

## Teaching Situation and Strategy of Phonetics in Universities' Ancient Chinese Courses

### LES CONTRE-MESURES ET LA SITUATIONS DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT DES COURS DE PHONOLOGIES DE LA LANGUE CHINOISE ANCIENNE DANS LES UNIVERSITÉS

DONG Binghua<sup>1,\*</sup>; XU Hua<sup>2</sup>; CAI Shuhua<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ph.D. Lecture, Research area: phonetics, history of Chinese language. Department of Chinese, Changchun University of Science and Technology, Changchun, China

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor, Research area: ancient Chinese, Department of Chinese, Changchun University of Science and Technology, Changchun, China

<sup>3</sup>Professor, Research area: contemporary Chinese, Department of Chinese, Changchun University of Science and Technology, Changchun, China

\*Corresponding author.

**Supported by** Social science foundation project of Jilin province (Project number: 2009B155)

Received 3 October 2011; accepted 30 November 2011

#### Abstract

Based on the prime significance of phonetics in universities' ancient Chinese courses, this paper objectively elaborates teaching situation of phonetics, where some problems are, and proposes a sequence of countermeasures and strategy to improve it.

**Key words:** Ancient Chinese; Phonetics; Teaching situation; Strategy

#### Résumé

Ce document décrit les anciens cours phonologie chinoise dans les collèges et les universités sur la base de l'importance d'une analyse objective de la phonologie de la situation d'enseignement et les problèmes, et fait une série de mesures d'amélioration et des mesures.

**Mots-clés:** Le chinoise ancien; Phonologie; Stratégies d'enseignement; Contre mesure

DONG Binghua, XU Hua, CAI Shuhua (2011). Teaching Situation and Strategy of Phonetics in Universities' Ancient Chinese Courses. *Cross-Cultural Communication*, 7(4), 101-103. Available from: URL: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/ccc/article/view/j.ccc.1923670020110704.263> DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/j.ccc.1923670020110704.263>

#### INTRODUCTION

Every university student whose major is Chinese should choose Ancient Chinese as essential, which is also fundamental and instrumental. The course aims at cultivating students' capacities of reading ancient books independently, by which students will understand ancient Chinese culture in depth, appreciate its breadth and proficiency, and on this basis, critically inherit and develop the excellent culture heritage.

The current textbook of this course in most of universities is Ancient Chinese (four books) edited by WANG Li, which is characteristic in principle of combining selected works, common words and general theory. It has been proved by teaching practice for many years that this "three-combination" principle has been consistently accepted in ancient Chinese teaching and learning. However, Ancient Chinese course contains variety of contents, besides a great deal of selected works, including text, phonetics, exegetics, grammar etc in general theory. During limited course time, selected books and general theory should be paid the same attention due to their importance. It is such a tough task to rationally arrange all of parts and obtain a balance of teaching time that some problems would unavoidably come into appearance like catching one but losing another. Teaching phonetics, that is, pronunciation in general theory, is particularly unsatisfying.

#### 1. PRESENT CONDITION AND PROBLEMS IN PHONETICS TEACHING

As one of basic knowledge in Ancient Chinese general theory, phonetics analyzes Chinese character pronunciation and its history, in close relation to vocabulary and grammar, which is indispensable if

students expect to boost the ability of reading ancient books. For instance, in pronunciation, interchangeable pronunciation of words appeared frequently in selected books; during the appreciation of poetry and verse, students would usually come across problems of according or changing rhyme; in the postgraduate entrance examination, phonetics is vitally necessary, which is not difficult but so fearsome by students that they could not get a good score about it.

After all, the significance of phonetics is obvious in Ancient Chinese course. But in comparison to vocabulary and grammar in general theory, it is still undervalued. If this part of knowledge is consistently ignored, students' capacities of reading Ancient Chinese books will be influenced. Present condition and problems of phonetics will be summarized as:

### **1.1 Students are Obstructed by Phonetics' Difficulty**

To some extent, it is difficult to learn characters and grammar in Ancient Chinese course, due to the fact that it is strongly professional, with relatively dull contents, and far from contemporary texts. What is more, phonetics is extraordinarily intricate and obscure, which has been regarded as "the book from heaven" or "the extinct book" for a long time by traditional wrong idea. Therefore, students will fear it even before they begin to learn it.

### **1.2 Phonetics is not Core Knowledge of Ancient Chinese Course**

In Ancient Chinese course teachers always focus on cultivating students' capacities of reading ancient books, and mainly teach students how to learn selected books and general theory, during which vocabulary and grammar are principles when phonetics teaching is at a disadvantage.

### **1.3 Teachers are not Sufficient in some Universities and Colleges and they are Lacking Attention of Phonetics**

In contrast to Contemporary Chinese, phonetics is undistinguished in Chinese Literature, and there are not enough professional teachers of this area in many universities and colleges. Quite a few of Ancient Chinese teachers, not mainly majoring in phonetics, are not broad and profound in it because of their incomplete knowledge structure. With the addition of limited course time, the part of phonetics is often ignored or just been at a glance.

### **1.4 Teaching Methods are Old-Fashioned and Lack of Diversity**

According to students, phonetics is so boring that hard to be learned, attracted, received and understood. And at the same time teachers are always using the same traditional teaching method, that is, teachers speaking and students listening. Teachers catch the dominant status during the process while students are totally passive, unwilling to show their subjective initiative, which will inevitably lead to undesirable consequences.

## **2. PHONETICS TEACHING STRATEGY**

### **2.1 Decreasing Students' Fear of Learning Thoroughly with Objective and Accurate Induction**

Chinese characters, not pronunciation characters, belong to ideograph system. When ancient Chinese people carry on pronunciation description, they must use Chinese characters to analyze pronunciation and then create a set of professional terms for phonetics. Based on the limited level of awareness, many basic conceptions of phonetics should strain their interpretation to some superstitions as "Five Elements" or "Eight Diagrams", which makes phonetics more mysterious and makes learners feel more obscure and harder to understand. Under this circumstance, learning phonetics becomes daunting and burdensome to students. With the importing of western linguistic theories and the continuous improvement of people's cognitive level, phonetics is no longer mysterious and obscure, but can be accurately explicated by means of contemporary pronunciation knowledge. On the other hand, pronunciation, with confined sounds, rhymes and tones, is most systematical in the three factors of language. Learning phonetics is similar to learn pronunciation, although in ancient time, and it is not that difficult as imagined. Teachers should clarify these principles for students, and induct them exactly to dispel their psychological burden, smoothing the way of phonetic teaching and learning.

### **2.2 Improving Value of Phonetics in Teachers and Students**

Traditional Chinese literary includes character, rhyme and exegetics, generally responding to form, sound and meaning, among which sound has special affinity with meaning. WANG Yingzhi, a scholar of Qing dynasty, resolved lots of unsolved problems in the light of the method of "understanding meaning through sound" and achieved striking success. From this perspective, people would hardly read ancient books if they did not have any knowledge accumulation in phonetics. Teachers and students should attach great importance to this course. Teachers should arrange contents rationally during limited time, using certain amount of time to concentrate on this part, emphasizing information practicality and completing knowledge structure of students.

### **2.3 Promoting Professionalism of Teachers to Adapt to Teaching Needs**

Ancient Chinese course involve variety of contents and phonetics as we cited is toughly arduous, so that it puts forward highly expectation on teachers. To give students a cup of water, teachers should have a bucket of water. In the period of information explosion and short knowledge renewing, teachers should build the belief of lifelong learning, aiming at enrichment and improvement of selves. Universities and colleges should simultaneously carry on

efforts of augmenting teachers' professionalism, offering further education and training chances for every Ancient Chinese teacher, which will accommodate preferably to social developments and teaching needs.

## 2.4 Providing Flexible and Variable Teaching Methods

### 2.4.1 Classroom-Infiltration Method

Interchangeable words appear constantly in selected books teaching, in which there are actually phonetic problems. For example, "Zuo Commentaries: Zheng conquered Duan in Yan" cited a sentence from "The books of songs Taiga Jizui": "Song says: "孝子不匮, 永锡尔类(Xiao zi bu kui, yong xi er lei)". What's the meaning of "锡(xi)" (which means "a metal" in Chinese) in this sentence? It cannot make sense if just focus on its own meaning of "锡(xi)". Teachers could tell students that, under this situation, "锡(xi)" is an interchangeable word which should be "赐(ci)", which means to give. This interchangeable phenomenon happens when ancient people transcribed and copied books and wrote down "the false word" with the same or approximate sound but different form. In contemporary Chinese, "锡(xi)" and "赐(ci)" do not share the same sound; but in ancient Chinese they are pronounced as the same, "锡(xi)" and "赐(ci)" both belonging to initial consonant "心(xin)" and final consonant "锡(xi)" in rhyme. And then students could understand the general idea of this sentence, that is, "sons show infinite filial piety to parents, which should be given to peers forever". Usually selected books teaching is earlier than general theory teaching, so teachers could impart phonetic knowledge by the infiltrating method through selected books teaching. In this way students will feel relatively familiar when confronting systematic phonetic knowledge teaching and will feel more comfortable to accept and understand it.

### 2.4.2 Dialects-Comparison Method

Entering tone (tone IV) is difficult to comprehend in Chinese phonetics because mandarin Chinese has lost tone IV, which is still reserved in Cantonese, Min dialect and Hakka dialect. For instance, in ancient time "xue" in "xuexi" (learning) used entering tone that is inexplicable in northern students. At this time teachers could use the dialects-comparison method. Teachers could invite students who came from Fujian or Guangdong to

exemplify pronunciation of "xue" (which is [h] in Hakka dialect and Cantonese; [h→j] in Min dialect). After students get this kind of perception, teachers could elaborate the specific details to lead students to rational conception. This method is conducive for students' comprehension and helpful to make teaching comfortable, enjoyable and effective.

### 2.4.3 Combining-Practice-and-Comments Method

Ancient Chinese course is regarded iconically as "foreign language" course, which demands students to accumulate basic knowledge of character, word, sentence and grammar, especially when learning phonetics. Because of limited course time, teachers should design more directive practice for students after the course has processed for a period. It counts for little that students depend only on teachers' explanation but nothing practical. It is also an effective approach that teachers respond promptly to students' practice, when teachers could realize students' acceptance and students could consolidate and deepen what they are learning.

---

## CONCLUSION

---

In conclusion, phonetics is a vital part of ancient Chinese teaching, which is a powerful implement to cultivate and improve students' capacities of reading ancient books and should be paid high attention to by teachers and students.

---

## REFERENCES

---

- HUANG Caiqing (2007). Research on Current Teaching Condition and Strategy in Ancient Chinese. *Education and Career*, (5).
- LI Zhenghua, ZHOU Changji (1999). *Ancient and Contemporary Sound Lists of Chinese Characters*. Beijing, China: Zhonghua Book Company.
- MING Chunfang (2001). Phonetics and Ancient Chinese Learning. *Journal of Northwest Academy of Nationalities*, (4).
- TANG Zuofan (2000). *Coursebook of Phonetics*. Beijing, China: Beijing University Press.
- WANG Li (1999). *Ancient Chinese*. Beijing, China: Zhonghua Book Company.