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Foreword

Welcome to the November 2013 issue of the *Journal of English as an International Language*!

The engaging array of research agenda and insights featured in this issue chimes in with EILJ's resolve and remit to foster and cherish a plurality of focus and conceptualizations. This is in keeping with the primacy and centrality of our aspirations and practices in the teaching of EIL. It is our fond belief that such initiatives and exercises could provide the stimulus and synergy that EILJ needs to democratize and dehegemonize the use of English across the cultures and continents of the world.

Alec Lapidus' paper, "English in a Non-Place: Supermodernity and ESL Pedagogy", sets the tone and tenor for this issue in that he articulates a bold theoretical resolve to interrogate and debunk colonial definitions of language which are out of sync with the socio-cultural dimensions that assume a particular prominence in the ways by which non-native speakers of English make sense of their realities and experiences. In light of this, the author asserts that by taking cognizance of the process of "Othering" in L2 teaching we can chart an alternate route for understanding identity formation in second language learning. The theory of supermodernity and its ramifications discussed in the paper can then encourage English speakers of other languages to challenge dominant discourses and positivist truths and assumptions about their culture and identity. In turn, this can be seen as a new direction for EIL/ESL pedagogy given its potential for empowering English language learners/users in their attempts to claim ownership of the language as they cross their cultural borders and boundaries in order to make sense of their identity.

The joint paper entitled "The Question-asking Behavior of Asian Students in an American University Classroom", by Yiting Chu and Lynne Masel Walters investigates Chinese graduate students' perceptions of asking questions in English in an American university classroom. Taking into consideration the impact of the Asian concepts of thinking and speaking on the participants' question-asking behavior, the authors attempt an informed understanding of how American professors' charisma, and the question-asking behavior of other students, influenced the participants' motivation and opportunity to ask questions. The interview findings reported in the paper confirm: that the Chinese students were neither inactive learners nor passive listeners and that they preferred not to ask questions in class, but to save them until later, or to solve the problems themselves prior to seeking assistance from their professors. In light of this, the authors argue that the American professors should be sensitive to the differences in

their students' learning styles and accordingly adjust their classroom methodology so as to optimize student participation and to promote the prevalence of an achievement orientation rather a survival orientation in their classroom ecology. The reasoned discourse used by the authors alerts us to "the rather unsavory issue" of unequal power distribution and its stifling effect on the motivational and participatory influences of the classroom ecology. The paper has all the hallmarks of a persuasive advocacy in that the authors have unabashedly questioned the American professors' inability to recognize the human differences that underlie their students' learning repertoire and their stereotypical characterization of their students' behavior as "atypical" of their classroom ecology.

Lijuan Stella's paper, "A Needs-based Analysis of Cross-Cultural Competence: A Case Study on Spoken English Learning Experience of Chinese International Teaching Assistants (ITAs) in the US", focuses on possible gaps existing between perceived needs of Chinese ITAs to improve oral English and practices in reality that address those needs in order to improve Chinese ITAs' oral English proficiency. The author poses a set of research questions that has helped her capture the dynamics and fall-outs of the phenomenon she has chosen to investigate. The narratives presented in the paper provide an interesting account of the author's first person voice and agency in that they are synonymous with the author's experiential understanding of the issues and insights that assume substance in the study. The theme-based presentation and discussion of the findings confer a sense of narrative immediacy and primacy to the study, which is reminiscent of the ethos that underlies our courage to interrogate the conventional as well the reductionist knowledge that appear to have hegemonized our pedagogies and practices in the teaching of English. Such a realization is fundamental to our beliefs and values in that they are synonymous with the sociolinguistic sensibilities and sensitivities that EILJ upholds both in its vision and practice. The implications stated in the study underscore the need and willingness to factor in content-based approaches to EIL in addition to triangulated interactions with those speakers for whom English is their first language or home language.

Juhi Kim's paper, "Dealing with unknown idiomatic expressions in L2 classroom", unpacks the nuances of idiomatic expressions (IE) in the practices of integrated classroom activity. Given the ubiquity and unpredictability of IE, the author believes that it can seriously handicap learners in their efforts to make sense of their primary classroom activity as the teacher is unaware of the difficulties that unknown IE can create for the learners. As the teacher's understanding of IE is anchored to cognitive theory, he /she views them as developmental issues of language instruction and teaching strategies rather than as phenomena that can co-construct meaning through a socio-culturally situated, collaborative and participatory course of action. In light of this, the

paper argues that unhealthy preoccupations with the teaching of IE as a means of acquiring scientific, measurable knowledge, which can be designed and assessed for the effectiveness of learning and instructional methods is neither tenable nor beneficial in the educational practices of EIL. Using well informed arguments, the author calls for a shift of mindset and approach by which the teaching of IE can be envisioned and enacted as an embedded sense-making practice, rather than as a set of abstract, intangible cognitive knowledge that is conveyed as a standardized form. The paper has profound implications for the EIL communities of practice in that it interrogates the prevalence of asocial assumptions and reductionist practices that have conditioned us into viewing language either as cognitive deficit or cognitive deposit.

Lingyan Zhu and M. Obaidul Hamid's joint paper, "Englishes in China: Researchers' and English teachers' perspectives and their pedagogical implications", uses the world Englishes perspective (WE) as its theoretical mainstay to call for a greater acceptability of varieties of Englishes in China and other new English using polities. The research methodology used in the paper is so well positioned and implemented that it confers a sense of vibrancy to the study. Using informed comparisons between researchers' and practitioners' perspectives on features of varieties' of English and errors, the authors use the ensuing divergence to point out the need to go beyond the mere error-feature distinctions as seen in the Normative English in order to assign appropriate pedagogical value to the featured corpus of Chinese style English constructions. By the same token, the authors argue that categorizing Chinese style English constructions into: China English (CE) and Chinglish (CH) can preclude our attempts to grasp the socio-linguistic sensibilities and sensitivities that underlie a phenomenon of this scale. The authors further argue that in the absence of a social or academic awareness of the features of China English as a distinct variety on the one hand and the curricular preoccupations with Normative English on the other, the teachers might apply their personal judgments to decide on the items' acceptability and categorization. In order to defend the prevalence of World Englishes in the educational practices of EIL, World Englishes research needs to be carried out from an abiding pedagogical perspective to draw on practising teachers' understandings and judgments as a way of promoting greater acceptability of the varieties of Englishes in China and other new English-using polities. Only then, as the authors assert, the linguistic liberalism (as well as pragmatism) underpinning WE can challenge the orthodoxy of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and L2 pedagogy, which view deviations from native speaker (NS) norms as errors and interlanguages (Jenkins, 2006), resulting from deficit learning.

Ugorji's paper, "Standardizing New Englishes: a Suggestion for Phonological Corpora", serves as a fitting testimony to the global spread of the English language as one of the most far-reaching linguistic phenomena of our time. In light of this, the author argues

that any understanding of Africa is not complete without an understanding of the African canons of New Englishes, such as the Nigerian English along with a focus on the socio-political and socio-linguistic sensibilities that underlie it. Pointing out the inevitable need for standardization and codification in the planning of Nigerian English/New Englishes, the author proposes a research tool for standardization focused on the use of phonological materials. The paper defines six parameters for identifying and evaluating elements of the phonology, which have far-reaching implications for the EIL classrooms. These parameters are well synchronised in an eclectic mechanism which borrows the Optimality metaphor (cf. Archangeli 1997, Kager 1999, etc.) in terms of their being ranked but not inviolable. It conceptualizes that input units consist of all elements of a family of units that may occur in the phonological (including phonetic) experience of speakers of the different varieties; and output elements are representatives of classes of such items that emerge as being “optimal” in the grammar. The paper thus provides informed descriptions of terms such as “Standardization and New Englishes”, programme specifics, its applicability and its sociolinguistic grounding.

In closing, I wish to applaud the courage and clarity with which the contributing authors of this issue have showcased their alternate discourses of current reckoning in EIL. Such endeavours are pivotal to EILJ’s declared mission of creating “a heterogeneous global English speech community, with a heterogeneous English and different modes of competence” (Canagarajah, 2006, p. 211). Given this, I am certain that the agenda and insights discussed in this issue would serve as a lamp to all of us, who could otherwise be stranded in a “methodological wasteland of EIL”. Read on!

Dr. Sivakumar Sivasubramaniam

Chief Editor

English in a Non-Place: Supermodernity and ESL Pedagogy

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Abstract

The theory of supermodernity gives us an interesting opportunity to re-examine the way we teach English as a Second or Foreign Language and culture in the 21st century. If language is a sociocultural phenomenon, then colonial definitions of what language is and how it is used by non-native speakers no longer match the reality in the field. In particular, here is an opportunity to cognize the process of Othering in L2 teaching and offer an alternative that is directly related to the question of identity formation in second language learning. In turn, this can be seen as a new direction for ESL pedagogy. Both the theoretical foundation and its practical ramifications are discussed.

Keywords: English as a Second Language, culture, supermodernity, the Other

The concept of place

The French ethnologist and anthropologist Auge (2000) defines places as physical areas which are, nonetheless, directly related to the properties which are tied to them by the human beings who inhabit them. For instance, he writes about places which are separated from the world outside by water and other physical barriers that signify the difference between those who live within the boundaries and the world which exists outside. He describes these places as areas that are directly connected to the way people who inhabit them describe themselves and their own identity. Therefore, from this point of view, “places create the organically social” (2000, p. 94). For example, Auge writes about the tendency to describe the place which a given group inhabits as tied to its origin and history in the group’s consciousness, even if the group has migrated from elsewhere and has only somewhat recently settled in this new place. In other words, from this perspective, places are not simply physical areas, but they are also directly related to the question of identity, in the multitude of its forms – the presence of this physical place is not unlike the role that is played by the many artefacts that can be found within the area to which this place is confined, in that the people who live in this place associate it with their cultural identity.

Auge (2000) describes this as an island with one defined “cultural totality” versus “the external world, a world of absolute foreignness” (p. 50), but he also questions this very concept and examines its impact on the way we think about culture. In particular, he meditates on the idea that there exists “a principle of meaning for the people who live in it” (p. 52). In other words, while it is easy to describe the exotic Other as someone who lives on an island and possesses characteristics which he/she shares with all those who live within that exotic place which is separated from the rest of the world, this essentialization of another human being does little to help us understand the inner world of this individual even if he/she does share certain characteristics with other people within the communities in which he/she plays a role. From this perspective, place can be seen as something that limits our understanding of another human being or, through critical analysis and immersion of the type we associate with applied ethnographic research, as something that allows us to ask critical questions about the events and rituals which exist in that particular place. In fact, Auge (2000) writes about events being “recognized” but not directly questioned or interpreted critically by those who inhabit a given place (pp. 44-45). In turn, it could be argued that the introduction of a researcher, such as a teacher-scholar, to this new place has certain benefits for the inhabitants of the place despite the currently more popular idea that it is best to be positioned as an insider from the start. From a strictly pedagogical point of view, this might mean that the teacher is also a learner whose ability to observe what happens in the place and interpret it critically, eventually becoming an insider, is what helps us create new knowledge as a community of practice.

On the other hand, whereas the teacher-scholar has this ability to look at the place critically, a child (or, more broadly, a student) who enters this place and becomes resident in it approaches the task of learning how to participate in the cultural practices which exist in this place from a slightly different angle. In particular, the student is asked to learn and orient himself/herself toward certain norms through which we “assign the child to his position” within this physical place (Auge, 2000, p. 54). A particular consequence of this process of socialization and enculturation is that “the inhabitant of an anthropological place does not make history; he lives in it” (p. 55). However, from the postmodern hermeneutics’ point of view, the learner is a “practical hermeneut” (Gromov, 2004, p. 10) who interacts with the world around him/her and, ultimately, interprets it in a unique manner so as to create his/her “own interpretations of reality” (Banks, 1997, p. 80). Thus, it is possible to think of learners and, more specifically, language learners becoming linguistically and culturally competent as qualitative researchers (Hanauer, 2001). Thus, second language literacy in this place becomes oriented toward manipulating artefacts; but it is how this manipulation leads to a new awareness of the learner’s world and, in particular, critical analysis of this world that needs to be addressed.

Of particular importance in this context is the symbolism of the artefacts or specific spaces associated with this place because they serve not only as carriers of cultural capital, but also as actual physical manifestations of the community coming together to manufacture, share, and disseminate this cultural capital. Auge writes about the marketplace as an example of this. The marketplace (at least, in various towns and villages around the world) is a concept that exists in many cultures. Here is where the community congregates to exchange goods and services, worship, conduct political affairs, and make decisions that affect the entire group of people who inhabit said place. Auge (2000) describes the “town centre” (p. 65), which is often synonymous with marketplace, as a physical point which attracts people from around the community and symbolizes the shared among them (the schoolhouse in many traditional communities is similarly located close to the physical center of the place). The English as a Second/Foreign Language classroom is not unlike this marketplace, as it attracts the various members of the “imagined community” (Anderson, 2006, p. 25) “English language learners/English language speakers” to this particular place in which exchanges regarding the cultural capital occur, which is why communicative language teaching is becoming more and more popular throughout the world. Importantly, Auge (2000) thinks of language as a tool that brings together “all who speak the same language” (p. 77), effectively creating a situation in which “place is completed through the word” (p. 77), i.e., where “the discourses uttered” (p. 81) within the physical boundaries which separate the place from the world outside allow all members of the community to identify themselves as such.

The Other and the place

This makes the existence of the Other less of an objective fact and more of a product of the same process of essentialization. Auge identifies four categories of the Other. There exists, he writes, “the exotic other” (p. 18), a person who lives in an exotic place and appears so foreign that the word *alien* best describes him/her. Fairytales told to children around the world contain an abundance of examples of this exotic Other, such as Baba Yaga in Eastern Europe or evildoers of various types. Naturally, this exotic other is also the colonial being who exists in a faraway land which we might see on TV or read about in a travel magazine, a place we are unlikely to visit ourselves. But Auge (2000) further identifies what he calls “the other of others” and “the ethnic and cultural other” (p. 18), perhaps the product of the “experience of the remote [which] had taught us to de-centre our way of looking” (p. 35) – the Other is no longer resident in this faraway land and instead appears in our midst with intentions that are unclear to us. This does not, of course, mean that we become any more excited to see the Other in our midst. In fact, the exotic Other may appear quite amazing, because the danger of encountering him/her tends to be limited by the distance, but the ethnic and cultural Other – the

refugee, the English language learner, the person who is not familiar with the dominant discourse – is much closer to us physically, to the encounter with whom we react. This Other is often segregated from us precisely because we recognize the cultural differences between us, perhaps collectively, and the Other. From this perspective, the third type of otherness is directly linked to the idea that, within our fairly homogenous community (which is itself a construct that cannot be illuminated without a lengthy conversation about the questions of power and why it is now actively challenged in the global classroom), there are elements who are not perceived as full members of the community due to their ethnicity or beliefs, the so-called “social other” (Auge, 2000, p. 18). Less cognized, however, is the identity of “the private other” (Auge, 2000, p. 19), i.e., individuals whose experience is rooted in culture and schema but translated into worldviews that are both unique and hidden. Naturally, it can be argued that every person is unique, so this awareness of the fourth type of the Other clearly demonstrates that it is no longer possible to view the world through the colonial prism.

In essence, in language pedagogy, this moves us away from the examination of the stereotypical British or American experience and closer to trying to understand what being a member of those imagined communities must feel like. At the same time, we can no longer define culture in simplistic terms. Thus, it is no longer possible to limit our experience of cultural negotiation to trying to uncover in a subject “individuality [as] a synthesis, the expression of a culture which itself is regarded as a whole” (Auge, 2000, p. 21). In turn, discussing American, British, Indian, or any other society in which the target language is widely spoken (and, by extension, any society or sociocultural group), the concept of “societies identified with cultures conceived as complete wholes” (Auge, 2000, p. 33) can be replaced by the idea that language allows us to communicate with each other not thanks to the boundaries which define places, but despite these boundaries’ existence. From this perspective, the island (as a metaphor) does not cease to exist, but the identities of the persons who populate it do not remain “absolute, simple and substantive” in our eyes as teachers, especially “on the collective as well as the individual level” (Auge, 2000, p. 22). For instance, problematizing the question of identity, one cannot completely discard the concept of “shared identity,” but it is possible to seek to define “singular identity” (Auge, 2000, p. 51), which he directly links to the question of uniqueness. Diversity, from this perspective, can be understood as the presence in the classroom not of representatives of various ethnicities, but as the presence, within the four walls, of individuals whose imagined communities overlap and are significantly larger than any given ethnicity, race, origin, and so on. Fundamentally, the concept of a traditional place becomes less stable because, as negotiators of culture encounter each other and engage in a dialogue, the schema-like experience of their places of origin is communicated to their interlocutors in a way that is personal and unique to them but not

representative of a faceless crowd. In turn, this makes the essentialization of fellow human beings even more difficult, if not altogether impossible, as place becomes less of a stable reality – or, more specifically, the inherent lack of this stability becomes illuminated and may become cognized by the English language learners.

ESL in the non-place

Thus, Auge (2000) introduces the concept of non-place, which he defines as “spaces which are not themselves anthropological places” and do “not integrate the earlier places” (p. 78). In particular, non-places are “never totally completed” (p. 79), yet they are still associated with “the shared identity of” the people who inhabit them (p. 101). However, in non-places, people come together on a somewhat temporary basis; they are associated with “spaces formed in relation to certain ends (transport, transit, commerce, leisure), and the relations that individuals have with these spaces” (p. 94). From this perspective, non-places can also be linked to what Anderson (2006, p. 25) and Kanno and Norton (2003, p. 243) describe as an “imagined community” – persons who would not normally meet each other either inhabit this space temporarily, often being only somewhat aware of each other's existence or simply never physically meeting in this space, despite being associated with the imagined communities “travelers,” “explorers of foreign cultures,” “speakers of international languages as lingua francas,” and so on. But the non-place does not have to be a large international airport; a small train station in Europe, a tent set up somewhere in the jungle, a summer camp, or a school can also potentially be an example of this space. In essence, here, multiple “personal linguacultures” (Risager, 2008, p. 3) interact in an atmosphere which is only remotely related to the reality we associate with the traditional place. It can be argued that the interactions which happen in this non-place are similarly not completely removed from each of the interlocutors’ experience, but they remain nonetheless aimed at more than simply cognizing the value of the past. Instead they tend to have as an objective the possibility of a different future – if what happens in the non-place has practical ramifications for the learner. This is why teaching L2 cultural negotiation, i.e., being able to meet people from other cultures and especially cultures with which we may not be familiar, has become so important in teaching English as second language. From this perspective, the development of what Kim (2008, p. 359) calls “intercultural personhood” during the “stress-adaptation-growth” (2008, p. 363) cycles is enabled through connections made in this non-place precisely because the non-place is defined, from my perspective, by this expectation of the future that all human beings share (Brudny, 2003), as opposed to only discussing the artefacts and the anchors in the traditional place.

Furthermore, Auge (2000) associates supermodernity with “the acceleration of history” (p. 26), where the “excess” (p. 29) of personal

meaningfulness brought about by the “overabundance of events” (p. 28) being reported to and observed by us brings the world closer but also allows us to experience our own history. Naturally, it can be argued that literacy, especially multiliteracies (The New London Group, 1996), is what enables this compression through technology and access to the Other. From the supermodern point of view, this means that individuals are now able to make their own decisions which are independent of the pressure associated with the colonial system, and in this new emphasis on the individual, there may lie the answer to understanding the Other. But if “the link between individuals and their surroundings in the space of non-place is established through the mediation of words, or even texts” (Auge, 2000, p. 94), the language of the classroom, i.e., the “prescriptive,” “prohibitive,” and “informative” (p. 96), is perhaps what allows learners to interact within this environment first, and then, as they leave this non-place, English language learners can go out and explore the ever-changing anthropological places and interact with the people who inhabit them. Of course, one cannot imply that this is all there is to English, an international language and a global lingua franca, but the socialization into the language classroom as a culture which only remotely resembles culture as it is associated with an anthropological place is a necessary step in second language acquisition from the institutional point of view. A good example of this can be found in what Auge (2000) calls the “solitary contractuality” (p. 94) in the non-place, i.e., “the user of the non-place is always required to prove his innocence” (p. 102), where the “proponents are not individuals but ‘moral entities’ or institutions” (p. 96) with whom those who temporarily inhabit the non-space have a “contract” (p. 101). The names on the tickets are checked at the airport; the presence of one’s name on the roster and, in many contexts, the uniform symbolize the English language learner’s right to participate in specific manifestations of the imagined community “English language speakers” in the classroom. In fact, non-places do not necessarily emerge spontaneously, and they are often designed and created to enable this very process of participation in an imagined community. We pay a fee to be able to be in an airport and use its facilities; we pay a fee, whether an actual sum of money or by agreeing to become good students, for the right to be in the English language classroom.

Furthermore, one of the most important contributions of Auge’s (2000) theory of supermodernity is the focus on imagination and the role it plays in the non-place. Echoing Vygotsky (2008) and Brudny (2003), he describes the immediate reaction to hearing something about a distant place. The teacher says, “London,” and the students visualize being in London and having tea by the Piccadilly Circus or perhaps having tea with the Queen herself at a palace. If language allows us to communicate in the non-place, then it is imagination that gives us the ability to extend our focus beyond the boundaries of the non-place and then make that final step toward our destination. Auge (2000) believes that “places and non-places intertwine and tangle together” (p. 107);

imagination can be understood to be what makes this possible. Indeed, English language learners may be asked to describe and think about places and cultures that they have not yet encountered personally. They study images. Auge associates the abundance of these pictures in tourist guides, highway signs, and other textual representations of places with supermodernity, and an abundance of similar images can be found in any ESL/EFL textbook that facilitates the process of creating these imagined communities. Therefore, “the real non-places of supermodernity [...] are defined partly by the words and texts they offer us” (Auge, 2000, p. 96), but one could argue that the words and texts can either be an obstacle or, on the contrary, a student empowerment tool in the English teacher’s hands.

Practical ramifications

The most immediate practical ramification of the theory of supermodernity and its most accessible piece, the concept of non-place, is that we have to look at the Other through a new lens. One of the most disheartening aspects of how we still tend to look at cross-cultural communication within the general frameworks of second language education methods is that we have not moved that far away from the point in our professional community’s history where the Other was essentialized and, naturally, turned into a topic for the curious to examine. In the 21st century, in particular, attempts at removing the orientation toward the native speaker norm have not yet been particularly successful; instead, even the World Englishes, an established field of inquiry in applied linguistics, have found little application in the teaching materials, including textbooks. But if the boundaries between the place where “we” live and where the Other lives are less well defined today, through the internet and the gradual collapse of the colonial systems throughout the world, then the Other cannot remain an exotic construct – the conversations which take place in our community about cultural and linguistic diversity and equal rights for all learners need to be translated into actual teaching materials we use with ESL students. This is not to say, of course, that the functional-notional ESL curriculum needs to be abandoned or that the grammar-based curriculum, despite its surface thematic organization, must play a less prominent role in how teaching and learning materials are designed. But the question of the Other is never quite adequately addressed in the mainstream ESL textbook, and thus, the opportunity to re-think language as what it actually is, i.e., a tool used by two individuals to communicate their thoughts and ideas to each other, which is really impossible without at least basic cultural awareness, is lost.

The second practical ramification is that the connection between one’s identity and the anthropological place is imagined, but it is not imaginary. In essence, this connection tends to feel personal and meaningful, and thus, it can be built on in the process of learning about the Other through introspective,

autoethnographic research. In fact, autoethnography, or the process of linking one's identity to artefacts that are described and discussed as actual data, can be a powerful tool in the hands of a language learner as well as a native speaker of English, which is a particularly important notion from the mixed NES/NNES classroom point of view. It is, in other words, an opportunity to examine things that make sense and why they make sense; to visualize being the Other and understand why something that makes perfect sense to us might not make perfect sense to the Other; and, finally, it is an opportunity to look at "us" as a construct, ultimately removing the wall between "us" and "them." Autoethnography is, therefore, our answer to essentialization which is still so rampant in the field.

The third practical ramification is that ESL, by definition, challenges the "we have always been here" position through access to content. It can be argued that the idea that, through technology, the world has become less segmented; there are more opportunities for an individual to go out and explore the world beyond the horizon than there were just fifty years ago. This expansion of our imagination in the general direction of the Other and the autoethnographic, introspective analysis that it stimulates will have as their consequence a very different understanding of the very concept of language as a shared code, at which point the introduction of English as an International Language to the classroom can only be natural. In particular, this movement away from the idea that the English language is possessed, as property, by persons in a limited number of countries whose roots are in Europe and toward the idea that English is a quintessentially global lingua franca will bring about the examination of the places with which we do associate our identities: our homes, our communities, our playgrounds, our schools, and the public places where we shape the future of new generations. Therefore, L2 cultural negotiation becomes possible not simply because we have discovered, or perhaps inherited, a code that we can share – but because we have problematized the way we define ourselves and our history. Thus, English can be more than just a shared linguistic code; it becomes a stimulus for individuals to question dominant discourses and uncover, for themselves, what it means to be able to spread one's wings by questioning the positivist truths about culture which we associate tradition with.

In turn, it is possible for an English language learner to develop an identity that is not directly linked to any given place but which is more than ties to all places which the learner has experienced, either personally or through membership in imagined communities (Hanauer, 2008). Therefore, we observe a unique situation in the increasingly postcolonial world of teaching English to speakers of other languages. English language learners are slowly becoming able to claim ownership of the language and the process of L2 cultural negotiation. Thus, student empowerment becomes a practical concept that arises out of classroom praxis but extends far beyond it, giving our students this push in a new direction.

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The question-asking behavior of Asian students in an American university classroom

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Abstract

Using individual face-to-face interviews, this study investigated five Chinese graduate students' perceptions of asking questions in the American classroom. It identified three concerns, shared by the participants, that had the most significant influence on their habits and feelings about asking questions: 1) respect for the teacher, 2) the value of the question, and 3) English proficiency. The study showed that although Asian students did not ask questions as frequently as did their American counterparts, the Asian students were not "passive listeners" or "inactive learners." Interviews revealed that the students were listening to the lecture attentively, thinking about the learning materials actively, and paying attention to their classmates' questions carefully. Their learning preference was not to ask questions in class, but to save them until later, or to solve the problem themselves before seeking help from the professor. The findings suggest instructors should recognize differences in the learning style of Asians and adjust their teaching methods to maximize the achievement of all students.

Keywords: question-asking behavior, passive listeners, Asian, university

Introduction

In the year 2011-2012, 764,495 international students were enrolled in American colleges and universities (Institute of International Education, 2013). Among these international students, more than 60% (489,970) were from Asia, which made it the major region of origin for international students enrolled in the American higher education institutions (Institute of International Education, 2013). China, South Korea, India and Japan were the top for sending nations, while countries like Malaysia contributed a little more than 1% (5,914) of this number. Approximately 30% of the Asian students

were in graduate programs, while the rest were for undergraduate study and non-degree training (Institute of International Education, 2013).

While enriching school diversity, the increasing portion of Asian international students in American colleges and universities also presented challenges for American institutions and professors. American professors were rarely aware of the cultural differences among international students and had little experience supporting the learning experiences of their international students (Galloway & Jenkins, 2005; Trice, 2003). Specifically, in regard to Asian students, American professors found it difficult to differentiate among them in terms of nationality, perceiving South Koreans, Japanese, Thais and Cambodians all as Chinese, because “they all look alike to me.”

In the classroom, one of the biggest misunderstandings regarding Asian students was that they were “passive listeners” or “inactive learners” (Cheng, 2000; Flowerdew, 1998; Liu, 2002; Valiente, 2008; Wilkinson & Olliver-Gray, 2006). This impression of Asian international students among Western educators is partly due to the fact that these students were silent in the classroom and seldom asked questions (Beaver & Tuck, 1998; Scollon & Wong-Scollon, 1994; Wan, 2001; Zhou, Knoke, & Skamoto, 2005).

However, such interpretation from the perspective of Western education did not take into account the tradition of education in Asian nations, or the expectations of the students and teachers there. This generalization of Asian students as “passive” also failed to investigate the unique learning styles and habits of students regarding classroom question under the context of their culture. The present study provided perspective on the issue by examining the perceptions and experiences of five Chinese international students of their question-asking behavior in classes at a major American university. Chinese students were chosen for this study because China is the major nation of origin for American international students and also because the senior author is Chinese and speaks Mandarin, giving him a connection with the study participants. However, the points made here can relate to the experience of students from other Asian nations, as the nations share cultural elements and, in the eyes of any of their professors, the students are “all the same.” The factors that affected participants’ questioning behavior in the American classrooms were identified and discussed from the perspectives of their culture and education, as well as the classroom environment in the American university. The article then explores the impact of the Asian concepts of thinking and speaking on the participants’ question-asking behavior. Finally, it examines how the classroom environment in the United States, including the teacher-student relationship, American professors’ charisma, and the question-asking behavior of other students, influence the participants’ motivation and opportunity to ask questions.

Literature review

In American schools, students are expected to participate in classroom activities orally by comments, arguments, and questions (Kim, 2002; Liu, 2002). By the standards of Western educators, question asked by students indicated their exploration of the knowledge (Morgenstern, 1992), effective learning (Biggs & Moore, 1993), and active thinking (Kim, 2002; Liu, 2002; Valiente, 2008). Thus, the silent Chinese students often frustrated the Western teachers who were committed to the belief that asking question and other oral communication was essential to effective learning (Valiente, 2008). In addition, this silence among Chinese international students was often interpreted by Western educators as passiveness and reluctance, lack of personal opinion, laziness, and relying on instructors and textbooks (Ballard & Clanchy, 1991; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Flowerdew, 1998; Tsui, 1996; Wilkinson & Olliver-Gray, 2006).

Many researchers investigated Chinese students' quietness and reluctance from the perspective of Chinese culture and its influences on Chinese education. Cortazzi and Jin (1996) surveyed 135 college students in China and found they did not ask many questions for various reasons: shyness, influences of Chinese traditions, fear of making mistakes, derision from classmates, ignorance of learning material, and not wanting to interrupt the lesson. Chinese students typically worried whether their question would be appreciated by other students in the classroom and whether they would be laughed at by asking a simple or foolish question (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996). Kim (2002) compared the concept of speaking under the American and Asian pedagogical educational practices respectively and concluded that students' beliefs about the value of talking were different. In American schools, speaking was viewed by teachers as a good sign of thinking and students were encouraged to talk in class in order to demonstrate their understanding on the learning materials (Kim, 2002). This positive correlation between thinking and speaking, however, may not apply to the Asian pedagogy where the quality of what was said outweighed the quantity or frequency of student speaking (Kim, 2002; Wilkinson & Olliver-Gray, 2006).

In addition, in China, as well as in other Asian nations, the relationship between teacher and student is unequal (Yang, Zheng, & Li, 2006) where student respect for teachers as authorities (Abubaker, 2008; Huang & Brown, 2009). This hierarchical teacher-student relationship in Chinese schools was also evidenced by the asymmetrical communicative patterns in Chinese classroom where students were expected to listen quietly (Holmes, 2005). Chinese students viewed the teacher as the only reliable source of knowledge and were not accustomed to casting doubt on his or her words (Jaju, Kwak, & Zinkhan, 2002; Pratt, Kelly, & Wong, 1999; Gallagher, 2013). This respect rule in Chinese school may explain why Chinese students seldom questioned their teachers in the class. Besides, Chinese students were also accustomed to conforming to the group values and avoiding any behavior that would deviate

from the social norms (Frank, Harvey, & Verdun, 2000). As a result, they would avoid being singled out of the group by asking question in front of the class (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Gallagher, 2013).

Moreover, Pratt, Kelly, and Wong (1999) summarized four stages Chinese learners experienced towards learning: “memorization, understanding, application, and questioning or modifying what they have learned” (p. 253). In other words, by Chinese standards, memorization, repetition, and understanding were the prerequisite steps before asking question (Pratt, 1992). For Chinese students, the primary learning methods were listening to the lecture, taking notes, and reviewing after class (Huang, 2005, 2009; Valiente, 2008). Huang (2009) found that Chinese students generally believed that the students’ role in classroom was to listen to the lecture and take notes. This was consistent with Chinese belief that hard work was the most important criterion for a good student and personal ability could be improved through constant effort (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996). For the Chinese students, when they attended a lecture, they focused on comprehension and acquisition of knowledge, rather than asking questions (Wang & Farmer, 2008).

Lastly, studies on international students’ classroom behavior indicated that language competency also had significant influence on international students’ classroom participation (Coleman, 1997; Huang, 1997; Price, 1991). For example, Young (1990) and Price (1991) found that foreign students were reluctant to speak in class because they were afraid of making mistakes or awkward expressions. Liu (2002) also found the lack of adequate English ability to express ideas effectively was usually identified as one major reasons causing Asian students’ silence in the classroom. Apart from the general English deficiency, Asian students were not familiar with the Western communication norms and the sociolinguistic rules in the American classroom (Portin, 1993; Zhou, Knoke, & Sakamoto, 2005). As a result, they often did not know when and how to interrupt the professor for questions (Portin, 1993; Jang & Jiménez, 2011).

Methodology

This study aimed to analyze five Chinese international graduate students’ attitudes and feelings about asking questions in the American classrooms. A qualitative method was used because the participants’ personal experiences and perceptions were of primary importance to the investigator (Creswell, 2013; Lichtman, 2006; Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2000). Considering the complexity and the open-ended nature of the research questions, a case study should be the best tool (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2008).

The campus on which participants were selected is a Tier One university in the Southwestern United States. Purposeful sampling and snowball technique were used to obtain potential participants. In this study, the

investigator purposefully chose students who could provide rich information and were willing to share their experiences and feelings into the studied phenomenon. Pseudonyms were used in this paper. At the time of this study, Nancy was a Master of Science (MS) student majoring in Industrial Engineering. She was in her second year of graduate study. Mike was a MS student majoring in Chemical Engineering and was also in his second year of graduate study. Cindy was a Master of Arts (MA) student majoring Curriculum and Instruction. She was in her third year of study and was graduating shortly. Sharon was a second-year Ph.D. student majoring in English as a Second Language (ESL). She got an MA and worked as a college English teacher for several years before coming to America. Lastly, Randy was also a Ph.D. student in ESL. He got his MA in another American institution before coming to this university and was in his third year of doctoral study.

The individual in-depth interview was selected as the major data collection instrument as it enabled the researcher to obtain information of individuals' personal experiences and perceptions that cannot be observed directly (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). The interview was semi-structured and guided by a set of open-ended questions written by the investigator. The collected data were analyzed immediately after each interview. The analysis began with mining information from each case and looking for phenomena and patterns that were important. In this study, data were labeled around two primary research questions: (1) what are the participants' experiences about asking questions in the American classrooms and (2) what factors have accounted for their question-asking behavior? As the interviews went on, themes that arose from the data were put together to abstract meaning across cases (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). They served as the starting point for data analysis and were revised as further themes were added until the end of data collection.

Results and Discussion

The participants reported that they asked many fewer questions compared with American students and international students from non-Asian regions. This result was consistent with previous studies on Chinese and other Asian students' question-asking behavior. Three major concerns were identified during the interviews that were shared by the participants regarding asking questions in the classroom: 1) the students' respect for the teacher, 2) the value of the question, and 3) English ability. In addition, the Asian concepts of education were discussed as the major conceptual foundation of the participants' perceptions of the significance of thinking and the value of speaking. Finally, the classroom environment, with respect to the behaviors of professor and other students, was also discussed as the primary external

contextual factor that influenced the participants' motivation and opportunity to ask questions.

Student's respect for the teacher

During the interviews, all the participants noticed that the stratified order within Chinese society, as well as in many other Asian countries, reflected the inferior's respect and obedience to the superior. In their previous educational experiences, the participants were accustomed to perceiving their teacher as a respectable, authoritative and, sometimes, authoritarian image in the classroom. As stated by Cindy:

We have a tradition to respect the teacher, which is grounded in the Confucian culture. We treat teacher as the authority in the classroom and we are expected to obey their instruction. Our education doesn't encourage the students to doubt or criticize the teacher. That's why, we don't have a strong motivation to raise questions in class.

This respect of the teacher generated the participants' fear of the teacher; they reported that they were afraid of talking to the teacher as a result of the unequal and formal teacher-student relationship. As explained by Nancy: "In China, the teacher was always serious and strict. You felt ill at ease when you talked to the teacher." Mike also made the similar comments:

The teacher-student position was distant and unequal.... You felt pressured when you talked to the teacher. It was just like the glass ceiling, you had to experience it in person in order to perceive that. In general, in my experience, Chinese students are afraid of talking to the teachers or asking questions," he added.

As a result of this fear, the participants would avoid communicating with the teacher in order not to offend him or her. That is one reason why the students were reluctant to voluntarily ask questions in the classroom.

On the contrary, they observed that, in America, teachers and students were more intimate and equal in status. For example, Mike said that he could clearly feel the different communication pattern between teachers and students in the United States: "Each party is in an equal position. We interact frequently and I don't feel constrained when I talked to my professors." When the participants felt relaxed and that they were more equal in status to the teacher, they said they would find it easier to ask questions spontaneously.

The second concern related to student respect was that it was regarded as inappropriate for Asian students to interrupt the professor for questions in the middle of the class. Cindy explained:

In China, we were not supposed to interrupt the teacher for questions in the middle of the class. If you had one, you had to wait until the class was over. So, it just became a habit, a style for our Chinese students.

Randy also said: “In China, you can’t just stop the professor in the middle of the class. However, here (in America) it is common for students to stop the professor and ask questions directly.” This did not mean that Chinese students could not ask questions at all. Due to the huge class size and consideration for discipline, Chinese students felt that they could ask questions after class in order to maintain the organization of the lecture and show respect to the teacher. Thus, Chinese students’ silence in the classroom reflected their belief that being a disciplined student was a sign of respect.

Third, the tradition of respect for the teacher also led to the authoritative, one-directional communication style in classrooms in China and other Asian nations; students were expected to listen to the lecture quietly and were not encouraged to interact with the teacher. Chinese students were accustomed to receiving the lecture from the teacher as a result of their belief in the teacher as the credible source of knowledge. Cindy explained:

From elementary school to college, the most common form of class is lecture.... This is just the classical form of class in our part of the world: teacher teaches and students listen. The teachers asked somebody to answer questions, but no one asked questions to them.”

In Chinese schools, the teacher is supposed to be the omniscient expert in his or her field. As stated by Sharon: “In China, the teacher would tell you directly what is important and students were comfortable with that, because we assumed that the teachers should know everything in his or her domain.” Under this one-directional teaching pattern, the students’ academic performance became a direct indication of the teacher’s competence. Thus, if a student asked a question because he or she did not understand the material, not only would the individual be embarrassed, also the teacher might be offended because it suggested some problems with the teacher’s instructional skills and content knowledge.

This respect for the teacher unfortunately was distorted by the examination-oriented educational system of China and many Asian nations. Since elementary school, Chinese students were required to behave properly in the classroom and listen to the lecture quietly in order to acquire knowledge necessary for the tests and exams. The ultimate responsibility of the Chinese teacher was to cover as much information as possible in order to cope with the high demands of standard examinations. This “stuffing the duck” teaching style forced the students to accept the teacher’s standard answers unconditionally, with little space for personal opinion or interpretation.

Asking high quality questions only

Another major concern among the participants was the value of their questions. Their first focus was whether their questions were good enough to be asked. As a result, they were trying desperately to ask excellent questions and avoid any simple or stupid ones. The second concern was that they did not know if their questions would also be helpful to others. They typically felt it was not appropriate to waste valuable class time on a question that only related to their own interests. However, the participants admitted that high-quality questions were rare, and their concerns were not always shared by others. Therefore, most of the time, they simply chose to withhold their questions until the end of the class.

In Chinese education, as in other Asian countries, asking questions was never central to the teaching and learning process. On the contrary, for Chinese students, asking questions might reveal their poor understanding of the learning material “because we believe the wise usually don’t ask,” explained Randy. Mike also said that, when he was about to ask a question, he would keep reminding himself not to raise a simple one because “if you did so, people would think you were stupid or just didn’t study well. When it happened several times, you would gradually lose your confidence and were reluctant to ask any more.” He then explained the reasons:

We Chinese people just like to rank things into hierarchies. If you asked a question that no one knew the answer, people would think you were good; otherwise, you would be laughed at. I think for the Americans, they won’t even bother to consider that.

His statement supported Cortazzi and Jin’s (1996) finding that Asian students had very different concepts of asking questions than did the Western learners: the Asian valued thoughtful questions, which were based on reflective thinking, and aimed to receive confirmation and positive feedback from the professor. Thus, when they asked a question, they typically hoped that their question would be of good quality and would contribute to the class discussion.

The participants’ caution about their questions focused on two concerns: 1) is my question is too simple to be asked and 2) is it valuable to others? For the second point, they hoped their questions would contribute to the class, or, at least, be meaningful to others. By their standards, asking too many personal questions might be viewed by other students as a violation of group values and lack of consideration for classmates. For example, Nancy said:

You know, you are not the only student in the classroom. It was just my question, not the others. So I would consider that maybe this was just my problem and maybe it was a simple one that everybody else knew the answer.”

Mike expressed a similar opinion: “Sometimes I had a problem, but other people might not be interested in it (so I was not going to ask it). If I realized this question was going to have some general meanings and help other students, I would.”

In addition, they were unwilling to waste the time of other students because of their personal questions. The students believed that the class time would be used best by leaving decisions about knowledge delivery and instruction to the teacher. Questions and discussion, however, could be pursued outside the class. For example, Mike said: “

Sometimes when I asked a question that had been taking the professor several minutes to explain, some classmates might mutter to suggest you were wasting the class time. In that case, the professor might stop and ask me to go to his office after class.

Therefore, when the participants thought their questions were irrelevant to others, or might take too much class time, they would choose to save them for after class or wait for a future opportunity.

English ability

When the participants came up with a question with which they were satisfied, the story was not over yet; as non-native English speakers, they still had to consider whether they could ask the question clearly and accurately in spoken English. All five participants identified English proficiency as a major difficulty associated with asking questions in the American classroom. For example, Nancy said: “I think for most international students, including Chinese students, English problem is the top challenge.”

Compared with the native English speakers, the participants needed more time to modify their words in order to ask the question accurately. As explained by Nancy:

(When you were about to ask a question) the first step was to locate the problem. Then you had to make sure you could express it clearly in your native language and, finally, you had to translate it into English...It is hard for international students to think directly in English without such a translation process.

This translation process, however, usually cost them the opportunity to speak up in the class. Cindy said, “It took me time to think and translate my words into English, but the lecture and discussion moved too fast to let me do so. As a result, I had no choice but being silent.”

The participants’ concern about their English proficiency also involved the presence of their classmates, mainly the American students. Said Cindy:

Sometimes, I did have my thoughts, but I knew I was disadvantaged in language compared with the American students. I could perceive this contrast. So I'd rather say nothing.... the discrepancy in English ability was clear and it kept reminding me that my language ability was lower than theirs. The performance of others would also remind you that you are inferior in language.

The participants knew their English was a disadvantage; so they simply avoided speaking up voluntarily to prevent revealing their shortcoming. In this sense, keeping silent in the classroom could also be viewed as a strategy the students used to avoid embarrassment due to English deficiency.

Thinking without speaking immediately

The importance of thinking was a theme mentioned by all five participants during the interviews. When asked why they were relatively silent in the classroom, they explained that they were listening to the lecture attentively and thinking about the learning material. When we were discussing their reluctance to ask questions, they also explained that they needed more time to think about the value of the question, their understanding of the concept, as well as the appropriate English translation. They explained that they preferred to first work on the problem individually before seeking help from the professor, stating that this independent thinking process enabled them to learn more (Dixon et al., 2012).

Although educators in Western cultures usually interpret the absence of speech as a lack of communication (Zembylas & Michaelides, 2004), Chinese and other Asian people are comfortable with silence, and silence is usually perceived as virtual and beneficial for deeper thinking (Kim, 2002). For the Chinese, being silent is not only an effective way to avoid potential embarrassment and open conflict, but also a demonstration of the individual's virtue in not wasting others' time on less important questions (Valiente, 2008). For students, it is also a sign of consideration because asking too many personal questions may interfere with the learning of their classmates (Li, 2009).

For the Chinese students, the major sign of effective learning and academic achievement was the mastery of essential knowledge, which was emphasized by education in China and other Asian nations. Accordingly, the most important learning strategies were listening to the lecture attentively and reviewing the notes after the class. This was supported by the participants' comments. For example, Nancy said:

In my opinion, the most important is thinking. You have to pay much attention on what the professor says in the class. Then you have to review after class, because you have to take time to fully understand the learning

material. For me, I think listening to the lecture and thinking are the most important.

Randy also said: “In Chinese education, learning is more about understanding by yourself, rather than asking questions.” Here, he stressed “by yourself.” Thus, when they had a problem, the students would rather spend more time working on it individually than seeking help from the professor immediately in the class. This was consistent with Kim’s (2002) finding that the assumption of speaking as a good sign of deep thinking might not apply for the students who were educated in the Asian tradition. For Chinese students, speaking and thinking were not necessarily interrelated with each other.

Similarly, in Asia, one also has no need to demonstrate his or her attention or engagement by asking questions as the Western educators expect. Researchers also found that Chinese students were silent verbally but active mentally, which was an illustration of respect and knowledge in Confucian-oriented education (Gudykunst, 2004; Hu, 2002; Valiente, 2008). This was supported by the participants’ comments that they listened to the lecture attentively and thought about the questions asked by their classmates actively, despite the fact that they did not speak up a lot. Besides, they found it beneficial to listen to classmates’ questions. Mike said:

Occasionally I was not sure how to ask a question. At that time, if another student asked a similar one, I would also benefit from it. Besides, one’s perspective on an issue is often established. Thus, others’ comments and questions could inspire you to think from diverse perspectives.

Generally, the participants believed that reflective thinking and personal effort after class benefited them more than asking questions in class. Despite their appreciation of the benefits of asking questions and of the questions asked by their classmates, they were silent in the classroom.

While their American counterparts preferred to verbalize their thoughts and ask questions in classroom, Asian students were likely to solve their problem in an inner-reflective manner. As mentioned earlier, the participants reported that they would not ask a question immediately in the class because they wanted to first spend time thinking about this question individually. Mike said: “When I had a problem, I would first try to solve by myself. If I failed after several attempts, I would ask the professor for help.” Sharon also said that, in most cases, the questions she asked in class were ones she had been thinking about for a long time, or ones that arose in other courses. She said: “The questions you found in the class were usually frivolous and loose. Personally, I would like to reflect my questions after class and reorganize and refine these questions.”

After a period of mediation, they said they could usually achieve a deeper understanding of the issue and come up with a better question. Randy said:

Sometimes I found a problem in the class, but before I could ask it, someone else did so. In that case, I would listen to his or her description and the professors' interpretation. I also gained something. Besides, if I could point out another valuable point based on the professor's answer, I would also speak it up.

This indicated that, unlike the assumption of many Western educators, Asian students were participating actively in the classroom, though they did not ask a lot of questions. From the perspectives of these participants, this process of thinking and synthesizing was of greater value to their learning, compared with asking questions immediately in the class.

In this sense, the Asian students were not more passive than the American students: they were both paying attention to the lecture and thinking actively. The only difference is that these Asian students do not demonstrate their active behavior in the American way. As explained by Randy: "In China, not asking questions doesn't mean that you don't understand; because we believe the wise usually don't ask. However, in America, if you don't have a question, you might have not paid attention." This may explain why Asian students are constantly misunderstood by Western educators as passive learners because of their silence and reluctance to ask questions.

Classroom environment

Finally, the participants' question-asking behavior was influenced by the classroom environment and atmosphere in the American school. As Cindy noticed:

... (In the United States), the classroom atmosphere is also easy and less pressured. In such situation, I would not have much hesitation and felt free to ask questions. This atmosphere is very important. It makes you feel that it (asking questions) is absolutely normal here." This easy and relaxing classroom atmosphere promoted them to ask questions spontaneously.

The motivating effect of American professors

The factors that influenced the participants' motivation to ask questions were the American teacher's classroom behavior, the equal teacher-student relationship and the professor's personal charisma. For the participants, the equal position between teacher and student in the American classroom, to some extent, changed the participants' established cognition on the image of teacher developed in Asia. Randy noticed:

In the classroom, the professors are not in a prominent position; instead, they give the stage to the students. They let the students to participate in the learning activities and even guide the learning procedures...the

professors expect the students to raise questions or challenge their ideas. It is a general rule and this (asking questions) is their (American students) way to participate in the class.

This equal and relaxed teacher-student relationship in the American classroom enabled the participants to communicate with the professors more freely with less stress.

The participants also noticed that the American professors had greater passion for the courses they taught and were energetic in the classroom, which created a lively atmosphere in the classroom. Mike said that some of his American professors had strong charisma, which had a positive impact on his question-asking behavior: "... the American professors generally are very passionate, they are interested in the teaching material, and they are enthusiastic. Their enthusiasm would, in turn, encourage the students. As a result, the frequency of student questions and classroom participation were increased significantly." Nancy also said:

I can feel the American teachers care about the course very much and prepare the lecture carefully. They have a different attitude and they care about if you really understand. In China, what the professors cared about was to finish their jobs. Instead, they (American professors) use all methods to make sure you understand.

As a result, she also responded with more enthusiasm and participation.

The motivating effects of other students

In the participants' previous educational experiences, few of their classmates asked questions in class. This was confirmed by Nancy: "We had huge class sizes since primary school and most of my classmates didn't ask any question in class. So, I just did as the others did." Randy explained: "Our traditional culture doesn't uphold individualism; we value the collectivism. Thus, nobody wants to be the person stands out of the crowd." Added Cindy: "We Chinese students are not used to interrupting the teacher for questions during the lecture. None of my classmates (in China) did so, me neither. Even I had a problem, I would not ask because nobody else did." This inclination of "going with the flow" was also addressed by other participants as an explanation of why they were not used to asking questions in class.

However, when they came to the United States, they realized that asking questions was the norm in the American classroom by observing the behavior of their classmates. As a result, they felt a need to ask more questions and be more participative. Said Mike:

We Chinese students are silent in the class and don't ask questions because nobody else does so. But when we come here, there are students from all over the world in the classroom, not only Chinese students. They are

passionate to ask question, both American students and international students from other countries...Asking questions is no longer an atypical behavior because everybody does so. You will appear abnormal if you don't do so. For me, I ask more frequently in the class, though I still prefer asking questions after class.

Cindy agreed: "When people around you were all asking questions, it would be odd if you weren't. In that case, I was willing to ask questions, too." In other words, once the students realized that asking question was the norm of American class, they felt the pressure to do so in order not to be singled out of the group.

The positive influences of diverse classroom

The third issue that was related to the classroom environment was the presence of other international students in the classroom. When there were more international students in the class, the participants were more willing to speak up. Said Sharon:

I would be more active when more international students were present. Because we were all international students and we were non-native English speakers, I felt that our language competency was about the same and some attitudes towards the American culture were similar, too. So I would ask more questions. When there were a lot of American students, I just didn't feel like speaking.

Cindy said that she would be more participative when there were more international students because:

Despite the fact that we were from different countries, we didn't have much difference in language ability, though someone's English was better than yours. We were all foreigners, (we were all) international students. In that case, I would be more comfortable to interrupt the teacher for questions.

For the participants, the presence of more international students actually provided them a relatively secure environment to speak. Although these international students were diverse in their cultural backgrounds and educational experiences, they shared the similar (adverse) conditions as foreigners and non-native English speakers. Thus, they were less vulnerable to be embarrassed by awkward expression or ignorance of the study content. These similar conditions made the Chinese students feel greater empathy with the fellow international students than the American classmates. Besides, under this atmosphere, their problems in language and culture were unlikely to become a negative focus. This built the confidence of the participants made it more comfortable for them to ask questions in a classroom consisting predominantly of international students.

Chinese students were silenced by American professor and classmates

As we have noticed when discussing the influences of the language problem, the participants were reluctant to speak in class in order to prevent the direct contrast to the American students who were superior in English ability. Once they realized that they were less proficient than their classmates, they were usually less motivated to ask questions.

In addition, Cindy noticed that the American students tended to dominate the “power of speaking,” even considering the gap in English ability. Sharon said that when there were many American students in class, she simply felt it unnecessary to speak up because “they talked a lot anyway.” Randy also found this phenomenon in his classes and he explained:

This might be due to the Americans’ stereotype that Asian students or international students were inherently silent in the classroom. You know, since there was always someone speaking in the class, the professor hardly paid attention to the Asian students. Or they simply thought you were just unwilling to speak, so they didn’t feel like forcing you.

From the perspectives of the American students and professors, they felt that they should not force the Asian students to speak because they assumed these foreign students were passive learners and hesitant to ask questions. However, for the participants, the external expectation or pressure from the professor or classmates could be important source of motivation to ask questions. Randy explained: “Some people might be more active if they were pushed (by others). Probably they were just waiting for this chance, this external power to push them forward.” Liu (2002) also noticed that American professors, sometimes out of kindness, did not ask Asian students to speak out of concern for their comfort. In other words, Asian students kept silent in classroom because of the actions of their American peers and professors (Jang & Jiménez, 2011).

Differences were found among the five participants. For Nancy and Mike, who majored in engineering, question asking was not one of their primary problems because most of their courses were in the lecture format, which did not call for much student participation. Nancy explained: “In my program, lecturing is the main form of class, which is no different from my undergraduate study in China. Generally we don’t have much class discussion or student question. So, it (asking a question) is hardly a problem for me.” However, for Cindy, Sharon, and Randy, asking questions was essential in their programs, in which most classes were seminars and involved discussions. In these courses, they were expected to ask questions and make comments on others’ questions. As a result, asking questions was not optional, since classroom participation usually counted in their grades. As explained by Sharon: “My questions are part of my academic performance. I know people

may evaluate my performance through my question, though I will not judge them.”

Conclusion

Although the research results are seemingly in accordance with the established impression that Asian students are silent in the classroom and are reluctant to ask questions voluntarily, the authors do not agree with the conclusion that Chinese and other Asian students are “passive listeners” or “inactive learners,” as many Western educators believe.

First, the students did ask questions. During the interviews, the participants reported that they were more active in asking questions in the U.S. than they were in China. This change of behavior was partly due to the open classroom environment, featured as the equal teacher-student relationship and the relaxed atmosphere. The participants also were motivated to speak up by their active classmates who kept asking questions during the class (Gallagher, 2013).

More importantly, although they did not ask questions as frequently as did the American students, they were not “passive listeners” or “inactive learners.” The interviews revealed that the students were listening to the lecture attentively, thinking about the learning materials actively, and paying attention to their classmates’ questions carefully. It was just their learning preference to save the question until the end of the class or solve the problem individually first before seeking help from the professor. Therefore, it is unacceptable to reject the learning style used by the Asian students, just because it was not consistent with the American norms, as “passive” or “wrong.”

Arguably, the participants could make the effort to improve their oral English skills, know more about the American communication rules, and get familiar with the teaching and learning styles of America. However, is it really necessary for these Asian students to follow exactly the American way to be academically successful? For the Chinese students, the problem was not whether they could achieve academically in the United States. Previous studies had indicated that they were successful in academic performances, as well as in career development.

The question is how can American institutions and professors understand the unique needs and learning styles of Asian students and facilitate their learning experiences in the United States in order to create a democratic and diverse school culture. For American educators, it would be more helpful to recognize the diversity in terms of culture and learning preference than to impose the American style of teaching and learning on all international students. Thus, it is important for teachers to monitor the dynamics of participation among students. They can make an effort to create concrete classroom activities, as these can inspire and encourage students to identify

and develop good learning strategies. When teachers clarify concerning the need to interact with fellow students, as well as the need to explicitly identify one's purpose, they facilitate and enhance student learning, not only for Asians, but for all the individuals in their courses (Jang & Jiménez, 2011).

In addition to keep encouraging Asian students to raise questions in class, American faculty members could provide help after class in an informal way. This would establish a rapport between teacher and students, which was highly valued by the Asian students. It was also suggested that the professors could give the Asian students enough time to prepare their questions by slowing and limiting their lectures. Another strategy that would encourage the Asian students' motivation to ask questions is to assign the questions before the class meeting. Moreover, since the Asian students were non-native English speakers, their voices would be harder to hear. So the professor could move closer to the student, or repeat the question for the other students.

In sum, American professors should be aware of the unequal power distribution in the classroom and intentionally give Asian students more chance to speak and participate. Above all, it is important for American professors to realize that adapting to a new academic environment is very stressful and painful. Instead of complaining about the "atypical" behavior of the Asians in their classrooms, professors should recognize the human differences in terms of learning and adjust their teaching methods to maximize the achievement of all students.

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A needs-based analysis of cross-cultural competence: A case study on spoken English learning experience of Chinese International Teaching Assistants in the US

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Abstract

The purpose of this case study was to investigate Chinese international teaching assistants' (ITA) English learning experiences at a large Southeastern university in the US. A triangular approach was adopted to analyze the interview data from two Chinese ITAs, their ESL instructor, and their ITA supervisor regarding ITAs' reflections of their practices to improve oral English, the instructor's observations of ITAs' effort to improve oral English in the ESL class, and the supervisor's evaluative comments on their ITAs' effort to improve oral English in relation to ITAs' performance in the lab work. The results showed that all three parties emphasized that spoken English played a critical role in their performance in ITAs' work and during ITAs' interactions with other people in their academic contexts, such as their instructors and supervisors. Personal attributes could affect ITAs' motivation to improve their communicative competence. While the ESL instructor lamented that ITAs did not seem to put enough effort into the language class, the two ITAs did not find the ESL class to be helpful, rather they often sought help from the experienced native speaker workmates. Results suggested that ITAs may benefit more from content-based ITA training programs.

Keywords: International Teaching Assistant (ITA), English learning, language competence

Introduction

My personal interest in this study developed from my own experience as an international teaching assistant in the US for almost three years. The first day when I arrived at the university, I was told that I would start three-week ITA training. I was shocked that I was still required to take this type of language training although I got high scores on my TOEFL and TSE (Test of Spoken English). However, after I attended the training courses, I found that to know how to speak English in China was entirely different from to know how to speak English here in the US.

The training program included three parts: oral English, cultural shock, and teaching demonstration. My major achievement, when I finished the training, was that I got to know American campus and American teaching style better, which worked as a springboard for my teaching assistant job. However, after I taught a content-based course to undergraduate students for a while, I felt that I still had a lot of problems that had not and could not have been taken care of in the training session, because it was all about the content course in my own discipline.

The real impetus that finally pushed me to carry out this study was from conversations that I had with other Chinese graduate students. Most Chinese graduate students from this university live in the same place where I live, and all of us need to take a train to go to school everyday. It takes us seven stations to get to school, which provides me with a lot of opportunities to get to know other Chinese graduate students. Otherwise, it would be hard to build this type of rapport, simply because everybody is too busy to spare a separate period of time for me. However, Chinese graduate students are willing to talk when they are waiting for the train, on the train, and back home from the train station. Therefore, I usually ask all kinds of questions regarding their experience in the US, including oral English class, ITA work, courses they take, etc. From these conversations for almost two semesters from Fall 2006 to Spring 2007, I have an impression that Chinese graduate students who take the ESL Oral English class do not seem to find it helpful, whereas at the same time, they are often looking for some classes that can help them improve their English.

The purpose of the present study, therefore, is to describe possible gaps existing between perceived needs of Chinese ITAs to improve oral English and practices in reality that address those needs in order to improve Chinese ITAs' oral English proficiency. There are two reasons why Chinese ITAs were chosen in this study: first, the number of Chinese graduate students has been increasing very fast, becoming the majority of the international students. The second reason for the current study is that most Chinese graduate students take a teaching or research assistant position. Moreover, most Chinese graduate students are pursuing a Ph.D. degree and they will probably take a teaching or a research position in universities in the US. Therefore, Chinese graduate students in the US have become an important group and to explore the motivation of Chinese ITAs both to improve English abilities and to acculturate into American campus culture can help address the issue of ITA training better. The research questions that are covered in this study include:

1. What are perceived needs to improve oral English from Chinese ITAs' perspective?
2. How do instructors in the ITA training program see Chinese ITAs' motivation?
3. How do professors evaluate the issue of oral English proficiency of their Chinese ITAs?

As can be seen from the above guiding questions, this study will collect interview data from three perspectives: Chinese ITAs, ESL instructors, and the ITA supervisor. While the emphasis will be put on Chinese ITAs' self-perception of their needs, data from the ESL instructor will focus on Chinese ITAs' performance in learning spoken English and data from the ITA supervisor will provide evaluation of their performance in their ITA work.

Review of relevant literature

With an increasing number of international graduate students filling in teaching assistant positions at North American universities, many undergraduate students in universities across the United States are now taking classes that are taught by International Teaching Assistants (ITAs). What have developed along with this trend in the past twenty years are research on the teaching effectiveness of ITAs and training programs that are specially tailored for ITAs.

While most ESL professionals agree that the three major areas of ITA problems are culture, pedagogy, and language (Hoekje & Williams, 1992), there has not been a consensus as to their relative importance in contributing to difficulty in ITA classrooms. In regards to the roles of culture and language, Stevens (1989) reviews a dichotomy of emphasis on ITA training strategies: on the one hand, some people including undergraduate students, parents, and even legislatures insist that language proficiency should be emphasized for ITAs; on the other hand, a new group of researchers (Constantide, 1987; Phelps, 1984; as cited in Stevens, 1989) argues for the cultural aspect of training to be considered more important, because cultural differences are more likely than language itself to cause miscommunication.

The end of the 1980s saw a plethora of research that takes on behavioral factors other than language proficiency in determining the ITA success. For instance, Bailey (1984), from a study on a typology of teaching assistants, identified successful ITA teaching behaviors that ITAs often employ to compensate for their linguistic inabilities: interpersonal communication skills; positive nonverbal cues; interactive teaching styles; teacher-student rapport; planning and organization; and a sense of humor. Bernhardt (1987) also argues that cross-cultural communication between ITAs and their American-born students is more problematic than language itself.

A major turning point of the new focus on other competences is seen in Nelson's (1990) review of ITA research, which suggests a set of important non-linguistic behaviors: to be friendly and interactive; to invite students' questions; to elaborate a concept; to relate old and new information; to make student responsibilities clear; to make eye contact with students; and to talk about their culture. Furthermore, although deficiencies in any component of the grammatical (i.e., English language), sociolinguistic (context-specific

language), discourse (cohesive language), and strategic (compensatory language) competences described by Canale and Swain (1980) can lead to communication breakdown, Hoekje and Williams (1992) contend that grammatical competence is less crucial to ITAs than the other three competences.

Much empirical research has also contributed to our understanding of the ITA problems inherent in the sociocultural aspect of communicative competence. Through studying the effectiveness of ITA teaching, Bailey (1984) found that cultural differences in the classroom could be a primary basis for ITAs' failure. Classroom settings to which ITAs are accustomed are quite different from those they confront as TAs in the U.S. ITAs from China, for example, might have been used to the teaching environment where usually a teacher lectures a huge class of students. In this case, they may find it difficult to attune themselves to small and intimate U.S. classes where personal interaction is expected, leading their undergraduate students to feel bored because those ITAs seem to act as impersonal "mechanical problem-solvers" (Bailey, 1984, p. 113).

Additionally, the instructor's role in the U.S. universities is very different from that in China. Interaction is rare in a classroom in China; rather, teachers can only deliver knowledge by writing on blackboard for a whole class and students do not usually ask questions. A Chinese student in Salomone's (1998) study realized the importance of interaction in a classroom by saying in a videotape critique that "nonverbal communication is one of my weak points. This time I paid attention to movement and position ... there were eye contacts between students and me" (p. 559).

A second important source of the ITA communication difficulties lies in the fact that international students feel uncomfortable in routine exchanges in English (Cook-Gumperz & Gumperz, 1984). Part of the reason has been discussed by Davies, Tyler, and Koran (1989) that "it is a difficult, exhausting business to try to communicate with someone who does not share your background culture and has limited control of the language" (p. 140). They continue to stress that international students do not have a clue of where they violate native speakers' expectations, how misunderstanding happens, and why communication does not carry on. Accumulation of frustrated cross-cultural communication experiences often leads to a perception held by international students that "trying to engage Americans in conversation is futile" (p. 140).

In addressing the issue of cross-cultural communication, Davies et al. (1989) employ Cook-Gumperz and Gumperz's (1984) definition of communicative competence, which is referred to as the ability to establish and maintain conversational involvement, in which miscommunication does not occur. Thus, the essential elements to achieve successful conversation involvement are shared communicative conventions, which "constitute a

mutual system whereby the communicative intent of a speaker can be inferred, and the general meaning of the ongoing interaction can be tracked and signaled” (Davies et al, 1989, p. 142). Davies et al. (1989) further put forward that participants bring to any conversational situation their own set of sociocultural knowledge which informs “appropriate roles of participants with attendant goals, attitudes, and [task and rapport-oriented] strategies and appropriate overall structure of an interaction in the situation in terms both of ritual behavior, and also of the sequencing of communicative tasks to be performed” (p. 142). While participants negotiate meaning, they continuously rely on a set of “culturally-constructed cues” (p. 142) which channel interpretive processes.

In response to the above issue of ITAs’ cross-cultural communicative competence, several studies have been conducted both to investigate factors that persistently influence ITAs’ lack of cross-cultural competence and to seek possible solutions to improve their cross-cultural communicative competence. To begin with, by examining the affective and behavioral dimensions of intercultural communication competence, Zimmermann (1995) found that talking to native speakers is a prime factor in international students’ perceptions of communication competency and thus, providing opportunities for interaction and social contact between international students and the local majority group is invaluable to the process of adapting to an American campus. Yet it requires a long time commitment for ITAs, as a minority language group, to modify its pragmalinguistic behavior to conform to that of the majority language.

Jenkins’ (2000) case study of miscommunication between Chinese ITAs and academic faculty in a Mathematics Department reveals a big gap of perception between academic faculty and their Chinese ITAs. The data in this study are analyzed according to five categorizations: 1) historical genesis of the problem; 2) the mathematics student role; 3) the ITA role; 4) motivation to improve language ability; and 5) motivation to acculturate. Messages from both sides of faculty and ITAs show that while most behaviors such as silence and avoidance in formal contacts are explained by Chinese ITAs to show deference to their faculty, all most every native English speaker faculty (except for one non-native English-speaking faculty) interpret those behaviors as a manifestation of unwillingness to improve their English.

Accordingly, Myles and Cheng (2003) point out that acknowledgement of student needs can help the faculty, staff, and students gain a better intercultural understanding and communication within the community, as well as greater academic fulfillment. Based on this rationale, they suggest the implementation of cultural and social support programs for ITAs in addition to English for academic purposes courses. Capraro (2002) also did a qualitative study on the spoken English learning experience of prospective international teaching assistants (ITAs) and she found that more attention should be paid to the process of the ITAs’ language learning through reflection activities.

Specifically in her findings, she pointed out that “ITA learners need to be encouraged to make positive changes in their thinking and attitude about learning SE,” “learners need to think about what they are doing to improve spoken English,” and “ITAs need to be more aware of their SE learning than they currently are in SE courses” (p. 304-306). Therefore, participants in Capraro’s (2002) study seemed basically not to be aware of what they were doing in the spoken English class and could not connect this learning experience with their goal.

An ideal discipline-specific practicum was piloted in Gorsuch’s (2006) study, which brought up the issue of whether ITA education should be done within academic departments or within content-based program. The pilot ITA practicum aimed to combine the best of both approaches in order to teach ITAs not only content-based knowledge in their disciplines but also classroom communication skills for them to cope with cross-cultural communication difficulties. Results confirmed this type of practicum to be useful because it created the interaction between ITAs and US undergraduates and provided ITAs with opportunities to observe and participate in experienced ITAs’ classes. However, Gorsuch (2006) continued that format of the classes (lab vs. lecture) and personalities of ITAs are two very important variables in affecting the results.

Based on the historical background of the ITA problem, the present qualitative study aims to explore possible problems inherent in the Chinese ITAs’ learning experience and to find a good answer as to what kind of training program or what approaches employed in the training program can benefit Chinese ITAs.

The study

Researcher role

As has been mentioned in the introduction, while I am a researcher for this study, I am an international teaching assistant in a large university in the USA. The double roles that I assumed in this qualitative study might bias my research; however, during the process of interviewing and analyzing, I tried to see my own experience as one case and remained a researcher to learn more about the needs of the other Chinese ITAs.

For example, the first interview question for Chinese ITAs is “Do you think it’s important to improve your oral English?” (see Appendix 1). I tried not to impose my own opinion during the interview, but rather I remained often as a listener. Furthermore, my analysis mainly focused on the interview data and my interpretation had examples from the interview data to back it up.

Site and participants

This study was conducted in the College of Arts and Sciences at a large Southwestern university. Specifically, two departments were involved: one was the ESL program; and the other was the chemistry department. The ESL program is in charge of the incoming international graduate students' English proficiency. All incoming international graduate students are required to take an ISSS GSTEP test, which includes three parts: short answer and essay, reading and listening, and speaking. If students fail the test, they are recommended by ESL specialists to take one or both of the two ESL courses that are specially tailored to international graduate students. The two courses are Academic Listening and Spoken English (ESL 7250) and Academic Writing (ESL 7350).

However, there is no university policy about the requirement of international graduate students' English proficiency for their TA work. Departments themselves can decide whether ESL training class should be the prerequisite for their students who fail the ISSS GSTEP to start TA work or not. That is why ESL specialists can only recommend rather than require students to take any ESL courses. Besides the two ESL courses mentioned, there is another ESL course specially for ITAs (ESL 7500). This course is neither closely related to the ISSS GSTEP test nor it is specifically for incoming international graduate students. Instead, this course is for international graduate students, who are recommended by various discipline-based departments. While ESL 7250 works more on the oral English fluency, cultural shock, and presentations, ESL 7500 focuses on classroom teaching skills.

There are four participants in this study: two Chinese ITAs from chemistry department, one ESL instructor who happens to teach these two Chinese students, and one ITA supervisor, who is in charge of one of two science center in the chemistry department. In this case, the two Chinese ITAs in this study are working in this supervisor's center. One of the Chinese ITAs, named Zhang, came in January 2007 to pursue a Ph.D. degree in chemistry; therefore, she has been in the U.S. for around four months up until the interview time. Before she came to the US, Zhang studied in Singapore for half a year. She took the TOEFL in May and again in August, 2005. After she got the score of 580 in the first try, she started to study hard and got 643 in August. In November of the same year, she took the TSE and obtained a score of 40.

The second Chinese ITA, Wu, came in fall 2006 to pursue a Ph.D. degree in the same department and, in fact, Wu and Zhang have the same professor and, thus, work in the same lab. Besides, the lab where both of them work only has Chinese students and their professor is Chinese too. Different from Zhang, Wu has a contract with the university in China that he must go back to work in that university after he obtains his Ph.D. degree.

The ESL instructor is a native English speaker and has taught ESL 7250 and ESL 7500 for three years in the ESL program. The ITA supervisor in chemistry department is Russian and she has been in the US for 17 years. She can speak fluent English, although there are some occasional grammatical mistakes in the interview data.

Data collection

This is a case study which focuses on the two Chinese ITAs: Zhang and Wu. The main method of collecting data is interviews, which entails two steps and three perspectives. What I mean by two steps is that I first did a broad informal interview with a big number of Chinese ITAs (around 15), as has been mentioned in the Introduction section. The first step helped answer some questions concerning Chinese ITAs' cross-cultural communicative competence. It is these questions that guide me through the second focal semi-structured interviews. The three perspectives refer to Chinese ITAs, ESL program, and the ITA supervisor in their disciplines. The two steps and three perspectives provide a comprehensive picture of the process of Chinese ITAs' acquisition of cross-cultural communicative competence. The secondary method to collect data was field notes, where I put down information from conversations with all participants. Besides, I did member-checking for all interview data with four interviewees through email.

An interesting thing happened during the interview with the Chinese ITAs. Before the interview, I already prepared the interview questions in Chinese, because, generally speaking, it is weird for Chinese speakers to speak in English with each other. However, when I had a talk with my participants before the interview, Wu asked me whether I needed to interview him in English because he assumed that everyone needed to write in English. I told him that I was not sure of how comfortable it was for him to speak in English with me. He immediately offered to be interviewed first in Chinese and then in English. I thought it was a good idea because I did not need to translate and also I could have a sense of how good his English was. Later I interviewed Zhang in the same procedure. Here, I see the importance of the rapport that the interviewer builds with his/her interviewees. Without our good relationship, my participants would not be willing to spend so much time with me, not to mention to be interviewed twice.

Data analysis

Data analysis was an ongoing process as data were collected, interpreted and written up (Cresswell, 2003). Field notes and interview transcripts were continuously read and notes were written to begin to find themes and patterns in the data. Content analysis of the data was the main analysis procedure used, which means that I read and reread the notes and transcripts. The main themes

emerged from interviews from three parties are demonstrated in the following figure:

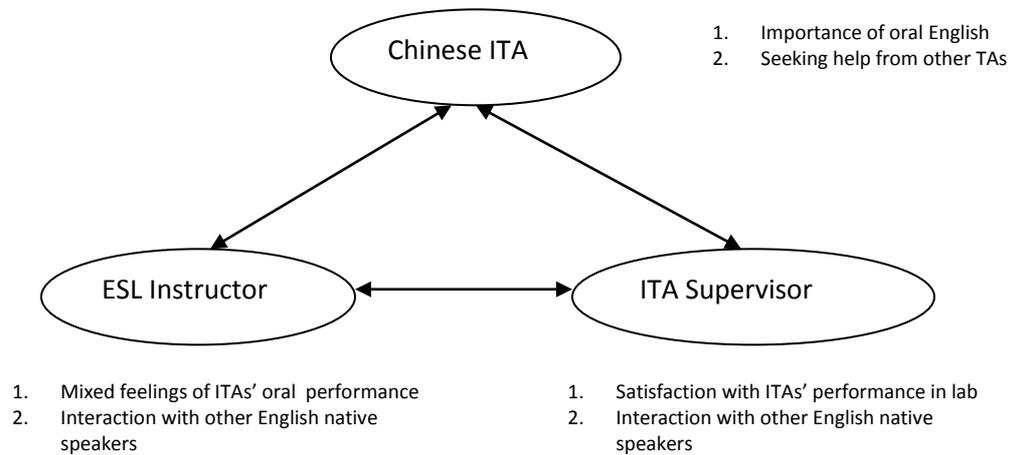


Figure 2. Major themes that emerged from the interview data

In Figure 2, the ellipses contain interviewees from three totally different perspectives. Main themes that emerged from each perspective are shown beside the corresponding ellipse. Arrows indicate that common themes are found among the three parties. During the data analysis procedure, I first focused on the two Chinese ITAs' interview transcripts, searching for themes about the cross-cultural English learning experience, especially their motivation, attitude and effort. From here, a list of themes was made and the themes were coded with a combination of a name and a number, e.g. Zhang1 means theme one from the interviewee Zhang. Besides, the same number shows the same theme across all interviewees' data. Thus, for example, themes Wu1 and Zhang1 discuss the same topic.

Based on the major themes found in the Chinese ITAs' data, a further content analysis was conducted on the data from the ESL instructor and the ITA supervisor, in order to find themes that were shared by all of the interviewees. After the common topics were explored, additional important themes that were only touched upon by one or two interviewees would also be coded and illustrated in this paper, in order to provide a full picture of the current study. Interpretation of the data include presenting cross-cultural English learning experience, providing examples, making connections among interview data.

Results

In this section, I will highlight important themes from the two Chinese ITAs' responses to the interview questions and also focus on the themes from the interview data of both the ESL instructor and the ITA supervisor that are

related to the Chinese ITAs' responses. I will use the last name for the two Chinese ITAs and the initial of the first name for the ESL instructor, J, and the ITA supervisor, ZO. I will refer to myself as Y.

Theme 1: Perceived needs to improve spoken English

The importance of spoken English for the Chinese ITAs was recognized and emphasized by all interviewees. When asked about the question of "Do you think oral English is important for your study or for your teaching assistant work?", both Zhang and Wu said that spoken English was very important for them, and, interestingly, the reasons they provide were all about their performance in TA work, where they needed to address their American students' questions, and their own interaction with advisors, where they needed to report their experiment progress. For example, the two reasons given by Zhang were:

Um ... firstly is because uh ... as a TA, we have to uh ... communicate with our students ... um ... during the lab time ... and they asked us question and we have ... we must answer the question no matter mm ... whether we know or not. And ... so if we don't have good oral English ability and they will not understand us and they will repeat their question or maybe they may do something wrong in the experiment ... so um it's very important for the TA work.

Mm another um uh point is we have to communicate with our uh ... instructor ... and uh if we do not ... mmm ... uh ... give him uh clear mm ... clear...mm ... a clear description of our work ... the problem and they cannot give us the right uh ... advice so the work will not go on just because of poor our oral English ... so we have to improve our mm ... oral English ...

Other than Zhang, the first two reasons Wu gave were all about how important he could benefit from interaction with his professors and classmates. Wu talked about TAs work very late when I asked for the third time a question that particularly specified the relationship between oral English and TA work.

Y: ok, um, so so speaking of speaking of the speaking of oral English and the interaction, how do you think um the importance to improve I mean during the interaction with your students undergraduate students during the lab time?

Wu: during other times like the TA, like the speaker, like some formal situation, you need to use English, especially in TA, this is my job this job is very important for me because it waiver my tuition and give me a scholarship, so support myself, so you I need pay attention to research on this job, um this job to communicate with the student, they always made some problems you need to share or give some suggestions, or how to go

through the problem, sometimes very hard for me because I haven't haven't memorized all the words about the equipment or how to describe in English this experiment ?

From the above illustration by Wu, we can see while Wu agreed that oral English was important, he also pointed out how he struggled in the first semester when he helped American undergraduate students.

The ESL instructor, of course, was the one who emphasized the importance of oral English the most, as can be found in his description of problems that exist in Chinese ITAs' oral English:

"The vowels are sometimes really awful."

"The word stress is major, so what I do is...I have them focus a lot on word stress, academic words they are going to use in their majors."

"It seems that thought groups and pausing is another one that really... can shift the, the ability to communicate quickly, comprehensive ability."

"Intonation is an issue sometimes, um, in that it goes up and down at the wrong place, at first. It's totally mixed messages, you ask me a question in the middle of the sentence, you know, it's just, and they don't get a really deep or full pitch drop at the end of the sentence, often."

The ITA supervisor also put forward the importance of oral English in Ph.D. students' academic achievement, but regarding ITAs' English proficiency; she seemed to fully trust TOEFL and thought that all ITAs were qualified as long as they were accepted by the department because without meeting the minimum TOEFL requirement, these ITAs could not have been admitted.

ZO: "They pass, without TOEFL, nobody can get this classes, if they pass TOEFL, it means they know English."

Furthermore, she stated that Chinese ITAs would improve their English on their own if they were not confident of their English and she referred to the ESL program as a resource.

Y: Ok, um, so, are there some policies regarding oral English proficiency by this chemistry department for TA?

ZO: No, no, no, no, because many of these students, if they would like, they can take English second language.

Y: Ok

ZO: And they improve their English, first of all, if they would like, after graduation, stay in America, anyway, they need English.

Y: Yeah

ZO: Do you understand? you can't imagine, you have Ph.D., and being in America, and if you get the job to teach, if your English bad, students from first quit from your subject, it's painful for you, yes, you have chemistry major knowledge, but no enough English, do you understand?

Y: yeah

ZO: for this reason, it's better if they take English second language,

Theme 2: Motivation to learn spoken English

There is a certain relationship between the Chinese ITAs' perceived importance of spoken English and their motivation to improve their communicative competence. However, this relationship seemed also to depend on personal attributes. For example, Wu was more motivated than Zhang to learn spoken English as shown through his participation in seminar discussions, his active interaction with other native speaker classmates, and the effort he made to learn how to communicate with American undergraduate students. Wu's response to the third question of "What have you done in order to improve your oral English after you came to the U.S.?" are as follows:

"Listen to the film about American living condition, um, to listen the TV every day's program."

"I already take part in some some some seminar, first, after seminar some speakers can go over some some lab to first talk with advisor, next talk with students always give you some tip... During this time you can make friends even your professor."

"Find some friend native speaker, native speaker can can share their life and to maybe, you can you can play game together, or you can go to some club to, to play some game."

"First take part in more seminar, especially extinguished scholars next step is... you can practice with speaker how to share the question, how to go through the problem together, maybe you can uh you can join together to to to find a new project for the follow research. I think uh during this time, we can pick up more."

Zhang did not seek to associate with native speakers by playing with them off campus or made an effort to make friends with native speakers through seminar discussions, but she seemed also to have made an effort to learn how to speak English in an American style through her TA work with native speaker undergraduates:

"To correct my grammar or ... uh ... mm ... speaking style ... in the ... TA ... work ... and one student asked me question ... mm ... I explain to him or her. If he or she can not understand me just because my poor uh ... expression ... and uh ... I'll have to correct it and they can ... so they can

understand. So ... during this ... during ... this time and I can improve a lot and try to uh um say it in correct ... in the right way ... and uh ... and next time I can use the correct way to communicate with them ... mm ...”

Furthermore, both Zhang and Wu seemed to think that listening to native English was very important because they could learn the style native speakers described things and explained things.

Zhang: “Soap opera in the computer like the Friends ... and uh ... in the mv ... in the play, I can learn a lot of ... English idiom ... and ... I can know what is very usual in ... very usual ... mm ... in ... um ... of the ... American’s speak English and I can learn from ... from them ... and ... like uh ... some uh ... like “I got it” or “let’s call it a day”... or ... mmm ... like uh ... other ... uh ... mm very daily talk daily talk to communicate ... so I think watching English TV is ... also ... or I mean ... important ... mm ... way to learn oral English ...”

Wu: “Only thing you need to listen very carefully, the native speaker can describe something, they can use some words, very helpful to improve your oral English.”

According to the ITA supervisor, the efforts that Zhang and Wu made to improve their English seemed to be typical of Chinese ITAs in the chemistry department. Although ZO recognized that the only problem that Chinese ITAs could have was English, she also emphasized that Chinese ITAs were very motivated and worked hard to improve their English:

Y: So you mean, you think Chinese graduate students, they are motivated?

ZO: Yeah, yes, yes, I see from their performance, they are very motivated, they are smart,

ZO also pointed out that people were different and, therefore, not every Chinese ITA worked as hard:

But some of them maybe a little bit lazy, some of them want to show they know everything they want to have, some of them can sit like that, I always like, go and ask student, maybe they need something ... But it’s not only Chinese, any nation, they have different different people, different personalities, psychologically, healthy problem, who knows.

As far as the ESL instructor is concerned, J seemed to have mixed feelings towards the Chinese ITAs’ performance in his class:

J: oh, generally, all of the students wanna improve their English, I mean ...

Y: you think they have motivation ...

J: yeah, I mean they are VER ... interested, of course, um, at the same time, they sometime, I know they are extremely busy in their major ... and their major is stressing them out. And it makes them very ... nervous so that they often tend to treat this class as ... I think less important ... so

when they are totally overwhelmed, something has to give, I think they, like I make specific assignments, they don't go to the LARC on their own.

Therefore, the above data show that while J could see Chinese ITAs' interest in spoken English; he tended to perceive that interest as a task that had not been carried out. The main reason that he assumed was the pressure from the students' workload in their disciplines.

Theme 3: Perceived resources to improve spoken English

Throughout the interview data, we can see some common points regarding resources that Chinese ITAs can make use of in order to improve their oral English. Firstly, interaction with native speakers was considered essential. In Theme 2, Wu has provided a list of ways to interact with native speakers through seminars, TA work, clubs, etc. Similarly, Zhang also stressed that she learned a lot of idioms and styles to communicate in an American way through the interactive dialogue with native speaker undergraduate students. Meanwhile, the instructor J also suggested a number of avenues to grab opportunity to speak with native speakers:

“Like we said, not hanging with, not speaking Chinese all the time the rest of,”

“So maybe... students who want to do something could ...ok, everybody in the lab, would you like to come over for a Chinese dinner in my house.”

“So if you can do you schoolwork, and don't always pair up with another Chinese student, but pair up with a native speaker whenever you are doing in group work, that helps, coz you have to be in English, or someone from another language, where you are still forced to use English”

However, J also brought up a very realistic issue regarding the difficulty for Chinese ITAs to find native speakers:

“Coz they are all busy, they've got families, or boyfriend, girlfriends, or brides, or husbands, whatever, and so, it is hard to break in, even for, when I, I mean, I've live in Atlanta twenty years, thirty years, and when I, when I came to this program, it was so hard to make friends,”

By the same token, the ITA supervisor expressed the same opinion regarding the importance of interacting with native speakers. Moreover, she suggested Chinese ITAs to be active and “tell to people around you, correct my English, if you don't tell, American people never correct, because they are very polite, they don't want to harm you ...”

Secondly, these two Chinese ITAs found much help from other native speaker or even non-native speaker TA workmates. Native-speaker TAs have been very important in helping them cope their difficulties at the beginning of

their TA job. The following conversation showed how Zhang benefited from working with native speaker TAs:

Zhang: yeah, mm. and uh especially at the beginning time. I ...I not only...I do not...not only do I know the knowledge about the lab section but I can not communicate with them very well. so I just call the other TA. “hi, can you help me with this problem?”

Y: uh ... so that means you can also learn a lot from from other TA, other international or American TA?

Zhang: yeah one I communicate with her is ... she is the native American people. Uh ... American girl. She ... she has ... her English is uh ... absolutely good. And uh ... and uh she tried to explain to me in simple English for maybe in the mm in the way I can understand. She is very experienced in the TA work and from her I can learn the knowledge about the TA work but also the improve English

Wu also referred to native speakers’ help in his data that “right now some body help native speaker or other English uh use English very frequently person can give me suggestions how to describe it, now I can help student more than before.”

Lastly, the two Chinese ITAs were asked about their opinions about the effectiveness of the course ESL 7250. Wu found this class more helpful than Zhang, shown as follows:

Y: So uh you take the listening and academic oral English class, is that class very helpful?

Wu: Uh, yes, that class focus on academic English, uh, especially in the listening and speaking, teach you how to uh describe the question, how to design the poster, how to share idea with other person, how to prepare with presentation. presentation is a powerful tools to help students share ideas with each other, maybe during this time, you can learn more um because this learning and this language uh this knowledge you can get not only in the book still in the other person, because different people have different background if the other background one question, if you say one question very difficult, maybe to the others very easy if you if they help you to go through this problem you improve very quickly.

Zhang: I think they give me a a um ... [pause for 4 seconds] certain amount of help ... and uh ... I just think I do not fit this English class ... I do not know American students like this style of ... teaching class ... and uh I was kind of do not like this class ... but because I just think this class sometime is boring ... and ... uh ... I don’t see ... I think sometime like the pronunciation. Or the ... or the ... mm or the ... mm ... or the ... uh ... [pause for about 5 seconds] pronunciation or some ... uh ... tips about presentation or poster is very important in my English learning period ...

and ... I was ... I truly got the help that work but ... kind of ... uh ... boring and ... I was sleepy when I take it that time ... and ... that does not mean it's not a good class ... just I do not fit it? or the class do not fit me?

In previous conversations with Zhang, she had already told me that she did not think this course was helpful. When I asked her this question again, she still seemed not to have a positive attitude; however, she started to express it in a different way, which was that “just I do not fit it.”

Besides, both Chinese ITAs also got help from the ITA supervisor, because the supervisor said in the interview that “If they can't understand English, let's go, I will show you what you are supposed to do, and they come with me, I am showing every step, because it's much better one time to see than seven time to hear.”

Conclusions

This qualitative study has explored the perceived needs and motivations of Chinese ITAs to improve spoken English. Major findings were categorized into three themes as shown in the above analysis: first, the two Chinese ITAs thought that good oral English played an important role in their TA work and their academic study; this finding was in agreement with the goal of the ESL courses and with the opinion from the ITA supervisor, who said that the only problem for ITAs was English.

Second, both Chinese ITAs were motivated to improve their oral English, but personal attributes and goals seemed to have a decisive role in how much they wanted to exert themselves in improving oral English. Wu not only wanted to perform well in his TA work, but, more importantly, he also set an academic goal to be able to communicate with important experts in his field in order to gain more experiences and invaluable opportunities, for example, the opportunity to work in the lab in MIT, Harvard. In contrast, Zhang seemed to be more concerned with her current TA work and course work because she said “it's not urgent for me ... and I was not crazy about it.”

In regards to the Chinese ITAs' perceived needs to improve oral English, some sources collected from all interviewees' data were listed in the last theme. From the Chinese ITAs' data, we can see that what they have actually done to improve their English was mostly to watch TV programs in English. A secondary way for Wu was to seek help from native speakers, especially his classmates or TA workmates. Zhang did not inform me of her interaction with native speakers until I specifically asked her whether she got help from other native speaker TAs. Interestingly, none of them included the ESL course as one of the methods for them to improve oral English; rather, it was only when I asked a question of whether they thought this class was helpful that they gave their opinion towards it. While Wu thought this class taught him useful

tools to deal with certain academic tasks, such as presentations, poster sessions, Zhang obviously did not benefit from this class.

Generally speaking, the findings partly confirmed Gorsuch's (2006) findings that it might be more effective if the ITA training program was combined with content-based course training, where new ITAs could have a chance to work closely with experienced native speaker TAs. Besides, Capraro's (2002) proposition that reflection activities might be useful to raise ITAs' awareness of the importance of ESL courses also seems to be shown in this case study.

Findings from the study indicate that more attention should be paid to Chinese ITAs' English learning experience in the US. Although the ESL course does not seem to be highly valued by the Chinese ITAs, it still raises their awareness of certain oral English rules and American campus culture. However, it might not be a good idea to give too much homework to the Chinese ITAs, simply because they do not have time to digest them. This has been recognized by the ESL instructor, who said that although he could see motivation in his students, he also knew that his students considered the class unimportant.

Moreover, it seems essential to incorporate the content-based course training in the ITA training program because the two Chinese ITAs actually got most important help from their interactions with their native speaker peers. If this is the case for most ITAs, to provide them with a real-world context where ITAs can learn from other experienced peers seems to be highly crucial.

However, it is difficult to generalize results from this study due to some limitations. First, the number of interviewees from three perspectives is small. There were only two Chinese ITAs, one ESL instructor, and one ITA supervisor. Second, the Chinese ITAs were both new in the US, thus, their opinions might not represent a comprehensive picture of Chinese ITAs' English learning experience. Therefore, Chinese ITAs who have been in the US for several years should be included for a balanced data. Lastly, the ITA supervisor in this study is a non-native speaker. What she talked a lot in the interview was her suggestions of how to learn English well. As a result, her data might not represent native speaker professors' view of the Chinese ITAs. In the future study, it is important to gain interview data from native speaker ITA supervisors or native speaker faculty who work closely with Chinese ITAs.

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Appendix 1: Interview questions on Chinese ITAs' motivation to improve oral English

Interview with Chinese ITAs

- 1) 你觉得英语口语对你现在的学习工作重要吗？
Do you think it's important to improve your oral English for study or for your TA work?
- 2) 你觉得从目前的情况看可以怎样提高你的口语？
How do you think you can improve your oral English in the current situation?
- 3) 来到美国以后，你做了什么样的努力去提高英语？
What have you done in order to improve your oral English after you came to the U.S.?
- 4) 你觉得ESL的培训班怎么样？
How do you feel about the ESL Spoken English class?
- 5) 系里对国际学生做助教工作有要求吗？
Is it any requirement regarding the qualification of international students to do TA work?

Interview with ESL instructors

- 1) What do you think are the major problems in Chinese graduate students' oral English?
- 2) Do you think students are motivated to improve their oral English from their performance in the class?
- 3) What improvements do you think they have made during the class?

Interview with Chinese ITAs' supervisors

- 1) What do you think of Chinese ITAs' performance in their TA work? Are there some common problems?
- 2) (If the interviewee emphasizes the problem of oral English, I will ask this question?) Do you think Chinese ITAs work hard to improve their oral English?
- 3) Are there any policy regarding oral English proficiency by the department? Are there any training program provided by the department to specifically improve the TA work?

Dealing with unknown idiomatic expressions in L2 classroom

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Abstract

Idiomatic expressions (IE) are so pervasive that the teacher and students can encounter them as unknown expressions in any classroom of language arts. Particularly in the L2 classroom, the unknown idiomatic expressions appear frequently and sporadically during the integrated classroom activities of listening, reading and writing. The unpredictability of occurrence of unknown idiomatic expressions during the class, which might hinder the students from following the primary class activity, requires the teacher's immediate treatment to make sense of how to proceed. The sporadic IE instructions in this sense are embedded in any integrated language classroom activity. Prior research into idiomatic expressions have focused on cognitive theory about the difference between L1 and L2 learners in their processing, teaching strategies for the effectiveness of IE instruction, etc. This study employs sequential analysis (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974) for the transcribed classroom interaction between the teacher and the student. Sequential analysis considers the meaning of every next turn in classroom discourse as an outcome of the contingently coordinated interactional work (Moerman & Sacks, 1988). Through sequential analysis, this study examines how the teacher makes sense of the meaning of idiom instruction for the course of the classroom activity and produces language pedagogy in an actual classroom occasion.

Keywords: Idiomatic instruction, ESL classroom, classroom research, sequential analysis, conversation analysis

Introduction

Idioms are defined as "fixed and formulaic expressions", which cannot be predicted from the meaning of the individual words that comprise them (Carter, 1998). Bachman (1996) categorized idioms as sociolinguistic knowledge that can only be achieved by cultural understanding of the target community. Despite the numerous studies about idiom instruction for L1 and L2 learners, the unpredictability and arbitrariness of idioms and the cultural relativity of metaphoric expressions make it difficult for L2 learners to understand idioms, that is, unknown expressions. L2 learners encounter the

sporadic occurrence of unknown expressions, which are called idiomatic or figurative expressions throughout a lesson. This sporadic occurrence of unknown idiomatic expressions is a burden on L2 learners as they follow the integrated language activities in class and also on the teacher in how they instruct the students to accomplish the primary objectives. In this regard, instruction of idiomatic expressions in an L2 classroom becomes a thorny issue in terms of its feasibility and practicality.

Thus, in this paper, I intend to look into how the idiomatic expression (IE) instruction that occurs sporadically in L2 classrooms is dealt with and how the instruction is shaped in the interaction between the teacher and the students. Firstly, I will start by reviewing the literature on how idioms or idiomatic expressions (IE) have been dealt with in the field of language education and which teaching strategies were suggested to instruct L2 learners. Secondly, I will present how IE instruction works in an actual occasion in a L2 classroom through sequential analysis (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974). Then, in the conclusion, I will discuss how IE instruction has been approached differently in its way of taking interest in actual classroom interaction.

Literature Review

How to define idioms

Idioms have been identified as “formulas”, “chunks”, or “fixed expressions”, which refer to “unanalyzed language”. Idioms are made up of multiple words where the meaning is not derived by consulting the individual words. In this sense, idioms are arbitrary expressions whose meaning is unmotivated (Kövecses & Szabo, 1996). Motivation refers to a listener’s ability to make sense of an idiomatic expression by reactivating or remotivating its figurativity, that is, using the literal meanings of the individual words of the idiom to understand why the idiom has that the specific meaning. (Langlotz, 2006, p. 45) For example, “tip of the iceberg” (small piece of a big hidden problem) can be motivated on the basis of our knowledge about icebergs and the problems they cause for navigation. However, “piece of cake” (something that is very easy to do) is unmotivated for most speakers of English because they have lost the metaphorical ground to make sense of this idiom. Lakoff (1987) discussed the motivation of idioms by using the example “spill the beans” as a conceptual metaphor that the speakers or listeners have. Through conceptual metaphors, people can associate the conceptual knowledge of “spill the beans” to the metaphorical knowledge of the idiomatic meaning (“reveal the secret”). Kövecses and Szabo (1996) classified idiom as a “mixed bag” that encompasses metaphor, metonymies, pairs of words, similes, sayings and phrasal verbs, and grammatical idioms. Nunberg, Sag, and Wasow (1994) categorized idioms with more flexibility, being a “fuzzy category” that

contains characteristics such as conventionality, inflexibility, figuration, proverbiality, informality and affect. Nunberg, et al. (1994) rejected the traditional view of idioms as arbitrary expressions and argued against the non-arbitrary features of idioms. They also criticized the claim of idioms as being single, arbitrary, semantic representations:

To justify this claim [...] it has to be shown not just that the meaning of the idiom could not be predicted on the basis of a knowledge of the meanings of its parts, but that once the meaning of the idiom is known [...] it cannot be devolved on the constituents of the expressions. (p. 496)

Those who support non-arbitrary features of idioms are grouped within the Cognitive Semantics school of thought. Lakoff, Langacker, and Johnson (1980) proposed a conceptual basis for idiomatic expressions, a model known as “cognitive linguistics”. They argued that idioms have compositional features, which can be predicted by the meanings of the individual words in the conceptual metaphorical system. This conceptual system (Kövecses & Szabo, 1996; Lakoff 1993) connects two domains of knowledge: one is a familiar, physical domain called a source-domain; and the other is a less familiar, abstract domain called a target-domain. The source-domain provides understanding of the target-domain, which the figurative expression expresses. These researchers consider idioms to be highly motivated. Gibbs (1994) suggests that people attempt to do compositional analyses when they try to interpret figurative, idiomatic expressions. Cognitive semantic theory matches well with transparent, compositional idiom expressions; however, for opaque idiomatic expressions, Nunberg, et al (1994) make a distinction between idioms and “idiomatically combining expressions” (for short, “idiomatic combinations”), which refer respectively to idiomatic phrases that can be decomposable, i.e., “all bark and no bite” (when someone is aggressive but not willing to engage in a fight) and to idioms that have to be understood as a whole chunk, i.e., “break a leg” (good luck!) and “dry run” (rehearsal).

Later, Nunberg, et al, were attacked for their concept of conceptual metaphor. Cacciari and Glucksberg (1994) argued that conceptual knowledge is developmental in its nature and questioned the universality of a conceptual metaphor system. Keysar and Bly (1999) also claimed that idioms cannot be used to argue for the existence of conceptual structures. They claimed that the relation between idioms and their metaphorical meaning is not because of the same conceptual system but because of the nature of interpretive strategies.

Idiom comprehension processing in L1 and L2

To date, there have been four theories of idiom comprehension. The first theory is called the Idiomatic Processing Model. According to this view, an idiom is processed first figuratively when it is encountered by the native

speaker. Then, when this model is not productive, a literal interpretation mode is activated (Schweigert & Moates, 1988). Due to the familiar conventionality of idioms, they claimed that the idiomatic processing mode gives the first priority to the figurative interpretation.

Bobrow and Bell (1973) and Burbules, Schraw and Trathen (1989) proposed the Literal Processing Model, which means, an idiom is processed literally first when it is encountered by the native speaker. Then only if the case is not productive with the literal processing mode, the figurative processing mode is activated. Later, Schraw (1995) replicated these findings and proposed the Focus-Shifting Hypothesis, which is that native speakers shift their focus to figurative interpretation mode in order to understand idioms only when their attempt fails to understand idioms literally. Schraw (1995) conducted experiments in his study with undergraduate students in a large Western university to examine whether metaphorical and literal statements presented in context receive similar amounts of perceptual decoding. The result showed the processing time of metaphorical statements was longer than the literal processing time. According to the result, Schraw (1995) suggested that the difference in the processing time between metaphorical and literal statements is attributed to a shift in focus that occurs when interpreting metaphors.

The third theory is Direct Access Hypothesis, which was proposed by Gibbs (1980, 1984). Gibbs insisted that native speakers hardly consider the literal meaning of an idiomatic expression. They quickly bring the meaning of the idiom from their own mental lexicon. Because of the familiarity and conventionality of idioms, they do not need more time in order to process or activate literal interpretation mode to understand idioms. Gibbs argued that native speakers do not process the meaning of idioms literally first. They access the conventional figurative meaning of idioms directly, rather than processing the literal meaning of idioms.

The last model of idiom comprehension is Simultaneous Processing Model (Swinney & Cutler, 1979). This model suggested that the meaning of idioms is processed literally and figuratively at the same time rather than separately. In line with this model, Forrester (1995) argued that idiomatic expressions are frozen by their history of use and recognized conventionally as fixed expressions, rather than being processed consciously.

Having discussed above the four models of idiom comprehension, it seems that the traditional view of idioms is in line with both the idiomatic processing model and direct access hypothesis, which focus on opaque expressions and which are not derived from the individual words. On the other hand, the cognitive view with both the literal processing model and simultaneous processing model focus on transparent idioms, which are made up of individual constituents.

Teaching strategies for idiom instruction

Irujo (1986) and Kellerman (1979) conducted research about the idiom comprehension of L2 learners. They investigated L1 transfer to L2 idiom comprehension and, although there is no significant positive or negative L1 transfer in L2 idiom comprehension, they claimed that L1 still plays an important role in L2 idiom processing in its comprehension.

Regarding the metaphorical awareness of idiom instruction, Kövecses and Szabo (1996) conducted a study that examines the extent and the effectiveness of metaphoric-oriented instruction in foreign language context. Fifteen Hungarian students were asked to study ten phrasal verbs (e.g., turn up the heading, cheer someone up) with conceptual-metaphor explanations (e.g., more is up, happy is up). And another 15 Hungarian students were asked to study the same phrasal verbs with L1 translation. The result showed that those who were guided to use the cognitive linguistic method, which is a conceptual-metaphor explanation, performed 25% better compared to the students who were guided to memorize idioms with L1 explanation (Kövecses & Szabo, 1996).

In addition, Schmitt (1997) suggested “grouping” as an important factor that helps L2 learners to organize their vocabulary in an effective way. Based on the tenets of the cognitive linguistic view on idioms, he argued that metaphor is ubiquitous in everyday life in our conceptual system. Within the system, the meaning of idiom is not restricted as an arbitrary constituent; rather, it is motivated by three mechanisms: metaphor, metonymy, and conventional knowledge (Kövecses, 2002).

Following the discussions of idioms and metaphor, Boers (2000) and Littlemore (2001) asserted the importance of metaphorical awareness to improve L2 learners’ idiom comprehension. Boers (2000) claimed that if learners are more sensitive to the metaphorical expressions in their everyday communication, the sensitivity will be helpful for figurative vocabulary learning and they will be able to maintain this knowledge longer in their memory. Littlemore (2001) claimed that L2 learners can enhance their metaphorical awareness by working with metaphorical vocabulary. In the similar vein, Andreou and Galantomos (2008) conducted a survey to examine the effectiveness of this method, which is increasing metaphoric awareness of learners in Greek idiom instruction. Their results showed that those who received the instruction to increase their metaphoric awareness achieved better performance in the idiom comprehension test than those who did not.

As shown above, connecting a speaker’s conventional, cognitive knowledge to the metaphorical awareness helps the language learners to process idioms easily by being motivated. Motivation in this sense is a central element in the cognitive linguistic approach for idiom instruction. Through motivation, L2 learners who develop metaphorical competence obtain a better understanding of fixed expression more than those who did not obtain that

competence. In this approach, the link between idiomatic meaning and the literal words stems from the knowledge of the cognitive mechanism, which is about conventional knowledge.

For the classroom activities of idiom instruction, Boers (1999), Lazar (1996), Denigran, Gabrys and Solska (1997), and Liu (2008) offer sample activities that make the learners aware of metaphor in everyday life and to give them an opportunity to make cross-linguistic comparisons and to be able to express themselves in metaphorical terms as well. The activities that they suggested are as follows: gap-filling exercises, metaphoric themes recognition, story-telling based on pictures, retelling stories, idiom flash cards with images, playing idiom games, idiom dictionary, and completing a story or a paragraph (Andreou & Glantomos, 2008).

Similarly, Cooper (1998) suggested activities at each level of developing teaching materials such as choosing, discussing and defining idioms, and dividing idioms into groups. He suggested teaching activities using cartoons, newspapers and TV shows, retelling and add-on story, interviewing classmates, idiom-board games, idiom jazz and chants. Through these activities, L2 learners develop knowledge of understanding idioms by increasing their metaphorical awareness to improve their socio-linguistic competence.

In addition, Scarcella and Oxford (1992) stressed that teachers need to illustrate key vocabulary effectively by showing pictures and diagrams so as to improve the ESL students' reading comprehension. Mayer (1999) found that words and pictures presented together helped students recall better than with words alone as it is efficient to provide interesting pictures to foster and reinforce vocabulary development.

In order to increase the subsequent memorization of idiom expressions, Diez Arroyo (2000) suggests three ways of grouping idioms: lexical, syntactical, and topical features. With this grouping of idioms, she also suggested three types of exercises to guide L2 learners through the meaning of idioms: matching expressions, paraphrasing exercises, and contextualizing exercises. Matching expressions are suggested as a traditional approach. Paraphrasing exercises and contextualizing exercises are suggested to guide the learners to replace the appropriate idioms and to clarify the figurative interpretation of the fixed expression.

Regarding the effective teaching methods of idiom expression, Palmer, Shakelford, Miller, and Leclere (2006) suggested explicit instruction: using dialogue to contextualize the teaching materials, visualization, modeling, and the use of native language. With the use of various activities that integrate listening, speaking, reading and writing, L2 learners learn and practice how to utilize the idiom in various contexts. Wu (2008) suggested that retelling and rewriting through dialogue writing and role-play in reading are helpful for students to practice English idioms.

Thus far, I have reviewed the literature on how idioms have been defined, how they were studied in the comprehension process for language learners and how it has been suggested to instruct idioms in the classroom. Those studies for teaching suggestions were conducted as experimental studies based on the theory and cognitive studies about idioms and idiom processing.

In the next section, I will examine how idiomatic instruction occurs in an actual L2 classroom and how the instruction looks in its classroom interaction through the analysis of the sequential organization of turn taking between the teacher and the students. By employing Conversation Analysis (CA), I will examine how this instruction is performed in actual occasions, how the teacher discovers and responds to the need for idiom instruction, and how he/she guides the students to understand and produce the meaning of idioms.

Data Analysis

Conversation analysis and classroom instruction

Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson (1974) discussed that natural conversation anchors a linear array of “kinds of talk”, each of which shows an orientation to a turn-taking system. Turn taking organizes the interaction of the parties, for which conversation shows its simplest systematics in its interaction (Sacks et al, 1974). Mehan (1979) described turn taking in classroom instruction as a sequence of three turns, which are well known as IRE (Initiation-Response-Evaluation): questions asked by the teacher, answers provided by the students, and remarks on the adequacy of answers in the teacher’s third turn. McHoul (1978) also discussed the orderliness of formal talk in classroom interaction that is in line with Sacks et al (1974).

Developed by conversation analysts (Sacks et al., 1974; Schegloff et al., 1977), sequential organization refers to the way that speakers are oriented to prior talk in conversation. Each next turn represents how the speaker of the turn understands the previous turn (Moerman & Sacks, 1971, 1988). Moerman and Sacks (1988) showed how understanding is constantly displayed and negotiated in each turn of a conversation’s sequential organization. Conversation in this sense is a procedural process toward understanding, which consists of what it takes to accomplish proper speaker transition through systematic analysis of the sequential organization of natural conversation. In this regard, understanding is a natural, social organization.

Payne and Hustler (1980) in particular discussed classroom interaction as the work of organizing by two parties: the teacher and the class through the distribution of turn takings between them. The order of the turn takings between the teacher and the class is accomplished in unnoticed ways that comprise a teacher’s professional expertise. On each and every occasion of a

lesson, the teacher accomplishes the order in its instructional occasions. Through routines, the order of the turns in classroom interaction is an occasioned order, “there and then”, in its accomplishment of the course of action (Payne & Hustler, 1980, p. 50).

IE instruction in an actual occasion

This is an ESL class with intermediate proficiency in a Mid-West University in the U.S. The students in this class are those who learned English as a foreign language. The lesson is a listening comprehension practice about world coffee prices.

The students listen to an audiotape and then the teacher asks them about what they heard. The teacher introduces several unknown words - idiomatic (figurative) expressions (IE) - from the audio script that might cause a problem for their understanding. After they listen to the segment, she checks their comprehension and moves on to the next segment of the audiotape.

Despite that the teacher tries to introduce the unknown IE proactively for the L2 students, the unknown IE appear frequently and sporadically during the class from the audiotape and from the teacher’s explanation. Those unknown IEs require an urgent treatment by the teacher in order to move on to the primary class activity – listening comprehension practice. In this regard, the unknown IE instruction is embedded into the main classroom activity and this embedded instruction of dealing with unknown IE during the main class activity occurs consistently but unpredictably in the foreign language classroom.

Now I will turn to an actual classroom occasion and show how the teacher deals with the unknown idiomatic expressions during the main classroom activity. The students are listening to an audiotape and trying to figure out why the Columbian coffee growers are having problems.

Excerpt 1.

- 0 Tape: *Slumping world coffee prices are driving many Columbian*
1 *growers out of business*
2 T: Okay, there is(.) number one(.) (1.0)
3 Why are Columbian coffee growers having problems?
4 S1: *new brand*
5 T: Because of new bra:nd That’s a good guess(.) Mohammad?
6 (7.0) ((The teacher rewinds the tape.))
7 T: The first word he says is slumping
8 You know what slumping means? (1.0)
9 Going(.) do::wn(.) So (.) listen again
10 Tape: *Slumping world coffee prices are driving many Columbian*
11 *growers out of business*

- 12 S1: Low price=
 13 T: =Low price is for what=
 14 S2: =something
 15 S1: *coffee*
 16 S?: for coffee=
 17 T: =for coffee (1.0) Slumping(.) Coffee(.) prices
 18 In the U.S?=No
 19 S?: *Columbia?*=
 20 T: Where?
 21 S?: *Columbia*
 22 T: Columbia? (.) No
 23 T: *What else?*=
 24 S?: ()
 25 T: Well(.) maybe (.) I'm asking the question(.) incorrectly(.) Listen
 26 Tape: *Slumping world coffee prices are driving many Colombian*
 27 *growers out of business*
 28 S?: ()
 29 T: Okay(.) Slumping?
 30 S?: world=
 31 T: =world (.) coffee prices
 32 (8.0)

The teacher asks a question with a known answer (QWKA) in line 3, “Why are the Colombian coffee growers having problems?” The teacher does not select anybody for the next turn as the question is addressed to everyone and relies on self-selection for the next turn. S1 in line 4 volunteers with uncertainty, marked by a soft voice. The teacher repeats the answer and assesses it as a “good guess”, which shows that she is expecting to have a more accurate answer. She then re-winds the audiotape and by doing this, she implicitly is instructing the class that her question is one whose answer will be found by closely listening to it.

Before they listen to the tape, she gives the first word, “slumping”, to the students. The IE instruction starts from the line 7. Since this is a listening comprehension practice, she assesses the long pause (7.0 sec) as possible difficulty for the students to figure out the idiomatic expression. She gives the first word, “slumping” and asks students the meaning of “slumping” in line 8. Following a (1.0) pause, she answers in line 9 by enacting its meaning, stretching the sound “do:wn” as a way of exaggeration. She shows the meaning of the figurative expression by performing the sound of its meaning.

This question and answer about the idiomatic expression “slumping” is embedded in the listening comprehension instruction. She identifies the expression as one that might hinder the students listening comprehension and provides the meaning of the idiomatic expression by enacting, i.e., stretching and exaggerating the sound with the indexical reference. This is part of what Payne and Hustler (1980) discussed as an experienced teacher’s expertise. In each and every occasion, the teacher assesses the situation and accomplishes

the order of the occasion and employs a prompt strategy to solve the problem and move on to the sequence of the main instruction.

The teacher plays the tape and S1 in line 12 answers without being asked. This shows that the student considers the lines 4-9 as an embedded sequence to the sequence initiated in line 3, and that the question of line 3 is still unanswered. He displays his analysis of the discourse so far and attempts to answer the first initiation. Without a gap or overlap, in the next turn in line 13, the teacher invites the re-completion of his answer. That is, she is fishing for a more complete answer, gets a candidate in line 14 that she ignores, and then S1 speaks softly and adds “coffee” in line 15. And in line 16, she completes the expression that began in line 13, pauses (1.0), and then shows that it is the same as saying “slumping coffee prices”.

In line 18, she begins the next sequence and asks a question to clarify their comprehension of “where” prices are slumping. She asks and answers her first question in line 18, “In the US? No.” This produces a candidate answer in line 19, and in line 21 she revises her question by saying, “maybe I’m asking the question incorrectly,” and returns to the audiotape. This shows her assessment about her own question and how she understood the students’ lack of responses. Returning to the audiotape returns the class to the listening comprehension task.

After listening to the tape, she uses its first word, “slumping”, to invite utterance completion; the students hear her invitation. A student produces the next word in line 30, and she accepts it and produces the rest of the key phrase. The line 31 is the answer to the first initiation in line 3 that led to the process of teaching the idiomatic expression, “slumping”. She gets the answer by inviting completion of the turn and phrase that she begins. The answer was elicited as a collaborative turn, rather than as an answer to a question.

After the pause in line 32, the teacher shifts the topic from a comprehension of the audiotape to a question about its implications, and then to whether coffee is more or less popular.

Excerpt 2.

- 33 T: So (.) that seems odd (.) doesn't it?
34 Is the coffee getting more popular or less popular?
35 S?: * more?*=
36 T: =How about you (.) are you drinking more coffee now than
37 you did two years ago? About the same or less?
38 ((to the student sitting in the front row))
39 S: More=
40 T: =More (1.0) And you are(.) buying it more from shops(.) right?
41 Everybody seems to be buying it(.) The astronaut () remember?
42 Everybody seems to be buying it
43 T: Well(.) wouldn't you think Juan Valdez would be making

44 more (0.5) money?
 45 S?: He shud=
 46 T: =he shud> you think about it ((T, smiling))
 47 Simz like he wud (.)
 48 But apparently coffee prices(.) are going do:wn (.)
 49 This is for the raw(.) coffee.
 50 ((She plays the next section of the tape))
 51 Tape: *Even as retailers in the United States earn huge profits*
 52 *from selling lattes cappuccinos and mochas*
 53 *Columbia's coffee growers are turning to an old friend*
 54 *Juan Valdez to tap into the coffee-shop rage*
 55 T: Okay (.)
 56 *we have* our barrel(.) tap(.) into(.)
 57 ((gesturing as tapping into a barrel with her hands))
 58 What are they tapping into?
 59 S ()
 60 T Juan Valdez (.) like (.) they are trying to tap into(.)
 61 the coffee shop ra:ge
 62 Where would you meet your conversation partner?
 63 S: *coffee shop*=
 64 T: =the coffee shop(.) Where would you meet um ten years ago?
 65 S: [()]
 66 T: [the restaurant (1.0) ((The students giggle)) café
 67 Coffee shops were not that big(.) Not that popular(.)
 68 Not that numerous
 69 So (.) It's a ra:ge(.2) that means very popular(.) A lot of
 70 ((The teacher rewinds the tape.))
 71 Tape: ((man's voice)) *Sibylla Brodzinsky reports from Bogota*
 72 ((woman's voice)) *For more than forty years Juan Valdez and*
 73 *his trusting mule have been promoting one hundred percent*
 74 *Columbian coffee*
 75 T: Okay
 76 S?: *() forty years*
 77 T: for more than forty years (.) had been a percentage number
 78 one hundred(.2)
 79 Okay I promised you I would stop after one (.) that's two (.)
 80 I will be quiet now because (.) we will continue with this
 81 tomorrow (.)We will do some listening practice with it.

In line 34, the teacher asks whether the coffee is becoming more popular or less popular. S? answers in a soft voice and with uncertainty in line 35. This is an interesting part, which shows the student's uncertainty about the teacher's question, whether it is a question with a known answer about the audiotape, or whether it is a real question for their everyday life. The teacher selects the next turn to the students in the first row and asks the revised question. The student answers "More" in line 39. The teacher latches the answer by repeating it with the following one-second pause. That turn is

followed by the tag question “Right?” in line 40, which is to confirm the student’s answer by soliciting agreement from the students.

The teacher’s questioning continues about whether Juan Valdez would be making more money in lines 43-44. S? answers, “He should” and the student’s answer is followed by the teacher repeating the answer, which is latched to the student's turn. This latched turn shows that the answer is a “preferred” one by the teacher (Pomerantz, 1984). In the next lines 47-49, the teacher clarifies that the coffee prices are going down and that it is for the raw coffee, which is guiding the students to the audiotape for further comprehension practice. She plays the tape.

Before she collects the answer about whether Juan Valdez would make more money, she introduces two new idiomatic expressions - potential trouble sources for the students: “tap into” and “rage”. In lines 55-58, she starts by showing what “tap into” means by using gestures and gives a more specific question about the tape, which also requires understanding the meaning of “tap into”. This question is followed by the teacher’s self-selected answer in lines 60-61. Then she solicits students’ agreement that coffee shops are more popular now than ten years ago in lines 62-68. In line 69, she offers the definition for “rage” as “very popular and “a lot of”, and demonstrates “rage” in how she says it by stretching the sound “ra:ge”, which she mentioned in her self-selected answer (lines 60-61). Then she plays the audiotape for the next segment.

S? gives his hearing of the beginning part of the audio tape in a soft voice without being asked in line 76. S? shows his understanding of how the listening practice has been running and continues the activity by providing the answer for the segment they had just heard. The teacher repeats the student’s turn, which is the beginning part of the segment of the audiotape and provides the latter part of the segment by rephrasing it. In lines 79-81, she brings the listening comprehension lesson to a close.

Concluding remarks

Idioms are so pervasive that students can encounter them as unknown expressions in any classroom of language arts. Teacher and students encounter idioms in any language activity – listening, reading, and writing – in an integrated language class. Whenever the teacher encounters idioms, he or she assesses the student’s knowledge and determines where to start and how to proceed with the IE instruction to achieve the primary objectives of the class. The unpredictability of the potential problem of understanding idiomatic expressions in L2 classroom requires the teacher’s ad hoc teaching techniques to make sense of how to proceed. However, the need for the teacher’s impromptu teaching technique in that situation has been overlooked in the

literature and what the language instruction looks like with the sporadic occurrence of IE has been missed as well.

As discussed in the literature review, the majority of literature has focused on the cognitive developmental issues of language instruction and teaching strategies (Hellermann, 2008; Kasper, 2006) that were designed to enhance the effectiveness of IE instruction. The studies about idiom instruction considered language learning as acquiring a scientific, measurable knowledge, which can be designed and assessed for the effectiveness of learning and instructional methods. But considering the necessity of the teacher's ad hoc teaching strategies based on his/her interpretation of the moment-by-moment interaction and the teacher's assessment of the occasion, instruction is an occasioned, situated, sense-making practice of ordinary activity in the world (Macbeth, 1996). The majority of the previous literature ignored the peculiarity of the construction of situated knowledge in the classroom and the ways of knowing actual occasion without examining what is going on in the classroom in detail. This is because it views knowledge and instruction as information to be conveyed in the classroom, rather than as phenomena that can co-produce meaning as a socio-culturally situated, collaborative course of action. "Situatedness" enacts the meaning of indexical knowledge of the world through activity (Hellermann, 2008; Macbeth, 1996).

As shown in the actual occasion, IE instruction that is embedded into the integrated language instruction in this lesson is dealt with by the teacher's prompt ad hoc teaching techniques, "there and then" (Mortensen, 2011; Payne & Hustler, 1980), rather than following the various teaching suggestions in the formal analysis in IE mainstream literature. What the teacher does in the actual occasion is to try to get the students to recognize the meaning of idiomatic expressions by producing (re-complete the filling-up-question turn-by-turn) and making the connection between the indexical meaning in the context of the lesson, and the students' knowledge of their everyday life. This is invoking the students' knowledge from their "everyday life" and invites them to realize it by making use of the world that they have already encountered. In order to accomplish the connection successfully, the teacher shows the meaning of the idioms by enacting, performing, and summoning the knowledge that the students possess from their experiences. The teacher constantly tries to make the students connect their world and knowledge to the indexical meaning of the idiomatic expressions by enacting, interacting, and communicating with them. The teacher assesses every occasion continuously and determines the teaching strategies that are needed in the occasion to keep the lesson moving forward. IE instruction in an actual classroom is more dependent on the teacher's interpretation of moment-by-moment interaction and the teacher's assessment of the occasion.

The moment-by-moment talk in interaction installs knowledge in the classroom (Macbeth, 2003). Through questions with a known-answer, the teacher organizes participation and builds starting places to teach the lesson.

The process of pursuing the answer to the QWKA is a contingent organization of talk-in-interaction between the teacher and the students. The teacher employs strategies to elicit the known answer from the students by inviting collaborative completions, showing answers, and leading them to produce the expected answer. Students learn the idiomatic expression in their talk-in-interaction as a course of action in the classroom. From a sequential perspective, the students display how they understand the teacher's questions in their next turn, and the teacher shows his or her understanding of the students' response to the initial questions in her third turn. By the contingent sequential contexts of talk-in-interaction, the teacher makes meaning of the lesson as a course of action (Hellermann, 2008; Mehan, 1979).

Thus far, I discussed how the sporadic occurrence of unknown idiomatic expressions for language learners is dealt with in the foreign language classroom along with the discussion of idioms and IE instruction in prior literatures. As it is discussed in the analysis of the classroom transcripts, instruction in an actual occasion is a set of contingent, sequential interactions, which is enacted as a sense-making practice, rather than as a set of abstract, intangible cognitive knowledge that is conveyed as a standardized form.

Learning and teaching, knowing and doing are not separable. Through the situated talk-in-interaction, the teacher and the students co-produce knowledge by enacting its meaning. Learning, interaction, and knowledge are interdependent and are situated as an ordinary activity of the world as a practical, social action.

Appendix: Transcript notations

Transcripts notations are derived from the conventions developed by Sacks et al. (1974).

- (.) micro pause
- (2.0) Timed silence within or between adjacent utterances
- // Notes the point at which one speaker overlaps another.
- = Notes the ending of one utterance and the beginning of a next without gap or overlap.
- Underlining indicates stress
- (.h) Indicates an in-breath
- (h) Indicates out breath
- Hyphens indicate a word cut off in its production
- * * Notes soft speaking
- : A colon indicates a sound stretch on a word or word portion
- () Empty indicates an unheard utterance
- (()) Double parentheses contain descriptions of the scene
- [Left bracket indicates a simultaneous start by two speakers
-] Right bracket indicates two utterances ending simultaneously

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Englishes in China: Researchers' and English teachers' perspectives and their pedagogical implications

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Abstract

This article compares researchers' and practitioners' perspectives on features of varieties of Englishes and errors. We surveyed a group of tertiary-level English/translation teachers in China to understand their judgments and categorisations of a small corpus of Chinese-style English constructions which Chinese researchers of applied linguistics have roughly categorised into China English and Chinglish. Findings show that although there was no clear consensus among the participants, their overall categorisation of the items into China English and Chinglish was at variance with those of researchers suggesting researcher-practitioner divergence on error-feature distinctions. We argue that world Englishes research needs to be carried out from a pedagogical perspective to draw on practising teachers' understandings and judgments in order to bring about a greater acceptability of varieties of Englishes in China and other new English-using polities.

Keywords: China English, Chinglish, second language errors, language varieties, teacher agency

Introduction

The world Englishes (WE) perspective¹ provides the theoretical and conceptual frame to understand the emerging varieties of non-native Englishes which are seen as natural outcomes of the changing face of English in a globalising world. Within this paradigm, "mistakes" or "errors", dominant features of second language (L2) English, have become something of an embarrassment or at least problematic categories, because English is argued to have multiple varieties and its use is informed by local norms. The linguistic liberalism (as well as pragmatism) underpinning WE challenges the orthodoxy of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and L2 pedagogy, which view

deviations from native speaker (NS) norms as errors and interlanguages (Jenkins, 2006), resulting from deficit learning. As Kachru (1986) explained:

In such [SLA] studies, any deviation has been interpreted as violating a prescriptive norm and thus resulting in a 'mistake'. The urge for prescriptivism has been so strong that any innovation which is not according to the native speaker's linguistic code is considered a linguistic aberration. If one makes too many such 'mistakes', it is treated as an indication of a language user's linguistic deprivation or deficiency. (p. 93)

Increasingly, WE scholars (e.g., Braine, 1999; Jenkins, 2003, 2006; Kachru, 1985, 1992; Kirkpatrick, 2006) have argued that what the SLA perspective considers errors may not be seen as errors; rather, these features deserve to be considered as linguistic innovations or features of nativised language use. As van Rooy (2011) observed, "[g]enuine new linguistic conventions emerge from forms that may have started out as errors" (p.189). This paradigm shift in our understanding of errors has given rise to a new problem: when can a salient feature of English use be accepted as a varietal feature and when should it be rejected as an error (Bamgbose, 1998; Li, 2010; Tan, 2005; van Rooy, 2011)? While WE researchers are trying to come to terms with this critical issue, Bamgbose (1998) has presented an elaborate treatise, proposing five major criteria to determine the status of a neologism which include: demographic strength, geographic spread, codification, authority, and acceptability. Among these criteria, codification has a crucial role in determining the status of features of non-native Englishes, as Bamgbose (1998) stated:

Crucial to the entrenchment of innovations and non-native norms is codification. Without it users will continue to be uncertain about what is and what is not correct and, by default, such doubts are bound to be resolved on the basis of existing codified norms, which are derived from an exonormative standard. (p. 12)

That codification is an essential criterion in distinguishing between erroneous features and features of a variety is demonstrated by the fact that the largest body of the WE literature has been devoted to describing and identifying features of local, national and regional varieties of English (e.g., Baumgardner, 1995; Simo Bobda, 2000, 2003; Guzman, 2009; Kachru, 2005; Mesthrie, 2008; O'Hara-Davies, 2010; van Rooy, 2011; Xu, 2010a, 2010b). Nevertheless, codification has certain limitations. First, both codification and the dissemination of codified features are lengthy processes which may not keep pace with the emergence of new varieties. For instance, it is only recently that Australian and New Zealand Englishes have been fully codified. Secondly, the process of codification interacts rather paradoxically with the other criteria included in Bamgbose's treatise. For example, although items that are codified can be assumed to win acceptability as well as demographic and geographic spread, codification itself is subject to authority (who

normalises the variety?), acceptance and spread. In other words, items to be codified should already have been accepted reasonably widely. Consequently, at any given period of time there would be many features of innovative Englishes in a particular variety which would simply exist because their status (as error or varietal feature) would not have been determined through codification.

This uncertain status of new features of Englishes has implications for L2 (English) teaching and translation (involving English and another language) in the Outer and Expanding Circle contexts. For instance, as part of feedback provision, English/translation teachers have to correct students' L2 errors and nurture their linguistic creativity (see Swain, Kinnear, & Steinman 2011, Chap. 6, for teacher's dilemma in this regard). However, the absence of codification of varieties or teachers' lack of access to (those) codified features raises the question of how English/translation teachers respond to idiosyncratic features of L2 English use in their pedagogical practice. Teachers are not only gate-keepers of standards but are also important conduits through which standards and their permissible variability are passed on to future citizens (Lee, 2001; Tupas, 2010). Whether teachers are familiar with codified features of English or not, they make important judgments of students' English on a daily basis. Teacher agency (e.g., Campbell, 2012; Canagarajah, 1999; Lopez, 2011; Tupas, 2010) determines whether certain forms can be accepted as "correct" use of English and therefore they mediate social acceptability of features of English and the birth of new varieties of Englishes.

Nevertheless, WE research is yet to give adequate attention to teacher agency vis-à-vis error-varietal feature debates. Although there have been some studies on teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards varieties of English (e.g., Baumgardner, 1995; Tsui & Bunton, 2000; Young & Walsh, 2010), these have not necessarily been linked to the question of innovations and errors which has pedagogical importance. A study by French (2005) is an exception. This study of teacher judgment examined which features of Japanese L2 English might be accepted as examples of Japanese English and which features might be treated as errors. The present study aimed to extend this WE research by exploring English/translation teachers' attitudes towards L2 English in China with reference to errors and varietal features. We investigated how practising English/translation teachers judged the acceptability of certain features of English and whether there were patterns in their judgments. In so doing, we were particularly interested in understanding teachers' positions on errors and varietal features compared to those reported in WE research in China. Focusing on teacher agency, we tried to understand these practitioners' perspectives on WE and their implications for L2 pedagogy.

China provides an important site for investigating errors and varietal features of English. First, the context of China demonstrates that the question of nativisation of English, which has typically been attributed to the Outer

Circle context (see Hamid & Baldauf, 2013), applies to Expanding Circle contexts as well, as has been argued by many authors including Jenkins (2007), Kim (2006), Kirkpatrick (2002), Lowenberg (2002) and Seidlhofer (2009). The main argument that is put forward by these scholars is that the English language has been going through comparable processes of localisation and innovation in both Circles deserving equal recognition. More crucially, the question of varieties of English has taken a complicated turn in China given the deliberate attempts at creating a national variety of English to be known as “China English” (CE)² which should be distinguished from Chinglish (CH) (discussion follows). Therefore, in China it is not a binary choice between normative English (NE)³ and the Chinese variety of English; rather, it is a more complex linguistic terrain where a niche has to be created for CE making it sufficiently distinct from NE on the one hand and Chinglish on the other.

China, Chinglish and China English

With the rapid growth of English as a lingua franca (ELF) in East Asia (Kirkpatrick, 2002, 2010, 2011), wide-ranging changes have been observed in English learning, teaching and use in China. Although NE, particularly British and American varieties, enjoys prestige in China, as elsewhere, a pidginised variety called Chinglish, reminiscent of Singlish, or Japlish, or Manglish, has entered into Chinese people’s linguistic repertoires. While debates about Chinglish and NE have attracted the attention of applied linguists and researchers, attention has also been drawn to the relevance of China English. Chinglish and CE are differentiated from each other both linguistically and socially. Chinglish is usually described as a derogatory form which is informed by the notion of interlanguage (Du, 1998; Guan, 2007; Jiang, 1995) as introduced by Selinker (1972) to describe structurally and phonologically intermediate systems between the L1 and the L2. On the other hand, China English, which found its most energetic expression in a journal article entitled “Issues of translation from Chinese into English” (Ge, 1980), has been widely accepted as a variety of world Englishes by a group of educationists and linguists for the past three decades (Fang, 2011; Hu, 2004, 2005; Jiang, 1995, 2003; Li, 1993; Lin, 1998; Xie, 1995). Despite differences in these scholars’ and researchers’ understanding and conceptualisations of CE, some key features of this English can be identified which suggest that CE: 1) follows NE as its core; 2) draws on local linguistic and cultural characteristics; and 3) maintains intelligibility in international communication. Likewise, there seems to be a general consensus among Chinese English scholars and linguists that: 1) features of Chinglish are errors in the SLA sense, while CE is recognised as a “nativised” variety; and 2) Chinglish is to be eliminated from Chinese learners of English, while CE, as a manifestation of their national and cultural identity, is to be accepted and promoted as a legitimate variety. Therefore, to distinguish Chinglish from CE is to distinguish an error from an acceptable

varietal feature. The present study was informed by this theoretical distinction between Chinglish and CE drawn by Chinese researchers.

Distinguishing between Chinglish and China English

Distinguishing between Chinglish and CE appears to be a common goal of Chinese scholarship in applied linguistics and language studies, as Xu (2010b, p. 284) observed: “What the Chinese scholars have in common is their intention to distinguish Chinglish from their versions of CE.” One of the first scholars to exemplify this distinction is Ge (1980), who argued that English expressions that were uniquely Chinese should be considered China English, not Chinglish. His examples of such expressions include *Four Books, Five Classics, eight-legged essay*, and *May Fourth Movement* (English morphemes, Chinese word-formations).

Another celebrated Chinese scholar, Li (1993), analysed differences between CH and CE by pointing out two important features of CE: 1) it is free from L1 interference; and 2) it is shaped by combining core linguistic norms of NE with Chinese cultural elements (p. 19). Li’s definition of CE, especially his insistence that it bears no Chinese interference, was questioned by Xie (1995), who argued that CE was, by definition, “an interference variety” (p. 7). On his part, Xie argued that what makes CE different from CH is that the former could win support from native speakers of English and, consequently, function effectively in international communication. Jiang (1995) described Chinglish by using a series of derogatory labels such as “ill-formed”, “erroneous” and not “comfortably intelligible”, affirming that CE was a variety of English with Chinese characteristics, and to be regarded positively. Despite these attempts at distinguishing between Chinglish and CE, the relationship between the two still remains problematic. As Hu (2004) observes:

[...] we can say that there is no clear boundary between Chinglish and Chinese English on the one side and China English on the other; it is not possible to place them neatly into two categories. Instead, they are situated on a continuum and progressively merge. (p. 27)

Hu’s notion of a “continuum” is reminiscent of “Chinese-style” English proposed by Gui (1988) who stated that this English comprised a continuum on which Chinese students’ English stood at one end and well-educated people’s use of English at the other (p. 13). However, it is unclear how to locate an utterance on this continuum and when it should be referred to as CE and when as CH (Chen & Hu, 2006, p. 45).

To address the dilemma, He and Li (2009) suggested the codification of China English as an urgent task for researchers. Accordingly, linguists and researchers have been conducting descriptive studies drawing on examples from lexis, syntax, discourse and pragmatics to try to identify features of

nativised English in China (He & Li, 2009; Kirkpatrick & Xu, 2002; Xu, 2010a, 2010b; Yang, 2005; Zhao, 2007). For instance, Yang (2005) explored lexical innovations by analysing 59 borrowed lexical items found in 84 news articles in two English newspapers in China. Similarly, Xu (2010b) codified lexical, syntactic, discoursal and pragmatic features of CE on the basis of data collected from 36 interviews with Chinese university lecturers and postgraduate students. However, it is unclear how widely these codified features have spread and to what extent the theoretical distinctions between China English and Chinglish are acceptable to Chinese teachers of English.

The present study explored the debate about China English and Chinglish from a pedagogical perspective, drawing on English/translation teachers' attitudes and judgments. Translation teachers are those teachers who teach a translation course from English into Chinese or Chinese into English at the tertiary level. As a compulsory course for English majors in China, this course is offered to improve students' translation skills. The aim of the study was to understand how these practitioners' positions in this debate relate to those of researchers.⁴ Three specific questions guided the investigation:

- 1) How do university teachers of English language/translation in China react to linguistic expressions labeled Chinglish or China English by researchers?
- 2) Is there a consensus among these teachers in their judgments on features of L2 English in China?
- 3) How do these practitioners' attitudes towards CE and Chinglish relate to the distinctions drawn between CE and Chinglish in the literature?

Methodology

The main instrument for our study was an online questionnaire survey which was linked to the website <http://www.sojump.com>. Carried out between October and December 2011, the survey sought teachers' judgments on features of Englishes in China. The 32 teachers, who were colleagues of the first author in China, were invited to participate in the survey through emails and/or phone calls from Australia. All of them had experience in teaching translation courses in China.

Corpus and participants

The corpus of our study consists of 20 English sentences used for Chinese-English translation in English courses in Chinese universities. They were selected from academic journals (16 items), textbooks (3 items) and practice materials (1 item). The sentences include eight examples of Chinglish, 10 of CE and two additional items (undecided) related to local features of English in

syntax, lexis, collocation, idiomatic expressions and rhetorical style.⁵ We focused the study on translation materials in L2 English teaching for two reasons. First, in the translation class: a) Chinese and English languages interact with each other; b) English language learners are more likely to be influenced by their mother tongue in their use of English; and c) they are more likely to produce English expressions with features of Chinese (Mandarin). Second, research on Chinglish and China English has traditionally focused on translation (e.g., Ge, 1980; Li, 2005; Wang, 2000; Zhao, 2007). In fact, the origin of China English can be traced to translation (Ge, 1980) and therefore “research into China English should be developed from the perspective of translation and pragmatics” (He, 1994, p. 3).

Thirty-two teachers who taught English/translation courses at five universities in mainland China participated in our study. Each of the teachers had at least a Master of Arts (MA) in English language and literature. All participants spoke Mandarin as their first language. They had varying lengths of teaching experience. Although all of them possessed high levels of proficiency as speakers of English in an Expanding Circle context, some of them were more proficient than the others.

Questionnaire survey

The questionnaire containing the 20 sentences previously mentioned was organised into three parts. The first part aimed to assess the acceptability of these expressions on a 5-point scale from “completely unacceptable” to “completely acceptable”. However, in the analysis of the acceptability judgment data, only three categories (*acceptable*, *unacceptable* and *not sure*) were used so that larger data categories were available for analysis. In this part of the questionnaire, each of the items was accompanied by its native-like rendering⁶ and each pair was presented as English translations with an accompanying sentence in Mandarin, as in the following example:

来信写道：“我去年曾经去过一次长城……” (Wang, 2000)

Version 1: The letter writes, “I went to the Great Wall once last year……”

Version 2: The letter reads, “I went to the Great Wall once last year……”

The participants were asked to judge the acceptability of the sentences in each pair but they were not informed which one was Chinese-style (referring to English language use with local characteristics, including Chinglish and China English) and which one was native-like.

The second part of the questionnaire asked the participants to label the sentences by choosing from five descriptors: “Chinglish”, “China English”, “Normative English”, “Not sure” and “Other”. The Chinese-style and native-like sentences were jumbled so that participants had to categorise them

without being influenced by any possible orientation indicated by their arrangement.

In the final part of the questionnaire, an open-ended question was included to provide the participants with an opportunity to comment on their responses and to react to issues surrounding Chinglish, China English and NE.

Findings

Acceptability and categorisation of L2 constructions

In this article, we report on the teachers' responses to the 20 Chinese-style English expressions which are tabulated separately for ease of analysis and interpretation. Table 1 presents two groups of sentences: a) those (n = 8) that are considered unacceptable (CH) in the translation literature; and b) new items (n = 2) that are yet to be categorised as CH or CE. Next, the items considered acceptable (CE) are subdivided into linguistic nativisation (i.e. innovations in morphology, syntax and phonology), and creative nativisation (i.e. lexical and semantic innovations), based on Bamgbose's (1998) interpretation of nativisation. They are reported in Table 2 and Table 3 respectively.

Table 1

Teachers' responses to items with CH tag and new items

	Items	Yes	Not sure	No	CH	CE	NE
Items with CH tag	i9	19(59.4)	3(9.4)	10(31.2)	6(18.8)	22(68.8)	3(9.4)
	i11	7(21.9)	2(6.2)	23(71.9)	22(68.8)	10(31.2)	
	i13	14(43.8)	4(12.5)	14(43.8)	8(25)	20(62.5)	3(9.4)
	i14	24(75)		8(25)	7(21.9)	5(15.6)	20(62.5)
	i15	25(78.1)		7(21.9)	6(18.8)	15(46.9)	10(31.3)
	i16	8(25.0)	1(3.1)	23(71.9)	13(40.6)	17(53.1)	1(3.1)
	i17	24(75)	3(9.4)	5(15.6)	4(12.5)	14(43.8)	13(40.6)
	i19	7(21.9)	6(18.7)	19(59.4)	18(56.3)	10(31.3)	4(12.5)
	Average	50	7.4	42.6	32.8	44.1	21.1
New items	i12	9(28.1)	3(9.4)	20(62.5)	16(50)	8(25%)	6(18.8)
	i18	12(37.5)	4(12.5)	16(50)	13(40.6)	15(46.9)	3(9.4)
	Average	32.8	10.9	56.3	45.3	35.9	14.1

Note: Yes = acceptable; No= unacceptable; CH= Chinglish; CE= China English; NE= Normative English. Figures in brackets denote percentages.

As Table 1 shows, eight sentences, which had been categorised CH by researchers, were identified as such by only about 33% of the participants. A higher proportion of teachers (44%) labeled them CE, while the label NE was used for the items by 21% of the teachers. Of note, half of the teachers considered these researcher-defined “erroneous” items acceptable, compared to 43% teachers to whom these were unacceptable. Of the eight sentences, i11 and i19 had the lowest acceptability rating (22%) and, as expected, these were categorised as CH by a higher proportion of teachers (69% and 56% respectively). Likewise, i15 had the highest acceptability rating (78%) and was labeled CH by a small proportion of teachers (19%). This item (His uncooperativeness makes the project progress slowly, Li, 2005) is a special kind of causative sentence in Mandarin which reflects a tendency where the verb ‘MAKE’ is oversued by Chinese learners. This tendency can also be found in other varieties of English such as Polish. Kaszubski wrote: “The verb (lemma) ‘MAKE’, for instance, appears to be ‘liked’ by Polish learners apparently the most in its canonical form” (cited in Tan, 2005, pp. 127-128).

From the SLA perspective, Chinese learners’ preference of using MAKE can be seen as a fossilised form resulting from L1 interference, as indicated by Chinese researchers (Li, 2005). However, our data show that 47% of the teachers labeled it CE and another 31% teachers even considered it as NE. These differential attitudes point to the gap in acceptability judgments between researchers and practitioners.

In addition to the CH items, the questionnaire survey contained two additional items which were related to the translation pedagogy. The teachers might have been familiar with both items through their teaching. Nevertheless, as Table 1 shows, they were divided in their judgments. Although they might have dealt with these forms in their teaching, they were not sure whether to reject or accept them as CE.

Table 2 and Table 3 present the teacher responses to the items that have been described as CE by Chinese researchers. Table 2 shows that the four items described as CE at the level of syntax were rated very highly as acceptable (71%) and these were identified as CE by 58% of the teachers. In other words, the majority of the teachers were aligned with the researchers in their judgments of these items. These favourable ratings suggest that there is a greater tolerance for linguistic nativisation compared to creative nativisation, as reported in Table 3. Therefore, our findings do not support Bamgbose’s (1998) observation that linguistic nativisation enjoys less tolerance. One potential explanation for our findings is that the sentences used in the study refer to syntactic, and not morphological, nativisation. Sentences with Chinese syntax usually do not violate NE grammatical rules. For instance, i7 is an example of following the norm of a modifying-modified sequence, which is preferred by the Chinese and is typical of China English. However, “this is not to say that the alternative sequence cannot be used” and “this marked form in CE is the unmarked form in British English” (Kirkpatrick, 2007, p. 149).

Since these L2 constructions still have some association with NE, they were accepted by the teachers.

Table 2

Teachers' responses to items with CE tag

Categories	Items	Yes	Not sure	No	CH	CE	NE
Linguistic nativisation	i1	20(62.5)	3(9.4)	9(28.1)	8(25)	15(46.9)	8(25)
	i6	28(87.5)	1(3.1)	3(9.4)	3(9.4)	16(50)	11(34.4)
	i7	19(59.4)	4(12.5)	9(28.1)	5(15.6)	20(62.5)	5(15.6)
	i8	24(75)	3(9.4)	5(15.6)	4(12.5)	23(71.9)	4(12.5)
	Average	71.1	8.6	20.3	15.6	57.8	21.9

As Table 2 shows, although i1 was rated favourably by the teachers (acceptability rating = 62%, CE = 47%), a quarter of the teachers also labeled it CH and over 28% teachers judged it unacceptable. This sentence caused a lot of dispute in the literature. Researchers (e.g., Wei & Jia, 2003; Xie, 1995; Yang & Yan, 2002) who have argued for its legitimate status as CE have stated that it reflected a Chinese thinking pattern, according to which, the time and the date are used as the subject in the construction (i.e. *Today is Sunday*, Xie, 1995). However, this view was challenged by a small number of researchers who insisted if the rules of NE where an existential *it* is usually used to replace the real subject as a formal subject were applied, it would be seen as an error (Zhou, 2007, p. 40). Overall, more scholars were inclined to accept it as a CE construction and a similar inclination is reflected in the teachers' responses.

The teachers' responses to items labeled creative nativisation are presented in Table 3. As can be seen, the teachers were almost equally divided in their acceptability rating (45% versus 46%). In the categorisation task, a slightly higher proportion of teachers described them as CH (47%) rather than CE (40%). These findings show that creative constructions labeled by researchers as CE did not have wide acceptability among teachers, suggesting that distinguishing between errors and innovations can be particularly difficult in the case of creative nativisation. One plausible explanation that we can put forward for this is that unlike the case of linguistic nativisation which allows teachers to draw on NE rules to judge acceptability, creative constructions do not allow them to draw on such rules. Therefore, they rely on their subjective judgments. This explanation is substantiated by Rubdy, McKay, Alsagoff and Bokhorst-Heng's (2008) research that investigated the ownership of English in

Singapore in which two participants did not accept the word “prepone”, an innovation in Indian English.

Table 3

Teachers’ responses to items with CE tag

Categories	Items	Yes	Not sure	No	CH	CE	NE
Creative nativisation	i2	14(43.8)	2(6.3)	16(50)	17(53.1)	11(34.4)	4(12.5)
	i3	23(71.9)	2(6.3)	7(21.9)	6(18.8)	14(43.8)	11(34.4)
	i4	12(37.5)		20(62.5)	25(78.1)	6(18.8)	
	i5	16(50)	2(6.3)	14(43.8)	14(43.8)	13(40.6)	2(6.3)
	i10	16(50)	4(12.5)	12(37.5)	13(40.6)	18(56.3)	
	i20	6(18.8)	6(18.8)	20(62.5)	16(50)	15(46.9)	1(3.1)
	Average	45.3	8.3	46.4	47.4	40.1	9.4

An exception to this general pattern in the teachers’ responses is i3 (Long time no see, Li, 1993), which was considered acceptable by 72% of the teachers. Of note, over one-third of the teachers even considered it as NE. This structurally “awkward” expression for greetings first came to China as Pidgin English, but has been absorbed into NE over time (Li, 1993), suggesting that even Pidgin English has the potential to attain wider acceptability through wider use and dissemination over time. This substantiates van Rooy’s (2011) argument that varietal features may have their origins in errors (Pidgin, in this case).

On the other hand, i20 (dropping the curtain on, Zhao, 2007), which was consciously created by journalists of the *China Daily*, China’s leading English newspaper, and was adopted by researchers as CE, had the lowest level of acceptance among the teachers (19%). The same proportion of teachers was also unsure of its acceptability. These responses suggest that the combination of Chinese rhetoric and English language, as epitomised in this sentence, did not receive favourable ratings from the teachers and thus did not provide support for Bamgbose’s view: “as far as creative nativisation is concerned, the fact that it also reflects aspects of the culture or is a rendering of [an] authentic indigenous idiom or rhetoric into English also ensures a measure of acceptance” (Bamgbose, 1998, p. 6). However, despite its lowest acceptance, this item was labeled CE by nearly half (47%) of the respondents, suggesting that acceptability judgment and categorisation are not necessarily related.

In sum, our findings suggest a notable divergence between Chinese teachers’ and researchers’ judgments of English expressions with local characteristics. Further, there is a lack of consensus in teachers’ judgments of local English usages, suggesting a pedagogical dilemma in the English/translation class.

Teachers' open-ended comments

Twenty six teachers (over 81%) provided written comments on CE, CH and NE in the questionnaire which we analysed to shed light on the findings reported in the previous section. Their responses were read repeatedly and were coded using such labels as NE, CH, CE and their combinations (e.g., both NE and CE) and sub-categorisations to understand the teachers' positions on the error-varietal feature debate.

In general, there was an overwhelming acceptance of CE as a variety of English, with 24 participants showing positive attitudes towards it, although at an abstract, varietal level only. Of them, 18 participants expressed positive indications, accepting their students' use of China English in the class. However, the teachers presented a different picture when talking about their own practice in the classroom. For instance, only about 12% teachers mentioned that they actively encouraged the use of CE in their English classes compared to an overwhelming 59% teachers who noted that they advocated the use of NE since, they argued, competence in NE was their students' ultimate goal, with the remaining teachers (29%) not referring to their positions with regard to actual practice. In other words, although the majority of the teachers were aware of the existence of the local variety of English, the institutional aim of developing NE proficiency prevented them from encouraging its use actively in the class. In their words, "China English is acceptable to some extent" (T12), but "surely we should pursue the correct and idiomatic English in our learning and teaching" (T12) and "when we learn a new kind of language, it is better to learn the standard one in order to learn the other's culture and the thinking way [pattern] at the same time" (T18). Below we present some of the teachers' responses to substantiate their various positions:⁷

China English as a legitimate variety

The majority of the teachers (n = 24) argued for this variety for the transmission of Chinese culture through English and for the projection of Chinese national identity. This can be seen in the following excerpts:

China English appears naturally just as the dialects of any language emerge with a large speaking population. Language not only stands for culture but for identity of a person, of a nation. (T1)

China English contributes a lot to introducing Chinese culture to the rest of the world suggesting the international status of China has been promote, which is an irrevocable trend. (T2)

Chinglish and China English: Errors versus correctness

A small number of four teachers displayed their perceptions of the difference between Chinglish and China English, agreeing that the two terms represent tensions between error and correctness:

China English is a variety of the English language, as a member of the world Englishes, with its own distinctive features in pronunciation, lexicon, grammar and rhetoric. It is different from the so-called Chinglish in that it is correct English use. (T7)

China English, different from Chinglish which is grammatically and semantically unacceptable, is grammatically correct and logically Chinese. (T25)

Doubts about the identification of varieties

A small number of three teachers noted that they were not sure which variety of English they used in teaching, pointing out their uncertainty due to their limited exposure to NE on the one hand and the influence of their own language in the learning environment on the other. As T24 explains:

I am often puzzled about what I am speaking and using is Normative English or Chinglish. Especially when I am teaching, I harbor a fear that I am delivering wrong or non-standard English input to my students. However, I am lacking in standard input. And finally the idea that it is ok for Chinese to use China English in communication if it makes sense became a kind of self consolation. (T24)

Promote NE but tolerate CE

The majority of the teachers (n = 14) expressed their preference for NE in the English class but simultaneously they indicated a high degree of tolerance for the use of CE for intelligibility in communication. This view is in line with the dominant status of NE in the Chinese EFL classroom (e.g., He & Zhang, 2010; Kirkpatrick, 2006; Li, 2006, 2007) which suggests that the teaching of college English should adopt NE, following exo-normative standards (He & Zhang, 2010; Kirkpatrick & Xu, 2002). A typical example of this view can be seen in the excerpt below:

China English should be encouraged to promote the transmission of the Chinese culture in the long run. However, in the English language classroom, Normative English is more preferred. (T26)

In summary, the participants were generally willing to embrace the establishment of CE, but they still upheld the dominant status of NE in their language teaching practice. They understood the correctness of CE compared

to CH, but they admitted that it is not easy to identify different English varieties in China including Chinglish, China English and NE, and acknowledged using a mixture of them in their teaching.

Discussion and Conclusions

This study has surveyed the acceptability and categorisation of 20 English sentences labeled CH and CE. The overall findings show that 67% of them showed unfavorable attitudes towards researchers' categorisations of the L2 constructions, as is shown in Table 4. With the development of China English, more and more L2 constructions have been differentiated from learner errors and admitted as features of CE by researchers. However, findings from our study show that language teachers only nominally agree with researchers' understandings of CE and CH. We do not suggest that our survey provides a representative picture of the state of opinions among English teachers in China because of the modest size of the corpus and the small sample of teachers. Without claiming generalisability of our findings, we can argue that researchers and practitioners in China seem to be following two parallel paths in their attitudes and judgments on features of Chinese-style English.

Table 4

Comparison between researchers' and teachers' categorisations

Items	Researchers' categorisation	Teachers' categorisation	Items	Researchers' categorisation	Teachers' categorisation
1	CE	× (46.9)	10	CE	√(56.3)
2	CE	× (34.4)	11	CH	√(68.8)
3	CE	× (43.8)	13	CH	× (25)
4	CE	× (18.8)	14	CH	× (21.9)
5	CE	× (40.6)	15	CH	× (18.8)
6	CE	√(50)	16	CH	× (40.6)
7	CE	√(62.5)	17	CH	× (12.5)
8	CE	√(71.9)	19	CH	√(56.3)
9	CH	× (18.8)	20	CE	× (46.9)
Sum	√ 6/18 ; × 12/18				

Note: √ means more than (including) 50% of the participants were in favor of the researchers' categorisation; × means that less than 50% of the participants showed favorable attitudes towards the researchers' categorisation. The two undecided items were omitted.

This researcher-teacher gap may have several explanations. First, it is probably a common phenomenon in the development of a non-native English variety. Kachru (1992, p. 56) refers to three phases through which institutionalised varieties of English have to pass: 1) "Non-recognition" of the

local variety characterised by conscious identification with native speakers by local users of English; 2) “development of varieties within a variety”: at this stage, a local model may be widely used but still remains socially unacceptable; and 3) Local varieties are both widely used and socially acceptable and thus can be accepted as a norm. In terms of these “phases”, China English is slowly heading towards phase two (Kirkpatrick & Xu, 2002). It means that not only is China English, as a distinct variety, yet to be fully explored and claimed, but also that it has a long way to go to gain social acceptability. As a consequence, the researcher-identified L2 constructions, which may possibly be accepted as legitimate language use in the future, are likely to attract a negative response from their language users at this time. However, the important point to note is that the reference to Kachru’s phases indicates that the process of nativisation in an Expanding Circle context is no different from that which occurs in the Outer Circle context.

Secondly, being at the beginning stage of its development, China English lacks a systematic codification of its distinct linguistic and paralinguistic features, which may exert considerable influence on current language teaching, as Jia and Xiang (1997) denoted:

Only if we admit and accept the existence of China English, can we determine what features are unavoidable by Chinese English speakers on the basis of identifying and analyzing nativised features of English in China. By doing this, in English language teaching the students are not forced to overcome what they should and could not overcome, and the teachers can play a better role of providing effective guidance to the students. (p. 12, translated by the authors)

Therefore, in the absence of a social or academic awareness of the features of China English as a distinct variety on the one hand and the curricular prescription associated with NE on the other, the teachers probably applied their personal judgments to decide on the items’ acceptability and categorisation. Related to this, none of the teachers participating in the study had specific training in world Englishes, although they were all generally aware of the field, the increasing recognition of national varieties of English, and of the differences between CE and CH. From this point of view, even though some codified features of CE were identified, teachers did not have access to them, and thus they probably judged the items in their own ways.

However, the teachers’ lack of familiarity with WE should not be overemphasised. To do so would mean denying the teachers’ agency and turning them into mere consumers of researcher-produced norms and prescriptions. The dominance of subjectivity in their judgments shows that they indeed exercised their agency and took positions on the error-varietal feature debates. Moreover, although there was a lack of consensus with respect to their judgments, an underlying logic can be seen in their judgments and categorisations. For instance, the majority of the teachers rated linguistic

nativisation (Table 2) more positively than the CH items (Table 1). Furthermore, it should be acknowledged that the teachers' subjective judgments could have been mediated by a lack of clarity between the two concepts of CH and CE. If these concepts had been sufficiently disambiguated at the theoretical level, there may have been a more discernible pattern in the teachers' judgments.

On the other hand, teachers' familiarity with codified features and the conceptual clarity of CE and CH are not a guarantee for a consensus between teachers and researchers. The groups are located in different institutional contexts and work under different policies, priorities and agenda. What this implies is that there has to be regular communication between them for codification of English and its dissemination in society. In other words, only researcher-approved features of English in China may not be widely accepted.

However, of concern is the lack of consensus between the teachers in their judgments of CH and CE. The teachers' subjective understandings and judgments of CE and CH point to a "pedagogical mess" where the same feature is treated as CE by some teachers, NE by some and CH by others. It is necessary for teachers to become aware of local language varieties so that they can provide more effective feedback to students on local English use and help them to negotiate the complicated push-pull relationships between CE and CH. The inclusion of WE in teacher education programmes, both long and short terms, may be useful in developing this awareness in the teacher community. Although striving towards a consensus around the codification of local English use among teachers is a pedagogical imperative, the use of only researcher-sponsored codification may not be a satisfactory answer to the problem. What is, therefore, required is for researchers to understand teachers' views, judgments and pedagogical practices to develop practice-driven criteria which can distinguish CH and CE – between errors and varietal features. These criteria can be developed at the level of individual institutions in the form of professional development workshops/seminars for teachers. In these forums individual teachers may present examples of disputable usages of English from their students in the class. All participating teachers may discuss these examples, offer collective judgments on them and develop criteria for such judgments which may guide teacher practice in the institution in the future.

Notes:

1. We use "world Englishes" in Bolton's (2006) first sense of the term, which "functions as an umbrella label referring to a wide range of differing approaches to the description and analysis of English(es) worldwide" (p. 240). Accordingly, rather than viewing ELF (English as a lingua franca) as a parallel perspective, we see it included in WE and it refers to varieties of English in the Outer as well as the Expanding Circle contexts.
2. There is a terminological dispute in the literature on the emerging variety

of English in China. Several terms, including *sinicized English*, *Chinese English*, *Chinese-colored English* and *China English* have been used to refer to it. It is generally admitted that *China English* is the most appropriate name to refer to this language variety (He & Li, 2009; Tu, 2006).

3. We prefer the term *Normative English* to *Standard English* following Li's (1993) argument that native speaker English, including British English and American English, is no longer viewed as the sole standard.
4. Although we do not aim to essentialise a divide between researchers and practitioners, the university teachers of English/translation participating in the study were not involved in WE research. This justifies our use of "practitioners" to refer to them.
5. Our categorisation of these examples does not mean that there is a clear distinction between Chinglish and China English which is acceptable to all. We draw on the general tendency among the majority of researchers to differentiate these L2 constructions. For example, all the features identified as CH came from a journal article entitled "on Chinglish in Chinese-English translation" (Wang, 2000) which was published in a reputed journal in China named *Chinese Translators Journal*. These features of CH have been cited and analysed many times by various academic publications and research papers, and thus have been recognised widely as examples of CH.
6. These native-like versions were also quotations from journal articles and translation materials except four of them, i.e. i1, i3, i19 and i20. These four were judged also as "native-like" by four native-speaker teachers of English in China.
7. The teachers wrote their comments in English and we have reproduced them here with minor changes in spelling etc.

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Standardising New Englishes: A suggestion for phonological corpora

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Abstract

New Englishes are products of history and the new world democratic and ideological gains. For pedagogical engagements, especially, codification and corpus linguistic planning are central to their standardisation. This need remains overriding for New Englishes or Englishes of the Outer Circle, among others, (Bamgbose 1995, Seidlhofer 2009) as it targets linguistic norm development in the indigenised settings and its formalised norms in settings where endonormative stabilisation is evolving or is recognised (cf. Schneider 2007). The present research proposes a tool for standardisation constructed for phonological materials. The grammar elicits the phonological elements which would constitute the normative inventory or so, which teaching and learning should target, among other properties which may more adequately characterise the standard or model inventory. It defines six parameters for identifying and evaluating elements of the phonology. These parameters cooperate, and are synchronised in an elegant mechanism which borrows the Optimality metaphor, of their being ranked but not inviolable. Its input units consist of all elements of a family of units that may occur in the phonological (including phonetic) experience of speakers of the different varieties; and output elements are representatives of classes of such items that emerge as being “optimal” in the grammar.

Keywords: Standardisation, New Englishes, Preference Grammar, Optimality Metaphor, Phonological Corpora, Language Planning

Introduction

New Englishes represent heritage of nations and cultures, and are therefore artefacts and resources for planning and management, notwithstanding their not being readily amenable to cost-benefit analysis. They are fast growing products of history and the new world democratic and ideological gains. Understandably, the growth of English as a global language brings with it interesting intellectual challenges. Efforts to address these growth challenges account for various ideologies, investigative approaches, as well as various

pedagogical considerations. Common perspectives would include English as a Native Language (ENL), English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL), which correspond roughly to Kachru's (1990) Inner Circle nations, Outer Circle nations and Expanding Circle nations, respectively. The new world ideological developments give rise to the New Englishes paradigm, especially in its recognition of pluricentricity of Englishes. The other is English as an International Language (EIL) Jenkins (2000), which stresses communicative contexts and seeks to model a compromise norm based on non-native speakers' negotiation for accommodation. Gibbon's (2005, p. 439) imagery speaks a dozen about this as a global experience: "the speakers of English in the oceans of the world are not just swimmers clutching lifebelts, but members of autonomous communities sailing their own robust ships, built independently of the UK and US ELT shipyards." These speakers, thus, have never heard of Received Pronunciation (RP) and General American (GenAm), could not care less about standard accents, and are constantly in contact with each other, using an endless variety of sounds of English found around the oceans of the world. The latter paradigm is the basis of the quest for LFC (Lingua Franca Core), as an outcome of the effort to estimate the features considered communicatively salient among non-native speaker interlocutors and as a reference for pedagogical guidance or approximation. While the LFC seeks to develop a reference or model for NNS-NNS (Non-Native Speaker) communicative contexts, the New English nations are in search of their national and/or regional model elements (cf. Schneider 2003, 2007, Banjo 1995, Bamgbose 1995, Ugorji 2010b). The present study is a contribution to these quests, but directed at phonological elements: it suggests a programme or machinery for empirically eliciting the model elements crucial to the quests at any (desired) levels – international, national and regional. In the present study however the demonstration of the programme is limited to New Englishes.

The rest of the study is organised in three main parts as follows: as part of background materials, we introduce some of the terms central to the discourse, namely, "Standardisation" and "New Englishes" to underscore the motivation for standardisation in New Englishes nations and to provide for clarity. The second section concerns itself with the programme created for standardising the phonological corpora of New Englishes, showing its tenets and operability. The last section provides further remarks on the tenets to underscore the gains of the programme and its wider applicability at various levels, as well as the sociolinguistic grounding of the programme.

Standardisation: An overview

Traditionally some languages or their varieties are believed to be standard(ised) and therefore referred to as standard languages or varieties. This is roughly the sense in which English, French, German, Swahili and Igbo

may be called standard languages. It is also in this consideration that, for English, the Received Pronunciation (RP) is said to be its standard variety, as Parisian French is to French language. A standard language variety therefore constitutes the model variety for all of the varieties of a language, a reference point for the establishment of norms, for resolving controversies and the basis of the rules for propriety in usage and for determining what is appropriate or grammatical, among others. Standard varieties are the targets for language pedagogies. Thus, they often constitute major indices for educatedness as well as elitism, being also associated with high social prestige. In addition, they are, in general, the linguistic resources of nations packaged for foreigners and for export to foreign nations.

Milroy (2001, p. 531) suggests that (broadly speaking) “standardization consists of the imposition of uniformity upon a class of objects”; and that language which is abstract and variable is one of such classes of objects upon which uniformity has to be imposed to bring about invariance. Thus, standardisation emphasises uniformity. The present research is sympathetic to this definition, but its scope appears rather too wide to represent the ideology of New Englishes very precisely. For example, standardisation of goods or other commodities required by nations and international communities may be about mathematical precision with respect to content, quantity, quality – analogous to language standardisation ideologically but not equivalent in fact. Certain properties of standardisation may be considered salient to the purpose of the present study, and are outlined below:

Accordingly, the salient properties of standardisation consonant with the current investigation may involve the internal linguistic or corpus aspect, and the external linguistic or status aspect, entwined, as follows: It is about legitimising a variety amidst others, legitimising certain norms and requiring their uniform implementation and use, assigning statutory domains and status to certain varieties, projecting a variety and/or its norms as a model over other varieties, implementing uniformity of given norm(s), turning a variety into a national one, and a certain variety of a language (viewed as the model variety) becomes widely accepted in a nation or speech community.

Standardisation may, thus, be about a process and about processing the product thereof, provided for people groups and nations. It could be viewed as a continuum: from recognising (or legitimising) an existing standard, that is, a convergence of norms (already has implicit acceptance), to processing the corpus of a variety to act as a model for other varieties (e.g. elaboration, vocabulary expansion, codification), and to imposing a variety by fiat (decree, law, policy).

These properties may contingently define a concept of standardisation which may be consonant to the ideology of New Englishes, as it more concisely would refer to the processing of linguistic varieties for uniform

administration and use in given domains, communities or nations and the means thereof.

Developing or formalising norms for world Englishes appears to be a pre-occupation of modern research, as some recognition that the need for standardisation cannot be ignored. *Lingua Franca Core* appears to address this kind of need pursuant to the perspective of English as an International Language: for Europe, for instance, the drive is “that EIL needs to be considered for European curricula, as an alternative option to ENL in some contexts and as default option in others” Seidlehofer (2003, p. 11). The New Englishes paradigm, defined on the basis of erstwhile ESL nations or Postcolonial Englishes show that this need is yet to be satisfied in some nations and regions. Some documented evidence for this fact appear in Schneider (2007, 2003): five developmental phases are accounted for regarding postcolonial varieties of English. The phases are linear or quasi-linear, such that these varieties of English are shown to have progressed from one phase to another, in that order: Foundation, Exonormative stabilisation, Nativisation, Endonormative stabilisation, and Differentiation. Varieties in the third and fourth stages share more of the challenge to formalise norms or standards. Thus, the programme suggested in the present research addresses this challenge for phonological corpora, and in respect to New Englishes. Further discussions on New Englishes are presented next, to further buttress their need for standardisation.

New Englishes: An overview

The development of New Englishes is situated in a major political history: “the spread of British imperial power, based on industrial revolution at home and manifested in settlement, conquest, and new trading relations overseas; and the westward expansion of the United States” (Jowitt, 2008, p. 2).

While the imperial powers seemed conquerors, not all their weapons could return with them. At least their tongue was conquered and nativised. Thus, “to some extent, linguistic developments and orientations follow from – and mirror – social and political changes” (Schneider (2003, p. 246); and the reality of New Englishes or world Englishes is evidence for this.

Two dominant theoretical approaches address the grounding of New Englishes. They are the “diffusion model” and the “evolutionary model”. The former derives from the osmosis inherent in language and dialect boundaries and factors which associate them with cultural ecologies; and the latter from “the long term changes undergone by a language (variety) over a period of time” (Mufwene 2001:145). The “diffusion model” is associated with Braj Kachru, and the “evolutionary model” with Edgar Schneider; see Schneider (2003), Kachru (1990), among others.

For practical purposes, the term “New Englishes” may (in a narrow sense) refer the indigenised and institutionalised varieties, the recognition thereof by the inner circle, the theoretical approaches to the phenomenon (following Jenkins (2006), Kachru (1990), and others, cf. Ugorji (2010a); or (in the wide sense) to include all varieties of English worldwide. For further discussions on the term and related concepts, see Jenkins 2006, cf. Mesthrie 2000, Mufwene 2001.

As indigenised and institutionalised varieties, New Englishes are therefore not conceptually definable in terms of the norms of other Circles of Englishes (see Banda 1996, Ugorji 2010b). As Seidlhofer and Berns (2009, p. 190) emphasise, “It is now widely recognised that the varieties in the communities of the Outer Circle constitute different Englishes in their own right that express independent sociocultural identities, and whose legitimacy owes no allegiance to the so-called native speaker norms”. Also, the developmental stages indicate that these Englishes are at different levels of growth, with standardisation as part of attendant needs. The present study has concerned itself with discussing a programme created for standardising the phonological corpora for New Englishes, focusing on stages where nativisation and endonormative stabilisation are established. We devote the next section to discuss the programme.

The programme: An introduction

To discuss the programme, we first provide some background information and basic considerations, to guide a better understanding of the issues addressed.

It is earlier noted that in Schneider (2003, 2007), a theory of Postcolonial Englishes is posited, which proposes five diachronic phases in its account for the emergence of these Englishes across the globe. The phases are linear or so, showing the progress each has made over time. The model conceives the phases as some form of indices for estimating the developmental history of Postcolonial Englishes as well as assigning certain level of accomplishments to them in respect to their growth. These varieties are therefore at different levels of growth and development, namely, Foundation, Exonormative stabilisation, Nativisation, Endonormative stabilisation, and Differentiation.

In view of the above background information, the following considerations appear salient: irrespective of the stage of growth, standardisation is a necessary process in language planning and an imperative for education and language pedagogy. It is also an on-going process, at least, in principle. In given New English nations, accents are variable in various dimensions; and a tool for standardising them is what this study is suggesting. However, for the moment, we limit our demonstration primarily to those varieties where endonormative stabilisation is achieved: “it is characteristic of this phase that the new indigenous language variety is perceived as remarkably homogenous,

and that this homogeneity is in fact emphasised” (Schneider, 2007, p. 57). It also caters for cases where nativisation is established.

It is therefore the conviction of the present research that standardisation for New Englishes should really not concern itself with prescribing norms for pedagogical engagements, as the tradition is, but that wherever endonormative stabilisation or even indigenisation is achieved, a convergence or levelled variety would be identifiable, developed from actual language use. In such cases, certain conventions, socially shared linguistic patterns, are developed which may be socially salient, such that they are regarded as standards even prior to any formalisation. This is understandably an exponent of an abstract mental phonological system in individual cognitive minds which converge as national or speech community minds.

However, given that lectal variation is the norm and not the exception, there is a challenge: which of the home-grown varieties should be selected as the candidate for formalisation? The estimated convergence of linguistic patterns might however be variant or non-monolithic. Processing this variety for formalisation and/or legitimising may be all there is to standardisation in such cases. This is in consonance with the realism of the gains of growth with respect to New Englishes as well as their ideological and cultural underpinnings.

Pedagogical programmes that fail to provide clear answers to this question might verge on chaos, so to say. Resolving this challenge is needful for educational development, especially, in providing a uniform focus for teachers and for teacher education, as well as specifying learning targets and measuring pedagogical achievements, among others. Thus, resolving the question may in general be salient not only to language and pedagogical development but also to socio-cultural development. According to the present research, there is no need to bother about which variety or varieties to select for standardisation, as all varieties or lectal clines are permitted to contribute; and all attested elements participate. That is, that all lectal variations within a given New English nation have equal chances. The contributions of attested spoken forms from all clines constitute the input data into the machine, whose duty is to evaluate them in their categories for membership of the normative inventory and/or inventories. The tenets of this programme, called Preference Grammar (PG), are discussed next.

The programme: Its tenets

In this section, we discuss Preference Grammar as a tool for standardising phonological corpora, including segmental constituents and prosodic elements. In the first part, certain theoretical assumptions essential to the investigative approach are discussed. Thereafter the tenets of Preference Grammar are presented alongside some further justification for the paradigm.

The goal of the Grammar is to elicit the sounds and prosody from spoken data which should constitute the normative inventory or so, which teaching and learning should target, as well as other properties which may more adequately characterise the standard or model variety. The grammar device defines six parameters for identifying and evaluating elements of the phonology that may participate in the normative inventory. These parameters cooperate, and are synchronised in an elegant mechanism that borrows the metaphor of Optimality Theory (cf. Archangeli 1997; Kager 1999): they are thus ranked but not inviolable as in the Optimality notion. The parameters follow below:

1. International acceptance, defined as close approximation to the more international norms that may be considered broadly as lingua franca;
2. Contrastiveness, defined as phonological distinctiveness;
3. Frequency, defined as overall high rate of occurrence;
4. Disambiguity, defined as preference for property or properties that diminish ambiguity or miscommunication or both;
5. Phonetic simplicity, defined as preference for feature(s) which seem(s) physiologically more plausible, and
6. Pedagogical convenience, defined as preference for feature(s) which advance(s) facileness in teaching and learning.

The parameters are ranked in the order shown above, but violable, as in Optimality terms (cf. Archangeli 1997). While (1) addresses the need to understand and be understood by other competent speakers in the world and so remain relevant in the global community, (2) permits those properties whose phonological status remains crucial to international intelligibility, even when learning them appears onerous, (3) incorporates those properties which may suggest ‘deviance’, relatively, but bear distinguishable national mark in having a high rate of occurrence. While the latter is being considered, ambiguity should be kept to the barest minimum; which is the point in (4). (5) is related to (6) in that what is physiologically more plausible may be relatively easier to learn but not to be preferred over and above (4), for instance; hence, the ranking.

Since the device borrows metaphorically the Optimality mechanism, the following parallels may be noteworthy: first, the “parameters” may parallel “constraints”; and as constraints are ranked with respect to one another, so are the parameters; and the ordering may be strict, especially with respect to the higher parameters.

The order is as follows: International acceptance (I-Ac) dominates Contrastiveness (ContR) which dominates Frequency (FreQ); and the latter dominates Disambiguity (DisaM) which dominates Phonetic Simplicity (PhoS), which in turn dominates Pedagogical Convenience (Ped-C), abbreviated

thus (where >> stands for ‘dominates’): I-Ac >> ContR >> FreQ >> DisaM >> Pho-S >> Ped-C

The parameters may also be interpreted in the Optimality convention as negative statements, if desired; namely,

- a. *No I-Ac - Non-international acceptance is prohibited
- b. *No ContR - Non-contrastiveness is prohibited
- c. *No FreQ - Infrequency is prohibited
- d. DisaM - Ambiguity is prohibited
- e. *No Pho-S - Phonetic complexity is prohibited
- f. *No Ped-C - Pedagogical difficulty is prohibited

The parameters are ranked but violable; and violations must be minimal. They evaluate the input candidates, and constitute one component. The input constitutes another component; and elements of this component are all attested forms within lexical contexts in the clines, not underlying forms. Instead, written forms are provided which only mark clues to context or orthographic spelling, if thought desirable. Dispensing with underlying forms appears to have two main advantages for New Englishes. The first is that we avoid estimating New Englishes in terms of any known other national model; and secondly, we account for natural languages as sociolinguistic phenomena.

That the tool adapts the evaluation mechanism of Optimality Theory may deserve further explication for obvious reasons. In its conception, the framework considers language phenomena to be guided by ordered and ranked constraints (Archangeli 1997; Kager 1999); and its advantage for our study is in its permitting all possible range of candidate items and allowing for violability, which is thought crucial in licensing parametric variations, and to the realism of language and dialect diversity. This capacity for explaining parametric variations situates it more elegantly to account for language as a social phenomenon. In the conceptualisation of the present grammar, there is neither commitment to the Optimality Theory itself nor to any cognitive mapping, except where society may be conceived as a “big mind”. Also, no underlying forms or norms are assumed, as concerned materials for evaluation are only attested synchronic forms. The evaluation process selects phonological elements preferred in the grammar, to which the schema ascribes certain social and pedagogical status, deemed crucial to the normative inventory it formalises.

Further to the properties of PG, we note the rationale for the ordering and ranking of the parameters: that ranking I-Ac highest in the ordering represents a rather global preference which forms part of the subsisting global objective of English (see also Banjo 1995; Eka 1996; Jibril 1986; Jowitt 1991). In addition, it identifies with the fact that “[i]n the communicative process, acceptability is the measure of validity in language usage” Kujore (1995, p. 369), defining “acceptability” as the minimum exponent of intra- and international intelligibility. The next is ContR which elicits priority for units

which may be phonologically and socio-linguistically significant. This parameter would then constrain the grammar against selecting frequent but non-distinctive forms or all attested phonetic gamut, allophones and alternants, thereby reducing the chances for the occurrence of ambiguities.

The implication of this is that reversing the ordering to have FreQ dominate ContR might yield a large range of phonetic forms not desirable for phonological grammar and literacy. The latter implication also tells the story why Pho-S and Ped-C should rank lowest. Where contrastive items compete, the more widely (frequently) occurring unit is preferred, confirming further that it is logical to rank ContR higher than FreQ, since such competitors would not violate ContR, but proceed to FreQ, where the infrequent unit may earn a violation mark (*) and the evaluation process may then eliminate it for having a higher violation mark. Preference Grammar is summarised in Figure 1:

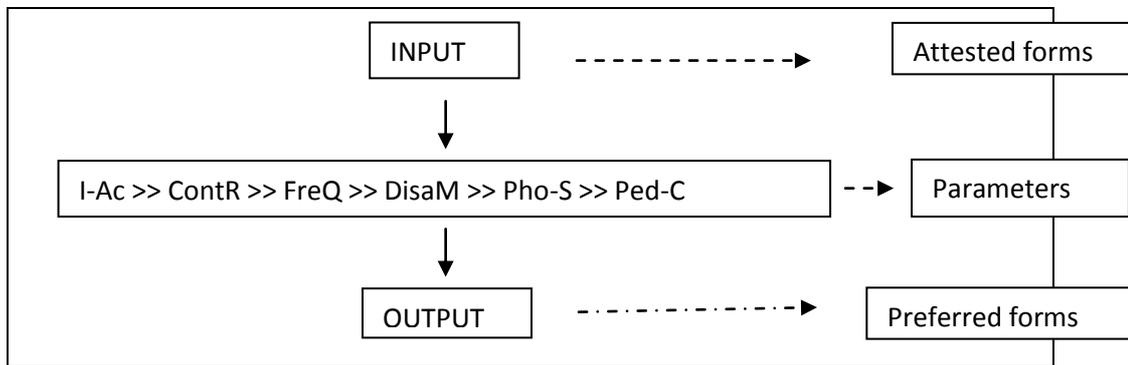


Figure 1. Preference Grammar (PG)

The rationale for ranking DisaM higher than Pho-S is to further reduce the chances of the occurrence of phonetic forms in the inventory. Although in most cases items that are phonetically simpler may be pedagogically easier as well, the grammar prefers to rank Pho-S higher than Ped-C, such that where two or more units are relatively pedagogically convenient, then Pho-S would readily discriminate them. Accordingly, it should be the case that units that are less phonetically marked are preferred over those that may be easier in learning and teaching. In any case, Pho-S and Ped-C rank the lowest; and are therefore of the least consequence in the grammar. Moreover, the evaluation process in any given case does not need to be exhausted, if higher ranked parameters are already violated by a given candidate in the competition and/or a winning candidate has clearly emerged.

We may now illustrate the evaluation procedure suggested in PG: Consider, for example, that /θ ð t d s z / may compete for “preference” in contexts spelt with <th> in English lexical items. The segments are viewed as

belonging to a phonological space definable, perhaps, as [coronal] or simply “dent-alveolar” coordinated with the relevant items of the lexicon within which the options of those input units occur in speech. Applying the schema may then reveal the preferred candidate, the winning segment; and the winner becomes a member of the formal standard inventory. In a second application of the schema, this preferred or “optimal” unit is not permitted to participate; so, other remaining members of the phonological space compete; and the (second/next) winner becomes part of the informal inventory. The evaluation is illustrated in Figure 2 where c) is preferred:

<th>	*No I-Ac	*No ContR	*No FreQ	DisaM	*Pho-S	*Ped-C
a. tɪŋk				*		
b. sɪŋk	*		*	*		
c. ⇒θɪŋk					*	
d. zɪŋk	*		*	*		

Figure 2. Illustrative tableau: <th>

Similarly, /o, ɒ, əʊ/ may compete in, say, *show, go, old, close*. The vowel segments constitute members of a phonological space, perhaps, “mid-back” and so on. The relation of the competing phonological entities in terms of phonological space is thought to correlate naturalness principles, as it implies that the variations that account for the cline of accents are not haphazard, but follow systematic naturalness principles. Note that elements of prosody are evaluated similarly; see Ugorji (2010b) for details. The above operation may be illustrated using <go>, elicited in Nigerian English corpora (Figure 3) where (a) is preferred:

<go>	*No I-Ac	*No ContR	*No FreQ	DisaM	*Pho-S	*Ped-C
a. ⇒go						
b. gəʊ			*		*	*
c. gɒ	*	*	*	*		

Figure 3. Illustrative tableau: <go>

Further remarks and concluding notes

As shown, the grammar predicts that input units consist of all elements of a family of units that may occur in the phonological (including phonetic) inventory; and output elements are representatives of classes of such items preferred in the grammar. Input materials are, thus, conceived as members of a “phonological space”, defined as all range of possible realisations of segment(s) within (a) lexical context(s), the segment options or variants specified therein. The output materials then consist of all materials in the competition that emerge as “optimal” or preferred units. While the (preferred) output in a competition may belong to the formal standard, the next to them belong to the informal standard. Others which still constitute well-formed elements of the grammar may belong to the non-standard forms. No element of the grammar may be thought inconsequential or be discarded; particularly in view of the fact that what may lie outside the normative inventory may bear sociolinguistic information, indicate directions for future language change or bear trace of diachronic patterns, among others.

This framework may then dispense with the notion of underlying representations and rely on actual spoken data, if the framework should address language materials as sociolinguistic entities, and also distance itself from the comparative and contrastive paradigm of ESL/EFL. In this regard, the consideration is for all forms existing in the repertoire of the English speech behaviour of (educated) speakers.

At the more practical phonological level, units in the informal standard may be considered as allophones of their corresponding formal standard units, and the corresponding units regarded as nonstandard may simply be regional variants or alternants or pragmatic variants which may constitute required materials for automatic accommodation in communication, among others.

Through this process, a two-way standard emerges, following the expanded parameters and the application of the schema, namely, a formal standard and an informal standard. While the formal standard may be less distinguishable from the more international norms, the informal standard may be more distinguishable, at least in principle. Pedagogical engagements may aim at the formal standard always; but permit the informal standard, which, in this consideration, may bear those regional flavours of (educated) speech that may not significantly diminish international intelligibility.

In general, the natural sociolinguistic continuum of English varieties are captured; namely, formal standard – informal standard – non-standard. Thus, the two-way standard emerging from the application of the framework reflects pluricentricity (see Grzega, 2000; Kachru, 1990); that is, a bi-normative or a two-centre standard; but the inner standard may retain highest prestige and

remain pragmatically more viable in international socio-economic considerations.

In particular, if it is recognised that the more common direction of advancement in proficiency is always towards the more globally viable standards, and same is what teaching and learning hope to achieve, then, the formal standard here is the preferred standard. If preferred, this may indicate some form of diglossic situation in the assignment or definition of status. Case studies appear elsewhere; see Ugorji 2010b.

Finally, the study has suggested a research tool for standardisation in language planning engagements, and demonstrates it in respect to New Englishes. Its advantage includes addressing the gap arising from the growth of varieties of English world-wide, the New Englishes ideology and the sociolinguistic realism of their independence, as well as addressing the need with respect to pronunciation pedagogies in New Englishes nations.

Also importantly, the suggested programme may be adapted for the development of international, regional and national Englishes in very practical ways, such as by demoting parameters, deleting parameters, and promoting parameters. For example, one main linguistic question with which EIL may be concerned is in respect to the salient linguistic features which can be said to characterise EIL, perhaps globally or regionally, say, in (Eastern) Europe (cf. Seidlhofer, 2003). Accordingly, PG becomes a ready tool to elicit phonological elements in EIL situations in a relatively practical and empirical way.

It is transparent and respecting democratic principles, as all clines and variants are given equal opportunities to contribute to the input and to participate in the competition. By this property, PG therefore provides no room for language or dialect suspicion and conflicts.

For varieties of English across the world, it promises to be a useful tool especially in the standardisation of spoken forms and the achievement of endonormative stabilisation. Part of the potentials may also include the possibility of automating PG; and we do envisage this for the future. By this study, we hope to have contributed a useful tool to the investigation, development, codification and promotion of “accents” represented by New Englishes world-wide.

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