

# An Analysis on the Application of the Communicative Approach in the Teaching of French in Chinese Universities

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**Abstract**—Language is the most essential tool for human beings to communicate ideas, and the teaching of foreign languages is an important part of the educational development of a country, in which teaching methods play a pivotal role. At present, the communicative approach has become one of the most popular teaching methods in the teaching of French in Chinese universities. In view of the practical difficulties encountered by Chinese students in learning French, we have analyzed their characteristics of personality and thinking patterns, and put forward reasonable plans and solutions for its improvement. This is of great significance for overall improving the teaching quality of French in Chinese universities and cultivating practical professionals for the country.

**Index Terms**—The communicative approach, the teaching of French, Chinese universities, application

## I. INTRODUCTION

Language is the most essential tool for human beings to communicate ideas, and is also one of the important characteristics of a nation. It is thus bound to have an impact on politics, economy, culture, science and technology and even all aspects of the social life of a country. It is because of the transmission of language and the recording of words that we have preserved and passed on the main spiritual wealth of human civilization to future generations. Each country usually has its own common language, which becomes one of the most representative features of the country. It goes without saying that it is only through the mutual communication of languages that we can accurately master the basic facts of all parties, and promote the mutual cooperation among countries. Thus the teaching and learning of foreign languages play a vital role in the overall development of a country.

Thanks to the vigorous development of education of foreign languages, China has been able to make contact with the international community through the mutual communication of different languages. It has promoted the comprehensive cooperation between China and other countries in the world at various levels and in various fields. Given the importance of the teaching and learning of foreign languages, China attaches great importance to it and strives to make it the best. However, the traditional teaching methods adopted by Chinese teachers of foreign languages today are so superficial that students cannot acquire the most all-round

skills of languages through learning. Therefore, the communicative approach has become one of the most important choices for different learners in different language environments. It is also one of the most popular teaching methods in the teaching of foreign languages in China at the moment.

In recent years, a large number of studies on the teaching of foreign languages have shown that the teaching of French in Chinese Universities should be based on the existing communicative approach and be supplemented by the traditional teaching methods, in order to better meet the learning needs of learners. By summarizing the experiences of French professors in other countries (especially France) in the application of the communicative approach, according to the specific current situation of the teaching of French in Chinese universities, we have analyzed the characteristics of personality and thinking patterns of Chinese students, and put forward precise and rational suggestions for its improvement in response to the practical difficulties they encountered in the learning of French. This not only will favorably promote the teaching quality of French in Chinese universities, but also will cultivate practical talents who have both professional knowledge and communicative competence for the country.

## II. MAINBODY

For a long time, the teaching of French in Chinese universities has been influenced by the traditional teaching methods. The extensive introduction and application of the communicative approach has opened up the best way for the teaching of French on a large scale. By analyzing the characteristics of personality and thinking patterns of Chinese people, we have a more thorough understanding of the characteristics of Chinese students in the learning of French, and put forward relatively clear plans and solutions for its improvement. This will beneficially improve the teaching level of French professors in Chinese universities, enhance the communicative competence of students, and make due contributions to the development of the education of French.

### A. The Overview of Application of the Communicative Approach in the Teaching of French in Chinese Universities

The Chinese nation has a splendid and brilliant historical civilization. Since ancient times, it has been interacting with countries all over the world, and foreign translators have been born. With the rise and fall of Chinese dynasties, Chinese education of foreign languages also fluctuated. The teaching

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of French was born in a religious school in the 17th century, namely the Xuhui School founded by Catholics in Shanghai in 1850. Subsequently, the Qing government established the first school of foreign languages, Jingshi Tongwen Guan in Beijing in 1862, and opened the French department in 1863, thus starting the formal teaching of French in China.

To this day, French is one of the six working languages of the United Nations, the learning of French in China has become a popular trend. Nevertheless, “the problem of centering on teachers and textbooks rather than learners has been discussed for a long time in Chinese educational circles [1].” Under the influence of this traditional teaching mode, French teachers play an absolute leading role, mainly teaching textbooks, while learners are passive in acquiring knowledge and have no opportunity for personal reflection. With the changes of the times, the teaching of French has also been influenced by foreign teaching methods. Thereby China has gradually introduced some teaching methods from other countries such as the communicative approach.

The communicative approach emerged in the early 1970s, which aims to help learners mainly improve their language skills so that they can express themselves more spontaneously and more correctly in communicative situations. It has tried to implement different language activities to form different language skills of learners. We must remember that “the purpose of the communicative teaching of natural language is to create conditions for obtaining the ability to produce grammatical statements suitable for the communicative context [2].” So the communicative approach is considered as the most important recommended approach for Chinese learners to learn foreign languages. It has transformed the dominant position between teachers and learners, and strengthened the ability of interaction between them. With the popularization of the communicative approach, this teaching method is also widely used in the courses of French in Chinese universities.

In the process of the application of the communicative approach, what is important is not the allocation of time between the professor and students, but that there is always a balance between them. The professor pay more attention to the language needs of learners, while learners actively acquire language knowledge and skills. Whether in basic or conversation classes, there are always opportunities for students to interact with each other or have more interaction with the professor. Most students are able to acquire the knowledge they want to learn from the very beginning, increase their opportunities for practice, and develop their communicative competence, which is very effective for them to improve their academic performance of French.

Then it is not surprising that the communicative approach can achieve such fruitful results. When students are able to study French hard with a determined will, they can succeed in their pursuit of goals. As the communicative approach improves the language skills of students, and basically meets their learning needs. Students have enough time to absorb and digest new knowledge on their own before putting it into practice. Through the evolution of the teaching history of French in China, we can see that the communicative approach has played a very important role in improving the teaching quality of French at university and cultivating practical professionals. However, there are still some urgent

problems to be solved in the specific teaching process of French.

### *B. The Practical Difficulties of the Communicative Approach in the Teaching of French in Chinese Universities*

According to the description by Jean-Michel Robert: “the Chinese learner (or Asian in general) is not accustomed to discovering notions, to organize them and to conceptualize them [3].” Due to the influence of the traditional teaching methods, Chinese learners always wait for careful guidance and clear explanations from their teachers before applying what they have learned to the classroom. This passive way of learning leads to the fact that most students cannot successfully learn French independently, especially to improve their ability of self-correction and self-assessment. Only when we are familiar with the unique characteristics of personality and thinking patterns of Chinese people can we have a more comprehensive understanding of the practical difficulties Chinese students encounter when learning French, and promote the widespread application of the communicative approach in the teaching of French in Chinese universities.

Firstly, the inherent character of Chinese people is particularly introverted, and students are not used to asking or answering questions when learning French to avoid making a mistake and losing face. They prefer to remain calm rather than express themselves first. Even if they have questions about their learning, they are more willing to solve them by themselves or ignore them directly. They would rather ask questions to their classmates than to their professors. They feel ashamed that they can't answer the questions correctly asked by their professors, which they consider it as a sign of incompetence, just as they are afraid of making mistakes in front of others. Although Chinese students who learn French have a great learning motivation, they are almost mechanical and passive in their way of acquiring and memorizing new knowledge, and are not good at mutual communication and self-improvement.

Secondly, the unique thinking of Chinese people is mainly based on rationality, and students especially give emphasis to the comprehension and cognition of words when they learn French textbooks and read literary works. The majority of them have a mania for trying to fully understand each word in French textbooks, especially in literary works. They believe that the misunderstanding of one word in a sentence can affect the understanding of the entire text due to the complexity of the grammatical structure of French. They don't want to miss a word or try to guess its specific meaning based on the overall text. This is why they often look up unfamiliar words or phrases in dictionaries as they learn French. This way of learning is not conducive to improving their comprehensive ability of reading and understanding.

Furthermore, the character and thinking of Chinese people determine their behavior, and once they go abroad, most of them like to choose foreign friends who are in the same background. That is to say, they are not good at getting to know and communicate with natives or locals when they arrive in France or French-speaking countries. They are afraid that native speakers will be able to distinguish their linguistic faults as soon as they speak. Even if they have full of ideas, doubts or they don't agree with the views of others when they learn French, they are also not actively involved in

communicative activities such as the teamwork or the role-playing. This saves them from embarrassing situations in the end, but also limits the improvement of their communicative competence and oral expression.

As we have already analyzed the problems before, what prevented Chinese students from improving their learning efficiency lies in their relatively closed character and rational thinking. One of the most primary constraints stems from the lack of knowledge of French. As a result, they do not have enough self-confidence in the process of the learning of French, and they are also afraid of making mistakes, especially they fear prejudice by others. Given the fact that Chinese students have the traditional way of learning languages, French professors should understand their specific difficulties, language needs, and what they ask of courses. The communicative approach pays more attention to the communicative competence of students and solve the related problems in this regard, allowing them to express themselves more naturally in communicative situations and achieve their own learning goals.

### *C. The Measurs of Development of the Communicative Approach in the Teaching of French in Chinese Universities*

At present, many educationalists strongly recommend the communicative approach to language courses, especially the teaching of foreign languages. Even so, the communicative approach still has many deficiencies that needed to be corrected, and that there are always other teaching methods that are being developed or perfected. I keep asking myself the following questions: "What is the future of the development of the communicative approach in the teaching of French in Chinese universities? Can we achieve the desired teaching effect it expressed in its rise?" To answer these questions correctly, we must analyze in detail the specific application of the communicative approach in the teaching of French in Chinese university, and take some corresponding solutions and specific measures.

Firstly, French professors should carefully analyze the characteristics of personality of students and improve their overall communicative competence. The communicative approach emphasizes the action-oriented orientation of language through the accomplishment of learning tasks, and "focuses on creating opportunities to use real language [4]." By effectively practicing the acquired knowledge of French outside the classroom, students can gain the self-confidence of active learning and overcome language barriers caused by psychological factors. At the same time, they also solved some problems in the traditional teaching methods, such as whether the pronunciation of words is accurate, and whether the spoken language is fluent or not, etc. Accordingly, students can apply the French knowledge they have learned to practice. While improving their oral skills, they not only exercise their communicative competence, but also master professional knowledge, so as to achieve the goal of linking theory with practice.

Secondly, French professors should continuously consolidate the grammar training of students and strengthen their whole thinking ability. French professors should attach importance to the teaching of grammar from the perspective of self-development and improvement of students. This is because "all learners need to internalize the rules of grammar to a language if they want to be able to spontaneously produce relevant utterances in that language [5]." However,

there are not really grammatical teaching activities in the communicative approach. In order to improve the grammatical level of students, French professors need to teach grammar explicitly, analyze grammatical structures and simulate the teaching of grammar in communicative situations. This will not only help students master the basics of grammar and enhance their ability to apply it, but also help them improve their overall thinking ability and enhance their comprehensive understanding of French texts.

Furthermore, French professors should comprehensively broaden the horizons of knowledge of students and enhance their social adaptability. Due to the lack of natural situations in real contexts, French professors should try their best to maintain the authenticity of the textbooks they use, especially the original French textbooks. In light of this, French professors must have solid professional knowledge, understand the international society, especially the national conditions of France, and go to France for study or further education, and promote the teaching of French with their own personal experience. French professors also need to broaden the domain of professional knowledge of students, and make the knowledge of textbooks corresponds to the real objects, so that students can master them in actual communication. Once students have the opportunity to study abroad, they can quickly adapt to foreign social life and lay a solid foundation for their future study.

In a word, even though Chinese students face many difficulties in the course of learning French, if French professors could make allowances for their specific circumstances and pay close attention to their learning needs, then the communicative approach could still be the main method of choice to improve their interest in the learning of French. This requires French professors to decisively absorb some of the advantages of other teaching methods, try to make up for some shortcomings in the communicative approach, and seek an optimal teaching method that integrates students into suitable groups instead of excluding them. In any case, the communicative approach has injected new vitality into the teaching of French in Chinese universities and achieved many satisfactory achievements in the field of teaching. It has become one of the important factors affecting the education of French in China.

### III. CONCLUSION

After more than half a century of teaching practice, the communicative approach has gradually become prominent in the teaching of French in Chinese universities, and it is very effective in cultivating the communicative competence of students. But the traditional teaching methods of China are deeply rooted, we still have a long way to go to fundamentally improve this current situation of the teaching and learning of French. This is because "education in every era and society is influenced by the ideas and values of that time [6]." Until today, some linguists and educators are still working to perfect the theory to compensate for the inadequacies found in the application of the communicative approach. The same is true in the field of the teaching of French in China. It symbolizes that related experts have been persistent and striving to perfect and innovate the communicative approach, which cannot be overemphasized.

As a new language teaching method, the communicative approach needs a period of adaptation before it can be completely integrated into the education system. We must

admit that there is no perfect teaching method that could solve all the problems found in the teaching and learning of French. In the future, we will further strengthen the research on the application of the communicative approach in the teaching of French in Chinese universities, especially in combination with the introverted personality, rational thinking of students and other influencing factors. We will gradually change the traditional teaching method of French in China, and explore an open and extensional teaching method, which maybe become a new teaching mode. With our in-depth research on the communicative approach, we believe that the teaching of French in Chinese universities will usher in a new teaching reform, and the teaching and education of foreign languages in China will also reach a new level of development.

#### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest

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