

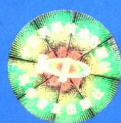
Bilingual Education in China

—A Critical Case Study of an International School
during a Period of National Educational Reform

中国的双语教学

——国家教育体制改革中的国际学校个案研究

赵 晖 著 魏汝尧 主审



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For the very special ones, my dear mother and father, to whom I will always be indebted for their unconditional love, encouragement and support. My husband and my baby son have been there for me with love and support.

ABSTRACT

In the past fifty years, China has been facing dramatic changes in both its political life and economy. The development of the country has led to an urge for the reform of all the systems of national life. Education has been emphasized by the government as one of the most important tools to improve the country and the people. Deng Xiaoping said in 1983:

Education should be modernized, should face the future

(Liu et al, 2003, pp1-3)

With the goal being the achievement of a 21st century system of education along globalised lines of educational reform. Consistent with this goal, modern foreign language education (MFL) has been recognized as needing urgent reform, with particular emphasis being placed on the introduction of an effective strategy of bilingual education. In 1996, vice-premier, Li Lanqing, mentioned at the Foreign Language Education Conference:

The foreign language education can not catch up with the development of China, which means reforms in the foreign language education are urgently needed.

(Xie, 2001, pp58-59)

Following Li Lanqing's concern, there followed a conference on Bilingual Teacher Training Study between Nov. 17th and 20th, 2003 undertaken by the National Education Science Planning Education Department (Zhu, 2003).

This research is focused on the development of bilingual education in China within the reform of MFL within the education system. The researchers carried out a critical case study of an international school, newly founded on principles of bilingual education (Xu, 2004), during its first year of operation. The case study utilized a combination of documentary sources, observations and interviews for the gathering of primary data. Follow-up interviews with key members of the school's staff were carried out a year later, along with the convening of a group of teaching staff from other international schools in China. Together, these procedures provided the study with primary data used for the preliminary evaluation of the current level of preparedness in the Chinese education system for achieving the goals of MFL (Zhu, 2003).

The study found that MFL provision in some bilingual education schools suffers from a still poor understanding of the pedagogic principles of effective MFL practice; teachers have

limited ability to teach other majors in English because of their own limited English level; that a greater measure of cooperation between Chinese and western teaching culture is required; consideration of the need for students' English competence to be matched to the content and assessment of the curriculum; and that parents' conflicting expectations for their children's MFL and other academic learning currently has a negative impact on the development of bilingual education in China.

This study concludes by making a number of recommendations for the operation and development of effective bilingual, international schools, necessary if the broader aim of Chinese educational reform is to be achieved.

Glossary

Term	Explanation
MFL	Modern Foreign Language
PRC	(the) People's Republic of China
WTO	(the) World Trade Organization
ELT	English Language Teaching
NEE	(the) National Entrance Examinations
HE	Higher Education
20C	20th Century
CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
IPBE	Immersion Program of Bilingual Education
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organization
GCE	(English) General Certificate of Education
GCSE	(English) General Certificate of Secondary Education
IGCSE	International General Certificate of Secondary Education
IB	International Baccalaureate
ISA	International Schools Association
IBO	International Baccalaureate Organization
ISC	International Schools Committee

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Chapter 1 Literature Review

In 2000, as a graduate with BA in English at SD University, China, I traveled to Europe for a holiday break. This overseas holiday provided me with the opportunity to experience the differences between the west countries and China. Even though with over ten years of studying English in China and a BA degree in English from a Chinese university, I discovered my lack of knowledge of the West in respect of cultural, history, education and so on. Therefore, I decided to further my study in an English speaking country. The successful application of Master in Education of a British University in 2001 brought me into the English education system. With the interest in second language acquisition, I carried out a research on the usage of native speakers in second language learning and teaching in current China's MFL system during 2001-2002. When I carried out my research in some of the universities and schools in the PRC, I interestingly noticed there were many debates and discussions over bilingual education provision which was then spreading widely in China.

In 2003, I was appointed as the Chinese Coordinator in a newly established International School (I.S.A.) in east central China. As the senior member of the school, I was involved with curriculum design, teachers' evaluation and so on during its first year of operation, which also provided me the opportunity for my professional development. However, remembering my Master's research focus on second language education during MFL reform in China, as the member of the staff, I started to raise certain concerns regarding the bilingual education provision offered by the school. With a motivation to discover whether bilingual education is suitable for current MFL system in China and if so, how to successfully carry out a genuinely bilingual education so that could benefit the students, I carried on my study onto doctoral level. Therefore, I carried out a critical case study as an 'insider' researcher at the school.



My employment at ISA ended in 2004 and since then, in addition to completing my doctoral study, I have been employed as a junior member of the English Department of the JZ University, China. My principal responsibilities are for English language learning of 300~400 undergraduate students, none of whom have English as their high education major study. Increasingly, I am of the view that Chinese students' English language competence at undergraduate level needs to be underpinned by a solid, developmental experience of MFL learning (and more, specially, of bilingual education) if they are to be capable to taking full advantage of an increasingly open and 'globalised' China.

Introduction

This chapter consists of review and evaluation of literature relating to the current reform of China's education system; the development of modern foreign language education, particularly English (MFL); the operation of bilingual, International Schools; and the development of an effective bilingual teaching system in such schools.

In the past fifty years, China has been facing dramatic changes in political and economic spheres of its national life, particularly since China joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001. Chinese people have been given more opportunities to know about the outside world, but at the same time are facing the new challenges of higher requirements of skills fitted to modern employment opportunities. Education, identified as one of the most important tools to equip the country and the people to meet the demands of such changes, has been recognized as needing major reform. Western influences impacting on China with its joining of WTO have had a broad and deep impact on China's traditional education system, pushing China's education system to communicate and cooperate with the outside world. Education in China in the 21C needs to develop along internationalized directions, and such reform is also a necessary requirement for world economic globalization. The education in China should speed up its international development. This is not only to meet the challenges posed by the WTO but also is necessary if China is to enter successfully into world cooperation and competition (Xiao, 2003).

In particular, China has adopted as a priority concern the development of an effective strategy for modern foreign language education, particular bilingual education (MFL), in order to equip students with the linguistic tools judged necessary for the nation to compete successfully in a globalized economic order.

The introduction and more widespread establishment of International Schools has become a distinguishing feature of China's educational reform. International Schools in China have the

following characteristics:

1. They are mostly independently owned and administrated (some exceptions are the international departments within China's mainstream schools).
2. They do not have the competitive entrance exams of the mainstream schools.
3. Their service is mainly for a certain group of people, such as foreign company or organization employees or people preferring to have their children educated in an international environment.
4. They normally have English as their medium of instruction and tend to have bilingual or multi-lingual education provision.

(Xu, 2001)

With more exchanges between China and the western countries in politics, the economy, culture and science, people have started to realize the importance of MFL. The traditional way of learning English could not meet the requirement of the development of the country. In response, educators started to explore a new point of view, the bilingual teaching system, in order to improve the achievements of learners to enable them to improve their ability to communicate and understand (Zhang & Wang, 2004). So suddenly there are thousands of bilingual schools appearing in China. However, the educators in China have increasingly begun to ask critical questions about the best character and delivery of bilingual education. Concurrently with this professional debate, parents of children attending International Schools have begun to express dissatisfaction with the quality and character of their children's bilingual education, with parents showing increased concern for the maintenance of Chinese competence alongside the acquisition of modern foreign languages, particularly English.

The development of MFL in the reform of Chinese education system

In the last two decades or so, there has been a rapid rise in economic development and an explosion in commercial, technological and cultural exchanges with other parts of world. This has given rise to a pressing demand for MFL proficiency (Wu, 2001). Presently, MFL in China mainly refers to English, and the focus of MFL at the moment in China is English learning and teaching. On the national level, English is perceived by the government as a necessary means for helping the nation to further open up, a valuable resource for realizing its modernization program and an important cornerstone of international competition (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Maley, 1995). Consequently, English proficiency has accrued superior national, social and economic prestige. In response to this ever-increasing demand for English, is an impressive

commitment to English Language Teaching (ELT) from the government, teachers, students, parents and society. There has been a massive drive to expand and improve ELT in the formal education system.

1. The Changes of MFL in Education System

For political reasons, China's education system has been based on that of the Soviet Union since restructuring in early 1950s. However, the breakup of the Soviet Union led China into its own exploration of new educational policies and structures.

A political movement of ideological extremism which started in 1966, named the Cultural Revolution, led to a whole decade of chaos and isolation in the People's Republic of China (PRC). It not only disrupted economic and cultural development of the country but also had disastrous effects on ELT at all levels of the education system (Fu, 1986). The purpose of and motivation for learning foreign languages were totally undermined (Ross, 1992). During that period, the formal education system ceased to function. Although English reappeared on the curriculum in the early 1970s, ELT was essentially in a state of chaos. The textbooks were full of politically charged texts to serve political needs and were not based on any theories of language teaching and learning (Adamson & Morris, 1997). The prevailing methodology was a teacher-centered, grammar-translation pedagogy. The quality of ELT was at its lowest (Chen, 2003).

The end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976 and the national program of 'Four Modernizations' brought in a new era of political, economic and social development, as well as a rapid growth of commercial, cultural and scientific exchange with the west countries. These developments exerted profound influences on education in general and ELT in particular (Shi, 1999). ELT regained legitimacy and its dominant aim was to prepare a new generation of Chinese for the language skills needed to learn science and gain technological know-how from the West. To keep up with the new requirements for ELT, English was made a core subject on the curriculum and the National Entrance Examinations (NEE) for entry into higher education (HE) was reinstated. To implement the syllabus, the People's Education Press, a publishing house of the Ministry of Education, published a unified set of textbooks for the English course in 1978, which was considerably revised in 1982. Partly out of pragmatic considerations and partly because of lack of information about ELT developments in other parts of the world, the textbooks took a pedagogical approach similar to that established in those textbooks published before the Cultural Revolution - an approach that attempted to graft audio lingualism onto the grammar-translation method (Jiang, 1998). The early oral training was aimed at developing good verbal habits and was superseded by traditional practice characterized by systematic and detailed study of sentence-level grammar, extensive use of translation, rote learning of

vocabulary, and emphasis on intensive reading skills and a focus on written language. The series of textbooks together with the pedagogy it embodied became highly influential because it dominated ELT for a decade.

As China further opened up whilst its economy developed rapidly, English was accorded ever-increasing importance because of its perceived role in the scheme of modernization. There was a great deal of public and individual investment in English teaching and learning. Meanwhile, however, there was also growing dissatisfaction with the quality of ELT (Wei, 2001). Multiple causes of the low quality of ELT were recognized, including outdated curricula, rigid teaching methods, shortage of qualified teachers and examination-oriented instruction. The recognition of these problems, together with the impetus of a nationwide reform in education started by the central government in 1985 (Lewin et al, 1994), initiated a top-down effort to reform ELT. This has led to, among other things, revamped curricula, updated syllabus, new textbooks, reformed tests and growing research on ELT.

In the last ten years, with the entrance of China into the WTO, the country took a new step, one of opening to the wider world. The idea of global economy from Western countries went into China with the WTO. This global economy enables the combination of international trade, finance and investment from different parts of the world. In this circumstance, the politics, culture, science and education exert a great influence. In particular, the educational system came to be viewed as the tool by which Chinese people could gain the various abilities needed to meet these new challenges and opportunities.

Therefore, the education system itself also needs to be internationalized in order to be competitive. ELT education change, as the result, became the priority in China's education reform. The discussions about how Chinese people learn English and how to teach English started to be the major topic in different education debates (Zhang, 2001). Emphasis shifted from the previous questions regarding curriculum, syllabus, textbooks, and tests reform to discussion of the combination of the internationalization of education and English teaching and learning in particular.

2. MFL/ESL Development in China

Just as the breakup of the Soviet Union led to a new emphasis on English in the new Eastern European countries, so in China Russian has given way to English as the favoured foreign language. Despite historical tensions and contradictions between Chinese and (Anglo) English cultures, the increased opportunity for Chinese citizens to travel and the pervasive influence of the Internet and the media have all contributed to the huge interest nowadays in learning English in China.

Historically, Confucian (551 – 479BC) principles have been central to educational methods of teaching and learning in China. In particular, the Confucian emphasis on passive learning and memorization has been central to education practice (Li & Liu, 2003). Additionally, it appears that Russian pedagogical practice reinforced these Chinese philosophical principles, making the adopting and assimilation of grammar translation all pervasive. Language teaching reforms have been inhibited because of the previous adoption of the Russian 5-Step teaching methodology. According to Kairov, the 5-Step teaching method consists of: ①reviewing the old material; ②orienting the new material; ③explaining the new material; ④consolidating the newly learned material; and ⑤giving assignments (Yu, 1984). These influences combined with Chinese oriental cultural background and the national education system structured the current, traditional Chinese approach to language teaching.

This has been further emphasized by the 20C influence of missionary education's total immersion approach to learning English, and the American system's focus on the study of literature. The results of these influences have tended toward grammar translation, intensive reading and the study of literature (Burnaby & Sun, 1989, pp187-195).

In summary, the essential characteristics of the Chinese view of language learning are memorization, repetition, habit formation and the quantitative accumulation of knowledge. In essence, repetition, memorization and habit formation are conditions for the mastery of form, which eventually leads to the understanding and creative use of the language. The following Chinese saying captures the relationship between leaning and creative use:

When one can memorize 300 The poems of the Tang Dynasty, s/he is sure to be able to compose poems of her/his own even though s/he is not a poet.

With the importance of English education increasing rapidly in China during the last decade, there is an enormous reform regarding ELT within the education system. In this process, it is often assumed that change is natural and inevitable, for the educators as well as the students. In this way, the conflicts between the Chinese traditional approach and communicative approach occur within the developments regarding ELT.

Regarding the development of ELT in China, the communicative approach plays a very important role. Today it seems that the communicative language teaching (CLT) is the hotly debated direction in ESL/EFL teaching. Most modern methods and techniques emphasize it. But what exactly is meant by the term. "the communicative approach"?

According to Maley (1984), it is characterized by the following: (1)concentration on use and appropriateness rather than simply on language form; (2)a tendency to favour fluency-focused

rather than simply accurately-focused activities; (3) communicative tasks are achieved through the language rather than simply exercises on the language; (4) an emphasis is placed on student initiative and interaction, rather than simply on teacher-centered direction; (5) there will be a sensitivity to learners' differences rather than a 'lockstep' approach, and (6) there is an awareness of variations in language use rather than simply attention to the language. The ideology of CLT contrasts directly to the traditional approach used by Chinese ELT in the past.

The CLT approach views learning as skills development rather than the knowledge receiving process. It is believed that students learn through using and experimenting with English, which is viewed as a means of communication. The communicative approach assumes that English is 'knowledge how to', that is skill, proficiency and functions whereas the traditional approach focuses on the knowledge of grammar, lexicon and rules. In order to implement the CLT approach rather than the traditional approach, Chinese teachers and students are making a conceptual shift as to what English means and also to how to study and learn it.

In the Chinese traditional approach, the primary role of the teacher, whose authority comes from holding all the knowledge, is to transmit that knowledge to the students. On the other hand, in a more communicative approach the teacher takes on a 'helper' rather than 'knower' role. This helper role implies a different set of skills than a knower role. This radical change was difficult for Chinese teachers as many teachers were teaching to the limits of their knowledge of English, so it was very threatening to use methods that allowed for unpredictability. As Campbell & Zhao (1993, p4) note:

Even though the professional literature in China reveals a clear understanding of the communicative approach, the importance of viewing communication as the organizing principle of foreign language instruction continues to exist in the professional literature to a far greater extent than as actual practice.

This suggests that it takes time and experience for teachers to understand and effectively carry out this new role.

For many Chinese contexts, the aim is to provide the grammatical and vocabulary knowledge so the students can successfully pass the many exams they must take in their academic career. English is one of the six components of the NEE. Because of the restrictive relationship between the curriculum and examination criteria, teachers believed that their grammar translation approach successfully prepared students for the exams. Students also felt this contextual constraint and this pressured their teachers to teach for the examination. The CLT approach aims to help students gain communicative competence. Chinese teachers had experienced evaluating grammatical competence; however, because of their own limitations