

READING BETWEEN THE LINES OF LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

That language and culture are inseparable is well accepted. That many people struggle to learn a second language is also not in question. But how might an appreciation of the deeper, philosophical basis of a language and culture help language learners? This paper explores the importance of reading nuances in cultural exchanges and asks whether Chinese culture might provide some clues as regards such a practice. This is a preliminary paper, exploring the topic through literature review and proposing a practical research study to collect data, which could provide useful answers to foreign-language learners.

Learning foreign languages can be difficult. Even when the basic rules of grammar and sufficient vocabulary are grasped, understanding spoken language in realistic situations is often difficult. Even if colloquialism is explained and local accents demonstrated, misunderstandings can (and often do) occur. The results, whilst perhaps humorous to some, can be embarrassing—or worse—in effect. Of course, all of this is understood by foreign-language providers. Hence, their courses incorporate foreign trips, which enable the learner to use his or her newly acquired language skills amongst native speakers.

But what if the nuances that cause misunderstandings could themselves be understood? What if the reason for learning the theory of the language in question and literal meanings could be complemented by a way of thinking and engaging which, naturally, enhances the speaker's ability to 'read between the lines,' to appreciate nuanced meanings without requiring each of them to be spelt out?

This research was undertaken in the context of the primary role of the Confucius Institutes, that is, to assist in and enable cultural exchanges between China and, in our case, Wales. In particular, we provide Mandarin lessons and introduce Chinese culture to a wide

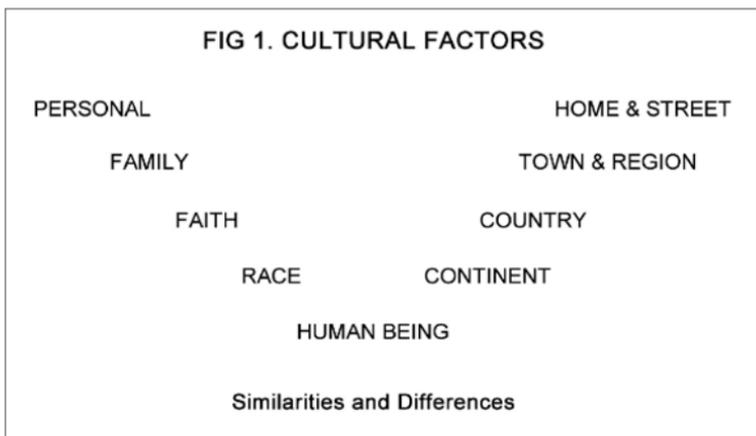
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range of individuals and organisations, from local school children to those seeking business links with China. We also work closely with the English Language Centre for Overseas Students (ELCOS), who provide English-language training for, amongst others, Chinese students studying at Bangor University. We are thus in an ideal position to compare and contrast English speakers studying Chinese with Chinese students studying English.

CULTURAL NUANCES: A FEW EXAMPLES

The dangers of stereotyping based on just one factor (e.g., ‘the Chinese are inscrutable’) are well-understood: the differences between any two individuals, irrespective of their cultural origin, have many components. Reading nuances is thus primarily concerned with being able to take each relationship and every situation as unique, to focus on the specifics of a given interaction at a given time. However, an awareness of the factors of differentiation provides an important framework for this.

In this short paper, it is impossible to include an extensive—let alone an exhaustive—review of these factors, but the figure presented here provides some indication as to their origin. Figure 1 identifies just a few of the factors related to location (of birth, residency, or other significant event in someone’s life) and to an individual’s background in terms of nature or nurture. Add to the mix differences in understanding and meaning of terms owing to gender and age, for example, and it is perhaps amazing that there are not more misunderstandings.



Any one of these factors might provide a reason for two individuals to find a resonance—where they share certain nuanced understandings—or seem, almost, to come from another planet. Likewise, two individuals may have all of the above factors in common yet still have misunderstandings over something as simple as the word ‘City’ in the context of one’s favourite football club: one might support Leicester City FC, the other Manchester City FC. That the unstated meaning of the single word ‘city’ can have such potential for conflict (or, at least, confusion) surely justifies the need for a better understanding of nuances, their causes, and apprehension.

The word ‘family’ provides another example. Family allegiances and associations are often particularly powerful in Chinese culture, at least compared with the modern-day lifestyle defined by personal freedom and independence in the West. When the Chinese talk of family, it is likely to include a nuance of ‘extended family,’ which is now rare in the U.K. Or it might, perhaps, refer to China’s one-child policy. Either way, the simple idea of ‘family’ is loaded with cultural nuances.

Our next example concerns a practical business situation that illustrates a nuance which often goes unacknowledged, because the underlying difference in thinking is so deep and unconscious:

“*Let’s meet,*” said by someone with a British (or American) cultural background is likely to have the (unstated) subtext “*so that we can agree that business deal, get it signed off.*” But said by a Chinese person, it would typically have the nuance of “*so that we can get to know each other, and build up a deep trust and understanding.*”

Such an example begs the question as to where such deeply engrained differences originate.

UNDERLYING PHILOSOPHIES

Both language itself and our understanding of it depend on and influence the culture of which it is part. These, in turn, reflect and are reflected in the underlying philosophies associated with those cultures. We will first explore key Chinese influences.

The ancient Chinese philosophical text, the *Tao Te Ching*, now often chosen as a personal-development text by some in the West, begins:

TAO called TAO is not TAO. Names can name no lasting name. (Lao-Tzu, ca. 3rd Century BCE; Addiss, S., Lombardo, S., tr. 1993)

Often considered the ultimate paradox or at least much easier to say than to fully understand, or to put into practice, the essence is simple: by naming something, its essence is destroyed. This saying is still, perhaps at the heart of the Chinese culture and way of thinking.

Contrast this with what some might consider the defining statement of Western culture, that is, the famous line from Descartes, “*I think, therefore I am*” or “*Cogito ergo sum*” (Latin) or “*je pense, donc je suis*” (French), from his *Discourse on the Method* (Descartes 1637). The resulting Cartesian epistemology could be considered as underlying the rational, Western way of thinking. With this often comes an unquestioning dependence on theories, words, and their literal meanings, at least when compared to Eastern ways of thinking.

Those more aware of the breadth and depth of Western philosophy might urge caution, pointing to the one idea on which philosophers generally agree. Here, as stated by James:

The Description of a thing is not the thing itself. (James 1902, p. 488)

Just as in the Tao, the gist is clear: by naming, labelling, or describing something, anything, its intrinsic nature, its essence, is lost.

Thus, in terms of philosophy and an understanding of a reality beneath or beyond conceptualisation, there would seem little difference between what can be found in Western and in Chinese literature. What is different, we propose, is the extent to which the Tao/James perspective is currently embedded in the respective cultures and integrated into ways of thinking today. Could it be that, in China, the Taoist view on naming is intrinsic and still part of how the Chinese think? Conversely, in the West might we have so taken on board the Cartesian perspective and rejected the James view, that we have come to place of far greater reliance (we would suggest, overreliance) on naming and describing?

OTHER INFLUENCES

If we first explore the situation in China and recognise that the *Tao Te Ching* is but one of a number of major influences on its culture, what do Confucianism and Buddhism contribute, for example?

The Analects of Confucius (Confucius 551–479 BCE) is widely accepted as underpinning much of Chinese culture. Whilst much of this ancient text is concerned with correct behaviour, some clauses highlight an underlying way of thinking, or a way of knowing:

16.9 Confucius said, Those who are born knowing are the best; next are those who study and come to know it; next are those who study it only in circumstances of duress. Those who do not study it even under duress, they are the lowest of people. (Confucius 551–479 BCE; Eno, R., tr. 2005, p. 92)

The implication, perhaps anathema to the Western mind set, is that learnt knowledge is far less desirable than having innate wisdom. Combined with the Taoist view on knowing, there is immediately a striking difference in the perception of knowing between Chinese and Western views. It is thus perhaps not surprising that cultural exchanges between the two are often challenging!

Other clauses of the *Analects* are equally illuminating in highlighting traits considered important:

17.6 Zizhang asked about ren. The Master said, “He who can enact five things in the world is ren.” When asked for details, he went on, “Reverence, tolerance, trustworthiness, quickness, and generosity. He is reverent, hence he receives no insults; he is tolerant, hence he gains the multitudes; he is trustworthy, hence others entrust him with responsibilities; he is quick, hence he has accomplishments; he is generous, hence he is capable of being placed in charge of others.” (Ibid., p. 95)

Similar ideas can be found in texts of Mahayana Buddhism, the form of Buddhism most often practiced in China. Here the focus is on attaining an enlightened mind:

This Supreme Bodhi Mind contains two principal seeds, Compassion and Wisdom, from which emanates the great undertaking of rescuing oneself and all other sentient beings (Dharma Master Thích Thiên Tâm 1993, p. 30).

From the Tao, Confucius, and Buddhism originate a consistent focus on wisdom, as opposed to intellectual knowledge. In all three of these key Chinese cultural influences comes the message of success through innate wisdom. Not taught facts, but what is known through being 'born knowing.'

In such a short paper, it is not possible to go into any detail of any of these influences. The intent here is, instead, to identify a few striking similarities among the Taoist, Confucian, and Buddhist influences. These may indicate both why and how China has been able to integrate these distinct philosophical approaches into daily life and explain why the influence has been both profound and long-lasting. The underlying culture, dating back over 2000 years, is, it could reasonably be argued, deeply embedded and strong enough to have largely survived the short and recent period of the Cultural Revolution. By contrast, the scientific revolution in the West has been underway for around 500 years and has had far longer to undermine the innate wisdom (which some might understand as 'Christ consciousness') and message of the underlying Christian philosophy.

THE SCIENTIFIC WEST

The situation in Europe during and since the scientific revolution has been very different. Harari summarises it nicely in *Sapiens – A Brief History of Humankind*: “There are very few equations, graphs and calculations in the Bible, the Qur’an, the Vedas, or the Confucian classics” (Harari 2011, p. 284).

Whilst the Eastern philosophies emphasise innate wisdom, natural flow, and human's place within this cosmology, the Western scientific method has, until very recently, insisted on a separateness between intellectual man and the world under investigation. Alongside this has grown the belief in the infallibility of rational thought, despite the numerous ills affecting modern human society. Again, this is too large an issue to discuss here, but one example is included below to illustrate the point.

In 1713 Jacob Bernoulli's *Law of Large Numbers* was published. It

states that

(Independent) repetitions of an experiment average over long time horizons to an arithmetic mean, which is obviously not generated randomly but is a well-specified deterministic value. This exactly reflects the intuition that a random experiment averages if it is repeated sufficiently often. For instance, if we toss a coin very often, we expect about as many heads as tails, which means that we expect about 50% (deterministic value) of each possible outcome (Bolthausen & Wüthrich 2013, p. 2).

From this law emerged the whole discipline of statistics and the largely unquestioned value of being able to ‘average out’ sets of data from any source. Whilst undoubtedly useful in some circumstances (Harari quotes its use in 1765 in the founding of the Scottish Widows pension and insurance company, for example), modern Western attachment to the law does, at times, cause concern. IQ, the intelligence quotient, for example, might be a good example of the use of Bernoulli’s law, which is largely accepted as a comparative assessment of one facet of intelligence, of an ability to think rationally. In recent years, attempts have been made to apply similar statistical assessment methods to emotional intelligence. This attempt to normalise a very personal set of traits was certainly not the intent behind the original use of the emotional quotient (see <http://www.keithbeasley.co.uk/EQ/eq2004.htm>; accessed 23 November 2016).

How one feels at a given moment depends on many factors. How one responds or reacts in a specific situation depends on one’s very specific and personal set of memories and attitudes, with all their cultural associations. Attempts to quantify these complex factors and compare them with ‘the norm’ flies against the heart-felt reality of deep and meaningful emotions which are essential for human relationships. Does not being wholly human mean having a full spectrum of emotions over time? If so, to average them out devalues them. If a young man dies unexpectedly just prior to his 23rd birthday, his family does not want to know that the average life expectancy, for men in the U.K. in 2014, was 79.1 years (<http://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/lifeexpectancies/bulletins/nationallifetablesunitedkingdom/2015-09-23>; accessed 24 November 2016).

It could thus be argued that the prevailing scientific method has, in the West and over many centuries, not only come to dominate our approach to science but our approach to life generally. Rather than acknowledge the importance of subjective experience as the Tao/Confucian philosophy does, the *Law of Large Numbers*, like the scientific method in general, perhaps, serves to devalue feelings and inner perspectives. It may even have been the start of a cultural chasm between science and non-science, made even deeper and broader, some would argue, by the typical narrow focus on economic growth. Whatever happened to the ways of thinking and behaving associated with Christian values?

And, having asked that question of current Western ways of thinking we must, to be equitable, ask the same question of China: to what extent are the Confucian values and views still prevalent in rapidly developing, commercial China? That is too large a question for any in-depth study within this short paper. However, discussions with those who have travelled extensively to China over many years, suggest that whilst there is a growing struggle between traditional values and those prevalent in the global economy, this materialistic growth is a more recent phenomenon, thus explaining the still-strong adherence to the code of Confucius. Indeed, that ancient and industrial philosophies are in ongoing conflict in China is well-documented, for example in Phil Agland's series of five films, *Between Clouds and Dreams* (screened in the U.K. on Channel 4 during November 2016: see http://www.river-films.com/IN_PRODUCTION.html; accessed 23 November 2016).

Thus, whether or not Western pre-scientific-revolution perceptions might equate to ancient, lived philosophies in China, the much longer exposure to and pressure from the rational/Cartesian world view (and those that sponsor it) in the West could well explain the difficulty Westerners have in understanding and tuning in to the Chinese way of thinking.

Having explored the historic and philosophical context, we now turn to psychological and practical aspects.

TUNING-IN AS A STATE OF MIND

Obtaining and using the right frame of mind for learning, not just of languages, has been the aim of much research. Carl Rogers, in founding the Human Potential Movement, for example, identified

and developed many ways of working which he demonstrated as being effective, not just in improving a sense of personal fulfilment, but in the effectiveness of learning. He talks of 'building person-centred communities' (Rogers 1995, pp. 181–206), meaning both the wider collaborative networks of those applying his principles and specific small-group 'person-centred workshops' in which much of the detailed work is undertaken.

In the context of exchanges between people from diverse cultures, it may seem paradoxical to talk about community. Indeed, it could be just this contradictory feature that provides the critical factor in resolving the question of nuances. By coming together within one community of willing learners, by meeting with the intent of mutual understanding, the mind is already open and receptive to moving beyond old paradigms and it will be more able to grasp nuances of language, for example. One of the benefits of his approach is, he contends, "*an almost telepathic knowledge of where the staff is*" (Rogers 1995, p. 188). He also emphasises that, even when groups contain manager and staff, that, beyond hierarchical position, brings best results:

We have found that by being as fully ourselves as we are able—creative, diverse, contradictory, present, open, and sharing—we somehow become tuning forks, finding resonances with those qualities in all the members of the workshop community. In the relationships we form with the group and its members, the power is shared. We let ourselves 'be;' we let others 'be.' At our best, we have little desire to judge or manipulate the other's thoughts or actions. (Rogers 1995, p. 187)

Transferring this intent to language tuition groups or learning a foreign language whilst travelling would, we suggest, go a long way towards tuning in to each situation and thus better connecting to the nuances of the moment. Taking into account formally taught information, but not restricted to it; using intellectual knowledge, but integrating it with the deeper connection indicated by Rogers' 'being.'

Rogers also describes another paradox related to this way of working, 'unity out of separateness' (*ibid.*, p. 190), where intense and intimate groups, whilst working in a strong, trusting community, do

so not by all becoming the same, but by each connecting more deeply to their individual identity. All this happens, Rogers argues, through ‘a new level of consciousness’ and a “*spirit of oneness which often occurs in our workshops*” (*ibid.*, p. 203). Language teachers (and, indeed, any teacher who works with depth and flow) will be familiar with this: how, whether for fleeting moments or prolonged periods, the class is at one with itself, at one with the subject, and thus able to discern deeper meaning and acceptance of the topic under study. It is in such moments that students will ‘get it,’ that key concepts will be grasped, and students smile as a previously puzzling nuance becomes clear.

In terms of methods and techniques that encourage and enable such a state of mind, each practitioner has their own approach, which they will evolve themselves; mindfulness, for example. In the U.K., mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) have been acknowledged by the U.K. Government (MAPPG 2015) as beneficial in many situations, not least in education and the workplace, for helping individuals to attain the emotional self-control and relaxed concentration required to progress. Their report includes this phrase amongst its summary of benefits:

Practitioners may be less drawn into unhelpful habitual reactions and more able to make good choices about how to relate to their circumstances (MAPPG 2015, p. 15).

This would certainly seem to fit the requirements for effective tuning in, that is, detaching from assumptions, better aware of here-and-now circumstances, for example.

Formal mindfulness programmes are but one approach and one present-day parallel to the Tao/Confucian/Buddhist mode of consciousness.

INSIGHTS FROM THE LANGUAGE OF MUSIC

Literature searches on ‘tuning in’ inevitably produce many results relating to music. Whilst perhaps not directly relevant to this study, these papers remind us that ‘to be in tune’ is a perfectly normal and natural state for members of choirs and orchestras, for example. And, if this ‘being in tune’ extends to composer, venue, and audience, all concerned may feel the result: that special performance that has hairs standing up on the back of one’s neck or transports the listener to

another time or place. Is this not akin to the cultural exchange sought through engaging fully in a new country's language and ways?

In *Tuning In: Practical Psychology for Musicians who are Teaching, Learning and Performing*, Mackworth-Young offers this advice:

We need to be open to new experience and able to change our views in the light of new experience and we need to be able to see beyond our existing skills, constantly enriching and enhancing them (Mackworth-Young 2000, p. 62).

Whilst willingness to learn is an established precept in teaching-and-learning theory, Mackworth-Young seems to go a step further: 'to see beyond' implies the application of a particular perspective skill. She clarifies this with a chapter (pp. 49–69) on maintaining positive energy. Whilst a musician or holistic health practitioner (or even an electronics engineer) would be comfortable talking about energy, its use has perhaps not been so common in linguistics or psychological disciplines. In recent years, however, validated by (amongst others) neurological research, an energetic perspective is embraced even within psychology. The Association for Comprehensive Energy Psychology (ACEP: <http://www.energypsych.org/?AboutACEPv2>; accessed 18 November 2016), formed as a non-profit association in 1999, proclaims that

Energy psychology (EP) is a collection of mind–body approaches for understanding and improving human functioning. EP focuses on the relationship among thoughts, emotions, sensations, behaviours, and known bio-energy systems (such as meridians and the biofield). These systems and processes exist, and interact, within individuals and between people. They are also influenced by cultural and environmental factors.

Within an EP framework, emotional and physical issues are seen, and treated, as bio-energetic patterns within a mind–body–energy system. The mind and body are thought to be interwoven and interactive within this system, which entails complex communication involving neurobiological processes, innate electrophysiology, psychoneuroimmunology (PNI), consciousness, and cognitive-behavioural-emotional patterns (<http://www>.

energypsych.org/?AboutEPv2; accessed 18 November 2016).

One might apply these ideas to Mackworth-Young's advice:

We need to be aware of both our pupil's and our own feelings, and we need to be able to understand and handle those feelings to make the most of positive energy (Mackworth-Young 2000, p. 55).

In other words, the communications within two individuals' mind-bodies might be understood as energies and energy flows. Parallels might then be made between electronic communications systems, which can resonate with or pick up information from adjacent components or systems. Just as a sensor might be chosen and tuned in to pick up particular information through energy transfer (e.g., a piezo-electric sensor which may detect changes in pressure) so, building on the EP model, one individual might be able to develop their ability to tune into the energy system of another.

Perhaps this is a way of explaining what Mackworth-Young describes as 'countertransference,' whereby "*We can know our pupil's feelings through our own feeling*" (*ibid.*; original emphasis). It is not the intent of this paper to debate, far less suggest, a mechanism for such a process. Our aim is to highlight the possibility, to bring to light the prospect for the understanding of skills (for example 'tuning in') that, despite having been anathema to science, is considered natural and useful, if not essential, in other disciplines.

Thus, in a foreign-language situation, we may not know what is meant by a particular phrase we have just heard but, by being aware of our own feelings and the resonance or otherwise between ourselves and the speaker, we may sense or feel, for example, that we have 'lost it,' become disconnected.

Applying the principles outlined in this paper provides sound and practical advice: rather than 'trying harder' or 'concentrating more' the recommended response would be to 'step back' from the rational mind, to allow a deeper connection by becoming more aware of our feelings, of a shared humanity, with a loving intent to understand what is being said. That is, we create a positive-energy atmosphere or environment in which, or through which, communication of understanding might take place.

The teaching of music is not the only area where such techniques are actively pursued.

PROBLEM MANAGEMENT

In *The Skilled Helper: A problem-management approach to helping* (Egan 1994), Gerard Egan suggests that professional helpers (in particular counsellors and psychotherapists, but extending to doctors and teachers) can benefit from adopting a problem-solving approach. Indeed, it is his belief that:

Problem solving and learning, as core human processes, by necessity underlie every approach to helping (Egan 1994, p. xviii).

Few committed language tutors would disagree: is not a key part of their jobs to help their students with the problem of making sense of a strange language? Egan covers many specific aspects of helping that are particularly pertinent to learning a new language, for example, active listening and empathising. Integrating each of these specific soft skills is an overarching ability that Egan calls *Attending: Actively Being with Clients* (*ibid.*, p. 91).

Egan contends that “*Helping and other deep interpersonal transactions demand a certain intensity of presence.*” Two individuals from different cultures and speaking different primary languages are, we would suggest, very much involved in ‘deep interpersonal transactions.’ Or rather, they need to be tuned in if a meaningful understanding is to be ensured and a deep relationship to form.

The words and ideas ‘being present,’ ‘attending,’ and ‘presence’ (or indeed just ‘being’), whilst perhaps difficult for theoretical psychologists, are ones with which many individuals on a spiritual quest or journey of self-discovery will be only too familiar. Beasley’s Ph.D. thesis (Beasley 2013) identified a movement of individuals and organisations (the transcendence movement) who are committed to the intent of being present, to personal growth towards this intent, and to practices that enable them to achieve the associated mode of consciousness. Like Egan, Beasley identified the value of this state of mind in a range of situations, not least as regards quality assurance:

To get the best from total quality management requires being with specific activity as well as the marketing and

user environment. Any 'me: them' or any 'my world: rest of world' divisions need to be transcended (Beasley 2013, p. 311).

The second sentence can be readily applied to language learning: to bridge two cultures requires the two parties to be present together. But what does that mean in practice?

Egan offers a number of suggestions, under the headings 'body language' (which is probably reasonably understood and is thus not pursued further here) and 'the microskills of attending' (Egan 1994, pp. 91–93). These include advice such as 'face the client squarely,' 'adopt an open posture,' and 'maintain good eye contact' (with a word of caution about applying some measures in some cultural settings). But, over and above these mechanical considerations, Egan emphasises 'social–emotional presence:'

Most important is the quality of your total human presence to your clients. Both your verbal and your nonverbal behaviour should indicate a clear-cut willingness to work with the client. If you care about your clients and feel committed to their welfare, then it is unfair to yourself to let your nonverbal behaviour suggest contradictory messages (Egan 1994, p. 93),

i.e., to help effectively, whatever the situation, requires that the helping party genuinely cares about the person they are with and about the reason they are together, in our case, a genuine desire for deep and meaningful cultural engagement.

This factor is already observed in TEFL (teaching English as a foreign language): those students who are really interested in learning English seem to do much better than those who are only learning English so that they can complete their studies in the U.K. Without the deeper intent, it is likely that they are less present in the classroom and thus struggle to learn.

Even in the limited space available in this paper, support from a wide range of sources has been provided for the idea that learning foreign languages may be improved by attention to the skills of tuning in and being present.

NEXT STEPS

This paper has been a scene-setter, a brief, multidisciplinary exploration of what is perceived by the authors as a key issue relating to language acquisition: how, beyond the words, form and literal meanings often lie hidden nuances that come from embedded differences in philosophy of life between two cultures. Coincidentally, the same deep philosophical underpinning of the Chinese culture may also provide clues as to how to bridge such cultural chasms.

This paper concluded that the intent of enabling language learners and support to those travelling to a country with a different culture might be usefully served by training aimed at improving one's ability to read nuances. Such training could, as outlined above, be informed by ancient philosophy, first-hand experience, and recent advances in positive psychology and consciousness studies. This approach, it is suggested, would help prepare language students and travellers with an awareness of the deep cultural issues underlying typical problems seen in learning languages.

It is thus proposed to develop the material presented here into an interactive, engaging training programme to be offered alongside English-language and Mandarin courses. Comparisons would then be undertaken between those receiving the additional training and those who did not. Determining a comprehensive and meaningful assessment would be an integral part of the training development, which might include comparison of exam results, focus groups, and survey of attitudes and experiences of students. In addition to an assessment between results with and without training, differences between benefits for English-language and Mandarin students would be studied.

Conversely, cultural-awareness sessions which involve both Chinese students learning English and English students learning Mandarin would enable direct comparison of experiences and perspectives and first-hand cultural exchange. Small-group discussions (with both Chinese and native English speakers in the same group) might explore topics such as:

“We need a long-term plan.” What is meant by long-term in your culture? How do you see ‘time’?

In your calendar, which national holidays do you have? How are their

dates determined? What's your view of the lunar calendar?

The lunar calendar, whilst a fact of life in China has little meaning in British culture, despite the fact that the date of one of our major holidays (Easter) is determined by the lunar cycle. Likewise, concepts of time are understood very differently in the two cultures, yet this would rarely be discussed in language teaching or cultural training.

To suggest introducing such topics into a training session might induce the comment that 'time,' for example, is a very deep and complex notion. And that, perhaps, is the point: misunderstood nuances result from deep differences. There may be no short cut nor simple lesson to bridging some cultural chasms. But to get British and Chinese students (for example) talking to each other about their personal perspectives at least begins the process. Hopefully it would also inspire both sets of students to open their minds to alternative perspectives and their underlying philosophies.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has been able to do little more than scratch the surface of the many, often deep and divisive chasms of (mis-)understanding which can exist between British/Western and Chinese cultures. The more such cultural differences are brought into conscious awareness—for example, during cultural training—the greater the chance that nuances can be detected and embraced.

And could it be that an innate Tao/Confucian approach to life gives Chinese students an advantage when it comes to tuning in to nuances? Or, at least, might having an inherent appreciation of nonrational knowing allow those of Asian descent to better use this ability and thus to 'tune in'?

And, by consciously raising awareness, within the Western mind set, of an intuitive knowing, natural to the human psyche, to what extent will language acquisition be enhanced? Key to answering these questions will be the development of engaging training sessions. These need to both explain the intent and theory of nuanced knowing and provide an in-depth, immersive experience of this mode of consciousness. These training sessions could use appropriate teaching and learning techniques, as well as provide evidence from, for example, mindfulness studies (e.g., MAPPG 2015), metacognition (e.g., Wallace 2000), reflective practice and action research (e.g., Harper, Barnwell, & Williamson 2016), thus approaching the subject from a variety

of angles and disciplines. Together, this multidisciplinary approach, supplemented by techniques borrowed from holistic health training and life coaching would, we suggest, instil just the state of mind necessary to achieve the aims of reading between the lines of language.

If the reader is interested to collaborate on the proposed research, please contact the authors.



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