

Chapter 15

Shifting Paradigm: Reforming Chinese Language Education in the Philippines

Sining Marcos Kotah

Abstract The quality of Chinese language education in the Philippines underwent a decline after the Filipinization Act of 1976. Chinese schools that catered mostly to teaching children of Chinese who had settled down in the Philippines were forced to teach the language only as an elective, instead of as the core curriculum. Combined with a change in culture and values of Chinese-Filipinos, students' proficiency in the Chinese language eventually deteriorated. Granted the change in the culture of the students, many Chinese educators moved to change the pedagogy of teaching from a first language approach to a second language approach. This paper discusses the background, assumptions, and processes of this educational reform using Philippine Cultural College, the oldest Chinese-Filipino secondary school in the country, as a case study on the implementation and efficacy of this paradigm shift in teaching the Chinese language.

15.1 Brief Background

Chinese language education in the Philippines used to be at par with that in China. Graduates from the local Chinese senior middle schools back in the early 1970s could very well cope with the teaching in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, or Macau should they decide to continue their tertiary education in those places.

The way Chinese schools in the Philippines were run was changed by the 1973 Filipinization law of the government during martial law. This law demanded “control and administration of all educational institutions . . . be vested in the citizens of the Philippines” (Presidential Decree 176 1973). Schools which used to be under the Taiwanese government had to restructure, and Chinese school directors and administrators had to step down. Philippine Chinese schools, which then patterned their system after the six-year middle and senior high school system in China, had to conform to the Philippine educational standard of four years, Chinese could only be taught as an elective, and the way subjects were taught had to be reformed.

S.M. Kotah (✉)
Philippine Cultural College, Manila, Philippines
e-mail: ningkotah@yahoo.com

In all, hours spent for Chinese instruction were cut down from four hours a day to two (Gan and Wang 2008; Sim 2011).

The government then issued Presidential Decree No. 1379 in 1978, which granted naturalization to foreigners. This led to many Chinese acquiring Filipino citizenship, thereby opening up economic opportunities for them. As parents became involved in more and more businesses, it led to changes in family dynamics in Chinese homes, leading to more reliance on hired nannies than ever before. This led to children being less and less exposed to Chinese language and culture as a whole. The integration of Chinese into Filipino society also led to a shift in cultural identity, with more and more Chinese incorporating both a Chinese and Filipino identity into their daily lives. Gone were the notions of living in the Philippines as a sojourn, as they were determined to grow roots in the land they now called “home” (Huang and Wang 1999).

The decreased emphasis in Chinese education, along with the changes in the cultural makeup of the next generation, led to alienation from a Chinese speaking environment (Wang 2003). Because of these changes, the utility of learning Chinese became less and less apparent, leading to its lower priority and its decline (Gan and Wang 2008). In the late 1980s, most high school graduates could not read or even carry conversations in the language (Sim 2011). As this decline in skill in Chinese permeated the family, most students entering school did so without enough proficiency in the language. This contrasted with earlier scenarios, where the emphasis on the Chinese language meant that students at least learned and were trained in the Fujian dialect. Coming into school, they would just have to adjust to learning Mandarin, which is similar in a lot of ways to the Fujian dialect.

Meanwhile, the approach to teaching Chinese has not changed throughout this period of cultural reform (Zhao 1999). Modeled after the educational system in China which taught Chinese as a first language, the system of education still assumed that students had at least a rudimentary grasp in the language, and thus failed to account for the needs of a new generation who were not as familiar with the language. This model of education centered on creating associations, going from words to phrases to sentences. Students were taught to (1) read, by repeating characters and linking them to words they knew; and (2) write, linking words they knew to strokes and lines. This pedagogy is summarized in Fig. 15.1. To a beginning student with previous knowledge of Chinese, this was manageable. To the student with no background on it, however, it became a cycle of echoing and memorizing what the teachers taught (Chen 2000), a difficult process that usually led to fear, alienation, or even hatred of the language. Chinese language education steadily worsened in this time (Wang 2013), and the lack of change in the method of instruction at a time when the demand of it had completely changed was a big part of the problem (Yang 1995).

And so reforms had to be carried out.

15.2 Shifting Paradigm

The key to the reform was a shift in paradigm in the way the Chinese language was taught. Chinese had to be seen as a second language to the students rather than the first, meaning that the language education had to shift from educating Chinese in the Philippines about their mother tongue to nurturing Filipinos aware of their Chinese culture (Wang 2013).

With the need to modify the model of teaching acknowledged, the precise mechanisms of this change left institutions divided. On the one hand, there were schools which insisted on maintaining the traditional way of first language education. Others believed that a shift to the second language approach would be more suited to the needs of the students. Philippine Cultural College (PCC), where I serve as the Vice President in charge of the basic education department, is one of the forerunners of the approach. Established in 1923, PCC is the first Chinese secondary school in the Philippines. PCC became the home base of a new model of Chinese education, one created by the Philippine Chinese Education Research Center (PCERC), an organization of Chinese language enthusiasts seeking to “save” the quality of Chinese language education in the country. PCC piloted paradigmatic shift to the second language approach, the results of which this paper is based upon.

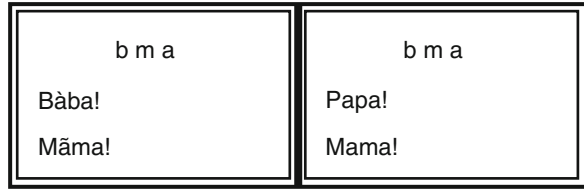
For the purpose of understanding the discussion that will follow, a review how these two approaches differ from one another is in order.

As mentioned above, the main assumption of the first language model is that the students are at least familiar with the Chinese language, and that this is due to exposure and habitual practice at home. Children are able to converse in their “native tongue,” and possess skills to use the language without much effort. Here the approach to teaching focuses on applications of the language. Students taught with this model are introduced to literature aside from the usual furthering of language skills for conversational purposes (Jiao 1995; He 2006; Sim 2011). Learners in this approach are expected to understand words mentioned in class, even partially, and are taught by the institution to read and write as proficiently as they can speak. Learning to speak the language is never the primary goal of this model. The following is a sample text of the first lesson of a first grade textbook demonstrating this approach (Chinese Language Arts 1n. d.):

Fig. 15.1 Sample text from a first language model textbook (English translation mine)

开学	School has started
开学了，	School has started
老师来了，	Teacher has come
同学们也来了，	Classmates are also here
我看到许多老师，	I see many teachers
也看到许多新同学。	And a lot of new classmates
见了老师，	Seeing teacher,
我说：	I say:
老师早！	Good morning teacher!
见了同学，	Seeing my classmates,
我说：	I say:
你好！	Hello!

Fig. 15.2 Sample text from a second language model textbook (English translation mine)



This text sampled above contains 21 distinct Chinese characters in eleven lines. Still, only four of these 21 characters were included in the list of vocabulary words after the text, which was meant for students to understand the definition of unfamiliar words. Having only two words (four characters), the editors clearly thought the first graders already knew the rest of the words (characters), such that all they had to do was to associate those vocabulary words with the Chinese characters used in the text. As indicated by the editors in the notes of the book, each lesson came with it three tasks to accomplish: to know the words, to read the words, and to write the words.

In contrast, a second language is one acquired through some kind of schooling after a first language has already been learned. The goal of teaching is to make students possess the skills and competencies of a language foreign to them (He 2006; Jiao 1995; Sim 2011). It is assumed that the student has no prior knowledge of the language, and cannot speak nor read in the language. Thus, the model emphasizes teaching students the language alone, with teachers having to teach the children how to speak the language starting from its phonetic alphabets (*pinyin*), from simple to complex, in a systematic manner. Through exposure over time, students gradually manage to acquire proficiency over the sounds, the meaning of the words, and then, eventually, grammar. The following is an excerpt from the first lesson of a first grade textbook using the second language model (Philippine Chinese Reader, Book 1 n.d.) (Fig. 15.2).

The lesson focuses on the phonetics and pronunciation of the word. As much as students may be taught the semantic meaning of a word, the primary goal is for them to learn to articulate the sounds of the language. In contrast to the first language approach, this one emphasizes listening and speaking before reading and writing. A simplified framework for each of these two models are shown in Figs. 15.3 and 15.4 below.

What is the more effective model will depend on the learners it caters to. Aside from migrant students from China, Hong Kong, or Macau, students are predominantly those born and raised in the Philippines. As previously mentioned, these students are more exposed to a culture more Filipino than Chinese and start to take up a Filipino identity (He 2005). With their full integration to Philippine society, the Chinese language and culture has become more and more foreign to them. Thus it seems like a shift to a second language model would improve the ability of schools to educate these “new generation” students. The feasibility of such a language education model was pilot-tested in PCC. The implementation and findings of this pilot test are the focus of the rest of the chapter.

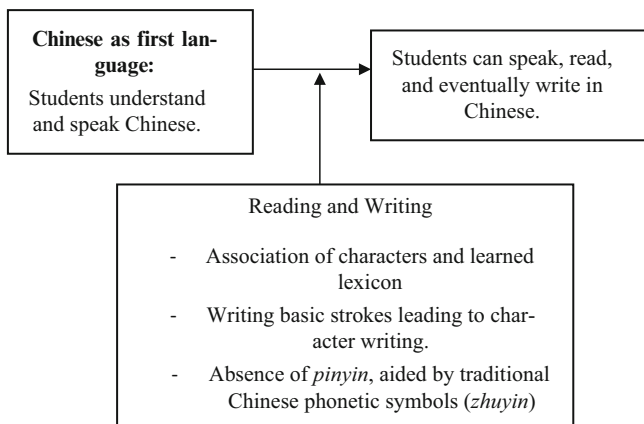


Fig. 15.3 The first language model of Chinese language education

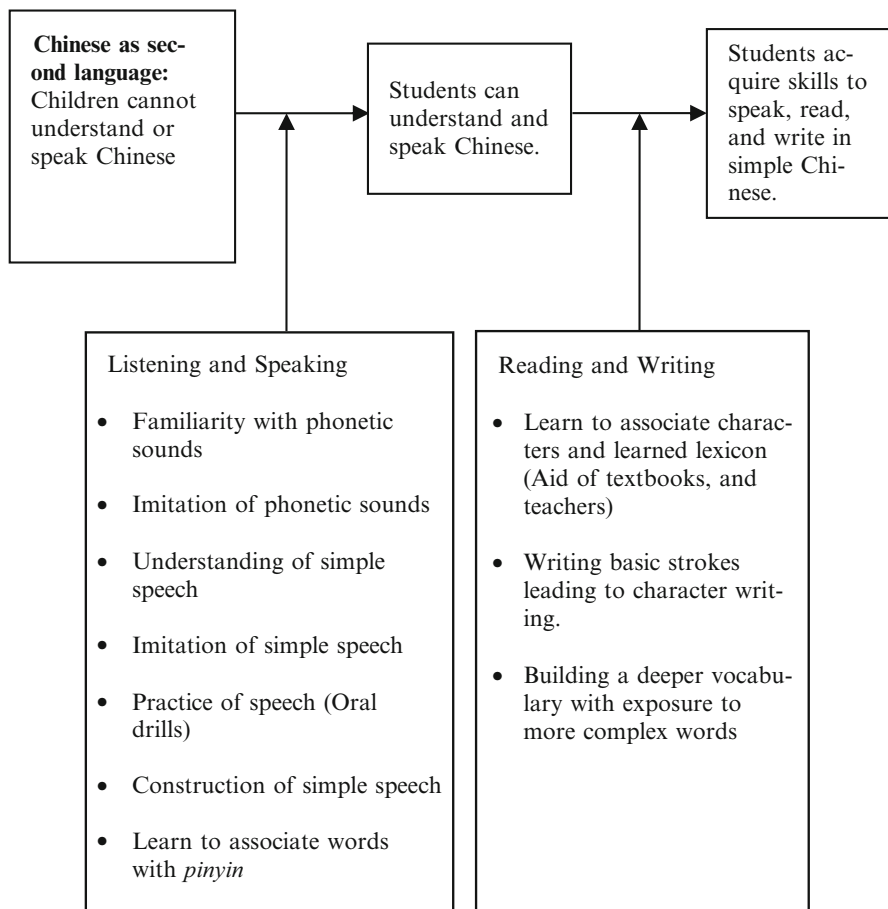


Fig. 15.4 The second language model of Chinese language education

15.3 Implementing the New Model

The efforts to revise the model was aided by Professor Lu Bisong, an authority in teaching Chinese as a second language from the Beijing Language and Culture University, who worked with the PCERC to conduct lectures to Chinese language educators in the Philippines in the early 1990s.

The shift to a second language model culminated in a new set of textbooks developed by the PCERC, “Philippine Chinese Reader”, and these books were the main bases of Chinese education during the pilot testing. Aside from emphasizing skills of listening and speaking, the text in the books also contextualized dialogue to the Philippine setting, making it more understandable and relatable for the students. They utilized Filipino names for characters, set stories in actual places in the Philippines, and referred to events that transpired in the country, effectively becoming guides to speaking Chinese in the country.

Aside from the books, points of emphases in the teacher’s pedagogies were also shifted. There are three main goals of this model, created by PCC after the model introduced by Professor Lu:

1. The first is to shift the role of the teacher from instructor to guide. Students are made to become active learners of the language, and the teachers become more responsible for the facilitation of the learning process. This contrasts with previous styles of rote memorization of students of information piled upon them by their teachers. This new role of teachers is achieved by emphasizing the importance of oral drills to develop students’ proficiency of the language. Students are asked in class to read, pronounce, and practice various sentence patterns routinely. The teachers explain core concepts that students learn through guided practice. The drills take precedence over regular textbook reading, with students encouraged to come up with their own answers to questions rather than read them from the book.
2. Teachers are also tasked to use a variety of teaching methods and techniques to practice different skills in the students. These methods include asking questions about the text for students to answer, narrations of stories by teachers, putting students in various imaginary situations, role-play conversations, among others. Teachers are prepared for these through training sessions, through their peers in demonstration classes, classroom observations, and supervisor evaluations.
3. Finally, teachers are also asked to make use of multimedia presentations, including visual materials, flash cards, audio recordings, video files, as well as computer applications to improve the quality of classroom learning. These and other techniques help make the content more lively and engaging for the students.

Together, the new textbooks and approaches to teaching have been in use in PCC since 1994. The shift was previously documented by Kotah et al. (2008), who published a progress report reflecting the preliminary results of 10 years of implementation of the model.

15.4 Results

Since its first use, the new model of teaching has improved the skills and competencies of PCC students. Reading and writing followed as learners acquired better competencies in the language. The quality of teaching the Chinese language has also steadily improved for the past years, as measured by the amount of students receiving failing grades in their Chinese subjects. Below are some numbers on students with failing grades (Table 15.1).

Before the series of “Philippine Chinese Reader”, which used second language approach, was pioneered in PCC, 133 out of 653 grade school pupils (20.4 %) received failing marks in the Chinese curriculum. After the said series of textbook was used for one year, the number of students receiving failing marks was reduced to only 94 out of 641 grade school pupils (14.7 %). The latest figures in PCC now show only 18 out of 733 grade school pupils (2.5 %) who failed in the Chinese subject. This is 17.9 % decrease from the figure when traditional way of teaching Chinese was still being used (Table 15.2).

The same trend is evident in the high school department. When PCC was still using the first language approach textbooks, 77 out of 498 high school students (15.5 %) received failing marks. After the series of “Philippine Chinese Reader” was used for 1 year, only 41 out of 500 high school students (8.2 %) failed. The latest figures in PCC now show only 13 out of 392 high school students (3.3 %) failed in Chinese language. This is a 12.2 % decrease from the figure when the first language approach dominated the Chinese language teaching in the country.

The figures above give support for the viability and effectiveness of the second language model of Chinese education, along with the importance of second language textbooks in the implementation of such a model.

Table 15.1 Grade school level grades (Philippine Cultural College 1994, 1995, 2013a)

Grade level (Grade school)	School year 1993–1994			School year 1994–1995			School year 2012–2013		
	No. of pupils	No. of pupils who failed in Chinese	(%)	No. of pupils	No. of pupils who failed in Chinese	(%)	No. of pupils	No. of pupils who failed in Chinese	(%)
Grade 1	90	8	8.9	103	7	6.8	119	3	2.5
Grade 2	105	8	7.6	83	8	9.6	132	1	0.8
Grade 3	102	28	27.5	118	16	13.6	112	1	0.9
Grade 4	118	32	27.1	97	25	25.8	122	4	3.3
Grade 5	130	30	23.1	114	21	18.4	127	7	5.5
Grade 6	108	27	25.0	126	17	13.5	121	2	1.7
Total	653	133	20.4	641	94	14.7	733	18	2.5

Table 15.2 High school level grades (Philippine Cultural College 1994, 1995, 2013a)

Year level (High school)	School year 1993–1994			School year 1994–1995			School year 2012–2013		
	No. of students	No. of students who failed in Chinese	(%)	No. of students	No. of students who failed in Chinese	(%)	No. of students	No. of students who failed in Chinese	(%)
Year 1	190	43	22.6	187	27	14.4	94	0	0
Year 2	143	27	18.9	144	10	6.9	93	3	3.2
Year 3	94	6	6.4	96	3	3.1	101	10	9.9
Year 4	71	1	1.4	73	1	1.4	104	0	0
Total	498	77	15.5	500	41	8.2	392	13	3.3

15.5 Future Directions

As a way to supplement the students' learning of the Chinese language, the school takes extra steps to further immerse the students in Chinese culture. This includes activities such as singing competitions, orations and declamations, drama festivals, story-telling contests, and Chinese book fairs. Chinese-speaking campaigns have also been launched, along with extracurricular clubs for calligraphy, Chinese orchestra, and declamation.

As a way to further check the quality of Chinese education in the school, students are also required to partake in the standardized international Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi (HSK, test of Chinese Proficiency). HSK type of questions have been incorporated in the regular quizzes and periodical examinations as early as the elementary grade four, and results have been promising (Philippine Cultural College 2013b). For the previous school year (school year 2012–2013), the elementary grade six graduates took the level 3 HSK, the passing rate was 90.68 %; the high school regular class fourth year graduates took the level 4 HSK, the passing rate was 81.71 %; and the high school pilot class graduates took the level 6 HSK, with a 100 % passing rate. This further validates the effectiveness of the second language model.

Teachers have undoubtedly been an integral part of this curricular reform. There has been a dearth of quality Chinese educators in the country, but steps have been taken for improvement. Aside from the training mentioned above, Chinese language teachers have also been sent to take up courses of Chinese language teaching in China. Since 2004, 14 high school graduates have been a part of the program, and 12 have so far come back to serve their alma mater. Tenured teachers are also encouraged to take a correspondence course sponsored by the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council of China and Jinan University in coordination with the PCERC. At present, there are 10 teachers taking the course, and they are expected to graduate within this year or early next year after submitting and defending their theses.

PCC teachers have also been going around the country, sharing how teaching Chinese as a second language can yield results with the use of the proper pedagogical techniques. To date, we have had around 60 teachers who have done this around

the country. Moreover, three of our teachers have won awards and recognition in the international search for the “Outstanding Chinese Language Lesson” and the “Outstanding Chinese Language Lesson Plan” sponsored by the Chinese National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language.

For its effort to uplift the quality of Chinese language teaching in the country, PCC received recognition from the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council of China in 2009 as the “Model School in Chinese Language Education”.

15.6 Conclusion

As has been presented throughout this paper, the second language model of teaching Chinese in the Philippines holds promise. From the initial results, it serves to maximize the students’ proficiency in Chinese while at the same time allowing them to complete their integration into the Philippine culture. While the current generation might not reach a proficiency in the language that equals that of their ancestors, the hybridization of the Chinese and Filipino cultures is inevitable and irreversible, and thus we can only keep changing the system of education to adjust to the mixture of the two cultures. The previous notion of Chinese as a first language simply cannot keep up with the culture. The quality of Chinese education will only go as far as its goodness-of-fit to the learners of the language, and it seems only right that the endeavor will adjust to the changing times. As we shift Chinese education into the perspective of it being taught as a second language, we realize that the language will never be the same as it was before its Filipinization, yet it seems that this is the only recourse to maximizing the appreciation of a new generation of Chinese-Filipinos to the roots of their ancestors.

References¹

- Chen, G. E. 陈根娥 (2000). The development and the future of the Chinese language education in the Philippines (探讨菲律宾华文教育的发展和前途—必须改革才有出路). In *Chinese language teaching in the new millennium* (新世纪华语教学序言) (pp. 44–54). Manila: Philippine Chinese Education Research Center.
- Chinese language arts 1 (Elementary)* (小学华语课本第一册). (n.d.). Manila: Luminaire Printing & Publishing Corp.
- Gan, E., & Wang, J. 颜长城、黄端铭 (2008). Evolution of Chinese language education in the Philippines (菲律宾华文教育的演变). In *1995–2004 Philippine Chinese education comprehensive annual report* (菲律宾华文教育综合年鉴) (pp. 117–119). Manila: Philippine Chinese Education Research Center. Manila, Philippines.
- He, Y. 何懿 (2005). From falling leaves returning to their roots to falling leaves growing their own roots (从落叶归根到落叶生根). In *Chinese language teaching in the eyes of the Chinese lan-*

¹References are all written in Chinese. English translations mine.

- guage consultants (2004–2005)* (华语督导看华校华语教学) (pp. 21–59). Manila: Philippine Chinese Education Research Center.
- He, Y. 何懿 (2006). *Looking through the Chinese language education in the Philippines* (菲律宾华教透视和思考). Manila: Philippine Chinese Education Research Center.
- Huang, B. H., & Wang, J. 黄炳辉、黄端铭 (1999). A few problems that require attention. (值得思考的几个问题). In *The 3rd southeast Asian Chinese language teaching conference* (第三届东南亚华文教育研讨会) (pp. 10–14). Manila: Philippine Chinese Education Research Center.
- Jiao, S. Z. 焦叔章 (1995). A brief discussion of the second language teaching (浅谈第二语言教学). In *Drawing up the new blueprint for the Chinese language teaching* (绘制华语教学心蓝图) (pp. 28–31). Manila: Philippine Chinese Education Research Center.
- Kotah, S. M., Young, B. B., & Wu, G. Z. 蔡艺术、杨美美、吴国政 (2008). Shifting paradigm for results in teaching reform (转变观念, 教学改革出成效). In *1995–2004 Philippine Chinese education comprehensive annual report* (菲律宾华文教育综合年鉴) (pp. 98–108). Manila: Philippine Chinese Education Research Center. Manila, Philippines.
- Philippine Chinese reader, Book 1 (菲律宾华语课本). (n.d.) Manila: Philippine Chinese Education Research Center.
- Philippine Cultural College. (1994). Students' permanent records for school year 1993–1994. Manila, Philippines
- Philippine Cultural College. (1995). Students' permanent records for school year 1994–1995. Manila, Philippines.
- Philippine Cultural College. (2013a). Students' permanent records for school year 2012–2013. Manila, Philippines.
- Philippine Cultural College. (2013b). Registrar Files. Manila, Philippines
- Presidential Decree 176. (1973). Retrieved from http://www.lawphil.net/statutes/presdecs/pd1973/pd_176_1973.html
- Presidential Decree 1379. (1978). Retrieved from http://www.lawphil.net/statutes/presdecs/pd1978/pd_1379_1978.html
- Sim, M. 沈文 (2011). *Chinese language teaching in the Chinese Filipino schools* (过河的脚步—菲律宾华校的华语教学). Manila: Philippine Chinese Education Research Center.
- Wang, J. 黄端铭 (2003). Developing Chinese culture and Chinese language teaching (华语教学与培养中华文化气质). In *Searching for the results in the second language teaching* (探索第二语言教学的可喜成果) (pp. 5–9). Manila: Philippine Chinese Education Research Center.
- Wang, J. 黄端铭 (2013). *Comprehensive report on Philippine Chinese education* (菲律宾华文教育综合报告). Manila: Philippine Chinese Education Research Center.
- Yang, S. Q. 杨石泉 (1995). The nature, characteristic, and method of Chinese language teaching (华语教学的性质、特点和方法). In *Drawing up the new blueprint for the Chinese language teaching* (绘制华语教学心蓝图) (pp. 35–38). Manila: Philippine Chinese Education Research Center.
- Zhao, M. C. 赵敏成 (1999). Philippine Cultural College – Remaining steadfast in the Chinese language reform, producing results (侨中学院 – 坚持华语教学改革, 成绩显著). In *Reforming Chinese language teaching in the new millennium* (迈向新世纪华语教学改革) (pp. 23–37). Manila: Philippine Chinese Education Research Center.