

A Study on the Ideological Orientation of ELT in Mainland China: Focusing on Off-campus Training

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Abstract—With the development of world globalization, the need for talented people in China is increasing and the requirement for English quality in all walks is improving. The development of off-campus English language training meets certain needs of market and also makes up for the disadvantage of school education to some degree at the same time. However, it needs a right value orientation in the off-campus English language training. Its internal factors and external factors make it a must to follow the correct value guidance. Only when the attributes of off-campus English language training and the pursuit of value get a harmonious development can it find its place in the market. Off-campus English language training would not be involved into the local educational ecology and get a further development without respecting the market rules and ideological orientation in China.

Index Terms—off-campus English language training, ideological orientation, harmonious development, educational ecology, mainland China

I. INTRODUCTION

With the development of globalization, there come more opportunities for China to communicate with the outside world. English language as an important communication tool, attracts increasing attention across the world. The number and scale of learning English have reached an unprecedented level, and off-campus English language training also gets to its peak. Naturally English language teaching becomes a big business: “ELT has boomed and seen a proliferation of university departments, language schools, publications, conferences, and all the paraphernalia of an established profession. ELT is also a billion-pound business ... as a ‘world commodity’....”(Phillipson, 1992, p. 4) In this way, a large number of training institutions, such as Wall Street English, English First, Language Link London, Fraser, Oregon, New Oriental Education, Crazy English, etc., all rushed into the market and become a necessary part of English education in mainland China. Off-campus English language training, an organic part of English education in China, meets certain needs of language education market and makes up for the disadvantage of school education to some degree. One point to note is that “the professional training of ELT people concentrates on linguistics, psychology and education in a restricted sense. It pays little attention to international relations, development studies, theories of culture or intercultural contact, or the politics of sociology of language or education.”(Phillipson, 1988, p. 348) In order to boost the development, more attention needs to be paid to the ideological orientation of off-campus English language training in the environment of Chinese educational ecology, which should be considered within the framework of the ideology requirements in China. For at the center of this question, “... a language is not a thing, but a practice always characterized by diversity....” (Jeseph, 2006, p. 9)

II. IDEOLOGICAL ORIENTATION AS A PREREQUISITE FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE TRAINING IN OFF-CAMPUS CONTEXT IN CHINA

For the business of English language teaching, it is a must to recognize the ideological aspect along the way of profit pursuit for the training institutions. Due to the great needs of language education market in China under the policy of reform and opening up, off-campus English language training develops rapidly. According to the Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on cultural issues concerning comprehensively deepening the reform which was put forward on the Sixth Plenary Session of the Seventeenth Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, it needs to expand international cultural exchanges and strengthen the international communication capacity. China will actively draw on the fine cultural achievements of other countries and hold on to the go-out strategy to strengthen the international power of Chinese culture. Nowadays the competition of soft power, namely, the competition of language, culture, education, information, values, and so on, becomes increasingly fiercer. According to Wang (2011, p. 2-7), language is the foundation of soft power, and the guarantee of the influence of culture or ideology. Off-campus English language training is not only one sort of English education, but also a useful supplement to the education system in mainland China. As a part of English education, English language training institutions need to keep the unity of English language training and educational development. “... language pedagogy, the scientific study of

language learning and language teaching, has been isolated from the social science for too long, and that ELT needs to be situated in a macro-societal theoretical perspective. ... unearthing some of the historical, political, and intellectual roots of the language pedagogy profession.”(Phillipson, 1992, p. 2) Thus in context of Chinese educational ecology, proper ideological orientation is necessary for teaching English language knowledge and skills, and in order to keep the correct value orientation guidance in off-campus English language training, the following four points are necessary to be considered.

The first issue is about patriotism, which is a basic requirement for any discipline of education in mainland China. For this requirement, when having a contact with foreign languages and cultures, the learners need to keep in mind that they should never forget the responsibility to rejuvenate the nation. New Oriental Education, which has trained millions of students to learn English and sent hundreds of thousands of students to study abroad, has great achievement of English language training both at home and abroad. It helps every student to remember their responsibility to rejuvenate the country no matter where they are. Wang (2006) stated clearly in the book *The New Oriental Way* that Chinese would never get out of the dreadful cycle of getting ruined unless the young people could make a comparison of the human civilization, get the fruits of them eagerly and use the crystallization of human civilization to update their own culture. The political correctness of its guidance helps the enterprise wins the huge market in mainland China, which is a typical example for the survival of language training institutions.

The second issue is about innovation capability. Nowadays the quality-oriented education emphasizes that it is important to develop the awareness and ability of innovation, instead of imitating others blindly in English learning. However, it is not a real condition in some schools; to some extent, the school education under the direction of countless tests and examinations is organized and ordered with the rigid system and poor adaptability, so that it usually fails to meet the needs of the labor market. As a matter of consequence, it is hard for students to be creative under the pressure of the examining system. English language training off campus came into being to meet the needs of the language market, which could keep pace with the needs and take actions quickly according to the social change. Today the innovation ability is deadly needed, and the atmosphere of off-campus English language training classes tends to be more active and democratic, and more teacher-students interactions are demonstrated. Most classes are of small size so every student can get the chance to express their own opinions and to exercise their language skills. The relationship between students and teachers is more harmonious so students dare to express their opinions directly, without concerning their answer is wrong and thus being criticized. In this way, learners become talents who have the awareness and ability to be creative instead of learning for official examinations.

The third issue is about cultural awareness. Off-campus English language training is more than developing the ability to use the language and regarding it as a tool of linguistic communication, due to the fact that the communication of languages is essentially the communication of cultures. Learners need to realize that the expression of the same phenomenon may be language-specific and the way of thinking may also be different. Thus learners need to know about the customs of the country of target language, and meanwhile they should know that the language, culture and thinking way of their own nation, and thus understand the advantages and the disadvantages of the two sides of the cultures. Crazy English pays attention to the ability of spoken English of the learners and treats language as a tool of communication, while at the same time Crazy English combines language learning with culture understanding, believing that speaking a foreign language means exchanging a different culture, from which it could be found that the educational philosophy of Crazy English includes developing up the cultural awareness. It is important to guide learners to speak the foreign language fluently while realizing that different language speakers tend to express differently for the same phenomenon and the ways of thinking may also be quite different. Getting to thinking about the cultural differences can help them to speak the target language better, and cultivating cultural awareness is one of the necessary requirements for the language training institutions.

The forth issue is about lifelong learning awareness. Every social member tries to make progress to meet the needs of social and individual development, and the modern society requires every member to learn how to learn and continue to learn. The language training institutions need to guide learners to master useful learning strategies and methods, and develop long-lasting learning motivation and interests. They are supposed to teach students of all ages, helping them to feel that they can get knowledge and keep up with the time regardless of their age. In addition, these institutions have different classes for learners of different levels, and thus all the learners have chances to improve themselves. They help learners to be confident of their learning ability, to be enthusiastic about new things, to be active in learning knowledge and to promote themselves through English language learning.

III. THE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL DEMANDS FOR THE OFF-CAMPUS ENGLISH LANGUAGE TRAINING IN CHINA CONCERNING IDEOLOGICAL ORIENTATION

“To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization.”(Fanon, 1967, p. 17-18) It is significant for off-campus English language training institutions to follow a proper ideological orientation, which is decided by both the internal and external demands in mainland Chinese education ecology.

From the aspect of internal factors, the primary object of English language training is to teach the language knowledge and language skills of the target language, while it is known that there is a close relationship among

language, culture and thoughts. Every language represents a unique culture and a view of world, so in a sense a language is a carrier, an inheritor and also an expression of the corresponding culture; on the other way round, a culture has a definite impact on the mode of thinking for a language speaker. In other words, learning a language is not only about a process of linguistic items but also about a process of thoughts. The content and mode of a people's thoughts and the way of expression would be different when their experiences and cultural backgrounds are different. Even in the conceptualization of linguistic imperialism, English language teaching "has become part of the process whereby one part of the world has become politically, economically and culturally dominated by another". (Naysmith, 1987, p. 3) Therefore without a proper understanding of the culture system of the target language and a systematic support of the related ideological orientation, the training of language knowledge and skills is nearly impossible. These two factors are basic and necessary for the development of the off-campus English language training in mainland China. The English language teaching without the related guidance is like a tree without a root, or a river without a source; if so, the English learning would only be at the surface of language knowledge and skills and it would be quite hard for the industry to develop further.

From the aspect of external factors, the development of off-campus English language training is more than the simple teaching of language knowledge and language skills. It needs to meet the various realistic needs of the market and keep up with the society to win the market. According to Hu (2011, p. 130-136), one of the objectives of English language teaching in China is to let the learners to get the basic language knowledge and skills, to develop the ability to use the language, and finally to help learners to get an overall development. The central problem of the English language training in China all the time is how to balance achieving the goals of overall education and cultivating the comprehensive ability to use the language. Today the requirements for English language skills in China becomes higher than before, so English language training should focus on helping learners to learn more efficiently. The learning motivation is thought to be one of the critical factors of the language learning efficiency, which can be classified simply into instrumental motivation and integrative motivation. According to Gardner and Lambert (1974), the learners with instrumental motivation desire to reach their goals with the help of a language and they stress the practical value of learning a new language, such as passing tests or to get a license as a tourist guide. The learners with integrative motivation prefer to be involved into understanding the culture of the target language and they have personal interests for the custom, history, education of the country, to name a few. For the efficiency of English language teaching, the motivations to direct learners who want to master English as a tool and to know about cultural background of the target language should be combined together, in which way the objectives of this English language training are to stimulate the learning motivation, to attract English learners and also to win the market successfully.

In practice of English language teaching, the foreigners are believed to be the best teachers of English by both the trainees and trainers, because the foreigners are regarded as the experts on the language and also the cultural background. The foreigners do have a native expertise of language, while in education it needs to be thought twice before taking action. "The role of English in the sociolinguistic context of each English-using Third World country is not properly understood, or is conveniently ignored. The consequences of this attitude are that the Third World countries are slowly realizing that, given the present attitude of TESL specialists, it is difficult to expect from such specialists any theoretical insights and professional leadership in this field which would be contextually, attitudinally and pragmatically useful to the Third World countries." (Kachru, 1986, p. 101) This question is related to the understanding of English language teaching, how to define it, and what is the boundary of it, that is, the micro and macro ways of conceptualizing English language teaching. "... the majority of those working in the ELT field tend to confine themselves, by choice and training, to linguistic, literary, or pedagogical matters. ELT is however an international activity with political, economic, military and cultural implications and ramifications." (Phillipson, 1992, p. 8)

IV. THE IDEOLOGICAL ORIENTATION AS THE NECESSARY WAY FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF OFF-CAMPUS ENGLISH LANGUAGE TRAINING

The industrial features and the pursuit of the industrial value of off-campus English language training are united but also contradictory. Only when the two elements get a harmonious development can English language training achieve its educational value and industrial purposes. The conflict between the two factors is inevitable because the objectives of the industry firstly aims at the commercial end, that is, the profit earned from it, which can not be denied anyway. While on the other side of this industry, English language training has specific educational objectives for specified subjects, including those who want to get certain language skills, who want to know about special cultures, to pass some examinations, to win chances to study abroad, to be promoted on some positions, and so on. English language training offers different courses according to the social development and market needs so that the teaching objectives are clearly set against the social backgrounds, and different teaching methods or techniques would be used to achieve the different teaching objectives. Between Chinese and western educators, they "evolve from such different cultural roots that it is no wonder conflicts and misunderstandings dominate historical and modern attempts by foreigners to impact Chinese education" (Porter, 1987, p. 369). For the cultural differences of English language teaching, it is important to bear in mind that "A way of teaching is never innocent. Every pedagogy is imbricated in ideology, in a set of tacit assumptions about what is real, what is good, what is possible, and how power ought to be distributed." (Berlin, 1988, p. 492) In order to make the language teaching more effective, the length of courses, the focus of training, and the teaching pace

are all different and specific. In practice, when a particular objective is achieved, the training of this period is thus all finished. English language training is basically commercial so its main goal is to make profits from it; seeking for more profits, training institutions have to consider about the investment, such as employees, teaching materials, teaching facilities and so on, that is to say they will have to weigh between investment and gain in order to make it lucrative.

It is necessary to have a balanced understanding of the relationship between the industrial character and the pursuit of the educational value of off-campus English language training in mainland China. These two factors are to be combined together instead of being separated, for the two elements integrated in harmony is a necessary way for the development of English language training. The harmonious development could be reflected in the aspects of course design, teaching materials, teaching methods, and so forth. Different kinds of courses are set according to the characters of learners of different levels, so the design of the courses needs to make a balance between meeting the needs of language knowledge and language skills and at the same time the proper ideological orientation. The teaching materials should be suitable in Chinese context of politics and ethics, for it is not acceptable to develop the materials according to the values of westerners totally. The teaching methods need to be varied and it is important to stimulate the study motivation and interests, to build the learners' confidence, and to lead to the critical thinking and creativity of learners so that learners could get a comprehensive development when learning a foreign language. In a word, "what we teach and particularly the way we teach reflects our attitudes to society in general and the individual's place in society, and that our own educational practice is an implicit statement of power relationships, of how we see authority in the classroom and by extension in society outside the classroom." (Prodromou, 1988, p. 74-75)

In passing, it is worth noticing that Chinese government under the direction of the Communist Party of China made a reform of English language education in recent two year. On October 21st, 2013, Beijing Municipal Commission of Education sketched The Reformation Program of National Senior High School Entrance Examination in 2014-2016 (Exposure Draft) and The Reformation Program of College Entrance Examination in 2014-2016 (Exposure Draft). According to these two drafts, National Senior High School Entrance Examination (NSHSEE) and National College Entrance Examination (NCEE) both will take fundamental changes since 2016 in Beijing municipal basic education system. One of the changes is that English test for NCEE will be implemented by the way of "socialized" examination, that is, the English tests are not necessarily organized by the official school education system, which will be held twice a year. Students can take participate in the tests many times during the whole process of high school education, and the NCEE will take account in the highest score which will be effective in three years of senior high school education. On the web page of Beijing Municipal Commission of Education, it defines the nature and status of the discipline of English language education as following: "Discipline of English language education should stress the practical application of language, and go back to the position where it should be. We should reduce the weight of English scores in NCEE, and implement the socialized examination which will be held twice a year. The meaning of English test is confined to checking the basic knowledge and basic skills, and reflecting the basic requirements of curriculum standard." (Beijing Municipal Commission of Education, 2013)

In the next month, this political direction of the reform of English language education is confirmed by the higher Chinese political institution. The Decision on Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Deepening Reforms (The Decision) was released on the Third Plenary Session of 18th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, which was held during November 9th to 12th, 2013. In The Decision, the 42nd item is about the reformation of education, which indicates that Chinese basic education development should "keep shaping people's morality, strengthening the education of socialist core value system and perfecting the Chinese excellent cultural tradition", and "subjects like foreign languages should adopt socialized examination and take more than once a year". (Xinhuanet, 2013)

According to this direction of English language education reformation by the Communist Party of China and the Chinese government, the socialized examination system of English language in the near future would definitely provide market opportunities for the off-campus English language training institutions, such as Wall Street English, English First, Language Link London, Fraser, Oregon, New Oriental Education, Crazy English, etc. When the opportunities come, it needs more consideration for the institutions to follow the ideological orientation in Chinese educational ecology, for their own development or for Chinese education system. In a word, "cultural and political issues are interwoven with language policies". (Gopinathan, 1980, p. 177) Understanding this complexity of connection between language education and political requirement is a must for any English language training institution in mainland China.

V. CONCLUSION

For the ideological orientation of English language teaching, Pennycook said: "Thus, I am arguing that no knowledge, no language and no pedagogy is ever neutral or apolitical. To teach critically, therefore, is to acknowledge the political nature of all education...." (1992, p. 369) In Chinese context of education, the political nature of off-campus English language training is supposed to be understood clearly. "... we need to recognize the complexities of language teaching and its context, and strive to validate other, local forms of knowledge about language and teaching." (Pennycook, 1989, p. 613) Nowadays the competition of the soft power among countries becomes one of the significant issues, while foreign language teaching as a foundation of the soft power is a critical problem which has close relationship with education, culture and ideology. Off-campus English language training needs to respect the role of the market in the process of development, and meanwhile it needs to follow the ideological orientation because it is basically an organic

part of English education in China. The balanced consideration in this way is for the English language training institutions to be better adapted to the educational ecology in mainland China.

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