Resistant or Favorable? Chinese Learners' Beliefs towards Task-Based Language Learning and Teaching

Résistants ou favorables ? Les opinions des apprenants chinois vis-à-vis de l´apprentissage basé sur les tâches

¿Resistentes o favorables? Las Creencias de los Estudiantes de Cultura China acerca de la Enseñanza del Inglés por Tareas

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Abstract

English as Foreign Language (EFL) in East Asia involves major sociocultural issues. Modern, Western-based methodologies such as Communicative Language Learning (CLL, Communicative Language Teaching, CLT in this paper) and its further development Task-Based Language Learning and Teaching (TBLLT, Ellis, 2003), feature principles which can conflict with some of the fundamental values of Confucian Heritage Cultures (CHC) education and hinder their adoption in Korea, Taiwan, Japan, Singapore, Hong-Kong and Vietnam. This article introduces a sociocultural, ethnographic perspective on EFL in East Asia which contextualizes language teaching in its broader educational and cultural environment. Teacher-centeredness, book and writing focuses, memorization strategies within a grammar-translation approach are in contradiction with modern language teaching methodologies' focuses on learner-centeredness and teachers' facilitating roles, student participation and interactions, communication competence and learner autonomy. The text advocates for a mean between Western and Eastern learning cultures through a context-based, culturally-sensitive approach and introduces classroom's strategies for the implementation of CLL and TBLLT in China and East Asia.

Keywords: Chinese culture of learning, Task-Based Language Teaching and Learning, Intercultural learning

Resumen

La enseñanza y el aprendizaje del Inglés como lengua extranjera en Asia del Este implica grandes retos socioculturales. Las metodologías occidentales modernas como *Communicative Language Learning* (CLL, *Communicative Language Teaching*, CLT en este artículo) y su desarrollo en *Task-Based Language Learning and Teaching* (TBLLT, Ellis, 2003), plantean principios que pueden chocar con algunos valores educativos fundamentales de las culturas de herencia confucianistas (*Confucian Heritage Cultures* (CHC)), lo que dificulta su adopción en países como Corea, Taiwán, Japón, Singapur, Hong-Kong y Vietnam. Este artículo introduce una perspectiva sociocultural, etnográfica, sobre la enseñanza del inglés en Asia del Este que contextualiza la

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enseñanza en su entorno educativo y cultural amplio. La enseñanza centrada en el maestro, los libros y la escritura, la memorización, dentro de un abordaje gramática-traducción entran en conflicto con los enfoques de las metodologías modernas centradas en el estudiante y el maestro como facilitador, la participación del estudiante, su autonomía y la prevalencia de sus interacciones, y la competencia comunicativa. Este texto propone un término medio entre las culturas de aprendizaje occidentales y orientales a través de un abordaje basado en el contexto y sensible a la cultura, e introduce determinadas estrategias de clase para la implementación de CLL y TBLLT en China y Asia del Este.

Palabras clave: cultura china del aprendizaje, enseñanza y aprendizaje basados en tareas, aprendizaje intercultural

Résumé

L´enseignement de l´anglais langue étrangère (ALE) en Asie de l´Est implique d´importantes problématiques socioculturelles. Les méthodologies occidentales modernes telles que l´approche communicative (AC) et l´approche actionnelle (Ellis, 2003), présentent des principes qui entrent en contradiction avec certaines des valeurs fondamentales de l´éducation des cultures d´héritage confucianiste (CHC) et mettent en difficulté leur mise en œuvre en Corée, Taiwan, Japon, Singapour, Hong-Kong et Vietnam. Cet article présente une perspective socioculturelle et ethnographique de l´ALE en Asie de l´Est qui aborde l´enseignement-apprentissage de l´anglais dans son environnement macro et culturel. La centration sur l´enseignant, la focalisation sur les livres et l´écriture, la mémorisation, dans une approche grammaire-traduction sont en contradiction avec les méthodologies modernes qui promeuvent la centration sur l´apprenant, son autonomie, sa participation et ses interactions, la compétence de communication et le rôle de l´enseignant comme animateur. Cet article préconise un moyen terme entre les cultures occidentales et orientales à travers une approche contextualisée qui prend en compte la culture et introduit des stratégies pédagogiques pour la mise en œuvre des approches communicative et actionnelle en Chine et en Asie de l´Est.

Mots-clés: culture chinoise d´enseignement-apprentissage, approche actionnelle, apprentissage interculturel

Introduction

The recent economic development of China has generated a surge in the need for competent English speakers. China is home to the world's largest English as a Foreign Language (EFL) population estimated at more than 300 million (The Economist, 2011; Wang, 2008). Likewise, their expanding role in the global economy raises the "four dragons'" (Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore and Korea) need for competent English speakers.

However, given that the obsolete grammar-translation approach is still prevailing (Chen, 2003; Hu, 2002, 2003, 2005a, 2005b, Rao, 2006; Wang, 2002), most learners in Chinese and East Asian contexts fail to develop oral competencies (Luchini, 2004; Rao, 2002). This partial failure of the methodology coherent with the traditional Chinese approach to learning appeals to reflections and studies on ways to implement modern methodologies (Bax, 2004; Hu, 2005a; Leung, 2005; Liao, 2004). Indeed, an important number of obstacles, sociocultural in particular, stand in the way of TBLLT. In addition to pragmatic difficulties such as class size and the examination-driven nature of the teaching (Aldridge & Huang, 1999; Chen et al., 2005; Littlewood, 2007; Tang & Biggs, 1999) which exclude any assessment of speaking competencies, numerous studies showed how Chinese educational background and institutional culture conflict with TBLLT principles and activities (Adams & Newton, 2009; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996a; Jin & Cortazzi, 1998a, 1998b; Li, M. S., 2004, 2005; Littlewood, 2007; Rao, 1996, 2002, 2006; Wang, 2002).

To tackle the problematic of the implementation of TBLLT in Chinese contexts, this study endorsed a sociocultural point of view. It sought to determine whether a representative number of Chinese students were resistant or favorable to TBLLT's principles and activities. The research included a review of the cultural psychology of Chinese learners to approach their "learning culture" as well as their culture of Foreign Language Teaching and Learning (FLTL). These macro patterns were then confronted with the data from a survey with 300 Taiwanese students and a dozen interviews.

Literature Review

Task-based learning.

TBLLT, also known as Task-Based Teaching (TBT, Willis & Willis, 2004) and Task-Based Instruction (TBI) (Skehan, 2001, 2003, 2006), focuses on the use of authentic language and on bringing students to realize purposeful, meaningful tasks using the target language and negotiating meaning (Chen, 2008). Tasks constitute the focus of TBLLT. Understanding and conveying messages are the first objectives, meaning is primary and integrated in tasks which relate to learners' personal (future) experiences and have an outcome. It is an FLTL actualization of the "learning by doing" axiom. Nunan (1989) defined a task as: "A piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing, or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form" (p. 10). For Samuda and Bygate (2008), a task is a holistic activity which engages language use in order to achieve some non-linguistic outcome while meeting a linguistic challenge, with the overall aim of promoting language learning, through process or product or both (p. 69). In a task-based course the emphasis is on meaningful, holistic language practice, in which learners need to listen, read, speak, or write in order to complete a challenge (Adams & Newton, 2009). For example, visiting a doctor, conducting an interview, or calling customer service for help. Assessment is primarily based on task outcome rather than on accuracy of language forms (Nunan, 2004; Willis & Willis, 2004). TBLLT is especially popular for developing target language fluency and student confidence. It looks upon learners as being "social agents" (Council of Europe, 2005) teachers should involve in communicative tasks. The

teacher acts as a coordinator and organizer who sets up activities, a complete shift from teachers' and learners' traditional roles, especially within the Asian context.

TBLLT, as the most modern methodology of language learning, is now consensually recognized as the most efficient way of learning languages (Ellis, 2003). National curricula and Ministry of Education policies of China (Hu, 2005c; Zhang, 2007), Taiwan (Sung, 2005), and Hong Kong (Carless, 2007) specify that task-based approaches to teaching English should be used at all levels of the curricula. This article aims at stressing that TBLLT, if properly adapted, appears as particularly suited to Asian and Chinese contexts. For cultural and institutional reasons, Asians appear to have bigger difficulties developing their speaking competence (Luchini, 2004; Rao, 2002). By bringing students to complete various communicational tasks using L2, TBLLT seems the most adequate methodology for developing communication skills. If, on one hand TBLLT is likely to conflict with the traditional role of the Chinese student, it is on the other hand highly suitable for collaborative learning, a pedagogy convergent with Chinese learning culture.

Chinese learning culture.

Foreign language teaching in China involves major cultural issues since modern, Western-based methodologies such as TBLLT and Communicative Language Learning (CLL) feature principles conflicting with fundamental values of the Chinese culture of learning. The opposition takes roots in the wide gap existing between Western and Chinese philosophies of education. These traditions translate into very different "culture of learning", which has been defined as:

> "the socially transmitted expectations, beliefs, and values about what good learning is. [...] usually taken-for-granted cultural ideas about the roles and relations of teachers and learners, about appropriate teaching and learning styles and methods, about the use of textbooks and materials, and about what constitutes good work in classrooms" (Jin & Cortazzi, 1998b, p. 749).

One of the main obstacle to the implementation of TBLLT in East Asia lies in the teacher′s and learner′s roles it promotes. Whereas Chinese educational culture is teacher-centered, with classes revolving around the teacher who is considered an unfailing fount of knowledge and operating *ex cathedra* (Aldridge & Huang, 1999; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996a; Watkins & Biggs, 1999, 2001) so learners adopt a silent and listening role (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996a; Qian 2007; Rao, 2002, 2006), CLL and TBLLT on the other hand get teachers to level with learners and act as facilitators of the communicative process (Breen & Candlin, 1980) and guides (Nunan, 2004; Li, 2000, 2004, 2005). Learner-centeredness and communicative activities that expect learners to speak in class conflict with learners′ ′silent way′ (Wang, 2002). Thus the adoption of modern EFL methodologies in a Chinese learning environment is likely to generate problems due to a mismatch between the role perceptions of learners and teachers. Issues may arise since learners —unfamiliar with Western methodologies— see the teacher as someone who should be providing explicit instructions and modeling of the target language.

Along the same lines, Chinese high regards for education and teachers (Lee, 1999) does not match with the use of role plays and games in class (Li, 2004; Rao, 1996, 2006; Wang, 1993). Chinese students take their learning very seriously. They tend to associate games and communicative activities with entertainment exclusively and are usually skeptical of their use as learning tools (Anderson, 1993). To most Chinese, learning involves deep thinking and in-depth analysis (Rao, 2006).

The focus on writing fostered by the Chinese culture of learning constitute another obstacle in the way of TBLLT′s implementation. "There are golden houses and beautiful girls in books" goes a Chinese proverb. The reverence for books is also present in the Mandarin concept for teaching:

"*jiao"* (teach) *"shu"* (book). This focus on written material helps understanding the neglect of the oral dimension in Chinese language classes (Jin & Cortazzi, 1998a; Rao, 1996), another consequence which most probably draws from mother tongue literacy (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996a). The trend impedes the spontaneous use of the language and can even be observed in conversation classes (Qian, 2007).

Partly because -inclusively in English assessment- exams are oriented towards content rather than task (Chen, 2008; Littlewood, 2007; Wang, 2002), Chinese learners tend to conceive knowledge as what lays in books (Li, X., 2005). They tend to focus on content rather than on building communicative competences whereas TBLLT relies on project activities, many of them oral and does not primarily make use of written materials. In the TBLLT approach, course and class beginning may not involve any written support. This can disorientate or frustrate Chinese learners who like to rely on texts. Some Chinese students have complained when not provided with a textbook but sheets (Li, M. S., 2004).

Another important feature of the Chinese learning culture which stands in the way of TBLLT's implementation is the prevalent use of repetition and memorization (Biggs, 1999; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996a; Liu, 1986; Rao, 2006). This orientation can be seen in the term "*xue xi*", the equivalent for "learning" whose meaning is centered on content knowledge, exercises and memorization for practice. Etymologically, "*xue"* means imitation, conceived as the main way to acquire knowledge and "*xi"* refers to revisions or exercises, conceived as a way to foster knowledge (Pu, 2011). Given that their apprenticeship of characters has shown Chinese learners how repetition as a memorization technique could be an efficient mean to learn a language (Jin & Cortazzi, 1998b; Rao, 2006), learners tend to transfer it in the foreign language learning (Li, 2005; Marton, Dall'Alba & Kun, 1999). This is evidenced by the success of books of English idioms and the broad use of flashcards and vocabulary lists or, more recently, a-phrase-a-day cellular phone text messaging service.

To the detriment of fluency, Chinese learners tend to focus on accuracy. Within the Confucian philosophy, still deeply influential today (Lee, 1999), learning is conceived of as the exact repetition, copy of the master's work (Rao, 2006; Biggs, 1999). "By reviewing the old, one learns the new", Confucius would have said. Constantly reviewing what one has learnt is thought to allow a new understanding, the building of a new knowledge within the old (Biggs, 1999). This trait helps understanding Chinese learners' strong attachment to accuracy (Rao, 2006) which induces a problematic apprehension of mistakes in language learning and a focus on grammar rules, both cultural obstacles for TBLLT.

These factors converge to the fact that most Chinese learners tend to develop a grammar-translation approach of FLTL (Li, X., 2005). They therefore tend to disregard CLL and TBLLT, both in theory and in practice. Relying on the literature one could expect most participants to present beliefs in opposition with TBLLT principles and activities.

Studying learners' beliefs.

Learners' beliefs, also known as metacognitive knowledge (Wenden, 1999) or social representations in the French literature (Castellotti & Moore, 2002; Moore, 2001; Zarate, 1995; Zarate & Candelier, 1997), refers within second language acquisition to learners' approach towards language learning and its modalities. In the literature the notion has also been referred to as attitudes, values, judgements, axioms, opinions, ideology, perceptions, conceptions, conceptual systems, preconceptions, dispositions, implicit theories, personal theories, internal mental processes, action strategies, rules of practice, practical principles, perspectives, repertoires of understanding, and social strategy (Pajares, 1992). Chinese learners'

beliefs, despite relating to the largest EFL population in the world and conflicting with modern methodologies, have little been studied (see Li, X., 2005 for a comprehensive review).

The relevance of considering learners' beliefs has been clearly clarified by various authors (Benson & Lor, 1999; Brown, 2009; Cotterall, 1995; Gardner, 1985; Horwitz, 1987). Indeed, given that these constructs constitute one of the initial stages of the whole learning process, they determine learner's strategies and attitudes (motivation) and, therefore, teaching's success or failure. Asian learners' biased and oriented perceptions of language teaching and learning can indeed lead them to adopt less efficient strategies (Horwitz, 1987; Li, X., 2005; Rao, 2006) -such as memorizing a dictionary (see 2.4.; Chen et al., 2005). Some beliefs induce learners to be reluctant to take part in activities they do not recognize as relevant (see Li, M. S., 2005), to discredit methodologies and classroom's activities (Li, 2000) such as games and role plays (Li, 2004). It is therefore crucial to identify learners' opinions and beliefs and to rely on them for introducing —explicitly or not— TBLLT. The study of learner's beliefs, alongside with purposes' and needs' analysis, embodies one of the most necessary steps in the implementation of adapted methodologies and successful learning.

Because language learning is "embedded in a political and historical context" which learners' views inevitably touch upon, beliefs necessarily relate to the wider socio-political context (Barcelos, 2003). Learners' beliefs are therefore "dialogic" (Bakhtin, 1981; Morin, 1977) since they both obey individuals' and group's logics, patterns this study took into account through its analysis of the Chinese culture of learning.

Chinese Learners' Beliefs.

A few studies have focused on Chinese learners' beliefs towards EFL methodologies (Zhang & Cui, 2010; Rao, 2002; Li & Liang, 2012; Peacock, 1998, 2001; X. Li, 2005), most of them using the BALLI questionnaire (Horwitz, 1987). Some of these research investigated Chinese learners' beliefs towards CLL (Rao, 2002; Zhang & Cui, 2010 to some extent) but, to our knowledge, no studies have been conducted about Chinese learners' beliefs towards TBLLT. The results of the aforementioned studies are rather heterogeneous and do not permit to draw any clear conclusion as to whether Chinese students are in favour or against Western methodologies.

On one hand, studies such as Xinping Li´s (2005) showed how mainland Chinese University students held positive beliefs towards a learning strategy in conflict with CLL and TBLLT: rote learning for vocabulary acquisition. A hundred EFL learners from a large Chinese university were involved in the research as well as teachers from all over the country. Li's research corroborated that rote learning was the most prevailing language learning strategy in China at that time. The trend can be understood from a cultural perspective since it is consistent with traditional culture and values and coherent with Chinese educational background (Rao, 2006) —linguistic in particular (the Mandarin literacy)—, as well as with Chinese learners' avoidance of new strategies (Li, M. S., 2005). The inclination towards rote learning should also be related to the EFL environment's nature determined by the national situation/examination demand (Hu, 2002; Li, X., 2005; Rao, 2006).

The trend is coherent with Rao´s study which showed that participants preferred non-communicative activities to communicative ones in EFL classroom (2002).

On the other hand, in a larger study Li and Liang (2012) found that a majority of the English students they surveyed did not endorse the primacy of translation, grammar, and vocabulary and Zhang and Cui's research (2010) which involved 90 distance language students using a survey adapted from Cotterall´s (1995, 1999) questionnaire and Horwitz´s (1987) "Beliefs About Language

Learning Inventory" (BALLI) provided mixed results which object to the statement that Chinese learners are against CLL and TBLLT. These results will be compared below.

In an alternative approach, Peacock (1998) studied 202 EFL Hong Kong English learners and 45 EFL teachers with the objective to determine whether teacher-student differences in beliefs about language learning would affect proficiency. He used the BALLI questionnaire (Horwitz, 1987) combined with other data. He found that students who endorsed the importance of grammar and who underestimated the difficulty of English were less proficient than students who were more adventurous (less worried about making mistakes). In another study (2001), Peacock further found that students who believed that learning a foreign language was mostly a matter of memorizing vocabulary were less proficient than those with the opposite opinion.

Research questions

This research sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are young Taiwanese attitudes, opinions towards TBLLT principles and methodologies? Do students appear as favourable or resistant?
2. How do the research findings relate with the literature on TBLLT's adoption in Chinese contexts? Are they coherent?

Material and methods

Participants and instructional context.

Data have been collected in two Taiwanese metropolitan high schools and one national university of Taiwan's second largest city, Kaohsiung. 344 questionnaires were distributed to high schools students and 300 were used in the survey (44 were discarded for being incomplete or not properly filled up, 32 of them from one of the high schools). High school respondents were third grade students (in Taiwan) aged 17 to 18. The 100 University students were 18 to 25 years old from different majors attending a General Psychology course within which they participated in the survey. There was almost an even number of male and female respondents in the first high school and at the university, but girls strongly outnumbered boys in the second high school (84%). The high school students had been learning English formally for six years in junior and senior high schools and the university students for at least one more year as university freshmen. Questionnaires were handed to the students stressing they should give their personal opinions and that their answers would help in improving the quality of English teaching in Taiwan.

The researchers decided to survey high school students on the ground that most language learners in China are less than eighteen years old. Moreover, eighteen-year old subjects are at the border between adolescence and adulthood. They have developed an analytical capacity, can be critical and formulate opinions while displaying naive beliefs and attitudes.

Care should be taken when dealing with data collected in Taiwan to draw conclusions relevant to the larger Chinese cultural sphere. During this research the authors have integrated the important differences between Taiwanese and mainland Chinese. Like Hongkongers, Singaporeans, and Macanese Chinese-, Taiwanese Chinese come from a specific historical and cultural background. Similarly, as Hu showed (2003), discrepancies between Chinese major coastal cities and smaller in-land ones in respect to teachers training, equipment, class size and CLL's implementation should be reminded. A study conducted in Shanghai or Beijing may, just like any cultural study —especially those conducted on a small scale—, be context-specific. Some of its conclusions might be bounded to the locus of data collection while others may have a broader significance.

The authors of this text want to stress that, dialogically, despite their heterogeneity, Chinese

students share mutual patterns. Beyond their distinct history of the last decades, Taiwan and the Republic of China belong to the same millenarian civilization. Studies such as Aldridge and Huang's (1999), and Wang's (2002) show similarities between Taiwanese and mainland Chinese learners.

In order to triangulate the data and confirm or not the results drawn from the questionnaires, a dozen control-interviews were conducted with university students after the questionnaire data had been analyzed. One afternoon, in the university courtyard, one of the authors interviewed Taiwanese students who were not majoring in languages. They discussed the subjects addressed in the questionnaires. Their answers were analyzed thematically and compared with the questionnaires' results which they totally confirmed.

Instrument.

The questionnaire's nineteen items have been devised to collect learners' beliefs in relation to TBLLT. In line with previous studies about learners' beliefs, six questions were adopted (and adapted) from the *Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory* (BALLI, Horwitz, 1987) and three others from Sakui and Gaies' study of Japanese learners' beliefs (1999). The rest were author-designed. Given that the target participants were high school students and in order to reduce misinterpretations, questions were formulated in the simplest way. The instrument has first been designed in English then carefully translated into Mandarin. Three different translations were realized to verify that the first had been done properly. Some concepts such as "language course's role plays and games", "interaction", "teacher's role as a facilitator" do not have any direct equivalent and are difficult to translate.

The questionnaire's first section contained demographic questions in order to gain information about the respondents' grade, gender, and age. Seven questions implied a TBLLT-grammar/translation axis to collect learners' conceptions of wished for class process and the appropriateness of communicative activities, games and role plays. Five items dealt with the participants' attitudes towards accuracy and their perception of the importance and role of grammar. Two questions dealt specifically with learners' perceptions of language learning in general. Three questions focused on respondent's beliefs in relation to mistakes and how teachers should handle them. Because teacher's role in TBLLT and Chinese traditional approach are radically different, the last two items sought to collect respondents' opinions towards this aspect.

Respondents were asked to choose if they: (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neither agree nor disagree, (4) agree, or (5) strongly agree with each statement. These questions have been designed according to a grammar/translation-TBLLT axis where disagreeing implied a TBLLT-compatible belief since objecting can be assumed to be more significant than agreeing, particularly in East Asia and China where harmony is a core value (Bond, 1994; Bond & Huang, 1986; Leys, 1983). After data collection, each answer was coded to enable counting: 1 for strongly pro TBLLT, 2 for pro, 3 for neutral, 4 for against TBLLT, and 5 for strongly against. As with previous BALLI studies (e.g. Horwitz, 1987; Yang, 1992; Zhang & Cui, 2010), when percentages were calculated, the answers "I strongly agree and "I agree" were collapsed into the "agree" category. "I disagree" and "I strongly disagree" were combined into a "disagree" category. "Neither agree nor disagree" was coded as neutral.

If in most cases the implied opposition was rather accurate (e.g. focus on writing vs. focus on speaking), for some items however the dichotomy can be considered simplistic and artificial: "12) In the English class students should learn grammar and vocabulary rather than complete specific tasks." This item opposes grammar, vocabulary, and specific tasks when those are complementary constitutive elements of TBLLT. To a lesser

extent the remark also applies to: "3) You prefer "accurate English" to "fluent but ungrammatical English"; "2) English teaching should focus on **accuracy** rather than **fluency**." Likewise, accuracy and fluency are not opposite but complementary.

In order to mix methods and to confirm the results achieved in a quantitative fashion, the questionnaire´s items were converted into an interview plan. Twelve control interviews with university students of the same university have then been conducted in a semi-directive fashion. Students of pedagogy and languages were not included in that sample.

Results

Results between the three different groups surveyed were consistent; the same trends are to be observed (table 1). As could be expected, the university students were more progressive, more favorable to most elements of TBLLT than the high school students. There was a lot of neutrality: 25.8% of the time respondents did not agree nor disagree (table 1).

In 1990, Yang (1999) surveyed 500 Taiwanese students using the BALLI questionnaire. Comparing with these data, it is striking that, despite a twelve years time lapse, except for one item ("If beginning students are permitted to make errors in English without correction, it will be difficult for them to speak correctly later on") results are highly similar. The same proportions appear; the current study's respondents were overall more neutral and slightly more progressive (inclined towards CLL and TBLLT) than Yang's study´s.

Favorable to TBLLT.

The major finding of this research is that the participants' beliefs regarding TBLLT's principles and activities appear to be highly favorable:

- 87.66% of the respondents disagreed students should not take part in communicative activities which make them practice English with their classmates;
- 71% agreed it is possible to communicate in English without knowing the grammar rules and only 10.5% disagreed.
- 78.33% disagreed learners should not interact a lot in English during the English class;
- 67% disagreed that students should learn grammar and vocabulary rather than complete specific tasks.
- respondents were highly favorable to the use of group or pair work (75.33%; 4.66% unfavorable), games (76.66%; 6% unfavorable), and role plays (59%; 9.33% unfavorable) in English classes.
- 42% disagreed learning English was mostly a matter of learning grammar rules and 39% were neutral.

In relation to previous works on Chinese learners, this inclination towards TBLLT is unexpected. The authors thought the major differences between TBLLT classroom and the usual grammar-translation class would have generated reluctance and resistances towards TBLLT's principles and pedagogic choices. However, more specific studies about Chinese learners' beliefs (Zhang and Cui's, 2010) have already shown that Chinese learners appear favorable to modern Western methodologies. The Respondent's favorable answers to a different pedagogy (such as games and role plays, completing tasks) can be understood as a reaction towards vertical classroom protocol which, as Littlewood showed (2000), is rather suffered than desired. The plebiscite for group and pair work, role plays and tasks completion demonstrates one more time Chinese proclivity to collaborate (Biggs, 1999; Hu, 2002; Littlewood, 2000; Salili, 1999; Tang, 1999; Winter, 1999). The trend probably ensues from Chinese's collectivism (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Ho, 1986) and attachment to harmony within the group (Bond, 1994; Li, M. S., 2005). Chinese students spontaneously collaborate more than Western students do (Tang, 1999). Hong Kong students prefer a more collaborative

learning environment which they see as promoting deeper learning strategies (Watkins & Biggs, 2001; Chan & Watkins, 1994).

Looking at the respondents' sociocultural origin also helps to understand the data. The participants are young metropolitan Taiwanese attending a public high school. They belong to a new generation more influenced by Western culture within a globalized, late modern era (Giddens, 1984). In comparison with surveys from mainland China, it could be inferred that the respondents' nationality also plays an important role in their favorable answers towards TBLLT. Given the wide discrepancies between Chinese major coastal cities and smaller in-land ones (Hu, 2003), it would be interesting to compare this study's results with those of modern Chinese from Shanghai or Beijing to see whether the nationality or urbanity factor takes a stronger hold.

Possible resistances.

However, an important number of respondents carry beliefs related to the grammar-translation approach. Conception of FLTL, mistakes management, skill focus and accuracy are still approached by an important part of the respon-dents in a traditional way. A consequent number of respondents present a traditional approach toward some items:

- 37% of the respondents agreed that "Learning a language is the same as learning other subjects and 14.66% were neutral. However, cultural bias may have been involved in the interpretation of this item.
- a quintile (19.66%) still believe "Learning English is mostly a matter of translating from Chinese" and about a third (31.66%) remained neutral. Participants' conception was more progressive than Zhang and Cui's respondents' (2010). The distance learners from mainland China they surveyed had agreed by 33.4%.
- 39% remained neutral when deciding whether learning English was mostly a matter of learning grammar rules and 16% agreed. In a previous study (Zhang & Cui, 2010) 20% had remained neutral and 26% had agreed.

These beliefs are convergent with Chinese learning culture as characterized in the literature. The high neutrality rate shows many participants do not appear as primarily favorable to TBLLT approach. They are unsure about learning grammar rules.

In the same line, most students' beliefs regarding mistakes' management are conflicting with TBLLT's "liberalism" in the matter:

- a majority (44.66%) agreed teachers should correct all students' mistakes, 35.66% have a neutral opinion;
- a majority (53%) believe that a good English teacher should correct students immediately, 34% have a neutral opinion.
- 29% agreed that "If beginners are permitted to make errors in English, it will be difficult for them to speak correctly later on", 27% were neutral.

In that respect Zhang and Cui's (2010) respondents were more progressive; 90% agreeing "making mistakes is a natural part of learning" and 77.8% disagreeing "making mistakes is harmful in language learning". TBLLT advocates not to correct students immediately but post-production, correcting the class as a whole and not individually. According to students' level and objectives, errors that do not impede communication should be tolerated.

An important number of respondents, most probably because of the examination-driven nature of the whole schooling system (Aldridge & Huang, 1999; Chen et al., 2005; Littlewood, 2007; Tang & Biggs, 1999), agreed English lessons should focus mainly on writing skills (20% agreed and 39.66% were neutral).

The attachment to accuracy is another obstacle; conflicting beliefs were carried by a substantial part of the participants:

- 20% prefered "accurate English" to "fluent but ungrammatical English" and 28.5% were neutral;
- 16% of the respondents believed English teaching should focus on accuracy rather than fluency and 20% were neutral.

The interviews strongly confirmed the questionnaire data. Except for their attitude towards mistakes, a large majority of the interviewees appeared as very acceptive of TBLLT methodology.

These results must be related to Chinese learning culture and its Confucian heritage. The Chinese attachment to accuracy entails an ill-perception of mistakes, the foci on content and writing as well as teacher-centeredness. These sources are perceived as safe sources of (exact) knowledge as opposed to learners' productions.

Discussion

This study's results are rather different from Zhang and Cui's study (2010). Their respondents displayed a more progressive perception of mistakes but a stronger attachment to grammar and a more traditional perception of language learning. This heterogeneity can be understood in the light of the maturity factor. Zhang and Cui's respondents are older and voluntary learners, therefore more aware of mistakes' necessity. The Taiwanese high school students' bigger "rejection" of grammar might be due to their younger age. The fact Zhang and Cui's participants are from mainland China probably also played a role.

The collected beliefs being favorable to TBLLT only imply participants are in theory inclined towards the methodology. It can only partially foretell how these learners will react when actually confronted to TBLLT. It should be reminded that games and role plays do not make the largest part of TBLLT classes which also involve written documents, grammatical and lexical activities.

Conclusions and Implications

The main conclusion of this research is that the surveyed learners carry few beliefs opposed to TBLLT and should positively welcome this new methodology. It legitimates from an empirical point of view the calls for the implementation of TBLLT in Chinese contexts. Merged with the literature on the Chinese language learner (with Li & Liang, 2012), it also permits to draw the hypothesis that the traditional way language teaching is conducted is not an answer to students' will but draws from other reasons, most probably systemic factors.

This study's results would be furthered by replicating the study in mainland China, both in urban and smaller city contexts. This replication would show whether mainland Chinese provide the same answers and thus help identify whether a nationality factor is at work.

To overcome certain resistances such as the reluctance to partake in communicative activities or the attachment to accuracy, teachers can rely on various techniques to set up a low-anxiety classroom atmosphere and defuse mistakes (Crookall and Oxford, 1991; Horwitz, 1987; Oxford, 1990; Price, 1991; Young, 1991;).

Given the plebiscite for group and pair work among Chinese learners (Hu, 2002), project-based learning (PBL), also called cooperative, collaborative learning (Nunan, 1992) will particularly suit Chinese contexts as implied by Tinker Sachs (2009).

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Table 1. Survey Results

Item description	1 I strongly disagree	2 I disagree	3 I don't agree nor disagree	4 I agree	5 I strongly agree
1) Learning a language is the same as learning other subjects.	10% (26/2/2)	38.66% (59/22/35)	14.6% (13/16/15)	23% (2/32/35)	14% (0/28/14)
2) English teaching should focus on **accuracy** rather than **fluency.**	16% (28/9/11)	48% (35/55/54)	21 % (21/19/23)	11.66% (14/11/10)	4.33% (2/9/2)
3) You prefer "accurate English" to "fluent but ungrammatical English".	8.66% (2/13/11)	34% (22/35/45)	31.33 % (39/30/25)	16.33% (29/3/17)	3.66% (7/3/1)
4) In the English class the students should not take part in communicative activities which make them practice English with their classmates.	32.33% (34/29/34)	55.33% (51/60/55)	14% (13/10/9)	1.33% (2/0/2)	0.33% (0/1/0)
5) The students should not interact a lot in English during the English class.	28% (32/30/22)	50.33% (38/51/62)	17.33% (25/16/11)	3.66 % (4/3/4)	0.3% (0/0/1)
6) The English lessons should focus mainly on writing skills.	9.33 % (19/8/1)	37% (57/25/29)	39.66 % (18/44/46)	16.33 % (6/20/23)	3.33% (0/3/1)
7) Good English Teacher should not use small group or pair work.	18% (14/22/18)	57.33% (46/64/62)	19.33% (34/10/15)	4.33% (5/4/4)	0.33% (0/0/1)
8) In the English class the teacher should not spend time on role plays.	15.66 % (14/23/10)	43.33% (24/54/52)	31.66 % (45/20/30)	6.66% (13/3/4)	2.66% (4/0/4)
9) In the English class the teacher should not spend time on games.	28.33% (28/36/21)	48.33% (44/53/52)	15.66 % (24/9/14)	4.66% (4/2/8)	1.33% (0/0/4)
10) It is impossible to communicate in English without knowing the grammar rules.	25% (18/34/23)	46% (42/45/51)	14% (25/15/12)	9% (14/4/10)	1.5% (1/2/4)
11) Learning English is mostly a matter of learning grammar rules.	8.66% (4/12/10)	36.33% (31/31/47)	39% (40/44/33)	13.33% (22/9/9)	2.66 % (3/4/1)
12) In the English class students should complete specific tasks rather than grammar.	2.33% (1/4/2)	7.66% (8/9/6)	22.66% (11/44/13)	46.33% (48/31/60)	20.66% (32/12/18)
13) Learning English is mostly a matter of translating from Chinese.	12.66% (10/10/18)	35.33% 24/34/50	34/41/20 31.66%	27/13/11 17%	5/2/1 2.66%
14) Good English Teacher should correct the students immediately.	0.33% (0/3/1)	11.66% (9/8/18)	34% (42/28/32)	42.33% (35/50/42)	10.66 % (14/11/7)
15) The teacher should correct all the students' mistakes.	2.66% (3/3/2)	17% (22/7/22)	35.66% (40/46/21)	39.33% (30/37/51)	5.33% (5/7/4)
16) You should not say anything in English until you can speak it correctly.	31% (40/12/41)	44/36/51 43.66%	8/1/6 5%	6/3/2 3.66%	2/0/0 0.66 %
17) If beginners are permitted to make errors in English, it will be difficult for them to speak correctly later on.	12.33 % (12/17/8)	31.33% (34/28/33)	27% (26/26/29)	25.66% (24/26/27)	3.33% (4/3/3)

Item description	1 I strongly disagree	2 I disagree	3 I don't agree nor disagree	4 I agree	5 I strongly agree
18) In the English class the teacher should strongly encourage the students to learn by themselves through struggling to communicate.	0.33% (0/1/0)	1% (2/1/0)	5.33% (8/3/5)	45.33% (53/35/48)	51.33% (37/60/57)
19) In the English class the teacher should have the role of a facilitator and an animator, setting up activities for the students and not "pouring out knowledge".	0.33% (0/1/0)	0.33% (1/0/0)	7% (4/8/9)	46.66% (44/45/51)	45.66% (51/46/40)

Note: The percentage corresponds to the total part of participants who elected the item (e.g. "I strongly disagree", "I disagree", etc.). The three following figures first indicate the number of respondents from the first high school surveyed, then from the second high school, and last from the university.

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