



Out of Comfort Zone – Learning Chinese in Chaos

Hu Lung-Lung¹

Abstract

Mandarin Chinese has become a very important language global-wise, even the department of education of Sweden has made it a second language in middle and high schools, and my task as a language teacher is to help students not learn but, ideally speaking, “merge” with the Chinese to make Chinese as their own language. Therefore, how to realize this idea has been a challenge to me.

Since stage 3 courses (In stage 1 and 2 courses at DU, students, as beginners or only have learnt Chinese for one term, are taught with patterns, grammars, and phrases to speak and write structured and meaningful sentences, as well as short articles) I will ask students to do presentations and activities about some topics, which are related to but not bounded by textbook, which can stimulate students’ self-directory learning. Students, based on the learning materials in the textbook, need to learn by themselves. During such process, students will be able to apply knowledge they can find in the textbook as the pre-understanding to acquire knowledge external to the textbook and then reach a new understanding. (In Robert Han Jauss’s word: horizon of expectation) In so doing language applications based on old knowledge for describing and understanding is extended by studying new materials on their own.

In this presentation, I will explain my method of how I make Chinese as students’ own language by comparing two of my stage 3 courses – Oral Proficiency 3 (Debate) and Integrated Chinese 3: in integrated Chinese 3 I utilize a psychological effect that makes students balance the feeling of being secured and the feeling of being chaotic (one course has textbook to follow they feel that everything is in control and oriented; and another course has no textbook that makes students feel that this course is chaotic even if this course may have been deliberately designed and structured). I will also explain how students, based on the balance of two contradictory feelings, are more certain, voluntary, and not intimidated to deal with something beyond their reach during language activities since they have already had something in reach.

Keywords: Self-directory Learning; Horizon of Expectation; Psychological Effect; phenomenagraphy

1. Teaching Chinese as a foreign language

Mandarin Chinese (*putonghua*), which has different grammars, syntax, and writing system compared with European languages, is not only a language tool that students can use for their career in the future, but also is a path leading students to Chinese culture.

For students who have never systematically learnt Chinese before college, Chinese study contains two parts: the first part is the target language itself – patterns, grammars, and syntax; and the second part is Chinese culture in a broad sense including literature and philosophy. Each part has its own difficulty.

Aside from pronunciation, the biggest obstacle for students to learn Mandarin Chinese, due to the influences of students’ mother languages, is to write and speak Chinese in a correct sentence order.

Basically, modern Chinese also follows subject-verb-object sentence structure, however, since Chinese has a very weak sense of tenses and grammars, Chinese in a sense is freer than any other languages in the world. Hence, in terms of the communicative purpose of language, I, in the very beginning, will encourage students to create Chinese of their own based on some simple sentence structure. Errors of grammars and syntax are acceptable only if the information in speaking and writing can be addressed. Accordingly, students will not be controlled by linguistic rules and gain confidence and make Chinese as their own language. Then, once students are not afraid of Chinese anymore and know they can make Chinese their own language, they will be more motivated to study by themselves because they can see the result.

2. To make Chinese as students’ own language

Since China has been the second largest economy in the world, more and more students are interested in studying Mandarin Chinese for better job opportunity either in Chinese companies or in European companies who have businesses in China or in any other Chinese speaking countries or

¹ Media and Humanities, Dalarna University (Sweden)

areas. Therefore, Mandarin Chinese has become a very important language global-wise, even the department of education of Sweden has made it a second language in middle and high schools, and my task as a language teacher is to help students not learn but, ideally speaking, “merge” with the Chinese to make Chinese as their own language. Therefore, how to realize this idea has been a challenge to me.

In stage 1 and 2 courses, students, as beginners or only have learnt Chinese for one term, are taught with patterns, grammars, and phrases to speak and write structured and meaningful sentences, as well as short articles. But, since stage 3 students have had one year language training – Chinese is only a three year program; language training courses are only in the first two years –, it is time to encourage students to learn by themselves which is very crucial for them to make Chinese as their own language. I will ask students to do presentations and activities about some topics, which are related to but not bounded by textbook, which can stimulate students’ self-directory learning. Students, based on the learning materials in the textbook, need to learn by themselves. During such process, students will be able to apply knowledge they can find in the textbook as the pre-understanding to acquire knowledge external to the textbook and then reach a new understanding. (In Robert Han Jauss’s word: horizon of expectation) In so doing language applications based on old knowledge for describing and understanding is extended by studying new materials on their own.

For example, I design some activities related but not in the textbook. For a lesson about shopping, I ask students to make a presentation about fashion. Students need to introduce any items they like, such as clothes, pants, and accessories – brand, price, customer, and so on. This type of case-oriented / problem-solving activity is to activate the autonomy of learning. Students have to learn by themselves because they cannot find all the answers in the textbook, and such design can also activate their interest in active learning because I believe that students are willing to study what they think interesting and worthy-discussing topics such as fashion and some social issues.

English Text

Before Zhang Tianming came to school, his mom bought him some clothes such as T-shirts, sweaters, jeans, and so on, but he doesn’t think they are very good either in terms of style or color. Today is Sunday, and it just so happens that Lin Xuemei and Lisa need to buy some daily necessities such as toilet paper, toothpaste, towels, and laundry detergent, so Ke Lin takes them to the biggest shopping center nearby.

Ke Lin: What clothes do you want to buy?
 Zhang Tianming: I’d like to buy a sweatsuit set.
 Ke Lin: Here they are. Look at this one. The style, size, and length are all very suitable. Plus, it’s 20 percent off.
 Zhang Tianming: The color isn’t bad, either. How much money? What’s the brand?
 Lin Xuemei: The price is not expensive. I’ve never heard of the brand.
 Lisa: But it’s pure cotton.
 Zhang Tianming: It won’t do if it’s not a good brand. I want name brand.
 Ke Lin: You’re really fashionable, wearing name brands! That one looks like it’s name brand. Oh my, way too expensive.
 Zhang Tianming: When it comes to shopping, I only buy name brand or I won’t buy, because name-brand clothes are better quality.
 Lisa: That’s right. Some clothes are inexpensive, but they are not good brands. After you’ve worn them once or twice, you don’t want to wear them anymore and you have to buy another set. That way the

cost of buying two sets of clothes is higher than buying just the one name brand.
 Lin Xuemei: What you say makes sense.
 Ke Lin: Of course it’s not good if you only consider price when shopping for clothes, but you don’t have to insist on name brands. My criteria for buying clothes is comfort first, and good quality at a reasonable price second. What brand they are and whether they are fashionable or not, I don’t care. You wear your clothes for yourself, not for others to look at.
 Zhang Tianming: I don’t agree. Are you telling me you like to see Lin Xuemei wear ugly clothes?
 Ke Lin: Xuemei looks good in whatever clothes she’s wearing. Isn’t that right?
 Lin Xuemei: Don’t be so glib.
 Zhang Tianming: Ke Lin, how come the clothes you are wearing are name brand? I thought you didn’t wear name brand.
 Ke Lin: I said you don’t have to buy name brand, but I didn’t say I don’t wear name brand. I bought this when it was on sale.
 Lin Xuemei: Lisa, let’s go over to the daily necessities to have a look.
 Zhang Tianming: You go ahead. I’ll go pay first. We’ll see each other in a little bit.
 (Zhang Tianming is at the check-out counter...)
 Sales clerk: Sir, cash or credit card?
 Zhang Tianming: I’ll swipe my credit card.
 Sales clerk: Sir, with tax it’s \$186.40.
 Zhang Tianming: All right. ... Thank you! Goodbye.

As you can see, the text gives students a context for them to apply what they learn in this lesson, however, even if the text is very useful, the text limits students’ imagination and confines them in a specific context. For example, “fashion” could be an important topic for students to explore. Hence, I asked students to present something about fashion. To make a good presentation, students need to do a research by themselves – learn the product, find new Chinese words, sentences, and rhetorical expressions, and they even need to design a marketing strategy and then present it in Chinese. And, for letting students know that I am with them, I also made a presentation introducing my favorite brand and product to students. (Students’ presentations will be shown in the next section).

Week 9 Presentation

Fashion

- Find a brand – Swedish, French, Italian, or Chinese
- Pick an item – clothes, pants, shoes, or accessories
- Price – how much, why and how you set such price.
- If someone wants discount, how will you explain your produce is worth such price.
- Use words from today’s class (and from your own research).



3. Asking students to learn Chinese by themselves

As above-mentioned, to make students learn Chinese actively, I ask students in Chinese III to do research on topics which are related to but not the same as the topics in the textbook. The reason I use this teaching method is that, for achieving such result of active learning, I once tried it in my debate course which is also a stage 3 course, but, since there was not textbook for such language training course – there are books about debating but there are not books about using debating as language training – and I had to prepare some course materials totally strange to students, such as some articles regarding legitimization of prostitution, the limit of freedom of speech, and some racial and religious issues and legal cases. Here are some examples:

第十一周辩论题目

dì shí yī zhōu biàn lùn tí mù
Topic of debate in week 11

正方：选择职业时应将金钱因素排除在考量之外

xuǎn zé zhí yè shí yīng jiāng jīn qián yīn sù pái chú zài kǎo liàng zhī wài
Money as a fact of consideration should be excluded
when you look for a job

反方：选择职业时应只考量金钱因素

xuǎn zé zhí yè shí yīng zhǐ kǎo liàng jīn qián yīn sù
Money in career consideration should be the only one factor

第十八周 第三次辩论题目

The 3rd Debate in Week 18

现在瑞典的男女平权政策是否已经太超过了？

If Sweden's gender equality policy of today has gone too far?

正方
Affirmative

VS

反方
Negative

对，已经太超过了。
Yes, it has gone too far.

不，其实还不够。
No, it is not enough.

Except for [libel](#), [slander](#), [obscenity](#), [sedition](#) (including, for example inciting ethnic hatred), [copyright violation](#).

第十五周，第二次辩论比赛

Week 14, Debate game 2

Affirmative:

题目

Topic

Negative:

正方：教育者（社会，家属，老师）在教育中应对受教者（孩子，学生）严格管教。
Affirmative: Educators (society, parents, and teachers) should rule the learners (children and students) strictly.

反方：教育者（社会，家属，老师）在教育中应让受教者（孩子，学生）自由发展。
Negative: Educators (society, parents, and teachers) should let learners (children and students) develop freely.

第二十一周，第四次辩论比赛

Week 21 debate 4

Affirmative:

题目

Topic

Negative:

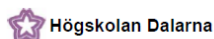
正方：言论自由应加以限制

Affirmative: freedom of speech should be limited.

反方：言论自由不应加以限制

Negative: freedom of speech shouldn't be limited.

As you can see, not all the topics are easy for students to understand and prepare under the circumstances of no textbook, therefore, students did complain as you can see in course material:



Course Evaluation

Name of course: Oral Proficiency III		Course Code: KI1031			
Course Coordinator: Teachers on the course: Lung Lung Hu		Semester: (V/H + Year): VT15			
Hours: 1.5		Higher education credits: 7.5			
Number of students who have evaluated the course:		4		Grades:	
Number of examined students:		Number of registered students:		VG	G
Campus					
Distance daytime	10	10	5	5	0
Distance Evening	0	0	0	0	0
Total	10	10	5	5	0
Type of evaluation: anonymous Fronter test					
Summary of students' evaluations:					
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students could obtain new vocabulary for various topics 2. Students had a lot of chances to talk. 3. Too many news words, better to make a list. 4. Students found the course too challenging. 5. Let a topic come back that students will have chance to review what they have learned. 6. Switch group members 					

deal with something beyond their reach during language activities since they have already had something in reach. As I mentioned in the previous section, also taking fashion as an example, students, based on what they have in their textbook, try to learn something new they are interested in and present to other students, and then other students can also learn more new things, such as:

So I took this opportunity of teaching a new course to adopt the teaching method I used in debate course, using the fact that Chinese III has a textbook with topics that students and I can both manage to offer students a well-structured course with textbook and clear instruction to follow; meanwhile, since I also use some topics which are not exactly the same as the topics in textbook to facilitate students' interests and motivation to do self-study. This method utilizes a psychological effect that: once students have a textbook to follow they feel that everything is in control and oriented (no textbook makes students feel that this course is chaotic even if this course may have been deliberately designed and structured), therefore, based on the feeling of security, students will be more certain, voluntary, and not intimidated to



(Alice)
手工制作的衬衫

我们手工制作的衬衫是地道的杰作。我们符合那不勒斯的传统。每一件衬衫都是一个杰作。所有的衬衫都是手工制作的。衬衫都是很认真地做出来的。我们的裁缝师都有丰富的经验并热爱他们的工作。追求完美和舒适是我们的目标。我们能符合每个客户的需要。我们有各种款式，再说，我们的造型师可以帮你选最好的造型，给你提供帮助。在意大利手工制作的衬衫是世界上最有名的，我们有最好的质量，最好的裁缝师。你一试，就不要穿别的衬衫。

(Junjie)
选织物的时候，重要记得：
我们在网址有尺寸大小，能看。如果您有问题，您最好约会见面，而且您想要我们把不已经买了合适的衣服，您也可以给我们打电话。

别忘了织物都不同，所以有的跟高棉纱支数有关，有的非常松软和光滑，但是也可以难保持，容易不想要的褶皱。测量身体的时候，你每次把卷尺带在身体上贴紧。所以您应该只穿内衣，这样我们能给您做合适的衣服。

两材质我们建议您试试：
Broadcloth——常常叫 Poplin，是紧密织的织物，因为织物有简单的上面和下面编织，织物有非常少的光泽，所以除了织物有光滑质地幸亏少的质地以外，织物是难有不想要的褶皱。因为织物还很薄，所以您活动的时候，感觉在身体上很舒服。我们选这个织物，因为它常常穿在西装里面，很流行，也很有职业感。

除此之外，每当您购买一件我们品牌的衬衫，我们会为“年轻的梦想家”基金捐款 50 元。“年轻的梦想家”基金是针对来自战争和贫穷国家的年轻设计师而设立的。基金会每年都会资助 3 名设计师为梦想求学或者开创品牌。也许您的下一件衬衫，就会是某一位曾经被基金会赞助的著名设计师设计的。



(Bence)
我们的公司自 1926 年以来制造衬衫，Grassia 有很长的经营历史。具体到衬衫产品，要想创建品牌却非常困难。但是，公司设置以后还没过五年，我们已经成为了无可争议的市场领导者。我们是一家家族公司，但是由于需求增加，Grassia 雇佣了更多的工人来增加生产。



时尚界的年轻创意人都希望一天在我们的公司工作。

have downsides. Since it is an online course, students don't really meet each other in person; sometimes they do not really communicate with each other. Hence, I may arrange a time – obligatory – in the future for students to participate online discussion together because students need real coordination, not just finish each part of the work assigned.

4. Conclusion – Theorizing my teaching

At the beginning of *Learning to Teach in Higher Education* chapter 6, Paul Ramsden quotes: “Bad teaching is teaching which presents an endless procession of meaningless signs, words and rules, and fails to arouse the imagination,” which implies that good teaching is teaching with arranged and meaningful signs that can arouse the imagination. It leads me to “what is imagination” and “imagination of what”, i.e. “what is knowledge” and “how knowledge is formed, transferred, and obtained”.



Pinpoint Oxford 纱线比 Oxford 的质量好。Pinpoint 的织物比 broadcloths 的重和厚。织物不透明。纱线能在 Broadcloth 里更看到。我们做礼服衬衫的时候，因为织物是被两种织物结合使用的关系，Pinpoint 纱线的衬衫正式和休闲都能穿。虽然织物正式和休闲都适合，我们推荐您在西装下面穿柔韧的织物。除了在办公室里穿很合适以外，还适合参加城市的派对。如果您没有别的参考选择，选择织物是一个很好的方法。



(Hanbing)
我们的衬衫全部使用天然环保的材料。在全球气候变暖的今天，倡导人们使用天然环保的材料，提高大家的环保意识，也是我们的理念之一。使用天然环保材料，并不意味着降低时尚的品味，相反，这是最流行最时尚的风格。我们的衬衫在穿旧或者破损以后可以回收再次利用。这样会大大减少每年的衣物垃圾。如果您寄回您的旧品牌旧衬衫，会得到 25% 的购物折扣哦！



我们手工制作的衬衫不仅流行而且是一件档次高的衬衫。不过，衬衫的价格挺合理的，价格是根据产品质量、生产制作成本以及市场动态等综合决定的。

我们提供各种颜色和款式的衬衫，每一个人都可以找到适合自己的款式。公司致力于为客户提供高品质、风格别致的产品。一件优质的衬衫比十件一般的更值得购买！好几个电影明星支持了我们的品牌和产品。如果您想穿一件跟电影明星一样的衬衫，那请试一试我们手工制作的衬衫吧！得体的打扮，是自信的表现！

Before students presented, I didn't know about this brand. In presentation, I really felt the enthusiasm and idea of this company, and students' love of this company's products. From students' presentations, I can also assess how many words, sentence structure, and knowledge of such brand and product students learn by themselves. Since presentation is also a part of grading, students need to take such activity seriously. Therefore, the improvement of their language skills and their attitudes toward this activity are quite obvious that I can see in their presentations. Although students were quite enjoying learning new things by themselves through cooperation with their teammates, such activity does



Therefore, the question of what the nature of knowledge is comes first into my mind. From a Platonic point of view, knowledge is a description of a prototypical ideal of an empirical phenomenon in the real world that can be acknowledged and perceived by human intelligence. Or, knowledge is an existent entity that we at least admit its existence that we can experience through the interaction between the consciousness and the outside world, if we examine knowledge from the perspective of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology.

Both theories imply that knowledge is fixed, universal and eternal that the only way for learners to know is to learn from someone who has already known it. But, if we try to trace back to the origin, some questions will arise, such as "who is the first teacher" and "who or 'what' taught the first teacher to be a teacher" who made an un-seeable Being a teachable knowledge. The first teacher somehow had to form knowledge in a situation that no one would be his or her teacher. That is to say: the first teacher must learn by him or herself; and the first teacher must be a learner before he or she became a teacher.

If we treat knowledge in this way, knowledge is no longer a thing that students can only learn from their teachers. Knowledge needs to be discovered by learners themselves even if we still believe some transcendental existence as their teacher. When post-structuralism and de-structuralism are involved in the discussion about knowledge, the idea of knowledge is changed and the stability of knowledge is challenged. Knowledge becomes multiple and individual, teachers no longer transfer knowledge but encourage students to create his or her own knowledge in "chaos".

As what I have mentioned in the previous sections, students learn Chinese not in the textbook based on the textbook. In other words: students learn Chinese through a controllable chaotic process. It is a very irrational emotion that once you have a textbook you feel something in control; if there is no textbook your emotion will tell you that this course is chaotic even if such course may have actually been well-structured. Therefore, I want to take an advantage of that. Because we use textbook in this course and I also explain some vocab., grammars, and sentences from the textbook, students are assured that they have something to follow. But, when an activity starts, this course will be switched to an uncontrolled or a least controllable mode in which students have to force themselves to learn actively and voluntarily. Meanwhile, since the activity is related to the textbook, students will still be given a feeling (or illusion) that they are still in control. If I say that case-oriented / problem-solving is my teaching method, giving students an illusion that they are in control but in fact I am pushing them to the edge of out-of-control will be the methodology.

If I need to apply a theory to theorize my teaching, I will use phenomena-graphy. Knowledge is something "there" but also needs to be constructed. Therefore, phenomena-graphy is a very suitable term to define my teaching method because phenomenology implies the "existence" of knowledge, and graphy – like photography and calligraphy – suggests the construction of raw materials. It is like stars don't line up by themselves to form a particular constellation; stars are lined up and formed to be a certain constellation by humans' minds. A constellation is there, but is also not there if human intelligence doesn't get involved. I think this idea can also be applied in language teaching, students need to get involved to form knowledge of their own.