

China English and College English Teaching in China: A Perspective of Identity Negotiation Theory

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Abstract: With the development of globalization, English, as a tool for communication, has become a lingua franca with more and more language varieties. China English, as one of the English varieties and the product of intercultural communication between China and other English-speaking countries, is becoming more and more important in introducing Chinese culture and civilization to the outside world. However, many Chinese English learners who have even studied English for a long time still haven't the full competence in introducing Chinese culture to foreigners, which hinders the intercultural communication. China English is the product of identity negotiation and it forms and develops in the process of seeking identity recognition and preventing identity crisis in Chinese people's intercultural communication with foreigners. China English becomes a good choice in eliminating the phenomenon of "Chinese cultural aphasia". However, it hasn't been fully understood and is basically excluded in English teaching in China. Based on the definition of China English and its relationship with Identity Negotiation Theory, this paper aims to explore the deficiencies and problems that are related to China English and Chinese culture in college English teaching. The corresponding countermeasures to those deficiencies and problems are also discussed.

Key words: China English, Identity Negotiation Theory, college English teaching in China

1. Introduction

The enormous development of world economy brings about the globalization, which promotes more and more international communications among countries. The boom of intercultural communication has made a great impact on different kinds of languages and cultures in the world. English, as a lingua franca used by people from different cultures, is undergoing its tremendous changes in two contradictory trends. One is the globalization trend of English. As an international language, English has found its way in the field of politics, law, trade, public media and education in many countries. Nowadays, it is the official or semi-official language in more than 60 countries and occupies a dominant position of languages in more than 20 countries (Crystal, 2003:360). In the intercultural communications, English has a great amount of contacting with other languages and cultures all over the world, causing many varieties of English which leads to another trend--- the nativization of English. There exist many English varieties, such as Australia English, Malaysia English, Singapore English, Nigeria English, Japanese English and China English, etc. As English is being spoken by such great population, its varieties are also

increasing. China English, as the product of intercultural communication between China and other English-speaking countries, is an objective existence and is becoming more and more important and necessary in the communication of the characteristics and connotation of Chinese culture. English, as the chief foreign language, has been taught in Chinese schools for many years. In retrospect, Chinese English teaching emphasize more on the study of Standard English, including not only the English language knowledge but also the cultures in English speaking countries. In English learning, Chinese learners have increased access to authentic English materials mainly from British English or American English and they are becoming more and more familiar with the English cultures, life styles, the social values and even the ways of thinking of the native English people. However, it is a common phenomenon that many English learners in China often find it difficult to explain the culture with Chinese characteristics to foreigners even though most of them have finished their English study and graduated from college or university. Nearly ten-year English study in school has provided them with sufficient knowledge of English language but many of them still can't freely communicate with native English speakers about Chinese culture. This just reflects the defects in English teaching in China. This paper, based on the explanation and analysis of China English from the perspective of Identity Negotiation Theory, aims to discover the deficiencies in college English teaching in China and then propose some suggestions correspondently.

2. China English

2.1 The Definition of China English

There are many studies about China English since the issue was early proposed by Ge Chuangui in his article *A Discussion on Chinese-English Translation* more than 30 years ago. But until now, there is no universal agreement on the definition of China English. Ge (1980) regards China English as an inevitable outcome in expressing phenomena specific in Chinese culture, such as Four Books(四书), Five Classics(五经) and May Fourth Movement(五四运动). He further generalized three characteristics of China English: first, China English refers to the vocabulary used to express Chinese specific culture; second, China English may bring about complaints from foreigners, but it can be understood by explanation; third, China English should follow the rules of English. In this definition, China English is restricted just to the lexical level. Later, Wang Rongpei (1991) states that China English is an objective existence and he extends and develops the study of China English from the perspective of the relationship between language and culture at the phonetic, lexical, grammatical and pragmatic levels. His definition of China English is that China English, used by Chinese people in native China, has the Standard English as the core but with Chinese characteristics. Li Wenzhong reveals his disagreement with Wang's definition of China English in his article. Li (1993) defines China English as an English variety with Normative English as its core and free from the mother tongue interference. It is used to express the specific phenomena in Chinese culture and society. Chinese linguistic characteristics are transferred into English by means of transliteration, loan translation and semantic regeneration at the aspects of lexis, syntax and discourse. Xie Zhijun (1995) holds different opinions against Li Wenzhong. He argues that China English is an influenced variety and belongs to World Englishes. It is based on Normative English and used by Chinese people in intercultural communication. The interference is caused by the Chinese language, culture and thinking pattern. The frequencies of use and communication effect of China English are related to the linguistic proficiency of English users. Wang

Zhixin (1999) also regards China English as the Chinese variety of English. He holds that English should be divided into two aspects: one is linguistic Englishness which is determined by the structure rule and reflected in linguistic competence; the other is cultural Englishness determined by the pragmatic rules and reflected in pragmatic competence. Thus China English is defined as an equation: China English = Linguistic Englishness + Cultural Chineseness. The definition given by Pan Zhangxian (2005:4) provides a broad definition of China English. Pan proposes that CVE (Chinese Varieties of English), in its broad sense, refers to English used by the speakers with Chinese linguistic and cultural background. It has the Chinese linguistic and cultural identities. It can reach the aim of communication and can be accepted by English speakers with other linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Although there is no consensus agreement on the definition of China English, we can summarize some features and properties of China English from the above definitions. First, China English is used by Chinese people with Chinese linguistic, social and cultural background to communicate with the English speaking people. Second, China English takes Normative English as its core and has formed its own comparatively stable features in pronunciation, lexicon, syntax and discourse. It is considered as an accepted variety. Third, China English with its Chinese characteristics to express things peculiar to China helps to promote the intercultural communication between China and other English speaking countries.

2.2 The Differences between China English and Chinese English

The terms China English and Chinese English are often used interchangeably for the two both have Chinese features, involving elements of interlanguage. Actually, they are completely distinguished. China English is a variety based on Normative English by means of transliteration, translation-loan and semantic reproducing to describe things existed only in China. China English has the stable linguistic features in phonetic, lexical, grammatical and pragmatic levels and it contributes much to the international communication. Nevertheless, Chinese English is the negative transfer of mother tongue in English learning for Chinese learners. It is a kind of anomalous English which ignores the basic grammatical structure of English. The Chinese speakers intend to express in English with the Chinese linguistic rules and customs. The meaning may be clear to Chinese people, but it is non-normative and cannot be accepted and understood by native speakers. For example, the Chinese idiom phrase “人山人海” is often translated into Chinese English like *People mountain people sea*, which is an absolutely bewildering one for the native people (the correct translation should be *a sea of people*). Chinese English impedes rather than promotes the intercultural communication, so it should be avoided in communication as possible as we can. Therefore, China English and Chinese English should be treated differently and the English with Chinese characteristics should not be rejected completely in English teaching and learning. The existence of China English is objective and has its theoretical foundation.

3. Identity Negotiation Theory

The idea that identities are negotiated originated in the sociological literature during the middle of the 20th century. Many scholars have studied this from different perspectives. Stella T. Toomey, a well-known professor of Human Communication Studies at California State University, applied the concept of Identity Negotiation in the field of intercultural communication. In the book *Communication across Cultures*, she introduces the identity

negotiation theory in details and then put forward her ideas for successful intercultural communication. Identity is regarded as “reflective self-images constructed, experienced, and communicated by the individuals within a culture and in a particular interaction situation” (Toomey, 2007). It refers to the processes through which people reach agreements regarding “who is who” in their relationships. Once these agreements are reached, people are expected to remain faithful to the identities they have agreed to assume. Identity satisfies a demand for some degree of stability and security in people and is enacted in every human interaction. The construction of identity is a dynamic process in which communicators continually negotiate with each other. And the concept negotiation refers to “a transactional interaction process whereby individuals in an intercultural situation attempt to assert, define, modify, challenge, and / or support their own and other’s desired self-images”(Toomey, 2007). That is to say, identity negotiation is a mutual communication activity in which the communicators always attempt to evoke their own desired identities in the interaction while, at the same time, they also attempt to challenge or support the other people’s identities. Toomey holds that “the effective identity negotiation process between two interactants in a novel communication episode” is an important foundation for intercultural communication competence. The theory assumes that people in all cultures desire both positive group-based and person-based identities in any types of communicative situation. The key of identity negotiation theory is the consideration for the security and the vulnerability. It explains how self-concept greatly influences one’s cognition, emotion and interaction. In this theory, identity negotiation is the precondition for successful intercultural communication and identity or introspection is regarded as the explanatory mechanism in the process of intercultural communication. The process of identity negotiation establishes what people can expect of one another and thus provides the interpersonal “glue” that holds relationships together.

4. Identity Negotiation Theory and China English

First, China English is a natural product in the process of seeking identity recognition and preventing identity crisis in Chinese people’s intercultural communication. Identity Negotiation Theory elaborates that the acquirement of group or individual identity and the pursuit of identity safety are the common motives existing in communication. The individuals or ethnic groups in any cultures have the same need in identity safety, trust, tolerance, relationship and stabilization. The recognition of group or individual identity is realized by communicating with others. It is easy for one to acquire the identity safety in familiar cultural context while feel vulnerable in unfamiliar cultural context. People often have the sense of trust when contacting others with the same cultural background. Conversely, one may have the sense of distrust when communicating with others from a completely different culture. It is a common phenomenon that many Chinese people mastering American English or British English well still speak English with Chinese characteristics. The Chinese accent shows the speakers’ Chinese ethnic identity, which would resonate among Chinese people in the world and help maintain the speakers’ identity safety. The culture between China and English countries has too much discrepancy, which leads to a lot of pragmatic failures for the intercultural communication. For example, praised by others, people often respond like “Thank you” or “I’m glad you like it” in English, which completely differs from that in Chinese culture. Chinese people get used to be modest by downgrading themselves, which shows their respect for others. In this state, they could not help themselves saying, “No, You flatter me!” even though the speakers understand

English language and culture well. Saying like this makes them have the sense of belonging. This response reflects the Chinese speakers' value and their internal need of identity safety. Meanwhile, it is much easier for listener to judge their identity. So, in order to avoid misunderstanding and be accepted by foreigners, Chinese people may need to further explain the Chinese cultures and customs to others. If all speakers must strictly follow the rules and principles in English culture, the identity crisis and vulnerability would appear, which definitely increases the anxiety and conservatism in communication. Therefore, in the smooth intercultural communication, it is not necessary for one side of the communicators to give up their own cultural identity to accommodate themselves to another side. The key to success in interaction is whether the both sides, through communicating, can build up a new cultural structure, the so-called Third Culture proposed by Samovar and Porter. The third culture contains the cultural features of the two communicating parties and is the product of mutual adaptation and adjustment in communication. The formation of the third culture is actually a process of negotiation. For example, the negotiation exists in the transliteration of Chinese names. Chinese people used to follow the English custom of putting given name before surname when introducing their names. Nowadays, it is very common for Chinese people, according to Chinese custom, to put surname before given name in transliteration of names, which suggests acceptance in Chinese people's eyes and has reached a consensus among Chinese people. When English native people doubt about this transliteration, Chinese people may feel being discriminated against rather than being tolerated. In order to get a good communication and interpersonal relationships, the Chinese people may further explain like this, "We know that you say names with given name before surname, but according to our tradition, surname goes first." This is actually a process of identity negotiation. This transliteration of names according with Chinese custom complies with the Chinese people's expectancy for ethnic cultural identity. If not still accepted by foreigners after explanation, the usage would be recognized and accepted by Chinese people independently out of their psychological identification. The collective ethnic identity of Chinese people requires that Chinese people should keep their own culture and stick to their own principle, which promotes the emergence of China English in intercultural communication.

Second, China English is the product of identity negotiation in intercultural communication and, on the other hand, China English greatly promotes the most effective intercultural communication. Language is the tools for people's cultural identity because language is the important expression means of cultural identity. Cultural identity decides not only the language people choose but also the way and the information people intend to transfer in communication (Rogers & Steinfatt, 1999). Combined with the Chinese culture, English has gradually been evolving to China English, which just bears out the fact that Chinese people could acquire group and individual identity safety when speaking China English with their familiar Chinese characteristics. Intercultural communication is a two-way interactive process in which people can not only communicate by language but also get the satisfactory communication results for both sides through the transmission of culture and the negotiation of identity. It is very necessary to insist on the principle of multivariate equality in international interaction. Asante (Li, 2007:5) points out that "Intercultural communication as a harmonious endeavor seeks to create the sharing of power." Effective communication must be based on the equality of both sides because the share of meaning is the fundamental prerequisite of understanding. Shapcott (Asante, 2007:26) proposes that "Communication involves a

formulation of equality that does not require the assimilation of the identity of the other.” Intercultural communication is a process of information exchange between different cultures and it will not be effective if an interlocutor abandons his/her cultural identity. It is helpful for people to build trust and reduce bias by explaining the characteristics and the code of conduct of one’s own culture to the other party. The positive negotiation in identity brings about understanding, respect, agreement and support. Only through China English can Chinese culture really go to the world better than before. China English as a member of World Englishes has established its legal status and become the powerful tool for Chinese people to communicate with the people in other English-speaking countries.

5. Implications for Chinese College English Teaching

Kachru(1985:213) holds that, “China English is the nativization of English as the result of those productive linguistic innovations which were determined by the localized functions, the culture of conversation and communicative strategies in new situations and transfer from local language.” As a product of identity negotiation in intercultural communication, China English undoubtedly has become a realistic existence and a particular English variety with localized linguistic and cultural features. However, the fact is that many Chinese people often find it difficult to communicate with foreigners about traditional Chinese culture even though they have learned English for many years. This phenomenon of “Chinese cultural aphasia” absolutely shows the deficiency and problems in English teaching. A really comprehensive understanding of China English may help solve the problems in English language teaching. In this paper, the present author mainly focuses on the college English teaching.

5.1. The Problems in College English Teaching

English education in China over the years has been emphasized on learning Standard English which refers to the two main varieties---British English and American English. The truth is that when people need to express something peculiar to Chinese culture, it is often difficult for them to find the exact ready-made equivalents in the English language. China English is the best choice to solve this problem. However, due to the lack of correct understanding of China English, many educators and teachers often overemphasize the original English teaching, rejecting any English materials with Chinese characteristics. The linguistic features of China English in the phonetic, lexical, grammatical and pragmatic levels are even regarded as mistakes. The concepts of China English and Chinese English are not distinguished clearly in English teaching. China English, the most useful tool for intercultural communication has been excluded in English class.

On the other hand, any language teaching must contain culture teaching. For many years, culture education has been emphasized in China English teaching, including the college English teaching. People have realized the close relationship between culture and language and the importance of culture study in language learning. But the culture education is only limited to the English culture and there is almost no home culture involved in teaching. Educators have come to attach greater importance to teaching western cultures and they tend to neglect the teaching of home culture. Chinese students’ inability to express what is particular to the Chinese culture is at least partly caused by this neglect. Chinese students are getting familiar with the English culture which inadvertently influences their way of life, values and code of conduct. Many of them begin to admire western ways of life,

political and economic systems and even turn a critical attitude towards their home culture and traditional values. Their national spirit is in the gradual loss. In 1990s, an authoritative American magazine focusing on China study once proposed that the core crisis in China was the identity crisis. The identity crisis actually refers to the crisis of national cultural identity. In fact, different cultures have different values and norms of behavior and there is no inferiority or superiority in any of these norms. The “cultural self-contempt” and the deficiency of home culture knowledge disable them to show their cultural quality and independent personality in intercultural communication. Only the combination of home culture education and English culture education can develop the competence in intercultural communication. The adaptation to English culture is the requirement and premise rather than the result and destination of intercultural communication. In college English teaching, the education of home cultural should be put on the agenda to develop students’ two-way communicative competence.

Fortunately, China national ministry of education has realized the problem and made some reforms in College English Test in 2013. Among the changes, the Chinese-English translation had been turned into short passage translation from sentence translation. The translation just involves the Chinese culture, history, economy and social development, etc. This presents that the competence of translating the passage about China’s national conditions or culture into English has become a new goal for college English teaching. In 2015, the *New Guidelines for College English Teaching* (the draft) was released by ministry of education definitely proposes that both foreign and Chinese cultures should be involved in English teaching and the learners should be able to handle well with the differences in cultures and values and could use correct communication strategies in intercultural communication. The reform puts forward new requirements to college English teaching. Compared with the requirement in test, however, the reform of the teaching appears to be lagging. There is still deficiency of home culture in college teaching materials. Here we take the textbooks--- *New College English* (2nd Edition) as an example. The textbooks, published by Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press are now one of the authoritative textbooks commonly used in college English teaching. There are three kinds of courses involved: *integrated course, listening and speaking course and reading course*. No matter what course books are used, we could easily find that all the passages are authentic and original and created by writers from English-speaking countries. The English cultures play a dominating role in cultural education. There isn’t any Chinese culture introduction at all, not to mention the contrast of Chinese and foreign cultures. Even though the Chinese learners know their home culture well from other studies, they basically can’t express what is peculiar to Chinese culture in English, which leads to the “Chinese cultural aphasia”. In other textbooks of college English teaching, such as *New Horizon College English, Experiencing English*, Chinese culture only makes up a small proportion of the culture content. If English teachers, guided by the textbooks, don’t value the home culture education enough and have no introduction of Chinese culture as the supplementary materials for the textbooks, the English teaching must not be conducive to the building of learners’ national cultural identity and cultural equality consciousness.

5.2 The Pedagogical Suggestions for College English Teaching

5.2.1 To Strengthen the Correct and Full Understanding of China English

Although the study of China English tells us that the existence of China English is objective, many Chinese still believe that the goal of English learning is to be native-like both in the aspects of linguistics and

culture. Therefore, the learners in China have to eliminate their Chinese linguistic and cultural identities in English. However, in reality, everyone speaks it with an accent and these linguistic and cultural characteristics in a local variety of English are inevitable. Maintaining local cultural identity is necessary for mutual understanding in intercultural communication. China English, with the Chinese linguistic and cultural characteristics transferred into it, is a member in World Englishes. It is equal to other English varieties and is helpful to spread Chinese civilization and culture to the world. So the traditional idea of taking China English as the interference and damage to Standard English should be changed. China English is not inferior to other English varieties and should be used by Chinese people confidently, which would surely promote the success in intercultural communication.

5.2.2 To Improve the Chinese Culture input in college English teaching

5.2.2.1 To Readjust the Teaching Materials in College English Teaching

Teaching materials with textbook as the main form play an very important role in English education. They should undertake the function of improving students' linguistic competence and intercultural communicative competence. Since at present the reasons for students' incompetence of expressing Chinese culture in English can be partially traced in the neglect of home culture in textbooks, the corresponding measures should be taken to make up for the defect. Jia Yuxin (1997:9) points out that "language education should be cultural education. And in foreign language teaching, culture includes both home culture and foreign culture." There has been a great amount English culture from customs to values has been presented in the teaching materials. What we should do is to add Chinese cultural contents into textbooks and increase the learners' access to Chinese culture in English. The study of Chinese culture in English would certainly help Chinese learners use English fluently in Chinese cultural context.

Chinese culture is very rich and profound and it is impossible to encompass all in one set of textbook. When selecting language materials, we can firstly use the teaching materials for foreigners to learn Chinese language for reference. This is a well-developed discipline in which the teaching content of Chinese culture is selected systematically and Chinese culture can be learnt step by step which just meets the needs of the students in intercultural communication. Secondly, the English literatures written by oversea bilingual Chinese writers are also good choice for the content of textbooks. Among them, the writers, such as Chang Ailing, Lin Yutang and Ha Jin, have left us amount of excellent works to appreciate. Thirdly, the teaching materials can come from the English versions of newspapers, websites, TV media and so on. Those abundant materials are almost closely attached to China's current events, characteristic cultures and people's daily life. An integration of these materials connected with Chinese society and cultures which the learners are familiar with will not only increase the intelligibility of English but also enable the learners to articulate their thoughts in English. These teaching contents also comply with the psychological need of national cultural identity and would improve learners' competence of intercultural communication.

5.2.2.2 To Adopt the Comparative Cultural Teaching Method

Comparative study of Chinese and western culture is an affective method in intercultural communication education. As is known to all, any kinds of foreign language learning are carried out under the condition of the mastery of mother language. College students' organs of speech and thinking have developed with maturity and

the direct and strong connection has been established between their thinking and native mother language. In the process of foreign language learning, the information transferred by foreign language and its culture would definitely be filtered first by native mother language. Hence, the influence of mother language and culture in foreign language learning is inevitable, which also illustrates the possibility and importance of comparative cultural teaching in foreign language education. There are both differences and commonness between Chinese and western cultures. The comparative study of two cultures can help the students deepen the understanding of the two cultures and thus improve their communicative competence. Intercultural communicative competence includes three parts: the sensitivity to cultural differences, the tolerance for cultural differences and the flexibility of dealing with cultural differences. A deep understanding in both mother and western cultures would inevitably produce sensitive cultural awareness. The students can not only recognize the difference of cultures, accept and deal with flexibly the differences but also know how to eliminate social conflicts caused by cultural differences. In teaching, we can firstly focus on the differences and the commonness between Chinese and western cultures in customs, social interaction and behavior patterns, values, ways of thinking and so on. Secondly, we can conduct our cultural comparative study from the learning of the culture-loaded words which are the most recognizable expressions of Chinese specific culture and carry on great differences between the two cultures. There are lots of loan words in China English, such as taoism, jiaozi, litchi, Confucianism, Cultural Revolution, paper tiger, tofu, spring festival, open-door policy and so on. The culture contained in these loan words can be explained in English, which will help the students understand Chinese culture from a new angle.

5.2.2.3 To Promote Teacher's Self-improvement in Cultural Education

Foreign language teacher plays a very important role in the cultural education. Besides English language proficiency, college English teachers should have enough knowledge of both western culture and native culture and intercultural awareness to achieve the teaching goal of improving students' intercultural communication competence. Moreover, teacher should be able to introduce Chinese culture in English and can compare and contrast home culture and western culture with skills. However, According to Xu Zhaoyang (2009), 80 % of Chinese English teachers are in the middle age between 28 to 48 years old and the vast majority of them received test-oriented education when they were young. Most of them are in lack of the full understanding of Chinese and western cultures and are not likely to teach Chinese culture freely in English. Therefore, it is necessary and urgent for English language teachers to enrich the knowledge of Chinese culture and study more teaching methods of cultural comparison and contrast. Only when teachers have enough knowledge of both Chinese and western cultures and are competent in comparative cultural teaching can learners' competence of intercultural communication be cultivated well.

6. Conclusion

Chinese culture with a long history of five thousand years plays a very important role in the world civilization. Nowadays, the study of Chinese culture is becoming more and more popular. It is a massive project to introduce the precious Chinese culture to the outside world. The emergence of China English has not only offered the access for Chinese culture to go out, but also promoted better communication between the Chinese and western culture. The globalization and nativization of English puts forward new requirements for college English

teaching and learning. China English should be integrated into the English teaching and be used by Chinese learners with confidence, which can not only be helpful to promote successful cultural interaction but also beneficial to keep Chinese people's cultural identity in intercultural communication.

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