Teaching Mandarin to Beginners

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08/12/12
Aims of Workshop

- Reflect upon particular challenges of teaching Mandarin to complete beginners
- Share practical teaching ideas
- Consider strengths and weaknesses of task-based language teaching
Ultimate aim of teaching Mandarin
What are the intrinsic linguistic challenges?

• Tones
• Homophones
• Reading and writing characters
• The system of particles and verb complements (Orton, 2008: 30-32)
• ‘Almost nothing is known of what works and what does not for the teaching of Chinese to English-speaking school children’ (Orton, 2011: 159).
• Please choose one of the challenges and have a brief discussion about ways forward
Tones

- Realise what tones mean for comprehension
- Accept the need to attend to tone
- Accept and understand pitch differences
- ‘Má or mà’ not which tone is ma?'
- Opportunity to hear a lot of Chinese in relaxed circumstances
- Use of gestures
- Danger of over-emphasizing tones – students scared to open their mouths
- To correct or not to correct?
Use of music in the classroom

• Use of song

• Download Audacity and a Lame MP3 encoder
• Google ‘royalty free music’
• http://incompetech.com
• Music Kevin Macloed
• http://www.cilt.org.uk/secondary/14-19/training_zone.aspx
Characters

• Sound, Meaning and Form – 3 things to learn
• Differences between learning European languages – task of vocabulary building through reading is much more difficult
• Danger of too much pinyin – students separate pinyin from learning characters which increases the number of steps needed to learn the character (Xing, 2006: 94)
• Step 1: Learn the pronunciation (pinyin)
• Step 2: Learn how to write the character
• Step 3: Learn the meaning of the character
• Step 4: Match the sound (pinyin) with the form (character) and the meaning
• The fewer steps students need to take the more efficiently they can learn characters (ibid. 94)
Characters

• Radicals – teach from the very beginning or only after students have acquired some characters?
• Need to provide high frequency encounter with characters (e.g. online games such as www.memrise.com)
• Card games: sorting activities
• Frequent reading opportunities
• Characters are fun, motivating, interesting and cool
• Beat the teacher
• Students come up with their own stories but target language?
• Useful Apps – make it part of their daily life
Fiction of best method?

• ‘What teaching method do you use?’
• Different learners have different needs
• Each lesson may have elements of ‘Grammar-translation’, ‘Audiolingualism’, ‘Communicative language teaching’, ‘Task-based language teaching’
• Most important is that the teacher and the students believe in what they’re doing
• More appropriate to talk about methods in terms of ‘convincing’, ‘plausible’, ‘powerful’ (Johnson 2008: 211)
• AFL: ask the students about their learning experiences – how are they learning? Why are they doing this activity? What are the strengths and weaknesses? What have they noticed?
Task-based language teaching

- Closely related to CLT: task-based work provides sufficient comprehensible input to trigger acquisition (Klapper 2003: 35)
- Klapper argues that TBLT is a reversal of Presentation – Production – Practice model
- Meaning is primary, there should be a communication problem to solve and a relationship to real-life activities, emphasis on completion of task rather than on grammatical errors
- Acquisition needs to be supported by some attention to linguistic form and initial fluency work should lead gradually to accuracy-focussed activities (some explicit engagement of the mind)
- Some use of the L1 allowed – particularly in follow up phase
- Different tasks prioritise different skills
Examples of tasks

• 做一个问卷！
Design a questionnaire.

Context—你要帮助上海的一家运动中心做一项调查，你的调查结果将被用于运动中心的筹建。
You will do a survey for a gym in Shanghai. The findings will be used for the construction of the gym.
Shanghai Gym Questionnaire

1. 我们需要什么信息？
What information do we need to collect?
2. 调查中会问哪些问题？
What questions will be included in your survey?

- 运动的名称 Name of the sports
- 喜欢/不喜欢 Like / dislike
- 会不会？ Can you play...?
- 谁会？ Who can play...?
- 多少人喜欢... How many people like...?
- 多少人会...? How many people can play...?
一、问：你会...吗？
答：我会...

我不会...

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二、问：你喜欢......吗？
答：我喜欢......
    我不喜欢......

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谁会踢足球？

谁会打篮球？

谁会打乒乓球？

谁会打网球？

谁会游泳？
谁喜欢踢足球？
    个人喜欢踢足球。
谁喜欢打篮球？
    个人喜欢打篮球。
谁喜欢打乒乓球？
    个人喜欢打乒乓球。
谁喜欢打网球？
    个人喜欢打网球。
谁喜欢跑步？
    个人喜欢跑步。
谁喜欢游泳？
    个人喜欢游泳。
• Choose any topic in Jinbu 1 and design your own task-based activity which could take between one or three lessons for students to complete
Kè táng yòng yǔ
课堂用语

• 请翻到第...页qǐn fān dào dì... yè Please turn to page...
• 今天我们学...jīn tiān wǒ men xué... Today we’re going to learn...
• 请举手!qǐng jǔ shǒu Hands up, please!
• 请站起来!qǐng zhàn qǐ lái Stand up, please!
• 请坐!qǐng zuò Sit down, please!
• 写下来!xiě xià lái Write it down!
• 跟我读!gēn wǒ dú Read after me!
• 再来一遍!zài lái yí biàn Again!
• 谢谢xiè xiè Thank you.
• 这个怎么读？zhè gè zěn me dú How do you read it?
• ..用中文怎么说？..yòng zhōng wén zěn me shuō How do you say..in
  Chinese
• 给我一张纸吧。gěi wǒ yì zhāng zhǐ ba. Please give me a piece of paper.
• 我做完了。wǒ zuò wán le I am finished.
• 对/是duì / shì Yes
• 不对/不是bú duì / bú shì No
• 作业zuò yè homework
• 下课。xià kè Dismiss.
• 再见!zài jiàn See you!
References