A Course of Independent Study for English Speakers of Chinese
after Intermediate Level at
California State University, Monterey Bay

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December 2002

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Master of Arts in Education

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Abstract

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By Wei Xu

This thesis discusses the development of an Independent Study course of Chinese language after intermediate level at California State University, Monterey Bay. The course was developed based on the needs of the learners, aiming to provide a guide for those learners of Chinese with the continuation of their language maintenance and development. The thesis addresses how a course can help improve second language learners’ performances as well as competences. The thesis rests on the belief that second language can be learned independently, and on the disbelief that a textbook should be the syllabus of a language course.

The thesis includes a syllabus. Its development was supported by reviewing literature and practices relating to second language learning, and Chinese as a second language in particular, coupled with qualitative research (four participants) in order to make decisions for the course. Suggestions for the prospective instructor(s) are also included.
Acknowledgements

With the conclusion of this thesis, I suddenly realized that I was deep "in debt", both academically and spiritually, to so many people, without whose encouragements and help, this thesis would have been impossible. The list here would be endless if not considering the limited space permitted.

I would like to thank the excellent tutees I worked with, who inspired me the wonderful idea of this thesis, who accompanied me all the way, and who tutored me as much as, even more than, I tutored them.

I am grateful to Dr. Christine Sleeter, who has been tentatively and patiently helping me with my study and life, demonstrating me a way of how a teacher makes a difference, without whom, my study at CSUMB would have not taken place and smoothly come to an end, which I feel much blessed.

I am also equally thankful to my adviser, Dr. Bob Hughes, for his vigorous directions and indications in helping me become an active learner, who shared with me not only his expertise in education but personal experiences both as an educator and as a learner, which I feel much obliged.
I would like to acknowledge as well my thanks to Dr. Donaldo Urioste, director of Institute for World Languages and Cultures, who offered me much generous assistance from the beginning to the end.

Also, sincere thanks go to Dr. Bill Jones and peer capstone classmates, for their taking the time reading my paper and giving me valuable feedback.

And, I must thank my supportive family, who helped make my study happen and were always there cheering me up.
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Chapter I  Introduction

Introduction

One of most urgent tasks of schools is to help prepare all students to get a head start on their futures by building skills and accumulating experiences necessary for success in the world of tomorrow. To ensure that this is achieved, bilingual / multilingual education is necessary. In this highly globalized world of technology and information, globalized thinking is apparently a necessity. Speaking another tongue, exposing oneself to another’s culture and enhancing international understanding no doubt play a significant role at this time. Speaking different languages is the trend and call of this century. The ability to communicate in different languages opens the window, builds the bridge and provides the passport to explore one’s own community beyond.

Politically and economically, the demand for bilingual personnel is increasing. Being bilingual offers the possibility to broaden one’s point of view and raise one’s standard of living. It also offers better employment and a brighter future. Language as a vehicle, foreign language in particular, plays a significant role in this aspect. Therefore, foreign language use is far more common than ever after the renaissance in the 1400’s in the atmosphere of politics, commerce, and cultural awareness.
More and more people learn the Chinese language in order to capitalize on the growing economic opportunities in China, since China has been an increasingly important production and consumer center for the world. After China joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) and has been selected as the host for the 2008 Olympics, with the growing involvement of China on international stage, the Chinese language and its considerable importance in nearly every field is gaining popularity. "Because I want to talk to the most people in the world," said one of the learners of Chinese at California State University, Monterey Bay (CSUMB) when being asking for the reason for learning the language. Other people gave other reasons, such as to entertain their interests of Qigong, Taijiquan, Martial Arts, Chinese medicine, Chinese history, Beijing Opera and other aspects of Chinese culture, in other words, to know more about the country. Evidently, the developing ancient nation attracts increasing attention. China, on the other hand, cordially welcomes those enthusiastic intellectuals with helping her development. The teaching and learning of Chinese becomes a topic of those who show interest and empathy.

This paper, however, does not intend to preach what is already more than enough the necessity of learning a second language, or learning Chinese as a second/foreign language. Instead, it tries to help those who are interested in both Chinese language
and culture when they learn Mandarin Chinese as a second/foreign language by
developing a course of independent study of Chinese for English speakers after
intermediate level.

The Background of the Project

I used to be a high school English teacher in the People’s Republic of China. Prior
to my coming to California State University, Monterey Bay (CSUMB), I taught
part-time both English and Chinese in Japan. Since at college as an English major, I
grew interested in second language learning and teaching, the interest and enthusiasm
intensified with my participation in becoming a language teacher. The desire to explore
more in this field was even escalated as my advanced education taking place at
CSUMB.

As a second and third language learner myself, I had experienced and I was still
experiencing some frustrations and breakdowns some other second language learners
endured, which was, that my language performance often disappointed me. The time
and effort I had spent on the languages was not paralleled to the outcomes I deserved.
Take English, for example. In spite of the fact that I had learned it formally nearly for
twenty years before I came to the U.S., I still could not express myself unmistakably
and appropriately, particularly in front of the native speakers. I remembered vividly
during the first few classes, my peer classmates' puzzled faces or dissatisfaction when
I tried to participate in the group discussions and failed to make the points I intended to
or they expected. I felt so sorry, felt stupid when I could not make myself understood
over trivial matters, though I swore to myself that I could make it and should make it
since I had learned it systematically for so long a time. After more than one year of
studying and living here, my English performance was catching up. I could digest
more of the class, became more comfortable talking to the others, and was enjoying the
life here. I got a sense of how to say, what to say, when to say, to whom to say, where
to say and why say it. I realized and was convinced that my poor performance was due
to my deficiencies in cultural and linguistic inappropriateness, of lacking genuine
practice in authentic application while learning the language, though I could do more
on paper work grammatically.

My Japanese, on the other hand, told another story. I did not go to school to learn
it, just picked it up both consciously and subconsciously, by living there,
communicating to the people and making me use it whenever possible. Within my
limited knowledge of the language, my Japanese performance did not let me down as
often as my English did, and which, I attributed to my authentic exposure to the
language since day one. However, it did not mean I was an accurate speaker of
Japanese, as I was aware that I was not able to generate decent Japanese, mainly because, I lacked grammar knowledge which led to less grammatical competence of it, and also because of not enough immersion in that culture. Both my English and Japanese marked me an "outsider" in some way and in another, prevented me from being either a competent or a confident speaker, as I had wished.

My own first hand experience proved to me that learning a second language and gaining the ability to use it appropriately did not mean much the same thing, therefore the questions of how languages should be learned and, conversely, how languages should be taught needed equal attention and discussion. My point of view was that only do we learn languages within its social context, in a suitable approach, facilitated by grammatical literacy can we learn, and possibly, learn well; only do we teach languages accordingly and responsively can we make a successful teaching happen.

I began tutoring Chinese at CSUMB almost at the same time as the inception of my education here in fall of 2001. It was during the tutoring sessions, I got the initiative and inspiration of doing something for second language learners, specifically, for those who learned Chinese as a second language. Having been a language teacher and tutor, I had the chance of observing some phenomena in the classrooms, had the opportunity to interact with the learners and get their feedback on their learning. I
perceived that some of them were in the same boat as I had been, facing the same
unpleasant situation I had confronted before, and they were struggling. It should not be
this way anymore and something should be done to change it, I determined.

I had to claim that before I undertook the graduate study here, I had never thought
in depth about these issues before, taking it for granted that second language learning
happened that way, and seldom gave it a consideration of doing something about it.
My study at CSUMB enabled me to make it possible to probe the mystery of second
language acquisition and tackle the issue which brought me in close contact with much
literature and theory elaborated in the classroom. The opportunity of helping the
Chinese language learners on campus gave me advantageous situation to do it and to
make some possible change(s), which I felt much obliged and blessed.

The Chinese program began at CSUMB shortly after the campus’s
commencement in Fall 1998, together with American Sign Language, Japanese, Italian
and Spanish (the language courses listed in alphabetical order), all of which make up
the Institute of World Languages and Cultures, and serves as one of the foreign
languages that meet university language requirements (ULR). At CSUMB, a student
needs to take a second language to fulfill the general education requirements if he/she
did not take one or did not take any foreign language assessment.
Altogether four semesters of study are needed if one begins from the rudimentary level, and only in this sequence can one complete the university learning requirements (ULR). Some students after intermediate level (Chinese 202) stopped taking any classes of the language either because their initial purposes for taking it were just to fulfill the academic requirements or because of inaccessibility of an advanced class, according to my contact with some learners. Though the campus had been trying / testing to find out if there was a possibility to develop it into a minor, the situation did not seem promising. When there were not enough enrollments for a class, the learners would be grouped together doing independent study; and a facilitator/tutor was introduced if there was one. That was how I first met my target audience in the fall of 2001.

When I started tutoring, the Chinese courses were offered both at Beginning and Intermediate level. There were also a handful of learners whose Chinese language level was a bit higher than those enrolled in the above two courses, but, were not yet ready to learn the language all by themselves. Under this special situation, they worked in a group trying both to maintain and develop their Chinese language skills. From my observation and interface with them, at this stage of second language learning, they had a good quantity of Chinese input to be able to do some communication, but for
A Chinese Course

some reason, their output did not reflect their input, performances did not correspond
to their competence (which as I had been). They immediately needed improvement in
all language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), especially their
communication competence, both speaking and writing, because they were longing to
communicate in Chinese with native or near native speakers. I, as a tutor, felt it
necessary to assist them in having a syllabus design and having some materials
collected to accelerate their learning, and broadly, to design a course of study of
Chinese to better facilitate for them study of the language. I believed though the
number of the learners was small, their need should be well addressed and accordingly
well served. From the situation when I started the project, more students would fall in
this group study since no advanced course was available after intermediate level on
this campus.

According to my inspection, which was further confirmed by the director of the
Institute of World Languages and Cultures at CSUMB, there was no such a syllabus at
this level, at least at the time of writing. Independent study usually means a learner
comes to the instructor and talks about his/her needs and situation, then the two sides
work together to decide what they should do according to the specific situation of each
learner. However, the population I was trying to serve was not entirely "independent";
their learning style was somewhat that of "classroom" and somewhat that of "independent". Classroom learning is different from study by oneself. In the classroom, often known as under an educational situation, learners have the opportunity to work together with the instructor and other peers, and can get feedback immediately. Independent study does not offer such a chance, but it offers the possibility of learning a language in a personalized setting and at one's own pace. The course to be designed tried to integrate the two features.

In order to make the course workable and worth trying, I completed an Independent Study looking into the Chinese Programs at universities in/near the Bay Area in the summer of 2002. I wanted to learn what others were doing at classes and how they designed their courses. The information I got from six campuses (Stanford, UC Berkeley, UC Davis, CSU Sacramento, San Francisco State University and San Jose State University) offered me valuable references when I developed the course.

The Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this project, as I expressed earlier, was to be of help in a tentative way to those who would take Chinese as a second/foreign language, specifically to design a course of study in Mandarin Chinese for English speakers who were taking or would take an "Independent Study" at California State University, Monterey Bay after
at least two years of exposure to the language. I would like to see that by taking this
course and by following the syllabus, the Chinese learners on campus could not only
maintain their Chinese language proficiency, but could advance their Chinese language
skills. The course tried to assist them to be self-learners and find a guideline to
accompany their future learning, and in due course to accomplish their goals of
learning Chinese as a second / foreign language. The goal of my endeavor would “cast
a brick to attract jade”, leading more concern about learning Chinese in this area.

It was also my hope to provide a guide for these eager learners of Chinese with
the continuation of their learning, satiating their thirsts for both Chinese language and
culture knowledge. Though the number of the learners at the time was not big, I
believed it would increase as CSUMB developed. My project also intended to
reciprocate my education here so that I was giving back to the school which taught me.

**Delimitations**

This course was limited and subject to evaluation because it was primarily for
those whose Chinese language level was intermediate low, who at least dedicated two
consequent academic years’ commitment to the language; as I stated above, it was for
the learners at CSUMB in particular or boldly, for learners from the Monterey
Peninsula. Because of my experience of being a language tutor at CSUMB, its service
scope might be limited. This was the first time for me to embark on such an endeavor, some thoughts and ideas might unavoidable be unwell-considered and lacking ripe experience.

I held it a milestone in my study of this field after the completion of the course. I would continue studying the theories and exploring better ways of teaching and learning a second language, as learning Chinese as well, to make the learning and teaching process more efficient and more rewarding.

Outline of the Thesis

Chapter II, reviewed some major theories / principles concerning second / foreign language learning, followed by literature about Chinese both as a language and a second / foreign language; Chapter III, Methodology, as the title suggested, described the procedure of the designing and developing the project, while Chapter IV came the project – A Course of Independent Study for English Speakers of Chinese after Intermediate Level, with a discussion and conclusion in Chapter V, which also discusses evaluation of the course.
Chapter II  Literature Review

Introduction

"Being bilingual is a way of life" (Brown, 1994). It is evident that promoting competence in other languages and cultures as part of basic education is a matter of political and economic survival for all nations. Speaking another language and understanding another culture is the need of the historical epoch. Being educators of this century, we have to be aware that "students really need to acquire proficiency in more than two languages to function effectively in their society" (Nunan and Lam, 1998).

Much effort has been made and much attention has been paid in this aspect, many principles and theories have been explored concerning second language (L2) learning. Researchers and educators have been trying to probe the "mystery" of it and the research has been fruitful. The theories and principles that have emerged provide us grounds to better understand the complexity and guide our work in the teaching/learning of second language.

The literature reviewed in this chapter sheds light on the project in discussion - A Course of Independent Study for English Speakers of Chinese after Intermediate Level, most of which helps me frame the course syllabus, think through the course
arrangement, set course objectives, decide course outcomes and procedures, locate learning materials and resources, select activities, pace course schedule, consider the testing and evaluation and some other concerns. It is twofold. Firstly, it reviews some theories on language learning in general and on second language learning / adult second language learning in particular, followed by literature about competence and performance pertaining to language learning. Secondly, it reviews Chinese as a language and also as a second language in order to better understand the language, with a study on Chinese programs at some campuses which I did in summer 2002, all of which provide me guidance for the course to be designed. Through the whole thesis, second language learning and second language acquisition are interchangeable.

Second Language Learning

Universal Grammar (UG), a theory of both grammars and human capacity for language, which is advocated by Chomsky, illustrates that “the system of principles, conditions, and rules that are elements or properties of all human language… the essence of human language” (Chomsky, 1976, as cited in Cook & Newson, 1996, p.1). It aims to explain that “language as a property of the human mind and to explain how it is acquired” (ibid). Universal Grammar identifies language as knowledge but not as behavior. It cannot be acquired by simply mechanical imitation and repetition. Simple
practice does not make perfect here. Instead, experience of exposure to the language makes the knowledge of language grow and develop. It argues that learners build up the grammatical system on the basis of input (Gass, 1996, p.339).

Though Universal Grammar claims little perceptibly about L2 learning, it provides some indications for us to adhere to. The theory proposes that second language learning is different from one’s first language acquisition (L1) in that second language learners have already had some knowledge of, and have already established sort of system of the first language. Universal Grammar does not favor the grammar explanation in either second language learning or teaching; neither does it appreciate the performance of a teacher’s correction of learners’ mistakes in the classroom. One of the reasons that helps comprehend why most of second language learners fail to reach the full achievement, according to Universal Grammar, is lacking of “natural communicative interaction” and “non-natural exchanges have been used by teachers in many ways ranging from grammatical correction to asking the students to talk about the differences between two pictures to the classic threefold exchange Teacher’s Initiation / Pupils’ Response / Teacher’s feedback” (Cook & Newson, 1996, p.129).

Wang (1995) further elaborates that if learners have adequate input from second language, the learning process of second language eventually takes place, and
accordingly fixes the parameters of the target grammar by using their innate linguistic component. First language parameters have effects on the second language acquisition during the initial stages of second language (p.19).

In Flynn's (1996) point of view, second language learners pay more attention to second language grammar, to the "differences in parametric values" (p.151) in the first place of second language acquisition. "...Whatever the grammar contains, it is something attainable via the employment of learning strategies, such as analogy" (p.132).

*Cognitive theory*, on the other hand, claims second language learning as the acquisition of a cognitive skill, a cognitive process, and can be ultimately attained by practice. As agreed in McLaughlin and Heredia (1996),

"A skill must be practiced again and again and again, until no attention is required for its performance. *Repetitio est mater studiorum* – practice, repetition, time on task- these seemed to be the critical variables for successful acquisition of complex skills, including complex cognitive skills such as second language (L2) learning" (p.216).

Based on cognitive theory, we may claim that learning a second language is like learning a skill; it is a procedure of repetition and accumulation. Practice makes perfect
in here. "Internalized rules are restructured as learners adjust their internal representations to match the target language," and "this restructuring process involves the use of learning, production, and communication strategies" (McLaughlin & Heredia, 1996, p.224).

Cognitive theory does not support simple "drill-and-practice exercises" in the classroom in any way because it holds that they lack "creative construction" and emphasize too much the "conscious learning of rules". Alternatively, it recommends to get acquainted with a target sentence structure by frequent exercise of it "in varied lexical settings". Moreover, the theory perceives the individual learning aptitude differences lie in the access to the knowledge about the target language, and depend on the speed and efficiency of working memory, both of which affect "the extent to which the individual succeeds in generating and altering the cognitive data required at various processing stages" (McLaughlin & Heredia, 1996, p.225).

In agreement, Shiffrin and Schneider make a similar argument arguing that controlled processes determines the transformation of information learned to long-term memory, and only by initial using of controlled processes are the skills learned and become automatically routinized. Learning takes time and requires attention. "Thus controlled processing can be said to lay down the 'stepping stone' for automatic
processing as the learner moves to more and more difficult levels" (Shiffrin & Schneider, 1977, as cited in McLaughlin & Heredia, 1996, p.215).

Conclusion maybe made based on the theories briefed above that while the generative grammarians such as UG alike, characterize language as a system of rules, from the point of view of the structuralists or behaviorists, it is a set of habits. Though they cannot agree with each other in the learning procedure of second language, they have something in common basically. They do not conflict with each other in that language learning occurs over time, needs sufficient and constant exposure to the target language and the exposure should be authentic and most natural-like. These speculations make me suppose that immersing the learners consistently in authentic exposure to Chinese will not only help their learning but also accelerate their learning speed. In addition, it will make their learning more practical and meaningful.

**Adults Second Language Learning**

The project is for college students, all of whom are adults. Many studies have showed that adult second language learning is different from that of children's native language acquisition in that adults "have advanced cognitive development"... and they advance in learning rate because of their "previous linguistic experience and the cognitive maturity" (Cheng, 1991), thus, adults possess more problem-solving skills.
Ellis (1994) confirms that second language learners, particularly adults, have the
capacity to engage in 'planned language use' by paying deliberate attention to the
language forms they choose (for example, by using explicit knowledge of grammatical
rules or by translating).

Savignon (1997) agrees that “a deductive statement of rules is efficient and
provides a good introduction to structural or functional features” because of “adult
learners with prior experience in linguistic analysis”, and further maintains that adults
“are capable of learning through experience alone quite complex linguistic rules of
grammar as well as sociolinguistic rules of appropriateness” (p.172). Studies show as
well that adults are advantageous to children in a number of ways as well. Ehrman
(1996) further notes that “while children speaking a new language still speak it like
children with relatively small vocabulary, relatively simple grammar, and generally
concrete topics. Adults, on the other hand, are capable of reaching high levels of
language proficiency in remarkably short periods of time since they have a level of
cognitive development, knowledge of the world, and experience of how to learn and
cope” (p.169).

According to Krashen and Terrell, there are three stages of development through
which a learner progresses in the acquisition of a second language: comprehension,
early production, and extending production. The first stage, also called silent period or preproduction stage, in which a learner of a new language gets acquainted with the sounds and rhythms, “becoming attuned to the flow of the speech stream”, of the target language. “Once a learner feels more confident”, he/she will attempt to utter words and phrases, which is defined as early production stage. Extending production, the third stage, sees the learner speed up considerably, “utterances become more complex, students begin to recognize and correct their own errors, and they become more comfortable at initiating and sustaining conversations” (Diaz-Rico & Weed, 1995, p.35). Diaz-Rico and Weed comprehend that “these stages are predictable, and learners advance through them at their own pace. Undue pressure to move through the stages rapidly only serves to frustrate and retard language learning” (p.35).

The learners the project served have finished at least two years study of Chinese, or, they are at equivalent level. They are much likely in the late second stage, going on to third stage on the condition that they have successfully accomplished all the study before. However, sometimes they just cannot perform as well as they should, according to their own statement and my observation. Put in another word, their language performance does not correspond with their language competence. Research reveals that adults’ prior language knowledge can either “facilitate” or “inhibit” their
second language learning, “the closer two languages are in terms of syntax, phonology, and lexicon, the more likely it is that higher levels of completeness can be reached” (Flyn, 1996, p.127).

However, this does not imply that the two languages that are not much alike cannot be mastered, though apparently some seem more time consuming or “more difficult”. The fact is that no two pieces of languages are alike and “for native speakers, all languages seem to be equally easy. Children throughout the world share the marvelous capacity of facile language learning” (DeFrancis, 1984, p.51). Every language is capable of communicating whatever thoughts its speakers intends to convey and the capability lays in the different strategies its speakers possess, the very essence of learning a language is the mastery of these strategies. “The ease or difficulty in achieving this mastery is a subjective matter that basically has nothing to do with the nature of the language itself” (ibid).

As long as second language is exposed in a suitable approach under appropriate settings, coupled with the necessary grammar framework presented in a proper way to support, any second language is learnable and can be learned well for adults because “we know that adults are capable of learning new languages under a wide range of learning conditions” (Flyn, 1996, pp.127-129).
Therefore, we may consider that when designing a course, second language should be introduced and delivered naturally and logically while addressing the learners' individualities.

**Competence vs. Performance**

*Competence:* *the knowledge that enables a person to speak and understand a language.* Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, tenth edition, p.234

*Performance:* *the ability to speak a certain language.* Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, tenth edition, p.861

According to the definitions, competence stands for “knowledge” and performance means “behavior”, the capacity to use the knowledge in communication.

Do we have the experience when our performance fails our competence, or we outperform ourselves? Performance, in such case, is used to assess one’s competence and can be regarded as a reflection of competence.

Generative theorists distinguish competence and performance as linguistic competence (or grammatical competence) and communicative competence (or as pragmatic competence) (Chomsky, 1965, 1980, as cited in Flynn, 1996, and in Li, 1996, Ellis, 1994). Competence is considered “the mental representations of linguistic
rules that constitute the speaker-hearer’s internal grammar”. This grammar is implicit and evident in the intuitions which the speaker-hearer has about the grammaticality of sentences; the use of this grammar in the comprehension and production of language is regarded as performance (Ellis, 1994, pp.12-13). The distinction between the two is further characterized as communicative competence versus communicative performance which the former comprises “both linguistic and pragmatic knowledge”, while the latter indicates “the actual use of these two types of knowledge in understanding and producing discourse” (ibid).

These concepts acknowledge that “language use is essential for the development of communicative competence” (Savignon, 1997, p.92) and “the speaker must know what to say, with whom, and when, and where” in order to communicate effectively (Munby, 1978), because the ultimate goal of learning a language is to communicate, to say and write the proper stuff at the proper time to the proper party within the community where the target language is used. Promoting communicative ability is both the goal of my learners and also the goal of my project.

*Chinese and Chinese as a Second language*

The project under discussion is *A Course of Independent Study for English Speakers of Chinese after Intermediate Level*. Chinese as a language and second
language has her own properties. The main aim of this part of the chapter intends to present a bird’s-eye view of Chinese both as a language and as a second language, with an aim to better understand the language itself and better facilitate the teaching/learning of it in supporting the arrangement of the course. It is not possible for this chapter to cover every aspect the language because it is a language with such a long history. The issues covered here are Chinese pronunciation, writing system and some evident differences between Chinese and English.

*Chinese*, as a language, is known in Mainland China as "/[Pǔtōnghuà/, /Hàn/yǔ/, or /Zhōng/wén"]", known in outside the mainland where the overseas Chinese live as "/[Huá/Yǔ/ or /Gāo/Yǔ/]", such as in Taiwan, Hongkong and Singapore, etc, and known as "Mandarin" to the non-native speakers of Chinese. In this thesis, I use the term of "Chinese" to address the language.

**Chinese Pronunciation**

Chinese sounds are represented by /Pīnyīn/, the official phonetic system of Romanizing Chinese, which helps to learn the pronunciation of the language. Three major component parts make up a syllable in spoken Chinese. They are consonants (referred as ‘initials’ – /Shēng/Mù/ in Chinese, altogether thirty-eight in number), vowels (referred as ‘ finals’ – /Yǔn/Mù/ in Chinese, altogether twenty-one in number), and tones (four tones plus a neutral tone, there is a tone to every syllable). A syllable
can work without consonants, but not without vowels. This is why Chinese is said to be a vowel-dominated language. A compound vowel may "consist of two vowels or a vowel with a nasal sound, which is treated as one unit" (Qian, 1996). Chinese has no distinctively voiced consonants as most European languages do. Though /PinYin/ symbols are almost the same as English letters, they sound different from their English counterparts.

*Chinese Writing System*

Unlike most European languages, Chinese is a language possessing both tones (different tones make differences in meanings) and characters (called Zi in Chinese) which make it extraordinary. It is described to be monosyllabic, of about 400 basic monosyllables to create words. However, it is not the case any more. Since modern Chinese tends to be polysyllables, and this disyllabic compound turns to be the most prevalent word form (Li & Thompson, 1979).

There goes a myth that Chinese characters are pictographic, which means that every character represents a picture. This is true to those characters that have evolved from pictures, which only comprise a small part of what are popular used characters at present. The remaining vast majority of the characters are pictophonetic characters which consist of a radical and a phonetic element. While the radical often implies the meaning of a character, and the phonetic element indicates its original pronunciation.
which may, or may not, correspond to its modern pronunciation” (Yao, et al.1997, p.15).

For characters, each is made up of certain strokes, the total number of which is around 30 with 11 basic ones, and the strokes are written in order. If one is aware of the strokes, components and construction of characters, it will mean no burden at all. As for the pictographic characters, it is suggestive to memorize them associating with the things they stand for.

Even though there are over 50,000 characters, only about 5,000 – 8,000 are in common use and merely a mastery of 2,000 to 3,000 is fundamental for everyday purposes. For native speakers, we believe that the more characters one acquires, the more literate one becomes. Children at school are taught /Pīn/Yīn/ first. Little by little, characters are introduced, and the textbooks are progressively presented in characters, showing new characters with /Pīn/Yīn/ on top of them. Primary school graduates learn around 2,500 characters, while college graduates boost the number to around 3,500.

*Chinese as a Second Language (CSL)*

When Chinese is taught outside China, it is commonly presented in the traditional way of starting with /Pīn/Yīn/, and gradually with the introduction of characters as our children do: /Pīn/Yīn/ - characters - sentences – text, coupled by pattern drills and grammar explanations. Since characters seem difficult to remember and write, most of
the non-native learners of Chinese rely too much on /Pinyin/, some even cannot write characters though are able to read some after several years of study of Chinese, which is not coherent with their speaking ability. For part of the reason, a few campuses start the program with two tracks: one is for true beginners while the other is bilingual especially designed for those who have a certain kind of comprehension and speaking skills, but lack of equivalent understanding of grammar and equivalent competence in reading and writing (as in the cases of Stanford and UC Davis). One more feature of Chinese is that there are cases of two different characters sharing the same /Pinyin/ with the same tone. One will easily get lost if he/she does not see the character from its context. Therefore at college level overseas, I would recommend to begin Chinese with characters, with learning /Pinyin/ only as a tool to assist pronunciation, as time goes by, character training should be more stressed. Some of the learners I work with confirm that learning characters helps memory and it is fun and enjoyable because as long as they understand the meaning of each component of the character, characters won’t be a problem at all.

“Chinese has the reputation of being a hard and unfathomable language”

(DeFrancis, 1984, p.51). It is grouped into the “most difficult” languages by English speakers, (according to the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, California),
because of the time it takes an English speaker to get the same level as the other languages. In fact, "Chinese have no more difficulty in learning to speak than do others born into one of the thousands of other linguistic environments around the world" (ibid). It is less uninflected, with no inflected verbs, no genders, no articles, no moods, no agreement and no plurals. Compared to English, Chinese verbs do not indicate tense, person or number, or voice distinction as English verbs do. And the sentence is usually arranged in a subject – verb – object order basically, and is of the “topic-comment type”. Unlike English, which is a sentence-oriented language, Chinese is more tending to be context-oriented (DeFrancis, 1984, p.49-50).

Some Practices

An independent study, *Chinese Programs in the Bay Area*, I did in the summer of 2002, which was mentioned in chapter I and which will be frequently referred to in subsequent sections of this paper, found that some of Chinese programs are successful, which gave me many hints in designing the course. Take Stanford, for example. Their program for advanced language maintenance in Chinese language as well as other Asian languages aims at providing an opportunity for enthusiasts of Chinese with advanced language ability to maintain their fluency by talking to each other. Interested parties usually meet twice a week, during lunch break, when a native speaker acts as a
main speaker lead discussions on selected topics. Films and videotaped television programs from China are provided for enjoyment and appreciation (http://www.stanford.edu/dept/CEAS/general.htm). The advanced levels at most of the campuses enjoy more flexible teaching methodology and materials – movies, on-line learning and other resources as supplementary, coupled with textbooks. From the intermediate level and above, all programs integrate culture awareness into language teaching, exposing the learners more aspects of the social and cultural aspects, which make language learning more understandable and meaningful. A flourishing Chinese program such as that of Stanford exemplifies that, “Chinese is an instrument for communication, and to teach Chinese is thus to make a commitment to assist students in acquiring communicative abilities” (Chu, 1996, p155).

**Conclusion**

It was beyond the scope of both this chapter and my personal present skill to scrutinize in detail and envelop every current phase regarding second language learning, as it is well understood that second language learning is multifaceted. This chapter simply intended to present some major theories and principles related to the project; the theories mentioned were far from complete. With the fast progress in underlining human abilities of learning languages, taking into consideration the
complexity of learning a second language, there should be no one best or preferred
theory to solely rely on. No single theory would work well all the time. We might not
lose ourselves within the multiplicity of theories in believing one theory and ignoring
the other. Language is living and changing as the time goes. No single theory works
perfectly all the time, and human learning is far more complicated. It is also
"dangerous to rely only on theory" (Krashen, 1981). It is the instructor's responsibility
to present a language course integrating the characteristics of the learners, the target
language, its practice and the culture that matures the target language. Learning one's
native language needs a whole lifetime, let alone learning a second language. To
anticipate the conclusion, I would like to end this chapter with what Ehrman proposes,

“Our goal as teachers should be not only to provide students with content but also
to enable them to continue to learn in our area of knowledge after they leave us.
This is especially important for language learning in which the skill is likely to be
applied in settings where there is no teacher. Learning strategies are a way for
students to reach the point where support can be withdrawn. Appropriate
strategies are the techniques students use to become independent learners. For this
reason, effective teaching includes helping students learn how to learn” (1996,
p.177).
Chapter III  Methodology

The identification of what is a realistic goal in foreign language teaching,
coupled with students' goals and expectations should form the bases for a
realistic foreign language curriculum (Gingras, 1978, p. ix)

The purpose of the course, A Course of Independent Study for English Speakers of
Chinese after Intermediate Level, as acknowledged in Chapter I, was to guide
independent learners to learn Chinese beyond the basics. After the course, I would like
to see the Chinese language learners feel more comfortable with the language study
and their Chinese language performance mostly accounted, if not equal, to their
competence. I had explained that I came up with the idea of the project while helping
some learners with their independent study. It was bred and born during our practice,
was developed as we proceeded, and at the time of writing, I was still considering
making amendments and exploring ways of improving it. Below was a sketch of how
the course came into being.

Getting Started

There were four learners I worked with in fall of 2001. One had studied in Taiwan
on an exchange program for one year; two had studied in Mainland China for one year
(one of whom was only a high school student), and a fourth-one a Chinese American
who spoke Chinese at home. Three of them were full-time CSUMB students. We worked on the book, Speaking Chinese about China (话说中国) (1985), assigned by the instructor at that time. The book was the syllabus and all we did was to proceed with one chapter after another. The book was written in 1985 and used by the Defense Language Institute, in Monterey. "It is a good book, but it is not suitable for me." "I need something practical that can help me with both the language maintenance and language development." Some learners commented as we continued. Something functional and practical that enabled them to perform well when going to China (as they wished) and walking around Chinese community should be introduced, I suspected.

In the spring of 2002, the high school girl left for college, and the Chinese American boy transferred to another campus. The other two remained, who were also my participants in this project. Because of conflicting time schedules, they had their independent study respectively with me, and this time they picked up their learning materials and scheduled the study to their own preferences. In addition to the two of them, I also interviewed other two who were at Chinese 201 level, to find out what their satisfactions and dissatisfactions with their learning situation and their
expectations of the course I was designing. Their wishes and propositions sketched the framework of my project.

The first participant I interviewed took Chinese classes partly because of her major requirements, and partly because she had learned some Chinese when she was in China and would like to advance her Chinese level. She planned to do some kind of job of international trading or international human relations. She graduated in spring 2002.

She thought she should put emphasis on writing and composition, which she thought was a higher level of learning a language. She felt lost since she had nothing to guide her study. She enjoyed studying in a group but also preferred learning on her own, at home. The important thing for her was to have a syllabus or guidebook for her independent study. She said:

*There is nothing written back to guide your study, so I have to decide what I think is best for me in the classes. That's the best way for me to learn. If there is process or ...something I can follow.*

When we began working in the spring of 2002, she took charge of her own learning. She thought she needed to learn the latest news, the situation in China, keeping her knowing the trendy expressions in Chinese. So she sometimes listened to the radio broadcast – the Voice of America (VOA). She admitted it helped a lot, in listening, reading and writing. She downloaded the news as well from the websites
before we met and we discussed the clippings together. She was pretty sure that she could learn the language through independent study, as long as she had a basis and guidance. In her words, “You need a basis. After that, students will be able to study alone, as Independent Study. For somebody who has studied the language for several years, it is useful.”

She also voiced she needed a program designed to develop her speaking skill. As she continued,

*I think it is better to do listening by Independent Study, and then I could probably do, you know, reading, and something else. As for speaking, I guess you can develop some programs... talking to the persons, individuals, as a part of learning experience. Yeah, I think Independent Study would probably suit reading and writing, compositions. I need to learn do conversation, and need to learn what will not be covered in the class, the composition. I like listening. I like listening to Voice of America, because it’s about real situation. And I need individual teaching, but I also need to learn by myself, on my own, alone.*

She reasoned that at her level, she should know more how to write the characters. She needed more practice on it. However no one had showed her that.

Another fact that bothered her about taking the independent study was the time. Her Chinese level was a bit higher than those of intermediate, but to some extent she could not study alone. She wanted to study together with someone equal to her level at school time. She had no choice but taking the independent study, because not enough enrollment to have a class.
I think it is hard for other people to come for the Chinese class here because it is at nighttime. If you do not have time at nighttime, you need to take Independent Study. And you need a guide. I don’t have a guide. I don’t know what the study means.

Her choice of downloading learning materials from the websites in Chinese proved of help. She knew the current issues in English already and it helped her comprehend the same topics in Chinese. Language learning with current awareness home and abroad was attained simultaneously. She urged me to provide more websites in Chinese to the learners like her since it was most authentic and up-dated.

The second participant chose a book she had studied in Taiwan which covered a range of topics concerning daily life. The reason for her to take the Independent Study was similar to that of the first participant - no class at her level was available. She intended to go back to China, either teaching ESL or to begin her own business. One more reason that motivated her going on learning was that she had a particular interest in Chinese Culture. She practiced Martial Arts and Qigong.

She was not satisfied with her studies, because she did not practice more -- not enough time. Besides, she felt anxious, was eager to speak out and produce. She also thought she was able to self study vocabularies and characters but needed more conversations when doing Ind. Study with me. All in all, she needed to improve her
Chinese language performance in communication. She explained, "I have the foundation, that's why I am anxious to speak."

When asking for her expectation of the Independent Study course, she told me, "Well, first you have to decide on a book. I mean, continuing learning the characters."

As for the teacher's part, she commented that it was just a matter of "speaking and listening, a kind of pronunciation." For the nature of Independent Study, her response was, "It doesn't matter where you have Independent Study, I mean, where it is. Even in the classroom."

She also suggested that she should "sit down every morning and learn," which I concluded that for Independent Study learners, learning time should be secured and addressed in the syllabus. We were doing the third semester Independent Study together when the project was undergoing.

The third participant, who had taken Chinese 101 and 102, was doing Independent Study of Chinese 201 with me in the fall 2002, and the fourth was at class at intermediate level (Chinese 201) when I wrote the course.

One of them picked up Chinese because he thought it interesting, he wanted to learn about the culture and fulfill the university-learning requirement as the same time.
He was in his second academic year of learning the language and he really hoped to go on to an advanced level when I interviewed him. He encouraged me that the course I was designing would be really helpful and he would take it. As a matter of fact, he was considering majoring in World Languages and Cultures. He was an active self-leaner; he usually demanded more conversations, unlike the others of his level, who brought their homework to me. He was not very happy about the situation then and felt he could take in more and the input from the class seemed insufficient for him. He uttered,

_I really didn’t take a lot. This is... I don’t think I learned as much as I would like to take. It’s okay, but not as much as I want. There are people always slow down the other people. The teacher seems she doesn’t care. ... It’s not really challenging._

He did not think languages were difficult to learn. He took Japanese as well in the fall of 2002. As for his Chinese learning, he preferred more emphasis on speaking, “I want to travel around China and talk to people.” His summer trip (2002) to Taiwan even stimulated his enthusiasm of learning it well. He expected the Independent Study would strengthen his conversational communication performance.

The explanation he gave me of doing independent study was, “I want to take it this way so the other people won’t slow me down. If I am in the classroom, the people will all keep talking; you won’t get much attention.”
He gave the suggestion of "being more strict" with the learners for the course to be designed. Otherwise, in his word, "I will lose motivation." What he implied as well was that it needs a strong motivation to further pursue the language learning after the completion of ULR. Motivation works and should be cherished, especially for those who will take the Independent Study.

To the fourth participant, Chinese was more difficult because it sounded different from English, unlike French and Spanish he had learned years ago. ...It was like learning two different languages, in learning spoken language and also in learning written language; it really had no relation between the two, according to him. He also attributed to the difficulty to his age. "The younger you are, the easier you learn. The best time is to be a kid." He learned French pretty easy when he was at High School but not as easily when he picked up Spanish 20 years later.

He had been to China on business before and he loved to visit it again. It was also his hope someday he would work there. In addition, he tried hard to be communicative with his girlfriend in Chinese. Before he took any class one year ago, he could only produce a few words. He said:

*Now actually I know a lot. But it's not enough to converse in a normal situation, not enough to be understood. If somebody knows exactly what I know, he knows which words I know, which words I don't know... and let me do conversations just around the words.*

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He would like to learn speaking first, and try to pick up some written language, too. He was annoyed that he learned the written language slower.

He did not think he would stay long enough to take the course I was designing. But he remembered when he learned Spanish, the language was picked up while developing culture awareness, which he thought it a better way to learn a language. He suggested if “there were a book that teaches the language more in a context of Chinese culture, about life in China, or something like that,” it would work better.

For independent study of language, he held that the book was the teacher and that unless he had a tutor around or somebody who spoke the language, who would correct him when he made mistakes, it would not work. One option was that having a couple of learners gather together who did independent study and practiced with each other that would be helpful. Language to him meant there should be someone to interact.

One more suggestion from the fourth participant was that maybe the students form a club whose function was not only to help the learners of Chinese but the international students from China, both sides would benefit from each side by offering tutoring Chinese and helping settle down and go around, etc.
The goal of the course, to develop the abilities in both speaking and writing communication skills at a higher level of study while having their current levels maintain, was thus drawn from the conversations with the participants.

**Preparing and Participating**

Prompted by my audience, I set to do some more investigation for my course, by formal and informal dialogues with the faculties/administration staff at the Institute for World Languages and Cultures in order to ascertain the situation in the past and present.

Consulting with the Director of the Institute of World Languages and Cultures, I knew that there had never been such a syllabus, such a course - *A Course of Independent Study for English Speakers of Chinese after Intermediate Level*, at CSUMB. I further was informed that learners were usually organized in a group under independent study when there was not enough an enrollment for a class as in the case where I became a tutor. If there were a syllabus ready, it would be tried when requested. I also learned that there have been independent study groups at different levels every semester since the Chinese program started at CSUMB.

Textbooks in use at both elementary and intermediate levels were a series titled *Integrated Chinese*, which were adopted by many campuses with Chinese programs.
(from the independent study research I did). After fully and successfully mastering the series (i.e., after Chinese 202), the learners should meet the minimum university language requirement of CSUMB. Their communicative competency is the ACTFL Intermediate-low level or ACTFL Novice-High level, which means satisfactory cultural appropriateness of using usually respectful, accepted and appropriate vocabulary, expressions and body language for individuals and situations, and ability to explain the reason for use, coupled with the satisfactory cultural sensitivity of describing cultures without bias or stereotype, and beginning to understand perspectives from the position of a person of the target language (insider). In addition, the learners come out with the satisfactory depth of understanding of that culture by demonstrating the ability to describe multiple examples of cultural practices and explain the historical origins and significance to the culture (Language ULR, Minimum Foreign Language Proficiency for CSUMB Graduates).

Clarifying the above and in combination with the data I obtained, I set the goal of the course: to help develop functional Chinese skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing, at the same time help language maintenance with cultural awareness. It was also hoped to model the learners a way of becoming language self-learners in their future study.
Developing

Materials and Resources

It is widely acknowledged that any kind of learning that takes place is built on previous learning (Diaz-Rico & Weed, 1995, p.230), and language is acquired by understanding the language that is 'a little beyond' the current level of competence" (Krashen, 1981, p.102-103). The Chinese Language level of the learners at CSUMB as implied from the data was that their comprehension ability exceeded their communication ability, and their Chinese communicative performance was less efficient than their competence. Part of the reasons, I reasoned from the data, was due to poverty of authentic input and genuine practice, improper learning instruction and lacking of suitable learning environments.

We needed a “book” that served us well, a book that could engage the learners, which could interest them. The book used from DLI did not magnetize my audience as it could be told from the data; on-line materials which were excellent as a supplement but looked inadequate because they were not designed to accommodate educational settings. This was a course and there should be a formal textbook for the learners to be able to thumb through before and after sessions, which they felt comfortable with and could find entertainment in it; simply reviewing old textbooks could only make
language maintenance but could do little in making any progress. Again from the
independent study done in the summer of 2002, I noticed that some campuses use the
(Xing, et al., 1996), as their textbook at the stage (as founded in Berkeley, UC Davis
and San Jose State Univ.). I recommended it to one of the learners as we worked
together for independent study in the fall 2002 at this level, and asked her opinion on
the book. She liked it and thought it more helpful and functional. We tried and went
through parts of it together while we used the book assigned by the instructor. So I
decided to select this book as a basic learning resource for the course. One more thing I
should address here was that I grouped the lessons into some categories according to
the activities and assignments, which I thought would engage the learners in learning
the texts instead of mechanically covering the book and soon forgetting about it.

*Beyond the Basics, Communicative Chinese for Intermediate/Advanced Learners,*

“aims to develop competence in advanced Chinese with an emphasis on the
improvement of spoken language skills. It is designed for students who have studied
for two years in a regular college program”, “the materials and activities in this book
are designed to help students actively engage in constant meaningful communication
within various contexts, to meet individual characteristics and needs, contextualize
linguistic patterns, sustain students' motivation to communicate” (Xing, et al., 1996).

Another feature of the textbook is that both simplified and traditional characters
are presented which provides equal opportunity for all students of different preferences
on the two styled characters, which also agrees with Integrated Chinese.

One book should not be the sole content of a course. The independent study also
informed me that the advanced level students were able to enjoy more flexible teaching
methodology and materials – movies, on-line learning and other resources as
supplementary. From the intermediate level and above, nearly all programs integrated
culture awareness into language teaching, exposing the learners more aspects of the
social and cultural aspects. From their practice and what we had done, I located some
Chinese websites that would seem workable and suitable for my target audience as
additional learning materials.

First, I recommended the website of Voice of America in Chinese, which we tried
worldwide, which kept the surfers updated of the world affairs while learning Chinese.
It also had relevant English version; besides, one could turn on the radio and listen to
the live broadcasting in Chinese.
My second suggestion was two Chinese newspapers on line, China Daily at http://www.chinadaily.net/worldrep/index.html and People Daily at http://www.peopledaily.net. It was well believed and accepted that reading authentic newspapers would contribute to the enhancement of language learning, both to the native speakers and to the second language learners. These two newspapers were most authoritative and widely distributed nationwide which informed readers of from daily life of ordinary people to official events concerning every aspects of the society. They supplied native speakers of Chinese overseas with most current trends at their hometown. They were presented in most popular language, for the learners of Chinese they were valuable resources to get to know, to be familiar with at least and to learn some “cool” stuff in Chinese.

Two learning tools of websites designed especially for Chinese language learners were also on the recommendation list, which could be found at http://www.asiasource.org/reference/language.cfm/chinese and http://www.wku.edu/~yuanh/China/language.html respectively. They had tutoring lessons on writing characters, pronunciation, telling stories of historical interest and culture. I had referred the websites to some of the learners for their references and their responses were positive, because they were tailored for those who learned Chinese as a
second language. As most of my audience was on the way to be advanced learners and from my own experiences of learning a second language, I assumed it was time to help them get acquainted with Chinese idioms and proverbs. Like idiomatic expressions of any other languages, Chinese idioms and proverbs were enriched with historical and cultural backgrounds and meanings, widely received in life. The proper use of them demonstrated a speaker's knowledge and competence of the language. So I introduced the website http://www.usc.edu/dept/ealc/chinese/Reading/chengyu.htm for the learners as supplementary learning materials.

The three independent learners working with me in the fall of 2002, who were at different levels, responded that the websites were informative and they would like to surf them to assist their learning, although they were also concerned with the difficulty in doing this alone. I showed them how to find something suitable to their levels and we enjoyed our trying.

Activities and Assignments

The ultimate objective of this course was to develop communication skills in Chinese after intermediate level. Therefore, some activities that would boost such abilities were planned during the course, like field-visits to the Chinese community in this area, interviewing native speakers of Chinese, watching Chinese video tapes,
presentations, turning-in reports, keeping diaries and meeting in groups were arranged. Since it was an independent study, learners might progress through their learning process at their own pace with some set deadlines.

We learn to talk by talking to each other. To be fluent in Chinese and to be confident speakers of Chinese, learners should be exposed as much as possible to the community of native speakers. China Town in San Francisco, Chinese shops and restaurants where native Chinese speakers could be found, are wonderful places to pay a visit, to gain the entrance to know about the country and try to understand the people. In addition, communicating with native speakers for academic purposes is another approach for the learners to improve their language performances. Activities of field visiting and interviewing native speakers of Chinese were thus projected.

In the course, two movies in Chinese were introduced – One was The Joy Luck Club, which told stories of four Chinese American families whose extraordinary lives were filled with joy and heartbreak. The dialogues are both in Chinese and English changeably as the plot going on, which make it easy for English speakers to enjoy. Another movie, Men, Women, Food and Drink (饮食男女), describes the ordinary life of a group of Chinese people in Hong Kong. The dialogues are in Chinese at normal speed. It reveals the real life of Chinese, of the youth and of the senior, which opens a
different window to know the culture and customs. The learners could understand the
two stories since they both have English subtitles. I chose the two stories that have
bilingual help not only to practice the learners listening comprehension but also to
promote their understanding and appreciation towards Chinese culture. Students’
Chinese oral presentations and essays to be turned in could demonstrate the learners’
appreciation of Chinese people and culture.

Ability to be commutative in written Chinese was another wish of my
participants. Sometimes one could not put in words what one spoke, as a Chinese
saying goes, 眼高手低, which means being fastidious but incompetent. The activity of
keeping diaries aimed to supervise the learners set time lots of thinking in Chinese and
practicing writing, at the same time to achieve the goal of maintaining their language.
This assignment also served for the purpose of instructor keeping record of the
learners’ progress.

Four times group meetings were scheduled for exchanging learning experiences
and appreciating one another’s achievement, and for conversations with the instructor.
The desire of interacting with one another from the same level was repeatedly
expressed from the data, and it did prove to be of a constructive way of learning a
language when we had group study in fall of 2001.
I explained above the orientation of my thinking through the course. Then the course - *A Course of Independent Study for English Speakers of Chinese after Intermediate Level*, arrived in the next chapter.
Chapter IV  A Course of Independent Study

for English Speakers of Chinese after Intermediate Level

This chapter constitutes two parts, the first part of which is the syllabus of the course and the second is some suggestions for the prospective instructor who uses this syllabus.

The Syllabus

- contact information for the instructor
- course description
- expected learning outcomes
- learning materials and resources
- activities and assignments
- course schedule
- testing and evaluation and
- some other concerns

Contact Information

Instructor: Tel:
E-mail address: Office hours:
Office:
Course Description

Welcome to the Independent Study of Chinese 397. This course is for students who have completed Chinese 202, or have the equivalent listening, speaking, reading and writing proficiency of the language. It is designed to review and develop you the above-mentioned language skills, strengthen your communicative competence in Chinese, as well as maintain your present language levels, while at the same time trying to help you become a language self-learner. To be a language self-learner, your courage is much admired and your persistent endeavor is appreciated, as we all understand that you not only need motivation, but also need to keep it strong through the whole course in order to make a success of your Chinese language learning.

This is an Independent Study, which means you are supposed to study most of the time by yourselves. You are welcome and strongly encouraged to meet the instructor whenever you feel like (by appointments), discussing the learning process, learning materials, learning difficulties and other concerns, or just to practice speaking, since both sides share the same obligation and have the same strong desire for you to succeed. You are also advised to meet the tutor(s) at least once a week by appointment with your learning problems or just to practice speaking Chinese. You are expected to communicate with the instructor / tutor in Chinese as much and as often as possible.
Peers/Groups will be gathered together for group activities once a month, for interactions, oral/written presentations and learning experience exchanges. 加油！

*Expected Learning Outcomes*

You are expected to reach the Intermediate-Mid /High according to the ACTFL (American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages) proficiency guideline. For details, please see the Appendix or refer to ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines at http://www.sil.org/lingualinks/LANGUAGELEARNING/OtherResources/ACTFLProficienyGuidelines/TheACTFLGuidelines.htm

A: 听-You will understand basic ideas and more details of associated discourse on different topics applicable in daily life.

B: 说-You will feel more comfortable in talking to the native speakers of Chinese on topics relating to different social situations, you will express yourself more clearly and efficiently, both your communicative skills and strategies will be developed.

C: 读-You will be able to read and understand Chinese newspapers and other authentic materials and get additional information you need, your reading strategies will also be further acquired.
D: ½-You will write at length with sufficient vocabulary and proper writing style on familiar topics such as visiting/interview reports, journals, reflection papers and articles.

E: You will be able to use the computer to communicate in Chinese.

F: You will be able to surf websites in Chinese for research and entertainment.

G: Your understanding and insights into the nature of various aspects of Chinese society, including geography, history, politics, traditions and customs, economy and education will be fostered.

Learning Materials and Resources

1. *Beyond the Basics: Communicative Chinese for Intermediate/Advanced*  
   Learners Cheng and Tsui Company, 1996, Author: Jianhua Bai, Juyu Sung, and Janet Zhiqun Xing, edited by Janet Z. Xing (ISBN: 0887272266, available at [http://ccsf.edu/Department/Language-Lab/library/chbook.htm](http://ccsf.edu/Department/Language-Lab/library/chbook.htm)) or, any other materials of similar level to your preferences, with the acknowledgement from the instructor.


3. Supplementary Online materials and help
4. Tips for learning Chinese:

- All learning is based on the previous learning (温故而知新).
  While you go on with new learning materials, try to connect it with what you have learned before, such as a character, a phrase or a sentence being used in the previous contexts.

- Try to make as many Chinese-speaking friends as possible, and talk to them whenever you get the chance. Keep in mind that you learn to talk by talking.

- Language, like any other knowledge, cannot be learned in a day. Plan and use your time wisely and I expect you to spend at least one hour a day on it (you may listen to the tape for a while, imitate the sounds...
and read aloud to yourself. It helps build your language efficiency.

- Try to find what type of learner you are: a visual, auditory or tactile learner. Go and visit the website

http://valencia.cc.fl.us/studentsuccess/barsch/BarschInventory.htm, it will help you understand whether you learn best through seeing, hearing or writing. My own experience as a second-language learner is that I learn best by applying the three plus speaking, "making noises", which I find helpful.

5. Video tapes are reserved at the instructor's / person in charge. You may exchange them by contacting the instructor/ person in charge (contact information available at the Institute of World Languages and Cultures).

Activities & Assignments

1. Field-visit This first part of the activity intends to refresh what you learned at the elementary level and intermediate level, and further enable you excellence on the functional language skills of ordering at a restaurant and doing shopping; the second part of the activity will enhance you ability in practical situations, both of which will empower your competence in utilizing Chinese in authentic situations. (Outcomes A, B, D and E)
1-1. You, as a customer, are to dine at one Chinese restaurant and to go shopping at one Chinese shop that has Chinese speakers working there. Take orders and do some shopping, making conversations with them. Submit two Visit Reports on ordering and shopping respectively, providing the names and locations of the places, and the time you did.

You may need to review Lesson 1, L3, L9, and L12 in Level 1 of Integrated Chinese, and L6 in the assigned book.

1-2. You, as a reporter, need to know a native speaker's biography by conducting an interview for 7 - 10 minutes in Chinese, turn in the report and present it at group meeting to your peer students. You may interview the instructor, other Chinese faculty on campus, Chinese students, or any Chinese speaker of your acquaintance. You need to review Lesson 1, L2, L4, L8, L20 and L22 in Level 1 of Integrated Chinese and finish L2 and L4 in the assigned book.

In the report, you need to cover the interviewee's education background, working experience, birth of place, the time he/she came, the major he/she studied and school attended or the work he/she did before and what he/she is doing now,
the name of the school he/she went to/is going to in the U.S., major, places he/she has been to in the U.S. and the hobby / hobbies of the interviewee's.

Suggestions for doing the activity 1-2:

- Be prepared, having your interview questions ready and practicing them before hand.

- Be flexible, though all the answers should be sought, they can be asked in different order and adjust to what responses you get.

- Be confident and do not be afraid. Asking the other party to slow down the speech speed or repeat if needed.

You may begin your conversation by self-introduction, telling them the purposes of doing it to get them understand your situation. You should make an appointment with the interviewee if necessary. You may find the following questions helpful in the interview,

- 请问你什么时候来美国的?

- 来美国之前, 你做过什么?

- 你从中国什么地方来?

- 你的老家是什么地方?

- 你在中国上了哪所学校? 学什么的?
2. *Chinese Proverbs/Idioms* Chinese proverbs/idioms are excellent teaching materials for intermediate-advanced Chinese learners. They are enriched with historical and cultural background, and the proper usage of Chinese idioms also demonstrates the speaker's knowledge and competence of Chinese. The more you appropriately use the idioms / proverbs in your daily life, the higher performance you prove. It also helps increase your vocabulary and exercise your memory. Go and visit the website [http://www.usc.edu/dept/ealc/chinese/Reading/chengyu.htm](http://www.usc.edu/dept/ealc/chinese/Reading/chengyu.htm) and learn (which means you not only know the meanings but can apply them properly) one proverb a week (at least for a total of 30 proverbs) and please have it record in your journal that is to be turned in every Monday. (Outcomes F and G)
To demonstrate your mastery of each proverb, we mean you should know how to write it with /Pīn yīn/ on top of each relative character. In addition, you should give one or two sentences by using it, preferably, your own sentences, with English counterparts if possible.

3. Presentation & Article One oral presentation is expected based on the broadcast on the websites of VOA and one article based on the newspapers in Chinese; go and visit http://www.voanews.com/chinese/

http://www.chinadaily.net/worldrep/index.html and http://www.peopledaily.net, pick up some topic(s) which interests you and read it. It may be about the current issues of the world, the present situation in China or any other nations. (This activity may be changed on to a required topic/situation if the instructor feels necessary to.) The presentation should be no less then five minutes and the article should be around 300 words. For these assignments, the familiarity with L10 and L11 is necessary.

4. A Chinese Journal Keep one journal each week in Chinese. This activity serves dual purposes. One is to track your processing with the textbook and let both you and the instructor know your progress with your learning, your situation and what should be improved in the practice of the course; your
journal is a valuable source for us. The second purpose is to exercise your
writing skill by communicating in written Chinese between you and the
instructor. In your journal, you should cover

4-1. The textbook material you learned in the previous week;

4-2. The proverb you picked up and examples/sentences of using it;

4-3. Your reflections on the textbook, assignments, activities or simply your
daily routines.

Any other aspects are equally welcomed in your journal, for example, a
Chinese website you visited, a person you got to know, a piece of news that
interested you, or a movie you saw. Since this is a weekly journal, the date and
the day of the week should be seen. Each journal should be turned in by email
every Monday and you will get feedback in the following day. (Outcomes D and
E)

For this activity, you may need to review Lesson 3, L8 in Level 1 of
Integrated Chinese and go through L1 and L12 in the assigned book. If you
cannot find a proper word in Chinese that expressing your intention, try to use
/Pinyin/ first, then use the English equivalent (but, overuse of /Pinyin/ will
degrad your grade!).

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5. **Group Discussion** One group discussion will be held at a group meeting from the videos of your choice. This activity is to build up your four skills of the language: listening, speaking, reading and writing. You may give others the account of your concerns and feedback on watching it/them.

Encouragingly, you would suggest an episode from the story for others to share. The following sentence structures may help you start your argument:

- 我喜欢看……, 因为……
- ……这个人物很有吸引人, 因为他/她……
- 我建议再看一遍……部分, 因为……

(Outcomes A, B, C, D, E and G)

For this activity, you may find some clues and help from L3, L14 and L15 in the assigned book.

**Suggestions for activity:**

- Chose a topic that you are familiar with or already know something about.
- Make a list of what you want to argue, want to articulate; rehearse it before the class.
- There is no right or wrong with your recommendation, as long as you can make sense of it and let the others buy it.
- Express your points in simple Chinese, avoiding using the phrases and
  sentences you do not feel comfortable with.

Tentative Course Schedule

- Group/Peer meetings are in the afternoon of the last Friday of every month (if
  it is a holiday, then the previous day), from 1:30pm to 3:30pm, either the
  instructor or a tutor will be there with you. If you cannot make it, please
  contact us first in case we can make an adjustment which is convenient to all.

You are required to attend all these meetings since these are the only
opportunities for your peers to share your learning.

1. In the first meeting, we will do self-introductions and talk about how to
   conduct the field-visits.

2. In the second meeting, Restaurant / Shop visit report due.

3. In the third meeting, the biography of a native speaker of Chinese is
   due.

4. Presentation and essay (Activity 4) is due on the fourth meeting.

5. Group Discussion (Activity 5) will be held in the last group meeting
   (which is part of finals).

6. Finals will be carried out during the final assessment week. It will test
you listening, speaking and reading skills of Chinese which will
contribute to demonstrate the learning outcomes for the course.

祝你马到成功！😊

Testing and Evaluation

Students are expected to actively participate in activities and presentation, both of
which are parts of your performance and will contribute to your final grades.

Activity 1 20%
Activity 2 15%
Activity 3 15%
Activity 4 15%
Activity 5 10%

Course Participation and Performance 5%

Finals 20%

A+ = 100 – 98  B+ = 89 – 86  C+ = 79 – 76  D+ = 69– 66
A = 97 – 94  B = 85 – 83  C = 75 – 73  D = 65 – 63
A- = 93 – 90  B- = 82 – 80  C- = 72 – 70  D- = 62 – 60

Activity/Assignment Grading

Activity 1
Field visit: 10 – 9 points  Reports covered every elements required:

the names and locations of the places, the time of visiting, menu of ordering and prices, shopping list and prices, comments on the aspects such as the food and products, both people working there and visiting there, etc. Much elaboration of the activity.

Little bilingual or /Pinyin/ assistance.

8 – 5 points  Covered most elements required, introduced the places clearly and provided the contents of ordering menu and shopping list. Some personal reflections on the activity. A little bilingual or /Pinyin/ assistance.

4 – 1 point(s)  Provided the menu and shopping list, with little description of the activity. Some or more bilingual or /Pinyin/ assistance.

Interview: 10 – 9 points  The whole interview looked coherent and sentences were produced in a natural way. Got every bit of information addressed in the activity, and presented
it with few flaws. Little bilingual or /Pinyin/ assistance.

8 – 5 points Covered most of the information required and presented it smoothly. A few language mistakes. A little bilingual or /Pinyin/ assistance.

4 – 1 point(s) Got some information, presented it mostly. Some mistakes. Some or more bilingual or /Pinyin/ assistance.

Chinese Proverbs/Idioms (Activity 2)

15 – 13 points Kept 30, or more, proverbs and idioms in the journal with examples/sentences of his/her own, and with English equivalents.

12 – 10 points Recorded around 30 (more than 25) proverbs/idioms and had examples and sentences. Some English counterparts.

9 – 5 points Around 20 (more than 15) proverbs/idioms with some examples and sentences, with a few English translations.
4 – 1 point(s)  Some proverbs/idioms (around 10) with or without examples, sentences and English versions.

Presentation & Essay (Activity 3)

15 – 13 points  Both presentation and essay showed some insights of presenter on the issues picked up, presented in his/her own words, few grammar and linguistic errors. Little bilingual or /Pinyin/ assistance.

12 – 10 points  Both presentation and essay covered the main ideas of each issue, a few misuses of the language. A little bilingual or /Pinyin/ assistance.

9 – 5 points  Main topics were mentioned. Some mistakes, some bilingual or /Pinyin/ assistance.

4 – 1 point(s)  Main themes were not clearly conveyed and if without the assistance of English and /Pinyin/, assignment could hardly be done.

Journals  (Activity 4)

15 – 13 points  Each week a journal as required, covering the
progress with the textbook, proverbs/idioms
learning. Some accounts about daily life and other
aspects were recorded, covering a variety of topics
such as reading a book, visiting a Chinese website,
or watching a movie, in a standard written Chinese,
few mistakes. Turned in on time.

12 – 10 points One journal each week, recording the learning
progress, learning of the proverbs/idioms. Some
daily accounts. Might be turned in late but with
acceptable explanations.

9 – 5 points Not one journal a week, might be one every other
week sometimes, reporting learning progress in
learning and proverbs/idioms. A few times late
work.

4 – 1 point(s) Late work often, some journals. Repetition of work.

Group Discussion (Activity 5)

10 – 8 points A clear introduction of the story and in an
understood language.
7 – 5 points  A relative understandable introduction of the story.

4 -1 point(s)  Something about the story.

Notes

1) Since this is an independent study, you may progress at your own pace within the permit able time. However, you are expected to reserve at least one hour a day on the language. After three days without reading, talk becomes flavorless (A Chinese Proverb). Your consistent effort is crucial in your learning the language. Please submit your assignments on time as they are scheduled. Late work without any acceptable explanations will result in a reduction of your grade.

2) At this level of language learning, reviewing and making most use of what you have learned is as much a part of acquiring a language as covering new materials. Some activities and assignments are designed for the purpose of refreshing your memory, applying book knowledge in authentic situations, providing you opportunities of exhibiting your language skills. I did not require you to cover every lesson in the book, but rather I grouped the lessons and paced them in the assigned book task-based with the aim of making the textbook a tool for your language learning.
3. You need to listen to the audiotapes that go with the textbook every day. Turn your tape-recorder on whenever you have the chance and get you familiar with the text you are learning.

4. All assignments are accepted in printed or handwritten format (double-spaced please). Computer processed is encouraged (and can be turned in via e-mail). Also please be noticed that, if you could not do the assignment totally in Chinese, you are understandable by using bilingual assistance, though it is not much encouraged. If you do not have Chinese character font software at home, or this is your first time to use computer in Chinese, please come to the Language Lab and use the computers there, the student assistants will show you how to do it, the Lab is located at Blg.49.

(Open: Monday – Thursday 8:00am – 8:00pm

Friday 8:00am – 4:00pm)

5. Any events will be doubly announced both through e-mails and phone calls.

6. It is your responsibility to keep the instructor informed of your status of progress. You are encouraged to contact the instructor as often as you feel like to.

7. Students with disabilities who may need accommodations please do not
hesitate to contact the instructor, or contact:

Student_Disability_Resources@csumb.edu Phone: (831) 582-3672.

Prerequisite(s)

Chinese 202, or consent of instructor. For details, please contact Donaldo Urioste, Director of the Institute for World Languages and Cultures. Tel: (831) 582-3620/3863.

Location: Building 48.

For the Prospective Instructor(s)

This part spells out some suggestions for you, the future instructor(s), from a developer's standpoint. It discusses your role and relationship with the learners, the handling of the activities/assignments, the carryout of the learning materials and the finals/assessment arrangements.

This course, as the title suggested, *A Course of Independent Study for English Speakers of Chinese after Intermediate Level*, is to guide learners to learn Chinese independently beyond the basics, to improve their language performance. In order to ensure a smooth delivery of the course and in due course to achieve the course goals, I would like to make some suggestions as explicated below.

✓ For most non-native speakers, Chinese is not as difficult as it is said to be but it is challenging – so much to remember and such a different pronunciation!
What is much tougher for you, the instructor here is that there is little exposure to the language on this campus and, therefore, few opportunities for the learners to practice. Though this course is of "independent" study, the instructive use of the time when meeting the learners should make a difference. Hereafter, to make this course feasible and achievable, to make Chinese much easier and more enjoyable to learn, the role of the instructor is most important and essential. You are maybe the only native resource for the learners to easily get hold of, and you are a resource person and a cultural and linguistic informant. For language learning, it is more challenging for one to do Independent Study. The learner alone is very respectful in that he/she is highly motivated and strongly consistent. As educators, we should value their spirit, act as a cheerleader, make environment more favorable by providing any assistance for them to learn.

✓ You are also a cheerleader. You should reward the learners' sense of accomplishment constantly and acknowledge their progress by giving them appropriate feedback on their assignments, activities, examinations and other endeavors in learning Chinese. Encouragement is important to keep the learners going. Caring and strictness should be also balanced or the motivated
learners will get less motivated or even lose the interests in further pursuit.

✓ The syllabus is adjustable and you are welcome to make any alteration of it if you desire, based on the learners' factual situation you work with.

✓ The placement test As you may conclude from reading the syllabus, the prospective learners have been exposed the language for at least two academic years, or equivalent time period. To make sure the potential learners have the competence for taking the course, the learners have to prove their Chinese language level is at least intermediate-low, ready to go on further study either by showing they have done two consequent academic years of learning the language or taking a placement test of the level. The placement test taken both at CSUMB and some other places is acceptable.

✓ It is advisable to introduce the learners to each other before the course starts if they are available. In doing this, we wish they may get help from each other. It turns out that language learners at the same language level improve and benefit from one another by exchanging experiences and discussing with their peers.

✓ Textbook Besides Beyond the Basics, some other books at the same language level designed to reach a similar goal are also workable. From my
own experience, some learners prefer to choose their own textbook that
works for them, because they know themselves better. Before they start
working on it, you are expected to have a look at it in order to make certain of
its usability. The audiotapes that accompany the textbook are suggested to
purchase and make full usage.

✓ **Online learning materials** The websites of the Voice of America,

China Daily and People Daily are scheduled in the syllabus and have
assignments in order to ascertain the learners really go and visit. If some
important events take place or it happens to be an important date according to
the Chinese lunar calendar (such as Chinese festivals), we should suggest
them to do the surfing at a proper time to gain relevant culture awareness.

✓ At the first group meeting, you are encouraged to model the learners how to
conduct an interview in Chinese with a native speaker. They have learned
some useful sentence structures which will help them in doing it, but they still
need to have these modeled in a natural way. Some interview techniques and
communicative strategies may be borrowed, which we should remind them.

You can give an example of acting as a reporter, interviewing the learners,
showing them starting from a simple question and gradually leading to the
points.

✓ At every group meeting, textbook sections that need covering should be spelt out and some main points of grammar and linguistic concerns should also be addressed. You may refer to the appendix of Teaching Methodology Index in the textbook.

✓ The finals Finals has three parts, listening comprehension, oral communication and reading comprehension.

Part I. Listening comprehension, total 4 points

Listen to a tape recording, about 3 minutes long. Ask the learner(s) to report it in English (to be provided).

4-3 points Responded quick, reported correctly.

2 points Reported mostly correctly.

1 point Mentioned something about the topic.

Part II. Speaking, total 6 points

1. Ask the learner(s) to tell what he did yesterday, what he is doing today and what he will do tomorrow. – 3 points

3 points Correct usage of tenses, vocabulary and conjunction words, clear description.
2 points Usage of tenses, vocabulary and conjunction words were mostly correct.

1 point Some misusage of tenses, vocabulary and conjunction words.

2. Ask the learner(s) to ask something about a subject/topic.

Choose one of the followings. – 3 points

2-1. You graduated from an American school, ask the learner(s) to initiate a conversation about the school and your study there.

2-2. You have a daughter/son, let the learner(s) ask something about your daughter/son.

3. Any other topic(s) you choose as long as providing some background.

3 points All/most of the information of the topic should be addressed, no grammatical mistakes and correct usage of sentences and vocabulary.

2 points Covered more than half of the information of the subject, a few misuses of grammar or vocabulary.
1 point Knew how to ask some questions, some mistakes in grammar and vocabulary.

Part III. Reading comprehension (to be provided), total 10 points

10 points Got five questions right

8 points Got four questions right

6 points Got three questions right

4 points Got two questions right

2 points Got one question right
Chapter V  Discussion & Implications

This course came from the need of a group of learners at CSUMB, from their need for a guidebook to guide them in doing independent study in Chinese after intermediate level. The course was developed for them, or those like them, who wished to accelerate their Chinese language learning, and who wished to sustain their understanding and interest in Chinese culture by way of doing an independent study. What I had been trying was helping with their language maintenance and development, bridging them in achieving their goals of taking Chinese as a second language, channeling them toward a way of learning the language and culture in a more autonomous way.

Before I go to the discussion and implications, I have a disclaimer to make. Even though I attempted to define a concept of second language learning and teaching by developing an independent course of Chinese, the nature of language, the intricacy of second language learning and the unique function of second language teaching, all make it impossible to be fully defined and developed in one paper. This is because, in my view, taking into consideration the target language itself, the target language learners, the components in deciding a language course, and some other essentials that affect second language acquisition, there should be no course that works as a panacea.
for all learners, or for a small group, or even for a single person, or at any time, or at any place, or under any setting. Therefore, this course remains open to be evaluated and modified.

Course Evaluation

The effectiveness of the course could be decided based on the learners’ performances and assessments, and their evaluation of it when it is completed. After construction and implementation of the course, I would like to hear from the learners that their Chinese language skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing are developed, their empathy of the Chinese culture accrues as they have wished. If that is the case, the course is presumably effective; otherwise, the effectiveness of it should be debated and the course suspended. As the writer of the course, I will figure out the failures and limitations of it by having the learners give feedback informing me what fails them and why, and how to make change(s).

The instructor(s) and administrators of the program could also evaluate the course. Comments and feedback on the suitability and adaptation of it from their first-hand experience with the learners would be an asset in helping me to make the course more worth trying, in directing my future efforts. For instance, if the instructor(s) considers some activities and assignments are either lower or higher than
the learners' abilities by working with them and observing their performances, or the
learners feel uncomfortable with the materials and resources, I would like to have it
tailor and adjust to let the course more responsive to the learners.

Discussion and Implications

Language is knowledge accumulating over a long period. Like any other kind of
knowledge, it is a human construction (Duckworth, 1987, p.131). Learners can
understand more of a language and master it as they use it more. The activities and
assignments were thus decided in aiming to empower the learners to demonstrate their
capacity of handling the target language in all four-skill aspects (i.e. listening,
speaking, reading and writing), which also supplemented the textbook. In so doing can
we make the textbook more usable and language learning more functional.

The course rested on the belief that second language can be learned
independently, though with some constraints. First, the learners need a foundation
before embarking on studying autonomously; secondly, the learners need a passion for
learning it alone and are willing to take their own learning responsibilities; if both are
the case as the learners in this course, then last but not at least, there should be a
syllabus, even a course, or some template there, for the learners to follow, preferably,
with someone there to help. The course also rested on the disbelief that a textbook
should be the syllabus of a language course.

Language comes from the need of communication; communication can take place
either orally or written. To make communication happen, language should be learned
and taught in a communicative way. How one communicates proficiently relics on
one’s competence in linguistics, grammar literacy and knowledge of its culture, and on
the pedagogy that is used to introduce it as well. These concerns should be taken good
consideration when we develop a course. These components should complement one
another so that second language acquisition can happen productively.

This development of the course also made me think about how we should learn
and teach English as a second language back home. My own experience elaborated in
the first chapter painstakingly informed me how important it was to learn a second
language “properly” and rewardingly. It took me nearly twenty years to perceive that; I
would not like to see any other language learners make this long trip, like me, to reach
the same conclusion. In this regard, it is the instructor’s, the administrator’s
responsibility to ensure language learning taking place on the right track for our
students, so that they will cash in on the education they received when they go for a
future career.
When I thought through the course, I came to understand that the learners had more choices than a course, a program, did, since a program, a course, might not choose the learners, but the learners could select a course, a program. Given the present situation at CSUMB, there is little to do but make an adaptation of the circumstances such as the instructor, the program and the system to cater to the needs of the learners, no matter how small the population is. After all, it is the learners who learn, without whom a course comes from nowhere. So the essential task of a course is to make sure the learners are well served, make sure their expectations are met.

One thing I am sure about is that in doing this project, while I was, in the first place, trying to help others, I eventually helped myself -- my understanding of education has never been so effectively refined and furthered, my experiences both in learning and teaching have never been so logically associated, reflected and valued, my philosophy about language literacy, learning and teaching has never been so clarified and standardized, and I am certain that my future practices will be more strongly theory-orientated and aim-directed. Though, I am also, at the same time, intensely aware of my insufficiency in the field of language teaching pedagogy, so much to explore. This project leads me to a higher level of knowing myself and drives me to continue delving into deep in the field of curriculum and instruction.
Appendix
The ACTFL Guidelines
Listening

Intermediate-Mid

Able to understand sentence-length utterances which consist of recombination of learned utterances on a variety of topics. Content continues to refer primarily to basic personal background and needs, social conventions and somewhat more complex tasks, such as lodging, transportation, and shopping. Additional content areas include some personal interests and activities, and a greater diversity of instructions and directions. Listening tasks not only pertain to spontaneous face-to-face conversations but also to short routine telephone conversations and some deliberate speech, such as simple announcements and reports over the media. Understanding continues to be uneven.

Intermediate-High

Able to sustain understanding over longer stretches of connected discourse on a number of topics pertaining to different times and places; however, understanding is inconsistent due to failure to grasp main ideas and/or details. Thus, while topics do not differ significantly from those of an Advanced level listener, comprehension is less in quantity and poorer in quality.

Speaking

Intermediate-Mid

Able to handle successfully a variety of uncomplicated, basic, and communicative tasks and social situations. Can talk simply about self and family members. Can ask and answer questions and participate in simple conversations on topics beyond the most immediate needs; e.g., personal history and leisure time activities. Utterance length increases slightly, but speech may continue to be characterized by frequent long pauses, since the smooth incorporation of even basic conversational strategies is often hindered as the speaker struggles to create appropriate language forms. Pronunciation may continue to be strongly influenced by first language and fluency may still be strained. Although misunderstandings still arise, the Intermediate-Mid speaker can generally be understood by sympathetic interlocutors.
Intermediate-High

Able to handle successfully most uncomplicated communicative tasks and social situations. Can initiate, sustain, and close a general conversation with a number of strategies appropriate to a range of circumstances and topics, but errors are evident. Limited vocabulary still necessitates hesitation and may bring about slightly unexpected circumlocution. There is emerging evidence of connected discourse, particularly for simple narration and/or description. The Intermediate-High speaker can generally be understood even by interlocutors not accustomed to dealing with speakers at this level, but repetition may still be required.

Reading

Intermediate-Mid

Able to read consistently with increased understanding simple, connected texts dealing with a variety of basic and social needs. Such texts are still linguistically noncomplex and have a clear underlying internal structure. They impart basic information about which the reader has to make minimal suppositions and to which the reader brings personal interest and/or knowledge. Examples may include short, straightforward descriptions of persons, places, and things written for a wide audience.

Intermediate-High

Able to read consistently with full understanding simple connected texts dealing with basic personal and social needs about which the reader has personal interest and/or knowledge. Can get some main ideas and information from texts at the next higher level featuring description and narration. Structural complexity may interfere with comprehension; for example, basic grammatical relations may be misinterpreted and temporal references may rely primarily on lexical items. Has some difficulty with the cohesive factors in discourse, such as matching pronouns with referents. While texts do not differ significantly from those at the Advanced level, comprehension is less consistent. May have to read material several times for understanding.
Writing

Intermediate-Mid

Able to meet a number of practical writing needs. Can write short, simple letters. Content involves personal preferences, daily routine, everyday events, and other topics grounded in personal experience. Can express present time and at least one other time frame or aspect consistently, e.g., nonpast, habitual, imperfective. Evidence of control of the syntax of non-complex sentences and basic inflectional morphology, such as declensions and conjugation. Writing tends to be a loose collection of sentences or sentence fragments on a given topic and provides little evidence of conscious organization. Can be understood by natives used to the writing of non-natives.

Intermediate-High

Able to meet most practical writing needs and limited social demands. Can take notes in some detail on familiar topics and respond in writing to personal questions. Can write simple letters, brief synopses and paraphrases, summaries of biographical data, work and school experience. In those languages relying primarily on content words and time expressions to express time, tense, or aspect, some precision is displayed; where tense and/or aspect is expressed through verbal inflection, forms are produced rather consistently, but not always accurately. An ability to describe and narrate in paragraphs is emerging. Rarely uses basic cohesive elements such as pronominal substitutions or synonyms in written discourse. Writing, though faulty, is generally comprehensible to natives used to the writing of non-natives.

The ACTFL guidelines
http://www.sil.org/lingualinks/LANGUAGELEARNING/OtherResources/ACTFL_ProficiencyGuidelines/TheACTFLGuidelines.htm

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