

Comparative Analysis of International Chinese Language Education Materials: A Case Study of “HSK Standard Course 1” and “Developing Chinese - Elementary Comprehensive Course”

Fei Chen

Macau university of science and technology, Macau, China

Abstract: This research aims to explore the characteristics and applications of different textbooks in international Chinese language education and analyze their impact on teaching effectiveness. By conducting a comparative analysis between two major international Chinese language textbooks, namely “HSK Standard Course 1” and “Developing Chinese- Elementary Comprehensive Course,” this study examines the similarities and differences in terms of language proficiency, cultural communication, student interaction, and teaching methodologies.

Keywords: Comparative Analysis; International Chinese Language Education; Textbook Development; Language Proficiency; Cultural Communication.

1. Introduction

This research focuses on a comparative analysis between two widely used Chinese language textbooks, “Developing Chinese- Elementary Comprehensive Course” and “HSK Standard Course 1”, both catering to beginners with no previous knowledge of Chinese language. “Developing Chinese- Elementary Comprehensive Course” contains a total of 30 texts, while “HSK Standard Course 1” offers 15 texts. For the sake of convenience in comparison, the first 15 texts from both textbooks were selected for analysis. The analysis delves into their lessons, examining their content, pedagogical approach, and potential impact on novice learners’ language acquisition and cultural understanding.

2. Compilation Style

Genre Selection:

The analysis of genre selection in Chinese language instructional texts is of paramount importance, particularly in the context of novice learners at the elementary stage. Both “HSK Standard Course 1” and “Developing Chinese-Elementary Comprehensive Course” predominantly employ conversational and narrative genres in their content, which aligns with the distinctive characteristics of beginners and meets the curriculum requirements. However, it is noteworthy that the genre format in “HSK Standard Course 1” leans toward a relatively uniform focus on conversational dialogues. In contrast, “Developing Chinese- Elementary Comprehensive Course” offers a more diverse range of genres, encompassing both daily dialogues and narrative passages, thereby enriching the pedagogical approach.

Text Structure:

In “HSK Standard Course 1,” each lesson follows a consistent structural pattern, comprising “Pre-lesson Warm-up, Text, Annotations, Exercise Question, Pinyin, Characters, and Application.” Additionally, each unit is supplemented with a dedicated section on Chinese culture, aiming to facilitate students’ deeper understanding of Chinese culture.

“Developing Chinese- Elementary Comprehensive Course”

also exhibits a uniform text structure, featuring seven key components, namely “Phonetic Exercises, Phonetic Knowledge, Text, Comprehensive Annotations, Classroom Activities, Exercise Questions, and Character Writing.” This multifaceted structure contributes to a comprehensive learning experience, with particular significance in the domains of phonetics and character acquisition.

The nuanced variations in genre selection and text structure in these instructional materials shall be further expounded in subsequent analyses to evaluate their impact on pedagogy and student learning outcomes.

These two textbooks share similarities in terms of their composition of text lessons, albeit with slight variations in the order of presentation, and they both provide comprehensive and rich teaching materials. However, it is worth noting that “Developing Chinese- Elementary Comprehensive Course” relatively offers less coverage on Chinese cultural elements.

For “Developing Chinese- Elementary Comprehensive Course”, there are avenues to further enhance the introduction and integration of Chinese cultural elements, which can be achieved by augmenting the lesson texts with additional information pertaining to Chinese culture, traditional customs, history, and related topics. Such enriching content not only aids students in gaining a better understanding of China but also fosters cross-cultural comprehension, ultimately enhancing their experience in learning Chinese. Furthermore, seamlessly intertwining these cultural elements with the lesson content creates a more captivating and practical learning journey.

In summary, while both textbooks offer extensive teaching materials, it is worth considering the inclusion of more Chinese cultural elements in “Developing Chinese-Elementary Comprehensive Course” to further enrich students’ learning experiences.

3. Features of Language Points

Quantity of Language Points:

An examination of the quantity of language points in both textbooks reveals a deliberate and balanced approach. Each

text lesson introduces no more than five grammatical points, ensuring a moderate level of complexity suitable for learners at the elementary stage.

Distribution of Language Points:

“HSK Standard Course 1” exhibits a relatively compact distribution of language points and maintains a swift teaching pace. In contrast, “Developing Chinese- Elementary Comprehensive Course” shares a similar pattern in language point distribution, with few disparities compared to the former, which are amenable to flexible adjustments by educators in the teaching process, coupled with comprehensive explanations of knowledge points.

Analysis and Practice of Language Points:

Both textbooks employ similar approaches in analyzing and practicing language points. Typically, this involves a sequence of steps such as “explanation of language points, example sentences, role-playing dialogues of the text, question-response exercises, and practice.” These steps underscore the importance of practical exercises following the explanation of language points. Nevertheless, “Developing Chinese- Elementary Comprehensive Course” stands out for its diversified approach to exercises, encompassing a wide array of question types, thus offering students a more comprehensive and multifaceted learning experience.

4. Topic Distribution

In terms of thematic content, both sets of materials predominantly revolve around daily life topics, which align with the requirements of the curriculum. Both of textbooks are tailored for beginners without prior knowledge of the Chinese language. According to the “Chinese Language Proficiency Standard and the Syllabus for Chinese Grammar,” the elementary level (Level 2) necessitates mastery of topics related to “basic expression of daily life and study, as well as a limited scope of social interactions.” Consequently, the choice of thematic content primarily focuses on “daily life” and “study.” From the table, we can also observe that both textbooks emphasize themes related to interpersonal communication and everyday life, which closely correspond to the learning proficiency of novice students.

“HSK Standard Course 1” and “Developing Chinese- Elementary Comprehensive Course” both prioritize covering topics that are relevant to the learning level of beginner students. Notably, they both share a common feature of placing a strong emphasis on daily life as the main themes, aligning with the fundamental topic requirements outlined in the “Chinese Language Proficiency Standards and the Grammatical Level Syllabus,” which encompasses fundamental topics involving expression of everyday life, learning, and social communication activities, all of which are essential for novice-level learners.

It is worth noting that “Developing Chinese- Elementary Comprehensive Course” provides character introduction before each text, embedding the teaching content within a context rich in storytelling elements. This approach facilitates students’ comprehension and application of the materials, enhancing their overall learning experience. In contrast, “HSK Standard Course 1” places a greater emphasis on engaging students through multimedia resources like images and tables, adding an element of fun to the learning process.

In summary, both textbooks exhibit a keen awareness of aligning their topic selection with the practical needs and proficiency level of novice students, while employing

different approaches to enhance the interest and practicality of the learning experience.

5. Phonetics

In terms of phonetics, both textbooks maintain a moderate level of difficulty, well-suited for students at the beginner level. However, “HSK Standard Course 1” provides a more concise coverage of phonetic knowledge while placing a greater emphasis on tone changes and offering detailed explanations. It also offers a detailed explanation of tone variations in Chinese covering the fundamental rules of the four Mandarin tones and provides words or sentences to demonstrate the pronunciation of these tones in different contexts. This aids students in understanding how to pronounce and utilize tones correctly. For instance, variations in tones for words like “不” (bù) and “一” (yī) are typically illustrated and practiced, encompassing all four tones to ensure students gain a comprehensive grasp of this critical aspect of phonetic rules. This meticulous explanation assists students in full comprehending the intricacies of the Mandarin phonological system.

6. Chinese Characters

Concerning Chinese character instruction, both textbooks introduce Chinese characters at the beginner level, following a step-by-step teaching approach that emphasizes strokes and its order, radical components, and structural composition. This systematic instruction lays a solid foundation for further learning of intermediate and advanced Chinese characters. Such teaching methodology assists students in understanding and mastering the fundamental structures and rules of Chinese characters, providing them with strong support for their future Chinese character studies.

7. Lexical Enrichment

Examining the lexical aspect, an analysis of average vocabulary acquisition per text reveals noteworthy distinctions between “HSK Standard Course 1” and “Developing Chinese- Elementary Comprehensive Course.” The former maintains an average of approximately 11 new words per lesson, while the latter introduces an average of about 23 new words per text. This discrepancy can be partially attributed to the diversified range of literary genres featured in “Developing Chinese- Elementary Comprehensive Course” and its richer textual content. Notably, despite the relatively higher volume of new vocabulary, these words remain closely aligned with everyday life, well within the confines of the curriculum guidelines.

8. Conclusion

In terms of theoretical principles in textbook development, both “HSK Standard Course 1” and “Developing Chinese- Elementary Comprehensive Course” adhere to the principles of combining structure, function, and culture. They align with the principles of instructional material development outlined in Liu Xun’s “Introduction to Teaching Chinese as a Second Language”: relevance, practicality, scientificity, interestingness, and systematicity. Both textbooks are exemplary resources for international Chinese language education.

Firstly, “Developing Chinese- Elementary Comprehensive Course” initiates each lesson with phonetic learning and

exercises. Students may find this segment initially monotonous and different, potentially leading to apprehension. Educators can flexibly adjust the sequence of teaching content, striving to make the introductory part interesting and attention-grabbing in order to alleviate this concern. Secondly, “HSK Standard Course 1” excels in making the lesson content more engaging, which incorporates a wealth of images and tables to aid learners in understanding the content. In the section dedicated to learning Chinese characters, it includes the visual representation of the evolution of Chinese character forms and their stroke order, offering learners an intuitive insight into the unique charm of Chinese characters. Thirdly, “Developing Chinese-Elementary Comprehensive Course” introduces character profiles before each text, weaving narratives around characters like Ming, Yamada, Martin, Zhu Yun, and Lin Na. These story-driven elements contribute to a strong sense of engagement and seamless continuity, particularly crucial for beginner-level learners.

In addition, the author also has a few suggestions for the two texts. Speaking specifically about “Standard Course HSK 1,” firstly of all, while it already demonstrates a commendable level of engagement, there is room for further enhancement of its level of engagement and enjoyment. Consider integrating additional interactive elements, captivating narrative elements, or multimedia resources to ignite students’ interest. What’s more, it can place more emphasis on the acquisition of Chinese characters, encompassing stroke order, character evolution, and related aspects. This emphasis will facilitate a more profound understanding and mastery of Chinese characters among students. Meanwhile, continue to enrich the section dedicated to Chinese culture, offering students a more in-depth understanding of Chinese cultural nuances. This enhancement will contribute to heightened cross-cultural comprehension and enhance the overall Chinese language learning experience. These recommendations aim to refine the pedagogical approach of “HSK Standard Course 1” to augment its educational efficacy and enrich students’ learning experiences. They can be tailored to specific instructional contexts and student requirements.

Regarding “Developing Chinese-Elementary Comprehensive Course”, firstly, it would be beneficial to adjust the sequence of phonetic learning. Given that this textbook introduces phonetics learning at the beginning of each lesson, educators can consider modifying the order of instructional content to ensure that the introductory section is more engaging and captures students’ attention effectively.

Secondly, it is essential to enhance the appeal of the content by injecting more elements of interest. While this textbook already emphasizes engagement, there is an opportunity to further increase interactivity, incorporate captivating narratives, or leverage multimedia resources to boost students’ motivation and enthusiasm for learning. Thirdly, it is crucial to further highlight the coherence of the textual narratives. This textbook distinguishes itself by featuring character introductions and narratives. Continue to emphasize this narrative approach to enhance emotional involvement and the overall learning experience for students. In addition, it would be beneficial to enrich the variety of exercise formats. Broaden the diversity of exercise types to cater to varying learning styles and skill levels, which will accommodate the needs of a wide range of students and enhance the comprehensiveness of the learning experience.

Both textbooks have their unique characteristics and are suitable for students with varying learning styles and needs. “HSK Standard Course 1” excels in providing detailed guidance in phonetics and Chinese character learning, catering to students who appreciate a more in-depth approach. “Developing Chinese-Elementary Comprehensive Course” enhances the learning experience through captivating storylines and an extensive introduction of new vocabulary. This comparative analysis serves as a valuable reference for educators and students when selecting international Chinese language education textbooks to meet different learning requirements and styles.

References

- [1] Qiao Zhihui.(2008). A Comparative Study between “A Course in Chinese” and “Development Chinese” (Primary Chinese). Xinjiang University.
- [2] Yang L. (2022). On the philosophical connotation and practical significance of Mozi's thought of "universal love". *Public Relations World* (24),106-108.
- [3] Liu Rong. (2021). The essence of mozi's education and its modern enlightenment (a master's degree thesis, guangxi normal university). <https://kns.cnki.net/kcms2/article/abstract?v=j6HAoO1nZAzNBIS2dXnlOg8zmH8Lan8aFIOzxClecyhemKwtSjCA5NzprCV65PfsWLAo00ihBYaxD3J-Su0zztOa29E7gytLg174yf6GsHJhpEZu8ZvOPEUBqTpgwAxWvzjBG9Ttn7s=&uniplatform=NZKPT&language=CHS>.