

Toward Critical Intercultural Literacy Enhancement of University Students in China From the Perspective of English as a Lingua Franca

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Abstract

The concept of intercultural communication has become a focus in English language teaching (ELT) against the backdrop of globalization, as English is now used as a lingua franca (ELF) among people with different first languages (L1s). However, the current linguistic landscape of ELF does not reflect well in ELT practices in which native speakerism ideology persists and curriculum design and teaching materials largely remain oriented to native speakerism. To address this gap, data drawn from a participatory action research were analyzed to discuss students' understanding and reflection of critical intercultural literacy. Several training activities in an adaptive English as a foreign language (EFL) course of intercultural communication that involved reading academic articles related to intercultural literacy were first implemented and two follow-up workshops were conducted with 10 Chinese university students as participants. Data from further interviews and reflective journals from the students in relation to critically evaluate the textbook contents of this course were analyzed using a qualitative content analysis. The results revealed that students acquired a sense of intercultural literacy and that they learnt to challenge textbook content from a critical perspective through the training. This article further addresses the importance of critical pedagogy in teaching linguistic and cultural literacy and concludes that ELT must be conducted from a multilingual and multicultural perspective.

Keywords

English language teaching, English as a lingua franca, critical intercultural literacy, intercultural communication, critical pedagogy

Introduction

Intercultural communication (IC) has become a key focus in the field of English language teaching (ELT). From a traditional perspective of ELT, the relationship of language and culture is rather fixed (see for example, Kubota, 2016), although the concept of culture is viewed as an inextricable and integrated element of language teaching (Baker, 2012; Byram, 1997; Nieto, 2017). The traditional understanding of culture in ELT might view culture as input to domain-specific *cognitive systems* that may structure learning (Gelman & Legare, 2011). The essentialist view also considers culture from a noncritical perspective, which may reduce the concept of *culture* to a concrete and tangible *product* (Peng, 2010). As argued, the native speakerism ideology “in the ELT field has resulted in the problematic, monolithic, unilateral view defining culture as representative only of Anglophone countries” (Liu & Fang, 2017, p. 26). The landscape of English has changed significantly in the new millennium. English is used as a lingua franca (ELF), facilitating communication with people who do not share the same first language (L1) (Jenkins, 2014; Seidlhofer, 2011).

The understanding of culture in the domain of IC and ELT should be problematised because English is used as a global language by people who do not share the same L1s (Baker, 2015; McConachy, 2018). However, in reality, many teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) may still refer to the English language with a national frame of reference, and believe that Anglophone cultures should be predominantly learnt by students while learning English (cf. for example, Kuo, 2006; Wolff, 2010). Against the backdrop of globalization, where language contact has become complicated and dynamic, any language should not be viewed as a fixed entity. Although scholars of ELF have advocated readdressing the ownership of English (Jenkins, 2014; Norton, 1997;

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Seidlhofer, 2011), culture is still often taught in a restricted manner, based on Anglophone cultural models in ELT in the Chinese context and beyond (cf. Fang & Ren, 2018). From a traditional perspective of ELT, students should strive to learn and understand Anglophone cultures to communicate with native English speakers (Kuo, 2006; Yoo, 2014). The concept of native speakerism remains the dominant ideology in the field of ELT because the Anglophone culture is still predominant, and that language learners are supposed to learn about the so-called target cultures in essence (Ahn, 2011; Holliday, 2005; Yazen & Rudolph, 2018; Yu & Jiang, 2021).

This leads to a mismatch between multilingual language policies and monolingual/monocultural teaching practices in different contexts, including China, the United States, and the United Kingdom (Jenkins, 2014; Shohamy, 2006; Tollefson & Tsui, 2003). In this transition era of education, students are required to raise intercultural awareness and encourage intercultural citizenship as a key component of their literacy development for various intercultural encounters (Byram, 2014; Fang & Baker, 2018). Literacy is viewed as a learning process displayed through text (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2006) and important to facilitate students' critical intercultural literacy (CIL) through language learning. The enhancement of intercultural literacy can also help people to manage various intercultural encounters and provide a key channel for CIL development through education.

In the context of an IC course where students participated in additional training by reading academic papers and writing reflective journals, this article addresses how the participants enhanced their intercultural literacy to understand multilingualism and multiculturalism from a broader and critical perspective. With a focus on intercultural literacy, this article aims to broaden this concept in language instruction on IC and to provide implications for both language policymakers and teachers when designing similar curricula. In this sense, it should also be noted that CIL reexamines intercultural encounters with the viewpoint of power and ideology to challenge the simplistic representation of language and culture and the dominance of Anglophone culture in IC education (Baker, 2015). The adoption of CIL into ELT and IC education could potentially challenge the entrenched relationship between language and culture, and the dominance and power representation of Anglophone culture in IC education (Kubota, 2018).

Literature Review

Understanding Culture and Intercultural Literacy

This article views culture from a dynamic and poststructuralist perspective to challenge the concept of culture-as-nation-state or merely a cognitive system (Baker, 2015; Halualani, 2011) and regards "culture and communication as mutually

constitutive, contested, situated in and requiring responses to systemic power imbalances" (Sobre, 2017, pp. 40–41). Byram (2021) defined critical intercultural awareness, as one of the components of intercultural competence within the model of intercultural communicative competence, as "an ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of a systematic process of reasoning, values present in one's own and other cultures and countries" (Byram, 2021, p. 140), which should be one of the top priorities in education. As discussed by Byram (1997, 2021), such criteria include the assessment of *identifying values*, *evaluating by reasoning*, and *interacting and mediating*. However, critical intercultural awareness should be contextualized in various circumstances to understand how learners acquire knowledge and enhance the transferability of skills and attitudes during the process of learning (Byram, 2021).

We realize that a contested term CIL could be interpreted from different perspectives. This article, however, draws upon intercultural literacy development through education. Here, the notion of *critical* was understood from the perspective of *critical pedagogy* in language education (Kubota, 2018; Sobre, 2017), from which a critical perspective

uses texts and print skills in ways that enable students to examine the politics of daily life within contemporary society with a view to understanding what it means to locate and actively seek out contradictions within modes of life, theories, and substantive intellectual positions. (Bishop, 2017, p. 371)

Therefore, the concept of CIL is best linked to the interculturality (Zhu, 2014), in which the relationship between language and culture is perceived as dynamic entities while learners should be required to critically analyze and reflect on various intercultural encounters and multimodal representations of cultural differences (McConachy, 2018).

As Baker (2012) stated, against the backdrop of globalization and the ELF paradigm, successful IC instruction should no longer simply ask learners to become educated on the basis of fixed cultural knowledge. Thus, it becomes necessary to incorporate CIL into IC instruction to challenge the essentialist perspective of perceiving culture, although this is not a simple task and requires systematic instruction and reflection. As Risager (2007) argued, language and culture should be viewed as "a close connection, an interdependence, a complex relationship" (p. 163). The notion of CIL should be seen as "an embodied form of intercultural scholarship and activism that sees culture and communication as mutually constitutive, contested, situated in and requiring responses to systemic power imbalances" (Sobre, 2017, pp. 40–41). In this sense, the adoption of CIL in IC instruction may empower learners to voice and reflect upon their own views, although we recognize the challenge of designing, implementing, and assessing intercultural curricula (Dunne, 2011). Moreover, international higher education has also emphasized intercultural citizenship and student mobility to

prepare for one's future career and life path (Fang & Baker, 2018; Porto, 2019). In this manner, this study brings the notion of CIL to further unpack the understanding of Chinese EFL students through their language learning journey with additional trainings. Despite the illuminating findings of the extant research, there remains a gap in matching the theoretical explorations with the practice of intercultural literacy education. This study intends to explore whether and how CIL can be incorporated into formal instruction and additional trainings in the Chinese EFL context.

Teaching and Learning Culture in ELT

As previously mentioned, learning about culture in many ELT contexts continues to suffer from the aftermath of native speakerism, with the belief that “native-speaker” teachers represent a “Western culture” from which spring the ideals both of the English language and of ELT methodology (Holliday, 2006). Native speakerism ideology still “constitutes and reflects the biases people have toward linguistic varieties and speakers’ race/ethnicity” (Kubota, 2018, p. 97). For example, Niu and Wolff (2003) lamented that the popularity of the English learning industry in China had led to the creation of a “Chingland,” while Guo and Beckett (2007) voiced concerns regarding idolizing “Anglocentric culture in the name of authenticity” (p. 124). Although the so-called “Westernised China” through language choice may neglect individuals’ agency in language learning because culture and identity are both complicated and are constructed and negotiated through the process of language learning, the hegemonic role of English in gatekeeping, cultural control, and local knowledge construction is reflected in many current ELT practices (Fang, 2018; Jiang et al., 2020; Zheng, 2014). In a similar vein, Liu and Fang (2017) investigated how Chinese students’ perceptions and awareness of their home culture may influence their practice of IC and concluded that a large number of students still have a superficial understanding of their home culture in the IC process. Therefore, they argued that aspects of students’ home culture challenge the native speakerism ideology and help language learners develop critical cultural awareness in ELT. In sum, it is found that the ideology of native speakerism continues to permeate numerous local ELT practices (Holliday, 2005; Kubota, 2016), thereby leading to a fixed, monolithic, and unilateral view of culture.

However, many ELT teachers and students may still view culture from an essentialist perspective, interpreting it as a nation-bounded entity rather than a process or a discourse from a fluid perspective. The relationship between language and culture continues to be taken for granted with the assumption that Anglophone culture is the target when learning English (cf. Kubota, 2016; Liu & Fang, 2017). This anachronistic anthropological belief (Kumaravadivelu, 2006) in the inextricability of the language-culture connection has been critiqued by scholars who view the relationship

between language and culture from a dynamic and fluid perspective (Baker, 2015; Fang & Baker, 2018; Gray, 2010).

When viewing language and culture as static and culture learning as merely a cognitive process, teachers and students tend to only passively learn cultural knowledge in relation to the restricted topics prescribed in textbooks (Dunne, 2011; Gray, 2010). For example, Gray (2010) analyzed ELT textbooks and argued that most ELT textbooks represent the discourse of new capitalism to reflect an Anglo-American ideology. Shin et al. (2011) found that the Anglophone cultural contents dominate most internationally distributed ELT textbooks. The cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1991) represented in many ELT textbooks does not reflect the current landscape of English. Without a critical orientation to textbook-mediated IC instruction, students may take the textbook writers’ cultural and ideological stances for granted, without critically questioning the textbook contents.

IC instruction may simply present a limited amount of cultural knowledge and may fail to reflect a critical perspective in which users of English are facing different emergent situations to deal with cultural references and practices to “negotiate and mediate between these dynamic resources in intercultural communication” (Baker, 2012, p. 67). Therefore, it is necessary to apply CIL to IC instruction to build more complex, critical, and deeper understandings of ELT (Byram, 2021; Fang, 2018; Shin et al., 2011). This article argues that a critical perspective of IC instruction should be recognized from an ELF perspective, where the relationship between language and culture is dynamic and language users coconstruct meaning in the IC learning process (Baker, 2015; Byram, 2021). In the context of IC learning, where students participate in additional training by reading academic papers and writing reflective journals, this article addresses the following research question:

Research Question: How do Chinese learners of English enhance their CIL from additional IC instruction and academic training?

Methodology

Research Setting and Participants

This study was conducted at a university in Southeast China where an English enhancement program was initiated in 2003 by the English Language Center (ELC). This university initiates five principles of English teaching and learning: proficiency, autonomy, sustainability, intercultural competence, and critical thinking. At this university, the ELC is a central resource charged with teaching English to more than 10,000 registered undergraduate and postgraduate students. To understand students’ IC awareness and develop their CIL, we situated our study in a 16-week course (four contact hours per week with a total of 64 teaching hours) focusing on IC during the 2017 autumn semester.

Table 1. Profile of the Participants.

Participants	Age (years)	Gender	Major	Current university year	Current English level
Student 1	17	F	Finance	Year 2	CET 4
Student 2	17	F	Law	Year 2	CET 4
Student 3	18	M	Chinese language and literature	Year 2	CET 4
Student 4	17	F	International trade	Year 2	CET 4
Student 5	18	F	Chinese language and literature	Year 2	CET 4
Student 6	17	F	Business administration	Year 2	CET 4
Student 7	17	F	Biology	Year 2	CET 4
Student 8	18	M	Business administration	Year 2	CET 4
Student 9	18	F	Law	Year 2	CET 4
Student 10	17	F	Finance	Year 2	CET 4

Because English is the medium of instruction at the ELC, this course was taken by a team of Chinese and international English teachers using the same syllabus and assessment methods. However, as researchers, we realized certain limitations in the design of this course and in the textbook that was chosen, which simply reinforced the promotion of Anglophone cultures in this so-called IC course. For instance, the textbook title was *Encounter with Westerners: Improving Skills in English and Intercultural Communication* (Snow, 2014), and the course syllabus stated that one of the intended learning outcomes was “to discuss common generalizations concerning Western and Chinese cultures.” The selected textbook and traditional focus on Anglophone cultures cannot develop the students’ CIL as we wondered how “encounter with Westerners” would improve students’ skills in IC and enhance students’ CIL. Students also expressed a great concern that they were already aware of most of the cultural knowledge written in the textbook and that the cultural content from the textbook was rather superficial. The textbook itself did not prepare students for future intercultural encounters because it is restricted to traditional and obsolete cultural knowledge of Chinese and American cultures.

We applied additional activities aiming to facilitate the development of CIL among students. We acknowledged the importance of adopting a critical stance to view curricula, texts, and practices related to IC instruction (Nieto, 2017; Piller, 2011) and aimed to investigate the extent to which the students enhanced their CIL by incorporating critical perspectives in training sessions. In this study, we also aimed to empower the participants by encouraging them to move beyond the traditional textbook-mediated IC instruction to avoid passively accepting the texts they read, thereby enabling them to challenge the hidden ideologies and decode what is missing—both silenced or discounted (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004). The participants were invited to question, examine, and readdress the power relations between readers and the author. Thus, reflection and transformation became important in this process.

After explaining the purpose of this study to the students in three different classes, 10 students were purposefully

selected to participate because (a) they were taking the IC course during the time the research was conducted and (b) they were willing to participate in additional training. Among these students, six were recruited from the third author’s classes and four were recommended by colleagues via email and social media. To minimize participant subjectivity, all 10 participants received a clear explanation that the research would not affect their final scores. Furthermore, all the student participants had more than 6 years of English learning experience, did not have experience studying or traveling abroad, and only used English on a limited basis in their daily lives. All students passed College English Test (CET) Band 4, which roughly equals CEFR B2 to B1 (see Table 1 for the participant profiles). However, the students might need to use English after graduation for various purposes—such as job interviews, further study, and work or travel abroad. These future IC encounters make it essential to include CIL in ELT to increase the possibility of success in real-life contexts.

Instructional Process and Activities

This study utilized a participatory action research method that uses data collection, action, and reflection to engage participants for the purpose of shaping people’s minds and practices to develop their CIL (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). The training process included having the student participants read academic papers, attend workshops, participate in interviews, and maintain reflective journals after the workshops. The third author mainly led the training; during the training process, he focused on incorporating the notion of CIL to help the participants challenge the fixed ideas of a nation-bounded definition of culture—as well as issues such as the *relationship between language and culture, globalization and IC, and ELT, culture and identity*—to challenge essentialist views of culture.

The participants were given academic papers related to critical literacy for reading and reflection in their journals as the first step. A few examples of these papers include Baker (2012), McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004), Holliday

(2006), Dooley (2009), and Gray (2010). These papers were selected because they offered themes that are suitable for critical intercultural discussions, and they could fit the participants' intermediate level of English language proficiency. The participants were told not to read every paper in detail, but to choose them based on their interests and time. As academic support when reading these papers, the students were given a few questions to consider: What is the main idea of the paper? What have I learnt from reading these papers? What have I reflected from such reading? Did I identify any points that are related to intercultural literacy? The reading of the academic papers represented the active participation of the students to develop their academic literacy and CIL in this research.

As a means of triangulation, after 6 weeks in the course with the additional reading assignments, the participants also attended two workshops (each workshop lasted 1 hr, one in Week 9 and one in Week 13), conducted by the third author, as the second step of developing their CIL. The workshops aimed to determine how well the participants understood the topic through the course and the additional reading. We adopted McLaughlin and DeVoogd's (2004) framework when conducting the workshops by asking the students to discuss relevant questions to promote CIL of the reading materials. The students were asked the following questions from McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004): Whose viewpoint is expressed? What does the author want us to think? Whose voices are missed, silenced, or discounted? How might alternative perspectives be represented? How would that contribute to your understanding of the text from a critical stance? What action might you take based on what you have learnt?

During the training process (academic reading, and discussions during workshops), the student participants were asked to participate in group interviews. They were asked whether they had developed any alternative views of understanding culture and IC. Based on this approach, it is hoped that the participants could "envision alternate ways of viewing the author's topic, and they exert that power when they read from a critical stance" (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004, p. 53).

Data Collection and Analysis

Because the researchers were familiar with the course contents, four unstructured group interviews (with two to three students in each interview based upon their availability) were conducted after the instructional activities, each lasting approximately 25 to 35 min (see Table 2 for further information regarding the groups and length for the interviews). Although unstructured, the questions focused on the students' feedback on the course, their understanding of local culture and IC, and their prospective interlocutors of communication in the future. Such a design is more flexible and increased the participants' freedom to express their ideas. The high degree of interactivity in the group

Table 2. Information of Group Interviews.

Interview number	Participants	Length of discussion
Interview 1	Student 1	26'37"
	Student 2	
	Student 3	
Interview 2	Student 4	32'45"
	Student 5	
	Student 6	
Interview 3	Student 7	30'45"
	Student 8	
Interview 4	Student 9	27'07"
	Student 10	

interviews enabled the researchers "to probe understandings and engage interviewees in a dialogue about what they mean by their comments" (Schutt, 2006, p. 31). The interviews were conducted in Putonghua to enable the participants to discuss their ideas in greater depth (Mann, 2011). They were audio-recorded for further transcription and analysis purposes.

Journal writing enabled the students to further develop their CIL and reflect on their participation in this research through reading the academic papers (Lin et al., 2014). As guidelines, the participants were asked to write about their experience of the course and their experience of participating in the research; they were also asked to indicate what they learnt from reading the academic papers and to share their personal challenges of developing CIL. By the end of Week 16, seven reflective journals (three participants did not submit their journals) were collected. All the journals were written in Chinese with a total number of approximately 4,700 Chinese characters.

We adopted qualitative content analysis (QCA) (Schreier, 2012) to "explore the deeper meanings so as to add interpretive depth and breadth to the analysis" (Jenkins, 2014, p. 128). The method was applied both in interview transcripts and journal writing data. The interviews were transcribed by a research assistant and checked by the first author after the initial transcription process. Thereafter, the authors listened to the recordings and compared them with the transcripts to double-check the accuracy of the transcription. All the transcripts were sent to the student participants for member check; this enabled them to review their words to ensure the accuracy of the transcription and translation processes. The coding process was implemented using NVivo11 software. The software also enabled us to check the initial codes and themes. The final coding scheme comprised 12 codes organized under two themes: *textbook content on cultural knowledge* and *IC instruction* (see Table 3). We focused on the student interviews and journal data related to these two themes in the coding process and subsequent analysis. When reporting the findings, the selected data excerpts were first translated into English by the first author and then checked by other authors.

Table 3. Coding Scheme.

Themes	Codes
Textbook content on cultural knowledge	Anglophone culture; Foreign people; Chinese culture; Cultural comparison; Cultural interpretation; Misunderstanding; Cultural knowledge; International students
Intercultural communication instruction	Teaching style; Communication barrier; Communication patterns; Intercultural skills

Thereafter, the English translation was back translated into Chinese by an experienced translator to check whether there is any discrepancy in meaning. This back-translation process enabled us to maintain data reliability.

Findings

Revisiting Textbook Content on Cultural Knowledge

Equipped with the additional materials and knowledge learnt from the workshops, the students voiced concerns regarding the exclusive focus on Western cultures in the course textbook. They mainly indicated that the textbook only introduced fixed cultural knowledge and only compared mainstream Chinese and American cultures. According to the students' comments, this textbook neglected to address the heterogeneous nature of culture.

For example, when asked about their expectations of the course in Interview 1, all three students agreed on the lack of varied cultures in the textbook. One noted that, "I expected the textbook to introduce not only Western cultures, but also cultures in the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Latin America [. . .] However, the textbook only focuses on typical Western cultures." Although the students still seemed to associate cultures with certain countries and regions, they became clearer in their expectation of multicultural content in their textbooks.

They also challenged the issue of how standards were set from this textbook. For example, one student stated,

I think the examples provided seem to give us a way of thinking about the problem from the foreigner's (mostly American) point of view. These are simple and typical examples asking readers to think and develop ideas already set from the author's perspective. (Interview 2, Student 4)

From this comment, it is evident that the students realized the reinforcement of stereotypes represented in the textbook. In a similar vein, Student 7 in Interview 3 mentioned that the textbook "only introduces some cultural differences and cultural concepts, and how people should change their way of thinking when encountering such situations."

In Interview 4, the students also noted that the textbook simply introduced an intercultural incident with a Chinese student and an American exchange student and it required the Chinese students to use the exchange student's perspective to

solve the problem (see Appendix). One student commented, "As long as the story happens in China, it is important for the American student to consider things from the perspective of the Chinese student." This echoes the presumption that many IC textbooks prioritize Anglophone cultures over local cultures (Gray, 2010).

In general, the students developed the awareness to challenge the tendency to equate English culture with Anglophone (particularly American) culture, and they realized the importance of contextualizing cultural content in the textbook design after participating in this study (see Liu & Fang, 2017). A student in Interview 3 mentioned, "I think some examples the textbook provide may want to lead the readers to develop their thinking according to the author's point of view, so it sets up some simple, typical examples." This finding echoes the results reported in previous studies that textbooks tend to view culture from a fixed and essentialist perspective with a focus on Anglocentric culture (Baker, 2012; Gray, 2010; Guo & Beckett, 2007). Furthermore, the students noted that the textbook simply listed various intercultural encounters and did not fully explain them in detail in terms of IC and did not reflect cultural diversity (Dunne, 2011). Again, the textbook content would tell people what to do without viewing the complexity of meaning-making through IC.

In Interview 2, the students mentioned that much of the content is rather superficial and too general—the content should be discussed and explored in more detail for readers not only to know what but also to know *how* and *why*. As mentioned, "the training process with academic papers really provides me with some new understanding of the complexity of IC" (Interview 1, Student 3) and "I see the importance to readdressing issues of local and global when interpreting intercultural encounters" (Interview 4, Student 9). Overall, most of the students were capable of adopting a critical perspective to comprehend the content of the textbook and reflect on their own needs and the goals of IC. This outcome also echoes that a target culture is likely to be presented at a superficial level and that a predetermined assumption of the learners' identity is established in the textbook content (Baker, 2015; Gray, 2010; Liu & Fang, 2017).

However, students also mentioned about the challenge of merely adopting a critical perspective in IC. For instance, one student stated that "CIL should be developed through multiple channels—I'm not sure how a textbook could be designed for such purpose" (Interview 2, Student 4).

Another comment was in relation to the notion of *literacy*: in CIL:

I understand that English is used as a lingua franca and I want to develop CIL. But many people don't want to know why we should challenge some concepts that are taken-for-granted. I don't think it's easy for teachers to transfer such notion to the students either. (Interview 4, Student 10)

Therefore, from some students' perspectives, CIL might be regarded as an important notion but still difficult to be incorporated through IC education.

In the journal writing, several students critiqued the over-emphasis on the standard English in textbook contents and they shared their understanding of how multilingualism should be recognized and developed. For example, one student suggested that teachers should recognize students' multilingual background and reconsider "how to assist students to recognise the concept of multiculturalism" (Interview 3, Student 7). One student also noted that "students should take the initiative and go beyond the language classroom and textbook content to form an intercultural awareness" (Interview 2, Student 4).

From an ELF perspective, Student 5 also expressed in favor of the importance of being exposed to a variety of English accents to improve communication:

I learnt a lot from this experience. Previously, I only read and learnt from what mentioned from the textbooks. I did not think of viewing things from another perspective and empowering the unvoiced. [. . .]. I am happy to learn to think about things from another perspective, especially from the workshops. (Interview 4, Student 9)

She also noted, "We need to break the fixed mindset to only learn British or American English and cultures." Student 7 voiced the necessity of "reader awareness" for developing CIL. He expressed the belief that a critical stance requires readers to use their own perspectives to analyze and critique the reading. He stated, "readers should learn to be the one to decode the text, rather than passively accept from what they have read. The goal lies not only to understand the text better, but also to go beyond the text." He also indicated that CIL is not knowledge itself but a dynamic process that needs to be gradually developed. This argument also reflects that the student has an increased awareness of challenging the essentialist perspective of viewing culture. However, Student 1 believed that she should take British and American cultures as the starting point to learn English and wrote "I believe that English originates from the UK and I think I should learn British culture to prepare my future study abroad plan."

Evaluation and Reconceptualization of IC Instruction

We attempted to probe the extent to which the participants valued the IC instruction and how they developed CIL after

participating in this study. In general, the students recognized the importance of IC instruction. Some expressed the belief that textbook content only enabled them to form a limited and superficial understanding of IC; others highlighted the dominance of mainstream culture in IC instruction with a failure to emphasize cultural diversity (cf. Fang & Baker, 2018). For example, Student 2 mentioned, "IC instruction in general focuses too much on mainstream cultures and neglects minority cultures." He also expressed that

I think it is necessary to understand them [minority cultures] because you cannot understand the cultures of all nations. However, if people could understand as much about cultural diversity, they could think more consciously and broadly when dealing with different situations of IC. (Interview 1, Student 2)

Similarly, Student 7 mentioned, "We only learn IC from a superficial perspective." This echoes the concept of viewing culture from a more dynamic and fluid ELF perspective than as a fixed entity (Baker, 2015).

It is also essential to consider the students' own culture during IC instruction (cf. Liu & Fang, 2017). However, many IC classrooms still neglect the importance of the home culture in the process of IC instruction, and the adoption of cultural diversity from an ELF perspective is often only given lip service (cf. Baker, 2015; Jenkins, 2014). For example, a student noted,

If one is rooted in his/her own culture as the foundation for IC before absorbing other cultures, he/she will then be critical and able to have a deeper thinking. If one is familiar with his/her own culture, he/she can better explain some IC encounters. (Interview 3, Student 8)

Student 1 also mentioned, "If one knows enough about his/her own culture, he/she can understand better in terms of cultural diversity in the process of IC. Some new common ground can even be reached during the IC processes." What the students lamented with regard to the existing IC instruction was the overemphasis on Anglophone cultures, which does not correspond with the real-life complexity of IC. The students also felt it crucial that their own culture be discussed in the IC process, thereby resonating with the concept of cultural diversity; thus, "effectively understanding other cultures requires adequate comprehension of one's own home culture" (Liu & Fang, 2017, p. 33).

It is interesting, though, that students had slightly different opinions in Interview 3 (Students 7 and 8). While Student 7 was critical to the textbook, Student 8 stated that

I do see the point that textbook could only provide certain perspectives of cultural contents, but I feel that it is difficult to apply some notions we learnt from the training into practice, because I still do not have such intercultural experiences myself.

Here, Student 8 might feel satisfied with what he learnt as cultural knowledge, but was concerned about the real-life

intercultural encounter. To a certain extent, students need to have intercultural experiences themselves to further develop their CIL.

In terms of the journal writing, for example, Student 2 wrote about the issue of how to empower minorities and raise awareness of their own cultures. She also realized that language ideologies (e.g., native speakerism, standard English) might lead to inequality in education. However, she stated, “It is hard to pursue cultural equality between the mainstream culture and the minorities, but it is more important to negotiate between cultures and emphasise people’s own culture.”

The students also developed a sense of cultural diversity. As stated by UNESCO, the resulting cultural diversity expands choices, nurtures a variety of skills, human values, and worldviews, and provides wisdom from the past to inform the future. Cultural diversity is a mainspring for the sustainable development for individuals, communities, and countries (UNESCO, n.d.). As Student 4 indicated, “We should break the fixed notion of only learning British and American English with Anglophone cultures.” Student 6 stated, “Intercultural communication and intercultural encounters are becoming increasingly popular in multiple areas. [. . .] It is important for us to jump out of fixed circles and think and treat different culture critically.” To summarize, these results indicate that the students were aware of how to be a “critical reader” and developed their own CIL by participating in a series of activities for this research.

Discussion and Implications

As participatory action research, the findings reveal that the students developed CIL through the training. The findings also indicate that the student participants were able to perceive the textbook content from a more critical perspective and are able to identify the IC process as being complex. It is believed that

the ability to see one’s own cultural practices [. . .] to learn about and from other cultures, and to negotiate between cultural worlds, can lead to fulfilment on a personal level, awareness and empowerment [. . .] in the global arena. (Pegrum, 2008, p. 137)

The findings are significant because they shed light on the importance of directing students to “think out of the box”—that is, to seek additional information apart from the textbook. Moreover, the data indicate that the student participants were keenly aware of the significance of multilingualism and multiculturalism in ELT and the necessity of incorporating local culture into IC instruction. These findings enhance our understanding that cultural instruction should develop learners’ awareness of “switching between different cultures and opinions swiftly and smoothly” (Zhu, 2014, p. 209). Overall, the findings contribute to the extant literature with empirical evidence illustrating how students’ CIL could be enhanced

and expanded with teacher support. Therefore, we propose several implications in IC instruction and training regarding the enhancement of CIL.

First, the association between English and culture has become ambiguous from the ELF perspective; students and teachers should develop their awareness of the complexity of linguistic and cultural contact in IC. Hence, the complicated perceptions of the relationship between language and culture make it imperative to revisit and rethink the overrepresentation of *Anglophone* (Baker, 2015; Piller, 2011; Sobre, 2017). To consider IC from a wider and critical perspective, this article advocates a multicultural approach to teaching IC content (Leung et al., 2016). In this sense, it is essential for the stakeholders (e.g., teachers, curriculum designers) to be fully aware of the intrinsic character of IC from an ELF perspective (Liu & Fang, 2017). Teachers in classes should concentrate more on simulating students to apply their language skills to real-life intercultural encounters, instead of merely learning the core of Anglophone cultures mainly from the textbooks and to equalize them with *intercultural* communication.

These real-life encounters include negotiating with people from different cultural backgrounds and applying accommodation strategies on the daily IC process (Baker, 2015; Dooly & Rubinstein, 2018; Illés & Akcan, 2017). Therefore, students will need to go beyond the textbook and understand their positions when communicating with other people. In this manner, students display their cultural identities “through a range of interactional work and discursive practice” (Zhu, 2014, p. 212). Nevertheless, given the test-oriented regime in Chinese universities, further research is required to explore the extent to which that teachers and students would be willing to teach/learn beyond the textbook and the prescribed to-be-tested content. It is the teachers’ responsibility to motivate students to deal with intercultural circumstances in real-life scenarios (not to simply encounter Anglophone people) in classes and encouraging students to come up with their own solutions. Furthermore, it is essential for students to venture into the real world to explore intercultural encounters by themselves, meet people from different cultural backgrounds, and, gradually, gain their own knowledge and experiences. This will enable students to learn how to accommodate their cultural identities through various intercultural encounters and practices.

Second, textbooks used for IC instruction should be carefully discerned and evaluated. This study found that the textbooks are likely to misdirect local teachers to believe that the “knot” of culture and language is tied uncritically—in order words, English has been used by a large number of non-native speakers as a global language. For example, after the student participants challenged the content of the *Anglophone cultures* represented in the textbook, we were reminded of whether it was feasible to assume that language teachers would do the same as what the students did. The notion of CIL should not only be applied in students but also equally

important to teachers during the IC instruction processes. For example, Gray (2010) discussed the culture of up-to-date capitalism and the ideology and practices of neoliberalism, appraising the content related to culture in global textbooks. Gray (2010) argued that, in contrast to teachers who bear in mind the limitation of the ideological dimension, some teachers carelessly approve of whatever is written in the textbook and appreciate the new capitalist values ingrained in those books.

Although we did not discuss teachers' perspectives in this article, the development of students' CIL is affected by the teachers' sociocultural perspective in selecting, utilizing, and revising ELT materials. This requires teachers to read extensive materials related to the topic and link to their own experiences of intercultural encounters. It is essential for language teachers to contextualize their teaching plans for more appropriate and practical intercultural encounters in their classes. In this article, we argued the importance of moving beyond the textbook contents and noted that students can participate in additional trainings and activities to build their CIL.

Third, teachers and students should be aware of the significance of switching from a conventional perspective of IC to an ELF, and a translingual and transcultural perspective of intercultural encounters (Canagarajah, 2013; Hepp, 2015; Pennycook, 2017). For example, Canagarajah (2013) argued that it is important to "consider how people engage with each other, tailor their language uses reciprocally, display uptake, resist dominant conventions, and co-construct meanings in relation to existing norms and ideologies in actual interactions" (p. 28). It is suggested that language teachers maintain a comprehensive sociocultural perspective to teach English and apply that perspective to IC instruction from an ELF perspective (Baker, 2015; Fang & Baker, 2018). The ELF (and a translingual and transcultural) perspective considers language and culture to be more flexible and vigorous, not limited and static within boundaries. Therefore, it is pivotal for language teachers to avoid being trapped in the essentialist national frame of reference of understanding culture in relation to ELT; they should also advocate CIL to "learn to problematize the uneven forces of globalization, in terms of economics, environment, technology and demographic shifts, particularly in the light of colonialism, hegemony and

modernity" (Sobre, 2017, p. 41). Thus, when transferring the notion CIL, language teachers should perceive and interpret students' learning needs and goals, and see their students' future use of English in classroom practice.

Conclusion

Before drawing any conclusions, we would like to reiterate that this study did not aim to evaluate the effectiveness of a textbook or the students' progress in learning English or understanding CIL through IC courses. We also acknowledge that this study has a few limitations in terms of the methods used for the instruction and the amount of time the students were exposed to the instruction. Therefore, in the next stage of the study, it is necessary to introduce different types of instruction (e.g., project-based inquiry, experimental instruction, content and language integrated learning) and expose students to those methods over a longer period of time. However, in this study, the students' voices provide firsthand insight for language teachers to reconsider and expand their IC instruction for students to advance their learning journeys.

This article argues for the importance of moving beyond the established relationship between language and culture from a case of additional training to enhance students' CIL. It is important that stakeholders should foresee complex and emergent situations in situ that may require the use of English for IC encounters from a multilingual perspective, thereby incorporating the ELF perspective while learning and understanding IC. This is essential because "the *degree* to which a curriculum can be considered intercultural has become a key concern" (Dunne, 2011, p. 619, italics in original). In this manner, students can develop CIL by speculating and questioning throughout the learning and experiencing process and become critical learners. In addition, developing CIL should increase the awareness of "teaching English in a way that recognises its role as a global lingua franca rather than principally as an Anglophone language" (Fang & Baker, 2018, p. 620). It is expected that language teachers and learners perceive language and culture from a multilingual perspective and move beyond the cultural content of textbooks to sense the critical moments of IC encounters.

Appendix

III Letter to Fran

Letter: The Goodnight Kiss. Read the following letter without using your dictionary. If necessary, mark words you don't understand and check them later.



Dear Fran:

I am a graduate student in China, and over the last few weeks I have become friends with Earl, a Western student who is studying Chinese at my university. We have a number of friends in common, so often see each other at various social gatherings. We enjoy talking to each other, and have gotten to know each other fairly well.

Last weekend Earl asked me if I would like to go see a movie with him. I said yes, so we had dinner and saw the movie together. After the movie we talked for a long time as we walked home. When it was time to say goodnight, he first took my hand and then he kissed me. I was a little surprised when he kissed me, but I was not unhappy because I like him quite a bit.

Now I have started to tell people Earl is my boyfriend. However, when I told one of my Chinese girlfriends about all of this, she said that Westerners are very casual about relationships between men and women. She said I should be careful about letting him kiss me because he probably wasn't very serious about his interest in me. What do you think?

Sincerely,
Xiao Juan

Questions: Before you read Fran's response, consider the following questions and jot down some notes.

- What do you think Earl's intentions are toward Xiao Juan?
- What do you think Fran's response will be?

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taken so seriously. It could signal serious romantic interest, but it could also just indicate a mild and perhaps passing affection, or even just a nice way to end a pleasant evening. In short, Earl's goodnight kiss might mean he would like you to be his girlfriend, but this is not necessarily so.

I would suggest that you try to find out how he really feels about you. If you have some trusted friends who also know Earl, especially someone from Earl's home country, you could talk with them to see if they can help you better understand where Earl is coming from. In order to sort things out, you could also consider talking to Earl himself about your relationship. It is relatively common for Western couples to talk with each other about how they feel as they attempt to work out their relationships. Talking about a romantic relationship in this way may seem somewhat awkward and difficult – even for Westerners – but it will help you get a better understanding of what Earl thinks about your relationship.

Sincerely,
Fran

Fran's Response: The Goodnight Kiss. Read the following letter without using your dictionary. If necessary, mark words you don't understand and check them later.

Dear Xiao Juan:

Your friend is basically right in saying that Westerners tend to begin and end romantic relationships more frequently and easily than Chinese people do. While from a Chinese cultural perspective this may seem to be too "casual" (suibian), most Westerners view this as normal and even good. In fact, many Westerners would argue that it is good to date a number of different people before you finally decide who to marry because this helps you choose a good partner.

On the whole Westerners also tend to be more accepting of sexual activity in dating relationships than Chinese are. However, Westerners don't agree among themselves on this issue as much as they do on the question of dating, and their views about this range from very conservative to very liberal.

As to Earl, without actually knowing him it's hard for me to be sure what he was thinking when he kissed you. Perhaps he has fallen in love with you and wants to have a more serious relationship. Perhaps he was moved more by the romance of the moment than by any deeper feelings, and he doesn't know for sure himself how he feels about you. It is also possible that his interest in you is more superficial; perhaps he just finds you physically attractive, or he is lonely in China and enjoys your company.

One thing I am fairly sure about is that the goodnight kiss Earl gave you didn't mean exactly the same thing for you that it did for him. From a Chinese cultural perspective, when a man kisses a woman it often indicates serious romantic interest. From a Western cultural perspective, a goodnight kiss is not

Comprehension Check

- To check your comprehension, without looking back at Fran's letter, see if you can remember and write down Fran's main points.
- Can you think of any possible interpretations of Earl's behavior that Fran didn't mention?

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