

# 大学英语教学 探索与展望

The Exploration and Prospective  
of College English Textbook

邱东林 蔡基刚 主编

复旦大学出版社

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# 前 言

我国大学英语教材正处于一个非常重要的转型时期。这主要表现在下面几个方面:

1) 2004 年教育部新制定的《大学英语课程教学要求》提出了“大学英语的教学目标是培养学生的英语综合应用能力,特别是听说能力”。这意味着现行的大学英语教材必须按新的教学目标进行修订或重新编写。

2) 教育部于 2003 年制定了《高中英语课程标准》,提出了几乎和大学英语一样的教学目标和标准要求,一批新的高中英语教材纷纷问世。而其中一些教材(如《新世纪高中英语》和《牛津高中英语》等)语言难度已经接近甚至超过某些大学英语教材的第一册和第二册的难度。从衔接的角度上讲,现行的大学英语教材也面临修订。

3) 现代教育技术的迅速发展和以计算机网络为基础的新的大学英语教学模式在全国的推行,要求新的教材不再停留在纸质形式上,而应向立体化发展,为教师和学生提供更丰富的教学资源,以适应由教师为中心、单纯传授语言知识和技能的教学模式,向以学生为中心、既传授语言知识与技能,又注重培养语言运用能力和自主学习能力的教学模式的转变。

大学英语教材国际研讨会正是在这样的背景和形势下召开的。本论文集收进了 17 篇大会论文,其作者有的是国外著名学者专家,有的是国内英语语言和教学的专家,他们从不同角度回顾了

我国解放后不同时期有代表性和有较大影响的大学英语教材;分析了当前我国大学英语教材存在的问题;从语言教学的规律和二语习得的理论来探索大学英语教材的编写理念,并在此基础上展望我国大学英语教材的发展趋势。

毫无疑问,本论文集的出版对于大学英语教材理论建设,对于新时期我国大学英语教材的编写,以及大学英语教学质量的提高将起到积极的作用。

最后,我们衷心感谢复旦大学出版社,由于他们的慷慨资助,才使论文集得以付梓问世。同时我们也感谢赞助本次大会的北京大学出版社、高等教育出版社、上海外语教育出版社和北京外语教学与研究出版社。

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# 1. Some Factors Affecting College-level English Teaching in 21st-Century China

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## **Abstract:**

In any discussion relating to the teaching of English in China, there are several changing conditions that need to be taken into account, one is the technology involved; not just the language-teaching technology, although that is obviously significant, but the technology involved in everyday languages, where computers and text-messaging mobile phones have replaced typewriters and conventional telephones as the medium of spoken and written discourse. The second is the changing status of English: English is no longer just one of a number of international languages, alongside Spanish, Portuguese, French, German, Russian, Arabic, Malay, Hindi-Urdu and Mandarin Chinese; it is now the distinctively global language, at least for the immediate future. And thirdly, there is the changing status of the Chinese language, now that China is coming to be a major economic power in the world. These factors affect the internal equilibrium of language: the balance between speaking and writing, between specialized and

non-specialized registers, between personal and impersonal modes of discourse, and perhaps others besides. They require us to re-examine the full range of linguistic practices in which the learner may expect to engage.

**Key words:**

College-level; English teaching; technology

## An Introduction

As my friends and colleagues here already know, I am not, and never have been, a teacher of English. Well, to say I never have been a teacher of English is not exactly true: for the first twelve or thirteen years of my adult life I was, in fact, a language teacher; and within that time I was teaching English, part-time, for one year — at Peking University, in 1947—1948. But for the remainder of that time, apart from one year in which I taught Russian, I was teaching Chinese, as a foreign language, to speakers of English. So I was teaching a language of which I was not a native speaker, which is an advantage when you are teaching adult, or adolescent, beginners — a point I shall return to in my talk tomorrow. But just in order to finish these introductory remarks about myself: for the rest of my career I was teaching linguistics, which is a very different kind of teaching activity — although one that is still relevant to my talks on this occasion, because throughout my working life many of my students have been teachers of English. So while it is true to say that I never, or almost never, taught any English, I have been a foreign language teacher, and I have taught numbers of others who were, or subsequently



became, teachers of English as a foreign language.

I gave my first foreign language class on 13rd May, 1945, which is just over sixty years ago. It was a dictation class, in Chinese, to a group of language trainees in the British armed services. We were using Gwoyeu Romatzyh, which is much the best resource for teaching Chinese to foreigners — I shall return to that topic also, at a later point. Sixty years is a long time, and I might seem justified if I was to claim that my age and experience gave me some added authority in the area of foreign language teaching, including the teaching of English in China. Age — yes: I am supposed to have attained the age of wisdom, when presumably I don't need to think anymore; I just need to stay quiet and look wise. But experience? The problem with any claim that one has experience is this: things change too quickly. The most obvious fact about the language teaching situation today, and especially perhaps about the teaching of English, is that it is very different from anything that was happening sixty years ago. And, almost more than any other activity in the field of education, the teaching of a foreign language is sensitive to the demands and the constraints of the environment.

So let us consider some of the major changes that have taken place, over the past sixty years, which might affect the teaching of English in China. We can group these, perhaps, into two broad categories, which I will call the technical and the social (or socio-political, to suggest a broader perspective). There have been massive shifts both in the technology and in the socio-political conditions that are associated with language use. Let me elaborate on these two factors, each in turn.

## 1. The Technical Aspect

When I first started as a language teacher, there were no tape recorders, and no easy ways of making copies of an existing text. In our department at the University of London we had disc recording equipment, so that students could not only listen to gramophone records of the foreign language but also record and listen to their own performance; but this was time-consuming and expensive. To make multiple copies of anything you had to type the text on to a waxed skin and run it through a cylindrical press (which I think was still operated by turning a handle, though that is probably a memory from my earlier schooldays!). Then one of our Chinese colleagues, a brilliant all-round scholar named Yu Dawchyuan, built a copying machine by creating an arc between two powerful light sources — a technical marvel, but rather complicated to operate. Since Fudan University is now a hundred years old, there may be some among my audience who remember those prehistoric times.

Since then we have had a number of technical novelties, coming into and sometimes soon disappearing from the scene; we have had programmed learning; we have had language laboratories with teacher — student interface and increasingly elaborate audio-visual equipment; we have had computer-assisted language learning, as well as learner-centred self-access programmes of various kinds; and all of these developments have affected the relationship between the learner and the teacher, as well as the relationship between who is learning and what is being learned. And “what is being learned”, the perceived content of a foreign language course, has itself been trans-

formed by advances in the technology: in particular by the computerized corpus, the facility for storing, accessing and processing huge quantities of language data on a scale that was never possible before. Here the most powerful agency is the combination of the computer and the tape recorder — or, since tape is no longer the preferred recording material, the combination of computing with some form of audio recording. We have been able to store written language ever since writing evolved, because that is what written language is: it is language that is stored in some medium or other, perhaps even carved in stone like the Chinese classics in the Bei Lin in Xi'an. But spoken language is ephemeral: it doesn't exist, it just happens; and until it could be captured in some way, and transformed into an object which could be held under attention and studied, we had very little understanding of exactly what it was we were trying to teach — unless, that is, we were teaching the language simply as a treasury of texts, as something to be encountered only in the form of writing. It is clear that all this new technology has had an impact on the theories and practices of language teaching, even if not quite as dramatic as some commentators have suggested (or as some practitioners had hoped). When each new technique is introduced, there will be people who say “now the teacher is no longer needed; all the learner requires is a programme and some mechanical device with which to operate it”. In fact, it seems that the opposite is the case: each new technical resource makes new and greater demands on the language teacher — and therefore on the professional training that the teacher needs to receive. I do not think that the foreign language teacher is likely to disappear from the scene.

What about the foreign language textbook? I don't think that that is going to disappear either (otherwise we wouldn't be holding an in-

ternational forum on the subject!). Of course the textbook is also affected by the new technology, because it now takes its place alongside all the other educational resources, and may, in some instances, be designed as an ancillary to something else — for example as text accompanying an audio-visual language course. Again, the new technology places more demands, not fewer, on the foreign language textbook, because the textbooks have to become more varied, and more versatile, than they were in earlier times.

But when we consider the effects of technology on our theory and practice in teaching a foreign language, on our decisions about curriculum, about materials and so on, it is not only the technology of language teaching — the technology of the language class — that is the relevant issue. What is equally relevant, though in a different way, is the technology of language use; and this too has undergone some rather fundamental changes. Language evolved as speech; that is its only original mode, and it is the mode in which each human child first learns language, unless debarred from this facility by being deaf. But alongside of language there evolved another mode of making meaning, using the visual channel: people made pictures, for example, on the walls of caves (no doubt also on other, less long-lasting surfaces like sand). These were semiotic events in their own right, although they were not constructed using language. Then at some period in the history of some human groups these two modes of meaning converged: the visual symbols came to function as symbols of other symbols. That is to say, the pictures were reinterpreted as standing for elements of (spoken) language: either words, and parts of words, like Chinese characters, or syllables, and parts of syllables, like the scripts of Sanskrit or Arabic, or English. There were now two distinct modes of lan-

guage, the spoken and the written. But they were different, because while people had never been taught to speak — they had learnt to speak, as small children, just by copying others — if they wanted to read and write they had to be taught.

So that is where language education began, and that is where the “four skills” come from. To know a language is to speak and listen and read and write; and when we teach a foreign language we design our courses and our assessments around these four skills, giving them differential value according to the perceived goals of the learners, or according to the goals that we decide they should achieve. These may be purely local goals, specific to one institution or to one category of student; or they may be formulated as a matter of policy, perhaps on a national scale. During the second world war a certain number of the pilots in the British Royal Air Force were taught just to listen to and understand spoken Japanese, so they could intercept radio communication between Japanese pilots and their controllers on the ground; this was a very specific goal, involving just one of the four skills, and only small numbers of learners were taking part. Even on a much larger scale one may still decide to teach just one of the skills; thus after the war was over the Japanese Ministry of Education introduced the teaching of English in educational institutions all over the country — but they concentrated entirely on reading; they wanted their people to have access to materials published in English, but were concerned to defend Japanese culture against the impact of American symbolic power, which they felt would penetrate all aspects of Japanese life, at that time, if English was taught also as a spoken language. On the other hand, in the usual pattern of foreign language teaching as part of school education in more typical circumstances it would be taken for

granted that all four skills were to be acquired.

This concept of language skills, with those of reading and writing being recognized as distinct from those of speaking and listening (even though both involve the two aspects of production and reception), accords with the historical evolution of literate societies, in which written language and spoken language have always been clearly separated. Speaking and writing had distinct and complementary functions: written language was for keeping records, whether the cycles of the calendar, or the exploits of rulers, or the inventories of goods being transported from one place to another in the course of trade; and for more esoteric purposes such as religious observances and divination. Spoken language was used in the ways in which it had evolved from the start, as the ultimate foundation stone of daily life: in the enactment of personal and socially sanctioned relationships and in the semiotic construction of shared experience — getting along with other people, and making sense of the world around. As time went by, of course, written language expanded its scope and took over some of this eco-social space, transforming it in the process into the realms of poetry, history, philosophy, technology and science; but the distance between the two was still maintained, because these activities were the prerogative of an elite minority, and so the written language could follow its own course, with the highly conservative forms of its lexicogrammar becoming more and more remote from the continually evolving grammatical structure and vocabulary of the discourses of ordinary speech.

So by modern times the written languages of the traditional societies in the Eurasian culture band, Chinese, Sanskrit, Latin and (later) Arabic, had all diverged rather markedly from the spoken languages of their communities, even if they continued to function in a spo-

ken form (like Latin as lingua franca among clerics all over Europe). Not that these written languages hadn't changed — they had. The forms may have been archaic; but the meanings that were construed in wenyan (literary Chinese) in Tang and especially in Song times were very different from those of Zhou and Han; likewise, medieval Latin was very different from the classical Latin of ancient Rome. Texts in these later varieties are much more easily rendered into the languages of today, because despite retaining words and structures from an earlier period, semantically they had evolved along with the spoken languages of daily life. There is much less insulation between spoken and written language at the level of meaning than there is at the level of wording — which is hardly surprising, because the wordings of the written text persist through time; they remain as models to be imitated; whereas the meanings are the part of language that is hidden from view.

But at a certain moment in history, technology intervened once more. Writing had always been a tedious process, because even with the invention of flat surfaces for writing on, like parchment and paper which would accept markings in ink, you could make only one copy of the text at any one time. But then the Chinese invented printing, so you could make multiple copies; and when movable type was introduced the same printing press could turn out indefinitely many different texts. Of course the scribes did not disappear overnight; even in the early Ming dynasty, *Yongle Dadian* was written out by hand (which was a pity, because most of it didn't survive). But printing became a major factor in keeping speech and writing apart: not only was writing permanent, freed from the moment of time as it always had been, but now a writer could produce a work in hundreds of copies

which would be read by people he didn't know and with whom there was no possibility of interacting; whereas speech, as it always had been, was ephemeral, it was gone with the wind, and most people throughout their lives seldom talked to anyone they didn't already know, and moreover the listener could usually answer back. So the two modes of language, the spoken and the written, were now about as far apart as they could be.

This was the situation up until the beginning of the twentieth century, the time when the teaching of foreign languages was becoming recognized as a regular profession. By this time, in Europe, Latin was no longer the *lingua franca*, and it was no longer generally spoken; but it still carried prestige, as the foundation of European culture, and so was widely taught in the schools. It was taught, however, purely as a written language; so when it became the model for the teaching of modern foreign languages they were also taught through the written mode — with the assumption that if you learned to read and write the foreign language you would automatically be able to listen to it and to speak it as well. This does work with some learners; but they are a rather small minority; for most, the result of trying to learn a spoken language this way is complete failure — as it was for one of the pioneers of modern language teaching theory Francois Gouin. Gouin was a French student of chemistry, who went to pursue his studies at a university in Germany; he had been taught German for six years in a French lycée, but when he arrived in Germany he couldn't even order himself a glass of wine, so he gave up chemistry and became a language teacher instead. His ideas were taken up in several places, including the Chinese Department in the University of London where I first went to study Chinese in the year 1942. They were quite sensible



ideas, and they worked remarkably well.

But by that time, in the middle of the century, the age of print, with the clear disjunction between language in its written mode and language in its spoken mode, was already coming to an end. The first major advances in the technology of language use, the telegraph and the telephone, had extended the range of the performance of writing and speaking, transmitting written language at great speeds and spoken language over great distances; but they hadn't altered the relationship between the two. This change really began with the phonograph, when Edison and Bell managed to get speech sound incised on wax cylinders; their technique soon evolved into that of the gramophone record, which is still around if you happen to be lucky enough to have a turntable which turns at the right speed (gramophone records are now collectively referred to as "vinyl"). Now for the first time speech had been held down and objectified, so that the same utterance could be listened to over and over again. But the recorded utterance was not yet a natural speech event — it was not spontaneous. It had been consciously composed, rehearsed and performed in a recording studio; thus it was a pastiche of spoken language, rather than being a real instance of language in the spoken mode.

The critical invention for the preservation of speech was the tape recorder (or rather, the wire recorder, which preceded it for a very short time — when I was a student of Wang Li, at Lingnan in 1949—1950, he had a wire recorder for his dialect field work; but the wire kept breaking off, and ending up as a cloud of spun metal somewhere in the corner of the room). For simplicity we can date the appearance of the tape recorder at 1950, though in fact it had been invented some years earlier. With the tape recorder, for the first time you could re-