A Quantitative Corpus Approach to Assessing Students' ICC Development in a College English Course in Mainland China

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Abstract

This paper aims to develop a way of assessing twenty Chinese college students' development of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) in one semester in an Audio-visual College English Course in Mainland China by quantitative AntConc Keyword List analysis of the students' four batches of Mandarin Chinese reflective journals kept at regular intervals during one semester. The assessment is with reference to two Chinese scholars Zhang & Yang's (2012) model of ICC. As revealed by the AntConc Keyword List analysis, the words related to Zhang & Yang's (2012) model of ICC move gradually from the Negative Keyword Lists to the Positive Keyword Lists, which indicates that students' ICC developed to different degrees during the course.

Key words: Intercultural communicative competence; A corpus approach; Quantitative AntConc Keyword List analysis; Reflective journal entries

INTRODUCTION

In the area of language teaching, as well as language proficiency, ICC is considered one element, either in Mainland China or countries abroad, or at secondary level or tertiary level (cf. Aguilar, 2002; *English Curriculum for Junior High School (For Trial Implementation, Revised Version),* 2000; *English Curriculum for Senior High School in Mainland China (Experimental Version)*, 2003; *English Curriculum for Compulsory Education in Mainland China*, 2011; *English Major Curriculum*, 2000; *A Framework of Reference for EFL Teaching at Tertiary Level in Shanghai (Trial Implementation)*, 2013; Fantini, 2005; Sercu, 2004).

In Mainland China, however, according to the nationally-issued English syllabuses, it is found that ICC is neglected in College English teaching when compared to the emphasis of ICC in English teaching at secondary level and teaching English as a major. Under this circumstance and based on proposed suggestions on improving College English teaching in Mainland China, e.g. Wen's (2012) Elective College English Courses and the Course System suggested in *A Framework of Reference for EFL Teaching at Tertiary Level in Shanghai (Trial Implementation)*, a pioneer trial Audio-visual Elective College English Course aiming at developing students' ICC is designed, in which film clips grouped by four different cultural dimensions serve as classroom input (detailed course design see Liu (2016)).

Among the three approaches to assessing ICC, namely, a quantitative approach, e.g. by questionnaires and surveys (Arasaratnam, 2006; Judit, 2013), a qualitative approach, e.g. by portfolio (Byram, 1997; Byram, et al., 2002; Sinicrope, et al., 2007), journal entries (Deardorff, 2006; Helm, 2009; Lussier, et al., 2007; Jackson, 2005; Judit, 2013; Vogt, 2006) and interviews (Yang & Fleming, 2013), as well as a mixed-methods approach, e.g. by questionnaire and portfolio rubrics (Peng, Lu, & Wang, 2006), researchers in Mainland China mainly center on the quantitative approach, especially questionnaires or surveys. Students' journal entries, no matter kept in Mandarin Chinese or in English, are seldom used in Mainland China to assess learners' ICC.

Besides, the AntConc Keyword List analysis, in

which the words that have the most "keyness" through comparing a smaller observed corpus are identified, is seldom used in the assessment of ICC.

1. RESEARCH QUESTION

This research aims to compare the observed corpus in this research, that is, every batch of students' Mandarin Chinese reflective journal entries, with a larger reference corpus, that is, all the four batches of students' Mandarin Chinese reflective journal entries to address the following question:

Whether the students' ICC has developed during the elective Audio-visual College English course?

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Participants

Twenty-four volunteers taking part in the elective Audio-visual College English course, but only twenty students' reflective journal entries are valid for assessment. They are those who both handed in their Consent Form, which means they allow their reflective journal entries to be used for research purposes, at the same time, they are those who kept all of their four reflective journal entries in Mandarin Chinese.

2.2 Instruments

Since students' development of ICC in the elective College English course, if any, may be affected by factors than the Audio-visual College English course itself, e.g. if students did a lot of self-study after class, did considerably more reading in English, watched more films and TV programs in a foreign language, etc. In order to control the variable, two surveys are adopted (for details of the two surveys see Appendix 1), in which the first is a simple survey attached to the first Reflective Journal Form aiming at obtaining basic information about the students. This survey shows that the students had never attended courses related to intercultural communication before; besides, none of them had ever visited a foreign country where they needed to use English to communicate with people in daily life before. The second survey is different from the first one, and was repeated in the second, third and fourth Reflective Journal Form. This survey divided the students into different groups. Eight students who answered "No" to all the questions in the surveys are those who confessed that they did not do any self-study after class, which implies that their development of ICC, if any, is only the result of the course. 'Group "Yes"' is made up of twelve students who answered at least one "Yes" in the subsequent three surveys. They represent those whose development of ICC, if any, might also be influenced by other factors outside the course.

2.3 Data Collection Procedures

Students kept one reflective journal for each cultural dimension (for details of the guidelines for reflective journal keeping see Appendix 2). In total, there are four batches of reflective journal entries. When their hand-written reflective journal entries were handed in, their reflective journal entries were typed into computer by the researcher, double-checked several times with reference to the raw reflective journal entries, and then segmented and tagged with NLPIR (also known as ICTCLAS 2016), a tool widely used to segment and tag Chinese corpora. The segmented and tagged reflective journal entries were then saved in UTF-8 for later analysis with Zhang & Yang's (2012) model of ICC as theoretical reference points, which will be addressed in the following section.

2.4 Theoretical Reference for Data Analysis

Two Chinese scholars Zhang & Yang's (2012) model of ICC is adopted as the theoretical point of reference in this project. This model has been tested and found to be rational and feasible in an empirical study in Zhang & Yang (2012) and this model of ICC focuses on the most important aspects of Chinese college students' intercultural communication with people from other countries and cultures. Specifically, this model contains three categories, including 文化意识(Cultural Awareness), 文化知识(Cultural Knowledge) and 交际实践(Communication Practice) and thirteen subcategories (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1
Zhang and Yang's (2012) Model of ICC

For pragmatic reasons, when conducting the AntConc Keyword List analysis, we only choose the sixty-three top-ranked words in both the Keyword List and the Negative Keyword List of the students' four different and successive reflective journal entries. These sixty-three words are compared to Zhang & Yang's (2012) model of ICC so that which words are related to Zhang & Yang's model of ICC are identified. If the number of ICC-related words in the Keyword List increases as the

course continues, it implies that the students are using more vocabulary related to Zhang & Yang's (2012) model of ICC. Similarly, if the number of ICC-related words in the Negative Keyword List gradually decreases, it demonstrates that the students are more aware of the aspects in the model of ICC. Besides, the words in the Keyword Lists also offer other connotations which reflect on the students' ICC development, if further investigated.

3. DATA ANALYSIS

Table 1 shows the words which are related to Zhang & Yang's (2012) model of ICC in the top-ranked sixty-three words in the successive Keyword Lists and Negative Keyword Lists.

Table 1
Words that are Related to Zhang & Yang's (2012) Model of ICC in Both the Keyword Lists and the Negative Keyword Lists

	Batch	Words in the Positive Keyword List	Words in the Negative Keyword List
Group No	1	我们(we/our), 自己(oneself)	文化 (culture), 不同 (difference/different), 交流 (communication), 学习(learn), 能力(competence), 英语(English)
	2	了解/理解(understand), 不同(difference), 文化 (culture), 自己(us, ours)	差异(difference), 文化(culture), 我们(we/us/our), 国家(country), 了解/学习/理解/知道(understand/learn), 交流(communication), 知识(knowledge), 他人(other/other's), 英语(English)
	3	国家(country), 学/学习 (learn), 知识(knowledge), 差异(difference), 自己(oneself), 了解(understand)	文化(culture), 学习/了解/明白(learn), 我们(we/us/ours)
	4	学习(learn), 知识(knowledge), 了解/理解(understand), 国家(country)	文化(culture), 交流 (communication), 我们(we/us/ours), 不同(difference/different), 学习/了解/明白/理解(learn/understand), 能力(competence)
Group Yes	1	文化(culture), 学习/学(learn), 英语(English), 明白(understand)	文化(culture), 交际/交流(communication), 国家(country), 了解(understand), 不同(difference), 对方(the opposite), 国家(country), 学习/学(learn), 理解/了解(understand), 知识(knowledge), 别人(other), 差异(difference)
	2	文化(culture), 对方(the opposite), 我们(we/us/ours), 一样(the same), 好坏(good and bad), 优劣(superior and inferior), 交流(communication), 身份(identity), 之分(no difference), 他们(they/them/theirs), 平等(equal), 风俗(customs), 不同(difference/different), 尊重(respect)	自己(oneself), 知识(knowledge), 英语(English), 学习(learn), 别人(other), 不同(different), 中国(China)
	3	交流/交际(communication), 文化(culture), 知识(knowledge), 外国(foreign country), 接触(contact/learn), 了解(learn), 跨(inter-), 自己(oneself), 意识(awareness), 中国(China), 平等(equal)	文化(culture), 不同(difference/different), 我们(we/us/ours), 自己(oneself), 知识(knowledge), 国家(country), 一样(the same), 学习(learn), 差异(difference)
	4	我们(we/us/ours), 自己(oneself), 外国人(foreigner)	文化(culture), 自己(oneself), 学习/了解(learn), 差异(difference), 英语(English), 不同(difference/different)

From the table above, we see that some of the words appear both in the Positive Keyword Lists and the Negative Keyword Lists. This is because the words have a different Part-of-Speech. For example, 了解(learn) is both a noun and a verb. However, please note that the present author has not specified the Part-of-Speech of the word in the English translations in the table.

4. DISCUSSION

We will first look at Group No and Group Yes separately and then make a comparison and contrast.

The words in the first reflective journal entries of Group No in the Keyword List are 我们(we/our/ours) and 自己(oneself), if combined, 我们自己(we/us/ourselves). The positive keyness (i.e. unusual frequency of usage)

of the first person pronouns imply that the students focus on themselves. Gradually, from the second cultural dimension on, besides the word 自己(oneself), words of great keyness emerge, including 了解/理解(learn/understand), 不同(different/difference) and 文化(culture). The unusually frequent usage of these words indicates that students are more aware that there are different cultures, or that cultures are different. In the third and the fourth reflective journal entries, other words of high keyness appear, e.g. 国家(country), 知识(knowledge) and 差异(difference). These words suggest that students gradually show their awareness of the differences between countries. However, it is noticeable that the expression文化(culture) never showed up in the Keyword List of Group No.

In the Keyword List of Group Yes, the unusually frequent words in the first reflective journal entries are

文化(culture), 学习/学(learn), 英语(English), 明白 (understand). This indicates that students in Group Yes understood that they are learning English and learning cultures, or perhaps even that the purpose of learning English is learning cultures. From the second reflective journal entries, the number of unusually frequent words in the Keyword List that are related to Zhang & Yang's (2012) model of ICC increases. Words showing position, e.g. 我们(we/us), 他们(they/them) and 对方(the opposite side), as well as 中国(China), 外国(foreign country) and 外国人 (foreigner) come to the top in the Positive Keyword List. Besides, words indicating comparison also have greater keyness, e.g. 一样(the same), 好坏(good and bad), 优劣 (superior and inferior), 之分(no difference), 平等(equal). The increase in the keyness of these words suggests that students are considering the relationship between "we" and "they", "China" and "foreign countries", as well as "Chinese" and "foreigners". The increased keyness of the words 文化(culture), 一样(the same), 好坏(good and bad), 优劣(superior and inferior), 之分(no difference) and 平等(equal) in the students' second, third and the fourth reflective journal entries suggests that students gradually showed their understanding that other cultures should not be unthinkingly dismissed; cultures could not be labeled good or bad, superior or inferior; and cultures are equal. What is more, the high keyness of 尊重(respect), 身份(identity) and 风俗(customs) ranks these expressions at the top of the Positive Keyword List in the second reflective journal entries of Group Yes, indicating that the students are articulating the fact that they respect others customs and identity, that is, other people's cultures. Fourthly, the keyness of 交流/交际(communication) and 接触(have contact with) also increases in the last three reflective journal entries. This implies that, gradually, students have a stronger awareness that they need to communicate with and have more contact with foreigners and other cultures.

Lastly, with regard to the Keyword List, the keyness of 知识(knowledge), 意识(awareness) and 跨(inter-), the core concepts in Zhang & Yang's (2012) model of ICC, increases in the second, third and fourth reflective journal entries, showing that as the course progresses, students' awareness of the model of ICC increases.

One observation is that the words in the successive Positive Keyword Lists of both Group No and Group Yes increase, and the words in the Negative Keyword Lists of both groups decrease. This implies that gradually students in both groups put more stress on the aspects of Zhang & Yang's (2012) model of ICC in their reflective journal entries. Comparatively speaking, the words in the Positive Keyword List of Group Yes outnumbers that of Group No, while the words in the Negative Keyword List of Group No are much more than that of Group Yes. It suggests that the students in Group Yes' reflective journal entries are more centered on ICC. Probably this was because students

in Group Yes had more awareness of and were more familiar with the components of ICC.

Specifically, when looking into the Negative Keyword List of Group No, we find that "不同(difference/t)" and "差异(difference/t)" are in the first two Negative Keyword Lists. However, these two words disappear in the third Negative Keyword List, showing that students use more "不同(difference/t)" and "差异(difference)" in their third reflective journal entries. Similarly, for Group Yes, "交际/交流(communication)", "对方(the opposite side/foreign)", "别人(other/other's)" and "中国(China)" gradually disappear in the last three Negative Keyword Lists, indicating that the students in Group Yes gradually use these words more frequently.

To conclude the AntConc Keyword List analysis, the number of words which are relevant to Zhang & Yang's (2012) model of ICC among the top-ranked sixty-three words in Keyword Lists increases and the words cover more aspects of Zhang & Yang's (2012) model of ICC as the course continues, e.g. from "我们(we/us)" to "尊重(respect)", "不同(difference/different)", "优劣 (superior and inferior)", "好坏(good and bad)" and "风俗(customs)". In contrast, the number of words in the Negative Keyword List decreases as the course goes on. In other words, for both groups, one common phenomenon is that the words expressing ICC concepts move from the Negative Keyword Lists to the Positive Keyword Lists.

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Appendix A Two Surveys

Survey I written on the first Reflective Journal Keeping Sheet

1. Have you taken any intercultural communication courses:

A. Yes. B. No.

If YES, please list other communication courses you have taken:

2. Have you ever lived in a country where you must use English to communicate with people in daily life:

A. Yes. B. No.

3. Does the frequency of your reading English newspaper/books, watching English films/ TV programs increase since you take this course?

A. Yes. B. No.

4. Do you have any experience of using English with a foreigner/foreigners outside the classroom, e.g. having a face-to-face chat with a foreigner, or on the internet, having a foreign friend drop by and talk with him/her, etc.?

A. Yes. B. No.

Survey II written on the second, the third and the fourth Reflective Journal Form:

1. Compared with when you kept the previous reflective journal, have you recently read considerably more English newspaper/books and watch more English films/TV programs?

A. Yes.   B. No.

2. Compared with when you kept the previous reflective journal, do you recently have considerably more experience of exchanging ideas with foreigners outside of the classroom, e.g. having a face-to-face chat or on the internet, having a foreign friend drop by, etc.?

A. Yes. B. No.

Appendix B Guidelines for Reflective Journal Keeping

Guidelines for Reflective Journal Keeping Adapted from the Prompt Question Bank of Hongkong Polytechnic University with Minor Changes (Retrieved from http://www.polyu.edu.hk/learn-to-learn/es/materials/

Reflective%20Learning%20Journal%20(Teacher%20Guide).doc)

Area 1 Explore a learning experience…

	Awareness	Evaluation	Regulation
Content (What)	What have I learnt?	Do I understand what I have learnt? or What else do I need to learn?	What can I do in order to gain a better understanding?
Process (How)	How did I learn / do it?	How effective is this strategy?	How can I make this strategy more effective?
Reasons (Why)	Why learn it?	Why would I think so?	What would be a more useful way to understand learning?

Area 2 Think of a learning experience in relation to…

	Awareness	Evaluation	Regulation
Academic development	How does this learning experience contribute to my academic development? or What is/are my short-term/long-term academic goal(s)?	What does this learning experience tell about my choice of academic goal and path? or Am I making good progress? or Am I on the right track?	All things considered, is this goal a suitable goal? or Are there any other options? or What other paths can I take to achieve my goals?
	What obstacles have I encountered?	What is the source of the obstacles? or Am I on the right track?	How can I remove those obstacles? or What other paths can I take to achieve my goals?