

ISSUES IN TEACHING CHINESE CHARACTERS
AND STRATEGIES FOR FOREIGN LEARNERS
OUTSIDE THE CHINESE CHARACTER CULTURE CIRCLE

Learning Chinese is far from an easy task and acquiring Chinese characters is probably the greatest challenge. Many foreign students outside the Chinese Character Culture Circle, beginners in particular, give up learning Chinese characters because of the ideographic system. This system embraces phonology, glyphs and semantic meaning, which are completely different from alphabetic writing. What makes things worse is that TCCF has been ignored for a long time in TCFL.

TCFL started to develop in China in the early 1950s, and that involved teaching some simple characters including strokes, the order of strokes and structural analysis.¹ There were no independent character textbooks for foreigners. The content concentrating on teaching characters did not play a leading role in materials for teaching Chinese. Furthermore, most teachers paid little attention to, or neglected character teaching and training, due to the lack of linguistic knowledge.

After the mid-1990s, more and more scholars began to attach importance to the research on TCCF, which has gone deep into character components, radicals, constituent theory, etc. A large number of articles was reported in scientific journals. At the same time, several character textbooks for foreign beginners were also published, such as *500 Basic Chinese Characters*,² *Guidance of Chinese Characters*,³ *Easy Way to Learn Chinese Characters*.⁴ Character classes as voluntary or compulsory courses have been offered by many schools.

In addition, some teaching concepts and methods were proposed, such as “interaction between Pinyin and characters”, “teaching method of componential structure”,⁵ “basic component + basic character system”,⁶ “character recognition/

¹ Zhou Jian, *Chinese Character Teaching Theory and Method*, Beijing 2007.

² Zhou Guijie, Zhou Baozi, Zhou Jian, *500 Basic Chinese Characters*, Beijing 1996.

³ Shi Zhengyu, *Guidance of Chinese Characters (with Exercise Book)*, Beijing 1998.

⁴ Liu Yanmei, *Easy Way to Learn Chinese Characters (English)*, Beijing 2001.

⁵ Zhang Wangxi, *From Chinese character components to structures*, “Chinese Teaching in the World” 1990, Issue 2, pp. 112–120.

⁶ Cui Yonghua, *A thought on Chinese character teaching*, “Journal of Peking University (Humanities and Social Science)” 1998, 35(3), pp. 114–118.

reading and production/writing as a united task”,⁷ etc. However, these concepts and methods were just an attempt to explore effective approaches in teaching characters, which could not solve the problems of learning Chinese characters.

In recent years, a new character teaching strategy has been put forward, which is to divide the task of learning characters into two parts. These are namely, recognition and production, which demand learners to be able to read more characters than write them.⁸ Although there is potential criticisms against this strategy, which has been pointed out by some scholars, it has been shown to be one of the ways to improve efficiency in learning characters. However, it cannot satisfy the demand of TCCF, because it could not reduce, or help avoid the numerous writing errors made by foreigners.

Therefore, in order to make Chinese character teaching easier and more efficient, the present paper summarizes issues in TCCF and analyzes writing errors made by first-year students at Gdansk University, Poland. This will help suggest some teaching strategies which could contribute to the improvement of TCCF. The causes of these errors in writing will be also considered.

Issues in TCCF

Chinese, especially Chinese characters, are difficult to learn, and this seems to be a theory known worldwide. A study by the American Government reported that it generally takes 840 class hours average to acquire elementary European languages, while at least 2400 class hours should be attended to reach a basic level in Chinese.⁹ What causes Chinese characters to be so hard to learn? Apart from the reasons originating in the Chinese characters themselves, there are several issues existing in TCCF.

⁷ Zhang Jingxian, *A few of question on compiling Chinese character. Proceedings of Chinese Characters Research and Teaching*, Beijing 1999.

⁸ Song Lianyi, *The feasibility study of emphasis on reading not writing in Chinese language teaching. Proceedings of the 6th International Conference on Chinese Pedagogy*, Beijing 2000, pp. 114–119; Ding Chongming, *Chinese character teaching and learning strategies for Western learners. Cognition and Teaching of Chinese Characters: Proceedings of International Conference of Recognizing Chinese Characters for Western Learners*, Beijing 2005, pp. 397–409; Jiang Xin, *Dividing the learning of Chinese characters: Read more and write less. Cognition and Teaching of Chinese Characters: Proceedings of International Conference of Recognizing Chinese Characters for Western Learners*, Beijing 2005, pp. 372–395.

⁹ Chen Shen, Fu Minyue, *Two difficulties in Chinese teaching and the assisted role of computer*, “Chinese Teaching in the World” 1996, Issue 3, pp. 88–93.

Misunderstanding TCCF

The fundamental problem underlying the TCCF is simple: the characteristics of Chinese have not been recognized sufficiently by foreigners. We always think about issues, guided by the Western linguistic and language teaching theories, but rarely consider features of Chinese itself, while the key point of TCCF is how to show the relationship between the Chinese language and its characters, which determines the position of TCCF and has impacts on the teaching concept and method.

Influenced by Western linguistic philosophy, pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar are emphasized in China, while characters play a subordinate role in the language teaching process. This can first be revealed in the construction of character textbooks for foreigners. Some of the character teaching materials which have been published for years have limited types of exercises and lack of scientific, practical or illustrative contents. Even worse, most textbooks for Chinese do not include character teaching content. What is currently seen, are character reading and writing practice in some textbooks, but with the input sequence and number of characters designed on the basis of grammar points. This means that character writing practice is extremely irregular and random. The characters occurring in these textbooks are not designed in order of difficulty, nor in view of the characteristics of Chinese characters. In addition, the characters in subordinate position can also be indicated by a curriculum.

At present, the major Chinese required courses for foreign learners are comprehension, conversation, listening and reading, although the curriculum designed by each university is different. However, a very small number of universities offers Chinese character study as an optional course or with a few class hours, which could not meet the needs of teaching characters. We should understand that the Chinese character is one of the basic units constructing the Chinese language. Learning characters first would likely be the best way to learn Chinese.

The defect of teaching approaches

As Lü pointed out all kinds of language teaching approaches with a considerable influence on the world, such as Grammar-Translation, Direct method, Audio-Lingual Approach, Functional Approach, etc., developed by scholars, are based upon the characteristics of Indo-European languages, and especially English.¹⁰ Therefore, the principle and method defined by the approaches above cannot completely solve the special problems which appear in Chinese language teaching. Chinese characters which

¹⁰ Lü Bisong, *On TCSOL (Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages) pedagogy*, "Journal of College of Chinese Language and Culture of Jinan University" 2003, no. 1.

are symbols used to record Chinese syllables differ in nature from Indo-European writing, so they cannot be taught in the same way as Indo-European languages.

In the early 1950s, researchers experimented with the mode “pronunciation first, writing second”, where beginners only learned spoken Chinese first, and then started to concentrate on characters after about half a year. The experiment failed because this teaching approach proved ineffective in learning Chinese.¹¹ The teaching approach “synchronization between conversation and characters” has been used till now. But the level of common vocabulary and the difficulty of characters are inconsistent, and this problem has not been solved completely.

In recent times, several character teaching approaches have emerged, but they are constantly criticized. The main problems are lack of pertinence, efficiency or interest. According to some authors, the major cause is lack of awareness of the essential distinction between teaching Chinese characters to foreigners and to Chinese people.¹² For example, explanation of and training in characters to foreigners at present follow the methods basically used to teach Chinese primary school students. The most common way is nothing more than explaining the components and tracing or copying the characters. There are great differences in Chinese primary school students and foreign students, as beginning learners of Chinese. Chinese children have mastered lots of Chinese words and sentences before the commencement of their studies at school. They are really familiar with the pronunciation and meaning of some new words, therefore the process of learning characters is simplified by making connections between pronunciation (known), meaning (known) and glyph (unknown), which makes learning a lot easier. As regards foreign students, especially those from countries with alphabetic writing, research on how to explore and utilize the phonetic function of Chinese characters and on the choice of approach according to memorization habits does not go far enough.

Problems with TCFL teachers

As has been mentioned before, the training of TCFL teachers in China emphasizes some language elements such as pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar but neglects the teaching of characters. “Chinese philology”, often shortened into a term with the literary meaning of “Chinese character study”, is an old discipline with a large body of academic literature of various kinds. Unfortunately, Chinese philology courses specializing in TCFL are too often neglected or are offered with few class hours at many Chinese universities. Under these circumstances, the TCFL

¹¹ Zhou Jian, *Chinese Character...*

¹² Shi Guangheng, *Teaching Chinese characters to foreigners should be started from glyphs*, “Chinese Teaching in the World” 1987, Issue 2, pp. 34–38; Zhou Jian, *Chinese Character...*; Zhou Xiaobing, *An Introduction to Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language*, Beijing 2009.

teachers are trained with a firm knowledge of linguistics but a weak foundation of pedagogy, especially of Chinese characters.

The science of Chinese characters is profound. It is rich in content, not only in terms of theories, which includes the origin of characters, the evolution of forms, the characteristics and structures of characters, etc. but also expounding Chinese cultural connotations implied by characters. For example, in China, the ancients express time through the position of the Sun in the sky, which explains why there are so many characters expressing time, such as 旦 (Pinyin: dàn), 朝 (zhāo), 早 (zǎo), 杲 (gǎo), etc. 旦 indicates that the Sun “日” just rises above the horizon “一”. 朝 refers to the Sun “日” appearing in the grass “艹” (the pictographic character of the grass) when the Moon “月” has not yet set completely. 早 means the Sun “日” has already appeared above the grass “艹”. 杲 expresses that the Sun “日” has risen above the trees “木”. If TCFL teachers could explain their subject with abundant cultural implications to their students, the character courses would be more interesting. Therefore, TCFL teachers have to delve in the science of Chinese characters and lecture on the character in a way which arouses the interest of students, so as to improve the quality and efficiency of character teaching.

Some plausible theories and approaches lack of intensive research on the cognition of Chinese characters and immediate analysis of the errors are applied by teachers in the TCCF. For instance, we always focus on the teaching of character components, or radicals, and then the whole character, because Chinese characters are a combination of components. There is some truth in this, but it may not be in keeping with the cognitive rules of Chinese characters. In fact, Chinese compounds consist of single-element characters and/or components, but the main route for people to recognize a character is through the decomposition approach. Wan claims that the whole character should be recognized first, which means, mastering holistic differentiation between characters.¹³ Next, the glyph is decomposed in order to further understand the relationship between its components and the whole character; and then finally the reader returns to the whole character. After learning a certain number of characters, students are confident in their ability to summarize interconnections between ideographs and phonetic components, which helps them to memorize glyphs more easily. More importantly, students can also acquire objective knowledge of the Chinese character symbolic system.

¹³ Wan Yexin, *Chinese characters: From research to teaching: Some issues concerning the process of learning the Chinese character symbolic system*, “Chinese Teaching in the World” 2007, Issue 1, pp. 5–16.

Methods of Collecting and Analyzing Data

Error analysis

Error analysis is defined as the study and analysis of errors made by second language learners.¹⁴ The term was first used by Corder in his article “The Significance of Learners’ Errors.”¹⁵ He pointed out that error analysis is of practical significance to language teachers, as it can help indicate the effectiveness of the teaching materials and techniques.

According to Corder, a study of errors is a part of the systematic study of a learners’ language which is itself necessary to understand the process of second language acquisition.¹⁶ He stated that error analysis allows teachers to discover which areas should be focused on and what kind of attention is required in language learning. It also permits researchers to make well-founded proposals for the development and improvement of materials and techniques of language teaching. Ellis also states that language errors made by learners are part of the language acquisition process.¹⁷

Error analysis can be used to find out what errors are most likely to occur in foreign language learning and ascertain the reasons behind these errors. It is also able to throw light on the learner’s language acquisition mechanisms, and find ways to predict and prevent the occurrence of such errors. Furthermore, it can give important suggestions to teachers about the difficulties that learners face while learning the language.

Methodology

In order to analyze the character errors in the samples, collection, identification and description of errors specified by Corder and cited in Ellis, were used.¹⁸ The data analyzed come from a variety of sources, including Chinese sentence dictations and paragraph writing, collected for the purpose of the study.

The subjects of the study were seven Polish speakers who are freshmen majoring in Chinese and who had been learning Chinese for about seven months,

¹⁴ J.C. Richards, J. Platt, H. Platt, *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*, Beijing 2002.

¹⁵ S.P. Corder, *The significance of learners’ errors*, “International Review of Applied Linguistics” 1967, no. 5, pp. 160–170.

¹⁶ S.P. Corder, *Error Analysis and Interlanguage*, Oxford 1981; Cui Yonghua, *A thought on Chinese character...*, pp. 114–118.

¹⁷ R. Ellis, *The Study of Second Language Acquisition*, Oxford 1994.

¹⁸ S.P. Corder, *The significance...*; R. Ellis, *The Study of Second...*

560 class hours in total, at Gdansk University. The subjects were required to collect copies of sentence dictations from each quiz and test of Chinese characters and the compositions they had written. Then lexical and the mechanical errors were analyzed regarding both misused characters and orthographical errors by the author. The causes of these errors were also analyzed.

Data Analysis

In all, twenty eight dictations and thirty compositions were analyzed to identify character errors. Character errors were noted in 241 sentences in the sentence dictations. The sentences were on average 9.93 characters in length. 185 character errors were detected among about 2393 characters.

For the purposes of the study it was decided to classify the orthographical errors into four categories as follows:

- 1) Stroke errors: These errors mainly included adding or missing strokes, or writing nonstandard strokes. Samples could be found in the sentence dictations where the character “目” was written “日” with the omission of one stroke “-”. In addition, the English capitalized letter “O” was written instead of the Chinese character “口”, “々” in the top part of character “笔” was changed into “KK”.
- 2) Component errors: These are the errors of substitution and omission of components, or strokes in the components. Students usually mix up components which are similar in form, for instance “阮” and “院”, “古” and “吉”. They also add unnecessary components to the correct character, e.g. adding one dot “、” to the character “今” which changes it to another one “令”; or lose a necessary component, e.g. forgetting the “心” in “意” which changes it into another character “音” or subtracting the component “弓” from the character “张”. Sometimes the components were written with left and right parts reversed, e.g. “陪” and “部”.
- 3) Structure errors: This focuses on the organization of characters and consists of the separation of the structures or the components, for instance, “项” was often written as “工页”, and “起” was changed into “走己”.
- 4) Misuse errors: This is an error in character usage. There are a lot of different characters with the same pronunciation, or with the same syllable, but different tones, or with similar forms which make foreign learners puzzled. Students are apt to confuse these homophones, such as “有” and “友” which have the same pronunciation “yǒu”, but different meanings. “有” means to have, while “友” is a friend. Students also confuse the characters “开” and “升” because of their similar forms.

The data was collected and is reported in terms of these four categories of errors. There were 64 stroke errors in total, including three types of errors: addition of strokes, omission of strokes and nonstandard strokes. The omission of strokes was a frequent error with about 14% of all errors, followed by nonstandard strokes with about 12%. The research showed that compared to other stroke errors, it is easier for students to lose the strokes “-” or “、”. They often subtract one “-” in the character “真” or “具” causing an error, or lose the strokes “、” in character “太” or “犬” thus changing it into another character “大”. The nonstandard formation of the stroke “|” is also a prominent error. It is difficult for foreigners to figure out the starting and finishing points of the stroke “|”. If the starting point of the stroke “|” in the character “午” (meaning noon) pierces through the top line, it becomes a different character “牛” (meaning cow).

86 component errors were collected in total, which could be subdivided into adding unnecessary components, losing necessary components, mixing up similar components and reversing components, among which the omission of components was highest in frequency with about 20%. The errors of strokes in components were classified as component errors, because the learners confused different components rather than the strokes. Taking the character “所” as an example, the learners often added one dot in the upper-left corner of this character, because they cannot distinguish the two components “戶” and “戶”. Xiao made a similar claim that component errors are not simply about adding, losing or transforming strokes.¹⁹ They reflect the learners’ unclear ideas about the essence of the ideograph. Overall, component errors were the main orthographical errors, occupying the largest proportion, with about 46%.

Structure errors, by contrast occurred least of all types of errors. The structure of Chinese characters is not only the basic method of formation, but also the important reference of acquisition. Each structure pattern of Chinese characters has been a difficulty in the system of simplified Chinese characters, owing to the evolution of Chinese writing system. It is therefore helpful to reveal these difficulties and reasons causing them by analyzing the structure errors.

The last type of error is the misuse of Chinese characters, of which 22 errors were collected. The misuse of characters is caused by focusing on applying the whole Chinese character as the starting point of the error, rather than strokes and components. Misused characters comprised about 11% of all the errors. Sun indicated that the main errors made by senior foreign learners are errors of misuse with about 78%.²⁰ This study found that misuse of characters caused by pronunciation are most common and that the foreign learners preferred using a character

¹⁹ Xiao Xiqiang, *An analysis of Chinese character errors made by foreign learners*, “Chinese Teaching in the World” 2002, Issue 2, pp. 79–85.

²⁰ Sun Wenfang, *The statistics and cause analysis of the types of errors made by foreign learners in different levels. Proceedings of the Second International Conference on Chinese Literacy Education*, Beijing 2006, pp. 302–310.

with a simple form instead of a character with the same pronunciation, or the same syllables, but complex in form. Misuse errors caused by form were a lower percentage of all types of errors. The distribution of all types of errors is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. The frequency and the percentage of each type of errors

No.	Types of errors	Frequency of errors	Percentage (%)
1.	Stroke	64	34.59
	– addition of strokes	(15)	(8.11)
	– omission of strokes	(26)	(14.05)
	– nonstandard strokes	(23)	(12.43)
2.	Component	86	46.49
	– adding unnecessary components or strokes in the components	(12)	(6.49)
	– losing necessary components or strokes in the components	(38)	(20.54)
	– mixing up similar components	(32)	(17.30)
	– reversing components	(4)	(2.16)
3.	Structure	13	7.03
4.	Misuse of characters	22	11.89
	– misuse errors caused by pronunciation	(14)	(7.57)
	– misuse errors caused by form	(8)	(4.32)

Source: own elaboration.

From the data analysis, it was revealed that component errors occurred most frequently among all types of errors. The main factor causing the component errors in character orthography appears to be the lack of sensibility of Chinese characters, which are deemed to be a collection of strokes. Students did not appear to know the rules for matching the components, which means that they do not know when a necessary component should be added and when an unnecessary one should be removed. Therefore, it is difficult for foreigners to be clear about characters with similar forms and shapes.

Stroke error was the second most frequent. In the process of TCCF, the first difficulty in writing a Chinese character is the stroke direction. Students do not know how to control the direction when they write the characters, due to the deep impact of their native alphabetic writing system. The alphabetic writing system is unidirectional, while Chinese characters are written in different directions. Unfortunately, it is hard to investigate the order of strokes and to observe stroke direction in the process of writing. Being unfamiliar with stroke order, each Chinese character is regarded as a combination of intricate strokes with multidirectional writing rules. Furthermore, students are accustomed to connecting two separate strokes into one

and they also like to “draw” the characters rather than “writing” them. All these nonstandard handwriting habits cause stroke omissions and errors.

Compared with other languages, there are more homophones and many characters with the same syllable, but different tones and forms in Chinese. According to statistics, there are 43,171 disyllabic characters in the *Contemporary Chinese Dictionary*, among which 7,915 characters are homophones. As their vocabulary expands it is inevitable for the learner to learn homophones. If students do not pay attention to the collocation of words, they are likely to misuse homophones easily.

Influenced by the writing habits of their native language, the beginners could not clearly understand the organic combination and spatial structure of Chinese characters. Hence, they are not able to group or combine the radicals and the components together in a reasoned way, only to pile each of them up, which is the main cause of structure errors. It is not easy for beginners to master the structural features of compounds because of the symmetrical distribution and componential combination. They possess sensibility of Chinese characters only after they are able to segment the characters precisely.

It is also difficult for foreign learners to acquire knowledge of the Chinese symbol system by sporadically learning single characters because of the control of system laws behind Chinese characters. For teachers, finding out about character errors is only the first step in teaching Chinese characters. To recognize character errors systematically and then to impart this systematic knowledge to learners is the best way to reduce or even eliminate errors.

Chinese Character Teaching Strategies

Based on the above-mentioned issues and the errors occurring in the writing of characters, appropriate teaching strategies are proposed in order to improve the efficiency of teaching and ease difficulties which restrict the development of proficiency in Chinese.

Creating the correct concept of Chinese characters

Foreign students that have learned Chinese for two months without grasping the characteristics of characters or rules of writing do not have much faith in their ability to learn characters well. They usually have the idea that it is “difficult to learn Chinese characters”, or tend to feel fearful because of the differences from writing in their native language when they start with characters. Thus it is necessary to impart knowledge about characters at the beginning of TCFL, including such features as the basic strokes and orthographical rules, and then to repeat these contents and

introduce appropriate theories so as to correct the learners' views and build up their confidence in characters.

The teaching mode "pronunciation and vocabulary first, character second" plays a large role in TCFL because of copying the Western linguistic system, and this can cause amusing incidents. For example, one of the foreign students learned the word "牛奶" as meaning "milk", but he did not know the meaning of the constituent characters "牛" (cow) and "奶" (milk), and so was not aware that the character in fact means "cow's milk". He consequently produced the incorrect sentence "在火车上, 我看见一个小孩子正在吃妈妈的牛奶。" (I saw a little baby sucking his mother's cow milk on the train.)

The concept "character first" was advocated by Xu first in 1994. He considered the characteristics of Chinese characters as the standpoint of the essence research on Chinese language. Starting with semantics, this concept suggests a new way to study modern Chinese, and thus solves numerous problems which exist in Chinese language teaching. Therefore, it is essential for TCFL teachers to create the concept "character first" and to make students realize the importance of Chinese characters. If a separate character class could be held first before proceeding with vocabulary teaching from the perspective of the "character", TCFL efficiency could be enhanced significantly.

Fostering the sensibility of Chinese characters

Sensibility of Chinese characters which belongs to a kind of intuitive thought is subconscious for the Chinese character symbolic system. This sensibility can be acquired through extensive exposure to characters. In order to foster the understanding of Chinese characters, TCFL teachers should more frequently demonstrate characters to help their students realize how a complicated character could be produced. They should also try their best to explain the structure of each character so that interest in and feeling for characters could be developed gradually. Once the characters can be parsed consciously by students, it will be easier for them to recognize and write them correctly.

Applying interrelated approach to TCCF

Interrelated approach in Chinese characters using foreign language theory as a guide can make students recognize the combination of Chinese characters and has a benefit for the consolidation and strengthening of memory. This can be done by connecting form and phonetical components so that characters can be learned consciously. If a foreign student wants to reach an appreciable level of proficiency in Chinese, he/she must master the 2905 characters of the *General Outline of the*

Chinese Vocabulary Levels and Graded Chinese Characters.²¹ It is very hard to have a good command of these characters without an error and confusion. Learning them one by one in isolation by the means of memorizing is ineffective. Therefore, it is necessary to advise students to learn Chinese characters systematically. An interrelated approach in teaching Chinese characters can help motivate students and summarize the rules, so as to learn more effectively with less effort.

It is generally known that the overwhelming majority of phonograms in Chinese characters is composed by form components representing the meaning and phonetic components denoting pronunciation. Making an interconnection between form components brings characters with the same form components together so as to help students grasp the meanings of the radicals. Take the character “打” (to hit), for instance, whose form component “扌” means “hand.” It can be interrelated to other characters with the component “扌”, e.g. 提 (to carry), 拍 (to clap), 扛 (to carry on the shoulder), 拎 (to lift), 握 (to hold), 抓 (to grasp), 扔 (to throw), 捏 (to pinch), etc. all of which are actions associated with the hand.

Interconnection between phonetic components is referred to when linking characters with the same phonetic component, but different form components, which play a crucial role in marking the pronunciation and can help students understand characters better. For example, the character “方” (Pinyin: fāng) which can also be used as a phonetic component, is applied in the characters 芳 (fāng), 房 (fáng), 防 (fáng), 肪 (fáng), 访 (fǎng), 仿 (fǎng), 纺 (fǎng), 放 (fàng), which have the same or similar pronunciations with different tones. TCFL teachers are advised to teach characters with the same form component, or with the same phonetic component and homophones to their students. This is conducive not only to understanding the construction of Chinese characters, but also helps to reduce the burden on memory, as well as to avoid character errors.

Embedding the Chinese culture in TCCF

Chinese characters are not only the writing symbolic system for recording the Chinese language, but are also cultural codes. They possess irreplaceable and unique value, and bear abundant cultural information. Configurations of Chinese characters have been significantly influenced by the thought, historical process and customs of Han ethnic groups, some of which still give information about the original culture. Uncovering the cultural implication underlying glyphs contributes to understanding the structure of Chinese characters. The character “家” (meaning home), for example, involves changes of social type in the ancient. This character can be taken apart to the components “宀” referring to house and the character “豕”

²¹ The Office of Chinese Language Council International, *General Outline of the Chinese Vocabulary Levels and Graded Chinese Characters*, Beijing 1992.

which is changed from the pictographic character for pig “豕”. Therefore, the form of the character “家” is the shape of a pig under a roof. In the ancient period, the number of pigs was usually the measure of the wealth of a family. Learning Chinese characters is based not only on understanding the words but the meaning hidden behind them. To understand the language better, both the learner and the teacher have to strive for understanding and usage of meaningful characters.

Adopting the appropriate in TCCF could inspire the passion of students to learn more Chinese characters and more about Chinese culture. Better teaching effects could be obtained if this approach can be combined with traditional structural analysis. In addition, telling cultural stories about Chinese characters will avoid stiff and mechanical recitation of glyphs and meanings. Then foreign students will really experience meanings of the character through Chinese eyes remember the characters better.

Limits of the Current Study

The number of students participating to collect the samples was very small. This study should be repeated with a broader student base. However, although the subjects of this study were all first-year students with Polish as their native language, the researcher believes that the findings referring to character errors may also apply to foreign students from other countries outside Chinese Character Culture Circle.

Errors involving the order of strokes, which are considered a writing error were omitted in this study because it is difficult to investigate the order of strokes and to observe the stroke direction during the process of handwriting.

The reasons for the writing errors are given only from the perspective of the teacher-researcher which is a limitation. Obtaining information from the learners, for example, by questionnaire, would have reduced the subjectivity.

Conclusion

This study offers some insight into the teaching of Chinese characters. To date, compared with other language elements, such as grammar and vocabulary, the teaching of Chinese characters has been given little attention. In fact, Chinese character teaching is the foundation of TCFL, especially for the elementary students and so should be awarded a prominent position.

There is still room for research and many issues to explore, such as the structure of textbooks for teaching foreign learners. A contractive study of the distinction between teaching Chinese characters to foreigners and to Chinese people

is not well recognized by teachers, nor is done sufficiently. It is hoped that the China National Office for teaching Chinese as a foreign language, will encourage researchers to work to collectively overcome difficulties regarding teaching approaches, teacher awareness, the structure of textbooks and the development of methods for teaching Chinese characters. This will contribute to the improvement and development of TCFL.

STRESZCZENIE

PROBLEMATYKA I STRATEGIE NAUCZANIA CHIŃSKICH ZNAKÓW WŚRÓD OBCOKRAJOWCÓW SPOZA KRĘGU KULTURY CHIŃSKICH ZNAKÓW

Język chiński jest uważany za jeden z najtrudniejszych do nauczenia języków na świecie z powodu jego pisma, czyli znaków chińskich. Przez kilka ostatnich dekad w nauczaniu chińskiego jako języka obcego (Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language – TCFL) można zaobserwować ogromny postęp. Tymczasem nauczanie obcokrajowców znaków chińskich (Teaching Chinese Characters to Foreigners – TCCF) jako istotny element procesu nauczania języka (TCFL) nadal pozostaje we wczesnej fazie, a nawet pewnego rodzaju stagnacji, wpływając tym samym na jakość i rozwój nauczania języka chińskiego wśród obcokrajowców (TCFL). Opinia, że „chińskie znaki są trudne do nauczenia”, stała się powszechna wśród cudzoziemców, a w szczególności osób spoza kręgu kultury chińskich znaków. Celem tego artykułu jest zatem analiza obecnej sytuacji i problematyki nauczania znaków chińskich, a także próba opisanie przyczyn wpływających na stan terażniejszy. Jeżeli zaś chodzi o błędy w pisaniu znaków chińskich, zostały one przeanalizowane w oparciu o materiał badawczy pozyskany od studentów pierwszego roku sinologii Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego. Ponadto w artykule tym zaproponowano skuteczne strategie nauczania pisania znaków chińskich, które mają pomóc osobom uczącym się zredukować lub całkowicie wyeliminować błędy, a tym samym poprawić ich umiejętność pisania, co z kolei przyczyni się do rozwiązania problemów związanych z TCCF w celu udoskonalenia metodyki nauczania języka chińskiego.