



## **Textbook Writers' Perspectives on Theoretical Frameworks in Beginning and Intermediate Chinese Textbooks**

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### **Abstract**

This article explores textbook writers' perspectives on theoretical frameworks in beginning and intermediate Chinese textbooks. Four prominent textbook authors were interviewed, and modified structured interviews were used. Interview data reflect the following three trends. (1) Four textbook authors had different foci in applying in their textbooks widely accepted principles of second language acquisition and approaches to second language teaching. (2) While all four textbook authors guide the teaching of language structures by communicative functions and relate the teaching with culture, they use one of the two methods in the process: practicing language structures and then completing communicative activities or completing communicative activities to learn grammatical structures. (3) The four textbook authors show distinctive features in their textbooks: grounding communicative Chinese language instruction in U.S.-specific language, educational and social contexts; enabling communication through setting up frameworks of language structures; developing proficiency by providing relevant materials in practical and manageable steps; motivating students by engaging them in communicative activities. Pedagogical application of the above findings in teaching Chinese as a foreign language is discussed.

**Keywords:** *beginning and intermediate Chinese textbooks, theoretical frameworks, second language acquisition, second language teaching, textbook writers*

The field of teaching Chinese as a foreign language (CFL)<sup>1</sup> is developing rapidly with one result being that more and more materials, in particular textbooks, are being published for CFL learners at all proficiency levels. In light of the rapid changes in the field, it is important to look more closely at CFL textbooks for adult native English speakers, particularly at the beginning and intermediate levels, and how these materials are composed and presented.

Richards (1998) has noted that “while the roles of teachers, teaching, and learners have been the focus of a vast body of discussion and research over the years, much less attention has been given to textbooks” (p. 125). More recently, McGrath (2013) echoed these concerns, noting that “textbooks, and materials more generally, ...require our critical attention” (p. x). Although Richards and McGrath focus on textbooks for the teaching of English, their concerns also exist for those who teach other languages. English is the most widely taught language in the world, and the trends in the field of teaching English lead those in other languages. Hence, it is of value to bring our critical attention to the textbooks that are commonly used in the teaching of CFL. This focus is especially important in light of the fact that while the field of CFL is growing rapidly, limited studies have been done to date examining leading CFL textbooks. The goal of this study is to reveal writers’ perspectives on fundamental issues in writing CFL textbooks.

## Literature Review

### Theoretical Frameworks for Materials Development

Materials development for language learning and teaching is a relatively new field of study, and has been systematically explored only since the mid-1990s (e.g., Harwood, 2010b; McGrath, 2013; Tomlinson, 1998, 2003/2013d, 2008b, 2010, 2012, 2013b, 2013c). As noted by Tomlinson (2012), “much of the literature focuses on materials for learning English but the same principles apply to materials for learning any L2” (p. 143). Reviewing the literature studying the development of language teaching materials, Tomlinson (2010) argues that “materials should not be random recreations from repertoire nor crafty clones of previously successful materials,” but rather be tied primarily to “theories of language acquisition and development” and “principles of teaching” (p. 82). What is provided below is a brief overview of the literature relevant to the teaching and learning of CFL, including: principles of second language acquisition, approaches

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<sup>1</sup> Although CFL and teaching Chinese as a second language (CSL) differ in significant ways, in this article CFL is used to refer to both concepts.

to language teaching (i.e., principles of language teaching), and goals of language learning that are relevant to the materials (textbooks).

**Principles of second language acquisition.** It is clear that there is no definitive model of language learning that explains all aspects of language acquisition (e.g., Tarone & Yule, 1989). Tomlinson (2008a), however, summarizes a set of commonly agreed upon principles of second language acquisition – relevant to any language, including Chinese – that are directly applicable to materials development. These principles include:

- the language experience needs to be contextualized and comprehensible...
- the learner needs to be motivated, relaxed, positive and engaged...
- the language and discourse features available for potential acquisition need to be salient, meaningful and frequently encountered...
- the learner needs to achieve deep and multi-dimensional processing of the language (Tomlinson, 2008a, p. 4)

According to Tomlinson (2010), the most effective language teaching materials are informed by “principled frameworks” and incorporate a “contextualized application of theory” (p. 99).

**Approaches to language teaching.** Over the past several decades, a variety of second language teaching approaches/methods have been used by foreign language teachers, including CFL teachers, with varying levels of success. The most familiar include the grammar-translation approach, the direct approach, the audiolingual approach, the communicative approach (Brown, 1995, p. 6), the sociocultural approach (Lantolf, 2000) and even the postmethod approach (Kumaravadivelu, 2001). Currently, the communicative approach is a commonly accepted approach in CFL contexts (e.g., Lü & Lavadenz, 2014; Shen & Xu, 2015; Xu, Padilla, & Silva, 2015). Within the communicative approach, “organizational language forms are not the central focus, but remain as important components of language...” (Brown, 2007, p. 46); fluency and accuracy have comparable importance (Brown, 2007). A variety of methods such as task-based methods are put under the paradigm of communicative approaches resulting in a great deal of diversity and variation in communicative approaches to language teaching.

**ACTFL and the 5 C’s.** The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) is the premier organization guiding and promoting the instruction of foreign languages in the U.S., and the standards established by ACTFL exert great influence on language learning and

instruction around the world, including materials development. Of great help to teachers and material developers, ACTFL has developed general language proficiency guidelines for each proficiency level from “novice” through “distinguished” (ACTFL, 2012b), including specific guidelines for Chinese (ACTFL, 2012c). In addition, ACTFL and other organizations developed the “World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages,” including “the five ‘C’ goal areas (Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities)” (The National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015). The five C’s are defined as follows:

- Communication: “Communicate effectively in more than one language in order to function in a variety of situations and for multiple purposes”
- Cultures: “Interact with cultural competence and understanding”
- Connections: “Connect with other disciplines and acquire information and diverse perspectives in order to use the language to function in academic and career-related situations”
- Comparisons: “Develop insight into the nature of language and culture in order to interact with cultural competence”
- Communities: “Communicate and interact with cultural competence in order to participate in multilingual communities at home and around the world” (The National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015).

Furthermore, ACTFL has established performance descriptors for the five C’s, including the “three modes of communication – interpersonal, interpretive, presentational” (ACTFL, 2012a).

There is overlap in the discussion above on key features of relevant principles of SLA, approaches to language teaching, and the 5 C’s, as each is looking at the same activity – language teaching and learning and the materials that support them – through a different lens. Even so, we use the three-part frameworks below to provide a clear description of the different focuses that CFL textbooks can have.

### **CFL Textbooks**

Limited research has been conducted examining CFL materials development in general and textbooks in particular. Liu (1994) proposed the following four criteria when developing CFL textbooks: (1) target developing proficiency and communication abilities; (2) focus on students’ needs and interests and apply second language learning theories and principles; (3) integrate

language structures, functions, and culture; (4) apply technology and develop different materials for different skills (pp. 62-65).

Ross (2001) identified six goals essential for the development of intermediate-level CFL learners: (1) “fill in the gaps” from the beginning-level curriculum; (2) “expand vocabulary and structure;” (3) “strengthen relevant foundation skills;” (4) “develop oral and written communication skills;” (5) “establish a foundation for the acquisition of literary language;” and (6) “broaden understanding of Chinese culture and history” (pp. 9-10). She then evaluated eleven intermediate-level CFL textbooks against these criteria and concluded that most of these textbooks demonstrated these characteristics but typically fell short on scaffolding “the development of interactive oral communication activities” (p. 15).

All popular textbooks claim to be based on widely-accepted teaching approaches and learning principles. Obviously, these textbook writers are aware of language acquisition and teaching theories. How they applied these theories and principles in writing textbooks is a key question worth exploring. However, as far as we are aware, no research has been conducted to date revealing textbook authors’ perspectives in writing CFL textbooks.

### **Gaps in the Literature and Research Questions**

As pointed out by Li, Wen and Xie (2014) reporting on their survey of “college-level Chinese language programs in North America” (p. 1), with more and more textbooks on the market, “a challenge confronted by an instructor today is to make decisions on what textbooks to choose and what supplementary resources to use so as to fulfill curriculum goals, instructional purposes, and accommodate their own students’ needs” (p. 26). One perspective that is clearly missing in the literature is an analysis of the theories and principles that CFL textbook writers apply in the writing of beginning and intermediate textbooks typically used in the U.S.

Wala (2003) describes a textbook as “a collection of choices made from a variety of options available” (p. 59); these choices draw on both applied linguistics research and, in the words of Dörnyei (2009), “the accumulated wisdom of best practices in the teaching profession” (p. 267). As Tomlinson (2013a) notes, “It is very revealing to try to find out how materials developers actually go about designing materials. Do they consciously apply theory to their practice or are they driven by their instincts and the apparent results of previous practice?” (p. 2). According to

Harwood (2010a), to answer this question “what is needed initially, then, are ethnographies of materials production, involving interviews with ... authors as a product unfolds in order to gain an insight into the factors that shape the eventual form of the materials” (p. 18).

In response to Tomlinson and Harwood, and as a step toward establishing a better understanding of the theoretical foundation for CFL textbooks, this study uses interview data to address these two questions: (1) do writers of leading CFL textbooks consciously apply principles of second language acquisition and approaches of language teaching in writing their beginning and intermediate textbooks? And, if they do, (2) how are these principles and approaches applied?

## **Method**

### **Participants**

This study focuses on prominent textbook writers in the CFL field. A number of leading CFL textbook writers were approached for this project, and four (two males and two females) completed the full interview process. All four participants are the primary textbook writers of well-known Chinese textbook series targeting native English speakers, and multiple colleges and universities in the U.S. use their textbooks. In addition, each textbook author has many years of experience in teaching Chinese to CFL students. In sum, each participant has great expertise in writing CFL textbooks and in teaching Chinese. For the sake of anonymity, the letters A, B, C, and D were assigned to these four interviewees consistent with the sequence of participation in this study.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

The interview questions were created and finalized through the following three steps. First, drawing on the literature from the field of materials development and from their relevant experience, the two authors of this article drafted preliminary questions covering theoretical frameworks, unique features of the Chinese language, language skill development, and the use of technology (computer software, websites, etc.). Second, the authors piloted the interview questions with two professors of foreign language instruction who had published textbooks, and then made modifications to the questions based on their feedback. These modifications included the addition of some categories of questions, as well as the addition, deletion and/or combining of questions. Third, the authors did a second set of pilot interviews. One interview was conducted by telephone with a professor of Chinese in China who had experience teaching in

the U.S. and published textbooks; the other interview was conducted face-to-face with one of the professors who first piloted the interview questions. After analyzing these two pilot interviews, the authors of this article made further revisions to the questions and then finalized nine categories with sets of questions under each category. These categories of questions cover the following critical issues: the application of theoretical frameworks, the design of the overall textbooks, the selection of characters and words to include in the textbooks, the design of exercises, the use of technology, the evaluation of textbooks, advice on writing textbooks in general, advice on writing textbooks for beginning and intermediate learners, and advice on writing textbooks for business Chinese. After completing the above three steps, the authors of this article felt confident that the interview questions covered major aspects of materials development in the CFL field and were sufficient to reveal textbook writers' perspectives.

A modified "standardized open-ended interview" was conducted with the four participants of this study (Patton, 2002, p. 344). According to Patton (2002), this method increases "comparability of responses" (p. 349). Specifically, the interview questions, in both English and Chinese, were emailed to participants before they were interviewed. The interviews, each lasting at least an hour, were conducted by telephone. The participants all chose to speak primarily in Chinese in the interview. During these interviews, the questions were asked in the same order for each participant, and flexibility was also allowed in the process. The four interviews were recorded and then transcribed.

### **Data Analysis**

This article focuses primarily on the responses to the first category of questions, which explores the theoretical frameworks used by the textbook authors as they wrote beginning and intermediate CFL textbooks. In some instances, textbook authors also touched on theoretical frameworks when answering other categories of questions, and these answers were also included in this analysis.

### **Findings**

The following three themes emerged from the interview data.

#### **Theme 1: All Four Textbook Authors had a Different Focus in Applying Theories and Principles of Second Language Acquisition and Teaching in Their Textbooks**

When asked to comment on the application of principles of second language acquisition, theories of language teaching (i.e., approaches to language teaching), and the five C's, all four

textbook authors said that they had intentionally applied proven principles and approaches in writing their textbooks.

**Principles of second language acquisition.** Interview data revealed both similarities and differences among the four participants in applying principles of second language acquisition. Common features were that they all paid attention to the learning needs of targeted learners (adults in CFL contexts) and to improving their communication abilities. Professor A specified that she selected Chinese language input at appropriate difficulty levels, used English as a scaffold to facilitate the learning of new language material, and considered learners' affective and cognitive needs and motivations. Professor B also clearly stated that second language acquisition principles had been applied in writing CFL textbooks, and specifically mentioned focusing on the student learning process and on improving students' communication abilities. Professor C described how he applied second language acquisition principles in his textbooks through the following steps: (1) provided input which is correct, natural, and specific; (2) used English to analyze and explain Chinese grammar and culture; and (3) guided students in memorizing basic Chinese structures and then using them in a variety of contexts. Clarifying that a drill had only one answer while an exercise had multiple answers, Professor C further explained that after internalizing language structures through recitation and drilling, students needed many exercises in order to practice and apply what they were learning. Professor D described how she facilitated language acquisition through the following practices: (1) used movies and documentaries to get students interested; (2) provided a great amount of audio with many kinds of comprehensible input such as scenes, conversations, actions, and stories; (3) offered opportunities for students to attempt the use of the language to communicate with others; (4) engaged students in all kinds of activities requiring output such as interacting with classmates and writing; (5) paid attention to grammar and accuracy.

In addition to the similarities, interview data also revealed differences among the participants in applying principles of second language acquisition in their textbooks. In order to highlight the differences, one or two characteristics for each participant are provided. Professor A's responses reflected her consideration of the learners' native language and educational and social contexts. To facilitate learning, she pointed out that she frequently contrasted Chinese with English (the students' native language) to highlight particular features of the Chinese language. For example, in teaching the Chinese word “也” (yě, “also”), she contrasted the

adverbial use of “也” with the corresponding English word “also”; “也” can only be put before the verb, while “also” can occur in several different places in a sentence. In addition, she said that she took into account students’ educational and social contexts when providing language input and gave the example of getting rid of sensitive words such as “alcoholic drinks” and “marijuana” in the second version of her textbooks.

Professor B’s responses reflected his belief that adults needed to be cognitively engaged and that they learned more efficiently through the conscious study of language structures. Specifically, Professor B noted that because adults had fully developed their logical thinking abilities, they needed grammatical rules to be explicitly taught to help them learn a second language. He further stated that the process of learning structures helped adults form an overall view of a language, and consequently it was much more efficient for adults, who typically had limited time, to first grasp major aspects (e.g., structural frameworks) and then add details.

Professor C’s responses suggested a particular concern with learners’ developmental needs. In answering the question of how he taught characters, Professor C mentioned separating listening and speaking from reading and writing into two books. In addition, in answering questions related to exercises, he mentioned that each of his lessons was not long and did not contain too many new words and sentence structures so that students would not be overwhelmed by the volume of the language input.

Professor D’s responses reflected her concerns for maintaining students’ interest. She stated that “the most important thing is to get students to like the Chinese language because learning a language is a lifelong endeavor.”

**Language teaching approaches.** The responses of all four participants reflect that they paid attention to addressing learners’ needs. However, as the interview data revealed, there were differences in how the four CFL authors applied and emphasized language teaching approaches in their textbooks. Professor A, for example, stressed the importance of language structures and culture. She specified that she closely connected language with culture, emphasized grammatical structures, and taught pragmatics. Recognizing the application of language teaching approaches (e.g., communicative approach) in his textbooks, Professor B further stressed that the teaching of Chinese grammar should not be neglected and that accuracy

should not be compromised in the pursuit of fluency. Professor B thought it was not sufficient to simply apply Western teaching approaches in teaching Chinese because Western second language teaching approaches were mainly generalized from the study of related European languages and also because Chinese and English do not belong to the same language family. For example, he pointed out that different from English, Chinese, a non-inflectional language, does not rely on word form change but on word order and function words to convey grammatical meanings. In another example, he stated that Chinese characters and tones do not exist in English.

Professor C emphasized practicality and relevance. Recognizing there was no single best language teaching approach, Professor C used an eclectic approach, “different pieces and ideas from several different approaches.” He rationalized this in that learners had “different personalities, different learning styles, different needs,” and instructors had diverse teaching styles. In answering the question of how he chose vocabulary and grammar for his textbooks, he emphasized teaching what was the most relevant and practical to the learners.

Professor D focused on a task-based approach and on communication. Professor D saw two main purposes for students to use the language. Specifically, she stated that “one is to complete tasks, to get what you [students] need.” She gave examples of real-life tasks such as buying food or visiting places. The other purpose, she mentioned, was to communicate in order to establish relationships with others, which was very important because it helped arouse students’ interest in learning Chinese.

**Five C’s and ACTFL proficiency guidelines.** Interview data revealed great differences in the application of five C’s and ACTFL proficiency guidelines. Professor A described how she applied the five C’s in writing her textbooks. She provided communicative tasks and situations, taught cultural knowledge in every lesson, helped students connect personal experience with their communities or connect Chinese language with other subjects such as Chinese literature, set up comparisons in the three aspects of culture, grammar, and pragmatics, and drew attention to communities. Moreover, in the second edition of her textbooks, she mentioned highlighting the five C’s at the beginning of each lesson.

Professor B recognized that the five C's were generally accepted and further stated that “we should not only refer to the five C's but also incorporate them [into our textbooks].” In addition, in teaching Chinese to adults, he suggested expanding the five C's to include learning language forms.

Professor C was not enthusiastic about the five C's. However, he drew attention to ACTFL proficiency guidelines (i.e., from novice to distinguished) and stated that he used them to set the goals of his textbooks. In particular, he “from the very beginning had enacted ACTFL proficiency goals especially in listening, speaking, and reading.” He suggested that for anybody who develops textbooks, there is a need to take into account ACTFL proficiency levels in developing various language skills.

Also bringing up ACTFL proficiency guidelines, Professor D stated that she used them as a basic framework for her textbooks. In particular, she described how she used proficiency guidelines to determine functions. First-year students usually reached the proficiency between novice high or intermediate low, not exceeding intermediate mid. At that proficiency range, students need language to meet basic survival needs and to communicate with others. Professor D used this to guide the selection of topics and functions in her first-year textbooks.

In addition, Professor D specified how she applied the five C's. She gave students many real-life communicative tasks and demonstrated Chinese culture in a movie she made for her textbook. As to communities, even though it was difficult to show them in textbooks, she could give suggestions on an accompanying website on how to use communities to facilitate language learning. For example, she encouraged students to go to Chinese-speaking communities in order to recognize Chinese characters and to communicate with native Chinese speakers. For connections, she also planned to post relevant activities on the website. She gave an example of using a historical documentary to learn Chinese, thus connecting language with history. For comparisons, she contrasted grammatical items and commented that it was the simplest comparison. For instance, she used communicative tasks to compare one use of 才 (cái, “something happened later than expected”) with one use of 就 (jiù, “something happened earlier than expected”). She also asked students to compare their answers. For example, after they



introduced the number of their family members, students could compare each other's answers by saying whether there were many people in a family or not.

Furthermore, Professor D used all three ACTFL communication modes: interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational. She provided many real-life interpersonal communicative tasks. For the interpretive mode, she asked students to listen to texts and then complete different tasks: to get the main idea, to get specific points, and to guess word meanings. She also asked them to read texts related to real life and try to comprehend them. For the presentational mode, she asked students to make various presentations in different settings.

In summary, by commenting on their application of widely accepted principles and approaches to language teaching, all four participants showed that they purposely adopted a principled approach to writing textbooks. Two key similarities in the principles that guided each author as they wrote their textbooks included focusing on students' language acquisition needs and striving to improve their communication abilities. However, their broad approaches to textbook writing also showed different foci in applying principles of second language acquisition and language teaching approaches within their textbooks. Table 1 presents differences in the application of principles and approaches highlighted by each participant.

Table 1. *Different Principles and Approaches Emphasized by the Participants*

Textbook Authors	Second Language Acquisition Principles	Language Teaching Approaches	Five C's & ACTFL proficiency guidelines
Professor A	Summary: <i>paid attention to learners' native language, and educational and social contexts.</i>	Emphasized culture and grammatical structures.	Applied all five C's in writing her textbooks.
Professor B	Summary: <i>paid attention to cognitive engagement of adult learners and efficiency.</i>	Emphasized grammar and accuracy.	Recognized that the five C's are generally accepted and pointed out the need to expand the five C's.
Professor C	Summary: <i>paid attention to learners' developmental needs.</i>	Emphasized practicality and relevance.	Not enthusiastic about five C's; instead guided by the ACTFL proficiency guidelines.
Professor D	Summary: <i>paid attention to fostering students' interest.</i>	Emphasized completing tasks and communication.	Guided by ACTFL proficiency guidelines; incorporated into her textbooks the five C's, and the three ACTFL communication modes: interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational.

**Theme 2: There was a Consensus That Language Forms are Best Taught When Guided by Functions and Related to Culture. In Addition, Two Distinct Methods in the Teaching of Language Structures Emerged**

When asked to comment on the application of theories and principles, all four textbook authors described how they taught Chinese language forms in their textbooks. They adopted the same general approach and used one of two methods.

**The general approach of embedding Chinese language forms into functions and relating language instruction to culture.** Interview data revealed that all four textbook authors embedded the teaching of grammar into communicative functions tied closely to culture.

Professor B clearly articulated the integration of Chinese language structures, functions, and culture. He elaborated that language structures (including pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar) served as the baseline for the learning of the language, functions guided the learning of structures, and culture formed standards for correct language use. Professor B's views may be summarized as follows: while mastery of functions is important, the learning of language structures enables students to accomplish functions, and understanding culture helps students use the language properly.

Similarly, Professor A pointed out that for each lesson in her textbooks she listed communicative objectives (i.e., functions), grammar, and culture. She also stressed that language cannot be separated from culture. In answering the question of how he chose vocabulary and grammar for his textbooks, Professor C stated that functions, situations, vocabulary, grammar, and culture need to be integrated and coordinated. Professor D pointed out that she used communicative functions to determine which Chinese language forms to teach. She said that she put functions first, yet they are closely related with Chinese structures. She also pointed out that language existed within culture.

**Two distinct methods: (1) practicing grammatical structures first and then completing communicative tasks or (2) completing communicative tasks to learn grammatical structures.** Interview data revealed that the four textbook authors applied two distinct instructional methods. Professors A, B, and C applied the first method, while Professor D applied the second one.

Interview data reflected that three textbook authors helped students first learn the grammatical structures and then use them. The following list outlines the common features of this method.

Three textbook authors considered grammar sequence. Professor A gave the example of how different forms of the *ba* structures were sequenced and introduced in different volumes of her textbooks. For example, she presented directional compliments and then combined them with

the *ba* structures; in a later volume, she reviewed the *ba* structures and combined them with resultative complements, building on and extending what students had already learned. Professor B also paid attention to grammar sequence. In answering the question of how he chose vocabulary and grammar to present in his textbooks, Professor B said that he used a syllabus for grammatical structures which ranked grammatical points in terms of difficulty. He noted that it was impossible to write textbooks to strictly follow the existing grammar syllabi, yet he followed the principle of introducing grammar from easy to difficult in textbooks, and modified texts according to the syllabi. Similarly, Professor C explained that he tried to present grammatical structures from easy to difficult; however, sometimes he was forced to introduce a difficult syntactic structure first because a specific situation required it. Under those circumstances, students learned to passively comprehend these difficult grammatical structures first and then use them.

These three professors mentioned teaching and drilling grammatical structures, engaging students in communicative tasks, and paying attention to accuracy throughout the process. Professor A mentioned comparing Chinese with English to show the special features of Chinese and reviewing and recycling grammatical points. She also mentioned providing communicative tasks. As for helping students accurately master the language forms, she stated that “highlighting the special features of the Chinese language prevents students from making some errors or at least makes students aware of their mistakes.” Due to significant differences between Chinese and English, Professor B stressed the importance of teaching and drilling and then applying Chinese language structures. He also emphasized the importance of correcting students’ errors so that they do not learn to speak in a way no one understands. Similarly, Professor C used English to explain Chinese grammar. Moreover, he had students memorize structures through drilling and recitation and then engaged students in applying the learned structures in a great variety of contexts. It may be inferred that Professor C stressed accuracy even at the initial stage because he led students in memorizing the correct forms through drills and recitation.

In contrast with Professors A, B, and C, Professor D first engaged students in completing communicative tasks and then gave detailed explanations of grammatical structures. She mentioned that she listed functions at the beginning of each lesson, provided audio input, encouraged students to attempt the use of the language, pushed them to use language in

meaningful ways, and then summarized grammatical structures, paying attention to accuracy, near the end of each lesson. At this point, she provided a can-do list for self-assessment. If students could not do the things on the list, they needed to go back and review the lesson. For example, in one activity she had students start by asking each other “你是几点起床的?” (*nǐ shì jǐ diǎn qǐ chuáng de?*, “when did you get up in the morning”). Through this activity, a student had many chances to use this sentence to gather relevant information from other students. Once students completed the task, she then drew their attention to the structure of “是...的...” (*shì...de...*, “in this context, to show that the time is emphasized”). Since they had used the structure many times, they did not find it unfamiliar.

**Theme 3: All Four Textbook Authors Saw no Major Differences in the Application of Second Language Principles in Writing Beginning and Intermediate Textbooks, but Three did Note They had Some Different Foci with Varied Proficiencies**

In answering the first category of questions, all four textbook authors noted that their approaches to writing both beginning and intermediate textbooks were (for the most part) the same in terms of applying principles of second language acquisition and approaches to teaching. Yet some indicated that CFL instruction at the beginning level focused on sentence structures while at a higher level the focus shifted to discourse and word usage.

Professor A stated that in terms of the principles and approaches used, there was no major difference between the writing of beginning and intermediate textbooks. She also pointed out that beginning textbooks set up a foundation, while intermediate ones added more formal words, reviewed the beginning level, presented new information, and lead students to advanced levels.

Professor B also explained that the integration of structures with functions and cultures prevailed in the writing of all his textbook series. In addition, he also revealed that there existed differences in foci at different proficiency levels. He pointed out the following:

At the beginning level, syntactic structures and basic grammatical rules are very important; at higher levels, the focus shifts to discourse and word usage. It is important to expand vocabulary and vocabulary usage, and it is even more important to produce paragraphs and discourse. With the progression of proficiency from beginning to

intermediate and advanced levels, the content changes and focus shifts. Yet, the integration of structures with functions and culture remains our teaching pedagogy.

Professor C held a similar view:

We all know that the beginning level focuses on sentences. With the progression of proficiency, the focus shifts to discourse, short paragraphs at the beginning and then long paragraphs. Our goal is to enable students to speak or write a paragraph with cohesion, not individual sentences. As far as theories are concerned, there are no major differences in the compilation of beginning, intermediate, and advanced textbooks.

Professor D held the same view as the other three professors. She expressed that the principles and approaches used in beginning and intermediate textbooks were the same. Yet in higher levels, she used more authentic materials.

## **Discussion**

### **Application of General Principles and Approaches**

There exist clear similarities among the four participants. Generally speaking, our research findings suggest that all four textbook authors apply principles of second language acquisition and popular approaches to language teaching in writing their textbooks for beginning and intermediate CFL learners. Specifically, learner language acquisition needs and effective communication are central concerns.

Interview data also revealed differences in the application of relevant principles and approaches. Learner needs may be put into different categories such as cognitive, affective, and communicative needs. Also, improving Chinese language proficiency is influenced by many factors such native language influence, the unique structures of the Chinese language, learner developmental processes, and learner motivation. Prioritizing different learner needs and different routes to effective communication, the four participants focused on different language acquisition principles and language teaching approaches in a variety of ways. The differences revealed in this study indicate that there are multiples ways of compiling CFL textbooks to reach the same goal of improving Chinese language proficiency for CFL learners.

Interview data also show great differences in applying the five C's. Findings from this study indicate that the CFL field is divided in accepting the five C's in Chinese language instruction. Further research needs to be done to survey the general attitude of the CFL field concerning the five C's.

The findings regarding principles and approaches adopted by the four textbook writers are of great relevance to instructors. Although instructors may get some idea of textbook writers' theoretical frameworks through reading their textbooks, this study reveals which and how language acquisition principles and language teaching approaches are applied in writing textbooks. Consequently, this study might help instructors effectively select and use textbooks.

### **Instruction of Chinese Language Forms**

Interview data show that all four textbook authors use the same approach of instructing Chinese language forms: the teaching of language structures is guided by functions and related to culture. This approach is in line with ACTFL's position that "while grammar and vocabulary are essential tools for communication, it is the acquisition of the ability to communicate in meaningful and appropriate ways with users of other languages that is the ultimate goal of today's foreign language classroom" (ACTFL, 1996).

In the teaching of language forms, two distinctive methods emerge from the interview data. These two methods are discussed below.

**Practicing language structures first and then completing communicative tasks.** Professors A, B, and C typically lead students to first practice grammatical structures and then apply them to complete communicative tasks. This method has the following three characteristics: (1) sequencing grammatical structures from easy to difficult and trying to follow acquisition sequence whenever possible, (2) using varied methods to highlight and explicitly explain grammatical structures, (3) using drills and application exercises to help students learn the presented structures, and (4) monitoring accuracy throughout the process.

The method used by the three textbook authors differs from both the traditional grammar teaching method and the communicative and task-based method. On the one hand, the traditional grammar method teaches grammar for the sake of grammar and "does virtually

nothing to enhance a student's communicative ability in the language" (Brown, 2007, p. 19). In contrast, instead of focusing on individual grammatical points, this method aims to provide scaffolding enabling students to use the necessary language forms to accomplish desirable communicative functions in a culturally appropriate manner. On the other hand, under the traditional communicative and task-based method, communicative tasks are in focus, while the teaching of grammatical structures lacks operational guidance. However, setting a linguistic foundation to enable students to communicate in meaningful ways, the method described by these three textbook authors provides operational guidance in carefully teaching and practicing grammatical structures appropriate to the students' proficiency level and to the context presented in textbooks.

The method used by the three textbook authors is suitable to the teaching of the Chinese language for adult native English speakers at the beginning and intermediate levels for the following reasons. First, because Chinese and English does not belong to the same language family, students cannot infer Chinese language forms from English and consequently have to learn them. Second, especially at low proficiencies with the Chinese language, students need to learn and practice Chinese language forms because they have not acquired good knowledge of the language. Third, because most students who use these textbooks live in a context where Chinese is not typically spoken around them (e.g., in the U.S.), it is believed to be efficient for students to consciously learn the grammatical rules and then apply them in a variety of circumstances. Also, as mentioned by Professor B, because adults have limited time to learn a second language, conscious learning of the grammatical structures enables them to set up a framework of the Chinese language efficiently. Fourth, this method taps into the cognitive learning abilities of adult learners. Because adults have fully developed their cognitive abilities, grammatical structures facilitate their learning of Chinese.

**Completing communicative tasks to learn grammatical structures.** In contrast to Professors A, B, and C, Professor D focuses on engaging students in completing communicative activities to learn grammatical structures. This method has the following three features: (1) giving sufficient explanation of grammatical structures in order to enable students to complete tasks, (2) engaging students in completing communicative tasks, and (3) drawing students' attention to grammatical structures and accuracy after completing communicative tasks.

Professor D's method is suitable for teaching Chinese for the following reasons. Using this method, students have a chance to explore the use of the language on their own, and later on receive more explicit instructions on grammar. Consequently, they have a chance to apply cognitive abilities to summarize rules on the basis of language use, which effectively contribute to the internalizing process. In addition, by first focusing students' attention on using Chinese to complete all kinds of tasks, it is easy to keep students engaged and interested in the learning process.

**The use of the two methods in teaching language structures.** These two methods both include communicative tasks and explicit teaching of language structures. Hence, these two methods do not necessarily conflict with each other because they both focus on meaning without neglecting forms. According to Tomlinson (2013b),

Form-focused materials involve learners in deliberate and explicit learning of discrete target features of the language. Meaning-focused materials involve learners in such language experiences as reading stories, performing plays, and completing tasks in order to help them acquire language from comprehensible input and motivated use. (p. 2)

These findings on how textbook authors approach the instruction of Chinese language forms may give guidance to instructors in teaching language structures in classrooms. Instructors may get a clearer idea that the purpose of teaching language forms is to enable students to perform different functions in a culturally appropriate manner. In addition, instructors obtain operational guidance on the instruction of language forms. Based on their own teaching styles and students' learning preferences, they can teach and drill grammatical structures before engaging students in communicative tasks, or engage students in completing communicative tasks to help them learn grammatical structures, or even combine the two methods.

### **Distinctive Features**

It is important to provide choices of different textbooks because there are different instructors and contexts. According to Graves (2000), the context of language learning includes "people, time, physical setting, teaching resources, and nature of the course and institution" (p. 16). Consequently, with so many varied external factors, textbooks with different characteristics are highly desirable because they cater to different needs and contexts.

Because these four textbook authors emphasize different principles of language acquisition and approaches to language teaching, they demonstrate distinctive characteristics in their textbooks. Professor A grounds communicative language instruction in U.S. specific language, and educational and social contexts. Professor B enables communication through setting up framework of language structures. Professor C develops proficiency through providing relevant materials in practical and manageable steps. Professor D motivates learners through focusing first on listening and engaging students in communicative activities.

As noted by Tomlinson (2011a), textbook authors need to incorporate “what teachers and learners believe about the best ways to learn a language and also to what they want from the materials they use” (p. 23). While having the same goal of helping students achieve communicative competency, instructors may still have varied emphases. Some may focus on local educational and social contexts, some may appeal to learners’ cognitive abilities, some may consider learners’ practical concerns and their developmental needs, and still others may focus on arousing students’ interest through engaging them in completing communicative tasks. Textbooks with distinctive characteristics cater to diverse teaching styles of instructors and different needs of students.

### **Limitations**

The goal of this paper was to respond to Harwood’s (2010b) call to interview authors of language teaching materials “to gain an insight into the factors that shape the eventual form of the materials” (p. 18). Consequently, the most important limitation is that this study mainly focuses on exploring the self-reported perspectives of four CFL textbook writers. Even though this study did not systematically verify interviewees’ claims point by point, examples from their textbooks did confirm interview data of this study.

### **Conclusion**

In-depth interviews with four textbook authors provided meaningful insight into their textbooks. Three trends may be concluded from this study. First, while all four textbook authors adopt a principled approach in writing their textbooks, they focus on different principles of second language acquisition and approaches to language teaching. Second, in terms of teaching language structures, all four textbook authors adopt the same approach of subordinating language structures to functions and relating language instruction to culture. In addition, they



apply one of the two methods: practicing language structures and then engaging students in communicative activities, or engaging students in completing communicative activities to help them learn grammatical structures. Third, with each author having a different approach to and emphasis on presenting and practicing language, each set of textbooks has its own distinctive characteristics.

Understanding textbook authors' approach and methods of teaching Chinese language structures helps instructors effectively teach structures in classrooms. In addition, findings on the distinctive features of the textbooks aid instructors in choosing a textbook that is most appropriate for their students and contexts. Moreover, the textbook authors' perspectives reveal the current status of materials development in the CFL field.

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