology depends to a considerable degree on it being merged with this common-sense background to discourse and other forms of social action" (p. 64). Since language is social activity, Fairclough (2001) holds that "[i]deologies are closely linked to language, because using language is the commonest form of social behavior, and the form of social behavior where we rely most on 'common-sense' assumptions" (p. 2). Society maintains itself through the interaction of people in power relationships. Fairclough (2001) adds that "the exercise of power, in modern society, is increasingly achieved through ideology, and more particularly through the ideological workings of language" (p. 2).

In their study of cross-cultural communication, Gumperz, Jupp, and Roberts (1979) find three major reasons for misunderstandings in conversations:

- (1) Different cultural assumptions about the situation and about appropriate behavior and intentions within it.
- (2) Different ways of structuring information or an argument in a conversation.
- (3) Different ways of speaking: the use of a different set of unconscious linguistic conventions (such as tone of voice) to emphasize, to signal connections and logic, and to imply the significance of what is being said in terms of overall meaning and attitudes. (p. 5)

Indeed, people of different cultures misinterpret or misunderstand each other, not because they do not use correct vocabulary or grammar, but because their speech represents different views of history, different cultural values, and different ideologies (Kramersch, 2006, p. 38–39). Awareness of different cultural traits is tied to success or failure in cross-cultural communication.

In light of the relationship between language use and cultural perspectives, cultural assumptions, and ideologies, the analysis and evaluation of the native

speakers' language production helps learners to perceive how meanings are constructed in the target language and culture. It helps them to understand how underlying assumptions and ideologies shape the values, attitudes, and meanings in the target society through language. In the end, learners become more conscious of the differences between themselves and others, which is most essential in cross-cultural encounters.

A discourse-based approach

Critical language pedagogy is discourse-based. This approach views language as discourse and views pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar as interconnected and essential components of discourse. It examines naturally occurring language and various aspects of language use in a socio-cultural context. This includes language users' choice of forms and ways in which parts of a spoken or written text are organized and relate to one another to construct meaning. A discourse approach views discourse as culture. McCarthy and Carter (1994) assert that "language is not...transparent and neutral; language is a site in which beliefs, values and points of view are produced, encoded and contested" (p. 155). Cultural perspectives, including beliefs, worldviews, and value system, are embedded in discourse. A discourse approach provides a tool for the implementation of critical language pedagogy that, according to Kramsch et al (1996), "makes the very process of enunciation the locus of cultural difference and personal choice" (p. 99) and engages students "to recognize both the cultural voice of a socially dominant group and the unique voice of a particular person" (p. 105). It allows students, as noted by McCarthy and Carter (1994), to examine "the relationship between specific linguistic choices and some ways in which cultural values and ideologies are conveyed" (p. 156). Finally, Fairclough (2001) suggests that language is connected with society through ideology and thus it is a device used in power struggles. For this reason, it is in discourse "where relations of power are actually exercised and enacted" (p. 36) because "the whole social order of discourse is put together and held together as a hidden effect of power" (p. 46). Thus discourse analysis, as an analysis of "power in discourse", is a tool that can deepen students' understanding of how cultural assumptions and ideologies are concealed and executed in language.

Principles for designing activities

To explore Chinese cultural perspectives with discourse-based critical language pedagogy, it is important to highlight four underlying principles in designing learning activities. The first is to engage students in situated learning. According to this perspective, learning is a process in which learners gradually develop an understanding as well as knowledgeable skills (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Students explore and interpret through various tasks and are encouraged to contribute alternative ways of thinking. The second is to expose students to functional uses of language in social contexts. This helps them to understand how language use is based on social environments (Scollon & Scollon, 1995, p. 95). It moves students beyond the referential meaning of words and encourages them to interpret between the lines and to examine the representations and intentions behind the words. The third is to guide students to interpret cultural meaning and to relate it to their own culture. According to Kramsch et al. (1996), “[b]y choosing to say things one way rather than another, even a first-year learner ... makes a cultural decision, because he/she adapts her language to the perceived needs of the situation” (p. 106). Culture instruction as such fosters students’ critical thinking and enables them to recognize differences and to begin a cross-cultural experience in the language classroom. The fourth is to develop an active understanding and interpretation that are responsive, relational, and dynamic. For Bakhtin (1981), “various different points of view, conceptual horizons, systems for providing expressive accents, various social ‘languages’ come to interact with one another” (p. 282). Learning that is situated in an interactive relationship with the target culture’s social world and with other participants holding different worldviews in the classroom, enables students to “discover which ways of talking and thinking they share with others and which are unique to them” (Kramsch, 1993, p. 27). In summary, language and culture instruction is situated, interactive, comparative, and interpretive.

INCORPORATING FILM CLIPS IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

Films made for native speakers usually portray a social reality in which people in the society live, behave, and connect with others in a way that is shaped by certain cultural perspectives and is governed by certain ideological social norms. In the distant past, language educators recognized the value of integrating films with language teaching. For example, Travis (1947) stated that films provide an “authentic background” for language study, e.g., “real people, in their natural surroundings,

speaking their own language”, and “the essential features of the spoken language” (p. 146), e.g., perfectly clear vowel sounds, and unmistakable intonation and expression. In Lottmann’s (1961) opinion, “hours of exposition in language, any language, cannot assure the same accuracy of meaning as that conveyed by the visual image” that portrays “a real-life situation with dialogue” and “an authentic picture presented in an authentic context” (p. 178). In later years integrating films into the language curriculum thrived and advanced innovatively in scope and modality. On the one hand, the increased availability of films with the development of multimedia technology makes the integration feasible; on the other hand, this integration is carried forward by students who are motivated to learn more through films. Students seek to understand socio-cultural reality through language study; films do an excellent job of portraying real-life situations full of linguistic and paralinguistic elements (Lonergan, 1984; Stempleski & Tomalin, 1990; Wood, 1995). The distinguishing feature of films vs. other texts is that films visually and aurally present reality. Thus, films can “focus student attention more powerfully than other texts” so they “can be part of the process of leading students to a discernment of cultural reality” while “raising a viewer’s sense of linguistic and paralinguistic authenticity” (Wood, 1995, p. 13–15).

A number of studies have been carried out to measure the effectiveness of using films/videos in language classes. For example, to discover whether the language used in films is really authentic, Rodríguez Martín and Moreno Jaén (2009) compared conversations in movie transcripts with those of live face-to-face conversations. Their findings reveal that “there are no relevant differences between the two ... insofar as key conversational features are concerned” (p. 455). In other words, “movies make use of a wide range of conversational strategies and devices” (p. 456) as found in natural social oral communication. In a study on learning culture through video, Herron, Cole, Corrie, and Dubreil (1999) investigated whether students are able to learn culture with material embedded in a video-based L2 program. They found that students gained significant cultural knowledge and that the knowledge of little “c” items scored significantly higher than that of big “C” items. To discover the effect of a visual image for beginning-level students’ comprehension and retention of information, Herron, Hanley, and Cole (1995) compared two advance organizers for introducing beginning foreign language students to video. They found students’ comprehension and retention of information “benefits significantly more from an advance organizer in which the aural description of major upcoming scenes in the video is accompanied by contextually related pictures than from an advance

organizer in which the students only listen to this description” (p. 393) With real people speaking naturally, an easily identifiable culture, and visual contexts that facilitate language and culture learning, students will not reject the opportunity to experience the target social reality in the classroom.

Selecting clips from a Chinese feature film to teach Chinese cultural perspectives has been conceived to remedy the deficiency in authenticity in Chinese textbooks. The authenticity of spoken discourse and the rich visual and cultural elements from film clips are essential for teaching cultural perspectives. With the discourse-based critical language pedagogy as described above, the spoken discourse from the film is conceptualized as a cultural product pregnant with cultural meanings. Students’ attention is focused on recognizing word choices, analyzing speech acts and strategies as well as paralinguistic communication (gesture, posture, facial expression, and use of space) to discern “the cultural voice of a socially dominant group and the unique voice of a particular person” (Kramsch et al., 1996, p. 105). Viewing the close relationship between linguistic choices and cultural voices enables students to examine and interpret “the relationship between specific linguistic choices and ways in which cultural values and ideologies are conveyed” (McCarthy & Carter, 1994, p. 156). Critical discourse analysis allows students to experience a target language and culture by examining culture through language and language through culture. It pushes students to reflect on the difference between target discourse and their native discourse in a specific speech situation and between cultural perspectives that are embedded in discourse.

Below is an example of a teaching plan for a 3-minute film clip from the Chinese feature film “Blue Paper Crane” directed by Xiaohua Li and released in 2003. The film is subtitled in standard Mandarin script. There are many Chinese dialects in China with spoken and lexical varieties that are mutually unintelligible.⁴ Since the Chinese written form is unified, subtitles enable the viewer to understand the film. Garza’s (1991) research on using Russian and ESL as on-screen target language subtitles indicates that the presence of captions can increase the comprehension of the linguistic content of the video material. Wang in a 2008 study discovered that regardless of the level of L2, on-screen subtitles play a significant and positive role in vocabulary learning. She found that for both high and low levels Chinese subtitles are more effective than English subtitles. Yet, the difference between Chinese and English subtitles is statistically significant for a low level group, but not so for a high

⁴ Jerry Norman (1988, p. 187) compares Chinese dialects to Romance languages and states that “[t]he Chinese dialectal complex is in many ways analogous to the Romance language family in Europe...”

level group. Overall the presence of film subtitles in the present teaching plan is a positive addition. Moreover, students' interest and confidence are heightened when they are able to recognize Chinese characters on the screen.

The following activities are designed to teach the 3-minute film clip from the film.⁵ The presentation of the activities is divided into four parts: 1) pre-viewing, and a synopsis is included in this part; 2) viewing and discussion which has three student worksheets A, B, and C; 3) viewing and discussion which has one student worksheet D; and 4) post-viewing. Students' sample responses are from a fourth and a fifth semester non-heritage track Chinese language classes. Overall, the goal of the activities is to engage students to examine how meanings are constructed and conveyed through language, to explore Chinese cultural perspectives embedded in discourse, and to interpret cultural assumptions and ideologies rooted in power relations. All activities are carried out primarily in Chinese.

Before presenting the details of teaching procedures, a synopsis and a script of the film clip with the English translation are provided below for readers to understand the content of the clip. The same synopsis is also used in the pre-viewing part.

Synopsis (in Chinese or English or both depending on the level of students and the purpose of the activity):

Juhua grew up in the countryside. Like many other young villagers, she went to a large city to look for a job. A thief stole her money. Only with the help of a young man named Gan Hong was Juhua able to get her money back. They became friends and fell in love with each other. All the while Juhua found a job in a public sanitation department. Several months later, Gan Hong's parents wanted to meet his girlfriend. Juhua was invited to dinner with the Gan family.

Script (my English translation)

The film clip has two segments. Segment I is a conversation between the mother (M), the father (F), Juhua, and Hong at the dinner table, and Segment II is a conversation primarily between the mother (M) and Hong in a bedroom.

⁵ For more on film clips, see Kaiser this volume.

Segment I

At the dinner table

- 1 母: 来,菊花。
M: Here, Juhua.
- 2 菊花: 谢谢。
Juhua: Thank you.
- 3 母: 你和阿洪认识多久了?
M: How long have you and A Hong known each other?
- 4 洪: 有半年了。
Hong: For half a year now.
- 5 母: 听你说话的口音,不像是海江市啊?
M: Your accent shows you are not a native of the Haijiang city, are you?
- 6 菊花: 我,我不是本地的,重庆的。
Juhua: I'm not a native, I'm from Chongqing.
- 7 父: 重庆啊,那重庆是个好地方,现在又是直辖市,那还是西部大开发的重点城市。
F: Chongqing? Chongqing is a great place. Now it's a municipality directly under the central government, and it's a key city in the development of the western part of China.
- 8 母: 家在市区,大学毕业后来海江工作的吧?
M: Your home is in the city, and you came to Haijiang to work after graduating from a university, right?
- 9 菊花: 不是,是农村。我没上过大学,是高中。
Juhua: No, my home is in the countryside. I never went to a university; I only attended a high school.
- 10 母: 在什么单位上班啊?
M: In what work unit do you work?
- 11 菊花: 环卫所。
Juhua: In the public sanitation department.
- 12 洪: 妈,您怎么问起来没完没了啊?
Hong: Mom, how come your questions are endless?
- 13 母: 你找的女朋友以后就是甘家的儿媳妇,我问一问都不行吗?
M: Your girlfriend will be the Gan family's daughter-in-law. Am I not supposed to ask questions?
- 14 洪: 有您这样问的吗?
Hong: But how can you ask questions like that?
- 15 父: 你看,光顾着说话了,大家吃菜,吃完饭以后,咱们再慢慢聊,啊,来吃菜。菊花,来尝尝这鸡。
F: Come on, you're all just talking, come, let's eat. After the meal we will have plenty of time to chat. Come, try the dishes, Juhua, have this chicken.
- 16 菊花: 谢谢。
Juhua: Thanks.
- 17 父: 甘洪妈,你也吃啊。来,大家吃饭。
F: Gan Hong's mom, you also eat. Alright, let's all eat.
- 18 洪: 您歇会吧,我来收拾。
Hong: You go and rest, I will clean up.

In the living room

The mother has peeled an apple for Juhua.

- 19 母: 菊花,来,吃个苹果。
M: Juhua, here, have the apple.
- 20 菊花: 谢谢伯母。
Juhua: Thanks, aunt.

- 21 母: 菊花, 你觉得你们俩相配吗? 你不觉得你们俩条件相距太远了么?
M: Juhua, do you think the two of you match? Don't you think your backgrounds are too different?
- 22 菊花: Silence
Juhua:
- 23 洪: 妈, 妈, 您过来一下。
Hong: Mom, mom, please come over here.

Segment II

In a bedroom

- 24 洪: 妈, 您刚才怎么这样对菊花?
Hong: Mom, how come you treat Juhua like that?
- 25 母: 你找的对象以后就是甘家的儿媳妇, 我这个当妈的问一下也是应该的啊。
M: Your girlfriend will be the Gan family's daughter-in-law, so since I am your mother there is nothing wrong with me asking her questions.
- 26 洪: 可这是我个人的事情, 您就尊重一下我的选择吧。
Hong: But this is my own business. Please respect my choice.
- 27 母: 不行, 你不能和菊花交往。
M: No, you should not have a relationship with her.
- 28 洪: 妈, 您不了解她。她是一个很好的姑娘, 她很有上进心的。我真没想到, 妈, 我没想到您是这么一个势利的人。
Hong: Mom, you don't understand her. She is a very good girl and wants to do better. I really didn't think, mom, I didn't think you were such a snob.
- 29 母: 我这不是势利。你想想, 你爸爸是个有头有脸的人。而我呢? 好坏也是个街道办主任。我们这个家庭啊, 只有你这么个儿子, 怎么能娶一个外地的农村人呢? 这说出去了, 你叫我脸往哪放啊?
M: I am not snobbish. Just think, your dad is a prestigious figure. And me? I am, if nothing else, the director of the neighborhood committee. We only have you, the only son, in our family. How can you marry a country resident from a different region? If the word gets out, where should I put my face?
- 30 洪: 妈, 亏您还是个共产党员, 这种话都说得出口啊?
Hong: Mom, what kind of a Communist Party member are you, saying these things!
- 31 母: 你怎么能这样对我说话呢?
M: How could you speak to me like this?
- 32 洪: 妈, 农村人怎么了? 咱们现在用的哪样东西不是出自农村啊? 如果没有他们的话, 咱们喝西北风啊?
Hong: Mom, what's wrong with country people? Of all the things that we use, is there anything that's not from the countryside? Without them, would we have anything to eat?
- 33 母: 不管你怎么说, 我就是不同意。
M: No matter what you say, I don't approve.
- 34 菊花: 伯父, 谢谢您。我先走了。
Juhua: Uncle, Thank you. I am leaving now.
- 35 洪: 妈。
Hong: Mom.
- 36 母: 别说了。
M: Don't say any more.

Teaching procedures

In the left column of the table below there are teaching activities and in the right column there are general annotations. Lengthy description, interpretation, and explanation appear after the presentation of the activities wherever particular language use needs attention.

Pre-viewing

Procedures	Annotations
<p>1. Show the picture of hanging paper cranes and discuss:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does the “paper crane” mean in Chinese culture? Does it have a special meaning in other languages/cultures? • What is used to represent this similar meaning in other languages/cultures? 	<p>This is a screen shot that appears at the beginning of the film. On the one hand, having students view the visual image, read the silent language created by it, and discuss the questions helps them to contextualize the general theme of the film clip and to notice cultural features related to the theme. On the other hand, interpreting the picture involves students making hypotheses.</p>
<p>2. Provide a written scenario (cf. “Synopsis” above) accompanying the picture and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss the table setting. What would the table setting look like in other cultures? • Have students work in pairs to imagine and predict the topic(s) of the family’s conversation and what questions each of the participants may have. 	<p>This step begins with students reading the scenario that supplies detailed background information. Students are asked to report what they find from the picture that is contrary to their expectation (e.g., table setting) and the reason for the difference. Students share and compare their imagined topics and questions and discuss any differences they find and the reasons for them.</p>

The situated activities with visual images and a written text (scenario) place students in an interactive relationship not only with the Chinese cultural context but also with other classmates that may have different views. Considering students’ experiences, different living environments, and their varying assumptions and expectations based on their own social-cultural reality, guide them to “discover which ways of talking

and thinking they share with others and which are unique to them” (Kramersch, 1993, p. 27).

Viewing and discussion (Segment I: #1–23)

Procedures

1. The segment begins with a listening task; it is played without the moving picture. Before beginning the clip, draw students’ attention to:
 - Who asks the most questions, the *Mother* or the *Father*?
 - What is the manner of speaking? Why?
 Elicit answers to these questions.
2. Discuss the following question:
 - What does the mother want to know and what is she concerned about?

Distribute Worksheet A (see below) and have students work in groups to create the mother’s questions in Chinese.

Collect the questions students created for the mother on the board for use later.

Annotations

This listening task sensitizes students to the controlling role a participant may take in a conversation both verbally and non-verbally. Have students identify and discuss these ways.

After hearing the clip once or twice (depending on student levels), students can comprehend the gist of the clip. This helps them answer the question and generate the main points the mother is concerned about. They serve as a base for Worksheet A, which asks students to create the mother’s questions. This involves a choice of words and discourse strategies.

Worksheet A	
What questions should the mother ask to obtain the answers she needs?	
<i>Hong’s mother’s concerns</i>	<i>Possible questions the mother can ask</i>
1. Native of Haijing City?	
2. City resident?	
3. University graduate?	
4. Work type?	
5. Well-matched pair?	

The following are the “Mother’s questions” as created by students (my English translation)

- Concern 1. 你是海江人吗? Are you a native of Haijiang?
 你是从哪儿来的? Where are you from?

- Concern 2. 你家在城里吗? Is your home in a city?
你是不是城里人? Are you from a city?
- Concern 3. 你大学毕业了吗? Have you graduated from the university?
你在哪儿上大学的? Where did you attend the university?
- Concern 4. 你在哪儿工作? Where do you work?
你做什么工作? What type of work do you do?
- Concern 5. They wouldn't say this.

Questions for concerns 1–4 are either yes/no questions or wh-questions. The response to Concern 5 reveals that in creating the mother's questions, students rely on their American cultural perspective and have cultural-specific assumptions about what is or is not appropriate to say.

3. Distribute Worksheet B (see below). It contains the script of Segment I with blanks for #5, 8, 10, 21 (cf. the script above). Play the clip with the moving picture several times so students can fill in the blanks with the mother's actual questions in Chinese characters or Pinyin.

Discuss the meanings of the mother's questions.

This activity is not mere dictation. Students' attention is drawn to: 1) a conversation with four participants in different roles; 2) the relationship between utterances in a conversation: here the sequence of question and answer is with an adjacent pair. The second is a response to the first. What does Juhua's silent answer to ❸ mean? (See discussion below); 3) the mother's word choice.

Worksheet B	
Fill in the blanks with the mother's words (in characters or Pinyin) while viewing Segment I.	
At the dinner table 母: 来, 菊花。 菊花: 谢谢。 母: 你和阿洪认识多久了? 洪: 有半年了。 母: ❶ _____ 菊花: 我, 我不是本地的, 重庆的。 父: 重庆啊, 那重庆是个好地方, 现在又是 <u>直辖市</u> , 那还是西部大开发的 <u>重点城市</u> 。 母: ❷ _____ 菊花: 不是, 是 <u>农村</u> 。我没上过大学, 是高中。 母: ❸ _____ 菊花: <u>环卫所</u> 。 洪: 妈, 您怎么问起来没完没了啊?	直辖市 zhíxiáshì 'directly governed city region' 开发 kāifā 'develop' 农村 nóngcūn 'countryside' 环卫所 =环境卫生所

母: 你找的女朋友以后就是甘家的儿媳妇, 我问一问都不行吗?	媳妇 xīfu 'daughter-in-law'
洪: 有您这样问的吗?	
父: 你看, 光顾着说话了, 大家吃菜, 吃完饭以后, 咱们再慢慢聊, 啊, 来吃菜。	顾 gù 'attend to'
菊花: 谢谢。	
父: 甘洪妈, 你也吃啊。来, 大家吃饭。	
洪: 您歇会吧, 我来收拾。	歇 xiē 'have a rest' 收拾 shōushi 'clear away'
In the living room The mother has peeled an apple for Juhua.	
母: 菊花, 来, 吃个苹果。	
菊花: 谢谢伯母。	
母: ④ _____	相配 xiāngpèi 'match'
菊花: (Silence)	条件 tiáojiàn 'condition'
洪: 妈, 妈, 您过来一下。	

The visual images on screen allow students to observe the role relationships through paralinguistic signs, such as facial expressions, gestures, and kinetics. Here students experience a conversation by viewing it, listening to it, and reading it. Classroom instruction continues to guide students to explore, discover, and interpret. For example, they might consider what meanings and assumptions can be discovered in the mother's utterances? Why does she make these utterances?

- Distribute Worksheet C (see below) showing the mother's actual questions and have students compare them with the questions they have created for the mother from Worksheet A collected on the board.

Have students examine the conversation between the mother and Juhua and discuss:

- What type of conversation it is (e.g., an interview, an interrogation, or small talk)? Features?
- What does Juhua express with her silence?

Putting the two sets of questions side by side enables students to see the differences. By explaining the meanings of key linguistics forms, students begin to recognize how a speaker puts forms together constructing meanings that reflect values, assumptions, and ideologies.

The second activity pushes students to look for conversational features, such as initiating a new topic, changing a topic, or speaking or remaining silent and to interpret the role relationship between the mother and Juhua and its development in a social-cultural context.

Worksheet C: Compare and Contrast

<i>Mother's questions</i>	<i>"Mother's questions" created by students</i>
#5 听你说话的口音, 不像是海江市啊? Your accent shows you are not a native of the Haijiang city, are you?	
#8 家在市区, 大学毕业后来海江工作的吧? Your home is in the city, and you came to Haijiang to work after graduating from a university, right?	
#10 在什么单位上班啊? In what work unit do you work?	
#21 菊花, 你觉得你们俩相配吗? 你不觉得你们俩条件相距太远了吗? Juhua, do you think the two of you match? Don't you think your backgrounds are very different?	

To facilitate the discussion on the comparison, the questions the students created for the mother are reproduced in the right column.

<i>Mother's questions</i>	<i>"Mother's questions" created by students</i>
#5 听你说话的口音, 不像是海江市啊? Your accent shows you are not a native of the Haijiang city, are you?	你是海江人吗? / 你是从哪儿来的? Are you a native of Haijiang? / Where are you from?
#8 家在市区, 大学毕业后来海江工作的吧? Your home is in the city, and you came to Haijiang to work after graduating from a university, right?	你家在城里吗? / 你是不是城里人? Is your home in a city? / Are you from a city? 你大学毕业了吗? / 你在哪儿上大学的? Have you graduated from the university? / Where did you attend the university?
#10 在什么单位上班啊? In what work unit do you work?	你在哪儿工作? / 你做什么工作? Where do you work? / What type of work do you do?
#21 菊花, 你觉得你们俩相配吗? 你不觉得你们俩条件相距太远了吗? Juhua, do you think the two of you match? Don't you think your backgrounds are too different?	They wouldn't say this. 你跟我儿子合适吗? / 你们的关系怎么样? Are you and my son suitable? / How is your relationship?

It is not difficult for students to identify the different language forms used in the mother's questions. However, they are unaware of how the different meanings of the forms can make a difference in how the utterances are interpreted. Although the auxiliary words 啊 (a) and 吧 (ba) placed at the end of a sentence are taught in an elementary level class, students are generally not taught about their functions as

discursive markers. In Chu's (1998) discourse grammar of Mandarin Chinese, he explains that using 吧 (ba) in a yes-no question indicates a speaker's uncertainty about something that needs to be confirmed (p. 135). For 啊 (a), he explains that it indicates personal involvement with two pragmatic functions: showing a speaker's concern and showing a degree of certainty or personal opinion. The questions the students have created for the mother are simply information-obtaining by using the auxiliary word 吗 (ma) in a yes-no question, question words, and affirmative-negative questions. Conversely, the mother's original questions framed with 啊 (a) and 吧 (ba) show her personal involvement and the fact that she is opinionated. Why is this so? When questioned by her son, the mother argues, "Your girlfriend will be the Gan family's daughter-in-law. Am I not supposed to ask questions?" In Chinese culture, parents often are involved with their children's boy-/girlfriend and marriage. The mother assumes that what she is doing is right. Thus, she positions herself as the family gatekeeper exercising her power as a mother and a would-be mother-in-law. This power can also be discerned in the two scenes: 1. the mother sits next to her son's girlfriend, Juhua, questioning her; 2. the mother peels an apple for Juhua.

The effect of power is even more salient in #21 with two rhetorical questions. The two words 相配 (xiāngpèi, match) and 条件 (tiáojiàn, background/social condition) encode the mother's ideologies related to social hierarchy and her belief in marriage to someone of a equal social and economic status. The mother exercises her power by using two rhetorical questions both with the verb 觉得 (juéde, think) and the personal pronoun 你 (nǐ, you) to hint "you should know..." Through these two rhetorical questions the mother shows her disapproval of the relationship between Juhua and her son and advises the girl to leave her son. It is clear that the mother uses these speech acts to protect the family's higher social status. With this concern she implicitly shows her expectation that her would-be daughter-in-law should have a city residence, be a university graduate, and have a decent job (cf. discussion above). An examination of Juhua's three simple answers and one silence to the mother's questions certainly proves the effect of the mother's power. The unequal relationship between the mother and Juhua, i.e., between a city resident and a countryside resident, and between a senior and a young girl, already exists. However, the mother further exercises and enacts her power in her utterances (cf. "power in discourse" in Fairclough, 2001).

*Viewing and discussion (Segment II: #24–36)***Procedures**

- This segment focuses on the conversation between the mother and the son.
 - Recall the son's reaction to his mother's questions directed to Juhua: "But how can you ask questions like that?"
 - Predict the content of the conversation between the mother and the son
- Play Segment II with both the moving picture and script; discuss the tone, the mood, and the manner of the two in the conversation.
- Distribute Worksheet D consisting of 5 tasks. Engage students in pair, group, and class discussion.

**Annotations**

Students interpret the son's questioning of the kinds of questions his mother directed to Juhua at the dinner table, then they speculate on the son's purpose in asking to speak to his mother in another room.

After the analysis and interpretation of Segment I, students are better able to analyze the text of this segment. They are directed to explore different dimensions of cultural values, assumptions, and ideologies. They are encouraged to offer their own thoughts and interpretations.

Worksheet D

- Mark on the script the utterances you think are different from your expectations.
- Mark the expressions you think the mother uses to show her power and concern about social status and public opinion. Explain the mother's utterances from a Chinese cultural perspective.
- The following are the son's utterances. What functions do they serve? What are the son's intentions?

#12. 妈,您怎么问起来没完没了啊?
Mom, how come your questions are endless?

#14. 有您这样问的吗?
But how can you ask questions like that?

#24. 妈,您刚才怎么这样对菊花?
Mom, how come you treated Juhua like that?

#26. 可这是我个人的事情,您就尊重一下我的选择吧。
But this is my own business. Please respect my choice.

#28. 我真没想到,妈,我没想到您是这么一个势利的人。
I really didn't think, mom, I didn't think you were such a snob.

#30. 妈,亏您还是个共产党员,这种话都说得出口啊?

Mom, what kind of a Communist Party member are you, saying these things!

- IV. To #30 above, the mother's reaction is 你怎么能这样对我说话呢? (How could you speak to me like this?) Think about speaking rules in a hierarchical relationship. Do they break them? What does "like this" refer to? What wouldn't a Party member do? Why is the mother so upset?
- V. What can you surmise about the father in and outside of the home? What role relationship does the Father have in this situation? Would the father approve of his son's relationship with the girl?

For Task II, students find the following Chinese cultural perspectives hidden in the mother's utterances:

1. Parental authority (hierarchy)

#25: 你找的对象以后就是甘家的儿媳妇,我这个当妈的问一下也是应该的啊。

Your girlfriend will be the Gan family's daughter-in-law, so since I am your mother there is nothing wrong with me asking her questions.

#27: 不行,你不能和菊花交往。

No, you should not have a relationship with her.

#31: 你怎么能这样对我说话呢?

How could you speak to me like this?

#33: 不管你怎么说,我就是不同意。

No matter what you say, I don't approve.

2. Social status (rank hierarchy and face)

#29: 你爸爸是个有头有脸的人。而我呢?好坏也是个街道办主任。我们这个家庭啊,只有你这么个儿子,怎么能娶一个外地的农村人呢?

Just think, your dad is a prestigious figure. And me? I am, if nothing else, the director of the neighborhood committee. We only have you, the only son, in our family. How can you marry a country resident from a different region?

3. Public opinion (face and sameness)

#29: 这说出去了,你叫我脸往哪放啊?

If the word gets out, where should I put my face?

In the Confucian tradition, parental authority in a family hierarchy is normal. Utterances of assertion, criticism, and denial found in #25, #27, #31, and #33 above are typical of parental discourse. In #29, however, the mother discloses the reason for her denial, namely, a significant difference in social status between the Gan

family and Juhua, i.e., the father's prestigious figure and the mother as the director of the neighborhood committee as compared to Juhua's non-local country resident. This, she assumes, will result in her losing face in public: "If the word gets out, where should I put my face?" Chinese people care very much about what others say. A Chinese saying is "Gossip is a fearful thing" or "Gossip threatens". Public opinion is face threatening and can even claim one's life. An example is a famous Chinese movie star in the 1930s that committed suicide leaving a death note saying: "Gossip threatens". In interpersonal relationships in a collective culture like the Chinese, people strive for sameness and are concerned about social comparisons. They try to avoid negative public opinion and gossip that may differ from the mentality of a more individualist culture. The English proverb "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me" reveals this.

Also worth noting is how power relations differ in the public domain from that of the home domain. In her study on politeness in Chinese face-to-face interaction, Pan (2000) finds that:

...while in the workplace official rank gives a woman power equal to that of her male colleagues in politeness behavior, that source of power may be unrecognized, or suppressed in the family situation where traditional values prevail. The power coming from seniority and gender overrides the power associated with rank in language use in the family setting. (p. 107)

That is, senior members and male members have a higher position in the family power hierarchy and "[f]amily members position themselves linguistically within this hierarchical structure" (p. 109). Pan adds that the power hierarchy is "embedded in discursive features such as performance of speech acts, topic control, management of conflict, and responses to previous turns" (p. 108). However, in this film clip the father, despite a higher official rank than the mother, has minimal involvement, e.g., three speech turns with two offering food, and one praising the development in Chongqing, the place where the girl said she was from. It is the mother who controls the conversation. A likely reason is that the conversation deals with finding an ideal daughter-in-law. In Chinese culture, a daughter-in-law is dutiful and expected to support and to protect the family. The Chinese saying "many years of a daughter-in-law makes a mother-in-law" indicates that: a daughter-in-law is controlled carefully by her mother-in-law to do things properly for the family. After the death of the mother-in-law, the daughter-in-law becomes a mother-in-law when her son marries,

and she assumes a mother-in-law's responsibilities. A mother-in-law always has power over a daughter-in-law.

For Task III, students are guided to identify speech acts in the son's six utterances and the relation between them. Two speech acts are found in the utterances: there is a request to stop questioning Juhua (#12, #14, #24) and not to meddle in the son's affair (#26) as well as a criticism of his mother's conduct (#28, #30). It is also found that, along with the ongoing conversation, the son's anger increases as he gradually realizes his mother's opposition to country people is counter to his own belief that city and country people are equal (cf. #31). The son's criticism sparks a dispute with his mother. So, the mother furiously says, “你怎么能这样对我说话呢? How could you speak to me like this?” (#31). Pan (2000) states:

In the Chinese context...argument is generally avoided especially when there are hierarchical differences (of rank, gender, or age) between the participants. To be polite is to keep harmony and to recognize the hierarchical position each participant occupies. Open confrontation among hierarchically differing participants is seen as a challenge to the hierarchy, and very rude. (p. 139)

In the Chinese family hierarchal system, younger members should not criticize senior members. Thus, the son's criticism breaks a hierarchical speaking rule. Even more salient is #30, for here the son challenges his mother's qualification for being a Communist Party member. The word 亏 (kuī) as a verb means “deficit; insufficient”. As an adverb, it suggests sarcasm while retaining its negative meaning from the verb. With the utterance in #30, the son sarcastically belittles his mother as a Communist Party member. In the Chinese social context, to have membership in the Communist Party is one's political identity and even one's political life. It relates to one's social rank and status. The mother is enraged because her political identity is questioned, her social status is attacked, and her power seems to be indecisive in public. Here to an extent is the effect of “power behind discourse” (Fairclough, 2001, p. 46). The son resorts to the social order of discourse in an attempt to conquer and to overwhelm his mother.

Since the son challenges his mother's qualification as a party member, what qualifications and behavior does he expect of a qualified party member? It is easier for students to understand this challenge when they are invited to examine the term “the Communist Party”. A brief survey to discover American students' perception of “the Communist Party” finds their perceptions are primarily that the Party is “a

dictatorship”, that “prevents people from speaking out”, or that the Party “kills people holding diverse opinions”. Here it may be useful to acquaint students with the ideology of the party in Chinese society by reading and discussing a few extracts from the Constitution of the Communist Party of China. For example, one might examine the definition of the party.⁶ Or one might look carefully at the description of the process involved in becoming a party member, which is almost impossible to compare with what takes place in America when one claims to be a Republican or a Democratic Party member.⁷ Finally, one might carefully go over the oath that a probationary party member takes to become an official member. From the text of the oath⁸ students can sense the ideology that makes up party members’ values, beliefs, attitudes, and conducts. Given that the Chinese Communist Party has been a ruling party in China for more than 60 years and that it has 78 million members, this knowledge is important and useful for students when encountering discourses encoding communist ideologies.

Task V focuses on the father’s role in and outside of the home and his role in this particular conversation. From the mother’s discourse, it is known that the father has a high social rank and substantial power. At home, contrary to Pan’s (2000) study, the father is less powerful although he is senior and a male. Even though the particular content of the conversation about the son’s girlfriend (cf. discussion above) may be responsible for him being less involved, it is common in China that powerful men give in to their wives at home. There is even a saying that 90% of men are henpecked. However, alternative views can be invited as to whether the father has

⁶ The beginning of the General Program of the Constitution of the Communist Party of China states, “The Communist party of China is the vanguard both of the Chinese working class and of the Chinese people and the Chinese nation. It is the core of leadership for the cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics and represents the development trend of China’s advanced productive forces, the orientation of China’s advanced culture and the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the Chinese people. The realization of communism is the highest ideal and ultimate goal of the party.” (*Constitution of the Communist Party of China*. Retrieved from: <http://www.china.org.cn/english/congress/229722.htm#6>).

⁷ According to the Communist Party Constitution, “[a]n applicant for Party membership must fill out an application form and be recommended by two full Party members. The application must be accepted at a general membership meeting of the Party branch and approved by the next higher Party organization, and the applicant must undergo observation for a probationary period before being granted full membership” (*ibid.*, Article 5).

⁸ The oath reads: “It is my will to join the Communist Party of China, uphold the Party’s program, observe the provisions of the Party Constitution, fulfill a Party member’s duties, carry out the Party’s decisions, strictly observe Party discipline, guard Party secrets, be loyal to the Party, work hard, fight for communism throughout my life, be ready at all times to sacrifice my all for the Party and the people, and never betray the Party” (*ibid.*, Article 6).

power at home. One alternative view may be that the father has power, but it is exercised in a different way. He may be positioning himself in the middle to balance the various relationships. Upon learning that Juhua comes from Chongqing, a different region, he praises its economic development. When the son argues with his mother, he tries to mitigate the tension by offering food. As Juhua leaves sobbing, he shows sympathy for her. It can be a good activity to compare the roles of the father and the mother in this instance and how they reflect or not larger gender roles in society.

Post-viewing

Procedures

1. Discussion
 - In America, how do parents deal with their children's choice of boy/girl-friends?
2. Choices of writing assignments
 - Write a narrative from one of the characters' perspective.
 - Write a follow-up or a resolution.
 - Write a report about this Chinese family's conversation from an American's point of view.
 - Create a script in an American home setting.
3. Exchange writings and make comparison.

Annotations

This can be done in groups; then in class have several students show the different ways of dealing with this matter.

For the assignments, students need to put themselves into the script, reflect on it and interpret it from their own viewpoint. This active output sensitizes students even more to cultural differences.

Another post-viewing activity is to have students imagine a group of Chinese people watching a film clip showing an American family meeting their son's/daughter's girlfriend/boyfriend for the first time. Then have the students predict what the Chinese would have trouble understanding.⁹ This activity allows students to further grasp the differences between Chinese perspectives and their own perspectives and understand themselves as Americans through the lens of the Chinese people.

The situated activities presented above engage students to explore Chinese perspectives, assumptions, and ideologies rooted in traditional and socio-political culture by analyzing spoken discourse. Through contextualization, interaction, comparison, and interpretation, students come to recognize differences between what is Chinese and what is American.

⁹ I want to thank Mark Kaiser for bringing this post-viewing activity to my attention.

SUMMARY

Teaching about Chinese cultural perspectives is more challenging than teaching about Chinese cultural products and behavior. This is because most textbooks do not consider cultural perspectives, because culture is so much a part of native-Chinese-speaking teachers that they overlook its peculiarities, and because it is believed that cultural understanding comes naturally once language is learned. Studies on cross-cultural communication show that cultural ignorance causes misperceptions and misunderstandings. It is ubiquitous that the utilization of one language form to speak different cultural minds results in misinterpretation and mistrust. In a global community, people of different cultures share a common space. For this reason alone there is an urgent need for people to be aware of different cultural perspectives. Since language and culture go hand in hand, learning a language is a fortunate opportunity to learn about another culture. The development of students' translingual and transcultural competence as described in the MLA 2007 report requires critical language pedagogy. Such a pedagogy teaches students differences, alternatives, critical language, and cultural awareness through its comparative, reflective, and interpretive methodologies.

This paper provides an example of teaching Chinese cultural perspectives through discourse in film clips. It uses a discourse-based approach and employs various activities to explore and to discover Chinese cultural perspectives, assumptions, and ideologies embedded in discourse. In this example, students are exposed to ideas about parental authority in the hierarchical system of the Chinese family, social status related to the Chinese social hierarchy, public opinions related to the all-important issue of Chinese face, as well as Chinese ideologies about equality and political identity. They are all concealed in various language features and they are interwoven in discourse through questions, statements, phrases or words, parts of speech, performance of speech acts, topic control, and responses to previous turns.

Kramersch (2006) writes, “[w]ith the increasing globalization of markets and international migrations, no stable knowledge can be really passed on from one generation to the next, except for strategies of discovery” (p. 49). Teaching, as put forward in this paper, empowers students with discovery strategies for likely encounters with Chinese spoken or written texts to enhance their sensitivity to Chinese cultural perspectives.

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