

A PROBE INTO THE DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHING MATERIALS AND QUALITY IN TEACHING CHINESE AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN TURKEY

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Abstract: To guarantee and improve the teaching quality, teaching material is one of the three main factors. In China the existing Chinese language textbooks for foreigners are almost universal, which can't meet the demands of learners from different countries. It's become a priority for us to prepare and compile country-specific teaching materials for local Chinese language learners. When we prepare textbooks, we may take these specific measures like changing the Chinese language-based perspective, highlighting the usefulness and relevance of teaching material; penetrating moderately cultural factors, adopting the way of international cooperation, which can make the learning process easier and more efficient.

Since 2009 China Hanban organized professors and experts to prepare a series of country-specific textbooks. However, most of these materials were only a translation of the original textbooks into different languages. They are not much used in Turkey as I know. My paper will search some solution to the real country-specific Chinese language textbooks for Turkish learners.

Keywords: Chinese language, Country-specific Teaching materials, Turkish learners

Introduction

An international symposium themed Country Specific Chinese Language Textbooks was held in December of 2009 at Xiamen University. Its aim was to “explore the country-specific teaching materials for learners from different countries to achieve sustainable development of Chinese language teaching materials”, which attracted the attention of both domestic and foreign experts. Subsequently, China Hanban organized professors and experts to prepare a series of country-specific textbooks. Country-specific foreign language teaching material is also known as localized materials. Recently, with the “Chinese rush” and teaching activities of the Confucius Institute carried out abroad, the problem of country-specific foreign language teaching materials has become more prominent.

Currently, commonly used Chinese textbooks are basically in English and Chinese, which sets up an insurmountable obstacle for non-English speaking foreign students. Even though textbooks in other languages can be found, they are only a translation from the Chinese-English version and error cannot be avoided. In the first lesson of textbook of 当代汉语 (Çağdaş Çince), the topic of the dialog is 您贵姓(What's your name). In the Chinese-Turkish version, the topic in Turkish is “Sizin soyadınız”, which is an incomplete question (Its proper Turkish translation should be: “Sizin soyadınız nedir?”) This is a very typical example of the fact that the country-specific textbook is only a translation from Chinese or English into a specific language. The compiler even did not read the contents of the text. In recent years, there are articles about foreign language teaching materials, but quite few specifically about the problem of localization of teaching materials. Some teachers have tried writing country-specific teaching material and have made some achievements.

But what is the localization of textbooks? What are the principles? How will country-specific teaching materials highlight the characteristics of “country-specific”? There are some issues worthy of further exploration.

1. What are country-specific teaching materials

As the name implies, they are Chinese language teaching materials prepared specifically for different countries. The ‘country’ not only refers to a particular country, but also to countries speaking a similar language and share similar cultural backgrounds.

The significance of country-specific Chinese language teaching materials is self evident to the performance of the local Chinese teaching. Then what's the relationship between country-specific and principles for the writing of Chinese textbooks?

1.1 The features and pertinence of country-specific teaching materials

In recent years, there are more articles on the principles of fun, practicality and pertinence in a Chinese language textbook. Fundamentally speaking, the user determines the principle to write a textbook, that is, it's important to know to whom a textbook is prepared, which is the issue not to be avoided. Li Quan (2004) generalized pertinence of teaching Chinese as a foreign language (TCFL) into five aspects: to fit the natural and social characteristics of learners; to fit the needs and goals of learners; to fit the conditions and environment of language learning; to reflect the nature of the discipline and the characteristics of the type of course; to reflect the teaching emphasis and difficulty of the target language. This summary is quite comprehensive. In fact, country-

specific is a concrete manifestation of the principle of pertinence in Chinese language teaching.

1.2 The relationship between the feature of country-specific and universal

The advocating of writing country-specific textbooks does not mean denying the writing of universal textbook. They differ only in the intention, the user, the contents, arrangement of style, choice of vocabulary, etc. If it does not reflect the principle for the preparation of teaching materials, a nominally country-specific Chinese language textbook may even less practical than one for general use. We studied some of the country-specific teaching textbooks and found that these teaching materials play a huge role in helping the local learners. Their common features are: (1) The “quantity” of the textbook coincides the local restrictive regulations for the school system, credit hours, which is easy to use; (2) The combination of text content with local circumstances and customs makes the teaching material attractive; (3) Grammar entry and choice of vocabulary is based on the language comparison in a specific range and as a result it is clearly targeted. (Zhao Jinming, 1992)

Although in recent years, manpower and material resources have been put in both domestically and abroad, the textbooks written appear “acclimatized.” Currently we are still lack of textbooks adaptable to all types and levels of learners. Country-specific teaching materials for specialized courses urgently need to be improved, such as textbooks for writing class and those for master programs of Chinese majors. Therefore, in order to compile a good localized textbook, we should not only compliance with the principles of localization, but also we follow the general rules to compile country-specific Chinese language teaching materials, such as following the principles of learner-centered, standing in the perspective of learners to design the structure, to select contents, to prepare exercises, to design the length of the text, etc. We should also follow the principles such as from easy to difficult, step by step, and recurring. All aspects of the past successful experience of compiling should be fully absorbed in the organization and lay out of a textbook and at the same time partial innovation should be made to enhance the characteristics and novelty of textbooks.

1.3 The significance and necessity of country-specific teaching materials

Since the teaching materials for general-purpose and for a specific country cannot replace each other, the country-specific teaching materials are indispensable. In particular, with the establishment of the Confucius Institute, Chinese language teaching has developed into two complementary wheels home and abroad. Now the number of Chinese language learners studying abroad even far exceeds the number coming into China to study. In many cases if we completely adopt teaching materials for general use for Chinese language teaching in a foreign country, the transformation is too large, too costly, which may be difficult for both learners and teachers to adapt. Thus it's necessary for local people to compile teaching materials that fit local education system, teaching philosophy, educational model, teaching content, etc. Or as what some universities have implemented, there should be a cooperation of Chinese and local teachers. Specifically speaking, emphasis should be laid on inter-university cooperation, regional cooperation and international cooperation. Universities should work together, break down barriers, and make full use of high-quality academic resources to construct successfully country-specific Chinese language teaching materials.

There's even a demand for country-specific teaching materials in China. Zhang Bo (2007) pointed out that due to the situation of little “United Nations” Chinese language learners with multi-native language speaking backgrounds has changed into the one with learners from different countries with a single-native language, the teaching pertinence quickly attracts attention of instructional circles. That means country-specific teaching materials also have a place in TCFL in China.

As to the language medium for universal teaching materials, Wang Hanwei (2007), after investigation, said that through consolidations of the composition of students of recent years and the findings of the survey, we can draw an important conclusion: TCFL teaching materials with English as its language medium provides service for different categories of foreign students to certain extents, but they mainly adapt about 16% of the native English speaker, not to approximately 84% of non English native speakers. Therefore, we believe that English cannot be used as the universal medium in TCFL and the language medium for country-specific teaching materials should be a local language, which means the preparations for country-specific teaching materials is essential.

2. Characteristics of country-specific Chinese language teaching materials

Country-specific Chinese language teaching materials are not simply a translation of the annotations of the existing textbooks into a certain local language, but they should be compiled concerning the language, culture, customs, and society of that country. Their characteristics can be of surface features and deep features.

2.1 The surface features of country-specific teaching materials

Surface feature is the surface characteristics, including: (1) Binding and design of textbooks. For example, the cover may be some familiar local landmarks, images of people, pictures of customs, etc. The user sees a brand new Chinese textbook, but there's something familiar to him or her which will bring about intimacy and will arouse the desire for the user to learn. (2) The annotation is in local language. Vocabulary and grammatical explanations leave clear traces of the local language. The user can accurately comprehend the

learning content, rather than learn a completely unknown language through a foreign language which he or she does not fully understand. (3) The text should involve local phenomena, like culture, customs, architecture, nature and so on. For an example, in a text designed for Turkish learners of making self introduction, such words like “伊斯坦布尔人 (I’m from İstanbul)”, “安卡拉人(I’m from Ankara)” and “伊兹密尔人(I’m from İzmir)” should be provided; as to festivals, such words like “开斋节(Ramadan Festival)”, “宰牲节(Feast of Sacrifice)”; as to customs, we cannot do without mentioning “土耳其肉夹馍(döner)”, “烧烤(kebab)”, “清真寺(mosque)”. While if a textbook for general purpose is used, it will be a teacher’s job to supplement these words. Although that is only a presentative example, it’s enough to make Turkish learners feel that this teaching material is entirely prepared for local learners, thus stimulating their enthusiasm to learn. (4) Lining with the actual situation of the local learners. Take the Department of Chinese Language and Literature of Erciyes University as an example, compared with 8-10 hours weekly for oral lessons (intensive course) in China, this university offers six hours. Besides, Turkish students, unlike Japanese and Korean students, spend less time in learning. So the capacity of a textbook for general purpose will seem excessive, which will result in a great blow to the confidence of the Turkish students.

2.2 The deep features of country- specific teaching materials

Deep features require that local learners’ characteristics should be studied; the similarities and differences between the local and the target languages should be compared to reduce the negative transfer. Surface features are relatively easy to achieve, but a country-specific teaching material cannot be in the true sense only with the surface features. Deep features include: (1) Contrast and comparisons are necessary between Chinese and the learners’ local language in order to improve their comprehensive level of Chinese language. For the learners learning Chinese as a foreign language, this contrast and comparison in their mind was inevitable and to a great extent the mistakes they make has something to do with the interference of their mother tongue. More importantly, if the advantage of the contrast and comparisons can be taken, the speed and efficiency of the learners can be greatly improved. Therefore, to compile good country-specific teaching materials with deep features, there should be teachers who know the local language to participate, especially the local Chinese language teachers, with their own Chinese language learning experience, coupled with their comparison of native and Chinese languages. As a result this teaching material can not only be more obviously targeted, but also help to improve the learning efficiency of learners. (2) Learners’ thinking and learning habits should be taken into considerations. The formation of learning habits is a long-term matter, and sometimes even with ethnic characteristics, so it’s no easy if you want learners to change their habits. As to the learning habits, the Chinese people generally spend a lot of after-class time to learn, but it’s rare for learners from the west, including those from Turkey. So the focus of the design of textbooks should be on classroom teaching. (3) Cultural contrasts and comparisons should be conducted to comply with the cultural identity of a specific country. In country-specific teaching materials, Chinese cultural phenomena can be appropriately explained. (4) Foreign language learning means should fit the specific country. If modern means can be found in a specific country, more practical network multi-media courseware and software should be developed.

3. The implementation for preparations of country-specific teaching materials

There are still some principles needed to be considered, such as the orientation of users, textbook category, context, vocabulary and grammar points.

Firstly, the organization of compiling team is important. Yang Qinghua (1995), said: “The characteristics of the country, the culture, the environment should be taken into considerations in the construction of a new generation of teaching materials, particularly for those to be use abroad. Chinese and foreign experts should cooperate. Only with a clear target will the teaching materials have better applicability and a higher effectiveness.” Tang Shi hong (2004), said: “I would like to acknowledge once again: Sino-foreign cooperation is the only way to improve the pertinence of TCFL teaching materials. And ‘cooperation’ should be a comprehensive cooperation in contrasting and comparing the languages and cultures. I wish that TCFL teachers and experts to give due attention and concern to this issue.” It can clearly be seen that the writers of country-specific teaching materials must be proficient in the actual situation of the two countries, languages, cultures, customs, educational system, educational philosophy, psychology of learning, learning stages and so on. The writer will either be local teachers who know Chinese or Chinese teachers who live and work for a long time locally, or a cooperation of two parties should be established. Textbooks with deep features should go through repeated trials, modification.

Secondly considerations should involve the implementation and enforcement of the principles to compile teaching materials. If deep features are to be embodied and to be implemented, at least the following work should be done: (1) After determining the general principles to write a textbook, the specific practices are to be established, such as those of how to allocate vocabulary, how to arrange grammar points, what is similar to the specific country. For example, we can change the sequence of Pinyin in phonetic learning stage by arranging

those consonants and vowels that have the same or similar pronunciation to Turkish in the first few lessons. By doing so, learners' fear of difficulty can be reduced, thus mobilizing their enthusiasm for learning in their first stage of learning. For learners of non-Chinese characters circle, they have to spend more time on writing, which should be taken into account. (2) Local second language teaching materials should be collected and then analysis and comparison should be conducted so as to establish the philosophy for the preparations of textbooks. It's also important to analyze the advantages and disadvantages of these materials, listen to the feedback from the learners about these materials so as to fully absorb the strengths of other materials and avoid deficiency. (3) The preparation of country-specific textbooks is inseparable from the principles for the textbooks for general purpose. The only difference is the addition of country-specific characteristics. The second language teaching principles, such as from easy to difficult, from simple to complex and priority for urgent should also be observed. (4) An investigation of motivation, purpose, methods and means is necessary. Preparation of a country-specific textbook is a comprehensive and systematic work. Preparation of dictionaries, of textbooks for different types of class and for different users for a specific country takes greater efforts for development.

4. Conclusion

When we talk about country specific teaching materials, we don't mean in a strict sense to compile a textbook respectively for every specific country. We mean only when universal teaching materials cannot meet the local demand do we have to prepare teaching materials for a specific region or a country.

Even a country-specific textbook will be given up or ignored if it is not well designed and prepared. A translation of the previous textbook cannot be a real and good country-specific textbook.

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