

The role of English language in China

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Feng Zhiwei

Institute of Applied Linguistics,
Ministry of Education
Email: zwfengde@bbn.cn

Abstract

In this paper, the zigzag process of acceptance of English in China is described, the development of English teaching (including English textbook composing, English level test, etc.) in China is introduced. Now English teaching becomes an industry in China. More and more Chinese people like to learn English. The multilingual service is important aspect of Olympic Beijing 2008. The author suggests reinforce the teaching and learning of Chinese language in the same time of teaching .English. How to balance the English teaching and Chinese teaching in China? It is a topic of language status planning in China.

Keywords

English, English teaching, multilingual service, language status planning.

1. Acceptance of English language in China

200 years ago, January of 1807, a British missionary left from London in order to go to China. His name is Mr. Robert Morrison (1782-1834) . He passed through the Atlantic Ocean, America, South America and Pacific Ocean. And in September of 1807 he arrived to Macao and then he came to Guangzhou of China.



Morrison and his friends

Mr. Robert Morrison was the first Protestant missionary to China. He was also the first Protestant missionary who teaches Chinese people to learn English. Since his arrival in Guangzhou in 1807, he had immersed himself in the Chinese language and culture until he died in 1834.

He was a prolific writer in both Chinese and English. He translated Bible (English version) to

Chinese, and he also translate classic Chinese literatures to English (e.g 《三字经》, *San-Tsi King, the Three Character Classic, on the utility and honour of learning*).

His *Dictionary of the Chinese Language*, which appeared in three parts, was considered one of his greatest works.



Robert Morrison, inset, and *Dictionary of the Chinese Language*

This dictionary has three parts. Part One (3 volume): containing Chinese and English arranged according to the keys; Part Two (2 volume): Chinese and English arranged alphabetically; Part Three (1 volume): English and Chinese.

The introduction in the first part of this Dictionary provides an overview of the origin, nature and history of the Chinese language.

The second part was based on the Chinese work 《五车韵府》 which contained about 40,000 characters. Mr. Morrison abridged and re-arranged the characters and this Chinese title can be found at the top of the title page of the second part.

Part three of this Dictionary was published in 1822.

He spent a total of thirteen years compiling the landmark dictionary.

In 1823, Mr. Morrison published a English grammar book: *A Grammar of the English Language* 《英国文语凡例传》.

The year 2007 is just the 200 anniversary of Morrison' arrival to China. We shall celebrate him.

After Mr. Robert Morrison, in according the dissemination of occidental sciences and technology in China, more and more Chinese men start to learn English, because the English language is the important tool in communication. Learning English can help Chinese to overcome the language barrier in the communication.

At 1708, The Qing Dynasty set up Russian language school(俄罗斯文馆)in Beijing. At1862, The Russian language school was renamed as Foreign language Institute (京师同文馆). This Institute firstly set up English language school, then French language school, German language school also set up. In that time, English language is the second important foreign language in foreign language Institute in Beijing.

At 1863, The Foreign language Institute (广方言馆) set up in Shanghai. They teach English.

At 1864, another foreign language Institute set up in Guangzhou. They teach English.

At 1893, The Foreign Language Institute (方言学堂) set up in Wuchang. They teach English.

At 1901, Peking University (京师大学堂) set up in Beijing. At 1903, Foreign language Institute of Beijing was merged into Peking University, and it was renamed as Translation Institute (译学馆)。 They also teach English.

Therefore English language is always the important language in the Institute and University.

Since 1903, The Qing Dynasty of China starts to teach English at the middle school. The class hours of teaching English are 1444 hours in the studying period of 5 years of middle school. At 1912, the class hours of teaching English are 1056 hours in the studying period of 4 years of middle school.

In this period, the famous Chinese scholar Ya Fu (严复) composed the first English textbook (英文汉诂) in China.



Yan Fu

Yan Fu established a three-character standard in translation: “信” (faithfulness), “达” (expressiveness), and “雅” (elegance).

After the May 4th Movement of 1919, Lu Xun (鲁迅) proposed “信”(faithfulness) and “顺” (smoothness) as the criteria of translation.



Lu Xun

These standards or criteria of translation gave a deep influence to English teaching in China.

In the school, teaching approach is translation approach. The English teachers concentrated to teach students to read English classic literatures. In Tsinghua school (清华学校, the original name of Tsinghua University) , fast all scientific courses are taught in English language with the exception of Chinese course.

The song of Tsinghua College is written in English as follows:

Tsinghua College Song (清华学校的校歌)

O come and join our hearty song,
As proudly here we stand;
For Tsinghua College let us sing,
The best in all the land.
We shall spread her fame and win a name,
And put our foes to shame;

If you don't agree, come on and see,
And you will say the same, the same,

O Tsinghua, fair Tsinghua, our college bright,
May we be loyal to the Purple and the White,
O Tsinghua, fair Tsinghua, our College pure,
We are loyal, we're faithful, we stand for you.

This college song is very nice, and the students like to sing it.

At 1922, some English teachers proposed the direct approach in English teaching in order to instead of the translation approach. They composed a lot of English teaching materials including conversation training.

The English was accepted step by step in the university and middle school. It became an important course in the university and middle school.

After the foundation of New China (People's Republic of China), Russian language became very important foreign language. In the Middle school, English teaching was stopped, most of English teachers changed to learn Russian language and then teach Russian language. The English teaching entered into the lowest level of the tide. At 1964, the Ministry of Education decided to take up again the English teaching in middle school, but the result is not so good.

In that time, the premier minister Zhou Enlai (周恩来) pointed out that if Chinese children start to learn foreign language since their childhood, then they can learn the pure foreign language, they can form custom to think by foreign language and to apply foreign language. It is good suggestion.



Zhou Enlai

According to this suggestion of Zhou Enlai, since 1961, the Ministry of Education starts to set up the schools of foreign languages in some big cities as Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, etc. The pupils of this kind of school can learn foreign language earlier, then they can have higher ability of foreign language.

However, in the culture revolution (1966-1976), English teaching was totally destroyed.

At 1974, Zhang Yuqin (张玉勤), a girl pupil of Mazhengfu middle school in Tanghe (Province Henan), hands in an examination paper unanswered (blank examination paper) in English examination, so she was criticized by English teacher, and then she suicides by throwing herself in a river. This event was called as "Mazhengfu Event". Mazhenngfu Event was exaggerated by "gang of four" (四人帮) in order to against English teaching. Afterwards in English class, only some political slogans as "Long live Chairman Mao" can be taught. The

students can learn nothing but this kind of political slogans.

After the culture revolution, Chinese people start our new Long March for modernization of our country. At 1979, the Ministry of Education pointed out that we have to reinforce the foreign language teaching, especially English teaching.

- a. Intensifying English teaching in primary school and middle school : In the middle school, English language is the basic course as Chinese language and mathematics. In the primary school, since third grade, all pupils have to learn English.
- b. Intensifying English teaching in university: In the university, common foreign language course is for all students. Every student in all subjects (including human sciences and natural sciences) has to learn one foreign language (English, or Russian, or Japanese). The foreign language university is the base of foreign language education.
- c. Intensifying to train the teachers of foreign language: sending teachers to abroad to learn foreign language, and inviting foreign experts of linguistics to China to give lectures.
- d. Intensifying the research of language teaching approaches and applied linguistics on language teaching.

The foreign language is a weapon in the struggle of life. Now Chinese people are setting our new Long March to achieve the general task for the new period. In order to raise the scientific and cultural level of the Chinese nation and to strengthen scientific and technical co-operation and academic exchanges with other countries, we are in need of not only Chinese language, but also foreign languages including English language.

2. Composing English Textbooks

In 1980, The Ministry of Education established two offices for teaching materials of English language. The south office is in Shanghai, the north office in Beijing.

A lot of English teaching materials are published. E.g.

- a. English 1-4 volumes, Peking University.
- b. Functional English, 1-3 volumes, Heilongjiang University.
- c. Practical English Grammar, Zhang Daozhen, Beijing Foreign Language University.

The model of English education is “**language training + content learning**”. In the same time to learn English language, the students have to learn subject knowledge as natural sciences, or diplomatic knowledge, or economic knowledge, or trade knowledge, etc, in order to become the expert in one thing (English language) and good at many (other subject knowledge).

3. English Level Test in China

There are many types of English level test in China:

- a. TEM-4 (test for students in basic grade) and TEM-8 (test for students in higher grade): This kind of test is only for students of English department.
- b. 4-6 grades examination of English: This kind of test is for all students in universities. At 2004, the number of test arrived to 11,000,000 students. Perhaps it is largest scale English test in the world. The certificate of this kind of examination is very useful to get a good job. So many students like to participate to this kind of examination.

- c. PETS: It is a co-operative item between Chinese and British governments. Everybody (no matter how age, job, location) may apply for join to PETS examination.
- d. English Self-learning test: two times test every year. One in April, another one in October. It is the English test for all self-learning students.

GRE, TOFEL, IELTS are English level tests of USA or UK. Some Chinese students also like to join to these examinations.

4. International Exchange of English language teaching

There are several aspects of international exchange:

- a. Exchange English teachers;
- b. Exchange English students;
- c. Co-operatively cultivating English students;
- d. Co-operative scientific research of English language;
- e. Exchange academic information and documents.

E.g. in the end of 2000, Foreign Language University of Beijing set up co-operation with 146 universities or Institutes from 46 countries and regions.

5. English teaching is a new industry in China

Now English is the first top language in Internet. The English Internet users are 311,241,881 at end 2006. The percentage of English Internet users is 30.6% of Internet users in the all world. But the percentage of Chinese language users is only 13.00%. The percentage of Japanese language users is only 8.5%.

English becomes the lingua franca of the world. It is the default language for international scientific conferences, no matter where they take place or what their specific topics are.

In China, English became a top important language in the politics, business, science, technology, education, etc. Many Chinese people like to speak and read English, even the following old man also likes to read English Newspaper, he even can read English form down to top of the Newspaper.



The old Chinese reading English Newspaper

The statistics shows that there are 20 millions Chinese students start to learn English every year when they became the fresh students of the state middle school.

Now there are more than 30,000 private English teaching schools in China. Many boys and girls like to learn English because they believe English will bring them a bright future.

Some years ago, the Sweden Education Institution *EF Education 2000* set up their English school in China, now China became their largest market for English teaching.

Wall Street Institute (WSI) is a famous English Teaching organization, now WSI has 14 branches in 3 cities of China. The students number arrived to 13,000, their income of English teaching will arrive to 27 millions US dollars.

Another English teaching organization *English First* set up more than 70 branches in 28 provinces of China.

The largest English teaching organization *New Oriental School* set more than 20 branches, the number of students arrived to 800,000, the income will arrive to 700 millions Chinese yuans, The pure profits will arrived to 12%. Now New Oriental School will expand to 100 cities of China. It likes to become Wal Mart in English teaching.



Students in New Oriental School

6. English and Olympic game 2008

The slogans of Olympic 2008 are “one world, one dream”, “New Beijing, New Olympic”. For welcoming Olympic 2008, the Organization Committee of Beijing Residents for English Speaking set up at 2002.

The purposes of this committee are as follows:

- a. The number of English speakers will arrive to 5,000,000 (35% of Beijing total population).



English corner

- b. All the street nameplate of Beijing will be written with Chinese and English.



street nameplate

- c. Organizing English volunteer team.



Olympic volunteer

- d. All window trades and service trades can serve in English without any difficulty.
- Civil servants of government have to learn English: ordinary servants have to know 100 English sentences. Young servants have to know 300 English sentences.
 - In public security organization, 6,000 staffs have to pass the English test of medium level.

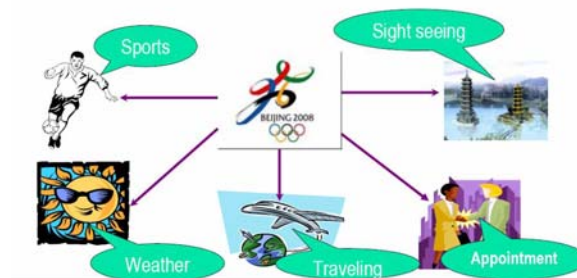
- In traffic communication organization, 60% taxi drivers have to know 300 English sentences, 80% taxi drivers have to know 100 English sentences, 100% workers of bus have to know 100 sentences, the workers in metro have to know 300 English sentences. Before 2008, they have to pass the English examination.
- Tourism (traveling, sightseeing, hotel). English speaking staffs will arrive to 90% for 5 stars hotel, 80% for 4 stars hotel, 60% for 3 stars hotel.
- Commerce: 60% young workers in commerce service (restaurant, barbershop, photo shop) have to master English.



Master English for Hotel

More and more Chinese shall speak English in Olympic 2008, we try to set up a multilingual service system as follows:

□面向2008北京奥运会的多语言智能信息服务系统



Multilingual service for Olympic 2008

7. Some recommendation to the language policy in China

7.1 Reinforce the teaching and learning of other foreign languages in China

Now Internet becomes a multilingualism network. 2000-2005, Internet growth of English is only 126.9%, while internet growth of Russian is 664.5%, Portuguese 327.3%, Chinese 309.6%, French 235.9%. Growth rate in number of Internet users in non-English speaking countries are much higher than in English speaking countries.

Top Ten Languages Used in the Web

(Number of Internet Users by Language)

TOP TEN LANGUAGES IN THE INTERNET	Internet Users, by Language	% of all Internet Users	World Population 2006 Estimate for Language	Internet Penetration by Language	Internet Growth for Language (2000 - 2005)
<u>English</u>	311,241,881	30.6 %	1,125,664,397	27.6 %	126.9 %
<u>Chinese</u>	132,301,513	13.0 %	1,340,767,863	9.9 %	309.6 %
<u>Japanese</u>	86,300,000	8.5 %	128,389,000	67.2 %	83.3 %
<u>Spanish</u>	63,971,898	6.3 %	392,053,192	16.3 %	163.8 %
<u>German</u>	56,853,162	5.6 %	95,982,043	59.2 %	106.0 %
<u>French</u>	40,974,005	4.0 %	381,193,149	10.7 %	235.9 %
<u>Korean</u>	33,900,000	3.3 %	73,945,860	45.8 %	78.0 %
<u>Portuguese</u>	32,372,000	3.2 %	230,846,275	14.0 %	327.3 %
<u>Italian</u>	28,870,000	2.8 %	59,115,261	48.8 %	118.7 %
<u>Russian</u>	23,700,000	2.3 %	143,682,757	16.5 %	664.5 %
TOP TEN LANGUAGES	810,484,459	79.6 %	3,971,639,798	20.4 %	150.5 %
Rest of World Languages	207,572,930	20.4 %	2,528,057,262	8.2 %	453.9 %
<u>WORLD TOTAL</u>	1,018,057,389	100.0 %	6,499,697,060	15.7 %	182.0 %

Number of internet user by language

Obviously, the dominant position of English in Internet was gradually broken. The multilingualism trend becomes more and more obvious in Internet. In this case, we have to reinforce the teaching of other foreign languages in China. We have to also learn French, German, Russian, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Arabic and other languages.

Now in universities of China, more than 40 foreign languages are taught. More than 100,000 Chinese are learning Esperanto.

7.2 Reinforce the teaching and learning of Chinese language in China

Chinese language is the mother tongue of Chinese nation. We have to reinforce Chinese teaching in the premier school, the middle school and university. In present, in some schools of China, the Chinese language teaching was ignored. The Chinese language of some students is not so good that they can not read and write Chinese very well. Many students seek to pass the English examination as GRE, TOFEL, IELTS, etc. They don't like to learn Chinese language.

Following is a report on the decreasing of Chinese language level of Chinese students:

“不久前，一家晚报报道，一位大学三年级的学生代替父亲写了一份“不足百字的申请书，竟有28个错别字”。据这位同学说，他们工科学生在大学里一般不学语文，过去学的也“早就忘得一干二净了”。这种现象难道不值得关注吗？”

A Chinese student studying in polytechnic university was asked to write an application for his father, this application including less 100 Chinese characters, but the wrong characters in this

application arrived to 28. It is a social phenomenon that sets Chinese people thinking.

Of course, English teaching is important, but Chinese language teaching is more important than English for Chinese students. How to balance the relation between English teaching and Chinese teaching, it will be an urgent topic for language planning in China.

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