The teaching of English in Hong Kong from problems to solutions

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THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH IN HONG KONG

FROM PROBLEMS TO SOLUTIONS

by

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ABSTRACT

The issue concerning English education in Hong Kong has been a matter of much debate. This dissertation comprises two parts. Part I (Chapters 1 - 3) is a description of the problems and Part II (Chapters 4 and 5) a search for solutions.

Chapter 1 gives a factual picture of the language problems and the responses of both the government and the public to them. Chapter 2 is a study of the linguistic situation in Hong Kong, having a discussion particularly about the nature of bilingualism. Chapter 3 analyses the language learning difficulties and the actual needs of the learners.

Chapter 4 is an attempt to solve the problem by locating the proper position of English learning in the language education of Hong Kong. Chapter 5 suggests a possible solution to maintain, and hopefully to improve the teaching quality, by adapting the communicative approach to the Hong Kong situation.

INTRODUCTION

The history of English education in Hong Kong dates back as early as when Hong Kong became a British colony. With such a long history and with such tremendous support from the Government, in view of resources both in finances and manpower, it is surprising and disappointing to find that the motivation of the learners is so low and, worse still, the standard of English is found to be declining. The fact that the environment for learning English in Hong Kong seems to be more favourable when compared with those in China and Japan makes it more necessary and meaningful to look into the heart of the matter.

As a secondary school teacher in Hong Kong, the writer observes that there are many causes for the failure in learning the target language. The improvements in syllabus design, teaching approach and methodology may solve part of the problem. To eradicate the root of the problem, however, there is the need for a radical change in the language policy at the same time.

The writer therefore begins by making an analysis of the actual linguistic situation in Hong Kong before attempting to search for solutions. Finally the conclusions are reached that firstly a change in attitude towards learning the language should be brought about by relocating the position of English education in Hong Kong, and secondly a more realistic adaptation of the Communicative Approach to the local situation will make the teaching and learning of English more efficient.

Since English will continue to be important in Hong Kong, it is high time to prepare within this transitional period of history for a more healthy survival of English education in 1997 and beyond.

PART I

THE PROBLEM OF ENGLISH EDUCATION IN HONG KONG

Chapter 1

THE HONG KONG SITUATION

1.1 Background

Hong Kong is a city situated on the shores of South China. It was partly ceded and partly leased to Britain in the 19th Century. It will, however, be returned to China in 1997 in accordance with the Sino-British Joint Declaration in 1984.

Throughout the past one hundred years Hong Kong has changed from a fishing village to an international financial centre, with a highly sophisticated and efficient network of communications. The rapid expansion of manufacturing industry has contributed to rank Hong Kong among the top 20 exporting nations. Hong Kong also functions as a centre of commerce, banking and insurance (Taylor 1987).

Hong Kong has an area of 1,071 square kilometres and a population of 5,658,800, one of the most densely populated cities in the world. About 97% of the people are Chinese and 3% non-Chinese. So, despite Hong Kong's cosmopolitan multi-racial appearance it is a 'far more racially homogeneous city than most in Britain and other western countries.' (Gibbons 1987).

The information about languages from the 1981 Census provided the following figures:

Speakers of Cantonese	88.00%
Speakers of other Chinese dialects	10.29%
Speakers of English	1.04%

'On this measure English falls below some comparatively obscure Chinese dialects.' (Gibbons 1987)

1.2 English Language Education

The education system of Hong Kong consists of 3 years of kindergarten, 6 years of primary education, 5 years of secondary education, 1 or 2 years of pre-university education and tertiary

education ranging from 2 to 4 years. Children are exposed to English as early as in the kindergarten and continue to learn it as a major subject until the junior years in the universities, polytechnics and other post-secondary institutions. A secondary school leaver has therefore learnt English for 14 years, a matriculated student for 15 to 16 years, and a post-secondary graduate for an additional 1 or 2 years.

As far as medium of instruction is concerned, Cantonese is used in most of the primary schools while English is adopted by the majority of the secondary schools to be the medium of instruction.

Since the early years of the Colony, English has been promoted as the medium of instruction, initially on the ground that it could 'act as a bond of union between the many thousands of Chinese who have made this place their residence and the handful of Europeans by whom they are governed.' (Endacott 1973) The history of education in Hong Kong shows that there has been a fast expansion of Anglo-Chinese secondary schools where English is the medium of instruction and a rapid decline of the Chinese middle schools.

The official Government publication (Hong Kong 1988) made known the following 1987 figures:

Types of school	No. of schools	Total enrolments
Chinese Middle School	60	34,640
Anglo-Chinese Sec. School	351	372,152

This predominance of English in Education has been under much criticism.

1.3 The Problem

Criticism increases when the standard of English is found to be declining rather than improving. Even worse, there is a simultaneous spiral downfall in the competence of the Chinese language.

The former Governor of Hong Kong, MacLehose (1972-1982) described the problem succinctly in 1983 during an interview with a Hong Kong English newspaper:

> Cantonese speaking children are not only taught English but taught in English, so as to gain familiarity with it as has happened in Hong Kong in the structuring of education to meet this desire. The system worked well so long as education was the privilege of an elite in whose homes English was spoken to some extent, and that elite played a major part in Hong Kong's initial success. But once elitism is abandoned, and education is made universal and consequently vastly abandoned, as was the case in Hong Kong, one immediately runs into dangers of inadequacy in both the native mother tongue and the English second language, and in comprehension of what was being taught in it.

In reality, the standard of English before the advent of 9 years' compulsory education in 1978 left much to be desired. The English Curriculum Development Committee (1973) remarked that despite the paramount importance that has been attached to the learning of English and the prodigious effort that has been made, the results have been rather dismal. A study of the essays written by Form 5 students in private secondary schools evidenced 'only one fifth of all sentences are free from grammatical errors' and of those grammatically correct sentences, less than 10% (i.e. 2% of all sentences) can be taken as 'normal English usages or mature expressions.'

Another survey carried out by Kvan (1969) among students at the University of Hong Kong revealed that of all the 1st year students, 'about 15% read at a speed of less than 150 words per minute, 75% under 175 ... rates of 80 - 100 words per minute are not rare even in good students. In the U.S. such speeds are quoted for children of 12 - 13 years of age who are regarded as slower than English children ... these reading speeds are similar to those quoted for English students reading French, their second language.'

In the year immediately after the implementation of compulsory education, Chan et al (1979) conducted an English language test of Primary 4 standard on 2,974 Form 1 students from 22 schools; only 35.36% passed the test.

In an analysis of the views of the examiners and teachers of Hong Kong's 'Use of English Examination', Workman (1987) reported that both the examiners and teachers were of the same opinion, that the students in the matriculation classes are poor in English; they need improvement in grammar; they lack general knowledge; they have specific difficulty with the questions 'what' and 'why' and other 'wh' questions; they need improvement in listening skills and have difficulty in selective note-taking. They are those students who have learnt English for 15 or 16 years and received their education in English, too.

The complaints about the overall decline in students' performance in English are ever growing, not only from parents, teachers and educationalists, but also from the education authorities.

1.4 The Government's Response to the Problem

In 1980 a 'language package' was approved by the Government to raise the standard of English and Chinese in schools. The Institute of Language in Education was established in 1982 as a training and research centre to bring about improvements in language learning and teaching, with particular emphasis on the training of teachers of English and Chinese.

In 1981, a panel of visitors consisting of language and education experts from the United States, West Germany, Australia and the British Council were invited to undertake an overall review of the education system of Hong Kong. After extensive consultation and meetings with various sectors of the local people, the Panel submitted a report on its findings in 1982, the Llewellyn Report. One of the sections in the report is devoted to language problems in education. The Assistant Director of Education, Verner Bickley (1985) summarised the report in an article as follows:

> The Llewellyn Report drew attention to improve the language competence of teachers and made a number of other observations about language in education. For example it argued for a shift towards the universal use of the mother tongue in the formative years, accompanied by the formal teaching of English as a first foreign language, believing that this would lead progressively to "genuine

bilingualism" in the senior secondary years. The panel also proposed that the use of Chinese be encouraged through a scheme of "positive discrimination" in favour of schools which use Chinese as the medium of insutruction.

In the light of the recommendations made in the Llewellyn Report, an Education Commission was established in 1984. Its overall objective is to provide the Governor with consolidated advice on the development of the education system as a whole in accordance with the needs of the community (Hong Kong 1988). The Education Commission has published two reports. Its recommendations on English language education include the recruiting of expatriate lecturers in Colleges of Education, encouraging secondary schools to recruit native English speakers to teach English, encouraging 'individual' secondary schools to adopt Chinese as the medium of teaching and providing these schools with additional English teachers and wire-free induction loop systems. These recommendations to check the downfall of the English standard due to limited exposure have already been substantiated and currently the revision of the English syllabus is under way. The estimated financial costs for such implementations will vary from HK$ 7.9 million in 1987/88 to HK$ 106.0 million in 1994/95 (Education Commission Report No.1, 1984 & No.2, 1986).

1.5 The Public's Response to Government's Measures

The recommendations of the Education Commission on the whole have a great deal of merit, as it has made the utmost effort to look for possibilities to improve both Chinese and English language teaching. However, it has been criticized in that some of the central issues in English language education have not been thoroughly dealt with, leaving the root of the problem intact.

The Government's scheme to recruit expatriate teachers at a cost of HK$ 53 million has aroused tremendous public concern. In 1987/88 the target of recruiting 89 such teachers to teach in 44 secondary schools does not seem satisfactory. Until recently only 59 have reported for duty and quite a number left before the expiry of their contracts.

Professor Lord pointed out that 'What we need is a language policy, one that will ensure the healthy survival of English beyond 1997.' He added,

> Improved English will never be achieved by injecting expatriates into the system, as is already becoming apparent ... Somebody once said that the successful propagation of English as a second language in Hong Kong depends first and foremost on developing and changing attitudes. Surely, the expatriate teacher is the last person likely to achieve this. (S.C.M.P. 1987)

In response to the Education Commission's remark that 'for Hong Kong to retain its position as a leading international centre of finance, trade and industry, we are convinced that bilingualism is essential,' I. Johnson (1986) of Hong Kong University raised a series of acute and prompting questions:

> It is true that a certain amount of bilingualism is essential to the prosperity of Hong Kong, as it is in other countries. What distinguishes Hong Kong from other countries is the fact that a large number of native English speakers are living and working here, who need to be able to communicate with their Chinese colleagues in trade, finance, industry and government. However, are we justified in making the assumption that all school children should be bilingual? Is it really necessary for the continued prosperity of Hong Kong that students be educated through the medium of English? What proportion of people in Hong Kong need to be bilingual in order for Hong Kong to be successful, and how many secondary school students who go on to work in business, trade and industry really need to be proficient in English? These are some of the questions that should be answered before deciding upon a language policy for secondary schools ...

I. Johnson concluded by making the recommendation that children should be taught through the medium of Chinese up to the level of Form 5.

Chapter 2

THE LINGUISTIC STATUS OF HONG KONG

2.1 The Roles of the Languages in Hong Kong

Before we can have an accurate estimation of the need for bilingualism in Hong Kong we should have a better understanding about the roles played by different languages in the Colony.

Cantonese

Cantonese is a Chinese dialect. As noted in Chapter 1, it is the mother tongue or means of communication for 97% of the population of Hong Kong. Within China itself, Cantonese is spoken by almost 40 million people in the South East of Guangdong Province, of which Canton is the capital. The Cantonese of Hong Kong is fairly close to the Canton norm. However, Cantonese and the spoken national standard language of China - Mandarin (Putonghua) are not mutually intelligible, and whether Cantonese is a dialect or a language in its own right is still a matter of much debate.

For the Chinese population in Hong Kong, Cantonese is nearly the only language used at home. It is also widely used among Chinese people on formal or informal social occasions and in business transactions. The Cantonese radio and television channels also attract over 90% of the local audience.

Written Chinese

While Cantonese is one of the many spoken dialects in China, written Chinese is the means of communication among speakers of all dialects as it is represented by characters common to all dialects. It is taught in schools at all levels. Like Cantonese, written Chinese is widely used among the Chinese community. There are about 68 Chinese newspapers and 549 magazines and periodicals in Hong Kong.

In 1974, the Chinese language was recognized by the Government as an official language in addition to the English language, such being the result of a large-scale campaign from the Chinese community. Miners (1979) of Hong Kong University commented on this situation:

> A gap between government and the people was created by difficulties arising from the fact that the language of the law and much of the administration is not understood by the bulk of the population...

However, the use of Chinese is gradually increasing and currently Chinese is extensively used by the Government whenever it deals with the public. And since 1985 the members of the Legislative Council can choose to speak either Chinese or English at council meetings.

Spoken Mandarin (Putonghua)

Mandarin is the national standard language of China. It is spoken by more than 600 million people, the largest number of speakers of any languages in the world (Gibbons 1987). In Hong Kong, Mandarin is taught in a small number of schools. For most Hong Kong people, the contact with Mandarin is mainly through entertainment, i.e. pop songs, and occasionally films and television programmes. However, with the increasingly close relationship between Hong Kong and China, the use of Mandarin is growing, especially in trade and communication between the two governments.

English

Given Hong Kong's colonial status, the official norm is British English. The English spoken by Chinese in Hong Kong runs along a continuum from heavily Cantonese influenced variants to standard British English. Luke and Richards (1982) remarked that,

> there is neither the social need nor opportunity for the development of a stable variety of spoken English though there are certain recognizable and distinctive features of the middle proficiency in Hong Kong English speakers.

English has been the official language of Hong Kong under the British sovereignty. Although Chinese was given a legal status in 1974, under the Official Languages Ordinance Section 4(1), 'every Ordinance shall be enacted and published in the English language.' In addition,

English is a prerequisite for Government jobs as English is still the major means of internal working within the government. The reality is a large number of civil servants who are at low and middle levels and who are mainly Cantonese speakers have to communicate with or report to a comparatively small number of English colleagues at high or top levels, who in turn have to make oral or written reports to the Foreign Office in London. Randolph Quirk (1985) gave a very trenchant description of the situation,

> ...the English language came to Hong Kong as an imperial instrument: a remote control device operated from ten thousand miles away in London.

This remote control is still persisting.

As English plays a dominant role in the legal system and in government, most secondary schools and higher academic institutions have adopted English as the teaching medium. Moreover, in Hong Kong there are three English radio channels and two English television channels (same number in Chinese), although the size of the Chinese audience is far bigger than that of the English. After all, English is undeniably essential in matters concerning foreign trade and in certain employment sectors.

2.2 The Status of the English Language

The status of English in Hong Kong is unique. It is neither a foreign nor a second language.

Hong Kong shares with situations where English is a second language in that it is an official language and the medium of instruction. However, it differs from such situations in that there are no in-group needs for English among the Chinese population. In places like India and Mosambique, the former colonial language is a lingua franca of the educated local elite, comprising one common form of local internal communication - a true second language situation.

On the other hand, English is not a foreign language exclusively used for external communication. In Poland, for example, Polish is used

for internal communication while other languages are learnt for external communication purposes. In the case of Hong Kong, English is also used for inter-group communication though there are very limited uses of this kind. Yet Hong Kong shares with situations where English is a foreign language in that native speakers rather than indigenous usage is the target norm for language learning, so English is classified as an 'auxiliary language' by Luke and Richards (1982) i.e.

> a non-native language which is reserved for certain functions in society for use of a restricted section of that society.

While English is used among Westerners and Cantonese among Chinese, the two lingua francas reflect a social division between the two communities. The knowledge of English among the Chinese varies in respect of family backgrounds and level of education as well as occupations.

2.3 The Attitude towards the English Language

The majority of the Chinese population's attitude towards the English language is an ambivalent one. On the one hand, with the colonial Government's unflinching attempt to assign a superior role to English, the Chinese community has a general feeling that the Government virtually treats Chinese as an inferior language and their culture is subdued accordingly. This feeling is particularly unpleasant to the Chinese community.

> Language for the Chinese is not only significant as a means of communication, but is a vehicle of social meaning. It conveys the values inherent in the culture, in the absence of an over-riding religious basis, in the strong, natural bias towards the oral transmission of Chinese culture in daily communication.
>
> (Tsow 1980a)

The Chinese are generally proud of their long history of civilization where the written records can be traced to thousands of years ago. Gibbons (1987) observed that though Hong Kong is a colony, most Chinese people appeared to have a strong sense of Chineseness and to be proud of their national identity.

At the same time, however, the Chinese are well aware of the association between a knowledge of English and self-advancement/good careers. The British Council Survey of use of English in Hong Kong (1977) evidenced the following relationship between proficiency in English and income in a fairly representative sample of 3,784:

Proficiency in English, expressed as percentages of income band total

Monthly Income	Proficiency in English				
	None	Poor	Adequate	Good	Excellent
Below HK$500	53.3	22.4	17.3	6.8	0.8
HK$501 - 1000	52.0	24.7	17.7	5.8	0.6
HK$1001 - 2000	30.6	22.0	24.0	22.2	1.8
HK$2001 - 3000	5.4	8.5	31.0	47.3	10.0
HK$3001 - 4000	2.9	2.8	14.0	54.3	25.7
HK$4001 - 5000	10.5	5.3	15.8	31.6	36.8
HK$5000 plus	9.4	6.2	9.4	31.2	46.9

The correlation between income and proficiency in English is self-explanatory, and the attitude of adults towards English has a great effect on the learners (see Section 3.4).

2.4 The Nature of Bilingualism in Hong Kong

Diglossia

From the perspective of societal bilingualism, Hong Kong is a diglossic situation. The term 'diglossia' was first introduced by Ferguson (1959) to describe a language situation where two markedly divergent varieties, each with its own set of social functions, co-exist as standards throughout a community. One of these varieties is used (in many localized variant forms) in ordinary conversation; the other variety is used in special purposes, primarily in formal speech and writing. Haugen (1978) wrote that Fishman extended the term to include any socially established split between languages, even where these were historically unrelated. Pieterson (1978) defined diglossia as a situation 'when both languages have their own separate functions.' The dichotomy between societal bilingualism and individual bilingualism enables Fishman to distinguish communities with or without each, making

four possibilities: diglossia with bilingualism and without; no diglossia with bilingualism and without (Fishman 1971). However, whether Hong Kong is a diglossic situation with or without bilingualism is a matter of controversy.

Diglossia without Bilingualism

In the case of Hong Kong, two largely monolingual communities are co-existing, with a small group of bilingual Cantonese functioning as linguistic middle men, while the expatriate population is mainly monolingual. Using two separate lingua francas, Cantonese and English, the two groups are relatively in social isolation. Both the Cantonese-speaking and English-speaking communities have access to almost all sectors of life in their own languages. Both English and Chinese are used in the communication between the government and the public. There are separate social institutions for both communities, e.g. Church, schools. etc. Linguistic parallels exist in the mass media, entertainments and leisure domains. For example, all Western films have prominent Chinese sub-titles and the Royal Jockey Club provides separate language facilities for each group. The lack of opportunities for social contact between the two communities and the different life styles and value systems of the Chinese and Westerners further reduce the needs for individual bilingualism.

Diglossia with Bilingualism

From another standpoint, Hong Kong may be classified as a bilingual society. Cantonese children are not only taught English but taught in English. They can be regarded as incipient bilinguals, i.e. potential users of an L2 but perhaps not in a position to do so in real life situations (Beardsmore 1987). However, the learners' ability in using two languages depends very much on their family background, such as parents' knowledge of English.

Among the Chinese population there are few true bilinguals who are capable of functioning equally well in either of the languages in all

domains of activities. Moreover, there are a large number of people who know no English and never have to use any. In between there is a considerable portion of the population which needs to know English, e.g. people who work in shops, schools, offices, hotels, restaurants, and who drive taxis, deliver messages, etc. Yet, their English is by and large restricted to the domains in which they operate.

2.5 A Quadriglossic Situation

By a careful study, one will notice that the linguistic situation is more complicated than it appears to be. It is 'quadriglossic' rather than diglossic.

Firstly, following the definition of Ferguson, apart from the English language, written Chinese may also be considered a 'super-posed' language to the Cantonese speakers. While Cantonese is the 'prime dialect' in Hong Kong, written Chinese is the 'standard language' for all Chinese people, which is 'grammatically more complex' and which is 'the vehicle of a large and respected body of written literature'. Written Chinese is mainly learnt through 'formal education' and is used for 'most written and formal purposes'. The relationship between written Chinese and Cantonese is close to Ferguson's idea of 'high' and 'low' varieties.

As well as English and written Chinese, Mandarin is becoming the third 'super-posed' language. As Mandarin is the national language of China, the Cantonese speakers of Hong Kong have to use Mandarin in conversation with the majority of the Chinese on the Mainland. Mandarin is growing in importance with the approaching of 1997.

It is therefore not unreasonable to say that Hong Kong is a quadriglossic situation with Cantonese as the mother tongue, written Chinese for written and formal purposes, English for education, trade and officialdom, and finally, Mandarin as the major means of communication with China. This complicated quadriglossic situation should be taken into serious consideration before a sound language education policy can be decided upon.

Chapter 3

THE LEARNERS : LANGUAGE LEARNING DIFFICULTIES AND LANGUAGE NEEDS

3.1 Language Distance

The Visiting Panel's Report (1982) observed that,

> the education system in Hong Kong must aspire to higher goals than those of many other nations. The necessity for most students to learn two languages - English and Chinese - is an unusual privilege and burden, especially when one considers the particular problems which arise from the difference between the spoken language, Cantonese, and written standard Chinese.

Difficulties in learning Written Chinese

As noted in Section 1.2, Cantonese children in Hong Kong begin to learn both written Chinese and English from the kindergarten. The learning of written Chinese has been taken for granted and the difficulties involved under-estimated. The Chinese language is of great antiquity and over time written Chinese and the various spoken languages of China have diverged, although an attempt is now being made in Mainland China to bring the written Chinese nearer to the spoken. Since the governments of China have resided in the North for a long period, the written language has been in a dynamic relationship of mutual influence with Mandarin. The result of historical divergence, in conjunction with the influence of spoken Mandarin, is that written Chinese is different in many respects from Cantonese. The differences include vocabulary, grammar and forms of expression. For the Cantonese speakers, learning written Chinese is as difficult as learning a 'second language' (Gibbons 1987).

Before a child can write in Chinese, he has to learn the Chinese characters, each of which is composed of separate horizontal, vertical and slanting strokes, and with bending hooks which tend to represent meanings more than sound. Each Chinese character has to be committed to memory. A child has to learn 3,000 characters for everyday vocabulary, 7,000 characters to read the newspaper, and 16,000 characters before he

becomes fully literate. The rich literature of China is accordingly another workload for the learners.

Difficulties in learning English

The learning of English is doubly difficult. According to Taylor (1987), Chinese dialect speakers have particular difficulty in acquiring proficiency in English. Stern (1963) tried to lay out research problems about young children's second language learning from the standpoint of the world scene. One of the problems was linguistic factors. The degree to which the second language was different from L1 was usually considered to have more influence on the difficulty of learning.

In an article concerning language errors due to first language interference (Cantonese) produced by Hong Kong students of English, Webster, Word & Craig (1987) remarked,

> English is an Indo-European language, while Cantonese belongs to the Sino-Tibetan group. The structure and patterns of the language and its culture are consequently further away from English than those of, for example, French or German. As a result, many first-language-induced errors are more marked in the case of Cantonese than in the case of a European first language.

Ladlow's contrastive analysis on pronunciation indicates that Chinese has fewer consonants, especially final consonants (e.g. 'can't') and no clusters of consonants, which tends to lead to the splitting of English words into separate syllables. D. Jones (1980) also found that Cantonese students have to make great effort to master some English sounds (e.g. the difference between 'l' and 'r' and between 'f' and 'v') which have no Cantonese equivalent. As Cantonese is monosyllabic a small range of possible words are distinguished by tones which differentiate meaning rather than the grammatical structure of statements or questions in English (Ladlow, n.d.1). This frequently results initially in a lack of intonation in spoken English (Jones, I. 1979).

As regards grammar, Chinese pupils usually do not have a firm grasp of it because Chinese, in contrast to English, has no inflexions or declensions in terms of plurals, nouns, adjectives and personal pronouns (Ladlow, n.d.1) or to denote comparatives, subject, object and gender,

and often lacks indefinite and definite articles (Hill 1976). The lack of conjugation of verbs, too, entails particular difficulties in forming tenses in English. A typical mistake would be the use of the infinitive instead of the gerund (Jones, D. 1980). Word order also presents problems as it differs from that used in English. Observation of set word ordering is the only way to make communication meaningful in Cantonese. And written Chinese differs even further.

Moreover, there is one aspect of difficulty which is often neglected by linguists. The differences between Chinese and English often go beyond the linguistic to the conceptual (Tsow 1980b). In learning English, Chinese children have to learn a new system of thought as well as a new language. Operating at a conceptual level in Chinese, Chinese learners need first to absorb material in their native dialect then translate their responses into English. However, this gives rise to problems with both understanding and expression. I. Jones (1979) noted that a natural tendency of Chinese adolescents to think in Chinese before writing in English cause characteristic grammatical errors. The cultural context of the Chinese language is one of the main sources of major language learning difficulties. Chang (1987) noted a very interesting mistake made by Chinese speakers in social interaction. Instead of using the English expression 'Make yourself at home', a Chinese speaker is likely to make a translation mistake by saying 'Don't be polite'.

3.2 Opportunity to learn English

Strictly speaking, the learning of English in Hong Kong can be described as the learning of an L2 in an L1 environment. English is learnt in a language classroom instead of through exposure to the target language. As noted in Section 1.1, nearly 90% of the people of Hong Kong are Cantonese speakers. In school the language used in the corridors, canteens, playgrounds, and common rooms is mainly Cantonese. The language used at home and among friends is entirely Cantonese. The chance to have conversation with native English speakers hardly exists by

virtue of the social distance between the Chinese and Western communities (see Section 2.4). Learners may listen to English radio and watch English T.V. but there is no interaction of any sort and family members are usually in favour of the Cantonese channels. The Hong Kong learners therefore have little chance to practise what they have learnt from the language classes. This explains why they are generally weak at oral and aural skills. The lack of opportunity to use English in real life situations also accounts for the learners' difficulties in differentiating between formal and informal conversations, such as expressing disagreement, declining invitations, exchanging greetings, saying farewells, and so on and so forth.

The use of the target language in education may be a possibility to increase exposure and the chance of using the language. However, the attempt to make English the language of instruction in Hong Kong has done more harm than good to the learning of English. The worst of it is that it has stifled the whole educational process of the learners.

'English-medium' schools in Hong Kong are schools where the language of instruction and the communication inside the classroom is supposed to be English, while the textbooks, hand-outs from teachers, homework and assignments are required to be in written English.

As most of the primary schools in Hong Kong have Cantonese as the medium of instruction, the change of teaching medium from primary to secondary schools is abrupt and drastic. In 1980, the Education Department made known the following figures:

School	Chinese Medium	English Medium
Primary	91.4	8.6
Secondary	12.3	87.7

So, nearly 90% of students are cast suddenly into a strange school environment where they are taught in an unfamiliar medium. More disastrously, they have to strive to learn various academic disciplines, e.g. algebra, ancient Chinese literature, history, etc. which are

completely new to them. The Visiting Panel (1982) remarked that,

> when all subjects across the whole curriculum are taught in English, those subjects with a high language dependency (e.g. history) tend to become exercises in English language instruction. Even in the upper secondary schools we observe such low standards of English in both teachers and pupils that the essence of the lesson was largely lost.

Kvan (1969) presented evidence that the switch to English just before the onset of puberty may adversely affect creativity.

> It seems clear that the students who had used Chinese as a medium of instruction but had studied English as a subject have shown greater originality of thought and greater maturity in general than those who had used English as a medium.

The sudden reduction of the possibilities for expression 'would cause a neurosis fully as severe as the one we find in children backward in reading and writing.'

A number of studies which compare the effectiveness of English and Chinese as the language of instruction in Hong Kong (Gibbons 1982) produced the evidence that the lower a child's academic ability, the more problems are caused by the use of the English-medium. This is not an unexpected finding. The Urban Family Life Survey (Downey 1977) found that,

> pupils with a greater knowledge of English are from higher class backgrounds, have higher expectation of attending university and are more confident about their career success.

Consequently, the majority of students who are poor in English not only fail to develop fully the potential they have in other subjects but are most likely to suffer loss of self-confidence. The harmful effect of using English as the teaching medium is both educational and psychological.

At the same time, the English-medium education has an adverse effect on the acquisition of the English language itself. What in reality is the nature of English the learners are exposed to in the Hong Kong classroom? Tam (1980) studied the amount of English used in teaching in the junior forms of Anglo-Chinese secondary schools and he discovered that the medium of instruction is a mixture of English and Cantonese as

teachers have to use Cantonese to help the students understand their lessons. The poorer the students' standard of English the more the teachers used Cantonese. The Visiting Panel (1982) on the other hand, was of the opinion that the teachers are not competent to teach in English. Both observations have posed an important implication. With the implementation of English as the teaching medium in all secondary schools, the learners are in fact exposed to a mixture of English and Cantonese, let alone poor English and incorrect use of English. The attempt to increase the opportunity to learn the language has jeopardized instead of facilitating the acquisition process - a tragic irony.

3.3 Parental Pressure

The Government's emphasis on the importance of English incites the preference of parents to send their children to English-medium schools. Traditionally the Chinese people have a high value for education which is regarded as the only means for social and economic betterment. Parents in Hong Kong retain the same tradition and often make personal sacrifices to ensure their children of either sex receive proper schooling. Fully aware of the importance of English in the competitive examination system and its implication in personal, economic and social advancement (see Section 2.3), a lot of parents consider the English language the most important subject in school. The Hong Kong British Council Survey (1977) obtained the following findings regarding the degree of importance the parents attach to the learning of English by their children :

26.6	essential
37.1	very important
24.5	relatively important
4.3	slightly important
2.1	irrelevant
5.4	don't know

This accounts for the reason why parents prefer to send their children to English-medium schools. Their motive is mainly instrumental. English is economically important.

Interestingly enough, such an instrumental motive of Chinese parents is endorsed by Taylor's review of research into the education of Chinese pupils in Britain (1987).

> Some adults feel strongly that if they give up Chinese, they will lose their cultural heritage ... However, it is found that Chinese parents have high hopes for their children to know English since they want their children to have the opportunity to choose a wider range of employment ... At the same time, the Chinese parents are eager to send their children to Chinese classes and pupils of Chinese origin learning Chinese in language classrooms have a very positive attitude to Chinese and want to learn it. This is the case as much for the U.K. as for the Hong Kong born ...

The motivation for their children to learn English is the same though the function of English to the learners in a British colony is different from that to the Chinese immigrants in Britain. As English is considered economically important, most of the parents, especially those from lower class families, never hesitate to remind their children of the importance of learning English and learning it well. English is associated with a 'good future' and 'so and so got a well-paid job because he is good in English' is often heard in conversations among family members. Such being the case, a failure in English means a 'destruction of one's own future' and indirectly the inability to procure a rich material life for the family as a whole. The parental encouragement is therefore a psychological burden to the Hong Kong learners which has in turn become a barrier to their success in learning the English language.

3.4 Motivation of the Learners

Gardner (1985) studied the relationship between motivation and second language achievement. According to Gardner, attitudes are,

> constructs, discoverable in statements of belief or opinion. They are related to motivation which involves four aspects, a goal, effortful behaviour, a desire to attain the goal and favourable attitudes toward the activity in question.

Following Gardner's analysis, we can have a fair assessment of the motivation of the learners of Hong Kong.

First of all, the reasons for learning English vary from passing the examination to getting a good job or furthering studies. All these reasons are obviously instrumental, i.e. students learn English because

of economic and practical advantages. The learners' perceived 'goal' is thus to a great extent influenced by their parents (see Section 2.3). However, despite this obvious goal, the majority of the learners fail to acquire a reasonable proficiency in the language. This phenomenon agrees with Gardner's findings. The goal is just 'a stimulus which gives rise to motivation', while 'individual differences in motivation itself are reflected in the latter three aspects' i.e. effort, desire and attitude.

In the case of Hong Kong, a lot of 'effort' has been expended by the schools to achieve the goal since approximately one fifth or one quarter of the school lessons are allocated to the teaching of English as an academic subject. In addition there are extracurricular activities after school aiming at improving English and in general students are assigned much homework in English. The effort expended by the learners depends on the individuals. Most of them will accomplish what their teachers have assigned to them but the 'intention' about using available opportunities to improve the English knowledge is, on the whole, not strong. The 'desire' to learn English is not particularly strong either. The attitude towards learning English is, generally speaking, unfavourable.

Several studies concerning the attitude towards the Chinese and English language are relevant in this respect. In one of these studies, Fu (1975) administered a controlled questionnaire to 561 secondary school students and her results were as follows:

1. English is an important and necessary subject.
2. Students do not feel easy about using it in speech.
3. Students take pride in their Chinese civilization.
4. Students have generally negative attitudes towards Western civilization and towards English speaking people.

The perceived goal (i.e. English as an important subject) and the unfavourable attitude towards the target language and its speakers, appear to be contradictory. But this contradiction may be explained by the findings in Gardner's study.

> In general, most but not all of the factor analytic studies support the notion of an integrative motive as being important in second language acquisition, while the multiple regression studies appear to cast doubt on this conclusion ... obviously, I am biased, but it is my opinion that the weight of evidence supports the generalization that an integrative motive does facilitate second language acquisition ...

Gardner also pointed out that,

> motivational variables are more influential in determining perseverance in language study than other factors such as anxiety, or parental encouragement.

Unfortunately, what the Hong Kong learners actually have is 'anxiety' and 'parental pressure'.

3.5 Perceived Needs and Actual Needs

English is perceived to be of great importance by both the parents and learners. In reality, how important is English? Owing to the prestigious status of English in Hong Kong, there is a big gap between the perceived needs and the actual needs.

With the linguistic situation in mind (see Chapter 2), one can conclude that the most important needs for English are in higher education and some sectors of employment, including the Hong Kong Government.

Higher Education

In view of higher education, the Form 5 graduates with good results in the School Certificate of Education Examination may be admitted into a 2 year matriculation course. After having fully matriculated, they will compete to enter one of the five officially recognised institutions: the University of Hong Kong, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Polytechnic, the City Polytechnic of Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Baptist College. The 1st year enrolments in these institutions in 1987 were as follows:

University of Hong Kong	1,907	
Chinese University of Hong Kong	1,430	
The two polytechnics	12,828	(all modes of study)
Hong Kong Baptist College	985	(degree and diploma)
TOTAL	17,150	

The number of students leaving Hong Kong for overseas studies in English-speaking countries were as follows:

Country	1986-87 (September - August)
Britain	4,254
United States	2,245
Canada	3,405
Australia	812
TOTAL	10,716

The following, however, was the number of Form 5 graduates in 1985:

Government and Aided	321,500
Assisted Private	4,097
Other Private	163,337
TOTAL	488,934

The above figures indicate about 5.7% of secondary school graduates in 1985 had the chance to further their studies in 1987. It goes without saying that only a minority of the student population will finally use English for higher education purposes.

Employment

Regarding the need for English in the employment sector, besides the fact that English is required for the majority of government jobs, there is a lack of research on the actual needs for English in the job market in general. Yau's recent survey (1987) provides some useful information. The survey by Yau is similar to the one conducted by Cooper and Seckbach (1977) to find out the importance of English in the job market in Israel. She studied the language requirements for jobs appearing in the Help-wanted advertisements in eight editions of two of Hong Kong's English newspapers (The South China Morning Post and the Hong Kong Standard) from August 1986 to March 1987.

Her findings on the requirement of English among the 15,278 jobs advertised in the South China Morning Post were:

No language required	62.8%
English required	19.5%
Chinese and English	16.5%
Chinese only	1.1%

The following were the findings in the Hong Kong Standard:

No language required	72.96%
English language	15.85%
English and Chinese	10.32%
Chinese only	8.56%

These findings show clearly that the majority of jobs do not need any langauge skills whatsoever. Yau continued,

> The result of this survey is not meant to be representative of all the possible jobs available in Hong Kong ... An overwhelming majority of the jobs which require manual labour do not appear in these two newspapers. Jobs advertised in the South China Morning Post or the Hong Kong Standard belong to the higher calibre, so to say, as compared to those advertised in the other newspapers and accordingly, the language requirements are also higher and the pay better.

Yau's remark is subsequently supported by the Government Statistics (Hong Kong 1988).

> Unemployment for the third quarter of 1987 fell to 1.8 per cent, and under-employment to 1 per cent. A shortage of workers became apparent in some sectors during the latter part of the year. Hong Kong's resourceful and energetic workforce totals 2.7 million - of which 63 per cent are men and 37 per cent are women ... The workers are mainly engaged in:

(1)	Manufacturing	34.8%
(2)	Wholesale & Retail Trade, Restaurants & Hotels	23.2%
(3)	Community, Social & Personal Services	17.0%
(4)	Transport, Storage & Communications	8.5%
(5)	Construction	8.1%
(6)	Financing, Insurance, Real Estate & Business Services	6.3%

Though the quoted information is not directly related to the need for the language, the actual needs for English can be inferred without much difficulty. What deserves special attention is that only 6.3% of the workforce are employed in the financing sector where English is claimed of substantial importance. In the other employment sectors, a large proportion of the workers either need some general English, perhaps plus certain English for special purposes, or need no English at all.

It was estimated by Downey (1977), So (1983) and Yu (1977) that about 15-20% of the school leavers at Form 5 are required to use English considerably in their occupations. This assumption is further endorsed in the survey conducted by Yau (1987) in the study of 228 Form 5

graduates. The respondents in her survey were given a list of 15 tasks and were asked how often, on a daily average, they had to do them in English in their present jobs. They were to indicate the frequency of the use of English in each task on a 5-point scale. The responses were as follows:

	Task	Mean Frequency
a.	reading letters	1.932
b.	reading manuals, notices, memos	2.386
c.	reading forms	2.538
d.	writing letters	1.666
e.	writing reports, notices, memos	1.936
f.	filling in forms	2.561
g.	filing documents	2.338
h.	typing documents	2.397
i.	taking shorthand	1.243
j.	talking on telephone	1.950
k.	talking with supervisors	1.586
l.	talking with colleagues	1.317
m.	talking with clients	1.913
n.	speaking at meetings	1.223
o.	attending lectures	1.315

The data show the frequency of the use of English among Form 5 graduates in their jobs is, on average, very low. Of the 15 tasks, only 5 of them had a mean frequency of over 2 and of these 5, two of them, typing and filing, belong to the more mechanical type of work, the mastery of which only requires a minimal command of the language. Similarly the other two tasks, reading and filling in forms, can also be performed by anyone who possesses the most basic knowledge of the English language. Yau concluded that,

> In order to prepare the Form 5 graduates for their future work purpose, ensuring a very basic knowledge of English will be quite enough.

To sum up, all evidence shows the perceived needs are much greater than the actual needs in Hong Kong. Needs analysis together with the information about the learning conditions and learning difficulties of the learners are crucial factors in deciding the content and method in English langauge teaching in Hong Kong.

PART II

A SEARCH FOR SOLUTIONS

Chapter 4

PUTTING ENGLISH EDUCATION IN THE PROPER CONTEXT

4.1 The Dilemma Fallacy

The Visiting Panel's report (1982) summarised the language issue as a 'dilemma'.

> In Hong Kong where proficiency in English is necessary for economic and political reasons, there is a classic public policy dilemma: whether to jeopardise the educational progress of the majority (and perhaps endanger the culture itself) in order to guarantee a sufficient number of competent English speakers; or to value the whole group (and in so doing conserve the culture), but accept the loss in capacity to deal with the international environment and have a possible decline in the economic prosperity.

It is not without justification to say that the survival of Hong Kong depends on its economic prosperity and there are actual needs for English in society. However, the needs analysis in Section 3.5 has shown beyond doubt that the majority of the population are not engaged in trades which require English, and a basic knowledge of English can satisfy most of the jobs. The high level executives and management personnel do need an overall competence in English but their number is extremely small when compared with the people who need some English, not to mention those who do not need it at all. It is essential that there are people able to communicate with foreign businessmen and obtain orders for factories, but whether the orders will be placed to Hong Kong depends mainly on competitive prices, the quality of goods and the punctuality of shipments. These crucial factors are controlled by those, most of whom do not have any knowledge of English, but in any event contribute a great deal to the prosperity of Hong Kong. A 'sufficient number' of English speakers, the Senior Subject Officer at the Hong Kong Examinations Authority Mr. King (1987) pointed out, is indeed always available as the standard of English among Hong Kong's best students has not deteriorated even after the advent of universal education. The Visiting Panel's worry does not have good grounds.

Regarding the 'political reason', the Visiting Panel's report did not elaborate in adequate detail. English, from a political perspective, has been a ruling instrument by virtue of the fact that Hong Kong is a British colony. However, realistically, the political necessity of English will come to an end in 1997. As the return of Hong Kong to China is to be a peaceful handover in line with the mutual interests of China and Britain, it stands to reason that the role of English be changed from a colonizing language to a useful foreign language, with the gradual fading out of the residual colour of colonialism. Indeed, for there to be a healthy survival of English after 1997, the present language policy should be adjusted as soon as practicable. This, of course, requires a great deal of courage, effort and determination on the part of the Hong Kong Government, and may involve the problem of 'face protection'. All in all, the adjustment is inevitable, and in the long term beneficial to Hong Kong's development. So, the basic assumptions for the dilemma are based on 'reasons' that are either groundless or will soon cease to exist.

On the other hand, it is indisputable that 'the educational progress of the majority is jeopardised'. The mixture of Cantonese and English used in the classroom is detrimental to the learning of both Chinese and English. Kanwit (1974) pointed out that the students write English in Chinese grammar and Chinese in English grammar. They cannot express themselves adequately in written English or Chinese: they speak Chinglish. This will lead to 'a conflict of identity'. Born in a British colony, the younger generation are suffering from the conflict that they belong neither to Britain nor China. They are 'Hongkongers'. As the sense of Chineseness becomes less, the sense of conflict becomes relatively greater. This is understandable.

However, 'educational progress of the majority' and the acquisition of English proficiency are not and need not be alternatives. The crux of the matter now is the gap between actual and perceived needs for English,

and the root of the problem stems from the unrealistic attempt to make all learners bilinguals in spite of the 'non-supportive' language learning environment.

4.2 Regaining Confidence and Creativity in the Chinese Languages

To increase the chance of success in the acquisition of English, the learning of the language should be put in its proper context. The position of English in education ought to be considered together with the place of other languages.

As early as 1935, the Burney Report criticised the fact that not enough attention had been given to Chinese primary education and in the secondary schools, far too much class time had been devoted to English. The report further remarked that the pupils' standard of English was unimpressive, and their Chinese well behind that of their counterparts in China. It finally suggested that,

> education policy in the Colony should be gradually re-orientated, to secure for the pupils, first, a command of their own language sufficient for all needs of thought and expression, and secondly, a command of English limited to the satisfaction of vocational demands.

It added that consideration should be devoted to the use of Chinese as the medium of instruction and a decision should be made whether the medium should be Cantonese or Mandarin. The Visiting Panel's report in 1982, some 47 years later, is not inconsistent with the Burney Report.

> They only underwrite these conclusions, at the same time putting them in a modern setting, and in a contemporary sort of educational planner's jargon. (Lord 1983)

Obviously, the first and foremost thing to do now is to help the learners regain their confidence in the Chinese languages which are, relatively speaking, culturally closer to them. Taking both the language learning burden and the actual needs of the learners into account, the most practicable measure is to remove the English subject from primary schools so that the learners can first concentrate on the learning of the Chinese languages, comprising Cantonese, written Chinese and Mandarin.

Cantonese

Although Cantonese is the language used at home, it does not necessarily follow that children can express themselves effectively in it. Without doubt, the language closest to the children is the best instrument for training them how to think clearly and express their ideas in a way understood by others. During a visit to the Johnston School in Durham, the writer had personal experience in observing a group of about six British students having discussions on problems, such as 'the Gran problem', 'the holiday problem', etc. in their mother tongue. The students were totally involved, emotionally and mentally, in the discussions and the use of the English language was exploited to the full. Children's ability to express themselves efficiently in their mother tongue is a great help not only to the learning of other subjects but also the acquisition of a second language. In fact the role played by the mother tongue in the learning of a second language is gaining more and more attention. In discussing errors and learning strategies, Littlewood (1984) remarked that it is , of course, economical and productive for second language learners to transfer their previous knowledge of language (including the first language) to the new task. It means that they do not have to discover everything from zero. Corder (1978) was of the opinion that 'the first language provides a rather rich and specific set of hypotheses which learners can use.' Canale (1983) wrote about the guiding principles for a communicative approach. One of the principles was to make use of the learner's native language skills.

> Particularly at the early stages of second language learning, optimal use must be made of those communicative skills that the learner has developed through use of the native (or dominant) language and that are common to communicative skills required in the second language.

The skills of the native language can be further developed by providing the opportunity to use it. Cantonese should thereby be a component of the language education in the primary schools. In this way, the learners will regain their confidence in expressing themselves in their first

language, which will subsequently assist the acquisition of the English language in their secondary education.

Mandarin

Mandarin ought to be taught in the primary school in addition to written Chinese. As there is a close link between the spoken form and the written form of the Chinese language, the introduction of Mandarin will complement the learning of written Chinese and vice versa. The language burden of the learners will be much reduced when compared with the simultaneous learning of the English and Chinese languages, which are not related to each other in any respect. Moreover, it is ridiculous to learn the written form of a language without learning the spoken form when the two forms are co-existing and language is primarily regarded as speech. Furthermore, the need for Mandarin will trigger the motivation for learning it, since it is the only spoken means of communication through which the Chinese of Hong Kong can communicate with the majority of their fellow countrymen on the Mainland and most significantly, a useful means to make their opinions and wishes understood by the Beijing Government. It is the language which helps Hong Kong to become an integral part of China again after more than one hundred years of separation.

4.3 Using the Mother Tongue as the Medium of Instruction

As far as the medium of instruction is concerned, 'the mother tongue is, all other things being equal, the best medium of teaching and learning.' (Visiting Panel's report 1982).

The writer is of the opinion that Cantonese should be 'mandated' as the medium of instruction for all subjects except the English language in secondary schools. If the government continues leaving schools to decide which medium to use, the problem cannot be much improved, due to the deep-rooted bias and mercenary orientation of the parents, which in turn reinforces the present policy under the pretence of parental demand.

By sending their children to English-medium schools, the parents assume that their children are able to learn in English, though such wishful thinking does not match with reality. For the good of students it is high time the authorities made known to the parents the adverse effects of English-medium education.

There are many advantages in adopting Cantonese as the teaching medium: the low ability children will not be deprived of their right of an education appropriate to them; the average students will benefit much more from an education free from the adverse effects (see Section 3.2); the various problems caused by the division between Chinese and English-medium schools will cease to exist.

From the English learning perspective, there is not necessarily any connection between English-medium education and the acquisition of English. On the contrary, the exposure to a mixture of Cantonese and English in the classroom, especially from teachers who are not competent in English, is definitely harmful to the learners in the acquisition of the English language. Moreover, when English is no longer a barrier to the pursuit of knowledge, part of the learner's negative attitude towards it will fade out. This in turn will be favourable to the chance of success in the learning of English. So, for a better education for the learners and the learning of English itself, Cantonese should be the medium of instruction instead.

4.4 Learning English as a Subject in Secondary Schools

When English is free of the role as the medium of instruction, it will then be learnt as an ordinary school subject. Under these circumstances the learners can establish a normal attitude towards the language. Some learners may be interested and do well in it and some may not but it is no longer a subject which they cannot afford to fail in examinations. The consequence is the general anxiety relating to the learning of English will be removed.

Affective factors are generally agreed to play a critical role in L2 learning. Dulay, Burt & Krashen (1982) defined the 'affective filter' as,

> that part of the internal processing system that subconsciously screens incoming language based on what psychologists call "affect": the learner's motives, needs, attitude and emotional state.

What happens now is: for the majority of learners who are weak in English, the greater the importance of English is stressed, the more they are 'afraid' of learning it. To remedy the situation, the learners should be helped by the school authorities to have a better understanding of the 'actual' significance of English in society and to what extent English may be useful to them, i.e. even if they are not interested in English or cannot do well in it, it does not mean that 'their future is ruined'.

And for those students who have a strong desire to further their studies or who are interested in careers which require English, they will try hard to acquire a competence in the language. In this way they learn English because they need it, not because they 'have to'.

Moreover, when English is taught as a foreign language in secondary schools, it can be learnt together with English history and English culture, which are introduced in Cantonese in other lessons. This helps to achieve a natural integration of the knowledge of a second language, the knowledge of the culture associated with it and the knowledge of the history of the people who speak it. Under such circumstances, the adolescent learners who are usually curious about the world around them may develop an integrative motive for learning the language, which is impossible in the present situation.

4.5 Starting Age at Adolescence

Despite the advantages brought about by the commencement of English in the secondary schools when the learners are at the age of eleven or twelve, those who have a concern for education and who believe in the optimal age hypothesis which states 'the younger the better' may be sceptical about the drastic changes.

The critical period hypothesis

Lenneberg (1967) argued that natural language learning 'by mere exposure' can take place only during the 'critical period for language acquisition', roughly between 2 years and puberty. By the time of puberty, lateralization of the language function to the dominant hemisphere is complete, resulting in the losing of cerebral plasticity needed for language learning. It is this biologically determined period that attributes to the fact that after puberty languages 'have to be taught and learnt through a conscious and laboured effort' and that foreign accents cannot be overcome easily after this stage. Rosansky (1975) also stated that the onset of abstract thinking that comes around the age of twelve with the final stage of cognitive development means that the learner is predisposed to recognize differences as well as similarities, to think flexibly, and to become increasingly de-centred. As a result he possesses a strong meta-awareness that inhibits natural learning.

Advantages of starting age at adolescence

However, empirical evidence does not support the 'critical period hypothesis'.

Concerning the effectiveness of foreign language instruction in the elementary school (FLES), Hatch (1983) pointed out that,

> the most sophisticated study, all those that look at age is the Burstall NFER report which followed British children learning French as a foreign language ... To simplify the massive amount of work into one relevant line, students who began French later did better than those who began at a younger age ... The difference held for all skill areas.

Hatch added that though the study has unpopular results, it is difficult to criticize it from an evaluative research standpoint. 'It is carefully done ... and the findings are replicated in Carroll's (1975) comparisons of French instruction in eight countries.'

McLaughlin (1978, 1984) reported that the studies conducted by Ervin-Tripp (1974), Kessler & Idar (1979) and Snow & Hoefnagel-Hohle (1978) showed that children and adolescents do better than young children

in acquiring a second language in a natural environment and generally the same pattern is found in the more formal learning situation, e.g. Buhler (1972), Politzer & Wass (1969), Grider, Otomo & Toyota (1961) etc. McLaughlin pointed out that adults and child second language learners pass through essentially the same developmental stages in their acquisition of selected linguistic forms. And he concluded that there does not seem to be evidence of biological limits to second language learning. An unqualified 'frozen brain' theory does not seem supported by available evidence, nor is there evidence that children possess special bilogically based language abilities that give them an advantage over adults in language learning.

Van Els et al. (1984) also reported empirical evidence which supports the argument that adolescent learners learn effectively, e.g. Fathman (1973), Olson & Sammuels (1973), Ramirez & Politzer (1978) etc.

> The general picture that emerges from the studies reported so far is not in agreement with the prediction of the CPH: adolescents and adults are better L2 learners than children, especially in the area of morphology, syntax and vocabulary. The picture is not entirely clear with reference to pronunciation: advantages of children over older learners have been found but mostly in studies of L2 learning in an L2 environment, which suggests that other factors than the age factor as such may be involved.

Ellis (1985) described the current state of research in studies of the development of control of second language grammar, a field labelled Second Language Acquisition (SLA). His conclusions are:

(1) Starting age does not affect the route of SLA.

(2) Starting age affects the rate of learning. Where grammar and vocabulary are concerned, adolescent learners do better than either children or adults, when the length of exposure is held constant. Where pronunciation is concerned, there is no appreciable difference.

(3) Both number of years of exposure and starting age affect the level of success. The former contributes greatly to the overall communicative fluency of the learners and the latter determines the level of accuracy in pronunciation.

Krashen, Long & Scarcella (1979) believed that the search in L2 learning should first be separated into studies that look at 'initial' learning and studies that look at ultimate long-term language 'attainment'. Under a careful review of the literature, they give evidence for three generalizations regarding age, rate and eventual attainment in L2:

(1) Adults proceed more rapidly through initial stages of syntactic and morphology development than children.

(2) Older children acquire faster than younger children.

(3) Acquirers who begin L2 in early childhood through natural exposure achieve higher proficiency than those beginning as adults.

So, their basic position is the same: adults do better in initial learning but younger ones are better in the long run (Hatch 1983).

There is, however, one very important point to note: those studies showing children have better performance, at least in some aspects of L2 acquisition, derive their empirical evidence from L2 learning in an L2 environment. Given that English is learnt in a Chinese environment in Hong Kong (see Section 3.2), generalization (3) above does not apply, as there is no natural exposure. The only relevant point thereby is (2).

Concerning the 'number of years of exposure', suppose English is introduced at the early stage of secondary education, this means that a secondary school graduate will have learnt English for five years, a matriculated student seven years and an undergraduate more than seven. This period of English learning is not particularly short when compared with those of many other places in the world. To meet the actual needs of secondary school graduates and those who are about to enter the tertiary institutions, the provision of one/two year EAP and ESP courses may be more practical and efficacious.

If English learning is postponed to the secondary school, the number of teachers required to teach English will subsequently be reduced considerably. The outcome will be: only those teachers who are

professionally qualified and eligible, i.e. (1) competent in English and (2) interested in teaching the language, will be appointed teachers of English. Unfortunately, the present situation happens to be: only a small number of teachers of English are university graduates majoring in English and surprisingly those who obtained their degrees overseas are automatically eligible irrespective of their interest and disciplines they specialized in. After the removal of the English subject from the primary curricula, those teachers of English who are competent enough can be upgraded to teach in lower secondary levels. The existing competent teachers will continue to teach senior forms in secondary schools. For those who are neither interested nor eligible, they can opt to be re-trained to teach other school subjects. Consequently, teachers teach English because they enjoy it, not because they 'have to'. The language competence of the teacher and the teacher's attitude towards teaching the target language are both decisive factors on which the success in teaching and learning hinges.

In brief, the introduction of the English language as a subject in secondary schools is favourable to the learners - both from the perspective of cognitive psychology regarding the question of starting age, and from the viewpoint of social psychology in respect of the problem of motivation. Indeed, it is only when the place of English education is properly specified that the learning/teaching of the English language can be made effective. Burden-free learners plus professionally qualified teachers are already half-way to success.

Chapter 5

ADAPTING THE COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH WITH REFERENCE TO THE HONG KONG SITUATION

Besides putting English in the proper context, the communicative approach should be adjusted in the interests of the Hong Kong learners.

5.1 A Survey of English language Teachers' Attitude towards the Communicative Approach

In 1983, the Curriculum Development Committee of Hong Kong recommended a 'Syllabus for English for the Secondary School'. The oral structural approach which had been extensively used since 1975 was thereafter officially replaced by the communicative approach that gives 'equal emphasis to form and function' of the English language.

The Survey

In 1987, Leung of the Chinese University of Hong Kong published a survey of English language teachers' attitude towards the communicative approach in Hong Kong secondary schools. A wide cross section of teachers who were trained in the practice of communicative approach by the British Council and the Schools of Education of the two universities, were examined in this respect, so that teachers' acceptance or rejection of the approach could be pinpointed; and a comparison of the trained teachers' attitude with that of the untrained was also carried out, so that the effect of teacher training could be ascertained.

Since this survey is 'the first and biggest sample ever investigated on the communicative approach', the results of the survey are of great significance to our attempt at searching for solutions to the problem of English education in Hong Kong. The following is a brief summary of its main points.

The subjects of Leung's study comprised both trained and untrained teachers. 567 questionnaires were issued to trained teachers, 400 to untrained teachers. The return rate of the former was 43.2% (245) and the latter 30.8% (123). The questionnaire consisted of 5-point Likert scale and open-ended questions, categorized as follows:

(1) the background information of the respondents

(2) the strengths of the communicative approach

(3) the weaknesses of the communicative approach

(4) the basic tenets of the communicative approach

(5) the features (as well as applications) of the communicative approach

(6) the teacher flexibility in adopting approaches

Regarding (1), '72.1% of the respondents are female. 91% of the teachers teach in Anglo-Chinese schools and 87% teach in aided schools, the rest are from the government schools. 71.4% of all respondents are from coeducational schools while the rest are evenly distributed in boys' schools and girls' schools. The age of the teachers ranges from 23 to 50.'

Regarding (2), 'the majority of the teachers rated high the humanistic potential of the approach, e.g. learning and teaching can be more fun, more student participation and meaningful language use can result.'

Regarding (3), 'less teachers showed an awareness of the weaknesses except for "more preparation for teachers" and "more time required in grammar teaching".' Another weakness reported is 'discipline problems in lower forms'.

Regarding (4), 'only 71.1% of all teachers found one of the tenets, the integration of language skills, realistic. The percentages for the other tenets (contextualized learning, a needs-based syllabus, student-centred teaching and activity-oriented learning, etc.) are not particularly favourable ... or worse still, they do not find the tenets realistic.'

Regarding (5), more teachers rated the features of the communicative approach, such as the use of group/pair work, games, and audio-visual aids, as workable, with the exception of 'a noticeable absence of mechanical drills', a feature which only 39.2% of teachers found workable.

'95.6% of the teachers rated oral lessons suitable for the communicative approach whereas all the other lessons such as composition, reading comprehension, reader and grammar lagged far far behind.'

When the teachers were asked to identify circumstances under which they used the communicative approach, the most frequent circumstances reported were, 'When the communicative approach is found to be suitable for certain topics' and 'When teachers have the time and energy'.

'As for the factors affecting the use of the communicative approach, students' English proficiency, student participation, public examination pressure and classroom setting ranked high on the list ... of all factors, students' proficiency topped the list.'

'Teachers were then asked specifically whether the communicative approach could be applied in class on a 5-point Likert scale - only 34.8% of them agreed whereas 38.5 disagreed.'

Regarding (6), '90% of the teachers preferred to be flexible in adopting teaching approaches instead of sticking to a specific one.'

The findings of the survey also revealed other facts such as 'the younger inexperienced female teachers find the communicative approach less workable and recognize more its weaknesses than their older experienced male counterparts'; 'the trained teachers have a more positive attitude towards four aspects of the communicative approach: acceptance of its potential strengths, its execution in class, the workableness of group/pair work and a topic-oriented approach', etc.

5.2 The learning of the Rules of Use

The finding that teachers considered the basic tenets of the communicative approach unrealistic is understandable. The communicative approach, as a matter of fact, originated in changes in the British language teaching tradition when applied linguists doubted the theoretical assumption underlying Situational Language Teaching and began to emphasize the functional and communicative potential of language. Another impetus for the communicative approach was the need for the

adults to learn the major languages of the European Common Market and the Council of Europe owing to the increasing interdependence of European countries. However, in the case of Hong Kong, both the linguistic situation and the language needs of the learners remain the same though the communicative approach replaced the oral-structural approach and the notional syllabus substituted the structural syllabus. The language used outside the classroom is still Cantonese, and as before, the learner's future need for English is unknown and unpredictable, and therefore cannot be specified. So, it is not surprising at all that teachers found 'contextualized learning', 'needs-based syllabus', 'learner-centred teaching', etc. unrealistic. In brief, there is no communicative need for the target language.

This gives rise to two fundamental questions, (1) Should the functional and social cultural aspects of English be taught? And (2) To what extent should they be taught? Before we can find answers to these questions, a brief review of the theoretical base of communicative language teaching is necessary.

Language as Communication

While Chomsky was interested in grammatical competence - the internalized knowledge of the system of syntactic and phonological rules of the language that the ideal speaker-hearer possesses in the native language, Hymes was concerned about 'performance', the language actually used by the individual. Hymes felt that there were aspects of 'performance' which were rule-governed. These aspects of language behaviour were related to the sociocultural context in which the speaker-hearer was operating. They should thereby be considered part of the language users' competence (Rivers 1983). 'There are rules of use without which the rules of grammar will be useless'. The term 'communicative competence' was introduced by Hymes to describe 'what a speaker needs to know to communicate effectively in culturally significant settings' (Hymes 1968). According to Hymes, 'a child

learning a language acquires, alongside with a system of grammar, a system of its use, regarding persons, places, purposes, other modes of communication, ... pattern of sequential use of language in conversation, address, standard routines' (Hymes 1974).

Hymes's theory of communicative competence linked linguistic theory to a more general theory of communication and culture, involving judgement of four kinds: whether something is

(1) formally possible;

(2) feasible by virtue of the means of implementation available;

(3) appropriate (adequate, happy, successful) in relation to the context in which it is used and evaluated;

(4) in fact done, actually performed, and what its doing entails.

Hymes observed that a normal member of a community has a 'knowledge' of and a 'capability' with regard to each of these aspects of the communicative systems available to him (Hymes 1971).

Halliday's functional account of language use complemented Hymes's view of communicative competence.

> The study of language in relation to the situations in which it is used - to situation types, i.e. the study of language as "text" - is a theoretical pursuit, no less central to linguistics than psycholinguistic investigations relating to structure of language to the structure of the human brain' (Halliday 1970).

Widdowson (1978) presented a view of the relationship between linguistic systems and their communicative values in text and discourse. He focused on the communicative acts underlying the ability to use language for different purposes. Canale (1983) identified four dimensions of communicative competence:

(1) grammatical competence (mastery of the language code);

(2) sociolinguistic competence (appropriateness of utterances with respect both to meaning and form);

(3) discourse competence (mastery of how to combine grammatical forms and meanings to achieve unity of a spoken or written text);

(4) strategic competence (mastery of verbal and non-verbal

communicative strategies used to compensate for breakdown in communication, and to make communication more effective).

So, at the level of language theory, communicative language teaching has a rich theoretical base.

Language and Culture

Really, the connection between language and culture is so close that 'for the speaker of a foreign language, any conversational exchange with a native speaker of the target language is a form of "cross-cultural encounter" ' (Richards & Sukwiwat 1985). Cultures define social situations differently. 'At the pub' in Britain and 'visiting elders and family members at Chinese New Year' in Chinese society are very different situations with different routines in the two cultures. Even where social situations are similar in the two cultures, the routines associated with the language differ. In English, a compliment may be achnowledged with thanks. However, in the Chinese culture, apologies rather than thanks are appropriate replies to compliments.

A: That was a lovely dinner.

B: No, No, the food and drink was scarce and poor and definitely not a proper sign of respect for an honourable guest.

There may not be exactly equivalent speech acts between the two cultures and pragmatic errors can occur when translation is used.

> English "can", "could" and "able" when indicating a request can be translated into Cantonese only as "hoyih"; other modals usually translated into English as "can" refer specifically to physical ability and do not imply directive force. A sentence like "Can you reach the book on the top shelf?" if translated with the modal "naahnggan" ("able") would be answered with "yes" or "no" with no attempt to get the book by the hearer.
>
> (Schmidt & Richards 1985)

The writer observed a translation error in her six year old daughter (Cantonese) saying goodbye to her classmate (English) after school:

A: See you later.

B: No, see you 'tomorrow'.

Richards and Sukwiwat (1985) observed that many utterances had a special status in conversation. 'They recur, are predictable, and are associated

with particular social situations and with particular types of interactions.' Such utterances may be referred to as 'conversational routines' (Coulmas 1981). Some are situational formulas, e.g. 'Check, please' said in a restaurant when requesting a bill; some accompany particular speech acts, e.g. 'Don't mention it' as a way of acknowledging thanks; some signal directions within discourse, marking speakers' attitude towards what has been said or what is to be said, such as 'as a matter of fact' (Keller 1981). Living in a Chinese community, the learners will not have any chance to know these conversational routines at all. And since the classroom is the only place where they learn or acquire English, it stands to reason that they should be taught not only the linguistic forms of the target language but also its functional and sociocultural aspects. That is to say, the Hong Kong learners have to learn how to express themselves in English and at the same time learn to understand and interact with the English culture.

Culturally Specific and Universal Rules

However, one very important point should be noted. While Hymes and Halliday referred to the acquisition of the first language, the Hong Kong learners learn English as a 'foreign' language. They have their mother tongue and they already know how to do things with language. They have no difficulties in negotiating meaning in discourse. In a word, our learners need not be taught the rules of use and the rules of discourse from scratch. When communicative competence is regarded as the goal of learning a foreign language, it is therefore necessary to make a distinction between the rules that are culturally specific in English and the rules that are not. Speech acts that are universal need not be taught and speech acts that are culturally specific to the English language should be given special treatments.

Swan (1985) wrote that the communicative approach should have four stages to needs analysis:

(1) find out what the learner needs to know;

(2) find out what he or she knows already;

(3) subtract (2) from (1);

(4) teach the remainder.

This, of course, leads to other considerations such as the number of rules to be taught and if there is consensus about the basic rules of use that a foreign language learner needs to know before he can claim to be competent in the target language.

Whose Rules of Use

Another problem arises when we consider the kind of rules to be used in the language class. During the communication process, should the learners apply the Cantonese rules or the English ones? Should we expect them to behave like Cantonese speaking English or English people using their mother tongue? The writer is of the opinion that the learners should be given as much opportunity as possible to express themselves in English in whatever ways they feel natural. As long as they can make themselves understood by other learners and their teachers, it is already a good starting point. When they have confidence in using English, they may then be helped to have a greater awareness of the culturally specific aspects of the language. The reason is simple: having gained the confidence in using English, the learners will be more interested in it and more ready to approximate to the culture associated with it.

Finally, it should be noted that the language used by the teacher in the classroom plays a crucial role in the learner's acquisition of the functional aspect of the language. It can be the most effective input the learner is exposed to. Conversational gambits (Keller 1981) like 'To give you an idea', 'Yes, but' etc. when frequently used by the teacher can be acquired in a subconscious way by the learner without much effort. The same applies to the acquisition of discourse rules in the classroom, e.g. opening and closing sequences, turn-taking rules, sequencing rules, etc.

5.3 The Teaching of Grammar and Communicative Methodology

One of the weaknesses of the communicative approach found in the Survey is 'more time required for grammar teaching'. This comment raises another interesting issue: the status of grammar and how grammar is learnt.

The importance of grammar in foreign language teaching is beyond dispute. To put it in a nutshell, communicative language use is only possible with a knowledge of the grammatical system. Indeed, the rules of use intertwine with the rules of grammar. However, before the rules of grammar can be properly taught, we need a better understanding of 'grammar' and how grammar is learnt.

Two Kinds of Grammar

Littlewood (1985) distinguishes between two kinds of grammar. Grammar can refer to the descriptive analysis of the various parts of a language system - the grammar which is contained in grammar books. This kind of grammar requires the learner's conscious attention to the rules. He has to make an effort to understand them, memorize them and apply them. On the other hand, grammar can refer to the system of rules which underlies a language and which every native speaker internalizes (Chomsky). This view of language is supported by the claim that if a child does not know the rules by intuition, he cannot produce new utterances or understand the utterances of others. So, the language learners can, on this basis, be said to possess their own 'interlanguage' (Selinker).

The learning of the first kind of grammar is through deliberate instruction where the teacher focuses on relevant features of the language and attempts to control the steps by which the learner can master them. The learning of the second kind of grammar is by engaging the learner in situations where communication has to take place so that the target language is learnt spontaneously. This latter kind of learning processes through subconscious strategies such as generalization

of rules or transfer of rules from the mother tongue. There is still considerable uncertainty about how the two kinds of learning, conscious and unconscious, and the two kinds of grammar relate to each other in the learner's mind, and how a teacher should best integrate 'learning' and 'acquisition' opportunities within a course.

Two Main Approaches to Communicative Language Teaching

Some applied linguists argue that it is what learners have 'acquired' that becomes part of their internal system which is used for communication. For example, Prabhu conducted an experiment in Southern India using a 'procedural' or 'task-based' syllabus. His central hypothesis is that 'structure can best be learnt when attention is focused on meaning' (Johnson 1982). The first consequence was the abolition of any kind of linguistic syllabus; the second was to eschew any formal teaching procedures (i.e. drilling and error corrections) whose primary attention would be focused on 'form' rather than 'meaning'. The content of lessons is planned in advance on topics of the task or activity it will involve, but no attempt is made to plan in terms of linguistic content. The hypothesis is 'through such tasks the student will extend his repertoire; he will acquire the language not previously known' (Johnson 1982).

Another experimental approach is the Natural Approach of Krashen and Terrell. Krashen made a distinction between 'acquisition' and 'learning'. Acquisition refers to an unconscious process that involves the naturalistic development of language proficiency through understanding language and through using language for meaningful communication. Learning refers to a process in which conscious rules about a language are developed. However, Krashen claims that learning cannot lead to acquisition and can only serve as a monitor under very limited conditions. The acquisition process is affected by the affective filter concerning factors such as motivation, self-confidence and anxiety. Teachers should resist any focus on grammatical structures

because if input is provided 'over a wider variety of topics which are pursuing communicative goals, the necessary grammatical structure will automatically be provided in the input' (Krashen & Terrell 1983).

On the other hand, some applied linguists, while agreeing that spontaneous communication depends on rules which the learner has internalized at a deep, subconscious level, believe that conscious learning can be the first stage in an internalization process that proceeds through practice activities of varying degrees of creativity. Littlewood (1981) remarked that 'the goal of foreign language teaching is to extend the range of communication situations in which the learner can perform with focus on meaning, without being hindered by the attention he must pay to the linguistic form.' In relation to this goal, he divided the classroom activities into two categories: 'pre-communicative' activities which include structural and quasi-communicative activities, and 'communicative activities' which include functional communicative and social interaction activities. The former aims at giving the learner fluent control over linguistic forms, and the latter aims at the communication of meanings.

Rivers (1983) compared the learning of language to swimming. The difference between a swimmer and a non-swimmer is a 'psychological' one. The teacher's job is to help the students 'pass from the storing of linguistic knowledge and information about how this knowledge operates in communication to natural use of this knowledge for the multitudinous unpredictable purposes of an individual in contact with another individual.' She suggested that the process of learning should be divided into two stages - 'skill getting' and 'skill using'. The skill getting stage includes acquisition of linguistic knowledge through 'doing', such as 'exercises', 'drills', intensive practice and practice in formulating messages. The skill using stage is to 'expand the skill getting activities with regular and frequent opportunities for autonomous interaction, thus making full provision for a dimension of language learning.' Emphasis was on getting the meaning across. In brief, the

rationale behind Rivers' as well as Littlewood's model of second language learning is more or less the same: 'tasks will activate structures previously learnt by practice' (Johnson 1982).

The two different approaches to language teaching correspond to the distinction put forward by Howatt (1984) between a 'strong' version and a 'weak' version of the communicative approach. The former is described as 'using English to learn it' and the latter 'learning to use' English.

The more workable approach for Hong Kong

Taking the Hong Kong situation into consideration, the weak version of the communicative approach seems to be more practicable. Firstly, the Survey revealed a contradiction in the teachers' attitude towards the communicative approach. On the one hand, they considered the basic tenets of the approach unrealistic; on the other hand, however, they found the features of the approach such as pair/group work, etc. workable with the exception of 'a noticeable absence of mechanical drills', a very essential feature of the communicative approach. This contradiction implies that while the teachers agree that communicative methods of teaching can help to motivate the learners, their experience tells them that drills and practice are indispensable to learning. Their 'conservatism' is standing on firm ground. Since the Hong Kong learners are not living in an area where English is the native language, they are not exposed to English like the immigrants in the U.S.A. who will live there permanently and who have to adapt to the new culture, nor are they like those people who will stay in Britain temporarily and who have immediate needs for the native language. They do not have the chance to acquire English through the process of approximation whereby they will lose their errors through exposure to the native language. Such being the case, the role played by practice (both conscious and unconscious) and even explanation of rules in the classroom is of considerable importance.

Secondly, the learning habits of the learner should be usefully harnessed (Edge 1987). Most Chinese students are learning in an education tradition where a strong emphasis is put on practice and memorization. At an early age, they are expected to learn by heart many individual characters. The recitation of essays (modern and classical) is a common practice in the Chinese language class. The part played by memory in the learning process surely cannot be disregarded. Stevic (1976) observed that 'mental activity on the part of the subject, whether intentional or unintentional, has a powerful effect on memory.' Practice does not necessarily mean the repetition of meaningless material.

> The giving of meaningful but prescribed responses to stimuli from teacher, tape or textbook is slightly more "communicative", the selection of a situationally appropriate response from among a set of previously practiced responses is still more "communicative" and conversing freely about matters of real and urgent interest is most "communicative" of all.'

For Stevic, the degree of communication in the classroom is a matter of 'depth'.

So, the teaching of grammar and communicative methodology need not be alternatives. In fact, Cheng (1986), Rinvolucri (1984) and McKay (1985) have demonstrated how grammar can be taught in interesting ways.

Accuracy and Fluency Activities

Brumfit (1981) pointed out a fundamental distinction for communicative teaching methodology. While syllabuses are concerned with 'accuracy', we need 'a syllabus with gaps' or 'a syllabus with holes in it'. There must be extensive gaps in which students are enabled to use effectively what they have learnt, from whatever sources they have learnt it, to develop the skills of negotiation by talking with each other for more or less genuine purposes. In other words, classroom activity should be concerned with both accuracy and fluency. The Survey, however, reflects another difficulty encountered by the Hong Kong teachers. 'Respondents seem to indicate that students' English needs to reach a certain threshold level in order that the approach can be used.' The writer is of the opinion that it should be the learners who decide when

to start producing speech. The five year learning process in the secondary education can be seen as a continuum with a greater proportion of accuracy activity at the beginning of the continuum (Form 1) and a greater proportion of fluency activity at the end of the continuum (Form 5). The proportion of fluency and accuracy activities in the classroom should be adjusted according to the proficiency level of the learner, the language competence and the teaching experience of the teacher and the actual effect on learning.

To enable both accuracy and fluency activities to be carried out in the classroom, Brumfit (1980) suggested a grammatically cored syllabus with notional, functional and situational specifications spiralling round it. The writer believes that this syllabus is more advantageous to the Hong Kong learners than the current notional one. Firstly, a grammatical syllabus is responsive to the theory of learning. 'Everything we know about human learning suggests that it is crucially dependent on our ability, consciously or subconsciously, to systematize. All other things being equal, learning will be effective when the material being prescribed is capable of being interpreted systematically.' Secondly, a grammatical syllabus provides a more economical way of learning. 'The grammatical system gives us a generative framework which is, by being generative, economical and capable of being systematically ordered for teaching (teaching as distinct from learning, being necessarily linear). That is, it is possible to segment the grammatical system, and to order the segments according to their view of the relationship between the parts.'

An Emphasis on Communicative Reading

Surprisingly, the Survey showed that 95.6% of the teachers rated oral lessons suitable for the communicative approach and the communicative approach was practicable 'when teachers have the time and energy'. The goal of getting meaning across is not limited to speaking. Meaning, in fact, can be conveyed by using all the four skills:

speaking, listening, reading and writing. Realistically, the skill that needs stressing in the Hong Kong situation is reading, the teaching of which can be and should be integrated into the teaching of other skills, especially writing (Brookes & Grundy 1987).

Criper (1986) argued that within limitations, the practices implied by class libraries, class readers, simplified texts, reading notebooks, stories from alien culture require rehabilitation as vital means through which we can at least hope to achieve a degree of communicative language teaching (and learning) particularly in institutional settings. He remarked that 'much of current thinking on communicative language teaching methodology implies native speaker teachers or at the very least, non-native speaker teachers who are very confident of their ability to be able to respond appropriately to their students' attempts at communication and to be able to judge and subsequently comment on their students' own communicative efforts in the foreign language.' His observation is that this is not the case in most situations in foreign language teaching across the world. 'The level of proficiency in the foreign language of the body of teachers at school level or beyond is one of the major problems in achieving a gain in the proficiency level of the learners they are teaching' He was of the opinion that communicative reading as a communicative activity can solve the difficulty in finding authentic communicative tasks for the learners who do not expect to be using the language immediately. Other problems caused by large class size and the mismatch between the level of teaching and the actual level of knowledge of performance of the learners can also be solved.

Criper's observation about the teaching of English in a non-English environment is accurate and his suggestions inspiring.

5.4 The Responsibility and Difficulties of the Teacher

The definition of an ideal teacher

How to motivate the learners is the responsibility of the teacher no matter what teaching approaches he adopts. Girard (1976) worked out a

questionnaire which was filled in by 1,000 boys and girls aged from 12 to 17 concerning the pupils' definition of the ideal language teacher. The learners were asked to classify twenty different features in order of importance and to complete the list as they wished by adding whatever other qualities they found important. 'My contention is that in defining the good language teacher is bound to give us some clues as to what the teacher should do to motivate his pupils', said Girard. The first point that was selected unanimously by all age-groups was 'the good language teacher makes his course interesting'. The next point was that the teacher should give 'a good model of English, especially to the spoken language'. Besides the content of the course and the competence of the teacher, the learners considered important the teacher-pupils relationship such as 'showing the same interest in all the pupils', 'making them participate in all activities', and 'showing great patience'. The qualities added by the learners are very interesting and are listed as follows:-

From the 12-13 age group:

- he gives us information about the country (England);
- he shows sympathy for his pupils.

From the 13-15 age group:

- he is fair to all pupils (whether good or bad at English);
- he is kind though strict and exacting;
- he inspires confidence.

From the 15-17 age group:

- he shows great understanding even for those who have difficulties;
- he shows sympathy for his pupils;
- he is quite close to his pupils.

From the findings of Girard's questionnaire, one will readily admit that the student-centred methodology associated with the communicative approach is most likely to motivate the learners. Learning through doing is fun. Moreover, the roles of the teacher as a facilitator in the communication process, an independent participant (Breed & Candlin 1980),

a needs-analyst, a counsellor and a group process manager (Richards & Rodgers 1986) enable the learners to be managers of their own learning. The non-corrective attitude of the teacher towards learners' errors can be highly encouraging.

Difficulties of the Teachers

However, for communicative methodology to be implemented successfully in the Hong Kong classroom, there are many difficulties the teachers have to overcome.

Taylor (1987) observed that,

> the classroom atmosphere in Hong Kong schools is generally agreed to be very formal, and even in kindergartens children are seated formally. This arrangement characterizes the pupils' relationship with the teacher, which is generally one of respect. The traditional value of respect due to seniors and, by extension, honour to teachers, continues to have an influence in the teacher-pupil relationship (Chann 1976). Learning is also highly disciplined with an emphasis on repetition and rote. In the strongly competitive ethos of education in Hong Kong, with its stress on academic examination-oriented learners, homework is expected from an early age. Thus pupils expect to work hard in a formal learning situation which does not provide much opportunity for informal social or cognitive learning through play.

The distance (out of respect) between the teachers and the learners in the language class is usually greater than that in other classes. This is mainly due to the language barrier. To bridge the gap, a language teacher needs to be sensitive to the needs of the learner as often as he can. However, the relationship between the teacher and the learners is cultivated not only inside the classroom but also outside. As most of the Chinese learners are rather shy they prefer to talk about their learning difficulties with their teachers in private. The teacher's concern for the learner over learning and non-learning matters and his willingness to give timely help are the bases for confidence.

Given the fact that Chinese learners value learning and believe that learning needs serious effort, the language teachers should, from the very start, help them understand that learning a language is different from learning other school subjects. In fact, it is similar to the learning of other human behaviours. The classroom is a 'small speech

community' and the learners are expected to learn through doing things with language. Moreover, the ability to do things with the target language and to express meaning with it is really a success in itself.

The non-corrective attitude to errors requires further understanding from the learners, the parents and even the school authorities. The high respect for the teacher is based on the belief that a teacher is a person who can tell the right from the wrong. A returned English essay laden with the corrections of the teacher is usually appreciated by the learner as it shows that the teacher is 'competent' and 'responsible'. Learners need to be helped to see the importance of focusing on meaning and getting the message across.

The Problem of Class Control

The last point to mention is the 'discipline problem' voiced by the teachers in the Survey concerning the adoption of the communicative approach. In building a genuine and friendly atmosphere in the classroom so that the whole person of the learners can be involved, there is another question we have to look for an answer: To what extent should the teacher control and to what degree should the learner take the initiative?

Widdowson (1987) wrote about the role of the teacher. He distinguished between two kinds of classroom encounters (interactional and transactional) and two roles of the teacher (as a master and as a teaching person). The exercise of authority in interaction is more or less authoritarian and varies according to different cultures. The exercise of authority in transaction is more or less authoritative. Widdowson pointed out that the teacher as a teaching person must surely retain an undiminished authority.

> The increase in learner-centred activity and collaborative work in the classroom does not mean that the teacher becomes less authoritative. He or she still has to contrive the required enabling conditions for learning, has still to monitor and guide progress. And all this presupposes an expertise, applied perhaps with more subtlety and consideration and discretion than before, but applied none the less. I see no future whatever for any pedogogy

> which undermines the authority of the teacher in his role as a teaching person, as ultimately responsible for the management of classroom transaction.

Stevic (1980) remarked,

> In exercising "control", then the teacher is giving some kind of order, or structure, to the learning space of the student. In encouraging him to take "initiative", she is allowing him to work and to grow within that space. The trick for the teacher is not only to preserve this distinction; it is also to provide just the right amount of learning space. If there is too little, the student will be stifled. If there is too much, the students will feel that the teacher has abandoned him. In a language class, the teacher should have "faith" that the student will in fact grow into that space and "understanding" of where the student is in that space at any given moment.

From the above analysis and opinions, it is clear that the job of the language teacher is demanding, and the difficulties he has to overcome while implementing the communicative methods of teaching are rather challenging, especially in a situation like Hong Kong.

CONCLUSION

The writer believes that a language policy designed according to the needs of the learners can result in a positive attitude towards the learning of the English language. The rate of success in acquiring the target language will be much increased if the communicative approach is applied with respect to the learners' 'educational culture' and social background.

However, since many aspects about foreign/second language acquisition still remain unknown, it is unrealistic to claim that a certain model of learning is 'the best'. Both teachers and learners being human and therefore variables, it is naive to look for a teaching formula which can be applied to all language learning situations. Indeed, the job of the teacher is to 'adapt' and not to 'adopt' teaching approaches and methodology. Whatever ways that can facilitate learning and make the teaching and learning process a creative and enjoyable experience deserve meticulous study and further exploitation.

All in all, with the introduction of a new teaching approach, the teachers, especially the less experienced ones, need unambiguous ideas about how it can be realized in the classroom. Vague instructions such as 'use more English', and 'don't have to correct all mistakes' offer little help to the teachers. The finding in the Survey that teachers use the communicative approach 'when they have the time and energy' reflects that a large number of teachers in Hong Kong still do not have a clear idea about the new approach. This of course does not mean that teachers should be told what to do. Rather, they should be given more help to understand the theory of language and the theory of learning on which the approach is based. Only when the teachers have a firm grasp of the basic concepts behind the approach will they be able to take a critical attitude towards the approach and make the necessary modifications and innovations in the best interest of the learners.

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