Micro-film Creation: A Novel Attempt by Thai Undergraduate Students in Advanced Chinese Audio-visual and Speaking Course

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Abstract

There is a lack of coherence between chapters in traditional Chinese audio-visual course in non-target language environments, and the design of exercises and practices primarily focuses on language learning and cultural understanding through selected individual video materials. This inhibits proactive self-expression and constrains the quality and quantity of discourse output among learners proficient at an advanced level of Chinese proficiency. This practice provides students with ample freedom of expression, encouraging them to actively engage in introspection regarding personal growth and societal issues, as well as promoting interdisciplinary expression through the utilization of the target language. Over a period of 4 months, students progressively prepare to produce micro-films as they participate in each chapter. In the end, each group needs to submit a micro-film, and individuals submit micro-film creation and viewed impressions. The course evaluation consists of assessments from Chinese language lecturers, film producers, as well as self-evaluations and peer evaluations conducted by the students. Guided by the Production-oriented Approach (POA), the selection criteria for chapters of film and television materials are mainly considered from three aspects: (1) thematic coverage, encompassing subjects such as economics, culture, politics, and natural sciences; (2) alignment with the various stages of micro-film creation, namely pre-production, shooting, and post-production; and (3) the difficulty of the materials, which is determined by factors such as pacing, average sentence length, and the HSK level of new words. The exercises in the chapters are designed to facilitate students in the conception of micro-films, analysis and development of roles, and training in performance skills. Research findings show that engaging in micro-film creation transforms students from passive audiences into active creators, thereby significantly igniting their enthusiasm for learning. The length of micro-film scripts written in the target language ranges from 2,600 to 6,300 words. Moreover, the enhancement of generic competences, particularly problem-solving abilities during the project, further fortifies students' self-confidence.

Keywords: *Chinese audio-visual and speaking course, advanced Chinese, micro-film creation, the multimodality theory, the production-oriented approach*

1 Introduction

Traditional exercises in Chinese audio-visual and speaking courses do not adequately meet the needs of intermediate to advanced-level Chinese learners to express themselves freely and comprehensively. The Production-Oriented Approach (POA) is designed to address the issues of input-output disparity and the prevalence of instrumentality over humanity in English teaching within Chinese higher education. It emphasizes the unit teaching process is composed of several

motivating-enabling-assessing cycles, with each cycle corresponding to a sub-production objective [3]. This approach has been widely adopted by numerous teachers and has received positive feedback for its teaching effectiveness. However, there is no sign that it has been widely applied in semester-long projects.

This study aims to discuss, within a semester-long audio-visual and speaking course, (a) the selection of chapter materials and design of chapter tasks under the guidance of the POA to assist undergraduate students in completing the course's major project — the creation of a micro-film, and (b) the process of micro-films producing is beneficial for enhancing students' generic competence.

2 Project design

2.1 Participants

This attempt was carried out in the first semester of the 2022-2023 academic year. The students are all Thai, majoring in Chinese language studies at the third year. The class comprised a total of 38 students, among whom 33 are female and 5 are male, with an average age of 20 years old. Prior to the project started, students' proficiency in the Chinese language ranged between HSK levels 5 to 6, which is approximately equivalent to the CEFR levels C1 to C2.

2.2 Motivation

In the first week, the teacher presented micro-film works made by former students (conducted entirely online during the pandemic period). Watching senior schoolmates, only slightly older by 1-2 years, independently writing, directing, and producing a complete micro-film in Chinese, ignited a strong desire in everyone in the classroom. During teacher-student interactions, the teacher encouraged students to extemporaneously outline a micro-film, helping students identify gaps in their in their capabilities and inspiring their desire to learn [7]. In the second week, a guest lecturer systematically explained the steps involved in content production, providing case studies of popular Thai series. The Chinese teacher guided students to comprehend the significance of micro-film creation. Through the warm-up sessions in the first two weeks, students realized that they were fully capable of creating a Chinese micro-film by the end of the semester in collaboration with their classmates [6].

2.3 Enabling

The chapter themes covered Chinese history, culture, economy, politics, and natural sciences, aiming to broaden students' understanding of the target language country, aiding them in acquiring the encyclopaedic knowledge required for output tasks [6]. These materials also supported the development of students' positive world views, intercultural competence, and social responsibility [7]. The video materials and corresponding production tasks for each chapter were specifically selected to align with the steps of micro-film creation, encompassing preparation, pre-production, production, and post-production. A variety of stimulus types (such as visual, auditory, reading/writing, kinaesthetic) and modes of activity organization enabled students to alternately utilize different cognitive processing mechanisms, thereby enhancing learning efficiency (Figure 1 and Table 1) [2, 5, 6]. Considering the difficulty of the input, video materials have a speaking speed of approximately 220-280 words per minute, with an average sentence length of 9-12 words. On average, there are 7-8 new words per hundred words, most of which are classified at HSK levels 5-6.

Figure 1. Production workflow

Chapter	Input Materials	Genre	Language Form	Theme	Stages of Micro-film Creation Associated with	Task	Notes
1	Appreciation previous Micro-film works	-	-	-		-	
2	Introduction to content production	-	-	-	Introduction to Micro-film Creation;	-	Guest lecturer, a senior producer, in Chinese and Thai
3	Tea Person	Documentary Film	Voiceover; interview; dialogue	Culture	Idea formation; Treatment and synopsis.	Personal presentation: My favorite quotes	
4	"Hitchhiking" Accident	TV Programs	Dialogue; voiceover; interview	Legal; morals		1. Role-play: Traffic Accident Interview Investigation 2. Poll: Do you suppose the court's verdict? Why?	
5	The Movie Dream of a Foreign Wife	Feature Film	Interview; voiceover; dialogue;	Intercultural communication; study in China	Script development; Casts and crews; Wardrobe; Make up; Location; Mood and tone.	Retelling stories	
6	100 people assistance charity activity series in Qinghai, China	Feature Film	Interview; voiceover	Public welfare		Group presentation: Introduce charitable activities that you or your idol have done	2 weeks
7	To Live	Movie	Dialogue	Modern Chinese history; kinship		Seminar	2 weeks
8	Animal Cubs Collection	Documentary Film	Voiceover; dubbing	Human and nature	Shooting	1. Script writing on animals 2. Group performance (based on Task 1)	
9	Takes a Real Man S02 Highlights	Variety show	Interview; voiceover	National defense education	※Post-production ※Distribution	1 Discuss 2 Voice dubbing	
10	Micro-film Screening, Reviews and Awards						

Table 1. Input materials and corresponding stages of micro-film creation

In the pre-production stage of micro-film production, the teaching objectives aimed to inspire students to consider the social background, main storyline, climax point, symbols, and motifs in their micro-film project. Using the teaching process of the film *To Live* as an example. This film, adapted from the eponymous novel, narrates the hardships endured by the protagonist's family during various historical periods, including the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, as they persistently choose to endure and continue living. The unit task involved conducting a seminar, with groups discussing the following topics:

i. How to interpret the film's title *To Live*?
ii. Heartwarming moments in the film *To Live.*
iii. (Dark) humor in the film *To Live.*
iv. Analysis of supporting characters in the film *To Live.*
v. A particular item runs through the entire film *To Live.* What is it, and what roles does it play in different historical periods?

During the production phase of micro-film creation, namely the shooting phase, the teaching objectives were focused on cultivating students' performance skills, particularly focusing on their dialogue delivery abilities [1]. While studying the defense-themed variety show *Takes a Real Man S02 Highlights*, the original footage featured intense conflict scenes between the squad leader and the celebrity soldiers experiencing life in the military camp, as well as personal interviews conducted by the director with the celebrity soldiers. The teacher instructed the students to analyze the participants' professional roles (military personnel, athlete, actors, TV host), the personas, and personalities. This aimed to help students understand the participants' initial reactions and language expressions within the program [5, 8]. After discussions, students were engaged in voice dubbing exercises, where the emphasis was not

only on pronunciation and intonation accuracy but also on the importance of emotion-filled vocal output [1, 2].

Though the post-production phase was not the focal point of this course for students majoring in language studies, it was still referenced throughout various chapters, encouraging self-study among students who are interested. Examples included the utilization of background music in the documentary *The Movie Dream of a Foreign Wife*, the extensive use of flashbacks in the TV program *Hitchhiking Accident*, and the implementation of reaction shots in the documentary *Animal Cubs Collection*.

Students were tasked with completing an outline in Chinese within a ten-week timeframe. The guest lecturer provided feedback on their outlines. Subsequently, students drafted the initial version of their Chinese scripts and sent them to the instructor for language polishing, particularly focusing on the lines of the characters.

2.4 Assessing

Upon completion of the micro-film shooting, each group uploaded their work to One Drive for exhibition. Additionally, each student was asked to submit a 600 to 800-word report in Chinese within three days after the display. The individual report included the following:

  i.   Reviewed the works of the other four groups and assigned scores based on the scoring criteria, and these scores were factored into the group's overall grade with a weightage of 30%. (story content and inspiration, voice, grammar, vocabulary, performance, and post-production); and designated four individual awards (Best Actor/Actress, Best Costume and Makeup, Best Cinematography, and Best Post-Production).
  ii. Reviewed their own group's work.
  iii. Summarized individual contributions to their group's work.
  iv. Discussed individual achievements throughout the project.

Two Chinese teachers (one from China and the other from Thailand) along with the guest lecturer evaluated the groups' works from the perspectives of language and micro-film production. Their scores to each work accounted for 70% of the group's total micro-film grade.

3 Results and discussion

3.1 Output quality

Group	Theme	The script length of the 1st version	The script length of the final version	Film Duration
Group 1 Supermodel War 《孰为（谓）汝吾好友乎？》	Fashion; vicious competition; jealousy and vanity; friendship	2369 words	2711 words	17:54
Group 2 Distrust in Friendship 《友谊友疑》	Friendship; trust crisis; reflection	4036 words	4137 words	19:33
Group 3 Unbreakable Love 《挨在身边》	Sisterhood; family's unfair treatment	5810 words	6248 words	16:14
Group 4 People Pleaser 《要懂得拒绝》	Mental health; people-pleasing	2271 words	2637 words	15:07
Group 5 Mad House 《疯人院》	Mental health; judging others	2930 words	3482 words	15:51

Table 2. Script Themes and Lengths

As shown (Table 2), the length of the scripts written in the target language by each group ranges from 2,600 to 6,300 words. The micro-film themes chosen by students are intricately linked to issues closely tied to their daily lives, yet often overlooked. They hope to reveal social phenomena and provoke

audience reflections through their audio-visual language. On the other hand, these themes also reflect the strong desire for self-identity among students.

3.2 Generic competences

Based on students' individual reports, they demonstrated proactivity in interdisciplinary learning during the micro-film creation process, encompassing target language knowledge and micro-film production techniques. With no restrictions on the theme, students are more inclined to invest time in self-study within their areas of interest. Encouraged by both peers and instructors, students are willing to venture out of their comfort zones and embrace challenges. Despite encountering numerous difficulties throughout the process, the immense sense of accomplishment upon successfully completing a micro-film project has significantly boosted students' self-confidence. Students' critical thinking and reflection have also received effective training through this practice. Their perception of social issues has evolved from either black or white to a progressively clearer recognition of the existence of gray areas. While confronted with criticism from others, students confidently and logically advocated for themselves. Their improvements in leadership, teamwork, communication, creativity, problem solving, and the critical reflection resonate with the generic competencies (including the Cluster of People Skills, Cluster of Conceptual Skills, and Cluster of Personal Skills) that undergraduate students should master [4].

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