

About Harmony and Networks? – The Problem of Intercultural Competence in the Field of Chinese as a Second Language

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Abstract

The linguistic turn in the humanities and subsequent pragmatic turn in the study of language led to the communicative turn in the field of language teaching and learning in the 1970s. In course of that and especially since the intercultural turn in the 1990s, pragmatic, context-specific and therefore also 'cultural' perspectives seem to be widely acknowledged as an integral part of second language education. However, the conceptualization of possible intercultural differences and the implementation of these concepts in the classroom still pose huge theoretical and empirical challenges. This is especially true with respect to distant languages like Chinese where the goal of appropriate language use seems to be hindered by perceived great differences in communicative conventions, social behavior or value orientations.

This article focuses on underlying theoretical implications and the possible integration of intercultural findings in the field of Chinese as a second language in higher education. From the viewpoint of cultural theory and the translational turn in the humanities it argues that there is neither a theoretical sound nor an empirical sufficient understanding of Chinese 'culture' yet, which could be used for the development of intercultural competence in second language teaching. As a result of that the article stresses the need for further research on intercultural issues which go beyond the anachronistic paradigms of 'national character' studies from the 1940s and 1950s.