

Title: Learning Chinese Language

Subject: Sociology: Language as a component of culture

Grade Level: This lesson is for grades 10-12 in a basic sociology class. It could easily be adapted to the lower grades. This lesson assumes it is the first time the students have been exposed to this information.

Time Duration: This lesson can be completed in two class periods.

Overview: During the Sociology unit on Culture, students will discuss language as a component of culture. This lesson will give them the opportunity to view language in a context beyond that of Standard English.

Objective:

- Students will become familiar with the history of the Chinese language.
- Students will understand that Chinese language uses symbols to communicate words.
- Students will develop and understanding of the differences between Chinese and English.
- Students will analyze what the language says about the cultural values.
- Students will learn how to create a few basic Chinese language symbols.
- Students will be able to create a Venn Diagram analyzing basic differences between the two languages.

Materials:

- Teacher prepared handout on the Chinese language including information on pictographs and language simplification using the following website:
 - <http://www.paulnoll.com/China/Culture/language-history.html>
- Two books on Chinese characters:
 - The Spirit of the Chinese Character - Barbara Aria with Russell Eng Gon
 - The Nature of the Chinese Character - Barbara Aria

(Jenny instructed me that since these books demonstrate how to write Chinese characters, I would not have to copy them for this lesson plan.)

- Venn Diagram sheet
- K-W-L Sheet (What do you Know, What do you Want to know, What did you Learn)

Activities and Procedures:

Day 1

- Teacher passes out the KWL and has the students complete the "What do you know about the Chinese language?" Students will have 3-5 minutes to write down what they know. The teacher will prompt them with questions about where they have seen Chinese writing, if they know anyone Chinese, etc.
- Students will pair share what they have written (1-2 minutes)
- Students will share through a directed discussion what they know. 3 minutes
- Students will then pair share to come up with a list of what they want to know. 3 minutes
- Students will share through a directed discussion what they want to learn about the Chinese language. 2 minutes
- Teacher introduces the Chinese language system to the students through the Chinese Language Handout
- Teacher distributes handout of information. Students are given time to read the handout in the class. 10 minutes
- Teacher asks the students if they have any questions about what they have read and addresses those.
- Teacher lectures on the history of the language 15 minutes
- Homework: Students will review what they have learned from the reading. They will list and define the new terms from the reading on their KWL.

Day 2

- Students will share the "L" section from the KWL with a partner, and will amend theirs as necessary. (5 minutes)
- Students will share their "L" section in a teacher led discussion that will be used to review the history of Chinese language. (10 minutes)
- Next teacher will pass out packets of pages that are copied from The Spirit of the Chinese Character and The Nature of the Chinese Character
- Students will be given a few minutes to review their packets. Students are instructed to look at the Chinese character, and determine if they can see a relationship between the picture and the word it is meant to represent. They will be instructed to pair-share this with their classmates. (5 minutes)
- Teacher will then lead a directed discussion on this topic, where students will share their observations (5 minutes)
- Students will be given time to practice writing some of the symbols (15 minutes)
- Students will share with the class some of the challenges they had in trying to recreate the symbols. How did it feel to write in this language? (5 minutes)
- Some of the students who are taking Chinese may want to share additionally with the class.
- Teacher pass out the Venn Diagram.
- Homework: Students will complete a compare and contrast between the Chinese and English languages by completing the Venn Diagram.

Extra Credit: Students may prepare sentences or write a short story using Chinese characters. This will require additional research on their own for additional characters. They will present these to the class at a specified time.

Name _____

Date _____

Period _____

Chinese Language

K - W - L

What do you know about the Chinese language?

What do you want to know about the Chinese language?

What did you learn about the Chinese language?

History of the Chinese Language

There are roughly 70,000 Chinese characters and phonetic sounds. An average person has to know about 3,000 characters to be able to read the newspaper. In secondary schools the number of characters taught is 5,000.

This is a discussion of the language of the Chinese, or Han, people, the majority ethnic group of China, including both the People's Republic of China and Taiwan. Of China's more than 1 billion people, approximately 95 percent speak Chinese, as opposed to the non-Chinese languages such as Tibetan, Mongolian, Lolo, Miao, and Tai spoken by minorities. Chinese is also spoken by large emigrant communities in Southeast Asia, North and South America, and in the Hawaiian Islands. More people, in fact, speak Chinese than any other language in the world; English ranks second in number of speakers and Spanish third.

As the dominant language of East Asia, Chinese has greatly influenced the writing systems and vocabularies of neighboring languages not related to it by origin, such as Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese. It has been estimated that until the 18th century more than half of the world's printed books were Chinese.

General Characteristics

Chinese, together with Tibetan and Burmese and the many tribal languages of South and Southeast Asia, belongs to the Sino-Tibetan family of languages. Besides a core vocabulary and sounds, Chinese and most related languages share features that make them unlike most Western languages: They are monosyllabic, have even less inflection than English, and are tonal. In order to indicate differences in meaning between words similar in sound, tone languages assign to words a distinctive relative pitch high or low or a distinctive pitch contour level, rising, or falling.

Language vs. Dialects

Spoken Chinese comprises many dialects that can be classified in seven main groups. Although they employ a common written form, they are mutually unintelligible and for this reason are sometimes referred to as languages; the differences among them are analogous to the differences in pronunciation and vocabulary among the Romance languages. The fact is, however, that most Chinese speak the same dialect, which Westerners call Mandarin; its standard of pronunciation is the speech of Peking. Mandarin also forms the basis of the modern written vernacular, Baihua, which supplanted classical Chinese in the schools after 1917, and of the official spoken language, Putonghua, prescribed in 1956 for nationwide use in schools. For this reason Westerners usually speak of a single Chinese language.

Development of the Language

The modern Chinese dialects (from the 11th century AD) evolved from Old (or Archaic) Chinese (8th-3rd century BC), the sounds of which have been tentatively reconstructed. Although monosyllabic, Old Chinese

was not wholly uninflected. The next stage of Chinese that has been carefully analyzed was Middle (or Ancient) Chinese (to about the 11th century AD). By this time the rich sound system of Old Chinese had progressed far toward the extreme simplification seen in the modern dialects. For instance, Old Chinese possessed series of consonants such as p, ph, b, bh (where h stands for aspiration or rough breathing). In Middle Chinese this had become p, ph, bh; in Mandarin only p and ph (now spelled b and p) are left.

The modern Mandarin syllable consists, at the least, of a so-called final element, namely, a vowel (a, e) or semivowel (i, u) or some combination of these (a diphthong or triphthong), with a tone (level, rising, dipping, or falling) and sometimes a final consonant which, however, can only be an n, ng, or r. Old Chinese, however, had in addition a final p, t, k, b, d, g, and m. The final element may be preceded by an initial consonant but never by a consonant cluster; Old Chinese probably had clusters, as at the beginning of klan and glam. As sonic distinctions became fewer for example, as final n absorbed final m, so that syllables such as lam and lan became simply lan the number of Mandarin syllables different from one another in sound fell to about 1300. No fewer words existed, but more words were homonyms. Thus, the words for poetry, bestow, moist, lose, corpse, and louse had all been pronounced differently from one another in Middle Chinese; in Mandarin they all become shi in the level tone. In fact, so many homonyms came to exist that ambiguity would have become intolerable if compound words had not simultaneously developed. Thus, poetry, became shi-ge, "poetry-song"; teacher became shi-zhang, "teacher-elder." Although a modern Chinese dictionary contains many more such compounds than one-syllable expressions, most of the compounds still break down into independently meaningful syllables.

Grammar

Highly inflected languages such as Latin and Russian make scores of additions to, or changes in, the sound of a word to indicate grammatical differences; modern Chinese, on the other hand, never changes, and seldom adds, sounds for such purposes. Because no inflection of nouns exists to show whether they are, for example, subject or object, and no indication is given that verbs, nouns, and adjectives agree with each other in number and case, word order is even more important than it is in English as an indicator of the relation of words to one another in the sentence. In broad outline, Chinese word order is quite like that of English: subject-verb-object, modifier-modified. On closer inspection, the grammar reveals greater differences between the languages. In English the subject is always the performer of an action, but in Chinese it is more often simply a topic set forth to be followed by a comment. An example is Nei-ke shu yezi hen da, literally "(As for) that tree, leaves very big," that is, "that tree has very big leaves." Further grammatical characteristics of Chinese are that, in general, verb tense is not expressed; and for lack of an equivalent of the English relative clause, quite complicated modifier phrases may precede the term modified. Jianle shu jiu mai de neige ren, "Having-seen-book-immediately-buy-is-that-man," is translated as "That man who instantly buys every book he sees."

Written Chinese

The Chinese written language is of an old and conservative type that assigns a single distinctive symbol, or character, to each word of the vocabulary. Knowledge of 2000 to 3000 characters is needed to read newspapers, and a large dictionary contains more than 40,000 characters (arranged according to sound or form). The oldest texts to have been discovered are oracular sayings incised on tortoise shells and cattle scapulae by court diviners of the Shang dynasty, from the early 14th century BC on; these are the so-called oracle-bone inscriptions.

Although the writing system has since been standardized and stylistically altered, its principles and many of its symbols remain fundamentally the same. Like other scripts of ancient origin, Chinese is derived from picture writing; it grew into a word-by-word representation of language when it was discovered that words too abstract to be readily pictured could be indicated by their sound rather than their sense. Unlike other scripts, however, Chinese still works pictographically as well as phonetically. Moreover, its sound indications have not been adapted to changes of pronunciation but have remained keyed to the pronunciation of 3000 years ago. The building blocks of the system are several hundred pictographs for such basic words as man, horse, and axe. In addition, expanded, or compound, pictographs exist. For example, a symbol of this type representing man carrying grain means "harvest," and thus "year" (nian).

Phonetic loans are pictographs of concrete words borrowed to indicate abstract words of the same or similar sound. The principle here is that of the rebus, or visual pun. Thus, the pictograph for dustpan (ji) was borrowed for this, his, her, its (qi or ji). Through the Chou period (11th-3d century BC) many characters had such a dual use. If at that time the scribes had agreed that only the "dustpan" pictograph would stand for any syllable pronounced ji, they would have discovered the principle of the phonetic syllabary, precursor of the alphabet . Because of the great number of homonyms in Chinese, however, scribes instead retreated to picture writing. The picture of the dustpan came to be used exclusively for his, her, its. In the rarer instances when scribes actually meant to refer to a dustpan, however, they avoided ambiguity by employing a compound symbol in which "dustpan" had added to it the pictograph for "bamboo," representing the material from which dustpans were made. This process for reducing the ambiguity of phonetic loans became in time a process by which any pictograph, borrowed for its sound, could be joined to any other chosen to indicate the meaning, forming a phonetic compound. Thus, "dustpan," with the addition of "earth" instead of "bamboo," indicated ji, "base, foundation." Today simple and compound pictographs continue to be used for some of the most basic vocabulary home, mother, child, rice, and fire. However, perhaps 95 percent of the words in the dictionary are written with phonetic compounds.

To express modern concepts, Chinese generally invents equivalents from its native stock of meaningful syllables, or renders such terms in phonetic spelling; thus, chemistry is expressed in Chinese as "study of transformations."

Shi Huangdi, first emperor of a unified China, suppressed many regional scripts and enforced a simplified, standardized writing called the Small Seal. In the Han dynasty (206 BC-AD 220) this developed into the Clerical, Running, Draft, and Regular or Standard scripts. Printed Chinese is modeled on the Standard Script. Cursive or Running or rapid writing (the Running and Draft scripts) introduced many abbreviated characters

used in artistic calligraphy and in commercial and private correspondence, but it was long banned from official documents.

There have been four broadly defined styles of writing in the last 3000 Years:

1. Seal scripts,
2. Regular Brush scripts,
3. Running script,
4. "Grass" script.

The printing of abbreviated characters is still forbidden in Taiwan but has become the normal practice in the People's Republic of China. The non-abbreviated characters is referred to as the "traditional" characters. Many of the old people in the People's Republic of China still use the traditional characters and some have trouble with the abbreviated characters. The abbreviated characters is sometimes referred to as the "simplified" characters.

Methods of Transliteration

In the English-speaking world, since 1892, Chinese words (except personal and place-names) have usually been transliterated according to a phonetic spelling system called Wade-Giles romanization, propounded by Sir Thomas Wade (1818-95) and Herbert Giles (1845-1935). Personal names were romanized according to individual wishes, however, and place-names followed the nonsystematic spellings of the Chinese Post Office. Since 1958 another phonetic romanization known as Pinyin ("spelling") has had official standing in the People's Republic of China, where it is used for telegrams and in primary education. Replacement of the traditional characters by Pinyin has been advocated but is unlikely to be carried through completely because of the threat it poses to literature and historical documentation in the classical language. Simplification of the sound system through time, with the resultant homonyms, has made the terse classical style unintelligible when transcribed in an alphabetic script. Since Jan. 1, 1979, Xinhua (New China News Agency) has used Pinyin in all dispatches to foreign countries. The U. S. government, many scholarly publications, and newspapers such as the New York Times have also adopted the Pinyin system, as has the Funk & Wagnall's New Encyclopedia.

Name _____

Date _____

Period _____

CHINESE - ENGLISH LANGUAGE COMPARISON

VENN DIAGRAM

Chinese Language

Commonalities

English Language

