

# A Review of Research on Chinese Medium of Instruction

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**Abstract:** Medium language appears in the process of second language teaching and learning with high frequency, but related researchers have different attitudes towards medium language. By reviewing the relevant literature, sorting out scholars' views on the use of mediated language in Chinese language teaching and the application experiences developed by different views, this paper summarizes the current research results on mediated language in second language teaching, especially in international Chinese language teaching, and looks forward to the future development of international Chinese language education classrooms.

**Keywords:** Second Language Teaching; Mediated Language; Synthesis.

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## 1. Introduction

Mediated language is an important part of the second language learning classroom, and it is an important tool for classroom teaching and classroom management for most international Chinese language teachers. There has been a great deal of controversy about the use of mediated language. Should medium language be used in the Chinese language classroom? Which type of language is the medium language? English or the students' mother tongue? At what stage of Chinese language learning should mediated languages be used? What is the proportion of media language usage in the Chinese classroom? What is the actual effect of using media language in Chinese classrooms? These questions have always been the center of controversy.

## 2. Current Status of Research at Home and Abroad

Research on medium language of instruction can be roughly divided into two categories: one advocates the use of pure target language for teaching and rejects the use of medium language; the other advocates the use of medium language in the teaching process.

### 2.1. Foreign Studies

Foreign research on the medium language of instruction is mainly in the field of second language teaching, which is basically research on teaching English as a second language. At the same time, foreign research on the medium of instruction can still be divided into two categories, one of which advocates the use of the target language to the exclusion of the medium, and the other advocates the use of the medium to assist teaching.

#### 1. Exclusion of media language

Earlier in its emergence and more widely influential is the rejectionist attitude of some schools of second language pedagogy towards mediated language. For example, the direct method advocates getting rid of the mother tongue, linking the target language and objective things in second language teaching, and teaching intuitively. The listening method also rejects and restricts the use of the mother tongue, and advocates the use of intuitive means as much as possible in teaching or the use of specific situations and contexts to understand and express directly in the target language.

Other foreign scholars are explicitly against the use of

mediated language in second language teaching. For example, Ellis argues that the extensive use of the learner's native language in second language teaching will reduce the proportion of learners' contact with the target language, thus affecting the effectiveness of second language learning.[1] Other researchers have used questionnaires as well as interviews to find out learners' attitudes towards the use of mediated language in second language teaching. The results of their studies show that second language learners believe that using the target language in the second language classroom can help them learn effectively. For example, Maram & Huda, but they also found that beginner as well as intermediate level L2 learners were more likely to recognize the role of mediated language in L2 teaching and learning compared to advanced level L2 learners.[2]

#### 2. Advocacy media language

The earliest advocates of mediated language use were the grammar-translation approach among the schools of second-language pedagogy, which advocates second-language teaching through the mother tongue, with translation as the main means of teaching, practicing, and assessing. Of course, the mediating language here refers to the learner's mother tongue. Although this pedagogical claim has been heavily criticized in the field of second language teaching research since then, there is no denying that it still has some merit.

Later on, some researchers also continued to advocate the use of mediated language, but instead of relying entirely on mediated language, they advocated the appropriate use of partially mediated language in second language teaching. Campa and Nassaji, for example, argue that there are times when the use of mediated language in the second language classroom facilitates vocabulary teaching and cultural instruction. For example, mediated language can help students understand complex vocabulary meanings and cultural knowledge that they have never been exposed to before.[3]

Similarly there are some researchers who have demonstrated the feasibility of using mediated language in second language teaching classrooms through empirical means such as classroom observations, questionnaires, and interviews. For example, Debreli interviewed 54 foreign language teachers about their use of students' mother tongue as the mediating language in the second language classroom. The results of the study showed that the teachers were unanimous in recognizing the role of students' mother tongue in second language teaching and affirming the place of the

mediating language in second language teaching. Teachers felt that appropriate use of mediated language could explain more difficult topics and vocabulary in the classroom and also better enhance the interaction between teachers and students. However, there are many other teachers who believe that high frequency of students' native language use applies to beginner level second language learners and should be limited for advanced level second language learners.[4]

By summarizing the current state of foreign research, we find that there are both supportive and exclusive attitudes towards the use of mediated language in second language teaching. Either way, the earliest studies originated in the second language pedagogy school. Researchers of both attitudes have proved their views through empirical studies based on theoretical research. As the study continued, researchers of both attitudes loosened their views, no longer simply supporting or rejecting mediated language, but partially adapting them to the actual teaching situation.

## 2.2. National Studies

Domestic research on the medium of instruction is relatively short compared with that of foreign countries, but it can be clearly divided into two categories, one of which excludes the medium of instruction and advocates the teaching mode of pure Chinese to create an immersive learning environment for learners. The other category does not exclude media language, but advocates the use of media language in appropriate teaching moments, and supports the integrated use of Chinese and media language.

### 1. Pure Chinese, rejecting media language

The research in this area mainly discusses the positive impact of the zero-media language teaching model on Chinese language teaching, and further elaborates the viewpoints on the basis of a large number of practical exercises and surveys at a later stage. For example, Liang Ninghui in the early days believed that teachers' mastery of the media language was not a necessary condition for teaching Chinese as a foreign language. He discussed the possibility of teaching Chinese without using the media language from four aspects: the fundamental purpose of classroom teaching, the purpose of grammar teaching, the arrangement of teaching materials, and the teacher's teaching focus. Six methods of organizing classroom teaching without the use of mediated language were also proposed: explanations with objects, pictures or diagrams; explanations with gestures and physical movements; the use of hyperbolic teaching methods; the use of non-standardized terms; the cultivation of the habit of students' self-checking in the dictionary; and students' explanations to each other.[5] Du Yalin believes that zero-medium language is also appropriate in teaching Chinese as a foreign language. She discusses her views from three aspects: necessity, feasibility and superiority. In particular, she pointed out that in a zero-medium Chinese teaching classroom, the teacher can avoid the problem of which medium to use, and thus avoid the upset caused by the use of one medium by students of different nationalities. The principle of immersion in Chinese language teaching is also affirmed by the examples of the language sense teaching method advocated by the Princeton Summer Chinese Language Program in North America and the Chinese brand "Express Chinese". At the same time, she cited numerous examples of negative transfer of students' learning due to the use of English as the mediating language in the Chinese classroom, showing that the mediating language, if not used

correctly, can lead to cognitive errors in students.[6] All these studies generally agree that the zero-media language model is conducive to the development of students' Chinese thinking, as well as creating a good Chinese language environment for students, and also avoiding the bias caused by the use of media language.

This was followed by a large number of dissertations that further demonstrated the idea of zero-media language Chinese language teaching through empirical research. For example, Hedandan proposed an instructional design suitable for teaching zero-media language at the elementary level, using "Where did Tianfang go?" as an example. After the design was completed a teaching experiment was conducted through 20 Korean students. Finally, on the basis of classroom tests on the students, the instructional design was affirmed and the feasibility of zero-media language teaching at the elementary level was affirmed.[7] Fan Xueting also believes that zero-medium language scenarios should be created in elementary Chinese as a foreign language teaching. She designed a lesson plan for teaching elementary Chinese as a foreign language in a zero-medium language situation, conducted a classroom experiment, and finally analyzed and commented on the results.[8] Chen Yuxuan, who believes that the proportion of classroom mediated language use should be reduced to achieve the goal of developing students' communicative competence in Chinese. Through his practical experience of Chinese language teaching abroad, he used a questionnaire to investigate teachers' ideal situation regarding the use of media language in the classroom at different stages of Chinese language proficiency, as well as the percentage of media language use and the ideal percentage of media language use in the feedback from students at different stages of Chinese language proficiency. In addition, he also takes the case of zero-basic Chinese classroom teaching as an example to explore the feasibility of avoiding mediated language in zero-basic Chinese classrooms, and to consider how to reduce the proportion of mediated language used in Chinese classrooms.[9]

### 2. Integrated use of Chinese and media languages

In this aspect of research, the first is the study of the necessity of using the medium language, and the second involves the definition and selection of the medium language. Some scholars advocate the use of students' mother tongue as the medium language in combination with Chinese for integrated use; others believe that English, the international lingua franca, should be used as the medium language in combination with Chinese for teaching.

#### (1) Research on the necessity of using media language

This part of the literature focuses on the definition of mediated language, the necessity of its use, and the methods and principles of its use. By reading this part of the literature one can quickly understand the basic use of mediated language in Chinese language teaching. By analyzing the advantages and disadvantages of using media language in international Chinese language teaching, Yang Messy proposes that in the process of Chinese language teaching, media language should be used selectively according to the teaching target.[10] Wang Di further explains the advantages and disadvantages of mediated language in the application of international Chinese language teaching, and summarizes the suggestions for the use of mediated language in Chinese language teaching.[11] Some other researchers take one form of mediated language as an example and discuss its feasibility in international Chinese language teaching. For example,

Zhang Rong proposes an illustrative and symbolic mediated language grammar for international Chinese language teaching and learning, and he argues that illustrative and symbolic mediated language is like a bridge that communicates words, paragraphs, and chapters between teachers and students.[12] Some other scholars affirm the role of mediated language in Chinese language teaching through practical tests. For example, Wu Qiong discussed the role of mediated language in the teaching of Chinese at the primary level of international Chinese language through a statistical analysis of the five test scores of primary Chinese language learners within six months by means of a follow-up survey, and concluded that the use of mediated language should follow the principles of appropriateness, necessity and moderation.[13]

(2) Research advocating the use of students' mother tongue as the mediator language

This part of the study, while recognizing the use of mediated language, denies the use of English as the medium of instruction for international Chinese language teaching. Wang Hanwei investigates the composition of the student population of international students coming to China and their adaptation when English is used as the medium of instruction for Chinese, and thus concludes that the model of international Chinese teaching materials using English as the universal medium, although it has provided different degrees of service for international students from different countries and regions, their main target of adaptation is still about 16% of the native speakers of English, not 84% of the non-native speakers of English, therefore English cannot be used as the universal medium of instruction for international Chinese. of non-native English speakers, and therefore English cannot be used as the lingua franca for international Chinese language teaching.[14] Chang Xiaojin believes that the classroom of international Chinese language should integrate the two language advantages of learners' mother tongue and the target language, and reasonably use the mother tongue in order to optimize the Chinese learning environment. She argues for the reasonable position of the mother tongue in the foreign language classroom on the basis of a survey and research on zero-based Chinese language classrooms in Thailand.[15]

In addition to that, it is the research on a certain kind of students whose mother tongue is the medium language. For example, Xie Honghua studied the current situation of Chinese teaching materials for which the medium language is French, and proposed corresponding countermeasures for the development of teaching materials.[16]

(3) Advocacy of English-medium research

Numerous studies have been conducted in English as the medium language as compared to studies in the students' mother tongue as the medium language. For example, Peng Jie believes that the use of English as a mediating language in the Chinese classroom will help to improve classroom efficiency, help the teacher to build up his/her prestige, and facilitate the teacher to understand the learning difficulties of the students and to establish a close teacher-student relationship with the students.[17] Huang Li found that many expatriate teachers are not proficient in the native language of the country they are going to work in, so she investigated and analyzed the use of English in the primary Chinese teaching classrooms of Chinese language colleges in Kenya by using questionnaires, classroom observation, and case study analysis, and put forward suggestions on the use of this media language. Her suggestions have four main aspects: first, to

grasp the timing of the use of media language; second, to focus on the target language and use media language in moderation; third, to use media language as accurately as possible; and fourth, to adhere to the principle of acceptability.[18]

(4) Research to investigate the use of media languages

This part of the research is based on dissertations, and most of the authors base their research on the use of mediated language in the Chinese classroom of a particular country on their own actual teaching experience overseas. Through her own teaching practice in Ecuador and classroom observation of other teachers, Yu Kewen investigates the use of media language in Ecuadorian Chinese classrooms through questionnaires and classroom videos, and analyzes the use of media language in teaching.[19] Taking Edinburgh Chinese School as an example, Liu Xi comprehensively used questionnaire survey method, interview method and classroom observation case study method to investigate teachers' and students' attitudes towards the use of mediated language, the scenarios and characteristics of the use of mediated language as well as the specific role of mediated language in teachers' discourse.[20] Taking the Chinese language classroom in Bulgaria's Rusay Middle School as the object of study, Shi Sanjuan summarizes the positive and negative effects of the medium and use of Chinese language teaching in Rusay Middle School through questionnaire surveys, interviews, and case studies of teaching and learning and puts forward a five-point proposal on how to eliminate the negative effects of the medium and use of the medium and the use of the medium.[21]

### 3. Analytical Summary

In general, the findings of recent studies on the use of mediated language in the Chinese classroom indicate that people no longer simply affirm or deny the use of mediated language in the Chinese classroom. From theoretical studies to classroom studies with practical experiences, scholars mostly advocate the use of a moderate combination of mediated language and Chinese language, especially in zero-basic or elementary Chinese language teaching, and there is no special restriction on whether the mediated language is English or the students' mother tongue. Especially in recent years, the research on media language in the Chinese language classroom has been mostly dissertations in terms of the content of the literature, and almost every author puts forward his or her own viewpoints and suggestions based on his or her own practical experience of teaching Chinese in a certain overseas country, which is even more relevant to the study of media language in the Chinese language classroom.

### 4. Issues to be Addressed

There are relatively few studies on this topic that use learners' mother tongue as the mediator language because only a small number of Chinese language teachers have the skills to use learners' mother tongue proficiently. In the face of non-native English-speaking Chinese language learners, it is an urgent issue for the country to train more international Chinese language teachers with non-English foreign language skills to devote themselves to the teaching of Chinese language at the zero-basic or elementary level. In addition, many scholars have advocated the combined use of Chinese and media languages in the classroom and the principle of moderation in the process of use. However, the "degree" of

the principle of moderation in the current research is relatively general, and more practical summaries are needed.

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