THE IMPORTANCE OF LEARNER DIVERSITY AND FOREIGN LANGUAGE STANDARDS IN THE CHINESE CLASSROOM IN THE UNITED STATES

A Thesis
Presented
to the Faculty of
California State University, Chico

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Teaching International Languages

by
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Summer 2015
THE IMPORTANCE OF LEARNER DIVERSITY AND FOREIGN LANGUAGE STANDARDS IN THE CHINESE CLASSROOM IN THE UNITED STATES

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to all those who supported me in the research. Your encouragement gave me incentive to continue working in the writing process, and made this thesis possible.

I would like to thank my first committee chair, Dr. Hernández. She led me into the program and; opening a new world to me. She prepared me with critical thinking skills, helped me improve my research abilities and provided all the necessary support for my professional development.

I would like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Thompson. She gave me so much valuable feedback, which not only improved the quality of the research, but also renewed my teaching philosophy. Her assistance was key to the success of this thesis. I really appreciate her support through the whole process.

I also want to thank Dr. Selvester. The flames of curiosity she inspired in me during the curriculum course I took with her benefit my career as a Chinese language teacher in many ways. The support she provided me in writing this thesis made this writing process go smoothly.

And last, I want to thank my dear family: My son, Yao, who helped edit my paper; my husband, Tao, who encouraged me to keep working despite facing difficulties; and my parents, who provided support to make sure I could focus on this study.
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ABSTRACT

THE IMPORTANCE OF LEARNER DIVERSITY AND FOREIGN LANGUAGE STANDARDS IN THE CHINESE CLASSROOM IN THE UNITED STATES

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With the recent development of teaching Chinese as a foreign language in the United States, Chinese language instructors and researchers are working hard to have better teaching quality in order to improve students’ language proficiency.

Based on the recent research, this thesis examined two important issues that are important for Chinese language instructors in their daily teaching.

One is the learner diversity, which focuses on the cross-linguistic influence, heritage and non-heritage language learners, and diverse learning styles in this thesis, which can impact Chinese language instructors on adapting strategies and methodology.

The foreign language standards, on the other hand, can prepare Chinese language instructors on the content of instruction. More specifically, the foreign language standards can guide Chinese language instructors on setting goals, adapting authentic
materials, adding cultural elements in the instruction, and teaching beyond the subject and classroom.

The application of these findings will benefit Chinese language teachers in meeting their diverse students’ needs in the classroom. Also, the research will help guide Chinese language instructors’ professional training through better understanding the foreign language standards and how they align with stronger classroom practice.
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Background

Given increasing global development, languages play an important role and “are the keys of global understanding” (D’Ambruoso & Silva, 2010, p. 20). Thus, in order to have a better understanding when communicating with our global neighbors, it is necessary to learn other nations’ languages as global citizens.

The increasing amount of Chinese immigrants also raises the need for teaching and learning Chinese in the United States. For the purpose of this paper, Chinese has the same meaning as Mandarin, Putonghua (普通话), or Guoyu (国语). The numbers of Chinese immigrants have increased in recent decades: “The Chinese population in the USA has been growing rapidly and reached over 2.5 million in 2000, making it the largest Asian group, and second-largest immigrant group (next to Mexicans) in the country” (Zhang & Slaughter-Defoe, 2009). Chinese is the second most commonly spoken non-English language in the United States (after Spanish), with over 2.6 million speakers (Heritage Languages in America, n.d.).

The United States is home to about 1.6 million Chinese immigrants (including those born in Hong Kong), making them the fourth-largest immigrant group in the United States after Mexican, Filipino, and Indian immigrants. . . . there were 3.2 million members of the Chinese diaspora residing in the United States in 2008, including 1.2 million native-born US citizens of Chinese ancestry. (Terrazas & Batalova, 2010)
In the United States, different groups learn Chinese for different reasons. Some take Chinese because of the population of China: Chinese is one of the most widely spoken languages in the world. Additionally, learning Chinese can enrich non-Chinese speakers’ understanding about Chinese culture and its impact. With thousands of years of Chinese history, Chinese culture is different from Western culture and has a big influence in the Asian region. As Asia Society pointed out, “China has a major international cultural presence in literature, philosophy, religion, film, dance, art, music, cuisine, and medicine, drawing on its tremendous heritage to enrich the present” (Asia Society, 2006, p. 1).

Some learners take Chinese because business between China and the United States is very popular and important. With the rise of China economically, knowing its culture and language is a big help for any business.

For tourists, learning Chinese fosters better communication with native Chinese speakers and deepens understanding of Chinese culture. The increasing amount of academic change between China and the United States makes communication and connection in academic areas important as well. Additionally, knowing the language can help scholars who are interested in Chinese history and cultures reach firsthand resources.

At the same time, most Chinese immigrants want the next generation to keep their roots so they can communicate with relatives in China. Moreover, some Chinese immigrants also think knowing Chinese is an advantage for children, as they can be involved in the development of Chinese economics in the future. Accordingly, these parents send their children to weekend heritage schools or take Chinese courses when available. Military personnel are the other group that wants to learn Chinese as well.
In all, for groups who want to know more about China and Chinese culture, learning Chinese is the best way to fulfill their goals.

Currently, there are many resources to help learning Chinese in the United States:

1. The formal education system. This could include different settings, K-12 or college, or classes provided by public or private schools.

2. Institutes or programs which provide Chinese courses or summer camps, such as the Confucius Institute, which also integrates with the formal education system.

3. Chinese heritage schools.

4. Online courses. Due to the development of technology, there are many online courses for people to learn or practice their Chinese.

In the formal American education system, more and more public and private schools provide courses in Chinese, from elementary schools to universities. “From 2005 to 2008, the latest data from the U.S. Department of Education that the council could use, Chinese grew from 20,300 students in grades K-12 to 59,860 students, a 195 percent increase” (Tennessee Chinese Chamber of Commerce, n.d.). “Nationwide, there are Chinese programs in more than 550 elementary, junior high and senior high schools, a 100% increase in two years” (Weise, 2007). For college students, according to fall 2006 enrollments in U.S. institutions of higher education, Chinese was ranked seventh in the top 15 languages learned in the United States. In 2002, the percentage of students who took Chinese was 2.4. The College Board provides AP Chinese and SAT Chinese to assess Chinese language proficiency for students who take Chinese courses before college. Some college students learned Chinese from the Confucius Institute, which is
supported by the Chinese government, or through courses provided by Flagship Programs. Universities also provide overseas immersion programs so that students can learn Chinese in China.

Another source for learning Chinese in the United States is Chinese heritage schools. McGinnis (2005, 2008) pointed out that “The majority of Chinese language education takes place in community-based programs, with over 600 programs and 140,000 students in 2005.” Furthermore,

Two national organizations, the Chinese School Association in the United States (from the People’s Republic of China) and the National Council of Associations of Chinese Language Schools (from Taiwan) provide a center for information dissemination and resource sharing among Chinese community-based schools. (Heritage Languages in America, n.d.)

Due to technological developments, some choose to take Chinese courses online in order to practice the language and improve their proficiency. The learners use Skype, chat rooms and other online resources. Chinese instructors use online resources as a method in the classroom, as well.

Researchers also noticed that these resources are not used separately in the learning or teaching processes. Many K-12 students who take courses in their schools probably attend a Chinese heritage school every Saturday, or an after-school Chinese program, and use the Internet as a support. And those who take Chinese in their K-12 or heritage schools will likely continue their Chinese learning in college, given the opportunity.
Statement of Problem

Recently, theory developing on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and Second Language Acquisition (SLA) has converted many language instructors’ pedagogies. This makes it urgent for Chinese language instructors to grow their curriculum based on recent research results and theories in Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL). At the same time, research has identified that there is a gap between Chinese instructors’ current pedagogy and the real need in Chinese instruction.

With the observations of other Chinese language instructors’ teaching, as well as my own personal teaching experience as a Chinese language teacher in a high school and two local Chinese heritage schools, I recognize these problems and their negative impact on the quality of teaching and learning in the Chinese language classroom. Thus, this thesis will focus on how and to what degree these problems could affect Chinese instructors’ teaching, and will also address some suggestions to help Chinese language instructors improve their teaching quality through this research.

For instance, in today’s foreign language classroom, a student-centered environment can motivate students’ learning. However, based on many Chinese language instructors’ cultural backgrounds, some still teach with an authoritarian pedagogy and feel the teacher should be the center of the classroom. Chinese language instructors should realize that it is the student who will learn the language, and should therefore be at the center of the instruction. More specifically, Chinese language instructors must pay more attention on learning factors in order to provide student-centered instructions in the language classroom. There has been a general lack of consistent standards for decades, and instructors are simply not clear about the goals of their teachings. The material in the
area is inauthentic, out of date, or places too much emphasis on knowledge rather than developing learners’ language proficiency. Rather, for a student-centered learning classroom, students will have more open-ended, real-life tasks, while getting involved in the learning process and therefore having the chance to develop critical thinking skills and learn from each other through collaboration and teamwork.

The problems mentioned above caused a great gap between Chinese language instructors’ current pedagogy and the needs of students of Chinese in the United States. However, all these problems could be improved upon by research on learner diversity, and how the *Standards for Foreign Language in the 21st Century* (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 1996, 1999, 2006) affect Chinese language instructors’ beliefs and pedagogical practices. In order to enhance instruction in the CFL area, instructors need to update theories and methodology, set goals, adapt appropriate materials, and deal with cultural issues in the Chinese language classroom.

**Purpose of Study**

This research also investigate what steps can be taken in order to best benefit practices in Chinese language teaching and learning in the United States. Exploring the challenges of current Chinese instruction in the United States can help students go deeper into the Chinese language, and will contribute to the spread of Chinese culture as well. As Vygotsky (1997) mentioned, human beings pass large amounts of knowledge across generations not biologically, but culturally (as cited by Liao & Larke, 2008, p. 5).

This research also provides a solid foundation for the theory and practice of teaching Chinese as foreign language in the United States. Furthermore, it will contribute to the development of a second language based on the characteristics of the Chinese language.

Research Questions

In recent years, the demand for Chinese has increased in the United States because of the developing global economy and rising Chinese immigration. There are many areas for the researchers to investigate: the linguistic differences between Chinese and English and how they will affect teaching and learning; how to choose appropriate materials; how to integrate technology with Chinese teaching and learning; how to assess or evaluate the teaching and learning; how to cooperate with local communities, and so on. However, based on recent research in the CFL area, the focus on how to update Chinese language instructors’ pedagogy should stem from the following two aspects:

1. For students from K-16 in the Chinese language classroom, their first language is English; some are heritage language learners, some are non-heritage language learners with different learning styles. Since learning factors are important in foreign language
acquisition, this research strives to note the important characteristics of Chinese language learners that an instructor should know.

2. When instructors know what they are going to teach, they can then focus on how to teach. Since the Standards for Foreign Language in the 21st Century (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 1996, 1999, 2006) and the Chinese-specific version (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 2006) tell Chinese instructors what should be taught, this paper wants to address how the standards can update instructors’ pedagogies. More specifically, how do the Standards for Foreign Language in the 21st Century (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 1996, 1999, 2006) help instructors renew their beliefs in setting goals, choosing appropriate materials, adding cultural elements, and teaching beyond the subject and classroom?

Thus Chapter I will be the overview of the paper. It will introduce the background of Chinese as a foreign language in the United States, why it is urgent to learn the language, who is actually doing the learning, and the various needs and challenges presented.

Chapter II will focus on learning issues. Since there are so many factors, such as age, gender, time, ethnic background, academic background, different learning styles, and cognitive issues, this paper will focus on the impact from factors like cross-linguistic influence, individual differences, and learners’ diverse cultural backgrounds in the foreign language classroom. Researchers will examine how these factors affect learners’ language proficiency in both the teaching and learning of Chinese.
Chapter III will inspect how the *Standards for Foreign Language in the 21st Century* (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 1996, 1999, 2006) contribute to Chinese language instructors’ pedagogic development. This chapter will also address how the standards benefit Chinese language instructors in setting goals, choosing materials, adding cultural issues in the curriculum, and teaching beyond the subject and classroom.

Chapter IV will be a discussion about recommendations and future research needed in the area; from current research, what kind of recommendations Chinese language instructors can get to make teaching and learning meaningful in the CFL area. More importantly, this thesis will discuss what kind of research is necessary for the further development of the area.

Limitations

Limitations in this research are as follows: The first is the limited research and findings in the new area. Teaching Chinese as a foreign language in the United States has recently attracted researchers’ attention because more students take the courses. In 1996, the number of students who were learning Chinese was about 82,675, and it expanded to 140,000 by 2005, according to the research by McGinnis (A. Liu, 2010, p. 2). With the rise of learners, more scholars have begun exploration in the area. As Professors Feng-sheng Hsueh and Timothy Light wrote, “[The monograph series] grew out of the increasing attention that has been given to theory and practice in Chinese language teaching over the past twenty years” (as cited by Everson & Shen, 2008, preface). However, the quantity and depth of the research in this new area is limited.
Additionally, most research of Chinese teaching and learning was done in these limited settings. Normally, the Chinese classroom is small, and the Chinese program in the United States is pretty rare. These issues limited research in the area, leading to general conclusions.

Another limitation is the limited access to some Chinese scholars’ research about teaching Chinese as foreign language in China. Some of their findings are written in Chinese and haven’t been published or translated to English; some data are also restricted to scholars and students overseas.

In this area, associations like the Chinese Language Teachers Association, and Chinese language programs (e.g., Startalk, Flagship) have just begun their research. The most well known institute for teaching Chinese in the USA is the Confucius Institute, sponsored by the Chinese government. Therefore, the researcher will have limited access to firsthand data and the teaching process under the instruction of the institute.

In this thesis, the primary resources came from the library of CSU, Chico, and the materials referring to the topic are restricted. This paper relied exclusively on other researchers’ findings and the author’s prior experiences, which is not enough to go deeper into the area.

Definition of Terms

Chinese Heritage School

In this paper, “Chinese heritage school” refers to informal schools that focus on K-12 Chinese language and cultural teachings. Most of them are sponsored by parents, and open on the weekend (Saturday or Sunday) or after school.
Chinese = Mandarin = Putonghua (普通话) = Guoyu (国语)

In this thesis, these four words have the same meaning. Normally, their meanings are different from one another. “Chinese” means all the languages Chinese people speak in their daily lives. For example: Cantonese and Mandarin. Mandarin is the standardized Chinese language in mainland China and Taiwan. Putonghua is another expression of standardized Chinese in mainland China. Guoyu is the way Chinese is expressed in Taiwan. In this paper, those four words have the same meaning, which is standard Chinese spoken on the mainland, as well as Taiwan. Mandarin is the official language of China. The majority of Chinese people can communicate in Mandarin. In China and Taiwan, schools teach Mandarin as Putonghua or Guoyu, while people still communicate in regional dialects. In the United States, some communities teach dialects like Cantonese, Taishanese, or Hakka. However, most learners prefer to learn Mandarin when they want to learn Chinese.

CFL

CFL means “Chinese as a foreign language.” For most learners in the United States, Chinese is a foreign language.

HLL

HLL means “heritage language learner” in this paper.

Non-HLL

Non-HLL means “non-heritage language learner” in this paper.
The Characters of Chinese

Different from English, Chinese is a character-based system; it has 3,500 characters used in daily life. For pronunciation, it has four tones. The language adapts the alphabet from the Western language system, used as Pinyin to help learners pronounce the word. For writing, it has a simplified form used in mainland China and Singapore; the traditional one is used in Taiwan.
CHAPTER II

SOME IMPORTANT LEARNER FACTORS

Introduction

In foreign language teaching, most evidence-based practices and curricula guidelines emphasize student-centered instruction because it is the student who is going to learn the language. This identifies the important role of learners in classroom. Therefore, how the learner’s background affects the language learning process is one of the main concerns in the field of second language acquisition.

What are the key factors in a learner’s background and how and to what degree do these factors impact language learning? Researchers investigate many aspects of learner backgrounds that impact SLA such as gender (Duff, 2012), age (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 2014), individual learning differences (Fillmore, Kempler, & Wang, 2014; Paradis, 2011), socio-economics (Saville-Troike, 2012), cultural (Liddicoat, 2006) and psychological factors (Gass & Mackey, 2013). These theories have helped foreign language instructors to realize the importance of learner factors, and have applied these theories to teaching in order to make learning more meaningful.

At the same time, for the Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) area, Chinese language instructors noticed that some students may repeat the same grammar mistakes; students’ diverse proficiency levels and differing language backgrounds in the Chinese classroom impact the efficiency of teaching and learning.
Based on that, this paper will address some aspects of the following: the influence of learners’ first language, the learners’ language background (heritage and non-heritage language learners), the diversity of learning styles, and the analysis of how these factors will affect Chinese language learning.

Among many factors affecting second language learning, researchers have long identified the importance of learners’ factors. Lightbown and Spada (2013) pointed out the importance of learners’ characteristics in the SLA. Larson-Freeman and Long (1991) said that there are two areas in SLA: the acquisition/learning progress, and the language learners. Weimer (2002) agrees with the importance of learners in the second language learning: “[The teacher] may set the stage, so to speak, and help out during rehearsals, but then it is up to students to perform, and when they do learn, it is the student, not the teacher, who should receive accolades” (p. xvi.). More and more researchers focused their investigation of the second language acquisition on learners, and their results are the guide for researchers in the CFL.

Tasker (2010) said that in order to know the learners’ needs and respond to them appropriately, it is necessary for educators to find out as much as they can about the learners themselves (p. 78). Learner factors in the second language acquisition ranged from individual factors, such as motivation, attitude (e.g., Ely, 1986; Gardner & Lambert, 1972; McGinnis, 1999; Wen, 1999), disposition (Bacon & Finnemann, 1990; Beebe, 1987) and anxiety (e.g., Gregerson, 2002; Onwuegbuzie, 2002), to social and cultural variables (Bacon, 1987; Wong Fillmore, 1976) (as cited by Chang, 2010, p. 103).

More specifically, Gui (2000) suggests that the learning process is influenced not only by the characteristics of the target language, but also the learners’ knowledge of
the world (as cited by A. Liu, 2010, p. 119). Canagarajah (2006) points out researchers should take into account diverse learning contexts and needs (as cited by Tasker, 2010, p. 14). More than that, individual differences in SLA also attract researchers’ attention. Research has shown that individual differences affect second language learning. Crozier (2001) points out the relationship between personality and learning, as well as personality and education. Revelle, Wilt, and Condon (2010) said: “The study of individual differences includes the study of affect, behavior, cognition, and motivation as they are affected by biological causes and environmental events” (p. 1).

Learners’ personal or social situations, which include family and cultural backgrounds as well as individual cognitive differences, could influence the quality of their language learning. These learner factors, along with those associated with the linguistic aspects, are orthography, genre and structure (Allen, Bernhart, Berry, & Demel, 1988; Koda 2007); the length of learning, perceptions, beliefs, emotional factors, and cognitive aspects make predicting the characteristics of learners difficult.

Additionally, researchers have become more aware of the diversity of language-learning backgrounds in the Chinese language classroom, such as the heritage language learners (HLLs) and non-heritage language learners (non-HLLs) (Liu, 2002; Wang, 2004; Xiao, 2008; Koda, Lü, & Zhang, 2008). According to McGinnis (2005) nationwide, there are around 24,000 Chinese students in secondary school and 160,000 in Chinese community heritage language (HL) schools (as cited by Everson & Xiao, 2011, p. 178). McGinnis (2005) found that the number of HLL is six times more than the mainstream students. Hence, a Chinese language classroom would be a class combined with HLLs and non-HLLs.
In order to know more about the influence of a first language, the learner’s language background and the characteristics of the individual become essential factors in the quality of Chinese language learning and teaching in the United States.

Cross-Linguistic Influence

Odlin (1989) described one characteristic of cross-linguistic influence (transfer) is “the influence resulting from the similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously (and perhaps imperfectly) acquired” (p. 27). According to this characteristic, the similarities and differences between English (the previous language of learners) and Chinese (the target language) has an impact on the learners’ Chinese language learning.

The impact is complicated. Isurin (2005) mentioned that learners’ first language (L1) can “have a facilitation or inhibition effect” on learners’ foreign language acquisition (p. 1115). Ellis (2012) agrees with this and points out that the learners’ L1 can facilitate L2 acquisition, as well as create negative transfer, a source of errors in the learning process (p. 51).

Research proved that if the learners’ L1 and second language (L2) belong to the same language system (for instance, if both are an alphabet language), that learners may have some advantages in their L2 learning. On the other hand, if the two languages have big distances between each other, it would be a huge challenge for learners to acquire the L2. Unfortunately, the L1 and L2 stated here belongs to different language systems, which magnifies the difficulties for the learner in the thesis.
The L1 of the learner in this research is English, and their L2 is Chinese. Since learners’ L1 plays an important role in their L2 learning, it is impossible and unnecessary for learners to avoid the influence from L1. Therefore, the realization of the cross-linguistic influence of L1 could not only help instructors pay more attention to the differences between the two languages from linguistic to discourse aspects, but also help learners avoid mistakes while using the foreign language they learned—which means language influence can be transferred from the negative side to the positive.

Some research also proved that there is positive influence from English to Chinese while learning Chinese. Yao (2007) finds learners whose first language is English are aware that embedded objects in Chinese can be topicalized from the beginning level. Zhao (2012) agrees with this and realizes the positive L1 (English) influence on L2 (Chinese) grammar in terms of the embedded object topicalization as well (p. 186).

For a Chinese teacher, realizing the cross-linguistic influence will help the instructor transfer the influence from negative to positive in today’s Chinese language classroom, as well as help the teacher prepare the lesson and give instructions more specifically. Instructors will understand some phenomena in Chinese language learning, and will not blame students when they make the same mistake, while also giving clear instructions to make learning more effective.

The cross-linguistic influence exists in the language learning process from linguistic aspects to the discourse area. Researchers noticed that in the Chinese language classroom, learners can’t avoid the influence of the L1. For instance, in the teaching process, Du (2010) noticed that the learners tried to translate from English to Chinese
directly when they need to use the “ba” construction (p. 8). This finding supported Wei Liu’s (1996) statement that the learning process is influenced by their native language. Aiqun Liu (2010) mentioned the influence of the learner’s native language from the result of the retelling (p. 130). Xiao (2010) said that these findings support previous CFL research, indicating that learners with English as their L1 were largely influenced by English grammar when dealing with Chinese discourse (p. 147).

Research mentioned above identified that the cross-linguistic influence has an impact on student learning from different language aspects. Understanding this would not only help instructors be more flexible and adaptive when teaching, but also help instructors adapt appropriate methods to transfer the cross-linguistic influence from negative to positive. Instructors will not focus solely on written grammar, but rather will realize that learners’ speaking and listening skills, as well as reading and writing, may be influenced by their first language. Therefore, instructors can compare and contrast the similarities and differences between English and Chinese in the teaching process, to help learners have a better understanding of the two languages. Strategies like making good use of a first language to aid a second language, and helping learners keep a positive attitude when making mistakes, may be adopted by instructors in the Chinese classroom as well (Wu, Le, & Lu, 2014, p. 463).
Heritage Language Learners and Non-Heritage Language Learners

In this paper, heritage language learners are classified as individuals who speak their first language—which is not English—at home, or are foreign-born (Campbell & Peyton, 1998, as cited by Webb & Miller, 2000, p. 19).

One complexity in the CFL classroom is the diversity of learners. Some are heritage language learners, and others are not. The diversity of learners makes teaching more complicated and challenging for the instructor. The instructors always ask, “Do I need to treat these two student groups the same, or differently?” Lots of instructors think heritage language learners’ language proficiency is much higher than non-heritage language learners. However, research shows that this is not true. Even though heritage language learners show higher proficiency in speaking and listening, they don’t have as many advantages in the long-term learning process.

A project conducted by National Standards in Foreign Language Education (1999), states that because the United States is a country of immigrants there are two distinct student populations among foreign language learners.

One of them is composed of American English speakers who have no prior experience in learning the target language, while the other is composed of heritage language learners, who are born into families who speak the HL and have the ability to engage in some level of oral communication. (p. 135)

Given the distinction, researchers should realize that there are remarkable linguistic and cultural differences between these two groups. This difference has attracted some attention from L2 researchers and teachers.
Xiao (2004, 2006) reported that heritage language learners’ language proficiency is much higher than non-heritage language learners, especially in skills like listening, speaking, grammar, and translation in discourse level. However, other studies argue differently. Cohen (2006) pointed out that HLLs learners, with few exceptions, have a very shallow level of fluency in Chinese. They know household objects, swear words and “gossip language,” but cannot talk about many serious subjects or Chinese culture. Their comments about Chinese cultural subjects are very frequently inaccurate and not even very rational (as cited by Xiao, 2010, p. 147).

Research done by Xiao (2010) also found that HLLs’ speaking and listening skills are at a very low level. HLLs’ limited oral skills and undeveloped oral discourse cannot support their written discourse development either (p. 148). They are foreign language learners with slightly better speaking skills than the non-heritage language learners. This study aligns with four years of research by Wang (2004) about heritage language learners’ literacy development in Chinese community schools. This is consistent with Cummins’ (1980, 1984) hypothesis about the two types of second language proficiency, basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). For bilingual learners, spoken language, especially related with daily activities, is easier to acquire (as cited by Xiao, 2010, p. 148).

In other words, heritage language learners are at the same starting point as non-heritage language learners most of the time. Xiao (2010) proved that heritage language learners did not show meaningful advantages over their non-Heritage counterparts in references, conjunctions or sentence structures. (p. 132). There is no
significant difference between HLLs and non-HLLs for long-term learning. As Davidson and Lekic (2012) mentioned in the Russian Overseas Flagship immersion model, data indicates that both HLL and non-HLL could acquire a professional-level language and cultural proficiency (p. 74).

In all, based on this research, educators should adjust their expectation about the heritage language learners in their language classrooms. Heritage language learners appear to have some advantages in certain areas in Chinese language learning, but that doesn’t mean that their learning process is faster than the non-heritage language learners in all areas. As O’Grady, Lee and Choo (2001) said, the Koren HLL looks like they have the advantage in vocabulary, comprehension and pronunciation, but not the morphosyntax (p. 10). O’Grady et al. argued that curriculum design and instruction must take consideration of this HLL learner in order to benefit their learning (p. 10). Everson and Xiao (2011) agreed with this and suggested different curricula, teaching materials and pedagogy approaches for heritage language learners and non-heritage language learners (p. 182). If the instructor has a better understanding of factors associated with the HLLs and non-HLLs, he/she could facilitate both heritage language learners and non-heritage language learners’ learning according to their prior Chinese ability.

Diversity of Students’ Learning Styles

Learning style means different learners acquire the information in different ways (Pashler, McDaniel, Rohrer, & Bjork, 2009, p. 106). Learning style differences are a display of learner variation. Howard Gardner’s (1983, 1999) theory of multiple intelligences includes eight components: linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial,
musical, bodily-kinesthetic, naturalist, interpersonal, and intrapersonal (as cited by Brown, 2009, p. 17). This implies some learners’ learning may be more effective if they received the appropriate instruction.

Learning styles are important, especially for a Chinese language teacher. According to the theory of learning styles, the Chinese language teacher needs to know that different students have different learning styles, and must think about diversity methods for the classroom instruction. Most Chinese language teachers are used to a method in which the teacher is the oral center of the classroom, and the students take notes. In order to maintain discipline in the classroom, students should sit in their seat for the whole period. This is a useful method. However, this shouldn’t be the only method in the language classroom. Instructors could bring music and pictures into the class, or allow students to move around the classroom to meet the diverse learning styles.

The thought that instruction should meet the diversity of learning styles in the classroom got support from researchers. Brown (2007) mentioned that an important factor in classroom instruction is that the instructor should realize that “most successful learners utilize both visual and auditory input, but slight preference one way or the other may distinguish one learner from another” (p. 129). Instructors need to be conscious of multiple intelligences to improve his/her teaching.

Michael Berman (2002) said, “It is very important for us as teachers to be aware of our individual intelligence profiles so we can make adaptations in class to ensure we reach everyone in the group” (p. iii).

These findings provide theoretical support for instructors to reform their classroom instruction. Traditionally, one method to evaluate instructors’ teaching is how
quiet the classroom is. The quietest classroom identified the best classroom management and most effective teaching. However, according to students’ diverse learning styles, the class could be very noisy; students may walk around, or even draw something. At the same time, teachers can use computers, pads or other tools to meet the needs of the diverse learner.

Conclusion

Knowing more about these three aspects of learner diversity (the cross-linguistic influence, the characteristics of heritage language learners and non-heritage language learners, and the learners’ diverse learning styles in today’s Chinese language classroom), could benefit instructors’ teaching, and make Chinese language learning more effective and meaningful.

As pointed out at the beginning, the issues of learning factors include many aspects, but for the purposes of this study, only three of them are focused in depth.

Additionally, researchers also need to keep in mind that the learner factors are not isolated in the learning process. These aspects of learner backgrounds always integrate with each other in the learning process. Therefore, in order to improve the quality of Chinese language learning and teaching in the United States, the focus of Chinese as a foreign language needs to shift from investigating just learner factors to the direction of how these learner factors work together and influence each other in the learning process.

DeKeyser (2012) talked about how individual difference variables interact with linguistic and contextual variables. He mentioned that research on the interaction
between individual variables and external, educational or contextual, can give educators more generalized predictions about adapting teaching methodologies to students, or matching students with treatments in the teaching and the learning process (p. 190).

More research is needed on in-depth investigations on learner factors in Chinese language classrooms, as it will benefit the development of Chinese as a foreign language in the United States. On the other hand, some researchers (Pashle et al., 2009) also point out that it is difficult to divide learners according to their different learning styles because it is costly (p. 116). Therefore, there is a gap between the need to take care of learners’ differences and the reality that there is not enough funding or trained teachers to deal with these phenomena. Even though technology can help instructors overcome this challenge, further research is still needed in this area.
CHAPTER III

THE IMPACT OF THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE STANDARDS

Introduction

As teachers of a less-common US world language, Chinese language teachers may be the only Chinese instructors in a school or district. They are therefore isolated in their teaching and professional development. Chinese language teachers often are not certain about what should be taught, or how to make teaching more meaningful to students.

In collaboration with national organizations, the Standards for Foreign Language Learning was published in 1996. In 1999, it was renamed as the Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century, and in 2006, its third edition was published. The *Standards for Foreign Language in the 21st Century* (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 1996, 1999, 2006) are based on the understanding that students in the United States should be educated linguistically and culturally in the foreign language classroom, so that they can communicate successfully either nationally or abroad (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages [ACTFL], 2013a, p. 1). In this thesis, the term “foreign language standards” is used to identify the Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21st Century. The foreign language standards include five goals (5Cs): Communication, Culture,
Connections, Comparisons, and Communities. Each goal has two or three content standards, which classify the knowledge and abilities that all learners should acquire in order to achieve these goals (Shrum & Glisan, 2005, p. 45).

The content of the foreign language standards (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 1996), the Chinese-specific standards (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 2006), as well as the current research on the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language, should collectively guide Chinese language instructors in better understanding the goals of students’ learning and improving their daily teaching. However, Chinese language teachers struggle to integrate the foreign language standards into their daily instruction. It is therefore important that Chinese language instructors become more familiar with the foreign language standards and use them to guide their teaching process.

This chapter will address how the foreign language standards can impact Chinese language instructors’ pedagogies and practices from setting goals, to choosing materials, to adding cultural elements in the teaching, to teaching beyond the subject and classroom so that instructors can provide better daily instruction.

Literature Review

The standards (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 1996, 1999, 2006) include a specific language such as Chinese, French, German, etc., and are for students from K-16. The standards for foreign language learning define the role of foreign language learning in the learners’ life-long learning, the content of the foreign language classroom. It is a “content standard—what students should know and be able to
do – in foreign language education” (ACTFL, n.d.). As Shrum and Glisan (2005) argue, the foreign language standards “describe the knowledge and abilities that all students should acquire by the end of their high school education in order to achieve the goals” (p. 45).

Since the foreign language standards help enrich the content of the language curriculum (language systems, cultural concepts, strategies of communication and learning, critical thinking skills connections to other subject areas, and technology usage), they make language instructors reconsider the methodology and strategies used in the classroom (Shrum & Glisan, 2005, p. 47). For instance, in order to improve learners’ communication skills, foreign language instructors needed to design activities so that students have the chance to communicate in group discussions, presentations or writing an email/letter, instead of just having a conversation between the student and teacher.

Even though the foreign language standards (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 1996) are the generic document in the foreign language area, standards for Chinese language learning (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 2006) provide an attainable vision for the future of Chinese language education in the United States (p. 161). The Chinese-specific standards serve as a guide to help Chinese language instructors design curriculum to connect learners, schools and communities; enhance learners’ critical thinking skills; provide opportunities for heritage language learners to maintain and improve their proficiency; and help students become lifelong learners (p. 161).

Some researchers (Everson, 2011; Poole, 2015) realized the important role the foreign language standards played in the learning of a foreign language. Researchers
believe these standards may potentially impact not only foreign language instructors’ pedagogy, but also the outcomes of student learning: Students know who, when, what and how to communicate in the foreign language. Hence, it is important for Chinese language instructors to learn more about the standards for their improvement of practice so that they may better help students acquire the ability to communicate in the real world in Chinese.

One example of a curriculum that seeks to integrate the foreign language standards is “The Chinese Wedding Banquet: An online Module for Teaching Chinese Language, Culture and Social Engagement.” In this model, Wu and Haney (2005) tried to integrate the foreign language standards with technology. In order to provide an effective and interesting Chinese language and culture e-learning experience, the wedding banquet module provided students with rich opportunities for exposure to Chinese culture. In simulation of a wedding, students learned the social interactions, food, traditions, and cultural elements of Chinese culture while demonstrating use of the language (p. 3). The module started with an introductory essay, including specialized Chinese vocabulary for the wedding banquet occasion, specific decorations, visual and audiovisual, aids, interactive and personalized exercises, and online discussion for students to share their thoughts about cultures. Wu and Haney (2005) note this online wedding banquet learning experience supports the foreign language standards 5C’s principles as well as presenting students with authentic Chinese language and cultural learning (p. 7).

Everson (2011) also provides additional ideas about how to bring the foreign language standards into the Chinese language classroom, and points toward much-needed new directions in the future of Chinese language instruction. Everson argues that there is
a lot of confusion on the part of Chinese language instructors in terms of what to teach. In order to help Chinese language instructors have a deeper understanding about the foreign language standards, he provides examples, activities, and suggestions about how to meet each goal area of the foreign language standards in the Chinese language classroom. One example is a unit based around the directional compass. In this curriculum, the compass is not just a cultural product but allows the instructor to lead students to a deeper understanding about Chinese perspectives on science and beliefs. For example, the directional compass was invented not for the direction (science) at the beginning, but was used to order and harmonize buildings to identify good or bad of Feng Shui (belief). Additionally, the curriculum helps students make connections to other disciplines, such as history. The instructor can assign an activity like how the compass traveled to and was used by other civilizations. In the last, Everson “hoped that through standards-based instruction, our field will move towards a more common vision of what we think is important for our learners to accomplish with the language” (p. 16).

Based on the above research, this chapter will investigate how understanding the foreign language standards may be part of developing better curriculum and instructional practice for Chinese language instructors in the United States.

Instructor's’ Pedagogy Development

For the development of Chinese as a foreign language in the United States, the foreign language standards and the standards in the CFL area aim to broaden Chinese instructor’s pedagogy development. Ideally, “the five goal areas of the national standards
become a rationale for learning languages and provide a road map for effective and motivating teaching and learning” (ACTFL, 2013b).

More specifically, the foreign language standards aim to improve Chinese language instructors in areas such as setting clear goals for lessons and units, adapting materials, adding appropriate cultural elements, and learning beyond the subject and classroom. Each of these areas will be reviewed in the following ways:

1. Setting clear goals in Chinese language teaching.

As a less common language in the United States, one problem for Chinese language teachers is that the field doesn't have a consistent guide or standard (Everson, 2011; Moore, Walton, & Lambert, 1992; Schrier & Everson, 2000). According to a survey by Moore et al. (1992), which focused on Chinese teaching in sample high school programs, Chinese language instructors had no idea what ideal curricular goals were, what skills should be focused on, or how to deal with grammar, vocabulary and cultural elements in teaching (p. 119). Chinese language instructors were also not clear about the larger goals of Chinese teaching. Some focused on linguistics, and paid a lot of attention to grammar; others thought culture was most important and didn’t teach enough grammar.

Shrum and Glsan (2005) agreed and argued that, traditionally, instructors at the middle and high school levels are used to separate linguistic content from academic and cultural content. The foreign language standards broaden the vision of foreign language teaching. They call for a mix of more sociocultural approaches to language learning, which emphasizes the importance of communication. The content of effective foreign language teaching is comprised of a combination of linguistic, social and academic elements, and teachers are asked to find ways to explore linguistics and grammar by
relating them to culture and other disciplines, and to the world as much as they can (p. 40). For example: Instead of focusing on vocabulary and grammar, a Chinese language teacher can teach “hello” by asking students to compare the similarities and differences in greetings between China and the United States. Through this, students will have a deeper understanding about when and how to greet people in Chinese appropriately and may walk away with a deeper understanding of the differences culturally in greeting across the globe.

Traditionally, the core elements of language instruction are comprised of mostly linguistic factors: grammar and syntax (Rivers, 1983). The foreign language standards shift the instructional focus from a sole focus on grammar and vocabulary, to the larger goals of communication and the cultural aspects of this communication. More specifically, a focus on grammar must always serve larger goals of communication. As Shrum and Glisan (2005) state, the foreign language standards help enlarge the foreign language system to areas that include sociolinguistic components of gestures and other forms of nonverbal communication, and discourse styles, in order to use the language appropriately in a specific cultural context (p. 47).

The foreign language standards emphasize that the current organizing principle for foreign language study is communication, which also highlights whom and when, and reflects that “while grammar and vocabulary are essential tools for communication, it is the acquisition of the ability to communicate in meaningful and appropriate ways with users of other languages that is the ultimate goal of today’s foreign language classroom” (ACTFL, 2013a, p. 3).
The foreign language standards help teachers clearly identify what students should know and be able to do in the foreign language classroom (Everson, 2011, p. 8; Shrum & Glisan, 2005, p. 50). The five goal areas interconnect with each other, which not only show the richness of human language, but also that language, culture and other elements, can’t be learned in isolation from one another. One is just as important as the other (Shrum & Glisan, 2005, p. 45).

Therefore, Chinese language instructors should be clear about the goals of daily instruction. In order to meet the goals of the foreign language standards, all elements (linguistic, cultural, social, etc) will be integrated together to achieve the goal. Hence, the four language skills—speaking, listening, reading and writing—also get developed with the improvement of learners’ communicative proficiency and literacy when the goals of the foreign language standards are achieved.

2. Adapting appropriate materials to make teaching and learning meaningful.

In most foreign language classrooms, the meaning of authentic materials is often misunderstood. When thinking about authentic materials, most of the time teachers are referring to a textbook because the textbook was, and still is, the center of the foreign language curriculum. However, some textbooks are not authentic materials, though many profess to reflect the latest language acquisition theory. Researchers (Aski, 2003; Frantzen, 1998; Lally, 1998; Takenoya, 1995) found that the textbook still focuses on bottom-up drills and form-focused activities that lack context or meaning (as cited by Shrum & Glisan, 2005, p.55). With the development of more communicative approaches in foreign language education, some textbook authors have responded by adding more
“contextualizing” exercises, which may lead students and teachers into believing that meaningful discourse is being fostered (Shrum & Glisan, 2005, p. 55).

To date, many language instructors prefer authentic materials because they come from the real world and have rich cultural content. As Cook (1981) defined: “[Authentic materials are] an example of language produced by native speakers for real purpose of their own” (p. 60). Each instructor of Chinese also knows the importance of authentic materials. More than that, the foreign language standards recommend that the authentic materials in a Chinese language classroom must serve the larger communication goals that teachers must have in mind (Shrum & Glisan, 2005, p. 50).

Reading materials in the Chinese foreign language classroom often are not serving communicative approaches as recommended by the standards. According to Chang (2010), many readings textbooks still focus on genre theory or, discourse analysis. Hence, reading activities in the CFL classroom became a matter of following procedures and instructions rather than focusing on communication (Chang, 2010. p. 107). Chang’s findings are in agreement with the finding of Ning (2003), that reading in many textbooks is viewed as a bottom-up process, which means students need to understand each word in order to understand the whole text (pp. 32-39). Wei (2011) points out that the design of a Chinese textbook, *Elementary Chinese* (中文天地), used by beginning college students in the United States, still keeps this procedural sequence, which begins with vocabulary, then builds toward sentences and is followed by text (p. 22). Shrum and Glisan (2005) suggest a top-down approach for reading instructions to foreign language instructors. Foreign language instructors can assign whole, authentic material to the students first,
followed by getting and exploring its main ideas, and focusing on specific details and/or linguistic factors like vocabulary, and grammar in the last (p. 52)

The foreign language national standards can also help Chinese language instructors make better selection decisions when it comes to writing and adapting materials in the Chinese language classroom. For a long period of time, theories of second language were adapted from first language acquisition theory, and concluded that grammar and written skills emerged from oral practice like L1 in L2 learning, especially at the beginning level (Harklau, 2002; Xiao, 2010, p. 135). This caused many second language materials to focus only on daily oral communication, with less attention given to writing (Ellis, 1994, p. 187). At the same time, some textbook authors ignored the fact that oral and written languages should be equally addressed in the Chinese language classroom (Xiao, 2010, p. 135). Written language is a critical part of communication in a foreign language. At present, in a foreign language, many Chinese textbooks used in the United States need to emphasize more practice in the written language for learners’ language proficiency development. Yao and Liu (2005) did a survey on the text *Integrated Chinese Level I* (one of the most popular Chinese textbooks used in the United States), and found that in the textbook, the 23 lessons included 41 spoken conversations (89.14%), two letters (4.34%) and three narratives (6.53%) (Parts I & II; Yao & Liu, 2005, as cited by Xiao, 2010, p. 135). These researchers questioned how CFL learners could acquire written discourse skills if their main resource for the target language did not include exercises in writing.

Xiao (2010) noted that the oral and written forms belong to different discourses in Chinese, and that there are big differences between the two forms (p. 133). Xiao (2010)
suggests that more writing work should be added to the materials, especially for beginners (p. 134). Spring (2010) also emphasized the necessity to include both academic and social language in CFL curriculum design (p. 200).

The foreign language standards help instructors to be selective when choosing appropriate materials, and have five goals to guide instructors when selecting or adapting materials. The more goals the instructional material can address, the better the learning outcomes for students of Chinese. For instance, to find supplementary materials for Lesson 18 (renting an apartment) of Integrated Chinese Level 1 Part 2 (2005), two rental websites (one from China, the other a local Chinese site in the United States) are provided to the students. On both these websites, students can find authentic materials, compare and contrast the similarities and differences of renting houses between the two countries, learn more about cultural issues and reach out to the local target community by using the Internet. Moreover, students also have authentic models when they need to write an advertisement about renting or leasing a house.

3. The foreign language standards can help instructors design lessons intended to broaden the understanding of culture for students of Chinese.

Brown (2007) argued, “Learning a second language implies some degree of learning a second culture” (p. 193), and that “culture is a deeply ingrained part of every fiber of our being, but language—the means for communication among members of a culture—is the most visible and available expression of that culture” (Brown, 2007, p. 194). Culture is not and should not be isolated by language in the language classroom.

While some instructors may realize the importance of culture in the language learning process, many find it difficult to bring it into the classroom or integrate it within
the objectives for language teaching or learning (Christensen, 2009). Fortunately, the foreign language standards make the concepts of culture much more clear, and give the instructor ideas about how to bring cultural elements to the language classroom.

The foreign language standards guide the language instructor to not only approach culture as cultural products, but also emphasize the relationship between cultural products, practices and perspectives. Moran (2001) defines culture products as “artifacts produced or adopted by the members of the culture, including those in the environments, such as plants and animals” (p. 25). Therefore, if a teacher wants to teach about the national animals that are important in Chinese culture, such as pandas, it is not enough to show some pictures or play some videos to the class. Chinese language Instructors also need to explain why it is that the panda, not other animals, have become so important to the Chinese.

Additionally, the foreign language national standards help instructors understand that teaching culture also means helping students develop a deeper cultural understanding of their own community, as well as their target culture. Like the lesson of the panda, students may gain a deeper cultural understanding about their national animal if the instructor asked the class to compare the panda with their own national animal.

However, some foreign language instructors don’t recognize this, and treat culture independently within the language. Some instructors make it too simple and don’t build up any connection between the product, beliefs, perspectives and linguistic factors. According to Moran’s (2001) definition of culture, the cultural product is just one of the five dimensions (products, practices, persons, perspectives and communities) of culture (p. 24). For instance, when introducing the importance of tea in Chinese culture, it is not
enough for a teacher to bring the tea (product) to the class. In order to help learners have
a deeper understanding of tea culture, the instructor may go further like introducing how
to make tea (practice), what kind of groups like to drink tea (person), why tea is an
important part in Chinese’ life (perspective), and which different social classes drink
which type of tea (communities).

According to the Chinese-specific vision (National Standards in Foreign Language
Education Project, 2006), culture is one of the five goals that foreign language teaching
should facilitate. Some standards, such as communication and cultures, also recommend
that students should not only understand cultural products and perspectives, but also the
relationships between them. Additionally, the instructor needs to create a cultural
environment to obtain other goals in the teaching and learning process. The standards
also point out that, as important as linguistic elements are, cultural issues are also
necessary to communicate with Chinese native speakers from different ages and social
backgrounds (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 2006, p. 167).

Furthermore, teaching and learning through cultural contexts and perspectives can
make comparisons between students’ first language and their second or third language
much easier and clear. Students can have a better understanding of both language and
cultures and the differences between them (National Standards in Foreign Language
Education Project, 2006, p. 181). If learning happens through more exposure to Chinese
culture, learners would be better equipped to access more resources from any Chinese
community for language learning beyond the classroom (National Standards in Foreign
Language Education Project, 2006, p. 185).
Omaggio-Hadley (2001) outlines three reasons for why many language instructors find it difficult to teach culture. The first is a time issue. Many teachers think they don’t have enough time to bring culture into the teaching process. The second is that many teachers are not comfortable or familiar with cultural elements. The third is related to the learner’s attitude, which means negative attitude may cause difficulties to acquire linguistic factors (pp. 346-347). However, if the Chinese language instructors have a clear understanding of culture, they will find that teaching culture in the Chinese language classroom is not so difficult.

Chinese language instructors may complain that they do not have time to teach culture because they have so many vocabulary and grammar to teach in a certain unit/period. However, Chinese language instructors will have time for cultural elements if they notice that better understanding of culture will benefit students’ understanding of language. Chinese-specific standards (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 2006) mentioned that “it is much easier to make sense out of the Chinese language when students come to a true understanding of the important linguistic and cultural variations of the Chinese-speaking world” (p. 174).

Goal two of the standards (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 2006) is culture. Its content standards are “2.1 students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the practices and perspectives of the cultures of the Chinese-speaking world” (p. 175), and “2.2 students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the products and perspectives of the cultures of the Chinese-speaking world” (p. 176).
For example, Chinese language instructors may find it is very challenging to teach American students to read/write Chinese characters (products). It is not only because of the distance between the target and students’ first language, but also related about how to make these words meaningful to students. Hsueh (2013) gave us a good example about making connections between practices and perspectives. In her TEDTalk, “Learn to read Chinese—with ease,” she pointed out the word (products) “出” (Out, exceed) is the overlap of the word “山” (mountain); the reason (perspective) for that was an ancient emperor of China sent political enemies away from the capital to urban areas, most of time areas beyond the mountains (http://chineasy.org/films/ted-talk.aspx). By adding these cultural elements in the vocabulary teachings, the instructor will find teaching and learning to be much easier than assigning students some drill practice, like writing the word “出” 10 times. Therefore, time is not an excuse for some Chinese language instructors’ not teaching culture in the class. Understanding perspectives of some practices/products will make teaching and learning more efficient, and will save time rather than take extra time in the Chinese language classroom.

With awareness of the importance of culture in the Chinese language classroom, Chinese language instructors, who are usually native Chinese speakers, can include cultural issues in the curriculum and do more research about the culture before the class. As the Chinese-specific standards pointed out, “Students need to be taught not only the history and geography of China, but also the Chinese people’s philosophical perspectives, their way of life, and contributions to world civilization” (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 2006, p. 174).
With better and deeper understanding of the Chinese culture as Chinese instructors themselves, they will know how to reduce students’ negative attitudes to the target culture, and motivate students to keep learning Chinese in the future. For instance, the author has a student who asked a question like, “Did you eat dog?” The author explained the Chinese’s perspective of food to the class, and was pleased that students understood it. One student also gave another example like India’s perspective about cows.

Hence, it is important for language instructors to widen their understanding of “culture” for their pedagogical and methodological development.

4. The foreign language standards broaden instructors’ belief that teaching and learning can and should go beyond the subject and classroom.

An old Chinese proverb says crossing majors is as difficult as crossing a huge mountain. The foreign language standards point out that foreign language teaching and learning could go beyond the subject and classroom by helping students to make connections, comparisons and communicate with Chinese-speaking communities.

Chinese language instructors need to keep this in mind so that Chinese language learning can go beyond the subject and classroom.

a. Chinese language teaching that moves beyond the subject.

Traditionally, Chinese language teachers only focus on the Chinese language learning and don’t pay attention to much else. However, the foreign language standards enlarge the instructors’ focus area. Goal three, connections, identified that learning Chinese can be integrated with different topics, concepts of other subjects, and reinforce it as well (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 2006, p. 178). Chinese language teaching and learning can go beyond the subject.
Everson (2009) agrees: Chinese language teaching not only needs interdisciplinary education, but demands it (p. 11). Moreover, teaching Chinese is not just the knowledge of linguistic, social or cultural elements, but includes tools to bridge the gap to other areas of learning about Chinese. Everson (2009) argues: “Chinese, then becomes not only a discipline in itself, but a tool with which to explore other disciplines” (p. 12). For example, to meet the foreign language standards (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 2006) 3.1: Students can reinforce and further their knowledge of other disciplines through Chinese language (p. 179), and the Chinese language instructor can make connections to math when they’re teaching numbers at beginning and intermediate levels. Instead of repeating “one, two, three,” the teacher can assign math tasks like addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. In this way, students are not only learning Chinese, but also making connections to their mathematical knowledge. Therefore, students can see how their Chinese language learning connects to their real life, which makes learning more meaningful to them.

b. Chinese language teaching and learning can go beyond the classroom.

In this global society, Chinese language instructors need to bear in mind that Chinese language teaching and learning can go beyond the classroom to the community or global level.

Goal five of the foreign language standards is communities. As the Chinese-specific standards (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 2006) point out, students are encouraged to “use Chinese to communicate in authentic real-life contexts” (p. 185). Through practice and daily use, students will not only understand Chinese
culture, but also “become more proficient in Chinese through involvement in programs and activities in the schools and community” (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 2006, p. 185).

Even today, Chinese language instructors’ teaching is limited in the classroom setting most of the time. However, the foreign language standards open up the possibility of extending Chinese language learning beyond the classroom to local communities or even global levels for Chinese language instructors. Students can improve their language proficiency through participation in their local Chinese community, such as becoming involved in local, Chinese New Year’s celebrations. Students can also learn the language on a more global level by communicating with pen pals via email, chatting with native speakers through Skype, QQ and other tools, or joining study abroad programs. As Spring (2012) points out, students can achieve higher levels of proficiency through intensive summer programs, language camps in China or the U.S., or online language instruction (p. 196).

If Chinese language instructors follow these guidelines, Chinese language learning and teaching can go beyond the subject and classroom. Aligning learning goals with these principles will help teachers design lessons that require students to practice the target language in a real-world setting. The Chinese language will become not just knowledge that students must acquire, but a tool that can help students explore other subjects in a local or global world. As Shrum and Glisan (2005) note, the foreign language standards take foreign language instructors to a level of foreign language instruction that focuses on students’ linguistic and cultural knowledge by connecting this knowledge to other disciplines and target-language communities (p. 50).
Conclusion

For a Chinese instructor, the foreign language standards clearly define the goals of Chinese language teaching and learning and how to prepare students for the 21st century. Students should be able to “know how, when, and why to say what to whom” in Chinese for uses in the real world (ACTFL, 2013b). The 11 content standards of the five goal areas are the guide for Chinese language instructors to develop their own curricula based on their program and students’ needs. At the same time, the foreign language national standards also have the potential to impact Chinese language instructors’ beliefs about what is important when learning a foreign language.

The foreign language standards can strengthen instructors’ pedagogies in many respects by helping them answer key questions in their practice. For instance, what is the goal of Chinese language teaching? How does one go about choosing materials? How does one add appropriate cultural elements in the Chinese classroom? And how can one’s teaching go beyond the subject and classroom? Shrum and Glisan (2005) agree: “The standards present various possibilities to language teachers as they strive to strengthen their curricula and instruction” (p. 51).

However, it’s important to keep in mind that the standards don’t describe specific course content, or a recommended sequence of study (ACTFL, 2013b, p. 2). According to the ACTFL, the foreign language standards reflect the best instructional practices, suggesting many types of curricular experiences to enable students to achieve the standards, and support the idea of an extended sequence of study that begins in the elementary grades and continues through high school and beyond. Thus, how the foreign
language standards are applied depends in larger part on the teachers’ philosophies and methodologies of language instruction, as well as their familiarity with the standards.

It takes time for the instructor to align their teaching practice with the standards for foreign language learning, and with the state and district standards for daily instruction. Chinese language instructors need to apply the foreign language standards appropriately and need time to work with other language instructors to develop their curricula. The standards must be used in conjunction with state and local standards and curriculum frameworks to determine the best approach and reasonable expectations for students in individual districts and schools (ACTFL, 2013b, p. 2).

Spring (2012) believes that language learners should be able to achieve high levels of linguistic proficiency and cultural competency in order to function professionally when needed in any field (p. 141). She emphasizes the importance of curriculum design that fits the needs of the next generation of language learners. Hence, it is time for foreign language instructors to think creatively, update their pedagogies, and align their daily teaching to the Standards for Foreign Language Learning, in order to engage students of the 21st century to learn Chinese.

Therefore, more targeted professional development may be needed on how to apply the foreign language standards in instructors’ daily teaching, as well as how to guide instructors to design an appropriate curriculum. Also, more teacher-led research is needed on how and to what level the foreign language standards can improve a teacher’s practice, as well as what professional development models best help language teachers learn from one another.
CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Summarize Key Findings

With recent developments in the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language in the United States, many Chinese language instructors and researchers are looking into the best practices or evidenced-based approaches to teaching Chinese while taking into account important aspects of classroom instruction, such as the linguistic (Du, 2010), social (Wong, Chin, Tan, & Liu, 2010), cultural (Christensen, 2009), and the needs of students in learning Chinese (Ning, 2009).

This thesis identifies two important factors in the research on Chinese language teaching in the United States: learner issues that play an important role in the classroom and the pedagogies, and standards a Chinese language instructor needs to be aware of in order to develop better instruction. More specifically, this study addresses some important factors that influence learning outcomes in the Chinese language classroom such as cross-linguistic influences of the first language for heritage language learners and non-heritage language learners; the diverse learning styles of students in the classroom; and how the foreign language standards (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 1996, 1999, 2006) may impact Chinese language instructors’ pedagogy such as goal-setting, material selection, and decisions to teach cultural issues beyond the subject and classroom.
Based on recent research of teaching Chinese as a foreign language in the United States, this thesis explored how Chinese language learners have multiple characteristics, which may impact their learning outcomes. In order to design meaningful learning outcomes for all learners, Chinese language instructors need to create opportunities for positive cross-linguistic influence as much as they can (Mei et al., 2015). This means designing lessons that can benefit both heritage language learners (those learners who have Chinese background or speak Chinese at home) and non-heritage language learners (those learners who do not speak the language at home or do not have Chinese background) at the same time (Liu, 2012), while keeping in mind that learners have diverse learning styles among both groups (Phillipson, 2010).

Another important influence on Chinese language instructors’ practice is their beliefs about what priorities for learning Chinese should be in a Chinese language classroom. This thesis focused on how the foreign language standards (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 1996, 1999, 2006) can affect our Chinese language instructors’ pedagogies in a positive way. The foreign language standards include content-based standards and tell the Chinese language instructors what’s important to prioritize in learning language and why. In order to meet or address each of the standards in daily teaching, Chinese language instructors must address setting goals, adapting appropriate and authentic materials, integrating cultural elements in the language classroom, and going beyond the subject and classroom.

- How does knowing about learner diversity help improve a teacher’s practice?

One of the areas of investigation in this thesis is the role of learner diversity in the Chinese language classroom and how being knowledgeable about learner diversity assists
language instructors in better meeting student needs. This finding agrees with Shrum and Glisan’s (2005) statement that “Knowing learner’s’ needs will assist language instructors in implementing a standard-based approach that benefits all learners” (p. 316).

Chinese language instructors must understand that knowing about learner diversity helps them choose better instructional strategies and, overall, be more effective in meeting learner needs. When teachers are aware of factors such as cross-linguistic influences on learning Chinese, or the various characteristics of heritage language learners and non-heritage language learners, or how diverse learning styles can impact learners’ language learning process, teachers are more equipped to adapt appropriate methods and strategies to benefit all learners (Brown, 2007; Everson & Xiao, 2011; Tasker, 2010; Wu et al., 2014). This agrees with the argument of Tomlinson (2014) and Hall (2002), who argue that teachers’ instruction needs to be varied in order to meet the diversity of students in the class. When language instructors are more aware of learner needs, they may employ approaches and methods such as comparing the differences/similarities between the target and first language’s sentence structures or vocabulary patterns (Du, 2010), or how to differentiate instruction for heritage language learners and non-heritage language learners, such as heritage language learners focusing on improving reading and writing skills while non-heritage language learners focus on listening and speaking (Everson & Xiao, 2011).

The author of this study teaches a Chinese level 1 classroom at a California high school. She uses additional strategies for differentiating instruction for all learners such as using songs to teach vocabulary or grouping heritage and non-heritage language learners together for group projects and asking them to present in a small group.
How might knowing about the foreign language standards improve Chinese language instructors practice?

The standards help guide Chinese language instructors from believing that teaching is about transmitting knowledge to believing teaching is about preparing students with lifelong skills. Learning in a language classroom is about preparing students for skills in communication, for better understanding themselves and others, for how to collaborate across cultures (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 2006).

The foreign language standards give the Chinese language instructor a guide about how to design a standards-based lesson for the learners. The five goal areas of the standards are: Communication, Culture, Connection, Compassion and Community, and can help Chinese language instructors design lessons that include the teaching of culture, that help students make connections to other disciplines, and help them become lifelong learners of language. The foreign language standards focus on preparing Chinese language students with the language skills needed for the 21st century.

The author of this study has used the foreign language standards to design a class-based research project on various countries and their cultures. In order to learn about different countries, students (beginning learners) choose a country to do some research and make a poster about the country and present it to the class. Students must include the following information in the poster: the name of the country; the country’s map, national holidays, ethnic groups and languages, and writing that describes the students’ knowledge about the country. The goal of this activity is for students to focus on authentic communication (presentational); connection (map, national day); culture (knowledge about the country); community (global level). By doing this, the learning is
meaningful to students. Students will not only learn the language, but also knowledge of
the culture while practicing skills like communication, connection and comparison.

Future Directions

Based on the literature, this thesis identified that two key areas needed for
Chinese language instructors is a better understanding of learner factors and the foreign
language standards. More specifically, knowing learner factors can help Chinese
language instructors to decide how to teach, and the foreign language standards help
guide Chinese language instructors in designing lessons with teaching goals and
objectives clearly addressed by activities. Teachers’ awareness of these areas of their
practice may help them to improve the quality of daily teaching. These findings align
with Sun’s (2014) conclusion that “[Chinese teachers] need to use differentiated
instruction in their classroom to accommodate diverse learners and meet diverse needs.”
Sun also notes that this knowledge is helpful in addressing the foreign language
standards, such as the standards for foreign language’s three modes of communication:
“interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational.”

Future direction for this research would be ways to help Chinese language
instructors better understand the learners in their classrooms, as well as the role of the
foreign language standards in developing curriculum. To do so, more professional
development for Chinese language teachers is needed because some instructors are afraid
of trying new strategies in the classroom, while others may be used to some materials and
don’t want or don’t have time to find new ones. Professional development could include
attendance at conferences and workshops. As Pufahl and Rhodes (2011) pointed out,
school districts, state departments of education, and the federal government should take greater responsibility in helping to expand language teacher education, certification, and professional development (p. 275).

Generally, more empirical research is needed to help Chinese language instructors align these theories to practice. Many instructors who do gain new pedagogical practices at conferences or workshops, but still find out that the application of the ideas are difficult in daily teaching. More research like Sun (2014) would be very helpful for Chinese language instructors. Hence, research about how to apply new methods and strategies through professional development is also needed for Chinese language instructors and researchers for better Chinese teaching and learning in the United States.
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