

Bridging the Gap Between Teaching Styles and Learning Styles: A Cross-cultural Perspective

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This paper investigates the nature of the mismatch caused by culture-based differences in perceptions and expectations of L2 teaching and learning style preferences between Irish English teachers and Chinese students in the learning setting. A survey was conducted which included questionnaire, interview and class observation at two language institutes in Dublin, Ireland. The findings suggest the mutual awareness of the 'cultures of learning' be required. It is mutual responsibility to gain intercultural understanding so as to ensure effective teaching and learning outcome. Teachers ought to develop awareness of their learners' culture of learning including their needs, wants, capacities, potentials and learning style preferences to meet learners' expectations and to foster their guided style-stretching. In the meantime, Chinese students also need to learn to develop sense of cultural sensitivity to reflect their own learning styles and strategy use to gradually adapt to the Irish school culture. Finally appropriate bridging strategies are recommended to native English-speaker teachers who are engaged in teaching Chinese ESL learners in their home institutions.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past seven years, the number of Chinese students going to Ireland to either learn English or to enter third-level education has risen to over 40,000. As far as Chinese students are concerned, most of them are high-

school leavers with no prior overseas learning experience. Different teaching approaches in Chinese and western cultures have created difficulties in classrooms for Chinese students in Ireland. Irish English teachers take a communicative approach and speaking is considered to be a vital aspect of language acquisition. Students are encouraged to speak and engage in discussions and debates with teacher and their peers. However, this may cause problems for Chinese students because Chinese 'collectivist' culture can sometimes cause a mismatch between western teachers' teaching styles and Chinese students' learning styles in the face of western 'individualist' approach to teaching and learning. To reduce teacher-student style conflicts, some researchers in ESL/EFL profession advocate teaching and learning styles should be matched (Kumaravadivelu, 1991; Oxford *et al.*, 1991; Smith & Renzulli, 1984).

As will be evident below, many of the problems facing both Chinese students and Irish teachers in a culturally diverse classroom can be traceable to the cultural differences. Hofstede (1986) states that interactions between teachers and learners from different cultures are fundamentally problematic and cross-cultural misunderstandings often occur because classroom interaction is an archetypal human phenomenon which is deeply rooted in the culture of a society (p. 303). Therefore it is necessary for educators and practitioners to call upon cross-cultural awareness, appropriate pedagogical practice and intercultural communication skills to support the learning process.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Researchers have published works about the ways in which culture influences thought and behavior (e.g. Gudykunst, 1994; Hofstede, 1986, 1991; Samovar & Porter, 1995). They have made available a wide range of perspectives for conceptualizing the influences of different cultures on thinking and behaving. Three perspectives are of special potential relevance to L2 / FL teaching: i.e. the distinction between individualism and collectivism;

different perceptions of power and authority; and different types of achievement motivation (Littlewood, 2001). An individualist orientation encourages individuals to believe in their own unique identity; they are more likely to claim the right to express themselves, make personal choice and strive for self-actualization. A collectivist orientation encourages individuals to see themselves as an inseparable part of the in-group; they expect and are expected to accord first priority to the views, needs and goals of the group rather than 'stand out' as an individual. Many comparative studies of attitudes and values report that people in East Asian countries have emerged as showing a much stronger collectivist orientation (Littlewood, 1999, p. 79), in which inequalities of authority and power are accepted as normal facts of life. In more individualist cultures, although differences of power exist in reality, there is a widely accepted ethos which emphasizes that they should in some way be minimized and their effects reduced. It is usually claimed that differences in power and authority are accepted most readily in more collectivist cultures. Two kinds of achievement motivation are often referred to. One kind is individually-oriented (success will satisfy personal goals and bring about individual self-fulfillment). The other kind is socially-oriented (success will bring prestige or other benefits to others within the ingroup). A more collectivist orientation is associated with a higher degree of socially-oriented motivation (Yu, 1996; Yu & Yang, 1994).

Concerning classroom behaviors, it is not uncommon to find literature reviews which report that Asian students are passive learners and just recipient of knowledge from the teachers. Asian students are expected to show 'total obedience or submission to their teachers', to be 'passive receivers of knowledge', 'they are not active in participating in tutorials and group discussions, and therefore to offer 'little input to the class' (Bradley & Bradley, 1984; Liu, 1998; Maley, 1984; Song, 1995). Therefore, 'effectiveness of learning depends on excellence of teacher in class' (Hofstede, 1986, p. 313). Many Asian students, according to Sue and Kirk (1972), are less autonomous, more dependent on authority figures and more obedient and conforming to rules and deadlines (cited in Rao, 2001). 'Asians go to great lengths to

preserve not only their own face but everyone else's face' (Samovar & Porter, 1995, p. 230). Generalizations like these are so widespread that they tend to become stereotypes (Littlewood, 2001). However, some EFL/ESL researchers hold different views (Cheng, 2000; Littlewood, 2001; Xiao, 2005). Littlewood (2001) conducted a large-scale survey of students' attitudes towards classroom English learning in eight East Asian countries and three European countries. He found that most students in all countries question the traditional authority-based transmission mode of learning. All students wish to participate actively in exploring knowledge and have positive attitudes towards working purposefully in groups, towards common goals. His findings serve to allow us to question some commonly held assumptions about the attitudes of Asian students. Cheng (2000) in his study argues that if Asian students are found in [English] class to be quieter than expected in certain circumstances, the causes are situation specific rather than culturally pre-set (p. 435). For example, the possible causes might lie in the teaching methodologies used by the teacher or the lack of required target language proficiency on learners' part. Some other studies support the similar assumptions (Xiao, 2005).

PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

To date, there is a lack of systematic and empirical research that may enable the voices of Chinese ESL students in Ireland to be heard and heeded. This research investigates the mismatch caused by culture-based differences in perceptions and attitudes towards different language teaching and learning styles in classroom-based setting. It intends to identify student concerns and to provide some insights into how Chinese students have experienced learning and how they have perceived communicative approach at their language institutes in Ireland. The Chinese language students' views, perceptions and comments, no matter how subjective and critical they might sound, will enable western teachers to identify the gap between their

espoused teaching principles and Chinese students' interpretation of them, as well as students' perceptions of their learning experience, to help western teachers critically reflect upon their teaching practices (Li, 2004). Also dealt with in this study are bridging strategies which can help western teachers to adjust their teaching styles to the needs of their Chinese students. This is particularly important for language institutes that may have up to 60% - 80% Chinese nationality students (Doyle, 2002).

THE STUDY: DETAILS OF SUBJECTS

Permission was obtained from two foreign language institutes in Ireland, one private college and the other affiliated to a university, both of which had a relatively large number of Chinese students learning English at various levels. The student attendance was reported to be much better than in other language schools. Chinese students were randomly selected to answer the questionnaire. Forty eight questionnaires were distributed and thirty four were collected. Almost all the respondents were high-school leavers in their early twenties, and had been in Ireland for periods of time varying from six to twelve months. Eight Chinese students took part in the follow-up semi-structured interviews, which was designed to elicit more detailed information left unsaid in the questionnaire.

METHODOLOGY

This study mainly used questionnaires to collect information from Chinese students learning English in Ireland. In addition, interviews and classroom observations were also conducted to supplement and triangulate the quantitative data collected from the Chinese students. The questionnaire consisted of 41 questions written in Chinese and a 5-point *Likert* scale was used. For example, each student was asked to indicate the extent of their

agreement or disagreement with statements: 5. strongly agree; 4. agree; 3. neutral; 2. disagree; 1. strongly disagree. The questionnaire items were grouped into the following categories that were designed to elicit students' attitudes towards:

- a) speaking out in English class
- b) communicative approach and traditional teacher-centered approach
- c) teacher authority in class
- d) motivation to learn English in Ireland
- e) use of language learning strategies practiced by Chinese students
- f) a mono-cultural class (consisting of only Chinese students) or multi-cultural class (consisting of students from different cultural backgrounds).

DATA INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS

Students' Attitudes Towards Group-work and Speaking out in Class

The data from this study more or less reflect Chinese students' perceptions of their learning experiences in Ireland. Regarding group-work in class including group discussion, role-play, and language game (see Appendix Items 1, 2, 7 and 8), the findings generally reveal that Chinese students showed mixed attitudes towards group-work in English class and about 50% students under study wanted to be active in group-work (see Appendix Item 2).

Concerning voicing one's own opinions or asking questions in class, it is interesting to note that even though many students indicate that they like to be active rather than passive or reticent L2 learners in class (see Appendix Items 2 and 11), most of them took little initiative to ask or raise questions in English class (see Appendix Item 36). Judging from this perspective, their apparent reticence in class as revealed in the follow-up classroom observations conducted by the author of this survey, seems to be more related to their limited linguistic proficiency, instructional practice, textbooks and topics than to the cultural traits as described above in the section of literature

review. The possible causes may be that the topics chosen for the group work in class are either beyond scope of their common cultural background or unconnected with their lives in Ireland or in China. During the interviews, some students complained that the content of textbooks was not interesting to them and nor closely related to their needs. This problem could be exacerbated if their linguistic proficiency was not good enough to express themselves freely.

When asked if they would like to outperform their peers or maintain harmony in group work, students' responses reveal they were more concerned about group harmony in class, and tended to avoid 'showing off' (see Appendix Items 7 and 8). The findings indicated that more students seemed to feel comfortable speaking English in a smaller group as they viewed a smaller group as a more protective environment than speaking in front of the whole class (see Appendix Items 2 and 12). Linking these items together, we can find that the majority of students were concerned with maintaining group harmony although some of them seemed to be more active than others in group-work. This finding supports some other studies of Chinese students' behaviors which reveal collective-oriented national cultural traits in the classroom (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Littlewood, 2001).

The findings also show that students often thought carefully before speaking English in class (see Appendix Item 19). This indicates that students surveyed tended to focus more on accuracy than on fluency as this would help them avoid making mistakes or experiencing loss of 'face' (see Appendix Items 12 and 36). The implication of this finding is that teachers should give students enough time to think actively before they speak while also encouraging quick and impromptu replies from the students. In Chinese culture, being active in class does not necessarily mean getting *physically* involved in the classroom activities. Being mentally active also means being co-operative with the teacher and actively listening to the teacher (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996). Students seemed to be more concerned about their own linguistic accuracy or fearful of losing 'face'. As a result, they might turn out to speak little in English class. This goes against communicative English language

teaching principles adopted by Irish English language teachers, which emphasizes fluency over accuracy and focuses on students' involvement in classroom activities. The implication of this finding for teachers is that they should be aware of the fact that teachers need to create a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere to reduce their anxiety in speaking English in English class.

Students' Attitudes Towards Communicative Approach

The findings also reveal that while Chinese students in general held mixed attitudes towards communicative approach (see Appendix Items 4 and 11), it seems that they still recalled the strengths inherent in teacher-centeredness in which they could learn much more linguistic input from teachers in class (see Appendix Item 3). Their interview accounts supported this assumption. They claimed that adequate attention should be paid to both meanings and linguistic forms so as to meet their needs to pass TOEFL or IELTS, which is required for enrolment of international students into a tertiary institution in Ireland. Moreover, classroom materials and the topics for group discussion should be carefully selected to stimulate Chinese students' interest and help them to express themselves freely without feeling embarrassed when they make a mistake (see Appendix Item 4).

When they were asked to comment on their Irish English language teachers' teaching styles, a large number of Chinese students expressed their strong desires that Irish teachers should prepare their lessons and teach in a more coherent, systematic, and structured way (see Appendix Item 6). The Chinese students expected to be provided with a detailed systematic plan pertaining to the course provision and delivery to enhance mutual understanding between teachers and students. With regard to the confidence to improve their English to a desired level within one or two years in Ireland, it seems that most students were not very optimistic (see Appendix Item 5). They felt that they had made some but not much progress in their language skills.

The findings also reveal that different students held different views about communicative teaching methods as well as their learning experience in

Ireland. Some interview accounts given by Chinese students reveal that some students did not seem to enjoy very much their study at the schools nor could they fully recognize the pedagogical value inherent in communicative approach. The reasons are multifaceted. For instance, they thought that teachers seemed to spend too much time involving students in group discussions and games. Some students found such a teaching approach time-consuming and hardly effective since students would receive very limited authentic linguistic input in class. Some students argued that group-work was organized for very good students only.

Another reason is related to Chinese students' own perceptions of learning and teaching. A closer look at their interview accounts indicates that students were not accustomed to communicative approach, which was deemed incompatible with their own conceptualization of what constitutes good learning and good teaching. The teaching methods used by Irish English teachers contrasted sharply to those in China where 'the transmission style of teaching is still popular' (Liu & Littlewood, 1997). Therefore, it is not surprising that students felt their learning needs and expectations were not fulfilled. While recognizing the good points of group-work and participation, some students still pointed out that group activities were over-emphasized at the sacrifice of linguistic forms and structure. In addition, students, during the interviews, emphasized that some topics for interactive activities were uninteresting, beyond the scope of their intuitive knowledge and incongruent with their cultural background. Even if they knew that the teacher's purpose was to encourage them to speak, they often found that they had little to talk about in such a circumstance.

Students' Attitudes Towards Teacher Authority in Class

With regard to teacher authority, the findings indicate that students did not rate teacher authority very highly in class (see Appendix Items 9 and 15). The results apparently seem to be incongruent with the reports in earlier studies which claim that teachers are perceived as a 'fount of knowledge' from

whom the knowledge is transmitted to students, and Asian students including Chinese learners are 'passive receivers of knowledge' as mentioned above.

The findings seem to indicate that a change in concepts of learning has been taking place, especially among those young people who have been physically exposed to the western culture via frequent personal communication, TV, films and so on. This change will, at least in principle, have an impact on their English language learning and classroom behaviors. Further examination in this survey reveals that Chinese students thought that respect for teachers was a very basic thing they should do in class. However, the students emphasized that only competent and considerate teachers would deserve a heart-felt respect whereas those teachers who poorly prepared their teaching and showed little pastoral care to students would not receive the real respect from the students. This indicates that while teacher authority is important to students, it also has to be *won*, not taken as *given*. This is similar to the Chinese equivalent of the English word respect (*Zun Jing*). Each of these two Chinese words has a separate meaning although, used in combination, they equate to respect in English. *Zun* means showing respect in action (body language or facial expressions), but this is at surface level. The real respect derives from *Jing* which means a kind of admiration from the bottom of one's heart. Therefore we can say that the justification of real respect is based on good quality of teaching performance and teacher's consideration of students rather than a perceived unequal relationship between teachers and students in class (Xiao, 2006).

Students' Motivation

When it comes to motivation, it seems that students are motivated by the sense of obligations to the family and to themselves (see Appendix Item 10). This finding supports the assumptions made in earlier studies. Littlewood (2001) describes Chinese college students in Hong Kong as having a typical social achievement motivation, characterized in a collectivist-oriented culture, that is, they are motivated to succeed because success would bring prestige

and other benefits to their families. In China, it is a virtue to involve the value and interest of family with what one is pursuing.

Students' Attitudes Towards Practice of Language Learning Strategy (LLS)

The findings show that the students in this study were not conscious users of meta-cognitive LLS, such as monitoring, planning, arranging and self-evaluating their own learning process, nor did they have a self-study plan to improve their language skills (see Appendix Items 20, 21, 22 and 23). The students claimed that this was related to their learning styles which had been shaped by the way they learned English at high schools in China where learning English meant little more than acquiring a thorough knowledge of grammatical rules and vocabulary, and teaching English was geared towards the preparation for passing the nation-wide university entrance examination. Obviously this learning style can hardly reveal its strength in Irish system in which the emphasis is shifted from cognitive pattern (i.e. usage or knowledge about the target language) towards real use or practice of what they have learned inside and outside the classroom.

The findings also reveal that Chinese students seem to lack adequate knowledge of LLS (see Appendix Items 24 and 25). It is important to note that good practice of LLS will benefit learners' learning process if teachers make explicit its usefulness and benefits. Various studies suggest that successful L2 learners are characterized by conscious use of different LLS for various learning tasks (Ellis, 1994; Rubin, 1975; Wen, 1995). The encouraging findings of this survey are that the students intended to do some after-class reading by selecting materials appropriate to their own English level (see Appendix Item 26). The findings also suggest that the Chinese students realized the importance of learning English by using it. However, outside class, they tended to cling to a small circle of their countrymen in their accommodations where limited meaningful communication in English took place. Another interesting finding in this survey is that even though they

could realize, to some degree, the role that the strength and weakness that personality traits would play in their learning process (see Appendix Item 27), it seems that they did not know how to effectively cope with their 'weaknesses' or to enhance their 'strengths' (see Appendix Item 25).

Regarding form-based LLS, the results show that the students tended to focus on the comprehension of every linguistic detail while listening to English (see Appendix Items 28, 32, 33, 34, 35 and 37). This is directly related to the prevalent traditional teaching methods widely adopted by Chinese English language teachers at various levels, i.e. teachers go over text materials in a sentence-by-sentence manner, and explain language points that may not directly affect the learners. As revealed in this survey, Chinese students were inclined to look up new words based on their pronunciation in a dictionary (see Appendix Item 33). This reflects their deep-rooted learning styles which focus more on accuracy than prediction or guess based on the discourse. It is not surprising that such an accuracy-oriented rather than gist-centered learning style contradicts the communicative principles of L2 teaching widely adopted by the Irish English language teachers in this survey.

Concerning function-based strategy, the findings indicate that students were interested in reading newspapers and magazines. They also liked watching TV or seeing English films in their spare time (see Appendix Items 37 and 40). The survey results reveal that many students took initiative in practising productive skills such as writing English letters, emails or notes (see Appendix Item 41). However, they apparently paid inadequate attention to the practice of their oral English, especially to communicating with local people in English (see Appendix Item 39). Perhaps the reason may lie in the fact that their inadequate English proficiency discouraged them from effective communication with native English speakers.

Students' Attitudes Towards a Mono-cultural or Multi-cultural Class

The findings also show that Chinese students preferred a small class mixed with students from other cultures to a homogeneous class consisting of

Chinese students only (see Appendix Items 13, 14, 16 and 17). They thought such mixed class would contribute to their linguistic skills and cross-cultural communication.

From the findings discussed above, it is obvious that the principles underpinning communicative approach adopted by Irish English teachers are culturally specific and are incongruent with the inveterate beliefs and value systems held by the Chinese students. On the part of Irish teachers, their attempts to adopt communicative teaching approach in English class inevitably led to cultural conflicts in classrooms between Irish teachers and Chinese students. The reason was quite simple: teaching approaches and methodologies are not value-free.

DISCUSSION: CULTURAL INFLUENCE ON L2 EDUCATION

As mentioned above, the main causes of mismatch between teaching styles of native English-speaking teachers and Chinese students' learning styles may lie in the different perceptions of what constitutes good teaching and learning. This study shows that teacher-student style conflicts are likely to occur due to lack of intercultural awareness on the part of teachers and students alike. The awareness of western culture will facilitate learners' understanding and use of a second language. What is more important is that student's native culture has influenced their perceptions of how a second language is learned and taught. It is worth noting that cultural influence on L2 education, in which Chinese students' learning styles have been conditioned, is deeply rooted, strong and persistent, though very often invisible. Cortazzi and Jin (1996, p. 74) use the term Chinese 'culture of learning' to describe a whole set of expectations, attitudes, beliefs, values, perceptions, preferences, experiences, and behaviors that are characteristic of Chinese society with regard to teaching and learning. Cheng (2000) further summarizes the characteristics of Chinese culture of learning. For instance, in China teachers have absolute authority in classrooms. Students show great

respect to teachers, but they also expect teachers to have thorough knowledge of the subjects they teach. Educational institutions have been under pressure from national curriculum and matriculation systems that are usually exam-centered or knowledge-oriented. Due to the Chinese modesty or face-saving philosophy, many Chinese students do not consider asking questions in public a good habit. EFL classrooms in China often take the form of 'knowledge transmission' from teacher to students (pp. 47- 48).

In other words, 'culture of learning' shapes the way a foreign language is learned and taught. If western teachers are not aware of this, it would be often the case that when they find their teaching process problematic, students are to blame, and vice versa. In this sense, knowledge of the different perceptions, beliefs and values inherent in culture of learning will facilitate mutual understanding and contribute to effective teaching and learning outcome.

For instance, in Confucian heritage value, a good teacher is supposed to be the one who has to know how to guide students without pulling them, how to guide students to go forward without suppressing them, and how to open the way for students to think for themselves (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996). Teachers are also role models for students in Chinese educational system – *Jiao shu yu ren* (teaching books and cultivating students). Teacher should not only impart his or her knowledge to students but also cultivate their good morality in order 'to transform the young into people with a highly developed social conscience and to inculcate in them the code for living already accepted by their elders' (Hu & Grove, 1991, p. 79). This role of being a moral model inevitably leads to a teaching approach which asserts that effecting teaching should be *yan chuan shen jiao* (teaching by personal example as well as verbal instructions). Such an approach is also known as *xiao zhi yi li, dong zhi yi qing, dao zhi yi xing* (to instruct with principles, move with emotions, and guide with teachers' own actions). Such a 'personalized approach is believed to be more effective than mere verbal instructions' (Leng, 2005, p. 26). As such, teachers are expected to be knowledgeable, considerate and play parental roles in the learning setting. In China 'the teacher-student interaction is not lubricated with the democratic oil of warmth and first

names, but with the oil of respect' (Biggs, 1998, p. 730).

As such, students might think their teacher somehow is deviating from his or her conventional functions by not being the focus of the class but being a 'facilitator' or 'coach'. This is especially the case when teacher's class management and presentation of text materials are found unsatisfactory, and topics for discussion are uninteresting.

During the interviews, the students said that their teachers often showed little interest in anything except classroom teaching. This negatively affective factor can influence their attitudes towards their learning process and constitute a negative 'Pygmalion effect'. In other words, a teacher's personality, knowledge level, teaching methods as well as his or her attitude and attention to students, will affect students' attitudes to and interest in his or her teaching in class. Chinese students, who have been conditioned by their previous cultural experiences in their own land, will show respect for their teachers and, in the meantime, expect their teachers to show a strong interest in them since the students see their teacher as 'the most reliable person to turn to for help' based on their own previous experiences in China.

As mentioned above, the survey findings also suggest that some knowledge of their Chinese students' home country would be an important asset for Irish teachers. Unfortunately in many cases this was missing. The author's follow-up classroom observation in this study confirmed this assumption. In English class, teachers made frequent reference to western perspectives and 'inside' knowledge that may be often outside their Chinese students' experience. This would lead to reduction of interest in text materials, and contribute to anxiety which will be compounded by their language deficiency. Of course, teachers expect their students to be engaged in interaction in class, and learn about the western culture. However, it is very helpful and necessary for teachers to have some basic knowledge of the culture their students are bringing into the classroom. It is worth noting that knowledge of culture-related differences in expectations on teachers and learners alike will be very helpful to meet learners' needs, to narrow the perceived mismatch and to achieve the aim of desired teaching and learning

outcome.

IMPLICATIONS

The survey indicates that an understanding of Chinese ‘culture of learning’ will help western teachers to bridge the perceived mismatch confronting both Chinese students and western teachers. Nowadays internationalization of education is an integral part of deepening global communication. In order to meet the challenges of the global marketplace, it is not appropriate for native English-speaking teachers ‘to restrict the frame of reference to their own culture’ (Li, 2004). Cross-cultural understanding will help teachers avoid their narrow range of teaching approach which may become a barrier hindering teachers from adapting their teaching to learner needs and to communicate successfully with Chinese or other Asian students in their teaching. To ensure desired outcome of teaching and learning, all participants, including western teachers, need to be aware of the impact of cultural influences upon learning and teaching so as to understand and cope with the difference and the issues which may lead to the teacher-student style conflicts in the learning setting.

SUGGESTIONS

Teachers need to free themselves from methodological dogmatism and cultural stereotypes and look for alternatives which blend the best practices from their own culture and the culture that their students are bringing with them into the classroom. Apart from the above-mentioned, some bridging strategies are suggested as follows:

1. To alleviate the tension, teachers need to help students to recognize the merit inherent in communicative approach. Teachers help students to be aware of the need to gradually shift from their previous learning model to

'communicative' methods, adapting step by step to the Irish school culture. In the meantime, teachers should make explicit the usefulness of this adaptation. On the other hand, western teachers may also need to properly diversify their teaching styles to meet Chinese learners' needs and classroom activity preferences, at least, in the initial period. Ur (1996) argues that activities in class should be varied and a varied lesson is likely to cater for a wide range of learning styles and strategies.

2. Teachers need to adapt classroom materials to make it user-friendly for Chinese students and to help them to express themselves freely without feeling embarrassed when they make a mistake. Another suggestion is to use class materials which are not purely culture-based, such as television advertisements or soap operas, or western pop idols.

3. Teachers use video and film to enrich learners' target cultural knowledge. Videos and films will also contribute to development of schemata in learners' mind, which might enable learners to have a longer retention of the information learned, and therefore serve as a more effective means to broaden their knowledge about target culture. One of the advantages of using videos/films as a teaching tool is that they may function as a springboard leading to a variety of meaning-focused speaking and writing activities in class. As such, video or film would lend itself well to the meaning-focused communicative approach and hence stimulate learners' enthusiasm for communicative learning activities in class. In this process, teachers need to provide learners with proper scaffolding in order that learners will understand the content and be prepared for follow-up activities. Moreover, enough attention should be paid to the design and activities appropriate for a specific video or film. For instance, the following three-stage activities for a video/film lesson may be helpful in achieving this purpose.

- Pre-watching stage: to arouse learners' interest, activate their schemata and provide a purpose for watching. At this stage, classroom activities focus on prediction of content, vocabulary, introduction of background information, asking questions.
- While-watching stage: activities focus on true or false questions,

sequencing of events, which should be simple and easy so as not to interfere with the watching process.

- Post-watching stage: is to reflect an integrated approach to develop four target language skills through meaning-focused tasks, such as group or pair discussion based on the given questions, role play, writing of summary, reinventing the ending, or asking students to add an ending to the story being watched, reading reviews or other related literature (cf. Zhou & Miao, 1996 cited in Song, 1998, p. 143).

4. Last but not least, good rapport also needs to be built between teachers and learners. In China, a good relationship between teachers and students is very important to keep harmony and show respect for teachers from students – a sort of ‘family relationship’ which places emphasis on respect, harmony and caring. If teachers are just concerned about nothing but teaching English in the classroom, students might be feeling very disappointed when they face such an unexpected style of relationship. With such awareness, if both teachers and students can blend the strengths from their own cultural orientation and exchange ideas constantly, the teacher-student style mismatch will be identified and then dealt with effectively.

CONCLUSION

To reduce teacher-student style conflicts is not easy but not impossible when teachers are aware of their learners’ needs, wants, potentials and learning style preferences so as to take appropriate pedagogical methods to meet them. Teachers should consider culture-related style differences as they plan how to teach, and make a conscious effort to include various learning styles in daily lesson plan. In other words, minimization of the perceived mismatch between teacher intention and learner interpretation will facilitate the chances of achieving desired learning outcomes (Kumaravadivelu, 1991). The findings also demonstrate that teachers can use instruments to identify students’ needs including classroom activity preferences, develop self-aware

learners, encourage changes in students' behavior and 'foster guided style-stretching' (Rao, 2001). Teachers ought to rely more often on informed assessment of learners' needs and preferences than on unaided intuitions when making course planning decisions. In so doing, western teachers can assist Asian learners, Chinese learners in particular, in becoming more effective L2 learners and in making their study in Ireland not only successful but also enjoyable.

RECOMMENDATION FOR FURTHER STUDY

As the number of the subjects in this study is quite limited, the findings might not be fully representative for all the Chinese ESL learners in Ireland. However, the goal of this study is not to generalize its findings but to provide western English language teachers with some insightful information as to how to teach Chinese ESL learners more effectively in western context. In this sense, this survey is very helpful and informative in terms of its findings. Due to the scope of this study, it is not possible to portrait a complete picture being investigated. Some questions require further research. For example, to what extent and how culture of learning affects Chinese ESL learners' communication with teachers in western context? Questions like this will contribute to a knowledge and understanding of teaching Chinese ESL learners in western institutions.

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APPENDIX**Questionnaire for Chinese students learning English in Ireland**

5-strongly agree; 4-agree; 3-neutral; 2-disagree; 1-strongly disagree	Mean	Standard deviation
1. I like to participate in group-work consisting of 2-3 persons in class.	3.106	0.504
2. I like to be active and to speak English when I am working in a group.	3.122	0.704
3. I like teacher-centered teaching methods in English class.	2.987	1.012
4. I like student-centered teaching methods in English class.	3.025	0.718
5. I have enough confidence in improving my English to my desired level within 1 or 2 years in Ireland.	3.211	0.885
6. I expect my teacher rather than myself to be responsible for evaluating how much progress I have made in L2 learning.	3.032	1.036
7. When I am working in a group, I like to help keep the atmosphere friendly and harmonious.	4.016	0.730
8. In the classroom, I do not like to 'stand out' by voicing my opinions or asking questions.	2.437	1.030
9. In the classroom I see the teacher as somebody whose authority should not be questioned.	1.937	0.853
10. I work especially hard when my own success will benefit my close relations (e.g. my family) as well as myself.	3.787	1.014
11. I like activities where I am part of a group in which we are all working towards common goals.	3.937	0.853
12. Sometimes I feel nervous to answer questions in class because I am afraid of being wrong.	2.625	0.957
13. I like to take part in group-work with foreign students in a multicultural class.	3.875	0.957
14. I like to take part in a group-work with only Chinese students in the classroom, e.g. classroom discussion, role-play.	2.812	0.834
15. I see knowledge as something that the teacher should pass on to me rather than something that I should discover myself.	2.183	0.841
16. I like to learn English in a small class consisting of 7-10 persons.	4.021	0.632
17. I like to learn English in a class consisting of Chinese learners only rather than in a multicultural class.	2.062	0.771
18. I expect my teacher to give oral explanations on written texts, e.g. TOEFL, IELTS.	3.625	0.885

Bridging the Gap Between Teaching Styles and Learning Styles: A Cross-cultural Perspective

19. When I speak English in the class or in a group, I like to pre-arrange my utterances rather than to speak spontaneously.	3. 497	1. 024
20. I make a plan of English study in addition to the homework assigned by my teacher.	2. 769	0. 926
21. I make a timetable for my study in order to make sure that I have enough time to be devoted to learning English everyday.	2. 692	0.947
22. I have specific expectations on the progress to make in improving my English in Ireland.	2. 923	0. 759
23. I make self-evaluation of my English progress so that I can discover my weaknesses that I will overcome.	2. 996	0. 862
24. I evaluate my use of language learning strategy so that I can be aware of the problems I have in my learning process.	2. 896	0. 716
25. I use different language learning strategies appropriate to the specific learning task.	2.923	0. 862
26. I select reading materials appropriate to my English level after class.	3.457	0. 947
27. I make analysis of my personality traits and try to find out study-facilitating and study-hindering traits so that I know what I should do to cope with them or enhance them.	3. 076	0. 862
28. When I read English I intend to understand every detail of the text.	3. 477	0. 759
29. I read English texts many times after class.	2.011	1. 154
30. I intend to analyse the grammatical structure of the sentence / text when I cannot understand it.	2. 886	0. 877
31. I recite large chunks of English texts, which I think are well written.	2. 307	1. 125
32. I intend to understand every detail when I listen to English.	3. 609	0. 898
32. When I come across new words while listening to English, I intend to learn by heart its pronunciation and try to look it up in a dictionary afterwards.	3. 303	1. 068
34. I read English newspapers, magazines and storybooks or internet information after class.	3. 384	0. 650
35. I often listen to English on radio after class.	3. 353	1. 2810
36. I like to initiate questions or answer questions in English class.	2. 884	0. 767
37. I see English films or watch TV after class.	3. 6153	0. 650
38. When my peer answers questions in the class, I murmur the answer in English to myself.	2. 8461	1. 214
39. I speak English with my friends or local native English-speaking people after class.	2. 891	1. 154
40. I often speak English to myself after class.	3. 109	0. 821
41. I keep diary, take notes, and write letters in English.	3. 307	1. 031