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Lianli Clara Gao
University of Wollongong

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The Changing Context of Tertiary English Teaching in China and Teachers’ Responses to the Challenges

A Thesis Submitted in Fulfilment of the
Requirements for the Award of the Degree

Doctor of Education

from

University of Wollongong

by

LIANLI CLARA GAO

B.A. and M. A., Literature and Linguistics in China

Faculty of Education

March 2007

Thesis Certification

I, Lianli Clara Gao, declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Education, in the Faculty of Education, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Signed

LIANLI CLARA GAO

28th March 2007

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Thesis Certification	ii
Acknowledgement	iii
Table of Contents	v
List of Tables.	xi
List of Figures	xii
Glossary of Abbreviations.	xiii
Abstract	xiv
Content of the Thesis	1
References	193
Appendices	208

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Rationale for the study	1
1.3 The context of tertiary English teaching (TET) in China	5
Internal influences on TET in China: tradition	5
External influences on TET in China: government policy	8
External influences on TET in China: globalisation	8
External influences on TET in China: the economy	9
External influences on TET in China: educational reform	10
1.4 Statement of the problem and its significance	11
1.5 Research questions	12
1.6 Theoretical orientation	13
1.7 Organization of the thesis	14
1.8 Summary of Chapter One	14

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction	16
2.2 Changes in curriculum	16
2.2.1 Historical overview of curriculum change	16
2.2.2 College English Curriculum Requirements 2004	18
2.2.3 Theoretical rationale of CECR 2004	19
2.2.4 Issues surrounding tertiary English curriculum	20
2.2.5 Summary of section 2.2	23
2.3 Changes in pedagogy	23
2.3.1 Historical overview	23
2.3.2 Research into ELT pedagogy in China	28
2.3.3 Pedagogical change in CECR 2004	31
ICT and autonomous learning in tertiary English pedagogy	33
Eclecticism and principled eclecticism in China	35
2.3.4 The need for further research	38
2.3.5 Summary of section 2.3	39

2.4 Changes in assessment	40
2.4.1 Overview of English language assessment at university level in China	40
Components of CET	41
Validation of CET	43
Research on CET before establishment of CECR 2004	43
2.4.2 Changes in assessment in CECR 2004	46
2.4.3 Research on assessment after CECR 2004	47
2.4.4 Summary of section 2.4	50
2.5 Summary of Chapter Two	51

CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction	53
3.2 Conceptualising tertiary English teaching as a field	54
Bourdieu's notion of 'field'	56
3.3 Theorising teachers' practice – Bernstein's 'code' theory	58
Autonomy, Specialisation, and Temporality	61
Stronger / weaker autonomy	62
Knowledge / knower specialisation	64
Retrospective / prospective temporality	65
Three key heuristic concept	66
3.4 Summary of Chapter Three	67

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction	69
4.2 Qualitative inquiry	69
4.3 Research design	70
4.4 Defining the participants, sample and scope	74
The selection of universities	74
The selection of teachers, administrators and policy-makers	75
The selection of documents	78
4.5 Data collection	79

Survey	79
Interview	81
Document	83
4.6 Data analysis	84
4.7 The role of the researcher	85
4.8 Researching in China	86

CHAPTER FIVE: CURRICULUM: CHANGING DEMANDS AND RESPONSES TO THESE DEMANDS

5.1 Introduction	89
5.2 The National Curriculum: challenges and responses	89
5.2.1 Purpose and function of the National Curriculum	90
5.2.2 Theoretical and research base of the National Curriculum	91
5.2.3 Aims and objectives of the National Curriculum	92
5.2.4 Content requirements of the National Curriculum	94
5.2.5 Summary: the National Curriculum	96
5.3 University syllabi: challenges and responses	97
5.3.1 Overview	97
5.3.2 Purpose and function of university-based syllabi	97
5.3.3 Theoretical base of university syllabi	99
5.3.4 Aims and objectives of university-based syllabi	99
5.3.5 Content requirements of university-based syllabi	100
5.3.6 Planning and programming requirements of university syllabi	101
5.3.7 Summary: university-based syllabi	104
5.4 Textbooks and materials: challenges and responses	105
5.4.1 Overview	105
5.4.2 Purpose and function of teaching materials	105
5.4.3 Theoretical base of teaching materials	108
5.4.4 Format and content of course books	108
5.4.5 Teachers' handbook	110
5.4.6 Course software	111
5.4.7 Summary: textbooks and materials	112

5.5 Summary of Chapter Five	113
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CHAPTER SIX: PEDAGOGY: CHANGING DEMANDS AND RESPONSES TO THESE DEMANDS

6.1 Introduction	116
6.2 The national curriculum: challenges and responses	116
6.3 Pedagogy in university-based syllabi	122
6.4 Pedagogy in teaching materials	126
6.5 Summary of Chapter Six	132

CHAPTER SEVEN: ASSESSMENT: CHANGING DEMANDS AND THE RESPONSES TO THESE DEMANDS

7.1 Introduction	137
7.2 Changing demands: challenges and responses in assessment	137
7.2.1 Purpose of assessment procedures in CECR 2004	139
7.2.2 The rationale of CECR 2004	143
7.3 University syllabi and assessment demands	144
7.3.1 Assessment reflected in university-based syllabi	144
7.3.2 The ambivalent status of university-based syllabi.....	145
7.3.3 Teacher-designed examinations	150
7.4 College English Test – Band Four	153
7.4.1 Changes in the CET-4 content.....	154
7.4.2 Structure and content of CET-4	156
7.4.3 The purposes and the role of CET-4	158
The leading position of CET-4	158
Teaching for CET-4	161
CET-4 as measurement of program quality and teacher Performance	163
7.4.4 Knowledge needed for CET-4	164
7.5 Issues of validity	167
7.6 Summary of Chapter Seven	168

CHAPTER EIGHT: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

8.1 Introduction	173
8.1.1 Changes in the Chinese context	173
8.1.2 Expectations on teachers, administrators and policy makers	174
8.1.3 Responses of teachers, administrators and policy makers	177
Rhetoric of change versus reality	177
Rhetoric of autonomy versus reality	181
Rhetoric of specialisation versus reality	183
Contextual considerations	186
8.2 Significance of the study	187
8.3 Issues and implications	187
8.4 Recommendations	190
8.5 Conclusion	191

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1	Changes in the CECR 2004
Table 2.2	General categories of the articles on foreign language study in 1999 (Yang 2003, p.58)
Table 2.3	The four components tested in CET-4/6 (based on Jin and Yang, 2006)
Table 2.4	General case for CET-4 from 87.9 to 95.6 (Basically from Yang & Weir 1998, p. 2)
Table 2.5	Interpretation to the curriculum (1985) (Yang and Weir 1998, p.69)
Table 2.6	Principles taken in Yang and Weir (1998, p.xii-xiii)
Table 4.1	Research design
Table 4.2	Timetable for data collection
Table 4.3	Categories of universities in China
Table 4.4	Universities or institutions
Table 4.5	The selection of the interview participants for the study
Table 4.6	Administrators and policy-developer participants in the study
Table 4.7	Survey distributed and collected
Table 5.1	Comparison of the main courses for English major students (SH, Interview, 2004)
Table 5.2	Teacher's participation in professional development (Question 13)
Table 6.1	Teacher's responses for present approach to English teaching
Table 6.2	Teacher's responses for a change in teaching approach in the past few years
Table 6.3	Pedagogy in university-based syllabi in BUCT, HUST, HLJU) (Until June 2004)
Table 7.1	Assessment in university-based syllabi (BUCT, HUST, HLJU) (until June 2004)
Table 7.2	Changes in the reformed CET-4 (Feb.2005 www.moe.edu.cn)
Table 7.3	The original types of content in CET-4 and scores after 1996 and before 2005
Table 7.4	The content and format of June 2001CET-4

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3.1	The field of TET in China
Figure 3.2	The outline of the theoretical framework
Figure 4.1	Data collection procedure
Figure 6.1	The computer- and classroom-based teaching model 1 (CECR 2004, p.33)
Figure 6.2	Process of computer-based English learning (CECR 2004, p.35)
Figure 6.3	Online teaching organization (NHCE, 2001. Teachers' book, Vol. 1, p.328)
Figure 6.4	Online students learning activities (NHCE, 2001. Teachers' book, Vol.1, p.329)
Figure 6.5	Teaching activities online (NHCE, 2001. Teachers' book, Vol. 1, p.329)

GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS

ALM	The Audiolingual Method
CEC	College English Curriculum/Curricula, in particular, in 1985 and 1999
CECR	College English Curriculum Requirements 2004
CET-4/6	College English Test (Band Four/Six)
CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
EFL	English as Foreign Language
EGP	English for General Purposes
ELT	English language teaching
ESL	English as a Second Language
ESP	English for Specific Purposes
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ME	The Ministry of Education in China
SET	Spoken English Test in CET-4/6
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
TESOL	Teaching English to Students of Other Languages
TET	Tertiary English teaching

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine changes in tertiary English teaching in China and the perceptions and reactions of university English teachers, administrators and policy-makers to these changes. In particular, the study focused on the tension between policy and reality in the areas of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in Chinese university English teaching. The key research question, therefore, related to how tertiary English teachers are meeting the challenges of the changing expectations of their profession, taking into account the complex context of tertiary English teaching in China with its characteristic historical, cultural, economic and political issues.

Different from most other research in this field in China, the study adopted a sociocultural perspective, using Bourdieu's (1971b; 1984) notion of 'field' and Bernstein's (1990; 2000) 'three message systems' to diagnose the expectations placed on English instructors as a result of changes in what to teach (curriculum), how to teach (pedagogy), and how to assess (assessment and evaluation). The study, finally, was organized around the principles of *temporality*, *autonomy*, and *specialisation* (Maton, 2004a, 2005) to identify teachers' and administrators' orientation to change, the degree of autonomy conferred by the changes and the specialist knowledge needed to respond to the changes.

A qualitative inquiry approach was adopted to explore thick and authentic data from a variety of sources, including policy documents, university syllabi, course designs, textbooks, assessment instruments, surveys, and interviews with teachers, administrators and policy-makers.

It was found that, although there is a great recognition of the need for reform, attempts have so far been ineffective because:

- policy appears to be inconsistent and unclear in its theoretical basis;
- the universities tend not to play a mediating role in interpreting national policy at the local level, leaving teachers to fall back on what is familiar;
- there is a lack of adequate pre-service training for English language instructors in the areas of ELT curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment, and a lack of sufficient in-

service professional development for further understanding and implementing policy in their teaching;

- textbooks and external examinations dominate tertiary English teaching, inhibiting change;
- as a result, university English language instruction is in a state of inertia and English language instructors are feeling confused and uncertain.

The study argues that power over university English language education remains centralised despite the apparent policy mandate to devolve autonomy in curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment to the universities and university English language instructors do not have the necessary background and experience in language education to assume autonomy or implement reform.