Teaching Chinese language skills
A general report on the teaching of reading, speaking and listening skills

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1. Background and outcome

1.1 Aims and structure of the project

The overall purpose of the project was to find the most efficient way of teaching a given Chinese language skill in a non-intensive way, with the underlying aim of responding to the Chinese language skill needs of different types of ab initio student. The project was divided into three independent sessions, covering the three language skills of reading, speaking, listening. These were taught as efficiently as possible in a non-intensive environment, allowing participants to establish the language skill in question by the end of each session. We believe that the project results are of value to institutions which offer Chinese language teaching as subsidiary courses in non-language departments.

1.2. Duration of and procedure for each session

The first (reading skills) and third (listening skills) sessions ran for a total of 127.5 classroom contact hours each, with each session lasting seventeen weeks. During these two sessions the participants were taught as a single group from 5 to 6.30 p.m., five days a week, with a six week break after the tenth week of each session. The second (speaking skills) session ran for a total of 97.5 classroom contact hours over thirteen weeks. During this session the participants were taught as a single group from 5 to 6.30 p.m., five days a week, but without a holiday break. The time scales for the three sessions are indicated in the following diagram.
1.3 Material taught in the sessions

1.3.1 Reading

This session consisted of thirteen topics spread over seventeen lessons. The main teaching material covered over 550 commonly-used newspaper words in both abbreviated and unabbreviated form, and approximately 108 sentence patterns and expressions in written style. On average, the participants learned about 33 Chinese words a week in both forms, along with other essential Chinese reading skills such as the use of a dictionary. The material was put into textbook format with indexes, and into a PowerPoint multimedia CDROM.

1.3.2 Speaking

Over 500 commonly used conversational words, and the majority of basic sentence patterns and grammar points, were covered through 30 conversation topics during this session. The participants learned approximately 40 words a week. The material was designed to develop conversation and oral presentation skills. It is in textbook format with a vocabulary index.

1.3.3 Listening

The listening session consisted of 33 lessons broken down into 25 topics, and covered basic conversation and news broadcasting sentence patterns, and 640 commonly used words. The participants learned approximately 35 words a week. The material was designed to develop listening comprehension skills for both colloquial and formal Chinese. It is in textbook format with a vocabulary index.

1.4 Participants’ background

As each session required *ab initio* students, the numbers of participants varied. There were seven participants in the reading session. The participants’ mother tongues were English, Danish, Swedish, Korean and Russian. They ranged from post-graduates to university lecturers. The age range of the group was from early twenties to early forties.

There were fifteen people registered for the speaking session. Eight completed the session, although two of the participants had to leave fourteen days before the end. Of the
four people from the reading session who came as non-active participants, three remained until the end of the speaking session. The participants’ mother tongues were English, Turkish, Japanese, German, Arabic and Thai. They ranged from undergraduates and post-graduates, to university doctor, college administrative officer, museum researcher and language instructor. The age range of the group was from early twenties to mid fifties.

There were six people registered for the listening session, of whom four completed the course. Four people from previous sessions attended as non-active participants. The participants’ mother tongues were English, Spanish and Vietnamese. They ranged from undergraduates and post-graduates to a hospital administrative officer and a part-time administrative officer. The age range was from early twenties to mid forties.

1.5 Participants’ performance records

1.5.1 Reading session

The time that the participants spent working at their material away from the classroom was monitored throughout the sessions. We asked the student participants to fill in a timesheet quantifying the time spent on learning various language skills every day. An example: during the reading session we monitored the hours that a participant spent learning Chinese characters, phrases, sentences and passages away from the classroom, as can be seen in the following diagram.
The records show that learning characters took up the major part of the participants’ learning time. The following diagram shows that on average a participant spent over 36 hours learning new words away from the classroom, but would only spend about 24 hours on translating passages. Very little time was spent learning phrases and sentences.

The following diagram shows the percentage results of the test which the participants took at the end of the reading session. This was the only test set.

1.5.1.1 Outcome, and participants’ reactions to reading session

Most participants were fully motivated and had analytical minds. They were not interested in the idea of having some sort of testimonial from the Institute for Chinese Studies in return for their commitment throughout the reading session. Their participation in this session was based on the desire to learn the language for use in their research. As they saw it, the reward for them was to be able to read Chinese newspapers by the end of the seventeenth week. Throughout the session the participants measured themselves against the level of language skill that they required for research. For instance, one student who was doing research on the Cultural Revolution brought in some passages from articles published in the People’s Daily during the mid 1960s. After showing them to the tutor he translated them for homework. Some participants attempted to read Chinese newspaper articles on the Internet, and one used a Chinese word processor to do
extra homework. Some however did not do very much during the Christmas vacation, which meant that teaching throughout the second half of the session was difficult and results were uneven. Although the degree of motivation among participants in this session was very high, different levels of application, and varying ways of learning the language away from the classroom meant that overall the teaching and learning environment was not like that of most UK Chinese courses at university level.

1.5.2 Speaking session

Throughout the speaking session we monitored the hours that the participants spent both listening to the tapes provided, and also learning Chinese words, phrases, sentences, and passages, as can be seen in the following diagram.

On average throughout the thirteen week speaking session a participant would spend just under fourteen hours away from the classroom learning new words, over eight hours on listening to the tapes, five hours on learning conversations and under an hour on oral presentation, as shown below.

Weekly revision tests were set throughout the speaking session but there was no final test.

1.5.3.1 Listening session

Although attendance in the listening session was regular, participants spent only a small amount of time working at the material away from the classroom, as can be seen in the following diagram, which shows the number of hours outside the classroom spent studying new words, phrases and sentences and passages.
On average throughout the seventeen week listening session a participant would spend just over seven hours away from the classroom learning words, seven hours learning phrases and just over three hours learning passages, as indicated below.

Three thirty-minute tests were carried out in weeks four, nine and seventeen. The first two tests were designed to test participants’ listening comprehension skills when dealing with sentences, dialogues and passages in colloquial Chinese. The third (and final) test was designed to test skills in dealing with news broadcasting information and vocabulary. The percentage results are shown below. People who participated in at least one of the previous sessions are shown in numbers 5-8. (Participants 2 and 5 came fifteen minutes late for the thirty minute final test.)

1.5.3.2 Outcome and conclusion

Although this experiment was carried out with a small group of people, we feel that the results are still of interest. The diagram indicates that those who spent most time learning did not necessarily do best; likewise, those who had learned other Chinese language skills in the past did not necessarily have an obvious advantage when it came to learning listening skills.
2. Teaching and learning methods

2.1 Reading skills

All the components required for reading skills were taught. These skills would range from those needed for the recognition of radicals, character components, characters, and words, to those required for reading phrases, sentences and passages. It also covered ‘supplementary’ skills such as Chinese pronunciation. In order to help the participants to consolidate the language, tapes of vocabulary from the texts were made for the participants to listen to and read away from the classroom.

2.1.1 Pronunciation

_Pinyin_ pronunciation was not properly introduced until week five. Our intention was to encourage the participants to build up the habit of reading Chinese characters fully, and to prevent them from remembering the pronunciation just through transliteration. However it was recognised at the end of the session that sounds learned whether via _Pinyin_ or not had an important part to play in helping participants to memorise characters and accumulate vocabulary. Those who simply looked at a character and registered its meaning without knowing the sound found it difficult to remember words later.

2.1.2 Chinese characters and sentence patterns

In the first ten weeks the main texts were presented in simplified characters, with full-form characters only displayed in the vocabulary list. In the second half of the session the main texts were presented in full form characters with the simplified versions in the vocabulary lists. Active language skills such as those needed for the formation of phrases and for syntax analysis were also taught.

2.1.3 Source of material and regular teaching patterns

The main teaching material was newspaper articles, but the supplementary materials in the form of exercises were structured conventionally. They moved from word recognition, through phrase formation and sentence pattern learning to passage reading, using analytical methods for comprehension and repetition methods for consolidation. Each week the class was taught in the following order:

_Word+Character+Use of Dictionary →Phrase→Sentence→Passage_

2.1.4 Teaching words, Chinese characters and use of dictionary

The participants were taught how to recognise radicals and the different components of characters, and also stroke order and stroke counting. Some meanings of radicals were explained in order to help the participants to memorise characters. As radicals for simplified characters were not written consistently in the various dictionaries employed, the participants were often confused. Moreover, although each participant was issued with a copy of _A Chinese-English Dictionary_, some participants brought in their own
dictionaries, and these had different indexing systems. Despite some confusion there were few complaints from the participants. They were philosophical and flexible, quickly learning how to identify alternative radical references and how to use different indexing systems, such as stroke numbers. The participants practised dictionary use in class many times every week. In the first few weeks, the exercises on character recognition were emphasised, but in later weeks the meanings of individual characters were only displayed in the vocabulary lists. The purpose of this feature was to help participants to memorise the new words and to build up recognition of word formation patterns. For instance, when the participants learned 分离, both 分 and 离 were explained individually. As a result, when they came across a word such as 分裂 they were able to work it out for themselves. Some of the participants who had spent the first five weeks learning the new words by writing them down stroke by stroke found it easier to learn new words later in the session.

They were also taught to use their reading time efficiently, and became skilled at deciding when dictionary use was necessary and when it was not. The aim of this training was to eliminate the tendency found at elementary level to think that it is necessary to know every word before the meaning can be understood.

2.1.5 Teaching Phrases

The best way of teaching a newspaper reading class is to guide participants constructively and help them to build up independent working skills. Thus we asked the participants to work out the meaning of words themselves by relating new information to words which they had already learned. This helped participants to strengthen their memory of vocabulary in an active way and improved their analytical ability. We encouraged the participants not only to work out the meanings of words themselves, but also to observe how words relate to each other in sentences. For instance, when they came across the words 制造 …分裂 for the first time, they had to work out the meaning themselves, based on the verbs 造成 and 分离 that they had learned in the past. By analysing the sentence they could work out that 分裂 was the object of the verb 制造.

2.1.6 Teaching sentences

A particular problem for beginners, as most Chinese language teachers are aware, is how to group the words in a sentence correctly when reading a Chinese newspaper article. The “piled-up-boxes” which we developed in the Sentence patterns and function words sections are designed to help participants identify function words in sentences and to use them to group words appropriately.

Some of the examples in Sentence patterns and function words from week three onwards could be used as vocabulary tests as well as sentence analysis exercises. This method not only clearly indicated certain patterns of Chinese word order, as demonstrated below (both 既 and 也 are placed before verbs or modal verbs), but also indicated a very
important factor in Chinese sentences, namely, syllabically balanced phrases such as 能 学 习 and 能 工 作. Moreover, the proportions of the boxes indicate the weight of the components in the sentences, as the subject and the verb clauses occupy more space in the boxes with English translation. When compared with the Chinese sentence in the last box, it is clear that the “piled-up-boxes” are much easier for participants to handle.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>有 签 证 的 学 生</th>
<th>subject</th>
<th>students who have visa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>来 英 国 以 后</td>
<td>time clause</td>
<td>after coming to England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>既</td>
<td>conjunctive adverb 1</td>
<td>both</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>能 学 习</td>
<td>verb clause 1</td>
<td>can study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>也</td>
<td>conjunctive adverb 2</td>
<td>and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>能 工 作。</td>
<td>verb clause 2</td>
<td>can work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.1.7 Practice in class

Repetition always aids the memory, but it can be monotonous. However, if repetition exercises occur in different environments they are more palatable. The Exercise sections for each week had the aim of helping participants consolidate and revise what they had learned. These exercises consisted of large quantities of passive skills drill such as character recognition and sentence-pattern reading, and semi-active skills such as ‘filling in the gaps with the given words’. All the following example exercises are taken from the material for week nine.

The following exercise was designed for practice in the use of a dictionary. The first column is the targeted character; the second is for the radical of the character; the third shows the number of strokes in the character excluding the radical; the fourth column is for Pinyin pronunciation of the character, and the fifth gives the meaning of the character. The last column requires the student to write a word or ‘combined term’ which uses the character.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>字</th>
<th>部首</th>
<th>笔画</th>
<th>拼音</th>
<th>意义</th>
<th>新词 / 意义</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>众</td>
<td>人</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>zhòng</td>
<td>crowd</td>
<td>众多/numerous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>澄</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>级</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following exercises were designed to help the participants consolidate vocabulary and grammar points. These exercises were carried out in the classroom, with a language instructor present. We believe that using multiple-choice is more beneficial in language tests than straight learning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>a.发出</th>
<th>b.超过</th>
<th>c.宣布</th>
<th>d.虽然</th>
<th>e.指派</th>
<th>f.消息</th>
<th>g.涉及</th>
<th>h.通过</th>
<th>i.调查</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

据________指出，________这起走私贪污案的官员目前已经________十人，

________政府已经________了逮捕令，但 ________据了解仍有许多官员________

非法途径逃到海外。昨天上午，公安部部长发表讲话，并再次________反贪污

的决心，他还________专案调查小组，对可能涉嫌的官员进行全面的

________。


The main sentence constructions in the Reading practice passages were highlighted as shown below, so that participants could grasp the main sentence constructions in each article.

最近在英国发生的恶劣天气将会向北移动，而且会对苏格兰和北爱尔兰地区造成严重影响。这只是近来在世界各地所产生的不正常气候现象的其中之一。这种自然状态产生的原因何在？至今仍未确定。

2.2 Speaking skills
We believe that the speed at which a student can learn and remember foreign language pronunciation depends on how far the language relates to his or her immediate environment. If a pronunciation exercise relates to the student’s everyday life, it should be easier for him or her to master than a meaningless drill. The aim of this experimental session was to teach the participants to grasp basic Chinese pronunciation so that they could quickly establish communication with native Chinese speakers. The emphasis was on communicative skills rather than accuracy of pronunciation and intonation. In order to achieve a high level of communication within the limited period of thirteen weeks we decided to use the following two approaches.

2.2.1 Starting with phrases

For the first six weeks we put more emphasis on teaching phrases and speech patterns as the smallest components in sentences, rather than on individual components of words. This was because the mother tongues of most participants consisted of multi-syllabic words and expressions. The expressions taught in class were closely related to everyday life from the start, so that the expressions could be used both in and out of the classroom. Words and small components of words were always introduced in the context of expressions, and wherever possible new components were introduced via new expressions that contained at least one component that had been learned before. For instance, the small components 你 you, 好 good and 早 early in expressions such as 你好 hello and 你早 good morning were not introduced until later when the participants came across sentences where these individual words were important. At this point we would remind the students to dig these words out of their memories. For instance, when they learned 哥哥 older brother in a question like 你哥哥好吗 how is your older brother? the participants had to remember the sound of the expression 你好. Only then would we explain the small components 你 and 好.

2.2.2 Pinyin not introduced first

There were some pronunciation problems that related to participants’ mother tongues. For instance, beginners find it difficult to tell the difference between words beginning with zh and j, ch and q, and sh and x. This is because the written form of Pinyin is too similar to English, and it was for this reason that we decided to delay the introduction of the written form of Pinyin pronunciation. It was felt that the right time to teach Pinyin would be when the participants had learned enough words to communicate, and enough expressions to cover basic Chinese pronunciation. The tapes were their only guidance at home.

2.2.3 Methods for delivering the language skills

Communicative skills were important in this experiment and it was decided that the material should be based on topics which related to real situations, in order to build up
participants’ conversational vocabulary. The method of teaching Chinese by using Chinese only was not going to be very successful for beginners who only had limited time. Moreover, it was impossible to create a Chinese language environment outside the classroom. The teaching repertoire was limited to imitation, repetition, translation and classroom drills.

2.2.4 Teaching and learning words

We decided to make tapes of the key new words, expressions and sentence patterns for the whole week and hand them to the participants on a Monday. During the first five weeks the tapes were the only pronunciation tool available for the participants to use away from the classroom. The tape would say for example, “New Words: 1. what? shénme…” One disadvantage was that some Chinese pronunciation such as k/g/h sounded distorted, and the participants often said that the instructors sounded different in person, so they used the teacher to correct their pronunciation in class. However, there was no confusion between zh and j, ch and q, and sh and x when we introduced Pinyin five weeks later. This was because of the strong element of aural training that had already taken place, and because the students had not been confused by the similarities between the written forms of Pinyin. The following is an example taken from Lesson Eight.

Part one: new words

1. Chinese on the tape (personal name)
2. Chinese on the tape Mr.
3. Chinese on the tape be in/on/at
4. Chinese on the tape question particle
5. Chinese on the tape hello
6. Chinese on the tape just
7. Chinese on the tape matter, things, business
8. Chinese on the tape would like to

Part two: expressions

A. Chinese on the tape Great!
B. Chinese on the tape May I help you?
C. Chinese on the tape Are you busy?

2.2.5 Teaching and learning sentences

We decided to use imitation and repetition methods for teaching and learning new words, and to use elicitation methods, translation, sign language and images to revise and consolidate vocabulary. After revision the participants were able to turn their passive knowledge of Chinese into active skills to form sentences. Chinese grammar was not taught during this session, but instead, a sentence pattern would be formed gradually through the teacher doing vocabulary revision.
For instance, after learning some new words the teacher would say:
“You have to tell a Chinese friend that we are going to school by bus.”
This would give the participants a clear purpose. Then the teacher would say:
“In Chinese it will be: we take a bus to go to school.”
This would indicate the Chinese word order. After that the teacher would ask:
“How do you say *we* in Chinese?” …
“How do you say *take bus* in Chinese?” …
“How do you say *go*?” …
“How do you say *school*?” …
Translation of the words was treated as vocabulary revision. As the words in the
questions had already been laid out via the Chinese word order, it meant that no grammar
had to be explained. The teacher then would ask:
“How do you say *we go to school by bus* in Chinese?” …

2.2.6 Comprehension, practice, drill and consolidation

Substitution exercises were used to consolidate sentence patterns. For instance, we could
replace the nouns *we* and *school* in the sentence pattern *we take a bus to go to school* with
other nouns that the participants had learned. Another crucial aspect of communication
skills was comprehension, without which speaking skills would be pointless. In order to
teach this skill, the teacher added sentence components to a basic sentence pattern, and
the participants were encouraged to use the same method to form longer and more
complicated sentences. For instance, a basic sentence such as *what is his name* can be
developed through the following patterns.

\[
tā jīào shénme
\]
\[
tā jīào shēnme míngzi
\]
\[
lǎoshī wèn tā jīào shénme
\]
\[
lǎoshī wèn tā “ni jīào shēnme míngzi?”
\]
\[
lǎoshī jīntiān wèn tā shénme
\]
As well as holding revision classes every Friday, we made handouts of all the material
that the participants had learned during the week.

2.2.7 Comments on speaking session

1. The result of delaying the introduction of *Pinyin* for a few weeks was good. After four
or five weeks the participants were longing for a standard written form for Chinese
pronunciation that was superior to their own version. Introducing *Pinyin* at that moment
was ideal and it made the teaching of *Pinyin* less painful. The participants could then
easily distinguish the so-called ‘difficult sounds’ when the *Pinyin* for a word was taught.

2. The result of teaching sentence patterns instead of teaching grammar was also good,
but as there were professional language teachers and students in the class, who had
learned their other languages analytically, grammar questions were unavoidable. More
grammar explanations could have been handed out as additional material at the end of
each week for those who were familiar with the traditional way of learning foreign
languages.
3. Repetition and translation methods of teaching were effective, but we felt that if one applied them too much students would not be able to free themselves from their teachers’ guidance or from their mother tongue, thereby damaging their confidence. Situation-related role-play exercises should be used for consolidation purposes.

2.3 Listening skills

2.3.1 Classroom teaching
What do we teach first? This was the question asked by many people from the beginning of our project. We taught listening comprehension skills in the same way as we taught reading and speaking skills: that is, for each lesson we started with words and phrases, then moved to sentences, and finally to passages. We made sure that this pattern was used consistently for each lesson.

2.3.2 Teaching words and phrases
One of the first tasks we had to tackle was how to teach participants to remember the sound of Chinese words. In our original plan much emphasis was put on exercises for differentiating sounds and intonation, but as we had to introduce both colloquial and formal language in this session we felt, reluctantly, that we should cut down on these drills. The emphasis was then put on remembering the words taught in class. At the beginning of a class the instructor would say the words in Chinese, and the participants had to respond with the meaning in English. This was done in a group. During the first five weeks the participants had to rely on their own transliteration to record the sounds encountered in the classroom, and had to use the tape we provided to remind them of the pronunciation when they were at home. Pinyin was gradually introduced after week five, and as a result, more intonation and sound differentiation exercises were carried out in class. Some participants said that they felt they had to go through three stages when trying to learn a Chinese word: remembering the sound, remembering the meaning and remembering the tone. Of these, remembering the sound was the most difficult, especially for words with consonants such as “zh” and “ch”, as the participants said that they sounded the same. For instance, it was difficult for participants to distinguish zhídào and chídào. The participants were asked to remember the words actively, in preparation for listening to passages after week five.

2.3.3 Teaching sentences
The difficulty in remembering sounds became less apparent when teaching the participants phrases and sentences. That was because the participants were focussing on situations rather than words. If they heard a difficult sound they would automatically assume a meaning, in order to make sense of the sentence. This kind of guessing is an essential technique in listening comprehension, and should be encouraged. Many teachers do not like to allow it, because of its ‘unreliability’ and because it might encourage students to have a sloppy attitude towards their studies. However, being over-cautious can seriously damage students’ confidence. In the listening session we found that it was
important to guide students towards the right ‘guessing path’. When students were busy working out the sense of sentences it was difficult for them to follow the flow of the passage. Normally teachers would slow down their speed of delivery, which causes loss of authenticity. We found that the only way to keep the reading speed up and simultaneously help students to follow the flow of a conversation was to use repetition within a passage. We managed to make it sound reasonably natural. For instance, in the conversation below between speaker A and speaker B, used in week nine, both speakers reinforce each other’s words, phrases and information. Please note that some especially noteworthy features of Chinese sentence construction, such as the positions of time, duration and location words, were introduced and discussed after week five. Otherwise grammar was not taught at all during the session.

A 中国报上总是报道国家主席访问哪个国家。英国报纸也是这样报道的吗？
B 英国报纸不是这样报道的。
A 为什么英国报纸不是这样报道呢？
B 在英国记者这样报道新闻，就没有人看报了。
A 他们是怎么报道的呢？
B 英国记者总是报道一些大家想听，也想看的新闻。
A 他们怎么知道大家想听什么，看什么新闻呢？
B 看报的人能写信给报社，告诉记者他们的看法。记者就去找这样的新闻。
A 好的和坏的外国事情英国记者都能报道吗？
B 好的和坏的都报。
A 英国政府不想让人民知道的事也能报道吗？
B 不想让人民知道的事，记者知道了以后一定会报道的。
A 英国政府不应该告诉记者应该写什么，报什么吗？
B 英国政府不应该告诉记者应该写什么，报道什么。
A 为什么不应该呢？
B 报纸不应该由政府管。中国报纸由中国政府管吗？
A 有些报纸现在中国政府也不管了。

2.3.4 Passages

An active approach was used when teaching students how to listen to passages. The participants were always given the questions relating to the passage that they were going to listen to in advance, so that they could prepare the exercises by using the information given in the questions. For instance, if a question related to the duration of a visit, the participants would try to find the possible words for “visit” such as “去”, “到”, “访问” or “参观” when they were listening to the reading of the passage. Because they had been taught some sentence structure points relating to time, location and duration they would also listen out for relevant information, such as 十天 in “访问十天” or in “进行十天的访问”。They had to keep listening for this information while following the flow of the passage. It was important to write down the sounds of crucial words, such as large number words, if they could not be recognised immediately.
2.3.5 Teaching problems

Although translation is the method most commonly used when someone starts learning a foreign language, it should not be relied on for too long. Students should be encouraged to break out of the habit of translating every word. One of the participants in the group had this problem all the way through the course, which slowed down her responsiveness. We tried to encourage the student to think in phrases and phrase patterns such as V-O patterns, rather than concentrating on individual words.

3. Issues arising when teaching and learning different language skills

3.1 Are there similarities between passive skills such as reading and listening?

Yes, there are some similarities, and the skills can sometimes be treated in a similar way. For instance, materials prepared for the teaching of reading and listening skills can be turned into Internet courses quite easily, but it is difficult to put material relating to an active skill, such as speaking, onto the Internet. However, there are also differences. Although one receives information via both reading and listening skills, the environments in which they are used are very different. Overall, teaching and learning the two skills of reading and listening require many differences in method, as illustrated below.

- The first difference is in the amount of time needed to comprehend a piece of material. Reading skills usually make use of an analytical approach, and students can control the length of time needed to understand a passage. Because of this, the analytical approach was fully explored in the reading session. The same approach cannot be used for learning listening skills, as the amount of time for understanding a conversation or a news report is not controlled by the participants. Consequently, when teaching listening skills, the emphasis was very much on how to develop the participants’ level of responsiveness, and their memory for pronunciation of words and short phrases, rather than on analysing Chinese grammar.
- The second difference between the two skills is in the teaching of sentence structure. We spent a lot of time in the reading session teaching the participants how to group words within a long sentence, and how to find function words in order to break sentences into phrases, as physical punctuation is often insufficient. However, this was not needed in the listening session, as the sentences and passages were read out loud by native speakers, who automatically grouped the words into phrases for the participants.
- Thirdly, although we touched upon formal (written) Chinese in the listening session, any similarities between reading and listening here were only in vocabulary, not in sentence construction. In the listening session the sentences were comparatively short, unlike those in the newspaper articles used in the reading session, when a full stop was rare a specie or a life-saving land-mark which could trigger a happy smile from the participants.
3.2 Brief notes on teaching and learning methods

- **Reading skills**: analytical approach; radical and character recognition for both abbreviated and unabbreviated forms; identification of function words in sentences; remembering phrase patterns such as V-O.
- **Speaking skills**: communicative approach with some explanations in English; use of imitation and substitution when learning speech patterns.
- **Listening skills**: communicative approach; using natural repetition for conversation; active listening approach for passages.
- *Pinyin* was introduced in week five in all three sessions.