

Interview

Intercultural Communication and Applied linguistics - Extending Horizons: An Interview with Lixian Jin

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Abstract

At the start of this interview, Professor Jin recounts how she abandoned her ambition to become a physician and ended up teaching and researching clinical linguistics at a British university for 18 years. She emphasises the crucial role of intercultural communication (IC) in both foreign language education and the 'internationalisation' of universities; in connection with the former, she recommends some ways for EFL teachers to promote intercultural communication competence (ICC) in their TESOL practices; regarding the latter, she points out that for a university to be 'internationalised', true IC is indispensable as it can bring all partners (i.e. academic, administrative, technical staff and students) up to a level where they understand, empathize and appreciate each other. In her current role as Dean of Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in the City University of Macau, she has been leading a group of faculty members to work on proposals to establish Applied Linguistics programmes for BA, MA and PhD levels, in order to support the infrastructure of future workforces in Macau and the Greater Bay Area. Additionally, in the Chinese EFL context, she discusses several key issues concerning teaching English to young learners and to older learners (aged 50 and above). Finally, she offers some advice regarding how to balance the teaching, research, and administrative responsibilities expected of a faculty member in the field of applied linguistics.

Keywords

Intercultural communication, applied linguistics, TESOL, life-long learning, the Greater Bay Area, Macau

We would like to start off on a more personal note, Prof. Jin. I would first invite you to talk about your academic and professional life highlighting how you got interested in Applied Linguistics and TESOL.

This is a long story. English was not my original career choice. I wanted to become a medical doctor. But fate has taken me on a pathway of English and then to applied linguistics and TESOL.

At school, it was not possible for me to learn English properly. At that time (in the ten -year turbulent period (1966-76)), schools were closed for long periods or opened but with little teaching. What we

learned, intermittently, was from an English textbook which highlighted political slogans. We had to memorise those words to pass the exam, but we did not really learn listening or speaking, reading or writing. Later, I hardly attended senior high school. I went to study traditional Chinese medicine outside the school, wanting to become a barefoot doctor. Then I worked as a replacement teacher for one year at a local primary school. I taught Chinese and Maths and, somehow, taught English to the middle school year one class attached to the primary school. A year later, it was back to Chinese herbal medicine: I was assigned to work in a traditional Chinese medicine faculty, but everything changed when I passed the first National University Entry Exam in 1977 and was luckily admitted to study English literature and language at university.

So how about learning English in these circumstances? During my brief schooling and factory work time, my parents were very wise. They heard me reading English sentences with awful English pronunciation, so they found an old friend to help. He was an English teacher. I used to go to his house every Sunday morning to learn some English and the rest of the time I was supposed to do home-study alone. But mostly I was simply exhausted, because in the factory I was often required to do extended work hours (from 7am to 9pm, six days a week). I worked as a construction labourer to move bricks and soil for the factory building, as an assembly line worker to wrap labels on medicine bottles, as a mechanic apprentice (a very much admired job then) with which I learned how to fix some mechanical equipment, to do welding to repair high chimneys, and to design and make moulds; as a herbal-extraction worker to produce Chinese medicines for intravenous injections. Sunday was the only time to catch up on sleep or daily life. Again, I hardly had the opportunity to hear English, although the teacher specially corrected my pronunciation here and there. We hardly finished one textbook during the years of studying with him. When we heard about the chance to go to university, this English teacher and another English teacher from my middle school both encouraged me to attend the exam - for the English major. All I knew was that I wanted to study in a university: I did not care what subject it might be. By that time, my father had passed away. My mother was still suffering under the consequences of the ten -year turbulent period, so I had no-one else to turn to. My mother had no income. She wanted me to keep my 'good' steady-income job as a Chinese medicine factory worker. So, I had to do my English revision and exam preparation secretly, outside in a street under the street-light whenever I had time.

Fortunately, I managed to pass the exam successfully. Nevertheless, my mother was strongly against the idea for me to go to a normal university: for her, having a good factory job was the best choice. She worried about our income situation. Luckily, to allow me go to study, my uncles agreed to support my mother's living expenses. However, when I got to university to study English, I could hardly say a word, not even to reply to greetings. It was embarrassing. At first this was a great struggle – everyone was better than I was at English. But I worked hard in class and especially out of class: I grabbed tape recordings to listen to English for as many hours a day as I could, plus reading texts, reciting passages aloud, learning vocabulary, and talking to myself even in my dreams. Once I understood some English words from the film *The Sound of Music*, I was so excited and felt proud. I have been watching this film many times since, and I still get the same feeling of contentment and satisfaction. A good classmate helped me practise my oral English: we've remained life-long friends. Another piece of luck was to have two American teachers (at that time, a handful foreign teachers were assigned to teach English majors at only three universities in the whole Hubei Province), and the best Chinese teachers of English. They devoted their time and energy to teach us.

After a year or so, my English had improved a lot. I won the university English-speaking contests a few times. This gave me the confidence to develop a special interest in English pronunciation. Every winter and summer holiday, I went to Beijing to join my uncles' families. They were all good at English and they supported me to study well. During those visits, I used to take notes from the limited linguistic books available in the Beijing library. I read about the concept of clinical linguistics one day. I thought it would be wonderful if I could study clinical linguistics, then at least I could use some linguistics linked

with medical sciences, since I had always wanted to become a medical doctor. By chance - or fate - years later, my first full-time job in a British university was to teach clinical linguistics to train speech and language therapists in a health and life sciences environment. For this, I had to seriously study the content before teaching it. I was well trained as an applied linguist and a linguist, but this does not mean I could teach every subject in the fast-expanding field of applied linguistics. Well, I did that job for 18 years and conducted research in clinical linguistics.

Going back to my university time in China, by graduation for my first degree, my English was considered 'competent'. My oral English was fluent and I was acting as an interpreter at university international meetings. My graduation dissertation on *The Problems of Wuhan People in Learning English Pronunciation*, considered the best BA dissertation, was published as a journal article in the 1980s after going through many reviews and some special approval by a well-known professor in linguistics (I was considered too junior to be allowed to publish an academic paper). So, this was my first academic publication. I was appointed to stay on as a university English teacher, specialising in English Phonetics and Phonology. I taught there for nearly 5 years before I left to do my MA and PhD in Applied Linguistics and Education in the UK, with the first non-government scholarship funded by several British educational foundations (in itself another long story).

You have done quite a lot of research on intercultural communication vis-à-vis TESOL. Can you tell us a little about what got you interested in these areas, what your research has found and how your findings can help teachers and learners?

To me, intercultural communication (IC) is a vital part of learning a foreign language. Students need to have the curiosity, patience and empathy to engage with a range of cultures. These qualities are worth developing for themselves; additionally, many students will be future professional language users. Cultures are parts of languages and languages are part of cultures. Learners need to appreciate through good examples in different contexts how different communities of English users (whether as a first, second or other language, or as a lingua franca or global English) not only have different styles of communication, but often different ways of conveying meaning, because their communication for some topics is based on different assumptions and so their expression in discourse might be hard for others to follow to get the main meaning without some knowledge and feeling about the people and their language use. Cultures create meanings but meanings also create cultures.

When I was searching for a worthwhile research focus for PhD, I realised that Chinese research students at that time in Britain were suffering a lot socially, psychologically and academically, even though they were from elite academic groups in China. They were confident that they were competent, but it seemed that they were not treated with respect by other students or staff. At the same time, British supervisors also commented that Chinese students were the most hard-working, intelligent, and self-sacrificing students they had ever met. These supervisors wanted to help Chinese students achieve more, but they did not know how the students could get into relevant 'Western' ways of thinking for their research or writing. So, for my PhD I decided to explore these intercultural academic gaps between the Chinese research students and their British supervisors.

My research findings have shown that there are different emphases in ways of learning, teaching and research: these are perceived by people coming from different social, psychological and academic backgrounds and inherited learning methods and beliefs. This might lead to different preferences in learning or teaching, e.g. tendencies to ask (or not ask) questions in discussion. Sometimes what is appreciated or valued by some academics (or other learners) may not seem important or relevant to other academics (or other learners). This is partly influenced by their cultural beliefs: about what a good student or teacher is, what is considered good learning or research, or how they should interact in

academic settings. For instance, to ask a question of a superior (a teacher or supervisor) may be perceived as impolite or inappropriate in academic settings by some Chinese students. They might think that the act of asking a question is itself a challenge, so they would not dare to ask questions with their supervisors, even if they see alternatives or have doubts about the ideas presented. They may be reluctant to ask any questions at all. I refer to this preferred academic behaviour as cultures of learning, because ways of learning vary, culturally, around the world. It means IC includes cultural learning, of course, but it also includes learning about other's learning.

So Intercultural communication (IC), as a large field, includes the interaction in language learning and teaching. I mean, language learning depends on cultures of learning and cultures of communication and these can be surprisingly different around the world or even within one country or one discipline of a university. How students learn and how teachers teach depends partly on their upbringing and socialization, education and training, on what they think language is, and how they believe people should teach and learn. For example, in one case, textbooks have questions and teachers ask these or make their own questions based on the book; students may give answers and sometimes everyone expects a single answer to each question: this answer is right or wrong (often confirmed as such by the answer given in the textbook or teacher's book). In this case, good learning means correctly answering questions, and the questions are often about something already taught. In effect, this particular learning means reading and listening in order to spot and remember answers to upcoming questions (e.g. for a test or an exam). This could be an overlooked IC issue.

In other cultures, there are cases where teachers (and students) perceive that many questions have a range of answers, so several different answers might be sought and discussed. In such cultures, educationally, teachers believe that students (not only teachers) ought to be asking questions: asking is a major way of learning. So, they develop techniques to encourage learners to ask and to be creative with thinking about their own questions, and not only to recall answers to teacher-or-book questions. Teachers in this second case are disappointed if students don't have questions: they think good teaching leads to learner questions, and that learner questions lead to accelerated, deeper or more emotionally-engaged learning. Good learners here should be eager to ask. In this kind of contrast, perhaps students in the first case don't ask, because the questions all come from the teacher or textbook. They are not used to asking. If a teacher does say, 'Any questions?' the students believe this is just a routine formula and it is not serious; or they don't want to interrupt the teacher; or they might think that to ask a question shows ignorance (rather than eagerness for knowledge and interaction) and perhaps they are afraid of negative comments from their peers.

So, this question of questions can be one small part of different cultures of learning. The concept of cultures of learning does not necessarily mean it has to do with learning styles or other aspects of cultures of learning between countries/communities, but it can be within one cultural community of a country, or these can be experienced through reflection even within individuals during their journeys of learning. Internationally, these cultures involve ways of developing intercultural communication in the actual moment-to-moment teaching and learning. So, IC is not only something outside the classroom, or only something for preparation for a future profession using English: it's in the classroom process and in daily interaction between teacher and class or between different groups of students, as well as communicating in English outside class. If the classroom process does not involve practical IC and intercultural thinking in some way (e.g. developing repertoires of ways of asking in intercultural situations in role playing) it is less likely to be effective in the real world.

In your keynote presentation *Internationalisation in HE? Not without intercultural communication...*¹, you have mentioned that intercultural communication might be carried out within a framework of internationalisation. Could you elaborate on it?

Internationalisation has been perceived as essential in business contexts and later in education since receiving international students and having international collaboration has become a part of the rating mechanism for league tables in university ranking. But what I have been arguing is that this internationalisation is not just a matter of student numbers, or university income, or points for reputation and status. More significantly, there should be substantial support for mind-and-heart internationalisation in business or education. It means developing a profound sense of 'planetization', a deep awareness that all nations and peoples are all on the same planet, interacting with each other and within the same global environment. It means international and local students learn culturally from each other. It means teachers as professionals (and students as future professionals) need to develop intercultural communication competence (ICC) in order to achieve a real sense of internationalisation, cognitively, emotionally, socially and culturally. When international students (and staff) are in a university, this does not necessarily mean the university is 'internationalised' unless true intercultural communication takes place to bring all partners (i.e. academic, administrative, technical staff and students) up to a level in which they understand, empathize and appreciate each other, not only in their work roles but as people on one planet.

I have brought in the argument of having awareness of cultures of learning and teaching. This has the aim to help make university a synergetic place, in which both staff and students treat each other with openness and curiosity about each other's repertoires of learning and teaching styles to make education truly international in curriculum, in thinking, in practice. This helps to create future professionals ready to serve the global workplace. People may argue that international students go to study in a British university, because they want to be educated by British ways. But what are British ways? Historically, and now, British businesses and society generally have been absorbing many resources internationally. In a reverse argument, staff in a British university might not learn all the styles of learning from all international students (and of course so many other aspects of cultures and worldviews). But the aim is not for one person to learn all styles of teaching and learning (and about all cultures). This is impossible in reality. But it is possible for staff and students to learn some principles for being aware of various preferred styles of teaching and learning. More importantly, to establish an open channel to explicitly explain their own thoughts about teaching and learning, while learning from and with others. Even if each participant insists on their own preferred ways of teaching and learning (which may be considered as their right), they would provide explicit information and insight so that other participants would make informed choices of learning and teaching. This strand of internationalisation is important because it suggests a teaching-and-learning process, a stance of investigation and imagination, as central to the international purpose and improved functioning of a university.

What does intercultural communication mean? What role should intercultural communication play in TESOL? How should English language teachers promote EFL/ESL learners' intercultural competence?

I have answered parts of these questions earlier. I would like to focus on the ways for ELT teachers to promote intercultural communication competence (ICC) in their teaching to EFL/ESL learners. There are many ways to teach and learning IC. Here I only mention three points which we often apply into our teaching. First, teachers will help students understand the broad concepts of what culture is, of what cultures do, and how cultures make and communicate meanings. This is not necessarily about different national cultures, but it could relate to students themselves, e.g. coming from different parts of the country or different cities or family backgrounds. Culture is partly about people's expectations, attitudes, preferences and perceptions which influence their thoughts and chosen behaviour. So, when we interact with people, we need to be open to others' views, to be aware of alternatives when we interpret their

behaviour and learn to think from others' perspectives, while postponing judgements. Secondly, teachers can be good examples of performing ICC in their teaching by guiding students to explore IC cases with thoughtfulness and empathy. Thirdly, teachers can raise students' sensitivity, curiosity, openness and awareness of intercultural issues for effective communication purposes. For example, in my teaching, I ask students to create their own lists of 'key IC ideas' or 'rules' by producing their own acrostic to remind themselves of IC in their daily action. For instance, some students in a group made an acrostic of **RESPECT**:

- Recognize differences between individuals;
- Evaluate everyone's behaviours without discrimination;
- Smile is a good beginning to show your kindness;
- People should think about issues from each other's point of view;
- Explanation is a way to solve misunderstanding and conflict;
- Controlling your emotion is necessary in communication;
- Try to be patient when facing difficulties.

Students work through IC theories in discussion. They read other's groupwork to internalise their own (and other's) understanding and create their own ways to think and behave in IC.

At De Montfort University (DMU), UK, you developed one of the few UK Master's programmes on Intercultural Business Communication and established an intercultural research centre for learning and communication. Can you share with us the interesting/challenging bits of this experience?

Around 2009 I initiated this innovative programme. There were just two similar programmes in the UK then. People did not know what this programme was about and why 'intercultural' was part of the degree title. I had to convince different university committees that 'intercultural communication competence' can be decisive for success in a business negotiation. We need to educate students who are able to handle intercultural business with communication competence, intercultural understanding, integrated with business or professional knowledge. I got some funding from the UK Prime Minister's Initiative fund: the findings demonstrate how business needs a trained workforce with ICC for their globalised work contexts.

I also faced a problem of where to locate this programme, since it involved staff from three faculties: Humanities, Business and Health and Life Sciences (where I was affiliated with). I wanted to locate it in my faculty, because the research and teaching could also link with speech and language therapy and other health professions trained in the faculty. In the end, the university agreed with my reasons that this programme would remain in the Life and Health Sciences Faculty, so I set up a teaching and research centre called Centre for Intercultural Research in Communication and Learning (CIRCL). Staff were from different faculties to be truly intercultural and interdisciplinary. Intercultural problems were solved through intercultural communication and action. The programme included many international students and many visiting scholars from China participated.

In your current new position as Dean of Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in the City University of Macau (Macau SAR, China), do you need to develop a similar master's or doctoral programme in the broad area of Applied Linguistics? What are your visions for the new programme(s) at your current institution? What difficulties do you need to address?

In my first month of arriving at the City University of Macau in August 2021, I led a group of staff members to work on proposals to establish Applied Linguistics programmes for BA, MA and PhD levels. We worked day-and-night for 20 days to produce over 50 documents for this application. There is currently no Applied Linguistics programme in Macau. It is timely to establish programmes at all levels to support the infrastructure of future workforces in Macau and the Greater Bay Area.

The Applied Linguistics degrees include different strands: for the BA, two strands are proposed which are on Language in Education for those who would like to develop their future career in ELT and on Intercultural Communication for those who would like to use IC for their professional development; for the MA, four strands are planned: TESOL, TCSOL (Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages), Teaching Languages to Young Learners, and IC. The main consideration is that these specialities are currently not available in education in Macau and the graduates would be able to fulfil the language needs locally, as well as in other areas of China (including the Greater Bay area) and elsewhere. As applied linguists, we aim to solve problems in education and other fields. In order to achieve the goals of meeting the educational and professional needs, we have designed work placements in all our degree programmes. Of course, this can be challenging: we are considering suitable work placement locations so that our students will benefit from applying their knowledge and skills into real world settings. We are also facing some difficulties to expand our staff expertise. Currently we are recruiting a large number of academics from lecturer to professor levels. We welcome talented academics to join us for the mission of providing good education for Macau and the Greater Bay Area.

In China, the number of English learners/users already exceeded 390 million in 2000 (Wei & Su, 2012). There are 60 million Chinese primary school children (China Education 2013) learning English at the age of nine or even younger (e.g., seven). To what extent is this popular TESOL-related belief true that ‘the earlier, the better’?

This is a complicated question. People may know that the ‘critical period hypothesis’ has influenced some decisions about early starting for learning English. Some primary schools in China start the teaching of English from Year 1 and some choose to start from Y3. There are several issues we need to consider for teaching English to young learners (EYL).

Firstly, this is not simply a question of timing the starting age for learning English; how we teach young learners is a more important issue. This is a reason that the City University of Macau would like to develop this strand of teaching EYL in order to produce specialists who can handle this teaching more effectively as teachers. The learners are young and usually keen to learn any knowledge and skills; if we teach them as if they are adult learners (e.g. focusing on testing them, or forcing them to learn grammar rules, or mainly memorizing) we will kill their enthusiasm for learning. I have conducted a series of funded projects investigating motivations of English learning from kindergarten to university students in China. A major finding shows children need to be motivated to learn according to their emotional, intellectual and cognitive development, with a good support in social, psychological and educational provision. Children are aware of different difficulty levels in learning, but learning needs to be scaffolded so that they can use their own learning pace and readiness to progress. Teachers pay attention to individual needs, so they need to use multiple techniques fitting with children’s developmental stages in learning.

Secondly, successful language learning for EYL relies on a positive linguistic environment. In international schools in China, where English could be the medium of teaching, these children would have a wider and richer exposure to English. In state schools, where children’s English learning may be restricted to a couple of hours per week, this provides relatively little input to their learning. If they do not have other sources of English in their learning environment, it would be hard for them to acquire

language skills. Thus, the best option is to nurture and sustain their interest in English through engaging activities and let them develop more rapidly when they are ready; meanwhile for EYL, schools can provide many short out-of-class activities and things-to-do-at-home in English (with support, parents or grandparents might be involved). Our research shows young learners are particularly keen when they could learn English together with their parents, as a rewarding time to spend with their parents.

Thirdly, teachers of English need to have regular professional training and development. In China, quite a number of provinces provide annual training plans for English teachers to update their knowledge and techniques for teaching EYL. At the same time, it may be informative and insightful for English teachers to learn from teachers of other disciplines (e.g. from teachers of Chinese) or learn from observing and collaborating in teaching styles from other levels of education, e.g. university teachers observe and collaborate with Senior High teachers in order to understand students coming from there to university level; Junior high school teachers may observe and work with primary school teachers, and primary school teachers of EYL may link with kindergarten teaching to understand how children develop their learning, and become familiar with different teaching styles from different educational stages.

When your research subjects include very young learners, did you have any difficulties in soliciting the cooperation of your research subjects? How did you overcome these difficulties?

This is a useful question to many researchers who are interested in young learners, not just for EYL. We have used a few strategies to help with data collection and analysis:

- provide as natural environment as possible as our data collection settings (in a familiar setting, with known adults, in a non-testing situation);
- collect data through playing with children (using games with toys, activities with objects, colours, picture books, etc.); and their own teachers can be research partners;
- let them get to know trained researchers in a relaxing environment (engage with children in classroom routines, before any research activities);
- model some examples by giving examples to clarify what to do, or what the activity is, maybe in several steps (particularly when using elicited metaphor analysis, which asks children to give an example of a comparison between a concrete object, e.g. ‘an apple’, to represent their attitudes towards an abstract idea or activity, as well as asking for their reasons of using this comparison to get children’s insight on a matter);
- use children’s way of talking at their cognitive level to interact with them (not being patronizing or ‘too-teacherly’, but showing that what children say or do is important, interesting and worth attention).

Of course, as research procedures, all of this has to go through ethical consideration and appropriate approval. In our cases, parents and teachers (and children) were reasonably aware of our research procedures and methods with their formal consent; often we gave general comments and feedback about the results. This is wide-ranging teamwork: we had prior consultation with kindergarten and primary teachers, and specialist teacher-trainers. They provided valuable advice on what props and realia to use in each kindergarten or school, including about suitable time-periods for activities.

There is an emerging research theme that examines the process and outcomes of learning of a foreign language (e.g. English) at a later stage in life (e.g. after retirement). Based on your research concerning older EFL/ESL learners, can you please share with us the takeaways?

Yes, this life-long learning is a significant development. It shows how it is never too late to learn a foreign language. One study I can share with you was completed by my past PhD student, Dr. Yanchuan Geng. His research focuses on the main reasons which motivate older learners of English in China (referring to those aged 50 and above). In contrast to other learners who may get obvious educational achievement or cognitive and linguistic improvement, one key finding from this study is the positive affective gain from learning English. This could be due to several reasons: a feeling of making up for lost opportunities in their youth when they did not have time or the chance to learn English; or they really enjoy communicating in English with their grandchildren who are learning English or leaving for study abroad; or they feel it is useful and convenient to use English in their international travel. Emotionally, they expand their life with feelings of gaining dignity, pride, happiness, enjoyment and satisfaction.

When we study this group of learners, who are sophisticated and well-experienced, we should not have fixed ways of research thinking to only use standard research methods (like questionnaire surveys or question-answer interviews). This may lead to ordinary findings because it asks standard questions. This study used elicited metaphor analysis in addition to traditional methods. This use of more innovative methods helps to dig deeper into understanding our participants. We need to treat them as valued partners and establish heart-to-heart conversations with them. Exploring their ideas and experiences through metaphors is one way.

You have a vast teaching, research and administrative experience spanning over your academic life. How compatible do you find these different roles and do you think whether language teachers should get engaged in research and administration as well as teaching?

Fundamentally, I am both a researcher and a teacher like many colleagues in education. These make my life engaging and exciting, and energetic: I gain strength and rewards from them. A researcher and a teacher should be a good leader, because we are leading students or colleagues as a part of our jobs. Different people may have different styles for leadership and management. My styles may reflect in how I do research: that is, to try to be open, transparent and fair in dealing with matters, showing respect to others and being willing to listen to others' views and advice. However, at the same time I should be firm and effective to make management decisions, be supportive when others are in need, and be responsive and responsible for any apparent errors made. In the UK, university academic staff are likely given all three roles: teaching, research and administration. All three roles are part of their challenging job. The job gives us a chance to be trained and practise our administrative capabilities. This is not necessarily a negative thing. We are all leaders in one way or another: in university, as elsewhere, everyone is a learner, everyone is a teacher, everyone is a leader in some ways. It seems positive to recognize these qualities and help to develop them in others.

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Lixian Jin (PhD) is Chair Professor in Applied Linguistics and Dean of Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at City University of Macau, after being the Chair Professor of Applied Linguistics and the Head (2016-19) of the School of English at University of Nottingham Ningbo China and at British universities in the UK for 30 years. She has had many UG, PG and PhD graduates from different countries. With teams of text book writers, she has been an editor and author for three series of English Textbooks in China. One series is for *College English Intercultural Communication: Creative Reading, Creative Writing and Creative Communication* published by Macmillan and Shanghai Foreign Language and Education Press (SFLEP). The second and the third series are *Teachers' Books for New Standard College English* and *New Vision College English* published by Macmillan and Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press (FLTRP). Recently as a 'creative' translator, the series - *Wonderful Minds* with 45 English story books was published for kindergarten children in China by East China Normal University Press with Ai-English. She has been awarded research grants by funding authorities in the UK, EU, China; and led many international research teams to research on child language acquisition and young learners with dyslexia; language assessment tools for speech and language therapy, English language teaching; and intercultural communication in, education, leadership and business contexts. She has developed qualitative research methods – metaphor analysis and narrative analysis to explore insights from participants. Her over 200 publications focus on researching cultures of learning, intercultural communication, metaphor and narrative analysis, language disorder and bilingual clinical assessments. Her webpage is lixianjin.org.