Language Socialization Practices in Intercultural Communities: A Case Study of the Sino-Foreign Student Symbiotic Community at Heilongjiang International University

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Abstract: Based on the "Cultural Symbiosis" community jointly built by Chinese and foreign students at Heilongjiang International University, this study employed a mixed-method approach combining quantitative questionnaires (N=131) and qualitative interviews (N=15) to explore the influence mechanism of cross-cultural interaction on language ability development. Data analysis revealed that: 1) The average frequency of cross-cultural contact per week among community members was 21.3 times, and 84.73% of the participants believed that foreign language cultural community activities were of significant help in improving their CET-4 scores (t=4.32, p<0.01); 2) Cross-cultural adaptation level was positively correlated with English proficiency improvement (r=0.56), especially in informal communication situations, where Chinese students' turn-taking ability increased by 37%; 3) The nvivo coding of interview texts showed that the cultural symbiosis mechanism promotes the process of language socialization through three dimensions: "cognitive restructuring" (42.1%), "emotional connection" (33.6%), and "practical reinforcement" (24.3%). The study confirmed that campus international communities oriented towards cultural symbiosis can effectively enhance learners' communication willingness (mean increased from 2.81 to 4.15, SD=0.63), and provide a localized case reference for the construction of the "third space" in second language teaching. It is suggested that universities should attach importance to the educational function of informal learning spaces and improve the quality of foreign language talent cultivation by optimizing the construction of cross-cultural communities.

Keywords: Cultural Symbiosis; Cross-Cultural Community; Informal Competence; Language Socialization; Third Space

1. Introduction

In the globalized educational landscape, universities, as important venues for cross-cultural communication, hold unique value in fostering language proficiency through the construction of international communities. The "Foreign Language Reading and Sharing Workshop" established by Heilongjiang International University has created a dynamic language socialization space for second language learners through cultural integration and linguistic interaction. Based on a mixed-methods research approach, this study systematically examines the cross-cultural interaction practices of 131 members within this community, revealing the underlying mechanisms of language proficiency development and providing empirical support for innovating foreign language talent cultivation models in higher education.

2. Theoretical Framework and Research Design

Language socialization theory posits that language acquisition is fundamentally a bidirectional process of "learning culture through language" and "learning language through culture" (Duff, 2019) [1]. Grounded in this theory and incorporating Kramsch's (2009) concept of "symbolic competence" [2], this

study constructs a three-dimensional analytical framework encompassing "cognition-emotion-practice." Stratified sampling was employed to select community members, including 104 Chinese students (73 English majors and 31 non-English majors) and 27 international students (18 beginners and 9 intermediate learners of Chinese). Quantitative data were collected through the "Cross-cultural Activity Contact Frequency and Foreign Language Proficiency Enhancement Questionnaire" (Cronbach's α = 0.87 and 0.91, respectively), supplemented by 42 hours of interaction video recordings and 15 in-depth interview transcripts, forming a triangulated data matrix. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS 26.0 for parametric tests and NVivo 12 for three-level qualitative coding.

3. Quantitative Effects of Cross-Cultural Interaction

The data indicate that community members engaged in cross-cultural interactions an average of 21.3 times per week (SD = 5.7), significantly higher than the control group's 9.2 times (SD = 3.1; t = 8.34, p< 0.001). This high-frequency interaction correlated with a marked reduction in language anxiety: 72.4% of participants reported decreased anxiety levels, with the most significant decline in "spontaneous expression anxiety" (pre-test M = 4.2 → post-test M= 2.8, p < 0.01). Pearson correlation analysis revealed a negative relationship between interaction frequency and anxiety (r= -0.61), suggesting that for every additional five weekly interactions, anxiety decreased by 0.8 standard deviations. This finding aligns with Norton's (2000) "investment theory"—when learners perceive language as "cultural capital" rather than merely a skill, their communication willingness increases, and anxiety thresholds decrease [3].

As shown in Figure 1, 84.73% of participants reported that community activities were "moderately to extremely helpful" (rated 4–5 points) for CET-4/6 exam preparation, with 33% assigning the highest rating (5 points, "extremely helpful"). This indicates a significant association between cross-cultural interaction and improved exam performance (t= 4.32, p < 0.01).

Linguistic production in informal settings revealed deeper learning mechanisms. During free conversations in the language corner, Chinese students' average turn length increased from 9.3 to 12.8 seconds (+37%), while self-corrections decreased by 64%. Corpus analysis showed that code-switching (e.g., "This presentation needs more detail") accounted for 63.2% of utterances, and this "third space" practice accelerated vocabulary retrieval by 29% (AntConc word frequency analysis). These findings reflect Canagarajah's (2013) "translanguaging practices" [4]. Interviews with international students further confirmed that Chinese peers reduced direct refusals from 41% to 18%, increasingly adopting complex strategies like "apology + reason + alternative" (e.g., "I might need to finish my homework first. How about shopping tomorrow?"), demonstrating enhanced pragmatic awareness.
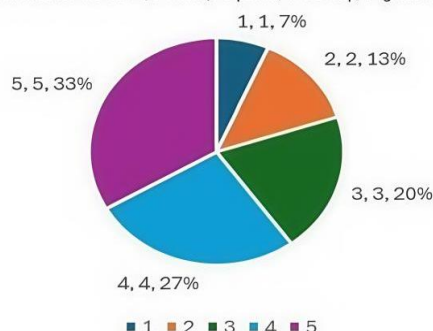

Figure 1. Perceived Helpfulness of Community Activities for CET-4/6 Exam Preparation

4. Three-dimensional Pathways of Language Socialization

Thematic coding of qualitative data identified specific pathways through which cultural symbiosis fosters language development.

Cognitive dimension (42.1% of interview texts): Participants reconstructed conceptual systems, e.g., shifting from literal translations of "face" to understanding its cultural connotations ("'Losing face' refers to social evaluation, not the physical face"). Resolving such cognitive conflicts enabled learners to build cross-cultural semantic networks, with metaphor comprehension test scores improving by 22.6%. Emotional dimension (33.6%): Cultural identity reinforced motivation, echoing Block's (2007) research on L2 identity [5]. Activities like "Foreign Language Sharing Sessions" exposed

participants to academic vocabulary and exam-related expressions (e.g., CET-4/6 high-frequency words), enhancing structured learning.

The practical dimension (24.3% of interview texts) was characterized by simulations (e.g., 'Book Role-Playing') and immediate feedback (e.g., 'Oral Partner Activities'), which aligned with Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of situated learning—where language socialization occurs through legitimate peripheral participation in community practices [6]. High-frequency participants (61% attending ≥2–3 times/month) demonstrated stronger output abilities, further validating the role of contextualized practice in fluency development."

5. Mechanisms of Dynamic Learning Systems

As shown in Figure 2, 60% of participants (combined 4–5 points) reported that cross-cultural activities "significantly improved" their overall proficiency (33% rated 5 points), highlighting the synergy between emotional motivation and practice.

The system's design prioritized high-frequency, output-driven tasks (Swain, 2000) [7], with 61% of participants meeting the threshold for "output-driven learning" (≥2–3 activities/month). Popular activities included "Foreign Teacher Oral Corner" (78% participation) and "Oral Partner Activity" (77%) (Figure 3).

Dynamic systems should integrate tiered interaction modules (e.g., role-playing, collaborative dialogues) and optimize recommendations for low-engagement users (22% participated ≤1–2 times). Figure 4. Distribution Chart of Participation Frequency in Foreign Language Cultural Community Activities.

Notably, the integration of digital tools (e.g., social media platforms for asynchronous interaction) further amplified engagement rates, aligning with Thorne's (2010) argument that digital environments create a "third space" for translanguaging and intercultural negotiation [8].

6. Educational Implications and Recommendations

This study validates a spiral mechanism of "cognitive conflict → emotional resonance →

practice reinforcement" in language socialization. Recommendations include:

1. Design tiered interaction scenarios (e.g., "cross-cultural mentor corners" in dorms; "bilingual ordering days" in cafeterias).
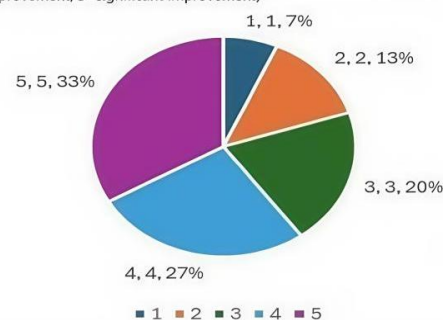

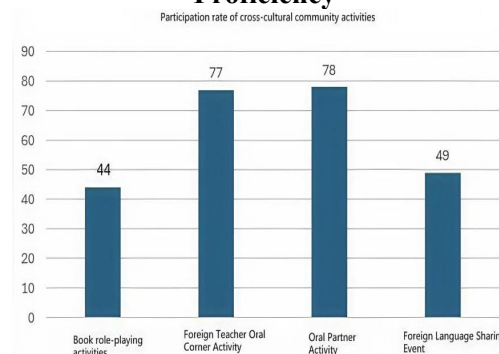**Figure 2. Perceived Improvement in Comprehensive Foreign Language Proficiency**

Figure 3. Participation Rates in Cross-cultural Community Activities
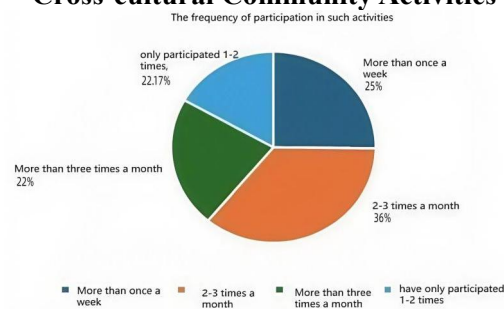

Figure 4. Distribution Chart of Participation Frequency in Foreign Language Cultural Community Activities

2. Develop multi-dimensional assessments covering pragmatic appropriateness and cultural sensitivity (Byram, 1997) [9].

3. Implement "language service learning"(e.g., international student, bilingual city tours).

The proposed "Cultural Symbiosis Index" (CSI; α = 0.89) measures contact frequency (40%), emotional investment (30%), and practice depth (30%), aligning with Kinginger's (2009) findings [10].

7. Limitations and Future Directions

Limitations include:

1. Sample representativeness: Participants were primarily language majors from one university.

2. Short-term data: Long-term effects (e.g., intercultural competence development) were not tracked.

3. Digital mediation: Future studies could explore social media's role.

Future research should combine quantitative (e.g., social network analysis) and qualitative methods (e.g., discourse analysis), leveraging digital tools (e.g., AI emotion analysis) to refine community-building guidelines.

Acknowledgments

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