



LEARNER'S L₂ (ENGLISH) INFLUENCES ON L₃ (CHINESE) LEARNING – THE USE OF BILINGUAL COURSE BOOK (ENGLISH AND CHINESE) IN INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' CHINESE LEARNING

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Abstract

This paper focuses on multilingual learning experiences and language transfer between L₂ English and L₃ Chinese. The purpose of the following study to present how bilingual course book (English and Chinese) influences Chinese learning for international students. It was carried with 35 international university students in the same class who are learning Chinese in Honghe university, Yunnan province, China. These students come from Vietnam, Lao and Sri Lanka and their L₁ include Vietnamese language, Lao language, Sinhalese and Tamil. The study focuses on their attitudes and experiences on learning Chinese with bilingual textbook. A small scale study in this class was launched with questionnaires to indicate the effect of L₂ English on L₃ Chinese learning for these students, in terms of the influence of bilingual textbook use.

Keywords: CFL, ELF, L₂ &L₃, Bilingual Course Book.

1. Introduction

The aim of the present study is to investigate if bilingual course books (English-Chinese) are able to be used as a tool for international students' Chinese language learning. With the development of China's economy, Mandarin Chinese (Putonghua or Chinese) has been regarded as a 'must-have language' in the present era. A new trend 'CFL', is explained as teaching of Chinese as a Foreign Language, which has been paid increasingly attention. International students havebrought diversity cultures and languages into bothChinese classrooms and society. With the prevalence of learning English in a global context, Chinese teachers and international students use English both in and out the classroom, in terms of teaching, learning or communication. In most of the Chinese learning classrooms, English is regarded as a lingua franca (ELF) to assist the teaching and learning of Chinese (House, 2003; Murata & Jenkins, 2009) From the end of the 1970s, the number English learners started to increase, in this regard, English is regarded as a foreign language or a second language among different countries. Lam (2005) stated that the learning of English as a second language has spread in schools, universities, educational institutes or commerce. In China, the population of English learners are greater than any other country (Kirkpatrick, 2007, p. 146) Norman (2011) found that the number of Chinese students who were learning English was more than 300 million till 2011 based on the Asia Society's report. Besides, before Norman (2001), Graddol gave another result that the population of Chinese new English users were more than 20 million, namely, they used English in different areas in terms of studying or working (Graddol, 2006, p. 95).

In CFL classes, Chinese teachers introduce Chinese culture, explain significant points or talk to students in English to assist the Chinese language teaching. English is regarded as 'lingua franca' in the context. Besides teachers, course books are explained with both Chinese and English in some schools, universities or language institutes. Some researchers called it 'ELF pedagogy' in Chinese language teaching The appearance of 'ELF' indicated the ways of foreign language teaching and learning has been changed to some extent, and more practical

attention have been paid.

This study focuses on the use of bilingual course book (English and Chinese) in the international CFL classroom. Simultaneously, students also experience ELF teaching. The aim is to investigate the attitudes of international students on the bilingual textbook, is it helpful to their Chinese language learning? In the process, any other effects or difficulties they may face with? For instance, the influence of their L1(mother tongue) or English on Chinese learning.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Using English as a lingua franca in Chinese teaching

There are two attitudes toward the use of ELF (English as a lingua franca) in language teaching. Rohsenow (2004) points out that two significant points should be taught in the CFL (Chinese as a foreign language) learning classroom, they are Putonghua (modern standard Mandarin Chinese or which is called Spoken Chinese) and standardized Chinese characters (Rohsenow, 2004, p.41). Based on the requirements of different syllabuses for CFL, ELF and other foreign languages should be strictly prohibited in CFL class (Yang, 1999). After Yang's earlier proposition, the Chinese Government's Chinese Language Council International, also known as Hanban (2002), prompts a series new teaching syllabus. It states that CFL teachers should 'maximize target language and diminish the use of [English] as a medium of instruction' (Hanban, 2002, p.3).

Some teachers agree with the 'Chinese-only pedagogy' in the CFL classes. They hold the view that it is better to teach Chinese in Chinese, and the use of other languages in teaching process have negative effects on the language transfer for learners (Liu 2006; Lü 1993; Sun 2003, p. 101) The use of EFL has been tried in the real Chinese teaching by some Chinese researchers. For instance, Ma (2003) and Wang (2007,2009) find that learners' English abilities has improved than their Chinese abilities, which contradicts the intentions of CFL teaching.

On the contrary, supporters of the ELF pedagogy give evidence that using English in the process of Chinese teaching have been successfully applied in the CFL classroom at different levels. These scholars states that it is sensibly and judiciously to use ELF in CFL teaching, and they also underline the significance of Chinese teachers' English ability (Wang, 2010). As early as 2005 and 2006, Zhang and Lam stress that the development on English language competence of Chinese teachers. At this point, Chinese teachers are required to give consideration to their abilities both on Chinese and English. In Chen (2010)'s study, the mission of teachers in CFL classroom is to keep the class communicative and interactive with the help of ELF. In this study, teacher uses English to teach Chinese in a multinational and multilingual CFL class with bilingual textbook which is investigated by researcher. Besides, the effects of bilingual textbooks and the use of English are discussed from learners' perspectives.

2.3. The use of bilingual books/materials

Ernst-Slavit & Mulheron, (2003) point out that bilingual books are widely used in different types of books. In the field of EFL or ESL, many bilingual books have been used for a long time in the language teaching, especially in the English teaching. Besides, the value of bilingual textbooks is steely approved. For instance, Oxford Bookworms series are produced with bilingual versions in English and Chinese. In China, students are required to use bilingual course books to learn English.

The main reason that bilingual books are widely used in different levels of language learning is that language learners are provided with learning motivation. Researchers, both in and out of China, state that the effects of bilingual books are positive for language learners, teachers or even parents (Hu et al, 2012; Parker, 2006). In the study of Schon (2004), it illustrates the beliefs of language teachers that bilingual books will help to improve language learning and they are willing to recommend bilingual language books or materials to their students.

Empirically, it's not easy for language learners to comprehend L2 materials with L2 directly, which may become a hinder in reading process. Therefore, bilingual books are easier to read and understand compared with only one language material. Besides, learners were found to be more positive and active to join English learning with bilingual book (Hu et al. 2012).

Another reason that bilingual books become an increasingly popular tool for language learners is that bilingual books can be the bridge between different languages (Lichty, 2002). Also, Lichty (2002) points out that both L1 and L2 of learners are developed though the text-to-text translations. 'The positive attitude towards bilingual books suggests that there may be potential for the reading of bilingual books to increase L2 vocabulary knowledge' (Lichty, 2002, p. 121).

In this study, the research context is the international learners in the CFL classroom in China, their bilingual coursebook is English and Chinese, and they are from different countries which is illustrated in the next part. The aim of the present study is to investigate the attitudes of learners towards using bilingual coursebook in CFL classroom.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research questions in this study

The present study mainly investigates that the attitudes of international students on bilingual textbook (English and Chinese), and the effects of English (L2) influences on learners' Chinese learning.

3.2. Participants

35 international students who were learning Chinese language with full-time at Honghe university engaged in this study. Different languages were included in the same class due to their different nationalities, including Vietnamese language, Lao language, Sinhalese and Tamil. The same course book was used in this class for the subject of 'Elementary Comprehensive Course' subject, which concludes vocabulary, reading comprehension and comprehensive exercises. Researchers had been granted permission from these 35 international students to join in this study.

3.3. Data collection

A questionnaire with 12 questions was used in the present study to answer the research questions. The questionnaire was assessed by one of the experts who is a professor in the subject of TCFL (Teaching Chinese as a foreign Language). These questions were designed based on 'Article 20 of the Law on the Commonly Used Language and Script', 'Chinese Teaching Syllabus' (Hanban, 2002) and some related issues in different studies (Liu 2006, p. 118; Lü 1993, p. 84; Sun 2003, p. 101; Ma 2003; Wang 2007; 2009) The questionnaire was illustrated in detail in the appendix. Besides, three students were interviewed by the researcher based on the answer of their questionnaires.

3.4. Data analysis

After the questionnaire was answered by these 35 international students, the results were analyzed by SPSS. And then the results were discussed based on the questionnaire and interviews.

4. Findings and Discussion

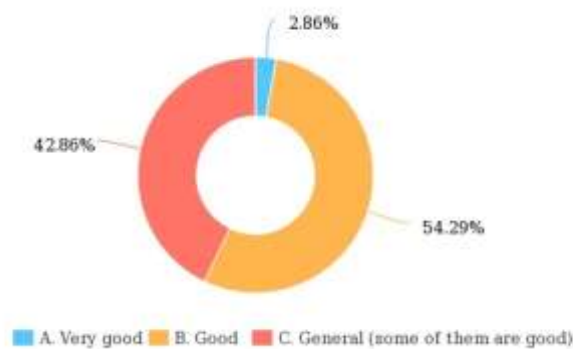
The questionnaire was finished and arranged through a professional platform which is named 'Wenjuanxing' for data collection questionnaire survey. The general results and findings are discussed in this section.

4.1 Findings

a. All 35 students in this study had learned Chinese before they came to Honghe University to study in major of Chinese. Namely, all of them had experiences on Chinese learning and using of different learning materials. According to question two in the questionnaire, there were 32 students who used bilingual course book in their learning process, only three of them used others materials, such as trilingual text books or materials. In this regard, the bilingual materials they used before included Chinese and their native languages. In this study, the bilingual book was referred to Chinese and English.

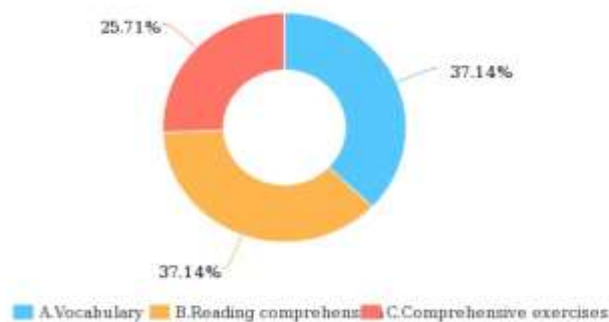
b. For the question about the use of English in Chinese teaching in CFL classroom, most of the students pointed out that it was positive (Figure 1.). At this point, students with good English proficiency who stated that the use of English was neither worse or better, and sometimes it helped them to understand some difficult points. But some learners who were not good at English (Vietnamese, Laos or even Thai) would rather learn a foreign language (Chinese here) in their native languages. But two learners stated that they felt good with Chinese and English bilingual course book even she had no good ability in English, the reason was that she was able to learn English and Chinese at the same time; and she also stated that there was no negative effects on the Chinese learning due to the far distance of these two languages.

Figure 1:



b. For the bilingual text book in this study, nearly 37.14% learners pointed out that the most helpful part was reading comprehension, and almost the same 37.14% learners preferred the vocabulary part, and 25.71% learners stated that English was helpful in the comprehensive exercises in this book (Figure 2)

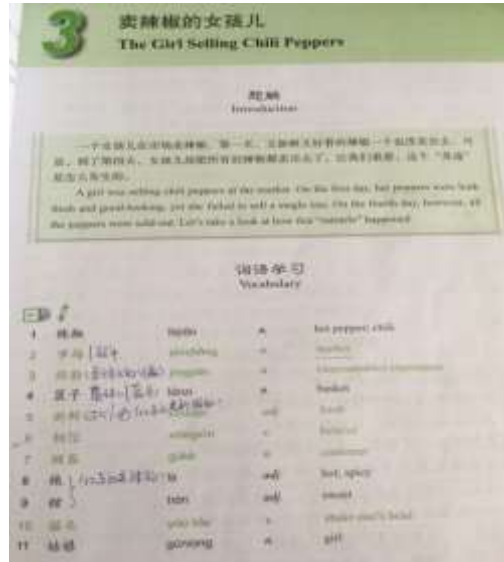
Figure 2:



4.2 Discussion

The vocabulary part in the bilingual course book in this study:

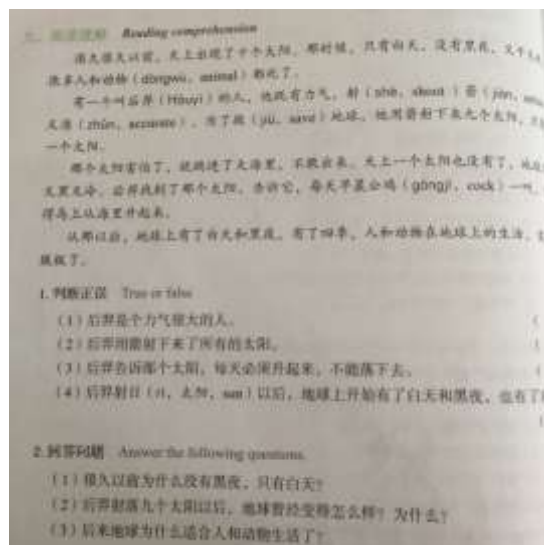
For the vocabulary part in this bilingual part, two versions of one word were illustrated. For instance, Chinese characters were on the left side, and in between were the corresponding



Chinese phonetic alphabet, on the right were the English interpretation (one to three simple words). It is also worth mentioning that part of speech was explained in English in this course book. According to the explanations of learners in the questionnaire, the vocabulary part was considered useful because they were able to remember vocabularies combining both Chinese phonetic alphabet and English; besides, English might also help to explain the meanings sometimes when learners met new words.

The comprehensive exercises part in the bilingual course book in this study:

These students who considered that English played the most significant role in the part of comprehensive exercises in this course book. As the example showed, English interpretation was under each headline to explain the purpose of each title, namely, what learners were asked to do. Hence, these learners stated that English helped them to understand every headline clearly.



The reading comprehension part in the bilingual course book in this study:

At last, English use in the reading comprehension part was regarded as significantly useful by some learners in this study. As the example showed, both the Chinese alphabet and English were used to explain difficult Chinese words or phrases. Students pointed out that English helped them to grasp new words which might stop them from understanding passages in reading comprehension.

Conclusion

Majority of the students stated that bilingual course book (Chinese and English) is helpful in their Chinese language learning, especially in the international CFL classroom in this study. English was used as a tool for both teacher and learners, in terms of communication and explanation. However, majority of learners would rather use bilingual textbook or materials in their native language and Chinese compared with in English and Chinese. The reason was that their English ability might not good enough to use as a tool to learn another language, but majority of students confirmed the positive effects of English-Chinese bilingual course book in this study. Moreover, these learners also pointed out that their native languages had few influence on the learning of Chinese, due to the long distance of different languages. For instance, Vietnamese and Laos are totally different from Chinese, in terms of shapes of words, pronunciations, or even sentence structures. Hence, there were no obvious affects in Chinese learning.

In the future study, it is possible to pay attention to the transfer between international students' naive language, English and Chinese in the CFL classroom, to know the use of different languages at different stages of Chinese learning. It may provide valuable evidence and material to the construction of Chinese language teaching and learning syllabus in the specific context.

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