

# *A Comparison of the Character, Target and Content of Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language and the Chinese Courses at Primary School*

Guo Lisha\*

Sichuan University

**Abstract:** This article examines the opinion that teaching Chinese as a foreign language (TCFL) is equivalent to teaching Chinese at primary school by analyzing the differences between the character, target and content of the two courses and reasons for their differences to provide theories and practical support for a more reasonable and effective teaching.<sup>①</sup>

**Keywords:** teaching Chinese as a foreign language, Chinese courses at primary school, the comparison

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Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) is an emerging academic discipline with tremendous future potential. Following the continual rise in the international standing and worldwide influence of the Chinese language, Confucius Institutes have been established worldwide and demands for expatriate teachers of CFL have surged. However, for a prolonged period the misunderstanding and bias against TCFL have led to an endless wave of opinions claiming that TCFL is equivalent to teaching Chinese at primary school.

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① In 2001 the Primary Chinese Language Teaching Syllabus was renamed Full-time Chinese Curriculum Standards of Compulsory Education. This paper retains the traditional “teaching syllabus” parlance.

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\* Guo Lisha, School of Overseas Education, Sichuan University.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Guo Lisha, School of Overseas Education, Sichuan University, Sichuan. E-mail: Lisag107@163.com

The teaching strategy of a course hinges on the course's character, target and content. Course syllabus will be used as the basis of comparison to summarize and demonstrate the similarities and differences between the character, target and content of CFL course and Chinese course at primary school.

### **The Character, Target and Content of Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language**

Teaching Chinese as a foreign language is the teaching of a second language that focuses on foreign learners (mostly adults) as teaching subjects and aims to cultivate proficiency in CFL among learners. From a macro point of view, TCFL belongs to the field of applied linguistics within linguistics; from a micro perspective, TCFL falls under foreign language teaching within the sphere of second language teaching.

Lyu Bisong (1986) pointed out that “the target of TCFL is to cultivate in students the proficiency to use the learned language in communication. During the process of the identification of cultivation targets and teaching requirements, selection of teaching contents and teaching methodologies, and formulation of pedagogic principles, the basis should always be for the sake of forming the necessary language communication proficiency in students to the maximal degree within the shortest period of time.” Fan Kaitai asserted that “Chinese communication proficiency includes systematic proficiency in the Chinese language, expressive proficiency in using appropriate Chinese, and adaptive proficiency in the culture of the Chinese language” (Fan, 1992). Thus, the cultivation of the student's communication ability is a particular emphasis in the teaching of CFL, which is characterized by applicability and practicality.

It was stipulated in the *Teaching Syllabus of Chinese for Foreign Students of Chinese Major in Higher Educational Institutions* (hereinafter referred to as the *Syllabus*) that the specialty “fosters all-around developed specialized person of Chinese language with good comprehensive quality and ability to adapt to the demand of modern international society.” Specific work requirements include contents in the following four aspects.

First, having good command of Chinese language and the communication skill in this language.

Second, mastering a systematic fundamental theories and knowledge of Chinese language.

Third, mastering the fundamental Chinese humanistic knowledge, being familiar with national and social culture of China.

Fourth, mastering the fundamental methods of literature and data searching, having the skill of doing elementary scientific research and practical working competence.

In these four aspects, the scientific research and actual work capacity was added to supplement the Chinese communication proficiency including systematic proficiency in the Chinese language, expressive proficiency in using appropriate Chinese, and adaptive proficiency in the culture of the Chinese language as proposed by Fan Kaitai. Surmising the intention of the *Syllabus*' formulators, I believe that this falls in line with the fact that the majority of teaching subjects of CFL are adults.

Comprehensive thinking and analytical abilities have already developed in adults, and language expressiveness and application are restricted to a certain extent because the contents being learned are in a second language. The correct pathway to learning a language is not to simply accept input. Instead the key is to summarize and make inductions, as articulated in the Chinese proverb “to give people a fish and you only provide them with one meal; to teach them to fish and they can benefit throughout their lives.” Thus it is necessary to instruct learners to master the basic methods for text searches and information inquiries to establish their preliminary scientific research and actual work proficiency in the process of TCFL, where the majority of teaching subjects are adults. The cultivation of such proficiency ought to exist throughout daily teaching behaviors.

However, due to the lack of an objective and quantified standard for proficiency assessment, quite a few scholars have proposed that the cultivation of the “linguistic sense” in foreign students should be the target or basic mission in TCFL. For instance, Zhao Chunli and Yang Caiying (2002), Zhou Jian (2003) and Zhang Wangxi (2007), among others. However, the definition for the term “linguistic sense” is a matter with neither unifying consensus in academic circles nor specific standards. For instance, Wang Shangwen believes that “linguistic sense” is the gestalt individual generates under the stimuli of the language subject, along with simultaneous decisions on correctness or incorrectness, authenticity or falseness, rightness or wrongness, and beauty or ugliness (Wang, 1995). It is a mindset that does not directly participate in action, but is instead replaced by unconsciousness, and it is a proficiency in language activity at the sensory level, as in “semi-conscious linguistic proficiency” (Wang, 1995), which returns linguistic sense to the “proficiency”, the original purpose of education. Liu Dawei (2003) held that “linguistic sense is the unconsciousness of language, and a language user might not recognize his or her mastery or usage of language. In reality, he or she did effectively use this language to achieve a goal.” Zhang Wangxi opined that “linguistic sense is the language user’s highly automated decision consciousness related to the specific internal associations between the formats, meanings and functions within a specific language system, and the manifestation of the language user’s deft linguistic behaviors in the usage of these specific internal associations,” and “specifically speaking, the basic missions in TCFL are: Revealing the linguistic sense system of native Chinese speakers as accurately as possible; use scientific and direct formats and methods to express the linguistic sense system of native Chinese speakers; establish a linguistic sense reference system that learners of Chinese as a second language may directly imitate; through aspects such as the composition and compilation of course materials, teaching in class and the generation of the language environment, endeavor to create mechanisms that correspond to the cultivation of linguistic sense, to better foster the Chinese linguistic sense in learners of Chinese as a second language” (Zhang, 2007).

In light of the above, although “linguistic sense” is defined variously within academic circles, there is a basic consensus that it has two features: One is the unconscious nature; and the other is instinctive judgment. There are three points that can be confirmed: First of all, just like “proficiency”, “linguistic sense” also lacks an objective and quantified standard for assessment; second, the establishment of linguistic sense could reflect to a certain degree the learner’s mastery of the corresponding language;

third, the attainment of linguistic sense is not realized without dedication, which is continuously accumulated and built up by the learner over the course of the learning process.

As a type of language education, the basic mission of TCFL is to enable learners to master the language. In the process of language learning, establishing a linguistic sense means that one has established a preliminary standard to judge and assess whether the language is applied suitably. The attainment of linguistic sense is founded on the training of listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation skills, and from this viewpoint, we could say that the basic mission of TCFL is to use the training of listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation skills to help students build up linguistic sense to achieve the goals of communication and preliminary scientific research.

The teaching contents in CFL classes include the following four aspects in accordance with stipulations in the *Syllabus*.

First, teaching of Chinese linguistic skills. Demonstrate and teach a combination of key elements of the Chinese language and related cultural contents and language knowledge, carry out training of specific Chinese listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation skills and other general skills, and gradually elevate students' Chinese linguistic proficiency and linguistic communication proficiency.

Second, teaching of Chinese linguistic knowledge. Through the teaching and training of Chinese linguistic knowledge, including Chinese pronunciation, lexicon, grammar, diction, written Chinese characters and basic linguistic knowledge, facilitate students to possess a comprehensive set of Chinese linguistic theoretical knowledge.

Third, teaching of knowledge about Chinese humanities and specific disciplines or professions. Through the systematic teaching of basic contents on knowledge about Chinese humanities (including an overview of China, Chinese politics, economy, literature, philosophy, history, geography, etc.), enable students to adequately learn about conditions in China, understand Chinese society and culture, and possess basic knowledge about Chinese humanities.

Fourth, teaching the processing of Chinese information in sports and computers and other aspects like a second foreign language. CFL is a course that focuses on the Chinese language as the learning subject. Therefore, from a macro point of view, teaching content includes the learning of knowledge of the language itself and the cultivation of linguistic proficiency; language and culture are inseparable, and thus the learning of culture should be included in the scope of learning. Meanwhile, the teaching of Chinese information processing, PE and Second Language is the teaching of necessary skills that would play a positive, auxiliary role in learning the language. Thus, configuring the teaching contents of CFL class as per the aspects mentioned above is rational and appropriate.

### **The Character, Target and Content of Teaching Chinese at Primary School**

Chinese course in primary school focuses on Chinese learners between the ages of around 7–13 years as teaching subjects, and is language teaching that aims to cultivate proficiency in learners that

speak Chinese as their native language. From a macro point of view, teaching Chinese at primary school belongs to the field of applied linguistics within linguistics; from a micro perspective, teaching Chinese at primary school falls under native language teaching within the sphere of language teaching.

In the 2011 version of the *Standards of Chinese Courses in Compulsory Education* (hereinafter referred to as “*Revised Edition*”), it was stipulated that a “Chinese course is a comprehensive and practical course for the learning and application of the Chinese language and words. The Chinese course in the compulsory education stage shall enable students to preliminarily learn to use the language and words of the motherland for exchanges and communications, absorb outstanding cultures of both China and abroad from both past and present, elevate the cultural sophistication in thoughts, and promote the spiritual development of oneself. The uniformity in the practical and humanistic attributes is the basic feature of the Chinese course.” “Course objectives should be designed based on the three aspects of knowledge and proficiency, process and method, and sentiment, attitude and value.” “Design of targets should underscore the holistic improvement in linguistic qualities and accomplishments.”

Since the primary school phase is the start of relatively systematic learning of a language, and a crucial stage in linguistic development in individuals, students’ preliminary mastery of the most basic tool—the Chinese language, naturally becomes the top priority in the Chinese course at this phase. In terms of emphasis on practicality, the missions of teaching primary Chinese can be explained in the following regards.

First, cultivation of linguistic proficiency. One of the main tasks of a Chinese class in primary school is to rely on the teaching of aspects like recognition of characters, reading, writing and oral communication to foster listening, speaking, reading, writing and general learning proficiency in students to form and fortify the foundation in students conducive to the establishment and enhancement in their linguistic proficiency and their study in other subject areas.

Listening, speaking, reading and writing are important formats for language-based communication and crucial methods for obtaining and processing information. The linguistic knowledge of pronunciation, lexicon and grammar may only be deftly mastered through understanding and general training in expressive skills. The four basic proficiencies of listening, speaking, reading and writing mutually affect each other and promote each other. From the cognition point of view, listening and reading are information input, while speaking and writing are information output. From the perspective of the course of language learning, the course of listening and reading is the conversion of external language into internal language, as in a course of comprehension and absorption; the course of speaking and writing meanwhile is the conversion of internal language into external language, as in a course of expression and application. Expression and application are contingent on the basis of comprehension and absorption, and general learning could only be realized upon the foundation of specific training in the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Thus, how to scientifically and appropriately combine listening, speaking, reading and writing in an organic manner to strengthen general learning proficiency has always been one of the top priorities in Chinese

class during the primary school stage.

The “*Revised Edition*” specifically pointed out the cultivation of linguistic sense, which is previously introduced and explained. The establishment and continual enhancement of linguistic sense could be actualized through continuous accumulation in daily life. Learning the language is also a vital method. By helping students learn about different styles and registers of the language, and deepen their understanding of the language, primary Chinese class plays an irreplaceable role in enabling students to gradually establish their linguistic sense during the course of actual language application.

Second, development of Chinese learning habits. Primary students are characterized by their strong ability to imitate and their large degree of moldability, thus this period is a prime window of opportunity to foster various kinds of positive learning habits in students. As a fundamental course in basic education, Chinese class in primary school plays a critical role in developing positive learning habits in students.

Compared with the *Standards of Chinese Courses in Compulsory Education (Trial Draft)* (hereinafter referred to as “*Trial Draft*”), the “*Revised Edition*” revised the original “experience the aesthetics of Chinese characters” to “experience the elegance of Chinese characters,” and added requirements such as “correct writing posture, positive writing habits.” Through these amendments, we can see the intention in the “*Revised Edition*” to emphasize the development of interest in recognizing Chinese characters and writing habits among students. The development of interest in recognizing Chinese characters among students is instrumental to the improvement and performance in character recognition ability, while the cultivation of writing habits in students is very necessary in this era when computer input has almost completely replaced handwriting.

Moreover, Chinese class could also help primary students develop positive habits such as reading, independent thinking, diligent writing, extracurricular reading and other beneficial habits, which are all immensely contributory to raising student initiative in learning, helping students discover suitable learning methods, and transforming passive learning into active learning.

Third, formation and improvement of humanistic qualities. German educator Leo Weisgerber asserted that the necessity of education should be superior to the teaching point of view, and native language education should shape each individual into persons with community characteristics, complete human qualities and capacity for independent thought and action (Weisgerber, 1967). German linguist Wilhelm von Humboldt also underscored cultivation of the human spirit and holistic education of the individual (Yao, 1988), and their opinions inadvertently coincide in the focus on the cultivation of “human quality”.

Weisgerber opined that the shaping of an individual may be divided into three levels, including teaching, upbringing and education. Correspondingly, the targets of native language classes could also be divided into expansion of knowledge, deepening of human qualities and formation of the individual.

When the dimension of value of humankind, value of community and value of the individual is



combined with the dimension of teaching, upbringing and education, Weisgerber summarized the tasks of native language classes into the two-dimensional chart below, known as the “basic schema for overall missions”.

Teaching of personal values	Teaching of community values	Teaching of humankind values
Upbringing about personal values	Upbringing about community values	Upbringing about humankind values
Education of personal values	Education of community values	Education of humankind values

If our analysis then takes into consideration that “uniformity in the practical and humanistic attributes is the basic feature of the Chinese courses” as mentioned in the “*Revised Edition*”. We can see that the expansion of knowledge hinges on the practical attributes of Chinese class while the deepening of human qualities and the formation of the individual are in line with the humanistic attributes. In the eyes of both Weisgerber and Humboldt, “humanistic attributes” trumped “practical attributes”.

With regards to the connotation of “humanities”, it is defined in the *Cihai* (large-scale dictionary and encyclopedia of standard Mandarin Chinese) as “humanities refer to the various cultural phenomena in human societies.” The “humanistic attribute” in Chinese courses chiefly refers to “humanistic spirit” or “humanistic thoughts”. At the core of this kind of thinking is the human, as in a human-first orientation, recognition of the value of humans, respect for the interests of the individual, and in particular highlight of spiritual interests. Specifically, in terms of teaching in Chinese class, only when teachers recognize the student as the main entity, respect and understand students, provide them with sufficient space, and express their dignity and value, would students live up to their full potential. The term “application” has been underlined time and time again in the preface of the “*Revised Edition*”, and it is evident that the formulators hope the repeated emphasis on “application” could help upend the instruction-oriented method in conventional primary Chinese class, to realize the transition to a student-oriented method with language application through actual practice. Due to the age of primary school students, the “humanistic attribute” of primary Chinese class is also manifested in helping students establish ethical standards, views on life, values, outlooks on the world and foster sound personal qualities. The thoughts and sentiments of philosophers and luminaries of the past could stimulate and touch students, continue to expand their views on nature, society and themselves, in turn allowing them to attain spiritual power during the course of which they may form and enrich their personal characters.

In light of the above, as native language education, the overall missions of primary Chinese class are, from micro to macro perspectives, the shaping of the individual, shaping of the society and shaping of humankind. The shaping of the individual in turn includes basic knowledge of the language, mastery of basic proficiencies and shaping of “human quality”. Basic knowledge of the language and mastery of basic proficiencies are the foundation, while the shaping of “human quality” is realized through continual reinforcements of the foundation.

The “*Revised Edition*” listed ten individual items with regards to contents of primary Chinese

class for further description. They are specific explanations of the three aspects of course objectives. In terms of knowledge and proficiency, there are cultivation of Chinese pronunciation, standard Chinese Mandarin, proficiency in the learning and reading of Chinese characters, writing proficiency, communication proficiency, and proficiency for the use of reference books and multimedia in assisting learning; process and method are primarily the mastery of methods for scientific thinking and methods for learning the language; sentiment, attitude and value include the fostering of ideological ethics and aesthetic tastes, spirit of innovation and spirit of cooperation, positive personal outlook, correct world views, values, cultural qualities and a passion for language and words.

## **Differences and Similarities Between the Two**

### **Similarities**

#### **Partial similarities in course nature and teaching objectives and tasks.**

The teaching of CFL and the teaching of primary Chinese both teach standard Chinese Mandarin as course content, and are both language teachings that aim to cultivate Chinese communication proficiency in the learners, thus are both characterized by practicality and applicability.

Language is a medium of culture, and language is inseparable from its culture. Thus the process of learning a language is at the same time a type of transmission of culture. As a time-honored language, Chinese is noted for its profound cultural sophistication and connotations. Cultivation targets and teaching contents in classes of CFL clearly stipulate “mastery of basic knowledge about the humanities of China and understanding about the conditions and social culture of China, possession of basic knowledge about Chinese humanities.” The term “culture” appeared in the “*Revised Edition*” a whopping 23 times, ample to prove the importance of “culture” in the teaching of Chinese in primary schools. The overall target and content in the teaching of primary Chinese also pointed out the objectives and tasks related to helping students “recognize the profundity and diversity in Chinese culture, care about contemporary culture and life, absorb nutrients from the distinguished cultures of humankind, and elevate cultural sophistication”, thus it is abundantly clear that the teaching of CFL and the teaching of primary Chinese are both language teaching associated with culture.

#### **Both focus on linguistic proficiency and linguistic communication proficiency in listening, speaking, reading and writing.**

The syllabus for teaching of CFL divides proficiency requirements of different levels of students into the two main categories of linguistic proficiency and linguistic communication proficiency, of which the former includes the four sub-categories of listening, speaking, reading and writing. The syllabus of teaching primary Chinese divides specific requirements for low-tiered students into the five aspects of recognition and writing of Chinese characters, reading, articulation through writing, oral communication and general learning. In these five aspects, other than general learning, the other four aspects could be understood as pertinent to listening, speaking, reading and writing. Recognition



and writing of Chinese characters and articulation through writing could be grouped under writing, reading obviously equates to reading, and oral communication is clearly related to speaking. Thus, the two are more or less the same in terms of categorization.

**Partial similarities in challenges and focal points in course content.**

The teaching of CFL and the teaching of primary Chinese are two different types of teaching of Chinese but are both developed from the foundations of traditional teaching of the Chinese language. The features in the Chinese language itself mean that the teaching contents in the two types of Chinese teaching share similar challenges and focal points. For instance, both emphasize the teaching of Chinese characters and stress reading aloud. Take corresponding learning stages for example. The syllabus for TCFL outlines requirements including reading short passages aloud and stressing the proper characters and sentences at reading speeds of no less than 120–140 characters per minute for first-level Grade One students, and reading short narratives and daily application-oriented texts at reading speeds of no less than 140–160 characters per minute for second-level Grade One students. Meanwhile, the syllabus for teaching primary Chinese outlines requirements including reading aloud textbook texts using correct, proficient and emotional Mandarin Chinese for students in the first phase of learning (Grade One and Grade Two). Clearly, both underscore the significance of “reading”.

Chinese characters are ideographs and it is difficult to guess a character’s pronunciation based on its visual form, which is further compounded by the often complex and numerous strokes in each character, as well as other features such as the substantial amount of similar-looking characters and homophones. Chinese characters are a daunting challenge for beginners, especially those from Europe and the US. Thus, the syllabi for both TCFL and teaching primary Chinese have listed detailed requirements in terms of Chinese characters. For example, the syllabus for TCFL outlines requirements for first-level Grade One students including mastery of 795 Level-1 Chinese characters and 993 Level-1 new words, mastery of Chinese strokes, sequence and writing rules, copying of Chinese characters at a speed of 15–17 characters per minute, dictation of single sentences or paragraphs (sentence groups) at a speed of 12–14 characters per minute, the composition of short passage with 150 characters or more within a single class session (50 mins), and a Chinese character writing accuracy rate of 90 percent or higher. For second-level Grade One students, requirements include mastery of the absolute majority of 1,491 Chinese characters and 2,704 new words, mastery of Chinese strokes, sequence and writing rules, copying of Chinese characters at a speed of 18–20 characters per minute, dictation of single sentences or paragraphs (sentence groups) at a speed of 14–16 characters per minute, the composition of short passages with 400 characters or more within two class session (100 mins in total), and a Chinese character writing accuracy rate of 90 percent or higher. For overall targets and contents, the syllabus for teaching primary Chinese stipulates demands for students including accurate, neat and orderly writing of Chinese characters at certain speeds. For the first phase of learning, specific targets and contents list Chinese character recognition and writing as an independent item, proposing the need to cultivate in students the interest to learn Chinese characters, and the yearning and active attitude to learn to read and write Chinese characters, and requiring students to have the ability to read around 1,600 commonly used Chinese characters including the capacity to write

about 800 of these, mastery of the basic strokes and frequently used radicals in Chinese characters, and the capability to use hard-tipped writing instruments to write Chinese characters according to stroke sequence and proper spacing between different strokes and components. In addition, other elements include preliminary appreciation of the beauty in the form of Chinese characters, develop sound writing habits, correct writing posture, and compliant, upright and neat writing, as well as to learn to read Chinese characters independently, and to use *pinyin* pronunciation to read and read Chinese characters. In light of the above, the two types of Chinese teaching have quantified requirements for recognizing and writing characters, with the stroke, stroke sequence and writing rules of Chinese characters playing a central role in the learning of Chinese characters.

## Differences

### TCFL with more quantified and fine-tuned targets.

Relative to the syllabus for teaching primary Chinese, the syllabus for TCFL is noted for its more quantified and specific teaching requirements. For instance, first-level Grade One students are required to listen to short passages within 400 characters, not involving new words or new grammar, at a speed of 160–180 characters per minute, and achieve a correct rate of understanding of 80 percent or higher. Students are required to listen to such passages at least 50 minutes each week, and at least 12 hours within half a year. Students are also required to be able to read aloud at a speed of no fewer than 120–140 characters per minute, and speak at a speed of no fewer than 100–120 characters per minute. Students are required to perform extracurricular dialogue practice of at least 50 minutes each week, and at least 12 hours within half a year. Students are also required to read dialogues or short passages with no new grammar and fewer than 3 percent non-essential new words at a reading speed of 90–110 characters per minute and achieve an accuracy rate of understanding of 85 percent or higher. For articles with reading speed difficulty slightly less than or similar to the aforementioned articles, reading speed should be 150 characters per minute, the rate of understanding should be 70 percent or higher, and the volume of reading within half a year should be no less than 25,000 characters. Additional requirements include copying 15–17 Chinese characters per minute and achieving a dictation rate of single sentences or paragraphs (sentence groups) of 12–14 characters per minute, and writing short passages with more than 150 characters within a single class session (50 mins). The accuracy rate for writing Chinese characters should be 90 percent or higher, correct sentence structure should be 80 percent or above, and correct punctuation should be 80 percent or above. Short passage writing with a cumulative total of more than 3,000 characters should be completed within half a year.

The syllabus for TCFL has very explicit and detailed requirements in terms of listening, speaking, reading and writing with every aspect containing quantified requirements with regards to speed and accuracy rates, and the aspects of listening and speaking even specify the amount of practice mandated each week and every half year. The aspect of reading is further broken down into reading aloud, reading and intensive reading, while writing speeds are subdivided into the speed of copying

Chinese characters, dictation speed for single sentences or paragraphs (sentence groups), and the writing speed for short passage within a class session. Meanwhile, the correct rates in writing are also detailed, including the three sub-categories of Chinese characters, sentence structure and punctuation. Quantitative requirements for the first phase of learning in the syllabus for teaching primary Chinese only cover the four sub-categories of number of characters read, number of characters wrote, list of texts memorized and total volume of reading. Students are required to recognize around 1,600 Chinese characters, of which roughly 800 should be wrote, memorize 50 distinguished poems, and reach an extracurricular reading volume of no less than 50,000 characters.

After analyzing the disparities, We believe that the differences arise from the pattern of the cognitive abilities in children. Psychological research studies point out that lower- and mid-tiered children think in terms of imagery and only after the ages of 10 to 12 would the logical mindset see relatively quick development. The cultivation of words recognition and writing skills at the early phase is indivisible from image-based thinking. The development of reading proficiency can roughly be divided into the three phases of reading for accumulation, reading for comprehension and critical reading, and the majority of primary school students belongs to the first phase. The pathway for accumulation is a substantial volume of input until a high degree of familiarity or even memorization of the text is attained. Thus the syllabus specially puts forth quantified requirements in terms of number of characters read, number of characters wrote, total volume of reading and list of texts memorized.

#### **Differences in content in the teaching of CFL and the teaching of Chinese in primary school.**

The overall teaching contents in the syllabus for TCFL include the following four areas: Teaching Chinese linguistic skills, Chinese linguistic knowledge, knowledge about Chinese humanities and general knowledge related to specific disciplines or professions, processing Chinese information in sports and computers, second language and other aspects. Of these, the teaching of Chinese linguistic skills requires linguistic elements, linguistic knowledge and relevant cultural contents, as well as listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation skills and other general skills. As for teaching Chinese linguistic knowledge, other than pronunciation and lexicon, grammar is also taught. Teaching primary Chinese does not involve the specific skills of translation and grammar.

The overall targets and contents in teaching primary Chinese encompass knowledge and proficiency, process and method, and highlight cultivation of student sentiments, attitudes and values. Take for instance the cultivation of patriotism, collectivism, socialist thoughts and ethics, and healthy aesthetics and sentiments in students, as well as development of personal character, cultivation of an innovative and cooperative spirit, and gradual formation of a positive outlook on life and an appropriate world view and values. Also stipulated are the cultivation of sentiments for language and words that show patriotic feelings for the motherland, and the gradual development of a scientific orientation that seeks pragmatism and truth, among other requirements. Specific requirements for the first phase of schooling explicitly stated the need to allow students to attain a preliminary sense of the beauty of Chinese characters, orient students toward a beautiful psyche through reading, guide students to care about nature and life, enable students to foster their own feelings and opinions about persons and events of interest, and develop in

students the inclination to communicate with others. Also stipulated are reading aloud children's songs, children's poems and simple ancient poems to help students expand their imaginations, obtain preliminary emotional sensations and relish the elegance and beauty of words.

I believe that the cause may be analyzed from two standpoints. First, the teaching subjects for primary Chinese class are students of a rather young age, and students in the first phase of schooling are children aged 6 to 7 that just enrolled in primary school from kindergarten. Second, the content of primary Chinese class is taught in the mother tongue. Thus training of the specialized skill of "translation" and grammatical content are omitted. Of course, there are opposite views with regards to this situation. For example, scholars point out that criteria in English courses in the US, ranging from pre-school classes to Grade 12, mandate students to master corresponding knowledge on grammar, and adding: "hope to ascertain the 'pattern' of the academic discipline of Chinese, rely on diligence, reconstruct the 'pedigree' of Chinese linguistic knowledge, grasp the core factors in Chinese education, explore the 'pillars' of the discipline and establish the 'Chinese language' academic discipline system"(Chao, 2012). "In terms of course content, it is necessary to standardize the scope of learning of the mother tongue, which generally encompasses linguistic knowledge, cultural knowledge and analytical skills, specifically referring to the training of listening, speaking, reading and writing, along with holistic improvement in general linguistic qualities" (Jin, 2011, pp. 84-89).

The mentality of young children is not yet fully developed, and the benchmarks for their judgment on what is right and what is wrong are relatively easily swayed by external influences and are characterized by fluctuations and inconsistencies, which means that their values might differ widely. As such, supplementing teaching contents in the emotional and attitudinal areas is necessary. With regards to this point, the new curriculum standard published in 2011 contains a multitude of explanations and manifestations. The "preface" segment underscores that Chinese courses have to "cement the foundation conducive to the formation of the appropriate world view, outlook on life, values, sound personality and healthy character in students," and thereafter the "basic principles of class" segment explicates "value orientation," stating the "need to call to attention to the impact and influence that Chinese courses have on the thoughts and emotions of students, pay attention to the value orientation of course contents, inherit and promote the outstanding cultural and revolutionary traditions of China, and embody the leading function of the core value system of socialism." Furthermore, the targets and contents of this learning phase also show the prevalence of emotional and attitudinal education in the four linguistic proficiencies of "listening", "speaking", "reading" and "writing", as well as their integration in the various steps of class execution.

Although the overall targets of TCFL and teaching primary Chinese both include the requirement for students to master the processes and methods of learning, these requirements differ in levels. The former refers to "basic methods for text searches and information inquiries," and the ultimate objective here is to enable students to "possess preliminary scientific research and actual work proficiency" through mastery of basic methods; meanwhile the latter emphasizes the "cultivation of sound Chinese learning habits" and "learning of scientific analytical methods," and the final goal here is to motivate

students to “actively carry out explorative learning, stimulate the imaginative and innovative potentials in students, and allow students to learn and use Chinese in practice.” The different levels of the aforesaid requirements are due to the differences in the teaching subjects. The subjects of the former are adults, which because of their age have developed completely independent learning proficiency, and have developed relatively fixed models and methods based on the learned and mastered mother tongue suitable to each individual. Thus, once they make the successful transition from learning the mother tongue to learning the target language it is only a matter of time before they reach the target of the possession of preliminary scientific research and actual work proficiency. The teaching subjects of the latter meanwhile are primary school students who are still developing their learning skills, and their learning models and methods are still being continuously explored and summarized. Thus the development of their learning skills, establishment of effective models and methods necessitate appropriate guidance. Thus, the requirements in the learning process and methods of primary Chinese courses first underscore the realization that the learning target is habit cultivation, to stimulate the potentials in students and actualize the goal of application through practice, which falls in line with the pragmatic characteristic of the Chinese course as a practical course.

In addition to listening, speaking, reading and writing, the phasic targets and contents of primary Chinese also include comprehensive learning. Take phase one learning for instance, contents in this area include three aspects.

First, interest in surrounding objects and events, inquiries about contents of interest, and joint discussions in combination of extracurricular reading.

Second, a combination of learning in Chinese class with observations of nature, and the expression of one’s observations and thoughts through oral, graphic, textual or other methods.

Third, passionate participation in campus and community activities. In combination with activities, expression of what one has heard and seen and one’s ideas through oral, graphic, textual or other methods.

The first aspect and the “passionate participation in campus and community activities” in the third aspect may be categorized as the sentiment, attitude and value portion of the overall target. The remaining elements may be summed up as the sub-categories of “speaking” and “writing” in the phasic targets and contents.

The listing of comprehensive learning as an independent component in the phasic targets and contents is indicative to the course designers’ intention to associate the singular linguistic skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing, and on top of this foundation combine the four and elevate them to a higher “comprehensive” status.

In light of the above, although the course of TCFL and teaching primary Chinese are both founded upon modern Chinese Mandarin as the teaching content, they differ vastly in course nature, targets, missions and content. These differences dictate that the teaching strategies will vary markedly, thus teachers ought to fully recognize the aforementioned differences and adopt corresponding and appropriate teaching strategies in order to achieve the desired and expected teaching outcomes.



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