The Scale and Increased Trend of Foreign Language Input in Bilingual Classes: A Study at a Chinese Applied College

Shuang WU¹,a

¹School of Economics and Management, TianHe College of Guangdong Polytechnic Normal University, Guangzhou, China

a wushuang999@hotmail.com

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Abstract. The paper mainly focused on investigating the scale and trend of foreign language input acceptable by students at different academic years in Chinese applied colleges. The particular context of the study (successive inter-connected bilingual modules developed with academic years) offered vantage point on testifying an increased foreign language input tendency. The subjects who participated in the study were mainly International Business students from an applied college in China. Assessment of the increased input of foreign language with and within academic years was provided by a one-year field experiment. Findings suggest that the foreign language input is expected and accepted differently in accordance with students’ English level. The arrangement of the foreign language input and whether it should be increased or decreased in different modules and teaching content is proposed differently by students from different subjects. Within one module’s teaching, foreign language input is increased within chapters rather than the whole term. Even though the foreign language input is proposed an increased trend, it is still asked to be kept at 50% in teaching materials like teacher’s PowerPoint.

Introduction

In the field, the importance and necessity of bilingual education has been largely explored, widely accepted and frequently reiterated. During the development of bilingual education, lots of teaching modes have been put forward by researchers in different countries. Different reasons for bilingual education lead to variable modes to be advocated in different countries or places. In Canada, for example, immersion bilingual education is adopted while in the USA the submersion bilingual education is chosen [1]. The selection of the suitable mode for bilingual education for a country or place is limited not only by its language contexts but also by its political conditions. For Canada, in 1969, the government declared officially that English and French to both become the official language, which ensures the great support of policies and funds for bilingual education. Besides that, with a number of residents speaking French, in Quebec almost around 80 percent, the language context for French is rather rich. The abundance of qualified bilingual teachers makes the bilingual education in Canada even more successful. In USA, by the contrast, the main aim of bilingual education is to melt the influence of the native languages for the minorities or immigrants to make them prepared for the future English learning and working environment. There have been no or limited support for learning the official language—English. The major aim of this subtractive bilingualism is to foster English language speakers rather than bilinguals.

In China, as the society moves ahead, the increasing requirements for bilinguals pushes the universities to move its emphasis over bilingual education. Hong Kong is a place that starts the
bilingual education relatively early. In Hong Kong, there has been English Medium Instruction (EMI) Class and Chinese Medium Instruction (CMI) Class. The development of EMI Class is somehow similar to the Canadian’s immersion bilingual education. However, this application is not as successful as the government expected, which makes it decrease the number of EMI Classes from 92% to 27% [2]. Therefore, as the language contexts and political systems are different, it is inappropriate and unrealistic to simply copy the bilingual systems from foreign countries. In mainland China, the importance of bilingual education greatly attracts the attention of the governments, universities, teachers and researchers. During the application of bilingual education, the modes can be mainly classified into four groups—solely English, English—Chinese evenly, mainly English, mainly Chinese. For the first two modes, there is no need to explicit the percentage of foreign language input as the former is 100% and the latter is 50%. For the last two modes, however, the percentage of foreign language input is quite blurred in real teaching.

Bilingual Education in International Business

For the students majoring International Business, English language ability is undoubtedly important as their future working environment is highly possible to be in English. Fostering bilinguals in this major is planned by considerable universities in mainland China, which urges researchers to carry out some related studies. With the heat discussion, there have been some common points summarized by researchers. Unsurprisingly, carrying out bilingual education in the subject of International Business is not being found without its problems.

Multiple Aspects Should be Considered in Choosing Teaching Materials

Teaching materials used for bilingual education are variable. Yang & Wu did an investigation of bilingual education system for international business students in Hubei University of Arts and Science. For teaching materials, they use original English books, English writings on blackboards and English PowerPoint. The language used for teaching they proposed is classified in accordance with students’ academic levels. The advantages for original English books are quite obvious as Yang stated that they tend to be more abundant, native and updated [3]. However, Zhao & Yan put that original English books are more profound which increases the difficulty in explaining some important knowledge. Besides that, the cases used in original English books are hard to be understood by the students in mainland China [4]. Yang further acknowledged that the cases about Chinese local business environment are inadequate [5]. It is thus inappropriate to simply copy the original English books. Therefore, though not so native, the usage of books composed by local teachers is more frequently advocated as they are undoubtedly easier for students to understand. Nevertheless, such books are rather inadequate in the area of International Business. [3]

In choosing teaching materials, there should be more aspects to be taken into consideration. Apparently, it is unrealistic to ignore students’ foreign language ability. Choosing one kind of teaching materials for all the students at even one university is rather inappropriate, be these books in English, Chinese or Chinese-English bilingually. As far as I’m concerned, the selection of teaching materials can be different in accordance with students’ English language ability and academic levels. For the universities those students with better English levels, original English books can be considered. For those students with lower English levels, in bilingual education, Chinese-English bilingual books or even Chinese books can be chosen. Teaching materials can also be varied according to students’ academic levels even in one university. For example, for those
students who just started to take bilingual class, it is easier to use local composed Chinese books or Chinese-English bilingual books. As the time goes by, with the increasing English ability, students may be able to use original English books and other teaching materials.

**English Language Context is Inadequate**

In the area of bilingual education, the significance of foreign language context is widely acknowledged. The success of bilingual education in Canada well explained that the learners tend to learn French easier and faster when their school, family and society are all able to provide abundant French-speaking contexts. By the contrast in Hong Kong, though English and Chinese are both official languages, Mandarin Chinese still composed the largest part in social communication while only around 2.2% people use English daily [2]. In mainland China this number may get even lower. In fact, the use of English can rarely be seen when out of classroom. Even in the class, it is hard to maintain an affective English context. Thus, the inadequate English-speaking context is frequently mentioned by the researchers in investigating bilingual education for International Business students in universities in mainland China.

**Shortage of Qualified Bilingual Teachers**

In mainland China, the shortage of qualified bilingual teachers is another factor that slows down the development of bilingual education. Qualified bilingual teachers should not only be professional in their own subjects but also should be able to express their knowledge to students in proficient English. This requirement is hard to satisfy even in first-class Universities, let alone in applied colleges [6]. In fact, for the subject of International Business in many universities, the teachers mainly can be classified into two groups. One is the teachers come from foreign language department. They are usually with good English levels but inadequate professional knowledge. The other one is the teachers come from business or finance department. They are usually with adequate professional knowledge but lower English level. In many universities, especially applied colleges, it is hard to make the teachers satisfy both aspects.

**The Foreign Language Input Should be an Increasing Tendency**

The differences between both the students’ and the teachers’ foreign language ability along with the variable foreign language contexts makes it not hard to imagine the difficulty to summarize a bilingual teaching mode that suitable for all the universities, let alone for all the majors. It does not, however, stop the researchers from putting forward and summarizing a clear tendency in terms of bilingual education in different universities or educational institutes.

In the field of language learning, Krashen, S.D. put forward a language input hypothesis. [7] It concludes five hypotheses—Acquisition-learning Hypothesis, Natural Order Hypothesis, Monitor Hypothesis, Input Hypothesis and Affective Filter Hypothesis. The Acquisition-learning Hypothesis put forward that there should be differences between the language acquisition and language learning. The Natural Order Hypothesis advocates the learners to learn a language in a predictable process. The Monitor Hypothesis stressed three conditions—knowledge of grammar, focus on grammar and availability of time. The Input Hypothesis is the core theory among the entire five hypotheses. This hypothesis suggests that to form the successful acquisition, the language input should be comprehensible, interesting, relevant and not grammatically sequenced. If the learner’s foreign language ability is i, the foreign language data for teaching should be i+1. In other words, the foreign language data that learners contacted in class should be a little more but not much more than
their actual foreign language ability. Since learner’s foreign language ability is assumed to be increased with time, in bilingual education, it is not difficult for an increasing foreign language input tendency to be summarized. This coincides with the research result of Ling Yang, Yang & Wu and Liu, Wu & Li. As it is mentioned above, however, it is unclear that how to increase the foreign language input and how to allocate the foreign language data in class, which urges a study to be taken.

A Study in TianHe College of Guangdong Polytechnic Normal University

The study attempts to first look at how bilingual education was implemented. When does bilingual education started to be taken? What kind of teaching materials are used by the teachers? What’s students’ opinion about bilingual education? How bilingual class should be assessed? Are there any special requirements, training and assessment for bilingual teachers? Then, the study will set out to investigate how to arrange the foreign language input in bilingual class. Should the foreign language input be an increasing tendency? If it is, how exactly should we increase? More specifically, in which part of teaching should we increase? Finally, it comes to examine the outcomes of the implementation of bilingual education. It is assumed that after the initial investigation, there should be an expected foreign language input advocated by the reporters. In order to testify the results, an experiment will be carried out for International Business students at Grade 16 (from 2018.09—2018.12) and Grade 17 (2019.03—2019.06) in Tianhe College.

Materials and Methods

The scare and scope of this research is limited to applied colleges. Questionnaire was issued online and was reported mainly by students in Tianhe College, Guangdong Polytechnic and Normal University. The students sampled were those who reported back. Age was not considered within the sample, but college, subject and academic level were requested.

Sources of data will include: (i) quantitative data from questionnaires (ii) qualitative data from face-to-face interviews and online interviews (iii) secondary sources will include document analysis of materials obtained and other written texts from relevant web sites, newspapers, magazines and other sources.

The questionnaire contains totally 42 questions. Questions 1-9 investigate students’ basic information. Questions 10-12 concern whether students are satisfied with current bilingual teachers, their foreign language input and the expected foreign language input. Questions 13-19 investigate some information about bilingual classes. Questions 20-22 are about the teaching materials used for bilingual classes. Questions 23-36 investigate and examine the increasing tendency of foreign language input (more specifically English input) in bilingual class. Questions 38-42 involves some open questions concerning students’ feeling and suggestion for bilingual teaching.

The questions utilized in questionnaire reflected the need to ascertain a quantitative representation of the perceptions and attitude of bilingual education held by learners, but also to maintain flexibility in allowing discussion of feelings and suggestions towards bilingual education. A face-to-face interview thus is carried out to supplement more details. Furthermore, in order to testify the study results, an experimental implementation of the increasing foreign language input mode is carried out in Grade 2016 and 2017 international business students.
Results and Discussion

The results of the study would disclose and assess the overall implementation of bilingual education. Specially, the scale and trend of foreign language input would be identified as acceptable and expected by students.

Overall Implementation and Assessment of Bilingual Education

Even though the importance of bilingual education has been reiterated, its’ implementation scale in applied colleges is not as large as it’s expected. While the majority of the reporters (at 82.63%) think bilingual class is in great need, still, 32.63% of them reflected that they don’t have bilingual classes. Thus, it leads to almost half of the reports’ disappointment towards the number of their bilingual classes. There have been, unsurprisingly, certain students think they don’t need bilingual class for that, as they put, teaching in English is “difficult to understand”, “unnecessary” and because they have “enough job opportunities that don’t need to use English”. These are mainly claimed by students who are major in Accounting.

For the modules that implement bilingual education are mostly those Subject Foundation Requisites and Subject Core Modules rather than General Foundation Requisites, Subject Electives and General Electives. In terms of the students’ expectation, for General Electives, it was mostly reported to be in whole Chinese (at 53.5%) or bilingual (at 40.13%), only 14.65% reporters suggest whole English teaching while the majority of them claimed that Subject Foundation Requisites and Subject Core Modules should be bilingual or even in whole English. This high expectation of foreign language input may be caused by the reason that the reporters are mainly major in International Business or English, which both require a relatively higher English level for students to get enrolled.

In Tianhe College, the implementation of bilingual education for international business students started from the year of 2014. Initially, bilingual education was carried out only in Subject Core Modules, such as International Business Practice and International Settlement. Gradually, some Subject Electives like Business English Letters start to be bilingual. None of the General Electives becomes bilingual though with five years’ development of bilingual teaching. This maybe because for applied colleges, qualified teachers are inadequate and student’s English level is lower than that of the students in First-class Universities.

In bilingual classes, the methods of teaching are variable. The combination of both the theory and practice teaching are adopted in most classes while for some classes only theory teaching is bilingual. There have been some attempts to implement the bilingual teaching in some newly-fashioned teaching methods, online teaching for example. Tianhe College, as one of the applied colleges, practice has been put a lot of emphasizes. It is thus unsurprising for bilingual teaching to be seen both in theory teaching and practice training.

Teaching materials chosen by applied colleges for bilingual classes are mostly local compromised bilingual books. A small part of the reporters, however, still reflected the use of native English books. This is maybe because the bilingual education at some applied colleges has been carried earlier and developed better. Take Guangdong University of Foreign Studies South China Business College as an example, teachers and students are of better English level. For the bilingual teachers in this College, they have clearer career development guidance. The college will arrange some training and assessment exclusively for bilingual teachers. There has been a small part of the
reporter reflected the use of Chinese books. For some subjects like engineering, students are with lower English levels, both native English books and local compromised Chinese books would increase the difficulty of students’ study. Thus it is not hard to understand the use of Chinese books in bilingual teaching.

**Increasing Foreign Language Input Mode**

In terms of the foreign language input in bilingual class, as summarized above, is an increasing tendency. This well coincides with the study result as 82% of the reporters claim that the foreign language input should be increased with and within academic years. However, it is unclear that that how to increase the foreign language input and how to allocate the foreign language data in class. Moreover, in the first place, it is important to clarify the scope of foreign language input. As proposed by students from applied colleges, the foreign language input is reported to be expected from 50% to 80%. This is a relatively high expectation since the real foreign language input is reflected lower at 40% to 60%.

At different academic years, students are with different expectations of foreign language input. As the study result shown, the foreign language input claimed acceptable for the reporters are demonstrating a clear increasing tendency. For the first term of the first academic year, reporters put that a 20% to 50% foreign language input is acceptable. For the second term of the first academic year, this scale increase to 30% to 50%. For the first term of the second academic year, it turns to 40% to 60%. For the second term of the second academic year, it is 50% to 70%. For the first term of the third academic year, 50% to 80% is reported while the second term stayed the same. For the first term of the last academic year, it is 50% to 90% while for the second term it is 50% to 100%.

To be summarized, with different academic years, students expected the foreign language input to be increased at around 10% for each term. Interestingly, when it comes to the second academic year (the fourth term), the scare stayed to get started from 50%. This is probably because for applied colleges, when it comes to the second academic year, Subject Core Modules and Subject Electives started to be arranged. In order to better understand these modules, students expected a balanced input of both Chinese and English. Nonetheless at the same time, they allow an increase of the foreign language input for the teachers as they estimated their foreign language ability to be increased.

Furthermore, 82.46% of the reporters stated that the foreign language input should also be increased within terms. They claim for an increase of foreign language input at around 5% each week. This is possibly because with time, students would get more familiar with the teaching content. Bilingual teaching would thus become more acceptable. For example, for those frequently appeared specialized English terms, it is unnecessary to repeat both in English and Chinese at each time. With several times explained in Chinese at the beginning, it can be later mentioned only in English in class. Therefore, an increasing tendency of the foreign language input can be estimated within each term.

In terms of the allocation of the foreign language data in class, for different teaching contents, the foreign language input is proposed to be different. The study investigates students’ opinion towards the foreign language input in general knowledge points, key points and edge knowledge points. It was proposed that the foreign language input for general knowledge points should be increased within term. The students ask for a balanced input of Chinese and English or English only. For key
points, it was claimed an increase for foreign language input within term and a requirement for teaching both in Chinese and English at the same time. The result for edge knowledge is quite different as most of the students proposed a decrease in foreign language input and some of them think the sole use of Chinese in teaching would be enough. This is quite interesting especially when the majority of the students already realized the importance and significance of bilingual teaching and expected for an increase in foreign language input. A further qualitative study would be carried out to investigate more details.

A Supplement Qualitative Study—Face-to-Face Interview

In order to clarify and supplement some more details, a face-to-face interview has been carried out in TianHe College of Guangdong Polytechnic Normal University. The students major in Arts and Science are both invited. They are mainly major in four subjects (English, IT, Engineering and International Business). For all the students reported, the importance and need of bilingual education was acknowledged.

For English majors, English is inevitably a language they need to master. When doing the research of bilingual education, however, English majors are less likely to be seen as the main research objects for that their subject itself is focused on language learning. Investing bilingual education in a language learning class is complicated. Teaching in whole English is even more proposed by reporters major in English than bilingual teaching because their English level is higher and they ask for an English speaking context. As they claimed that, the lack of language context is one of the biggest factors that hinder their study.

Nonetheless, it cannot be ignored that for most applied colleges, English majors can select one direction of their learning. For example, in TianHe College of Guangdong Polytechnic Normal University, English majors are able to choose different directions, take International Business as an example. Therefore, even English majors in applied colleges would encounter some classes that are not related to English language learning but about some other subjects. For those classes, it becomes meaningful to carry out bilingual teaching. With better English language level, some English major reporters claim that they can accept a foreign language input up to 100% in class. This already coincides with the above quantitative study result. They however still acknowledged that the foreign language input should be arranged differently among different teaching contents. They proposed an increasing tendency of the foreign language input for both general knowledge points and key points with and within the development of academic years. For edge knowledge points, contradicted with most other reporters, they claimed that sole English teaching should be adopted. This is because with better English levels, there is less difficulty for them to understand those edge knowledge points directly in English.

For students majoring International Business, they also have a great need of bilingual education. They have given out the reason that English is much likely to be their language in future working environment. Bilingual education would make them adapt earlier and thus easier to their future work. Compared with the high expectation of foreign language input proposed by English majors, students major in International Business claimed a lower proposal but a clearer increasing trend. Besides that, the emphasis of bilingual teaching in terms of the teaching content in international business is somehow different than that put by English majors.

For general knowledge points, they claim for an increasing arrangement of the foreign language
input as they put that their English level would be increased with time. Moreover, for the subject of International Business, there has been a close connection between the modules and a developing trend at different academic years. The Subject Core Modules and Subject Electives are arranged mostly at the second and third academic years. For example, the module International Business Practice, a module that introducing some basic knowledge of international business is carried out on the fourth term while the module International Settlement, a module that focuses mainly on payment in international business, is on the fifth term. The knowledge points of these two modules are posing a developing trend. It is not hard to imagine that students would get more familiar about the course content and the general knowledge points with time. This thus makes an increasing tendency of foreign language input easily implemented.

For key points, interestingly, students majoring international business stated that it is necessary to have a balanced input of foreign and native language, namely English and Chinese both at 50%. This well coincides with the above study result that students claim a foreign language input stayed the same to get started from 50% from the fourth term. The reason given by the reporters is that teaching in English and explaining in Chinese at the same time would ensure they won’t have misunderstanding of the key points. As they put that, the key points themselves are already hard to understand. If it’s mostly taught in English, there may be some misunderstandings. If they cannot learn their own subject well, the bilingual education is meaningless.

For students major in Science like IT and Engineering, it was initially estimated that bilingual education would be of lower requirement and expectation. Reporters from these subjects however still acknowledged the importance of bilingual teaching and further claimed their needs for bilingual classes. They way how bilingual teaching should be implemented is a little different than that in the above Arts subjects. In the first place, the foreign language input proposed by the reporters is relatively lower at around 20%. The reason explained by them is that students major in Science are of lower English levels.

Furthermore, in terms of the teaching content, there is no such trend as increasing or decreasing for different teaching contents. They put a rather fixed foreign language input in a fixed teaching content. Take the subject of IT for example, students put that the software are usually directly introduced from foreign countries. Thus, it would be unnecessary for some specialized terms to be translated into and then taught in Chinese. Directly usage of foreign language in those terms would be enough and more efficient. For other teaching content, they expressed a lower need for bilingual education. A relatively low English language level makes them less confident in understanding bilingual classes.

To be summarized, based on different English language levels, the foreign language input claimed by the reporters major in English is relatively higher while that claimed by the reporters major in Science is relatively lower. Moreover, in considering the complicated situation of bilingual education in the subject of English and other Science Subjects, the implementation of bilingual education in these subjects would be more complicated and less representative. Therefore, an experimental implementation of the increasing foreign language input mode would be carried out in the subject of International Business to testify the above summarized increasing trend.
An Experimental Implementation of the Increasing Foreign Language Input Mode and the Reflection

In order to testify the above foreign language input and the effects of this increasing foreign language input mode, an experimental implementation was carried out at the year of 2018 on the students major in international business. In the first half of 2018, the experiment was carried out in the module of International Settlement among the students from Grade 16 on their 5th term. In the second half of 2018, the experiment was carried out in the module of International Business Practice on the students from Grade 17 on their 4th term.

For the students from Grade 16, as summarized above, a foreign language input proposed is from 50% to 80%. At the beginning of the class of International Settlement, the foreign language input stayed at 50%. For the first two chapters, the teacher would teach in English and then translated in Chinese at the same time. This helps the students to get familiar into the bilingual teaching environment and also to testify students’ reactions to bilingual teaching. It is important to mention that the students would be a little bit resistant to bilingual teaching in the first place. It can be seen that some students would totally ignore what’s taught in English and only focus on the Chinese part. Nonetheless, the teachers still need to insist on teaching everything bilingually and make clear that later the English input would be increased. Gradually, students would get used to the environment of bilingual teaching.

From the 3rd chapter, the teacher started to increase the foreign language input. Each chapter was taught mainly within one or two weeks. Within a same chapter, the teacher would introduce first both in Chinese and English. If a term or knowledge point appeared more than 3 times, which frequently can be seen, English teaching only would be adopted. Therefore, for every two weeks, the foreign language input was arranged at an increasing input from 50% to 80%. This arrangement is because the teaching content for each chapter is different. Thus the increasing trend is not to increase the foreign language input from 50% to 80% from the first week to the 16th week. It is mainly increased from 50% to 80% within every two weeks. This implementation way is reflected later by the reporters as more effective and acceptable.

For the students from Grade 17, as summarized above, a foreign language input proposed is from 50% to 70%. For the students on their 4th term, it is the first time for them to encounter a bilingual class. Therefore, for the first month’s (from chapter 1 to chapter 3) teaching, a balanced input of Chinese and English is implemented. This is to help students foster an idea of bilingual teaching and also helps the teacher to adjust her foreign language input in accordance with students’ reactions. Take an example, from the 4th chapter (Trade terms), it is a good opportunity to increase the foreign language input as there would be a lot of knowledge points repeated in this chapter. Besides that, the chapter was arranged to be taught in a relatively long time within almost 3 weeks. In the first half of the first week, the foreign language input stayed at 50% to introduce the 1st and 7th section of chapter 4. In the second half of the first week, the foreign language input can be slightly increased at around 55% for that there are already some terms appeared more than two times. For the 2nd to the 6th section, it is mainly about different trade terms, there have been more knowledge points, words and expressions keep repeated. Therefore, an increase arrangement of the foreign language input from 55% to 70% can be accepted. The rest chapters are also alike arranged with the foreign language input increased within each chapter but not within the whole term.

In terms of the teaching materials, PowerPoint for example, the foreign language input is a little
different that in the teaching process. The foreign language input in the PowerPoint stayed the same at 50% even within a same chapter. This is because in case there are some students cannot catch up with the English teaching, they are able to understand the course content with the aid by teacher’s PowerPoint.

After the experiment, the students were investigated in terms of their opinion by an online interview on We Chat. They put that the increasing foreign language input mode is acceptable and makes the course more effective. They further suggest that the page number of the knowledge points should be marked on teacher’s PowerPoint to help them catch up with the class easier.

Conclusion

As summarized above, the importance of bilingual education is well acknowledged now in China. The study result reveals that bilingual teaching is more efficient and higher expected for those students who are likely to work in an English speaking environment. Also, for some subjects that largely imported native English materials, IT for example, students also expected the implementation of bilingual classes. Finally, in terms of the foreign language input, the scale claimed acceptable by students is mainly according to their English language level but still is posing an increasing trend with the development of academic years. The increasing and decreasing of foreign language input is proposed differently by students in terms of the teaching content. Even though the foreign language input is claimed to be increased in one term, for the module of International Business and International Settlement, it is mainly increased within each chapter but not to be increased from the beginning to the last of the module. Meanwhile, under an increasing trend of foreign language input asked for class teaching, still, a balanced input of native and foreign language in teaching material like PowerPoint is insisted.

Though previous study goes some way towards suggesting ways out for these the scale and input of foreign language in bilingual classes, further research is still in need. Since the study is carried out mainly at one Chinese applied college and limited subjects, it is hard to refer the results to all subject students and other type of universities or educational institutions.

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