

English as an Academic *Lingua Franca*: Internationalisation, Economic Imperative or Cultural Chauvinism?

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Context

- Internationalisation – English word – roots in Latin
 - skewed towards a particular Western cultural mindset ?
- Kutieleh and Egege (2003) Flinders University
 - critical thinking specifically a Western approach to knowledge claims → challenge - incorporation of critical thinking into first year programs for Asian internationals.
 - no assimilationist or a deficit approach.
- Atkinson (1997) and Fox (1994) - critical thinking is incompatible with Asian cultural attitudes.
- Lun (2009) - Asian student's apparent lack critical thinking - consequence of the need to use English as a second language in academic discourse.

Data

- snapshot - postgraduate international student cohort - Faculty of Economics and Business
 - language background
 - English language proficiency
 - motivation for study
- interviews – 57 students in major universities in China and India.
- history and philosophy of science and the environmental history of China.

Interviews

- student interviews - 3 Project 211 Universities in China and one research institute in India.
- 57 students interviewed in English (with some Chinese) - undergraduate & postgraduate – science, engineering, finance, economics & English majors.
- Interviews in groups ranging in size from three to seven members - groups capture a greater understanding of critical thinking and English as an academic *lingua franca* than sum of each student individually.
- Interviews - recorded in note form - notes written up as soon as possible after the interviews → nuances of responses.
- Grounded theoretical approach → analytical framework

Questions

- Is critical thinking important in university study?
- What do you think of English as the international academic *lingua franca*, i.e. the language of international academic communication?
- Definition:
 - “a language common to, or shared by, many cultures and communities at any or all social and educational levels, and used as an international tool” (McArthur, 2002)

Internationalisation

- 2008- 429,359 total commencing students in higher education - 32.9% international students – increase by 11.4% from 2007 (DEEWR, 2009).
- 2008 - domestic Australian students in higher education courses in 2008 - 17% spoke a language other than English in their home (DEEWR, 2009).

Internationalisation

Faculty of Economics (& Business)

- 1996 - 3,045 students - 550 postgraduate (106 international – 19%) including 106 doctoral or masters by research students (17 international).
- 2009 - 8,389 students - 4,228 postgraduate (2,682 international – 63%) including 180 doctoral or masters by research students (43 international).

(Usyd - Strategic Planning Office, 2009)

Internationalisation

Positive comments:

- “we need one world language”.
- “English is the universal language and we need one”.
- “English as the *lingua franca* is more positive than negative. Communication is the most important thing. 80% of information is transmitted in English, so it’s good to speak English internationally”.

Internationalisation

Useful tool in some circumstances:

- “Knowledge is more important than language; English is just a tool.”
- “It’s not strange that English is the *lingua franca*. It’s the least effort principle. There’s a need for a common language. English is now the international language. If that becomes inconvenient another language will become the *lingua franca*.”
- “It depends on the field. English is ok for science but English can’t capture the literature of other languages. There’s a problem with the translation of great novels.”

Internationalisation

Unfairness:

- “Language affects understanding and it is unfair to Chinese as compared to native English speakers.”

Why Australia:

- “It takes too long to study in China as compared to if it was studied in a native English speaking country”.

Faculty of Economics and Business - language background of students

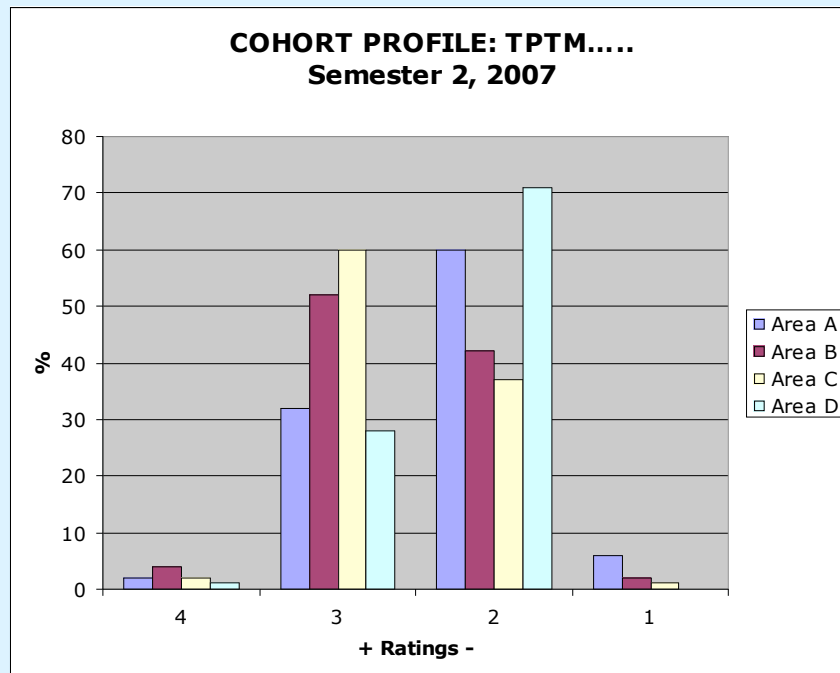
- 2004 - postgraduate accounting unit - 17 English first language, 7 Korean, 4 South Asian, 4 Arabic, 2 Indonesian, 2 Thai, 2 Vietnamese, 1 Japanese, 1 Turkish and 239 Chinese (88%).
- 2007 - postgraduate transport studies unit - 2 English, 1 French, 2 German, 1 Filipino, 3 South Asian, 3 Italian, 1 Japanese, 1 Portuguese, 1 Norwegian, 1 Setswana, 3 Spanish, 9 Thai and 93 Chinese (77%).
- 'I want to kill someone' (PG Chinese student 2008).

MASUS test

(Bonanno, 2007)

- **Semester 2 2007 – 125 students in Transport PG unit.**
- **Area A Information retrieval and processing,
Area B Structure and development of written text
Area C Control of academic writing
Area D Grammatical correctness.**
- **Students rated 1 to 4 with 1 & 2 indicating need for language remediation or development.**
- **87% scored 1 or 2 in at least one area.**
- **16% scored 1 or 2 in all four areas.**
- **Semester 2 2004 – 279 Accounting PG unit - 88% (246 students) scored 1 or 2 in at least one area.**

**Area A Information retrieval and processing,
Area B Structure and development of written text
Area C Control of academic writing
Area D Grammatical correctness.**



Economic Imperative

- Chinese Government's 211 project - transform higher education in China - commitment to higher economic growth (Li et al., 2008)
- 'New Gold Mountain' - 1849 to 1900 > 100,000 Chinese came to Australia (Choi, 1975; Fitzgerald, 2007).

Economic Imperative

- “English as a *lingua franca* has both economic and historical reasons. We need to pick a language and English places more emphasis on logic. There English is more convenient as the *lingua franca*. Or perhaps in the world we could have many languages as the *lingua franca* because of the problem of translation of some words in English. Therefore people should learn other languages. Nothing is forever. The *lingua franca* was Latin before. It depends on what’s convenient”.
- “necessary tool”, “a bridge”, “the official language”.
- “it can be used for my future”, “if I learn it I can get a good job”, “if I practice it gives me greater work skills”.

Economic Imperative

Globalisation:

- “developing countries can learn from developed countries”; English “enables relationship”.
- “With globalisation the world is becoming smaller and smaller. We need one language, so English plays a more and more important role. Even in daily life there is no doubt that it’s essential especially in finance”.
- “It is good because of the structure of English. You express ideas at the beginning, not at the end, so it is really useful for business”.

English as a business *lingua franca*

- 2008 - 141,131 international students commencing higher education in Australia - 71,382 ($\approx 50\%$) in management and commerce (DEEWR, 2009).
- education sector - Australia's third largest export sector after tourism and transport (Carrington et al. 2007).

Motivation for postgraduate international students to study in E+B

(Paton & Sutton-Brady, 2007)

- Survey – based on Harris and Halpin (2002) - *Development and Validation of the Factors Influencing Pursuit of Higher Education Questionnaire*
- 32 questions + data on nationality, 1st language, other languages spoken, undergraduate university and degree awarded, longest essay written in English (number of words), & IELTS average score.
- Introductory PG economics & advanced PG accounting units.
- 283 respondents yielding 274 usable surveys.

Results

- SA- Strongly agreed, A-agreed, D-disagreed, SD- Strongly disagreed.
- 91% students Chinese language speakers.
- 10% SA/A parents chose their current degree
- 80% SA/A chose Sydney because of International accreditation with 82% SA/A because Usyd internationally recognised.
- 92% SA/A studying to increase knowledge and 80% self fulfilment.

Results (cont.)

- 46% SA/A to make more money.
- 66% SA/A better job in home country.
- 35% SA/A chose degree to get permanent residency.
- Extrinsic rather than intrinsic motivation - learning outcome comparatively negative (Walker et al., 2006; Goldberg & Cornell, 1998; & Mitchell, 1992) + negative class dynamic.

Environmental history of China

- *The Retreat of the Elephants: an Environmental History of China* (Elvin, 2004).
- 'The 3000 year war' – the negation of the wild.
- Late imperial period (circa 1600) – lack of environmental 'sink' → unprecedented increase in scope & frequency of famine.
- Mass migration & emigration.
- 'The logic of short term advantage' – epitomised by war.
- Not specific to Chinese culture.

Cultural Chauvinism

- tendency for powerful cultures to usurp the knowledge systems of less powerful cultures and claim them as their own.
- Francis Bacon - basis of modern civilisation - paper money, gun powder and the compass (Hobson, 2004).
- Algebra, freestyle swimming, zero.

Cultural Chauvinism

- “I think English, as a *lingua franca* is cultural chauvinism. Europe and the English speaking countries have economic, political and social power and so the language has spread. It’s a reflection of financial power. I think Chinese could become the *lingua franca*.”
- “I blame English for being language chauvinists.”
- “Ancient languages are disappearing as English takes over. Therefore we should keep our own languages. Us Chinese should speak Chinese”.
- “English is the *lingua franca* because the US and UK are superpowers. We should start a war with them and kill them all and the people of their colonies and then Chinese can be the *lingua franca*”.
- 法家 - *fajia*
- *fenqing* – ‘angry youth’ 憤怒的青年 (憤青)

Conclusion

- Higher education in Australasia has much to offer international students.
 - ‘southern culture’
 - Vivian Chow - the ANZAC spirit (Fitzgerald, 2007)
- Be careful of:
 - logic of short-term advantage.
 - trap of “I speak English, therefore I know”.

Example of group interaction

- There are 3 groups of students – those who have critical thinking and language skills, those who have critical thinking but no language skills and those who have neither.
- Critical thinking is character building. It's especially beneficial for women because they can be moody and sentimental, and it can be disastrous if their feelings take over. (female student) It's also good for career development. Critical thinking and the dialectic method gives further development and successful research, which leads to a positive career and the right attitude to life.
- I have a similar opinion. But critical thinking can't be taught, it can only be cultivated. In work, study and career it's useful. In life it's useful to look at the other side. Bad ideas and habits can be changed to good through critical thinking .
- I don't agree. Critical thinking is easier in the academic field. It's more difficult in everyday life. People follow others too easily.
- In postgraduate work it's important. In research we have to look through theories and think about the materials from all aspects. By finding the demerits we find our own opinion.
- Critical thinking has it's roots in traditional Daoism. It is not only useful in university, it is a view that keeps us rational. And it is the source of our creativity.
- I have the same idea as the rest. To sum up, many linguists like Chomsky and Halliday use critical thinking to find new approaches. To become famous you need critical thinking.