

Autonomy for English Teaching and Learning in China

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Abstract—Autonomy for English teaching and learning conduces to removal of several side-effects of authoritarian management. It aims at briefly introducing individual autonomy and local autonomy. Individual autonomy relies on an individual's self-control capacity. Teachers ought to shift their roles from being pure instructors to becoming objective advisors; whereas learners shift from being blind receivers to becoming active performers.. Local autonomy does not value certainty of remaining monopolized. It requires flexible localized arrangements and a harmonious relationship among and between linguistic aspects.

Index Terms—English teaching and learning, individual autonomy, local autonomy

I. INTRODUCTION

Autonomy refers to the capacity to take control of oneself, involving self-direction; self-management; self-evaluation; self-redirection as well as the capacity to cooperate with others, etc. It may help us think of a certain degree of dependence, independence, interdependence. Where there is life, there is requirement of autonomy. Where there are cultures and languages, autonomy is likely to prevail.

The concept of autonomy first entered the field of language teaching and learning through the Council of Europe's Modern Languages Project, which was established in 1971. One of the outcomes of the project was the establishment of CRAPEL—Centre de Recherches et d' Applications en Langue, at the University of Nancy, France. Yves Chalon, the founder of CRAPEL, is the father of autonomy in language teaching and learning. The leadership of CRAPEL was passed to Henri Holec, with his project report to the Council of Europe as a key early document on autonomy in language teaching and learning.

Autonomy for English teaching and learning requires removal of toxic teaching and learning styles, creation of healthful individual and local autonomy for progressive teaching and learning process. The practice of self-directed teaching and learning objectives, progress and evaluation of teaching and learning need to be determined by local teachers and learners themselves. A harmonious relationship between lingual and non-lingual aspects ought to be taken into careful consideration for autonomy of English teaching and learning.

II. ANALYSIS OF SEVERAL SIDE-EFFECTS OF AUTHORITARIAN MANAGEMENT

Under the influence of Chinese history, officials have the authority to decide the direction, management, evaluation, redirection of English teaching and learning process. Leaders take control of syllabuses, curriculums, examinations, evaluation, etc. Millions of students take part in the national entrance examination; CET-4, CET-6 examinations and the like. On campus, teachers make nearly all the decisions during the class. They can decide what to teach, what to learn, how to teach, how to learn, when to teach, when to learn, where to teach and where to learn.

As a result of authoritarian management, teachers are deprived of local autonomy for practical syllabuses, curriculums, various styles, while learners are deprived of individual autonomy for self-direction; self-management; self-evaluation; self-redirection. No one dares to challenge authority. Learners are mainly manipulated, controlled and traditionally pacified like little children. The common mode is academic command and control or authoritarian monopoly, regardless of diversity and efficiency. The majority of learners are motivated by fear, phobia rather than enthusiasm or interest in learning. They are supposed to do what they are asked to do. The only evaluation resorts to digital scores in standardizes examinations instead of performance or competence. Competent performers are submerged in academic monopoly or authoritarian management.

Removal of several side-effects of above-mentioned authoritarian management ranks as a hot topic and deserves great public interest or attention at present. People should cultivate new ideology of linguistic and non-linguistic elements. As China has a population of more than 1.3 billion, how can officials authorize the universality of national arrangement? How can they resort exclusively to results of national examinations for evaluation? Where there is diversity, there ought to be autonomy. Great energy ought to be directed toward autonomy for English teaching and learning. Only when inner-linguistic elements are in agreement with cross-linguistic aspects, can harmony be created for English teaching and learning.

III. INDIVIDUAL AUTONOMY

Individual autonomy relies on an individual's capacity to direct, to manage, to evaluate and to redirect himself or herself. Generally speaking, the Chinese learners are likely to be more influenced by their parents' and teachers' arrangements. What their parents and teachers instruct will lead to their daily performance. If their parents happen to be intellectuals, they tend to pay attention to knowledge of English. If their parents act as gray collar workers or illiterate farmer, they often lack the sense of learning English. If teachers are good advisors, they usually work hard at English. When teachers are out of patience or lack proper individual advice, learners may lose their way of learning English. It is true that in China many students usually follow the class without asking why and how they improve English.

With the development of foreign cultural exchange, the Chinese teachers and learners need to have a clear understanding of individualism and individuality. The former focuses on the belief that the freedom and rights of individual persons are the most important rights in the society, and the behavior or attitude of a person who does things in her or his own way without being influenced by other people. Traditionally speaking, the majority of learners in China do not want to be laughed at by others, and are often too shy to perform in public owing to their lack of necessary individualism. They prefer that silence is gold from time to time, a clear case experienced by most foreign teachers when they arrive in China. As most Chinese learners are short of required individualism, they may lack great courage and refrain from asking and answering questions. If they make mistakes, they think that they have lost face, which is crucial to the Chinese culture. Therefore, when we talk about individual autonomy, we need to promote proper individualism, accounting for about twenty seven percent of functions in linguistic autonomy in our experiment. Improper individualism may deprive of others' performance whereas necessary individualism helps the majority of Chinese learners to be encouraged to speak and perform.

Individual autonomy is more closely related to individual quality or individuality of learners. It promotes individual characteristics that make something or someone quite different from all other things or people. Quality varies from person to person. Without individuality, there would be no involvement of diversity. In order to help the Chinese teachers and students improve individuality, we arrive at the experimental result that individuality accounts for about thirty eight percent of functions in linguistic autonomy. Improper individuality may leads to blind liberalism, whereas proper individuality leads to academic vitality. In this sense, both teachers and learners are required to shift their roles for improvement of individual autonomy. Teachers ought to shift from being pure instructors to becoming objective advisors. Good English instructions are supposed to be accompanied with good advice by good advisors. Teachers need to refrain from saying what must be done, but instead offer various learners concrete advice or suggestions on individual direction, management, evaluation, redirection etc. They ought to arrange face to face discussions with learners for improvement of mutual individuality at regular intervals. Academic individuality demands that different students should receive different assignments with various evaluation means. Take an oral assignment for example. Learners with good backgrounds may recite longer paragraphs while those with poor backgrounds may read or recite short sentences or paragraphs. Although management seems to be individually different, when confidence is acquired for individuality, great achievements do matter and count in autonomy. But if learners have gone astray from correct direction, both instructors and learners need to co-analyze the problem and find solutions. Learners ought to shift from being blind receivers to becoming individual performers. They ought to experiment with practical advice and practice individual autonomy such as self-access: a means of facilitating self-directed learning with self-instructional and distance learning materials. Self-access is broadly conducive to learners' individuality, though it may inhibit autonomy without any strong pedagogical rationale under certain conditions. Learners need to have more academic self service, similar in tertiary industry, questioning oneself for adjustment from time to time. Diverse self academic service is likely to result in rich outcomes of individual autonomy.

IV. LOCAL AUTONOMY

Local autonomy refers to diverse self-management in different localities. It is acknowledged that culture varies from place to place, and that there is no certain arrangement which is acceptable, suitable and popular all over the country at present. National documents have no power of really conquering all universities and colleges. Institutions need to have their own ways of academic administration. Therefore, local instructors need to plan their local schedules, design various teaching contents, assign different assignments even when learners are in the same class. They have the right to design local syllabuses, curriculums or academic arrangements according to learners' intelligence, backgrounds, performance and progress. They can evaluate locally with quizzes, tests, contests, debates, examination in oral or written forms, and make timely changes, reforms, etc.

Local autonomy is somewhat related to individualization or individualized learning and instruction. It is linked with programmed learning and based on a thoroughly behavioristic psychology, aiming at the most efficient use of teachers and learners to achieve the most effective result. If in terms of what the teacher wants the learner to achieve, it may sometimes leave little freedom of choice to the individual learner. If in terms of good cooperation, it may create more chances for learners to perform. On our experimental basis, we think that individualized learning and instruction or individualization accounts for about thirty five percent of function in linguistic autonomy. With proper individualization, both teachers and learners enjoy local partnership, hence cooperative efficiency, equality, win-win situation.

Local autonomy does not value certainty of remaining fixedly monopolized. Instructors ought to apply up-dated methodology, adapt network media contents, adjust to international changes. They are encouraged to help learners select from the media proper materials of various kinds including dramas, films, songs, poems, cross-talks, sports, science, business, industry, agriculture, travel, service, medicine, military, finance, transportation, education, etc.

Local autonomy also requires a harmonious relationship among and between linguistic aspects. Listening and speaking, reading and writing as well as translation practice ought to be organically arranged side by side. Peculiar interest in one or two items, yet less attention to other items will be avoided from any perspectives. Oral practice instructors should consider reading, writing, translation arrangements, and instructors of reading, writing, translation need to design listening and speaking contents. Flexible local autonomy is greatly based on performance and commitment of local learners in the region. Besides, when local autonomy takes non-linguistic environment into proper consideration, localized facilities, human resources, methodology as well as governmental policies contribute to improvement of local autonomy. More local investment in facilities, organizing more English speaking and writing contests, lectures, popularization of simple English conversations in public adds creative atmosphere to the trend of local autonomy.

V. CONCLUSION

Autonomy arouses the particular personal or moral qualities associated with learners' global capacity to carry out learning effectively. Autonomy for college English teaching and learning covers a wide range of individual and local autonomy. It may refer to self-regulated, self-designed, or self-organized learning process, which means independence from national monopoly to a great degree, dependence on instructors' advice, interdependence between instructors and learners. Teachers' role need to be shifted from being pure instructors to becoming academic advisors, suggesting flexible schedules, diverse methods for self-direction, self-management, self-evaluation or redirection. Learners can no longer be blind receivers, they ought to be active performer and good cooperators. Diversity, localization, quick adjustment to any kind of change in modern times and catering to the quality of changing or being changed to suit different situations are important elements of local autonomy, some of which can be further discussed in the future.

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