

Case Analysis of an Elementary-Level Integrated Chinese Language Class in the Context of Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language

-- A Lesson based on "Is This Red Dress Pretty?"

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Abstract: With the evolving concept of cultivating international Chinese language teachers, there has been a shift from an academic research-oriented model to a professionally practice-oriented approach. This transformation requires teachers to not only focus on instruction but also actively observe and analyze exemplary teaching cases, which is particularly valuable for novice Chinese language teachers entering the profession. This paper takes a teaching video of an elementary integrated Chinese class delivered by Professor Shen Hongdan of Beijing Language and Culture University as the research subject. Through classroom observation, the case is systematically analyzed in conjunction with theories of second language acquisition and instructional strategies, aiming to identify strengths and areas for improvement to enhance teaching effectiveness. The paper is structured into four main parts: the first part introduces the course background; the second part serves as the introduction; the third part provides a detailed narrative and analysis of the case, covering six aspects-classroom organization, review and assessment, vocabulary instruction, grammar teaching, text instruction, and homework assignment; the fourth part summarizes pedagogical insights and reflections. This study seeks to explore practical experience and teaching strategies through the observation and analysis of exemplary lessons, offering actionable ideas and methodologies for international Chinese teachers-especially beginners-to enhance their competence and professional development in integrated Chinese instruction.

Keywords: International Chinese Language Education, Teaching Competence, Elementary Intergrated Chinese Course, Teaching Practce.

1. Introduction

With the sustained development of China's economy and its growing influence in the realms of culture, science and technology, and international affairs, Chinese has increasingly become a vital medium for global communication. An expanding number of learners recognize that mastering Chinese not only facilitates daily interaction but also serves as a powerful tool for deepening cooperation in business, culture, and scientific fields. As a result, the development of international Chinese language education has become a key driver in promoting language dissemination and cross-cultural understanding.

As of now, China has established 550 Confucius Institutes and 1,172 Confucius Classrooms in primary and secondary schools across 162 countries and regions. The global number of Chinese language learners continues to rise[1,2]. Following the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, an increasing number of international Chinese language teachers and volunteers have resumed teaching abroad, marking a new phase of development in the practical realm of international Chinese education. However, the diversity of teaching contexts and the complexity of learners' cultural backgrounds have posed greater demands on teachers in terms of pedagogical philosophy, instructional strategies, intercultural adaptability, and classroom management-especially for novice teachers without prior overseas teaching experience, who face considerable challenges.

This study selects the elementary integrated Chinese course as the subject of case analysis, as the integrated course, being a fundamental component of Chinese language instruction, is

designed to holistically develop learners' listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Its curriculum features the integration of knowledge, skills, and task-based learning, making it particularly suitable for achieving foundational teaching objectives at the elementary level and offering considerable value for research and pedagogical reference[3].

As Zhao Jinming[4] pointed out, integrated courses at various levels encompass content related to phonetics, vocabulary, grammar, discourse, Chinese characters, and culture. These elements should be approached holistically to systematically train learners' communicative competence, and scientific classroom organization should be employed to transform linguistic knowledge into practical language skills. Therefore, by observing and analyzing classes taught by experienced instructors, this study aims to offer practical teaching references for novice teachers and enhance their classroom management abilities and instructional effectiveness.

2. Background

This case is drawn from an elementary-level integrated Chinese language class titled "Is This Red Dress Pretty?" taught by Professor Shen Hongdan from Beijing Language and Culture University. The lesson corresponds to Lesson 15 of the textbook *New Concept Chinese 1*. The learners in this session comprised eight beginner-level Chinese language students aged between 18 and 24, originating from Europe, North America, and Southeast Asia. Despite their diverse cultural backgrounds, the learners demonstrated a generally high level of motivation. Their active participation and responsiveness in class reflected positive language learning

attitudes and strong engagement.

The total duration of the class was 45 minutes, and the instructor structured the lesson around six pedagogical components: review and lead-in, vocabulary instruction, grammar explanation, text comprehension, classroom exercises, and assignment briefing. The instructional design was clear and logically sequenced, demonstrating the teacher's deep understanding of the teaching content and precise control over the classroom pacing. The following sections analyze the lesson in six corresponding segments.

3. Case Description and Analysis

This elementary-level grammar-focused integrated class was conducted by the experienced instructor Professor Shen Hongdan. Prior to the session, the teacher had prepared all necessary teaching aids, and the lesson proceeded under the thematic focus of "Is This Red Dress Pretty?". To facilitate a more precise identification of the instructional strengths within this case, the class has been divided into six distinct phases: classroom organization, review and assessment, vocabulary instruction, grammar explanation, text instruction, and assignment arrangement.

3.1. Classroom Organization

At the beginning of the class, the teacher entered the room with a smile and greeted the students using concise and lively classroom expressions (e.g., "Hello everyone, class is starting"), thereby quickly establishing an interactive rapport with the learners. The instructor then transitioned naturally to the lesson topic by asking contextualized questions such as "Is the classroom beautiful?" This approach created a smooth shift from everyday language to the instructional context, exemplifying the application of situational teaching methods. This strategy effectively captured students' attention and fostered a relaxed and engaging classroom atmosphere.

3.2. Review and Assessment

The teacher employed a series of scaffolded questions such as "What's in the classroom?" and "Where is the sofa?", accompanied by visual aids, to guide students in reviewing content from the previous lesson. This segment not only served to reactivate prior knowledge but also leveraged visual and physical stimuli to deepen memory retention, reflecting the use of a "connecting old with new" pedagogical strategy. The questions were designed in a progressively layered manner, effectively constructing cognitive scaffolding for learners and demonstrating the flexible application of scaffolded instruction.

3.3. Vocabulary Instruction

New vocabulary in this lesson was categorized as follows:

- 1) Clothing-related terms: skirt (裙子), coat (大衣) with measure words tiao (条) and jian (件);
- 2) Color adjectives: red (红色), white (白色), yellow (黄色), blue (蓝色), green (绿色);
- 3) Collocational expressions: white skirt (白色的裙子), blue coat (蓝色的大衣), etc.;
- 4) Descriptive and evaluative terms: beautiful (好看), how about (怎么样);
- 5) Action verbs and negation: wear (穿), and the negative adverb mei (没).

Rather than following the order presented in the textbook,

the teacher reorganized the vocabulary thematically according to semantic fields before instruction, helping students establish a more systematic understanding of vocabulary within a semantic network. This approach aligns with the semantic field theory in vocabulary teaching. After introducing each category of words, the teacher immediately conducted practice activities to reinforce learning, forming an integrated "presentation-practice-application" instructional cycle.

For example, when introducing the verb "wear (穿)", the teacher used physical demonstration to create a direct association between the action and its meaning, reflecting the principles of Total Physical Response (TPR). During the instruction on colors, the teacher incorporated national flags (e.g., those of China, Italy, and Brazil) to provide cultural enrichment, establishing a meaningful connection between language and culture and fostering intercultural awareness.

Additionally, during pronunciation instruction, the teacher used hand gestures to illustrate tone changes, particularly to clarify the tone sandhi rule involving the numeral "yi (一)" before "tiao (条)". This enhanced the visualization of tone change rules, aiding learners' phonological awareness.

Overall, the vocabulary instruction emphasized categorization, repeated practice, image association, cultural integration, and communicative orientation, which not only improved students' retention efficiency but also rendered the learning process more engaging and culturally enriched.

3.4. Grammar Instruction

The grammar instruction in this lesson focused primarily on two key grammatical structures:

- 1) The usage of the structural particle "的 (de)";
- 2) The interrogative sentence pattern used to inquire about attributes: "...怎么样? (How is...)"

When introducing the "的"-structure, Professor Shen deliberately avoided excessive use of grammatical jargon. Instead, she adopted a teaching approach centered on high-frequency input, contextualized examples, and substitution drills, allowing students to gradually internalize the basic structure and meaning of "的" phrases within authentic communicative contexts. This instructional strategy aligns with Krashen's Input Hypothesis, which posits that language acquisition is facilitated through comprehensible input.

For instance, Professor Shen guided students through sentences such as "Whose coat is this?", "The teacher's coat", and "The blue coat", to illustrate the "modifier + 的 + noun" structure. She then extended the complexity of the sentence patterns with examples like "six blue sofas" and "three white telephones", thereby scaffolding learners' understanding of syntactic variation and transferability of the grammatical structure.

In teaching the sentence pattern "...怎么样?", the instructor employed substitution techniques to help students transform and contrast sentence forms-e.g., changing "Is the teacher's skirt pretty?" to "How is the teacher's skirt?"-thus guiding students to grasp the evaluative function of "怎么样" in interrogative contexts. Subsequently, three sets of practice activities were implemented, utilizing celebrity photos, clothing combinations, and role-play dialogues. These activities were all designed as task-based communicative tasks, encouraging learners to engage in meaning negotiation, which reflects the core principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT).

During the error correction phase, the teacher used recasts-repeating students' utterances in corrected form-to prompt self-repair. This method not only preserved students' self-esteem but also enhanced their ability to monitor and regulate their own language output. Such an approach embodies a learner-centered philosophy and demonstrates the use of reflective classroom management techniques.

3.5. Text Instruction

The core text of this lesson is titled "Is This Red Dress Pretty?", presented in the form of a dialogue and accompanied by illustrations. The content is contextualized and engaging, aligning well with the linguistic comprehension level of beginner learners.

The text instruction was structured into three stages:

1) Introduction Phase

The teacher began by playing a short video clip thematically aligned with the lesson content and guided students to watch it with specific questions in mind. This multimodal input approach enhanced students' comprehension by activating both visual and auditory channels. The video closely reinforced the previously introduced vocabulary and grammar points, enabling knowledge consolidation through repetitive and contextualized input, consistent with the principle of "comprehensible input with contextual support."

2) Reading and Practice Phase

The teacher adopted a segmented playback and explanation method, guiding students to read the dialogue sentence by sentence while emphasizing intonation and emotional expression. This approach heightened learners' awareness of the affective functions of language and contributed to the development of pragmatic competence. Additionally, the teacher employed substitution drills and role-based Q&A activities to reinforce structural internalization and facilitate productive language use.

3) Performance Phase

Students were paired to perform role-plays, reenacting the dialogue. This activity encouraged language output through reprocessing, embodying Swain's Output Hypothesis, which emphasizes the role of output in promoting language development. By performing the dialogue in context, students used the target language in meaningful communication, enhancing fluency, self-confidence, and authentic language use. The performative aspect also increased student engagement and contributed to a more dynamic and participatory classroom environment.

3.6. Homework Assignment

The homework assigned for this lesson was categorized into four distinct components, each targeting specific language skills:

1) Complete Exercises 1 and 2 on Page 42 of the Workbook

This written assignment is designed to help students systematically review key grammatical structures and vocabulary items introduced in the lesson. It also aims to foster accuracy in written expression and improve students' command of sentence patterns.

2) Listen to and Read Aloud the Text from Lesson 15

This task serves a dual purpose: to enhance students' listening comprehension and oral fluency, and to reinforce pronunciation and intonation through repeated and naturalistic input. It contributes to expanding learners' input base and promotes the internalization of phonological

features.

3) Preview the New Vocabulary for Lesson 16

By activating relevant lexical items in advance, this task reduces the cognitive load in the upcoming lesson and increases in-class learning efficiency. Pre-exposure to target vocabulary also facilitates better retention and contextual understanding.

4) Prepare for a Speaking Task

Students are instructed to conduct a simple oral interaction with a classmate, asking: "What color do you like?" and "What color clothes do you have?" This communicative and open-ended task encourages learners to apply newly acquired language in authentic contexts, thereby improving their pragmatic competence and reinforcing active language use.

The homework design encompasses listening, speaking, reading, and writing, providing a well-rounded practice model. The tasks are appropriately challenging, clearly structured, and demonstrate the teacher's comprehensive understanding of both instructional objectives and the learners' developmental stage in second language acquisition.

4. Case Summary and Reflection

Through an in-depth analysis of Professor Shen Hongdan's teaching case, this study not only presents the instructional process of an elementary-level integrated Chinese class but also offers theoretical insights and methodological inspiration for international Chinese language teachers. The reflection is organized around two key dimensions: teaching models and instructional methods.

4.1. On Teaching Models

1) Scaffolding Instruction

Scaffolding instruction emphasizes the provision of cognitive support by the teacher during the early stages of learning, which is gradually withdrawn as learners gain mastery, enabling them to complete tasks independently. In Professor Shen's lesson, scaffolding was constructed through the use of images, demonstrations, and guided questioning. Once students had acquired the fundamental structures, the teacher intentionally withdrew support and encouraged autonomous expression. This approach effectively stimulated learners' initiative and cognitive engagement. For example, in teaching the grammatical structure involving the particle "的 (de)", the teacher transitioned from modeling to open-ended expression, demonstrating the application of Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory.

2) Immersive Instruction

Immersive instruction advocates for teaching conducted entirely in the target language. Notably, as early as the 1980s, the United States implemented immersion programs for Chinese as a second language. Tang[9], in her study of Chinese immersion programs in American society, found that parents were motivated to enroll their children in such programs to foster mutual understanding and respect between Chinese and American languages and cultures. In the 21st century, Zhang Xiaolu[5] was among the first to examine Chinese immersion projects and emphasized the importance of addressing individual learner differences and affective factors both inside and outside the classroom. Professor Shen conducted the entire lesson in Mandarin, thereby creating an authentic language environment rich in target language input. This approach enhanced learners' linguistic sensitivity and their ability to interpret meaning in context. Although

beginner learners may initially struggle with comprehension, the teacher effectively reduced linguistic barriers by incorporating intonation, gestures, visuals, and contextual clues, thereby increasing the comprehensibility of input. This reflects the $i+1$ principle of Krashen's Input Hypothesis[8], which advocates for input that is slightly beyond the learner's current proficiency level to facilitate acquisition.

3) Heuristic Teaching

Heuristic teaching emphasizes learners' active construction of knowledge under the guidance of the instructor[6]. Throughout the lesson, Professor Shen frequently posed reflective and open-ended questions such as "What do you think?" and "Anything else?" to prompt student thinking. She also used gesture cues to encourage diverse forms of expression, demonstrating a learner-centered philosophy that values student agency[10]. Furthermore, she effectively stimulated classroom dynamics through both teacher-student and peer-peer interaction, exemplifying the principles of student-centered learning[15]. This pedagogical approach significantly enhanced learner engagement and their willingness to participate in communicative tasks.

4.2. On Instructional Methods

1) Situational Language Teaching

The instructor created real-life communicative scenarios, such as classroom descriptions and shopping dialogues, enabling students to use the target language within meaningful contexts. This approach promotes learners' language transfer ability and communicative awareness, allowing them to apply linguistic knowledge in authentic situations.

2) Role-Playing Method

By assigning students to perform scripted dialogues from the lesson in different roles, the teacher not only deepened their understanding of linguistic forms and semantic meaning, but also enhanced students' confidence in expression and active classroom participation. This method reflects the constructivist approach to learning, which emphasizes that knowledge is constructed through learning-by-doing.

3) Real Object Demonstration

Professor Shen used real objects and visual aids (e.g., physical garments and pictures) to introduce vocabulary items such as skirt and coat. This increased the visual intuitiveness of instruction, facilitated concrete cognitive associations, and effectively reduced the abstractness of language input for beginner learners.

4) Cooperative Learning

Through pair work and group discussions, students engaged in peer-to-peer interaction, which enhanced their communicative competence, collaborative awareness, and provided opportunities to test the practical applicability of learned content in semi-authentic communicative contexts.

5) Cultural Extension Approach

In teaching color-related vocabulary, the instructor introduced national flags from various countries (e.g., China, Brazil, Italy) to connect linguistic content with cultural symbols. This facilitated the development of intercultural communicative competence, strengthened the connection between language and culture, broadened learners' perspectives, and boosted learning motivation.

5. Conclusion

As a novice teacher newly entering the field of international Chinese language education, I am keenly aware

of my current limitations in areas such as pedagogical philosophy, instructional methodology, and classroom management. However, through systematic observation and in-depth analysis of Professor Shen Hongdan's exemplary lesson, I have gained not only valuable teaching experience but also a clearer sense of direction for my professional growth.

This case exemplifies a well-structured instructional design, flexible teaching methods, sound theoretical grounding, and rich classroom interaction. In particular, it emphasizes learner autonomy[7] and the activation of learning motivation, which holds significant instructional value for beginning teachers. Moving forward, I intend to deepen my understanding of key theories in Teaching Chinese as a Second Language (TCSL), such as Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theory[16], Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)[11][13], and Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)[12][14]. I will also continuously reflect upon and refine my instructional strategies through classroom practice.

I firmly believe that with sustained passion and effort, along with the willingness to learn from exemplary educators and continuously enhance both pedagogical beliefs and professional competence, I will be able to grow as an effective teacher and make meaningful contributions to the field of international Chinese language education.

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