

To: UBC Chinese Language Program Course Coordinator

From: Miranda Tang, UBC Student

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Subject: Proposal for Renovating Listening Training Approaches in Chinese Language Courses at UBC

Introduction

Since its inception in 1957–1958, the Chinese language program at UBC has had over 2000 individual registrations per year, making it the largest and most comprehensive program for Chinese studies in North America. It currently offers all levels (100-400) of language and literature courses to meet the special needs of students of diverse backgrounds and conforms to a fundamental policy that students be placed in courses appropriate to their existing level of ability so that they can learn and develop their language proficiency to a higher level.

Despite the program's determined efforts to serve all students well by maintaining the highest standards of teaching and learning, there exist deficiencies in the present educational approaches that may result in a negative perception of the courses by students. These deficiencies are most apparent in non-heritage language courses, which are designed for foreign language learners who have had no previous exposure to the Chinese language and who need to develop all four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Listening, among all language skills, is regarded as

the most difficult skill for L2 learners, especially for those with lower proficiency (Renandya & Farrell, 2011). Without a better understanding of what listeners do and what problems they may confront in a certain context, teachers in the Chinese language program are likely to hinder students from taking independent, creative control of the language.

Statement of Problem

There is a lack of effective training in listening skills in the non-heritage 100- and 200-level courses provided by the Chinese language program at UBC. Most materials selected in class, including a limited number of exercises in textbooks, fail to suit listeners' language competence or are simplified texts that eliminate the rhythms and pause patterns of natural speech. Contextual information is often lost in listening activities, where audio recordings with no visual support are the primary sources of training. Success in listening is solely measured by correct responses to questions or tasks, which thus turns listening into a repeated encounter with failure.

Proposed Solution

One possible solution to the problem of a lack of sufficient and effective listening training in Chinese language courses is to combine a strategic approach with extensive listening exercises. The strategic approach here refers to cultivating students' ability to draw upon contextual evidence to make intelligent guesses based on the dislocated words they recognize, which is particularly important when understanding is impaired by limited vocabulary or syntax (Field,

1998). Extensive listening, on the other hand, employs a large amount of comprehensible and enjoyable input through all types of listening activities (e.g., reading aloud) (Chang & Millett, 2014).

This combination of strategic training and extensive listening cannot succeed without the support of suitable materials and well-designed tasks. Therefore, authentic materials should be introduced in class rather than simplified ones, and the tasks should prioritize reasonable interpretation of the whole text rather than exact recall of verbal detail (Harmer, 2015).

Scope

To determine whether this proposed solution is viable, I plan to investigate five areas of inquiry:

1. What teaching approaches have been adopted in the present Chinese language courses at UBC?
2. What improvements would students in Chinese language courses wish to see in terms of boosting their listening skills?
3. Based on the existing research in listening training, which teaching approaches are deemed the most effective?
4. What features or practices can be introduced in future Chinese language courses to provide students with better listening training?

5. What implications can we draw from a recent experiment conducted by my former colleague in China, in which she testified to the effectiveness of authentic materials in improving Chinese learners' listening skills?

Methods

My primary data sources will include informal interviews with TAs in Chinese language courses to gather insight into the present educational approaches adopted in class. I will also perform anonymous surveys with students in Chinese language courses to pinpoint the deficiencies that may exist in the listening training they receive and to determine what improvements they wish to see concerning this issue.

Secondary sources will include publications on effective teaching approaches in listening training and a review of a study by my former colleague on the effectiveness of authentic materials in alleviating learners' anxiety, generating motivation, and ultimately improving their listening skills.

My Qualifications

After five years of study at East China Normal University, among which one year was spent at Durham University as an exchange student, I obtained my bachelor's degree in Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages in June 2022. This degree has given me a thorough understanding of teaching theories and methods and has deepened my knowledge of the training

of Chinese language teachers at home and abroad. The courses I took covered the core areas of linguistics and the fundamental concepts in the study of language. I was encouraged to explore how the bilingual mind processes, develops, and maintains multiple linguistic systems and what tools can be used to assess the degree of language acquisition and facilitate language learning. In the meantime, my stints of teaching the elderly English at a community college in China and volunteering in British primary schools further enhanced my ability to apply these teaching theories to realistic settings.

Conclusion

Listening plays a significant role in language learning: it is the starting point for understanding spoken words and promotes learners' acquisition of new language forms from authentic materials. At the same time, listening is regarded as the most difficult skill for L2 learners, especially for those with lower proficiency.

By addressing the five areas of inquiry mentioned earlier, I can discover which teaching approaches might be the most effective in terms of boosting learners' listening skills and determine what materials or tasks would best supplement such approaches. Using this information, I will suggest ways in which teachers in Chinese language courses at UBC can better support their students in developing listening skills.

Works Cited

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