False alarm or real warning? Implications for China of teaching English

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Abstract

This paper explores the cultural impact of teaching the English language with particular reference to China. It deals with the following questions: (1) It is said that English is threatening other languages and cultures. For China, is this a false alarm or a real warning? (2) The fact that China has entered the world of English teaching has accelerated the spread of the English language. Is English teaching in China a good idea or not? (3) Language is part of culture. English teaching in China therefore may lead to conflict between two strikingly different cultures: the western and the Chinese. What are the cultural implications of English teaching in China? (4) By teaching the English language, China is making a transition from English as a foreign language to English as a second language. What are the implications of such a transition? In response to these questions, the author argues that Chinese language and culture might not be safe once China enters a bilingual stage and proposes ways to protect them.

Introduction

There are about 6000 languages in the world (Crystal 2000). However no other language can be compared with English in terms of its spread as an international language: 'English and English language teaching seem ubiquitous in the world, playing a role everywhere from large scale global politics to the intricacies of people's lives' (Pennycook 1994, p 5).

According to Crystal (1997), those using English as a second language number 150 to 300 million, while the number of those learning English as a foreign language is estimated to be as high as one billion. The fact that modern society has come to depend on the English language is reflected in English being the major international language in academic publications, education, communications (including the internet and world

wide web), advertising, broadcasting, films, popular music, the Olympics, as well as international relations, travel and safety.

Such a reality shows that our world has entered the age of globalisation of the English language, in which 'most observers see a tendency toward homogeneity of values and norms; others see an opportunity to rescue local identities' (Stromquist & Monkman 2000, p 7). Cooke (1988) compares English to a 'Trojan horse' that will kill other languages and cultures. Skutnabb-Kangas (2001) actually refers to English as a 'murder' language and appeals to the users of English to stop it being a killer and change it to an additive asset. Is English so dangerous to other languages and cultures? For China, is this a false alarm or real warning?

In September 1943, Winston Churchill made a speech at Harvard University. When praising the USA, and especially FD Roosevelt, for taking an interest in English as a universal second language, he compared the Americans to 'the headstream of what might well be a mighty fertilizing and health-giving river' and said: 'Such plans are far better prizes than taking away other people's provinces or land or grinding them down in exploitation. The empires of the future are the empires of the mind' (reprinted in Ogden 1968, p 111).

We might have a clearer understanding of his remarks if we look at what William Russell wrote in 1801:

> If many schools were established in different parts of Asia and Africa to instruct the natives, free of all expense, with various premiums [prizes] of British manufacture to the most meritorious pupils, this would be the best preparatory step that Englishmen could adopt for the general admission of their commerce, their opinions, their religion. This would tend to conquer the heart and its affections; which is far more effectual conquest than that obtained by swords and cannons: and a thousand pounds expended for tutors, books, and premiums would do more to subdue a nation of savages than forty thousand expended for artillery-men, bullets, and gunpowder. (quoted in Crystal 1997, p 70).

During the Second World War, Winston Churchill actually presaged a new order in which colonialism and open physical exploitation were to be replaced by more subtle forms of exploitation in which the English language was to play a very large role (Pennycook 1994).

The British Council (1961, p 16) seemed to appreciate the US policy to foster the spread of English as an international language and expressed its wish to extend what had happened in the US to the whole world: 'Teaching the world English may appear not unlike an extension of the task which America faced in establishing English as a common national language among its own immigrant population'. Ndebele (1987) points out that the British Council continues to be untiring in its efforts to keep the world speaking English, for teaching English as a second language or foreign language is not only good business, but also good politics.

Naysmith (1987) argues that English language teaching has become part of a process whereby one part of the world has become politically, economically and culturally dominated by another. The core of this process is the central place the English language has taken as the language of international capitalism. Having studied the situation of Chamorro in Guam and the Northern Marianas, Day (1985) has concluded that the gradual replacement of Chamorro by English is only one example of the American policy and practice of replacing other languages with English everywhere. 'The very concept of an international language, or world language, was an invention of Western imperialism' (Ndebele 1987, pp 3–4). According to Burchfield (1985), English has become a lingua franca to the point that any literate educated person is in a real sense deprived if he or she does not know English. Crystal argues:

> Perhaps a global language will hasten the disappearance of minority languages, or – the ultimate threat – make all other languages unnecessary … and once a world language is in place, other languages will die away. Linked with all this is the unpalatable face of linguistic triumphalism – the danger that some people will celebrate one language's success at the expense of others. (1997, p 13)

'ELT practices support the global spread of capitalism, for example, or are an instance of cultural imperialism that automatically supports the vested interests of Western nations' (Pennycook 1994, p 179). The move by China to enter the world of English teaching means a great increase in the numbers of people learning English and accelerates the spread of the English language. Is English teaching in China a good idea? What are the implications of the teaching of English for China?

Culture, language and language teaching

To discuss the above issues, it seems necessary to be clear about the relationships between language and culture, and between language teaching and culture teaching.

According to Valdes (1986), when a baby is born it is slapped on the back and made to cry – this much is virtually universal; but from that point on every person's life and most of their world views are shaped largely by their particular environment. Here, Valdes is arguing that culture plays a key role in a person's development. Such a role was noticed even 2500 years ago by Confucius, as seen in *Analects* Ch 17 (Xu 1997): 'While we are similar to one another by nature [in infancy], experience makes us different'. Brooks (1968) argues that, while people everywhere are physiologically and psychologically the same, the patterns emerging from the interaction of personal need and group-approved behaviour will differ, often widely, from one location to another. Emmitt and Pollock (1997) point out that if we come from similar backgrounds our worlds are similar, but if we possess different languages and cultures our worlds may be very different.

In Hantrais' (1989) opinion, culture is the beliefs and practices governing the life of a society for which a particular language is the vehicle of expression. Goodenough

(1964) believes that a society's culture consists of whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members. Therefore culture is not a natural phenomenon; it is the form of things that people have in mind, their models of perceiving, relating and otherwise interpreting them. Thus, 'our culture compels us to recognise distinctions between people, and it does this by giving us language that identifies and marks out those distinctions' (Emmitt & Pollock 1997, p 22).

In terms of relationships between language and culture, Byram (1989) suggests that, as language is part of culture and can capture cultural meanings and experiences, then it is possible to interpret and describe a culture in its language, and that language holds the culture through the denotations and connotations of its semantics. Fanon (1967) believes that to speak a language means above all to assume a culture and to support the weight of a civilisation. Emmitt and Pollock (1997) argue that what language is and how it is used depends on the culture. Pennycook (1994) comments that language is a cultural practice: both language and thinking about language are always located in a very particular social, cultural and political context. As Halliday and Hasan have pointed out:

> The notions of text and context are inseparable: text is language operative in a context of situation and contexts are ultimately construed by the range of texts produced within a community…. One commonsense conception is … that our knowledge, our thoughts, our culture are all there – almost independent of language and just waiting to be expressed by it. (1989, p 117)

From the above, we can see the 'link between structuring experiences in a particular way [culture] and encoding experiences into words [language]' (Fantini 1991, p 111). While language expresses, embodies and symbolises cultural reality (Kramsch 2000), it is also a means by which people perceive or learn something. Thus, knowledge of culture is best imparted as a corollary of language learning (Brooks 1986).

Language is rooted in culture and culture is reflected and passed on by language from one generation to the next (Emmitt & Pollock 1997). Therefore, 'meaning is revealed to be culturally grounded' (Turner 2002, p 14) and learning a new language implies learning about another culture (Allwright & Bailey 1991). Consequently, language teaching is culture teaching (Byram 1989). Politzer (1959) argues that, as language teachers, we must be interested in the study of culture not because we necessarily want to teach the culture of the other country, but because we *have* to teach it. For if we teach language without at the same time teaching the culture in which it operates, we are teaching meaningless symbols or symbols to which students may attach the wrong meaning. Unless they are warned, unless they receive cultural instruction, they will not associate English concepts or objects with the foreign symbols.

Cultural awareness and cultural conflicts in English teaching in China

The fact that language teaching and culture teaching are inseparable inevitably leads to difficulties in the teaching of English as a major foreign language in China. Prodromou (1988) argues that what we teach and especially the way we teach reflects our attitudes to society in general and the individual's place in society. Berlin (1988) believes that every pedagogy is embraced in ideology, in a set of assumptions about what is real, what is good, what is possible, and how power ought to be distributed. Phillipson (1986) believes that applied linguists and English language teaching experts help to legitimate the contemporary capitalist world order and claims that the primary purpose of his own work is to gauge their contribution. Porter (1987, p 369) suggests that Chinese and western educators 'evolve from such different cultural roots that it is no wonder conflicts and misunderstandings dominate historical and modern attempts by foreigners to impact Chinese education'.

Cultural conflicts in the teaching of English in China

The following examples show that, in the teaching of English in China, cultural conflicts exist between the two strikingly different cultures: the western and the Chinese.

English teaching in China is foreign language teaching conducted in a Chinese way, while in the West it is native or second language teaching conducted in a western way. Such different ways of teaching, according to Pennycook (1994), are embedded in social, political, philosophical and cultural differences.

Teaching method. While the Chinese way of teaching is teacher-centred and Chinese teachers of English prefer formal teaching, western education is learner-centred and native English teachers tend to teach less formally. Pennycook (1994) comments that learner-centredness is inappropriate in China as it is very different from how many learners have learned how to learn. Chinese students think that it is all right for western teachers to teach oral classes but not intensive reading ones (Cortazzi & Jin 1996) and often regard the less directive teaching methods of foreign teachers as a waste of time (Maley 1986). The technique called 'informal discussion' in class is mightily resisted (Murray 1982).

Class size. Class size is one of the key factors influencing the way teaching is carried out. Class sizes in the West are usually small. The NCTE (1998) reports that student achievement increases significantly in classes of fewer than 20. Goettler-Sopko (1990) concludes that class size should be below 30. However, class sizes in China are much larger. According to Cortazzi and Jin (1996), class sizes are between 40 and 100. Du (2002) has investigated college English teaching in four universities in southern China and found that class sizes in these universities vary from 45 to 62.

Teaching materials. For many westerners, books may contain facts open to interpretation, opinions to dispute and ideas for discussion; whereas Chinese students and teachers think of books as the embodiment of knowledge, wisdom and truth. They endeavour to take out the contents and put them inside their own heads by learning by heart (Maley 1986). Chinese teachers of English usually teach English through a set of textbooks, while English teachers teach using handouts.

Opinions on memorisation. In ancient China, without memorisation, many skills or crafts would have been lost because they were usually passed on orally by parents or masters to their children or apprentices from generation to generation. Westerners often regard the learning of Chinese learners as memory-based. Over-generalised as it is, memorisation is an important learning skill for Chinese learners. Talented students in China usually have powerful memories. Western teachers sometimes respond to memorisation by Chinese students with derision and scorn. Sampson (1984) argues that such a response is not a mark of advanced scientific thinking and westerners need to reflect carefully on this matter and ask why there is apparently nothing worth memorising in western society today.

Communication. In China, students address their teachers in a formal way, usually as 'Teacher + the teacher's surname', for example Teacher Li, while students in the West address their teachers in an informal way by directly saying their teacher's name. Different ways of addressing teachers naturally lead to different styles of communication between teacher and students in class: Chinese teachers and students tend to be formal in communication, while western teachers and students communicate less formally. Therefore, western students tend to ask their teacher any questions that occur to them in class, whereas Chinese students raise questions after reflection and often after class, for the sake of their own faces as well as their teacher's. This in turn makes the atmosphere in class in the West seem more active than that in China. Sakamoto (1999) compares the western-style conversation to playing volleyball or doubles in tennis: whoever is nearest and quickest hits the ball, while Confucian style conversation he compares to bowling: one has to wait for one's turn. However, this does not necessarily mean that Chinese students do not have discussions. Western students are usually not together after class and their lifestyle is individual-based, while Chinese students live on the campus and their lifestyle is usually collective-based (eg one bedroom is usually shared by four students), so discussions among western students often end with the end of each class, while discussions among Chinese students often only start after class.

Greetings and farewells in class. When Chinese students greet and say goodbye to their teacher at the beginning and end of a class, they usually stand up, while in the West students do not do so; if they greet or say goodbye to their teacher they do not change their posture.

Emphasis. While it is the end product rather than the process that is emphasised in the Chinese way of teaching, education in the West is more concerned with process than with the product (Biggs 1996).

Opinions on success. While ability is considered a major source of academic success in the west, hard work is regarded as a key to success in China (Biggs 1996). In contrast to the belief in the West that success is for learners themselves, success and failure in a Chinese cultural context influence not just oneself but the whole family or group (Spence 1985).

According to Auerbach (1993), classroom practices are far from neutral and natural because they have ideological origins and consequences for relations of power both inside and outside the classroom. Lee and Van Patten (1995) believe that the classroom is not only an academic environment with expected academic outcomes, but also a social environment in which participants learn how to behave. Pennycook (1994) suggests that an English language class may be less about the spread of English than about the spread of certain forms of culture and knowledge. The examples given above illustrate only some of the surface conflicts between western and Chinese culture. There are conflicts deep in people's values, attitudes, ways of thinking, preferences, criteria of judging right or wrong, and so on. How should we look at the issue of cultural awareness in the teaching of English in China?

Debate on learning a culture

Some people think that learning a culture means becoming a part of that culture. This is cultural assimilation, which is defined by Crystal (1997, p 77) as a process whereby 'one culture is influenced by a more dominant culture, and begins to lose its character as a result of its members adopting new behaviour and mores'. Obviously, the danger of assimilation lies in its potential to lead to the death of local languages and cultures. Brown, however, takes an alternative view about cultural awareness:

> The act of learning to think in another language may require a considerable degree of mastery of that language, but a second language learner does not have to learn to think, in general, all over again…. the second language learner can make a positive use of prior experiences to facilitate the process of learning by retaining that which is valid and valuable for second culture learning and second language learning. It is just the bath water of interference that needs to be thrown out, not the baby of the facilitation. (Brown 1986, p 47)

By retaining 'the baby' and throwing out 'the bath water', Brown seems to argue that learners should adjust themselves to the culture they are learning, which is what Bochner (1982, p 164) calls 'cultural chauvinism': the newcomer should abandon the culture of origin in favour of embracing the values and customs of the host society. Brown seems to mean the same as West (1934, p 172): 'The heritage of the English speaking people is something of stupendous importance to the world. We believe that it

is more important that mankind should learn to think Englishly than should learn merely to speak English.'

On the contrary, Valdes (1986) argues that, just as similarities and contrasts in the native and target languages have been found to be useful tools in language study, so cultural similarities and contrasts, once identified and understood, can be used to advantage. In Bochner's (1982) opinion, to learn a culture is to know the culture: to understand people's behaviour in the culture, not necessarily to become a part of it.

Many mother-tongue English speakers believe in an evolutionary view of language: let the fittest survive, and if the fittest happens to be English, then so be it (Crystal 1997). This is obviously linguistic and cultural imperialism. No wonder Crystal (2000, p 32) appeals for 'green linguistics' and suggests that the green movement has been eminently successful in raising the public consciousness and sense of urgency about our biological heritage – in all domains except language. Teasdale and Ma Rhea (2000) argue that we should provide all the knowledge and skills required for scientific and technological advancement, while at the same time ensuring that students lose neither cultural identity nor the underlying languages, values and wisdoms on which it is based. Kramsch (2000) suggests replacing cultural appropriateness with the concept of appropriation and that learners should have the ability to acquire another person's language and understand someone else's culture while retaining their own so as to be able to mediate between several languages and cultures. Crystal (2000) points out that there is no necessary confrontation between the new language which is perceived to be desirable and useful and the old language, and that the pride which everyone feels when they succeed in acquiring a new language should not make them any less proud of the language that they already have.

The fact that language is part of culture means language teaching is also culture teaching. Therefore, it is natural to have cultural conflicts in the teaching of another language. As Kramsch (1993) explains it, culture is difference, variability, and always a potential source of conflict when one culture enters into contact with another. The aim of culture teaching is to give learners a better understanding of the language that is being taught. Rather than losing their own culture, learners can acquire an even deeper understanding of it by comparing it with the culture they are learning. For an English learner, to know western culture is to make use of it, but not to be transformed into another person by that culture. Through the teaching of English, and of western culture, Chinese culture, instead of being assimilated, should be enriched by Chinese learners using the English language and its culture for their own purposes.

China and the globalisation of the English language

The world may be divided into three broad categories in terms of the English language: English-as-a-native-language countries, English-as-a-second language countries and

English-as-a-foreign-language countries. China currently still belongs to the third group, but is moving rapidly from the third to the second.

In the age of information technology and the globalisation of English, English-speaking countries are using their mother tongue to handle information and communication with other peoples, while China is using English as a foreign language to do so. Such a reality has obviously placed English-speaking countries at an advantage and China at a disadvantage. Having realised the seriousness of the situation, the Chinese government attaches great importance to English teaching, as shown in Table 1, which shows the extent to which it is now being taught in schools and universities.

Table I: The typical pattern for teaching Chinese and English in schools in China

Teaching schools	The Chinese language		The English language	
	Grades	Periods/week	Grades	Periods/week
6-year elementary school	1–6	6	5–6	3
3-year junior high school	1–3	5	1–3	5
3-year senior high school	1–3	6–7	1–3	6–7
4-year university	0	0	1–2	4–5

From the table, it can be seen that the number of teaching periods for English and Chinese are almost the same, especially in secondary schools. Therefore, it could be expected that the whole population of China will become at least bilingual in the near future. Is it good or not that China is entering a bilingual stage as a result of the efforts of English teachers over several generations?

The bilingual stage, according to Crystal (2000), may last for either a long or a very short time. When people regard both languages as complementary to each other and the two languages are equal, the bilingual stage may be long lasting; when one language becomes obviously dominant and the other one is dominated, the bilingual stage may exist for only a short time. It can be seen that if two languages cannot coexist equally, language death is likely to happen for one in the bilingual stage.

Chinese is not only the national language of China, but also the mother tongue of the world's largest population. However, a national language can also die. A case in point is the Manchu language, which used to be the national language of the Qing

Dynasty (1616–1911). What is surprising is that such a national language actually died at the end of the Qing Dynasty. Ramsey (1987, p 217) explains: 'By the eighteenth century it probably ceased completely to be spoken in the court, even by the Manchus themselves.' At present, the Man population is nearly 10 000 000, but it is very hard to find a person who is familiar with the Manchu language (Bai 1992).

Languages with very large numbers of speakers may not be safe in the long run if they have been denuded of most of their domains: their status may be gradually eroded until no-one wants to use them (Crystal 2000). According to So (1987), ninety-eight per cent of Hong Kong's population are Chinese, and most of them are Cantonese. However, as a variety of the Chinese language, Cantonese encounters 'linguistic curtailment' because it is linguistically unable to perform in academic, professional and legislative domains where English is dominant (Pennycook 1994, p 23). There seems to have been a tendency in Hong Kong for the Chinese people's mother tongue to give way to English. Fu (1987, p 29) explains that, in Hong Kong, 'English is the passport, it is the prestige, it is the profession, and parents want their children to get on the boat early and stay there'.

Protection of Chinese language and culture

Reflecting on the death of the Manchu language and the situation in Hong Kong, we see that the Chinese language might not be safe unless effective measures are taken early in the bilingual stage. Globalisation means not only integration, but also disintegration (Bessant & Watts 1999). Hogan (1996) argues that, while we think globally and act locally, we must also think locally and act globally. Facing the globalisation of English, the Chinese government might take the following measures to protect Chinese language and culture:

1. Set up a national research centre on the globalisation of the English language, and fund strategic studies on the protection of Chinese language and culture.

2. Launch more cultural journals to encourage studies on cultural protection from both theoretical and practical perspectives as China enters the bilingual stage.

3. Stipulate in the English syllabus for higher education that cultural comparison between China and the West should be an integral part of English teaching in China. By learning English, learners should not only know western culture but also have a deeper understanding of their own Chinese language and culture. In April 2001, in an address at China Pharmaceutical University about higher education in China, Professor Yang Shuzi, an academician of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and the former President of Huazhong University of Science and Technology, complained that Chinese university students were weak in their knowledge of Chinese culture and explained that this was the

reason why he required his postgraduate students to understand the *Analects* as a precondition of their graduation. What Yang Shuzi has done is worth considering to protect Chinese culture.

4. Include Chinese cultural content in English language textbooks. Cetce-Murcia and Olshtain (2000) argue that themes and topics included in the curriculum should not only provide appropriate cultural background for the language material and activities carried out, but also motivate interest and be relevant and appealing to learners. It seems hard for learners to have a sense of Chinese cultural protection without being in touch with anything about Chinese culture in their English learning materials. It seems necessary that something about Chinese culture be included in the content of the English language textbooks used in colleges and universities in China.

5. Initiate English language teacher training programs based on cultural comparisons between China and the West. In China, with almost all English learners and teachers being Chinese, it seems hard for the Chinese to understand the significance of cultural studies. By using cultural training programs, teachers will reflect on their English teaching in the context of the globalisation of the English language and the ways to strengthen Chinese culture through teaching English and western culture.

6. Set up a teachers' fund to reward those who have achieved significant outcomes in strengthening Chinese culture through teaching English language and culture in class. Teachers of English play a key role in the protection of Chinese culture. However, it does not seem to be an easy job to strengthen Chinese culture in the process of teaching western culture. It seems essential to launch a special fund to stimulate the teachers' interest, enthusiasm and responsibility to probe ways to strengthen Chinese culture in their English teaching. Those who have discovered successful approaches should have their excellent classroom teachings videotaped as exemplars for other teachers to follow, with tapes distributed to other colleges and universities.

7. Send more and more Chinese teachers of English to English-speaking countries and attract increasingly more westerners to come to China, so that the Chinese and the English will have a better understanding of each other culturally. Staying in China cannot guarantee the safety of Chinese culture. One can only be truly sensitive to Chinese culture, and committed to its preservation, when one has an in-depth understanding of another culture, and therefore a basis for comparative analysis. In this sense, to know western culture helps to retain Chinese culture. Therefore, more cultural exchanges between China and English-speaking countries are necessary.

8. Make a greater effort to develop the economy and thereby raise the living standards of the Chinese people. Backwardness and poverty cannot save one's culture: 'It is development that is the truth' (Deng 1993, p 377). With a higher standard of living, the Chinese people will feel prouder of their own culture, while people in other countries will show more respect for Chinese culture. It will be beneficial for the protection of Chinese culture when it is more widely appreciated both within and without the country.

Teaching the English language: a good idea?

It seems that the globalisation of English is a trend that no country can stop or change. The development of China does not depend on fighting against such globalisation, but on making effective use of it. Opportunities as well as challenges coexist for China. The fact that great changes have taken place in China since the end of the Cultural Revolution shows that China cannot be strong in isolation. China's reforming and opening to the outside world is the key to its development, in which, among other things, Chinese people using English is crucial. In the age of the globalisation of the English language, while the Chinese language can make Chinese culture brighter, the English language can help China develop faster.

According to Zhao and Campbell (1995), there are 200 million English users in China. Without English teaching, there could never have been so many Chinese who know English; without English teaching, it would be impossible for China to open to the outside world. According to Cook (1991), in places where a foreign language has no function in the society, teaching is the chief or only source of the foreign language, for whatever learners know, whatever learners can say or understand, is the effect of teaching. It is true of China.

In *Analects* (Xu 1997), Confucius mentioned six times his idea that it is important to know other people (Chapters 1, 4, 12, 14, 15). The following remarks by Confucius might illuminate our understanding of English teaching in China:

> It does not matter if other people do not know you. However, it does matter when you do not know about other people. (*Analects*, Chapter 1).

> He who does not know other people's words is incapable of knowing them. (Analects, Chapter 20)

> Those who know something are not so good as those who are fond of knowing it; those who are fond of knowing it are not so good as those who find great pleasures in knowing it. (*Analects*, Chapter 6)

Language reflects not only individual thoughts but 'culture with words' (Bock 1996, p 102). As far as Chinese learners of English are concerned, learning English is a means by which they can get to know not only individual native English speakers, but

also their countries. English is shared by the world; knowing English also means having the ability to know other peoples whose native languages are not English and to access the most advanced science and technology. Therefore, knowing English certainly helps China to learn from other countries. English teaching in China is a good idea.

When a country is learning from others, it may well be under pressure and can often see its own disadvantages and shortcomings. Its desire to catch up with and exceed others can help it develop faster and be active and dynamic. When a country is admired and followed by others, it tends to feel proud of itself and might not be under such pressure, which might make it less active in learning from others. China used to be a powerful and prosperous country that was followed by others during the Tang Dynasty (618–907 AD), as Schafer (1975) describes:

> the scope of imitation of the T'ang model abroad, of which Japan is one example, proves that this very cosmopolitanism of T'ang culture had already had a deep impact on world history. Never before and never again did such a large proportion of mankind look to China as the paramount political and military power of the world and as an obvious model for government and culture.

However, China has now fallen behind many other countries. It is a great a pity that none of the four most civilised countries in ancient times – China, India, Egypt and Babylon – are among the most developed countries today. China is still a developing country. Realising where it is in the world, China is pushing itself to develop faster.

The globalisation of the English language means not only the spread of the English language, but also the fact that English belongs to the whole world. Besides British English, American English and Australian English, other varieties of English have developed. Romaine (1997) mentions the fact that in Papua New Guinea there have been attempts to use Pidgin English as a medium of advertising, which has given rise to many linguistic and cross-cultural dilemmas. Once people in non-English speaking countries start to share English and use it as a tool to struggle for their own identities and positions in the world, it is no longer the English-speaking countries that control English. Even if the English-speaking countries switched to another language, it would not change the status of English as an international language. Consequently, when English is used by different peoples in different non-English-speaking countries, it does not necessarily follow that the words or expressions with the same spelling and pronunciation mean the same. Culturally, they might have different meanings. Therefore, it seems necessary to have cultural translators in the above situation. Warschauer (2000) argues that even native speakers may need to learn new dialects, not only to fully understand what people are saying in different parts of the world, but also to communicate effectively in international settings where the use of North American, British or Australian colloquialisms may be inappropriate.

Two contrasts between China and English-speaking countries

Cook (1991) has commented that knowing a second language is a normal part of human existence, but it may well be unusual to know only one language like most people in England. Simmons (2001) worries about the inflexibility and incompetence of native English speakers to learn other languages and to understand other cultures. However, English-speaking countries do not seem to mind and are sparing no effort to spread English all over the world by making English a priority in second or foreign language teaching and learning. We might find an explanation for this phenomenon in White (1987): ELT is a service industry, supplying people with the service of English language teaching and the commodity of the English language. The British Council (1969) acknowledges that there is *a hidden sales element* in every English teacher, book, magazine, film-strip and television program sent overseas. 'English is a "global commodity" to be bought and sold on the world market' (Pennycook 1994, p 158). Consequently, English-speaking countries have first of all become the beneficiaries of English teaching:

> According to a study for the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) (McCallen 1989), it is estimated that the world market for EFL/ESL training in 1988, not including expenditure by public authorities, was worth around £6.25 billion (about US$9.5 billion). Of this figure, just over £1 billion (16.4 per cent) was accounted for by the British market, £2 billion (32 per cent) by the North America market, another £2 billion (32 per cent) by Australia and the Far East, and £1 billion (16 per cent) by Europe. (Pennycook 1994, p 155)

Contrast 1: The fact that peoples in other countries are working hard at English might make most native English speakers so proud of their mother tongue that they may feel that it is unnecessary for them to learn other languages. In contrast to their indifference, more and more Chinese people are very active in learning English.

Contrast 2: Such a sharp contrast might lead to another contrast in the near future. While the Chinese people are able to use English freely, the majority of native English speakers are still at a loss when Chinese is spoken to them. This means that what native English speakers understand will also be understood by Chinese. But the reverse is not necessarily the case. In other words, in terms of language, when China's disadvantages turn out to be advantages, the advantages of the English-speaking countries will become disadvantages. This will be the time when the Chinese people's studies have paid off, while the English-speaking countries will have to start to pay. It would be a pity if English-speaking countries threw themselves too much into selling their English at the cost of their own linguistic future in the world.

Conclusion

The shaping of different languages and cultures is due to the isolation of peoples inhabiting different places. However, such isolation is being broken by the globalisation of the English language. As a result, cultural differences, instead of being enlarged, are

being shrunk at the cost of other languages and cultures. Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson (1989, p 63) argue that it has been British and American government policy since the mid 1950s to establish English as a universal 'second language' so as to protect and promote capitalist interests. Consequently, English poses a direct threat to the very existence of other languages (Pennycook 1994; Cooke 1988; Stubbs 1986; Judd 1983) and if English continues to grow as it has it might be the only language left to learn in the future (Crystal 2000).

However, facing the globalisation of English does not necessarily mean losing one's own language and culture. What is likely to happen does not necessarily mean what is inevitable. Only those reacting to the challenges passively will lose their own language and culture. It cannot be taken for granted that the Chinese language will always be safe. However, if China takes effective measures in both policy making and academic studies, as mentioned earlier, it will not only retain its own language and culture, but also enrich them through overcoming the challenges. English belongs to the whole world. Without English, it is impossible to know the world. Therefore, English teaching in China, as a chief source of English learning, is a good idea. Language and culture are interrelated to each other, so are language teaching and culture teaching. The teaching of English in the setting of Chinese culture also means the teaching of western culture, which inevitably brings about conflicts between the two different cultures. The purpose of English teaching in China is not to make Chinese learners become westerners, but to make them more competent Chinese who know the English language and at the same time are even clearer about Chinese culture, because they compare it with western culture in the process of learning English. Learning a foreign language and culture should help to enrich the Chinese language and culture rather than threatening them.

The current contrast between Chinese people learning English actively and most native English speakers' indifference to learning other languages will lead to another contrast: the advantages of Chinese people in being bilingual and the disadvantages of most native English speakers in being monolingual. In the first contrast, China is at a disadvantage; but in the second contrast, it is English-speaking countries that will be at a disadvantage in terms of language. The fact that China is entering a bilingual stage means that China is overcoming its disadvantage in English. However, both opportunities and challenges coexist. Isolation cannot make China strong. Chinese people using the English language help China to develop faster. 'As many languages as he has, as many friends, as many arts and trades, so many times is he a man' (quoted in Crystal 2000, p 44). When the population of China is at least bilingual, it will not only benefit the development of China, but also make a great contribution to the development of the whole world.

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