

EFL/ESL TEACHING IN CHINA: QUESTIONS – QUESTIONS - QUESTIONS

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ABSTRACT

The teaching of English as a Foreign/Second Language (EFL/ESL) in China has become a nationwide endeavor pursued at all academic levels, from the kindergarten to the University. In the past ten years there has been an explosion in the development of public school English programs and private English language schools throughout China. EFL/ESL has become very big business in China (China Daily, HK Edition, October 9, 2002.) Reports show that ESL has become a 10-billion yuan business in China. Of the 37 billion yuan annual book sales, ESL takes up as much as 25% of the market share. And a few ESL teachers in Shanghai command an hourly rate of 1,000 yuan (US\$120). Even on average, a student pays 10-20 yuan (US\$1.2-2.4) for one hour of ESL training. This article raises numerous fundamental issues which appear to have been overlooked by China in its exuberance to embrace EFL/ESL teaching as China rushes to join the new world order and partake of its share of the global economic pie. This article establishes a solid and fundamental legitimization for asking the politically incorrect, controversial and sensitive questions but leaves their final resolution to the language teachers, graduate students and linguists who have the inherent fundamental duty to seek the answers.

INTRODUCTION

“*Can We Talk?*” This question precedes the often politically incorrect, controversial or sensitive monologue of America’s famous stand-up comic, Joan Rivers. It is often followed by “*Really people, let’s get serious.*” So -

Can We Talk?

There are many unanswered questions concerning China’s nationwide EFL/ESL teaching fever which are probably politically incorrect, controversial and sensitive:

1. Why should 1.3 billion Chinese learn English?
2. How can EFL/ESL teaching in China be called a success?
3. Is EFL/ESL teaching in China a case of the blind leading the blind?

4. Can anyone really be expected to acquire English in this hostile environment?
5. What is the Chinese English student's favorite wine?
6. Is it inevitable that although we teach them English, they will learn Chinglish?
7. What's in a name?
8. What is worse: Students who cheat the system or a system that cheats the students?

This article raises numerous fundamental issues which appear to have been overlooked by China in its exuberance to embrace EFL/ESL teaching as China rushes to join the new world order and partake of its share of the global economic pie. This article establishes a solid and fundamental legitimization for asking the questions but leaves their final resolution to the language teachers, graduate students and linguists who have the inherent fundamental duty to seek the answers.

Really people, let's get serious.

WHY SHOULD 1.3 BILLION CHINESE LEARN ENGLISH?

In 1862, under the Great Qing Dynasty, the first English Language School was officially opened by the Chinese Government to train ten men for the newly created diplomatic corps. (Deyi, 1992 Panda Books) In the past ten years, there has been an alarming increase in the emphasis on English as a Foreign/Second Language (EFL/ESL) in China.

Now, China annually recruits 100,000 "Foreign Experts" (FE) to teach English as a Foreign/Second Language (EFL/ESL) (www.Chinatefl.com) with an accompanying 10 billion Yuan price tag. (China Daily, Hong Kong Edition, October 9, 2002.) According to one Internet recruiting web site there are 150,000 foreign ESL teachers working in China (www.AbroadChina.com). The People's Daily reports that in 2001 the industry made a 700 million yuan (US\$8,700,000) profit in Beijing alone. (People's Daily, 1/23/02) Public middle schools, high schools and universities throughout China have developed and implemented English-language programs. Private EFL/ESL schools (kindergartens, primary, middle, high and college) have proliferated to such an extent that according to statistics from the Education, Science, Culture and Health Committee of the NPC, about 54,000 private schools had been set up in China by the end of 2000, with 6.93 million

registered students. (People's Daily, 5/23/01).

At first blush, it may appear admirable that China has so wholeheartedly made such a concerted effort to adopt English, the international language of commerce, as its second language. On October 24, 2002, Zang Xinsheng, Vice-Minister of the Ministry of Education reportedly said: "With China's accession to the World Trade Organization and the approaching Olympics in 2008 more than ever is it a priority for young Chinese to learn and improve their language skills" (China Daily, 10/25/02). The same article states "Beijing is striving to reach its goal of teaching citizens to speak English to improve its image as an international metropolis."

Beijing wants its 13 million residents to speak English to enhance its image as a cosmopolitan metropolis (China Daily, 10-05-02). China's Ministry of Education wants all young people of China to learn English due to China's WTO membership and China's hosting the 2008 Olympics (China Daily, 10-05-02). Certain municipal governments in China require all of their civil servants to learn some English (China Daily, 10/05/02)

These goals or objectives beg the question, WHY?

Market studies, market analysis and affirmative recommendations from experts in the fields of business, math and linguistics should support each of the forgoing propositions, but do not appear to have been conducted.

What is the mathematical probability that each of Beijing's 15 million or so residents will need to be able to speak English for an intended or even accidental encounter with a single English speaking foreigner during the 2008 Olympics? Probably not very high.

Does a market study support the proposition that Beijing's image will be enhanced in the eyes of foreigners if all the residents of Beijing can speak English? Further, would such image enhancement translate into increased economic benefit for Beijing? If so, how much economic benefit will accrue to Beijing and does it offset the social, cultural and political costs that must be paid along the way by the people of Beijing? These questions do not appear to have been addressed by any formal study.

How many bilingual (Chinese-English) jobs will actually be created in China due to China's World Trade Organization (WTO) membership and hosting the 2008 Olympics? Does the number of new jobs requiring English support the need for all of China's young people to learn English? Answers to these questions are not readily available. And about the bilingual jobs created by the 2008 Olympics: How long will they last? A few months? Why should someone spend three or four years studying English in College for a job in 2008 that will only last a few months? Post Olympics what becomes of these Chinese

English speakers?

What is the mathematical probability that all municipal government civil servants, in any particular Chinese municipality, will need to use English in their daily work? Very slim.

Is there any empirical study or evidence to support the current EFL/ESL revolution in China, which revolution may in fact have significant adverse social, cultural and political effects? (Qiang/Wolff, 4/03) It does not appear that the Chinese Central Government has issued any formal Resolution or Position Paper authorizing, condoning or supporting the current ESL revolution in China. Rather, it has been allowed and even encouraged to just evolve. Other than standardized testing for College entrance, the Central Government seems to have no set educational policy or curriculum for EFL/ESL. There is no single Ministry of Education document stating the Government policy on EFL/ESL in China. (He Qixin, 8/01)

This rush to educate has spawned an industry run amuck, without appreciable government control or regulation. (Qiang/Wolff, 9/03)

Why the concerted effort to require 1.3 billion Mandarin speakers, 25% of the world's population, to learn English as a foreign/second language? Since Mandarin is one of the six working languages of the United Nations, does the world at large have a greater appreciation for the importance of Mandarin than China itself?

Is the current EFL/ESL revolution in China a misguided, self-inflicted English colonialization, brought about tacitly, if not officially, by adopting EFL/ESL teaching as a national program? Will the West conquer China from within, without a single shot ever being fired? Will English enculturation supplant traditional Chinese culture and values? Will Beijing duck and dim sum be replaced with McDonalds and Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC)?

Why has China apparently forsaken Mandarin for English when 25% of the world's population already speaks Mandarin, and Mandarin is one of the six working languages of the United Nations? Why does China so meekly submit to the English-based new world order emanating out of Washington, D.C., when 25% of the world's population looks to Beijing for its leadership? Does China not yet realize the reality that the emerging China has the immediate clout to demand that those desiring to do business in China or with China should learn Mandarin, rather than expect 1.3 billion Chinese to learn English?

Why should 1.3 billion Chinese learn English when "95% of Chinese college graduates will not use oral English in their whole lifetime nor will they read any English materials.?" (China Daily, 11/03/03)

Could or should China learn something from the EU's prioritizing the preservation and continued use of native languages? (Qiang/Wolff 4/03) Is the risk posed by EFL/ESL to China's social, cultural and even political structures and systems outweighed by the potential economic benefits such that China's Chineseness is for sale? EFL/ESL at any cost? Should the love of money replace traditional Chinese wisdom as the most valuable asset of the new Chingland? Should economic gain be at the expense of what makes China different from all other nations? National identity is tied directly to the preservation of the native language.

HOW CAN EFL/ESL TEACHING IN CHINA BE CALLED A SUCCESS?

THE KINDERGARTEN EXPERIENCE

Foreign experts employed in middle schools and colleges are routinely asked to give Saturday or Sunday English classes to kindergarten teachers and students. Having examined this phenomena in three Provinces, the various experiences can be reduces to a similar pattern.

The foreign expert is picked-up at their home by a kindergarten car and driven to the school. Upon arrival at the school the foreign expert is introduced to the head mistress who does not speak a single word of English. (One immediately wonders how such an administrator can properly supervise or evaluate the effectiveness of her English teachers.) Then a few kindergarten teachers are paraded before the foreign expert. Aside from the perfunctory "Hello, how are you?", the teachers are unable to engage in the most rudimentary conversation with the foreign expert.

Next the foreign expert is paraded through the campus, visiting select classrooms where the foreign experts greet the children and nothing more.

It is now lunchtime and the foreign expert is treated to a feast. During lunch the foreign expert inquires when the teaching will begin and is informed that it is already finished. Then the foreign expert inquires as to the identity of the person with the movies camera who had filmed the entire event and is informed that was the representative of the local television station.

After lunch the foreign expert is driven back to their apartment to relax and bask in the satisfaction of knowing that they have made a significant contribution to the EFL/ESL teaching in China. NOT! The foreign expert is thoroughly disgusted that they have been used as a marketing tool, a sort of endorsement for the school to establish that the

school has a relationship with a real live foreign expert. This relationship encourages new enrollments and higher profits but has little or nothing to do with teaching EFL/ESL.

THE MIDDLE SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

Foreign experts employed in colleges are routinely asked to give English classes to middle school teachers and students. One such experience in 2003 is representative of this experience.

A foreign expert was asked to present a series of six courses to middle school teachers for two hours and a student class for another two hours. After the first two lessons to the 30 teachers, the vice-principal cancelled the teachers' class without any advance notice to the foreign expert. When the foreign expert showed up for the third teachers' class, a student class was substituted without explanation. Since the foreign expert had prepared a teachers' lesson, this made things a little difficult for the foreign expert. When this was explained to the Vice-principal, he responded that the foreign expert should "just read from the approved textbook like the Chinese teachers do."

Upon inquiry, the foreign expert was informed that the Vice-principal did not want his teachers being further informed about any Western teaching methodology.

The Vice-principal also unilaterally changed the student class format to four classes of 200 students for one hour each. The foreign expert also learned about this change when he showed up for the third lesson. When the foreign expert inquired as to how he was to teach such classes without having made appropriate preparation, the Vice-principal advised that his "students have prepared questions to ask so just talk with the students."

In one representative class, 38 students out of the 200 asked all of the questions. The students had not prepared any questions in advance of the class. (So much for the Vice-principal's claims of student preparation.) The students simply opened their textbooks and randomly selected questions to read to the foreign expert. With the exception of one question, they were all answerable with a "yes" or "no." (So much for "talking" with the students.) The only question that required a different answer was, "What color is it?" This "color" question was asked 7 times in the one representative class, six times after it was explained that the question was an incomplete sentence lacking a proper subject or object. (So much for listening comprehension.)

Other questions were repeatedly asked in the representative class:

Question: Do you like China? (Asked 22 times) Answer: yes

Question: Do you like Chinese food? (Asked 21 times) Answer: yes
Question: Do you like Chinese people? (Asked 19 times) Answer: yes
Question: Do you play the guitar? (Asked 4 times) Answer: no
Question: Do you play the piano? (Asked 7 times) Answer: no
Question: Do you play basketball? (Asked 11 times) Answer: no
Question: Do you play football? (Asked 9 times) Answer: no
Question: Do you like us? (Asked 17 times) Answer: (audible) Yes (inaudible) I am starting not to.

Is there a listening comprehension problem? NO! It was the first time that any of these students had ever met a foreigner and each of the brave ones wanted to say something, anything, to the foreign white monkey the school had brought around for an afternoon's entertainment. The real problem appears to be a less than competent school administrator, an issue discussed below.

A foreign expert was introducing himself to individual students in a middle school class and the dialogue went like this:

FE: Hello. My name is Bob. What is your name?
Chinese English teacher: Prompts the student with something in Chinese.
Student: My Chinese name is xxx. My English name is Bill.
FE: How are you Bill?
Chinese English teacher: Prompts the student with something in Chinese.
Student: I am fine. How are you?
FE: I am fine thank you. Nice to meet you Bill.
Chinese English teacher: Prompts the student with something in Chinese.
Student: Nice to meet you too.

After this exchange occurred with six or seven students, always with the prompting of the Chinese English teacher, the foreign expert changed the dialogue ending. The following occurred:

Student: I am fine. How are you?
FE: I am really very tired and I wish I were not here teaching this class.
Student: Stares at FE with frightened "deer in headlights" look.
Chinese English teacher: Silent
Student: Turns and looks at Chinese English teacher.
Chinese English teacher: Shrugs shoulders
Student: Turns to foreign expert and shrugs shoulders

Are the middle schools merely training parrots? May it never be!

A foreign expert wrote a tongue twister on a middle school blackboard:

“How much wood could a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood?”

The foreign expert asked a middle school student to stand and read what had been written on the blackboard. The student stood only after several classmates said something to him in Chinese. Instead of reading, the student remained silent and appeared to have difficulty seeing the blackboard from the back of the classroom. The foreign expert asked the student to come forward. The student did not move until some classmates said something to him in Chinese.

When the student arrived at the front of the room and stood facing the blackboard, the following dialogue occurred:

FE: Please read what I have written on the board.

Student: Please read what I have written on the board.

FE: Yes. I want you to read what I have written on the board.

Student: Yes. I want you to read what I have written on the board.

FE: Can you read?

Student: Can you read?

FE: OK. Please take your seat.

Student: OK. Please take your seat.

FE: Go and sit down.

Student: Go and sit down.

FE: I want you to go and sit down in your seat now. (Pointing to the student's seat at the back of the room.)

Student: I want you to go and sit down in your seat now. (Pointing to the student's seat at the back of the room.)

YES, we are merely training parrots!

Middle school teachers use the ‘talk and chalk’ teaching methodology and the parrots err students repeat after the teacher who reads what they have written on the board. Vocabulary is taught in the same manner, with emphasis on memorization, but completely lacking in definitional meaning or contextual usability.

THE COLLEGE EXPERIENCE

“The incompetence of many graduates from high schools or even colleges and universities to communicate effectively in spoken and written English is related to the teaching

methods in China. Students are usually spoon-fed, listening and taking notes with teachers standing at the front and doing most of the talking.” (He Mei, China Daily, 9/28/00)

“Most of us begin studying English at 12 or even younger. By the time we graduate from the university, we have studied English for over 10 years. However, the result is awful. Many students can say nothing but some simple phrases. Even for some English majors, writing an article in English also means nothing other than making countless mistakes.” (Deng Di, China Daily 6/9/00)

A business English major at Xinyang Agricultural College, Henan Province, inquired: “What use is a degree from this college when I can only get a job as a laborer?”

In the summer of 2002, two weeks before graduation, a business English major commenced his graduation party speech with the following sentence, “My English is so poor I will make my talk in Chinese.”

In the summer of 2002, two weeks before graduation, one-third of a business English class could not spell “business.”

"I read nothing but English during my free time," said Xiao Zhong, a postgraduate from the Economic Department of Beijing Normal University, "but my listening comprehension and oral English remained far behind satisfaction."

A girl had to take the graduate school entrance examinations five times because of failure in English in the four previous years, although she had excellent records for her major subjects. "During the past five years, I had spent 80 percent of my time on studying English until finally past the examination," she complained. She said that if she had spent the time on her major subjects, she might have great progress in her studies.

Professor Gu Haibing from the National Economic Management Department of Remin University of China said that for most people who had finished nine-year compulsory education, it is impossible or unnecessary to be excellent in all the subjects, given the current

circumstances that professions are all meticulously divided.
We suppose the study cost (time) on basic subjects are the same, if a person spends more time on English and his time on other subjects will be less. The result is that the person masters neither English nor other subjects.
(China Daily, 11/03/03)

“Currently, the English teaching in colleges and universities is not at a higher level, but only a repetition of what the students learned in high school. And again, the English class for postgraduates is a repetition of their college classes.” (Haibing, China Daily, 11/3/03)

Is China producing more EFL/ESL failures than successes?

IS EFL/ESL TEACHING IN CHINA A CASE OF THE BLIND LEADING THE BLIND?

The all time best selling book, which was banned from China for a very long time, contains an applicable admonition which should quite possibly be taken to heart by those charged with promulgating and administering educational policy in China.

“And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit.” (Holy Bible, NAS)

China recruits approximately 100,000 native English teachers each year (www.chinatefl.com) “According to a certain statistics about 100 thousand teachers will be needed every year in China.”). English teachers from Australia, Great Britain, Canada, and the United States of America are heavily recruited through the Internet (<http://www.chinatefl.com>; <http://www.tefl.com>; <http://www.eslcafe.com/jobinfo>).

Generally speaking, in America, a University Bachelors, Masters or Doctorate Degree, in any discipline, merely qualifies a native speaker to enroll in a teacher training program where they will then receive a teaching certificate or Masters Degree, which amounts to a license to teach.

Unfortunately, there is no universal recruitment standard for EFL/ESL teachers in China other than the requirement that they are native speakers and have a college degree, in some recognized discipline. (See below)

Most Chinese schools require a Bachelors degree, at a minimum. Unfortunately the degree does not need to be in English, Literature, Linguistics or Education. There are many circumstances where Native English Speakers have been employed with an Associates

degree or as little as a U.S. high school diploma.

“Xin Pai Foreign Language School Date: Monday, 20 January 2003, at 10:08 a.m. More Job Vacancies Four more teaching positions are now available at Xin Pai Foreign Language School ... but even those with no experience, who would like to try their hand at teaching, are welcome, as we can provide on-the-job training and assistance” xinpai@china.com

“Frequently Asked Questions: 1. What qualifications should one have in teaching in China? The basic qualifications are: being a native speaker of English, having a minimum BA degree and commitment to teaching, loving China and its people. Clear, well-spoken English and a good knowledge of the fundamentals of English grammar. Teaching experience/certificate is preferred but not a must.”
<http://www.chinatefl.com/abroad.html>;

A major ESL teacher recruiting web site (www.AbroadChina.com) gives the following advice:

What if I do not have a degree?

If you do not have a degree, you must have:

Qualified Teacher Status and at least one years' recent classroom-based experience of teaching English or modern languages, or a TEFL qualification and one years' classroom-based experience of TEFL or teaching another subject.

However, some school will accept you without degree requested, and in some summer program, they may also accept. But some school will not accept you without a degree, so your options will be restricted.

What if I have limited teaching experience?

With TEFL qualifications or equivalent & less than one years experience. If you have a degree, some host schools still will accept you.

The above directly contradicts, at least as to public universities and institutions of higher learning, the following official position of the Chinese Central Government:

The Central Government guide provides:

“Those in search of language teaching positions in universities and institutions of higher learning should have a good grasp of their native languages and literature and should have at least three years' language teaching experience. They should be able to speak their native language in standard pronunciation and intonation.” (State Bureau of Foreign

Experts, 1994, “Guide for Foreign Experts Working in China”)

Note that the above is advisory and applies only to “universities and institutions of higher learning,” presumably public colleges and private Business Institutes, but not kindergartens, primary schools, middle schools or high schools, public or private. The use of the word “should” and not “must” should also be noted. The final and most important observation must be the lack of any requirement that English be the native language of the foreign expert hired to teach EFL/ESL.

Most schools request a TESOL, TEFL, TOFL, ESL or CELTA certificate, but actual teaching experience or business experience is an acceptable substitute. (See above.) Most EFL/ESL teaching certificates are designed for EFL/ESL teaching in Europe whereas Asia is a completely different situation involving a different cultural orientation completely unlike that of Europe. The standard teaching certificates do not prepare one to be an EFL/ESL teacher in China.

Although many schools claim to offer training once the FE is in China, in fact only a handful of private schools provide any pre-employment or on-the-job training specifically for EFL/ESL teaching in China. Public schools provide no formal on-the-job EFL/ESL training.

Most Chinese schools prefer some teaching experience but some do not, let alone EFL/ESL experience. Likewise, most schools do not provide any type of teacher training, either on-the-job or on-line. They use the learn-as-you-go, on-the-job, by “trial-and-error” method of teacher training.

Unfortunately there does not appear to be any enforcement of even the most basic requirements that an EFL/ESL teacher be a native speaker of English or have a college degree in some discipline.

We are a network of English Training Centers based in Guangxi province, South China, and have an urgent need for English teachers (non-native speakers should have a fair English accent), for our centers and partner schools in the region. (www.routard.com)

Non-native English speakers, or put another way, L2 English speakers currently teaching EFL/ESL in China are from Nigeria, Cameroon, Ghana, Philippines, Pakistan, India and Russia.

In reality, there is no native English speaker requirement, teacher training requirement, or

even any teaching experience requirement to become an English teacher in China.

Most EFL/ESL teachers are recruited to China with very attractive bait (Travel/Teach English: The Global TESOL Institute <http://www.eslcafe.com/jobinfo/asia/sefer.cgi?China>; *Looking for a well-paid job to explore China? Come to TDM!* Posted By: TDM Language College woody@tdmlanguage.com Date: Thursday, 16 January 2003, at 10:04 a.m. But you are very well paid. Your salary will be more than enough for you to live comfortably, to explore the exciting China, its history, its nature, its people, its culture, its language and its food).

The recruit is usually very young with no prior teaching experience, away from home for the first time, in his first cross-cultural experience, and under the belief that they are about to embark upon a China vacation, which of necessity, must be interrupted occasionally for a little work.

There is little or no advance training, preparation or indoctrination for teaching EFL/ESL in China. Far too many recruits never finish their one-year contract, some leaving within the first week, month or first several months. The reasons for disillusionment are almost as many and varied as the number of disillusioned (<http://www.eslcafe.com/jobinfo/asia/sefer.cgi?China>). In a two year period 113 FE's published over 400 complaints, mostly about Chinese owned and operated primary schools. (Qiang/Wolff, 9/03)

“Too many people with no real interest in the job come here (China) for a good time (very easy to do) and leave the real teachers trying to clean up the mess and repair their image. A white face and a degree, even a fake one, land a job.” (Tamblyn, Andrew, 1/15/03, letter)

“The tragedy is that some folks come here not to teach, but to travel, so they get all romantic and misty eyed. They can't teach, don't want to teach, and want to party like in the good old USA. This devil-may-care, happy camper attitude unfortunately leads them to make immature decisions and to be placed in schools that can not wait to capitalize on these “Rage Against the Machine” look-a-likes. They also give serious teachers a bad reputation.” (H. Jones, (2/25/01, Letter)

China is burdened with far too many “backpackers” parading around as EFL/ESL teachers.

Evidence that the native English teacher produces students any better equipped to speak English than their Chinese English teacher counterparts is lacking. This is partly due to poorly designed curriculum and partly due to the fact that too many native

English-speaking teachers are simply not trained to teach anything, let alone teach EFL/ESL, which is a highly specialized field.

Most private English schools rely upon the foreign expert to bring appropriate teaching materials with them and to prepare their own courses. Middle school and high school students of Chinese English teachers are subject to objective evaluation through the college entrance examination process. University students of Chinese English teachers are subject to objective evaluation through the Band 4 and Band 6 testing program, however limited and inadequate they may be in testing oral capabilities. However, private college or business institute students taught by “native” English speakers are not subject to any objective evaluation testing process. The effectiveness of these private educational programs is an unknown factor and hence their contribution to the Chinese society is also an unknown factor. The only thing really known for certain about these private English schools is that they are draining an appreciable amount of yuan from the local economy (China Daily, HK Edition, 10/9/02).

This situation cries out for and demands an empirical study of the real benefit of private English colleges and business institutes in relation to their economic profiteering. The 16th Communist Party Congress discussed the advisability and merits of allowing private educational institutions to begin engaging in business for profit, as if it was not a current reality. Acknowledgement that private educational enterprises are making a financial killing in China already is a prerequisite to developing appropriate Governmental regulation and quality control standards for the private educational sector.

Language and culture are inseparable; on this there is no apparent disagreement between linguists. How then can an L2 EFL/ESL speaker, without any actual immersion in, or exposure to, the L2 EFL/ESL culture, possibly expect to be an effective L2 EFL/ESL teacher? They are certainly capable of dissecting the grammatical rules, analyzing English writings, reading extensively, and memorizing vocabulary, but this will enable them to do nothing more than teach a “DD” form of English. Additionally, in far too many cases, (especially the primary school teachers) their own pronunciation is so atrocious that they cannot possibly correct a student’s improper pronunciation and they are so steeped in Chinglish that it is impossible for them to recognize it and correct it in their students. (Yanping Dong, 2003)

The L2 students of L2 teachers will not have any appreciation for the cultural or environmental context in which the native speaker actually uses the language. The student will speak, if at all, in a “DD” form of English that the native speaker will find very strange, bookish, stiff or formal, and unintelligible; or, the Chinese student will use a form of Chinglish which is universally understandable by other EFL/ESL speakers and L1 English speakers alike.

Chinese English teachers at the middle school and high school levels are themselves so unaccomplished in proper English pronunciation that they discourage and even intimidate their students from attempting to speak in English (He Mei, 9/28/00) When these students reach the university level they have little or no practical speaking ability and have very poor pronunciation, making the university oral English teachers job almost an impossibility. This situation has also been fostered by an English curriculum that is test result driven rather than driven by practical conversational ability. (China Daily, 11/3/03) Middle school and high school students focus on learning only that which is required to pass the college entrance examination, which does not at present include oral English.

Few, if any Chinese English teachers are educated as to the difference between language learning and language acquisition. Those Chinese English teachers trained more than five years ago read a textbook that had only one or two chapters dealing with 20-year-old language acquisition theories. At least one college level Chinese English teacher was hired for the 2002-2004 school years with only a high school diploma and absolutely no language acquisition training.

The following are examples of a dictionary definition (DD) conversation and a culturally insensitive textbook:

EXAMPLE #1: (Dictionary Definition, Chinese English Teacher talking to Foreign Expert, Feb. 24, 2003)

CET – “Tomorrow you will “fetch” your Temporary Residence Permit from the Public Security Bureau.”

FE – “Why do you talk to me like that? I am not a dog!”

CET – “What do you mean?”

FE – “In America we command our dogs to “fetch” when we want them to retrieve something for us.”

CET – “But the dictionary says that “fetch” is used to refer to going someplace and bringing something that is there back.”

FE – “Yes, but in actual daily usage we only tell our dogs to “fetch” when we throw something and have them chase it and bring it back or when we are using dogs while hunting for birds. It is an insult to tell a person to “fetch.” You insinuate that they are a dog.

EXAMPLE #2: (Cultural Ignorance, excerpts of inappropriate conversational English randomly taken from an English textbook published in 2001 and written by a Chinese L2, “Interactive Speakers.”)

It’s time to say our farewells. P55

Could they make me known the exact time the plane takes off? P69

Have I got the go ahead to put out the fire? P119

I wonder if you'd excuse me for a moment. P152

... I'm afraid. P183

I'm afraid P 24, 167, 182

Will it be convenient if I call upon you at seven this evening? P220

To be openhearted, your denial that you had witnessed the accident dumbfounded me. P 249

He chooses to look into the matter till the truth is out. P264

Should properly qualified Foreign Experts be pressed into the service of teaching primary and middle school teachers how and what to teach in their EFL/ESL classes?

Today's Chinese English/Linguist Ph.D.s study language acquisition but where do they end up teaching? The Chinese PhD's either go abroad or congregate in the national or provincial top tier universities where they reach a minority of the 11.75 mil. College students. The majority of English majors are dispersed throughout the 2nd and 3rd tier colleges and universities where language acquisition theory is a relative unknown. The Chinese linguists concentrate their research primarily on the top tier students and their journal articles are thus misleading as to the state of EFL/ESL teaching for the majority of Chinese English students.

Even at a top tier Shanghai University, a Chinese PhD Associate Professor employed in the English department teaches a class in English, about English, and then allows the final exam to be written in Chinese. The claimed rational is that it is harder for the Chinese English major to formulate and write the final exam paper in Chinese. This would be a great rational for a Chinese class but inappropriate for an English class. The bottom line is that it is easier for the Associate Professor to read, correct and grade the final exam paper written in English. This is just plain laziness at the highest academic level in China.

A flawed L2 curriculum, taught by L2 speakers who themselves are deficient in their L2 language understanding and production ability, constitutes an educational program doomed to less than stellar results. In fact, the results are so poor as to require a very lenient grading standard to avoid failing more than half of the Chinese English students in each class.

“Currently, the English teaching in colleges and universities is not at a higher level, but only a repetition of what the students learned in high school. And again, the English class for postgraduates is a repetition of their college classes. The students take the course only for passing the examinations. The real meaning of English learning no longer exists.” (Haibing, China Daily, 11/3/03) The college Chinese English teachers are merely teaching what they were taught, the way they were taught, without much knowledge about EFL/ESL acquisition.

How can someone teach beyond his or her own knowledge? When Chinese English teachers and non-Chinese English teachers are incompetent to teach English, can they produce anything other than incompetent students? Is this just like the “blind leading the blind”?

Exactly how does China wind up with so many incompetent EFL/ESL teachers? Clearly the government guidelines are inadequate and do not even have the force and effect of regulations or laws and are rarely the subject of any enforcement proceedings or actions.

But there may be something more basic at the root of this situation and it may be a case of incompetent school administrators. In 2002 a 2nd tier Shanghai University appointed a history major (who could not utter one English word) to be Dean of the English department. An isolated case you think? Consider that in 2002 a 2nd tier university in Hebei Province appointed a civil engineer (who could not speak English) to be the Dean of the English department. A private business institute in the same province appointed a North Carolina hillbilly Seminary dropout with no teaching credentials or experience to be the Director of Studies. And reflect further on the fact that in 2002 a Veterinarian who could not speak any English was the Dean of the English department in a 3rd tier college in Henan Province. This Vet hired three department employees who could not speak a word of English and all departmental meetings, communications and notices were in Chinese.

To improve EFL/ESL teaching in China, maybe there needs to be a fundamental shift in educational philosophy and administrative qualifications. If the English department business is conducted in Chinese, how can the department set a proper example for the Chinese English major to utilize English at all times? An English department operated in Chinese does not create a friendly English acquisition environment.

CAN ANYONE REALLY BE EXPECTED TO ACQUIRE ENGLISH IN THIS HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT?

You are forced to trudge up three to five flights of cold concrete stairs, (past the stench of open trench, self-cleaning bathrooms reeking of urine and feces,) to reach your assigned concrete cubicle where you are required to sit on a 17” high backless wooden stool with an 8 1/2” x 11” seat, in front of a 30” high wooden bench, enclosed on three sides with glass partitions. The cold concrete floor is swept daily by merely pushing the dirt into a corner where it stacks up. Water is splashed on the floor to keep the dust down. There is no heat to ward off the freezing cold of winter nor air conditioning to provide relief from the sweltering heat of summer. The walls are dingy-yellowed with time, dirty and in disrepair. The lighting is bare fluorescent tubes just like a sweatshop. In the front of the room is a

Chinese language sign that roughly translated means [only speak mandarin in this room]. There is a second Chinese language sign on a sidewall that roughly translated says [no talking in this room].

This cold, dank, concrete box is surrounded by construction noises on one side, and from another side the machine-gun rapid-fire pops of hundreds of dribbled basketballs on the concrete exercise yard and the sound of popcorn popping as 50 ping pong balls are slapped with bare wooden paddles and bounced on concrete tables located underneath your windows; and from yet another side the sounds of people noisily clomping up and down the adjacent stairs or people in an adjacent concrete cubicle playing a Chinese movie on the television loud enough for the entire building to participate in the audio bombardment.

Inside the concrete cubicle you sit theater style facing the front of the room, in a semi-isolation cubicle if in a sound lab, for nine hours each day. There are no English signs or notices posted on the walls, no decorations to instill any thoughts about the West, its culture, or its language. There are two Chinese signs on the front wall, one says, “No Talking In Class” and the other says, “When You Speak Use Mandarin Only.” There are no maps or globe of the outside world. You are deprived of any and all English newspapers, magazines or periodicals. There is no western music or television. And worst of all, no one speaks to you in English, not even those sitting next to you, let alone any of the other forty plus occupants of the cubicle. You are forced to watch Chinese movies or be completely bored.

Suddenly, but on cue, an authority figure enters your cubicle and announces that you will now learn English as a foreign/second language and you are snapped into the reality that you are now in an environment where you are required to not only learn but to “master” English as a foreign/second language. Your English teacher stands in front of the two Chinese signs that advise against talking in class or when you must, only use Mandarin. Your teacher commences to teach you English using Mandarin.

No, this is not punishment, not a prison, not a concentration camp, not a re-education camp or some other type of detention facility. You are a free spirit! Free that is to “master” English and do it within the next three years or four years by memorizing a vocabulary of 1,000 to 5,000 words, memorizing grammatical rules and memorizing set phrases or language patterns.

Outside your cubical you are constantly bombarded with Mandarin over the campus-wide loudspeaker system and in the written notices and bulletins posted on the public information boards around the campus, but nothing in English. Even the posted notice advising of an impending English Corner is written in Chinese characters. You note the absence of English reading materials in the brand new \$3.5 mil. College library; the

absence of English music CDs, English DVD movies or television programs; the blaring Chinese movies in the cafeteria; the total absence of English signs or decoration anywhere on campus; and the lack of any inducement to speak English. When you go to the English department offices, all of the staff and students are communicating in Mandarin. You observe that the English department staff meetings are held in Mandarin. There are no staffs in the college library, cafeteria or store that speak English. No staff in the College President's Office or other college administrative offices speaks English. The campus medical clinic and post office staffs also speak only in Mandarin.

There is nothing special or attractive about being an English major and there is no inducement to acquire English as a foreign/second language, just learn it as it is taught to you by your Mandarin speaking teachers who predominantly speak and teach in their L1 using a "chalk and talk" methodology.

The above-described environment violates every principle set forth by Krashen for establishing a friendly English acquisition environment. (Krashen 1989)

Acquisition requires meaningful interaction in the target language - natural communication - in which speakers are concerned not with the form of their utterances but with the messages they are conveying and understanding. ... The best methods are therefore those that supply 'comprehensible input' in low anxiety situations, containing messages that students really want to hear. These methods do not force early production in the second language, but allow students to produce when they are 'ready', recognizing that improvement comes from supplying communicative and comprehensible input, and not from forcing and correcting production. Stephen Krashen

It also constitutes Chinese immersion rather than English immersion.

Learning English needs a language environment. Without it, people have to spend a lot more time on memorizing. For many of the learners, even they have tried hard, they still achieve very little. ... Here is the dilemma: on the one hand English is compulsory in school, on the other hand, there is no language environment in the society. Professor Gu Haibing, National Economic Management Department, Remin University. (China Daily, 11/3/03)

EFL/ESL students require comprehensible input within a friendly, no stress environment,

to acquire the target language, which should be taught in the target language. (Krashen 1997) Chinese English majors with adequate financial resources study abroad where there is a friendly English language environment. By studying abroad the Chinese student is immersed in an English language environment.

In the real world, conversations with sympathetic native speakers who are willing to help the acquirer understand are very helpful. Stephen Krashen

But for the majority of Chinese students this approach is not realistic. As Professor Haibing points out and the above described English language environment at a Chinese college portrays; Chinese colleges not only fail to provide a friendly English acquisition environment, they actually seem to go out of their way, either through design or ignorance, to create an environment that is hostile to English acquisition.

Why don't Chinese colleges and universities make the most modest attempt to create a friendly English acquisition environment for their English majors? It seems to us a matter of common sense that if going abroad is the preferred manner of learning English due to immersion in a friendly English environment, then for those who are financially embarrassed, the Chinese college should at least make a modest attempt to bring "abroad" to the Chinese college campus.

Merely hiring a few foreign experts to visit with the students a couple of hours a week does not constitute the creation of a friendly English acquisition environment when all of the other daily input is Chinese. Students must have free library access to diverse English reading materials (books for all ages and language development stages including comic books, magazines, newspapers, novels, journals, classics, as opposed to English textbooks) since comprehensible input will be different for each student based upon their stage of English language development and learning speed differentials. They must also have free library access to English music (English CDs at 8 rmb each), movies (English DVDs at 6 rmb each), and television (CCTV Channel 9 (English) International). Free access in this sense means freedom to choose interesting and understandable materials (comprehensible input); freedom to decide when to access the materials; and freedom from the stress of doing assignments in preparation for a test (friendly environment).

Acquiring English should become a matter of enjoyment and fun in the sense of a little child finding themselves alone and unsupervised in a candy store.

The student should receive as much daily comprehensible input in the target language as possible which means the college should have bilingual signage; the English department should have English only signage; the English department should conduct all of its business in English; within the English department there should be a communicate in

English only rule; class schedules, class rosters, notices to students and memoranda and other communications with staff should all be in English; the English department should be decorated with things English; the English department should be readily identifiable as a “little English enclave” even to the casual observer. Walking into the English department should be like walking into another world, an English-speaking world.

When a Chinese student goes abroad, they are forced to acquire English very rapidly or face the probability that their basic needs will go unmet. This is made easier due to the immersion in everything English. The same should be true in the Chinese college English department.

Is the cost to create such a friendly English acquisition environment much more than the cost to send one Chinese student abroad?

WHAT IS THE CHINESE ENGLISH STUDENT’S FAVORITE WINE?

There is a New York joke that goes like this:

Question: What is the favorite wine of a New York Jewish princess?

Answer: I’d rather be in Miami!

(This is a play on the words “wine” and “whine” which are both pronounced the same, at least by New Yorkers. The favorite Jewish “wine” is Manishevits. A “Jewish Princess” is a young, drop-dead gorgeous Jewish girl who demands the best of everything, including spending New York’s cold winters enjoying the warm sunshine of Miami, Florida.) How many Chinese English scholars would understand this joke without the background explanation?

Ask any foreign expert what is the favorite wine (sic) of Chinese English students and the resounding answer is: “My English is so poor, how can I make it better?”

In response to this “whine” the foreign expert explains the difference between language learning through traditional “chalk and talk” teaching methodology with rote memorization as its core, and language acquisition through comprehensible input in a friendly English acquisition environment. The teacher explains the need for the student to take charge of their own learning experience and to become both responsible and accountable for free reading, free listening, free film or television watching, and constant oral practice. (Krashen 1989) The EFL/ESL teacher explains that English should be spoken during class breaks, in the dormitory, in the halls, in the cafeteria, and that questions of the Chinese English teachers should be asked in English and answers should be demanded in English.

Professor Gu Haibing stresses, “for English today, especially the study of spoken English, practice is very important.” (China Daily 11/3/03)

During the next class break the foreign expert observes that the students are still communicating with each other in Chinese. That evening the foreign expert calls one of his student’s dormitory rooms to hear the phone answered “Wei! Ni Hao!.” The next day the foreign expert observes his students speaking Chinese in the cafeteria and asking Chinese English teachers’ questions in Chinese. Two of his students prepare a notice of English corner to be posted on the campus, and you guessed it, the notice is written in Chinese.

The following week, at the end of the class, the foreign expert asks the standard question: “Do you have any questions?” At least one student inquires, “My English is so poor, how can I make it better?” The foreign expert’s inaudible reply goes something like this: *(You lazy no good for nothing S.O.B., why don’t you try getting off your dead a** and do a little work like reading, listening, and speaking more. You might also try coming to class more often. Do you honestly think your English will improve by repeating your stupid question every dam* week that you do decide to grace us with your presence in this class, which is not very often?)* The audible reply goes like this: “You must read more, listen more and speak more. You may also try coming to class more often so you hear all of the lectures and do not ask for material to be repeated.” Of course, since most school libraries are lacking in English materials, this does require the student to search out their own learning materials.

“Without practice, the level of oral English of some people who have studied English for many years may not match those vendors at the foot of the Great Wall who often speak English with foreigners while hawking their commodities.” (Haibin, China Daily, 11/3/03)

There is a lot to be said for only allowing students interested in learning and acquiring English to participate in English classes and to stop using English as the great warehouse to store people until the job market expands to afford them a viable employment opportunity or worse still, to simply keep them off the streets and out of trouble. Student motivation is an indisputable crucial component of any educational process. Unmotivated students do not learn. (Krashen 1988)

IS IT INEVITABLE THAT ALTHOUGH WE TEACH THEM ENGLISH, THEY WILL LEARN CHINGLISH?

The purpose of all language is effective communication.

“Pidgin” English is understood amongst the native Hawaiian people and it also enables

them to effectively communicate with the English-speaking foreigners who are occupying their homeland. “Singlish” is an effective form of English communication amongst the people of Singapore and their English speaking world trading partners, business associates and tourists.

In fact, almost every nation that has adopted English as a second language has developed a form of English that can be readily used by the lowest common denominator within its own people’s abilities to communicate and to still have effective communications with the native English speaker. Regional Englishes abound worldwide.

There may be some purists who look down upon “Chinglish” or anything less than “perfect English” but of course their definition of what perfect English is will also depend upon which of the 7 standard English forms they consider to be their native form or “pure English.” (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, 6th Edition.) There are some who argue that there are many more “standard Englishes.”

China is a developing Nation and is well within its rights to develop a form of English or regional English that best suits its general population’s need to communicate with each other as well as with native English speakers, while insisting on a more refined proper English or standard English, (Jiang Yajun, 1995) only for its official translators and some groups of professionals such as lawyers, accountants, scientists, medical doctors, etc. (Shanghai Star 10-24-02,).

Chinglish is not a bad thing! In point of fact, it is inevitable (Jiang Yajun, (1995)

Some professionals believe that as long as one knows 1,000 to 2,000 vocabularies, basic grammars, simple dialogues and the way to check into a dictionary or relevant software, he or she would be able to use English as an important tool in their future work and studies. (China Daily, 11/3/93) Certain Municipal Governments require all of their civil servants to have a minimum of 1,000 English words in their vocabulary. (China Daily, 10-05-02) This official policy forces Chinese speakers of Mandarin to sprinkle a few English words in to give a little English flavor to their Mandarin. This is nothing less than an officially sanctioned and promulgated form of Chinglish.

WHAT’S IN A NAME?

At a 3rd tier college in Henan Province with a total student enrollment in excess of 5,000 and an English department of 600 majors, 20 Chinese English teachers and two foreign experts; it is difficult for the staff and even the students to recognize each other on campus or in town. It would be beneficial for the English department staff and the students to be

able to identify each other at all times so they would identify with each other and also know when it would be appropriate to use their English.

All students are required to wear nametags but the English majors wear the same Chinese nametag as the other students. This works to the disadvantage of creating a friendly English acquisition environment and is a missed opportunity to create an exclusive club identity, which is so important in creating proper language acquisition motivation. This is but one example of where an informed administrator could implement a simple, cost free administrative change that would help create a better language acquisition environment.

Chinese English teachers are predominantly known to their students by their Chinese name and many such teachers do not even require their students to have proper English names. In a completely unscientific study, it was observed that if a student addresses their Chinese English teacher by their Chinese name, it is highly likely that the ensuing conversation will also be in Chinese. However, it has also been observed that when a student addresses their Chinese English teacher by their English name, the ensuing conversation is more likely to be in English. If further scientific study bears this out, then all Chinese English teachers should be required to use their English name.

As has already been noted, many English majors are not required to take English names. It has also been observed that when English majors do take English names, they tend to look in a dictionary and assume an English word rather than a name. Some students have assumed such bizarre “names” as:

Chinese; God; Raingirl; Peak; Money; Cash; Moonbeam; Success; Crayon; Ship; Vessel; Silent; Orange; Apple; Candy; Cookie; Cappacino (sic) *Cappuccino*, etc.

These “names” go uncorrected by the Chinese English teachers.

It has also been observed that the boys who take seats in the back of the room and assume such names as Hitler and Stalin turn out to be the habitual failures. It may be interesting to study the correlation to see if assuming the power name influences the failure of academic performance.

WHAT IS WORSE: STUDENTS WHO CHEAT THE SYSTEM OR A SYSTEM THAT CHEATS THE STUDENTS?

Students cheating on tests, students engaging in plagiarism, students manufacturing fake diplomas and credentials, and school administrators' falsification of students' records are rampant practices throughout China's universities and colleges, both public and private. Of this there is neither doubt nor dispute. (Qiang/Wolff, 2003, in press, “Chinese University Diploma: Can Its International Image Be Improved?”)

The Ministry of Education has taken a strong stand against exam cheating by announcing that anyone caught cheating on college entrance exams would have their names published for public humiliating purposes i.e. loss of face. (China Daily, (7/8/02)

Official reaction to the call of the Ministry of Education to crack down on rampant cheating in universities has been limited, but very positive.

Beijing University will not only punish exam cheats who hire a surrogate test taker but will also punish the surrogate who takes an exam for another. Electronic instruments such as personal data assistants, calculators with higher memory function and communications equipment like mobile phones will be excluded from exams. The new rules will also punish students who attempt to plead with, threaten or bribe a professor. (China Daily, (6/28/02)

Peking University has adopted new rules to curb plagiarism on essays and thesis. The punishment can result in failing a course and even loss of the opportunity to complete the requirements for a degree. (China Daily Hong Kong Edition, 7/5/02) Li Ki'an the head of the Academic Affairs Office says that the new rules "are meant to curb the rampant problem of cheating."

Fujian Normal University has expelled a PhD candidate and three Masters degree candidates because they sat a college English test for other students. The Chinese University of Science and Technology punished eight students for either hiring test takers or for sitting an examination for someone else. (China Daily Hong Kong Edition, 1/16/03)

In China grades are meted out on a predominantly "A", "B", or "C" standard. Teachers are loath to offend a student with a "D" or "F" for various reasons discussed in "Chinese University Diploma: Can Its International Image Be Improved" Qiang/Wolff, 2003.

This results in English majors graduating without the knowledge and skills represented by the diploma. This is a fraud upon the students whose diploma is a representation to them that they have acquired the knowledge and skills represented by the diploma. It is also a fraud upon the parents who financed the student's college education and are led to believe that their child has made a major accomplishment other than just sitting through a university education. It is also a fraud upon the student's future employer who will rely upon the college diploma when making the initial employment decision, only to subsequently realize that the student is totally unqualified for the job.

But worst of all, it is a fraud perpetrated upon a society that believes that a highly educated workforce will lead to a better-off society and therefore expends huge amounts of resources on higher education. The college graduate with the unearned diploma is qualified

to do little more than be a “highly educated” laborer with a college diploma. Society will only be advanced on paper and in the minds of its members, while the goal of a better-off society will have been lost to the disillusionment of reality as these “educated” college graduates fail to make meaningful contributions to society.

CONCLUSION

There is something terribly amiss with EFL/ESL teaching in China.

The major clue to what is wrong is found in the statements of Deng Di and He Mei found at pg. 8 and 9 of this article. But what should be resonating in our minds, like the clap of thunder rolling just above our heads, is the question of the anonymous business English major at Xinyang Agricultural College, “What use is a degree from this college when I can only get a job as a laborer?” This question speaks volumes about the poor quality of EFL/ESL teaching in China rather than constituting a comment on the job market.

Until the euphoria of EFL/ESL teaching and the huge economic business sector it has spawned are put into proper perspective, China will continue to waste its valuable resources producing more EFL/ESL failures than successes.

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