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Теоретико-методические подходы в преподавании китайского языка в начальной школе (на примере специфических лингвистических задач: тона и иероглифы)

Аннотация: В данной статье анализируются теоретико-методологические подходы к обучению китайскому языку (мандарин) в начальной школе (возраст 5–11 лет) с акцентом на специфические трудности, связанные с тональной системой и иероглифической письменностью. Растущий мировой спрос на обучение китайскому языку на уровне начального образования требует переоценки педагогических практик. В исследовании проводится синтез релевантных теорий усвоения второго языка (SLA) и рассматриваются методики, адаптированные для удовлетворения уникальных когнитивных потребностей младших школьников при изучении тонов и иероглифов китайского языка. Анализируется адаптация основных педагогических моделей (CLT, TBLT, CLIL, TPR/TPRS, TELL) для преподавания китайского языка в начальных классах. Целью анализа является создание теоретически обоснованной базы для принятия педагогических решений, разработки учебных программ и подготовки учителей для программ обучения китайскому языку в начальной школе.

Ключевые слова: начальный класс китайского языка, теоретические и методические подходы, преподавание китайского языка, педагогическая практика

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Theoretico-Methodological Approaches at Teaching Mandarin Chinese in Primary Education (on the example of Specific Linguistic Challenges: Tones and Characters)

Abstract: The given article analyzes theoretical and methodological approaches to teaching Mandarin Chinese in primary education (ages 5–11), focusing on the specific challenges posed by the tonal system and logographic script. The increasing global demand for Mandarin instruction at the primary level necessitates a re-evaluation of pedagogical practices. The study synthesizes relevant Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theories and examines methodologies tailored to address the unique cognitive needs of young learners (YLs) in acquiring Mandarin tones and characters. It investigates the adaptation of major pedagogical frameworks (CLT, TBLT, CLIL, TPR/TPRS, TELL)

for the primary Chinese classroom. The analysis aims to provide a theoretically sound foundation for informing pedagogical decisions, curriculum development, and teacher training in primary Chinese language programs.

Key words: primary Chinese classroom, theoretical and methodological approaches, teaching Mandarin Chinese, pedagogical practices

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. THE RISE OF MANDARIN CHINESE IN GLOBAL EDUCATION

In recent decades, Mandarin Chinese has experienced a meteoric rise in global prominence, driven by China's economic growth, cultural influence, and geopolitical significance. This has translated into a surge in demand for Chinese language learning opportunities worldwide, extending beyond higher education and secondary schools into the primary education sector [Zhang & Li 2018; Zhao & Liu 2020]. Introducing Chinese at the primary level (typically encompassing ages 5–11) is increasingly advocated, underpinned by arguments related to cognitive benefits associated with early bilingualism, the potential for achieving higher long-term proficiency through early exposure, and the fostering of intercultural understanding from a young age [Ashrapov 2021, 2022; Rashidova 2022; Lo & Murphy 2010; Lin & Lu 2017; Murodi 2021; Dodokhojaeva 2021].

1.2. UNIQUE CHALLENGES IN TEACHING CHINESE TO YOUNG LEARNERS (YLSC)

Despite the benefits, teaching Mandarin Chinese to young learners, particularly those whose first language (L1) is typologically distant (e. g., English), presents significant challenges for educators and curriculum designers:

Tonal System: mandarin is a tonal language where pitch contour distinguishes meaning. Acquiring accurate perception and production of the four main tones (and the neutral tone) is notoriously difficult for learners whose L1 is non-tonal and requires explicit pedagogical attention from the outset [Braun & Clarke 2006; Chen & Yang 2019; Davison & Leung 2009].

Logographic Writing System: unlike alphabetic scripts, Chinese uses characters (汉字, hànzì) that represent morphemes or syllables. Learning thousands of characters, understanding their structure (radicals, components), and mastering stroke order for writing poses a substantial cognitive load, especially for young children still developing L1 literacy [Shen 2013; Everson & Shen 2010].

Pinyin: while Hanyu Pinyin (汉语拼音, hànyǔ pīnyīn), the official romanization system, serves as a crucial phonetic tool, its relationship to English phonetics is not always intuitive, and managing the transition from Pinyin dependency to character recognition requires careful pedagogical sequencing [Everson & Xiao 2012].

Cultural Distance: significant differences in cultural norms, communication styles, and conceptual frameworks between Chinese culture and many learners' home cultures necessitate explicit cultural instruction integrated within language teaching to foster comprehension and appropriate use [Xu & Wu 2014; Wang 2015].

Age-Appropriate Pedagogy: methods suitable for adolescents or adults often need substantial adaptation for primary learners, requiring a focus on play, movement, multi-sensory engagement, concrete concepts, and shorter attention spans [Han 2015; Lai & Gu 2011].

1.3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE AND SCOPE

The primary objective of this article is to analyze and synthesize key theoretical perspectives that inform effective teaching methodologies for Mandarin Chinese in primary education (ages 5–11). The scope includes:

– to consider foundational SLA theories and their applicability to YLsC;

– to examine theories and approaches specifically addressing the teaching of Mandarin tones and characters to young learners

– to analyze major pedagogical frameworks (CLT, TBLT, CLIL, TPR/TPRS, TELL) as adapted for the primary Chinese classroom.

The corpus of our study aims to provide a theoretically grounded overview to inform pedagogical choices, curriculum development, and teacher education for primary Chinese language programs.

2. METHODS

The given article employs a qualitative research design centered on a systematic literature review and theoretical synthesis. It does not involve empirical data collection but rather analyzes and integrates existing scholarly knowledge regarding the theoretical basis of teaching methods for Mandarin Chinese in primary education. The aim is to construct a coherent overview of the field, identify key theoretical influences, and analyze their application to pedagogical practice for YLsC.

While the primary focus was on English-language publications to ensure broad accessibility, relevant insights from summaries or abstracts of research published in Chinese (e. g., via CNKI – China National Knowledge Infrastructure) were considered when available in English translation or through secondary source references, acknowledging the potential limitation of predominantly relying on Anglophone literature.

Data Analysis and Synthesis

A thematic analysis approach was used to analyze the selected literature [Leung 2017]. This involved:

1. *Familiarization:* to read and re-read the selected articles and chapters to gain a thorough understanding of their content.

2. *Initial Coding:* to identify the key concepts, theoretical frameworks, and pedagogical methods discussed in relation to teaching Chinese to young learners.

3. *Theme Identification:* to group related codes into potential themes (e. g., Input-based theories, Interactionist theories, Tone pedagogy, Character pedagogy, Communicative approaches).

4. *Theme Review and Refinement:* to dwell on the identified themes against the coded data and the entire dataset to ensure coherence, distinctiveness, and comprehensive coverage of the literature. Themes were refined and organized into logical categories reflecting major theoretical influences and pedagogical domains.

5. *Synthesis:* to integrate the findings within each theme to construct a coherent narrative summarizing the state of theoretical understanding regarding effective methods for teaching Chinese in primary contexts. This involved identifying areas of consensus, divergence, and gaps in the literature.

6. *Critical Evaluation:* to analyze the applicability and potential limitations of various theories and methods in the specific context of YLsC, to consider their cognitive development and the unique features of the Chinese language.

3. MAIN RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Theoretical Perspectives and Methodological Approaches: the thematic analysis of the literature revealed several key theoretical foundations and associated methodological approaches informing the teaching of Mandarin Chinese in primary classes. These are presented below.

3.1. Foundational SLA Theories and Applications for YLsC: established theories of second language acquisition provide crucial grounding, though they require adaptation for the specific age group and linguistic context.

3.1.1. Input Hypothesis: Li's (2012) emphasis on comprehensible input (i + 1) remains highly influential. For YLsC, this translates into creating a language-rich environment where exposure to meaningful Chinese occurs slightly beyond their current level.

Methods: extensive use of visuals (flashcards, pictures, realia), gestures, facial expressions, simplified language, repetition, routines, storytelling (especially with visual aids), and Total Physical Response (TPR) where commands are linked to actions [Rea-Dickins 2001; Li 2012]. The focus is on understanding before production is expected.

3.1.2. Interaction Hypothesis and Sociocultural Theory: to highlight the importance of interaction and negotiation of meaning for language acquisition. concepts of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and scaffolding emphasize learning as a social process, where learners achieve more with guidance from teachers or more capable peers.

Methods: structured pair and group work (adapted for simplicity), information gap activities, teacher-led questioning that encourages participation, using predictable conversational routines, collaborative tasks (e. g., sorting pictures, simple projects), and explicit scaffolding techniques where the teacher provides temporary support (linguistic or conceptual) that is gradually withdrawn [Sun 2019].

3.1.3. Output Hypothesis (Swain): Swain (2005) argued that comprehensible output – producing language that is understood by others – pushes learners to process language more deeply, notice gaps in their knowledge, and test hypotheses. For YLsC, output should be encouraged in low-anxiety situations.

Methods: opportunities for meaningful, albeit simple, language production through games (e. g., guessing games, board games requiring verbal responses), songs and chants (providing structured output), simple role-plays based on familiar scenarios (ordering food, greetings), show-and-tell activities, and short presentations or descriptions using learned vocabulary and sentence patterns [Zhu & Li 2017].

3.1.4. Cognitive Theories: principles from cognitive psychology highlight the importance of attention, memory, and processing limitations in young learners. Learning should be multi-sensory, engaging, and involve appropriate levels of repetition and recycling of language.

Methods: incorporating movement, music, rhythm, and visual aids; breaking down complex information (like characters) into smaller chunks; using games for repetition and reinforcement; varying activities frequently to maintain attention; explicitly drawing attention to key language features (e. g., tones, character components) in meaningful contexts.

3.2. ADDRESSING SPECIFIC LINGUISTIC CHALLENGES: TONES AND CHARACTERS

Mandarin Chinese instruction for young learners (YLs) necessitates specialized pedagogical strategies to address the distinct linguistic challenges presented by its tonal system and logographic orthography. Efficacious pedagogy for primary-level YLs

leverages multi-sensory input, contextualized learning, and active engagement over abstract memorization to optimize acquisition and maintain learner motivation.

3.2.1. PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES FOR MANDARIN TONE ACQUISITION

Effective tone pedagogy for YLs prioritizes the development of robust auditory discrimination abilities, the establishment of kinesthetic and visual associations for tonal contours, and the integration of tones within meaningful communicative contexts from the initial stages of learning [Wang 2015; Zhao & Liu 2020]. Research suggests that decontextualized drills focusing on isolated syllables are less efficacious than methods embedding tones within lexical items and providing concrete representations.

Methods & Examples:

Auditory Discrimination Training: Enhancing perceptual sensitivity to tonal distinctions is foundational.

Minimal Pair Discrimination Activities:

Auditory-Visual Matching: learners identify the correct visual representation (e.g., **Picture Point**) corresponding to a spoken stimulus from a minimal pair set differing only in tone (e. g., 汤 tāng – soup vs. 糖 táng – candy; 睡觉 shuìjiào – sleep vs. 水饺 shuǐjiǎo – dumplings).

Tonal Categorization Tasks: learners classify auditory stimuli (words represented by Pinyin or pictures, e.g., 妈 mā, 麻 má, 马 mǎ, 骂 mà) sorting corresponding cards into categories based on perceived tone.

Oddity Tasks: learners identify the stimulus with a deviant tone within a set of three syllables, where two share the identical tone (e. g., mā, mā, má).

Kinesthetic and Visual Aids (See and Feel the Tones): to employ physical movements and visual representations facilitates the internalization of tonal contours.

Manual Gestural Representation: to utilize standardized hand movements mirroring the pitch contour of each tone (e. g., level trajectory for Tone 1, ascending trajectory for Tone 2, descending-ascending for Tone 3, descending for Tone 4, brief motion for Neutral Tone). Learners practice vocalization synchronized with corresponding gestures.

Gross Motor Association: to engage whole-body movements correlating with specific tone contours (e. g., upward extension for Tone 1, rising motion for Tone 2, dipping motion for Tone 3, downward motion for Tone 4). This can be integrated into structured activities like command-response games.

Color-Tone Association: to assign systematically distinct colors to each Mandarin tone, consistently applied across instructional materials (e. g., Pinyin charts, flashcards, orthographic representations: (老师说 Lǎoshī shuō...) to create visual anchors.

Diacritic Awareness: to present consistently and explicit focus on the standard diacritic marks corresponding to each tone above Pinyin vowels, reinforcing the visual encoding of tonal information.

Musical Reinforcement: to capitalize on children's inherent responsiveness to musical stimuli to facilitate tonal acquisition.

Song-Based Instruction: to utilize simple, repetitive songs frequently employed in children's education, where the melodic contours often approximate or reinforce correct tonal patterns (e. g., 两只老虎 Liǎng zhī lǎohǔ, 找朋友 Zhǎo péngyǒu). Explicitly draw learners' attention to the pitch variations associated with key lexical items within the song.

Rhythmic Chanting: to employ rhythmic chants, incorporating vocabulary, numerical sequences, or short phrases. The rhythmic structure provides temporal scaffolding

for tonal anchoring (e. g., "一二三四五 yī èr sān sì wǔ, 上山打老虎 shàng shān dǎ lǎohǔ...), simultaneous clapping or tapping can further enhance auditory-motor integration.

Isolated Tone Melodies: to practice tonal sequences using a single syllable (e.g., /ma/ in various tonal configurations) set to a basic melody or rhythmic pulse. This method focuses exclusively on the accurate realization of the target tones.

Contextualized Tone Instruction: to introduce tones within meaningful linguistic units rather than in isolation.

Lexical Primacy: to prioritize initial tone practice with high-frequency, concrete vocabulary relevant to the learners' experiences (e. g., 妈妈 māma, 爸爸 bàba, 猫 māo, 狗 gǒu, 苹果 píngguǒ, 吃 chī, 喝 hē).

Phrasal and Sentential Embedding: to integrate tone practice into common greetings (你好 Nǐ hǎo), interrogative sentences (你好吗? Nǐ hǎo ma?), and classroom directives (请坐 qǐng zuò, 起立 qǐlì). Model natural, albeit slightly exaggerated, tonal articulation within these communicative contexts.

Narrative Exposure: to utilize expressive oral storytelling, emphasizing accurate tonal production to convey meaning and emotional nuances. Encourage learners to echo key words and phrases, focusing on tonal correctness.

Instructional Patience and Positive Feedback: to recognize that tonal acquisition is a process that requires sustained exposure and time; to emphasize comprehensibility over absolute accuracy in initial stages; to implement corrective feedback judiciously, focusing on errors that significantly impede comprehension; to prioritize positive reinforcement and encouragement of learner effort and attempts to minimize anxiety and promote communicative willingness.

4. CONCLUSION

The increasing integration of Mandarin Chinese into global primary education curricula necessitates a critical examination of effective pedagogical approaches tailored to the unique cognitive and developmental characteristics of young learners (YLs). This analysis highlights that the principal linguistic hurdles for YLs acquiring Mandarin – namely its tonal system and logographic writing system – demand specialized, theoretically informed instructional strategies. Evidence synthesized from Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research and specific studies on teaching Chinese as a foreign language converges on the inadequacy of rote learning or methods directly transposed from adult education.

Effective pedagogy for YLsC must systematically address tonal acquisition through multi-sensory techniques emphasizing auditory discrimination, kinesthetic-visual association, and integration within meaningful communicative contexts, rather than abstract phonetic drills. Similarly, the introduction of Chinese characters (Hànzì) requires approaches that prioritize meaning-making, leverage visual and pictographic elements, introduce structural components (radicals, stroke order) progressively, and utilize age-appropriate, engaging activities focused initially on recognition before demanding complex production.

The successful implementation of primary Mandarin programs, therefore, depends significantly on adopting pedagogical frameworks (such as adapted versions of CLT, TBLT, TPR) that are sensitive to these specific linguistic challenges. This implies a need for curriculum design and teacher education initiatives that equip educators with the specialized knowledge and methodological repertoire to foster both linguistic com-

petence and sustained motivation in young learners navigating the complexities of Mandarin tones and characters. Further empirical investigation into the comparative efficacy of specific interventions and the optimal sequencing of skills remains crucial for advancing evidence-based practice in this rapidly expanding educational field.

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