

LINGUISTIC ENGINEERING IN MAO'S CHINA: THE CASE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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To produce a new, 'improved version' of man – that is the future task of communism ... Man must look at himself and see himself as a raw material, or at best as a semi-manufactured product, and say: 'At last, my dear *homo sapiens*, I will work on you (Leon Trotsky).'²

People for the most part ... don't know how to *think*, they only *learn words* by heart (Vladimir Lenin).³

The leaders of twentieth century Marxist regimes knew that if they were to create societies of virtuous revolutionaries, they would need to remake people's minds – aggressively, systematically and profoundly. Without exception, they regarded control of language as crucial to the attempt. Lenin identified the Communist Party's most critical task as 'the selection of language'.⁴ Stalin saw language as an important 'instrument of struggle and development of society'.⁵ And Mao instituted the greatest programme of linguistic engineering the world has seen.

Linguistic engineering in communist societies was based on the assumption that language and thought were two sides of the same coin, or at least that they were so closely connected that it was possible to re-make people's minds by controlling what they said, heard, wrote and read. So communist regimes suppressed the use of words which were linked to 'incorrect' thought; they compelled everyone to learn a new, revolutionary

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² Leon Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, XXI, Moscow, 1925-27, 110-112, quoted in Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution 1891-1924*, London: Pimlico, 1996, 734.

³ Lenin to Inessa Armand, c. 31 December 1913, quoted in John Wesley Young, *Totalitarian Language: Orwell's Newspeak and Its Nazi and Communist Antecedents*, Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia 1991, 208.

⁴ Quoted in *ibid.*, 126.

⁵ Quoted in *ibid.*, 211.

vocabulary to express ‘correct’ thought; and they enforced the use of a wide range of linguistic formulae – slogans and other fixed expressions which served revolutionary purposes. They hoped that, over time, the revolutionary words and phrases would sink into people’s minds and transform them.⁶

The beginnings of a comprehensive, centrally directed programme of linguistic engineering in China can be traced to Yan’an, where Mao built up an independent communist state between 1935 and 1947. There, he created a revolutionary ‘discourse community’ – a community united and empowered by a special language, by an associated body of theory and by the constant repetition of appropriately worded Maoist myths.⁷ Then, after the communist victory in 1949, he sought to extend this discourse community to the whole of China. Within a few years, the discourse of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought was a part of daily life, but it was not until the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) that linguistic engineering reached its maximum intensity. For two years (from mid-1966 to mid-1968) Mao mobilized the Chinese people against the Communist Party and the bureaucracy, attempting to rule by manipulating discourse through the media. Then from mid-1968 he re-imposed centralized control, institutionalizing the Cultural Revolution and its ‘New Born Things’. He and his supporters also enforced an unparalleled degree of linguistic rectitude, so that Maoist discourse and corresponding modes of practice dominated spheres which had hitherto been only superficially politicized. These included the teaching of foreign languages.

Foreign Language Education in China

China has a long tradition of foreign language education. The first language school opened in the thirteenth century, and from the nineteenth century Chinese governments actively encouraged the teaching of foreign languages, especially English, as a key to modernization. After 1949, the new communist government expanded foreign language education as part of its modernizing mission. For a time, Russian was the most popular language because China depended heavily on the Soviet Union’s diplomatic, military, economic and technological support. However, after the Sino-Soviet split in the early 1960s the demand for Russian speakers declined and English regained parity.⁸ In all periods, down to 1966, the purpose of teaching foreign languages was to facilitate communication with foreigners for diplomatic or commercial purposes, or to gain access to useful aspects of their science, technology or culture.

⁶The argument of this paragraph is developed in my book, *Linguistic Engineering: Language and Politics in Mao’s China*, Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2004.

⁷Cf. the splendid book by David E. Apter and Tony Saich, *Revolutionary Discourse in Mao’s Republic*, Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1994.

⁸K. Fu, *Zhongguo Wai Yu Jiao Yu Shi* (History of China’s Foreign Language Education), Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Publishers, 1986, 1-83.

The Cultural Revolution changed all this. From mid-1966 to late 1968, the schools and universities virtually ceased to function except as revolutionary headquarters. Nearly all staff were subjected to harrowing criticism, large numbers were beaten and many were locked up for months or years in improvised campus gaols. When the schools re-opened, under the control of 'workers-peasants-soldiers propaganda teams', their teaching was at first largely confined to supervised study of Mao's works and Maoist newspaper editorials, and to political talks by workers and peasants. In 1969 and 1970, however, new curricula and textbooks appeared, together with enough teachers to provide at least some formal classes. The curricula and textbooks bore the unmistakable stamp of the Cultural Revolution. In Canton, for example, the textbook used to teach Chinese literature and language contained mostly quotations from Mao, together with newspaper editorials on the latest political campaign and occasional readings from new 'model revolutionary plays' sponsored by Mao's wife, Jiang Qing.⁹ Even the arithmetic textbook 'contained mainly Mao quotes.'¹⁰ In both content and linguistic form, the new textbooks were the embodiment of Maoist discourse.

In this context, it is at first sight surprising that English was taught at all. It was the main language of the imperialists, and in a country that had largely cut itself off from the world few people would ever use it to talk to foreigners or to read English newspapers, books or scientific journals. However, the teaching of English underwent a boom, for Mao had told some Red Guards in 1968, 'It's good to know English. I studied foreign languages late in life. I suffered. One has to learn foreign languages when one is young ... One cannot study geology without a foreign language. It's good to learn English. Foreign language study should be started in primary school.'¹¹ So schools all over China began to teach English. They did so by ensuring that language classes were, like all other classes, vehicles of Maoist political discourse and tools of linguistic engineering. I will explain what this meant by analyzing twenty-two English language textbooks published in China between 1969 and 1976. These textbooks were all published in important centres, they became models for texts published elsewhere, and they are typical of the genre.¹² I will then draw on eleven typical textbooks published between 1977 and 1985 to show how language teaching was 'normalized' within a few years of Mao's death.

⁹Jonathon Unger, *Education under Mao: Class and Competition in Canton Schools, 1960-1980*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1982, 176,

¹⁰Ibid., 158, 175.

¹¹Ibid., 283, n.6.

¹²During the 'institutional phase' of the Cultural Revolution between late 1968 and 1976, centralized, authoritarian control of discourse produced remarkable uniformity within literary genres at any given point in time. So assertions that a book is 'typical' are not problematic, as they would be if we were examining textbooks published in a pluralist society. This enhances the value of data contained in the tables below, even though they are based on very small numbers of textbooks.

Literary, Social and Political Content

Communicative competence in a foreign language requires understanding of the culturally specific contextual assumptions which guide reference assignment and determine the social significance of what is said.¹³ Before the Cultural Revolution, foreign language students in China were required to study not only vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation, but also the current situation, history, geography, culture and customs of the country whose language they were acquiring. Their textbooks complemented this contextual information by including fables, short stories, myths and extracts from original works by native speakers.¹⁴

Under no circumstances, however, were the Maoist cadres who controlled education during the Cultural Revolution going to expose language students to a discourse which reflected the assumptions of Western society. This ruled out any attempt to introduce students to Western myths, fables, literary classics or authentic examples of contemporary writing. Indeed, it ruled out any non-political material at all, for the belief that such material existed reflected the 'bourgeois' assumption that there was a sphere of 'private life', separated from politics, which could be analysed in non-political terms. For the Maoists, everything was political, and the only acceptable politics was based on Mao Zedong Thought. This 'fact' had to be reflected in the contents of the textbooks. Table 1 summarizes the contents of the 25 lessons in a Beijing textbook which became a model for introductory texts in many parts of China.

Table 1: Contents of *English*. vol. 1, Beijing 1969

Contents of lesson	Number	Percent
Political	25	100
Moral Education Chinese Tradition	0	0
Science	0	0
Foreign Stories	0	0
General	0	0
TOTAL	25	100

The lessons, it can be seen, were entirely political. They consisted mainly of English translations of political slogans, quotations from Chairman Mao, the inscriptions of his deputy Lin Biao, and revolutionary songs. Their main theme

¹³See M. Saville Troike, 'The Ethnography of Communication', in *Sociolinguistics and Language Teaching*, ed. S.L. McKay and N.L. Hornberger, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996; C. Cramsch, *Context and Culture in Language Teaching*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993; and on context and reference assignment in general, Dan Sperber and Deidre Wilson, *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986, second edition 1995.

¹⁴L.X. Tang, *TEFL in China: Methods and Techniques*, Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign languages Press, n.d. [1983?], 43.

was Mao worship. The first thirteen lessons, in fact, consisted of nine lessons praising Mao and four quoting him. In lesson six the only thing students learned was that 'Chairman Mao is the red sun in our hearts'; in lesson seven, their only task was to study Mao's statement that 'Our Party is a great Party, a glorious Party, a correct Party'; and in lesson ten, they confined their attention to Lin Biao's inscription:

Long live the great teacher, great supreme commander and great helmsman Chairman Mao! A long life to him! A long, long life to him!

While the standard scripts of Mao worship dominated the early textbooks, they were always complemented by lessons which encoded other themes of Maoist discourse. Five themes were especially common. The first was 'the bitter past of the labouring people', which was always contrasted with the happiness and prosperity of the present:

I am fifteen.
And Grandpa is sixty-three ...
I have bread and rice for meals.
But he had only husks and weeds ...
Why are things so different?
Because the times are different.
Thanks to the Party and Chairman Mao, the former slaves are the masters of the country now.¹⁵

Students were made to recite this script, which consists largely of stock phrases known to every Chinese, because most of them had been hungry during the Great Leap Forward and were still very poor. They had to be convinced that they were actually well off – or at least better off than their grandparents.

A second theme of the discourse was class struggle, which dominated lessons as never before. Its form can be exemplified from the textbooks themselves:

On the blackboard there is a quotation from Chairman Mao, 'never forget classes and class struggle'. An old worker is telling the pupils about his bitter past and his happy life today. From time to time the pupils shout, 'Never forget class bitterness! Always remember class hatred! Long live the Communist Party of China!'¹⁶

Recitation of the scripts of class hatred was intended to perpetuate hostility to surviving members of the old exploiting classes, who played a useful role as targets of competitive displays of revolutionary fervour. To justify continued struggle against them, the scripts had to claim that they could never be trusted. One textbook, for example, told the story of 'The Farmhand and the Snake'. It related how a farmhand took pity on a snake dying of cold. He picked it up and warmed it in his bosom. When the snake revived it gave the farmhand a

¹⁵ *English*, vol. 8, Shanghai 1973; see also, for example, *English*, vol. 11, Shanghai 1974.

¹⁶ *English*, vol. 1, Henan 1973.

deadly bite. The story ends like this:

Chairman Mao teaches us: ‘Who are our enemies? Who are our friends? This is a question of first importance for the revolution.’ Class enemies are just like snakes. We should never expect them to change their nature. We should always be on our guard against them and carry the revolution through to the end.¹⁷

There were similar stories about the cunning and treachery of class enemies in other textbooks, many of them using the same quote from Mao and the same stock phrases.¹⁸

A third theme was reverence for workers, soldiers and especially poor and lower-middle peasants:

We are educated young people. We receive re-education in the Red Flag People’s Commune.... The poor and lower-middle peasants are our good teachers. They help us study Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought. They often give us lessons in class struggle and the struggle for production.... We are determined to make revolution in the countryside all our lives.¹⁹

There were many variations on this standardised script, revolving around the same stock phrases (‘The poor and lower-middle peasants are our good teachers’; ‘We are determined to make revolution in the countryside all our lives.’). It served two purposes. It subordinated educated people – whom Mao mistrusted – to the poor and lower-middle peasants whom he manipulated and claimed to represent; and it forced the students to praise what many of them dreaded – exile to the countryside, where they would live out their days performing back-breaking labour.

The fourth theme was summed up by the Maoist slogan ‘Serve the people!’ One textbook included an abridged version of Mao’s essay which bore that title, and nearly all textbooks had stories which exemplified its theme. Characters in the books not only burned with desire to sacrifice themselves for the people in general, they actively searched for ways to sacrifice themselves for individuals, especially old people from good class backgrounds. Invariably, they were inspired by Chairman Mao who taught them: ‘All people in the revolutionary ranks must care for each other, must love and help each other.’²⁰

The fifth theme was the universal appeal of Mao’s Thought. Teaching students how to recite Maoist discourse in other tongues universalized its message, and the point was rammed home whenever the textbooks mentioned ordinary people from other countries. Consider the foreigner in the story ‘Eager to get a Chairman Mao Badge’:

¹⁷*English*, vol. 10, Shanghai 1973.

¹⁸see, for example, *English*, vol. 5, Henan 1972; *English*, vol. 8, Henan 1974; *English*, vol. 6, Henan 1973; *English*, vol. 6, Tianjin 1973.

¹⁹*English*, vol. 8, Henan 1974.

²⁰*English*, vol. 5, Henan 1972.

The black sailor comes to China for the first time ... He loves Chairman Mao. Chairman Mao is the ever-red sun in his heart. He is eager to get a Chairman Mao badge. 'How happy I am!' Tears in his eyes, he shouts: 'Long live Chairman Mao! A long, long life to him!'²¹

Or consider the fictitious Soviet sailor who appeared elsewhere in the same book:

Comrade Mao Tse-Tung is the Lenin of our era. He is the ever-red sun in the hearts of the people of the world. He is the great leader of the world's revolutionary people. He leads us in the struggle against imperialism and revisionism We vow to follow him and make revolution forever.²²

These stories encouraged young Chinese to believe that Mao was the inspiration of all the oppressed peoples of the world. Those oppressed peoples glorified Mao and revolution using the stock phrases of Maoist discourse. They were models for emulation – 'foreign' clones of idealized revolutionary Chinese.

These five themes, together with Mao worship, dominated the textbooks even after Lin Biao's death and disgrace in 1971. The emphasis on politics scarcely slackened. Table 2 shows that in the three texts published in Henan in 1972 the percentage of lesson categorised as mainly 'political' remained nearly as high as in the Beijing text of 1969.

Table 2: Contents of *English*, vols 2, 3, 5, Henan 1972

Contents of lesson	Number	Percent
Political	23	88.45
Moral Education and Chinese Tradition	1	3.85
Science	0	0.00
Foreign stories	1	3.85
General	1	3.85
TOTAL	26	100.00

If anything, the table understates the pervasiveness of political education, for throughout the Cultural Revolution there was explicit political content in almost every lesson, whatever its overall classification. For example, in a 1974 textbook, a lesson on knowledge of the earth, which I would classify under the heading 'General', attacked the discourse of race and expressed the discourse of class and revolution:

A. ... What are the five races on the earth?

²¹ *English*, vol. 1, Beijing 1969.

²² *English*, vol. 1, Beijing 1969.

B: They are the red, the yellow, the brown, the white and the black races. But it is nonsense to divide mankind according to the colour of the skin.

A: How would you divide mankind, then?

B: They may be divided into two classes, the exploiters and the exploited.

C: You are right. They may also be divided into the revolutionary and the reactionary.²³

The main difference in the content of textbooks after Lin Biao's death was that they were purged of Lin's own Mao-worshipping slogans and inscriptions. In their place were lessons condemning Lin with the standard discourse once used to vilify class enemies like Liu Shaoqi. One textbook, for example, made a former coal miner say:

Before liberation this coal-mine was owned by the Japanese aggressors. I was a coal-miner here. How I suffered in those miserable days! ... But Lin Biao attempted to restore capitalism and sell out our country to the socialist-imperialists. He wanted to make us suffer under the imperialists' rule once again. We will never allow such a thing to happen. We will further strengthen the dictatorship of the proletariat and smash any plot for capitalist restoration.²⁴

The textbooks kept in step with the latest political line by attaching different referents to the stereotyped terms of praise and condemnation specified by the discourse. It was possible to predict the contents of the books if one knew the current political situation, and one could understand the current situation simply by reading the books.

Vocabulary and Politics

People studying a new language cannot use it effectively as a medium of communication unless they know the most commonly used words. We can ascertain whether the textbooks provided a suitable grounding in the English language's 'essential nucleus' by comparing their vocabulary with the first and second word lists compiled by Paul Nation.²⁵ The first list consists of the thousand words (apart from purely structural words like prepositions) judged most necessary for students to master if they are to use English as a system of communication. These words occur very frequently, they are used in many different contexts, their inflections and syntax are relatively regular, and they are extremely useful in defining and explaining other words. The basic

²³*English*, vol. 8, Henan 1974.

²⁴*English*, vol. 2, Tianjin 1974.

²⁵I.S.P. Nation, *Vocabulary Lists, Words, Affixes and Stems*, Occasional Publication No. 12, English Language Institute, Victoria University of Wellington, 1983. See also the same author's *Teaching and Learning Vocabulary*, Boston, MA: Heinle and Heinle, 1990.

vocabulary in any well-designed course of instruction in English will consist mainly of these words. The second list consists of another thousand words which, while less essential, figure prominently in the vocabulary of native speakers. Students who can recognise these words, and the thousand somewhat more advanced words in Nation's third list, will be able to read a good deal of everyday English material without frequent use of a dictionary.

The first of our textbooks, published in Beijing in 1969, is an introductory text for students who had never learnt English before. It has a total vocabulary of only 179 words which are not purely structural. Table 3 shows that only 33.5 percent of words are in Nation's first list, and only another 2.8 percent in the second list. Most of the words, in fact, are not part of the everyday vocabulary of native speakers of English.

Table 3: Frequency of Occurrence of Basic Vocabulary in Introductory Textbook, *English*, vol. 1, Beijing 1969

Total Vocabulary		In Nation's First List		In Nation's Second List	
No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
179	100	60	33.5	5	2.8

If so few of the 179 non-structural words in this introductory textbook are amongst the 2000 most basic words in the English language, what principles governed their selection? The answer is simple: they were the words required to translate the slogans of the Cultural Revolution. Before students were taught how to say 'hello' or 'goodbye', they were taught how to say things like 'Chairman Mao leads us in the socialist revolution and socialist construction, and in the struggle against imperialism and revisionism'. It mattered not at all that few native speakers of English had more than the haziest idea of what this meant.

The influence of politics on vocabulary was particularly obvious in 1969, but it remained strong throughout the Cultural Revolution. As Table 4 shows, just over 40 percent of the non-structural words in two middle level school textbooks published in Henan in 1972 and 1973 occur in Nation's list of the thousand most basic words, and only six or seven percent can be found amongst the next thousand.

Table 4: Frequency of Occurrence of Basic Vocabulary in Intermediate Level School Textbooks, 1972 and 1973

	Total Vocabulary		In Nation's First List		In Nation's Second List	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
<i>English</i> , vol. 5 Henan 1972	124	100	51	41	7	6
<i>English</i> , vol. 4 Henan 1973	129	100	56	43	9	7

The table reflects the fact that the textbooks were using the spelling and phonetics of the English language to code the Chinese political vocabulary, which remained mysterious even in translation. Few native English speakers would have guessed that the term ‘socialist-imperialists’ referred to the leaders of the Soviet Union; fewer still would have known the term ‘traitors’, when applied to people because of their activities after 1949, referred exclusively to those who had betrayed their ‘good’ class origins by opposing the revolutionary line; and even Western ‘Maoists’ often failed to understand that in China the term ‘class’ referred to groups which often had nothing to do with classes in any traditional Marxist sense. Other words in the textbooks which had different meanings for Chinese students than for native speakers included ‘reactionary’, ‘the people’, ‘landlord’, ‘model’, ‘secretary’, ‘instructor’, ‘renegade’, ‘bad element’, ‘scab’, ‘intellectual’, ‘advanced’ and ‘correct’. No attempt was made to teach Chinese students the meanings these terms had in the English-speaking world. Thus, even on narrowly political topics they would have found it difficult to get their message across. In the words of one language teacher, ‘The English in the textbooks was not the English of any English-speaking country.’²⁶

The Politics of Grammar Teaching

Before the Cultural Revolution, the teaching of English grammar in China followed the same principles as were generally used in the West: simple grammatical principles were explained before complicated ones, frequently used rules before rarely used ones, and regular forms before irregular ones. However, during the Cultural Revolution, these pedagogical principles were for a time abandoned. The first English sentence students encountered in the 1969 Beijing textbook, for example, was ‘Long live Chairman Mao!’ This is a conventional expression with irregular grammar, and using purely linguistic criteria it would not have been considered for inclusion at the outset of an introductory text. However, from a political point of view, the most important sentence in the English language was ‘Long live Chairman Mao!’, so it had to come first.

If students were to recite many of the slogans of the Cultural Revolution, they had to be introduced to the imperative mood. So the second sentence in the textbook was an imperative: ‘Let’s wish our great leader Chairman Mao a long, long life!’ This laid the groundwork for a later lessons in which students were expected to say things like ‘Down with U.S. imperialism!’ and ‘Down with the renegade, traitor, and scab, Liu Shaoqi!’

Having learned to shout slogans in the imperative mood, students were sensibly introduced to the commonplace indicative mood and the present tense. This enabled them to chant the slogan ‘Workers, peasants and soldiers love Chairman Mao best.’ In this sentence, however, they met their first adverb,

²⁶Tang, 44.

and it was not a simple adverb but the superlative 'best'. No attempt was made to explain the use of adverbs in English, or to situate the superlative form 'best' in the context of the comparative 'better' or the simple 'well'. From a linguistic point of view, this was poor pedagogy, but from a political point of view it was natural. The language of Chinese politics was built around dichotomies between perfect goodness and total evil, which required the almost immediate introduction of the superlative form.

In 1969, it was necessary not only to participate in the cult of Mao-worship but also to acknowledge the authority of the cult's high-priest, party Vice-Chairman Lin Biao. This involved the recitation of Lin Biao's inscriptions, which could sometimes be translated only with the use of advanced grammatical forms. Students who knew almost no English were required to say:

Sailing the seas depends on the helmsman,
Making revolution depends on Mao Tse-tung's thought.²⁷

Here they met the gerundive use of 'sailing' and 'making'. Since Chinese verbs are not inflected, and there are no gerunds, these English words would have puzzled students who thought about them. Fortunately, the book did not add to the confusion by attempting to explain gerunds. Its concern was not the grammar, but the political necessity of worshipping Mao in the words of Lin Biao.

Mastery of the tenses of the English language presents particular problems to Chinese students, for the verbs in their own language have no tense. It is very important, from a linguistic point of view, to introduce the tenses in a clear and systematic way. Left to themselves, Chinese teachers of English would have dealt first with the present and past tenses, leaving the rather confusing present perfect and past perfect till later. In the 1969 textbook, however, the second tense which students met was the present perfect, as in the phrase 'has brought forth'. This was because it was politically imperative to teach students to sing 'The East Is Red' early in their studies:

The East is red, the sun rises,
China has brought forth a Mao Zedong.

It would be hard to think of a more confusing way of introducing the present perfect tense, for 'bring/brought' is an irregular verb, and students had not yet been introduced to verbs like 'start/started' which follow the standard form. Moreover, 'to bring forth' is a rather uncommon expression, unlikely to be used except when singing 'The East Is Red'. And finally, this lapse into the present perfect tense was accompanied by no attempt to explain or illustrate the principles which govern its use.

By 1972, linguistically oriented pedagogical principles had regained much of their importance in the teaching of grammar. Students still had to

²⁷ *English*, vol. 1, Beijing 1969.

learn how to say ‘Long live Chairman Mao!’ at the beginning of their studies, and they were still given an early introduction to the imperative so that they could recite the more inflammatory slogans. Thereafter, however, the textbooks reverted to a traditional order of presentation. By 1972, textbooks in Beijing, Henan and elsewhere were drilling students thoroughly in the present tense, then moving systematically through the other tenses before presenting the present perfect and past perfect tenses last.

Why, when the textbooks’ vocabulary lists remained politicized throughout the Cultural Revolution, did they so quickly discard most political criteria in teaching grammar? The crucial difference is that while a specialized political vocabulary was essential in order to convey ‘correct’ revolutionary content, there was less need to introduce grammatical points in sequences which made no pedagogical sense. Even an introductory textbook restricted to the present tense had ample scope for Mao worship:

Chairman Mao!
 You are the red sun in our hearts!
 We are sunflowers.
 Sunflowers always face the red sun.
 We think of you day and night.
 We wish you a long, long life.²⁸

The textbooks had so often ignored sound pedagogical principles in teaching grammar in 1969 because Mao worship and disdain for experts were still at their height. Mao’s Thought was regarded as the secret of success in all fields, and textbooks which taught grammar according to standard pedagogical principles, rather than political ones, could easily be accused of putting ‘skills first’ like the ‘number one revisionist’ Liu Shaoqi. By 1972, however, the worst excesses of the Mao cult were over, the moderate Zhou Enlai had regained some of his influence, and China was re-establishing contact with the outside world. Under these circumstances, Mao agreed with Zhou Enlai and Vice-Premier Li Xiannian to re-emphasise the teaching of foreign languages. At the same time, Mao’s allies in promoting the Cultural Revolution – his wife Jiang Qing and her radical coterie – insisted that the textbooks be dominated by political material reflecting the current Party line (Fu 1986: 84-5). The result was a compromise, weighted in the radicals’ favour. The textbooks retained their revolutionary content and vocabulary, but these were now introduced in ways consistent with the proper teaching of grammar.

English Language Teaching after Mao

After Mao’s death in September 1976 and the arrest of the Gang of Four, Hua Guofeng became the new Party Chairman. He attempted to appropriate Mao’s legacy, so the new textbooks issued in 1978 made him the star of a

²⁸*English*, vol. 2, Beijing 1972.

personality cult, maintained their revolutionary vigour and continued to endorse the Cultural Revolution. They also joined the nationwide campaign against the Gang of Four whose members, in the best Maoist fashion, were accused of plotting to restore capitalism:

The Gang of Four Anti-Party clique wanted to usurp Party and state power and restore capitalism. We Red Guards, never allow them!²⁹

Under these circumstances, there was only a small reduction in the textbooks' concentration on political themes, a point borne out by the analysis of two textbooks in Table 5:

Table 5: Contents of *English*, vols 2 and 4, Henan 1978

Category	Number	Percentage
Political	23	71.87
Moral Education & Chinese Tradition	4	12.5
Science	1	3.12
Foreign Stories	2	6.25
General	2	6.25
TOTAL	32	100

Hua stood for Maoism-without-the-Gang-of-Four, and while he retained effective power the great Maoist experiment in politicized language education continued, just a little attenuated.

Hua's weakness was that he was a leftist who had gained power through a purge of the strongest force on the left, the Gang of Four. This made him dependent on the support of pragmatists like Deng Xiaoping, who had a different vision of China's future and who gradually eased him aside. Deng was restored to all his offices in 1977 and throughout 1978 his influence grew. Hua still clung to the trappings of office, but by the end of the year Deng was China's 'paramount leader' and in a position to repudiate the 'left' orientation of the Cultural Revolution and launch the Four Modernizations.

In March 1979, the counter-revolution in China's foreign language teaching began with the circulation of documents produced at an All-China Foreign Languages Forum seven months earlier. Those documents recommended that foreign languages become as important in the school curriculum as mathematics and Chinese.³⁰ Linguistic skills were once more seen as essential to China's expanding diplomacy and as a means of gaining access to knowledge which would aid the country's drive for economic development. Moreover, China's rapidly growing tourist industry was creating additional demand for skilled interpreters and translators, especially in English.

²⁹ *English*, vol.3, Henan n.d. [1977?].

³⁰ Fu, 87.

Languages were now to be taught with the traditional objective of enabling students to communicate with foreigners.

The changed goals of foreign language teaching required new pedagogical techniques, which were reflected in textbooks published after 1978. In contrast with books produced during the Cultural Revolution, the new books were compiled mainly by language experts, scientists and educationalists in co-operation with experienced high school teachers. Students were not involved and workers, peasants and soldiers were not consulted. In the words of the Minister of Education, the books were intended to help students to ‘say real things as real people about real life, not just to mimic or translate from Chinese’ (Fu 1986). Grammatical points were presented in a logical order, political jargon was eliminated and lessons featuring direct political indoctrination were dropped. They were replaced by a wide variety of foreign stories not subordinated to overt political goals, by items explaining basic science and technology, and by lessons intended to expand general knowledge. The dramatic change in the contents of the textbooks can be seen from the titles of the lessons of Beijing’s 1984 senior school textbook, which are classified in the following table:

Table 6: Titles of Lessons: National Senior School Textbook, Beijing 1984

Titles of Lessons	Category
At Home in the Future Continents and Oceans Watching Ants	Science
A Little Hero The Story of William Tell The Footprint Abraham Lincoln The Emperor’s New Clothes At a Tailor’s Shop Galileo and Aristotle How Marx Learned Foreign Languages Napoleon’s Three Questions The Blind Man and the Elephant	Foreign Stories
Pollution The Great Wall of China Lady Silkworm	General

The foreign stories, which make up the bulk of the lessons, are a far cry from the ‘foreign’ stories invented by Chinese authors during the Cultural Revolution to attack the evils of capitalism and show how workers in other countries loved Chairman Mao. The story on Marx is not explicitly political, doing no more than recount the effort he made to learn English and Russian. Most of the other stories are well known tales drawn from the literature and

folklore of Western nations. Their original authors include Daniel Defoe, Guy de Maupassant, Hans Christian Andersen and Mark Twain. The stories represent a genuine attempt to introduce Chinese students to the culture of the English-speaking world.

The impact of the renewed desire to understand and communicate with foreigners can also be seen in the vocabulary lists in the revised textbooks, such as those published in Tianjin in 1984 and 1985:

Table 7: Frequency of Occurrence of Basic Vocabulary in Middle Level School Textbooks, 1984-85

Details of Textbook	Total Vocabulary		In Nation's First List		In Nation's Second List	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Tianjin 1984, v.4	256	100	163	64	29	11
Tianjin 1985, v.5	231	100	162	70	32	14

We see that seventy-five percent of the vocabulary in the 1984 volume is included in Nation's lists of the two thousand most basic words, and that eighty-four percent of the vocabulary in the 1985 volume is included. The exclusion of explicitly political content from the books meant that the technical vocabulary of Chinese political debate was eliminated. China's new leaders had abandoned the Maoist strategy of 'building socialism' by waging ideological warfare in the classroom against alleged class enemies in China. Instead, they set out to find rational solutions to practical problems to achieve socialist goals. Language was still influenced by politics, but the nature and extent of control were now very different. One still could not praise the Gang of Four, attack the Party or condemn socialism. But within these limits, the textbooks could deal with a wide range of topics and say nearly anything. They were now free to discuss non-political subjects in non-political language, to introduce students to the cultural heritage of the English-speaking world, and to employ whatever pedagogical tools helped students to acquire the foreign language skills required by the Four Modernizations.

Conclusion

English language textbooks in China during the Cultural Revolution ensured that learning a foreign language was not going to open up a window onto another world or give students access to alternative ways of thinking. The goal was not to help the students communicate with foreigners but to keep them locked within Maoist discourse – a discourse which they were expected to reproduce, internalize and live by. That discourse dictated the textbooks' content, their vocabulary and for a time even their teaching of grammar. It categorized and evaluated the world in politically correct ways; it constituted the only legitimate language of political, social, moral and aesthetic analysis; and it reduced the world to a one-dimensional conflict between good and evil.

Anyone who wanted to add other dimensions to the picture had to learn a vocabulary which, quite deliberately, was simply not taught. Over time, the Maoists hoped, this rigorous programme of linguistic engineering would have profound effects, re-shaping patterns of thought and producing new, revolutionary human beings. It only partly succeeded, but that is another story.

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