

A Research and Counter-measures of English Cultural Hegemony in China

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Abstract

It is well admitted that English is being more widely used than ever before in history in today's international and intercultural communication. Around the world, English is widely accepted as a de facto international language or world language, it has infiltrated into almost every aspect of social life, from education to scientific research, from economic affairs to mass media. In a word, there is a "English craze" in the world.

Usually language is considered merely a tool for communication, however, according to the Antonio Gramsci, a well-known Italian Marxist Philosopher, language, which is closely related to culture and ideology, can influence people's value and world view. Therefore, it is not simple to spread English into China, but the English culture which can influence our Chinese people's value and ideology, even establish the English Cultural Hegemony in China.

Based on Gramsci's theory, combined with the example of English education in China, this thesis analyzes how language, culture, ideology and cultural hegemony relate to each other, and guide us how to treat it, especially the English education.

Keywords: English craze, English cultural hegemony, Gramsci, English education

1. Introduction

With the coming of globalization and the age of information, an indisputable fact is: more and more people from different countries around the world are communicating and disseminating ideas by using the same language, that is, English. China is not exceptional, moreover, there are increasing number of Chinese people crazy about English for distinctive reasons and purposes.

However, the language problem awareness might be traced back to 1877-1885 when the Warsaw optometrist L.L. Zamenhof invented the Esperanto in hopes of resolving many of the possible problems in communication, which might lead to conflicts and contradiction among people of different ethnic groups. It is not until the 1960s and 1970s that the phenomenon of language inequality-hegemony-imperialism was critically discussed by linguists like Fishman. From the 1980s, the language problem of English hegemony was explored and stated from various points of view (Crystal, 12002, Phillipson, 1992, and Tsuda, 1985, 1987). The voice of it became louder gradually and was unambiguously addressed as language imperialism by Robert Phillipson (1992) and as English hegemony by many others with the discussion proceeding from the 1990s.

English cultural hegemony is a phenomenon which combined with English, culture and ideology. It has already permeated into Chinese life quickly, due to the widely development of English in China which influence our Chinese culture and ideology a lot, this thesis starts with the relationship between language and culture, points out that the spread of English is the main approach for the native English countries to realize the national cultural hegemony.

Therefore, this thesis can be divided into introduction, conclusion and five parts, based on the Gramsci's theory, the first part talks about the brief history of English. The second part mainly expresses the "English craze", including the definition, the signs, and the reasons of it. Then, the third part focuses on the English cultural hegemony, and explains the existence of it as well as the effects of English Cultural Hegemony. The fourth part analyzes the situation of English education in China. Lastly, the solutions are pointed to deal with the English Cultural hegemony.

2. A Brief History of English

English is not an indigenous language in England. It was brought there in about AD 500 by the Anglo-Saxons. The language did not step on foreign lands until from the 16th century, when Britain gradually rose to be the global maritime hegemony, and set 69 colonies around the world in the following centuries, including some current big nations, such as the USA, Australia and India. English spread to wherever the British troops and business companies arrived. English was set as the official language in the British colonies and imparted by missionary schools. By the beginning of the 20th century, English had established as an important language in global communication.

The global political situations changed in the 20th century, especially after WWII, which had direct influence on the spread of English. Great Britain was on decline while the USA rose abruptly. Thanks to the Industrial Revolution, the USA ascended to be the No.1 powerful country in the world. From then on, English was promoted mainly by the political, economic and cultural influence of the USA by means of the global econocultural system.

3. English Craze

It is quite clear to recognize that English, with the high speed of development, is obtaining acceptance in non-English countries as a second language or a foreign language. The learning of English is like a strong wind sweeping through the whole world. Obviously, English is becoming the global language. When a famous linguist named Davie explained the position of English in his work "English: the universally used language", he wrote, "whether a language can become a universally used one depends on two conditions: firstly, it becomes the official language for many countries; secondly, it takes up an important position in one country's foreign language teaching."

Nowadays, English is the world's most important commercial language and the most commonly used language on the Internet. As a natural language, a communicating tool for economic powers, it gains a more and more important position.

Although there are only more than ten countries who take English as their mother language, more than 70 countries have already given it the official position in the whole world. Furthermore, there are already 100 countries which treat it as the first foreign language for teaching, including China, Russia, Germany and Japan and so on. The universally official position of English and its worldly distribution have surely made it a globally used language.

3.1 The Definition of "English Craze"

According to *Longman Advanced American Dictionary*, the meaning of "craze" is a fashion, game, type of music etc. that becomes very popular for a short amount of time. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* explains "craze" as an enthusiastic interest in something that is shared by many people but that usually does not last very long. In this sense, people are passionate for English which is considered as a fashionable trend, imitating almost every aspect of this language, including speaking, writing, reading, listening, in order to use idiomatic English as naturally as the native speaker do.

3.2 The Signs of "English Craze" in China

3.2.1 Booming Consumer Markets

China is full of booming consumer markets, from car sales growing at 50 per cent a year to top-end apartments that developers sell within days of putting them on the market. But one of the most interesting is urban China's craze for the English language. According to industry analysts, there are as many as 30,000 organizations or companies that offer English lessons outside school in China and the market has nearly doubled in the last five years to around \$3.5bn.

3.2.2 The Popularity of English Teacher in China

More remarkably still, it was estimated in a recent report that China may already have more English speakers than India. China's English fever has turned some of its most successful teachers into cult heroes. As a young man, Michael Yu, founder of New Oriental, was rejected for a visa to study in the US, so he started teaching English instead. His company is the biggest English language training company in China with schools in 40 cities and more than 5,000 teachers, and his classes became so famous that they spawned a market in bootlegged recordings. Li Yang, meanwhile, runs an operation called "Crazy English" and sometimes attracts thousands to open-air lectures that mix a sort of evangelical fervors for the language with a patriotic sub-text.

3.2.3 More English Learners in China

The English craze in China has a close relationship with its open policy, especially after its entry into WTO. Currently, it is not only required that all the students in junior and senior high school should learn English, but also required the permeation of English teaching among the grade-three pupils in primary school in some good-conditioned cities from 2001. English is the subject that students have to take in the college entrance and postgraduate examination every year in China. And it is a prerequisite for the promotion of cadre. In some big cities like Shanghai, one's ability of using English determines whether he can become an internationalized talent or not.

3.2.4 Widespread of Foreign Festivals and Food in China

Many festivals from the English-speaking countries gained popularity in China, such as the Christmas Day, the Valentine's Day, Halloween, and Thanksgiving Day and so on. Some western-style food also flourished in China, such as KFC, Mac Donald's and some other fast food.

All in all, English is like a huge snowball and it is rolling to be much bigger in China. The whole nation raises an upsurge of learning English.

3.3 *The Reasons of English Craze in China*

The reasons of English craze can be divided into two sides--- international and domestic. As one of the world's foremost authorities on language, David Crystal writes: "English is now represented in every continent". His words demonstrate the position of English in the world at present. From the population of English in schools of non-English speaking countries to the use of English in international conferences, it is obvious that English can be already considered as an international language or global language.

3.3.1 International Factor

Crystal mentions two factors for the international status of English: First, it is used as a first language or owns official status in many countries such as the United States, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa; second, though it is not an official language in the certain countries, it has the priority in foreign language teaching in nations such as China, Russia, Germany and Spain.

3.3.2 Domestic Factor

Besides the international reason, the current situation in china also accelerates the appearance of English craze. Though a developing country, china has made great progress in every aspect of nation's power in recent years. Two typical domestic affairs boost the appearance of English craze. The success of Beijing Olympic Games, which aroused the passion of learning English in China. Li Li, the vice president of New Orient said that under the influence of the Games and other positive factors, the register numbers in New Orient surpassed 30, 000 which was the highest record in history. Another good example of China's development that facilitates English Craze is China's entering the WTO in 2001. with the fast-developing economy, China is becoming more prominent in its status. Owing to more chances to communicate with foreign countries, more Chinese people acquaint themselves of the importance of English. At the same time, a large number of foreign enterprises come to China bringing a lot of tempting vacant jobs requiring employees' English skills.

Under such circumstances mastery of English becomes necessary, even hot. Different kinds of training organization appear; more Chinese people join in the learning of English. Parents hope their children can have a good base of English skill in order to be competent in the future society; students try their best to improve English in order to enter the ideal universities; college advocate the English learning atmosphere in order to solve the problems of researching; naturally, English Craze has become one of most popular phenomena in today's China.

4. Cultural Hegemony

Due to the great power of economic, political and military, this allows English countries to be the world's foremost sides. The socialistic Soviet Union was the greatest threat to those countries, especially America, after the World War 2, from then on, "Cold War" began, when America pushed the strategy of "Peaceful Evolution" in order to defeat Soviet Union and firm the poison as a hegemony. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the growing might of socialistic countries, such as China and other western countries like European countries, naturally caught America's attention. The English countries changed its policy of military strikes to "soft power", culture, which could function quietly and infiltrate, has become the main approach to keep its hegemonic status in modern civilized world.

4.1 Gramsci's Theory of Cultural Hegemony

Antonio Gramsci, a prominent Western Marxist and theorist, made great contribution to the Italian Party and the theories for proletarian revolution. His theory concentrates on the analysis of cultural hegemony, whose basic character is the amalgamative study of culture and ideology. There are three factors to define the cultural hegemony--- cultural, ideology and language. Gramsci considers that the culture is a kind of ideology. No matter whether it is religious or philosophical, it is carried out through human being's life. Francesco De Sancti, the Italian literary theorist once put forward: lack of Power occurs simply because of lack of belief; lack of belief occurs simply because of lack of culture. The 'culture' here means 'a universal view toward human beings' life', as well as a certain 'worldly religion' or 'Philosophy', by which a certain morality lifestyle and behavior principle of individuals and society should be produced. Similar to Sancti's idea, Gramsci considers that culture is not knowledge like that in an encyclopedia used to fill up human beings, and "it is the organization and edification inside a person, and the negotiation of human individuality; culture is to reach a higher self-conscious state, and by culture people can understand their historical value, their function in the life and their right and duty."

In Gramsci's view, ideology, which is not considered a false concept, but a right one with functions, is a world view that is embodied in various practical activities or it is "a world view that is implicitly demonstrated in art, law, economic activities, and all individual or collective life."

In the aspect of language, Gramsci considers language to be culture and philosophy, which include world view and ideology.

According to the above factors, Gramsci made the definition for cultural hegemony. Cultural hegemony means the spontaneous consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant group.

4.2 Hegemony in Chinese View

Originated from a profound word of ancient Greek without negative meanings, the word "hegemony" appears much earlier than Gramsci's "cultural hegemony". "Hegemony" originally meant the prior status and ability of a country, national group or regime but not a behavior or policy. Nowadays, westerners and Chinese have different ideas on the definition of "hegemony". According to the definition of Modern Chinese Dictionary, it means 'the behavior to operate or control other countries in international relationship', while Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary defines: "leadership, authority or influence, always signifying a nation's or a government's political dominance in alliance or commonwealth." It seems that Chinese people consider "hegemony" as a policy made subjectively, but not an objective situation, since China has long-suffered from western invasion, China has a natural antipathy for the hegemony in politics.

5. English and Cultural Hegemony

5.1 The Relationship between Language and Cultural Hegemony

In Prison Notebooks, Gramsci analyzes the role of language in cultural hegemony. Language is also culture and philosophy, endowed with the components of world view and ideology. Language may possibly function as hegemony, which is carried out through the cultural occupation of a new class and the dominance of a new language over other languages. T.J. Jackson Lears explains that human beings created their symbolic systems of language so as to make life more understandable and make it easier to act. When these symbolic systems are passed down from generation to generation with obvious effect, cultural hegemony appears. In this sense, the ruled class can take part in mastering those symbolic systems. Therefore, the language is the effective to realize cultural hegemony which can be ignored. 'Language is often used by the dominant groups as a manipulative tool to achieve hegemonic control.' Donald Manado, one of the writers of *The Hegemony of English*, indicates the relationship between language and cultural hegemony.

5.2 English Cultural Hegemony

English is one part of language, so the English cultural hegemony can be explained by the above theory. As Gramsci points out, Marxist superstructure includes two aspects, one is "civil society", which is the folk collection of social organizations; the other is "political society", whose executive intuitions are military force, law courts, jails etc. which somehow represent violence if they are used as the tool of dictatorship. "Civil society" constitutes various social collective such as parties, labor union, churches, schools and various news media. "Civil society" is the new way to carry out the purpose of cultural hegemony with the non-violent activities in people's life style, habit, value, taste and ethic, which are invisible kinds of ideology. The learning of a language occurs through organizations, schools, universities and other kind of media which belong to "civil

society". Therefore, learning English is not a special thing for a small group of people but a universal activity which is accepted consciously without force.

As a matter of fact, English-speaking countries treat the spread of English as a language policy to rule or control the "civil society" as well as strength their "soft power", which be defined by Joseph Nye, a famous American theorist on international relationships, who raised two concepts—"hard power" and "soft power". 'Hard power' mainly signifies military and economic power, while the 'soft power' means power of culture, view and ideology. Both "powers" can help realize the aim of hegemony and reflect the policy to influence and control other countries. From this sense, combining Gramsci's term, those two concepts can also be named "hard hegemony" and "soft hegemony", whose relationship between each other is that "hard power" is the basis for "soft power", while "soft power" can influence the exertion of "hard power". With the completion of international system, it is impossible for the English-speaking countries to control the world, as they did before the breakdown of the system of 'two poles', by military power, or "hard power". Instead, most countries paid much attention to the development of economy and technology, so the "soft power" containing culture, view and ideology became the emphasis. Thus the English speaking countries are developing their "hard power" fast as well as the "soft power". on the one hand "soft power" can directly influence the 'hard power', on the other hand, it can strengthen a country's national cohesion in self-identification toward national cultural value or ideology. Through this way, English can influence other countries from culture, ideology and self-identification to political ideas, diplomatic policy, even global statues. Naturally, the English cultural hegemony formed and works.

6. The Effect of English Cultural Hegemony

6.1 The Positive Effect of English Spread

No one can deny that English dominance has both positive and negative impacts on our country. From the positive point of view, the direct effect of English dominance is that it made English popular on a large scale in our country, and thus effectively enhanced the people's makings and the degree of internationalization of China, improving the soft environment in which our country keeps steps with the world. Just think: if there were not the language bridge—English, what would the finale of our reformation and the open policy look like in the past 20 years? If we did not induct the English dominance, and did not attach great attention to English learning and did not make a link between the level of English and promotion, there would not have been English craze one after another in the past 30 years: from the New Concept English, to Crazy English, and the "English Economy" would not have emerged.

In the whole, if there was not the effective absorption of the English dominance in the past 20 years, there would not be the good environment for our elementary internationalization and if there was not such environment, it would be impossible for us to enter into WTO and obtain the opportunity to hold the 2008 Olympic Games successfully.

All these things suggest that the English dominance benefits us greatly. It helps boost our economy, and makes it easier for us to keep steps with the world. This experience indicates that as long as we deal with the English dominance appropriately, and only take it as a tool for our melting into the world, we will be able to develop our modernization faster with less capital, and to shorten the time of being dropped behind, thus, we can lay a solid foundation for carrying on the "overtaking".

6.2 Negative Impact of English Cultural Hegemony to China

However, through the process of English cultural hegemony in china, we definitely lose more than we gain. Lots of scholars critics the English craze in china, there is a hot debate between scholars on this topic. These negative ones even make the phenomenon to the position of nation security. Among them, professor Ma and professor Pen emphasize that there is a important connection between language and national security. They point out: "English craze in china is not a good phenomenon for the development of national language security, which is the component of national sovereignty."

Mr. Xu jialu pointed out: "since ancient time, language issue has always been related to the sovereignty of country, nation and citizen's human rights. Language is like the national flag and national emblem which is the symbol of nation sovereignty and dignity." However, through the fast spread of English and the 'English craze' formed in china, Chinese people trend to pay much attention to the English culture while ignore our own Chinese culture . it seems like that speaking English is the sign of high reputation and taste, even feel more confident in the social life. Thus, the English cultural hegemony have already changed some Chinese people's ideology and value, which is the beginning of losing national language sovereignty, that means, gradually, Chinese people will lose the confidence of using Chinese, which is the inflection of lack of self-identification to our own culture and

history that will threaten the national security and national spirit. In fact, these consequences accord with the Gramsci's theory completely.

Two examples can explain the great power of English hegemony in the national security and development. Language is not a pure "tool", it must bring kinds of culture to another country, so if you really want to learn a foreign language, culture is the key. However, if one country wants to conquer another, it must carry on it with the cultural hegemony. Japan wanted to use Japanese to permeate our Chinese culture after Japan invaded Taiwan, now, we can still clearly see that the factor of Japanese which used often in the daily life. Another example is Iraq. America invaded Iraq not only by the weapons but also by the English permeation so that the Iraq lost their awareness to America at the cost of sacrificing their own language. As we can see, what the author is talking about, the language invasion and cultural hegemony, is not make nonsense or exaggerate, it is real, it is serious.

7. English Education in China and the English Cultural Hegemony

In a country like China whose education system is highly exam-oriented, if you want to enter college, you will have to pass the National Entrance Examination in which English is one of the most important subjects; if you are already in college as a non-English major and want to get your Bachelor's degree, you will have to pass CET 4 or CET 6 in some schools; if you happen to major in English, you will have to face two tougher tests, that is, TEM 4 and TEM 8 in your second and fourth school year respectively; if you want to become a postgraduate, you will have to pass the National Entrance Test of English for MA or MS candidates, which some candidates complain is even harder than TOEFL test. If you find all this too hard and want to escape by pursuing your studies abroad, still you will have to, in most cases, take the TOEFL test or GRE, or IELTS. What can the students do then under such circumstances? They can find no way out but to study English as hard as they can. No wonder that many parents in China now send their children to English classes even before they reach the school age. No wonder that English has become one of the most profitable industries in China. No wonder considerable achievements have been made in this field of English education in China. That is the Chinese feature of teaching English.

But language is not a simple medium of communication. It carries with it the culture and ideology of the people using it. That's why the author of this paper raised such a topic to discuss. That's why the author believes that it is high time we pondered and reflected upon our attitude toward the English language and our language policy. That's why Gramsci's theory stands for. And that's why a hot debate happened at the English scholar filed.

However, in such situation, some scholars still emphasize the importance of culture learning of English. The author can not help to ask where our Chinese is. Where is the confidence of our Chinese? Where is the self-identification of our nation? Is the implementary English education system perfect? Should English be the standard to judge a person's ability? Should English be compulsory course for all schools at different levels in China? Should English be placed over all the other foreign languages/ is English education investment reasonable? Is it proper encouraging all Chinese to learn English? Is it necessary to promote bilingual education?

In the author's opinion, English achieves hegemony not only through native countries' powerful political and economic influence, but also through the non-native countries' conscious surrender to English and English related culture and ideology.

8. The Ways to Deal with English Cultural Hegemony

8.1 To Build the Strategy of Cultural Safety

Cultural safety is one part of the national safety. "English hegemony has threatened china's nation safety." mentioned by professor Ma, therefore, it is urgent to build a proper strategy of cultural safety.

1) to cherish and enhance the historical cultural tradition of china. As descendents of 'Yan Di' and "Huang Di", Chinese people have a long history and abundant traditional culture. Chinese ancestors left Chinese people much spiritual wealth, which is worth enhancing and passing down to the next generation. We should improve our own culture widely when we connecting with other countries as well as our own ideology.

2) to establish the pre-warning system for cultural safety. Carry out a series of steps to identify and distinguish those cultural factors and power which may possibly threaten cultural safety of China. Therefore, responses can be made beforehand by applying legal, administrative, marketing, economic and other managing measures.

3) to create innovating English teaching. English tests, as a necessary permit to further education, should be more flexible in different majors; teachers of English teaching should introduce Western culture objectively when there is a need in English teaching, based in the promotion of Chinese culture and language. It is not advocated that children learn English as early as possible.

8.2 Be Confident in Chinese Language and Culture

If a country loses the basic confidence in its language and culture, it will collapse quickly when facing an invasion of any sort from other countries. Thus, the firm spiritual support of native language and culture from “civil society” is the basis for a country to face the challenge of cultural hegemony.

As one of the most important representatives of Chinese culture, Chinese language is the symbol of the nation. Besides the Four Chinese Ancient Inventions, some consider Chinese characters as the fifth invention of Chinese people. Many ancient letters such as Egyptians letters disappeared about one or two thousand years ago, only Chinese characters have survived.

The fastest development of Chinese comprehensive power has attracted many foreigners who want to learn much about Chinese culture, history and language. Professor Dai Zhongming shows clearly: “Chinese owns the largest number of native speakers in the world compared to that of other languages, about more than 1,300,000,000 people; moreover, Chinese is also one of the six working languages of the United Nations. At present, there are about 2100 universities teaching Chinese in 85 countries in the world. Since China’s position in the world is gradually rising, Chinese people ought to have confidence in their own language and culture at any time and any place. Confronting with the possible culture permeation from English-speaking countries, Chinese people will not lose the basic trust and belief in their native precious wealth— Chinese language and culture.

8.3 To Adopt Proper Attitude toward English and Culture

In Cramsci’s theory of cultural hegemony, language can take a country’s ideology into another, especially in a large scale, greatly influencing the native ideology. But this does not mean a foreign language and culture should be absolutely rejected and despised. Thus, we should take a positive attitude to keep the balance between advantages and disadvantages.

9. Conclusion

From what have been discussed above, we may safely come to the conclusion that the English language flourishes in the whole world. It is building the language imperialism through high speed of development. The impact it brings about involves every aspect of each country, and is fully reflected in the current development of China. However, in my eye, with the development of globalization, the economic level and the comprehensive power of each country are improved. The dominant position of the English language may be weakened. Each country should speed up with its own development so as to reduce the negative influence of the English cultural hegemony. China should also treat it as a two-edged sword and make full use of the positive influence of English to accelerate its own development. At the same time, English education in China should also has its own features on the basis of the protection of Chinese culture. Lastly, due to the limited research, analysis and my ability, this topic should be kept going on in the future.

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