



WINPEC Working Paper Series No.E1621

March 2017

the Working Paper Series "Systematization of foreign language education and classroom management in Japan: Cooperation between classes in English, German, French, Chinese, Korean, Spanish, Russian, and Japanese"

Chinese language education and classroom management

—Towards open education systems—

Kazuko SUNAOKA

Waseda INstitute of Political EConomy
Waseda University
Tokyo,Japan

Chinese language education and classroom management

—Towards open education systems—*

Kazuko SUNAOKA**

This is a digest translation of the Japanese research paper written by Kazuko SUNAOKA published as a Working Paper Series of the Waseda Institute of Political Economy “中国語のクラス授業と教室運営-開かれた教育システムに向けて-” (2017)¹. The expressions and the order of the topics dealt with in the article might be slightly different from the original Japanese version. The charts, case study details, and other reference data which have been used in the original Japanese version have been omitted from this summary. Mr. Daniel Roy PEARCE² translated this text. I deeply appreciate his contribution.

Abstract:

This purpose of this paper is to introduce instances of efforts by academic organizations and research groups that are interested in articulation of Chinese language education, and to consider relevant issues in collaboration between practitioners, classes, schools, and between domestic and international educational institutions.

The first chapter focuses on the characteristics of Chinese language education in Japan at present, with respect to various developments in learner motivation, Chinese internationalization, increasing sophistication in machine translation and interpretation technology, and the aims to which Chinese language education should

* This article is a part of the Working Paper Series "Systematization of foreign language education and classroom management in Japan: Cooperation between classes in English, German, French, Chinese, Korean, Spanish, Russian, and Japanese"

** Professor of the Faculty of Political Science and Economics, Waseda University

be directed. In chapter two, necessary data on the current circumstances of Chinese language education, and discuss the enormous number of Chinese language classes at universities, which has led to a lack in sufficient educational resources and inconsistent lesson management. In chapter three, we introduce innovative practice in teacher collaboration, before summarizing the present situation and principles for systematization of education in the future.

Key words: Chinese language education, classroom management, education systems, ICT, social intelligence

1. Issues in Chinese language education

Japan and China are two geopolitically close entities, and the history of language contact between the nations has a history of more than 1,500 years. In the past half century, with mass movement of people between the countries' borders, and rapid advancement in information communication, the number of Chinese language learners in Japan has exploded. The implementation of Chinese language subjects at university also continues to rise, with an estimated 500,000 students per year enrolled in Chinese language classes.

In the 1980s, as the relationship between Japan and China grew more friendly harmonious, so learners of the Chinese language were also positive towards Chinese. In recent years, however, China's rapid development as fueled a sense of wariness amongst neighboring countries, and the view of Japanese people towards China has also deteriorated. A new generation of learners who are cautious of protecting their Japanese identities has arisen. A large percentage of learners are choosing Chinese language for out of necessity or for practical reasons, and interest in Chinese culture or history is surprisingly low.

Since the end of the twentieth century, Chinese economic development, and the influence of Chinese action on the world stage has greatly increased, along with greater interaction between the Chinese people and the greater global community. Not only is a high level of Chinese language ability required for interaction and

negotiation with Chinese people, there is a need for competence in the English language as well.

On the other hand, the accuracy of neural network machine translation, of which Google Translate is perhaps the most well-known, has dramatically improved, while automated voice interpretation technology has also developed to the point of practical application. Chinese language education has thus a vital mission to contribute to regional stability and development through the cultivation of high-level foreign language talent, rich in creativity, that cannot be achieved through artificial intelligence. In order to raise Chinese language learners in Japan to this level, educators have a responsibility to share educational resources, and collaboration is imperative.

2. The current circumstances of Chinese language education

Japanese learners of the Chinese language span multiple domains, from Educational institutions to the private sector. While it is often labelled ‘Chinese as a foreign language’, Chinese language education is characterized by the many points of direct contact with native Chinese language speakers. Chinese residents in Japan (about 800,000 from mainland China, and another 100,000 of Taiwanese background) and international students and trainees from China (around 120,000) account for a third of the total number of people of foreign descent residing in Japan. In recent years, the increase of people with Chinese heritage, or international students with close ties to China in Japan has led to an attempt to refocus Chinese language education from the classroom to a social context, in which students become central, as practical users of the Chinese language for communication.

Number of students and education practitioners

As of 2014, the 633 universities in Japan offer Chinese language courses, about 86% of the total number of universities. The total number of learners may be estimated to be at least 470,000. Many universities also include a Chinese language component as a requirement for graduation. For beginner-level class, 45% of classes

are comprised of between 21 – 30 students, around 30% of between 31 – 40 students, while slightly under 10% of classes are comprised of more than 40 students. By dividing the estimated total number of learners in 2014 (470,546) by the average class size of 30 students, we can assume that there are roughly 15,586 Chinese language classes held throughout the country. Assuming that one teacher is, on average, responsible for 5 classes, 3,137 Chinese language instructors are required to meet the demand. The Japan Association of Chinese Language Education (<http://www.jacle.org>), the authoritative academic organization for Chinese language education in Japan, however, had a membership on only 483 (including part-time membership) in 2015, only around 15% of the necessary number of domestic teachers. The Chinese Linguistic Society of Japan (<http://www.chilin.jp>), the majority of whose members are responsible for Chinese language classes reported a membership of 1202 in 2015 (also including part-time faculty), roughly 40% of the necessary number of teachers estimated above. It is assumed that this lack of teaching staff is made up for with either large classes, or teachers managing more than five classes per week, both of which are factors that may lead to decline in quality of language education. Roughly two thirds of teachers are part-time staff, and recently the number of teachers with a Chinese background have an increased presence.

Language level

More than 70% of learners enrolled in Chinese language classes are beginner learners. The maximum number of class time is 180 hours per year, and often less than 90 hours for short course, resulting in the majority of learners ending their studies at CEFR level A1. Previously, Chinese language learners have typically come from the humanities, however at present 70% of enrolled learners major in the social sciences. Although most learners recognize the value in practical Chinese ability, many feel the effort spent in learning to be overly burdensome to the gains achieved. Classes tend to spend a disproportionately large amount of time on pronunciation practice, and are thus ineffective for the development of practical ability.

While these issues bear similarity to those facing English language education in

Japan, foreign languages other than English face a dearth of both social capital and standing domestically, and the lack of publicly funded large-scale investigations into such foreign language education is a barrier to discussions on the improvement of education.

Teaching methods

When compared with the instruction of other languages, Chinese language classes tend to incorporate more conversation activities and group work, and the amount of learner-centered output is reported as the highest amongst the six major foreign languages. Nevertheless, the reality is that much of this is comprised of machinelike drills such as repetitive pronunciation practice, and interactive tasks are lacking. As such tasks may be managed by machines, and artificial intelligence and robots are unsuited to ‘asking unique questions’ of the learner, this is where teachers should be focusing their efforts. Language teachers should reduce the number of by-the-book questions, but rather seek to develop their skills in enlightening students, and encouraging thinking on a higher order with the aim of nurturing abilities which are beyond the scope of what AI can achieve.

Textbooks

Grammar syllabi represent the majority of Chinese language textbooks published in Japan. Learners who have been exposed to the grammar-explanation oriented approach to English language teaching at the secondary level show a strong desire for explanation of grammatical explanations when learning the Chinese language, and for teachers feel ‘safe’ in providing such explanations to their learners. While in the research of second language education, study of explicit knowledge may aid in the acquisition of implicit knowledge, such study alone will not result in the subconscious automatization of said knowledge. Regardless of what kind of text they are dealing with, the quality of the teacher is determined by how well they are able to evaluate the difficulty of the content, and then to demonstrate any form in such a way that it leads to the development of learner’s acquisition of practical communicative

skill.

The standardization of textbooks is perhaps the most promising means to achieve appropriate lesson management and systemization. The number of institutions introducing standardized textbooks for beginner level Chinese language across classes is increased, although as there is little investigation into the effects of this, the spread of such practice has stalled.

Compared with instruction of other foreign languages, multimedia sees frequent use in Chinese language classes. In recent years, government-affiliated educational institutions in both mainland China and Taiwan have been producing a large variety of inexpensive digital teaching materials. Furthermore, open-courseware type materials such as MOOCs, open to tens of thousands of users, originally developed in Europe and the United States have begun to appear, oriented to Chinese language learning. In Japan, there are many practitioners reluctant to adopt Chinese-made materials, for the reason that they are unsuitable to the Japanese learning context. Nevertheless, it is likely that opportunities for joint development and publication of materials between Japan and Taiwan, the United States, or mainland China will increase.

Evaluation and testing

The evaluation of ability in university Chinese language courses is conducted through short tests and periodic university-set examinations. As for qualifications, the Chinese-government sponsored HSK (Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi) is the most prevalent, with testing branches (typically affiliated with Confucius Institutes) worldwide. Alternatives include the Test of Chinese as a Foreign Language (TOCFL), overseen by the Taiwanese Ministry of Education, and the Society for Testing Chinese Proficiency, Japan, is dominant domestically. However, inconsistency is tested grammatically items and vocabulary, as well as Chinese characters, is problematic to examinees.

Classroom management and management systems

General education classes for Chinese language are typically conducted twice a week by both a native-Chinese speaking teacher and a native-Japanese faculty member. Grammar instruction tends to be handled mainly by the native Japanese teacher, while the native-Chinese instructor often takes charge of conversation-oriented lessons. However, there is often no overt separation of such roles, and it would be desirable for both teachers to remain in close contact, adjusting their roles and content together as necessary. Regrettably, this is, rarely the case, as teachers are both overwhelmed by their workloads (particularly part-time teachers, who are often responsible for a large number of classes), and the fact that each teacher tends to work from a different textbook.

Recently, educational institutions have been increasingly conducting unified management of teaching via LMSs (Learning Management Systems). At Waseda University, the CourseN@vi system is employed not only for general management of education, but also for the semiautomatic creation of essay topics and short tests, as well as the distribution and collection of class surveys, BBSs, chat systems, recording of classes, and distribution of on-demand audiovisual materials, amongst a variety of other uses appropriate for foreign language classes. The author of this paper fully utilizes the system in her own classes. Through such LMSs, it is possible for multiple teachers and students to work together and share materials and information quickly and efficiently. Unfortunately, however, it seems that only a minority of teachers are proficient in the use of such systems, and this is delaying the systematization of foreign language education.

E-learning systems are useful tools, with no constraints on time and location, and their digital nature lends itself to easy protection of personal information. While the operation of LMS systems may be slightly difficult for the majority of presently practicing teachers, their easy accessibility from personal terminals such as smartphones is highly rated by students.

3. Endeavors in practice and collaboration

Collaboration in Chinese language teaching in Japan is more often than not limited to teachers overseeing the same classes within the same faculties in the same institutions. It would be egregious to suggest that collaboration above the class or institutional context is commonplace. Below, we will explore endeavors in, and issues related to, collaboration in Chinese language teaching in accordance with the three criteria (vertical, horizontal, and inter-subject) for collaboration as described by J-GAP (Japanese Global Articulation Project).

Secondary-tertiary collaboration

The University Center Entrance Examination can be cited as an example of collaboration between secondary schools and universities in Chinese language teaching. In 2015, 516 schools in total offered Chinese language classes, with 19,106 students enrolled. 482 candidates took the Center Examination in Chinese. While amongst German, French, Korean, and Chinese, Chinese language classes boast the largest number of enrolled students taking the subject, given that 99.8% of high school students chose English as a language subject on the examination, and only 0.09% select Chinese, the number of students taking the Center Examination Chinese language subject is still extremely small. For learners that begun their Chinese language instruction at the high school level, the difficulty of the examination is too high, and they are thus forced to choose English as the foreign language subject. In order to encourage continued study of the Chinese language at universities, it is necessary to implement vertical collaboration such as allowing learners of Chinese may skip classes and continue study at an appropriate level, or the allocation of credits for previous study in the language. In future, it would also be desirable to introduce programs such as the CEFR language passport, as certification of language ability that is recognizable between institutions and across borders.

Collaboration within institutions

Within institutions there are many examples of horizontal collaboration, for

example in homogenizing progression rates across classes. The Waseda University Global Education Center is an interdisciplinary provide classes in general education, liberal arts, and languages to all students. In the 2016 academic year, there were approximately 50 Chinese language courses offered, including 80 small-scale classes in ‘Tutorial Chinese’. A subject ‘map’ for each language course is prepared and available to students for subject selection. Courses in the Cantonese dialect have also been offered in the last few years. While the Cantonese dialect is not given priority by mainland China, the availability of such courses is important in the development of multilingualism in Japan.

Collaboration across institutions

Collaboration at the inter-institutional level remains limited. Projects supported by the Japan Forum (<http://www.tjf.or.jp/jp>) aim to create guidelines for the instruction of foreign languages. Initially, many Chinese and Korean language instructors at the secondary and tertiary level were involved, and has since expanded to a mixed team of practitioners of nine languages, including German, French, Arabic, Russian, Japanese, and English. Workshops for instructors have been held, and the best practices for multilingual classes derived from these are published online. The Chinese language version, entitled ‘meyasu [criterion]’, based on the CAN-DO statements introduces around 300 tasks, as well as the necessary linguistic ability required for each task.

International collaboration

Several attempts at international collaboration exist presently, including interest in collaboration from the Chinese sphere through Confucius Institutes. The author has been involved with the Chinese community for the past 16 years through the Asian Students’ Conference organization. In some Cross-Cultural Distance Learning subjects, learners may participate in face-to-face discussion with members of a handful of universities in the Chinese sphere via the internet. Such cooperative classes are established not only through the efforts of students, but also the efforts of

instructors opening their own classes in such a manner.

Collaboration across subjects

The subject ‘Chinese Society’, offered by the Global Education Center at Waseda University is an omnibus subject overseen by 12 faculty members including the author, and focuses on a broad range of subjects including politics, diplomacy, economics, law, environmental issues, science and technology, media, international culture, history, religion, and language, held in distance-collaboration with universities in Beijing, Shanghai, and Taipei, and conducted entirely in the Chinese language. Such classes have a significant role in promoting discussions of fairness and justice in the international community, as should be offered by universities, which are public spaces in which discussion is not constrained by nations or nationalities.

4. Towards the development of educational systems

Language activity is deeply connected with all areas of human life, and as such the process of language education is both diverse and complicated. The design of systems for collaboration must therefore be flexible and inclusive. The Japanese classroom is known worldwide for its excellent maintaining of order. System designs that can fully realize the efforts of both instructors and learners working together is desirable. The day in which robots or artificial intelligences and assume social intelligence is still far. A system which allows human teachers to work within it to further develop creative education is desirable.

Chinese language is still divided between mainland China and Taiwan, and the realization of an ‘International Chinese’ is not yet on the horizon. International collaboration in educational research cannot be said to have reached the level of English or French and German languages, and there is a lack of organized dissemination. The Chinese language academic community in Japan must also work to overcome various issues in teaching, as well as play an active role in the promotion of international collaboration.

-
- ¹ WINPEC Working Paper Series No. J1610
(<https://www.waseda.jp/fpse/winpec/assets/uploads/2017/03/a63daefb179524f30be8ef67fd5ef3e8.pdf>)
- ² He is a PhD candidate at the Graduate School of Human and Environmental Studies, Kyoto University.