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

LIU Suiling[a],*

[a] Lecturer, School of Foreign Languages, Henan University of Technology, Henan, China.
*Corresponding author.

Received 12 June 2018; accepted 20 September 2018
Published online 26 October 2018

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, 2006), 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 other 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 handwritten 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 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](image)

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>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Words that are Related to Zhang &amp; Yang’s (2012) Model of ICC in Both the Keyword Lists and the Negative Keyword Lists</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Batch</strong></td>
<td><strong>Words in the Positive Keyword List</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>我们(we/our/ours), 自己(oneself)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>了解(understand), 不同(difference), 文化(culture), 自己(us/ours)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group No</strong></td>
<td>国家(country), 学/学习(learn), 知识(knowledge), 差异(difference), 自己(oneself), 了解(understand)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>学习(learn), 知识(knowledge), 了解/理解(understand), 国家(country)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>文化(culture), 学习/学(learn), 英语(English), 明白(understand)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group Yes</strong></td>
<td>文化(culture), 对方(the opposite), 我们(we/us/ours), 一样(the same), 好坏(good and bad), 优势(superior and inferior), 交流(communication), 身份(identify), 之分(no difference), 他们(they/theirs), 平等(equal), 尊重(respect)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>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)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>我们(we/us/ours), 自己(oneself), 外国人(foreigner)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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(difference/different) 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
The words "Chinese" and "foreigners". The increased keyness of "they", "China" and "foreign countries", as well as 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 (culture), (same), (good and bad), (superior and inferior), (no difference) and (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 (respect), (identity) and (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 should respect others customs and identity, that is, other people's cultures. Fourthly, the keyness of (communication) and (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 (knowledge), (awareness) and (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 these concepts 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 outnumber those 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)” and “差异(difference)” 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)” and “差异(difference)” in their third reflective journal entries. Similarly, for Group Yes, “交流/交流(communication)”, “对方(both sides)”, “别人(both sides)” 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)” and “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.

REFERENCES


Helm, F. (2009). Language and culture in an online context.
What can learner diaries tell us about intercultural competence? Language and Intercultural Communication, 9(2), 91-104.


Ministry of Education, P.R.C. (2011). English curriculum requirements for compulsory education. Beijing: Beijing Normal University Publications Group. Retrieved from http://wenku.baidu.com/link?url=suD736_WyPyNRI_CEEd011mKBNMBoq73-u91xJkkb0sTmXaOSmXaOCN2TUiz-zVuW3A0m5aNbGAxKZ0GX40dW0aDqHJlq7sdRATPIFqG


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, and talk with him/her, etc.?
   A. Yes. B. No.

Appendix B Guidelines for Reflective Journal Keeping

Reflective Learning Journal (Teacher Guide).doc

**Area 1 Explore a learning experience**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Awareness</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
<th>Regulation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content (What)</td>
<td>What have I learnt?</td>
<td>Do I understand what I have learnt? or What else do I need to learn?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process (How)</td>
<td>How did I learn / do it?</td>
<td>How effective is this strategy?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasons (Why)</td>
<td>Why learn it?</td>
<td>Why would I think so?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Area 2 Think of a learning experience in relation to**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Awareness</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
<th>Regulation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic development</td>
<td>How does this learning experience contribute to my academic development? or What is/are my short-term/long-term academic goal(s)?</td>
<td>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?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What obstacles have I encountered?</td>
<td>What is the source of the obstacles? or Am I on the right track?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>