

Language and Globalization

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In the context of current political and social developments, where the national group is not so clearly defined and delineated, the state language not so clearly dominant in every domain, and cross-border flows and transfers affects more than a small elite, new patterns of language use will develop. This series aims to provide a framework for reporting on and analysing the linguistic outcomes of globalization and localization.

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Paul McPherron

Internationalizing Teaching, Localizing Learning

An Examination of English Language Teaching
Reforms and English Use in China

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*This book is dedicated to my father and mother,
Robert and Phyllis McPherron,
who taught me the importance of listening before speaking*

Preface: First Impressions: “I Don’t Love Learning English”

English has been taught in China for over 300 years (Gil and Adamson, 2011), but since 1984 and the opening of the Chinese economy, English learning and teaching has been made central to Chinese education policy in order to meet the needs of the “four modernizations” in agriculture, industry, national defense, and science and technology (Mao and Min, 2004). Even more recently as the nation prepared for hosting the Olympics in 2008 and broadening economic and trade links, English was pushed into the lives of even more Chinese citizens, with English introduced at Grade 3 in 2001 (9 years old) in the national curriculum standards set by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and in earlier grades at many private academies and urban school systems (Graddol, 2013). Further, an MOE mandate in 2004 stipulated that 5–10% of all courses at universities be offered in English with the long-term goal of over 20 % of undergraduate courses in English (Wang, 2006, cited in Hu and McKay, 2012). Due to these various language policies, by the mid-2000s estimates range from over 25 million college students learning English in China (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2014) to over 115 million total students, from kindergarten through university, studying English by the mid-2000s in China (Wen and Hu, 2007). As scholars have pointed out, there is a difference between a learner and a user of English (McKay, 2002; Yang, 2006), but generally it is estimated that between 300 and 350 million people throughout China have studied and used English in

their daily life to some degree (Honna, 2006; Zhang, 2005), creating a situation in which there are more English speakers in China than the total population of the USA, Britain, and Canada combined (Chuanbo, 2013).

Thus, from a macro-policy perspective and in terms of sheer numbers of English learners, it would appear that the Chinese nation has embraced English as an index of global identity and future superpower status and Chinese learners have embraced English learning as central to their future careers and professional lives. At the same time, during my first semester as an English instructor at a university in southern China in the fall of 2004, referred to throughout the book by the pseudonym China Southern University (CSU), a student with the English name Guy wrote an email to me explaining his ambiguous relationship with English.

To be honest, I don’t think many Chinese students really love English, include me. I don’t love learning English, I learn it just because I need it, sometimes—maybe I need it more in the future—and because sometimes I found it interesting to use a language which is different from my own, from which I can hide myself and “translate” myself to be a different person, another ego. (Personal communication, October, 2004)

Guy went on to write that many of his classmates were tired of the speaking focus of the classes at CSU, and he suggested fewer classroom speaking tasks and more focused writing help. I was immediately challenged by Guy’s unsolicited and direct comments about his reasons for learning English and his problems with my focus on activities that drew on Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Learning Activities (TBLT). I asked myself many questions: why did he write to me, the so-called “foreign” teacher, and not one of the other, “local” Chinese teachers?; did he want me to know something, as the foreigner in China, about what students really thought of my classes?; was he resisting my teaching or more widely the university’s policies that require all students to advance to a high proficiency in English?; and, finally, it may not be necessary to “love” learning English in order to do well in class (and Guy was a top student), but what exactly did Guy mean by “need”? The email provided important insight into my classroom at the time and Guy and I have since become good friends, often discussing his ideas about educational reforms in China and his desire to

make studying ancient Chinese characters a requirement for all university students; but the questions that emerged from Guy's email—about globalization, English Language Teaching (ELT), and identity (both mine and Guy's)—remain. In many ways, these questions were the catalyst for my research projects in China and the writing of this book.

When I arrived at CSU in 2004, I had experience teaching English to high-school students in Sibiu, Romania as a volunteer in the Peace Corps, and I had taught writing and oral presentation courses to undergraduate and graduate students at UC Davis during my Master's in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (MA-TESOL) program. I also had experience of teaching in US public schools as an English Education major at the University of Illinois, where I finished my undergraduate degree and received a teaching credential for teaching English in grades 6–12. In all of my teaching experiences, I had always viewed myself as "student-centered" and politically engaged in the needs of my students. Reading Paolo Freire as an undergraduate student inspired me to pursue a career in education, and my readings of critical pedagogy scholars in graduate school such as Sarah Benesch, Suresh Canagarajah, Brian Morgan, and Vaidehi Ramanathan furthered my desire to create socially conscious and problem-posing activities that connected with the lives of my students. As Freire (1970/2000) writes, I envisioned leading my students "to come to feel like masters of their thinking" (p. 124). Thus, Guy's email—in which he later asked me to concentrate on providing grammatical correction on writing assignments rather than on speaking activities—challenged me on several levels; it not only moved me to question the role of English proficiency in my students' lives but also my role as a teacher in the Chinese ELT context and what kind of teacher my students both expected and needed. Could I or should I be the critical and consciousness-raising teacher that I envisioned? Perhaps my students did not want me there in the first place and did not want to learn the main content, English, that I was paid to teach.

During my interviews for my application to become a Peace Corps volunteer, the interviewers emphasized that the Peace Corps would only send teachers to countries and schools that requested volunteers, and in some ways, I justified joining the Peace Corps because I felt that I had to be doing more good than harm if I worked with local teachers who wanted my support and teaching expertise. At CSU, however, it was not

clear to me that it was necessary for me, a foreign teacher with little proficiency in Mandarin Chinese before arriving in 2004, to teach students like Guy, who just did not seem to want me to teach them. Answers to my questions were complicated by the fact that at least outwardly, the university and larger CSU community appeared to be doing everything possible to make "foreign" teachers feel comfortable and part of the local community. I was given a rent-free apartment near campus that included a weekly maid service, I shared an office cubicle with a "local" Chinese counterpart with whom I coordinated one of the course levels, and the department organized numerous excursions, parties, and professional-development activities for the English teaching faculty, such as a Thanksgiving dinner and a trip to a local hot-springs resort. Some of my students may have been questioning why they were learning English from me, but my colleagues and the English Language Center (ELC) that housed ELT programs were more than hospitable, and despite my trepidation, I could envision working at CSU for many productive and enjoyable years.

After one year of teaching at CSU from 2004–2005, with the numerous questions sparked by Guy's email still challenging me, I decided to pursue a PhD program in applied linguistics to further think through the complex contexts and motivations for learning English around the world. At the time, I imagined that I would focus on university English learners similar to the undergraduate and international students I had taught during my MA program; however, students such as Guy, and the Chinese ELT context, with its internationalizing spaces and desires, as exemplified by the CSU campus, fascinated, perplexed and intrigued me, and I returned in 2007 to complete data collection for my dissertation and again in 2010 and 2013 as a teacher and researcher after the completion of my PhD. This book is thus the culmination of these numerous trips and stays at CSU over the past 10 years as a teacher, researcher, and member of the CSU community. As detailed, examined, and analyzed throughout that next chapters, CSU is a fascinating place, as it offers a front-row seat to many key issues and processes that define how we live and work in the twenty-first century. As seen in the spectacle of students singing Broadway show tunes with study-abroad students from Romania, Israel, and the Philippines at a festival celebrating English learning, and the presentations given there by famous journalists and researchers from

all over the world, CSU is an internationalizing space with multiple community members and interests competing against each other, working together, or simply unaware of each other, and it has become a large part of my professional and personal identity and a home away from home.

Researching Teacher

Part of my reason for writing this preface is to point out that I am not an unbiased observer nor am I claiming to be one, but that my perspective as a “researching teacher” allows me to add a grounded perspective to discussions of globalization, cultural identifications, and English teaching pedagogy. As described in more detail in Chap. 1, I have primarily adopted ethnographic and qualitative-research methods in collecting the multiple sources of data at CSU presented in the following chapters, and I include my own classrooms and living experiences as part of the data collection. Although grounded in my own perspectives and experiences, the multiple examples of teaching, learning, and using English presented in the following chapters represent rigorous qualitative data collection methods and analysis, and these diverse data perspectives allow me to make connections with other internationalizing universities and communities throughout the world.

I prefer to use the term “researching teacher” to describe my position at CSU because the more common term “participant observer” used in qualitative research may signal that I was simply a part of the setting, without an active role in shaping and determining the teaching and teacher community at the university; nor would it make clear that my role was also to provide my own perspective and analysis in building the picture of CSU presented in this book. In fact, whether by participating in level meetings about final exams, giving a lecture on English naming practices, or co-writing a companion teaching book that supplemented the state curriculum, I was not just participating in the CSU context, but was taking an active part in its history and construction. This is why I prefer to borrow the term *autoethnography* from Brodkey (1994) and Phan (2008). In her study of English teaching in Vietnamese universities, Phan (2008) describes why she uses the term autoethnography to frame her work:

The nature of what is presented in this book dictates the importance of defining my positioning as the writer in relation to English, ELT, the West, Vietnam/Vietnamese and being a teacher. I first need to define myself in the jungle of varied and even conflicting viewpoints regarding these issues. Since the book discusses the identity formation of Western-trained Vietnamese teachers of English, I find myself one of them. I am thus both the writer and the insider. (Phan, 2008, p. 14)

In the same way, I am writing about foreign and local teachers of English in China and the overall context of English learning at universities in China, and I am both an insider of the research site and the writer who is putting together the images of CSU in this book. Just as I draw on data from my own classrooms and teacher notes, I will draw attention to my own positioning and views on the key aspects as I lived them and researched them over the 10-year period the book represents.

As a final point of introduction to the book, the chapters draw on Ramanathan and Morgan (2007) and their call for studies that move beyond the level of description and deal with the messy details of how we can affect and change our teaching contexts. They write:

It seems time that we go beyond documenting and describing how our current language policies often sustain or create inequalities—we accept this as a truism now—to spaces where we become cognizant of our agentic roles in their enactments. In other words, we wish to go beyond asking, “what do language policies do,” to asking “what can we do with language policies in our immediate professional contexts?” (Ramanathan and Morgan, 2007, p. 450)

Following this call for a move from description to more personal analysis of what we can do in our immediate educational policy and pedagogical practices, and attempting to represent the intricate practices and processes of English learning at CSU in relation to larger theoretical concepts, the book is a study of both the foreign- and local-teacher classrooms that I observed at CSU as well as my own classroom practices. For example, in Chap. 4, I describe CSU student choices and uses of English names, and I also analyze my own role in their creation and discuss how curriculum and policy can respond to this local creative practice. Further,

in Chap. 3, I report on the multiple and conflicting teaching roles for local and foreign teachers in CSU classrooms, and I also detail my own negotiation of locally and globally indexed teaching roles. In short, the following book draws on ethnographic data collection, grounded theory, and larger theoretical notions of identity and globalization while contextualizing my own position as a teacher and member of the CSU university community.

Structure of the Book

After this Preface, the book begins with Chap. 1, which further introduces the Chinese ELT context and CSU as well as providing information on the data collection methods and sources. Next, Chaps. 2–6 are the primary data chapters and each focuses on a particular group of participants, aspect of learning or teaching English at CSU, pedagogical activity, or classroom context. Each data chapter begins with a brief narrative from my own teaching experience that will help contextualize the local CSU data and analysis within the larger Chinese and international ELT context. These introductory sections of the data chapters are followed by descriptions of the key research questions, theories, participants, and data collection used in the chapter. After presentation of the data and themes, each data chapter ends with a brief analysis and discussion section that links issues and participants across the chapters and again to the larger Chinese and international ELT context. Chapter 7 then provides an overall summary and analysis of key themes from throughout the book and links the analyses and discussions from the preceding chapters.

More specifically, Chap. 2 investigates the history of English teaching policies in China and how understandings of “foreign,” “local,” and “reform” affect the professional identities, relationships, and classroom practices of CSU teachers. Drawing on the notion of “super-diversity” (Blommaert, 2013) and a wider definition of citizenship as “being able to fully participate” (Ramanathan, 2013a; Ramanathan, 2013b), the chapter analyzes how foreign teachers became associated with CLT approaches and how local and foreign teachers work to adapt their teaching methods and relationships inside and outside the classroom to build community

and "fully participate" as citizens in the CSU community. The main sections of the chapter present examples and case studies from CSU teachers and administrators, including an analysis of the production of the musical *Fiddler on the Roof* as part of extracurricular English language activities at CSU. In many teaching programs in China and elsewhere, foreign and local teachers are provided minimal chances to collaborate, and foreign teachers are often asked to focus on speaking skills or given upper-division, content courses while local teachers focus on grammar and vocabulary. Since CSU's inception, teachers and administrators at CSU have worked to counter that trend and create spaces where everyone can "fully participate" as equal citizens including through extracurricular programming, and the chapter reports on the creative successes and persistent tensions that emerge in the creation of a teaching community. At the end of the chapter, I discuss identity and the multiple "identifications" of CSU teachers as part of an "incomplete, unfinished and open-ended activity in which we all, by necessity or by choice, are engaged" (Bauman, 2001, p. 121).

Next, Chap. 3 offers analysis of the teaching roles in Chinese classrooms and educational policy, with a particular focus on recent attempts to reintroduce Confucian education and morality education into Chinese society and education. The chapter offers case studies of local and foreign teachers at CSU who have sought in different ways to bridge Western and Chinese teaching roles. Data comes from teacher and student interviews as well as classroom observations. The chapter shows that many teachers in China hope to incorporate the role of moral guide into their relationships with students in different ways, but that this role is complicated by the teachers' access to local knowledges and identities as well as the way moral education has been used to reinstitute nationalist and often patriarchal values. Through placing an explicit emphasis on moral education as one part of a teacher's repertoire of "cultural identity," the chapter argues that teachers can find spaces to engage with tensions over Western-based reforms of English language policy, and rework traditional teaching roles in their English classrooms.

Chapter 4 investigates the reasons why Chinese university students pick English names at CSU, and how they use them both inside and outside CSU classrooms. As illustrated in the chapter, CSU students choose

English names that range from the traditional names found on lists to playful adaptations and coinages. Many English teachers in China have compiled similar lists of student English names, and a common discussion topic among both local and foreign teachers is: why do our students pick such creative and "weird" names? Makoni et al. (2007) point out that name choices offer locally grounded insights about language use and identity processes, but few studies have investigated the naming practices of language learners, particularly in ELT contexts, and none have examined English name choices over time. The chapter begins and ends with a discussion of how English name choices complicate the separation of local and global spaces and can become a revealing topic in language classrooms, provoking playful appropriation as well as critical reflection on language learning and translanguaging practices (Canagarajah, 2013a, 2013b) In all chapters, I follow Charmaz (2014) and draw attention to my own position of authority as both a participant/teacher and observer/researcher at CSU, but in Chap. 4, I pay particular attention to my own interest in helping students make choices about their English names.

Next, Chap. 5 examines ongoing debates in the field of writing pedagogy over self-assessment and critical thinking skills in multilingual English composition courses (Conner, 2014; Li, 1996; Ramanathan and Atkinson, 1999). These principles are widely taught in traditional L1 English writing courses but have been criticized for assuming a Western and unitary conception of the "self" that privileges individualism and autonomy over more fluid and multiple conceptions of "identity" (Atkinson, 2003; Varghese, Morgan et al., 2005). As a writing teacher, particularly as a foreign teacher from the global West teaching in China, or conversely as a Chinese teacher attempting to adopt process and CLT approaches to writing, it can be very difficult to decide on student needs and expected outcomes. In the first sections of the chapter, I present further background on second-language writing studies on self-reflection, critical thinking, and portfolio assignment particularly in Chinese and Asian contexts. The next sections then detail aspects of my academic writing classes including assignments, rubrics, and expectations for a portfolio reflection piece. Throughout the chapter, I include long quotes and extended passages from student writing to let the student interpretations and comments speak for themselves with little analysis provided until the end of the chapter. This allows readers to

understand the actual writing performance and practice of Chinese students during writing-class activities.

Chapter 6 is the final chapter focused primarily on data collected in the CSU and China context, and it examines the relationships between the increased role and status of English learning at CSU and the actual English use and experiences of CSU graduates in their professional lives. In particular, the chapter analyzes the results of a survey and interviews that investigated the use of English in the professional lives of CSU graduates. To date, no study has examined the relationships between the university English-teaching reforms enacted in Chinese university English programs throughout the 2000s and the actual English-language practices and desires for using English of university graduates. In contrast to the expectations behind CLT reforms at universities in China, the chapter discusses examples of former students who have a limited need for English, particularly spoken English, in their professional lives. These CSU graduates do, however, still desire to maintain their English proficiency and project an international and English-speaking identity.

Chapter 7 concludes the book with a summary of the key points, examples, and data analysis made in the preceding chapters as a way to explore competing perspectives and offer suggestions and implications for language teachers and administrators in divergent contexts. The chapter is organized around the dominant themes that have shaped the book from the opening chapter: (1) Teacher interpretations and appropriations of West-based teaching roles and methods; and (2) English-language learner responses to internationalization reforms and to the renewed emphasis on learning and using English in China.

In addition, in Chap. 7, I return to the email from my former student, Guy, as introduced above. Guy's words represent many of the issues confronting CSU students and teachers who are responding to given realities and inherent power dynamics in the spread of English as an international language. Each of these participants in the English-language-learning project at CSU are making choices based on dominant trends and the latest processes of globalization, and each group is "translating" itself and performing new identifications that are not necessarily predetermined by the processes of globalization. In this way, the final chapter will advocate a flexible pedagogy in which tensions between diverging policies, cultural

expectations and desires can become the basis for teaching and learning English. At CSU, much of the policy and methods for teaching had been introduced by outside experts who did not teach or live in the community, and many chapters in the book reveal that teachers and students at CSU and in similar ELT contexts should have a more prominent role in choosing, interpreting, and implementing the pedagogy and curriculum at their institution, or in any other English-learning context. I hope that this book will form part of a larger trend of allowing a great variety of classroom voices and perspectives to be heard in this debate, with contributions from English teachers and students throughout China. These stakeholders should be the true engine that drives English-language teaching at CSU and elsewhere.

Notes on Terminology: Key Dichotomies

The following chapters will explore a number of key dichotomies and terms in relation to the CSU data, but it is important to define and introduce a few key terms from the outset. First, the split between “local” and “foreign” teachers at CSU is an important, if not tenuous, distinction. At CSU, a “local” teacher is a teacher who is a citizen of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), Macau, or Hong Kong, and “foreign” teachers are everyone else. The terms “foreign” and “local” are in quotes here to highlight their contested and problematic meanings. Outside of citizenship status, it is difficult to define who is “foreign” at CSU as many of the Chinese teachers of English come from other provinces of China and speak dialects and languages very different than the *cháoshàn huà* and Cantonese which are used by many CSU students. Further, teachers from Chinese communities abroad such as Singapore, Malaysia, Canada, and elsewhere often share cultural and linguistic backgrounds with CSU students. Henceforward, the terms will not be in quotes but refer to their meaning in the CSU context.

The foreign/local question brings up questions around the definition of “native” versus “non-native” speaker. The term “native speaker” (NS) has been questioned, problematized, and generally discarded by many in ELT and applied linguistics (Davies, 2003; Pennycook, 2001). Many of

the questions and problems around the term deal with the difficulty of defining exactly what or who are the prototypical and authentic native speakers (Mulder and Hulstijn, 2010) and how the promotion of a "native" speaker is based on an underlying monolingual ideology that serves to discriminate and privilege certain groups and speakers (Makoni and Pennycook, 2007). At the same time, we cannot simply ignore the fact that the construct of "native speaker" does have important implications in our everyday lives as educators, and certainly, the terms "native speaker proficiency" and "non-native teacher" are important concepts that drive much of the policies and practices at CSU and in the CSU context. As Pennycook (2012) writes:

Language may be inventions but language policies, language-in-education practices and language discriminations are deeply real ... We need to appreciate that the NS is a proxy for many things, for discriminatory hiring practices along racial lines, for ideas of standard languages imbued from birth rather than inculcated through education, for prejudicial categorizations of the language spoken by others. It is a folk concept held in place to signal certain ideas about language. It is very real in the sense that it is invoked as an arbiter on language correctness, as a level of ability or as a preferred employee. (Pennycook, 2012, p. 86)

Because of these inherent language myths and inequalities perpetuated by the notion of a NS, Faez (2011) argues for a movement away from the term "non-native" speaker (NNS) as a label for teachers, even if the argument is being made that NNS teachers are equal to or better than NS teachers. At the same time, it is not enough to simply discard or ignore the use of "native" speaker as an important notion in our field. Instead, as the following chapters attempt to analyze, we can continue to study how the notion of "nativeness" and NS and NNS teachers are defined and actually taken up and used, perhaps even strategically at times, by NS and NNS teachers, students, and administrators. As with *foreign* and *local*, in using and analyzing the terms in the following chapters, I will refrain from placing quotes over NS or NNS, but readers should be aware of my understanding of the problems inherent in their definitions and use.

A few key terms from the field of English teaching should be defined and described in more detail here. In general, I prefer to use the term

ELT as a catch-all term for the entire field of English-language teaching and learning instead of splitting up the field between English as a Foreign Language (EFL), English as a Second Language (ESL), and English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). English learning in China has typically been defined as an EFL context because Chinese learners are considered to be learning English in a setting in which English is not an official language, used in official government or official documents, nor spoken by residents in daily life. On the other hand, ESL settings have traditionally been defined as places where English is the official or dominant language used for education and government and learners will interact with many first-language (L1) English speakers, historically a place like the USA or Australia. Just as definitions of NS and NSS are problematically tied to notions of monolingualism and homogenous cultures, it is increasingly difficult to define any context as clearly ESL or EFL. As previewed above and discussed through the book, English can be seen and heard in a variety of places in China from official state-run newspapers such as the *China Daily* to menus and signs that dot the linguistic landscape of both urban centers and rural villages. Similar to critiques of the concentric circles of the World Englishes paradigm (Kachru, 1986), labeling a national or local context as EFL ignores the multilingual and translingual (Canagarajah, 2013a) realities of global communication practices. At the same time, I am aware that using the term English in ELT in analyzing learning and teaching in China does not in and of itself challenge the status quo in the field nor help usher in an era of disinvented and reconstituted languages (Makoni and Pennycook, 2007), but similar to my approach to the terms foreign, local, native, and non-native in the following chapters, I draw attention to its uses in the CSU context and will problematize its use, whilst at the same time, remaining aware of instances and examples in which English or any other notion based on a particular myth can be strategically used by teachers, students, and administrators; this is what Gayatri Spivak has called *strategic essentialism*, which describes the way in which the political or cultural distinctiveness of a marginalized group becomes unified in the face of a dominant language or culture (Spivak and Harasym, 1990).

Finally, it is important to note that the next chapters will refer to a number of teaching approaches, methods, and techniques, from the Audiolingual Method to the Natural Approach. As previewed above,

CLT and TBLT are two of the most influential approaches to teaching in English in China, but it is unclear in the literature why CLT and TBLT are considered as approaches while other teaching ideas are methods. As conceptualized by Anthony (1963), historically in language teaching, an approach was linked to “the highest level of thinking that deals with the nature of language and the principles of language learning and teaching” while a method was based on an approach and directed the “orderly presentation of teaching materials,” in other words, the syllabus (as cited in Liu, 2008, p. 14). A technique was considered as an instrumental activity that teachers used on a daily basis to teach the language. Liu (2008) has pointed out, “the distinction between an approach and a method in language teaching is so controversial that any effort to precisely define each term causes confusion” (p. 18). Similarly, in analyzing ELT in China and CSU, teachers, students, and administrators will use a variety of terms to refer to how they organize, experience, and teach their courses. I am more concerned with how the participants interpret and appropriate these approaches and methods (in particular, how foreign teachers understand Chinese approaches to learning and local teachers draw on Western learning approaches) than worrying about what exactly is an approach or method in language teaching. In this way, I am starting from a *post-method* perspective on teaching, understanding that all teaching draws on local and global influences and ideas (Kumaravadivelu, 2003, 2006), but I am keen to point out the importance of particular sets of teaching ideas, activities, and identities in the CSU and Chinese context.

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