

Chinese Teaching Methods Based on Thomas More University of Applied Sciences in Belgium

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Abstract. Thomas More University of Applied Sciences in Belgium has offered Chinese majors since 2014, the purpose is to let the students study Chinese language and understand Chinese culture without going abroad. Because of the special characteristics and lots of differences from the Chinese learners all over the world, such as nationality, culture, grammar, native language and so on, Belgian students indeed face lots of difficulties in the process of learning Chinese, these are completely different from the languages of the phonetic system, and the learning of Chinese characters is even more difficult. In this article, the author lists the main difficulties sampled from 105 Belgian students to learn Chinese through a questionnaire survey in non-Sinosphere. A set of Chinese teaching methods related to the writing, recognition, understanding and memorization of Chinese characters are researched according to her experience, it will be widely promoted and applied for Chinese teaching as a reference in this field. The process of edutainment will also spread the excellent traditional Chinese culture.

Keywords: Chinese characters; Chinese teaching; Belgium

1. Introduction

As early as the 50s of the last century, China had established the National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (NOCFL, referred to as Hanban). However, teaching of Chinese as a second language was not carried out on a large scale until the 90s. Currently, the trend of development in teaching Chinese as a foreign language is very strong. Till the end of year 2020, there were more than 180 countries and regions carried out Chinese education, and 70 countries around the world have incorporated Chinese language teaching into their national education systems. Around 25 million people are learning Chinese outside of China. And more than 4 thousand universities and over than 30 thousand middle and primary schools have been offering Chinese courses. Approximately 200 million people from Europe, America and Australia are learning and applying Chinese. And the number of Chinese learners in many countries is still increasing by 50% or more.

2. Background

As for the location in Europe, Belgium is bordered by Germany in the east, Netherlands in the north, France in the south, Luxembourg in the southeast, and the North Sea and the United Kingdom in the west, so the official language is French, Dutch and German, and the fusion of language used in Belgium is the phonetic system. The English alphabet is a common script, but Chinese characters are a form of ideogram, having the characteristics of using figure to express meaning. With this, Belgian students indeed face lots of difficulties in the process of learning Chinese, which is also prone to resistance. Because for learners in non-Sinosphere, learning Chinese should not only distinguish the difference between Chinese Pinyin and alphabet, but also master Chinese grammar. These are completely different from the languages of the phonetic system, and the learning of Chinese characters is even more difficult. In order to solve these problems, the author collected the main difficulties of learning for Belgian students and taken the characteristics of Chinese character into consideration, a set of Chinese teaching methods was researched and widely promoted and

applied while she taught Chinese in Thomas More University of Applied Sciences, which greatly improved students' interest in learning Chinese and reduced the difficulty of learning. In the process of edutainment, they not only learned Chinese characters, but also spread the excellent traditional Chinese culture.

3. Research Method

Teaching of Chinese as a foreign language mainly includes four parts: pinyin, vocabulary, grammar, and Chinese characters. The embodiment of Chinese communicative skills not only shows speaking Chinese fluently and correctly, but also shows the use of standardized and correct Chinese characters during communication, so that the combination of colloquial and literary language is achieved. In another word, Chinese characters have become one of the embodiments of the real communication ability of Chinese. For the students of Thomas More University of Applied Sciences, the Chinese course is arranged by three modules for one semester, including the explanation of Chinese ontology knowledge, the introduction of China's actual national conditions and cultural practice. Among them, 24 classes are allocated for the learning of Chinese character part from Chinese ontology knowledge. The daunting Chinese characters also has its gentle side, the difficulty of Chinese characters is not terrible at all, because these difficulties can be identified, learned, and thus solved. Therefore, in this paper, it is listed the common problems of Chinese learning through a set of questionnaires (refer to table 1), and it's distributed to 105 Chinese learners, rated from 1 to 10 points according to the difficulty level, the higher, the more difficult. Then the author conducts Pareto analysis of the statistical data, finds out the main problems and difficulties of Belgian students for learning Chinese, and then explores effective ways to solve them one by one. The Questionnaires of Chinese learning is as follow:

- 1) I can't recognize Chinese pronunciation.
- 2) I have difficulty to master Chinese intonation.
- 3) I have difficulty to distinguish Chinese character glyphs.
- 4) I can't understand the meaning of Chinese characters.
- 5) I can't distinguish the homophones.
- 6) I can't remember polyphonic words.
- 7) I have difficulty to write Chinese characters.
- 8) I have difficulty to remember Chinese characters.
- 9) I can't distinguish the simplified and traditional Chinese characters.
- 10) I can't make sentences by Chinese characters.

Table 1 Self rating for questionnaires of Chinese learning

No.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1										
2										
3										
4										
5										
6										
7										
8										
9										
10										

Through the ranking of statistics data of the questionnaires (refer to Fig 1), it can be seen the main problems encountered by local students in the process of learning Chinese are related to the writing, recognition, understanding and memorization of Chinese characters. From sector diagram (Fig 2), these 4 problems take almost 50% of the total score. After in-depth daily communication with students and information exchanging, the author finds out couples of effective solutions according to her teaching experience.

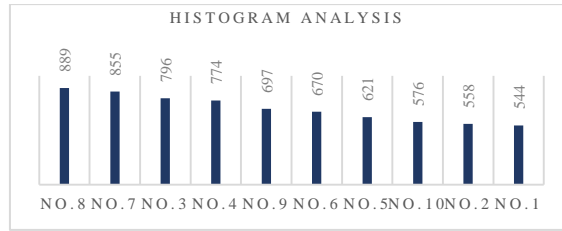


Figure 1. Ranking for Self-rating of questionnaires of Chinese learning

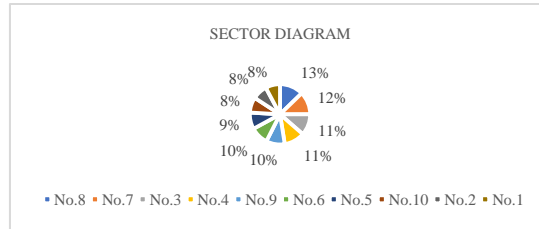


Figure 2. Percentage for Self-rating of questionnaires of Chinese learning

4. Solutions

Chinese character teaching has always occupied the top spot in the list of the difficulties in teach Chinese as a foreign language. Many students in the early stage are so intimidated by the Chinese characters so that they just master the spoken language. Students in the intermediate stage have a particularly difficult time in writing Chinese characters, especially for the students who are not in the sinosphere, writing Chinese characters is something like abstract painting, and they have no idea with the sequence of the stroke, and even think it’s impossible to master that this strange writing. If the students are not proficient in the writing of Chinese characters, it can only be regarded as putting away the cup after taking a tiny sip for learning Chinese, which is equivalent to illiteracy in China. Although Chinese character learning is difficult, the targeted methods and techniques in the specific teaching process can really improve the learning content. From the teaching point of view, it’s important to establish a self-consciousness. Since it is a very difficult text to master, putting a lot of effort onto teaching is critical, the author specifically lists some teaching techniques and summarizes as follow:

4.1 Chinese Oracle bone inscriptions teaching approach. For the beginners of Chinese learning, the author deployed Chinese character teaching in oral and listening classes, so the students had to start changing the habit of writing their own language and accept the thinking mode of Chinese character writing. Therefore, it is necessary to teach students a little interpretation of Chinese Oracle bone inscriptions. Not only can the pictures be used to attract the students and stimulate their interest in learning, but also to enable them to understand the origin and subsequent development of Chinese characters deeply, which was not limited to instilling the concept of writing strokes. For instance, in the daily conversations involving the primary stage of learning textbooks Conversational Chinese 301 and Chinese Link, there are some high frequency used Chinese characters, it can be taken into consideration of using the image introduction of Oracle bone script during the teaching and explaining to students, which can help them to understand the entire development process of Chinese characters more intuitively. For example, “How many people are there in your family?” In the sentence, the word of “you” shows the overall change of Chinese characters (Fig 3), so it’s better for the teacher to tell students the story behind each stage of Chinese characters during the actual teaching process, which not only deepens the memory and learning of Chinese characters, but also improves students' interest in learning.



Figure 3. Chinese character of you

Another example is the word of "people", in the interpretation of the lambdaoid (Fig 4), the oracle bone is like an animal figure with hanging arms. The original meaning of the word is the laborer who bows down and hangs his arms. Inscriptions on bronze basically inherits the oracle bone glyph. Seal script highlights the image of labor bent over and with his arms hanging down, his face facing loess with the back to the sky, like picking with his hands or working in the field. However, it's totally different by clerical script, the image of bending over and hanging arms completely disappears. "People" are laborers who pick with their hands or work in the fields.



Figure 4. Chinese character of lambdaoid/people

The author believes that teachers can list all the words on Chinese Oracle bone inscriptions one by one with corresponding comics, it will be better than just letting students memorize the stroke sequence. The animation of 36 Chinese characters is a good example to vividly expresses the evolution of common 36 Chinese characters from oracle bones to the present in the form of animation, and it is clear at a glance how Chinese characters come from, and the meaning of each Chinese character is impressive, which is convenient for people to remember. Oracle bone style helps students to develop an interest in learning Chinese characters, so that they gradually identify emotionally with such a complex and difficult writing form. It can also allow students to touch the breadth and depth of Chinese traditional culture in the process of learning Chinese characters. Therefore, the role of oracle bone script in teaching Chinese characters as a foreign language is worth paying attention to. Meanwhile, because Chinese Oracle bone inscriptions are very ancient scripts, it's not advisable to get too deeply involved in its purpose as a means as it is not necessary to master ancient Chinese characters at this stage. As long as the awareness is established, the students could be brought to next stage of learning. In a nutshell, this is only a way to throw bricks and lead jade, we cannot put the cart before the horse.

4.2 Approach of Chinese characters radicals. Since most Chinese are pictophonetic characters, there will be a phenomenon of guessing the pronunciation of the radicals, or knowing the meaning of Chinese characters according to the radicals, which is not rigorous academically, but it is a very effective learning method for international students who are not in sinosphere. For example, the river, the lake, the sea and other Chinese characters, the common feature is that the water character is on the left side, it's not necessary for the teacher to introduce and teach them word by word, but explain the water component of these characters. By knowing this method, the students will also know that these characters are also related to water when they encounter some Chinese characters that they do not yet know, such as sweat, drip, and flow. By guessing the approximate meaning of the new words based on the known components, which is similar to the prefix, the stem and the suffix when learning English. So it is recommended to the foreign students as another learning method.

4.3 Analogical memory method. The similar relationship of Chinese characters is the same as the spelling of the English words. There are similar characters in all languages. The learning of Chinese characters is not only a process of expanding the number of characters and vocabulary, but also a process of correctly distinguishing the confused characters and words. For example, the character of you and heart are combined into respectful you. In addition, teachers can make component cards and single character cards by themselves to help students learn and use them through continuous combination and separation. This method of Chinese character recognition is especially suitable for students who already have a preliminary amount of Chinese characters.

4.4 Computer aids writing approach. After the perceptual knowledge of Chinese characters from the students are established by using computer teaching, they can improve their level of Chinese characters accordingly. However here is the question: is it suitable for students to learn written Chinese characters by computer and when it's the right time? From the author's perspective, after the students have a certain amount of literacy, they can use computers to write Chinese characters and it should be put in the traditional way of teaching Chinese characters. When starting

to learn disyllabic vocabulary and idioms, we can consider to add the written part by using computer. Chinese has evolved from a monosyllabic language to a disyllabic language after thousands of decades. With the Chinese intelligent input method, students can continuously tap the phonetic transcription of two syllable words, and the computer can pop up alternative words for selection. For some words with three characters and idioms, or some other words with more than two characters are especially good with computers, it's hardly needed to choose the words after tapping the phonetic transcription, because the desired phrase will be automatically displayed. In the author's opinion, when students rapidly expand their Chinese vocabulary, plus use computers as a teaching aid, on the one hand, verify whether their phonetic transcription is correct or not, and on the other hand, train students to recognize static Chinese words. There is also a big advantage, the Chinese phonetic alphabet is easy for foreign students to master, it can be quickly combined and reflected with the Chinese character font, so that students can establish a feeling that it is not difficult to convert the Chinese phonetic alphabet into the Chinese character font. Once they have mastered it, they can even feel it is very simple, which greatly enhances their confidence in learning.

5. Conclusion

In a nutshell, this paper is a just a reference and experience sharing from the author for Chinese teaching in Belgium. From the questionnaires and ranking with statistical data to get the top difficulties, then conduct Oracle bone inscriptions teaching approach to solve the problem of understanding of Chinese characters meaning, with the approach of Chinese characters radicals, it's easier to distinguish Chinese character glyphs, coming along with analogical memory method to remember the Chinese characters and computer aids approach to help the students with Chinese characters writing. However, the sampling size of 105 students among more than 200 million Chinese learners is like a drop in the ocean. It's necessary for us to appeal to all the Chinese international education teacher to conduct similar research all over the world, and it is believed that contention of a hundred schools of thought is on the way to promote international education of Chinese language.

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