

论交际能力 5 批判性思维能力的培养

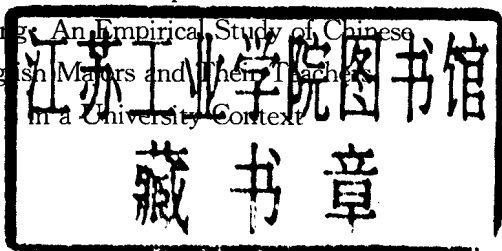
Communicative Competence and Critical Thinking:
An Empirical Study of Chinese English Majors and
Their Teachers in a University Context

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Abstract

This study explores a pedagogical framework for tertiary level learners. It takes full account of the traditions and context of Chinese English language teaching. It aims to adapt the western-based communicative language teaching approach and communicative competence model to the Chinese setting at university level so that both learners and teachers can benefit.

The research methodology consists of a quantitative survey and a qualitative study which includes in-depth interviews and classroom observations. The aim is to compile first-hand information on learner/teacher attitudes towards teacher-centred and student-centred teaching approaches, culture learning in EFL programs, and the major difficulties faced by both students and teachers in the teaching/learning process when CLT is introduced into English classes.

Quantitative data are analysed using the Statistics Package for Social Science (SPSS), and qualitative data are categorized to identify possible patterns for analysis and discussion. A comparison between students' and teachers' data reveals perceptual matches and mismatches between the two groups. Survey findings are evaluated in relation to the theoretical foundations of communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980; Canale, 1983). On a practical level, some effective strategies for teaching EFL to Chinese English majors at third level are suggested. On a theoretical level, a synthesized approach for integrating communicative language teaching into current Chinese traditional teaching methods is proposed whose aim is to enhance Chinese English majors' communicative competence.

List of Abbreviations

ACD:	American College Dublin
BEC:	Cambridge Business English Certificate
CA:	Communicative Activities
CC:	Communicative Competence
CIDA:	Canadian International Development Agency
CLT:	Communicative Language Teaching
CR:	Comprehensive Reading (Course)
CT:	Critical Thinking
DCU:	Dublin City University
DCULS:	Dublin City University Language Services
EFL:	English as a Foreign Language
EMGs:	English-Major Graduates
ESL:	English as a Second Language
EU:	European Union
FL:	Foreign Language
GRE:	Graduate Record Exams
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
IR:	Intensive Reading (Course)
L1:	First Language
L2:	Second Language
LLS:	Language Learning Strategy
NCA:	Non-Communicative Activities
NPG:	[The] North Project Group
SCA:	Student-Centred Approach
SPSS:	Statistics Package for Social Science
TCA:	Teacher-Centred Approach

TEFL: Teaching English as a Foreign Language
TOEFL: Test of English as a Foreign Language

Introduction

The reason why teaching is so difficult to talk about is not because it is so unfamiliar, but because it is too familiar.

Kramersch (1993: 104)

Development of personal interest

Twenty five years ago, when I was still an English language university student, learning English meant little more than acquiring a thorough knowledge of grammatical rules and vocabulary and reading literary masterpieces. The fact that the primary goal of any language is communication did not seem to have any bearing on how it was taught. As long as students could reproduce grammatical rules and apply them to the most intricate translation exercises, the teacher was happy and convinced that s/he was doing a good job. The traditional dominant model of EFL teaching in China today still presents language as a system of cognitive patterns and reference items to be learned and mastered, in a fashion not dissimilar to mathematical and physical laws.

Although the revised national English curriculum for English-major students at tertiary level claims the cultivation of learners' communicative competence as a goal of EFL education and calls for a further reform, in reality with this teaching approach little intercultural sensitivity or communicative competence has been achieved. As a university teacher of the English language in China for 20 years, I have realized the merits and demerits of the traditional language teaching approach. However, given the situation of EFL teaching in China, a fundamental shift cannot take place without a fundamental pedagogical change both at a theoretical and a practical level. From the Chinese perspective, this shift is of

great significance because China has the largest national population of English language learners in the world, and at present enthusiasm for English language learning is unprecedented in her history.

Significance of this study

This thesis explores how to enhance Chinese English major students' communicative competence by examining the specific problems encountered in English language classrooms in a university context in North China (See Chapter 4 for further details). Communicative language teaching (CLT) was introduced to China in the early 1980s, but the changes it has brought about have been more on the theoretical level rather than affecting what actually goes on in English classrooms. As a result, the outcome of EFL teaching of college-level English majors has not been satisfactory. In China, the dominant teaching practices are traditional grammar-translation and audio-lingual teaching methods which do not prove helpful in developing learners' communicative competence as 'students became almost structurally competent but communicatively incompetent' (Johnson & Morrow, 1981:1). The results of this study will be of significance to current EFL reform at tertiary level in China and to native speakers of English who teach Chinese students in multicultural classrooms outside China, the latter having experienced an extraordinary rise in recent times. For instance, in Ireland the past few years have witnessed a substantial increase from a few hundred Chinese students to an estimated 40,000 now arriving to study English or pursue an advanced degree at tertiary level.

Focus of this study

This research falls into two parts, as it involves both teachers and learners. As teaching and learning are interlinked, the enhancement of Chinese learners' communicative competence will proceed from change in the classroom involving both teachers and learners. The questions this thesis seeks to answer are the

following:

1. What are the attitudes of Chinese English-major students and their teachers towards: a) communicative language teaching (CLT), b) the traditional Chinese teaching approach in English class? Does any major perceptual match or mismatch on these subjects exist between students and teachers?

2. What are the major difficulties that Chinese EFL students and teachers might have encountered in their attempts to adopt CLT in the Chinese context?

3. How can Chinese English learners' communicative competence be enhanced within the EFL programmes at tertiary level?

4. How can Chinese English learners' critical thinking skills be developed?

It should be emphasized that these concerns have arisen from my direct experience as a university lecturer and this thesis draws from the teaching of English for English majors at university level as the empirical research in this study bears witness. Unless specified otherwise, the Chinese EFL learners in this thesis are referred to as university-level English major students.

Organization of the thesis

This thesis consists of 10 chapters detailed below:

Chapter 1 presents a history of EFL education in China over the past century. It also gives a description of the various challenges confronting EFL education for English majors at university level in China.

Chapter 2 presents a review of the related literature, and is divided into two sections. The first section begins with an overview of the notion of communicative competence. It examines its application in CLT and presents a review of the various critiques of CLT. The second section examines the current state of the communicative competence of Chinese EFL majors, and the debate over the application of CLT in Chinese EFL education at university

level.

Chapter 3 outlines a review of cultural factors affecting the EFL education in China by discussing the concepts of ‘individualism vs. collectivism’, ‘high vs. low power distance’ and ‘strong vs. weak uncertainty avoidance’ and the ‘Chinese culture of learning’.

Chapter 4 describes the research design used in this study and includes a detailed description of both the quantitative and qualitative research methodological procedures used in data collection, presentation and analysis.

Chapter 5 focuses on the presentation and discussion of the quantitative data. The first section begins with quantitative data findings of the student group including Chinese EFL students’ attitudes towards CLT, the traditional approach, authority in class, and learning foreign cultures in English language programmes. The second section provides a comparison between quantitative data of students’ and teachers’ perceptions of the above-mentioned items in the first section.

Chapter 6 presents an analysis of qualitative data collected through interviews and questionnaires from both students and teachers. A detailed account of both groups’ comments is given, focusing on why they might favour or disfavour CLT or traditional teaching methods. The problems they encounter in the process of their learning and teaching are explored.

Chapter 7 focuses on an analysis of qualitative data arising from classroom observations of five teacher participants. Similarities and differences in terms of their classroom instruction patterns are presented and discussed. Contributory factors, such as those which lead to the discrepancy between what most teachers claimed to do and what they actually did in class, are also examined.

Chapter 8 proposes a pedagogical model for an eclectic approach which integrates communicative components into the traditional approach in order to suit the Chinese EFL context.

Chapter 9 focuses on ways of addressing a major problem identified in this study: namely, learners’ inability to think critically in EFL programs at tertiary level in China. I suggest

suitable pedagogical strategies for the development and assessment of critical thinking instruction in English class.

Finally in Chapter 10, I discuss the significant implications of this thesis in the area of English language education for English majors at tertiary level within and outside China.

Chapter 1

A Historical Overview of EFL Education in China

Introduction

This chapter begins with a chronological overview of English language teaching in China. This is followed by an overview of the present state of English teaching at tertiary level, including the differences between English education for English majors and for non-majors. New challenges facing English teaching for English majors in the Chinese context are also examined and discussed in order to provide the background and context for the research.

1.1. A brief history of EFL education in China

Over the last 150 years, China has experienced tremendous changes in its foreign language teaching policies, especially in the area of English as a foreign language (EFL). The evolution and development of foreign language education in China has undergone various twists and turns. It is generally agreed that two broad historical periods are significant: old China (1759-1949) and new China (1949 to present day) with the founding of the People's Republic of China (1st October, 1949) as a demarcation line (Fu, 1986; Li *et al.*, 1988; Ross, 1993; Adamson, 2002; Lam, 2002). (See Table 1.1 and 1.2)

Table 1.1 Historical period one: old China (1759-1949)

Period		Role and status	English language Education
Later Qing Dynasty	1759-1860	English perceived as a 'barbarian' tongue, low official status	Private study
	1861-1911	English as a vehicle for gaining access to Western science and technology; helpful to the development of China's international diplomacy	On the curriculum of newly established secondary schools
The Republican Era	1911-1923	English as a vehicle for exploring Western philosophy and other ideas; opportunities for study abroad; high official status	On the curricula of secondary and tertiary institutions
	1924-1949	English as a vehicle for diplomatic, military and intercultural interaction with the West; resistance from nationalistic scholars and politicians fearing unwanted cultural transfer	On the curricula of secondary and tertiary institutions

Source: Fu(1986), Adamson(2002), Lam(2002)

Table 1.2 Historical period two: new China(1949 to present day)

Historical Period	Phase in FL education	Time
Before the Cultural Revolution	Russian as the first foreign language in China	1949-1950s
	English as the first foreign language in China	1957-65
During the Cultural Revolution	Repudiation of Foreign language learning	1966-70
	English for renewing ties with the West	1971-76
After the Cultural Revolution	English learning for modernization	1977-1990
	English learning for international relations	From 1991 onwards

Source: (ibid.)

At different times throughout the history, the English language has been perceived variously as a threat to national integrity or as a conduit for strengthening China's position in the world community

(Lam, 2002). From 1759 to 1860, under the influence of Chinese rulers' parochial arrogance and closed-door policy, English was regarded as the language of a 'technically powerful enemy' whose culture appeared to the Chinese as essentially 'barbaric' (Adamson, 2002: 231). In this period there was little need for learning or teaching English and, as a result, little took place.

However, China's defeat in the opium war against Great Britain (1839-1842) signalled the end of the Chinese rulers' delusions. It revealed the technological inferiority of Chinese weaponry and the state's inability to protect its territorial integrity. This had far-reaching implications on the nation's cultural and political well-being and finally led to the birth of a strategy of synthesis – Ti-Yong Dichotomy – put forward by Zhang Zhi-dong (1837-1909), a statesman and reformer, who promoted modernization in China during the last years of the Qing dynasty. The principle was 'study China for *essence*, study the West for *utility*' [*zhong xue wei ti, xi xue wei yong*]. In other words, traditional Chinese philosophy was studied for its fundamental principles *ti*, and Western civilization was studied for practical applications *yong*. (Ross, 1993; Feng, 2000). Chinese scholars and rulers recognized that this principle necessitated the study of English and other languages to gain access to Western technology. They believed that once access to such skills was obtained, foreign aggression could be challenged, leaving the spiritual core of Chinese cultural traditions – Confucianism – intact (Adamson, 2002: 234; Ross, 1993; He, 2000).

Thus in 1861, the Chinese government set up the first foreign language school Jingshi Tongwen Guan (literally School of Combined Learning) in Beijing with British missionary, J. C. Burdon, as its first English instructor (He, 2002). Two years later, a similar establishment was established in Shanghai. By the late 1870s, graduates from the Jingshi Tongwen Guan began to gain appointments within the civil service and diplomatic postings overseas. The status of the school, and of studying English, rose accordingly. In the following years, more schools based on the model of the Tongwen Guan were established and English was

taught in schools set up by foreign missionary organizations and became a way of capturing the hearts and minds of the Chinese people and a means of peaceful transformation. However, it was the economic benefits of learning English that attracted most Chinese students (Adamson, 2002).

The revolution of 1911 overthrew of the Qing Dynasty and ushered in the Republican era in 1911. English was one of the three core subjects (along with Chinese and Mathematics) in the secondary school curriculum (Rose, 1993). But the wider function of English language teaching and learning as a medium for accessing philosophical, economic, social and political ideas was resisted by traditionalists who viewed English as a ‘threat’ to Chinese traditional values. (Fu, 1986; Li *et al.*, 1988; Ross, 1993; Adamson, 2002). Moreover, at that time the government’s budget for education was curtailed due to economic difficulties. All this had a very negative impact on formal English language teaching. During the years of Japanese invasion (1937-1945) followed by the civil war (1946-1949), the country was left economically devastated and psychologically scarred. Given the desperate situation in China, it was extremely hard to carry on normal schooling.

The New China phase began after the founding of the People’s Republic of China on October 1st 1949 (See Table 1.2). In the New China phase, learning a foreign language became a compulsory subject not just in high schools but also in universities under the order of the Ministry of Education. But from 1949 till the mid-1950s, English was rarely found in the school curriculum, as Russian was the main foreign language due to China’s extremely close economic and diplomatic relationship with the Soviet Union (Xu, 1990 ; Scovel, 1995 cited in Lam, 2002: 246). Meanwhile, a number of English-speaking countries refused to recognize the People’s Republic of China and imposed an economic blockade.

Under this hostile international environment and the antagonistic relations between China and Western English-speaking countries, China kept the door of the country tightly closed to the Western world. English and other modern languages were almost stamped out at that time and it became somehow unpatriotic to study