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TEACHING COLLEGE
ENGLISH IN CHINA

中国 大学英语教学 研究

北京大学外国语学院英语系 编



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序

我国各类高等院校都普遍开设大学英语课程,虽然各自的对象和具体的要求不尽相同。大学英语教学拥有为数众多的学生,对于我国英语总体水平的提高起着至关重要的作用。在 21 世纪即将来临之际,面对我国经济发展的迅猛势头,面对经济全球化的趋势,我国需要更多高水平的和高素质的英语人才。因此,大学英语教学的改革与质量的提高是摆在我们面前的一项紧迫的任务。如何提高学生的听说读写技能,加强实际交际能力,如何进一步拓宽知识面,以及如何利用现代化教学手段改进教学和提高教学质量等等,无疑都是亟待我们探讨的课题。

北京大学英语系于 1997 年 7 月 21 日至 7 月 25 日召开了“中国大学英语教学国际研讨会”,这是一件很有意义的事。提交大会的论文涉及大学英语教学的方方面面。值得注意的是,不少同仁已经开始认识到,在某种程度上,大学英语教学可能便于文、理学科的相互交叉和渗透,也能体现科学技术和人文科学的紧密结合。有些同仁极为关注在大学英语教学中如何深入挖掘文化内涵的问题。的确,一门外语包含着一个国家或一个民族的文化。它不仅关系到现实生活中的语言交际,而且也涉及社会状况、习俗礼仪与人际关系,尤其是社会价值观念。可以说,语言既是文化的重要组成部分,又是文化的载体。将外语仅仅视为一种工具的观点显然是有失偏颇的。实质上,任何一种语言都是既具有工具性、又具有人文性的。因此,除了重视语言技能的训练和知识的扩展外,也必须加强素质教育,强调人文精神,这也是我们当今时代的要求。人文精神乃是人和人类社会自我激励、自我约束、自我完善所需要的美好的精神要素,是在人类文明发展中起基础作用的品质。它意味着对个人完美品德的追求,对真善美的向往,对知识的渴望,也包含着个人对整个人类社会所应承担的的认识,从而尽力为人类社会做出积极有益的贡献。如果说我国高等院校必须全面提高学生的综合素质,那么在这方面,大学英语教学自然也责无旁贷地应当发挥本身的优势和应有的作用。

本论文集集中的论文均选自在本届国际研讨会上宣读的论文。与会者近 300 名,提交的论文约 220 篇。论文作者来自全国各地,也有来自美国、澳大利亚、韩国、日本等国和港、澳等地区的。他们大多富有长期的教学实践经验,拥有大量值得借鉴的最新资料,有些还作出了很有参考价值的调查报告,提供了各种新的视角,新的理论,以及如何运用现代化手段改进教学方法和提高教学质量。我们

认为,这些都是值得借鉴和学习的,而且也必定有助于我们在新的世纪开创一条符合中国高校学生特点的中国大学英语教学路子。

胡家峦
2001年10月
于北京大学

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Prospect of China's ELT in the 21st Century

Hu Zhuanglin
Peking University

1. The Strategic Role of ELT in China

China's open-door policy has brought China back to the international arena and more contacts with foreign countries have been established since then. This called for the learning of foreign languages (FLs) throughout the country and the training of students majoring in foreign languages.

The latest figure of China's FL student population in the tertiary universities in China amounts to 75,534, which includes 73,311 for the 7 main FLs, namely, English, Japanese, Russian, French, German, Spanish, and Arabic, and a little more than 2,000 for 30 other FLs. As an average, there are about 19,000 graduates this year.

Table 1 China's FL Student Population

Total	75,534	100.00%
7 Main FLs	73,311	97.06
English	55,859	73.95
Japanese	8,856	11.72
Russian	4143	5.48
French	1825	2.42
German	1681	2.23
Spanish	586	0.76
Arabic	361	0.48
30 other FLs	2223	2.94

From the above figure, one could not refrain from observing that English occupies a strategically important position among all the FLs as it amounts to 73.95 % of all FLs and 76.19 % of 7 main FLs respectively.

When it comes to college English education, the majority of the high school students and university students choose to take English as their credit course for a foreign language.

Naturally, one witnesses unprecedented development in the teaching of English in China. English has replaced Russian as the chief FL taught in China since 1960s; greater progress in teaching methodology has been made since 1976 as a result of sending tens of thousands of teachers to receive advanced training in English-speaking countries such as the U. K. , the U. S. , Australia, Canada, New Zealand, etc. , and employing more native speakers of English to teach in China; the learners have also benefited from their free accessibility to broadcasting, TV programs, and films in English and free contact with English-speaking tourists and businessmen.

2. The Negative Aspects of China's English Education

In spite of the above-mentioned achievements in the teaching of English, one should not ignore that there is still a great gap between what we have been doing today and what is expected in the 21st

century.

As remarked by some government officials, we have spent too much time in learning a foreign language, say, English. In many parts in China, students started to learn English in the primary school, and went on learning it in the high school and in the university. But their proficiency level cannot meet our expectation. Some graduates still behave like deaf-mutes after graduation. Apart from this, they fail to function well in interpretation and translation in those professional fields such as foreign affairs, foreign trade, legal practice, news reporting, etc.

The English proficiency level of Chinese learners lags behind their counterparts in India and Pakistan. It is said that India has got the lion share of world's software contracts because of their competence in the English language. Although China might be proud of their better performance in English teaching when compared with Japan and South Korea, one cannot deny that our learners' command of vocabulary is much smaller than that of these two countries (4000:6000 words). It is also said that 59 universities in Thailand offer their courses directly in English.

3. SEC's Key Project: Teaching Content and Syllabus Reform

Beginning from 1995, the State Education Commission (SEC) instructed the FL Teaching Advisory Board to make a nationwide investigation of FL teaching in general, and the English language in particular, and make necessary proposals for reforming FL teaching in China so as to meet the challenge of the new century. The project was officially named as "FL Teaching Content and Syllabus Reform for the 21st Century" on February 15, 1996.

Assigned with this task, the English group of SEC FL Advisory Board set up two groups in operation.

Table 2 Members of the Task Groups

<u>The North Group</u>	<u>The South Group</u>
Participating institutions Beijing Foreign Studies University Peking University Beijing Normal University International Trade and Economics University Beijing Institute of Foreign Affairs	Shanghai Foreign Studies University Fudan University East China Normal University Nanjing University PLA Loyang Foreign Languages Institute
Tasks Foreign languages in general 3rd-4th year students "composite-type" personnel	English in particular 1st-2nd year students

By the end of 1996, it was decided at the annual meeting of the English Group of the SEC Advisory Board held at Shantou University to:

- (1) investigate the graduates and their employers' institutions or units so as to have some idea about the social demand (the North group);
- (2) investigate the current situation of teaching, especially problems, to find out what is not suitable to social needs. (both)
- (3) present a reform proposal for SEC's policy-making. (both)

The North Group had 4 sessions already and received responses from 419 graduates, 248 Graduating English majors, and 264 minor FL majors. A hearing was held on May 8, 1997 in Beijing with representatives from Beijing Education Commission, China International Broadcasting Station, Ministry of Economics and Trade, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Xinhua News Agency, and Foreign Enterprise Service Company.

The South Group had 6 sessions and sent questionnaire forms to FL departments in 17 comprehensive universities, 7 universities of science and technology, 9 normal universities, and 9 FL institutes.

Here are some of the questionnaire forms designed for the graduates and the employer's institutions:

Table 3 Follow-up Questionnaire Forms for Graduates (Adapted)

	Highly Satisfactory	Satisfactory	General	Unsatisfactory
Self Evaluation Synthesizing quality Adaptable ability FL proficiency Research ability Chinese proficiency Global knowledge structure				
Course Evaluation FL obligatory General obligatory Minor/Elective Lectures				
1-2 year FL Intensive reading Grammar Audio-visual Oral Extensive reading Reasons for unsatisfactory responses: materials() methods() teacher()				
3-4 year FL Intensive reading Newspaper reading Writing FL-Chinese translation Chinese-FL translation Audio-visual Classroom discussion				
General courses and others Politics Chinese 2 FL Computer Reasons for unsatisfactory responses: content() methods() teacher() value() The most beneficial year: first() second() third() fourth() The least beneficial year: first() second() third() fourth() Reasons: personal() overloaded() least-loaded() teacher() Courses to be strengthened: FL() FL country() science & technology() liberal arts() The above courses to be taught as: required() minor() elective() lecture() The basic FL skill to be strengthened: audio-oral() reading() writing() translation() A 21c graduate should learn: 1FL() FL + economy() FL + journalism() FL + law() FL + foreign affairs() FL + wide knowledge() 2FL() 2 BA degrees()				

Table 4 Follow-up Questionnaire Forms for Employers' Institutions(Adapted)

	Highly Satisfactory	Satisfactory	General	Unsatisfactory
Evaluation of graduates				
Synthesizing quality				
Adaptable ability				
FL proficiency				
Research ability				
Chinese proficiency				
Global knowledge structure				
FL proficiency				
Listening comprehension				
Oral work				
Reading				
Writing				
FL-Chinese translation				
Chinese-FL translation				
Language theory				
Knowledge about FL country				
	Rich	Relatively Rich	General	Little
Relevant knowledge				
Economy and trade				
Foreign affairs				
Law				
Science and technology				
Chinese culture				
Foreign culture				
Computer				
The strengthened courses to be taught as: required() minor() elective() lecture()				
Requirement of graduates				
21c students should know: 1 FL() FL + Economy() FL + Foreign affairs()				
FL + journalism() FL + law()				
FL + wide knowledge() 2FL() 2BA degrees()				
Qualification expected: MA() BA() specialized() not specified()				
Condition valued: ethics() FL() knowledge() ability()				
The graduates are weak in: ethics() FL() knowledge() ability()				
Ability				
to acquire knowledge	strong()	relatively strong()	general()	weak()
to cooperate	strong()	relatively strong()	general()	weak()
to act	strong()	relatively strong()	general()	weak()
Proposals:				
What kind of quality is to be strengthened? How to strengthen? (ideas, culture, business, psychology)				
What courses are to be added?				

4. Analysis

In this section, I will report some interesting figures which reveal the opinions held by the graduates and their work units.

4.1 Basic Evaluation

Compared with synthetic quality, adaptive ability, and FL proficiency, both the institutions and the students are not happy with their research ability, Chinese proficiency, and global knowledge structure, as manifested by the following figures.

Table 5 (%)

	Research ability				Chinese proficiency				Global knowledge structure			
	I	G	U	M	I	G	U	M	I	G	U	M
Highly satisfactory	5	5	4	10	9	14	10	20	5	11	5	11
Satisfactory	36	45	49	45	62	53	48	61	57	49	51	50
General	58	45	43	42	28	32	37	12	37	34	40	35
Unsatisfactory	1	5	4	3	1	1	5	7	1	6	4	4

Notation: I = institutions; G = graduates; U = undergraduates; M = minor FL students

4.2 Overall Course Evaluation

Table 6 shows that the students are somewhat satisfied with FL required courses, but hold university required courses, elective courses and lectures with reservation.

Table 6 (%)

	FL required			Uni required			Minor/Elective			Lectures		
	G	U	M	G	U	M	G	U	M	G	U	M
Highly satisfactory	18	20	15	2	5	4	6	6	6	14	7	13
Satisfactory	64	68	59	27	31	29	35	34	28	40	34	44
General	17	10	21	56	54	46	44	49	45	38	47	36
Unsatisfactory	1	2	5	15	10	21	15	11	21	8	12	7

Notation: G = graduates; U = undergraduates; M = minor FL students

4.3 FL Courses

On the whole, students have no objections to 1st & 2nd year FL courses, such as intensive, reading, grammar, audio-visual, oral and intensive reading, but there are high percentages of reservation concerning courses such as literature and language theory.

Table 7 (%)

	Intensive R			Newspaper R			Writing			FL-C translation		
	G	U	M	G	U	M	G	U	M	G	U	M
Highly satisfactory	23	19	24	7	3	26	19	16	14	16	12	22
Satisfactory	52	53	49	23	18	52	44	51	42	49	58	54
General	19	19	16	20	15	14	31	30	28	29	28	20
Unsatisfactory	2	3	4	3	2	0	3	2	7	4	1.5	3
Non	4	6	7	47	62	8	3	1	9	2	0.5	1
	C-FL translation			Audio-visual			Literature			Language theory		
	G	U	M	G	U	M	G	U	M	G	U	M
Highly satisfactory	16	11	22	16	13	16	13	9	12	3	4	6
Satisfactory	49	60	54	50	51	42	35	46	35	22	21	23
General	29	28	19	24	30	25	35	27	37	42	38	23
Unsatisfactory	2	0.5	4	3	2	5	6	5	7	10	17	6
Non	4	0.5	1	7	4	12	11	13	9	23	20	42

Notation: G = graduates; U = undergraduates; M = minor FL students; Non = courses not offered

4.4 University Required Courses

Except for physical education, students did not value highly of those university required courses. However, further investigation needs to be done in order to clarify some puzzles. For instance, quite a few institutions and even the student themselves hold the opinion that the students are not proficient in Chinese. Computer is actually a course needed for the new century, but one find categories 3 (general) and 4 (unsatisfactory) amount to 74%. This might be the case that the teachers are not well qualified or responsible. It has been once a recommended practice to let those minor FL students to pick up a 2nd FL (mostly English) so that they are able to find a job after graduation, but the 3rd category and the 4th category run as high as 43% and 34% respectively.

Table 8 (%)

	Chinese			2 FL			Computer			Physical education		
	G	U	M	G	U	M	G	U	M	G	U	M
Highly satisfactory	6	5	8	6	5	6	4	7	7	12	12	14
Satisfactory	33	27	30	33	36	18	25	28	19	51	52	45
General	48	56	49	42	41	42	35	40	27	30	30	37
Unsatisfactory	13	12	13	19	18	34	36	25	47	4	3	3
Non										3	2	1
Notation: G= graduates; U= undergraduates; M= minor FL students; Non= courses not offered												

4.5 Proposals for Course Development

To meet the need of the 21st century, students emphasize the inclusion of courses such as science and technology, foreign language, liberal arts, and foreign studies.

Table 9 Courses to be strengthened(%)

	Graduates	Undergraduates	Minor FL students
Science and technology	46	40	43
Foreign language	75	29	31
Liberal arts	22	27	14
Foreign studies	7	4	12

With regard to the strengthening of skill learning, more students are interested in listening and speaking and translation as well.

Table 10 FL skills to be strengthened (%)

Graduates	Undergraduates	Minor FL students	
Listening and speaking	49	58	61
Translation	29	24	19
Writing	17	14	14
Reading	5	4	6

4.6 Knowledge Structure for 21st Century FL Students

Evaluation of the employers' institution has shown that less than 50% of graduates possess rich or relatively rich knowledge of disciplines other than the foreign language they have majored, especially science and technology, teaching methodology, computer, economy and trade, law, foreign affairs, foreign culture, etc.

Table 11 (%)

	Science and technology	Teaching technology	Computer	Economy and trade
Rich	1	3	9	3
Relatively rich	21	20	29	30
General	59	61	51	51
Weak	19	16	11	16
	Law	Foreign affairs	Foreign culture	Chinese culture
Rich	1	6	8	6
Relatively rich	18	37	40	44
General	66	47	47	46
Weak	15	11	5	4

From the feedback of both the institutions and the FL students, graduates for the 21st century should be prepared for their FL major and wider knowledge.

Table 12 (%)

	Units	Graduates	Undergraduates	Minor FL
FL + knowledge	66	78	76	71
FL + economic & trade		64	73	71
FL + law	5	27	18	14
2BA degrees	6	10	17	14
2 FL	23	7	5	10
FL + journalism	4	2	6	10
1 FL	0	7	3	5
FL + foreign affairs	53	5	2	5

4.7 Evaluation of FL Proficiency by Employers' Institutions

Different from the graduates' self evaluation that they need more training in listening and speaking, the employers' institutions think the students are relatively weak in language theory, foreign studies, writing, Chinese-FL translation, and FL-Chinese translation.

Table 13

	Listening	Oral	Reading	Writing	FL-C	C-FL	Language theory	Foreign Studies
Highly satisfactory	10	14	10	6	8	6	3	4
Satisfactory	75	65	75	63	68	66	50	51
General	14	18	14	30	23	26	45	43
Weak	1	3	1	1	1	2	2	2

4.8 Overloaded with Courses

According to the investigation of the South Group, it was found that students are overloaded with courses. For instance, they have 30-35 hours of classroom learning every week. On the contrary, they only have to spend 8-16 hours in the classroom when in the 4th year. This is the reason why students responded that they learn the least in their 4th year. This might also be due to the reason that they have to write BA thesis and be involved with job-hunting.

4.9 Hearing with Employers' Institutions

Apart from questionnaire forms, a meeting was arranged for employers' units to voice their opinions directly to the research group on May 8, 1997. The participants mainly talk about the following points:

1) The need of FL personnel in the 21st century

—The supply of English majors cannot meet the demand in number as the overall need has been increasing.

—There is imbalance between social needs. More personnel are needed in big and medium sized cities, coastal open regions and economically developed regions. The main markets are those state organizations, companies, business units and tertiary institutions. Those with BA degrees and MA degrees, especially from key universities, are expected, but there is less demand for graduates at college level.

—The employers' units are now quite critical about the quality of graduates majoring in English both in terms of their English proficiency, but also in terms of their practical ability, hard-working spirit, and creativity. The graduates should process professional knowledge and good skills. On the one hand, FL practical abilities are to be stressed; on the other hand, mere FL skills cannot adapt to social and market needs. The knowledge structure of the graduates should be adjusted so as to possess some knowledge about other disciplines. The 21st century also expects graduates to possess comprehensive aptitude and abilities.

—They emphasize undergraduates should be given basic instruction. They should be trained for their adaptability and intellectuality,

2) Graduates' current status

—Their FL proficiency is better than before, but attention should be paid to the cultivation of their ability to put their knowledge into application.

—Some graduates are of poor quality,

—Some graduates are weak in Chinese and literature, and their proficiency in the Chinese language is no better than that of high school students.

—Their knowledge structure is not reasonably balanced.

—Some graduates revealed incompetence in their work as well as in the application of their knowledge. Those students who had some experience in student organizations are somewhat better than their peers.