

Research on Practical Pathways of the “Three Integrations” Blended Teaching Mode for Foreign Language Majors at Local Universities in China

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Abstract: Taking Maton’s Semantic Wave Theory as the analytical framework, the current paper has constructed an online and offline collaborative blended teaching mode that is well compatible with the textbook series *Understanding Contemporary China*. It establishes a four-dimensional integrated blended teaching ecosystem, i.e., knowledge-point objectives, learning resources, teaching activities, and monitoring and assessment. Relying upon local characteristic resources, such as Southern Shandong red-themed culture, Great Canal culture, Ban-Mo culture, rural revitalization pomegranate industry, etc., the transformation of theories can be concretely realized.

Keywords: Local university; Foreign language major; Three Integrations; Blended teaching; Textbook series *Understanding Contemporary China*; Southern Shandong local resources

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1. Introduction

1.1. Research background and policy demands

For the sake of systematically boosting the integration of multilingual versions of Xi Jinping: The Governance of China into universities, textbooks, and classrooms, the Ministry of Education compiled the multilingual textbook series *Understanding Contemporary China*. This textbook series encompasses three course modules, i.e., translation, speeches, and reading and writing, which have become the essential teaching carrier of the “Three Integrations” initiative. Deeply entrenched in the peculiar Chinese discourse system, the series demands that learners simultaneously realize the goals of promoting foreign language competence and internalizing ideological theories, and be endowed with the dual talent-fostering objectives of language training and values guidance.

Zaozhuang University, as the application-oriented local undergraduate university in the south of Shandong Province, has come to realize that it is hard for the superposition mode of offline classroom and the simple pre-recorded online mode to counterbalance the abstract theoretical interpretation and foreign language practical training. There are the following three core predicaments. Firstly, teachers attach greater importance to the explanation of vocabulary and grammar, whereas downplaying the interpretation of theoretical connotations. Secondly, the ideological and theoretical lectures are divorced from students' life reality, thus making the grand narratives alienating to them. Thirdly, the instructional content of online and offline teaching is repetitive, and the activities are disjointed, thus failing to form the collaborative education loop.

1.2. Literature review

1.2.1. The current status of foreign language blended teaching

Foreign scholars have systematized and discussed the current situation and concepts concerning the blended teaching of foreign language courses. Scholars ^[1-6] put forward 12 modes of second language blended teaching with technical support, who claim that blended teaching should provide support for language input, output, interaction, scaffolding, etc., for students' foreign language learning.

Domestic scholars have probed into blended foreign language teaching as well from diverse perspectives, such as the theoretical connotations and paradigm research ^[7], the construction paths of blended foreign language golden course ^[8], and the mode research of college foreign language blended teaching ^[9]. However, the current achievements have primarily been investigated in terms of teaching technologies, classroom procedures, etc. Few studies have been conducted from the angles of internalized rules regarding knowledge generation for online and offline logic of division of labor, in which the knowledge-construction chains of integrated collaboration are not yet established.

1.2.2. Studies on the *Understanding Contemporary China* textbook series

The relevant studies at home center around the following major dimensions. Firstly, studies focus on the relationship between the textbook series and the cultivation of high-quality interdisciplinary foreign language talents ^[10]. Teachers can fully take advantage of the selected texts and address both linguistic form and thematic content. Secondly, studies center around the theories, principles, and practice of the textbook series ^[11]. Teachers can better grasp the compilation purpose of the textbook series and conduct secondary development towards the textbook series. Thirdly, studies concentrate on the construction and practice of curriculum-based ideological and political education regarding the relevant series courses ^[12].

1.2.3. The application-oriented research of Semantic Wave Theory

The Semantic Wave Theory is proposed by Maton ^[13,14], originating from Legitimation Code Theory. The core logic is that knowledge learning is the cyclical process of unpacking and repacking that proceeds in the repeated sequence of "abstract ideas—specific cases—abstract sublimation," in which the recurring semantic wave is forged depending upon the dynamic alternation between semantic gravity (SG) and semantic density (SD). Those abstract discourse elements with lower SG and higher SD and those specific discourse elements with higher SG and lower SD are situated in the positions of semantic peaks and semantic troughs, respectively. In contrast to the wave peaks and troughs with gentle change, the semantic amplitude between ascending and descending curves undergoes dramatic fluctuations. The three jointly yield a single semantic

wave of knowledge “depacking and repacking” along the temporal dimension^[15]. The monolithic classroom form scarcely generates complete semantic waves. Concretely speaking, pure offline lectures tend to linger on high-order abstract semantic meanings, and students fail to resonate emotionally. On the contrary, pure online autonomous learning is restricted to fragmented linguistic points, and learners will inevitably remain long-term at low-level concrete semantics, making it hard to internalize the theories.

2. Core theory and inherent logic of compatibility

2.1. Semantic wave and the compatibility with the blended teaching of *Understanding Contemporary China*

The textbook series embraces the higher SD abstract theories, such as Chinese modernization, cultural confidence, common prosperity, and so forth, which demand concrete cases to achieve semantic downshift. Local resources, such as the revolutionary culture of the Railway Guerrilla Unit in Southern Shandong, the Grand Canal Culture, a model for revitalization of the pomegranate industry, Ban-Mo culture, etc., can be utilized as carriers of semantic downshift. Segmented online and offline teaching design is capable of precisely adjusting semantic fluctuation tempo, so as to address the deficiencies regarding the semantic flatness and superficial cognition brought about by traditional teaching.

2.2. Core aspirations of “Three Integrations” reform at local universities

Unlike the key universities, the local undergraduate universities are frequently restrained by insufficient university-running resources, yet have abundant local practical resources. Three points can be inferred in terms of the core aspirations of “Three Integrations” reform. Firstly, bridge the grand narratives of state-level textbooks and the micro practice of local development. Secondly, integrate language skill training and ideological and political value guidance. Thirdly, establish a lightweight and sustainable blended ecosystem, so as to lower the cost of teachers’ lesson preparation and classroom implementation. The blended teaching mode instructed by semantic wave theory is rightly compatible with the above-mentioned requirements.

3. The construction of blended teaching mode of *Understanding Contemporary China* guided by semantic wave theory

3.1. Holistic logical framework

The core division of the current mode abides by the operational law of semantic wave theory. Concretely speaking, the online pre-class stage corresponds to semantic downshift, i.e., knowledge depacking. The offline classroom stage corresponds to semantic upshift, i.e., knowledge repacking. As for the after-class extended practice, it signals a second semantic downshift. The three-cycle practice establishes a spiral upward development knowledge internalization closed loop.

Online stage (Platforms of Superstar Learning Pass, Rain Class, etc.): Deliver textbook excerpts, vocabulary translation, micro-lectures, Southern Shandong local case materials, and so forth. Students can independently complete the unpacking of theories and the learning of fundamental language points. In this stage, the highly condensed theories can be unpacked into perceptible and concrete materials. Thus, the first semantic downshift is completed.

Offline classroom: Through diverse means of answering the shared questions, organizing case debates,

carrying out hands-on external translation practice, and thematic speech, guide students to extract the core theories of the textbook series from diverse concrete cases, such as Zaozhuang pomegranate industry, Grand Canal cultural-tourism resources, revolutionary stories, Ban-Mo culture, etc. As a result, the aggregated semantic upward shift has been accomplished.

After-class second classroom: Through diverse means of bilingual publicity, red-themed short video creation, and field research reports concerning regional development, students can apply abstract theories to analyze local reality, thus completing the second semantic downshift and deepening value identification.

3.2. Construction of the ecosystem of quadruple blended teaching

3.2.1. Knowledge-point objective system: Anchoring the top-level orientation of semantic wave peaks

The knowledge-point objective system is the top-level starting point capable of regulating semantic wave fluctuations, which is designed in the light of a three-tier progressive gradient, compatible with the cyclic alternation of semantic downshift and upward shift.

The first tier: Language basic objective (semantic low point) encompasses core textbook vocabulary, official standard translation, textual structure, and syntactic expressions, which are the key tasks of online autonomous learning, in order to ensure students' basic competence in textual interpretation.

The second tier: Theoretical cognitive objective (semantic upward shift channel) centers around disentangling the core theoretical logic of each unit, historical background, and institutional connotations. Through group discussion, the offline classroom completes theoretical extraction, advancing semantic meanings to wave peaks.

The third tier: Practical value objective (the second semantic downshift orientation) demands that students are capable of analyzing Southern Shandong local practice by utilizing textbook theories. For instance, Zaozhuang pomegranate industry can be applied to interpret common prosperity. Southern Shandong guerrilla can be interpreted as revolutionary cultural heritage. The third tier is capable of bridging theories and local reality.

3.2.2. Learning resource system: Enriching the transformation carrier of semantic upward shift and downshift

Construct a three-level resource repository, matching the three semantic activities of online unpacking, offline critical deliberation, and after-class practice, respectively.

The first level: key nationally compiled resources, encompassing textbook series, i.e., Reading & Writing course, Translation course, Public Speaking course, and *Understanding Contemporary China*; supporting audio resources; Official guiding materials of Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press (FLTRP); bilingual commentaries.

The second level: General digital resources, encompassing XueXiTong micro-lectures, theoretical short videos, bilingual reports from the mainstream media at home and abroad, state-level foreign language MOOCs, all online platforms, all of which prop up pre-class semantic unpacking.

The third level: Local-characteristic resource repository of Southern Shandong embraces four major sections. Firstly, revolutionary cultural resources include the bilingual exhibition panel translations of Railway Guerrilla Memorial Museum and oral-history narrative resources of red-themed stories. Secondly, Ban-Mo cultural resources involve the connotative interpretation and the contemporary value with regard to

the national-level master artisans and the cultivation of craftsmanship. Thirdly, Great Canal and traditional cultural resources comprise foreign materials regarding the protection, heritage, and development of the Great Canal (Southern Shandong section). Fourthly, industrial resources for rural revitalization consist of Chinese-English bilingual publicity materials for Yicheng District's pomegranate industry, field research materials for demonstration villages for rural revitalization, etc.

3.2.3. Learning activity system: Regulating semantic fluctuation tempo in different phases

Pre-class online autonomous activities (semantic downshift-depacking)

Teachers release learning sheets and formulate four types of tasks, i.e., vocabulary self-assessment tasks, text reading, preview of the local-characteristic case materials, and online discussion forum. Launch online theme-specific contests of Understanding *Contemporary China*, encompassing translation, reading, online tests for public speaking, etc. By means of various task-driven activities, it can facilitate students to independently depack theoretical knowledge and complete fundamental semantic extension.

In-class offline critical thinking and deliberation activities (semantic upward shift-repacking)

The offline classroom is the essential field for semantic wave upward shift, and multi-layer progressive activities can be designed, namely, answering shared questions→group deliberation for local-characteristic cases→bilingual public speaking/practical interpretation→theoretical logic generalization and sublimation. For instance, while giving a lecture on the theme “rural revitalization,” teachers can take advantage of Yicheng pomegranate industry to summarize the rural development logic in the era of Chinese modernization.

After-class extensive practical activities (the second semantic downshift-value implementation)

Relying upon Zaozhuang local venues, towns and villages, and cultural-tourism institutions, carry out university-local collaboration. Diverse productive tasks can be designed, such as bilingual volunteer interpretation services for red-themed venues, multilingual short video creation for Southern Shandong culture, foreign language research reports for local development, and bilingual public speaking for “Understanding Contemporary China, Telling Fine Southern Shandong stories.” Accordingly, the new semantic downshift has been completed, and the in-depth internalization of theories has been achieved as well.

3.2.4. Monitoring and assessment system: Dynamically giving feedback to teaching based upon semantic wave fluctuations

Construct a full-process and multi-dimensional assessment system, in which stratified evaluation can be carried out at three key stages, namely, semantic wave trough (after the end of online preview), wave peak (after the end of offline classroom), and the terminal of the second semantic downshift (the end of the after-class practice). Meanwhile, reverse optimization for teaching design should be implemented.

Process-oriented evaluation (occupying 60% of the overall scores): covering the online learning duration, unit self-exam, discussion & presentation, performance for in-class deliberation, bilingual practical outputs, volunteer publicity work. In this process, stress should be placed on whether students are capable of elaborating textbook theories and integrating them with Zaozhuang local-characteristic cases, so as to ultimately examine the transformation effectiveness.

Summative evaluation (occupying 40% of the overall scores): apart from traditional language testing, critical thinking and writing tasks can be incorporated, and Southern Shandong local development materials can be integrated with the corpora as well, all of which are utilized to comprehensively measure language

proficiency and theoretical applicative competence.

Dynamic feedback mechanism: the data are applied to evaluate whether there is sufficient semantic wave fluctuation. Provided that students can scarcely bridge theories and local reality, teachers can incorporate local-characteristic case materials and expand offline deliberation hours, thus ultimately formulating the closed loop of “teaching-evaluation-optimization.”

4. Integrating Southern Shandong local resources: The practical pathways for “Three Integrations” in foreign language majors of local universities

4.1. Constructing bidirectional integration course frameworks of “national-unified textbooks plus Southern Shandong local narratives”

To advance “Three Integrations,” local universities should not mechanically replicate the standardized scheme, which must be situated within regional characteristics and establish stratified teaching frameworks. Taking the textbook series *Understanding Contemporary China* as the core thread, teachers should firmly grasp the officially authoritative theoretical narrative. Meanwhile, local resources, such as Southern Shandong revolutionary culture, Great Canal culture, Ban-Mo culture, rural revitalization of the pomegranate industry, resource-based city transformation, etc., should be further explored, and a matching checklist for each unit should be established.

4.2. Disseminating semantic wave-oriented blending teaching mode, establishing stratified hierarchical classroom paradigm

Teachers should fully implement the three-stage blended teaching model, i.e., online unpacking, offline repacking, and after-class practice, clarify the online and offline functional boundaries, and prohibit the simple replication of online resources in the offline classroom. Relying upon the Superstar Learning Platform, teachers should solidify the local resource repository, micro-lectures, question bank, etc., to actualize the renewal of teaching resources. Regularly carry out the virtual teaching and research section activities, teaching and research seminars, and organize teachers to refine stratified teaching design. In terms of different languages and students from different grades, teachers should properly adjust the ratio of online and offline class hours.

4.3. Consolidating university-local collaborative talent cultivation and extending social practical field for “Three Integration”

Leverage the in-born advantages of local universities adjacent to regional communities. Establish long-term and stable practice bases with Railway Guerrilla Memorial, Zaozhuang Cultural-tourism institution, Yicheng District Pomegranate Industry Demonstration Park, Grand Canal Cultural Pavilion, and so forth. Establish regularized off-campus foreign language practical platforms.

Organize students to carry out real-scenario tasks, such as venue-based bilingual interpretation, international publicity translation for local culture and tourism, foreign language research reports for regional development, etc. Open up a complete holistic chain of talent cultivation, namely, “classroom learning-social practice-value identification,” gradually coping with the deficiencies of foreign language talents’ armchair theorizing and lack of real scenarios for international communication.

4.4. Perfecting multi-dimensional evaluation and teaching staff guaranteeing system, and constructing long-term operational mechanism

On the one hand, teachers should solidify a whole-process, multi-dimensional monitoring and evaluation system, and incorporate bilingual practice, local-characteristic cultural publicity, and research reports into routine assessment. Establish a dynamic observation mechanism for students' ideological cognition, and regularly carry out student interviews and teaching feedback. On the other hand, improve faculty development guarantees and organize teachers to regularly participate in national-level and provincial-level textbook training of *Understanding Contemporary China*. Carry out research-based study activities of Southern Shandong local culture, and promote teachers' comprehensive instructional ability for integrating theoretical teaching, language training, and local cases. The ultimate goal is to construct a stable ideological and political teaching team, providing human-resource support for the long-term advancement of "Three Integrations."

5. Conclusion

The research outcomes of the current paper not only enrich the application scenario for the foreign language education field based upon semantic wave theory, but also provide a referable and replicable practical scheme for the implementation of "Three Integrations" in the application-oriented local undergraduate universities in China. As a result, it effectively facilitates the implementation of the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education for foreign language majors in the new era.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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