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International Chinese Language Education in the Context of Third Language Acquisition: the Value, Connotation and Practical Approaches

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Abstract

International Chinese language education has long been incorporated into the theoretical framework of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), while Chinese is being learned as a third language in most overseas countries. Introducing the theory of third language acquisition sheds light on the pattern of Chinese language acquisition for multilingual learners and promotes the further development of international Chinese language education. This paper examines the history, content, and current status of research on third language acquisition and identifies three aspects of the relationship between pedagogical elements in international Chinese education and the paradigm of third language acquisition: the cognitive advantage of multilingual learners firstly promotes the transformation of instructional goals from perceptual to rational cognition; secondly, interlanguage transfer and affective strategy convergence prompt teaching approaches to expand beyond the theory of third language; thirdly, constructing a model for third language acquisition can enhance the explanatory power of second language teaching theory in international Chinese language education. This research highlights the potential benefits of incorporating third language acquisition into teaching models that align with the cognitive processes of multilingual learners. It emphasizes the need for specialized teaching materials that adhere to the principles of third language acquisition, utilizing a “practice-evaluate-develop” model to integrate language meaning, form, and use as content. Ultimately, this approach can facilitate the development of multilingualism with a focus on commonality, distance and awareness of languages among learners.

Keywords: third language acquisition, second language acquisition, international Chinese language education

1. Introduction

International Chinese education has the dual nature of both a discipline and a profession, and generally refers to the cultural and educational practice of Chinese as a foreign language promoted by the mother tongue community. It has made essential contributions in serving national diplomatic strategies and promoting the construction of new international relations and the community of shared future for mankind (Wu, 2022). According to statistics, the demand for studying Chinese continues to grow throughout numerous nations and regions as globalization intensifies. Over 80,000 schools and training facilities of various kinds offer Chinese language classes, and more than 30 million people are learning the language in more than 180 nations and territories worldwide. Additionally, 81 countries have included Chinese into their national education systems (Sun, 2022).

The current mainstream view among scholars in the international Chinese language education community is to regard it as second language teaching. Educational administrators and practitioners also mostly consider international Chinese language education as second language teaching and adopt teaching models based on the theory of second language acquisition. However, in many countries' language education systems, Chinese language may not be positioned as a second language (L2) for learning, such as the United States, France, Japan, South Korea, Thailand, Vietnam, etc. (Zhang & Wang, 2020). Most Chinese language learners start studying Chinese as third language (L3) or even as part of multilingualism after having acquired their first language (L1) and second language (L2) proficiency. The continued use of the second language acquisition research or teaching paradigm contradicts the fact that Chinese language learning is often in the position of third language (L3) in most countries overseas. Furthermore, it fails to capture the emerging trends, distinctive features and evolving demands of international Chinese education in the current era of globalization and China's endeavor to foster a community with shared destiny for humanity, as envisioned by the Belt and Road Initiative (Duan , 2022).

Therefore, conducting research from the perspective of third language acquisition, extracting new developments in international Chinese education with universal application value, and constructing innovative teaching models can effectively enhance the efficiency and proficiency of international Chinese language instruction and promote profound development of the global Chinese education industry.

2. Literature Review

Third language acquisition refers to learners who are learning one or more other languages in addition to their native language and the second language they have

already acquired (Fouser, 1995; Jessner, 1999). Research on third language acquisition originated from the study of second language acquisition and was once subsumed under the field of second language acquisition in the early stages of the study. This is because some scholars believe that second language can refer to any non-native language other than the first language (mother tongue) and that the process of acquiring a foreign language is not different from the process of acquiring another foreign language (Gass, 1996; Sharwood, 1994). However, in recent years, more and more scholars have begun to realize that third language acquisition and second language acquisition have fundamental differences in many aspects. It is not appropriate to simply view the learning of a multilingual speaker as the accumulation of several monolingual learning processes. In fact, during the process of acquiring multiple languages, learners' language cognition and language processing mechanisms undergo changes, and these factors lead to the complexity and diversity of third language acquisition (Kong, 2023; Eibensteiner, 2022; Kim et al., 2022; Rothman, 2010; Bardel & Falk, 2007). Therefore, it is necessary to study third language acquisition as an independent discipline.

In countries other than China, research on third language acquisition began in the late 1980s. The European Union's political and economic integration has led to increasingly close exchanges between member states, creating a demand for a large number of foreign language talents, resulting in an increase in multilingual learners and the emergence of research on third language acquisition (Jessner, 1999; Thomas, 1988; Cenoz & Valencia, 1994). In recent years, research on third language acquisition abroad has developed rapidly, covering various aspects, including the mutual influence between the languages already acquired and the third language, the advantages of bilingual learners over monolingual learners in learning a third language (Cenoz & Genesee, 1998; Bild & Swain, 1989), the study of vocabulary, sentence, grammar and other microcosmic aspects of learning Chinese as a third language (Efeoglu et al., 2019; Kim & Lee, 2018), and the emergence and awareness of trilingual pragmatics (Safont, 2005) etc. In 2001, the book *Cross-Linguistic Influence in Third Language Acquisition* edited by Cenoz collected research findings from many scholars on third language acquisition. The research perspectives cover linguistics, psycholinguistics, sociology and other fields, and the contents involve transfer, interference, avoidance, borrowing, mediation language, as well as language loss related to second language acquisition (Cenoz, 2001).

Influenced by foreign research, third language acquisition research in China has gradually developed in the past decade, but is still in its initial stage. Based on statistical data and analysis, early research in China mainly introduced research on trilingual acquisition from abroad (e.g., Fan, 2019; Chang, 2011; Lei, 2010). Subsequent research has mainly focused on the learning situation of learners whose first language is their native language (Chinese or minority languages), analyzing whether they are influenced by their first or second languages when learning a foreign language (e.g., Lin, 2021; Wei, 2021; Wu, 2021). It is worth mentioning that there is an international forum in China that specifically focuses on the trilingual education model in ethnic minority areas, and has been held for more than ten sessions to date. Additionally, several books on third language acquisition have also been published in China (e.g., Han, 2017; Liu, 2013; Cui, 2011; Gu, et al., 2011). Overall, research on third language acquisition in China primarily centers around language transfer, trilingual education and pedagogy, as well as metalinguistic awareness. However,

empirical studies are relatively scarce and the range of languages investigated is rather limited. Therefore, further improvements are needed to broaden and deepen our understanding of this field.

On the whole, research on third language acquisition in other countries is mainly conducted from the perspectives of linguistics, education, psychology and sociology, involving language transfer in third language acquisition, the effects of bilingualism on cognitive development and third language acquisition process, multilingual patterns and universal grammar etc. (Yuan, 2010). Research on third language acquisition in China has primarily relied on foreign research findings, with a focus on trilingual learners whose first language is Chinese. Although third language acquisition has received attention from scholars in many countries, becoming a hot research topic, due to the unique and complex nature of the discipline of Chinese international education, research on third language acquisition in the field of international Chinese education is still in its infancy, and there is a severe shortage of theoretical and empirical research on topics such as overseas learners studying Chinese in a multilingual context.

3. The Value and Connotation

As a language learning activity, third language acquisition is essentially related to human cognition, involving psychological processes such as thinking, memory, and cognition. The ultimate goal of studying third language acquisition is to explore the mystery of human multilingual learning (Wang, 2016). International Chinese education has long been incorporated into the theoretical framework of second language acquisition research, introducing the theory of third language acquisition will bring important theoretical value to the in-depth development and related research of international Chinese education.

3.1 Multilingual learners possess a cognitive advantage that facilitates the shift of instructional goals from perceptual to rational cognition

The cognitive advantage of multilingual learners triggers the transfer and optimization of learners' learning goals, content, methods and strategies (Ding, 2017). The teaching objective refers to the level of knowledge and language proficiency that students should achieve through learning. The objective of foreign language teaching is to cultivate students' intercultural communication skills. This is not only the view of the Chinese language teaching community, but also in the past foreign language teaching, the teaching objectives have expanded from language proficiency to communicative competence, and then to intercultural communication competence. Based on the generally accepted authoritative standards such as *the International Chinese Language Proficiency Standards* and *the Common European Framework for Language Teaching and Assessment*, the Office of Chinese Language Council International has formulated and promulgated *International Curriculum for Chinese Language Education* (referred to as the Curriculum below), and stressed that “the ultimate objective of international curriculum for Chinese language education is to facilitate learners in acquiring knowledge and skills pertaining to the Chinese language, while concurrently reinforcing their learning objectives, fostering independent and collaborative learning abilities, devising effective learning strategies, and ultimately achieving comprehensive proficiency in using the language”.

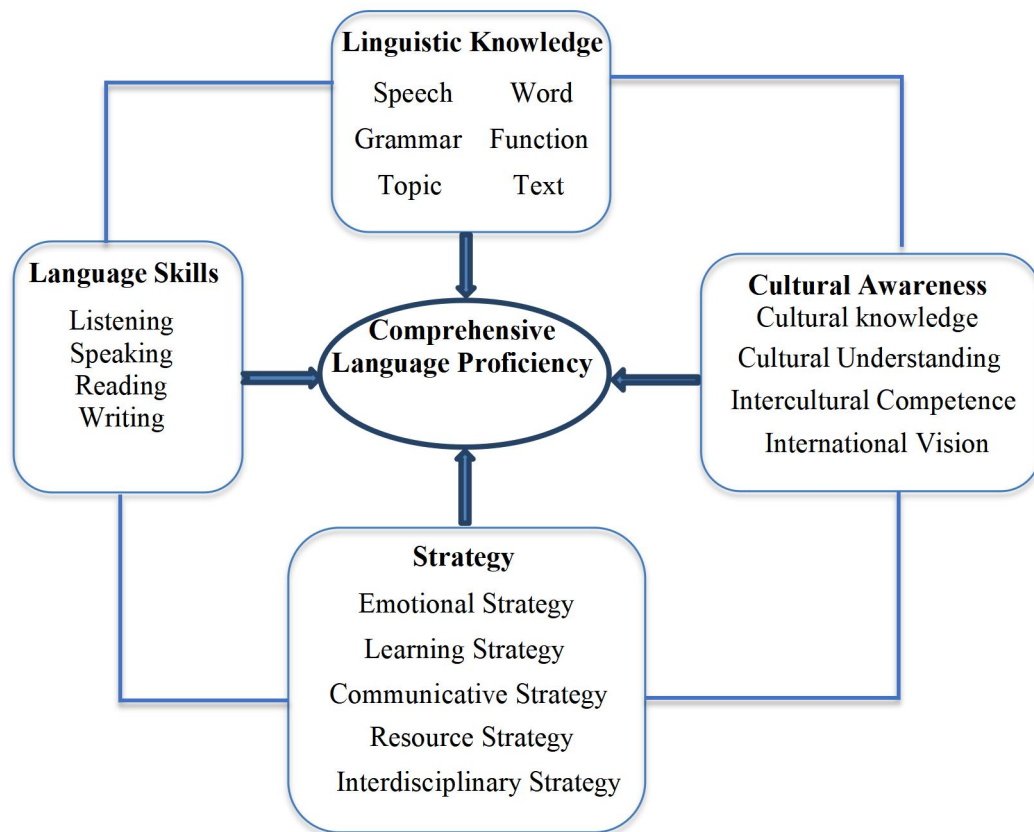


Figure 1. Structure diagram of the teaching objectives of international curriculum for Chinese language education (from *International Curriculum for Chinese Language Education*)

Chinese Proficiency Grading Standards for International Chinese Language Education (CPGS) promulgated by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the National Commission on Language Education (NCLE) in China consists of four basic language elements: syllables, Chinese characters, vocabulary, grammar, which make up the “four dimensions” of the assessment. The assessment is composed of three evaluation dimensions: communicative ability, task content, and language quantification indicators, and five language skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translation. CPGS divides learners’ Chinese proficiency into “three grades and nine levels” (as shown in Table 1) to accurately determine their Chinese proficiency.

Table 1. Summary of quantitative language indicators of *Chinese Proficiency Grading Standards for International Chinese Language Education*

Grade	Level	Syllables	Chinese characters	Vocabulary	Grammar
Primary	Level 1	269	300	500	48
	Level 2	199/468	300/600	772/1272	81/129
	Level 3	140/608	300/900	973/2245	81/210
Moderate	Level 4	116/724	300/1200	1000/3245	76/286
	Level 5	98/822	300/1500	1071/4316	71/357
Higher	Level 6	86/908	300/1800	1140/5456	67/424
	Level 7-9	202/1110	1200/3000	5636/11092	148/572
Total		1110	3000	11092	572

Notes: In the table, the number before and after the “/” respectively indicate the quantity of language elements added at this level and accumulated up to this level. However, for higher-level languages, quantitative indicators are no longer broken down by levels.

CPGS adheres to the concept of openness, conforms to the trend of the times, and sets the short-term goal of international Chinese education as elementary level, the mid-term goal as intermediate level, and the long-term goal as advanced level. This goal system is the scientific basis and cornerstone for setting the Chinese proficiency of foreign learners as “three levels and nine grades”. The “three levels and nine grades” is a choice made by the new era of international Chinese education discipline and career, focusing on long-term development and comprehensive consideration. The three-dimensional evaluation system is continuously improved in dialogue with the world’s popular language standards (Kong, 2023). It embodies the wisdom of integration and coordination, which can better connect with the influential language standards in the world (Eibensteiner, 2022; Kim et al., 2022). It is a new framework and paradigm for the national standard of international Chinese education (Rothman, 2010; Bardel & Falk, 2007).

Listening and reading language materials are the primary means for learners to understand language input. After processing language materials through the senses, learners further analyze and organize them in a cognitive network using “strategies” and “cultural awareness”. The “reaction” solidifies into a cognitive mental model, which is described as a complicated “mechanized exterior response” after frequent use and habitual expression. This cognitive model is portrayed as a sophisticated “mechanized external response”, which is mentally altered to “adapt” to related but dissimilar cognitive situations, creating an idealistic cognitive model and completing “creation” in accordance with its own requirements (Duan, 2014). By utilizing strategic and culturally sensitive cognitive processes, the human brain engages in a series of mental tasks before producing language through speech or writing, all while being stimulated by sensory input. This is a complex process of transforming realistic concepts into mental representations, which are then translated into linguistic expressions. The intricacy of this procedure cannot be overstated.

Research results show that multilingual learners have a cognitive advantage in learning a third language, and their language systems develop language learning skills, language management skills, and language maintenance skills in the learning process (Fouser, 1995). In this respect, the teaching of international Chinese language should

leverage learners' bilingual advantages and language acquisition experiences, guide trilingual learners in their “strategies” and “cultural awareness”, and enhance the quality and skills of their language systems to achieve teaching objectives. This transfer and optimization are based on the philosophical experience of cognitive linguistics, which asserts that the learners' physical experience and human brain processing is the path to language acquisition. Therefore, in trilingual education, there is a hierarchical relationship between the four areas of the general curriculum's “Cultural Awareness” category, which can only be understood based on cognitive cultural knowledge, ultimately expanding their “international perspective” as shown in Figure 2. The synergy between flexible and diverse strategies, as well as the cultivation and expansion of cultural awareness, synergistically fosters the development of comprehensive language proficiency.

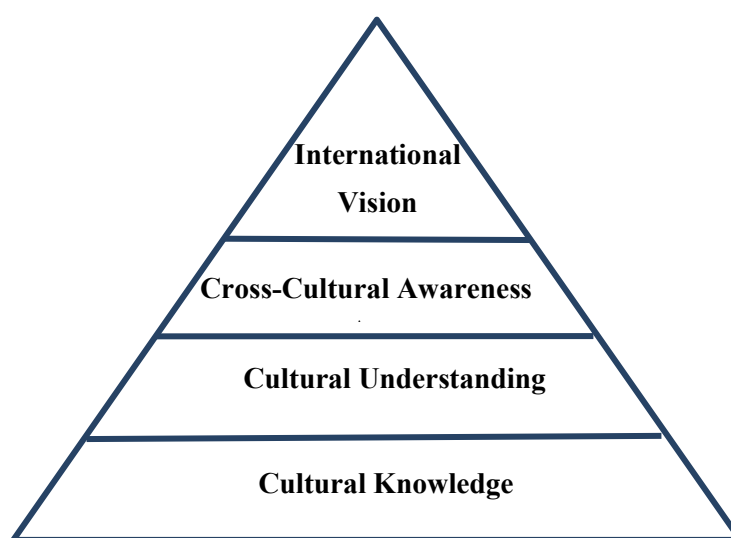


Figure 2. Hierarchy of “cultural awareness”

3.2 Interlanguage transfer and affective strategy convergence prompt teaching approaches to expand beyond the theory of third language acquisition

With the advancement of second language teaching theories and practices, various methods and genres of second language teaching have gradually emerged. Depending on the purpose, target audience, and materials used in instruction, teachers employ different approaches to their pedagogy. The traditional methods of teaching second language mainly include the translation method, reading method, listening method (later developed into the audio-visual method), cognitive method, functional method, task-based method, etc. New teaching methods have begun to emerge in recent years, such as communicative method, word root method, case method, post method, stimulation method, habit method, flipped learning method, etc. In addition to exogenous teaching environment factors, teaching methods must also consider trilingual learners' personality characteristics, needs analysis, cognitive strategies, learning style tendencies, and learning strategy tendencies (Fouser, 1995). Therefore, only some methods applicable to second-language teaching are suitable for third-language teaching.

The scientific process of language teaching should be based on understanding the nature of language and the language learning process. The theory of learning language on the process of third language acquisition positively impacts the approach to language teaching. First, besides emphasizing the interaction of the three languages in terms of lexical, phonological and syntactic transfer, third language acquisition studies also pay special attention to the analysis of the internal elements between multilingual systems by comparing Chinese with L1 and L2, so as to find the intrinsic connections between those three languages, thus achieving the purpose of helping Chinese learners to integrate the knowledge of the two foreign languages into their self-cognitive system (Zhang & Wang, 2020). Second, the findings of the study on cultural identity and language proficiency among international students in China indicate that cultural identity serves as a primary intrinsic motivator for language acquisition, with a strong positive correlation observed between interest in Chinese culture and level of mastery in the Chinese language (Wang, 2004). The language acquisition path in which emotional-attitudinal factors motivate students' learning also applies to international Chinese teaching and learning practices (Santos, 2022). Therefore, in trilingual teaching, teachers can make full use of different types of motivational roles to strengthen the positive influence of affective factors on students, thus expanding the amount of language input, stimulating the activity of interlingual language transfer, serving to strengthen learners' cognition of interlingual transfer and building awareness of using positive language transfer to promote learning of the target language, which helps to reduce learning difficulties and improve learning effectiveness. Third, the consolidation of background language proficiency can effectively enhance learners' language experience, thereby enriching their language learning journey and improving their linguistic competence. By enhancing learners' metalinguistic and language transfer awareness, positive interlanguage transfer can be facilitated while reducing learning difficulties (Lian, 2020). Enriching and improving learning strategies, implementing effective follow-up management, and optimizing the application environment can effectively enhance language learners' absorption, digestion, and output expression. The optimization of processing mechanisms and the improvement of linguistic performance play a vital role in the effectiveness of third language acquisition.

3.3 The model of third language acquisition enhances the explanatory power of second language teaching theory in international Chinese language education

International Chinese language education has long been regarded as second language teaching, contrary to the fact that Chinese is possibly in L3 learning position in most overseas countries. In addition to providing better insights to trilingual students, teachers, and policymakers, research from the perspective of third language acquisition and its introduction into the field of international Chinese language education research can also fill the gap in the field of multilingual research, realize the research value of the third language acquisition, and maintain the diaspora of trilingual speakers of Chinese. Theoretical models related to third language acquisition, such as the Cumulative Reinforcement Model (CEM), L2 Status Factor, Language Proximity Model (LPM), Language Type Preference Model (TPM), Multilingual Dynamic Model, Scalpel Model, etc., can be used to construct relevant studies based on multidisciplinary perspectives and methodological innovations (Wang, 2016). Second, international Chinese language teachers have an entry point to conduct empirical research from a new perspective. Due to the fact that international Chinese education is commonly perceived as second language teaching within the

academic community, theories based on the second language acquisition teaching model have been extensively utilized by international Chinese teachers to analyze and elucidate various pedagogical issues, with ignoring the influence of multilingual background on learners' learning of Chinese. Introducing theories related to third language acquisition into the field of international Chinese language teaching can create a new paradigm for international Chinese language education that has universal applicability for teachers and establishes a novel pedagogical model.

The empirical studies that can be focused on include: first, the subjective factors that affect trilingual learners' acquisition of Chinese, including their personality characteristics, needs motivation, cognitive strategies, learning styles etc.; second, the characteristics of trilingual learners' code-switching, including their language use strategies and trilingual teachers' own code-switching; third, interlingual commonality and multilingual transfer, which explain the intrinsic connections between the L1-L2-Chinese learners in terms of phonology, vocabulary, syntax, etc. (Köster, 2018; Wang, 2016).

4. The Practical Approaches

The language skill cultivation direction is to fully exploit the teaching value of learners' reverence for listening and speaking skills cultivation while constructing a cultivation mechanism that focuses on literacy skills cultivation and promotes the synergistic development of listening and reading skills (Jessner, 1999). The construction of this cultivation mechanism is closely related to the breadth and depth of language knowledge acquisition and the development of teaching materials, classroom teaching and student training and other teaching aspects.

4.1 Developing specialized teaching materials that follow the principles of third language acquisition based on a “practice-evaluate-develop” model

In the triangle of educational subjects, teaching materials are usually characterized as a dual identity, not only as the bearer of what teachers “teach” and students “learn”, but also as the link between “how to teach” and “how to learn”. The extent to which teaching materials adhere to the principles of pedagogy and cognition determines the achievement of instructional objectives. Therefore, the development of teaching materials should be guided by the laws governing third language acquisition.

Presently, the number of countries from which international students originate is increasing annually. The disparities in student proficiency levels are evident and the demands of Chinese learners both domestically and abroad are becoming more diverse, thereby imposing higher standards for the development of international Chinese teaching materials (Tang & Xu, 2022). However, more nationalized, localized, and specialized instructional resources that fit the country's specific educational objectives are required. The published teaching materials typically also include issues like repetitious content, poor relevance, and the requirement to abide by the norms of both cognitive human brain rules and general foreign language teaching rules (Jessner, 1999). When selecting teaching materials, Professor Wu Yongyi suggests considering their applicability from three perspectives: whether they are suitable for specific learners, whether they are appropriate for specific teachers, and whether they align with particular curriculum systems and teaching environments (Wu, 2012). Given the disparities in cognitive styles, learning strategies, and objectives between L2 and L3 learners, it is imperative to differentiate them as

distinct categories. For international Chinese language education, teaching materials that meet the target learners' specific teaching environment and teaching needs can complete the realistic transition from "qualified teaching materials" to "appropriate teaching materials". Therefore, when selecting and editing international Chinese language teaching materials, it is necessary to consider the cultural differences between the target language and the native language, and arrange the content in a more relevant manner. It is also recommended to encourage the development of school-based teaching materials through a "practice-assessment-development" mode. The development of school-based teaching materials based on the "practice-evaluation-development" model should be encouraged.

The background language has a higher impact on the third language's acquisition and output quality for trilingual learners. In order to arrange targeted teaching materials that adhere to the cognitive rules of third language acquisition in terms of lesson planning, capacity, difficulty of material samples, and frequency of knowledge points, international Chinese teaching materials should focus on the bilingual characteristics of trilingual learners and make a preferential selection in terms of text content, language expressions, and drill design. For one thing, based on the specificity of trilingual learners' meta-linguistic awareness, some knowledge of Chinese-related language elements in trilingual learners' meta-linguistics is added in the layout in a targeted manner to achieve a certain degree of language learning transition and ensure a stable input (Tang, 2021). For another, based on the cognitive influence of interlanguage transfer, the phonological, lexical and syntactic contents of L1 and L2 are appropriately coded to play the role of positive language transfer effectively.

In addition, the knowledge analysis and processing control strategies in third language acquisition are also essential guidelines for compiling the content of teaching materials. The knowledge analysis strategy should be applied in designing drill content to connect the interlanguage commonality of Chinese language elements with trilingual learners, culture and pragmatic rules, as well as language skills and communicative competence, thereby facilitating positive transfer for third language acquisition. Additionally, effective implementation of language processing control strategies is crucial for inhibitory control of language output. The content of the teaching materials should be arranged in such a way as to enrich the contrastive content of Chinese and L1 and L2 as much as possible, and to fully stimulate trilingual learners' ability to organize and express their linguistic and cultural knowledge related to Chinese with the help of trilingual learners' background language to form Chinese language control trajectories (Wang, 2016).

4.2 Integrated teaching incorporating language meaning, form, and use as its core content

According to Higgs and Krashen's theory on comprehensible input, sufficiently large comprehensible input is a necessary and sufficient condition for the acquisition of a second or third language (Higgs & Krashen, 1983). However, due to the limited time available in the classroom, it is often difficult for teachers to give students sufficient comprehensible input in written or spoken discourse. Therefore, in addition to providing students with such input as much as possible, teachers should encourage students to actively use the target language and produce oral and written output. Because of this, this paper advocates that international Chinese teachers should effectively combine comprehensible input and output from multiple languages in their

classrooms and lesson plans. Results from studies on trilingual meta-linguistic awareness demonstrate that, during the teaching process, adopting a holistic viewpoint and making full use of bilinguals' linguistic backgrounds can successfully stimulate trilingual speakers' meta-phonological awareness and syntactic awareness, thereby enhancing the efficacy of Chinese learning. Therefore, a teaching framework that integrates language meaning, language form, and language use as a whole, as proposed by Cummins (2001), can be drawn upon (Table 2).

Table 2. An integrated teaching framework focusing on language meaning, language form and language use (Cummins, 2001)

<p>A. FOCUS ON MEANING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Making Input ComprehensibleDeveloping Critical Literacy <p>B. FOCUS ON LANGUAGE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Awareness of Language Forms and UsesCritical Analysis of Language Forms and Uses <p>C. FOCUS ON USE</p> <p>Using Language to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Generate New KnowledgeCreate Literature and ArtAct on Social Realities

Incorporating comprehensible input as an instructional element and emphasizing a focus on language meaning, the framework adopts a broader perspective on successful language acquisition by integrating linguistic, cognitive, sociocultural, and sociopolitical factors. It is worth mentioning that the concept of “comprehensible input” cannot only be interpreted in a literal sense. For example, students who are learning a language need to be able to comprehend not only the straightforward linguistic information but also the language's concepts and vocabulary. They also need to have the critical thinking abilities that are essential for intelligible input. The second element of the integrated teaching framework, focusing on language form, points to the importance of developing students' language awareness. This includes not only paying attention to the form of language, but also developing students' critical language awareness and encouraging them to explore the relationship between different languages and rights. Teachers should effectively focus on language form by reading to increase the amount of target language input for students, while also providing extensive opportunities for written or oral use of the target language. The third element of the integrated teaching framework, focusing on language use, emphasizes the need for students to express their identity and demonstrate their level of intelligence through focused language. The active use of the target language aids in the development of pupils' general literacy abilities and their sense of self. In conclusion, the comprehensible input teachers provide is only a starting point in students' acquisition of trilingual skills. Additionally, teachers can give students more chances to produce understandable language in order to maximize cognition and improve language and subject matter comprehension, while also giving them enough chances to use language in real-world contexts in order to co-create knowledge and strengthen multilingual identity.

4.3 Enhancing individuals' multilingual competence with a focus on language universality, language distance, and language awareness

Jessner points out that the language repertoire of multilinguals is built on interlinguistic similarities. However, teachers in multilingual classrooms pay little attention to the commonalities between the languages in focus and tend to ignore the positive effects of students' acquired linguistic knowledge (Jessner 1999). Ringbom argues that interlingual similarity plays a crucial role in elucidating certain psycholinguistic issues. He advocates for greater attention to be paid to the inter- and intra-lingual similarities already perceived by learners, rather than an excessive focus on linguistic analysis of differences between native and target languages (Ringbom, 1987). In third language acquisition, especially when the learned languages are similar in type to each other, teachers should focus on motivating students in the classroom by incorporating their previous experiences of learning multilingualism, focusing on similarities between languages, and encouraging students to fully use their previous learning strategies to identify and share what they have learned about the language. The degree of similarity or dissimilarity between the learner's perceived native language and the target language, or perceived language distance, also plays a significant influence in the transfer behavior of trilingual learners. Kellerman refers to this awareness of the relationship between language types as psychological typology, which means that the higher the similarity between several languages at a given stage of learning, the more likely the native language will influence the development of other languages (Kellerman, 1995). Most previous studies have considered this "influence of the mother tongue" as a hindrance to the learner, but have ignored its facilitative effect. In fact, even if learners have not yet fully mastered the language, any knowledge they have acquired can be a point of interaction between several languages. At the same time, language awareness is closely related to the development of multilingualism, and emphasis should be placed on developing and improving learners' multilingual awareness. Research on the psycholinguistic processes in third language acquisition also has important implications for international Chinese language teaching. Teachers should encourage students to use learning techniques to promote language awareness and enhance learning strategies since research has shown that they can have a good impact on the acquisition of a third language. To sum up, improving students' language awareness is beneficial to the formation of multilingual identities and the development of multilingual competence. Teachers should focus on developing students' awareness of multilingualism so that they can demonstrate some critical reflection, decision-making, and independent behavior when using language (Renou, 2001). These skills are represented in the usage of multilingual resource banks as well as in the learning of new languages and the various communication demands of language. Furthermore, it is imperative that educators possess a thorough understanding of the unique characteristics of students' language representations and acquisition processes in order to actively reflect upon them within the classroom setting and enhance their linguistic and communicative proficiency.

5. Concluding remarks

The cause of international Chinese language education, originating in China, transcends national boundaries. The COVID-19 pandemic and the reform and development of Confucius Institutes have propelled international Chinese language education into its 4.0 stage, making it imperative to accelerate its endogenous,

embedded and localized development (Wang, 2020). The introduction of third language acquisition provides a fresh perspective for the teaching practice of international Chinese language education, which holds significant theoretical and practical value. In the realm of international Chinese language education, language instruction serves as a crucial conduit and should actively engage in research on third language acquisition within multilingual environments. It is imperative to flexibly incorporate relevant theoretical findings and integrate them into an ever-evolving developmental process. In this way, we can not only refine the laws of Chinese language acquisition, establish a new teaching model, and significantly enhance the efficiency and level of international Chinese language teaching but also optimize the macro-level language education environment. This provides a robust guarantee for improving the effectiveness of language acquisition, and promoting deeper development in international Chinese language education.

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