

A New Study on Chinese Teaching of Donggan Students in Central Asia From the Perspective of Inheritance Theory

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, the teaching and acquisition of inheritance language has received more and more attention from academic circles. However, teaching research for Chinese learners of the Donggan nationality in Central Asia is rare. The article starts from the Chinese teaching practice of Donggan international students in Central Asia, and aims at the characteristics of the process of learning Chinese language elements for Donggan international students. At the same time it proposes the following teaching suggestions: standardization and regularization of pronunciation teaching, written vocabulary teaching, comparative grammar teaching and Chinese characters and reading teaching.

Keywords: Donggan, inheritance language, teaching, acquisition

I. INTRODUCTION

The inheritance theory believes that the acquisition of inheritance language is unique from the acquisition of the first language and the second language. Therefore, domestic and foreign academic circles have shown a strong interest in the teaching and acquisition of inheritance language. However, due to the small number of large-scale learners, materials are severely lacking. The main methods of current research are still small samples and small-scale research, and the conclusions obtained are not universal and stable. The author's unit has a well-established group of learners of inheritance language — more than 200 foreign students of the Donggan nationality in Central Asia, which is convenient for group observation, research and practice. Therefore, the research will focus on the teaching of Chinese language elements for inheritance language learners, and put forward constructive teaching suggestions on the basis of teaching practice.

II. DONGGAN STUDENTS' CHINESE ACQUISITION IN INHERITANCE AND VARIANT

The theory of inheritance originated in the United States. Since it was widely used in the field of language policy and language education in the 1990s, it has attracted attention from academic circles because of its more precise classification of language learners and more in line with the reality of language teaching. Inheritance

Language refers to “the first language that the individual has not fully acquired due to the switch to another dominant language” [1].

Donggan Language, the mother tongue of Donggan students in Central Asia, is “a special variant of Central Plains Mandarin and Lanyin Mandarin in northwest China in Central Asia” [2], which is a cross-border product of Chinese dialect. The use of Donggan is limited to family, ethnic group, religion and other communication environments. Therefore, the first language that traditional Donggan people contact and acquire after birth is Donggan, which is their “first language”. However, in the context of Russian as the official language of the country, the lingua franca in political, economic, social, and cultural fields, and the linguistic awareness of each nation's nationality, in order to survive and develop, many Donggans have not yet fully acquired in Donggan, since the beginning of school years, they have switched to the dominant language of their country — Russian in schools, politics, economy, culture, and academic fields. At the same time, the differences in life and communication lead to the fact that rural Donggan people still insist on Donggan language in family and external communication environment, while Donggans living in cities mainly use Russian. Therefore, the current Donggan young people “can speak Donggan language, but not well; some can spell Donggan, but not many [3]. This completely conforms to the definition of inheritance language. Therefore, Donggan language belongs to Chinese inheritance language, while Donggan people's acquisition of Donggan language belongs to Chinese inheritance language acquisition.

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Meanwhile, the acquisition of Mandarin Chinese by Donggan students also belongs to the acquisition of Chinese inheritance language. The “diglossia” theory of sociolinguistics believes that there is a hierarchical relationship between different variants of the same language in the same language group, and the variant used in informal situations is called “low variant”, which is informal communication the language used at the time (such as family life); “high variant” is used in formal occasions, enjoys a high social status and reflects an elegant culture. The difference in structure and function between the low and high variant is not only different in the occasion of use and embodied style, but also in the way of acquisition. The low variant is acquired by children in a natural and spoken form, while the high variant is acquired through school education. The acquisition of Donggan language belongs to the acquisition of low variants of Chinese, while the acquisition of Mandarin belongs to the acquisition of high variants of Chinese. However, both low and high variants belong to Chinese, so the acquisition of Mandarin Chinese of Donggan students’ belongs to the category of Chinese inheritance language acquisition. The teaching methods proposed by the inheritance theory can be applied to the Chinese teaching of Donggan students.

III. APPLICATION OF INHERITANCE THEORY IN THE TEACHING OF CHINESE INHERITANCE

Unlike traditional language teaching that divides the teaching type into first language and second language, and the dichotomy of mother tongue and foreign language teaching, the inheritance theory believes that inheritance language acquisition is not only different from the first language acquisition, but also different from the second language. Inheritance language acquisition has its own uniqueness, and then proposed a three-point model that divides language teaching into inheritance language teaching, first language teaching and second language teaching.

Due to the different characteristics of inheritance language learners and non-inheritance language learners, the researchers have proposed macro and micro teaching paths based on the acquisition characteristics of American Russian inheritance language learners. On this basis, Xianwen Cao combined with the characteristics of Chinese inheritance speakers, proposed that the teaching of Chinese heritage language should take a macro approach in vocabulary, reading, writing, speaking, listening, and cultural teaching [4]. Predecessors believed that pronunciation practice is not a key teaching content for adult and child inheritance learners. In terms of reading teaching, quite large and complex texts should be taught from the beginning; research also pointed out that simple and easy texts are part of the key teaching content for children learners, but belongs to the non-key teaching content for adult learners.

However, in the process of teaching Donggan students, we found that the above methods for teaching Chinese inheritance language are not completely applicable. Because Donggan students’ Mandarin Chinese acquisition needs to transcend the hierarchical restrictions between low and high variants, it is this characteristic that makes the teaching of Mandarin Chinese for Donggan students slightly different from the typical inheritance language teaching. For example, the vocabulary, reading, speaking, listening and cultural teaching methods mentioned in the above teaching methods are suitable for Donggan students, but the contents of phonetic teaching and simple texts are not suitable. Therefore, the teaching of Chinese language inheritance to Donggan students should be based on their aptitude.

IV. THE TEACHING OF LANGUAGE ELEMENTS FOR DONGGAN STUDENTS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF INHERITANCE THEORY

The Chinese teaching of Donggan students is consistent with other inheritance language teaching in terms of vocabulary, writing, listening, speaking and culture, but there are differences in pronunciation and reading. The theory of inheritance language has reference significance for the Chinese teaching of Donggan students. Specifically, under the framework of the inheritance language theory, the Chinese teaching of Donggan students can be carried out from the following aspects:

Phonetic teaching is standardized and routine. Donggan is a northwestern Chinese dialect, and its pronunciation is quite different from Mandarin. Domestic scholars have found that some Donggan students even use Chinese characters to reduce the negative interference of Donggan pronunciation [5]. It can be seen that it is difficult for Donggan students to master the pronunciation of Mandarin. Therefore, in the initial stage of Chinese teaching, phonetic teaching should be emphasized, especially the teaching of the phonetic differences between Donggan and Mandarin should be emphasized. So that students can master standard Mandarin from the beginning. Specifically, the method of batch correction can be used. For example, the similarities and differences between the two languages can be found through phonetic comparison, and the characters with different phonetic batches can be emphatically corrected. This method is also proved the effectiveness by the Chinese teaching practice of Donggan students. In addition, in the process of teaching, we found that the pronunciation teaching for Donggan students lasted even longer than that of foreign students with other language backgrounds. Because of the influence of their mother tongue, it is more difficult for Donggan students to correct their pronunciation and requires more time. Therefore, phonetics teaching should run through and be routine.

Vocabulary teaching should teach more written language. Donggan language was developed on the basis of the Northwest dialect native language, with obvious oral characteristics, and retains many words from the end of the Qing Dynasty. For example, it said “lei” was “fa” and called brothers “lianshou”, the government agency is “Yamen”, etc. In the process of development, influenced by other languages, Donggan has absorbed a lot of vocabulary from other languages. These factors lead to a certain difference between the vocabulary of Donggan language and the vocabulary of modern Mandarin Chinese. Therefore, in the process of teaching, we should pay attention to the teaching of vocabulary, especially the teaching of written words.

Grammar teaching adopts contrast method. The grammatical difference between Donggan and Mandarin is relatively small. Therefore, in terms of grammar teaching, teaching based on the comparison of Chinese and Donggan has achieved better results. According to the empirical research of domestic scholars, it is found that Donggan students show more grammatical errors in the primary stage, and fewer grammatical errors in the intermediate and advanced stages [6]. The main reason is that Donggan students are beginning to learn Mandarin and have not yet understood the connection between their native language Donggan and Mandarin. Therefore, they dare not apply the content of their mother tongue to Mandarin learning at the early stage. With the increase in Mandarin and the improvement of Mandarin level, they have experienced many similarities between the grammar in the mother tongue and Mandarin grammar, and can naturally transfer the corresponding grammatical points of the mother tongue to the study of Mandarin. Therefore, in the elementary stage, the grammar teaching for Donggan students should not be relaxed, and at the intermediate and advanced stages, it is necessary to focus on the different parts of the two languages. This will not only save time, spend more time on the problems that need to be addressed, but also avoid students' boredom. This requires a detailed comparison between Mandarin and Donggan grammar, and this issue needs further study.

The teaching of Chinese characters and reading is polarized. Since the language environment in which Donggan students in Central Asia had been in an early age did not have Chinese characters, their native language, Donggan, was also written in Cyrillic. Their Chinese character acquisition shows the characteristics of a non-Chinese character cultural circle where the recognition of Chinese characters is a key and difficult point. However, due to the similar pronunciation of Donggan and Mandarin, Donggan students have a great interest and curiosity in recording Chinese characters in Chinese pronunciation. In addition, the grammar of its mother tongue is similar to that of Mandarin. Once the problem of Chinese character recognition is solved, the reading speed and accuracy of Donggan students are significantly higher than those of foreign students with

other language backgrounds. Therefore, the viewpoint that the simple text does not need to be the key teaching content for adults is not entirely suitable for Donggan students. Specifically, it should be treated in stages: simple texts for beginners of adult learners are also the focus of teaching, but it can be read directly from the simple text to the more difficult text without intermediate transition stages. Because Donggan students don't master many Chinese characters at the beginning of their Mandarin learning, if they use long-form reading materials to teach directly at the elementary stage, they may be afraid of difficulties and discourage their enthusiasm for Mandarin learning.

V. CONCLUSION

In summary, the Mandarin acquisition of Donggan students in Central Asia belongs to the acquisition of Chinese inheritance language. The theory of inheritance language has reference significance for the Chinese teaching of Donggan students. However, because Donggan and Mandarin are both low and high variants of Chinese, Donggan students' Mandarin Chinese acquisition needs to go beyond the hierarchical restriction from low to high variants, so it is similar to the typical inheritance language acquisition. These similarities and differences have important guiding significance for the teaching of Mandarin for Donggan students.

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