Discrepancy between native English speaker teachers' teaching styles and Chinese English learners' learning styles

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Abstract: Recent decades have witnessed a growing number of native English speakers teaching English in Chinese classroom. However, their teaching does not gain expected ends. Extensive studies have found that the mismatch between learning styles and teaching styles is a possible reason for this phenomenon. This paper aims to investigate whether the teaching styles of NS English teachers are matched with learning styles adopted by Chinese English learners with quantitative methods.

Key words: teaching style; learning style; discrepancy; cognitive style

1. Introduction

Recent years, there are a growing number of native English speakers (NS) teaching English in Chinese classroom. Although they bring with their rich and colorful exotic cultures and teaching styles, their teaching does not gain expected ends. There are certainly amount of explanations for this phenomenon, but research into the relationship between NS teachers' teaching styles and Chinese English learners' learning styles can provide us with a new angle of view to explain it.

Extensive empirical studies have found that the mismatch between the learning styles and the teaching styles is a possible reason for learners' poor language performance. However, most of these studies are qualitative in using open-ended questions. More rigorous studies call for quantitative methods to illustrate the discrepancy among NS teachers' teaching styles and Chinese English learners' learning styles. For this purpose, this paper will discuss the following questions: (1) What learning style preferences do Chinese English learners have? Are there any general tendencies among them? (2) What teaching style preferences do NS English teachers have? Are there any general tendencies among them? (3) Should there be discrepancy between teaching style and learning style in Chinese EFL (English as foreign language) classroom, what causes are behind them and how can the discrepancy be solved?

2. Methodology

2.1 Participants

The participants in the research were 51 English students and 10 NS English teachers from Jiangxi Normal

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University. All the students in the sample were English majors in grade three from the Foreign Language Institute, and their age ranged from 19 to 24. They had been studying English in the university for three years, so their learning styles are relatively stable. Of all these subjects, 10 were male and 41 female. All participants were randomly selected from two classes to enhance homogeneity of variables.

10 NS English teachers were invited to participate in the survey. Of all these teachers, 5 were from U.S., 2 from Australian, 1 from Canada, 1 from New Zealand and 1 didn't confirm the information of his nationality. Of all these participants, 3 were female and 7 male. All the participants had obtained bachelor or master degrees in TESOL or had attended TESOL training courses before teaching English abroad. By the time of the research, their English teaching experience in China ranged from half a year to 6 years. The courses they taught covered listening, speaking, reading and writing.

2.2 Instruments

In this study, two paired scales were used: one was teaching style identification scale and the other was learning style scale, both of them are self-report measurements and were originally designed by Arthur J. More (1993) to investigate the relationship between teaching styles and learning styles in language classrooms. Some modifications had been done to them when used in the present study.

The main body for each scale is concentrated on the cognitive styles of NS teachers and Chinese English learners, and other elements, such as physical and social factors, are not included in the scales. They are global-analytic, verbal-imaginal, concrete-abstract, trial and error plus feedback versus reflective (see Figure 1).

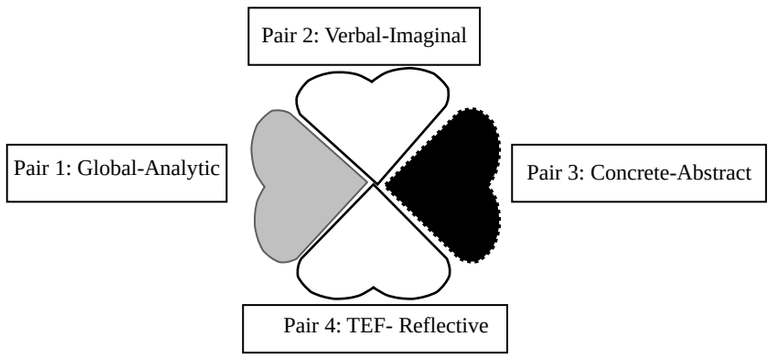

Figure 1 The cognitive styles surveyed in the study

It must be pointed out that using the scales designed by Arthur J. More, the learning styles investigated in this study are all about cognitive processes going on when learning activities happen, because "It is far more practical in the classroom to focus on cognitive factors" (Arthur J. More, 1993), and he thinks they will be the most helpful to classroom teachers. So, although there are many others learning style dimensions according to different learning style theorist, the emphasis in this study will be on cognitive elements and so will be the following discussions.

2.3 Data collection and analysis

The data about learning style was collected from the students on December 20, 2005 by the researchers. The questionnaires for NS English teachers were handed out by the teaching staff of Jiangxi Normal University.

The statistical analysis of data was conducted by SPSS 13.0 (Statistical Package for Social Science 13.0). The missing values were replaced by their mean values. Based on the research questions, the data analysis was

carried out in the following steps: First, the statistics analysis was employed to explore the general situation of Chinese students' learning styles and NS English teachers' teaching styles; then comparisons and contrasts were made between Chinese students' learning styles and NS English teachers' teaching styles.

3. Results and discussion

A series of statistic analysis will be performed on the data collected from NS teachers and students. Efforts will be concentrated on disclosing general cognitive style tendencies on both sides and the relationship between them.

3.1 The general tendency of Chinese students' English learning styles

Descriptive statistical test is employed to find the general features of all participating students' learning styles and the report is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics of Chinese students' learning styles

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Global	51	6.00	18.00	12.0000	2.36643
Analytic	51	12.00	19.00	15.0196	1.83837
Verbal	51	8.00	17.00	12.3922	2.17328
Imaginal	51	9.00	20.00	14.8627	2.40848
Concrete	51	8.00	19.00	14.0980	2.31737
Abstract	51	5.00	17.00	12.3922	2.36709
TEF	51	6.00	18.00	12.2941	2.24761
Reflective	51	6.00	20.00	13.5490	2.78793
Valid N (list wise)	51				

From Table 1, we can see there are differences of mean values among all four learning style dimensions. Are the differences caused by sampling errors or the real differences in population? Before any further data analysis to be carried, a one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was done to decide whether the data belong to a normal distribution sample (see Table 2).

Table 2 One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test on Chinese students' learning styles

		Global	Analytic	Verbal	Imaginal	Concrete	Abstract	TEF	Reflective
N		51	51	51	51	51	51	51	51
Normal Parameters (a, b)	Mean	12.000	15.0196	12.3922	14.8627	14.0980	12.3922	12.2941	13.5490
	Std. Deviation	2.36643	1.83837	2.17328	2.40848	2.31737	2.36709	2.24761	2078793
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.134	.158	.162	.111	.130	.124	.172	.102
	Positive	.134	.158	.112	.105	.105	.124	.126	.102
	Negative	-.101	-.134	-.162	-.111	-.130	102	-.172	-.069
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		.959	1.129	1.160	.792	.930	.887	1.230	.731
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.317	.156	.135	.557	.353	.411	.097	.659

Note: a. Test distribution is Normal; b. Calculated from data.

From Table 2, it is clear that the sample is from a normal distribution because the 2-tailed significance level of all categories is above 0.05.

Then a Chi-square test is employed to examine the differences among these categories of learning styles.

Significant differences were found all eight learning styles categories with $p < .05$ (see Table 3). These could be interpreted as significant differences that exist between each sublevel in each category of learning style with at least 95% confidence intervals.

Table 3 Chi-square test statistics for Chinese students' learning styles

	Global	Analytic	Verbal	Imaginal	Concrete	Abstract	TEF	Reflective
Chi-Square (a, b, c, d)	34.412	18.490	28.804	26.412	24.275	17.824	40.235	16.059
df	11	7	9	11	10	9	10	11
Asymp. Sig	.000	.010	.001	.006	.007	.037	.000	.039

Results of the within-group comparison for each of the four bipolar learning style dimensions, arrived via a paired t-test, are presents in Table 4. From the paired t-test, all the 2-tailed significance level within each bipolar learning style is below 0.05. This further test proves that there are significant differences in the learning style preference of Chinese students.

Table 4 Paired t-test of Chinese students' learning styles

		t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	Global-Analytic	-7.164	.000
Pair 2	Verbal-Imaginal	-6.202	.000
Pair 3	Concrete-Abstract	3.452	.001
Pair 4	TEF-Reflective	-2.517	.015

Further statistic analysis about the frequency and percentage of each learning style are also calculated and presented in Table 5. In this table, there are three columns under each bipolar learning style dimension. Students are divided according to their scores on each learning style. Students whose scores on Global are two points more than that of Analytic can be viewed more Global and are placed at the Global end of the continuum. The number and percentage of them are listed in the left column under Global-Analytic learning style dimension. Students whose scores on Analytic are two points more than that of Global can be viewed as more Analytic and are placed at the Analytic end of the continuum. The number and percentage of them are listed in the right column under Global- Analytic learning style dimension. The students who don't have score differences between Global and Analytic dimension are viewed as neutrals, the number and percentage of them are listed in the central column. Divisions are made in the rest of three categories in the same way.

Table 5 Frequency and percentage of each learning style among Chinese students

	Global-Analytic			Verbal-Imaginal			Concrete-Abstract			TEF-Reflective		
Frequency	5	11	35	1	18	32	28	17	6	10	19	22
Percentage	.10	.22	.69	.02	.35	.63	.55	.33	.12	.20	.37	.43

From the statistic analyses of the data of Chinese students' learning styles gathered in this study, we can see that there are significant differences within each bipolar learning style dimension. So it's safe to claim that, on the whole, Chinese students have certain type of learning style of their own and the most frequently used learning style types found in this study are Analytic, Imaginal, Concrete and Reflective.

3.2 The general features of NS English teachers' teaching styles

First of all, a one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was carried out to decide whether the sample belongs to a normal distribution sample. In this test, all the two-sided significance level of all teaching style dimensions is

above 0.05. It is clear that it is a normal distribution sample and any statistic analyses results derived from these data will be meaningful.

The descriptive statistic analyses of the data show that, there are significant differences within all four teaching style dimensions. The mean value of Global is 1.9 more than Analytic; the mean value of Verbal is 2 more than imaginal; that of Abstract is 2.2 more than Concrete; the margin between TEF and Reflective is the largest—4.2.

Frequency and percentage of NS English teachers' teaching styles are also calculated. TEF, Global, Abstract and Verbal are the most used teaching styles. Among them, TEF is the most prominent teaching style, amounting to 80%, followed by Global, Abstract and Verbal. Verbal is the most mild teaching style preference among NS English teachers. Of all the teaching style categories, Analytic and Reflective are the least preferences, whereas they are the most used by Chinese students.

According to these data analyses, we can see that NS English teachers have clear teaching style preference of their own. And the most frequently used teaching style types employed by NS English teachers is TEF, Global, Abstract and Verbal.

4. Conclusion and implications

4.1 Conclusions for the present investigation

After thorough statistic analyses and discussions made on the data derived from this survey, following conclusion can be arrived:

(1) With regard to the learning style categories investigated in this study, Chinese English majors have certain learning style preferences of their own, that is they are more analytic, imaginal, concrete and reflective, and these features are deeply influenced by Chinese traditional education pattern and belief system.

(2) Of all the cognitive styles involved in this study, NS English teachers show clear tendencies towards global, verbal, abstract and TEF (trial, error and feedback). It's clear that these features are shaped by output-oriented culture and individualist-oriented self concept that are prevailing in western culture.

(3) From the comparison between teaching styles adopted by NS English and learning styles of Chinese English majors, severe mismatches exist.

4.2 Implications for instruction

With these statistic-supported conclusions, we know that the style conflicts emerge because they have different cultural background. In order to increase the understanding towards each other's cognitive styles between Chinese students and NS English teachers, nurture rapport relationship in the language classroom and eventually enhance students' language achievement, it's very important for NS English teachers and Chinese English majors to develop style self-awareness.

(1) Effective matching between teaching styles and learning styles can only be achieved when teachers are aware of their learner's needs, capacities, potentials and learning style preferences. Teachers should help students discover their own learning preferences and provide constructive feedback about the advantages and disadvantages of various styles. Opportunities for students to experiment with different ways of learning also should be encouraged.

(2) A variety of activities that focus on different learning styles should be designed by teacher and get all the students participate in all the activities.

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