

The Study of China English and Its Implication for TEFL in China

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Abstract—The paper first describes the rapid development of English as a lingua franca in the world. As an important means of communication, language is always in motion; the internationalization of English triggers the nativization of English across the world. The development of the English language all over the world results in different English varieties. The nativization of English in China has evolved a special variety—China English with Chinese characteristics. The paper then gives an overview and manifestation of China English from the perspectives of definition, connotation, and linguistics features, makes a comparison between China English and Chinglish, and talks about the necessity and rationality of China English. It also argues that the existence and development of China English is necessary and acceptable, and China English, which reflects the nativization of English in China in a globalization context, is of great significance to English teaching in China.

Keywords—World Englishes; English variety; China English; English teaching

I. INTRODUCTION

Many facts demonstrate that English has become a global, international, and world language. English as a lingua franca has become a focus of attention for many scholars both at home and abroad. As an important tool of communication, language is always changeable and the contact of different English varieties will trigger variation. The concept of world English means that English is a language spoken in the Olympics or World Cup Football seasons, international trade fairs, academic conferences, and so on. When referring to English, one is not confined to American English, British English, or to Canadian English, Australian English, and New Zealand English. More and more people are aware of the existence of Asian Englishes, and African Englishes, and other English varieties in the world. The purpose of the paper is to make a status confirmation of China English and its implication for English teaching and learning in China, give a brief introduction to the history, the definition and connotation of China English, make a comparison between China English and Chinglish, and analyse its linguistic features in lexicon, phonology, and syntax. Meanwhile, the author argues that the existence and development of China

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English is necessary and acceptable, and China English, which reflects the localization of English in China in a global context, is of vital importance to English teaching and learning in China. Ultimately, The author predicts the prospects of China English, The prospects are, the author argues, that China English is on the way to becoming another world variety, which will happen when it has been adequately depicted, codified and authoritatively recognized.

II. ENGLISH AS A GLOBAL, AN INTERNATIONAL, AND A WORLD LANGUAGE

Admittedly, English has already been used all around the five continents of the globe. An estimated 320—80 million people speak it as their first language and presumably 150—300 million as their second language. A billion are learning it, approximately a third of the world's population are exposed to it. It is predicted that by 2150 half the population in the world will be more or less proficient in it. English is the major language used in such fields as science, business, trade, and sports, gaining great importance in the media, the world's tourists, and entertainment industries; more than half of the international journals are issued in English. Meanwhile English has been playing an important role in world politics. It has gained the status of being one of the five official languages in the United Nations and a working language in many world organizations such as UNESCO, WHO and international business communities. Phillipson uses the term linguistic imperialism to depict this phenomenon. Crystal wrote a book on English as a global language, in which he defined global English as a lingua franca for most people in the world; he claimed that non-native speakers of English outnumber native speakers of English. It is known from this that English is no longer possessed only by its native speakers.

As English is spoken by a great many people in the world, obviously its varieties are also increasing. The varieties of English have been studied by some scholars since the 1960s and many important symposiums have been held to discuss the status of English. In addition, the international Association for World Englishes contributes to the study of English varieties and many academic journals regarding the study of world Englishes are issued such as English Today, World Englishes, and Asian Englishes. According to Kachru, Englishes can be classified into three concentric rings, namely inner, outer, and expanding circles of English. Inner

circle countries include the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. Englishes are distinguished as native speaker varieties. An outer circle, which uses English as an institutionalized, official variety, includes India, the Philippines, Nigeria, Jamaica, and Singapore. Many people can use English fluently for different purposes of communication. The expanding circle comprises countries such as Japan, China, Germany and Russia, where English is taught as a foreign language. China English belongs to this circle. The number of English speakers in the expanding circle is bound to be the largest group but does not have any single, identifiable standards; however, in many expanding circle countries, such as Sweden and the Netherlands, English is playing a growing role within the country. Many people can have a good command of English as people from the outer circle. Kachru maintains that “there are now at least four non-native speakers of English for every native speaker.”

The German author Gnutzmann adds another way of looking at this: “it has been estimated that 80% of the verbal communication in which English is used as second or foreign language don’t involve native speakers of English. The plural form of English first emerges in the *A History of English* written by Barbara Strang. From then on, it is frequently used by different scholars in the title of books regarding the pluralism. This plural form of English, such as Asian Englishes, European Englishes, New Englishes, and World Englishes, indicates the multiplicity of English varieties, and their nativization in different social-cultural contexts.

III. CHINESE VARIETIES OF ENGLISH

A. *China English and Chinglish*

The term “China English” was first used by Ge Chuangui in 1980. At the beginning, it was used as a term to refer to the translation of things specific to Chinese culture, such as Four Books (Sishu), eight-legged essay (Baguwen), May Fourth Movement (Wusi Yundong), Three Represents (Sange Daibiao) etc. Since then, the name China English has been adopted by many others who join the discussion. The main debate in these articles is whether China English exists and what it is. However, before we explain further, we need to be clear about the two concepts of China English and Chinglish. According to Hu Xiaoqiong, there is no clear distinction between the two terms; rather, they are at the opposite ends of a continuum: At one end, it is an incorrect form of English. The words are ungrammatically strung together, with often inappropriate lexis and probably only a partially comprehensible pronunciation. At the other end, it is a language which is as good a communicative tool as Standard English. The pronunciation is close enough not to pose much of a problem; there may be some syntactic and grammatical differences attributable to the influence of Chinese; and the lexis may occasionally differ, reflecting cultural differences.

On the one hand, Chinglish is foreign, ill-formed or even erroneous, and not comfortably intelligible for the most part. It is an unavoidable yet necessary stage on the way to learning English as a second or foreign language, and the

speaker may get there. Apparently, Chinglish violates the general English rules, grammars, and customs; in addition, it obviously hampers international communication and the spread of the Chinese culture. Consequently, it is not accepted by English native speakers. Some Chinglish sentences are produced by misunderstanding semantic meaning and some are even arranged in Chinese structures. The following sentences are typical examples: my age is very young. Your brain is very clever. The price of the food is quite expensive.

On the other hand, China English is English, a member of the big family of World Englishes or, more exactly, a member of the expanding circle, to use Kachru’s term, but with Chinese characteristics:

- A near-native yet Chinese accent.
- Words which are basic only to Chinese because of its history, environment and politics.
- Dead or old-fashioned forms or pronunciations resulting from Chinese approaches to language learning.....
- A linguistic mixture of British and American English in both spoken and written forms. So China English is a nativization of normative English used by Chinese people mainly in China, for international and intranational purposes. It is self-justifying as English.

China English and Chinglish are interrelated in some respects: both of them express Chinese things and have Chinese features. Yet there is an essential distinction between them: China English is on the way to becoming a new variety of English and a member of the world Englishes; its composition and scope are much richer and wider than Chinglish. China English, with its increasing publicity in the world, will exert a great influence on the English language. However, Chinglish is a deformed language with an unstable composition and narrow scope; it can cause barriers in China’s international communication and culture spreading. Some Chinglish sentences have entered English, for instance, the sentence “Long time no see.” Originally was pidgin English, but now it is uttered by many native English speakers. Nevertheless, such cases are very rare.

It should be noted that there are a great many pragmatic errors in the materials publicized to overseas countries and areas. According to the statistical data collected by Duan Liancheng, by the end of 1990, there had been over 2000 sorts of booklets to foreign countries just in Shandong Province. The correct use of China English is a good solution to the difficult translation problem. Therefore, the scientific study of China English is of great importance to both linguistic theories and social reality.

B. *The Objective Existence of China English*

1) *The characteristics of China English*

In the past twenty years, a great deal of work has been conducted by many researchers both at home and abroad regarding the issues of China English. Admittedly, the existence of China English is apparent and essential because

China English has its definite Chinese characteristics at different linguistic levels, namely pronunciation, vocabulary, syntax and discourse. Some phonological features are predictable such as the tendency for syllable-timing as opposed to stress-timing. That is to say, Chinese users are always confused with the stress rules in English because in Chinese, there is no problem of stress. Chinese is a language of tone rather than stress.

At the lexical level, many Chinese words and terms have been translated into English, such as fengshui, taichi, maotai, one country two systems, etc. As time goes by, the standard native English has enriched itself by absorbing many Chinese words. In Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language, there are more than 100 Chinese words, apart from proper nouns. According to a survey conducted by Cannon until the middle of the 1970s, 979 Chinese words have been included in various Standard English dictionaries and reference books. Since the policy of reform and opening, more and more Chinese words have access to the English language. These Chinese words, such as "taichi", and "fengshui", of course are a rich resource of China English vocabulary with Chinese characteristics.

Chinese characteristics may occur in syntax, although there is very little research available. Deterding reports that subject-less sentences are very common in Singapore spoken English by Chinese native speakers. Therefore, Kirkpatrick and Xu assume that subject-less sentences might be also be a syntactic feature in China English. At the discourse level, the development of China English aims at successful mutual understanding between Chinese people and other native or non-native English speakers, while reserving unique Chinese cultural peculiarities. Chinese culture, like any other culture, has its distinct norms and behavior, such as ways of greeting, apologizing, showing gratitude, and the most conspicuous response to compliments. These norms are neither better nor worse than those of English-speaking countries. However, to speak English, we used to sacrifice our cultural peculiarities, and follow norms and behavior of Western countries. China English, as an English variety developed in Chinese culture, should carry Chinese cultural peculiarities. That is one of the most important reasons why China English is encouraged.

2) *Towards the acceptability of China English*

Although English in China belongs to the expanding circles according to Kachru's classification, it is a fact that China English has not developed into a new variety of English as other varieties from the inner circle and the outer circle. Indeed, China English has not gained the status according to Bamgbose's criteria, i. e. demography, geography, authority, codification and acceptability. Judging from the five factors, China English has not been fully accepted by Chinese learners, English users in China do not consciously use China English, and most of the learners now prefer American or British English. China English has not been codified or used systematically and authoritatively yet, English is widely used in China. It will play more important roles in the near future. As I have mentioned previously, China English exists at the different linguistic levels, and indeed reflects the cultural identity behind the language. China English can meet every communicative purpose in the

exchanges between China and the world. We have no reason at all to refuse it unless it is unintelligible.

One researcher in China, Chen Hanlin has conducted an investigation into English native speaker's attitudes towards two kinds of English journals published in China namely, Beijing Weekly, China Today. The result demonstrates that China English exists in such prestigious journals in China. Meanwhile, the English native speakers interviewed all admit the existence of China English. Another survey to investigate the attitudes of people from the inner and outer circles towards China English has been conducted by Chen Meilin; it shows that favorable attitudes towards China English do exist. Over half of them accepted and would accept China English. The two typical examples are only the way to prove the acceptability of China English from the inner and outer circles, but it is a great encouragement for the learner from the expanding circle. In this case, it is surely reasonable for the English researchers and teachers in our country to show positive attitudes towards the existence of China English and contribute considerably to it.

IV. IMPLICATIONS FOR ENGLISH TEACHING AND LEARNING

The study of China English and World English has offered some insights into English language teaching and learning in China. Especially, it is of great significance to our international communication, English curriculum design, textbooks construction and English learning.

First, it is believed that China English will be further explored by researchers and the English taught and learned in the future should not be restricted to the inner circle countries. Some countries from the inner and outer circles have claimed their English as the standard variety, for example, the Australians and Singaporeans. Currently, English learners in China do not communicate only with native speakers from the inner circle. Evidence suggests that it is vitally important to be familiar with the non-native varieties of English because there may be more chances to engage in English communication with non-native speakers of English than native speakers. English is no longer a colonial language but, as a lingua franca. It has become a tool of communication with people from the world. English learners in China must be ready to communicate with people who speak English with a Japanese, Korean and even Spanish accent. Nobuyuki writes "English is not the language for us to use only with Americans, the British, or any other native speakers. Rather, English is the language for us to use with Chinese, Koreans, Singaporeans and other Asians...." As far as the communication content with non-native English speakers is concerned, it is unnecessary and even ridiculous to abide by American customs when we communicate with Koreans, Germans. So, it is no use imitating American pronunciation and tone in order to communicate successfully.

After China's WTO entry and Beijing's successful bid for the 2008 Olympic Games, English learning is much more popular than before. As the prediction from the journal of Foreign Language Teaching and Research demonstrates that "English will most probably be the second language of

many Chinese people in the 21st century, China English will become one of the biggest varieties in the world.” At that time, English from the inner circle countries cannot be the focus in the teaching curriculum. However, we can systematize China English in terms of phonetics, grammar, lexicon, culture, etc. Learners can be more exposed to China English and Chinese culture can be better learned.

Second, the famous Israeli linguist Bernard Spolsky states, “in the course of globalization, every Asian country should formulate English teaching objectives according to individual practical conditions. In the past, people used to adapt British or American teaching policies and objectives. But we can’t do like this way anymore, it is wise to design teaching policies and objectives on the basis of national conditions....” According to him, it is absolutely necessary to integrate China English into textbooks and other teaching materials. At present, all teaching materials and textbooks from primary school and tertiary level either select from the inner circle countries or represent their cultures and customs, while culture from the outer and expanding circles is neglected. This unbalanced culture learning leads to Chinese learners’ inability to talk about their culture in English. We strongly recommend the incorporation of Chinese culture into English teaching. According to Adamson at least 40 kinds of contact literature have been produced by bilingual Chinese writers since the 1930s. The typical representatives are Lin Yutang, Han Suyin, and Chang Ailing. The writers went abroad after they received high education in China. Admittedly, they write for Westerners and English native speakers considering Chinese stories as their fictional resources. These nativized linguistic features are definitely presenting the Chinese identity of the characters in the novel. Articles written by the Chinese regarding Chinese culture from Chinese periodicals and magazines also can be useful teaching materials. So it is of great value to incorporate these China English materials into our teaching syllabus; that will facilitate our deeper thinking on Chinese culture. Introducing Chinese culture to foreigners and getting them to be familiar with Chinese culture should be our final goal of English teaching and learning.

The study of China English can also give some reflections on English learning in China. In fact, most English learning programs in China are conducted in the classroom; college students are playing a significant role in English learning in China. In the course of globalization, it is of great value for college students to have a good command of English. So, full consideration should be given to the balanced development of students’ linguistic competence and intercultural communication competence. Meanwhile, many college students, especially for non-English major students are learning English as a tool of communication, and they want to acquire a working command of English in picking up information, job hunting, studying abroad, business transactions, and entertainment and so on. Most of them are not required to acquire native –like English proficiency in English is enough in their work and communication. In this sense, more attention should be paid to teaching English for specific purposes (ESP) because the ESP program will be the mainstream of English learning in

the future. As for English major students, we had better be widely exposed to different English varieties, and broaden our knowledge of Englishes. Exposure to different English varieties can enable us to be competent interpreters and efficient intercultural communicators.

V. CONCLUSION

There is a Chinese saying that everything is difficult at the start, or that it is the first step that costs. Although China English has not gained general recognition and confronts great challenges from both at home and abroad, we believe that the potential prospects of China English are promising. In this case, it is surely reasonable for the English teachers and researchers in China to assume the responsibility for advocating the development of China English and enthusiastically spreading our splendid culture. In order to adjust to this tendency, it is urgent to reform the English language teaching and learning in China. To be aware of the importance of researching into World English, Asian English, and China English can contribute a lot to our present English teaching and learning.

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