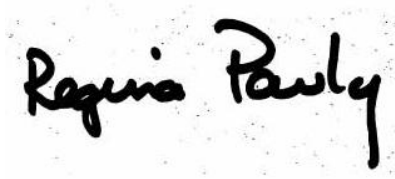

SECOND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS: A
CASE OF MY OWN EXPERIENCE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Approved:

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Abstract

This paper focuses on English language learning and the way that English is taught in China. It also touches on some of the differences between Western and Chinese education in high school. The paper focus on the different ways those American students learn foreign languages and the ways that we learn here in China, and how adopting some of the western methods could help and improve Chinese learning. It also talks about some of the problems Chinese students face when trying to learn English and some ways to overcome these problems.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

English language is more popular in China and most of the people choose it as Their second language. Sixteen to 18 year old students in high school can grasp the Basic grammar and the language skills, but they can not apply it well and don't know how to use it. In China, students never stop studying the English language. On one hand, with the studying they will come across the different kinds of problems, for instance, culture problem, learning environment problem, economic problem and so on. And at the same time, they are trying to find solutions to find the different methods to learn. The results are not always productive. If learning goes poorly the students will think English is too difficult and they will lose their confidence to do it. Thus, many researchers want to analyze the reasons from the students and one of a famous teacher, Li Yang, he suggests that the students should bravely face the English language. The paper is divided into two parts. The first part compares what is the difference education systems in China and western countries, and refers to the difference between classrooms in the East and West. The second part focuses on the English Language Learners (ELL) in China.

Statement of the Problem

The problem to be addressed is “What is the relationship between the second language teaching and learning in high school in China and what are the other factors that affect the students’ ability to learn the language?”

Limitations of the Research

The research will be conducted in and through the Karmann Library at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville and the other resources from the Professional English Teaching Website in China. Primary searches will be conducted using Ebscohost Databases as the primary sources. Key search topics included “second language teaching and learning, “Chinese educational testing and in high school”, and “Language learning strategies and high school students”.

Method of Approach

A review of the research will be conducted. Also teachers and students will be asked informally about common problems in learning English. The conclusion will report on the research literature and student and teacher views.

Definition of Terms

Second language: A language in addition to the native language. The people or the students choose the language of the other country to learn it, such as English language, Japanese language, and so on.

Pedagogical: concerning teaching methods or the practice of teaching.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Differences between Chinese and Western Education System

Different countries offer their students different courses, which are largely effected by the theories of their own educators. One of the most famous educators in American modern history is John Dewey. He was one of the founders of the philosophical school of pragmatism, a pioneer in functional psychology, and representative of the progressive movement in U.S. education. (李观仪, 1994) He advocated that schools should provide pragmatic knowledge to their students to help them survive in society. Though the dominant role of his theory gave way to Essentialism in the 1960s, its effect is still felt. In contrast, pragmatism is not so influential in China. In the past few decades, we generally followed those theories advocated by Russian educators, especially by MaKapeHKo and CyxoMLuHcKuu. They emphasized the function of the collective. Today, while the collective spirit is still a great component in ethical education, the trend has moved to Scientific Humanism. This teleology takes science as its basis and humanism as its orientation.

The teaching of second languages in China

As a developing country, China has placed a lot of importance on education in the last 25 years. As a result of this, China has now become one of the major leading

countries in the world and is continually making advances in fields such as science and technology. Unfortunately, though I believe not much emphasis has been placed

on the learning and development of the arts. As a student studying a foreign language, this lack of attention to the field of arts has been very noticeable.

The learner has two types of second language knowledge: declarative and procedural (Faerch and Kasper 1983b). Declarative knowledge ‘knows that’; it consists of internalized second language rules and memorized chunks of language. Procedural knowledge ‘knows how’; it consists of the strategies and procedures employed by the learner to process second language data for acquisition and for use. When we talk about acquiring a second language, we normally mean declarative knowledge, as the learner is considered to have access already to a set of procedures for learning the second language (Ellis 1985).

Teachers hold lower expectations for the academic achievement of English language learners across all subjects (Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2001). Instead of developing students’ capacity to read, discuss, and write substantive texts in multiple genres (Langer and Schleppegrell, 2002), teachers typically address the increasingly diverse linguistic needs of students by taking a reductive approach of simplified content, and a focus on isolated basic skills (Garcia, 1999; Knapp et al, 1995; MetLife, 2001). As most people are aware, studying a language is more than just remembering words, sentence structures, and grammatical rules. To really understand the language and be able to use it freely, you need to understand how the people of that language think and act. In China, English is our unofficial second language. It is taught in most

primary, middle and secondary schools around the country. Since China has opened its doors to the rest of the world; Chinese have had the chance to see and get to know how foreign people do business, trade, study and many other things. As Chinese have worked alongside foreigners for many years now, they and have adopted some of the ways they do things. This has greatly benefited the country, especially in recent years as our government has tried to introduce and implement Western teaching methods to schools and universities.

The teaching of second Languages in Western Countries

In recent years, according to the different reasons a lot of people are immigrating to the Western countries; for instance places like the United States, Britian, Australia and so on. That a strong link between educational attainment and economic success exists is widely accepted (Rothstein 2004). Public school has played an important role as the primary institution charged with assimilating and educating immigrant children (Gabriel A, 2008). Second-language acquisition research, however, strongly suggests it takes five to seven years for normal ELLs to achieve average grade-level performance in subject-area classes (Collier 1987, 1989; Cummins 1980, 1996). This linguistic research consistently shows that ELLs learn English better and faster while learning academic content simultaneously (Gabriel A, 2008). For ELLs, learning how to “break the code” of how native English speakers read, write, talk, and think within a particular content area is substantial work (Meltzer. J; Hamann. E. 2006).

By the time English language learners enter high school, they lag far behind their classmates in literacy achievement. Nationwide, the average score of ELLs on the National Center for Education Statistics eighth-grade reading assessment was 41 points lower than of non-ELls. In contrast to the 70 percent of ELLs who scored below basic in reading on this assessment, 70 percent of non-ELls scored above basic (NCES, 2003).

A lot of focus is put on oral communication in Western country. This is not the case in China. Oral English classes are once or twice a week, but that doesn't really help. If Chinese want to improve our spoken English, students go to training schools after ordinary school; this is not the case, however, in western countries. In western schools, there are always oral exams and these oral exam are more than a quarter of the overall points you can achieve for the year. Due to this fact, students spend a lot of their time practicing their oral communication. We Chinese teachers tend to pay more attention to learning vocabulary, grammar sentence structures, and rules. Although Chinese know all of these things, it is very difficult to communicate verbally with native English language speakers. Why is this?

This analogy will help you to better understand why so many Chinese students fail, when it comes to having a conversation with someone in English. For example, a short story heard from my colleague was taken from swimming. Say that swimming is my favorite sport and I always watch swimming on TV. I know all the names of the swimmers, I know all the names for the certain strokes; I could tell you who won the gold medal in the 100m men's freestyle race at the 2000 Sydney Olympics, I could

tell you all you would ever need to know about swimming, including how to do it. But, if you took me and threw me into a pool, I would drown. Do you know why? Because I have never swum before, I have never practiced swimming and no one has ever really taken the time to teach me how to swim. This is exactly how it is for many students when speaking English. They know the rules, they know the words, they know most things; but if you put them in a situation and ask them to use what they have learned, they can't. This is because they have never practiced it before, and as long as we have no oral exams for English, very few students will ever practice it.

Listening is also another problem that many Chinese students succumb to. It's not that they can't listen, or find listening difficult to do, but rather, that they don't care what you have to say. I've seen it many times, when a student sees a foreigner and approaches him/her to talk, the student will ask a question and not even wait for the foreigner to finish answering the question before they jump to their next question. This is bad for two reasons. One, it comes across very rude and impolite, and secondly, it cuts the length of the conversation you are having in half. If the student just stopped to listen to the foreigner's response, the conversation could last a while and the student may even find out that the foreigner likes the same kind of things that the student does. By not listening, people waste excellent opportunities to practice their speaking and make new friends.

In western countries, key aspects of motivation and engagement are setting up and facilitating a safe, responsive learning environment that clearly supports and expects the participation of all students and ensuring that students interact with texts

and with one another to learn (Meltzer; Hamann 2006). Students are taught and encouraged to question things and think critically. In my opinion, this helps students get a better grasp of whatever they are learning. In China though, if we ask our teachers questions like; “Teacher, why do you say this instead of that? And would it be ok if I said this as well?” it is frowned upon. It seems to me that when you ask questions like this, teachers feel as though you are doubting their knowledge of the language and their ability to teach it, which makes them lose face. When this happens, the teacher feels very defensive and usually scolds the student. Because of this, most students now are too afraid to ask questions in class preventing them from fully understanding the subject matter that is being taught. I think that if we had the same amount of freedom as western students did in relation to asking questions and disagreeing with the teacher about something, we would learn a lot more and understand a lot better.

Learning environments in the east and west

A supportive environment is necessary to encourage the participation of ELLs who may be shy or embarrassed about speaking, writing, or reading in English and may not see their lives or experiences reflected in typical classroom texts or assignments (Meltzer; Hamann 2006). Teachers must ensure that the classroom climate supports inclusive learning and that deliberate connections are made between home experiences and school expectations. Sensitivity to students’ cultural norms is

also necessary. For example, generating questions, a vital learning strategy, is not a comfortable action for students from cultures where questioning is not encouraged or permitted in school setting. Although questioning can ultimately become a useful teaching strategy to use with students, it may not be a good starting point.

The use of collaborative text-based learning—key to literacy development for most adolescents—also emerges as important for ELLs because it provides an authentic reason to listen, speak, and think about content that is presented in English (Meltzer and Hamann, 2006). To apprentice students into the disciplinary demands of a content area, teachers themselves must be cognizant of the literacy demands that are specific to their discipline and the range of strategies they might use to each others to meet those demands (Meltzer and Hamann, 2006).

Finally, in China for English classes the whole class learns together. Some students in the class have a very high level of English ability, others are average and others can't even ask or answer a simple question. The classes are mixed with all different levels of ability. How can the teacher teach effectively if the classes are like this? If he/she teaches to the higher and middle level students, the lower level students won't understand anything the teacher is saying, and then if the teacher teaches to the lower and middle level students, the high level students in the class will be very bored. If you look at schools in the west that teach foreign languages they break up the classes into levels. They don't mix the advanced and the beginner level students together. I think if, in China, we could also implement this kind of system; it would make English learning a lot more fun, enjoyable and definitely a lot faster and easier

and faster.

English learner in China

Learners make errors in both comprehension and production. From a linguistic point of view, social studies vocabulary words are highly abstract and subject to culturally embedded meanings, making a simple explanation or demonstration difficult (Chamot and O'mally 1994). An example of a comprehension error is when a learner misunderstands the sentence 'Pass me the paper' as 'Pass me the pepper', because of an inability to discriminate the sounds /ei/ and /e/. Not only do students need to know the different meanings of discipline-specific words, such as *act* and *bill*, but they are also less likely to encounter advanced vocabulary words such as *embargo*, *dismantle*, *dangle*, and *lure* in their everyday lives, however, comprehension errors have received scant attention, as Corder has pointed out, although we can test comprehension in general terms, "it is very difficult to assign the cause of failures of comprehension to an inadequate knowledge of a particular syntactic feature of a misunderstood utterance"(1974:89). There is, in fact, a fundamental difference between comprehension and production in processing terms (Ellis 1994).

Disadvantages of Memorizing English

There are also certain key differences with the pedagogy of how English is taught in China. First of all students tend to learn English by memorizing words and

grammar rules. This method is similar to learning Chinese characters. Unlike alphabet based languages, Chinese requires the learning of a large number of characters which need to be memorized. The greater difficulty in learning characters in comparison to alphabet based languages can be seen in how many foreigners can speak Chinese and write pinyin but can't read or write Chinese and find learning difficult. As a result we Chinese students learn and are taught English in the same manner.

This, however, has several disadvantages. First it does not address the fact that visual/written stimuli and oral/aural stimuli are stored in separate parts of the brain. Thus although this approach is fine for characters which are purely written, it leads to the conflation that because you know a word in its written form you can use and understand it in an oral context. Sadly this is not entirely correct. Often Chinese students will not understand the spoken word so easily, but when the same word is written on the board by a teacher their recognition is instantaneous.

Secondly, Chinese people tend to learn words out of context. This means that later on when they wish to use the word for meaningful communication it is very difficult to use what they have learned meaningfully. It also means that students will also confuse the different forms of the word (adjective, noun, verb, adverb) when using it because they did not learn the word in a context.

Finally, we Chinese students learn by memorization, thus encountering the difficulty of the fact that memorization, reading lists of words and their Chinese meanings, stores things primarily in short term memory. When learning Chinese characters this is not a problem because their daily environment will have Chinese

characters wherever they turn to reinforce the initial learning. Learning English this way, however, is problematic because outside of a few English classes the students will not encounter these words again meaning the only reinforcement is from constant review which is both time-consuming and boring. Furthermore, it means that if Chinese students cease to study for even a short period of time they are likely to forget a large part of their English vocabulary.

Lack of Communication in English

Simply providing professional development opportunities is not enough. It is essential to communicate that all content area teachers are responsible for the academic literacy development and content-area learning of all their students, including those who are ELLs. The expectation must be made clear that all teachers will participate in some sort of professional development each year that will improve their capacity to fulfill this responsibility (Meltzer 2006). A second problem with learning English in China is the lack of communication in English. This obviously once again revisits the problem above of lack of contextual English language use. It also means that students never learn to use two of the most important parts of a spoken language: tone and stress. Many things in English can vary greatly in meaning. English as a language places great emphasis on the forms of politeness. This has two ramifications for the use of the language. First polite words in English can easily be accented to have the opposite meaning by the use of tone (sarcasm or irony). For example foreigners can use the word “Pardon?” in the following ways:

1) To indicate they did not hear clearly what another person has said

2) To mean “how dare you!!!” when it is felt that another person has said

something very wrong or offensive.

This is only one example but in fact almost any word in English with a strong meaning can be given the opposite meaning simply by using a different tone. More importantly this means that sometimes when Chinese students speak English they may often use the wrong tone or stress when saying a certain word, and although they might not mean to, they come across as being very strange.

This is also the case for many students when they use Chinese grammar and carry it over to English. Basically, they are speaking English words in a Chinese grammatical form and this often sounds very strange too. An example of this could be “that’s all”. Many times I have seen a foreign teacher ask a student what his/her hobbies are and the student always replies, “My hobbies are watch TV, play basketball, sleep, that’s all”. Although the student doesn’t mean to, he/she sounds very impatient. When said in this way, the student, not to their knowledge, is basically saying “I don’t want to talk to you anymore! Stop asking me questions”. What the student is trying to say though, is other than watching TV, playing basketball and sleeping, they have no other hobbies. In Chinese we would say it like this, “I like watching TV, playing basketball, sleeping and so on”. And it would be fine.

It concerns about direct translation and our lack of comparing our native language, Chinese, to English always effect our communication. In China we are not really taught that to translate something, you need to know the context of what you

are translating. What many of us do is translate word for word and it sounds very strange. Take this Chinese sentence for example, “There is a beautiful flower garden”. If you asked most Chinese people to translate this sentence into English, they would translate it like this “Here have a beautiful garden”. This is wrong. The correct way to translate this sentence is “There is a beautiful garden here”. But because we do not compare Chinese to English and think about the context, we often make silly mistakes like this. By compare, what I mean is thinking to ourselves, “I know in Chinese we say it like this, but in English how would they say it”. Another great example of us translating directly and not comparing the two languages is “If you study hard every day, you will be successful”. If, when you translate this sentence, you don’t compare the meaning that it has to English, you will do a direct translation and it will sound very stupid. Translated directly it says “Good good study, day day up up”. If anyone said this to a foreigner, the foreigner would have no idea what the Chinese person was trying to say to him/her. That is why it is so important that we should be taught to compare the languages. First, think about what the sentence means, and then translate the equivalent into English.

The fact that we are not taught to compare the two languages being spoken not only effects us when it comes to translating, but also lapses in to everyday conversation. Many things that are acceptable for us to say in Chinese are unacceptable to say in English. Let me give you some examples. In Chinese, if someone asks us why we did something or why we think a certain thing, it is quite ok for us to answer “No reason”. In English though, we cannot say “No reason”. If you

were talking to a foreigner about movies, for example, and you said that you didn't like a certain movie and the foreigner then went on to ask why and your reply was "No reason", the foreigner would believe you well incapable of forming an opinion. In the English language you need to be able to say why you like or don't like something and back up things that you say with some conclusive evidence. If you don't, the foreign person may be not wanted to speak to you again. Another example of things that are acceptable to say in Chinese, but not in English is "I haven't thought about that". Here is an example. If a foreigner asked his/her student "How do you think life would be different if we had no electricity?" if would be fine, in Chinese, to answer him/her by saying "I don't know, I never think about it". But saying this in English would give the foreigner the same feeling as saying "No why" would. A foreign person would think, "Ok, you haven't thought about it before...well, think about it now!" We need to be taught these kinds of things in school. We need to know how to compare our native language, Chinese, to English and other languages. We need to know what is acceptable to say and what is not. I think this is very important for us.

Phonetics and Exams

A lot of Chinese students are confused or how to tell the difference between almost the same words what they hear spoken on different from other people. In fact, this is simply due to an adjusted speech rate and enunciation. While English is a stress-timed language, many other languages, including Spanish, are syllable-timed

languages (Rost 2001). English tends to stress one or two syllables and slur the rest of the word or sentence. This means that English sounds are often unclear to some speakers of other languages. Thus, pronouncing equally stressed words or sentences may increase students' comprehension along with adjusted speech rate (Meltzer and Hamann 2006).

As a Chinese student, I can say without a shadow of a doubt that we have much too much homework, and sometimes, I don't feel like doing any and if I do it, then I do the bare minimum. Many students believe that learning English is boring and they hate it, and to a certain extent I can agree with them. If you just do your English lesson at school and then go home and do the homework the teacher has set for you, then yes, English is very boring! It is beyond the homework, classes and exams where English becomes exciting and interesting. Learning new words, slang, the differences between American and British English, etc, can be very interesting. And talking about these differences and speaking to foreign teachers about them is very fun and interesting too. So, I believe that we shouldn't just study English to pass the exams. If we have to learn English, why not learn it well and to the best of our ability. English can be, and should be, fun to learn, both at home and in the classroom

Chapter 3

Conclusion

To learn a second language is not an easy thing for high school students. They have some restrictive factors to limit them developing their studying. According to my paper, you can see comparing different Language Education in China and Western countries that they have their advantages and disadvantages. They have different learning skills and teaching skills. As for Chinese students, they feel it is more difficult to learn a Second Language, For instance, grammar, vocabulary, phonetic and communication and so on. This is especially true that they have less chance to know the Western culture. They may have different cultural uses of literacy and different experiences with literacy before entering school (Heath, 1983), or may be nonnative speakers of English (Krashen, 1993, Weaver, 2002). All of these variables affect the success of a student as learning Second Language. Ideally, ELLs should have full access to appropriate curricula taught by qualified teachers using appropriate instructional resources that match students' language and grade level. However, not many schools can afford such support (e.g. bilingual instructional materials, time, and specific guidelines). Teachers' frustrations often originate from their feelings of helplessness and doubts about ELLs' ability to catch up with grade-level content (Reeves, 2004). Thus, we suggest the following practical strategies: increase the comprehensibility of texts and speech, increase interactions between native speakers

and ELLs, and increase teachers' linguistic and cultural awareness. Whereas the following list of suggestions is neither a quick fix nor a one-size-fits-all answer, it is my hope that these suggestions will help teachers accommodate the needs of ELLs better. These practical suggestions are adapted from multiple sources, such as the sheltered instruction modal of Jana Echevarria, MaryEllen Vogt, and Edborah J. Short (2004) and the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach of Anna Uhl Chanot and J. Michael O'Malley (1994). And the other hand, it's the most important that ELLs should set up his/her goals, whatever, even though they come across the difficult time in his/her studying in high school, they should communicate with their teachers. That must be helpful for them.

Recommendations

Here are some ways in which I think we could improve students English Learning and make English a language that all Chinese people want to learn; and will learn well.

First, it is important for the students to have a foreign teacher. A foreign teacher can teach the cultural background of their country and language better than any Chinese English teacher ever could. They also bring with them new and different teaching methods that the students find interesting and that the Chinese teachers can learn from.

Second, the classes need to be fun and enjoyable. Encouraging students to perform role plays, short skits, etc. That includes modern language and grammar that

they have learnt in class, will help them when they need to speak to others in real life situations.

Third, it is important that more attention and emphasis is placed on the oral aspect of a language when it is being taught. In Chinese schools, most of the assessment is written or grammar based and there are no oral exams. Because of this, students pay little attention to the oral English classes. Although it is important to know how to write and how to use grammar correctly, etc, if a student goes abroad, he/she will need to know how to speak. This is a serious problem in China. In theory, students know how to speak, but in actuality they cannot.

Finally, it is important that we encourage students to have an open mind about different topics. Students should be taught that it's ok to disagree with someone about a certain topic, but that they should state why they disagree and to respect the other persons' beliefs and opinions. This is very important because a lot of foreigners enjoy discussing or debating controversial topics.

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