Revolution, or not Revolution: That is the Question: Investigating the Pedagogies of 'Crazy English'

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Abstract 'Crazy English' (CE) is one of the most popular, radical, yet controversial English training programs in China. There has been a tension between CE advocates and the academics about whether CE can really help Chinese people learn English. However, for more than a decade, CE is clearly more than just a passing phenomenon. It seems that CE has become a 'subculture' in China [47]. If CE offers anything new or valuable, we just cannot afford to ignore it. Thus a qualitative study was undertaken to identify the espoused concepts of CE in terms of foreign language learning and to examine its pedagogical practices. The study was framed by the examination of major views of language and schools of thought of learning theories. Results of data analysis show that CE classroom activities are underpinned by a blend of theoretical approaches and practices.

Keywords Crazy English, Li Yang, Language, Learning

1. Introduction

With China's increasingly active involvement in the process of economic globalization and international cooperation, English teaching and learning in China has become a nationwide endeavour. All of a sudden, it seems that everyone wants to learn English, especially in big cities. To meet such huge demand for English learning, various private training centres have been set up to provide more educational accesses that were only available in universities. Among these private training centres, the commercial program 'Crazy English' (CE) is one of the most radical and most popular.

'Crazy English' (CE) appeared in early 1990s and was founded by Li Yang in response to "the tragedy of traditional teaching" in China based on his personal learning experience [29]. CE heavily focuses on practicing English orally. Among its radical teaching methods, a core feature is to 'shout': to shout out sentences repeatedly [55]. A typical scene of Li Yang's public lecture, reported by Huang [25], is to get his audience motivated, force their mouths open, thrust their arms into the air and repeat the sentences he uttered in English at the top of their lungs. His way of learning English looked different, or abnormal, or somewhat *crazy*, his method was thus called 'Crazy English' [42].

CE has attracted attention and aroused controversy at home and abroad [33]. On the one hand, it has been welcomed by the Chinese public and its learners, and is highly successful commercially. On the other hand, it has drawn constant antagonism from the Academy due to its "revolutionary" [28] teaching practices that use highly physical involvement, the extravagant claims it makes for learning outcomes, and an unabashed pursuit of commercial success. Despite this reprobation, CE is still flourishing after more than a decade. It has clearly shown itself to be more than a passing phenomenon, and instead has become "a subculture" in China [47].

Thus, CE can no longer be ignored. One objective for undertaking this study is to determine whether CE has, in fact, found a means to teach English to Chinese people. How revolutionary are the pedagogical principles underpinning its classroom activities? How might we look at CE? A few studies have been conducted [1, 2, 3, 5, 47, 15, 55], but none of them have seriously investigated CE's pedagogical principles over a period of time. It is therefore time to critically investigate CE, its pedagogy herein – to see how revolutionary its principles are.

2. Method of the Study

2.1. Data Collection

The selection of data in this study was inspired by its *purposive* nature, that is, to seek information. Data comprised the Guangzhou CE Centre, a class of 30 at the Beijing CE Centre, and six individual learners from the class.

2.1.1. Sites

The information sought in this study consists of the basic principles and practice of CE, which is located in CE centres. CE has some 44 centres scattered across China, all using the

same curriculum, pedagogies and textbooks. Only the centres in Guangzhou, Beijing, Shenzhen and Changsha, however, are directly run by the founder, Li Yang. The others operate as a franchised business. It was, therefore, decided to select centres from the latter group, as they were considered more likely to directly reflect the founder's vision and values, and thus fairly represent CE thought and practice.

Among the four directly-run CE centres, Guangzhou and Beijing were chosen as the sites for the study. CE was established in 1994 in Guangzhou, the capital of Guangdong Province, and its headquarters is still there. Beijing is the only large, modern, culturally developed base of CE other than Guangzhou, and the only base outside China's deep south. As well, the Beijing Li Yang Crazy English Centre (Beijing Centre for short) was the earliest branch to be established and so has the most experienced and on-going teaching staff. Beijing Centre offers a wide range of CE classes and they must compete with many other commercial English schools and programs available in the capital. For all these reasons, the Beijing Centre is clearly important and may be considered a solid representative of CE teaching.

The Guangzhou Centre houses the largest collection of documents concerning CE and hence it was here that documentary data were gathered. Interviews were also conducted with the CE Director and a teacher in Guangzhou, while data of class observation, and interviews with Li Yang, another two teachers and six learners, were collected at the Beijing Centre.

2.1.2. Class

Though CE does offer children's programs, the target group in this study is adult learners, because the project aims to explore the results of CE experience in relation to course on offer to adults in universities. On the CE program list, there are intensive week-long camps and one-to-one tailored programs available, but most teaching is carried out in one of three major program types: a six-month 'Professional English Training Program'; a two-month 'Adult Training Program' and an 'Adult Weekend Training Program'. The first type of course was both too long and, with 60-70 students per class, too big for the purposes of this study. The weekend courses were extremely short and intensive, allowing no time for researcher and participants to meet for interviews. The two-month course comprising 2 x 2-hour & 2 x 3-hour classes per week, with an enrolment of 30, however, seemed particularly suitable in all respects: the type of program, the size of class, the extent of time for an investigation of complexity in depth. Thus a two-month, beginning level adult CE training program with one teacher, one tutor and 30 learners at the Beijing Centre was selected to be the case.

Table 1. Lesson format

Phase	Focus	Teacher's activity	Students' activity
1. Warm-up (2 mins)	1.1 Greetings 1.2 Slogans	Greeting the students in general and individual students in particular. Leading the whole class to chant the class slogans while gesticulating.	Responding to the teacher's greeting and greeting each other. Standing in a circle chanting the class slogans together while gesticulating.
2. Review (15 mins)	2.1 Sentences 2.2 Short dialogues 2.3 Short passages	Going over the sentences/short dialogues and short passage learnt the previous time by asking learners to translate sentences between English and Chinese, or produce the sentences according to situational clues, and to recite the short passage together, or individually in front of the class.	Speaking aloud the sentences/short dialogues by translating, completing the missing part or producing their own sentences according to situational descriptions. Reciting the short passage together or individually in front of the class.
3. New lessons (90 mins)	3.1 Phonetics 3.2 Sentences 3.3 Short dialogues 3.4 Short passages	Pointing out the key features of the phonetic symbol and demonstrating how to pronounce it while gesticulating. Briefly explaining the grammar points, new words and expressions in the sentences upon request and reading the highlighted words and expressions and then the sentences. Asking learners to practice the sentences till learnt by heart and then to recite them. Using similar methods for short dialogues and varied methods for short passage. Asking learners to practice conversations in pairs and short passages, individually or in pairs. Providing individual coaching during practice.	Practicing the phonetic symbol while gesticulating. Reading after the teacher the highlighted words and expressions. Practicing the sentences to learn them by heart. Rehearsing the short dialogues in pairs and role-playing them in front of the class. Reading the short passage repeatedly and practicing reciting by themselves.
4. Recap (5 mins)		Summing up what was learnt in the session together with the learners. Assigning homework. Finishing the session by chanting a few sentences while gesticulating.	Responding to the teacher's questions. Recalling together with the teacher what had been learnt. Chanting a few sentences while gesticulating.

Note: This format was generally followed in all classes

2.1.3. Learners

As discussed above, CE is a complex method of learning English. To investigate such a complex phenomenon, data were gathered in multiple ways, using several instruments, undertaken in two stages. The first comprised document analysis and interviews with senior administrative and teaching staff at Guangzhou, the CE head office; the second, a two-month (10hrs/pw) case study of teacher-student experience throughout a typical adult program in Beijing, using survey, observation, interviews and reflective journals. This range was necessary to capture the complexity of the theories underpinning CE's classroom practices.

The program was taught by one principal teacher (Teresa), supplemented by a tutor, who helped by giving individual support during practice. The tutors varied from time to time and were mostly new staff under training. Each class group was required to have a slogan, chosen by the teacher from one of CE's catchphrases. The one for this group was *Don't be shy! Just try!*, which was written on one of the classroom walls.   Each class consisted of four phases: warm-up, revision, new lesson and recap, presented in Table 1 (see p.4). Most instruction was conducted in Chinese.

To obtain their bio-data and understandings of CE, a survey was conducted using a questionnaire. Responses were also used to select participants for the follow-up interviews. Twenty eight out of the thirty students agreed to participate in the research, which they started by completing the questionnaire. Learners varied in demographic features, educational qualifications and self-ascribed personal characteristics. Their English levels also varied greatly, from beginner to CET 6[1]

Six out of the twenty-eight learners were selected as subjects for close-up study. These six were selected as representative of the group in terms of their varied responses to the survey questions, their demographic features, participation, performance, learning outcomes, and their willingness to co-operate in the study. In a similar trajectory to the whole class, their responses and behaviours showed development throughout the program. The six learners examined closely were called Xu, Ao, Zhang, Xiao, Ji and Feng[2].

2.2. Reliability

A key criterion for the trustworthiness and further the quality of the study is reliability of the data collected. Although Lincoln and Guba [32] do propose two measures to enhance reliability of qualitative research: *peer debriefing* and *inquiry audit*, it was not quite feasible for this study, given the bilingual and cross-cultural nature of the appreciative repertoire needed to make any meaningful comment on the data. However, the need for scrutiny of data as they were being gathered and considered was recognized as essential to reliability, and to this end, the researcher made use of a variety of means to make these available to public scrutiny and comment, both in China and Australia

throughout the research process. The informal and formal means of doing this include (i) constant talking with other doctoral students at the Melbourne Graduate School of Education, about the methodology, the data and the framing of the study; (ii) formal presentations in the School to peers who included people familiar with China and others; (iii) presenting at conferences in China, to an audience made up of members of the Academy which had criticized CE; and (iv) submitting to an international publication some key findings from the project.

2.3. Data analysis

Data involved in this study consisted of CE publicity documents, newspaper articles, survey responses, field notes, transcribed interviews and journals. Analysis comprised of coding the data, both deductively using the general categories derived from the research questions and examination of key constructs, and inductively by identifying themes as they emerged from the data. Miles and Huberman's [37] three-stepped framework was adopted to analyse most data, including documents, field notes and reflective journals, and transcripts of interviews. The author started from sorting, discarding and organizing the data into different datasets and different kinds within each set, to allow for thorough analysis. As well, the author transcribed interviews, reviewed observation notes and reflective journals. After that, the reduced data were displayed in an organized, compressed way so that conclusions were more easily drawn. Data were organized using descriptive codes by attaching "words" and "phrases" to "chunks" of data. In this process, the author identified the emergent themes, which were topics that run through-out the data or recur with regularity. The process of identifying themes was guided by the goal of the study, that is, to identify the basic pedagogical principles of CE. The emergent themes were displayed in tables and figures so that conclusions could be more easily drawn. Responses to the small-scale survey were managed in a simple, but clear way. A profile of the learners was constructed using a matrix. Responses were sorted into ranges, with any interesting but complex ones marked. These provided the basis of selection of the six participants for the close study.

3. Results and Discussion

Integrating all sources of data, results of analyses revealed that CE's classroom practices are underpinned by a blend of traditional and modern pedagogical principles.

Classroom Practices

3.1. Traditional Practices Found in CE

About 60% of activities in the CE classroom are traditional language teaching and learning exercises, similar

to practices found in both GTM and ALM. The substantial use of bilingual translation between English and Chinese in CE texts and classroom activities is typically a traditional exercise found for centuries in the GTM. In CE, all texts are presented bilingually. In class, oral translation between English and Chinese at the sentence-level is conducted as one of the major methods and activities, particularly in the learning of short passages. It is also the most common way used to review sentences. Translation is sometimes also used in chanting slogans and recapping. Parts of lessons are also taught in Chinese.

There are, however, some differences between these practices when used in CE and as originally practiced in GTM. Unlike the latter, in CE there are fewer elaborations on grammar, unless requested by the learners, and there is no required memorization of vocabulary lists. Unlike students in the traditional GTM classroom, CE learners play an active role in various practices, though the nature of interaction is still mostly teacher-led. CE places great emphasis on spoken English rather than on accuracy of reading and writing, the usual focus of the GTM which resulted in little attention being paid to phonological features beyond segmental articulation. CE, by contrast, highlights this domain and a great deal of time is spent on it. Thus, in sum, the content of a number of CE practices are similar to GTM, but many have been modified to accommodate a goal of real-life spoken use, and an appreciation of the learner as active agent in the learning process.

CE's key beliefs about language and learning and most of its class activities are strikingly consistent with the principles of the ALM. For example, to achieve oral proficiency, a large amount of time is spent on imitation, repetition and recitation of texts. The teacher guides these activities, modelling and gesticulating like the conductor of an orchestra. Vocabulary is learned in example sentences given by the teacher, or in translating between English and Chinese. Learners are actively involved in these practices. These activities are consistent with the mimicry drills and pattern practices of the audio-lingual methodology.

Nevertheless, there are some dissimilarity in the practices of CE and ALM. Most significant of these is in the text types used in the two approaches. In CE, texts include sentences, dialogues and passages, while in ALM material is always presented in dialogue form. In CE, Chinese is used for both instruction and organization of class activities, along with the occasional use of half Chinese and half English. By contrast, very little use of the mother tongue by teachers is permitted in ALM.

3.2. Modern Practices in CE

Modern pedagogical practices are also found in the CE class. Some of these practices embrace CLT approaches, and some involve innovative practices.

3.2.1. CLT practices

In addition to the traditional approaches discussed above, some CLT principles and practices were identified in CE's pedagogy and activities. CE and CLT share the same primary goal: to cultivate the learners' communicative competence. A hallmark of CLT is its learner-centeredness, which is also reflected in CE to some extent. Firstly, for example, most of the learners in the CE program observed had taken it up in order to improve their pronunciation and spoken English, and they were actively involved in the various exercises provided to achieve this. At the end of the program, the learners believed that CE had largely met their needs. Secondly, following their request, the usual texts were supplemented by longer ones. Supporters of CLT suggest that errors are a natural and valuable part of the language learning process [e.g. 16], and, thirdly, CE echoes this principle by encouraging learners to speak out at the cost of *losing face* and *making mistakes*, despite also placing emphasis on accuracy.

Unlike traditional approaches, CLT emphasizes fluency and accuracy, and includes work on both segmental and suprasegmental features of language. Seidlhofer [46] proposes that "[in CLT], pronunciation is a means of negotiating meanings in discourse, embedded in specific socio-cultural and interpersonal contexts" (p.12). Likewise, pronunciation instruction and practice in CE include mastery of stress, intonation and rhythm, as well as of individual sounds. CE's emphasis on the role of pronunciation in successful communication reflects the same communicative view. In practice, some oral class activities in CE also reflect characteristics of CLT teaching and learning. For example, many activities are conducted using pair work; dialogues are role-played in front of the class; a variety of game-like activities are used to facilitate learning. Interview data revealed that the learners were enthusiastic about these activities and games and believed that they had made progress from taking part in them.

Contextualization is a basic premise in CLT [11], and thus, the learning of words and dialogues centres on communicative functions. Similarly, Li Yang claims that to learn a language is to learn how to use it in real-life communication. In the CE class, it was observed that many single sentences were learned in context. The student Feng said that she had developed a habit to think *when* and *how* to use the sentence whenever she was learning a new one. In the CE textbooks, there is often some additional commentary on the usage of certain words and phrases as part of the lessons, which link book language to real-life use. This realizes Munby's suggestion that learners' communicative awareness should be aroused by asking "[w]ho is communicating with whom, why, where, when, how, at what level, about what, and in what way?" [39].

The extensive data on CE's provision of context and overt drawing of learners' attention to it and its communicative significance contradict the claim made by Woodward [53] that CE only teaches single words and sentences "without giving any context" (p.21). Woodward does note that when learning the expression, *The very idea!*, a note from a native-speaker teacher is attached to illustrate the usefulness

of the phrase: *A wonderful way to express indignation.* Similarly, *Don't talk to me like that!* is explained in dialogue form: A: *You're fat and ugly and I hate you.* B: *Don't talk to me like that!* (p.24). However, it is true that CE does not contextualize every sentence taught.

The above characteristics of CE match those of CLT, but other key aspects of CLT are missing in CE's pedagogy. Firstly, the introduction of authentic texts into the learning situation is central to CLT [40]. In CE, all texts were written or edited by Li Yang himself, except the limited notes given by the native-speaker teachers and a couple of demonstrators on the CDs. Speakers in short dialogues are marked as A and B, instead of being given real names, although the longer supplementary dialogues used later do include real names. Among other aspects of CE to note, the teacher is a non-native speaker. Thus, compared to a CLT classroom, language use or communication in CE is often still distant from authentic. Secondly, in CE class, little attention is given to the rules of grammar. From its inception [e.g. 16], the proposal that in a communicative classroom, someone competent in English should demonstrate the rules of grammar and their use, has been present. Thirdly, CLT advocates developing activities that integrate listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, and as used in China, translating skills as well. The focus of CE classroom practices, however, is almost exclusively on speaking and translating, and occasionally listening skills. Fourthly, in the communicative classroom, students ultimately have to use the language in their world outside the classroom even while taking the course, while most CE learners still rest on rehearsed responses.

In the program studied, there were two exceptions to this, two students who effectively applied what they had practiced in class in novel settings while still on course. On his trip to Japan, Zhang fully tested his communicative competence in English. Although he sometimes was not as fluent as he aimed to be, he found he could get his meaning across, and won praise from his senior colleague for managing their travel. Likewise, while Xiao's "blurt-out" about parking could be understood as an automatic response due to drills practiced in class, the incident entailed *negotiating meaning appropriately and spontaneously with a foreigner in a real-life context* outside the classroom. This was certainly communicative.

3.2.2 Innovative practices

Beyond common modern activities of CLT, there is also one innovative practice used extensively in the CE classroom: the hand gestures to assist articulate. This is very much in line with emerging contemporary approaches to L2 learning in western countries. Although the use of hand gestures in CE as explained is the result of the personal intuition of Li Yang, it does have strong theoretical support in general pedagogy [e.g. 17-18], and in language pedagogy in particular [e.g. 20, 48].

The relationship between gesture and learning has been drawing increasing attention. Studies by researchers in psychology, neurology, linguistics and education show that gestures generally function in two ways in learning. First, learners gesture naturally to coordinate their attempts at mastery and to indicate their cognitive state during learning [21-22, 36]. Secondly, gestures have been used deliberately in language learning to facilitate mastery [e.g. 41, 35].

Just as in CE, these remedial gestures have been used, in particular, to effect change in pronunciation and rhythm. One of the earliest practices involving gestures was the verbo-tonal approach developed by Guberina [20], in which techniques to modulate the frequency of oral language included learners walking, tapping and humming the rhythm of what they will say. Others have included Chan [7], who proposed the use of basic hand gestures in teaching pronunciation – to show syllables, indicate stress, illustrate linking and intonation; Larsen-Freeman [27], who observed that gestures are effective in teaching and correcting pronunciations. Chela Flores [8-9] also found that gestures enable learners develop an awareness of rhythm, and particularly help fossilized learners develop more acceptable rhythm patterns. Orton et al. [41] targeted synchrony of voice and movement as the means to develop L2 rhythm and intonation.

Data gathered in this study show that hand gestures and rhythm training are both used in the CE program. In fact, in CE each sound is assigned a corresponding gesture which shows where in the mouth it is produced, and mirrors the contour of the sound as it is expressed. It is a technique very similar to Guberina's improvised gestures which match the tension, voice contour, and length of the target sound or phrase. Similar to the contemporary Canadian and European approaches to language teaching and learning [48, 35], gestures and vocalic expression are used in the CE class to combine utterances. However, CE does not use the gesture-based approach exclusively and does not insert a gesture for every word as Maxwell does, but only on stressed syllables.

The systematic use of gestures to accompany and guide phonological accuracy is one innovative, contemporary practice in CE that has not been appreciated by its critics. It challenges the judgment Gao [15] made that CE is not much different from the outdated audio-lingual method, and also challenges the Academy's overall judgment that CE does not offer anything new, that it is just "old wine in a new bottle" [31].

The nature of Language and Learning

3.3. The nature of language

Pedagogical practice reflects perspectives on the nature of language and language learning. The pedagogical practice of CE manifests aspects of four different views of language: the traditional formal view, the structural, the socio-functional and the intercultural view.

CE's classroom activities include some basics of the GTM approach to language learning, in particular, bilingual

translation. One of the goals of CE is to enable learners to develop automatic oral translation proficiency: to become an "all-round translating machine" as Li Yang has been called. Like the GTM, CE thus acknowledges the formal system of language and considers mastery of the decontextualized utterances to constitute one part of mastery of the language.

In addition, the heavy use of activities in CE classrooms which appear also in the ALM approach, shows a strong reliance on a structural conceptualization of language. Thus, CE learners are led to repeat deconstructed morphemes, words and phrases, before finally forming them into sentences. The heuristic approach to translating Chinese into English is congruent with the contrastive way of thinking of structural linguistics; and the significance of phonological units is also typical of structuralist belief.

In addition to these, CE's communicative practices reflect the functional view of language as communication. In CE, language is regarded as a tool for communication, an instrument of social interaction. This is a view of language which reflects Halliday's [23-24] social theory of language, in which a text cannot be understood without knowing the situational context in which it is embedded.

The communicative approach understands language learning as an interactive process and incorporates culture as an important part of communicative competence, including the interaction and culture of the classroom. Although Li Yang maintains that English in China is learned just as a tool, he still claims that language embodies culture and thus language learning also involves cultural learning. He proposes that foreign language education in China should provide four orientations, one of which is orientation towards intercultural communication. He even suggests the Academy should make more efforts in cultivating learner's intercultural awareness and competence. Despite these averrals, throughout the 10-week class observation, limited evidence was found relating to developing learners' intercultural competence.

3.2. The Nature of Learning

In relation to the nature of learning, the findings showed that there are several different views of learning underpinning CE's classroom activities. The major tenets of CE learning are: (i) Language learning is physical labour rather than mental work; (ii) language learning is skill training, like learning to swim or to play the piano; (iii) teachers are the trainers or coaches and learners are active participants. (iv) learners' motivation is crucial for successful learning; (v) learning is both a painstaking and a joyful experience; (vi) adult learners are different from child learners; (vii) appropriate seating can facilitate and enhance learning; (viii) the 3-ly training technique is an essential for effective language learning. These views of learning rest on a blend of learning theories which will be discussed in detail below.

Li Yang believes that language learning is a matter of physical labour rather than mental work and that language can only be learned through intensive imitation, repetition and recitation. This is consonant with the behaviourist view that learning is a process of habit formation and over-learning. Mimicry, memorization of set phrases, and repetitive drills are the primary teaching techniques, which are justified by the Skinnerian concept of conditioning [43]. Likewise, CE's blurt-out is similar to the behaviourist concept of internalization. As Teresa explained, "[i]f it is repeated enough, it will develop into a pattern of thinking and become part of your own. Then it will respond automatically when needed". This falls exactly into the behaviourist paradigm that with sufficient practice, the language structure will be internalized and come automatically [14].

The practice of error correction and positive feedback in the CE class also echoes the behaviourist tradition. In the CE classroom, whenever a sound was mispronounced, the teacher would correct it again and again until the learner got it right. Praise and encouragement in verbal and nonverbal forms were provided to help learners with the experience of success.

The ultimate aim of CE is to blurt out English. It refers to "the kind of naturalness or sub-consciousness produced in speaking English in lifelike communications, as if without thinking" [30]. Blurt out is the result of having achieved automatic Chinese-English translation. While the idea of blurt-out fits with the behaviourist paradigm, the evidence from contemporary neuroscience suggests that this is achieved through automatic Chinese-English translation is not correct. At the level of competence in question, the second language of a bilingual is able to be invoked directly through perception, without being first processed in the mother tongue. Even in the early stages, using L2 involves *effortful* processing of information, although it may proceed rapidly and efficiently when speech has been highly practiced [19].

Although Li Yang claims that language learning is physical work, in practice CE activities also reflect learning as skill training, a stance which mirrors cognitive theory to some extent. CE's creative use of hand gestures to facilitate pronunciation is also consistent with Fraser's [13] suggestion of using visual representations as well as verbal explanations in learning. And, indeed, Feng said she repeated and gesticulated in order to *compare* some sounds, and Zhang stated that he repeated with gestures in order to *figure out* whether gestures worked on him. Hence even the most evidently physical CE practices involve some thinking, or cognition, on the part of the learners.

However, it should be noted that CE's view of language as skill is only a partial consonant with cognitivist ideas. According to Li Yang, language use is a matter of skill, not knowledge; language learning is physical labour, not mental work, or as he later revised the view, as 90% physical work and 10% mental work; and language learning depends upon how many times one opens one's mouth to practice speaking to develop automaticity. The CE view is quite evidently more behaviourist-based than cognitive-based.

In addition to the above, two features in the CE classroom indicate constructivist thinking. The first one is related to the teacher-learner roles. Rather than being the "transmitter of knowledge", teachers in the CE classroom are "trainers", or "coaches" involved in guiding and facilitating various activities, while learners are highly involved in these activities. The second feature involves the concepts of scaffolding and peer practice which are supported by a range of key philosophers and their social constructivist views [38, 52, 50]. These authors see the conceptualization of knowledge as a social artefact that is maintained through a community of peers. Data from observation and teacher-learner interviews, in particular with learners Zhang, Xiao and Feng, show that CE values peer-to-peer work, not just teacher-learner interactions. As Vygotsky determined, social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition. The scaffolding and peer practice that CE provides fit into the constructivist view that the support of learning from peers in a 'community of practice', provides opportunity for the novice practitioner to reflect upon propositional knowledge.

The deep concern about learners' affect and motivation in CE is strongly in agreement with the humanistic theory about the well-being of the learner as Maslow [34] and Rogers [44] propose. Li Yang claims that CE aims at "education rather than simply the teaching of English". By education, he means "cultivating learners into whole persons". He argues that sometimes motivation is more important than knowledge. There are echoes here of Rogers' statement that learning involves cognition and feelings. The results also show that learners benefited from the supportive and relaxed class atmosphere, and their self-confidence increased. This is in harmony with Maslow's belief of establishing a secure environment to help learners build up self-respect and achieve their potential.

Rogers [45] offers some practical micro strategies to cater for learners' affective side. First, an arousal of interest through an intensely involving first few minutes, in which everyone in the group takes part, including the teacher, and is fun is an essential (p.33). Secondly, praising is important as "it makes us feel secure and confident" and thus helps to form positive learning cycle (p.39). Thirdly, enhancing group dynamics among learners and between teacher and learners is important. Fourthly, make sure the room arrangement is appropriate and comfortable. Finally, it is important to carefully design the first session as "it is in this first session that vital first impressions are formed and motivation built on or crushed" (p.92). And a better tactic to make the best use of the first few minutes is for the teacher "to arrive in plenty of time" (p.97), greeting learners warmly, asking their names and introducing themselves. Learning their names is another way to impress them. Most of all, CE's major concern about learners' affect, and the positive and encouraging environment, are aimed at making a CE program a happy learning experience.

Although Li Yang claims that CE is an unorthodox, revolutionary method of learning English, when it comes down to its actual practice, many of its beliefs and exercises rely on the traditional learning style of Chinese culture. In particular, CE relies very heavily on imitation, repetition and recitation. Li approves of the saying from Chinese ancestors that "when a book is read for a hundred times, its meaning will appear automatically". In class, learners are encouraged to practice speaking a sentence or dialogue repeatedly until they can recite it. Such practices are similar to the traditional memorization of texts in antiquity found in the *Four Books* and *Five Classics*.

As well, CE's paradoxical belief that learning is both pain and joy resonates well with the Confucian view. Li Yang defines CE as "the extreme diligence" and learning English as "a painful process", but on the other hand, he promotes happy learning, claiming "learning English is interesting" and "I enjoy learning English". For Confucianists also, learning requires painstaking effort which is driven by self-determination, will power, perseverance and patience [4, 49]. Based on the view of effortful learning, memorizing is a widely adopted practice, yet at the same time, Confucius was enthusiastic about learning, saying in the opening sentence of his *Analects*: "[i]sn't it pleasant to learn with a constant perseverance and application?" (I.1). In this respect, Li Yang is a clear follower of the Confucian tradition.

Finally, like the use of hand gestures discussed earlier, another two practices of CE actually suggested a sound knowledge of learning: the seating arrangement and the 3-ly method. Although the CE classroom may look normal to Western eyes, its U-shaped seating arrangement is in contrast to the rows of fixed seats in most academic institutions in China. Observation data show that this seating arrangement makes it easier for learners to move around practicing, and thus facilitates learning, activities not typical of traditional Chinese classrooms, or even contemporary ones.

It has been argued that the appropriate arrangement of seats can facilitate and enhance learning, while traditional fixed seating style restricts the nature of communicative possibilities for each student [16, 51]. Likewise, similar voices were heard from practitioners. In his pilot study on the Vygotskian notion of the zone of proximal development, McCafferty [36] places great emphasis on the importance of the 'V' shape seat arrangement in helping to create spaces which lead to the co-construction of learners' identities in transforming themselves into natural performance. As observed, compared to the traditional style in academic institutions, the U-shaped seating arrangement in the CE class made it easier, more natural, and more convenient for learners to work in pairs and move around, gesticulating, repeating and reciting.

The second intuitive understanding of learning concerns the 3-ly method. Based on his own learning experience, Li Yang believes that good English can only be learned through practice and the most effective way to practice is the 3-ly method. Data analyses revealed different results for the 3-ly method. Interviews with learners showed that they all approved of practicing speaking as clearly as possible in

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order to achieve *accuracy*. Although they also enjoyed practicing speaking as loudly as possible, academics have been antagonistic to such a "hysterical" learning style [54]. They maintain that this practice is unscientific and may do harm to learners. Yin, however, does admit that shouting can enhance memory, although he does not elaborate. Otherwise, sparse literature had been found as to whether or not speaking as loudly as possible is effective in learning a foreign language. The result of data analyses showed a conflict about practicing speaking as quickly as possible. On the one hand, it contradicts Fraser's conclusion that the quicker you say a sentence, the more fluent you will sound is not true [12]. On the other hand, it conforms to Cook's [10] finding that memory span is restricted by the speed of articulation. In particular, CE's training to speak as quickly as possible fits well with Cook's suggestion that training students to speak swiftly and accurately can help enhance memory, as well as their general ability to process language. Learners also reported its effectiveness from their own experience. Li Yang claims that he borrowed the idea from athletes' extra-intensity training. The author finds a resemblance to the practice of 'tongue twisters' used in the training of traditional Chinese 'cross talk' performers to attain fluency.

The study found that CE pedagogical practices for English learning comprise an eclectic set of traditional, modern and innovative methods drawn from China and abroad, which are promoted without reference to theories or scholarship, and used without being subjected to formal testing and evaluation. Their employment stems from Li Yang's largely intuitive sense of what is useful, combined with methods he has found empirically effective in turning his own failure at English into success, and are continued as their value is supported by CE teachers' and learners' own experience with them. There are tensions if not actual contradictions between some of the fundamental positions adopted, especially concerning the nature of language and learning. Nonetheless, staff and students all believe CE leads them to make progress, and there was some experiential and observation evidence to suggest this was true for those studied.

Although CE employs a great many practices which would be quite familiar to those teaching university classes, there are several aspects in CE that would be new to academic classes and that may be worth academic teachers noticing, thinking about, attending to in some way, or even copying. CE learning involves high frequency of practicing language skills used in real-life context. This is an emphasis that today's university students could also benefit from. In achieving this, the use of hand gestures in teaching pronunciation is of particular benefit.

As CE learners spend a lot of time on English, it is hardly surprising if they improve. But at the same time, there is very evident care taken to ensure that the content provided is focused on what they want to learn, and that learning is scaffolded over a lesson and across a course. The practices include individual, pair and group work, teacher-learner and learner-learner interactions, all of which are known to be sound. These areas also may offer something useful for the design of academic classes.

At the same time, it is also evident that the Academy could offer CE some theorizing of its practice to lift them off a basis of pure intuition, and of the intuition of only one man at that.

4. Implication

The findings of this study suggest that CE's classroom practices are underpinned by a blend of traditional and modern pedagogical principles. Its practices are a combination of old and new, and as a result, its Founder Li Yang's claim that CE is a revolution in learning English is not completely true albeit some innovative and intuitive activities. Such a claim may be more of a concern of publicity.

The findings of this study will evidently be significant to the EFL community in China. First, this significance can be established within the Academy. The project's results will provide accurate, first-hand critically appraised information about CE's practices and outcomes, which is essential for any rational debate within the Academy about the value of CE. Secondly, it is important for EFL teachers and learners. Factors revealed will carry some practical implications for both EFL teachers and learners, enabling them to benefit from some effective and innovative methods that can complement their existing repertoire and thus improve learning. Thirdly, the results can also be significant to education policy makers. It is anticipated that some CE values, concepts and practices will inspire the development and reform of ELT in China.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, while many activities in the CE class continue traditional practices, others are grounded in modern and contemporary approaches. The emphasis on cultivating the learner's ability in using language in real-life contexts, the focus on both fluency and accuracy of speech, and the attempt to satisfy learner's needs, are congruent with a CLT approach. Significantly, the frequent and systematic use of gesturing is cutting-edge in practical repertoire, and its value is supported by a solid body of recent research. However, it appears that gesture use in CE owes its inclusion not to these studies, but rather to the intuition of its Founder. The activities in a CE class are thus an evidently compatible blend of traditional, modern and contemporary practices used in foreign language teaching and learning. It is evident that CE is not completely revolutionary in English learning as its Founder claims, who coined it likely to attract attention or for publicity's sake.

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Notes

1. A national EFL test to examine the English proficiency of non-English major postgraduates in China.

2. For the sake of confidentiality, names of students have changed