



VNIVERSIDAD
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CAMPUS DE EXCELENCIA INTERNACIONAL



FACULTAD DE FILOLOGÍA

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GRADO EN ESTUDIOS INGLESES

Trabajo de Fin de Grado

The Spread of English and its Implications for ELT in China

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ABSTRACT [EN]

English is now the most important language in the world. It is deeply connected with everyone's daily life. It has become a way through which people get to know the outside world. The reason to explain why English has spread so widely and rapidly becomes very clear by reviewing its expanding history. Colonization, the British Empire expansion and the U.S superpower boost the spread of the English language from the British Islands to the rest of the world. As the largest English language teaching and learning country in the world, China has witnessed the ups and downs of ELT inside the country throughout history. Because of the implementation of the Economic Reform in 1978, English has radically changed its status in China. People began to associate the language with both personal and national success. Nevertheless, there have been some problems that limit the performance of English teaching and learning in China. In order to improve learners' English levels, it is necessary to find solutions and solve the problems from the root.

KEYWORDS: Spread of the English language, evolution of ELT in China, problems of ELT in China, solutions for ELT in China.

ABSTRACT [ES]

El inglés es la lengua más importante del mundo. Está intrínsecamente conectada con el día a día de todas las personas. Es un instrumento que sirve a los hablantes para conocer el mundo exterior. La razón que explica por qué el inglés se ha extendido tan rápidamente se encuentra en su historia. La colonización, la expansión del imperio británico y el poder de los Estados Unidos han propiciado el salto del inglés desde las Islas Británicas al extranjero. China, la mayor comunidad de estudiantes y profesores del inglés del mundo, ha sido testigo de la fluctuación de la enseñanza del inglés a través de su historia. Debido a la puesta en marcha de la Reforma Económica de 1978, el inglés ha cambiado radicalmente su estatus en China. La población ha empezado a asociar la lengua con el éxito, tanto a nivel personal como nacional. A pesar de ello, ha habido algunos problemas que limitan la enseñanza del inglés en China. Para poder mejorar el nivel de los hablantes, es necesario encontrar soluciones para solventar los problemas desde la raíz.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Propagación del inglés, evolución de la enseñanza del inglés en China, problemas de la enseñanza del inglés en China, soluciones para la enseñanza del inglés en China.

摘要 [CN]

英语是当今世界最重要的语言，并且与人们的日常生活紧密相连。它已然成为人们了解世界的重要渠道。通过回顾英语的发展历史，我们可以清晰地了解英语在全球范围内广泛且迅速传播的主要原因。殖民主义，大英帝国的扩张和美国作为超级大国的影响力加快了英语从英国本土走向世界舞台的传播速度。与此同时，作为世界上最大的英语教学国家，中国见证了英语教育在其历史上的一系列变动。由于 1978 年经济改革的实行，英语在中国的地位被彻底改变。人们逐渐开始把英语和个人的成功，甚至于国家的成功联系起来。然而一些固有的问题始终限制着近些年来英语教学在中国所取得的成果。为了提高英语学习者的语言水平，找到相应办法并从根本上解决这些问题便显得尤为关键。

关键词：英语的传播，英语教学在中国的发展，英语教学在中国所遇的问题，英语教学在中国所遇问题的解决办法。

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1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, there is no doubt that English has become the only global language in the world as it “achieves a genuinely global status when it develops a special role that is recognized in every country” (Crystal 3). English language plays a vital part in major global events such as politics, economics, culture and technology. Its significant function, in terms of the international communication, establishes its own position as a global lingua franca. In 1978 the Chinese government decided to carry out the economic reform, since then, the country has been developing rapidly and gaining its status as an economic and political world power. China’s “Open Door” economic policy in the late 1970’s led to the boom of the teaching of foreign languages. Being the most influential language in the world, English has been chosen by the Chinese government and has become the most important foreign language to be taught in China. However, although China’s Ministry of Education carried out the reform of English language teaching in the beginning of this century, the outcome seems dissatisfactory so far; and such dissatisfaction is related to a series of difficulties that Chinese English teachers have to confront with. This paper aims to briefly introduce the spread of English language in its global context; and focus on ELT in China by analyzing its historical development, exploring the problems that both Chinese EFL teachers and students are facing and offering certain advice to solve the problems.

2. THE SPREAD OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN ITS GLOBAL CONTEXT

It is doubtless that English is the only language that could be considered as a

global lingua franca and a global language which has already generated a series of linguistic varieties. According to Crystal, “without a strong power-base, of whatever kind no language can make progress as an international medium of communication” (7-9); and this “strong power-base” comes from the people who speak this language. Hence, in order to analyze the spread of English, it is necessary to focus on the change of its speakers. The spread of English throughout the years could be basically divided into three stages, which are Colonisation, Imperialism Expansion and Global Expansion. These three stages could be corresponded to the “Three Circles” theory proposed by Kachru, who divides the spread of English language into three circles: “the Inner Circle”, “the Outer Circle” and “the Expanding Circle”; and believes that these circles “represent three distinct types of speech fellowship of English, phases of the spread of the language, and particular characteristics of the uses of the language and of its acquisition and linguistic innovations” (122).

2.1 Colonisation (the Inner Circle)

The Inner Circle countries, such as the UK, the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, are those countries which have certain regional power to spread the language in the very beginning. In the late of 1500s and early 1600s, English people made many attempts to found colonies in America and finally achieved it and brought the language to the northern America continent. Although the United States won the revolutionary war against the UK and became independent, English has remained as the official language; moreover, the independence of the US was crucial to the spread of English language later. In the case of Canada, due to the fact that English settlers

took over this ex-French colony during the 1750s and many loyalist supporters of Britain ran away from the US after the Independence War (Crystal 36-7), English owns prestige in the country. Besides, while Australia once was colonised to solve the problem of overcrowding in English prisons, New Zealand “was settled as a free colony and attracted immigrants from southern England and from Scotland” (McIntyre 27). Thus, via colonisation, the large-scale migration from the British Isles to the colonies makes English spread inside the Inner Circle and creates the base of its so called native speakers.

2.2 Imperialism Expansion (the Outer Circle)

The Outer Circle countries, such as India, Malaysia, Bangladesh, Singapore, Ghana are the countries which once were British colonies in Southeast Asia and Africa but English has still remained as the co-official language. English did not spread to these countries by means of migration but politics and economics (Brutt-Griffler 117). By taking advantage of its industrial power by the beginning of the nineteenth century, Britain extended its sphere of influence to Southeast Asia and Africa. These Outer Circle countries not only were colonised by Britain but became a great part of the British Empire. Such an imperial expansion forced indigenous people to accept English as the dominant language in their countries. After being independent, due to political and economic reasons, when these countries participate in any global events or have any international cooperation, English would be the first option for them to communicate with others.

2.3 Global Expansion (the Expanding Circle)

The Global Expansion refers to the final stage, in which English spreads to the Expanding Circle countries, such as China, Japan, Russia and the rest of the world. In this period, instead of colonisation, military and politics, the terms of economics, education, technology help the English language spread extensively. However, different from the preceded periods where the UK played the main role, in this third stage, the US becomes decisive. As Crystal states, the emergence of the US as the superpower country explains the English language status in present day (59). Having substituted the UK and become the most powerful country in the world after two World Wars, the US has been holding the dominant power in all fields. For instance, the Bretton Woods system established the global monetary hegemony of US dollars. As a result, the irreplaceable power of the U.S enforces the Expanding Circle countries recognise the importance and unshakeable position of the English language; and such a recognition encourages the development of ELT although the language has not become the official language in any of these countries yet (Crystal 60).

2.4 The current global status of the English language

Having gone through the three stages mentioned above, English eventually has become a global lingua franca, which plays an irreplaceable role in terms of international relations, global trade, access to information, popular culture etc. It has been adopted as the official language in many countries, taught as a second and foreign-language widely (McIntyre 31). Caine claims that English spreads significantly with its non-native speakers outnumbering its native speakers (1). Such a fact leads to a current debate about whether the English language should be still

considered as the property of its native speakers. For many linguists, such as Hülmbauer, Böhringer and Seidlhofer, English is no longer native speakers' own property, but is "democratized and universalized in the 'exolingual' process of being appropriated for international use" (27). In spite of this, in many institutions and working places, native speakers' English is still considered as the standard. This is a current debate, which is out of the scope of this essay.

3. THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE STATUS AND TEACHING IN CHINA

China, as one of the Expanding Circle country, has already become the biggest English language learning country in the world because of its large population base and its strong desire to integrate in international affairs. According to Bolton and Graddol, the number of Chinese English learners has reached 400 million in 2010, about one third of China's population (3). Pan acknowledges that "the informatisation of social life, economic globalisation and the globalisation of social and economic activities" make English and English studies become indispensable to Chinese society (82). It seems to be true that not only the government encourages the people to learn English but also parents persuade their children to speak the language (Jiang, qtd. in Gil 3) as English is deemed as a shortcut leading to national and personal success. With the high demand for English language skills, ELT field has been unprecedentedly booming in China. In fact, throughout the early modern and modern history of China, the development of English could be generally divided into several

periods by a series of historical events.

3.1 Pre-Opium Wars (Pre1840) and Post-Wars (1840-1911)

Being one of the most ancient country in the world, China is embedded with glorious history and splendid culture. The name of China in the Chinese language literally means “the Middle Empire,” from which it is clear to see its Sinocentric position in history. It despised foreigners and considered their languages and cultures as barbarian. Thus, “English had very little status, and the learning and command of it were not respected” (Pan 77). Nevertheless, twice Opium Wars made the Qing court become aware of British advanced military power, which potentially threatened China’s sovereignty.

In order to defend itself from further foreign military invasion and also advance its own military power, China began to pay more attention to the teaching and learning of Western languages, especially English. During this period, the Western missionary schools and language schools, supported by the Qing court, were the main force of ELT in China (Zhang 62). However, it is necessary to mention that over the period, English was learnt only as a tool for “the transferal of practical Western knowledge” (Pan 77); and was still considered inferior to the “intellectual” and “spiritual” Chinese culture (Johnson 146).

3.2 The establishment of the Republic of China and the New Culture Movement (1911-1949)

By overthrowing the Qing dynasty, Chinese people established the Republic of China in 1911. Soon after, the New Culture Movement broke out. A group of famous

intellectuals who had studied abroad criticized the traditional Chinese culture and called for the importation of Western theories and doctrines. Nevertheless, English “was not treated as a living language for direct communication” but a medium to access to Western knowledge (Pan 77).

3.3 The establishment of the People’s Republic of China and the Culture Revolution (1949-1976)

After the Civil War, the PRC was founded. Due to the intimate relationship between Chinese communist party and the Soviet Union, Russian once was the most important foreign language in China. Later on, English replaced Russian because of the conflict between the Chinese government and the Soviet Union government. Then, the coming of the Culture Revolution (1966-1976) badly hit the English language teaching since China became isolated and “everything which did not conform to the communist ideology was to be crushed and swept away” (Pan 70). Over the period, the English language textbooks were extremely politicalised with quotations from Mao, and the ELT became a propaganda of communist ideology (Pan 71).

3.4 After the Economic Reform (1978 to Present)

The death of Mao ended the disordered Cultural Revolution and the power transition to Deng opened China to the rest of the world. The Reform and Opening policy, as Lam and Chow claim, endowed increasingly “educational, occupational and economic advantages” to the English language (qtd. in Zhang 62); since the co-operation with other countries, the international communication and the participation into the international affairs requires the help of the international

language, English, as a medium (Shen 118). Subsequently, “English education gradually gained a steady footing and began to expand” (Pan 83): it has become one of the three compulsory subjects examined in the National College Entrance Examination; it was announced as the main foreign language in secondary education in 1982 (Pan 72). In 2001, the national curriculum reform stipulated English should be taught from the third grade in primary schools; and all college students have to pass the College English Test for Band 4 to graduate even if their majors are not related to English (Bolton and Graddol 5; Shen 118). All these reflect the emphasis that the Chinese government has made on ELT in recent years. Moreover, the state’s 2001 WTO acceptance and the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games resulted in an enthusiasm of English learning among Chinese citizens; more and more Chinese people consider the mastery of English as a necessary way to know the world better. To some extent, China has already acknowledged the power of English for the dual success, at both national level and personal level (Johnson 147).

4. ROOTED PROBLEMS IN ELT IN CHINA

The English language, changed from a language spoken by “barbarians” to a language considered as a necessary tool for personal and national success, has fundamentally elevated its social status in China within a hundred year. Nevertheless, though the government recently carried out a series of educational reforms in terms of ELT; and an average Chinese student must receive at least around 11 years of formal EFL education, the majority of English language learners could not communicate

properly in English and they still speak a “deaf and dumb English” (Lam, qtd in Zheng 45).

According to the test taker performance released by IELTS exam centre, Chinese academic test takers in 2015 had a mean band score of 5.7 out of 9, which shows that Chinese English learners have one of the worst English levels among all test takers. Furthermore, due to the fact that Chinese learners only scored 5.3 (out of 9) and 5.4 (out of 9) in Writing and Speaking sections respectively while scored 5.9 (out of 9) and 6.1 (out of 9) in Listening and Speaking, it could be said that the English language learning in China is passive; since writing and speaking could show whether the learner is able to use the language properly whereas listening and reading require only passive training. In order to understand why the EFL learning in China is passive and unsuccessful, it is necessary to acknowledge three intractable problems that exist in ELT in China.

4.1 Poor English language environment

According to the Chinese National Survey of Languages completed in 2001, there was about 69% of respondents who acknowledged that they seldom used English since “the main domain of contemporary use is education” (Bolton and Graddol 7). As time goes by, there is no doubt that English has become much more popular and it is much easier to get access to the language in daily life. Gil is convinced that China’s English language environment is actually better than many people think, as English, nowadays, is used extensively in many domains with high demand (3). He gives the examples of the variety of English language newspapers and

magazines; a large number of English language books; English programmes; visible signs and notices written in English in public transports and places (3-7). Nevertheless, it is necessary to indicate that the examples, which are listed by Gil, show a passive way of English learning for Chinese learners. They do have much more chances to see and hear English in public places than ever before; however, the chance for them to communicate with each other in this language is scarce. As a result, though China's English language environment has already been equipped with massive resources, it still lacks enough occasions for learners to put them into practice.

4.2 Inequality in teacher-student relationship

There is a clear distinction between the traditional Chinese culture of teaching, which is more teacher-centred; and the western culture of teaching, which is more learner-centred. In China, the saying "once a teacher, for life a father-figure" shows the paramount status of teachers and the submission of students in Chinese traditional education. This unequal relationship between the teacher and the student is more or less inherited in ELT in China. As the one who holds the knowledge, the teacher plays a dominant role in front of the learner. Normally, the teacher is the one who decides the way of teaching; in the case of ELT, it is usually based on grammar, vocabulary and translation. Moreover, as students are used to following the teacher's order, the teacher can barely receive the feedback in time from students and this unidirectional process results in the inefficient teaching and passive learning of English.

4.3 Exam-oriented teaching

It is true that the National College Entrance Examination is decisive and vital for

most Chinese students; and English, as one of the three obligatory test subjects, always calls for the attention of both the student and teacher. Once they have entered the college, the student also needs to pass the College English Band Four Level before graduation. In some cases, if the student expects to study abroad, he or she may need to take the TOFEL or the IELTS test to certificate the English level. Such an examination culture leads to “a ‘put examination first’ ideology and practice in language teaching and learning” (Pan 110). Consequently, ELT in China is usually targeted at helping students pass the exam, which also means the neglect of students’ needs and learning styles (Zheng 49). This utilitarian way of teaching explains why Chinese English learners cannot use the language properly in their daily lives since what they have studied over the years in class may only serve for the exam.

5. POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

In 2001, the Ministry of Education of China, by publishing the National English Curriculum Standards, clearly stated the object of ELT, which is:

“... to activate and cultivate students’ interest in learning, to build up confidence, to form a good learning habit and effective learning strategies, to develop autonomous learning and cooperative spirit, enable students to master basic English language knowledge and skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing so as to develop overall language competence. . .” (1-2)

In order to achieve these goals, firstly, there is a need for a de-emphasis of English in the domain of examination system as it is the premise to change the way English is

taught and learnt. Actually, this de-emphasis has already happened. In 2013, the Ministry of Education announced that English would no longer be a test subject in the National College Entrance Examination from 2017. Such a decision made by the Chinese government reveals “social dissatisfaction with the current teaching and learning of English” (Pan 75).

Secondly, Chinese EFL teachers should pay more attention to the participation of students in class. In other words, they need to abandon the traditional lecturer-centred, unidirectional way of teaching and adopt a more student-centred teaching method. They should listen to their students and know what their students want to learn about the English language. EFL teachers are responsible for encouraging students to participate in class. They can conduct certain activities, such as group discussions, debates, presentations, role-plays, which contain more communicative features; so that students could learn and improve their communicative skills of the language.

Thirdly, in terms of learner autonomy, students should take responsibility of the English language learning for themselves. It is necessary for students to realise the linguistic variability of English language and they should feel confident even if their English is non-standard (Liang 94). Besides, students can also develop their interests in English learning by means of leaning western culture through movies, music, literature etc. as learning language is learning culture.

6. CONCLUSION

Having experienced three major historical stages, the English language

eventually has spread all over the world and has changed the role from a normal language, which was only spoken in England, to a global lingua franca, which has been widely acknowledged by the world. Its position, in terms of international communication and cooperation, is irreplaceable. In this new era, English seems to be a bridge that connects people and countries together in the globalisation process.

With the spread of English, the development of ELT has been booming globally. In China, the biggest English language teaching and learning country, English language education witnessed its “ups and downs along with the Chinese historical events” (Zhang 66). Nowadays, while the language is increasingly gaining popularity, there are still many problems in ELT in China waiting to be solved. It may not only require a further educational reform of English language policy from the Chinese government but also need both EFL teachers and students’ efforts.

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