

Research on Cultural Symbols of “Global Village” Based on Semiotics—Taking the “English Village” of Jilin Foreign Studies University as an Example

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Abstract: Jilin Foreign Studies University initiated the “Global Village”, a comprehensive language and culture experiencing and practicing center in China, which is a new exploration and attempt of the cultivation of applied talents in foreign languages. “Global Village” has more than 20 languages and cultures villages, such as China Village and English Village. Each village displays the politics, economy, history, science and technology, education, sports and other cultural symbols of each country through the miniature landscape of landmark buildings, boards and various kinds of physical objects, so that students can experience the culture of all countries in the world and can appreciate the different customs of all countries in the world without going abroad. Studying the cultural symbols of “Global Village” from the perspective of semiotics is of great significance for innovating the ideas of foreign language teaching reform and better playing the role of “global village” language laboratory.

Key words: Global Village; Semiotics; Cultural Symbols

1. Basic Connotation of Semiotics

When we understand another thing through one thing, the function of this thing is called “symbolic function”, and the thing that bears this function is called “symbol”. Symbols exist everywhere, images, words, sounds, spaces, objects, colors and so on are symbols. The cultural symbols of the English village design of Jilin Foreign Studies University, such as images, words, models, objects, audios, and videos, are all symbols. Through the creation of symbolic communication context, students’ language practice skills can be better improved. Therefore, exploring the cultural symbols of English village from the perspective of semiotics is of great benefit to language learners.

Ferdinand de Saussure, a Swiss linguist, believes that linguistic symbols can be divided into two concepts, namely, the process of encoding and decoding, namely, “signifier” and “signified”. Images, words, models, objects, audios and videos are all symbolic elements of the English Village which turns the abstract background culture, historical environment and humanistic feelings into concrete symbols, and accurately encodes these symbols. Learners and visitors interpret these symbols in combination with their own cultural literacy, The process of understanding and interpreting the cultural connotation of English speaking countries is decoding. “Signifier” refers to the visible formal part of the symbols, such as “Steam Engine” model, “London telephone booth” and “British double decker bus” model, which are all coding processes. “Signified” is the meaning part of the symbol, which is the psychological interpretation of the symbol users after contacting the “signifier”, with polysemy. For example, the signified of the “steam engine” is the beginning of the British Industrial Revolution. It has made great changes in the British social structure and production relations, and the productivity has increased rapidly, which has had a significant impact on the development of other capitalist countries and even the whole world. This is the decoding process. Therefore, the cultural symbol of the English Village, such as images, words, models and objects, have changed from simple meaning carriers to a dynamic information generation mechanism, conveying specific information to users through the symbol system, with cognitive and communicative functions.

Symbol is the basis of constructing cultural phenomenon and conveying cultural connotation. The study of cultural phenomenon is the study of symbol system. Therefore, the study of culture and semiotics cannot be separated. Studying culture from the perspective of semiotics is cultural semiotics. Tartu Moscow school believes that “what symbols represent is not things, but cultural connotations. Things can only be recognized through the cultural connotation given to them by communicative space; semiotics is the meta language of human culture, so the main research of semiotics should be culture”.

2. Design concepts and principles of English Village

The choice of cultural symbols in English villages follows the following two principles: first, the principle of representativeness. Cultural symbols are the external manifestation of national culture. We must choose the symbol that best represents national culture. For example, the decoration of the “British red double decker bus”, which originated in Britain and first entered London in 1954, is a symbol of British public transport and is regarded as a “national treasure” by Britain. The “Hollywood hill” image represents the film industry in the United States. DreamWorks, Walt Disney and other film giants are set up here. It is also used as a place for film premieres or Oscar Awards. The second is the principle of personalization. Although some cultural symbols are representative, they may be similar to the cultural symbols of other countries. Therefore, when selecting cultural symbols, pay attention to highlighting personality and avoiding similarities. For example, “hamburger and coke” were imported from Western European countries into the United States in the early stage. But at that time, the social economy in the United States was developing rapidly, and the fast and simple fast food industry was booming in the United States. That is why when people mention “hamburger and coke”, they first think of the American fast food brands “McDonald’s” and “KFC”. The fast food culture in the United States is deeply rooted in the hearts of the people, and has a profound impact on people’s social life.

3. Cultural Symbols of English Village and their Signified Meanings

The English Village selects typical cultural elements of English speaking countries to convey cultural information through vivid images, words, models and objects, which can be seen as the study of symbols, from the process of conveying the meaning of symbols to the process of perceiving the meaning of symbols, from coding to decoding.

3.1 Cultural symbols of English Village

The cultural symbol elements designed of the English village mainly introduce the cultural connotation of English speaking countries from the aspects of history, economy, scientific and technological civilization, drama, literature, festivals, sports, music, films and international friends.

3.2 An Analysis of the Signified Meaning of Cultural Symbols in English Villages

The cultural symbols of the English village are “signifier”, and the interpretation of the culture of English speaking countries through these cultural symbols is “signified”. It is under the joint action of “signifier” and “signified” that we can understand the cultural connotation accurately.

The “Alphabet Bridge” cabinets display contains six unique cultural elements - models or objects - from Britain, the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Ireland. The cabinets are the “signifier” referring to “the bridge that combines China and the West “, which is in line with the “Bridge” culture of our university; at the same time, the design and research of the cultural symbols of the English Village provide practical situations for students to learn foreign languages well, improving their critical thinking ability and cross-cultural communication ability. Another cultural symbol, “International Friends” are Henry Norman Bethune, Edgar Snow and Joseph Needham, the words and images of the three international friends are “signifier”, and “signified” meaning is the historical link between the three international friends and China. Henry Norman Bethune, a Canadian, a thoracic surgeon, came to China in 1938 and made contributions to the cause of the Chinese revolution. He is an international friend worthy of the memory and respect of the Chinese people. The “English Village” should not only cultivate students to “learn foreign languages well”, but also teach students to “be Chinese and tell Chinese stories well”, so as to achieve the purpose of cultivating students from the perspective understanding well about core socialist values.

In Semiotics, “reality” is a special and complex concept. The “signified” of the cultural symbol of the “English Village” is no longer the automatic operation of the symbol, nor the pure expression of emotion, but the result of the perception and cognition, emotion and symbol interaction of symbol users.

4. The Significance of Cultural Symbols in English Village for Foreign Language Teaching Reform

4.1 Types and Application of Cultural Symbols in English Village

The use of cultural symbol elements such as text symbols, image symbols and model objects help users or students to decode information correctly. At the same time, cultural symbols are interrelated and form a complete symbol system.

1. Application of Character symbols

The use of written symbols in the English village combines function and emotion, and coordinates with other visual symbols in the venue. For example, the wall of “Famous People’s Sayings” includes the classical sayings of 20 famous people such as famous philosophers, linguists, litterateurs and scientists from English speaking countries, which is very enlightening. The symbol design of the 20 famous sayings is not displayed according to the traditional English writing style, but uses a variety of fonts, such as Chinese clerical script, regular script, and Chinese regular script, which not only presents the aesthetic feeling, but also implies the cultural diversity of English speaking countries. For another example, the cultural symbols of the national names of six English speaking countries and representative buildings are displayed on the wall at the entrance of the venue. The design of the country names is displayed in the form of Relief, which makes the information to be expressed have a special expressiveness and artistry. Most of the characters and symbols of the English Village venues are displayed in traditional forms with images. Such as the history of the Industrial Revolution, a brief introduction to Churchill manor, a brief introduction to international friends, a brief introduction to the national flowers, etc., all highlight the text content information and image content and playing an auxiliary role. Different styles of text symbols in English Village show rich cultural connotations. Symbol users decode information according to their own cultural literacy and experience its rich emotional content.

2. Application of Image symbols

Compared with the text symbols, the image is more intuitive, so the English Village uses a large number of image symbols to introduce the culture of English speaking countries, that is, to construct the signifier based on the visual similarity of the image. For example, the image of Queen Elizabeth I of England, seeing this image symbol, naturally reminds people of the great achievements of Queen Elizabeth I in her life. During her reign, England became one of the most powerful countries in Europe, and English culture reached its peak, known as the “Golden Age”. Seeing the image of Kobe Bryant, a famous professional basketball player, reminds people of his superb skills, hard work and brilliant achievements in his life.

3. Application of Model and Object symbols

Compared with text symbols and image symbols, models and objects are more vivid and interesting, express cultural content more quickly and intuitively, and can easily attract the attention of symbol users. Therefore, a large number of models and object symbols are used in English village. Such as Churchill manor model, steam engine model, British cottage model, Big Ben model, etc., these are all scaled back by the designer, which truly presents the cultural connotations of English speaking countries such as history, economy, civilization and

architecture, and fully embodies the culture immersion teaching.

4.2 The Significance of Foreign Language Teaching Reform

The design of cultural symbols of English Village, from the perspective of teachers, skillfully combines teaching and education; from the perspective of students, the ingenious combination of self-study and practice has given a new idea and mode of teacher-student interaction in foreign language teaching. How to use and develop the cultural resources of English village more scientifically and highlight the functions of teaching, self-study, education and practice is the top priority of the connotation construction of English village.

1. Enlightenment of Teachers' Teaching Mode

English classroom teaching has gradually shifted from the teaching of traditional language knowledge and skills to the cultivation of students' ability to acquire knowledge and use language. In the process of teaching in the English village, teachers will try a new teaching mode of "theory plus experiment or immersive practice", according to the teaching content, combined with the cultural symbols of the English village, establish the cultural theme for students, and design a language experiment project to realize the combination of theory and practice, and the integration of language and culture. The promotion of "theory plus experiment or immersive practice" teaching mode can not only improve the connotation construction of English village, but also better play the role of English Village Language and culture laboratory.

2. Significance of Students' Practical Activities

The biggest goal of the transformation of teachers' teaching mode is to improve students' language communicative ability. English Village creates effective and authentic language learning situations for students, helps students experience culture when learning language, edifies language in the experience of culture, and plays a positive role in promoting the improvement of language communicative ability. Practical teaching is an important link and way of education and teaching. Its purpose is to help students further improve their comprehensive language ability, shape their personality and will, stimulate their potential and cultivate their innovative consciousness.

Conclusion: The English Village has established the construction idea of "taking the cultural atmosphere as the platform and the language practice as the core". The design of cultural symbols has better realized the multi-level and multi modular experimental teaching system of "cultural edification - language practice - comprehensive application". The study of various cultural symbols in the English Village provides a theoretical basis for the English village to continue to strengthen the connotation construction, and provides new teaching methods for the country and society to cultivate more foreign language professionals who are proficient in foreign language, literature and culture.

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