

Teaching Linguistics to Supplement the Implementation of the Five Cs

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Abstract

I argue that linguistics courses in a language program in an institution of higher education can supplement the implementation of the ACTFL five Cs, because of the unique status of linguistics as a bridge course between language classes and other content courses. Especially for less commonly taught languages, the greater linguistic distance and cultural distance make it more difficult to achieve the goals of the five Cs. Linguistics courses can help students perform better in the relevant goal areas using the target language. Although the five Cs are to be assessed and achieved in the target language, linguistics courses nonetheless contain a good amount of data and a component of language learning. Such courses deal with conceptual understanding and critical thinking more effectively, as supported by course evaluation data and topics covered in such linguistics courses.

Introduction

In this article, I will argue that introductory linguistics courses can be used as an effective supplement for enhancing the outcomes of learning goals related to the five Cs proposed by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), especially four of them, i.e. Communication, Cultures, Connections, and Comparisons. This study is inspired by ACTFL's report on the implementation of the standards, titled "A Decade of Foreign Language Standards: Influence, Impact and Future Directions" published in 2011 (also see Abbott & Phillips 2011 in references). I will refer to this report as "the ACTFL report (2011)" throughout this article.

The national standards, often referred to as the ACTFL five Cs, were first published in 1996. Now in 2015 these standards have

just been refreshed and made available as the “World-readiness Standards for Learning Languages”. The five Cs include Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons and Communities. Here we focus on the following four Cs. The latest definitions are:

COMMUNICATION: communicate effectively in more than one language in order to function in a variety of situations and for multiple purposes.

CULTURES: interact with cultural competence and understanding.

CONNECTIONS: Connect with other disciplines and acquire information and diverse perspectives in order to use the language to function in academic and career-related situations.

COMPARISONS: Develop insight into the nature of language and culture in order to interact with cultural competence.

After the release of these standards, they quickly became important guidelines for language programs throughout the US. But how are these standards effectively implemented?

A Critical Reading of the ACTFL Report (2011)

The ACTFL report (2011) is a project to assess the effect of the Standards on language teaching and learning. The project surveyed 1299 language teachers. The respondents teach courses in elementary, middle, and high schools and also postsecondary/undergraduate and post-undergraduate programs. Altogether there are 397 respondents for the “Postsecondary/Undergraduate” category and 67 from the “Post Undergraduate” category. There might be overlaps between categories. If we assume that the majority of these 464 respondents teach at institutions of higher education, then the data in this report can be very representative of how the five Cs are implemented in these higher education programs. The following figures show how the five Cs are implemented in all language courses:

Rank of emphasis, 5 = most emphasis (the ACTFL report 2011, p. 26)

#1: Communication (5: 79%)

#2: Cultures (5: 22%)

#3: Comparisons (5: 12%)

#4: Connections (5: 11%)

#5: Communities (5: 8%)

It can be seen that only Communication has been well implemented, while all the other four Cs have been much less taught. Among the four less emphasized categories, Cultures is not as difficult to teach as Comparisons, Connections, and Communities. The ACTFL report (2011) cites some respondents explaining why Cultures is the easiest goal area. Among these reasons are, “I am well traveled/fascinated with cultures myself/have lived abroad/am a native speaker,” “It’s embedded in everything/easy to embed with communication/language instruction”, and “Students are interested in cultures.” (p. 27).

The concept of “culture” can be approached from an intuitive perspective, but it is one of the most difficult subjects to deal with if one wishes to go beyond the mundane observations of snippets of everyday culture and to explore cultural differences in depth. Thus the kind of reasons listed above is not rigorous enough, and actually common cultural stereotypes, misconceptions, and misunderstandings are part of what cultures are on the superficial level. Judging by the quoted responses above, Cultures is easy to teach only if the instructor does not engage students in critical discussions of cultures guided by a scientific methodology.

With regard to why Connections is the most difficult goal area, the report suggests that this is because it needs interdisciplinary perspectives and a higher level of competence in the target language or the second language (L2). (p. 28) Comparisons is less well implemented because it is difficult to achieve this goal in the target language, many students are not familiar with their own language, and students are not ready to talk about their own cultures in more technical terms, unless they have taken a course in that field. (p. 28).

Therefore to sum up the main points of the ACTFL report (2011), among the five Cs, Comparisons and Connections are among the most difficult to teach. If Cultures is to be taught with rigor, it is also a difficult area. Although Communities is the least well implemented, I will not discuss it in this article because implementing Communities goes well beyond the confines of linguistics courses. In the ACTFL report (2011), the survey does not distinguish among language programs. But the implementation of the Standards is very likely challenging to different languages in different ways, especially to LCTLs.

Of the reasons listed above for why certain standards are more difficult to teach is the fact that students' L2 competence is lacking. This is why some instructors responded by saying, "Culture, Just explain it" (p. 27), or "Connections—I have to create and translate nearly everything I do, which is 'sooo' time-consuming." (p. 29) In this respect, many LCTLs are among the most difficult languages for English speakers. It takes a much longer time of intensive studies to achieve the advanced level of proficiency. According to a popular ranking created by the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) to show roughly how much time is needed for an English speaker to achieve general professional proficiency in both speaking and writing, Category I languages, e.g. French and Spanish, only require 23-24 weeks, or 575-600 hours of studying, while Category V languages, e.g. Arabic, Chinese, Japanese and Korean, require at least 88 weeks or 2200 hours of studying. Many LCTLs, e.g. Albanian, Burmese, Turkish, Amharic, Zulu, Xhosa, belong to Category IV, which requires 44 weeks or 1100 hours of studying. Thus after the same number of hours of studying, for languages of Categories IV and V, students' level of proficiency cannot compare to the level that can be reached by students of Category I languages. For example, in order to achieve the advanced level of proficiency in the Chinese language, students should spend about twice as much time studying in beginning and intermediate Chinese language classes, in comparison to students of Category I languages. But such a dedication of time to studying Chinese cannot be afforded by all schools and students. In many Chinese programs students spend roughly the same amount of time as students of Category I language

do, and consequently most of these students of Chinese cannot reach the advanced level after four years of studies. Thus, it can be argued that among the five Cs, even Communication can be a difficult area to implement for LCTLs.

Discussions of Cultures, Comparisons and Connections can be better done when students have reached a higher level of proficiency. The effectiveness of the implementation of these three Cs is relative to students' level of linguistic proficiency. Thus due to the greater linguistic distance between many LCTLs and English, the implementation of the five Cs is inevitably more difficult in classes of LCTLs.

Apart from the greater linguistic distance, there is also a greater cultural distance between these LCTLs and English. The very fact that these languages are not taught very often is equal to saying that most American students are not familiar with these languages and cultures. Furthermore, many of such cultures are so different from the American culture that common stereotypes, misconceptions, and misunderstandings of these cultures are internalized by many students without questioning their validity. Such a situation especially calls for a more rigorous implementation of the Cultures and Comparisons standards. In most language classes, however, such discussions cannot be carried out with much rigor or in depth.

Thus, although the five Cs have been implemented in language programs throughout the US for almost two decades now, the effectiveness of Cultures, Comparisons, and Connections is still far less than that of Communication. This problem is especially urgent for LCTLs, due to the greater linguistic distance and cultural distance between these languages and English. In fact even Communication can be difficult for these LCTLs.

The question to ask now is: given the fact that students' linguistic proficiency in LCTLs is generally not as well-developed compared to commonly taught languages if the same amount of time is spent on learning the target language, what can language programs

of LCTLs do in order to enhance students' performances in terms of the five Cs? I argue that linguistics courses can be used as an effective supplement to the implementation of the five Cs.

First, although the five Cs should be assessed in the target language only, we do see that in many classrooms explanations in English can help students understand certain important perspectives that are beyond their level of proficiency. For example, as shown by the ACTFL report (2011), some instructors do sometimes resort to English to explain cultural practices and perspectives. For lower-level language classes, appropriate use of English can therefore be helpful. However it is a good pedagogical practice to use as little English as possible in language classes. Instructors can resolve this dilemma by reserving explanations regarding the structure of the language, culture, and connections with other disciplines to linguistics courses. Such knowledge in linguistics not only can train students to be more critical learners of L2, but also prepare them with necessary background knowledge to tackle authentic materials in L2 concerning cultures, connections, and comparisons.

Second, linguistics is unique in that there is a good amount of language learning involved in talking about languages from a technical perspective. For one thing, linguistic research is based on empirical data, and in the process of analyzing such data students are learning L2 at the same time. Furthermore, within a language program, linguistics courses can be taught as a language specific course, e.g. Chinese linguistics, Arabic linguistics, etc., and such language-specific linguistics courses generally are more descriptive than theoretical. Thus the focus is on adequate and accurate analyses of linguistic data. Compared to other courses that have components in the L2 culture, e.g. political science, linguistics situates nicely between these so-called content courses and the traditional language courses. In essence, linguistics within a language program is a bridge course with both a language-learning component and a critical thinking component.

Therefore in order to better implement the five Cs in classes of LCTLs, linguistics courses can be used as a supplement, because

such courses not only contain a good amount of language learning but also train students in critical thinking and prepare them to tackle authentic materials in cultures, connections, and comparisons. Although the five Cs should be assessed and achieved in the target language, linguistics courses nonetheless can be used to enhance such goals, especially for LCTLs that are facing more instructional challenges. Linguistics courses act as a bridge course to help connect language learning and other courses. In the next section, I present data from my linguistics classes to show how they can be related to the implementation of the five Cs.

Analyses of Course Evaluation Data

Linguistics classes are becoming popular among language programs in many universities. There are two different ways of teaching linguistics in a language program. On the one hand, the course can focus on linguistic theories based upon data from the target language. Such a course may benefit majors in linguistics more than language students who have a more practical goal. On the other hand, the course can be more about the language and culture per se, but approach these topics by resorting to the technical concepts and tools used extensively in linguistics research, e.g. hypothesis testing and experimental methods. Although linguistics majors can still benefit from such a course by broadening their empirical knowledge of different languages, students in a language program can arguably benefit more here. Therefore the second way of teaching linguistics fits better within a language program. This is also how the Chinese linguistics courses are taught in my institution.

I have taught two linguistics courses, one on the structure and current use of the Chinese language, and the other on the historical development of the language. The enrollment numbers have been growing over the past five years. I have also taught Chinese language courses on various levels. The course evaluation data from all of my courses will be used here to show the effectiveness of the linguistics courses as a supplement to the implementation of the five Cs.

The data for the linguistics courses span five years from 2010-2015, and as shown in Table 1, of the 113 students enrolled in linguistics classes, 102 completed the course evaluation forms on line, i.e. a response rate of 90.27%. Two students in the linguistics classes had not studied Chinese before, but all the other students in the linguistics classes had taken some Chinese courses in our program before taking the linguistics course.

Table 1. Numbers of students and response rates

| Class types | Enrollments | Respondents | Response rates |
|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| Beginning | 355 | 294 | 82.82% |
| Int-Mid/High | 34 | 31 | 91.18% |
| Linguistics | 113 | 102 | 90.27% |

I put the language courses in my data into two categories: Beginning vs. Intermediate-Mid and High (“Int-Mid/High” for short), with an aim to see whether students’ level of proficiency affects their evaluation of the class in the relevant aspects. In our program, the first year is the novice level. The second and third-year classes are all considered intermediate. This is due to two reasons. First it takes a longer time for students of Chinese to reach the advanced level. Second, the contact hours are reduced after the second year of classes. Therefore most of our students in the first semester of the fourth year would be between the ACTFL intermediate high and advanced low levels. The data reported here from the Beginning Chinese classes include both semesters in the first year. The data from Int-Mid/High are from third-year classes and a reading class in the first semester of the fourth year. I do not have data from the second year or other classes in the fourth year. But the data I have here represent two clearly distinct levels of linguistic proficiency for effective comparisons. For the Beginning Chinese courses, the data span five years from 2009-2014, and as shown in Table 1, of the 355 students enrolled, 294 completed the evaluations, i.e. a response rate of 82.82%. For the Int-Mid/High Chinese courses, I only have one year of data from 2014-2015. Of the 34 students enrolled, 31 completed the evaluations, i.e. a response rate of 91.18%.

For all of these courses, we use the same course evaluation forms, which students can fill out on line, and the data are then automatically summarized and made available to the instructors. To see the effectiveness with regard to the implementation of the five Cs, I select two questions. As shown in Figure 1, Question 1 (or Q1 for short) is actually the third question or sometimes the second question on the survey. But I will call it “Question 1” here. It specifically asks “Overall, how would you rate your level of intellectual challenge in the course?” Students rate the course on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being “not at all challenged” and 5 being “very challenged”. As shown in Figure 2, Question 2 (Q2) is actually the sixth or sometimes the fifth question on the evaluation form, and it asks about the level of “Increased conceptual understanding and/or critical thinking”. Students rate the course on a scale from 1 being “not at all” to 5 being “a great deal”; but the students have the option of not answering the question, or indicating that this question is either “not applicable” or they have “no opinion”.

3. Overall, how would you rate your level of intellectual challenge in the course?

[117]

| | Number Responses | Percent | |
|--|------------------|-------------|----------------------------|
| | | All | Valid Percent ¹ |
| Answered: | 20 | 100% | |
| Unanswered: | 0 | 0% | |
| (1) Not at all challenged [1] | 0 | 0% | 0% |
| (2) [2] | 0 | 0% | 0% |
| (3) [3] | 1 | 5% | 5% |
| (4) [4] | 5 | 25% | 25% |
| (5) Very challenged [5] | 14 | 70% | 70% |
| Mean of student responses: ** | 4.7 | | |
| Standard deviation of student responses: **** | 0.6 | | |

Figure 1. Question 1 and answer scale

6. Increased conceptual understanding and/or critical thinking.

[129]

| | Number Responses | Percent | |
|--|------------------|-------------|----------------------------|
| | | All | Valid Percent ¹ |
| Answered: | 20 | 100% | |
| Unanswered: | 0 | 0% | |
| (1) Not at all [1] | 0 | 0% | 0% |
| (2) [2] | 0 | 0% | 0% |
| (3) [3] | 3 | 15% | 17% |
| (4) [4] | 7 | 35% | 39% |
| (5) A great deal [5] | 8 | 40% | 44% |
| Not applicable / No opinion [x] | 2 | 10% | -- |
| Mean of student responses: ** | 4.3 | | |
| Standard deviation of student responses: **** | 0.7 | | |

Figure 2. Question 2 and answer scale

How can we use these two questions to relate to the five Cs? For Question 1, a language course may very well be challenging if it is a Category V language. On the other hand, a content course, e.g. calculus, may very well be less challenging if the instructor chooses to make the course a very easy one. Therefore Question 1 is really just an indication of the rigor of the requirements of the class. In principle, if the rating of Question 1 is rather high, it is to be expected that the students learned a lot of content in the class as well. For Question 2, since it addresses conceptual understanding and/or critical thinking, it is particularly pertinent to the five Cs if it is a language class, or if it is a class with a language-learning component such as a linguistics course. In principle if a language class implements the five Cs well, we would expect to see students rate the class higher in this question. On the other hand, if a linguistics class is taught from a language specific perspective (i.e. the second way of teaching as mentioned above) a higher rating in this question can show, to a certain extent, that such courses can supplement the teaching goals of the five Cs, in combination with an examination of the topics covered in these courses.

Now let's first examine the means and standard deviations of the ratings for these two questions, as shown in Table 2 and Figure 3. Note that in Figure 1 and Figure 2, the values of means and standard deviations are rounded off to one decimal place. But here I recalculated all the numbers and rounded the numbers off to two decimal places.

Table 2. Means and standard deviations of ratings

| Class Types | Question 1 | | Question 2 | |
|--------------|------------|-------|------------|-------|
| | Mean | StDev | Mean | StDev |
| Beginning | 4.38 | 0.76 | 4.23 | 0.81 |
| Int-Mid/High | 4.23 | 0.91 | 3.93 | 1.05 |
| Linguistics | 4.00 | 0.83 | 4.05 | 1.00 |

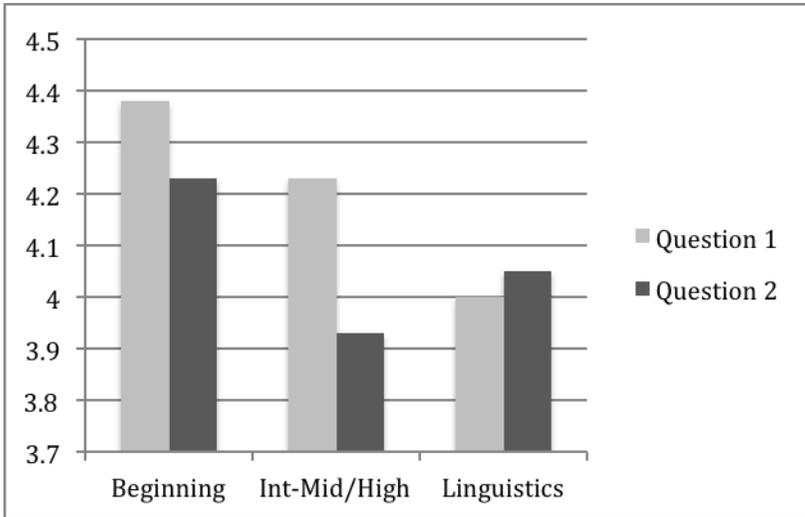


Figure 3. Means of ratings

As shown in Table 2 and corresponding chart in Figure 3, a general observation of the data suggests that for the language courses, the means of Q1 are much higher than the means of Q2, i.e. 4.38 vs. 4.23 for Beginning Chinese and 4.23 vs. 3.93 for Int-Mid/High, while the mean of the rating for Q2 is higher than Q1 for linguistics classes, i.e. 4.05 vs. 4.00. This is a very interesting result. Q1 indicates how demanding the course is, and Q2 indicates how much content students learned. One would reasonably expect a higher Q1 rating to be correlated with a comparable Q2 rating. But here we see that in the language courses the Q1 ratings are much higher than the Q2 ratings. Thus it suggests that in most of the language classes the amount of “content” is lower than non-language classes, presumably due to limitations of students’ linguistic proficiency levels. On the other hand, the higher rating for Q2 compared with a lower rating for Q1 in the case of the linguistics classes can show that the amount of content that students learned in the class is either proportional or much higher than what is expected. Another interesting trend in Table 2 is that the language classes are generally regarded as more challenging than the linguistics classes, as shown by the Q1 ratings. This is related to one of the two properties of LCTLs, i.e. greater linguistic distance. Because languages such as Chinese, among the

Category V languages, are more difficult for English speakers, classes are generally viewed as more challenging. In comparison, the linguistics courses are rated as less challenging, and this is partially related to the use of English as the language of instruction in these linguistics classes. But it is more likely the case that in language classes students learn by using the target language while instructors try to avoid too much explaining. Thus it can be very difficult for some students to understand what they are doing. On the other hand, especially for these confused students, their confusion can be cleared in linguistics classes because linguistic facts and usage are discussed with a rigorous methodology.

Moreover, the rating for Q2 in the Int-Mid/High language classes is the lowest among the three groups of classes, i.e. 3.93 vs. 4.23 and 4.05. There are several possible explanations here. First, as Table 1 shows, the number of respondents is the smallest for Int-Mid/High. Second, the Int-Mid/High students are from different levels of classes, i.e. third-year and fourth-year classes, and the third-year class is a comprehensive class, while the fourth year class I teach focuses on reading. Therefore there is less homogeneity in this Int-Mid/High group. The effect of these two factors can be seen by the value of the standard deviation for Q2 of Int-Mid/High, i.e. 1.05, which is the highest among the three categories. Another factor could be due to the selection of the materials and the lack of higher linguistic proficiency. Because of the general lower proficiency level for Category V language learners achieved within the same amount of time as Category I language learners, the course materials tend to be less conceptually or linguistically challenging. Consequently the rigor of argumentation and level of critical thinking are inevitably compromised. On the other hand, because of students' general lack of higher level proficiency, the depth at which students can engage with the course materials is also compromised, leading to further lower rating of Q2. In comparison, the higher rating of this question for Beginning Chinese classes might be due to a lower expectation from beginning students. They know very little about the Chinese language to begin with and thus to some extent progress is perceived to be greater than in higher-level classes.

Therefore by looking at the data in Table 2 and Figure 3, we may conclude that linguistic courses are generally regarded by students as less demanding but containing more “content” to train students in the important aspect of conceptual understanding and critical thinking.

Now let’s look deeper into the data. Table 3 shows the number of respondents for each scale point in Q1 and Q2. The ratings of 4 and 5, as underlined in Table 3, are then taken to calculate the percentages of higher ratings for Q1 and Q2 respectively, as shown in Table 4. The total numbers of students who gave ratings of 4 or 5 are shown in brackets following the percentage numbers. For total number of respondents, please refer to Table 1. For Q2, the percentages of “Not applicable/No opinion” are also given in the fourth column labeled as “N/A”. A small number of students, i.e. 3 from the linguistics classes (2.94%) and 4 from the Beginning Chinese classes (1.36%) skipped Q2. I interpret this as “Not applicable/No opinion”. Figure 4 shows the contrast among the three types of classes in terms of the percentages of higher ratings. Figure 5 shows the contrast of percentages of the “Not applicable/No opinion” answers.

Table 3. Numbers of respondents for each rating

| Class types | Ratings of Question 1 | | | | | Ratings of Question 2 | | | | | |
|--------------|-----------------------|-----|-----|------------|------------|-----------------------|-----|-----|-----------|------------|-------|
| | [1] | [2] | [3] | [4] | [5] | [1] | [2] | [3] | [4] | [5] | “N/A” |
| Beginning | 1 | 4 | 32 | <u>103</u> | <u>154</u> | 0 | 4 | 52 | <u>92</u> | <u>123</u> | 23 |
| Int-Mid/High | 1 | 0 | 4 | <u>12</u> | <u>14</u> | 1 | 1 | 7 | <u>8</u> | <u>10</u> | 4 |
| Linguistics | 1 | 1 | 28 | <u>43</u> | <u>29</u> | 2 | 5 | 15 | <u>40</u> | <u>36</u> | 4 |

Table 4. Higher ratings and “No Opinion/Not Applicable”

| Class types | Q1 rated 4 or 5 | Q2 rated 4 or 5 | Q2 “N/A” |
|--------------------|------------------------|------------------------|-----------------|
| Beginning | 87.41% (257) | 73.13% (215) | 7.8% (23) |
| Int-Mid/High | 83.87% (26) | 58.06% (18) | 12.90% (4) |
| Linguistics | 70.59% (72) | 74.51% (76) | 3.92% (4) |

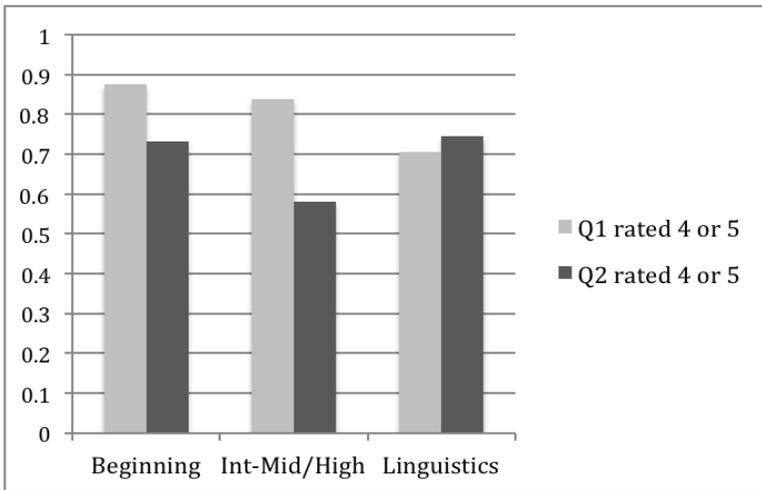


Figure 4. Percentages of higher ratings for Q1 and Q2

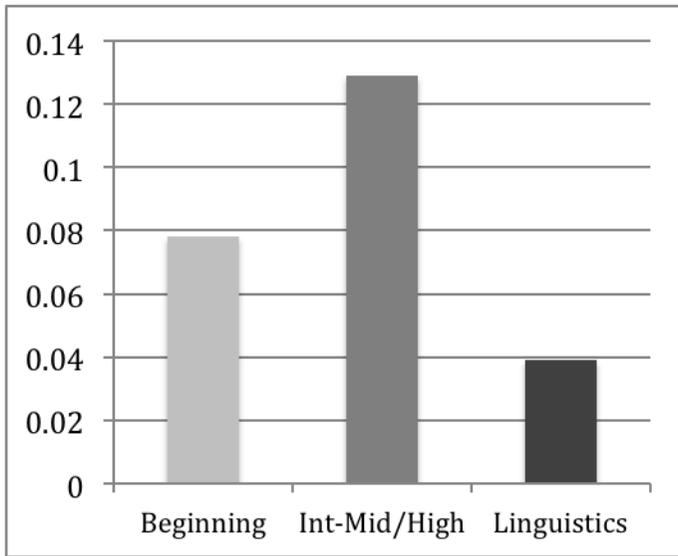


Figure 5. Percentages of “Not applicable/No Opinion” answers

Table 4 and Figure 4 show that in the language classes, the percentage of higher ratings for Q1 is higher than that for Q2. For example, in Beginning Chinese class, the percentage of higher ratings for Q1 is 87.41% while it is only 73.13% for Q2. The same trend is observed for Int-Mid/High, with 83.87% for Q1 and 58.06% for Q2. In contrast, the situation is reversed in the linguistics courses. The percentage of higher rating for Q2 is higher than Q1, i.e. 74.51% for Q2 vs. 70.59% for Q1. If we calculate the gap between the percentages for Q1 and Q2 in each type of class, we see that the gap is the smallest for the linguistics courses, i.e. 3.92%, and the largest for the Int-Mid/High language classes, i.e. 25.81%, and the Beginning Chinese classes are in the middle with a gap number 14.28%. This can be easily seen in Figure 4. Moreover we notice that the Int-Mid/High classes received the lowest percentage of higher ratings for Q2, while the percentages are roughly the same for the other two types of classes. The same factors mentioned above for the low value of the mean of Q2 ratings in Int-Mid/High classes in Table 2 are possibly relevant here.

Now let's look at the percentage for "Not applicable/No opinion". The percentage for Int-Mid/High is the highest at 12.90%, and the percentage for the linguistics classes is the lowest at 3.92%, while the percentage for Beginning Chinese is 7.80%, i.e. twice as high as that of the linguistics classes. This is very interesting, because students do not have to choose "No Opinion", or "Not Applicable", or even skip the questions. However by choosing these options, students indicate that the course did not teach them any theories or critical thinking skills. Apparently by taking the reverse of these percentages, we can conclude that the students feel that the linguistics courses did the best job to teach students in terms of conceptual understanding and critical thinking.

Note that the ratings of Q2 are related to the goal areas of Cultures, Connections, and Comparisons in the language classes. Thus the course evaluation data suggest that students feel linguistics courses did better in teaching them the three Cs just mentioned above.

It is worth noting that the five Cs are to be assessed in the target language but not in English. This is why I propose that linguistics courses can help the language classes in terms of the implementations of the five Cs. Moreover, there is indeed a good amount of language learning even in linguistics classes, as I have pointed out before. For one thing the linguistic data and facts are useful language learning materials. Thus linguistics is a bridge course between other types of classes taught in English and the traditional language courses.

In fact on the course evaluation form for my linguistics course in the Fall semester of 2010, a question added specifically for language courses was present. The question asks if the "quality and quantity of target language in class are appropriate". Students rate the class on a scale from 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest. As shown in Table 5, the response rate for this question in the linguistics class is 87.5%, i.e. 7 of the 8 enrolled. The mean of the ratings is 4.29. In comparison, the means of this question in the course evaluation data from the language courses range from 4.15 to 4.8. Thus it shows that

students feel that there is indeed language learning in linguistics classes.

Table 5. Added question in a linguistics class

| Class types | Response rate | Ratings of Added Question | | | | | Mean | StDev |
|-------------|---------------|---------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|-------|
| | | [1] | [2] | [3] | [4] | [5] | | |
| Linguistics | 87.5% (7/8) | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 4.29 | 0.88 |

Now let me summarize the analyses in this section. The data show that students think that linguistics courses are better at training them in conceptual understanding and critical thinking, and these courses are less demanding than the language courses, especially in a program of Category V languages. One thing that we need to look at is where the conceptual understanding and critical thinking skills are taught in these linguistics courses and how they can supplement the implementation of the five Cs in language classes, especially Cultures, Comparisons, and Connections. An examination of the topics that can be covered in these courses is thus needed.

Sample Topics in a Linguistics Course

In this section, I will present a few topics from my linguistics classes to show how linguistics topics can help students learn the target language better in terms of Communication, Cultures, Comparisons, and Connections.

Although I did not discuss Communication extensively above, it is apparent that the core areas of linguistics, (phonetics/phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics) not only train students in terms of conceptual understanding and critical thinking, but also help students learn the target language better. In language classes, all of these aspects of the target language are mentioned and taught, but not in any adequate detail, since the focus is on the communicative tasks. Thus an extensive and in-depth analysis of these important aspects of the sounds and grammar can be very beneficial to students' acquisition of

the target language, thus promoting the achievement of the learning outcomes related to Communication.

Now let's take a look at topics related to Cultures, which is essentially a relational notion, i.e. between the practices/products and the perspectives of the cultures. Such phenomena are easily enumerated in each language, and instructors can easily give some examples in their language classes. However, in order to achieve a deeper understanding of such knowledge, a more rigorous argument is needed. In my linguistics classes, we look at various linguistic features of Chinese and their connections to various social variables. Topics include language and identity (Zhang 2005), gender (Chan 2000), social stratification (Labov 1966), kinship relations (Huang & Jia 2000) and terms of address (Qin 2008), etc. The relevant papers are mostly sociolinguistics research papers done with careful data collection, statistical analysis and argumentation. As an example, let me briefly discuss rhotacization in Chinese and the relevant social variables.

One of the key phonological features of Modern Standard Chinese is the use of the *-er* suffix. For example, the word *huā* ('flower') can be optionally pronounced as *huār* by many speakers from the north. However this kind of rhotacization is rare in the speech of southern speakers. Therefore for learners of the Chinese language, this phonological phenomenon is a fascinating one. In my linguistics classes, we first learn about the rules of rhotacization in the section on phonology. Such rules are hardly touched upon in traditional language courses, and consequently many students find it confusing as to how to pronounce the rhotacized versions of certain syllables, and their communicative competence is thus affected. By learning these rules with the help of phonetic symbols and sufficient examples, students will have a clear picture of the sounds of rhotacized syllables. On the other hand, we also introduce the connection of this linguistic feature with different social variables based upon a study by Zhang (2005). She interviewed native speakers of Beijing Mandarin and analyzed their use of the *-er* suffix in daily life, but in different milieux, e.g. talking to state-owned company colleagues, or conversing with colleagues in foreign companies. She

discover that the *-er* suffix tends to be used more often when people talk with other native speakers of Beijing Mandarin if they work in state-owned companies, but less often when people talk with native speakers of Chinese from other places or foreigners when they work in international companies. Her interpretation of such data is that the *-er* suffix is correlated with social identity, whether being a local Beijing native, or being a more cosmopolitan citizen. By using more *-er* sounds, the native Beijing speakers are constructing a distinctive local identity, while by using fewer *-er* sounds, other Beijing speakers are constructing a cosmopolitan identity.

Cultures and Comparisons are closely related goal areas, and the comparisons involve both linguistic features and cultural aspects. It goes without saying that the core areas of linguistics mentioned above are straightforwardly related to comparisons between the learners' native language (e.g. English or Spanish in the US context) and the target language. Apart from the linguistic comparisons, students are usually very interested in how language and culture influence each other. This is usually started by popular folklores about linguistic relativity (Whorf 1940). Almost every student has heard of the large number of words for snow in the Inuit languages. However this popular myth has been definitively debunked by Pullum (1991). There are not as many words for snow as the common myth claims. This just shows how myth-laden when it comes to topics such as language and culture can be. This is also one of the areas where a cursory remark in a language class would not suffice.

In my Chinese linguistics classes, we discuss topics such as the nature of the Chinese writing system and its philosophical implications (DeFrancis 1984; Hansen 1993; Dong 2014, pp. 180-182), the processing of Chinese characters in the brain and the relation between reading and the hemispheric lateralization of brain function (Tzeng et al. 1979, Coney 1998, Tan 2000, Tivassoli & Han 2002), counterfactual thinking (Bloom 1981, 1984; Au 1983, 1984; Yeh & Gentner 2005), etc. Chinese characters are probably one of the most fascinating aspects about the Chinese language for learners, and it is also one of the most often misunderstood topics by both

native speakers and learners of the language. DeFrancis (1984) argued against the common myth that the Chinese writing system is ideographic. By showing how the majority of Chinese characters have phonetic cues built in and how there has never been a fully functional purely ideographic writing system throughout human history anywhere, DeFrancis (1984) helps students of the Chinese language correctly compare the English alphabetical writing with the Chinese writing system.

On the other hand, although the English alphabet and the Chinese characters share some common features, the way these two writing systems affect reading is quite different. Since Tzeng et al. (1979), various psycholinguistic experiments have been carried out by researchers in both linguistics and psychology. The current state of the research seems to suggest that reading Chinese characters involves the right hemisphere of the brain more than alphabetical reading, although both types of readings involve the left hemisphere.

Perhaps the most famous debate of linguistic relativity in the Chinese context is Bloom's (1981, 1984) claim that because the Chinese language lacks grammatical devices for encoding counterfactuality, Chinese speakers are therefore lacking in their strength of hypothetical thinking. This claim is a typical instance of the common myth that if you speak a different language, you have a different brain and worldview as well. However, many researchers have shown that there are various linguistic devices to encode counterfactuality in Chinese and furthermore, as Yeh & Gentner's (2005) experiments show, Chinese speakers are as good as English speakers at hypothetical thinking.

Admittedly topics of linguistic relativity are fascinating, but such topics are also prone to unsound judgments if not approached from a rigorous scientific perspective. Therefore it is very difficult for language instructors to engage students in such discussions in a language classroom, given the priority of instruction being communicative tasks, which limits the use of English in the classroom. Therefore it is necessary to engage students in other ways e.g. in a linguistics class, in order to lead students to make correct

comparisons, and this will also prepare students to tackle such problems by using the target language once their linguistic proficiency is at a much higher level.

In terms of Connections, students need to reinforce, further or acquire information through using the foreign language. In the sample topics mentioned above, students who have taken psychology classes would reinforce their knowledge in the experimental methods and statistical analysis used in most social sciences. Other topics I have looked into for my linguistics classes include marketing and branding strategies of American companies in China, with a special focus on the influence of the Chinese writing system on translations of brand names (Zhang & Schmitt 2004, Kosdrosky 2008), language policy and contemporary politics in China (Eng 2010), etc. Students with different majors can use the knowledge they have acquired in other classes to understand these interdisciplinary topics.

It is true that the implementation of the five Cs should be assessed in the target language. But linguistics courses, acting as a bridge between language courses and traditional content courses, can nonetheless be beneficial to the implementation of the five Cs in language classes. Take connections as an example. The research papers mentioned above not only contain a good amount of linguistic data, but also help students draw the connections. Thus when students' proficiency levels are high enough to tackle such problems by using the target language, they are already equipped with certain background information. Even when students' proficiency levels are low, such knowledge as gained in linguistics courses can be very beneficial to students, since we definitely want students to learn the language and the culture right from the beginning.

Conclusion

As I have pointed out earlier, there are two approaches to teaching linguistics in a language program. If we teach these linguistics courses as an essential component in the language program, they can be very useful to enhance the learning outcomes of the instruction with respect to the ACTFL five Cs, especially for

LCTLs due to the greater linguistic distance and cultural distance. Linguistics courses are a bridge between language classes and content courses because linguistics courses not only contain a good amount of linguistic data and a language-learning component, but also train students in conceptual understanding and critical thinking to prepare them to tackle such materials by using the target language. Thus linguistics can be an important supplement to the implementation of the five Cs, especially Communication, Cultures, Comparisons, and Connections, in language classes. Therefore by adding a linguistics course in a language program, we may achieve better results with respect to the five Cs.

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