

The Current Situation of Chinese Teaching in the University of South Carolina and the Enlightenment to the Chinese Counterparts

FENG Chuan-qiang

Beijing Language and Culture University, Beijing, China

This thesis mainly introduces the current situation and future of Chinese language teaching in America. In recent years, Chinese courses appeared in more and more various kinds of American schools from pre-school programs to universities even to postgraduate studies, and which gradually developed into a complete system. This thesis, taking the University of South Carolina for example, mainly analyzes its main advantages and characteristics in Chinese language teaching and extracts some urgent problems needed to be solved in America. Besides, this thesis will also make a contrast on Chinese language teaching situation between America and China. On this basis we will put forward new vision and direction on researching of Chinese teaching as foreign language in China.

Keywords: Chinese learning fervor, Chinese pronunciation clinic, English-Chinese contrast, task-based teaching approach, communicative approach

Introduction

In recent years, with continuous economic development in China, it raised a hot wave of Chinese learning fever in the world including America. According to the report, American government has already involved Chinese as one of its strategic language, and more and more American schools have made Chinese on the list of their foreign language teaching program. In the past several years, Chinese teaching as foreign language in America has crossed two great steps: The first one is in 1994, Chinese became an elective foreign language in senior high school; another one is in 2006, being an AP (advanced placement) subject, Chinese has become part of AP. Its first Chinese exam took place on May of 2007, which made Chinese AP teaching a standard model and goal of Chinese teaching in the United States. Then as the age of Chinese learner becoming younger in America, more and more American kindergarten designed Chinese teaching program for children. We believe the Chinese teaching in America will be closely linked from pre-school, primary school, middle school to university in the next few years. The East Point Academy funded by the Confucius Institute at South Carolina University is the first full-time Chinese immersion charter school in the South Carolina State. There are now almost 400 students from pre-school to primary school and to secondary school according to its plan.

Except for the formal schools, different kinds of other Chinese teaching schools are widespread in America; many formal or informal language schools with Chinese teaching program attract a large number of

Chinese-American children and local American students.

In particular, Confucius Institutes and Confucius Courses held by Hanban play a great role in promoting Chinese teaching in America. Confucius Institute usually promotes Chinese language teaching and culture spreading through cooperating with American universities in running schools. Till April 2013, 92 Confucius Institutes have been set in many famous universities of the United States which include the University of Chicago and Columbia University.

The Current Situation of Chinese Language Teaching in the University of South Carolina

Since August 2012, the author has been teaching Chinese in the Confucius Institute at the University of South Carolina under the dispatchment of Hanban. In the Chinese Department of the South Carolina University, Chinese curriculum belongs to elective course facing to all undergraduate students. In its Chinese teaching program, it consists of all the curriculums from the first grade to the fourth. The largest number of students is in the first grade which involves about more than 150 pupils of seven classes and there are about 60 students in each of the second and third grade. The curriculum mainly teaches intensive reading course, but related courses like the culture and videos, etc. are also involved. Intergraded Chinese is the only teaching material on language arts for the first to third grade students. According to the research, this series of teaching material is the most highly used textbook in America universities. However, it is not so popular in the southeast of America where the South Carolina University located. The Chinese curriculum system in the South Carolina University is basically complete, but with only one intensive reading course without reading, literature, writing, etc. courses seems tedious. According to the author's interview and research, tedious course setting problem represents the general situation in American universities which have close relationship with the lack of sufficient qualified Chinese teachers. The shortage of qualified faculty is the most serious problem on Chinese teaching existing in American schools from primary school to universities.

Differences between America and China on Chinese language teaching as foreign language are expressed by the author deeply during the past one-year's teaching work. The mainly aspects can be described as following:

(1) Limited number of classes. There are only three classes on main subjects and another subsidiary class for the first grade per week in the University of South Carolina which is greatly different from 10 classes every week in China. Given to the fact that there is no target-language circumstance for American learners to practice, it is obviously uneasy for the American students to learn Chinese. Except for the chance of speaking Chinese on class, there is mere possibility for them to practice after class. In recent years, more and more Chinese middle school students go abroad to America, which is a benefit for the Chinese learning Americans.

(2) Relatively high qualified students. Most students taking Chinese classes in the University of South Carolina are from Business School, the international business of which is ranked No.1 in the United States. In addition, some students are admitted on the basis of their specialties as an important measure taken by the University of South Carolina to attract talented students. The University of South Carolina offers high scholarships to attract students who shall enroll into top US universities. These students are much more excellent. However, foreign students majoring in Chinese in China are mainly from Korea which accounts for 30% to 40%. And a large number of them come to learn Chinese because they fail their college entering examination in Korea. So students in the South Carolina University are relatively more qualified than those who learn Chinese in China.

(3) A detailed syllabus. The syllabus of the school concretizes to the detail content of every lesson including the text scores composition, assignment of every lesson, etc.. The syllabus will be handed out to every student at the beginning of each semester in order to help students have an overall impression on the class. Then the teaching and learning process will follow this syllabus in the entire semester. The record composition in the Chinese teaching program of the South Carolina University is quite different from that in China. The final exam only represents 20% of the grade. There is a quiz after every lesson in the first grade and the scores takes 20%. The dictation in the daily study takes 5% and the midterm oral exam represents 10%. Since your absence on the class will lead to the poor academic performance on casual quiz and dictation, this kind of grade composition plays an efficient role in supervising attendance and ordinary study which will also eliminate the idea to cram before the final. The domestic educational institutes can learn from this.

(4) The Chinese pronunciation clinic and task-based teaching approach. In order to help students pronounce accurately, the University of South Carolina set the pronunciation correction clinic in particular. In this course, the teacher should correct the pronunciation errors and show them the right one by one, then give feasible training methods and suggestions to every student. It is called task-based teaching approach which is the most highly used teaching approach. No matter in the on-class form or as the after-class assignments, almost in every lesson, the teacher should ask the student to practice a group dialogue or other communicative assignments. The teacher shall send the group task to the student in advance. And the student must organize the dialogue according to the requirement. For example, please invite your friends to take part in your birthday party and notify another person to join in by phone, at last describing the birthday party.

We can find that the number of students who study Chinese in the South Carolina is continuously increasing in recent years, and they are also satisfied with the teaching quality and effect. The author believes that it has close relation with its teaching model and arrangement.

The Enlightenment to the Chinese Counterparts

On Chinese teaching as foreign language, there are a lot of aspects we can learn from the University of South Carolina. At the same time, it also shows us many views worth to lay an attention and to do research.

(1) Arrange pronunciation correction lesson in the primary stage of Chinese learning. We often lamented the slide of students' accurate pronunciation level, but never found an effective way to fix it. The course Reading and Pronunciation opened by the Chinese Department, Beijing Language and Culture University is a good try to improve this phenomenon. It is elective course and there are 20 students in each class. Different students may have different problems with their pronunciation. Group teaching may not be able to produce satisfying result. Therefore, we recommend pronunciation clinics be offered every two weeks for elementary level students so that instructors could help to correct their pronunciation on a person-to-person basis. The pronunciation exercise materials shall be given to students in advance, and personal voice record is required to submit.

For improving the pertinence, the recorded material selection shall be discussed together in advance by the parallel class teachers or other teachers who are in charge.

(2) Execute task-based teaching approach on the primary stage. Task-based teaching approach is one of the most popular teaching approaches currently. Whether it is prorated to apply this approach on the primary stage may have different opinions. What is different in the University of South Carolina from China is that their students are all American natives, so it is relatively much easier for them to explain the task that students need

to fulfill in English. But in the domestic universities, students from different countries are usually mixed up in one class. Take Beijing Language and Culture University for example, in each class there are almost 15-25 students from at least five different countries, even more than 10 countries in one class. As their native language is diverse, it is not so easy to narrate clear the task on primary stage. Our suggestion is that the teacher shall demonstrate the task to students. The advantage to learn Chinese in China is that students are in the target language circumstance which is much more convenient for them to finish the task. For example, ask students to order dinner in the restaurant, to bargain in the market, etc.

(3) Design a unified syllabus as exhaustive as possible. The syllabus of the South Carolina University is very explicit, so that students are very clear about both the content of every class and the arrangement of each semester. Both the teacher and the student can be easily aware of which part should be enhanced or learned once they are absent from class.

(4) Tailor textbooks for a particular language. The demand for teaching Chinese in America is growing. According to our research, the Chinese textbooks published in America mainly for regular school but less for short-term training. Besides, there are a lot of problems existing in textbook cohesion. Most textbooks applied in America are edited by American Chinese and published locally, less from China mainland, which is a great opportunity for domestic counterparts. Some problems show out while the author teaches the Intergraded Chinese Textbook. This textbook implements communicative approach, but there are still some shortcomings in the aspects of grammar occurring sequence and vocabulary reiteration which will lead to certain difficulties in learning Chinese for both teachers and students. We can take good advantage of the research results on Chinese acquisition as second language, to make the textbooks more scientific and reasonable especially on the grammar occurring sequence and vocabulary reiteration.

Most students who learn Chinese in America are English oriented. So making fully use of the English-Chinese contrastive study to write more specialized textbooks comes fairly necessary.

Conclusions

In general, the Chinese teaching program in the University of South Carolina embodies that Chinese teaching in America pays more attention on listening, speaking, and communication and has its own distinctive features on syllabus design, pronunciation correction, task-based teaching approach, etc., which worth to merit attention by the domestic colleagues. Problems like the shortage of qualified faculty, tedious curriculum, and unsystematic use of textbooks need to be improved and strengthen. Apart from the above, the website serving particularly for teaching is designed quite practical and personal. The teacher can upload all the teaching materials related and notice on the website to students to download and take as reference. It can also display records of quiz, dictation, etc., on the website in time. Besides, the computer can calculate scores automatically after the teacher finishing uploading records and notifying the percentage of each part. It is very convenient. And the students' personal information including emails is on the website, so teachers can send emails to all or part of the students conveniently. Therefore, we strongly suggest the Chinese colleges and universities to make full use of website so that students and educators can access conveniently.

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