
Chinese Basics for Adult Elective Beginners

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Abstract

At Nagoya University of Commerce and Business, among the students who take Chinese language courses, there are more who just want to have a “taste” of Chinese than serious Chinese learners. The majority of our students only study Chinese from one textbook during their college years. A real mastery of Chinese will not happen after a two to four credit course; however, by combining targeted materials with age-appropriate teaching methods, we can help students learn suitable content and language skills of Chinese in both quantity and quality. Three goals of teaching adults Chinese basics are: to introduce a simple but complete structure of the Chinese language; to cultivate a feel for Chinese; and to establish a foundation for self-learning or future learning.

Keywords: *Chinese basics, Adult elective beginner, FOCC (the first and the only Chinese course for the time being), Complete basics*

Introduction

The content of the first and the only Chinese course for the time being (FOCC) has to be basic. Chinese basics for adult electives are neither the same as those for children, due to the variations in developmental stages, cognitive abilities, and social-lingual environments; nor the same as those taught in the first Chinese course within a curriculum for Chinese majors or minors. Children learn simple words in age-appropriate forms such as children’s songs in their FOCC. Chinese majors or minors may focus on one aspect of Chinese language depending on the curriculum or their teacher’s teaching methodology. Chinese basics for adult FOCC are conveyed over a limited time span; yet the content has to be complete enough to cover the basics for further learning. This brings challenges to decisions about teaching materials and teaching methods. Although there is no specific research on Chinese basics for adult FOCC, studies have supported the background discussion on this topic. The factors for creating a course of Chinese basics for adult FOCC are the desired characteristics of the course, the learners, and the linguistic environment.

Foreign Language and Second Language Acquisition

Ellis (2007) distinguishes foreign language learning from second language learning. Both programs do not take place in natural settings but educational settings, which are defined as settings “where the target language (TL) is taught as a subject only and is not commonly used as a medium of communication outside the classroom.” Learners in both programs have no or minimal contact with the TL outside the language

classroom. The targets for both a foreign language (for example, Japanese classes in the United States) and a second language (for example, ‘ESL’ classes in a francophone area of Canada) are not native-like speakers. But in a second language classroom, native-like cultural and pragmatic competence is more of a high priority than in a foreign-language classroom (Nayar, 1997, in Ellis, 2007). The target of a second language is to train students to be “competent bilinguals” rather than native-speakers.

In addition to the two types of non-native language learning mentioned above, there is a third one: learning a new language in the TL speaking country (for example, Chinese classes in China for foreigners). Students have many opportunities to contact with the TL outside the classroom while being on campus or on streets, yet few of them became “native-speakers”. The distinction between foreign language and second language is mainly based on curriculums. Chinese courses for language majors can be considered as second language teaching whereas Chinese elective course, as foreign language teaching.

Adult Learners and Child Learners

Whether children learn languages faster than adults or vice versa is either unanswerable or dependent on the circumstances. Due to the different stages of physical and cognitive development that children and adults are at, there are certain linguistic elements that children learn faster than adults. They are based on arguments such as: children are so immersed in the language; they learn vocabulary faster (Graceffo, 2010). There are also certain linguistic elements that adults learn faster than children, based on arguments such as: adults can study on their own because they have discipline, motivation, and focus. This is to say that children learn faster than adults in native speaking environments, while adults learn faster than children in formal and educational environments. That adults progress faster than their child counterparts is attributable to their background knowledge and learning experiences. For example, after a 40-hour English course, child learners would have only learned those sentences with three or four words, whereas adult learners would have studied more complicated sentences and gained an ability to translate them into L1. There are others who believe that adults do learn faster than children, however, children eventually catch up and surpass adults in ultimate attainment, especially in pronunciation and aspects of grammar (Graceffo, 2010).

Because the concepts constantly are altered, the discussions on the topic sometimes go around in circles, revolving on two types of comparisons: between child native language (NL) and adult TL acquisition, or between child TL and adult TL acquisition. A common phenomenon is that supporters of the “children learn faster” theory often provide arguments within a comparative framework between child NL and adult TL learners, or that supporters of the “adults learn faster” theory often provide arguments within a comparative framework between child TL and adult TL learners. A logical comparison is based on a logical premise. Since children and adults learn the TL in very different ways with their respective strengths, the comparison can only be done specifically and relatively. Three factors have to be taken into consideration in comparing the strengths between child and adult TL learners: 1) the linguistic environments they are in; 2) the content they learn first; and 3) the way they learn. These are the three dimensions of a course for “Chinese Basics”.

Acquisition and Learning

Children acquire a language rather than learn it. The difference between “acquisition” and “learning” was thoroughly discussed by Krashen. According to Krashen (1988), there are two independent systems of second language performance: subconscious language acquisition and conscious language learning. Language acquisition requires meaningful interaction in the TL — natural communication. Acquirers do not need to have a conscious awareness of the “rules” they possess, and may self-correct on the basis of a “feel for grammar”. Children acquire both their first and second languages in that way. Language learning is the

product of formal instruction and it comprises a conscious process guided by a learner's conscious knowledge of the language such as grammar rules (Schütz, 2007). It helps learners come to "the correct mental representation of the linguistic generalization" (Krashen, 1988). According to the Monitor hypothesis of Krashen, adults need both systems for developing ability in second languages. It implies that no matter in which linguistic environments children acquire languages whereas the conscious learning, as a Monitor, alters "the output of the acquired system", and improves its accuracy in adult second language learning (1988).

The differences between children and adults in learning TL are also related to the characteristics of their linguistic environments and social activities. The comparisons often put child and adult TL learners in different linguistic environments: children are in a natural, informal, or immersive linguistic environment whereas adults in an artificial, formal, and foreign linguistic environment. The length of children's natural exposure to the TL is usually many times as much of the artificial exposure adult TL learners get in a formal linguistic environment. More importantly, there are differences between children's natural linguistic environment (NLE) and the adults' one. The NLE of children mirrors their daily life. The linguistic exposures to them, which include vocabulary and expressions, are mostly practical ones at a low linguistic level that children can easily remember and use with their strength in memorization. Whereas the NLE that adults are in can be related to their daily life, but the language exposed to them is often above their linguistic level, and too difficult for them to acquire.

The logical comparisons should start by putting both child and adult TL learners within the same context of either a formal or an informal linguistic environment without prior knowledge of that language. The focuses of adult FOCC include: 1) initiating the course differently from one for children; 2) choosing teaching materials for adults to learn the basics; and 3) conducting the course for adults to acquire as well as to learn. Thus the purpose of this article is to discuss the differences between child and adult language learning with a focus on how to help adults to learn language more efficiently in an artificial and formal linguistic environment. The research framework is within an adult FOCC of 4 credits at about 56 class periods. In order to bring out learners' strengths, teaching is the decisive factor and involves creating a suitable linguistic environment, choosing targeted materials, and using an "age-appropriate foreign language teaching" method (Resnick, 2006). Thus, "Chinese Basics" implies not only the contents of the course or language materials, but also the linguistic environment in the classroom, and the interaction between students and a native-speaking teacher, or among students themselves.

Initiating Adult Chinese Learning

According to the definitions of foreign language and second language, the FOCC is not a second language course but a foreign language course. It is unlikely that the first course of Chinese as a foreign language will bring students native-like cultural and pragmatic competence. While the target of a second language or a language major is to reach the level of competent bilingualism, the target of a foreign language or a language elective is to master the complete basics of the TL. Students learn basic and genuine Chinese that can be applied to simple practices and be built upon for further learning.

Rod Ellis (1984, in Ipek, 2009) outlines three developmental stages of language learning: the silent period, formulaic speech, and structural and semantic simplification. In the initial stage, learners listen to the language and build a competence in listening. But it could be a stage of incomprehension due to the incomprehensible input and learners' tendency to intake everything. At the stage of formulaic speech, expressions are learned as unanalysable wholes and employed on particular occasions without an understanding of the language structure. At the third stage, learners apply structural simplifications and omit grammatical functors, and apply semantic simplifications to omit content words. Should the road map of the FOCC follow the pattern of developmental sequences? The three stages of developmental learning

cover important elements of input and output for language learning, and advance students' competence in listening, speaking, and grammar. However, there are two factors that hinder a two to four credit course to follow the conventional order. First, the duration of the FOCC does not allow learners to go through all three stages at a normal pace. Second, students of the FOCC are adults who are learning a foreign language not in a TL environment. Their silent period is among peers and a native-speaker teacher who is the only resource of TL input. Considering these two factors, the FOCC should follow an opposite order of developmental sequences: structural and semantic simplification, formulaic speech, and the silent period. First, according to the conventional order, the silent period requires a lot of time to achieve a result in foreign language learning. This is suitable for children who learn a language in immersion or submersion settings. Also it can be adjusted to fit a language major program for adults, in which students take a language course nearly every day. However, such a method is not applicable for a single foreign language course. Second, when it starts from the stage of structural and semantic simplification, the course introduces students the basic language structures and commonly used vocabulary, and students can produce simple sentences with errors. However, when they go through the other two stages, students will enhance their understanding in structure and semantics through more exposure to expressions and applications of the language. Third, with this order, when the learners reach the third stage of the silent period, what they hear is at least a mixture of comprehensible and incomprehensible input. In this case, the silent period is not pure silence, but partially silence and partially production that combines what they have learned, and improves their listening comprehension.

"Chinese" is a L2 Chinese textbook for children widely used overseas (Jia, 2006). It has 12 volumes that can be used as a textbook for a 24-credit course. Each volume has 12 lessons designed for semesters of 13 or 14 weeks. The first 6 lessons of Volume I teach no grammar rules but vocabulary in riddles and children's songs with many pictures. The new words include numbers, different parts of the human body, the natural environment such as rivers and mountains, directions and simple verbs, and natural phenomenon such as wind. These words are visual and familiar to children. They are easy to understand, but limited in quantity. The content of Volume I and Volume II together is equivalent to a textbook for a 4-credit course, but the vocabulary from these two volumes contains less than 300 words. Starting from lesson 7 of Volume I, each lesson covers one grammar point. The grammar points covered only include a small part of level-A Chinese formulated by the Office of Chinese Language in China (Hanban). In conclusion, as a L2 Chinese textbook, "Chinese" teaches students limited vocabulary and sentences in the forms of riddles and nursery rhymes that are suitable for kids to understand, imitate, and acquire in situations familiar to them. However, there are no grammatical interpretations but drills in the textbook. It is not suitable for an adult FOCC. First, riddles and rhymes can raise children's interest in learning Chinese, but they are not age-appropriate or practical to adults. Second, lacking grammatical explanations hinders students from learning by themselves through reviewing and deducing, which are the ways adults learn. Third, the grammar points in the textbook is not selected according to the levels of difficulty; the untaught grammar elements often appear in order to meet the need of the texts. Children usually do not ask grammar questions, but adults do. So the teacher has to explain the new grammar elements that will be taught in later lessons.

Chinese textbooks for child beginners and child FOCC learners have much in common. Both of them have to focus on pronunciation and simple communication, consist of words and rhythms familiar to children, and be easy to imitate. Children are good at mastering authentic pronunciation with a strong sense of a language in riddles and rhythms. They learn from play, and their learning has to be more visual and aural than cognitive. The words and sentences are simple and age-appropriate, but situations are limited, and difficult to be applied in other contexts. It is not likely that children will understand the whole grammar system of a language after one course, or learn more complicated content on their own afterwards. The content and the level of a children's first language course have to match their interests, knowledge and

cognitive stage. “Kids never come in and ask for a lesson on a particular point of language” (Graceffo, 2010). However, Chinese textbooks for adult beginners or adult FOCC learners can be very different. The beginning Chinese textbook in a serial can focus more on either grammar and writing, listening and speaking, or communicative ability. It depends on the theoretical orientation of the curriculum and the teaching methodology. If a teacher applies the grammar-translation approach, with which “vocabulary is taught in the form of isolated word lists”, and “little or no attention is given to pronunciation” (Mora, 2010), he/she will choose a textbook that focuses on grammar instruction so that students can put words together, and understand the meanings of sentences by translating the TL into the mother tongue. If a teacher applies the audio-lingual method, with which “skills are sequenced: listening, speaking, reading and writing are developed in order”, and “great importance is given to precise native-like pronunciation” (Mora, 2010), he/she will choose a textbook that focuses on phrases and drills with tapes, visual aids, and language lab use so that students can mimic, memorize, and make utterances rapidly. Teachers decide what to teach first according to his/her theories and practices. The other important content will be taught in other courses in the serial. Ultimately, for adult FOCC, the content has to be basic, and to avoid variation due to teachers’ preferences for any particular teaching methods.

The concept of “Chinese Basics” in this article implies that the teaching content is decided according to the developmental characteristics of adult foreign language learning. The contents are age-appropriate and allow adult learners to get into the door quickly, while ultimately mastering the basic linguistic elements for a solid foundation in the Chinese language. The Chinese basics for adult learners in their FOCC should incorporate two considerations. First, through the course, students understand Chinese as a language different from other languages in terms of its phonetic system, most commonly used vocabulary, basic grammar rules in both morphology and syntax, and character writing. Second, through the course, students establish a foundation for future learning with their cognitive ability of self-study. The first Chinese course for children can only cover the age-appropriate vocabulary, oral drills, and almost no grammar rules at all. But the adult FOCC has to be a complete course that covers important elements from every aspect of Chinese language, although it has limitations in quality and quantity.

Child foreign language learners are more ready to be immersed in the language due to the natural context and linguistic level of natural exposure to them. The situation in adult foreign language learning is very different. First, it is difficult to create a NLE for adult learners so that they can learn the language in an automatic or subconscious way. NLEs for adults and children are different in its content and linguistic level. As mentioned above, the language exposure to children are usually related to their daily life; they can play with peers using simple linguistic elements that they can easily understand and mimic. These exposures are repeated so frequently that children can gradually apply new language patterns on their own with little accent. Children connect words with objects, and say sentences without thinking of grammar rules. They correct their language mistakes by imitating their teachers or sensing the natural order of the language. In some way, they learn a language in a NLE faster than in a formal environment. The most common and natural exposures to adults in the country of the TL include daily greetings, news, meeting participation, and conversations with colleagues. Except daily greetings, the linguistic elements are more complex, not repeated, not practical or applicable in other occasions, difficult to mimic, and easy to forget. Second, it is difficult for adult foreign language learners to acquire a foreign language when they have been trained in a conscious way of learning, and have the generalizations of their first language. Lincoln (2009) distinguishes that the process of learning the NL is taken in by a *Tabula Rasa* whereas the process of learning a foreign language is taken within the paradigm of the first language. The similarities and dissimilarities of different languages in areas of phonetics, lexicology, syntax, and semantics bring positive transfer as well as negative transfer of learners’ NL. Third, adult foreign language learning starts with simple grammar rules and vocabulary, but they also learn some age appropriate words and sentences with

translation. It brings challenges to apply a subconscious way of teaching. Deciding Chinese basics for adult learners involves how to avoid making the FOCC a complete learning course or a conscious process, and how to create sub-environments of acquisition within a formal linguistic environment. Fourth, the adult FOCC can be much more difficult and have much more content than a corresponding children's course. Adults can easily understand the meaning of the TL by linking it with the knowledge they have in their NL. Their understanding in grammar and vocabulary enables them to learn more sentences of the same type, and new grammar rules related to what they have learned or similar to those of their NL with positive transfer.

Now comes the question of how to create an adult FOCC. It is unlikely for adults to be in a NLE for TL acquisition even in the country of the TL. The language materials adults encounter are usually initial elements within the grammar system of the language. Adults are more used to cognitive learning, and intend to have a morphemic, morphological, or syntactical way of thinking about grammatical functions of words and sentences. Chinese basics for adult FOCC have to comprehensively cover various Chinese language skills. They have to include elements indicating the logical beginning of the Chinese language, such as Chinese writing and pronunciation based on grammar and phonic rules. However, the competence of a language cannot be artificially divided into different parts. By learning a language as a whole at the very beginning, students not only understand the intrinsic structure of the language, but also have the basics for future development in different skills. With these basics, the course provides an environment for adults to learn as well as to acquire the TL.

Teaching Materials for Adults: Ground, Bricks and Tiles, and Frame

Adult language learning combines the characteristics of language learning and adult learning. The target group of this research consists neither of children nor of elders but young adults. The target learning abilities are of language, not those of physics or mathematics. Mankind has learning abilities in perception, cognition, and motion. Each of the age groups has its respective strengths that affect the learning habits and abilities of that group. In addition, in order to reach the learning goals, students have to apply learning abilities according to the content and the learning strategies of that subject. Researches have concluded that adults are motivated to learn for the money they are paid, and for the purpose of improving employment opportunities or to travel (Graceffo, 2010).

Language ability consists of various skills related to our perceptions and cognition. Research indicates, "except in the area of pronunciation, adults were far superior second language learners than children" (Graceffo, 2010). First, adults have a strong ability to learn grammar due to their logical thinking and linguistic knowledge. The fact that adults already are able to read in their NL helps them to understand the grammatical parts, such as subject, predicate, and object, and the functions and positions of those grammatical parts in sentences based on adults' awareness of similarities and dissimilarities between their TL and NL (Zhu, 2011). They are able to understand grammar rules and apply these rules to the content uncovered before. It only took minutes to teach adults past tense or future tense although they have to spend several hours practicing and memorizing them. Later they spent much more time to apply them. In contrast, "you can't teach tenses to children in minutes" (Graceffo, 2010). Second, adults are also more interested in reading in a broader range of topics such as current events and foreign cultures.¹ With the appropriate background knowledge and experiences, adults can understand nearly any vocabulary they learn. They can learn as many words and phrases as teachers introduce, which helps them to understand more complicated texts. A motivated adult Chinese learner can have a vocabulary of four thousand words with a few courses.

1 <http://efffrog.com/blog/myth-children-learn-languages-faster-than-adults/>, 5-8-2011.

“How many Chinese words does a non-Chinese child under six know?” (Graceffo, 2010)

Ellis (2007) covers that “success in learning a language in a foreign language classroom may depend on to what extent the learners see the language playing a role in whatever identity they wish to construct for themselves”. A majority of adult learners will not reach this consciousness in their FOCC. However, the course teacher needs to thoughtfully choose the teaching materials and purposefully design a learning setting. Considering pertinence, qualitative scope, and quantification standards, Lincoln (2004b) identifies five factors for choosing teaching materials: time length, specialty of student body, qualitative scope, quantification standards, and quantity of practice and exercises. The student body for that research is of Chinese majors, whereas the student body for this research is of Chinese electives. The five factors are still within consideration for choosing teaching materials, but the outcomes are only related to concrete and reachable goals for adult FOCC. In other words, what students learned from this course will cover the basics for them to construct the whole language for themselves and to lay a foundation for the future learning. The key words to choosing the teaching materials for adult FOCC are basic, simple, and complete. The FOCC does not expect to complete the construction of Chinese language “building”, but to set up a “ground” (basic grammar rules) and a “frame” (TL environment for acquisition and learning) with as many “bricks and tiles” (words and phrases) as possible.

The word “frame” here means a TL environment for acquisition and learning as well as the way of the “ground” being laid and the “bricks and tiles” being put. There has been much research supporting the following two hypotheses that are related to the two linguistic environments: 1) an informal or natural environment can be efficiently utilized by the adult second language learners; and 2) formal study or an artificial environment, or its essential characteristics, is significantly more efficient than informal exposure in increasing the second language proficiency of adults. Either of the two hypotheses can find support from various research. For example, one argument for hypothesis one is that “motivated second language students are able to provide themselves with the essential ingredients of formal instruction without going to class” (Krashen, 1981). Research also indicates “more instruction means higher proficiency, while more exposure does not necessarily mean more proficiency” (Krashen, 1981). A simple but self-evident example would be in a comparison between an adult who worked in a TL speaking country for four years with no formal learning environment and a college student who majors in the same language for four years without any exposure to a natural environment of the TL. The premise is that the objects of this comparison are two adults without any learning experiences of that language, with similar intelligence and motivation, and spent the same amount of time in different language learning environments: one in an informal linguistic environment, and the other in a formal linguistic environment. In average, a college language major graduate should be able to master the basic skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing of the TL. But an adult who does not have any background knowledge of that language will lack the linguistic elements to be interactive in an informal environment as children do.

It is obvious that motivated students can learn a foreign language in either a formal linguistic environment or an informal linguistic environment. But in which environment do adults learn more efficiently? What language skills can be obtained most efficiently in a formal environment for adults, and which language skills in an informal environment? For adult language learners, which roadmap or which language priority leads to an efficient learning process in terms of the learning orders of oral, listening, grammar, reading, or writing skills in either of the two linguistic environments? As mentioned above, the linguistic elements in a natural, informal learning environment are too difficult for adult language beginners. Without formal instruction, an adult learner will not automatically become fluent in a TL even after many years in the TL country. Each language appears as a set of pronunciations with special meanings, and is symbolized by a group of letters in different orders according to its grammatical rules. Without an understanding of some basic grammatical rules and basic vocabulary, there will be no connection between audio or visual

exposures of the TL and the proficiency of that language. It would not be a learning process of a language system but an exposure to a set of meaningless phones and tones. A formal linguistic environment is necessary to an adult language learner. Also, it is more efficient to start with grammar and vocabulary according to the cognitive ability and the NL knowledge of adult learners.

Zhu (2011) suggests teaching Japanese adults “Formula + Vocabulary” in the FOCC. Based on the characteristics of adult foreign language learning in general and Japanese adults’ learning Chinese in particular, “Chinese for All Purposes” (Zhu, 2008) was compiled in the structure of “Formula + Vocabulary”, which introduces a simple but complete grammar system of Chinese language and a substantial volume of practical and age-appropriate vocabulary. It is a textbook especially designed for FOCC adult students, particularly for Japanese learners. The book covers majority of A-level grammar points and 80% of A-level words stipulated by the Hanban (Zhu, 2011). The so-called “a simple but complete Chinese grammar system”, or the term of “ground” used in this article, includes six basic grammatical parts of Chinese sentences, their orders in sentences, and the typical sentences they form. The basic grammar parts and their conventional positions in sentences are introduced as different sentence types from “Subject + Predicate” to “Attribute + Subject + Adverbial Modifier + Predicate + Complement + Attribute + Object”. Meanwhile, a large amount of vocabulary, or the “bricks and tiles”, are introduced in groups such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, pronouns, adverbs, auxiliary words, and auxiliary verbs. Since words in the same group are in the same position in most cases, and play the same grammatical roles in sentences, it is not difficult for adult learners to use words they just learned to make the same type of sentences. Applying the format of “Formula + Vocabulary” in the FOCC, adult students can go through the first stage of structural and semantic simplifications smoothly and efficiently; more ready to understand various expressions in the second stage of formulaic speech; and build competence in the silent period. If a student can read the word and know its function in the sentence, he/she would more likely recognize the word while hearing it, which helps him/her to catch some points in listening. The “Formula + Vocabulary” method not only enables adult Chinese learners go through three stages in a short trip within an educational setting of the FOCC, but also helps students to establish a foundation for understanding Chinese morphology and semantics for the future learning.

An appropriate textbook compiles the “bricks and tiles” of Chinese basic words and rules on a “ground” of grammatical structure. However, the ground, bricks and tiles do not necessarily lead to the frame of a big and strong building. Teaching methods are the keys to the quality of language frame, on which to develop a language building.

Teaching Adults for Learning and Acquisition

Ellis (2005) gives ten principles of language instruction. A two-to-four-credit course cannot take all these aspects into consideration. However, some of them are applicable to the FOCC, such as to ensure that learners to develop both a rich repertoire of formulaic expressions and a rule-based competence, and focus predominantly on meaning and form; to provide extensive L2 input and opportunities for output and interaction; to take account of individual differences in learners; and to assess learners’ L2 proficiency in both free and controlled production. Although language cannot be taught but only be acquired or learned, teaching methods play important roles in leading students acquisition, guiding them to learn, and shaping and strengthening the “frame” of TL. Lincoln suggests using combined methods (2010), increasing visual inputs and enhancing the audio-visual coordination in teaching (2011). There are three considerations for teaching methods of the FOCC: to create a mimic-NLE; to take advantage of adults’ cognitive ability; and to minimize the negative transfers of adults’ mother tongue.

Creating a Mimic Natural Linguistic Environment

It is widely accepted that children are better in pronunciation, whereas adults are faster and better learning in rules and pragmatics (Ipek, 2009). According to psychomotor and neurological explanations, the decline of the flexibility in the speech muscles after puberty prevents adults to reach the native-like pronunciation in foreign languages. After puberty, the brain loses its plasticity and lateralization is accomplished, which enables the person to reach the capacity of abstraction, of formal thinking, and of direct perception (Brown, 1994, in Ipek, 2009). Adults' weakness in plasticity and strength in cognition should be the starting point of adult L2 teaching methodologies. As one of the Chinese basics, pronunciations of all syllables in Pinyin with tones need to be taught by a native speaker. Since the FOCC is conducted in students' country, a submersion in classroom is a necessity for adult students to have a good pronunciation. The teacher has to use every possible minute to allow adult learners to hear, imitate, and repeat the native sound. This is also critical to students' speaking capability and listening comprehension.

Good teaching not only makes students learn, but also connects learning with acquisition. To create a mimic NLE means to turn the classroom into a world of TL. A feel for a language is more than living in the country of that language. Real immersion only happens when students play roles in a NLE. The language classroom in students' country cannot provide a pure NLE. However, teachers can make students learn the language in a virtual reality of the TL. Teachers should expose the authentic sound of the language to students at the very beginning and during the entire course; introduce the grammar structure in TL; and provide students opportunities of applying words and sentences in realistic situations. If students can acquire language elements in a mimic NLE, they will remember them in a natural way, and do not have to rely on memorizing for tests and exams.

Taking Advantage of Adults' Cognitive Ability

Graceffo (2010) notes "how little most kids learn in ten years" in contrast to the claim, "adult learners learn Chinese in six months to a year at NCKU". Adults can learn a foreign language successfully, and learning is more efficient than acquisition for adults. The FOCC in this research introduces all the grammar parts and their positions in sentences at the beginning of the course based on adults' linguistic knowledge and cognitive ability. Adults understand the grammatical structure so that they are ready for creative language use at each step when they learn new words and sentence types. Good teaching introduces the language itself to avoid teaching linguistics. Teaching linguistics is to ensure students to understand "language form, language meaning, and language in context." There is a wide range in terms of the subfields of linguistics such as morphology, syntax, phonology, phonetics, semantics, pragmatics, and language acquisition.² Linguistics majors learn the general rules of languages, and understand the structure and subfields of languages. To be able to speak a foreign language is not their concern. The content has to be taught in students' NL for its complexity. Language majors have to understand the rules of the language. But the goal is to apply these rules in order to communicate effectively. One visible difference between the learning content of linguistics and that of a language is that the former does not learn vocabulary specifically whereas for the later, knowing certain amount of vocabulary is a necessity.

The FOCC has to be a comprehensive one that presents students a complete picture of the Chinese language. In other words, through this course students learn the basics to Chinese listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The course covers two basics of Chinese: basic grammar structures and common vocabulary. How to teach grammar is a matter of teaching students linguistics or language. To teach grammar as part of linguistics, the goal is to make sure that students understand all the rules theoretically. To teach grammar as part of a language, the goal is to make sure students understand the basic rules practically, thus to

2 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Linguistics>

make the language learning easier and language production more accurate. But how do teachers teach grammar as part of a language? The following can be the guidelines: first, teach only basic grammar rules; second, teach grammar rules only in sentences; and third, teach grammar in TL and within the TL system so that learning grammar itself is a part of language learning. The basic grammar the course introduced to students includes important grammatical parts of the language and their positions in sentences. New grammar elements bring new sentence types, and students understand grammatical rules in those sentences. It is an all in one process that learning of grammar, words, and sentences happens spontaneously.

Vocabulary is another Chinese basic that comes easily to adults with their “highly developed cognitive skills and more worldly knowledge and experience” (Gao, 2001). Adults understand all the words introduced in the FOCC in their NL. To them, the task of learning words is to memorize their written shapes and utterances. No teaching or explanation is needed in teaching adults common words in the FOCC; just let students learn them by matching word shapes with their meanings in sentences, and acquire them by interacting with peers and teachers in TL.

Minimizing the Negative Transfers of Adults’ Mother Tongue

Adults have the cognitive strength in learning. On the one hand, they “tend to overanalyze and to be too intellectually centered on the task of second language learning” (Brown, 1994, in Ipek, 2009); on the other hand, their foreign language learning is more likely to be interfered with by the fossilized norms and forms of their NL. In Japan, it is very common that teachers teach adults Chinese grammar in Japanese. It is easy for students to understand a teacher’s explanation in classroom, but meanwhile they fossilize an understanding of TL rules within the framework of NL. They will always rely on the terms and explanations in their NL, which will cause more fossilization. To teach adults grammar in TL is more difficult than in students’ NL. However, we are teaching language, not linguistics. We only need teach students those rules that are important to form sentences, thus must focus on application and pragmatics and avoid the tendency of overanalyzing.

To teach a simple but complete Chinese grammar system is extremely important for Japanese adult learners due to the differences between Japanese and Chinese language systems and Japanese students’ word order confusion. As an agglutinative language, Japanese words are formed by gluing morphemes together in using suffixes or prefixes, or by the function words or case markers in case of nouns (Lincoln, 2004a). For example, a Chinese sentence of “Mother gave me a gift” can have six Japanese versions. By introducing the basic Chinese grammar parts and their order in sentences, it avoids various negative transfers of Japanese in syntactic order (2009). The organization of the eight chapters in “Chinese for All Purposes” is following the order of six grammar elements, their functions, and the complexity of sentences. Unlike most other Chinese textbooks that introduce grammar elements one or two at a time, this textbook introduces six major grammar elements before lesson one, and finishes teaching them in the first five lessons. Each lesson focuses on one grammar element, and each step emphasizes on one or two grammar structures of the Chinese language. It also introduces a large amount of vocabulary to bring out more positive transfers based on Japanese students’ background in character writing and recognition (Lincoln, 2011). Among 2905 basic HSK (Chinese Proficiency Test) characters, 1125 of them are written the same and have the same or similar meaning as corresponding Japanese Kanji, and 792 of them are different in writing but similar in meanings. Only 34% of basic HSK characters are unknown to Japanese students (Lincoln, 2009). Thus it is much easier for Japanese students to learn 20 to 30 words at a time than students from other language systems. “Chinese for All Purposes” covers 819 words that are basic for students to form many sentences of various types. In conclusion, two ways to avoid the negative transfer in teaching grammar rules is to use the TL throughout teaching, and to introduce grammar terminology at the very beginning. Meanwhile, the positive transfer in understanding the similar grammar elements and

their functions in sentences encourages a more efficient learning process.

Conclusion

Language teaching now uses a variety of materials and multimedia devices including audio, visual, video, and computers, providing teachers many resources for instructing students in the classroom. In order to utilize these modern equipments and interact with students in TL, teachers need to create a virtual acquisition environment. There are two tasks involved: to compile a textbook to allow teachers to teach adults language, not linguistics; and to create a NLE through classroom teaching in which students can acquire as well as learn the language. Adults' cognitive ability can be taken advantage of only when we teach them age-appropriate materials with age-appropriate methods. Minimizing the negative transfers of adults' mother tongue should be one of the FOCC early focuses. It can be accomplished through encouraging positive transfer within the TL system, introducing simple grammar rules clearly, and practicing pronunciation, dialogues, and listening materials with Chinese natives.

Chinese basics include materials for a solid and efficient learning with appropriate teaching methodologies. The textbook and classroom teaching of the adult FOCC should not only result in a thorough understanding of a simple yet and complete Chinese language system, but also enable students learn the language authentically and naturally. Teachers can add some elements of acquisition in the learning environment to make the learning more natural, such as native pronunciation and speaking, visual exposure of characters in words, their formation in sentences, grammar terms, and grammar rules in the TL system. Chinese basics for the FOCC enable adults to learn a simple but complete structure of Chinese language through one textbook; to cultivate a feel for Chinese in a natural environment through the teaching in TL; and establish a foundation for self-learning or future learning.

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