

EVERYDAY CHINESE SPEAKING PROFICIENCY GUIDELINES : A CASE STUDY OF CHULALONGKORN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract

This article is to study and propose a Chinese speaking proficiency guidelines for Thai students using Chulalongkorn University's Chinese-majored students as a case in focus. In our analysis of each course in the curriculum of Chulalongkorn University Chinese Language Major, we first apply the so-called Language Functional Trisection, as developed by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) to help summarize students' expected speaking ability on each subject and to determine to which level each subject should belong.

Next we compare ACTFL Chinese speaking proficiency guidelines to those of Chulalongkorn University from two different aspects; horizontal and vertical. Our finding shows that in all levels not only is the speaking ability of Chulalongkorn University students

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majoring in Chinese higher than that of ACTFL's, their level of progression grows faster than that of ACTFL's as well.

1. Introduction

The Chinese language course at Chulalongkorn University in Thailand already has a 34-year long history. In 1973, the course was opened as a foreign language elective course. Eight years later, in 1981, the Chinese language course for foreign language elective course was offered as a Chinese Language Major. Since then, the Chinese language as a major in the Faculty of Arts at Chulalongkorn University has developed greatly, cultivating a lot of talented students with a proficient knowledge of Chinese linguistics and literature. As the Chinese Language Major has undergone great changes, we intend to synthesize it and issue guidelines based on it as a standard.

Learning a language primarily focuses on the abilities in communication, which are listening, speaking, reading and writing. The Chinese Language Major has already been providing courses in these four abilities and the researchers intend to analyze all the abilities students have after finishing each course in the whole curriculum. Following the analysis, the researcher will design and compile "Chinese Proficiency Guidelines: A Case Study of Chulalongkorn University Students". Our research team consists of Apisara Pornrattananukul, responsible for analyzing listening ability, Pattra Pichetsilpa, responsible for speaking ability, and Sansanee Ek-atchariya, responsible

for reading ability. In this paper, we only focus on the speaking ability, so this article is entitled “Everyday Chinese Speaking Proficiency Guidelines: A Case Study of Chulalongkorn University Students”. The reading and listening abilities can be found in separate articles, namely “Chinese Reading Proficiency Guidelines: A Case Study of Chulalongkorn University Students” and “Everyday Chinese Listening Proficiency Guidelines: A Case Study of Chulalongkorn University Students”.

In this article, the curriculum of the Chinese Language Major for the year 2006 is analyzed. To do this, ACTFL Chinese Proficiency Guidelines is used as the reference.

The question may be asked, “We already have the ACTFL Chinese Proficiency Guidelines, which are the universal guidelines, so why do we have to design ‘Everyday Chinese Speaking Proficiency Guidelines: A Case Study of Chulalongkorn University Students’?” This is because the objective of ACTFL Chinese Proficiency Guidelines is for daily interpersonal communication skills, whereas the curriculum of Chulalongkorn University’s Chinese Language Major is not so. The objective of this curriculum is to train graduates who (1) have a good knowledge in the Chinese language and Chinese literature, so that they can study further and become Chinese language experts, Chinese language researchers or Chinese language lecturers in the university; (2) are able to apply their Chinese language knowledge to their future jobs effectively, and do further research as well; (3) are creative, ethical

together with vision. Consequently, there are some parts of the ACTFL Chinese Proficiency Guidelines that are not quite appropriate for Chulalongkorn University students. Thus, we believe that this is worthy of study.

2. The ACTFL Chinese Proficiency Guidelines

2.1 The Origin of the ACTFL Chinese Proficiency Guidelines

In the last few decades, foreign language teaching in the USA has focused and frequently discussed the topic of objectives and methods used in foreign language teaching. In particular, ACTFL has played a leading role in tackling the problem of how to improve foreign language learners' ability in using the language. After some discussion, it was found that foreign language teaching in the USA that only advocating the "communicative competence" on the paper was not enough. Addressing the problem of what should be real "communicative competence" as well as how to classify the language level of the learners, a more objective and exact criteria had to be created. Finally, a general language ability criterion was created, which was commonly used for every foreign language. It was called "Generic Proficiency Guidelines".

In 1984, the committee for drawing Chinese Proficiency Guidelines (CPG) began convening to write the guidelines. In order to determine the level of proficiency in Chinese, the CPG committee paid attention to the "Language Functional Trisection", containing function

statements, context statements, and accuracy statements, coupled with the particular condition of the Chinese language before making the different levels of proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, writing and cultural understanding skills. In 1986, therefore, the ACTFL Chinese Proficiency Guidelines were issued under the title of “Chinese Proficiency Guidelines of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages” or “ACTFL CPG”.

2.2 The Content of the ACTFL Chinese Proficiency Guidelines

Novice-Low

No functional ability to speak Chinese. Oral production is limited to a few common loan words in English (*kungfu, chow mien*) and perhaps a few high frequency phrases (*xièxie, nǐ hǎo*).

Novice-Mid

No functional ability to speak Chinese. Oral production is limited to basic courtesy formulae (*Nǐ / Nín guìxìng*). Can ask (*Duōshao qián?*), and answer (*Wǔkuài qián.*). Can count from one to ten, name basic colors (*hóng, lán*), common nouns (*qìshuǐ, chē*), and food items (*fàn, miàn, ròu*). Pronunciation and tones may be barely intelligible and strongly influenced by the first language.

Novice-High

Emerging ability to make short statements utilizing simple formulaic utterances and ask simple questions. Often misplaces question words (**Shénme nǐ yào?*) and make statements with incorrect

word order (**Nǐ hǎo jīntiān*). Vocabulary is limited to basic objects, common measures, numbers 1-1,000, names of immediate family members, and high-frequency place names. Can use correctly common verbs and adjectives in the present time frame (*kàn, mǎi, guì*), but often confuses the use of verbs (*shì, yǒu, zài*) as in (**Wǒ shì zhèr.*). Pronunciation and tones are often faulty.

Intermediate-Low

Can ask and answer simple questions and initiate and respond to simple statements in the present time (*Nǐ shì bushi Měiguó rén?, Nǐ jǐ suì?, Wǒ jiā zài chéng wàitou.*). Can use limited constructions such as common verb-object phrases (*hē píjiǔ*), simple modifications with *de* (*wǒ de dàxué*) and *le* (*Wǒ lèi le*) indicating completion status change. Most utterances contain fractured syntax and other grammatical errors (**Wǒ chī fān zài fān diàn*). Misunderstandings frequently arise from poor pronunciation, wrong tones, and limited vocabulary.

Intermediate-Mid

Can ask and answer simple questions involving areas of immediate need (*Yige rén de fángjiān, yìtiān duōshao qián?*), leisure time activities (*Nǐ xǐhuan kàn wàiguó diànyǐng ma?*), and simple transactions, i.e., at the post office (*Liǎngmáo qián de yóupiào, wǒ yào shízhāng.*). Quantity of speech is increased and quality of speech is improved. Greater accuracy in word order, basic constructions, and use of high-frequency verbs and auxiliaries (*shì, yǒu, yào, xǐhuan*). Can use simple time words (*míngtiān, xiànzài*) and other time markers to

indicate various time relations. Has basic knowledge of differences among such sets of terms as: *kěyi*, *néng*, *jiào*, *qǐng*, *wèn*; *zhīdao*, *rènshí*, but still make errors.

Intermediate-High

Has flexibility in expressing time relationships (*Wǒ qùguo Zhōngguó*. *Wǒ hái yào què*.), actual and a few potential resultative compounds (*Jǐntiān wǒ yǒu shì*, *wǒ láibùliǎo le*.), and simple comparisons (*Zhōngguó de rénkǒu bǐ Měiguó de duō*.). Can describe daily activities (*Cóng xīngqī yī dào xīngqī sì wǒ měitiān dōu yǒu sāntáng kè*.), likes and dislikes in detail (*Wǒ xǐhuan kàn Zhōngguó xiàndài de xiāoshuō*, *yīnwei wǒ kěyǐ duō zhīdao yìdiǎnr Zhōngguó rén de shēnghuó qíngxíng*.), and express agreement and disagreement (*Dào fānguānr qù chīfàn bùcuò*, *kěshí tài guì*.). Emerging ability to state opinions (*Nǐ xiǎng zhèi liǎngmén kè*, *wǒ xuǎn něimén hǎo?*). Evidence of connected discourse is also emerging. While common word order is established, errors still occur in more complex patterns.

Advanced

Can make rather complicated factual comparisons (*Chénglǐ de shēnghuó bǐ xiāngxia de yǒu yìsi de duō le*.). Has fairly consistent control of *shì...de* structure, question words used as indefinites (*Wǒzhèi yícì lái jiù mángzhe kāihui*, *méi qù shénme dìfang*.), and some cohesive devices (*bùdàn...érqiě*, *suírán...kěshí*). Can handle arrangements with Chinese administrators, i.e., regarding travel to China (*Wǒ hòutiān yídìng děi dào Shànghǎi*, *huòshí fēijī piào huòshí huōchē piào*, *qǐng nǐ*

xiǎng bànfa gěi wǒ mǎi yìzhāng.). Can talk in a general way about topics of public interests (*Nǐ juéde jīnnián Zhōngguó de jīngjì qíngkuàng zěnmeyàng?*). Can explain a point of view in an uncomplicated fashion (*Wǒ rènwéi chāojí dàguó bù yīnggāi gānshè biéde guójia de shìqing.*).

Advanced-Plus

Emerging ability to support opinions, explain in detail, and hypothesize (*Yàoshi Zhōng-Měi guānxi èhuà, nà jiù huì yǐngxiǎng dào Měiguó gōngsī zài Zhōngguó de tóuzī.*). Can discuss topics of current and personal interest (*Nǐ juéde yíge guójia yīnggāi bù yīnggāi yīnwèi zhèngzhì de guānxi jùjué cānjiā shìyùnhuì?*). Has good control of many cohesive devices (*yì fangmian... yì fangmian, búshì...jiùshì*). Errors still occur in complicated structures.

Superior

Can support opinions and hypothesize on a broad range of concrete topics. Vocabulary is broad and hesitating or groping for words is rare. Pronunciation may still be foreign. Occasional unpatterned errors are evident, but there are no patterned errors, even though control of some low frequency structures (*Chúfēi...yàobùrán...jiù*) may be less consistent. Control of general idiomatic expressions and slang may vary, and confusion may arise over such terms as *jiǎnchá* and *diàočá*. A small proportion of utterances may still be literal translations from the native language.

2.3 The Functional Trisection

Levels of proficiency on the ACTFL CPG scale can be distinguished by considering the three interrelated criteria underlying the proficiency descriptions : *The Language Functional Trisection*.

The language functional trisection composes of:

1) **Language Functions** : refers to real-world tasks that the speaker can perform in the language.

2) **Language Context and content** : context refers to circumstances or settings in which a person uses language; and content to topics or themes of conversation.

3) **Language Accuracy** : refers to the acceptability, quality and precision of the message conveyed.

3. Chulalongkorn University Chinese Curriculum

3.1 Curriculum Objective

Chulalongkorn University's students majoring in Chinese have to study Chinese for four years. The objectives of the curriculum are to produce graduates who :

1) have a good knowledge in the Chinese language and Chinese literature, so that they can study further and become Chinese language experts, Chinese language researchers or Chinese language lecturers in the university.

2) are able to apply their Chinese language knowledge to their future jobs effectively, and do further research as well.

3) are creative, ethical and long-vision.

3.2 Curriculum Structure

In order to achieve these objectives, our students have to study a 4-year Chinese course. There are more than 20 courses in the Chinese language major, which can be divided into 2 types: those of Chinese language and those of Chinese culture. The courses can be classified as follows:

Year	Subject	hrs/week	hrs/term
1 st	Chinese 1	5	85
	Chinese 2	5	80
2 nd	Chinese 3	4	60
	Chinese 4	4	60
	Chinese Computer Program	3	45
	Chinese Conversation 1	4	60
	Chinese Conversation 2	4	60
3 rd	Chinese Public Speaking	4	60
	Chinese Reading 1	4	60
	Chinese Reading 2	4	60
	Classical Chinese 1	4	60
	Classical Chinese 2	4	60
	Chinese Grammar	4	60
	Evolution of the Chinese Characters	3	45
	Chinese Phonetics	4	60

Year	Subject	hrs/week	hrs/term
4 th	Translation: Chinese-Thai	4	60
	Chinese for Business	4	60
	Chinese from Audio-Visual Media	4	60
	Reading of Chinese Newspaper 1	4	60
	Chinese Writing 1	4	60
	Chinese Writing 2	4	60
	History of Chinese Literature 1	4	60
	History of Chinese Literature 2	4	60
	Seminar in Modern Chinese Fiction	4	60
	Translation: Thai-Chinese	4	60

3.3 Classification Principle of the Chinese Speaking Proficiency Guidelines of Chulalongkorn University Students

By observing the objectives of the Chulalongkorn University Chinese curriculum, teaching materials, teaching contents, teaching methods, and the extent of the ACTFL “language functional trisection”, we analyze what speaking capability each student will have when they finish each subject and decide which level of speaking proficiency students should belong to, whether it is novice, intermediate or advanced. Finally, the results of the curriculum analysis is interpreted to sum up the principles used for classifying Chulalongkorn University Chinese Speaking Proficiency.

3.3.1 The Novice Level

Able to handle a limited number of interactive and social situations. Can ask and answer questions, initiate and respond to simple statements, simply narrate and describe, and participate in simple conversations on topics of the most immediate needs. The speaker may lose the ability to maintain the conversation if the topics surpass areas of immediate needs. Since vocabulary is limited and speech production relies on learned materials, so the speech is still influent, the speaker can maintain only a few coherent sentences. Pronunciation is inaccurate, but may not cause misunderstanding. The use of grammar is often incorrect, especially on the patterns which are different from Thai language.

3.3.2 The Intermediate Level

The students are able to satisfy the requirements of everyday situations and routine school and work areas, including the basic knowledge of the Chinese major specialized field. They can initiate and sustain a general conversation, involving areas of immediate need, school and work activities, current public transactions, and simple transactions. Students can narrate and describe with some details, linking sentences together. They have the emerging ability to state and support opinions on topics of public interest and in Chinese specialized fields. A good control of pronunciation and tones is demonstrated; however, grammatical errors still occur in complex patterns.

3.3.3 The Advanced Level

Students are able to satisfy the requirements of a broad variety of everyday school and work situations, including within the Chinese major professional field. They can support opinions, explain in detail, and hypothesize. Oral production reaches the level of educated speakers, together with rich vocabulary knowledge, and good control of grammar and idiomatic expressions. The Advanced speaker often shows remarkable fluency of speech. Unpatterned errors may occur in low-frequency or complex structures, but errors do not interfere with communication.

4. The Comparability of ACTFL Chinese Proficiency Guidelines and Chulalongkorn University Chinese Curriculum

As the above result of the analysis, it is found that CU guidelines also depend upon “communicative competence”, but it is appropriate for Chulalongkorn University students only, and not for other university students, which is to say it is not universal. In this chapter, the differences between both guidelines is mainly discussed.

We will compare ACTFL Chinese speaking proficiency guidelines to those of Chulalongkorn University from two different aspects. Horizontally, we mainly discuss the similarities and differences within those three components of Language Functional Trisection as well as other relevant contents of the guidelines. Vertically, however, we chiefly focus on different levels of progression on Chinese speaking

ability from novice to advanced. Our finding shows that in all levels not only is the speaking ability of Chulalongkorn University students majoring in Chinese higher than that of ACTFL's, their level of progression grows faster than that of ACTFL's as well.

Based on the vertical and horizontal analysis, the following can be concluded:

- 1) Each aspect of the hierarchical proficiency of Chulalongkorn University Chinese curriculum is higher than the ACTFL Chinese Proficiency Guidelines.
- 2) The improvement of Chulalongkorn University Chinese curriculum is faster than ACTFL Chinese Proficiency Guidelines.

Here are the conclusions of the differences between ACTFL Chinese Proficiency Guidelines and Chulalongkorn University Chinese guidelines, including further explanations:

1) The Chulalongkorn University Chinese speaking proficiency guidelines only focus on the main objective of the curriculum, that is, to produce graduates who are fully adept and knowledgeable in the Chinese language and Chinese literature, so that they can study further and become Chinese language experts, Chinese language researchers or Chinese language lecturers in the university. Unless the level of proficiency is quite high, it is impossible to reach the superior level.

2) The Chulalongkorn University Chinese speaking proficiency guidelines are for students who are majoring in Chinese. Apart from

learning Chinese, they have to learn about other aspects of linguistics. This is the reason why students' ability improves so quickly.

3) The Chinese language and Thai language are in the same language family, which is the Sino-Tibetan family. Therefore, phonetics and grammar are rather similar. This can help Thai students to learn Chinese language easier and also has an influence on the improvement of students' speaking ability.

Table 1 Correspondence of Speaking Proficiency Scales

Chulalongkorn University Chinese Curriculum	ACTFL Chinese Proficiency Guidelines	Content
Advanced / Superior	Distinguished	educated speakers
	Superior	can participate in a discussion on any area of topics, can support opinions and hypotheses
	Advanced-Plus	can communicate on the areas of everyday life and specialized field, can provide and support opinions
Intermediate	Advanced	can participate in a general conversation, provide some views, and explain in detail

	Intermediate-High	can meet with most everyday life and social needs
Novice	Intermediate-Mid	can participate in face-to-face conversation, communicate on the topics of individual's interests
	Intermediate-Low	can use certain grammar structures to meet everyday needs
	Novice-High	can use a single sentence to meet basic living needs, such as ask and answer questions
	Novice-Mid	can use very short sentence to meet with basic needs
	Novice-Low	non-communicative competence

5. Conclusion

5.1 Everyday Chinese Speaking Proficiency Guidelines : A Case Study of Chulalongkorn University Students

Novice

Learners are able to handle a limited number of interactive and social situations. Can ask and answer questions, initiate and respond to simple statements, simply narrate and describe, and participate in simple conversations on topics of the most immediate needs. The speaker may lose the ability to maintain the conversation if the topics surpass areas of immediate needs. Since vocabulary is limited and

speech production relies on learned materials, so the speech is still not fluent, the speaker can maintain only a few coherent sentences. Pronunciation is inaccurate, but may not cause misunderstanding. The use of grammar is often incorrect, especially patterns which are different from the Thai language.

Intermediate

Students are able to satisfy the requirements of everyday situations and routine school and work areas, including the basic knowledge of the Chinese major specialized field. They can initiate and sustain a general conversation, involving areas of immediate needs, school and work activities, current public transactions, and simple transactions. Can narrate and describe with some details, linking sentences together. There is the emerging ability to state and support opinions on the topics of public interest and within Chinese specialized fields. Students have good control of pronunciation and tones; however grammatical errors still occur in complex patterns.

Advanced

Here the students are able to satisfy the requirements of a broad variety of everyday school and work situations, including within the Chinese major professional field. They can support opinions, explain in detail and hypothesize. Oral production reaches the level of educated speakers, and they have acquired a rich vocabulary knowledge, and good control of grammar and idiomatic expressions. The Advanced speaker often shows remarkable fluency of speech. Unpatterned errors

may occur in low-frequency or complex structures, but errors do not interfere with communication.

5.2 The Uses of “Everyday Chinese Speaking Proficiency Guidelines: A Case Study of Chulalongkorn university Students”

5.2.1 The Suggestion for Speaking Test

1) The content of the test must be according to communicative competence, but not the progression of the students. The traditional Chinese language examination is always based on the number of Chinese characters and grammatical structures which students learn. If two persons know 1,000 Chinese characters, but those Chinese characters are not the same, is their speaking ability also the same? We think that students' speaking ability is not how many Chinese characters or grammatical structures they have learned, but that concern should be given to these three conditions:

Firstly, language performance depends upon the qualifications and functions of the language which can be shown in general communicative skills.

Secondly, language performance must be accorded to the specific situation, and this situation is limited by social and cultural conditions.

Thirdly, the differences of language performance levels can mostly be seen in the particular situation. Language function should be

used appropriately to achieve the purposes that they have to satisfy social and professional needs.

2) The purpose of the test is to distinguish students' speaking ability, whether their ability is good enough to communicate with other people. Students can use language as a tool of communication, and they can deal with various social and professional needs.

5.2.2 The Suggestion for Selection of the Teaching Materials

1) To comprehensively design the content of teaching materials: the use of speaking materials in practicing conversations; these materials should be related to daily life, social situation and occupational needs; the materials should be from China or Taiwan, for authentic purposes. These materials are allocated to each level, the content should be appropriate to social, cultural situation and students' needs.

2) To plan the usages of materials: to train the lecturers how to use materials, to supervise the practical use of the materials, to ask for the lecturers' opinions about the materials, and to adjust the materials to be appropriate for students.

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