CFL Learners’ View on Chinese Language and Their Writing Process: A Case Study of Three Advanced-level CFL Learners

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Abstract

Learners’ belief and view of a foreign language play an important role in language acquisition (Horwitz 1988; Norton 2000). Especially, when Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) learners acquire Chinese which has few similarities with their first language, their positive views on the Chinese can make significant difference in their learning progress. There are studies of foreign language learners’ belief on Chinese characters (Kanji and Hanzi) and their acquisition, yet few studies discuss learners’ view or socio-cultural aspect of Chinese writing as a composition (Zhang 2009). Zhang focused on how the creation of online learning community has positive effects on learners’ Chinese writing. Her holistic approach to Chinese writing reveals that when Chinese learners perceive Chinese writing as a social act, they are more interested in Chinese writing. However, her study did not explain how learners’ view on writing has changed through their learning experience and how their belief influences their writing process. In order to fill the gaps in Chinese writing research, this paper investigates how CFL learners construct their views on Chinese writing and how their views influence their writing processes.

A mixed methodology combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches was utilized in this study. In order to examine CFL learners’ views on Chinese writing, participants were asked to complete initial and exit surveys about their view on Chinese language and their daily Chinese practice. Interviews were also conducted to understand and confirm their answers in both surveys. For the analysis of Chinese writing, this paper modified the “process approach of writing” and mainly examined learners’ planning and editing in one draft. This study also utilized “real-time data collection” which is to record writing processes using computer-based technology to analyze learners’ thought processes. Three advanced-level CFL learners participated in this study. They had similar Chinese learning experiences including the duration of studying Chinese and the experience of studying abroad in China. The data was collected for one academic year at a large state university in the Midwest of the United States. They were asked to provide their writing samples from their classes and they came to the researcher’s office to write essays. Their essay writing was recorded by a hand-writing movement capture device and a computer screen capture program for analysis.

The results reveal that three participants had different views on Chinese writing. One believed that Chinese writing is not necessary for Chinese learners. The other two participants agreed that Chinese writing is a necessary skill to learn. However, all of them did not consider Chinese writing as a communicative way to engage with Chinese communities. The data also show that their preference of writing methods (computer vs. paper-pen) is influenced by their views on Chinese writing. It further influenced their writing processes such as the use of references and editing patterns. Lastly, this paper discusses how CFL learners utilize different strategies to write and edit essays.