

Original Research Article

Research on the use of Chinese cultural symbols (such as dragons and pandas) in college students' English public speaking

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Abstract: This paper focuses on the scenario of college students' English public speaking, delving into the usage of Chinese cultural symbols therein. It specifically analyzes two highly representative Chinese cultural symbols: the dragon and the panda. Through the collection and analysis of a substantial amount of textual and video data from college students' English public speeches, this study uncovers the current status and existing issues in the utilization of these two types of cultural symbols by college students in their English speeches. Furthermore, it proposes targeted optimization strategies aimed at enhancing college students' ability to effectively disseminate Chinese culture through English public speaking.

Keywords: college students' English public speaking; Chinese cultural symbols; dragons; pandas

I. Introduction

In the context of accelerating globalization, cross-cultural communication has become increasingly frequent. English, as the international lingua franca, plays a pivotal role in cross-cultural transmission. College students, as the main force in future cross-cultural exchanges, view their English public speaking not only as a platform to showcase their linguistic proficiency and overall competence but also as a vital window for disseminating Chinese culture. Chinese cultural symbols, embodying rich cultural connotations, vividly represent Chinese culture. The rational use of Chinese cultural symbols in English public speaking can enhance the cultural appeal and attractiveness of speeches, thereby facilitating the international dissemination of Chinese culture. As highly recognizable symbols in Chinese culture, dragons and pandas respectively represent the spiritual temperament of the Chinese nation and an image of affinity and friendliness, enjoying high popularity both domestically and internationally. Therefore, investigating the use of cultural symbols such as dragons and pandas by college students in their English public speaking holds significant practical implications.

2. Literature review

2.1. Research on Chinese cultural symbols

Scholars both domestically and abroad have conducted extensive and in-depth research on Chinese cultural symbols. Foreign scholars often approach from the perspective of cross-cultural communication, exploring the acceptability and dissemination effects of Chinese cultural symbols in international contexts. For instance, certain studies have pointed out that due to cultural differences, some Chinese cultural symbols may encounter comprehension barriers in Western cultural contexts, necessitating appropriate translation and interpretation strategies. Domestic scholars, on the other hand, focus on the classification, connotation exploration, and applications in cultural heritage and innovation of Chinese cultural symbols. Some studies have meticulously categorized Chinese cultural symbols into material, behavioral, and spiritual cultural symbols, analyzing the profound cultural meanings embedded in each category.

2.2. Research on cultural dissemination in English public speaking

Existing research on cultural dissemination in English public speaking primarily centers on speakers' cultural awareness, cross-cultural communication skills, and the presentation of cultural content. Some scholars

propose that speakers should possess keen cultural insights, enabling them to select appropriate cultural content for dissemination based on diverse audiences and cultural backgrounds. Simultaneously, employing vivid and specific cultural examples in speeches can enhance their persuasiveness and appeal. However, research specifically targeting the use of particular Chinese cultural symbols in college students' English public speaking, especially in-depth analyses exemplified by dragons and pandas, remains relatively scarce.

3. Research methodology

3.1. Data collection

This study gathered relevant materials on college students' English public speaking through multiple channels. On one hand, it obtained speech videos and texts from English speech contests and English cultural festivals held at various universities. On the other hand, it utilized online platforms to search for English speech videos delivered by college students in public settings. A total of 3 effective speech samples were collected, including 4 speech samples involving the cultural symbols of dragons and pandas.

3.2. Data analysis

The collected speech samples underwent detailed analysis. Firstly, the frequency of occurrences of the dragon and panda cultural symbols in the speeches was tallied. Secondly, the interpretation methods, usage scenarios, and conveyed cultural connotations of these two cultural symbols by the speakers were analyzed. Finally, the effectiveness of the cultural symbols' utilization in the speeches was assessed, including whether they could accurately convey Chinese cultural information and elicit interest and resonance from the audience.

4. Research findings

4.1. Usage of dragon cultural symbols

4.1.1. Frequency of occurrence

Among the collected speech samples, the frequency of the dragon cultural symbol was relatively low, with only 6% of the speeches mentioning it. This may be attributed to the negative connotations associated with dragons in Western culture, leading some college students to fear potential misunderstandings among Western audiences.

4.1.2. Interpretation methods

When speakers mentioned dragons, they often adopted a literal translation approach, rendering it as "dragon." However, this translation method failed to fully capture the positive connotations of dragons in Chinese culture. A minority of speakers attempted to provide explanatory notes, emphasizing that dragons symbolize auspiciousness, authority, and power in Chinese culture, yet these explanations were often brief and lacked depth.

4.1.3. Usage scenarios

Dragon cultural symbols primarily appeared in speeches introducing traditional Chinese culture, historical stories, and expressing national pride. For example, some speakers mentioned the significance of dragons in dragon dance activities during the Spring Festival when introducing traditional Chinese festivals. Others used dragons as a metaphor to express admiration for China's long history and splendid culture.

4.2. Usage of panda cultural symbols

4.2.1. Frequency of occurrence

The frequency of the panda cultural symbol was significantly higher than that of the dragon cultural symbol, with approximately 5% of the speeches mentioning it. With its adorable image and gentle disposition, the panda has become a popular choice for college students to disseminate Chinese culture in their English speeches.

4.2.2. Interpretation methods

Speakers provided relatively rich interpretations of the panda cultural symbol. Besides a literal translation of "panda," many speakers introduced the panda's living habits, habitat, and its special status in Chinese culture, such as being China's national treasure and symbolizing peace and friendship. Some speakers further elaborated on the panda's positive role in promoting cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries through specific cases, such as China's international cooperation projects for panda conservation.

4.2.3. Usage scenarios

Panda cultural symbols were widely applied in speeches introducing China's natural ecology, wildlife conservation, and cultural exchanges with foreign countries. For instance, some speakers highlighted the panda's habitat when introducing the natural scenery of Sichuan, China. Others used pandas as a starting point to narrate stories of cultural, technological, and other exchanges and collaborations between China and countries worldwide.

4.3. Existing issues

4.3.1. Insufficient elaboration of cultural connotations

Whether it is the dragon or the panda cultural symbol, the speaker often fails to delve deeply into their cultural connotations. They mostly remain at the surface level, failing to fully explore the rich cultural significance contained in these two symbols, resulting in the audience's understanding of China's culture being neither comprehensive nor profound.

4.3.2. Inappropriate translation and interpretation strategies

The literal translation of "dragon" easily evoked negative associations among Western audiences. Regarding the panda cultural symbol, although interpretations were relatively abundant, some speakers' expressions were overly rigid and lacked natural fluency, undermining the effectiveness of cultural dissemination.

4.3.3. Limited usage scenarios

The usage scenarios of dragon and panda cultural symbols were relatively confined, predominantly focusing on traditional culture and natural ecology, and failing to adequately extend to other themes related to modern society and technological development, thereby restricting the scope and influence of cultural symbol dissemination.

5. Optimization strategies

5.1. In-depth exploration of cultural connotations

College students should enhance their learning and research on Chinese culture, gaining a profound understanding of the historical origins, cultural implications, and social values of cultural symbols such as dragons and pandas. In English speeches, they should not only introduce the superficial characteristics of cultural symbols but also delve into the cultural spirits behind them, enabling the audience to truly appreciate the charm of Chinese culture. For instance, when introducing dragon culture, they can recount the origin and evolution of dragons in Chinese mythology and the profound impact of the spiritual qualities represented by dragons, such as unity and perseverance, on the Chinese people.

5.2. Optimization of translation and interpretation strategies

To address the translation issue of the dragon cultural symbol, a transliteration plus annotation approach can be adopted, rendering it as "Long (a symbol of good luck, power, and authority in Chinese culture)," which preserves the distinctiveness of Chinese culture while avoiding the negative connotations of "dragon" in Western culture. For the interpretation of the panda cultural symbol, emphasis should be placed on natural fluency and vivid imagery in language. Storytelling and case analysis methods can be employed to enhance the attractiveness and appeal of interpretations.

5.3. Expansion of usage scenarios

College students should broaden their thinking and apply cultural symbols such as dragons and pandas to a wider range of speech topics. For example, when discussing technological innovation, they can use the pioneering and innovative spirit represented by dragons as a starting point to introduce China's rise and achievements in the technological field. When deliberating on international cooperation, they can leverage the image of pandas as friendly envoys to elucidate China's philosophy and practices in actively participating in global governance and promoting the construction of a human community with a shared future.

6. Conclusion

This study, through an in-depth analysis of the usage of dragon and panda cultural symbols in college

students' English public speaking, uncovers the existing issues in the current utilization of Chinese cultural symbols by college students in their English speeches and proposes corresponding optimization strategies. The research findings indicate that the rational use of Chinese cultural symbols in college students' English public speaking holds significant cultural dissemination value; however, their current capabilities in this regard require further enhancement. In the future, universities should strengthen the cultivation of college students' cross-cultural communication skills by offering relevant courses and training activities, guiding them to gain an in-depth understanding of Chinese culture and master effective cultural dissemination techniques. Simultaneously, college students themselves should also proactively engage in learning and practice to continuously improve their ability to disseminate Chinese culture through English public speaking, thereby making greater contributions to promoting cross-cultural exchanges and mutual learning between China and foreign countries.

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