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*Wai Meng Chan, Kwee Nyet Chin,
Titima Suthiwan (Eds.)*

FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING IN ASIA AND BEYOND

CURRENT PERSPECTIVES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

STUDIES IN SECOND AND
FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

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Foreign Language Teaching in Asia and Beyond



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Current Perspectives and Future Directions

edited by

Wai Meng Chan

Kwee Nyet Chin

Titima Suthiwan



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PREFACE

In December 2004, the Centre for Language Studies of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the National University of Singapore, held its inaugural Centre for Language Studies International Conference or CLaSIC 2004. The three-day conference brought together over 200 academics, researchers, practitioners and other professionals from Asia and beyond for a productive and rewarding exchange of insights, experiences, views and perspectives on current and future developments in foreign language education and the important feeder disciplines of second language acquisition and linguistics. It also provided an avenue for the discussion and critical examination of new and innovative concepts and approaches expected to have an impact on future practices. In all, some 140 papers and posters were presented, twelve of which have been selected for publication in this book by the editors following reviews by a Scientific Committee, consisting of Anna Uhl Chamot (The George Washington University), Stephen Culhane (Kagoshima University), Hermann Funk (University of Jena), Yoshiko Kawamura (Tokyo International University), Brian Tomlinson (Leeds Metropolitan University), Mayumi Usami (Tokyo University of Foreign Studies) and Wu Weiping (Chinese University of Hong Kong).

There are many to whom we owe a debt of gratitude for the success of CLaSIC 2004 and the publication of this book. In particular, we would like to thank the following persons and organisations: the Guest-of-Honour and Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Associate Professor Tan Tai Yong, for opening the conference; Professor Peter Reeves, then Director of the Centre, for having believed in and supported the conference from the onset; members of the Scientific Committee for the selection of papers for this book; the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences for a generous research grant (Academic Research Fund Project No. R-127-000-005-112) in support of the conference and this publication; our other sponsors, including the Lee Foundation, the Goethe-Institut Singapore, 3A Corporation, NUS Extensions and the Chinese Language Teaching and Research Fund administered jointly by the Centre and the Department of Chinese Studies; and Lionel Lye for his invaluable help in proof-reading and formatting the manuscript. Last but certainly not least, we feel compelled to convey our sincere thanks to the colleagues on the Organising Committee of the conference and in the Centre's administrative support

team, whose dedication and tireless efforts provided the basis for the resounding success of CLaSIC 2004.

Wai Meng Chan, Kwee Nyet Chin and Titima Suthiwan,
Singapore, June 2006

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1

FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING IN ASIA AND BEYOND: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK

Wai Meng Chan, Kwee Nyet Chin and Titima Suthiwan

1 The spread of foreign language learning and its significance

Given the spread of foreign language learning around the world today, it may come as a surprise to many that “futurologists” of the 19th century had actually failed to predict the importance of foreign language learning and its unprecedented growth since the second half of the 20th century (Graddol, 1997/2000). After all, the European Union (EU) has identified proficiency in foreign languages as one of several key competencies “considered vital for a lifetime of successful participation in society” (Eurydice, 2002, p. 3). In fact, it justifies this view by citing several benefits which foreign language proficiency can provide:

Competence in **foreign languages** has long been recognised as an indispensable economic and social resource within a culturally and linguistically diverse Europe and beyond. Competence in foreign languages is not limited to technical skill in a particular language but also includes openness to different cultures and respect for others and their competence and achievements. Learning other languages promotes an extended sense of identity, making people feel part of more than one linguistic and cultural community. It also increases people’s employment, education and leisure options, which in turn may generate a whole range of personal, social and workplace competencies.

(Eurydice, 2002, p. 17)

Earlier, in 2000, the Lisbon European Council had called for the establishment of a framework to provide EU citizens with five basic skills: IT skills, technological culture, entrepreneurship, social skills and foreign languages (European Council [EC], 2000). The Barcelona European Council in 2002 recommended the learning of at least two foreign languages from a very early age. Certainly, countries in the EU have made much progress in the realisation of these goals, as data from 2002/2003 reveal that, in almost all EU countries, pupils have to learn a foreign language from primary school on-

wards, with pupils in Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands and Norway starting as young as 5 or 6 (see Eurydice, 2005). In thirteen of the surveyed countries, 50% or more of primary school pupils learned at least one foreign language in 2001/2002, while at least 50% of upper secondary pupils learn at least two foreign languages in fifteen countries in the same time period (Eurydice, 2005).

Across the Atlantic, in the United States, a Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies came to the conclusion in 1978 that Americans' lack of foreign language proficiency threatens to compromise the country's security and could have an adverse effect on its economic growth (Crystal, 1995). Efforts have been undertaken since then to improve the status and availability of foreign language learning both in schools and colleges in the U.S. Moderate success was achieved as foreign language enrolments almost doubled in U.S. public high schools, rising from 23% of the student population in 1978 to 44% in 2002¹. Despite this almost twofold increase in enrolments, the American administration argues that much more needs to be done and cites the following statistics (see U.S. Department of Education [USDE], 2006) as cause for serious concern: 1) Only 31% of American elementary schools and 24% of public elementary schools report teaching foreign languages; 2) Of these schools, 79% provide no more than introductory exposure; 3) Of the 44% of high school students enrolled in foreign language classes in 2002, 69% are enrolled in Spanish and 18% in French; 4) Less than 1% of high school students combined study Arabic, Chinese, Farsi, Japanese, Korean, Russian or Urdu; and 5) Less than 8% of undergraduates in the U.S. take foreign language courses, and less than 2% study abroad in any given year. To counter these trends, the U.S. Department of Education will be proposing a sum of 57 million U.S. dollars in its budget for financial year 2007, representing an increase of 35 million U.S. dollars over the previous financial year, to fund various initiatives to educate students, teachers and government workers in critical need foreign languages such as Arabic, Chinese, Japanese and Korean, and to increase the number of advanced level speakers in these and other languages.

Myriam Met (n.d.) of the National Foreign Language Center in Maryland provides two main reasons why more Americans should bother to learn foreign languages. First, she believes that foreign language proficiency will im-

¹ Data collected by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (Draper & Hicks, 2002) show that foreign language enrolments in US public high schools rose from 23% in 1978 to 43.8% in 2000. U.S. Department of Education figures place the percentage of American high school students enrolled in foreign language classes at 44% (U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

prove the United States' competitiveness in a globalised world and aid its increasingly service-based economy in securing business volume. As an essentially monolingual society, the U.S. would otherwise concede significant ground in international trade to multilingual countries. Second, the lack of foreign language skills would severely hinder its efforts to ensure its national security and defend itself against terrorism, as intelligence gathered is unlikely to be in clear, comprehensible English. If the U.S. are to continue to "make progress toward achieving humanitarian goals and promoting prosperity and democracy around the world" (Met, n.d., paragraph 4), then the country must pay far greater attention to foreign language learning. This view is echoed by the U.S. Department of Education, which — in justifying its intended injection of 57 million U.S. dollars — cites the same two reasons of security and competitiveness (USDE, 2006).

There can be little doubt that globalization as well as the economic conditions and opportunities it has created have greatly influenced the way foreign languages are viewed and valued — in particular those languages which are considered of greater economic value. In 1997, the United Nations published two rankings of languages according to their relative economic strength. To arrive at the first of these lists, the educational consultancy and research firm, The English Company (UK) Ltd (henceforth: engco), uses the GDP of countries in which major languages are spoken to calculate a Gross Language Product (GLP) for these languages. Table 1 shows this ranking of languages by GLP.

Table 1. Estimates of Gross Language Product (GLP) of major languages in \$billion (source: Graddol, 1997/2000, p. 29)

1.	English	7,815
2.	Japanese	4,240
3.	German	2,455
4.	Spanish	1,789
5.	French	1,557
6.	Chinese	985
7.	Portuguese	611
8.	Arabic	408
9.	Russian	363
10.	Hindi/Urdu	114
11.	Italian	111
12.	Malay	79
13.	Bengali	32

A different calculation model, which uses the relative international trading volume of countries where these languages are spoken, leads to a different ranking, reproduced in Table 2.

Table 2. Major languages by traded GLP in \$billion (source: Graddol, 1997/2000, p. 29)

1.	English	2,338
2.	German	1,196
3.	French	803
4.	Chinese	803
5.	Japanese	700
6.	Spanish	610
7.	Italian	488
8.	Portuguese	138
9.	Malay	118
10.	Arabic	85
11.	Russian	73
12.	Hindi/Urdu	25
13.	Bengali	9

Interestingly, the relative popularity of foreign languages studied by students at the Centre for Language Studies (CLS) of the National University of Singapore, to which the editors of this book are affiliated, seems to bear out the predictive value of these models. The languages with the highest enrolments in the last few years have been Japanese (with an enrolment of approximately 1520 over two semesters in the academic year 2005/2006), German (850), French (780) and Chinese (730)², all placed within the top six of both rankings. Overall, foreign language courses at the CLS have gained considerably in popularity among students, who read them mainly as free electives, with the total enrolments for all languages growing by 40% from approximately 3,600 in 2001/2002 to 5,150 in 2005/2006.

Educational policy in other Asian countries seems also to reflect engco's estimates of the languages' economic strength. A recent survey of language education policy and trends in China (Lam, 2005) reveals that English is undoubtedly the most important and most learned foreign language in Chinese universities. There exists in fact a requirement for students to study College English in the first two years of the four-year undergraduate programme (with four hours of instruction per week) and Subject Based English in the next two

² English, which is not a foreign language in Singapore, and Spanish are not taught at the CLS. The nine languages offered at the CLS are Chinese, French, German, Indonesian, Japanese, Malay, Tamil, Thai and Vietnamese.

(with two hours per week). The surveyed universities reported that, besides English, the foreign languages attracting the largest enrolments are Japanese, French, German, Russian and Spanish, most of which are placed high in the rankings cited above.

Indeed, globalization and the perception held by individuals, society and the state that foreign languages are necessary and valuable assets in today's competitive economies are apparently the driving forces behind Asian governments' efforts to promote foreign language learning in their respective countries and to enable students to acquire communicative competence in at least one foreign language; invariably, English has been chosen as the required foreign language by most Asian countries, including the main economic powerhouses, Japan, China, South Korea and Taiwan. In introducing his country's action plan to cultivate "Japanese with English abilities", the Japanese Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) sums up the new challenges and opportunities created by globalization, which necessitate an adequate grasp of the English language:

Recently, globalization in various fields of the economy and society has advanced rapidly. Transfers of information and capital across national borders as well as the movement of people and products have increased. Thus, international interdependency has deepened. At the same time, international economic competition has intensified entering a so-called period of "mega-competition". Much effort is necessary to meet such challenges. [...]

Globalization extends to various activities of individuals as well as to the business world. Each individual has increasing opportunities to come in contact with the global market and services, and participate in international activities. It has become possible for anyone to become active on a world level. Furthermore, due to progress in the information technology revolution, a wide range of activities, from daily life to economic activities, are being influenced by the movement to a knowledge-based society driven by the forces of knowledge and information. Thus, there is a strong demand for the abilities to obtain and understand knowledge and information as well as the abilities to transmit information and to engage in communication.

In such a situation, English has played a central role as the common international language in linking people who have different mother tongues. For children living in the 21st century, it is essential for them to acquire communication abilities in English as a common international language.

(MEXT, 2003)

While enrolment statistics and curricular descriptions for foreign language courses at institutions of higher education in these countries are difficult to come by, such information is more readily available for primary and secondary education. Such data as well as the respective governments' policy statements provide a clear indication of the growing importance of foreign lan-

guage education, especially the learning of English as a foreign language. Besides making College English a curricular requirement in universities, the Chinese government requires primary schools to introduce English lessons latest by Primary 3, with no less than four lessons a week. English language learning is to continue through all twelve years of school education from the primary to the upper secondary level (Ministry of Education, People Republic of China [MOEPRC], 2001).

In Japan, English language teaching was introduced in primary schools in 2002 as part of the state's plans to promote international understanding and, ultimately, to advance the internationalisation of Japanese schools and local communities. Pupils are exposed to the English language within the subject of Integrated Studies from Primary 3 onwards, with the emphasis on learning conversation through appropriate hands-on activities (MEXT, 1998; see also Araki-Metcalf in this book, chap. 12). As prescribed by MEXT's Course of Study for lower and upper secondary schools, implemented in 2003, foreign language learning remains a compulsory component of the school curricula at these levels (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology [MEXT], 2003). At upper secondary level, students may also opt to learn other foreign languages, including major languages such as French, German, Spanish and Chinese, depending on the availability of teaching resources.

In South Korea, starting from 1997, English has become a part of the regular curriculum, with one hour of instruction per week in Primary 3 and 4, and two hours per week in Primary 5 and 6 (see Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development [MOEHRD], n.d.). It remains a compulsory subject for students through all three years of lower secondary education, with a total of 340 hours of instruction from years 1 to 3. While English is required only in year 1 of the upper secondary level, it is in fact taught in most upper secondary schools for all three years. However, students do have the option of learning a second foreign language in addition to or in place of English at designated foreign language high schools, established in the 1990s to "provide students with the skills needed to be internationally competitive and communicatively competent in foreign languages" (Murdoch, 2002, p. 1). The languages available to students in these schools are — besides English — Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Russian and Spanish.

Following experiments with the teaching of English in selected primary schools in the latter part of the 1990s, the Taiwanese Ministry of Education introduced it in 2002 as a required subject in schools for five out of the nine years of compulsory education. English language teaching commences in Primary 5 and continues till the end of lower secondary education (Ministry of

Education, Republic of Taiwan [MOEROC], 2003). Students advancing to upper secondary education are expected to study English throughout the three years at this level. Besides promoting English, which the Taiwanese government has designated a quasi-official language, it has sought to stimulate greater interest in a second foreign language among upper secondary students by implementing a five-year programme for the promotion of a second foreign language in 1999 (Government Information Office [GIO], 2005). Schools started teaching Japanese, French, German and Spanish, and by 2005, one year after the conclusion of the programme, 138 schools offered Japanese to 19,877 students, 50 offered French to 3,274 students, 16 offered German to 765 students, 17 offered Spanish to 581 students, and 2 offered Korean to 42 students (MOEROC, n.d.). The Taiwanese government had in fact achieved a more than twofold increase in total enrolments in these second foreign languages from 11,500 in 1999, when the programme was launched, to 24,539 in 2005.

It would appear apparent that a common pattern is emerging among Asian countries in their efforts to promote foreign language learning and to ensure that their people will partake in international communities and the economic activities of an increasingly globalised world. First, English — as the *lingua franca* of the financial, academic and technological sectors — has been firmly installed as the first and most significant foreign language taught in schools and universities, which is not surprising considering that it easily topped the two rankings of major languages based on their economic value (see pp. 3–4). Second, education ministries have all chosen to give their students an early start to English language learning, beginning as early as Primary 3 in most cases. Third, the teaching of English is sustained thereafter through primary and lower secondary education till at least the first year of upper secondary education. Fourth, students are increasingly being encouraged to learn a second foreign language at the upper secondary level. Fifth, there are unmistakable parallels in the goals of the foreign language curricula implemented by the various governments. For one, the main goal of these curricula is to develop students' ability to communicate effective and appropriately in the foreign language. Emphasis is given, particularly at the lower levels, to speaking and listening. Another notable parallel is the goal of fostering a better understanding of the cultures of the target languages and thus greater openness to international exchanges through exposure to foreign languages. Lastly, there is the intercultural goal, namely that students will — in the process of learning about a foreign culture — gain a keener awareness and appreciation

of their own native cultures (see e.g. Lam, 2005; MOEROC, 2003; MEXT, 2003).

While there is no denying that English is the single most important foreign language in Asia (and around the world) and that European languages figure prominently among the second foreign languages taught from the upper secondary level onwards, major Asian languages are by no means marginalized or run the risk of becoming irrelevant in the future as foreign languages. In fact, the engco forecasting model predicts that, while English will most probably retain its significance as the global lingua franca in the latter stages of the 21st century, it is unlikely that it will command a monopolistic position (Graddol, 1997/2000). Rather it expects an "oligopoly" of world languages to emerge, each potentially with its own sphere of influence. Among the languages expected to join English in the top league are — based on current demographic and economic trends — three Asian languages: Chinese, Hindi/Urdu and Arabic.

Asian states are also not sparing any efforts to ensure that their respective languages remain relevant and are learned around the world. Japan, South Korea and China have all founded institutions similar to the more established European institutions of British Council (UK), Alliance Française (France) and Goethe-Institut (Germany) to promote the study of their respective countries and the Japanese, Korean and Chinese languages.

The first of these institutions to be founded, in 1972, the Japan Foundation (JF) aims to promote the study of Japan and the Japanese language as well as to facilitate intellectual, cultural and arts exchange between Japan and the world. While Japanese has not been predicted in the engco report to be among the world languages of the future, official Japanese statistics reveal that the number of learners of Japanese as a second or foreign language has risen significantly in the last two decades. In a survey conducted in 2003 (see JF, n.d.), it found that there were 2.35 million learners of Japanese as a foreign language in 127 countries, a substantial increase from approximately 127,000 in 1979 and approximately 981,000 in 1990. 60% of these learners are to be found in East Asia and up to 90% in Asia and Oceania together. At the same time, true to its intention to internationalise and to attract more overseas students to its universities, Japan has been working at providing greater financial aid for international students, encouraging greater student exchange between Japanese and international universities, improving the admission system for international students, and promoting the teaching of Japanese as a second language (JSL) for international students. The latter move has seen the num-

ber of JSL learners in Japan grow from 69,950 in 1992 to over 95,000 in 2000, according to figures released by MEXT (n.d.).

Unlike JF and the Korea Foundation (KF), established in 1991, the Confucius Institute conducts its own Chinese language courses. Set up only in 2005 by China's National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (NOTCFL), it has quickly expanded its operations worldwide, and there are currently 71 institutes in Asia, Africa, Australia, Europe and the United States, with the number expected to hit 100 by the end of 2006 (Leong, 2006). The pace of its expansion may appear phenomenal, but this may have been precipitated by a remarkable surge in worldwide interest in the Chinese language, underlining perhaps engco's prediction that Chinese would be a world language to rival English by 2050. According to figures released by the NOTCFL and cited by the People's Daily Online, there were more than 30 million non-native learners of Chinese worldwide in 2005, while more than 90,000 people took the Chinese Proficiency Test (HSK) — the equivalent of the English TOEFL — in 2004 ("Chinese teaching to match nation's clout", 2005).

While there are apparently no statistics on the number of Korean language learners around the world, it is unlikely that the Korean language would enjoy the same level of popularity as Chinese or Japanese. In institutions of higher education in the US, Korean ranks 15th of 162 foreign languages taught and accounts for only about 5,100 learners or 0.4% of all modern foreign language students (Welles, 2004, cited by Lee, 2006). However, Welles observed that the figures had doubled between 1990 and 2002, which is consistent with KF's claim "that an increasing number of non-Koreans are also choosing to study Korean as a foreign language to gain a better understanding of Korean culture and society" ("Major programs for 2005", 2005), attributing the increase to a growing international interest in Korean popular culture. According to figures provided by KF, there were, in 2002, more than 370 universities in 54 countries outside of Korea offering Korean language courses ("KF's support for Korean language", 2002).

The information above on language education policies, foreign language curricula and enrolment figures in various states reveals an unmistakably positive trend in foreign language learning in Asia and beyond. The main reasons for this trend as well as the governments' intensive promotion of foreign language learning are most likely to be found in 1) the perceived opportunities and needs arising from the process of globalisation, 2) the intention to increase international exposure and exchange, and 3) security concerns (particularly in the case of the U.S.). There may however be another reason for this

upward trend — one that augurs well for the future of foreign language teaching in Asia. Gone are the days when, for a lack of qualified teachers and teacher preparation programmes, anyone with a reasonable grasp of the target language was considered qualified to teach it. Proficiency in the target language is but one of many criteria which a good language teacher must fulfil. The increasing professionalism in and the scientific grounding of foreign language teaching have, in the last decades, led to significant improvements in teaching and facilitated more effective and enjoyable learning. The *science* behind foreign language teaching today is turning it into a more refined *art*, making language learning a motivating and rewarding experience for students.

2 The science behind the art of foreign language teaching

As Ornstein and Lasley (2000) remark, “good teachers use and combine a variety of technical skills in ways that create fluid opportunities for learning” (p. 1). Indeed, looking at the teacher behaviours which educationists have found to have a positive influence on learning outcomes, one comes to realise what intricate skills a good teacher must possess. In investigating teacher effects on student achievement, Gage (1978, cited in Ornstein & Lasley, 2000) contends that the following three clusters of teacher behaviour have a positive effect on learning outcomes: 1) teacher indirectness, the willingness of the teacher to accept student ideas and feelings, and the ability to provide a healthy emotional climate; 2) teacher praise, support, and encouragement, use of humour to release tensions, and attention to students’ needs; and 3) teacher acceptance, clarifying, building, and developing students’ ideas. On the other hand, teacher criticism, reprimanding students and justifying authority have been identified as behaviours which are negatively correlated to student achievement. Brophy and Good (1986) point to a number of principles of teaching which one would have to adhere to to ensure good learning outcomes. For instance, they assert that a good teacher should ensure that learning activities are of an appropriate difficulty level and suited to learners’ current achievement levels and needs, be aware of what is going on in the classroom and be alert to the progress of classroom activities, be able to sustain an activity while doing something else at the same time, be able to sustain proper lesson pacing and group momentum, monitor students’ performance and provide immediate help where necessary, and give appropriate feedback and praise.

It would appear from the above that good teaching — and likewise good language teaching — would involve a host of personal attributes on the part of