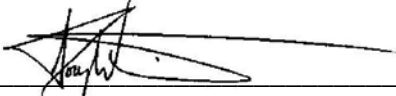


WHAT CHINESE EFL TEACHERS CAN LEARN FROM THE PHILIPPINES  
ABOUT ENGLISH LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

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WHAT CHINESE EFL TEACHERS CAN LEARN FROM THE PHILIPPINES  
ABOUT ENGLISH LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

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Abstract

WHAT CHINESE EFL TEACHERS CAN LEARN FROM THE PHILIPPINES  
ABOUT ENGLISH LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

Weizhong Chen

Under the Supervision of Kory Wein, Ph.D.

English is today's lingua franca. There are many varieties of English or World Englishes spoken around the world. Pedagogy wise, this paper aims to look at English language instruction in the Outer Circle, where English serves as a second language, to give EFL teachers in the Expanding Circle some new insight about the teaching of EFL by reviewing English language instruction in China and in the Philippines. It recommends Chinese EFL teachers have a passion for teaching EFL by immersing themselves in various online English environments to create an ESL-like context, and motivate the students by using an eclectic approach to teaching EFL in the Chinese context as well as integrating EFL learning with subject matter content.

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## Chapter I Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that English is today's lingua franca. According to Kirkpatrick (2011), *lingua franca* is defined as “a common language between people who do not share a mother tongue . . . [and] offers no necessary linguistic advantages to any speaker” (p. 213). The ownership of English, to a certain extent, does not solely belong to its native speakers coming from English-speaking countries in the Anglosphere (Hu & Jiang, 2011).

Kachru (1997) points out that the status of English can be divided into three categories: the Inner Circle, including the native English-speaking countries; the Outer Circle, consisting of former British and American colonies; and the Expanding Circle, in which English is learned as a foreign language.

The teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL) has a long history in China. It can be traced back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century during the Qing Dynasty, where the unravelling of Western culture gave way to the learning of EFL (Wang, 1986). Nowadays, EFL, as a mandatory subject across all primary, secondary, and tertiary levels, plays an important role in the Chinese education system. EFL students in China are required to take English classes—“4 class hours a week, 18 terms, for 12 terms in high school and 4-8 terms at university” (Wu, 2001, p. 19). Despite efforts made by the Chinese government to incorporate English to modernize the nation (Liu, Lin, & Wiely, 2016), there are still some problems and challenges remaining in the teaching of EFL in China today (Rao, 2013). Chinese EFL teachers understand the effectiveness and role of communicative language teaching (CLT), but they prefer to use the traditional approach to teaching EFL (Luo, 2012).

On the other hand, the Philippines, China's neighboring country, is known to be highly proficient in English (Saban, 2015) and successful in English language instruction in a general

sense. According to Ozaki (2011), from January to December 2008, the average Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) iBT score of Filipinos was 88 out of 120, ranking the second highest in Asia. These test scores suggest that Filipino ESL teachers have an excellent command of the English language in terms of English language instruction. Another report by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) also revealed that in 2010 the Philippines ranked 35<sup>th</sup> out of 163 countries on the TOEFL and is regarded as one of the top performers in Asia (Chavez, 2014).

### **Statement of the Problem**

The problem addressed is “What can Chinese EFL teachers learn from the Philippines about English language instruction?”

### **Definition of Terms**

*CLT* refers to Communicative Language Teaching. It initially draws its principles from Hyme’s (1972) notion of communicative competence (CC); Canale and Swain (1980) later provided concrete theoretical bases and pedagogical applications of communicative competence; they proposed four major components of CC: grammatical, discourse, sociolinguistic, and strategic (Marin, 2014; Brown & Lee, 2015).

*EFL* refers to English as a Foreign Language. It “may be taught as a school subject but has restricted uses in society at large” (Richards & Renandya, 2002, p. 1).

*ELT* refers to English Language Instruction and is defined as the teaching of English to speakers of other languages (Cambridge Dictionary online, 2017). Throughout this seminar paper, ELT refers to the field of English Language Teaching in the Asian context.

*ESL* refers to English as a Second Language. It is “a language that is widely used in society and learners need to acquire English in order to survive in society” (Richards & Renandya, 2002, p. 1).

*GTM* refers to Grammar-Translation Method. This method, given in the native language of the students, focuses on grammatical parsing, resulting in an inability on the part of the student to use the language for communication (Celce-Murcia, 2001).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine English language instruction in the Philippines to identify ways Chinese teachers can improve the teaching of EFL in China.

### **Significance of the Study**

Since there is relatively little research on the topic, this study is important. By looking at English language instruction in the Outer Circle, where English serves as a second language (ESL), EFL teachers in the Expanding Circle can gain new insight about the teaching of EFL. The study is also beneficial to those scholars and graduate students of applied linguistics in China interested in exploring the similarities and differences between teaching EFL and teaching ESL.

### **Delimitation of the Study**

The study explores how the English language instruction works in the Philippines in order to give Chinese EFL teachers ideas about English language instruction and alternative ways of improving their teaching repertoire. It does not discuss whether teaching EFL in the

Expanding Circle should be taught the same way as teaching ESL in the Outer Circle. It does not advocate native English-speaking teachers over non-native English-speaking teachers or vice versa in relation to the teaching of English in the Asian context either. The study used library research as a means of gathering relevant information and did not involve human participants.

### **Methodology**

A review of the literature was conducted in and through the Elton S. Karrmann Library at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville throughout Spring 2017. The findings are summarized in Chapter II and recommendations are made in Chapter III.

## **Chapter II Review of Literature**

Kachru's three-circle model of World Englishes (1997) has provided the basis for distinguishing between English as a native language, English as a second language, and English as a foreign language, where English is said to operate as an EFL in China and as an ESL in the Philippines. One of the great advantages of this model is that it does not suggest "one variety is any better, linguistically speaking, than any other" (Kirkpatrick, 2007, p. 28). In this sense, this review does not touch upon the discussion of whether teaching EFL in the Expanding Circle should be taught the same way as teaching ESL in the Outer Circle; it simply provides an overview of English language instruction in China and its pedagogical issues, as well as explores English language instruction in the Philippines.

### **English Language Instruction in China**

#### *A brief historical development*

Research by Wang (1986) mentions that the teaching and learning of EFL in China has existed for over 100 years since the Westernization Movement driven by the Qing imperial government. EFL went through two stages of development, from emphasis on reading and translation to a focus on listening and speaking before the establishment of People's Republic of China in 1949. However, there was a setback period between 1949 and 1956 when the fervor for learning the Russian language surpassed maintaining EFL in the school curriculum. After US President Richard Nixon's official visit to China in 1972, English language instruction was reintroduced into China's education system. After the end of Cultural Revolution in 1976, English in China regained its former level of popularity. Wang (1986) further points out that English has become one of the core subjects in middle schools and in some primary schools.

In 2001, China's Ministry of Education (MOE) mandated that English be taught as a foreign language starting in the third grade rather than the first year of middle school (Hu, 2008); however, many primary schools in cities offer English starting from the first grade, while in rural areas, English may be delayed due to a lack of teaching resources (Qi, 2016). Hu (2008) also agrees that problems exist with the policy's implementation, arguing that the teacher shortage and the disparity in implementation are "impeding the teaching of English in primary schools" and causing "undesirable effects" (p. 531).

Not only is English compulsory in basic education, but it is also a required course at the university level (Wu, 2001). There are two kinds of college English pathway programs that provide the opportunity for all college EFL students in China: one is designed for students who are considering an English major, and the other is for non-English majors entering the college EFL program (Rao & Lei, 2014).

### ***Teaching methods***

Chinese EFL teachers have been familiar with the use of Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) for over 30 years. Even though many of them understand the effectiveness of the use of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) inside the classroom, they still give importance to the classic and traditional GTM as a way of teaching, where students are given explicit instruction by analyzing the language features as well as correcting grammatical errors (Luo, 2012; Rao, 2013). According to Rao and Lei (2014), not all of the EFL teachers have a good knowledge of understanding the current trends in English language instruction; they would still prefer to give priority to the traditional ways of teaching EFL by delivering teacher-centered instruction as well as sticking to textbooks. Zhang and Watkin (2007) explain that "Chinese teachers attached importance to sound content knowledge about the subject, and Chinese students viewed teachers

in accordance with their traditional roles, expecting teachers to be intellectual as well as moral models” (cited in Zhong, 2012, p. 6). Because of the prevalence of GTM, the Chinese educational system, according to Wei and Su (2008), tends to produce “deaf-and-dumb” English learners (cited in Liu, Lin, & Wiely, 2016, p. 138).

### **Pedagogical Issues in English Language Instruction in China**

Siemon (2010) identifies the various problems regarding English language instruction in China. To summarize, they are (1) instruction being mainly centered around reading and writing, around grammar and translation, and around rote learning of vocabulary development, leading Chinese EFL students to failure of communicative competence; (2) teacher-centered instruction; (3) structure-based textbooks in which much of the text is translated into Mandarin, and multiple choice activities are found of considerable use; (4) memorization of vocabulary and grammar rules in order to test students’ textbook knowledge; and (5) instruction being conducted in large classes.

Rao (2013) illustrates four challenges for China’s EFL teaching and learning when the CLT is utilized in Chinese schools. Chinese EFL teachers’ own level of English language proficiency is the first challenge. This is not surprising that they “are well aware of their linguistic deficiency” (Medgyes, 2001). The second challenge that impeded Chinese EFL teachers from implementing CLT in the classroom is that it is in conflict with the traditional role of the student-teacher relationship because teachers are expected to pass on knowledge, provide answers, and set an example by being a role model, while students, in some sense, are passive-obedient recipients of knowledge (Zhong, 2012). The third challenge takes Chinese EFL textbooks into consideration. Nearly “all English textbooks are designed to teach grammar, reading, and writing, with little emphasis on listening and speaking,” not to mention using fun-

based activities in the EFL classroom (Rao, 2013, p. 37). The fourth challenge is due to a lack of resources as well as the influence of class size.

Chinese EFL teachers find it difficult to implement CLT; it is only employed when the class needs to be observed by teachers from other schools or when the school directors visit and inspect the class (Li & Baldauf, 2011). Liu (2010) states that for the majority of Chinese EFL students the main reasons to learn English is to prepare “for various high stake exams” (p. 92). Deng and Lin (2016) conducted research on high school EFL teachers’ and students’ beliefs on the teaching of grammar in China. They found that the students tend to focus on achieving good grades instead of improving their communication skills, and they are motivated to do so by the Chinese examination system (Li and Baldauf, 2011). In other words, most EFL students in China “are concerned about their results”; “the end product” is emphasized instead of learning (Siemon, 2010, p. 42). Luo (2012) has also found three major reasons why it is common to see Chinese EFL students have difficulties in speaking English, such as more time being spent on doing written exercises and exam-driven education. Yu (2001) sees the lack of qualified English teachers as the biggest constraint:

A qualified English teacher should, in the first place, be capable in all four skills. . . . Quite a number of teachers know only some basic English grammar and vocabulary. For them the grammar-translation method is the most acceptable because they can basically teach English in the Chinese. (p. 197)

Research by Zhong (2012) has yielded similar findings regarding some pedagogical characteristics of the teaching and learning of EFL in China. To summarize, they are (1) rote learning and repetition as a teaching and technique; (2) the students as passive recipients of

knowledge; (3) emphasis on grades and exams instead of developing students' communicative competence; and (4) traditional ways of teaching coexisting with CLT.

Even though GMT still seems to have been one of the most preferred teaching methods widely used in all Chinese public school settings (Liu, Lin, & Wiley, 2016), there is a possibility of using the eclectic approach to allow Chinese EFL teachers to “reconcile the modern methodologies with the traditional ways of teaching in China” (Rao, 2013, p. 38). Yu (2001) recommends that Chinese EFL teachers “must undergo training that will promote their theoretical awareness as well as their linguistic abilities” in order to “change the situation” (p. 197).

## **English Language Instruction in the Philippines**

### ***A brief historical development***

The Philippines, where English is one of the official languages and used as a medium of instruction, is “a nation that is leading English proficiency in Asia in general” (Wa-Mbaleka, 2014, p. 1). It was colonized by the Spanish for over 300 years; however, the Americans “liberated” this archipelago country “from the Spaniards and made education an important mission” (Koo, 2008, p. 20). Vizconde (2006) introduces the initial stage of developing English language instruction in the Philippines as follows:

The teaching of English was undertaken initially by the American teachers until such time that they were able to train Filipino teachers. The methodology of instruction is basically recitation. Although there are periods devoted to writing and a little of reading, the interactions between the teacher and the students in the classroom were conducted primarily by the teacher. . . . Textbooks and other teaching aids were either imported or

adapted from the United States of America. (p. 265)

Additionally, Martin (2014) mentions other traditional ways of teaching English during U.S. colonialism, such as “stressing eye movements in reading,” “asking students to read aloud,” “making them perform grammar drills,” as well as “expecting them to recite memorized passages” (p. 476).

Decades after the US granted the Philippines its independence in 1945, English “continued to enjoy a privileged position” and was the medium of instruction in all Philippine schools (Koo, 2008, p. 20). Until 1974, the Bilingual Education Policy (BEP) was implemented by the Philippines’ Department of Education (DepEd). This policy gave the English and Filipino languages official legal status in the government, business, and education sectors; English shared the same status with Filipino. English was the language of instruction for English language arts, mathematics, and science, while Filipino was used in all other subjects (Vizconde, 2006; Koo, 2008; Martin, 2014). During this period of time, English language instruction improved greatly, from “highly structured drills and memorization” to “awareness among teachers with the second language teaching methodologies” (Vizconde, 2006, p. 267).

The current educational policy in the Philippines stipulated by the DepEd is the Mother-Tongue Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE), covering “all areas of basic education” in the country “from pre-school to high school” and mandating “the use of the learners’ first language as the primary medium of instruction from pre-school to at least Grade 3” (Ho, 2011, p. 18).

The DepEd noted the continuous improvement in public school student performance in the National Achievement Test (NAT) in a five-year analysis, particularly the subject of English. The DepEd also believed that English proficiency starts with teachers who are proficient in the

subject matter, and that English is as critical in learning as other key subjects such as Mathematics and Science (Asia News Monitor, 2009). In other words, English language instruction in the Philippines “has been targeted to improve the students’ performance not only in communication but also in the comprehension of mathematics and science” (Vizconde, 2006, p. 269).

### ***Filipino ESL Teachers and Context***

In terms of English language instruction, Medgyes (2001) regards the concept of the “ideal teacher” as being problematic and comments as follows:

It is becoming a generally accepted view that outstanding teachers cannot be squeezed into any pigeonhole: all outstanding teachers are ideal in their own ways, and as such are different from each other. The concept of the ideal teacher resists clear-cut definitions, because there are too many variables to consider. (p. 440)

According to Ozaki (2011), Filipino ESL teachers are “good models for language learners” because they share “their own experience as learners” and master “high English competency” (p. 55). Saban (2015) studied 22 effective Filipino ESL teachers in the context of Philippine public schools. Regarding their personal and professional qualities, the author concluded that

the macro-qualities of an effective English teacher are purpose-driven, language learning-focused . . . well-informed in their area of teaching, adaptable and teachable, willing to learn, resilient optimistic. It could be construed, therefore, that these qualities enable the teachers to rise above the public school challenges and make a difference through their commitment to excellence in their teaching profession. (p. 128)

Filipino ESL teachers also immerse themselves in various environments that allow them to “listen to English on the radio,” “watch English language television and movies,” and “read

English in newspaper, magazines and books” (Thompson, 2003, p. 77). Filipino ESL teachers “improve their own English competency through not only systematic study of the language but also immersion environments” (Ozaki, 2011, p. 55).

Ho (2011) introduces the National Competency Based Teacher Standards (NCBTS) in the Philippines and relates it to the English language instruction in the Philippine context; the NCBTS consists of the following seven domains: “social regard for learning; learning environment; diversity of learners; curriculum; planning, assessing, and reporting; community linkages; and personal growth and professional development” (p. 43). Within these seven domains, Ho (2011) finds it necessary to see “the context of English language teaching and learning; the role of pre-service teacher education; the knowledge-base of teaching and teacher preparation; and teacher standards” as important factors (p. 52).

Gaerlan (2016) analyzes the reasons behind less successful Filipino ESL students’ experiences in learning English, discovering that some of them “are not motivated to use or learn in English” because they “do not see English as part of or necessary to their future, and even if they do, they do not seem to want to exert too much effort to use the language” (p. 6). Research by Aquino, Cabarrubias, Park, Rabang, Rafael, Yogaratnam and Oringo (2016) illustrates some demotivating factors in learning English in the Philippines: “confidence, fear of committing mistakes, demotivated teacher, and lack of resources” (p. 4). The study suggests that the roles of teachers are as follows:

to lessen the pressure and anxiety that students feel through their customized teaching strategies. They engage students to be more productive and turn their fear into challenges and challenges into success by giving activities that they’ll surely enjoy as a class. (p. 5)

## ***Teaching Methods***

After the implementation of the newly-established MTB-MLE policy, “A quick survey of memoranda, circulars and orders from the DepEd reveals three dominant ELT practices in the Philippines, namely, the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), and Task-Based Language Teaching approach (TBLT)” (Martin, 2014, p. 477).

Research by Maestre and Gindidis (2016), however, shows a somewhat different picture of the use of CLT strategies in Philippine public schools. They investigated whether the primary school ESL teachers in the Philippines use CLT in teaching English and what their beliefs are regarding the implementation of CLT in the classroom setting. The findings affirm the use of CLT in teaching the English language, but there is a gap between teachers’ beliefs about CLT and “actual classroom practice” (p. 10) by combining “grammar-focused activities and CLT activities” (p. 11).

It can be seen that Filipino ESL teachers, according to Martin (2014), have “different interpretations of the CLT approach to teaching English” (p. 479), but it is still considered “the most popular approach” in the Philippine ESL context (p. 478).

### **Chapter III Conclusions and Recommendations**

Based on what have been reviewed in Chapter II, CLT is a much debated approach recommended both in the Chinese EFL context and in the Philippine ESL context. Much of recent research on the Chinese EFL setting has reiterated that GTM is still the most popular and preferred approach to teaching English in Chinese public schools in order to balance high stakes exams with teaching all English subject standards and language points within the national English curriculum. However, in the Philippine ESL context, English language instruction is not only aiming to enhance the students' communicative competence but also to facilitate learning across the curriculum as a means of gaining access to other academic subjects, which are taught in English.

Teachers from both countries understand the effectiveness of the use of CLT in their classrooms; the implementation of real classroom practice, however, has lead to the blended version of CLT approach with traditional ways of teaching in both EFL and ESL contexts. It should be noted that Filipino students do have daily extensive exposure to various English engagements regardless of the specific approach used for classroom instruction, as well as their varying levels of language skills, reading comprehension, and literacies in public and private schools in the Philippines.

The reason why Chinese EFL students' English is often regarded as dumb and/or deaf English is because some Chinese EFL teachers use Mandarin Chinese to give teacher-centered English lessons, explain meanings of vocabulary words and teach grammar. Whether it is best to use students' first language in teaching English as a second or foreign language is still a debatable topic. However, the current MTB-MLE policy in the Philippines allows the teachers to

use students' first language serving as the primary language of teaching at the early stages of schooling.

Chinese EFL teachers are said to be a role model by imparting knowledge and providing answers, while Filipino ESL teachers are considered to be a language role model by sharing their own language experiences as well as embracing effective personal and professional qualities. Much research has also emphasized the importance of teacher standards, teacher education, and professional development.

Regarding what Chinese EFL teachers can learn from the Philippines about English language instruction, the following recommendations are made to provide some different ideas about the teaching of EFL in China:

#### ***Integration of EFL Learning with Subject Matter Content***

The integration of EFL learning with subject matter will provide an interesting basis for EFL learning as well as students' engagements with the English language. It will also address the varying needs of the students, arouse their interest, and make them aware that learning English can be an eye opener in a broad sense. Although the structure-based English textbooks are widely used across the country, Chinese EFL teachers can find possible ways to create various English environments by planning and preparing activities that incorporate subject matter content with English language features, such as grammar, sentence structures, and language points.

#### ***Motivation with the Use of an Eclectic Approach to Teaching EFL***

Motivation is a prerequisite for effective teaching. No one teaching method can be the best because the students learn differently. As long as the students are motivated to learn the English language, the eclectic approach to teaching EFL can be the most effective one by

tailoring different teaching methods and approaches to the Chinese context, depending on the learning objects and the needs of the students.

### ***Passion for the Teaching of EFL***

Chinese EFL teachers should be passionate about teaching EFL by immersing themselves in various English environments in the globalized 21<sup>st</sup> century such as watching online English TV dramas, movies, and TED Talks and reading online newspaper in English. Additionally, there are many English applications designed to run on smartphones and tablet computers providing a good learning English environment as well. By doing this, an ESL-like context is made to enhance Chinese EFL teachers' English proficiency.

Overall, there seems to be a need for further research regarding what strategies, techniques, and assessments can be aligned with the eclectic approach to teaching EFL in China in order to maximize student learning and improve students' communicative competence. Whether or not to teach China English in the Chinese context is also researchable in the taxonomy of World Englishes.

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