Non-standard learning acquisition: The use of colloquial language among ELS (English as a second language) students in China higher education

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Abstract: Second language (L2) education regards a foundation for Second language (L2) learners before they went to English-using situations. China has the largest English-users among expanding markets as results of globalization and modernization. With the increasingly influence of China in international affairs and the increasingly importance in the global economy, the demand for English proficiency is unprecedentedly high (Wu, 2001)[1]. In western, many linguists have researched Colloquial Language Learning in English in many aspects. Normally colloquialism (informal language) learning is defined in the article as informal language learning in Higher education (HE) context. Although the content of colloquial learning has increased recently, the teaching of informal language into the classroom is still limited in China. Chinese English teaching pays more attention to grammar training instead of communicative training, and formal English gained mostly from the prescribed textbook. Therefore, to give a more equality and open-to-world atmosphere towards English learning in higher education, this need to pay attention to the content design and forms of colloquial English using in the classroom.

1. Introduction

From the twenty century, English was appointed as a compulsory course through primary school to higher education in China. As results of the size of the class are usually over 50 students, the curriculum teaching is likely 'English for all' teacher-centred rather individualized (Zhang et al., 2017)[2]. Turns to higher education, English proficiency test regard as important as mandarin as one of the college entrance examination before they entry to colleges or universities. When a learner goes to higher education, students have to take a college-level 4 or 6 test which is decided by their major during their union life. English using ability is a qualification for a good university, job promotion and future development (Luo & Shenkar, 2006)[3]. However, conventional English teaching in china higher education was mostly adapted and suitable for assessment rather than to daily use as these were written examinations (Zhang et al., 2017)[2]. There was very limited opportunity for students to appliance oral English into real-specking hypotheses, apart from

informal learning activities such as traditional "English corner" (Gao, 2009)[4]. However, L2 learners are likely to study with a native speaker for better performance at English using. As a result, 'Overly formal language can make native speakers uncomfortable' (Engkent, 1986, 225)[5]. Formal language education towards L2 students and existing tools are insufficient for learning a language for use in daily life (Xu, 2017, Chen & Chung, 2020)[6][7].

Colloquial language could be seen as a linguistic style used in casual communication. It is the most common form of pragmatics, an idiom usually used in conversations and other informal contexts. However, colloquial in terms of informal expression is met with the confused expression for L2 students while they over the classroom. Hasanah (2020) and Teng (2018) demonstrates students were more familiar with colloquial items that are lexical compared with phrasal[8][9], the highest frequency colloquial words are popular which is what learners want to learn. Karimi (2018) found out Colloquial expression positively affected the EFL (English as a foreign language) learner's listening comprehension[10]. For this study, the colloquial expression will be defined as an informal, conversational speech. Slang considered a part of colloquial speech.

2. English Teaching under China Higher education Context

2.1. Standard English teaching in china higher education

From the early 1980s, English has been a compulsory subject in secondary and tertiary curricula in China and 2001 in Taiwan. China's tertiary English education is still guided by some outdated guidelines, sometimes known as the "three centres", that is, teacher-centred, grammar-centred, and examination-centred fail to reach the desired level of English in Chinese college English education (Zhao, 2022)[11]. The teaching method in China is based on a large classroom (40 to 60 people) with teaching by specialized subjects (Jin & Cortazzi, 1998)[12]. The teacher-centred pedagogy has been gone through all stages in China education systems, especially in higher education.[11] This approach lays its theoretical basis on behaviourism theory, in which Skinner assumes that students who have been taught through punishment will only learn how to avoid punishment in terms of the role of the learner is to be acted upon by the teacher-controlled environment. The teacher's role is to manipulate the environment to shape behaviour. Thus, the student is not an agent in the learning process, but rather an animal that instinctively reacts to the environment (Brau, Fox, & Robinson, 2018)[13].

The traditional model focus of learning is mastery, practice, rote memorization and discipline. It emphasizes the role of teaching materials and teachers serve as sources and disseminators of knowledge. The traditional language acquisition of communicative competence and the modules of communicative competence range from single skill development to comprehensive skill training in English teaching. It can be seen from the curriculum reform and curriculum development project that was issued by the Ministry of Education in 1999 China. In addition, the Ministry of Education China requires all majors (preferably foreign textbooks) to be taught in English in the near future (Luo, 2007)[14]. Although education authorities have been trying to promote CLT by introducing new curriculum goals and textbooks, CLT has not been widely popularized among teachers (Hu, 2002)[15]. Objectively, the English test has to a certain extent prompted colleges and universities and students to pay attention to English teaching and ensure the quality of college English teaching. However, due to the different positions of limited consideration, as Chinese exams prioritize textbook-orientated skills, such as speaking, writing, reading, listening and translating, the test will also hinder students from achieving a balanced development of different skills practically (Zhao, 2012)[16].

2.2. Standard language teaching towards L2 students and influences

Under China's education system, students' thoughts are formed in the classroom by listening, noting rather than speaking, which leads to them tends to be passive learner rather than active, Likewise, they are influenced by the Confucian-heritage-cultural and doctrine of the golden mean (silence is an expression of modesty), which students maintain a silent form of learning. Then for language learning, expressing and expressing one's own opinions is a way to exercise language expression skills (Li & Zhu, 2010)[17]. Foster and Yufeng[18] reported that for general Chinese students are lacking critical thinking (2011), similarly, the traditional china's pedagogy push students more likely to adopt surface learning as they used to learn through task-oriented, memorization-based and non-holistic approach (Zhu & Gao, 2012)[19]. Most students are often asked to recite and recite texts. As a matter of fact, language learners' motivation on learning language dominants by teacher's teaching in class rather than themselves, have not known this much but start to remember. Even so, under the influence of the Chinese education system, teachers are still considered the esteem of god and centre of knowledge, students rely on textbooks and teachers in their studies. They not only lack objective self-reflection ability, but also lack the Independency. From the research of L2 Chinese learner's autonomy of English learning which students expressed a strong desire to integrate classroom learning into daily use, but they did not want to be passively teacher-centred and test-driven.

2.3. Oral English/colloquial English teaching in china higher education context

Since 2006, the China national college English testing committee clearly stated that the goal of college English is to cultivate students' comprehensive ability to use English, especially in listening and speaking (Li et al., 2012)[20]. Communicative English teaching required teachers to pay attention, not only to the training of written examination but also to the training of students' oral and listening ability. Moreover, the new textbooks are generating new teaching methods, such as communicative language teaching is being widely promoted (Toro et al., 2018)[21]. However, according to the research on Journal of Chinese teaching, the research pointed out that more than 90% of Chinese educational institutions (primary, junior high and higher education) accept semi-Chinese and semi-English teaching methods, which shows that in the subconscious of students, they still rely on their mother tongue for oral language learning (Yao, Zhang & Li, 2019)[22].

When Colloquial expression mentioned into English learning, most people think of vulgar expressions which cannot be appeared informal situations, colloquial English regards as sensitive part of English language teaching accordingly (Shadrah, 2010)[23]. However, language shape has its backgrounds which means colloquial English also represent the English Cultural. Western civilizations should be incorporated into their English classes due to the fact that language and culture can never be separated (Liu, Lin & Wiley, 2016)[24]. So, considering the feasibility of teaching in a formal classroom, it can be taught as in other parts of the language. The colloquial teaching conducted by communication-based English approaches emphasizing the pragmatic authentic and functional use of the target language for meaningful purposes (Li, 2011)[25].

2.4. Colloquial English towards L2 students learning and influences

Only students who want to learn from their own needs can learn well (Powell & amp, 2011)[26]. Proper interest in class can greatly improve the relationship between teachers and students. In addition, positive learning attitude will help to change language input into internalized language take (Oroujlou & Vahedi, 2011)[27]. Zhu and Gao also pointed out the intercultural communication skills are essential for students to overcome learning difficulties in language training (2012)[19].

Mixed approaches in teaching not only arouse them learning motivation, but also stimulate and strengthen them willing to use intercultural communication. Motivation has been seen as one of the strongest factors in language learning (Oroujlou & Vahedi, 2001)[27]. In addition to that, English slangs appear normally with real context which in TV, movie, songs (ESL/EFL) which is often can activate classroom atmosphere, make students relaxed (Schoepp, 2001)[28]. An American educator and psychologist Carl Ransom Rogers agreed that the successful teaching relies on a sincere relationship between teachers and students and a harmonious and safe classroom climate. On this basis, colloquial English can be regarded more than the ability to integrate language and skills (Luo, 2007)[14]. while student's communication could across these colloquial which gives them confidence and sense of achievement (Hasanah, 2020)[8]. By this, self-confidence plays an actively role in promote learning, also promote the formation of teaching methods and the harmonious teacher-student relationship.

3. The problems and challenges towards L2 student in achieving English

3.1. The problems of L2 (Chinese) student language proficiency in English-speaking country

Since the establishment of China's market economy system, it has continued to deepen through the Educational purpose and teaching pedagogy. Chinese students occupy a large share of the transnational education market, and demand is growing at a rate of 13% every year (Edwards & Ran, 2006)[29]. Turns to study in the English-language country, some issues identified as effecting Chinese students' performance is the pastoral concerns (Confucian ideology) which has limited students' understanding of western academics of cultural expectation (Edwards & Ran, 2006)[29]. In the UK, lower performance on mastery in English proficiency has troubled international students. On this basis, few western Universities have provided English helping services for L2 language learner, this can be reflected in numerous admissions plans, language training facilities and pre-session programs, in-session learning guides and special tutorials tailored to the social and educational needs of international students. Dr. Tom from Birmingham City University explained that more and more international students are choosing to enter UK universities, and that the university uses teaching and learning strategies such as one-to-one seminars, group projects, and academic tutoring to help overseas students make a successful transition to UK higher education. The Teaching International Students project (TIS project) of the UK Higher Education 'Academy' aims to provide HE teachers seeking ideas and resources for teaching international students with support. Since 1972, the English for Academic Purposes Lecturers' Association (EPA) has acted as a central national organization to promote EPA pedagogy in most UK universities and higher education institutions (Edwards & Ran, 2006)[29].

However, as students are required to qualify in academic English and provide standardized test scores (ILTES or TOEFL) prior to entering higher education in an English-speaking country, there is few literature focusing on supporting the use of practicality informal English by non-native students in western country whiling their living and off the campus (Oropeza, Varghese, & Kanno, 2010)[30]. Non-native English speaking student still require additional linguistics support towards their academic/non-anaemic classes and assistance (Bergrey, et al. 2018)[31]. According to the American instituted for Research result, which shows there are nearly over thousands ELS programs in US higher education that support ELS educational services. Likewise, for improving international English proficiency, mostly university provides academic preparation course programs: oral communication class (Informal daily English), English for Academic purposes (EAP) and cultural training. Following the increased educational aims of apply informal English teaching to L2 learner, the L2 students find it challenging to understand the correct use of keywords in the language. On this basis, considering of over academic English has been learn, L2 learner are all

faced the misuses words within real communication, which not only affects the efficiency of communication but also eliminates the confidence of secondary school students in opening their mouths.

3.2. The issues of teaching standard and colloquial English in china higher education

Morris and Mo have found (2023) that proficiency in English is viewed as a key opportunities in China. 'Deaf - Dumb' English among Chinese English learners has become one of the key concerns of a whole society[32]. The learning ideology of 'Rote-memorization' and 'recite from others' limited the Chinese L2 learners to express themselves and afraid to speak. There is an obvious deviation between Chinese teaching aims to Western pedagogy. In the China context, education aims to emphasize student's language cognition and textbook knowledge, therefore ignores the teaching of applied language. Xu[6] conducted a study on oral English and the results reflected that English lecturers in China were asked to focus on teaching vocabulary, grammar, and reading rather than speaking (2021). A survey conducted by Karima[33] (2022) revealed that a great majority of the students had only some fragmentary knowledge of English grammar and recognized some English words but were very weak in the language using skills.

Towards Chinese students, the exam culture has been predominant and influential in language learning (Curdt-Christiansen & Wong, 2016)[34], what they learnt from the class aims to pass the exams. The philosophy of the Chinese education system is to use test scores to prove students' abilities, universities and social work filter student's comprehensive ability by evaluating students' performance in school. Secondly, the embodiment of Confucianism in learning is that knowledge is derived from the teacher, the teacher is considered the centre of esteem (Edwards & Ran, 2006)[29]. on this basis, as influenced by Confucius ideology, Dr Liu, Dr Lin and Dr Wiley[24] found that, as described by Chinese students, a good teacher is a person who is knowledgeable, able to answer questions, and has good morals (2016). In contrast, British students describe an excellent teacher as someone who can motivate students, use effective teaching methods and organize various classroom activities. It seems that the Chinese participants emphasized the importance of more knowledge, while the British participants focused on teaching methods and skills.[24] Although education authorities have been trying to promote CLT by introducing new curriculum goals and textbooks, CLT has not been widely popularized among teachers (Hu, 2002)[15]. However, many teachers claim that they support CLT, but in fact, they may not even have a clear syllabus and professional training of CLT teaching (Qasserras, 2023)[35]. In this regard, Xu in 2021 has criticized that there is no systematic pre-employment training in China, most of the teachers are graduates of the college English department, academic training of instructional teaching was considerably impracticable in an education system facing a large population[6].

4. Analysis of Chinese L2 learner in achieving language/linguistic

4.1. Analysis

The challenges of English teaching in China's higher education can be separated into 5 aspects: Teaching aims, Confucius ideology, teachers' training, syllabus with teaching approach and facilities. The aims of this research are to reflect the effects of using standard and colloquial English in teaching L2(Chinese) students in China higher education and analyze what kind of challenges will Chinese students meet in learning colloquial English under China higher education. From analyzing these two questions, the author will be trying to give a recommendation for English teaching in the China context.

In the case of comparing two kinds of English teaching from academic English teaching to

informal language teaching, the results show that the classroom application of colloquial English enable to increase driven factors L2 learning acquisition. As Ni[36] stated that If the learner's negative emotions are strong or the level of emotional filtering is strong, the learner's absorption of language input will be very low (2012). Adopting a new open approach into traditional teaching to enable students to study in a pleasant environment without pressure will have a great impact on them. Students will benefit from learning fashionable words or activities and know the function and meaning of learning it well so that they can persevere in learning. Which also arouse the motivation of L2 Chinese students' wish and driving forces to learn English. Students can voluntarily concentrate on L2 English learning, thus, achieved more understanding of English materials. Secondly, based on the pedagogy of Chinese English teaching, the major misunderstandings in learning and applying English are the long-term "crawling" education approach i.e., learning English for examinations, and their actual level of daily using or actual ability of practical English are lower than expected; another factor is that English teaching is nothing but " Pronunciation, Grammar, Sentences and Vocabulary". Memorization of texts allows the students to show respect for authors (Chan cited by Edwards & Ran, 2006)[29]. On this basis, co-existence of traditional and communicative teaching approaches is considerable practical to L2 learning. Avoid over-application emphasis of the rote-memorization and repetition words in English teaching and learning technique, paradoxical roles of learners. In the context of Chinese classroom, teachers are regarded as the authority in the Confucian tradition, teachers plays an inevitably role at the center of knowledge transfer and are typically the transmitters of English knowledge. The influences of Confucianism is not only evidenced to student-teacher relationships but also in preferred learning styles, such as memorizations of texts, preserve social harmony and avoid loss of face (Edwards & Ran, 2006)[29]. A Chinese proverb describes the central attitude of Chinese learning which is 'Writing can convey the way (or truth)[37]''. In this regards, students remain silent because it suggests that writing is a more powerful medium for expressing profound truths and ideas, often more effectively than spoken words.

4.2. Recommendation

The ability to understand colloquial terms is instrumental in increasing the efficiency of comprehension of a new language (Friesen et al., 2022)[38]. But, in most cases, ELS students experienced difficulties in understanding key concepts of English as students find it challenging to understand the colloquial terms used within real English communication; this has hindered the success of the students in learning the new language. Additionally, compared with phrases of colloquial language, in most cases, there is a tendency for L2 English speakers to use slang more lexical in their communication (Zuckermann, 2003)[39]. And some words can be defined differently; thus, the teacher needs to develop an understanding of the essential elements of colloquial language and notice the different forms of colloquial expressions for balancing the negatives of the student's learning processes. Notably, the teachers has responsibilities in trying to adjust the classroom atmosphere and form to change exam-oriented education. By the same token, Bradford[40] has suggested regardless of the content of the teaching, don't just do it for entertainment and entertainment (2010). In the classroom environment, teachers can integrate this kind of media presentation to L2 students learning. Determine the structure of the language by asking students to emphasize or choose the practice of speaking phrases. Finally, institutions of higher learning also need to invest more in the means of teaching English classes, such as: setting up classes for foreign English teachers, exchange classes with foreign exchange students or multimedia teaching.

4.3. Summary

As stated above, research studies have placed more emphasis on colloquial English teaching should conduct into China's English classroom. In most cases, the availability of the appropriate colloquial items helps in increasing the efficacy of the learning process for L2 learners. In the most cases, the increased use of slang affects the efficiency of the learning processes by second language learners (Bradford, 2010)[40]. Notably, the teaching mechanisms used also affects the student's ability to comprehend critical developments in the language (Bradford, 2010)[4-]. Developing appropriate mechanisms and techniques to enhance the efficiency of the L2 learning process may be more challenging for those pedagogies that incorporate different cultures, but this does not negate the efficiencies and benefits that are necessary for the application of informal L2 instruction within the normal ELT methodology.

5. Research reflection and limitation

5.1. Reflection

This qualitative study mainly collects relevant data and draws analysis via reviewing previously published literature. Creswell (2007, 43) noted that 'Our questions change during the process of research to reflect an increased understanding of the problem[41], a point also addressed by researchers' capacities to examine their own roles and perspectives in the inquiry process. For research about L2 language teaching, investigating the issues by asking participants and integrate into the classroom will give the researcher better understanding and knowing the issues. Whether learning and teaching are good which is subjective understanding, statistical or human data could support the reliability and accuracy of research results. Qualitative review uses a descriptive narrative style to examine previously unobtainable forms of knowledge and gain new insights. However, sufficient validity or reliability is a major criticism of the qualitative method. Due to the subjective nature of qualitative data and its source in a single context, it is difficult to apply conventional reliability and validity standards.

Even more, cultural values and opinions play in the collection and researcher as opposed to eliminating or trying to balance the influences of it. Social situations or processes are interpreted from a particular background and set of values and not simply based on the situation itself. And must rely on their own sense and process all information through their own minds, the researcher perspective influences the conclusion (Sutton & Austin. 2015)[42]. Frankly, cultural values and opinions play in the collection and researcher as opposed to eliminating or trying to balance the influences of it. English colloquial teaching is a beneficial attempt towards L2 learners, concerning the Confucius teaching ideology communicative teaching is just beginning appears, and it also needs to be improved in the teaching practice under speciality of Chinese cultural.

6. Conclusions

In order to further improve the effectiveness of bilingual teaching in Chinese universities, measures should be taken from both teaching and learning process. Suitable teaching materials are also a key issue that should be emphasized in the teaching process. Bilingual teaching methods should be strengthened to make bilingual teaching conform to international practice and suitable for Chinese students. On the other hand, for students, positive attitude towards bilingual education should be formed so that they can have more subjective initiatives in the L2 learning process. In addition to the above two aspects, the government and universities should also provide more supports and give priorities to bilingual education under materialization of education. In China, the

implementation of corresponding policies for bilingual education motivation seems crucial. The Ministry of Education of China has carried out a bilingual teaching curriculum development demonstration project at the university level since 2006. From 2006 to 2010, 100 bilingual courses were selected nationwide each year, which has greatly facilitated the adaptation and adjustment of bilingual teaching implementation in Chinese universities (Li & Wang, 2010)[43]. However, some research suggests that students who can move between daily and scientific languages benefit from this exchange, while students who only use colloquial language or relate the content to everyday experiences become disadvantaged (Nygård Larsson & Jakobsson, 2019)[44]. Although the aim of language learning and linguistic acquisition by Chinese student in higher education are somehow textbook oriented, instead of practical prioritized, the excellence of English language education outcomes as well as scientific research results are undeniable. By these, under the Chinese materialization education goal, a new question has been formulated to address the alignment (or misalignment) between the aims of English teaching and the practical use of English.

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