

USING MODERN INTERACTIVE MEANS OF TEACHING AT THE CLASSES OF CHINESE FOR PRESCHOOL AND PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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The relevance of the problem under study is determined by the need to improve the methods of teaching Chinese for younger children. The goal of this paper is to analyze various forms and methods of teaching Chinese for pre-school and school-aged children using audiovisual means and computer technology. The leading approach to studying this issue is the problem approach. The main results of this study are the achieved categorization of technical means of learning based on multimedia technologies, as well as the Chinese language teaching materials for this age group. The materials of this article may be helpful for teachers of Chinese at the early stages of learning, as well as for education supervisors and developers of teaching resources.

Keywords: education, audiovisual means of learning, interactive forms, Chinese language, computer technology, innovative methods.

INTRODUCTION

It is known that audiovisual means of learning (AVML) or, as they are often called these days, modern technologies, interactive forms of education, are a part of educational technology (ET), and their use in education is determined by the objective need to implement the didactic principle of using visual aids in teaching. Traditionally AVML are understood as complexes that include didactical material and technical means of showing it, united into groups of audio, visual and audiovisual means (Frolova, 2012). The method of computer assisted language learning is not new, but it has been used for teaching Chinese for a relatively short time (Strukova, 2015). Today developers of materials for learning Chinese have new teaching aids based on multimedia technologies that open up new possibilities for wider and more effective use of visual aids in teaching this language (Foyle, 1995; Pilott, 2013).

The special role of visual aids in teaching Chinese is determined by the specific traits of this language itself (Demina, 2006). The essence of Chinese language proficiency is in forming connections between hieroglyphics and notions in the learners' minds, as well as forming the ability to use these connections for interpersonal communication. The practice of teaching foreign language has shown that the use of visual aids is the most effective if it is systematic and regular (Buehl, 2013). It must, firstly, coincide with the stages of speech patterns development, and, secondly, be organized according to the main parts of the learning contents (Pilott, 2013).

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METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The methodology of research methods allows to see the main development trends of the educational science and evaluate the various practices of theorists, educational content developers and practicing teachers, as well as to learn about the structure and level of methodology of our predecessors and contemporary researchers.

The theoretical and methodological basis for our study is the conceptual tenets of various research works on the problems of teaching Chinese at schools and universities. The use of methodology and methods of existing academic works facilitates the adoption of the pedagogical scientific thought in the practice of teaching Chinese for pre-school and school-aged students, as well as of research methods and techniques in this sphere.

The systemic-structural approach gave us an opportunity to fully consider the system of Chinese language teaching methods in middle and high school as well as at the university level, and to choose the optimal methods of using interactive forms and audiovisual methods of teaching Chinese for pre-school and school-aged children. The systemic-structural approach also helped to unite into a single method the information from various aspects of learning: hieroglyphics, listening, grammar, reading, etc.

The use of general scientific logics allowed us to construct our method in its succession and sequence with internal logical connections between certain elements.

RESULTS

Audio means are irreplaceable at the stage of learning the phonetic system of Chinese, specifically for understanding the tone system, which is usually the main difficulty for foreigners who study this language. They create the basis for the phonetic registration of a sound, a word or a phrase. The visual aids play a great role when teaching the Chinese writing system, when presenting new characters to the learners or when analyzing a hieroglyphic character's structure with them (its phonetic and semantic structure). At the stage of shaping speaking patterns the visual teaching and learning aids can be used to facilitate the understanding of spatial-temporal and causal-resultative relations (when studying verbs of movement and direction 进去/ 进来, 跑进来, 拿走 / 拿来, adverbial modifiers of place, prepositions).

It is viable to use visual aids when introducing new material to students: for visual semantization of lexical units, for facilitation of memorizing by creating connections between the phonetic, notional and graphical image of the new lexical units. In the course of learning the audiovisual means taken either separately or in combination play specific roles in achieving certain goals. These roles are differentiated depending on the goals of learning, the age peculiarities of the learners, the type of speech activity and the availability of the needed didactic materials.

The main purpose of using audio materials is to demonstrate a phonetic example (at the early stages of learning), presenting a vocable stimulus-statement or creating a communicative situation that would stimulate the formation of a learner's own speech act (at more advanced levels of learning). The functions of visual teaching aids are defined by their specifics and are as follows: presenting new information in visual form (in the case of Chinese vocabulary it is especially important due to the realities of the Chinese people's lifestyle not present in other cultures), stimulating the organization of speech, a semantic basis for creating one's own speech act (Kartuzov, 2009). Vast possibilities for organizing this type of activity are created by television, because it provides dynamic visuals and multi-sensory input of information. An even more effective means is interactive educational computer programs that help the learners not only to engage in learning by doing certain exercises but also to receive either immediate or delayed evaluation of their actions, as well as hints.

Teaching Materials

For studying Chinese at schools and in universities, as well as for self-studying, Chinese language experts and specialists on methods of teaching Chinese have developed a lot of useful and interesting interactive means and aids to help both teachers and learners. Among these is a multimedia teaching aids kit "The Kingdom of Chinese Language". It includes student's books for various levels, each of them having its own CD, as well as workbooks and four multimedia CD's. This Chinese teaching aids kit has been recommended by the Chinese National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (Hanban). The kit is designed for three levels of learning, each consisting of two parts and 6 units with 12 lessons in each unit. Every lesson introduces 1-2 Chinese characters, about 10 new words and one simple basic sentence structure. The teaching aids kit contains: dialogues, new words and tasks on hieroglyphics. Some general information on Chinese culture is also presented in illustrated form and described using simple language easy for children to understand. Besides that, the kit includes handcraft tasks, songs, short stories and a variety of games. Having completely studied the materials of the kit, learners will know 50 characters and 300 new words, will be able to construct simple sentence structures, will learn by heart several Chinese children's poems and songs, as well as get acquainted with some peculiarities of the Chinese culture. This is an exciting way of learning Chinese for beginners. Multimedia means of teaching Chinese, represented by such PCR publishing companies as Beijing Language and Culture University Press and Peking University Press, a series of teaching aids for studying hieroglyphics "Chinese Characters with Pictures", as well as other audiovisual means of learning recognized by Beijing Language and Culture University present modern methods and programs of full-time learning. These methods and programs combine studying the language and culture, training

various language skills and general intellectual development. Thus the collection of teaching materials called “The Kingdom of Chinese Language” (published by Beijing Language and Culture University Press) uses a variety of forms of teaching: animated flash videos, karaoke songs, games, high resolution videos. The exercises are used to revise the contents of a previously introduced lesson. Every lesson contains 5-6 minutes long games that include phonetics, Chinese characters, grammar and the use of various sentence structures. Attention is paid not only to listening and reading but also to communication skills. Every lesson includes three types of games for checking the efficiency of learning and raising the students’ interest to it.

At the beginner’s stage of teaching the Chinese writing system it is recommended to use “The Hieroglyphics Learning Set” that includes 6 books whose content gradually brings the learner to the stage of receiving new linguistic knowledge, as well as a stylus pen for reading and pronouncing Chinese characters and a CD with videos. At the first stage students study characters that denote phenomena of everyday life, as well as characters that denote numbers and simple objects. At the second stage we introduce adjectives, verbs, classifiers, as well as characters that have the structure of “right and left part” and “up and bottom part”. At the next stage even more complex hieroglyphs are introduced, the ones with the structure of “upper part, middle part, bottom part” and “left part, middle part, right part”, etc. This set will help a young student of Chinese to be able to recognize, read and write over 200 frequently used characters and learn to use about 400 different expressions and sentences. A balanced unification of learning both hieroglyphics and the “pinyin” romanization system will simplify the process of learning to read. This teaching materials set has been created in view of the “encouragement” theory: the learners are supposed to get curious and excited about the process of learning and the materials, which significantly increases the efficiency and quality of learning. The specific features of all visual aids of teaching Chinese published by Chinese companies are innovative styling, brightness, humor and rich contents: “The Hieroglyphics Learning Set” and “The Kingdom of Chinese Language” kit are not just images, hieroglyphs and their romanization but also teaching the order of writing the characters, a comprehensive learning of transcription, phonetics, groups of words, sentences and other things that help the students to understand and memorize the meaning of characters and to learn to use them correctly.

Other interactive forms of learning to be used at the classes of Chinese (especially at the beginner level) include the so-called “speaking images” – a special type of ET that gives an opportunity to hear the pronunciation of all characters, phrases, sentences and even pictures, the sound being played by means of a special stylus pen (Shifu Stylus). This is a new generation teaching aid that makes studying Chinese incredibly interesting. The head of the stylus pen has an inbuilt optical

camera that allows one to play the sound corresponding to the images; when touching pictures and texts in the book with the stylus, students hear their pronunciation. All the texts are voiced by professional native speaking announcers. High sound quality and clear pronunciation are the very important features of this device. By pointing the stylus pen at texts or images one is able to hear the pronunciation of certain characters or the translation of certain words, syllables or even entire phrases. There is even an option of recording your own voice to compare it with the original pronunciation. This compact and easy-to-use interactive means of learning may be useful for training phonetic and vocabulary skills by taking the students through the stages of listening, repeating after the announcer, writing down and comparing. This teaching package includes a stylus pen, a USB cable, a charging device, as well as a set of thematic two-sided cards with images, characters and their romanizations and examples of phrases and sentences. There is no doubt that the use of such an interactive device enlivens any lesson. When students use the stylus pen they connect the graphic image with sound in their minds, while repeating the sounds aloud helps them to develop the correct pronunciation. Thus we ensure the learners' memorizing of the most possible amount of characters with various levels of difficulty. The possibility of both graphic and vocal representation of a phrase is especially valuable when teaching Chinese due to the peculiarities of its prosodic system, and it helps to develop the learners' ability for self-control and self-correction.

Internet Platforms

Besides that, the following type of the interactive method should be noted separately – the Guidelines for CLT Materials Development platform (Guidelines for CLT platform, 2017). It is designed for creating one's own teaching aids. It is supposed to be mostly used by teachers but a learner can handle the software navigation by him/herself as well. Videos containing slang, sets of interactive entertainment exercises, additional information, games involving the order of strokes, tabs with music, vocabulary bonuses – in Confucius Institute Online one can find any sort of materials.

Virtual Classrooms

Various online resources for studying Chinese are also very popular. Today virtual classrooms are offered not only by Confucius Institutes or educational institutions in addition to their main courses but also by web platforms specifically designed for that, such as Laoshi.ru. The creators of the online classrooms complement their language lessons with some information on Chinese culture: they bring up Confucius's quotes or names of traditional dishes, start blogs and grant 24-hour user support.

The material of such classes is often well-developed, very detailed and well-drawn but in spite of that little attention is given to motivation. According to the

statistics provided by Katharine B. Nielson, expert in self-learning software and applications, of every 50 people who take a 20 week course, only one learner on average finishes the course. Most people give up after the third lesson. According to her, this does not depend on the design or the number of hours (Strukova, 2017).

Apps

Digital applications for learning Chinese are currently becoming very relevant as well. They are a large segment of the “new” technology in learning foreign languages. The criteria that their singularity and innovation are evaluated by are rather ambiguous, but let us single out the most popular of these apps.

Pleco: basically a digital dictionary of Chinese, similar to the less popular Line Dictionary (former Nciku). The CNTV (Chinese Internet Television) app is also popular, and it allows you to watch television programs on a mobile device. Another increasingly popular software product that can also be considered as belonging to this type of applications is TingMedia: Broadcasting Stories. As you can see from its name, it allows users to listen to various stories, tales and even narrative poems. These apps are effective for learning Chinese only if used regularly or as an additional means of education.

Many new applications, just as many old software products, are designed based on the spaced repetition principle, which means achieving learning results through continuous repetition of the same patterns. Having experimented with this method as early as in the 1930s, Professor C.A. Mace came to the conclusion that, in spite of its simplicity and wide availability, it is sufficiently effective. In the 1960-70s the school of cognitive linguistics proved the effectiveness of the repetition method and proposed a new system of memorizing the material – flash cards. According to experts, up to 90% of modern applications are based primarily on repetition and reviewing of the already learned material.

The new alternative technology of code switching (the sandwich stories method) involves working with short stories in the learner’s native language with the gradual addition of more and more foreign words. And in the end the student is able to completely tell the story in the foreign language. This method is demonstrated very well in the Learn Chinese: Toy Story 3 app. The sandwich stories method is very effective when working with children, but it is not well adapted for Russian speakers.

Chinese for Children

Thanks to modern technologies, today Chinese language for children is a bright feast of life and an exciting journey to the country of hieroglyphics and Confucius. The use of tablets during classes, as well as applying the achievements of psychology and psycholinguistics to develop intuitive interfaces, as well as active introduction of multimedia resources, works in favor of teachers both in school groups and in

groups with younger children. One of the most famous applications is Monki Chinese Class, developed on the basis of an illustrated book called Chineasy. Another hugely popular product is the Feed Me (Mandarin) digital pet application very similar to a Tamagotchi. The app involves feeding a pet dragon with words that he likes.

DISCUSSIONS

The use of interactive methods of teaching and modern technology in learning foreign languages, including Chinese, is one of the most popular topics among education researchers. From the vast amount of academic works we would primarily like to single out a series of studies called Optimise Your Teaching Competences: New Teaching Methodologies and CLIL Applications in Foreign Languages: Content and Language Integrated Learning Techniques for Foreign Language Teachers (Papaioannou, 2014) and Interactive Learning in the Higher Education Classroom: Cooperative, Collaborative, and Active Learning Strategies, National Education (Foyle, 1995). Another work that is interesting in terms of its overview of various modern techniques and methods is a book by Marty Pilott (Pilott, 2013). It is also worth noting that unfortunately we have not been able to detect any Russian studies on this topic (Strukova, 2017; Frolova, 2012).

CONCLUSION

Thus, with the development of modern digital technology a large number of innovative software products and interactive sets for learning Chinese language are being designed, although some of them are basically old methods in a new envelope. Some young teachers and learners concentrate solely on newest teaching means that cannot serve as a proper basis for quality language learning. Without the needed motivation and diligence the above mentioned software products are merely entertainment, a game, a supplement to learning. But at the same time it needs to be emphasized that teaching any foreign language without the use of visual aids or modern audiovisual interactive means reduces the efficiency of learning. When applied to Chinese language we can safely assume that ignoring the visual aids principle or unsystematic use of AVML in the conditions of absent language environment does not allow for complete achievement of learning objectives. It also makes the process of acquiring Chinese language extremely laborious and almost rids it of any visible achievements. However, if the learning process is organized correctly and when the means and technologies of teaching are chosen in an informed and conscious manner, there is a good chance of achieving the intended goal and raising the Chinese language ability to the desired level.

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