

METP

EU – China

Language Policy



Good Practice Executive Summary

Introduction:

This Good Practice focuses on both policy and implementation through training. It is therefore two elements of best practice combined, one focussed on the policy to be implemented and the other focussed on a high-profile example of a resulting training programme at national level in China. Hence the title 'China Language Law and METP'. Given the scale of the necessary implementation, specific focus has been given to the METP training programme for 2006-10, a joint China-EU training programme in language, culture & work experience for managers of SMEs and NGOs. This provides Chinese companies with both short-term language ability through the employment of EU managers and the longer-term language skills through training of their own staff who are sent to Europe on language for business training.

Background to the Policy:

China is a complex country, and to understand the reasoning behind its language policy we need to appreciate the linguistic challenges which China has faced. The information below helps to 'set the scene'. Some of this is based on desk research, in particular reference to 'Language Education in China' by Agnes Lam, 2005 (Hong Kong University Press). The remainder is based on 2 visits to China, one to Shanghai and Hangzhou in April 2009 and the other to Beijing and Hangzhou in March 2010.

China is also a multilingual and multidialectical country. The majority language group are the Han Chinese, for which there are 2 main groups of dialects, namely northern and southern. Within these 2 groups there are 7 sub-groups of northern dialects and six sub-groups of southern dialects. In addition, there are 56 ethnic minorities (mainly located in the west and south-west) who between them speak up to 70 languages and possess 50 written languages.

The official language is Chinese, and the standard dialect is Putonghua ('common speech'), which is based on a northern dialect and which in the west is called 'Mandarin' Chinese. As part of this, and to raise the levels of literacy amongst the general population, the government decided to simplify the Chinese characters to make them easier to learn.

The most prominent foreign languages taught in China are English (ranking far above the rest), then Japanese, German & French.

The People's Republic of China (PRC) government has implemented 3 main language policies, revised in 2001:

- 1) Standardisation of Chinese
- 2) Promotion of importance of English
- 3) Development of minority languages

Although all 3 are of interest for the Lilama project, the first and third have direct bearings on the second, as learners often need to acquire both Putonghua and target foreign language skills. In other words, many non-Mandarin speakers need to learn Mandarin before they can learn a foreign language using Mandarin as a medium for communication.

The standardisation of Chinese included both the simplification of the written characters and the standardisation of the pronunciation of these characters.

It began in earnest in 1956 with the First Character Simplification Scheme, which contained 2,235 simplified characters & 14 radicals (part of a Chinese character). In that year was announced a directive that all Han Chinese schools should teach in Putonghua. To facilitate this, a standard pronunciation based on a phonetic alphabet was introduced, called 'hanyu pinyin', in 1958. Although Chinese dialects share the same written script, they vary in pronunciation. Speakers of southern dialects have a greater learning curve to cope with when learning Putonghua, as it is a northern dialect. Job recruitment in government, business or education, however, is conditional on having a level 2 or 3 qualification in Putonghua.

The rise of English as the dominant foreign language came with Deng Xiaoping's Policy of Four Modernisations (agriculture, industry, science & technology and defence), which evolved into the Reform and Open Door Policy. During this period policy direction at State level was matched with practical support from resident ELT teachers and overseas experts. Milestones included the 1979 curricula for foreign language teaching, the 1982 announcement of English as the first foreign language, the 1984 introduction of English for specific purposes (beginning with science & technology), and the 1987 introduction of standardised exams for College English.

In the 1990s and early 21st century this was expanded to include syllabi for all levels of education (not just secondary), and in 1999 the Public English Test System was introduced. A key political milestone during this period was China's entry into the World Trade Organization in Dec 2001. In 2006 the latest phase of language policy implementation was announced with the introduction of the METP Managers' Education & Training Programme, which is a joint EU-China initiative to increase language skills amongst SME and NGO staff through a period of intensive study and work placement in the counterpart territory.

China's main approach is to increase the number of students leaving full-time education and entering the world of work with a higher level of English language competence (it is reported that currently there are more Chinese

learners of English than there are English native speakers). This is complemented by a large number of working Chinese citizens taking private English language lessons and who can have their payment of fees reimbursed once they pass the examinations.

During a visit to China in Apr 2009 by RLN East, it was discovered that in general State and provincial governments are reluctant to provide large-scale funds for English language training, as younger citizens would willingly pay the fees themselves in the hope of improving their career prospects. The government will, however, fund basic skills training for companies, with training needs analyses often outsourced to third parties, including their own subsidised services.

The market for private language training on the East coast is reported to be saturated, however there is a growing emphasis on supporting graduates with internship training to gain work experience, including the placement of graduates with foreign language skills. To this end the government provides a package of support to employers.

METP

The EU-China Managers Exchange and Training Programme (METP), launched in July 2006, is a five-year intergovernmental cooperation project between the EU and China in the field of international trade. It is currently in its fifth intake (each intake is approx 6 months apart). The programme aims at enhancing the capacity of EU managers to act with confidence in the Chinese business environment, improving their capacity to conduct business in Chinese.

The programme provides support for exchange and training support to 450 Chinese and European managers (according to the website), revised down to 200 in practice. It is implemented by the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT) in close consultation with the Ministry of Commerce on the Chinese side and the European Commission Delegation in China on the European side. The total funding to the programme across the five years is 23 million euros, of which the contribution of the EU is 17 million euros. The Chinese side is providing financial contributions of 6 million euros.

The European managers will be trained in Chinese language and business culture and gain work experience in China, while the Chinese managers will take part in management training at European business schools and then gain work experience in a European company or organization. Altogether five groups of managers from both sides are expected to participate, one group per year.

1. Reflects current EU and regional policy on multilingualism

The PRC government has implemented 3 main language policies:

- Standardisation of Chinese
- Promotion of importance of English
- Development of minority languages

This policy refers to the use of English as a dominant language for international trade and to the common use of Putonghua (Mandarin) Chinese for employment within China. Consideration is also given to other languages, in particular French and Italian, through a period of study in the corresponding countries. Economic growth, enhanced education across the population and political stability are the drivers behind the policy.

The Ministry of Education is responsible for the policy, which targets all levels of corporate and public society, and which through the METP programme targets specifically SMEs. All learning modules within the METP reflect the dialogues used in the world of work, both in China and in the EU member states. Practical use of the acquired language skills is gained through a period of work experience in a host company at the end of formal training.

The institutions tasked with implementing the programme are a university consortium consisting of the University of International Business & Economics in Beijing, Manchester Metropolitan University, the Solvay Brussels School of Economics & Management, ESC Paris (run by the Chambers of Commerce) and the University of Turin. Although the policy is long-term, the METP programme is medium-term in that it lasts from 2006-2010. A steering group has been established in the UK to determine the topics for delivery in Manchester. The development of learning materials needed to reflect the differences in work practices and economic environment of the different participating EU member states.

The content of the training for Chinese managers for the fifth intake (2010 intake) is as follows: following the initial intercultural training (block 1, May 2010), the two first weeks in Paris (block 2, Jun 2010) are dedicated to accounting. The sessions address the logic of financial and management accounting in the international accounting standard environment. They are offered to attend courses about marketing management, including a session about marketing communication and advertising, about the design and implementation of IT projects, and international trade. The third week concentrates on the areas of strategy. In Brussels (block 3, Jun 2010), participants will have an opportunity to refine their abilities in finance and investment, mainly interpreting data and statistics. The two-week programme in Manchester (block 4, Jul 2010) is designed to introduce and add expertise for participants regarding their management of individuals, groups, and organizations.

Block 5 (Jul-Aug 2010) is the work placement in an EU company or NGO, and block 6 (Sep 2010) in Paris focuses on HR issues such as the management of diverse cultures within Europe. Block 7 (Sep-Oct 2010) is the second work placement in an EU company or NGO.

The content of the training for EU managers is as follows: following the initial intercultural training in Beijing (block 1, May 2010), the second block is a 7-month Chinese language training course (May-Dec 2010), followed by a 3-month work placement (Jan-Mar 2011).

The language training is divided into 4 phases. Phase 1 includes an introduction to Chinese characters combined with elementary speaking & listening skills development. Phase 2 introduces business vocabulary and context, and includes an element of e-learning. Phase 3 promises that participants will be able to use Chinese business language 'relatively fluently' and includes financial topics such as taxation and foreign investment policy. Phase 4 mainly focuses on training participants' language skills acquired in real practice and taking some online courses for a better understanding of the Chinese business environment.

Under METP4 the intake of EU managers was divided into 3 groups by level, namely beginner (the largest group), lower intermediate and intermediate. The lower intermediate group included those with better spoken Chinese but poor or non-existent reading & writing skills. Training is delivered every morning and on two afternoons per week over a 7-month period which includes a 2-week summer break. In addition, up to 8hrs individual tuition is allowed for each week, taking place in the afternoons and operating on a 'surgery session' basis.

To help participants have a better understanding of modern day China, METP also provides participants with culture and business visits around the country in addition to prime business and technology parks in Beijing.

2. Includes incentives to enhance and sustain language learner motivation and employment benefits

The beneficiaries of the programme are the SMEs whose staff participate and those SMEs who act as hosts for the work placements. Performance at work is measured by 4 logistic or 'welfare' partners combined with e-mail supervision from academic partners, with performance during training measured by university staff.

The programme is marketed in China through the provincial offices of the CCTIP, and this is reported to be an efficient method of promoting the programme. In the EU, where there is a more broken marketing network, word of mouth is a better tool for promoting the programme. This has resulted on the EU side in a larger intake for METP5 (240 applicants for an intake of 50 participants) which has helped to redress the previous imbalance, where there was a greater proportion of Chinese applicants. There is an EU-China Manager Association of METP alumni which helps to promote the programme.

The market for private language training on the East coast is reported to be saturated, however there is a growing emphasis on supporting graduates with internship training to gain work experience, including the placement of graduates with foreign language skills. To this end the government provides a package of support to employers.

Consideration of employment context is provided both in the topics covered during training and as part of the work experience. Further details are provided in section 5 'Mobility' below. SME alumni of previous years are able to provide input to future rounds of training.

3. Reflects regional strategy for employability and intercultural benefits

China's main approach is to increase the number of students leaving full-time education and entering the world of work with a higher level of English language competence (it is reported that currently there are more Chinese learners of English than there are English native speakers). This is complemented by a large number of working Chinese citizens taking private English language lessons and who can have their payment of fees reimbursed once they pass the examinations.

An important point to note is that the objective for Chinese managers on the METP programme is to improve the business English (or French or Italian) and not acquire low-level language skills. They acquire the vocabulary and confidence to operate at a higher level of English. On the contrary, EU managers acquire Chinese language skills from a beginner or low intermediate level.

For Chinese managers, the programme funds participants 55 euros per day for their time in both Beijing and the EU in addition to travel within the EU. The sending companies finance the cost of the EU-China flights, visas and any daily allowances above the 55 euros. In order to ensure that Chinese participants return to China after the period of training, a deposit of 40,000 RMB (approx 4,000 euros) is paid by the sending company to the Chinese government and is only reimbursed 3 months after the return of the participant.

For EU managers, the programme funds participants 1,000 euros living allowance per month whilst in China, all tuition fees and travel within China. It does not fund the return flights to China and any living costs above the 1,000 euro allowance. Accommodation is available on campus at a cost of 500 euros per month, and meals are available for approx 150 euros per month.

EU managers need to source their own work placement, although support is given by the university in Beijing. Important, note: although Chinese companies are generally much larger than EU companies, a Chinese SME is defined as an enterprise with annual sales and total capital of up to RMB 500 million (approx 50 million euros).

A total of 200 SME learners have to date been supported by the programme, the larger proportion of which come from China. It is reported that the Chinese SMEs appear to have a clearer career structure than their EU counterparts.

4. Addresses local language minority and migrant community language resources

There are over 100 million ethnic minorities in China, or around 8.4% of the population. These live in the west and south-west regions which account for approx 64% of China's total area. It is a realistic expectation that all METP Chinese managers have a good command of Putonghua, irrespective of linguistic background. In 2001 the policy of the promotion of Putonghua has encouraged minorities to learn Putonghua whilst maintaining their own language. Job recruitment in government, business or education, however, is conditional on having a level 2 or 3 qualification in Putonghua. Although Chinese dialects share the same written script, they vary in pronunciation. Speakers of southern dialects have a greater learning curve to cope with when learning Putonghua, as it is a northern dialect.

Some of these minorities have not only their own dialect but also their own language, often with a different script to Chinese. The definition of 'migrant' in the title above is based on an European employment environment, yet mobility in China is two-way, with first the repopulation of traditionally non-Han geographical areas (such as Xinjiang Province) with Han Chinese citizens, and secondly with minority citizens moving to the cities in search of employment, particularly in the construction sector.

It is frequent practice to attend formal meetings held in Putonghua and then for breakout groups or smaller meetings to take place in local dialect, such as Shanghainese. Many business meetings between Chinese also switch between Putonghua and local dialects, depending on the background of those involved.

The proliferation of Putonghua is targeted for local economic growth.

5. Provides for international networking and/or mobility

Participants take formal training in 3 of the four partner institutions in Europe, rotating from one to the other. Following formal training there are work placements. In the last round approximately 25% of the Chinese learners stayed in the UK, with the remainder moving to a range of countries within the EU, in particular Germany & Spain. At the end of the work placement learners are expected to produce a report of between 5000-7000 words on their experiences.

Under the recent round (METP4) European participants convened in Beijing in Feb 2010 to exchange information about their work placements. METP has financially supported three months of work placements (Jan to Mar 2010) as an integral part of each training intake. Work placements allowed the participants to put their newly acquired language skills to the test in a Chinese working environment and to learn more about Chinese business culture and practice. Some placements can last up to 16 weeks, and SMEs may opt to self-fund a further placement in another EU member state.

It is reported that about one third of the EU applicants remain in Beijing for work placement, whilst the remainder are scattered across China. To date European managers have come from 23 EU member states. Equally, Chinese participants come from a wide range of provinces, albeit with a stronger representation from the major cities of China. Participants are encouraged to build relationships with their target Chinese company during training so that expectations during the work placement can be managed and the company has a realistic understanding of the linguistic ability of their allocated EU manager. A workshop is also held during training with the purpose of introducing EU managers to Chinese companies.

Participants were free to choose in which company, industrial sector and geographical region of the EU/China they wished to do their work placement. This implies that they make very different experiences, depending on where they are and what they do. The workshop in early February brought everyone together in Beijing roughly at half time of the work placements, in order to discuss experiences, successes, problems and strategies. In addition, the one-day event provided longer-term perspectives in discussions with human resources managers of large firms operating in China, representatives of business associations and headhunting firms. Most Chinese participants already have companies in the EU targeted for work placement.

6. Incorporates the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) with transparent validation/ credits

There are no formal qualifications attached to the METP programme, although with regard to the standardisation of Putonghua, all employees in government and business are expected to reach a minimum level 2 or 3 qualification. Although English IELTS level 6 is a guide for study in the UK component of the METP, English language testing is conducted by MMU staff and local project staff in Beijing prior to selection.

For each intake, independent European and Chinese pre-selection experts review received applications and shortlist eligible candidates who are then interviewed by a jury of EU and Chinese officials and experts. At the beginning of each training intake, selected European and Chinese managers will jointly participate in a 2-week intercultural training in China. After the intercultural training, selected European managers will receive seven months of full-time business Chinese language training at the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing, attend specially tailored seminars and workshops on cultural and business issues, and undergo a three-month internship to gain work experience in a Chinese environment.

For the EU managers there are phase tests at the end of each phase. For the beginner group there are regular progress checks and quizzes, and for the intermediate groups these take place every 2-3 weeks. There is a final examination in all 4 skills (speaking, listening, reading & writing) at the end of the training, and a certificate of completion is provided at the graduation ceremony.

Selected Chinese managers will receive seven weeks of tailor-made management training at 3 locations of four European business schools, in Manchester, Paris, Turin and Brussels. Different from standard MBA programmes, the training in Europe will focus on practical skills and networking rather than academic skills. After the management training, the Chinese managers will undergo 7-21 week internships in European companies in any EU member states to further their understanding of the business practice in Europe.

Entry criteria to the programme exclude many SME managers, therefore it must be borne in mind that METP is primarily a programme which supports junior managers in SMEs/NGOs or private consultants who are not tied to a particular business. The entry criteria for each participant is that they need to be of Chinese or EU nationality, 26-45 years of age (26-40 for EU staff), possess a minimum of 5 years' work experience (including 2 in a managerial role), have a strong academic background in a business, economic or technical subject related to their field of work (EU staff), support from their company in the form of a business plan for the EU/China & financial contribution, have previous contact with the EU/China, excellent English & no or basic Chinese language skills (for EU staff), and current employment by a

company/NGO with EU/Chinese ownership. Possession of a second EU language is considered an asset.

7. Can be readily & usefully implemented

The dossier file should capture data on whether the policy can be realistically implemented, and should show linkages between recent employer surveys and planned implementation of activity.

8. Transferability

There are several key issues to consider when discussing transferability:

- 1) To what extent do the age-related eligibility criteria exclude managers of SMEs in both China and the EU? Many SME managers are over the age of 40 and have family commitments, excluding them from lengthier periods of time spent abroad.
- 2) How many EU or Chinese managers are able to spend long periods of training overseas whilst leaving the business in the hands of their colleagues?
- 3) To what extent are those EU participants identified in the testimonials private consultants with no or few staff and the ability to move locations with less difficulty?
- 4) Is it the case that for Chinese companies, which tended to have a longer-term view, such a period of time away from the business was not necessarily an issue?
- 5) How successful are EU & China managers at finding suitable work placement?