China and English

Globalisation and the Dilemmas of Identity

Edited by
Joseph Lo Bianco, Jane Orton
and Gao Yihong

Critical Language and Literacy Studies

CRITICAL LANGUA UDIES
Series Editors: Vai onny Norton and
Alastair Pennycook

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MULTILINGUAL MATTERS
Bristol • Buffalo • Toronto

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.
China and English: Globalisation and the Dilemmas of Identity/
Edited by Joseph Lo Bianco, Jane Orton and Gao Yihong.
Critical Language and Literacy Studies
Includes bibliographical references and index.
1. English language--Social aspects--China. 2. English language--Study and teaching--China. 3. English language--Globalization. 4. Language and culture--China.
I. Lo Bianco, Joseph. II. Orton, Jane. III. Yihong, Gao.
PE3502.C54C45 2009
427'.951–dc22 2009033462

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue entry for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN-13: 978-1-84769-229-0 (hbk)
ISBN-13: 978-1-84769-228-3 (pbk)

Multilingual Matters
UK: St Nicholas House, 31–34 High Street, Bristol BS1 2AW, UK.
USA: UTP, 2250 Military Road, Tonawanda, NY 14150, USA.
Canada: UTP, 5201 Dufferin Street, North York, Ontario, M3H 5T8, Canada.

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Typeset by Techset Composition Ltd., Salisbury, UK.
Printed and bound in Great Britain by Short Run Press Ltd.

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Series Editors: Vaidehi Ramanathan, *University of California, USA*; Bonny Norton, *University of British Columbia, Canada*; and Alastair Pennycook, *University of Technology, Sydney, Australia*

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Contributors

Joseph Lo Bianco is Professor of Language and Literacy Education and Associate Dean (Global Relations) at the Graduate School of Education, University of Melbourne. He is author of Australia's first comprehensive language policy, the National Policy on Languages, 1987. In 2007 he produced a Special Issue of the journal *Language Policy* entitled *The Emergence of Chinese*. His email address is j.lobianco@unimelb.edu.au

Jane Orton is an Honorary Senior Fellow in the Graduate School of Education at the University of Melbourne, where she has researched, taught and supervised for many years in the area of international English, language teaching and culture, and non-verbal communication. Her email address is j.orton@unimelb.edu.au

Gao Yihong is Professor in the English Department, School of Foreign Languages, Peking University, and Director of The Association of Chinese Sociolinguistics. Her major research interest lies in the social psychology and social context of language learning. Her email address is gaoyh@pku.edu.au

Bian Yongwei is Associate Professor in the Department of Language and Literature of the University of International Relations, China. She is a PhD candidate in the English Department, School of Foreign Languages, Peking University. Her research addresses identity and language learning, intercultural communication and discourse analysis. Her email address is tongbianca@163.com

Li Jingyan received her Doctor of Education degree from the Graduate School of Education at the University of Melbourne and is a staff member at the Harbin Institute of Technology in China. She is an experienced EFL teacher and an associate professor at the College of Foreign Languages, Harbin Institute of Technology in China. Her email address is lijingyan.622@163.com

Liu Yi is a Doctor of Philosophy candidate in the School of Foreign Languages at Peking University and specializes in applied linguistics. Liu Yi has published on language assessment, systemic functional linguistics, EFL teaching methodologies and EFL teachers' professional identities. Her email address is daphneliu3@hotmail.com

Li Yuxia is a Doctor of Philosophy candidate in linguistics and culture studies in the School of Foreign Languages at Peking University. Her research and published work have focused on second language learning, discourse analysis and sociolinguistics. At present, her research interest lies in EFL learner identities. Her email address is mortalbird@126.com

Li Zhanzi received her PhD in linguistics from the English Department of Peking University. She is now a Professor of English in Nanjing Normal University and her research interests include functional grammar, discourse analysis and language-learning autobiographies. Her email address is lizz402@hotmail.com

Xu Hongchen is a Doctor of Philosophy candidate in the School of Foreign Languages at Peking University, majoring in sociolinguistics. His research covers bilingual education in China, language and identity, and intercultural communication. His email address is michaelhongchenxu@yahoo.com.cn

Zhou Qingsheng is Director of Department of Southern China Minority Languages at the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. A volume of the *Annual Report of the Language Situation in China 2005* (Volume 1) edited by him was published in 2006 and of the *Annual Report of the Language Situation in China 2006* (Volume 1) edited by him was published in 2007. His email address is qshzhou@163bj.com

Preface

As editors of this series, we were very interested to read the proposal on China and English, forwarded to us by Joe Lo Bianco, Jane Orton and Gao Yihong. For a number of years, we have observed the dramatic changes in the relationship between China as a nation, and English as a language, and were intrigued to see how diverse scholars would frame and analyse China's complex linguistic landscape. We were not disappointed. Drawing on a range of innovative research, the authors in this edited volume have given readers a window into the multiple ways in which Chinese speakers are negotiating the English language at a time of great sociopolitical change, and how issues of identity at individual and national levels are implicated. Of particular interest is how the editors have been able to accomplish this ambitious project, and what themes the authors of individual chapters have considered the most salient.

How the editors have accomplished this task speaks to the nature of much international collaborative research conducted in the academic world in this era of globalisation, where the internet has facilitated research relationships between scholars separated by thousands of miles, and air travel has made regular face-to-face collaboration possible. In the great sweep of history, it was not that long ago when international collaborative research was constrained by a laborious mail system and cumbersome sea travel (Leavitt, 2007). Modern technologies have enabled Lo Bianco and Orton of the University of Melbourne in Australia to collaborate with Gao of Peking University in China, to produce a research-based volume that indexes a unique set of mutual interests and investments. These interests are centrally concerned with interculturalism, and indeed arise from exemplary intercultural collaboration. Interculturalism is thus both the medium and the message of this volume, and authors have engaged in what Orton calls 'mutual self-exploration' in productive new ways. Clearly, such relationships need to be supported by a scholar's institution, which in turn reflects wider priorities at national levels, an issue of great interest to language planners and policy-makers (Spolsky, 2004).

Interestingly, the very technologies that have made international collaborative research possible are also associated with the increasing dominance of the English language internationally, and with respect to China in particular. Crystal (2006) documents the extent to which the internet and world wide web are dominated by the English language, though recent research has suggested that while English language use may be increasing, its proportional representation on the internet is decreasing as more languages are used (Danet & Herring, 2007; Graddol, 2006). Nonetheless, the publishing industry, and scientific publication in particular, remains English-dominated. Small wonder then that China's English language planning has been particularly intense in recent years. Indeed, Lo Bianco argues that recent developments in China's language planning have, in some cases, and in parallel with similar trends elsewhere in the world, begun to shift English from object of instruction to medium of instruction. This forms part of the context to this book: English dominates communication in many domains, and yet the growing international significance of China is giving Chinese languages, cultures and identities an increasingly important role in this mix.

Such shifts in language policy and use have considerable implications for how identity is understood and negotiated, particularly with respect to what Orton calls China's 'narrative of self-identity'. This question has a long history in China – as it has for many other countries in the world – from early relations with missionaries and colonial powers, through the turbulent 20th century and the strong antipathy to Western knowledge and culture, and on to the more accommodatory stance of more recent years. As Chen (1995) makes clear, China's relation to and construction of the Occident has to be seen as a counterpoint to the Orientalist constructions of China. It is in this context that many of the concerns of this book need to be understood: how can Chinese speakers negotiate a productive relationship with English, and Western ideas more broadly, without sacrificing Chinese cultural identity? As Gao notes in Chapter 2:

> One issue that Confucius and his contemporaries did not have to worry about was the learning of languages other than the native. It has been left for generations of their descendents to respond to the central threat to the integrity of Chinese identity posed by the rituals embedded in another language. (p. 59)

This complex question is taken up in all five sections of the book, which include research in diverse traditions, from historical analysis (Lo Bianco, Orton, Zhou) and narrative (Li Yuxia, Li Zhanzi, Liu) to quantitative study (Bian) and survey research (Lo Bianco, Orton). Themes investigated

include relations between China and Western societies (Gao, Lo Bianco, Orton); legitimacy of identity research (Gao); language pedagogy (Li Jingyan); teacher identity (Liu); and bilingual education (Xu).

The fundamental question of cultural identity in relation to language use raises two second-order series of questions: What is a language, and who owns it? With respect to the nature of language, applied linguistics in the West varies between structuralist orientations that take the position that language is a neutral medium of communication, characterised by a systematic set of rules, structures and vocabulary (Saussure, 1966), and more poststructuralist orientations that view language as a complex social practice that engages the identities of learners in diverse and often contradictory ways (Block, 2007; Norton, 2000; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004; Toohey, 2000). Readers of this volume learn that the Chinese distinction between *yong* (Chinese learning as essence) and *ti* (Western learning as utility), as discussed by Gao, is highly paradoxical with respect to debates on the nature of language. On the one hand, the notion of *ti* seems to suggest that it is possible to learn a language as a neutral set of structures, leaving cultural identity intact; on the other hand, the notion of *yong* suggests that any learning (and this must include the learning of a language) is integral to cultural identity. These paradoxes around identity underscore for us ways in which identities are constructed within discourses, as produced by particular historical contingencies, modes of teaching, institutional sites of learning and individual proclivities. As the various chapters attest, identities emerge within fluid circulations of power, which defy notions of identity as seamless and unified.

The question of who owns English – and the notion of ownership may vary substantially across different political and cultural systems – is another important theme in this volume. In the field of applied linguistics, early distinctions between English as a Second Language and English as a Foreign Language, while seeking to address the importance of context in relation to the learning of English, nevertheless reinforced the notion that learners of English were newcomers to the language, and that the goal of English language learning was to approximate the native speaker. The work of scholars such as Canagarajah (1997) Pennycook, (1994, 2007), and Ramanathan (2002, 2005) has begun to shift the grounds of this debate, challenging common-held assumptions about English language teaching internationally. Most recently, as the European Union grapples to accommodate its multilingual population (Phillipson, 2003), scholars such as Jenkins (2007) and Seidlhofer, Breitender, and Pitzl (2006) are becoming advocates for an understanding of English as a Lingua Franca. Similarly in the Asian context, the notion of English as a Lingua Franca, as a language

that is no longer tied to the cultural baggage of either native or nativized varieties of English, as a language produced in the communicative marketplace of an expanding, diverse and vociferous Asia, has been the subject of much debate (Kirkpatrick, 2006; Tupas, 2008). If, as many scholars have suggested, the non-native speaker of English needs far greater recognition (Braine, 1999; Kachru, 1986; Norton, 1997), or indeed the very nature of the native/nonnative distinction is an untenable one, particularly in the context of global Englishes (Rajagopalan, 2004), then Chinese speakers of English are an important stakeholder in this increasingly crowded linguistic marketplace (Norton & Gao, 2008). In this view, learning English will not necessarily compromise the cultural identity of Chinese speakers, but render it more complex and multifaceted.

We conclude with a note on the genealogy and dissemination of ideas. It is evident from this volume that ideas, like international collaborative research projects, do not exist in a vacuum, but index complex histories, sets of relationships, and access to resources. While Lo Bianco, Orton, and Gao are all senior scholars at the University of Melbourne and Peking University, all of the other contributors, with the sole exception of Zhou, have been trained as PhD candidates at these two institutions. What this suggests is that many ideas, theories, and research projects have genealogies that reflect a discursive history between established and emerging scholars. This is not to suggest that the relationships are uni-directional, or that the theories are static. Rather, the extent to which theories are shared, generated, and possibly resisted takes place within networks, which themselves are part of wider sets of relationships. It is sobering to consider what opportunities are available to emerging scholars who have little access to such valuable material and symbolic resources; equally troubling is to reflect on the impact of this volume if it were published in a lesser-known language than English. Such concerns aside, we appreciate that globalization has created the conditions necessary for us to access an exciting array of scholarship from a region of the world that is making a significant impact on applied linguistics.

Bonny Norton, Vaidehi Ramanathan and Alastair Pennycook
June 2009

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Introduction

JOSEPH LO BIANCO

The Volume

The idea for this volume arose from a series of research projects on Chinese learners' acquisition of English and from research conducted on the experiences of Chinese learners in Australian education. Also relevant have been wider considerations about effective teaching and learning of languages in general, such as Chinese in Australian education. These experiences stimulated reflection on a range of theoretical and practical issues concerning identity change, educational adjustment and cultural consequences of the encounter with difference and otherness represented by rapidly integrating global education.

The roots of the volume are ultimately in our individual encounters with diverse learners and the simultaneous transformation of the disciplines of applied linguistics and comparative education under the influence of critical perspectives, rapid globalisation of education markets and the emergence of highly competitive and interacting knowledge economies in the Asia Pacific region (Marginson, 2007). Foremost among these is China with its extensive investment in English language-mediated education, and therefore its deep interest in effective teaching and learning of English, not to mention research and publishing efforts, which increasingly rely on English. These considerations have influenced our choice of title for the volume, *China and English: Globalisation and Dilemmas of Identity*. The locus of the writing is China, overwhelmingly in relation to its encounter with English under contemporary conditions of more rapidly enmeshed globalisation. All these raise some issues and dilemmas related to identity at national or collective levels and for individuals.

This volume is the outcome of an extended interaction among the writers. Our essential aim has been to capture something of the flavour of many conversations that have informed this work, conversations extended over several meetings, mostly in China, between a largely stable grouping of Australian and Chinese scholars thinking, writing and teaching about the intersection, problems and dilemmas of contemporary language education. The volume as it appears therefore is the outcome of a long gestation of the independent research trajectories of the participants and of our collective discussions and encounters.

The Collaboration

The writers are individual researchers, teachers and teacher educators located in Australian and Chinese institutions who have engaged in conversation around questions of language and identity. These interactions led to a formal agreement between the University of Melbourne and Peking University to facilitate and support the evolving collaboration.

The endeavour envisaged in this institutional accord was a highly productive eight-institution Roundtable held at Peking University in October 2005. In preparation for the Roundtable, the editors of the volume, Lo Bianco, Orton and Gao, supported by Dr Margaret Kumar, prepared a literature review of Chinese and Western understandings of the culture and identity consequences of language learning and provided this to participants of the Roundtable. The fruitful discussions that followed were incorporated into papers written by the participants and were published in the *Journal of Chinese Sociolinguistics*[1] in December 2005, a rapid turnaround, which is testament to the success of the collaboration.

In December 2006 a number of Roundtable participants presented papers at the 5th International Conference of Chinese Sociolinguistics in Beijing. In May 2007 'the team' once again came together, this time running a well-attended symposium entitled *English: Language and Identity in China* during the 5th International Congress of the China English Language Education Association, jointly held with the 1st Congress of the Chinese Applied Linguistics Association.

As a result of these activities, the collaboration and the ideas that inform it have been field tested and the research areas have formed a relatively coherent and holistic enterprise, although studied from a diverse array of perspectives. These perspectives illuminate what is empirically a very complex field and so no attempt has been made to restrict, limit or direct

the specific approaches, methods or theoretical assumptions brought to bear on the problem of English learning and identity issues in China.

English: Expanding and Extending in Education

China's English language planning has been particularly intense since 2000. While the expansion of English in Chinese education has been continuous since the late 1980s, the coincidence of the country's admission to the World Trade Organisation on 11 December 2001, Beijing's hosting of the Olympic Games in 2008 and Shanghai's successful bid to host the 2010 World Expo have meant that the first decade of the third millennium has seen a major acceleration of provisions and planning on behalf of foreign languages in general and English in particular. Most of these measures aim to extend the reach of English throughout Chinese education and some aim to raise competency outcomes, but others point to new directions and new reasons as to why English is allocated a prominent role in Chinese education, and therefore in Chinese society (Wen & Gao, 2007).

In January 2001, the Chinese Ministry of Education issued a document entitled 'Guidelines for Promoting English Teaching in Elementary Schools' (Ministry of Education, 2001a), which stipulated that the threshold of compulsory English learning be lowered by four years, from the first year of junior high school to Grade 3 in elementary school. Significantly, the Guidelines replaced the general focus of the 1999 curriculum on receptive language skills, like reading, with a new emphasis on the productive use of English for interpersonal communication. In some large cities and in the private and non-formal sectors, English study begins earlier. Shanghai is a good case in point. Local authorities have moved to develop internationally competitive foreign language teaching programmes with the explicit aim of supporting the wider municipal goal of positioning Shanghai as a competitive international metropolis (Shanghai Education Commission, 1999: 3). One component is an expanded role for English, now used to teach arts and ballet, mathematics and some sciences, especially the computer sciences, and information technology. Subjects that are not presently taught in English and for which it appears that there are no current plans to teach in English, such as physics, chemistry, history and politics, are not immune from English influence, since in these learning areas technical terms, laws, translations of key concepts and other glossing from English are promoted. This approach of including English labels and information within Chinese-medium courses (Shanghai Education Commission, 2002–2003) suggests a new role for English, that

of semantic accompaniment to material and concepts primarily mastered in Chinese.

This inclusion of English within Chinese-taught subjects underscores the wide set of roles and expectations of bilingual functioning in Chinese contexts, differentiated according to levels of competence, purpose and audience. These might range from basal recognition of romanised or pinyin-rendered Chinese, to English equivalence recognition, to basic translation knowledge, to receptive skills of reading and listening, all the way through to productive skills of speaking and interacting, and, maximally, high-level academic writing production. The situation is dynamic and, depending on levels of preparation and resourcing, is likely to expand further in the coming decade.

A new English language curriculum for senior secondary schools was published in the People's Education Press in April 2003 (Ministry of Education, 2003). This too is significant because it modifies the traditional aims of English education, adding a 'humanistic' goal to the longstanding 'instrumental' rationale (Wang, 2006), thereby reinforcing moves away from compartmentalisation of English language knowledge as simply an exercise in gaining extraneous utilitarian skill to advance culturally uninterrupted Chinese national interests. In August of 2001, the Ministry of Education (2001b) issued university-level language of instruction guidelines. Entitled 'Guidelines for Improving Teaching for University Undergraduate Students', this document facilitated an increase in the use of English as an alternative medium of instruction at the tertiary level by suggesting that 5–10% of all undergraduate teaching should be imparted through a foreign language.

The collective effect of these laws has been to shift English from the object of instruction to the medium of instruction, although admittedly still at low levels, to widen the purposes from strictly utilitarian to officially 'humanistic', and to expand sectors from high school down to elementary school and up to undergraduate and post-graduate provision.

The Chapters

The volume is influenced by these policy moves and our collaborative initiatives and aims to apply Western and Chinese understandings of the notion of identity as it takes shape in and through language. The varied professional backgrounds of the writers ensure that a multi-methodological approach complements its multiple disciplinary perspectives. As a result, we present this as a genuine collaboration between Chinese and Australian researchers, teachers and students, jointly exploring issues of identity from multiple angles.