



CLASSROOM CHINESE LANGUAGE

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1. BACKGROUND

Studies over decades in second and foreign language acquisition show that time spent in meaningful engagement with their target language will result in students' increased language proficiency (e.g. Krashen, 1985; Lee, 2003; Met & Rhodes, 1990). For students who have little access to natural language use outside the classroom, the use of the target language in class is essential, whereas the use of their mother tongue undermines this process by diverting attention from the object of their learning (Dickson, 1996, p. 1). More specifically, appropriate and extensive target language use have been shown to improve listening skills and sensitivity to pronunciation and intonation patterns; develop strategic and discourse competences; and increase opportunities to create genuine communication which challenge students to express personal meaning (Lee, 2003, p. 163).

A key challenge in realising these benefits, however, lies in teachers' management of the content, complexity, range, and speed of delivery of what they say in the language, as well as the support they provide to students (Lee, 2003). As revealed by recent studies (e.g. Orton, Tee, Gong, McCulloch, Zhao & McRae, 2012), most Chinese language classes in Australian schools are conducted in English because, on the one hand, non-Chinese background (L2) teachers of Chinese have not learned the language they need for running a lesson, while, on the other, the mother tongue speaking (L1) teachers find their unrestrained language is more than the learners can cope with and so default to English. To improve this situation first requires identifying the language that L2 teachers need to learn, and the pared down but still natural and accurate corpus of language that L1 teachers should use. The project entitled *Chinese Language in the Classroom* is intended as a start to establishing this corpus. It has been carried out collaboratively between two researchers at CTTC and three colleagues at Beijing Normal University (BNU).

2. AIM

The aim of the project is to collect samples of language used by L1 Chinese teachers in the conduct of lessons, and from that data to establish a corpus of classroom language that is natural and manageable, which could form the base of Chinese classroom language for teachers to use with Australian school students.

3. PROCEDURE

Volunteer mother tongue *Putonghua* Chinese teachers conducting lessons solely in Chinese in three sites, Beijing, Hong Kong, and Melbourne were audio recorded as they taught their usual lessons, with observational notes also taken by the researchers. Lessons in Beijing were chosen to provide contemporary Chinese language used in education. Hong Kong lessons were included to ensure a range of activities and instructional style that would be both essentially Chinese in usage but, due to having been set up modelled on Victoria's own curriculum, also close in instructional style and curriculum content to that used in Australian classrooms. It was thought that the language from these Hong Kong lesson data might be needed to supplement the language data from a possibly narrower set of activities and style of teaching found in Beijing. Lessons in Australia were chosen to ensure data which would provide both local curriculum content and instructional style.

Data comprised audio recording of 20 x 45-minute lessons taught by 10 teachers, four in Beijing, four in Hong Kong, and two in Melbourne, as well as the researchers' observation notes.

Data from the eight lessons recorded in Beijing were analysed by BNU researchers, and those from the eight lessons in Hong Kong by CTTC researchers. The four lessons taught by two teachers in Melbourne could not be recorded until late October and early November, 2013, and the results of analysing these will only be undertaken in early 2014.

The analysis by both sides is comprised of the following steps:

- Teacher's speech in each lesson is transcribed
- The transcribed language is coded to show the type of utterance, vocabulary, grammar structures and language function
- Utterances of different types are tallied
- The coded transcripts of all lessons gathered on each site are synthesized and organized to show the language for performing different functions throughout the lessons
- The synthesized language is also organized into lists showing the key language structures and vocabulary involved
- The results of this language analysis are submitted to L2 speaker teachers of Chinese to discover their views on the degree of language complexity and relevance in local classrooms, and to estimate the ratio of known to unknown language in the corpus presented
- Synonymous expressions are reduced to one high frequency term
- The outcome is a set of reduced but natural and correct language, which may be used as a first basic corpus of Chinese language for the classroom.

4. RESULTS

Initial analysis of the eight Beijing lessons has provided detailed classification of the expressions of *encouragement*, a primary function of the language found to be frequently used in the lessons. These expressions have also been analysed with respect to grammatical structure, semantic value, and pragmatics. The findings have been disseminated in a paper entitled “The Chinese of Encouragement in Primary Classes”, jointly written by Ying Chen, Liping Feng, and Shuangxia Sheng, and presented at the *CTTC 2013 Annual Forum* in Melbourne October 2013. Analysis of the Beijing lessons is continuing but as to date it is available only in Chinese, it has not been further presented in this report.

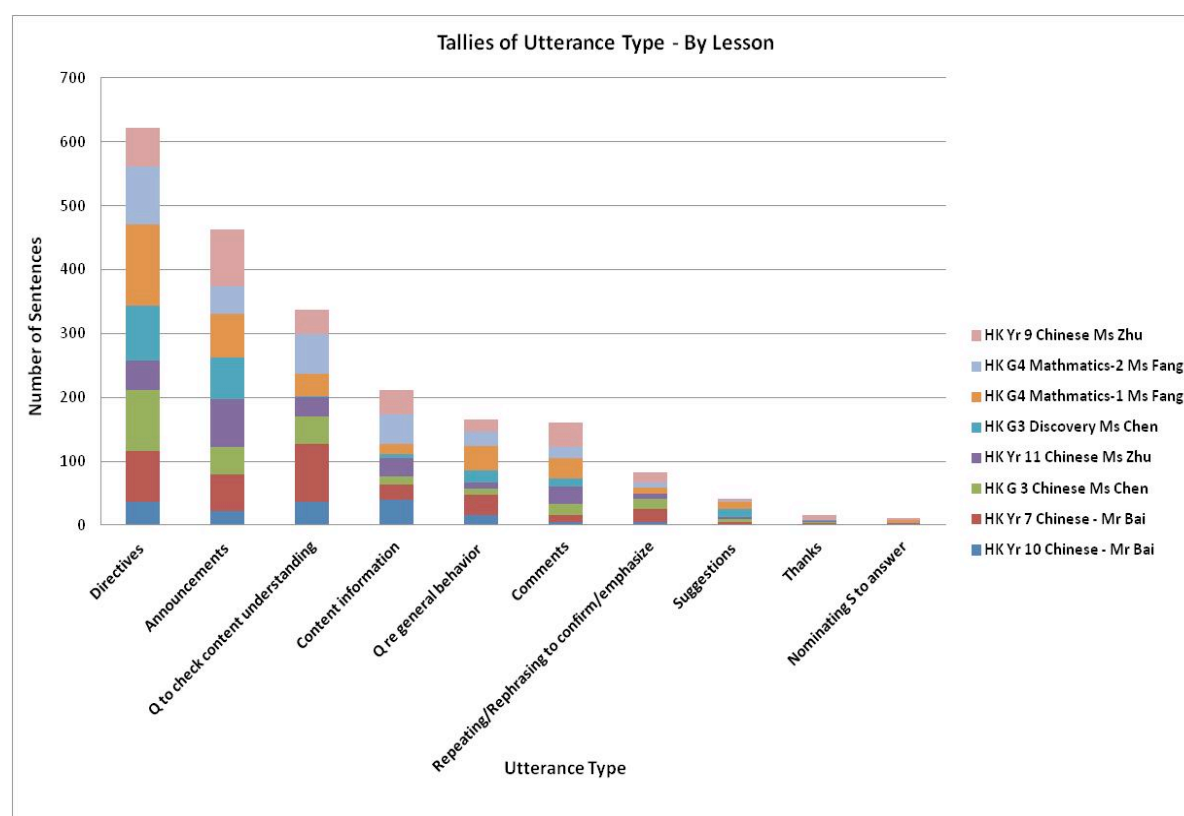
Results of analysis of the eight Hong Kong lessons are presented below, showing 1) the types of utterances and their spread in lessons; 2) the cluster of language based on the function they perform at various lesson stages; 3) key language structures; 4) feedback from L2 Chinese teachers; and, 5) the implications. These have also already been presented at the *CTTC 2013 Annual Forum* in a paper by Xia Cui, entitled “Features of Classroom Chinese: Uses and Implications”.

4.2 Types of utterances

Analysis of the teachers’ language shows that there are nine types of utterance recurrently used by all four teachers. These are *directives*, *suggestions*, *announcements*, *content specific information*, *comments*, *questions to check content understanding*, *questions to check on general behaviour*, *nominating students to respond*, *greetings*, *thanks*, and *repeating/rephrasing to confirm/emphasize*. These utterances have been tallied to show which types are used most often, first by teachers as a group (Graph 1), and then as used in primary and secondary lessons (Graph 2).

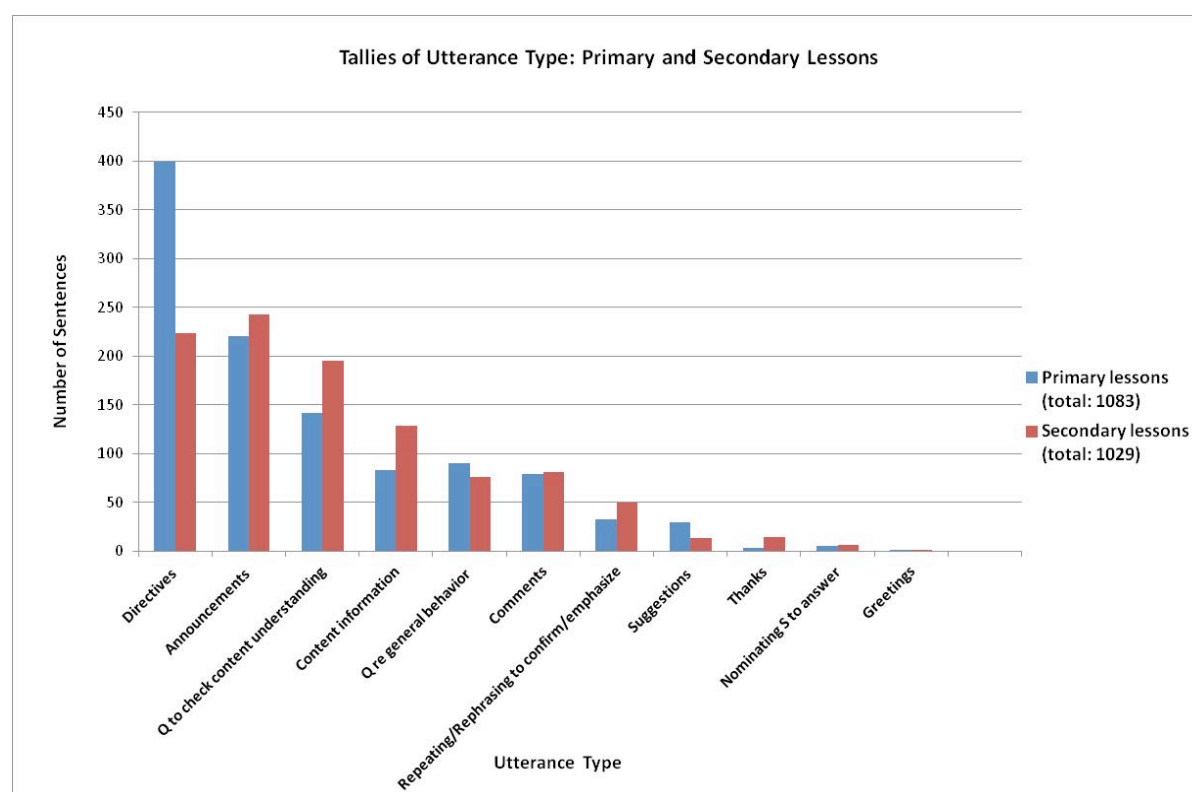
As shown in Graph 1 (BELOW), teachers as a group used directive utterances most often, followed by announcements, questions to check content understanding, giving content information, questions regarding students’ general classroom behaviour, and comments. As indicated by the more or less evenly spread colours which represent different lessons, there is a consistency among these in terms of which types of utterances are used most often.

Graph 1: Tallies of Utterance Types – By Lesson



In Graph 2 (below), utterances have been tallied as they were used in primary and secondary lessons. While the total number of utterances gathered from primary and secondary lessons does not differ much, there are significantly more directive utterances in primary than in secondary lessons, whereas relatively more utterances to teach content information and check content understanding are used in secondary lessons. For the rest of the utterance types, the differences are rather small.

Graph 2: Tallies of Utterance Types – By Primary and Second lessons



4.3 Functions of the language

The language gathered in all lessons was synthesized and organized based on the function it performs at various stages of the lesson. The purpose of this procedure is to collect all the utterances fulfilling the same lesson function. These are later reduced to one expression of high frequency to be used in place of synonyms. Emerging from the data are the language to achieve four major functions: to indicate lesson stages, to organize activities, to manage the learning process, and to manage classroom behaviour.

4.4 Key language structures

Analysis of teachers' language reveals several key structures commonly used across all lessons. One most noticeable word that comes up very often is the use of “好” (meaning “good”). While it is often used to approve students' performance in the classroom, most significantly teachers used 好 to call for students' attention, as well as to indicate moving on to the next task. “的” segments (segments using the particle “de”), shown in five structures, stand out as being highly frequently used by all teachers across various stages of the lesson. Some examples of “的” segments are: 我们刚才读的这篇文章; 读一次的同学举手, and 这个工作我们是按组来完成的. Another significant feature in the language is the various verb structures. For example, 把 sentences, *verb + verb complements* (e.g. 把上周的作业拿出来), and *verb repetition* (e.g. 听一听).

4.5 Feedback from L2 Chinese teachers

Once categorized, the language was submitted to two L2 teachers to obtain their feedback with respect to the degree of language complexity, its relevance in local classrooms, and ratio of language known to them to new language. Results of these tests show that, although little of the language itself was found to be new or difficult, actually using the language competently by getting the tone, rhythm, phrasing, fluency and particular modal particles all right in a single utterance is generally challenging for these L2 users. The two teachers also reported having difficulties reading longer structures with fluency, and expressed a lack of confidence in the appropriateness of their use of language in class. In addition, they found some expressions they are unlikely to use in their own classrooms, such as those arranging for students to recite and write from memory.

5. IMPLICATIONS

Results of analysing the Hong Kong lessons show that, regardless of the subject matter, teacher classroom talk is finite and recurrent. Although Beijing and Melbourne lessons have not yet been incorporated in the results at this stage, it has been noted already that the transcripts of these show the teachers' language presents similar features to those in the Hong Kong lessons in terms of the range of functions, key structures and volume of vocabulary.

The results of analysis do provide the base of a corpus of classroom language usable by teachers and of a kind and volume manageable for students to learn. Feedback from two L2 teachers shows that, if L2 teachers are to conduct their Chinese lessons mostly in Chinese, their key training needs will be in the area of building fluency, and the confidence to use spontaneous longer, slightly more complex structures than they do at present.

6. CONCLUSION

At its Summer School in January 2014 the CTTC is offering the first training sessions in using the language identified in this study. In the first half of each session, L2 teachers will rehearse with the researchers acting as coaches, and in the second half they will practise using the language with student participants. L1 teachers will be present as observers and as co-trainees in learning to use a restricted corpus of language.

Further analyses and further synthesizing of all data will be collaboratively undertaken by the researchers in 2014.

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