

# Critical Evaluation of Bilingual Pedagogy of Advanced Placement Program in Nantong, Jiangsu Province, China

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**Abstract:** *Advanced Placement Programs (AP) is regarded as a bridging course which builds a positive connection between secondary education and higher education. Different from general high school students, it is set in a bilingual environment. This study will discuss the language learning and using in this context from bilingual pedagogical perspectives. First, some contextual background information regarding this program in terms of two kinds of English course—Basic English course and English proficiency course will be provided, following this, the issue related to bilingual pedagogy in this context will be identified. In the end, based on this matter, the future implications will be proposed.*

**Keywords:** *Bilingual pedagogy, Advanced Placement, monolingual turn, higher education, evaluation*

## 1. Introduction

Currently, with the development of international education background of globalization and internationalization, international curricula have considerable popularity, AP program particularly. As a program initially aimed at providing students the opportunities to achieve excellence through independent study, AP program mainly benefit students from three aspects: promote student skills and confidence, achieve college admission and student success and save time and money (Discover the Benefits of AP, 2018). Due to the qualifying AP examination scores can earn positioning in more than 90% of colleges and universities in over 100 countries (Zhao and Zhang, 2009), AP program has been widely welcomed in China. A few private international schools in China first introduce AP program and then the public schools set the AP Centre, including the school in this context. It locates in Nantong, Jiangsu Province, south-east China.

Compared to general high school students, students in the AP program suffer more stress (Yang, 2013), among which, language is one of the toughest obstacles. Chinese students who have just graduated from middle school and used to accept exam-oriented education need to study in a bilingual environment. In order to fit students well in this situation, curriculum designer set both basic English course (focus on linguistic aspect) and English proficiency course (promote comprehensive language skills). Two different English courses serve for language learning and language using respectively. According to Evans (2014), language (English) uses symbols which consist of a form and a meaning to express its symbolic function by encoding and externalizing, from language learning we could gain the “form” knowledge, but to reach language using it may still in need of “meaning”, “contextual practice” and so on. In this situation, the applicable language teaching and learning pedagogy worth exploration for this program.

## 2. The Setting of Two Kinds of English Courses

### 2.1 Basic English Course

From the perspective of Basic English course, it is normally delivered by non-native-speaker teachers in this context. In order to meet the demand of other subjects learning and TOEFL, specialized vocabulary and grammatical and structural language knowledge is the main content. And audio-lingual method which is based on behaviourist theory and communicative method focused on interaction of “target” language are employed. Besides, students are exposed to explicit instruction, which according to Ellis (2015), is focus-on-form and is normally achieved by highlighting specific target forms in the input. However, the content and expression of materials or textbooks are not always very authentic, which

inhibit students' production of target to some extent. Also, the type of input inhibits the production in communicative process. Krashen advocates that speech cannot be taught without enough comprehensible input (1985). There are also some factors that encourage the production, for example, feedback, especially corrective feedback. According to Trahey (1996), external language input provides learners with only positive evidence (grammatical information) about the structural rules of the target language, but lack of negative evidence (information about ungrammaticality). It may result in the situation that learners know how to say, but do not know those cannot be said. From my point of view, when there are obstacles to communication, knowing what is wrong could provide me the opportunity to solve the problem, to enhance my language knowledge, as well as to reduce my mistakes. This is a kind of modified output and could encourage my reformulation in interactions. Another factor which could encourage students is motivation. Motivation is regarded as the impetus of learners to achieve learning goals by Crooks & Schmidt (1991). Some learners may choose to learn a foreign language because they are interested in the people and culture represented by the target language group.

## **2.2 English Proficiency Course**

Considering English proficiency course taught by native speakers, which includes English Drama, Debating, English Literature-based studies and so forth. The innovative content compared with conventional course appeals and motivates students to some extent. On the one hand, under these setting courses that present rich cultural background, students have special interests in the target language community. It is defined as integrative motivation (Gardner, 1985) which stems from inner interest. For example, in English Drama class, some famous movies are presented for students to enjoy and role play in a group is adopted to engage them into the specific language community. On the other hand, class performance and involvements account for large percentage in final exam, students may treat the language learning as a way to pass examinations, adapt to the oversea environment and in the long term to receive better opportunities for higher education. According to (Gardner, 1985), it is instrumental motivation. In this context, both integrative and instrumental orientations in L2 motivation has been stimulated. Students seek to achieve certain skill through English language learning as well as concern the practicality of learning a new language.

## **3. The Exploration of Language Learning Pedagogy**

Considering the bilingual pedagogy, the whole program adopts monolingual ideologies, no matter it is basic course or proficiency course, guided by non-native speakers or native speakers. Alisaari *et al.* (2019) found that students' mother tongue was not always considered as resources for learning just as in this context. Although bilingual proficiency has been promoted to some extent, it only focuses on bilingual proficiency with separate bilingual pedagogy but ignore the cultivation of culture pluralism.

### **3.1 The Adoption of Monolingual Pedagogy**

The whole program adopts what Creese and Blackledge (2010) regard as "language separation as bilingual pedagogy" (p.104). As a longstanding concept, the native speaker is treated as the representation of rules of language usage (Davies, 2003), which is akin to Chomskyan notion of the idealized native speaker. Based on this circumstance, traditional bilingual education adopts "bilingualism through monolingualism" (Swain, 1983, p. 4), where the institutional aim is "language as content". In this context, students are asked to ask and response in English (target language) all the time and teachers allow very little interactional space for apposition and mixing of linguistic resources. Immersion methodology is widely used in bilingual education as a stringently monolingual pedagogy (Martin-Jones, Blackledge, and Creese, 2015), which is adopted in this program to make students monolingual in the dominant language of the country that they probably go after the program. They limit the use of mother tongue to help students get maximum benefits from activities which will be carried out in the target language and mother tongue is only used in procedural process or as a teaching tool (e.g. translation).

### **3.2 Problems Exist in This Context**

Although the educational aim language maintenance is in accordance with the program, ignoring students' mother tongue often results in poorer academic performance (Menken and Kleyn, 2010) and in this context, negative aspect does occur. When something hard to understand or express occurs, students would choose to give up and language learning would stay on the superficial level. To be specific, it is

possible for students to respond or write without comprehensive understanding in a monolingual teaching situation and “processing for meaning may not occur” (Baker, 2006, p.289), since they may merely copy or adapt sentences from textbook, Internet or class dictation instead of “digesting” them. In that case, the role of mother tongue and such monolingual ideology in language-as-communicative-action ought to be reconsidered.

In addition, “separate bilingualism” is related to political and academic discourse which treats languages as inconspicuous and corresponds to culture in simplified and consistent way (Creese and Blackledge, 2011). At the same time, according to Li (2013), what bilingual education promotes is language proficiency and cultural pluralism. However, under this pedagogy, language learning fails to affirm students’ identity and is unable to strengthen their sense of belonging and engagement in literacy practices.

### **3.3 The Appearance of “Multilingual Turn”**

With the prevalence of “monolingual bias” (Kachru, 1994), ideas against separate bilingualism such as additive (where second language adds to rather than replace the first language) rather than subtractive bilingualism (García, 2009) appear. In that case, May (2013) introduces “multilingual turn”, which advocates a more integral way and pursuit of understanding how learners’ languages interact with each other. “Multilingual turn”, at first for me, was the shift happening in language learning process from monolingual instruction strategies which keep language separate to combination. Namely we can take advantage of mother tongue and use different languages in various degrees of code-mixing for different purposes and situations (McArthur, 1992). Now, from my point of view, Multilingualism is ranging from knowledge of a few words to full competency in more than one language. Multilingual speakers could choose between languages depending on the situation and language competency of the interlocutor. Also, multilingual speakers can mark identities or group affiliations to negotiate social roles and status and to establish interpersonal solidarity or distance. For instance, dialects are not official languages in China, and they are “unmarked” choice in public settings and service.

Under this background, Creese and Blackledge (2011) propose flexible bilingualism and take translanguaging as bilingual pedagogy for learning and teaching (2010), which is an “important communicative resource” when operating in and across many languages (García and Hessom, 2015, p.230).

## **4. Future Implications**

In response to the discussion above and in the light of the L1 language and culture are valuable resources, some suggestions regarding bilingual pedagogy in this context in pursuing translanguaging as bilingual pedagogy will be made.

### **4.1 Translanguaging as Bilingual Pedagogy**

Translanguaging simply implies receiving information in one language and applying it in the other one, which has potential educational advantages as a pedagogical practice (Baker, 2006). Lewis et al. (2012) later clarify that translanguaging represents applying one language to reinforce the other, which could boost students’ empathy in both languages. However, as Taylor *et al.* (2008) claim that in real context, “students’ diverse linguistic capital is rarely framed or tapped into as valuable forms of literacy” (p.270). In that case, both macro and micro levels: from school level, as well as teacher and student perspectives need to be taken in account to employ this pedagogy.

From macro level, the school ethos need to be bilingual created by cultural events, curriculum resources and extra-curricular activity using both languages, which reflects the significance of the culture of language minorities being presented to create “an additive bilingual and multicultural environment” (Baker, 2006, p. 232). Also, translanguaging space where “breaks down the artificial dichotomies between the macro and the micro, the societal and the individual, and the social and the psycho in studies of bilingualism and multilingualism” (Li, 2011. p.1234) is equally essential. It is the space accommodates bilingual students to incorporate social spaces that have been trained respectively. Moreover, issue related to curriculum need to be taken into account. Learner-centred curriculum which is negotiated through collaboration between teachers and learners is the premise of the realization of learner diversity (Li, 2013). With this type of curriculum, diversification of linguistic, accumulated cultural and educational background could be the authentic classroom resources, which is better for students to engage in the real-

world meaning making.

In terms of micro level, firstly from teachers' point of view, becoming a linguistically and culturally responsive teacher could they understand the position of language and culture in students' learning (Alisaari, et al., 2019). They ought to provide students the opportunities to choose languages used in class, as well as to utilize students' entire linguistic repertoire as resources for language learning, since it can establish and sustain their self-identities (Cummins et al., 2005). To be specific, when different languages are seen equally as resources for learning and literacy, they are considered as assets to the society to enrich intercultural communication and thus affirms identities of bilingual students. This kind of teaching guides students to value different cultures and pursue multilingualism in its broadest senses. In addition, according to Baker (2006), translanguaging is the process of making meaning, thus teacher's attentiveness to meaning making is also of great necessity (García and Li, 2014). In order to achieve that, teacher could translanguaging when proper for understanding and encourage students' translanguaging in inner speech. Instead of obstructing learning by imposing information, student-generated materials ought to be brought in (see Blog 5). "Figured worlds" proposed by Gee (2014) advocates making use of subconscious theories and stories which depends on personal experience to deal with the issue in our daily lives, which can be a solution.

#### ***4.2 Approach through Meaning Making***

As the paradigm in language learning theories shifted from behaviourism to a communicative approach, social meaning making which advocates the significance of the negotiation of meaning in L2 development has gained great prevalence (Long, 1985). Conventionally, vocabulary learning is often by providing general definitions and is taken out of specific context, which may have problems for learning context-dependent vocabularies such as idioms. A real-life context is needed to make meaning. According to Nation (2001), there are three psychological processes for vocabulary learning: noticing (highlighting words as a way of input), retrieving (repeat words) and creative (using the same words in different context).

However, meaning making is the process of thinking, thinking that it means to do something while making meaning is the action, create value through practical actions. In order to obtain knowledge, repetitive behaviours are not enough. Both the thinking of how to really change your mind and how to change your behaviour ought to be simultaneously. In this case, teachers should bring in student-generated materials so as to facilitate both the comprehension and creation of an open learning environment in language learning process. In that case, exploring into the approach introducing pragmatic meaning embedded would be necessary. "Figured worlds" proposed by Gee (2014) can be one way to achieve that goal. It makes use of subconscious theories and stories which depends on personal experience to deal with the issue in our daily lives. Therefore, the teaching method should not be limited to the introduction of definitions but extend to the theories or stories related to learners' true-to-life experience. The outcome here may be that students could express their own opinions with their "figured worlds" so that their communicative competence can be improved.

#### ***4.3 Taking Students into Consideration***

As for the learners, they should not only stick to their own "figured worlds" but broaden their minds, trying to be the pluriliterary global citizens, namely, to engage themselves into more social and cultural context. For example, when we are thinking of the colour "blue", we may recall a sense of harmony, but it also represents worn-out, we will not use blue to decorate ceremony. But in English, blue has the implied meaning of notable family or people of high social status. Like "blue room" refer to the living room where the president used to meet friends in the White House. Learners ought to place themselves in a larger context of meaning making which results from diverse "figured worlds" in the world.

Due to the issue that teachers' teaching beliefs are connected with the social identities of their students (Fitch, 2003), students' elements must be taken into consideration. According to Cenoz and Gorter (2011), bilingual speakers acquire and employ their languages while engaging in language practice. Thus, students ought to use their resources exist in a social context and shape this context through communicative interaction, which is to make use of sociocultural function of language.

When it comes to the paradigm "pluriliterate global citizen", two elements emerge. First one is the sociocultural function of language. Take English as an example, some of the academics have been urging the teaching of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), Snowden (2012) would treat Lingua Franca as a monolithic or a single variety, namely to teach English systematically with prescribed rules, while Cogo

(2012) argues against it for the reason that cultural and linguistic resources are inevitably transformed as they are locally appropriated. In that case, English is treated as a tool to achieve the goal of communication, people who use this language are treated as “community of practice”. Similarly, due to the different cultures and communities, inevitably, we should be equipped with such kind of Lingua Franca to contact with others. Thus, one of the foremost requirements of being pluriliterate global citizen is to be bi/multilingual. At the same time, they should realize the role of language in facilitating their learning, shaping their identities and raise the awareness of intercultural tolerance.

Second is related to personal subordination. When staying abroad, what would you pay attention to in the unfamiliar place? Pop music from the street market, or the phenomenon that male and female drivers are treated unequally you observed when taking a taxi? According to Parekh (2003), “global citizenship involves an active commitment to achieve a just world order”. In our interdependent world, pluriliteracy encourages us to recognize our responsibilities toward each other and learn from each other. With the knowledge and values gained from learning about global issues, people are equipped with skills, what we need is the sense of obligation to be pro-active in making difference in the world.

As for the theories support to achieve that goal, there are numerous theories such as behaviourism, contextual, transdisciplinary framework, among which constructivism and transdisciplinary have been worshipped. In the “constructivism”, students can engage in the learning process themselves, constructing and co-constructing with teachers and peers. Ideally in the future, they could use this potency in the society to construct meaning and share ideas as a global citizen. Another theory is transdisciplinary framework proposed by Gouglass Fir Group (2016), which investigate the learning and teaching of additional languages across private and public, material and digital social contexts in a multilingual world. In this framework, language learning in the end is not only a tool of communication, but could offer us a pattern in micro, mesh and macro dimensions to become a better agency.

## 5. Conclusions

In conclusion, the study evaluates how language is used and learned in the context of AP program. Separate bilingual pedagogy adopted by the program cannot realize students’ bilingual proficiency and culture pluralism uttermost, and thus further implications based on this issue considering from schools’, teachers’ and students’ perspectives to make use of translanguaging as bilingual pedagogy have been analysed.

Back to context, although the monolingual ideologies are more accord with SLA theories to some extent, students’ fail to take advantage of emergent bilingual knowledge and the lack of reflection of sociolinguistic reality indicates the need for strategically carrying out bilingual practices as translanguaging, further investigation into the particular curriculum, the intention of faculties, parents and students need to be implemented.

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