Hayo Reinders • David Nunan • Bin Zou
Editors

Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching

The Case of China

palgrave
macmillan

Editors
Hayo Reinders
Department of Education
Unitec Institute of Technology
Auckland, New Zealand

David Nunan
University of Hong Kong
Pokfulam, Hong Kong

Bin Zou
Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University
Suzhou, China

New Language Learning and Teaching Environments
ISBN 978-1-137-60091-2 ISBN 978-1-137-60092-9 (eBook)
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-60092-9

Library of Congress Control Number: 2017947177

Cover illustration: Dong Wenjie / Getty Images

Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature
The registered company is Macmillan Publishers Ltd.
The registered company address is: The Campus, 4 Crinan Street, London, N1 9XW, United Kingdom

Contents

12

Facilitating Transformative Learning Toward Productive Bilingualism: Innovations in Teaching English for Intercultural Communication in China

Xuan Zheng and Yihong Gao

1 Introduction

With the speeding intercultural exchange around the world, the relationship between language and culture is growing more complex. As China is becoming more internationalized, speaking English has become part of everyday life for many Chinese people, adding to the complexity of the multilingual, multidialectical Chinese society. The goal of English education in China has also undergone changes: simply imitating "native speakers" of British/American English and learning about the "western culture" no longer reflect the diversified linguistic and cultural situations today. Although there has been a recent call to foreground students' intercultural communication competence (ICC) development as one of the

X. Zheng • Y. Gao (✉)
Peking University, Beijing, China

H. Reinders et al. (eds.), *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, New Language Learning and Teaching Environments, DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-60092-9_12

new goals for language teaching in China (Sun, 2016), research and real change in teaching practices and assessment tools are still in its initial stage (Wang & Kulich, 2015). Classroom teachers now believe that ICC is important, yet most of them still understand ICC as merely knowledge and skills of English "native speakers" (Gu, 2016).

Among the new language learning and education models that deviated from the "native speaker" norm, the proposed "productive bilingualism" (Gao, 2001, 2002, 2014) stresses the learner's growing competence in additional languages/cultures and his/her competence in languages/cultures acquired earlier reinforces each other. "Productive bilingualism" was originally found among recognized "best foreign language learners" in China, and later empirical research based on questionnaire and case study (e.g., Gao et al., 2013) demonstrated it was one of the self-identity change directions among Chinese university students. However, while productive bilingualism as an ideal has been commonly recognized, whether it is commonly practiced in real life among college students remains to be closely examined; the challenges of moving toward such a goal and related pedagogical measures remain to be identified. To ground the new goal in real teaching practices, this study explored how in practice English language teachers can develop methods and materials that facilitate students' transformation toward productive bilingualism in their local contexts. Based on an action research that developed the curriculum of a College English course "Language, Culture and Communication" (LCC) in a comprehensive university in Beijing, this chapter serves as an example of how classroom teachers could act as agentive forces that bring changes to their classrooms. Through three cycles of action research, the teacher had developed a new curriculum that was guided by transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 2000) by emphasizing critical reflection where the teacher guided students to become open and critical of their own and others' assumptions, to redefine problems from a different perspective and to incorporate multiple perspectives. By analyzing data from multiple sources, i.e., classroom observations, teaching journals, surveys and students' reflection papers, the effects of the course design, teaching steps and techniques were discussed, and suggestions for language teachers who would also like to bring changes to their own classrooms,

especially for facilitating their students' developments toward productive bilingualism, were provided.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Teaching English for ICC Development in China

In the field of English education in China, there has been a recent call to shift from developing communicative competence to intercultural communicative competence (ICC) (Gu, 2016; Sun, 2016). The paradigm shift intends to move away from imitating the communicative competence of "native-speakers" to cultivating ICC and "intercultural citizenship" (Byram, 2012). However, although such a goal has been proposed, research and real change in ICC-oriented teaching practices and assessment tools for Chinese students are still in its initial stages.

Classroom innovations in cultivating ICC have been documented in some studies (e.g., Gao, 2008; Huang, 2015; Snow, 2015; Wang & Kulich, 2015). Among them, a few emphasized teaching practices that facilitated attitudinal change toward openness. For example, viewing cultural differences as relative to one's frame of reference, Gao (2000, 2008) advocated for first knowing and describing cultural differences and then deconstructing cultural stereotypes—"going across and going beyond". Huang's "process oriented cultural teaching" (2015), which encouraged students to actively investigate cultural phenomena themselves, had significantly enhanced students' affective and behavioral aspects of intercultural competence. Snow (2015) applied "critical incidence exercise" that helped students become aware of their habitual interpretation process and affective reactions. What these scholars shared in common was that they strived for openness through being aware and critical (i.e., problematizing) of one's taken-for-granted frames of reference.

On the whole, however, classroom innovations still need to be fully realized in foreign language teaching. A review of studies on ICC in foreign language classrooms revealed that most pedagogical practices in China still

focused on knowledge and skill-oriented training (Wang & Kulich, 2015, p. 41). Furthermore, the ICC "knowledge and skills" were still centered on English "native speakers". Surveying 1000 English teachers from 39 universities in China on their ICC perceptions and practices, Gu (2016, p. 264) found that although most teachers were willing to assess ICC in their English classes, they still perceived it as "merely specific knowledge and sociopragmatic norms of mainstream English-speaking countries, which are seen as the standard to conform to and the means to facilitate the development of language skills and interactive abilities".

Such practices that assumed the link between English and cultures of "English-speaking" countries, without problematizing the values and worldviews transmitted through, may lead to the reversed form of ethnocentrism: students may judge their own culture from the standards of others and see themselves as inferior to the "English-speaking cultures". As a result, English education in China was criticized for its "Chinese culture aphasia" (Xiao, Xiao, Li, & Song, 2010). This highlights the need for maintenance and strengthening of one's own "frames of reference", or native language/culture in the Chinese context.

2.2 Productive Bilingualism

Among the new language learning and education models that promoted the development of ICC, the proposed "productive bilingualism" was rooted in the Chinese context, highlighted the mutual enhancement between one's native language/culture and the ones acquired later, and was distinct from earlier models of "subtractive bilingualism" and "additive bilingualism" (e.g., Lambert, 1974). Drawing on Fromm's (1948) theory of "productive orientation" and based on empirical data from 52 "best foreign language learners" in China, Gao (2001, 2002) illustrated this concept by discussing the pattern of interaction between one's native language (L1), native culture (C1) and one's target language (L2) and target culture (C2). Different from "subtractive bilingualism" in which one's L1/C1 is replaced by L2/C2 (symbolized as 1-1=1), or "additive bilingualism" where one's L2/C2 is simply added to one's L1/C1, which share separate communicative functions (1+1=½+½), in "productive

bilingualism", L1/C1 and L2/C2 benefit and enhance each other (1+1>2). For a productive bilingual (Gao, 2002, p. 159), "the command of the target language and that of the native language positively reinforce each other; deeper understanding and appreciation of the target culture goes hand in hand with deeper understanding and appreciation of the native culture. In the process of learning another language and related culture, the learner's personality become more open and integrated at the same time".

Productive bilingualism is characterized by the following characteristics: (1) openness: an increased open attitude toward both L2/C2 and L1/C1, (2) criticalness: being able to critically appreciate and reflect on aspects of both C1 and C2, and (3) incorporation: integrating or relating L1/C1 and L2/C2 in meaningful ways, often with creative outcomes (e.g., translation of ancient Chinese poems into foreign languages, with a distinct style). Moreover, productive bilingualism is a concept capturing what may refer to a stable orientation, a state, a moment or an experience (Gao, 2002).

With accelerated globalization, increased transcultural flow (Pennycook, 2007) and mobility of languages (Blommaert, 2010), especially the continuing spread of English and its deterritorization from "native speaking" countries, the "C2" in productive bilingualism has been expanded. The renewed "productive bilingual" in the context of intercultural communication, in the form of a "dialogical communicator" (Gao, 2014, p. 68), is one who "has transcended various dichotomies such as listening vs. speaking, native culture vs. C2, and instrumental vs. integrative motivation" and who "enjoys mutual enhancement of L1/C1 on the one hand, and competence in the chosen L2 target discourse and identification with the chosen imagined community on the other". The expanded version of productive bilingualism is in line with existing social constructivist approaches to L2 identities that stressed individual agency in selecting learning "targets" (e.g., Norton, 2013) or "C2". In its emphasis on L1 competence and C1 identity enhancement, productive bilingualism is distinguished from radical critical approaches to intercultural communication in that the identification and labeling of "cultural" identities were rejected altogether, or hybridities replaced identification with explicit languages, speech communities or cultural groups.

Although the ideal of expanded productive bilingualism was proposed, and sketches of evidence were provided showing the presence of such expanded productiveness, for example from Olympic Games volunteers (Gao, 2014; Gao et al., 2013), it remains to be examined whether it is commonly practiced among college students, what challenges there are in its development, and what pedagogical measures can be taken in its facilitation.

2.3 Transformative Learning

In the process of becoming a productive bilingual, one will become more open and at the same time integrated rather than split as he/she learns another language. This is congruent with a key aspect identified by scholars of intercultural communicative competence (ICC): a frame-of-reference shift from ethnocentric to ethnorelative worldviews. How does this identity expansion happen? Mezirow and his successor's transformative learning theory (TLT) (Mezirow, 1994, 2000; Taylor, 2008) has shed light in understanding this process.

Mezirow's TLT explains how adults changed the way they interpreted the world (Taylor, 2008). Mezirow believed that certain experiences (e.g., intercultural contact) may lead to a "disorienting dilemma" that prompts people to question their usual way of doing things. When people start to have a deeper understanding and awareness of cultural differences, they may change their attitudes and perspectives (e.g., from an ethnocentric orientation to an ethnorelative orientation), and eventually will be able to handle intercultural situations more successfully. This process has the potential to lead to identity expansion in some individuals. Mezirow pointed out that critical reflection was the key to transformation: that is, "a process by which we attempt to justify our beliefs, either by rationally examining assumptions, often in response to intuitively becoming aware that something is wrong with the result of our thought, or challenging its validity through discourse with others of differing viewpoints and arriving at the best informed judgment" (Mezirow, 1995, p. 46). Through critical reflection, a person may experience change in their habitual mindset and an identity expansion.

Since the 1980s, Mezirow's TLT has been widely used in professional training programs. The classrooms guided by TLT emphasize critical reflection: teachers help learners to become aware and critical of their own and others' assumptions, to recognize their own frames of reference, and to redefine problems from a different perspective. Learners achieve these goals through participating in discourse with others: discourse that is learner-centered, participatory and interactive. To create this kind of discourse, group problem solving, role-play, reflective journals, class discussions and case study are common activities used in class. To facilitate students' active engagement with the course concept, real-life experiences of the learners are treated as important resources for reflection in class (Xu & Qiu, 2011). To capture the dynamics of the process of transformative learning, portfolios are often used as the assessment tool (Taylor, 2008). As examining one's assumption critically is considered the key in a person's transformation, TLT provides useful implications to change the status quo of English teaching for intercultural communication.

3 Methods

This study sought to explore classroom innovations that will bring changes to current English education that aims at productive bilingualism in China. An action research approach was taken, with the goal of solving problems identified by the practitioner herself in order to improve practice (Burns, 2011). By definition, action research is an inquiry into one's own practice through a cycle of planning, acting, observing and reflecting (Farrell, 2007). The "problem" that guided this action research was: *How does a content-based College English course titled "Language, Culture and Communication" facilitate students' transformation toward productive bilingualism?* With this question in mind, the teacher who was also the primary researcher planned and taught the course, and observed students' reactions. Through reflection, she identified the challenges, adjusted teaching materials and techniques, and observed the change in the class again.

The primary researcher in this study was the teacher of a content-based College English course titled "Language, Culture and Communication" (LCC) at a comprehensive university in Beijing, with the goal of facilitating

students' transformation toward productive bilingualism. She was a young foreign returnee with a PhD degree in language and rhetoric from a US university. At the time of writing she had taught LCC for five consecutive semesters. Every semester she taught two classes with a total of around 70 non-English major students, aged between 18 and 23.

The action research underwent three cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting. The initial cycle included the first two semesters (2014.2–2015.1) when the teacher planned and taught the course mostly from experience. She identified the biggest challenges and sought solutions from relevant literature. The second cycle (2015.3–2016.1) started with an updated course plan and specific teaching steps and moves guided by TLT. By the end of these two semesters, students improved the most on the aspects of criticalness and openness. The teacher identified new problems and reflected on the causes. The third cycle (2016.2–2016.6) started with planning and carrying out adjusted teaching techniques. Effects of the course in relation to developing productive bilingualism were observed and reflected.

To document the process and effectiveness of the course holistically, data were collected through multiple sources: students' written assignments, teacher's journal, TA's classroom observation notes, class recording transcriptions, and pre- and post-class surveys. These qualitative data were analyzed in a bottom-up manner using theme analysis, in relation to the characteristics of productive bilinguals, and with a focus on the changes students experienced. The themes that were related to the aspects of the course that facilitated students' transformation were also coded. The data from multiple sources were triangulated in order to strengthen the findings.

4 Findings

4.1 First Cycle (February 2014–January 2015)

During her first year teaching the course, the teacher relied mostly on her experience studying in China and the US and arranged the course around topics that were related to language and culture. Class activities included lectures, class discussions, presentations and role plays. Course

assignments included journals, a group research project and a final reflection letter. Throughout the semester, students were attracted by the communicative approach she took and came up with creative final presentations; however, the teacher observed three major challenges: (1) the students were often unaware of potential problems in intercultural communication, (2) they were unaware of their own assumptions and thus attitude change toward openness was difficult, (3) they were not able to incorporate their own cultures/perspectives with others.

These challenges were observed from students' completed class assignments: they remained at the descriptive level of simply comparing and contrasting cultural products (food/cartoons) and practices (wedding ceremonies/humor) across nations/regions; interactions between cultures were rare; and the suggestions students provided to solve intercultural conflict were simple. For example, in a final project explaining the differences between "northern Chinese" and "southern Chinese" culture, the solutions proposed by the group of students to resolve conflicts between the two regional groups were simply:

> Being calm. Try to change it or try to accept it. Enjoy the diversity. Take it easy. (Student PowerPoint, June 9, 2014)

Despite the positive tone, students were not specific about possible conflicts between cultures and didn't say how they could manage negative emotions. Similar results were observed in the second semester. Such simplistic optimism reminds one of a common criticism of the ICC literature that emphasized ideals, unproblematic equal relationships and positive outcomes while in reality, people often have to become aware of the barriers and negative realities (Wang & Kulich, 2015). Furthermore, there was no attempt to incorporate one's self and others; one needs to either completely accept others by giving up their own preference or change others despite their needs.

Similar results were observed in the second semester. Interestingly, two German exchange students who were teaching English in China took part in the course. They had provided a different perspective in the class. However, the benefit of having international students was not realized fully because the Chinese students preferred to work with themselves.

In class, one of the German students often raised negative impressions about Chinese students' "rude" behaviors (e.g., cutting into the waiting lines in cafeterias), and the other Chinese students often seemed intimidated, lowered their heads and avoided eye contact with the teacher.

In retrospect, the teacher sensed a lack of theoretical grounding and a specific standard for ICC assessment. To address these problems, the teacher read more relevant literature on intercultural communication, productive bilingualism and came across TLT. She was enlightened by the construct of the productive bilingualism as the goal for developing intercultural competence, and the potential of applying TLT in facilitating students' change toward productive bilinguals. She also realized the key stage to assess ICC development was a change from ethnocentrism toward ethnorelativism. Therefore, in the second teaching year, she held the "frames of reference shift" as central to her course and redesigned the curriculum based on the key components from TLT (e.g., critical reflection) that she believed would facilitate the transformation.

4.2 Second Cycle (March 2015–January 2016)

After the first phase, the teacher developed a course pack, combining theoretical readings and short essays from several textbooks on intercultural communication such as Jackson (2014) and Xu (2009). Since the teacher held "the frames of reference shift" as the key stage for ICC development, the course emphasized critical reflection where the teacher helped learners to become aware and critical of their own and others' assumptions, to recognize their own frames of reference and to redefine problems from a different perspective. This process was realized in two teaching steps and five moves:

1. *Creating a "disorienting dilemma"*: the teacher helped students to question their usual way of doing/viewing things.

    a. *Cultivating awareness.* The first move in this step was to make students become aware of their own judgments when faced with strangeness. For example, the teacher asked the students to observe

an "unfamiliar" group, took some observation notes and discussed those in class. Often the students' descriptions of the group implied their attitudes toward them. For example, some of them wrote: "unlike the Chinese students, the European students often used too much body language and exaggerated facial impressions while talking", and, "I found it quite strange that they touched each other very often, which was different from us Chinese students". The teacher directed students' attention to the implied attitudes by underlining the words such as "too much", "unlike", "different" and "strange". Another technique was to use a "verbal guise test" (Garrett, 2010); that is, students listened to different English varieties and wrote down their reactions. The students could realize they made judgments on people just based on their speech.

b. *Examining frames of reference.* When the students realized their descriptions were not as neutral as they thought, the teacher asked: why do we tend to have negative judgments about others? In this way the students could start to think about their ethnocentrism tendency: that is, people tend to judge others based on their own familiar cultural framework. Then the teacher showed them a detailed explanation on how people make quick judgments on others from academic research.

2. *Resolving the "disorienting dilemma".*

a. *Deconstructing stereotypes.* The teacher guided students to trace the sources of their previous values, beliefs and worldviews, and the consequences of stereotypes. The students could become aware of the long-lasting influences their parents, peers, teachers and the public media had on them.

b. *Reconstructing open attitudes.* In this move, the teacher asked students to think about alternative interpretations of "strangeness". For example, she used the example of how silence could be interpreted in class in a PowerPoint slide.

Example 1:

Some Chinese students do not respond to teacher's questions in class. (observation from an American teacher's perspective)

Teacher: "Chinese students are just so passive and timid in the class. They are not interested in the class". (quick judgment)

Alternative interpretations: "Are all Chinese students quiet in class? Are they quiet in all classes? What are the possible reasons that they don't speak up? Is silence always bad in this cultural context? Can it be good?"

c. *Seeking creative solutions.* After the students learned to postpone judgments and started to seek alternative answers, the teacher gave them scenarios of conflicts in which they need to come up with creative solutions.

In actual teaching, "Creating a dilemma" turned out to be a very challenging process. Describing differences was easy for the students but they were not able to differentiate description from judgment. For example, when the teacher asked the students to identify their attitudes in their field notes on non-verbal behaviors of an unfamiliar group, they claimed that they were very neutral and objective. Only when the teacher pointed out words such as "too much", "unlike", "different" and "strange", did the students start to acknowledge they had negative attitudes. Similarly, in doing the verbal guise test on attitudes toward different English accents, what had attracted the students the most was getting the correct answer of accent identification; detecting their own judgments toward the accents came only later. When the real identities of the speakers were shown, students were busy checking whether their answers were correct. Some students even claimed that "the Indian speaker in the recording spoke better than most Indian speakers" without realizing their own prejudice. Without becoming critical of their own biases, it was difficult to continue with the later teaching steps.

The second reason why creating a "disorienting dilemma" was difficult was that students were often held back by fear and anxiety; they preferred to stay in their comfort zone, avoided seeking constructive solutions to conflicts, and thus missed the chance of developing an in-depth relationship with others. Such tendency can be observed both in the students' writings as well as in-class activities. A typical response can be seen from a student writing about an intercultural experience;

this student wrote about having a picnic with some American friends and said:

> It was fine but not fun enough. Although we talk a lot, but somehow we were scared that we might say something unwittingly offensive to others so most of our conversations were really "safe" and boring as a consequence.

Similarly, in class activities where students were asked to solve intercultural conflicts, many chose to quit, oblige or turn to a third party. For example, in a conflict scenario of visiting the family of one's boyfriend/girlfriend with an unintelligible dialect, some students immediately said they would "break up with him/her". In a scenario of interpreting for a professor whose English was difficult to understand, most students responded they would "pretend" understanding and never ask him to rephrase, because asking may suggest they were not competent. In the simulated scenario of volunteering for VIPs whose English was unfamiliar during Beijing winter Olympics, some just complained it was a wrong volunteer-VIP match and would ask to be replaced by other volunteers who could understand the native language of the VIPs. A few even reacted emotionally by saying if the VIPs became impatient and yelled at them, they would yell back "This is our land. If you don't speak good English you should go back to your country" (class observation notes, November 24, 2015).

Another challenge was that when students became "critical", they were most of the time one-sided, using others' standards and being sweepingly negative about their own culture. Contrasted with productive criticalness which transcends simple dichotomies, such "out-group favoritism" (Council of Europe, 2009, p. 12) might also be an embodiment of "ethnocentric" attitudes and was evident in subtractive bilingualism (Gao et al., 2013).

For example, in a group project comparing the Regulations for Pupils (小学生守则) between China and America, the suggestions the group gave in the end were all for improving the Chinese regulations for pupils:

> Avoid ambiguous terms which could be obscure to pupils. Add more practical terms. Borrow ideas from American student codes in instructing

students to be a role model and a good influence. Propagandize the regulations in a more active way, such as making cartoons.

When the teacher asked the group what suggestions they could provide for the American regulations for pupils, it seemed to be the first time they started to think about this question. The one-sided suggestion in this example may arguably be due to the relative unfamiliarity the students had with American cultures; nevertheless, the general attitudes revealed by their projects were often preference of western cultures over Chinese cultures. In reflecting why the students had these challenges, the teacher recalled her own life experience and found she had been there herself too. She remembered her college years when she faithfully imitated native speakers' English and behavior, and preferred western culture over Chinese culture. She also recalled the time when she was so uncomfortable being hugged by a male American professor in the US but pretended she was happy and open enough. She remembered those critical incidents where she was reminded by her American friends for stereotyping "Americans". Resonating with the challenges with the students, she realized the first step to opening up to others was full acceptance of himself/herself.

4.3 Third Cycle (February 2016–June 2016)

Accordingly, as a start of the third cycle, the teacher emphasized more acceptance of one's self and native culture in planning. She acted it out through several teaching techniques:

First, the teacher gave direct instructions that acknowledged struggles students have and asked them to experience their fear and anxiety when faced with unfamiliar situations. For example, in an activity *Find Friends* during week 4, students were asked to walk around the classroom and have small conversations with others. To prepare them, the teacher first showed a list of typical suggestions for striking up small conversations: for example, relax, smile and say hello, remember their names, etc. Then the teacher presented a quote from the course pack that defined communication competence as "the ability to achieve one's goals in a manner that

is personally acceptable and, ideally, acceptable to others". The teacher highlighted "personally acceptable" to the students and emphasized to consider both their own and others' preferred communication styles. She told the students "it is ok to feel nervous and awkward", "use your own way to connect with others" and "it's not a test! Notice how you feel in this experience weighs more".

Secondly, the teacher set up student groups since week 4, and many activities and discussions were done through group work. To help students identify with their own group, the teacher asked each group to name themselves: for example, GF boys, Running girls, Black glasses, Half-blooded and etc. As students got very familiar with their group members, they became braver and more outspoken in answering questions the teacher raised. Groups also helped introverted students to work in a less stressful way than directly interacting with the whole class. Most importantly, working with others helped students to gain different perspectives and this served as an additional way of problematizing students' habitual thinking and facilitating change.

Thirdly, the teacher often shared her personal intercultural experiences in class, which functioned as a demonstration of critical reflection. Students were highly engaged when she did such personal sharing and would often immediately follow up by sharing their own. For example, in the lesson on language attitudes, students became very quiet when asked "where do our attitudes come from?" The teacher then shared a personal reflection with them:

> T: "Well, I guess when we talk about English or other languages, maybe some of them are too far from our lives, but what about your dialects? So, like, for me, born and grew up in Wuhan, I don't speak Wuhan dialect, because, uh, when I was little, my parents told me 'Do not speak...' (Students laughed) ... because it is rude, it's not elegant, or as woman, you shouldn't really speak Wuhan dialect. So I never learned, and, now I feel pretty bad about it because I don't mingle with my friends who ... all of them speak Wuhan dialect. So have you also had similar experience?"

A student immediately responded by saying he shared a similar experience where growing up in Guangzhou, his Wuhanese parents did not

allow him to speak the Wuhan dialect while all his relatives did. Then the teacher concluded "so the family influence is a source" and the student was nodding (class observation, April 26, 2016).

Many students mentioned in their final reflection papers that they had deep impressions of the teacher's personal sharing and were grateful of it. The teacher's personal sharing had made some students more accepting of themselves. For example, once the teacher shared a story of hiding her uneasiness when a Hispanic American professor hugged and kissed her during greetings. The teacher asked the students what they would do. Then she told the class that today she would explain to him although she respected his way of greeting, it was actually uncomfortable to her. This sharing had contributed to the change in this student from avoiding conflict to making himself understood, as he said in the reflection paper:

> I know how to make myself understood and am never too shy to admit and explain my differences from others. We consider it others' fault to be different from us and vice versa. This class has taught me there are times when we should try to explain the diversity. For example, I've met some embarrassing situations like you said in the class (the case that your professor hugged you, you know). I used to bury my head in the sand and never tried to figure it out. But now I can tell, it may be our different culture dimension or so, thus make myself understood and let others know that diversity is nothing deficient.

Fourthly, the teacher often provided non-evaluative feedback to students' "wrong" answers. Instead of directly stating that the students were "wrong" and immediately correcting their "mistakes", she either summarized and repeated the part that seemed problematic, provided another perspective, pursued a further question or asked what other students thought. In the excerpt below, the student, as the spokesperson for his group, had just reported two strategies they would use if they could not understand the dialects of their girlfriend/boyfriend's family.

T: Um, so the first is to try to speak mandarin. The second one is if they don't understand, then you smile (T giggled and Ss laughed)...
S: And just listen to them.

T: But you don't understand them (T giggled and Ss laughed).
S: (S giggled and Ss murmured) Pretend to understand them.
T: Pretend. (Ss laughed)
(class transcription, May 10, 2016)

The teacher meant to point out that the second strategy was problematic. She did so by first summarizing what the student said. Then she emphasized "but you don't understand them", suggesting that "smile and just listen" would not really work. When the student responded again, she repeated "pretend", suggesting again this strategy was just pretending.

Another example was when discussing what counted as "racial discrimination"; a group of students were not able to see their own prejudice against "black people". They thought the toothpaste brand in China, "Darlie" (黑人牙膏), with the logo of a wide-eyed, smiling dark-skinned black male wearing a top hat was not racism, but simply an accurate description of the black people. The teacher didn't point out directly that they were wrong; instead, she asked "suppose a person with a dark skin color walked into the Chinese store and saw the toothpaste, what will he or she feel?" The students responded "they may feel a little offended". Realizing the brand was problematic, they searched online and had a deeper understanding of this issue.

Such non-evaluative feedback gave students opportunities to explore answers on their own without causing shame or low self-esteem.

5 Discussion

Through the three cycles of the action research, the teacher developed methods and techniques that prompted criticalness in order to achieve openness. The most obvious effect of the course design, teaching steps and techniques was a more open attitude. The openness was two-sided: students became more open to both themselves and others. They became more aware of their own prejudice and biases. By the time of writing the students also improved significantly in providing creative solutions to conflict situations, a sign of incorporating different cultures and perspectives.

5.1 Criticalness

Guided by TLT, the teaching steps of creating "a disorienting dilemma" (Mezirow, 2000) and resolving it, that is, revealing the ethnocentric tendency of ourselves and guided reflections on real-life examples, had helped the students become aware and critical of their own frames of reference. Most of the students experienced an awakening moment in the class where they recognized their own prejudice, and examined deep into the source of the prejudice. For example, after the lesson on language attitudes, a student wrote about his realization in the journal:

> I was surprised that we had quite different opinions on these people. Some of these opinions, which I also had, are obviously prejudice. I have to admit that I don't like it when I heard the Indian accent. It makes me laugh though because it's funny, but if I am asked whether I want him/her to be my teacher, I wouldn't prefer that. I think the main reason is that I've seen too much news on rape in India, and from movies I also learn that Indian people are overactive and like to sing and dance. All these help me form the stereotype that Indians are not trustworthy. When I check others' answers, I found my classmates rate Indians much higher than I expected. This indeed gave me a lesson. Indians are not that bad in reality, and not even in others' impression. It is only my prejudice.

Most students remembered the teaching steps that prompted critical reflection and described it as the most useful part they learned from the course. For example, a student said in the final reflection paper:

> What impressed me most is that before our judgement, we need to do self-questioning again and again, to think whether the judgements are reasonable to some extent, and to put ourselves into others' shoes so that 'we' and 'they' can understand each other. After this, do reinterpret from a brand new level.

5.2 Openness

It was observed that through being critical, most students experienced a change from an ethnocentric perspective to an ethnorelative perspective. The openness identified among the students was for both themselves

and others: they not only learned to tolerate, understand and accept others, some also mentioned they learned to accept their own uniqueness. Comparing the strategies students would use in dealing with intercultural situations in the beginning and the end-of-the-semester surveys (Spring 2015), the most significant progress was an increase from 18% to 33% on the aspect of attitudes and feelings. Many students described that they were able to view and understand differences from others' perspectives. For example:

> ...now I always put myself into others' shoes in an effort to enhance mutual understanding. The more cultural differences I take into consideration, the less conflicts and stereotypes I have.

Similarly, in the reflection papers, students described in detail their changes in attitudes: from negative reactions such as complaining, to trying to understand others' cultures. For example, through the teaching steps of "creating a disorienting dilemma" and "resolving it", a student realized her past judgments on others were based on prejudice. She now learned to postpone judgments and understand others:

> Instead of complaining about some "strange" things in the communication with people from different culture like before, now I always put these in a specific cultural background and figure out how these exterior phenomena are connected with this culture interiorly. In this way, I found myself more tolerant and moderate facing differences and conflicts in intercultural communication.

For those who struggled with accepting themselves in the beginning, a positive change was found at the end of the class: they learned that their own difference was not a deficiency; instead of simply avoiding or obliging others during conflict situations, they now chose to explain their own differences to others. For example, a few students who were really shy in the beginning became more and more outspoken in class discussions, despite their red face and nervousness when they spoke. A student pointed out his change toward acceptance of himself as who he was in the final reflection paper:

> As I have said in mid-term cultural identity paper, I am a little introvert person. I always feel a kind of inferiority when I sense that I can't talk with others freely. At this class, I can participate in a lots of funny games and lively discussions. I think the class atmosphere is pretty good. It helps me overcome my weakness in a way. Besides that, I can accept myself confidently. Cultural diversity told me there are many different kind of people, some people tend to be outgoing, and others tend to be opposite. It's unnecessary for excessive self-blame. Just be myself.

In sum, the course was the most effective in prompting openness, toward new cultures on the one hand and one's own native culture and oneself on the other.

5.3 Incorporation

When the first few teaching moves were enacted more successfully, the last teaching move "seeking creative solutions" also facilitated incorporation of needs from different parties. Students' creative solutions to simulated conflict situations can be seen as a sign of incorporation. They no longer withdrew or avoided the problems but actively sought help from different parties. In the fifth semester of teaching the course, for example, in the scenario of interpreting for a professor, whose English was difficult to understand, at his academic talk, the students no longer chose to pretend that they understood. Instead, there were several steps they would apply:

Take a break
Speak to the speaker privately
Ask the speaker to slow down
Ask the speaker for handout/outline/notes of his talk
Apologize to the speaker
Stop translating word for word but only summarize the main ideas
Turn to the audience for help

Such change suggested students' willingness to consider multiple parties involved and the potential in solving conflicts in a win-win manner.

In their final reflection papers, some students described an incorporation of different cultures, be it cultures of a nation, an ethnicity or a

regional group. For example, a student reflected on her experience growing up in a family with mixed Han and Hui ethnicity. In the mid-term paper she described a conflict with her mother's family who were Muslims when she and her Han friend secretly had a pork hamburger for lunch. At a young age, she could not understand why she couldn't eat pork while her friends could, and her attitudes had made her mother angry.

> I didn't think there was anything wrong because I was Han and I was not supposed to obey the eating taboo. So when my mother called me to come home for dinner from the window of house on the third floor I responded to her that I had have a Chinese hamburger so I was not hungry in a high voice which can be heard all around the yard. Immediately, expression on my mother's face became serious and she asked me to be back at once. Doubtlessly, what was waiting for me was her scold and others' showing cold shoulders on me. I cried sadly and repeated again and again that I was different from her and I was a Han and I didn't have to be like her to not eat pork. But she did not want to listen and became more and more angry.

In the final paper, she stated she now had a deepened understanding of her multicultural family, knew how to handle conflict properly and was "doing better" transitioning from one culture to another. She identified herself as a mixed Han and Hui person.

> Recalling some conflicts and confusion again, I don't feel angry or sad anymore, but have deeper understanding of the influence of this cross-ethnicity family culture on me ... Some unhappy experience taught me a lesson that although you don't belong to a specific cultural group, when you are in this specific situation, it's better not to do things going against its rules. Everyone has his right to keep his own belief but it is also our responsibility to respect others' and try not to bother them ... I now understand this cultural difference between ethnicities more and have found the proper way to handle this. The transition from one culture to another is not easy, but I believe I am doing better and better.

One student seemed to have developed a productive orientation by transcending polarities and integrating the strengths of "extroverts" and "introverts", thus a "more complete person":

> I have become a more complete person, and I regard this word to be more beautiful and graceful than any other word in this world. Through this course, I become a better extrovert: I learn to observe, respect, communicate, and love different people around me, I learn to maintain an open heart always ready to connect, listen and share. Through this course, I also become a better introvert: understanding and handling the difference taking place every day and everywhere through the means of self-reflection ... When difference and similarity are one, when conflict and unity are one, then grace is within us.

Further research is needed here for identifying approach, methods and techniques that facilitated incorporation at a deeper level such as the quote above.

6 Conclusion

To implement the new goals for English language teaching for intercultural communication in China, the chapter has discussed the effectiveness of classroom innovations in a content-based College English class, LCC, in facilitating students' development toward productive bilingualism. Through three cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting, the revised teaching steps and techniques were able to help students develop toward a fuller status of productive bilingualism.

Bringing about real change was not easy. The initial teaching was faced with students' unawareness of potential problems in intercultural communication, unawareness of their own assumptions and incapability of incorporating cultural perspectives. To address these challenges, the new curriculum, guided by TLT, emphasized two teaching steps (creating a disorienting dilemma and resolving it) and five teaching moves (cultivating awareness, examining frames of reference, deconstructing stereotypes, reconstructing open attitudes and seeking creative solutions). The teaching steps were difficult to enact at the beginning, due to students' incapability to distinguish description from judgments, their fear and anxiety in unfamiliar situations. The teacher used

techniques of empathizing, group work, personal sharing and non-evaluative feedback to strengthen students' confidence and acceptance of themselves.

The teaching steps and techniques were on the whole effective in helping students develop toward productive bilingualism, characterized by transcendence of polarities. Openness toward both self and others was achieved successfully through methods and techniques that prompted criticalness. Students became more aware of their own prejudice and biases, accepting themselves, and learned to understand others from multiple perspectives. They also improved significantly in providing creative solutions to conflict situations, a sign of incorporating different cultures and perspectives.

Although the students in this study had not yet achieved the degree of productiveness documented in Gao's (2001, 2002) study of "best foreign language learners in China", their substantial progress during the course demonstrated probabilities of cultivating productive bilingualism through transformative learning in classroom settings and potentials for the students' continuous development toward fuller productive bilingualism in future. Further research is needed in looking at how in-depth criticalness and incorporation can be achieved. Further, although there were positive changes toward productive bilingualism in the classroom, it was not yet clear whether the students will apply their learnings in action outside the classroom, and continue to develop toward productive bilingualism in their lives. Future studies are expected to look into the effects of pedagogical efforts in the long run, and what participants actually do in real intercultural situations.

Lastly, the study highlighted the transformative potential of using action research for teachers who seek changes in their own classrooms. Compared to following a revised curriculum imposed by researchers or policy makers, action research enabled teachers to develop and own the methods and materials for the classroom they themselves knew the best. It is hoped that the study will serve as an example for English teachers in China who also seek classroom innovations to address the new demands brought by the changing contexts of English learning and teaching.

Appendix: Weekly Calendar of *Language, Culture and Communication*

Week	Topic	Assignment	Goal
1	Introduction		Knowledge orientated: To have a general understanding on cultural differences, and the relationship between language and culture. To create class community
2	Cultural diversity		
3	Language and culture		
4	Intercultural interpersonal relationships		
5	Family culture and the primary socialization process	Journal 1	To define culture as learned
6	Communication styles: online and offline		To help students notice, describe and interpret cross-cultural differences and similarities, especially in communication styles in different modes
7	Non-verbal communication	Ethnographic observation and field notes	
8	Gender and communication		
9	Language and identity in intercultural communication	Journal 2	To help students reflect on how their ideas and attitudes toward self and others are formed
10	Language attitudes	Journal 3	
11	Stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination	Research proposal due	
12	Movie showing: Shanghai Calling		Action oriented: to help students apply effective strategies in communicating, managing conflicts and emotions across contexts
13	Conflict and conflict management		
14	Intercultural adaptation		
15	Presentation	Final research report due	Assessment
16	Presentation	Final reflection letter due	Assessment

References

Blommaert, J. (2010). *The sociolinguistics of globalization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Burns, A. (2011). 英语教学中的行动研究方法 *[Action research in English language teaching: A guide for practitioners]*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.

Byram, M. (2012). Conceptualizing intercultural (communicative) competence and intercultural citizenship. In J. Jackson (Ed.), *The Routledge handbook of language and intercultural communication* (pp. 85–97). New York: Routledge.

Council of Europe. (2009). *Autobiography of intercultural encounters: Notes for facilitators*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

Farrell, T. S. C. (2007). *Reflective language teaching: From research to practice*. New York: Continuum.

Fromm, E. (1948). *Man for himself*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Gao, Y. H. (2000). 语言文化差异的认识与超越 *[Understanding and transcending linguistic and cultural differences]*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.

Gao, Y. H. (2001). *Foreign language learning: "1+1>2."*. Beijing: Peking University Press.

Gao, Y. H. (2002). Productive bilingualism: 1+1>2. In D. W. C. So & G. M. Jones (Eds.), *Education and society in plurilingual contexts* (pp. 143–162). Hong Kong; Brussels: VUB Brussels University Press.

Gao, Y. H. (2008). 跨文化意识与自我反思能力的培养—"语言与文化"、"跨文化交际"课程教学理念与实践 [Developing learners' intercultural awareness and competence of self-reflection—Teaching belief and practice of "Language and Culture" and "Intercultural Communication"]. *Foreign Language Education in China, 2*, 59–68.

Gao, Y. H. (2014). Faithful imitator, legitimate speaker, playful creator and dialogical communicator: Shift in English learners' identity prototypes. *Language and Intercultural Communication, 14*(1), 59–75.

Gao, Y. H., et al. (2013). 大学生英语学习动机与自我认同发展: 四年五校跟踪研究 *[College students' English learning motivation and self-identity development: A four-year longitudinal study]*. Beijing: Higher Education Press.

Garrett, P. (2010). *Attitudes to language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gu, X. (2016). Assessment of intercultural communicative competence in FL education: A survey on EFL teachers' perception and practice in China. *Language and Intercultural Communication, 16*, 1–20.

Huang, W. H. (2015). 过程性文化教学与跨文化交际能力培养的实证研究 [An empirical study on process-oriented culture teaching and development of intercultural communicative competence]. *Journal of PIA University of Foreign Languages, 38*(1), 51–58.

Jackson, J. (2014). *Introducing language and intercultural communication.* London: Routledge.

Lambert, W. E. (1974). Culture and language as factors in learning and education. In F. E. Aboud & R. D. Meade (Eds.), *Cultural factors in learning and education* (pp. 91–122). Bellingham, Washington: Fifth Western Washington Symposium on Learning.

Mezirow, J. (1994). Understanding transformation theory. *Adult Education Quarterly, 44*(4), 222–244.

Mezirow, J. (1995). Transformation theory of adult learning. In M. R. Welton (Ed.), *In defense of the lifeworld* (pp. 39–70). Albany: SUNY Press.

Mezirow, J. (2000). *Learning as transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Norton, B. (2013). *Identity and language learning: Extending the conversation* (2nd ed.). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Pennycook, A. (2007). *Global englishes and transcultural flows.* New York: Routledge.

Snow, D. (2015). English teaching, intercultural competence, and critical incident exercises. *Language and Intercultural Communication, 15*(2), 285–299.

Sun, Y. Z. (2016). 解读《高等学校外国语言文学类专业本科教学质量国家标准》[Interpreting "National Standards for Teaching University Undergraduates Majoring in Foreign Language and Literature"]. Keynote speech at National Forum on Reform and Development of Foreign Language Education at the Tertiary Level, April 16, 2016, Beijing.

Taylor, E. W. (2008). Transformative learning theory. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 119*, 5–15.

Wang, Y.'a., & Kulich, S. J. (2015). Does context count? Developing and assessing intercultural competence through an interview- and model-based domestic course design in China. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 48*, 38–57.

Xiao, L. F., Xiao, D., Li, F., & Song, Y. W. (2010). 我国高校英语教育中的"中国文化失语"现状研究 [A study of the "Chinese culture aphasia" in present English education in Chinese higher education]. *Foreign Language Teaching, 1*, 91–92.

Xu, J., & Qiu, X. M. (2011). 成人转化学习理论述评 [A comment on adult transformative learning theory]. *Adult Higher Education, 1*, 20–23.
Xu, L. S. (2009). *Intercultural communication in English (revised edition)*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.

Xuan Zheng is lecturer at Institute of Linguistics and Applied Linguistics, School of Foreign Languages, Peking University. She has received her PhD in English language and rhetoric from the University of Washington at Seattle. Her research interests include foreign language education and intercultural communication.

Yihong Gao is professor and director of Institute of Linguistics and Applied Linguistics, School of Foreign Languages, Peking University. Currently she serves as vice president of China English Language Education Association (CELEA). Her major research interest lies in the social psychology of English language learning and teaching.