

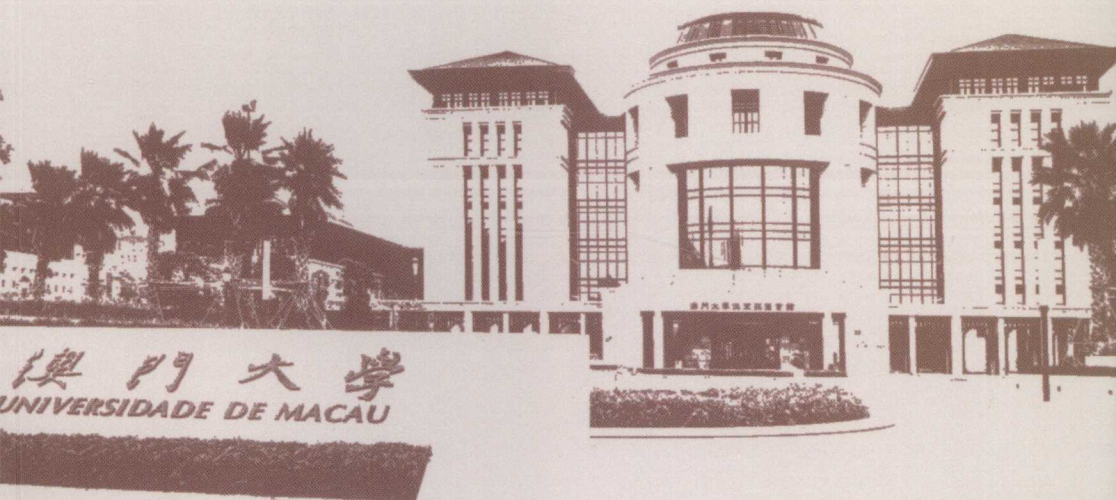
Needs Analysis and Curriculum Design

—A case study of non-Chinese speaking staff members at the University of Macau

需求分析与课程设计

——以澳门大学外籍教师为例

罗 兰 著



湖南师范大学出版社

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CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose and Significance of the Study

As mentioned in the Wikipedia Encyclopedia, Chinese is a language (or language family) that forms part of the Sino-Tibetan family of languages. About one-fifth of the people in the world speak some form of Chinese as their native language. The standardized form of spoken Chinese is based on the Beijing dialect, a member of the Mandarin group; it is described in the article “Standard Mandarin”. Chinese is one of the six official languages of the United Nations (alongside English, Arabic, French, Russian, and Spanish).

A report in Renming net mentioned that, in the 21st century, the fast development of China’s economy, as well as China’s reform and opening up process, has not only spurred on its interactions with the rest of the world, but also expanded the role of the Chinese language in the world. Chinese has become the bridge between

China and other countries in developing friendly relations, making exchanges in culture and technology, as well as boosting mutual understanding. The Chinese language is gaining growing popularity among China's neighboring countries in Southeast and East Asia. Learning Chinese has become a nationwide campaign in Japan and South Korea. Besides, Britain, generally regarded as a conservative country, is also showing increasing interest in the Chinese language and its importance. Moreover, according to the journal—China & the World Cultural Exchange, Thai Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn is even enrolled in Beijing University to learn Chinese. Departments and courses related to the Chinese language have been set up in many universities in Europe and North America. For example, departments on East Asia studies have been opened in many German universities, partly because it's vast investment in the automobile industry in China. Some even set up Sinology departments to deepen the study of China.

Let us now attempt to extend the observation into the area of Macau; the Macau Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China is a small territory on the southern coast of China. Administered by Portugal until 1999, it was the oldest European colony in China, dating to the 16th century. The administrative power (in Portuguese "potência administrante") over Macau was transferred to the People's Republic of China in 1999, and it is now one of two Special Administrative Regions of the PRC, together

with Hong Kong. Macau has played a unique and influential role in relations between China and the West, especially between the late 16th and 19th centuries. In 1999 Macau took on a new political shape as a Special Administration Region (SAR) of China. Residents of Macau mostly speak Cantonese natively; Putonghua, Portuguese, and English, Fujianese, Pilipino, Thai and several other languages are also spoken. Thanks to the rapid development of international communication and cooperation on science and technology in Macau, and the close relation with mainland China, where Putonghua serves as the official language, there has been an increasing demand for foreign staff coming to Macau with considerable Chinese speaking and listening proficiency, especially the practical oral skills necessary for culture exchange or academic activities on cross-culture occasions. Taking the University of Macau as an example, in the past 10 years there have been over a hundred international academic conferences and seminars hosted, let alone those international academic conferences and seminars held elsewhere in Macau. Among these cultural or academic exchange occasions, refer to the University of Macau's statistic record that half of these exchange activities or seminars were conducted with mainland scholars. Moreover, from the introduction of the University of Macau, we can see that starting from 2001, the University has been recruiting students in 14 provinces and cities in China. Meanwhile, many academic staffs from mainland China have been recrui-

ted in the University. With the daily tightening relationship with mainland China, undoubtedly, this creates a great many chances as well as challenges for foreign staff members to learn Putonghua. Therefore, there are rising demands to provide foreign staffs with sufficient instructional opportunities to develop the language skills they will need to be successful foreign staffs and academicians or technical personnel.

However, according to the author's observation that there is few Putonghua teaching program for foreign academic staffs in Macau and the Putonghua teaching program in University of Macau does not provide learners opportunities in the classroom to develop the Chinese listening and speaking skills that they will need in their target language encounters. Although communicative and learner-centered approaches to language teaching has been influential at least in the last two decades, classroom instruction in many Chinese teaching programs still concentrates on linguistic accuracy and a general knowledge with an disproportionate emphasis on reading and writing. As a result, after studying Putonghua for more than two years, many foreign staffs might have learnt how to analyze sentence structures and memorized a large repertoire of technical terms, and some even score high in HSK^① (Hanyu Shuiping

① The Chinese Proficiency Test (HSK) is a national standardized test to assess the Chinese language proficiency of non-native speakers (including foreigners, overseas Chinese and students of Chinese national minorities).

Kaoshi), but they still remain at a loss when they meet Chinese speakers. They usually have difficulties in expressing themselves in Chinese when they need to communicate their ideas orally in everyday or academic situations. Many are still weak in comprehending oral Chinese. They can not feel confident when they talk to Chinese-speaking people or listen to authentic materials and speakers with various accents. This inability of listening and speaking will greatly limit them in communicating effectively in Chinese.

In order to unveil the reality of present Putonghua teaching for foreign staffs in China, the author has conducted a trial survey in the University of Macau from which conclusions are drawn so far:

Most of the non-Chinese speaking staff members feel that they lack the level of Chinese speaking and listening proficiency needed in their daily communication and present research and study.

Therefore, a demand is urgent for effective Putonghua learning of listening and speaking among non-Chinese speaking staff at the University of Macau. Being an English student and the one who comes from mainland China with Putonghua as first language, the author thinks that she has the responsibility to do some research in Putonghua curriculum design so as to find ways to narrow the gap and attribute her effort to Putonghua teaching in Macau. Although the author finds it hard to deal with everything about Putonghua curriculum on listening and speaking for non-Chinese speaking staff, she tries her best endeavors to offer some suggestions with

the intention of bridging the gap between the pedagogical ideal and reality. When we intend to develop teaching materials and revalue them, it is helpful to understand learners' needs and get data from the learners. It is necessary to know what the learners' objectives are, what they are expecting from the course, and the characteristics of their learning habits. This book discusses the learners' needs and tries to match their needs with curriculum, and materials.

1.2 Research Questions

It is worth noting that with the rapid economic and academic development of China, more and more foreigners are in contact with Chinese people. Putonghua is becoming increasingly important in Macau. As far as we know, there are no curricula specially designed for the non-Chinese speaking staff members who have little knowledge of any Chinese dialects at the University of Macau. Therefore, this research will try to do the needs analysis for the target group and specially design the curriculum for the target group—the non-Chinese speaking staff members who have little knowledge of any Chinese dialects at the University of Macau.

To sum up, this research will attempt to:

- (1) Define the needs of non-Chinese speaking academic staff

members who have little knowledge of any Chinese dialects at the University of Macau;

(2) Develop a curriculum based on the needs of these non-Chinese speaking academic staff members.

1.3 Layout of the Book

The layout of the research is as follows;

Chapter 1 briefly introduces the purposes, setting and organization of the paper; then it explores some theoretical concepts ranging from the definition of curriculum and syllabus to the principles and methodology of needs analysis followed by a brief review of the development of a curriculum, as well as some influential theories of curriculum design.

Chapter 2 is a needs analysis which serves as a preparatory stage for the formulation of a curriculum for non-Chinese speaking staff learning Chinese Putonghua at the University of Macau. It employs questionnaires and interviews as instrument to conduct the investigation followed by a detailed analysis of the data and recommendations for curriculum design.

Chapter 3 explicitly explains the curriculum for Putonghua-learning foreign staff, consisting of its goals, objectives, teaching strategies, material selection and testing. Two units of teaching are

included as a sample and specification of the suggestions proposed. What is more, the main issues in this paper are put forward and suggestions on future studies are also offered. It is expected that more studies would be carried out in this field to produce effective pedagogic practicability.

1.4 Review of the Literature

There has been a great deal of literature published during the past decades of years which focuses on the teaching of language skills to students with specialized needs of Putonghua. The planning of a curriculum for foreign staffs at the University of Macau requires a review of the practical considerations of curriculum development and the definition of the concepts related.

1.4.1 Needs and Needs Analysis

1.4.1.1 Definition of Needs

Over recent years, one natural and healthy development in Chinese language learning is so-called “needs analysis”. The key assumption on which needs analysis is based is that the learner is at the heart of any teaching program. To be more exact, learners are seen to have different needs and interests, which would have an important influence on their motivation to learn and therefore on the

effectiveness of their learning. Thus it is claimed that information of the learner's needs would help in drawing up a "profile" to establish coherent objectives, and take subsequent decisions on course content.

However, the concept of "needs" is ambiguous. It has been used with various interpretations in the literature, and there has been a lack of clarity in its definition. On the one hand, it could be defined with a narrow interpretation as "the language skills and content with which an individual will be confronted when he finds himself in particular communication situations" (Richterich, 1983, p. 2). On the other hand, it may be used to cover such concepts as ideas, wants, desires, interests, expectations, motivations, and demands.

There is a conflict, as Widdowson (1981) points out, between what the learner needs to do in learning the language and what the learner needs to have acquired;

The expression—learner needs—is open to two interpretations. On the one hand it can refer to what the learner needs to do with the language once he has learnt it. This is a goal oriented definition of needs and related to terminal behavior, the ends of learning. On the other hand the expression can refer to what the learner tends to do in order to actually acquire the language. This is a process oriented definition of needs, and related to transitional behavior, the means of learning.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) make a similar distinction between “target needs” (i. e. what the learner needs to do in the target situation) and “learning needs” (i. e. what the learner needs to do in order to learn). They argue that the term “target needs” involves three different types of needs: necessities, lacks and wants. Necessities as defined by Hutchinson and Waters, are “determined by the demands of the target situation, that is, what the learner has to know in order to function effectively in the target situation”. They define “lacks” as the gap between the learner’s existing proficiency and the target proficiency, and “wants” as what the learner feels she/he needs in a subjective sense. Needs analysis is acquiring more and more importance in the field of curriculum development and curriculum design. It is a device to know the learners’ necessities, needs, and lacks in order to develop courses that have a reasonable content for exploitation in the classroom (Huchinson and Waters, 1987). Needs Analysis is therefore a process for identification and defining valid curriculum and instructional objectives. These objectives facilitate learning in an environment that is closely related to the real life situations of the student. It brings into focus the settings and roles that a learner is likely to face after he finishes his formal education (Fatihi, 2003).

Another distinction in defining learner needs can be made between objective needs and subjective needs. Needs which are perceived externally by teachers or administrators are called “objective

needs" (Richterich, 1972), whereas needs are called "subjective needs". That is to say, objective data is that factual information which does not require the attitudes and views of the learners to be taken into account. Therefore, biographical information on age, nationality, mother language, etc. is said to be "objective". "Subjective" information, on the other hand, reflects the perceptions, goals, and priorities of the learner. It will include, among other things, information on why the learner has undertaken to learn a second language, and the classroom tasks and activities which the learner prefers. This is a useful distinction for it lets us locate the source of need and strike a philosophically satisfying balance between learner-centered and teacher-cornered inputs to the course planning process.

Therefore needs do not have of themselves an objective reality and what is finally established as "needs" is a matter of agreement and judgment without discovery. One of the purposes of needs analysis is to involve learners and teachers as well as administrators in exchanging information so that the agendas of the teacher and the learner may be more closely aligned.

Argument for teaching foreign languages can generally be related to needs. Needs are sometimes divided into "personal" and "social" needs. It seems to us that this division is hardly useful. First of all it is evident that social needs cannot be separated from personal needs; social needs are always reducible to the personal