Connecting Australian students’ prior knowledge with their foreign language learning—A beginning Mandarin teacher’s exploration of strategies through language transfer

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DECLARATION

I declare that except where due acknowledgement has been made this research thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in any form for another degree at any university or other institute of tertiary education. Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references is given.

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Lists of abbreviations

DEEWR: Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

L1: First Language

L2: Second Language

MCEETYA: Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs

MFL: Mandarin as a Foreign Language

NALSAS: National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools

NALSSP: National Asian Languages and Studies in School Program

NSW: New South Wales

ROSETE: Research- Oriented School-Engaged Teacher Education

TL: Target Language

WSR: Western Sydney Region
Abstract

With the growing influence of China on the world economy, the learning of its official language, Mandarin, has become increasingly important in Australia. However, Mandarin is regarded as a difficult language for speakers of an Indo-European language, given the fact that it belongs to a different language system. To make Mandarin learnable and lower the cost of learning Mandarin for students in the Western Sydney Region (WSR) schools, this research explores the impact of language transfer on Australian non-Chinese-background students’ Mandarin learning from the perspective of a beginning teacher. A qualitative case study was conducted in a local school in the WSR. Data were collected from observation of the teacher researcher’s own Mandarin classes and her reflective journals. The data shed light upon how language transfer influences Mandarin learning in the perspectives of phonology, morph-syntax, and pragmatics. The major finding of the research is when the implementation of language transfer was constructed on teachers’ correct subject matter knowledge and students’ prior knowledge, the outcome of the learning experience was likely to be satisfactory. Otherwise, it led to students’ confusion and frustration. The conclusion of the research mainly includes two parts. First, the effectiveness of language transfer largely depends on teachers’ understanding of the learner and the subject matter. Second, including both Mandarin and English in teachers’ talk contributes to a TL-input rich and accessible learning experience.

Key words: language transfer; prior knowledge; Cross-linguistic similarities; beginning teachers
Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Background to the research

This study explores the impact of language transfer on Australian non-Chinese-background primary school students’ Mandarin learning. This chapter is composed of five parts. The first part pictures the research background from the social context of the research and the researcher’s personal experience. The second part poses the research question, followed by the third part on the significance of the study. The fourth part is the proposed research outcome and the last is the outline of the research.

1.1.1 Australian context

Over the past few years, Australia’s trade has continued to shift its focus towards Asian countries and will increasingly do so in the future (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2008). As Australia’s key trading partner in East Asia, Orton (2008) describes China as Australia’s regional neighbour and largest trading partner. China made a major contribution to the workforce, students, and tourists to Australia (Orton, 2008). Such a relationship was believed to maintain and continue to benefit Australia economically in the future (Orton, 2008; DEEWR, 2008).

In reply to such relationships and equip all young Australians for the modern, globalized society of the 21st century, it is necessary to create a solid pool of Australians in a range of sectors who deeply understand China and who can speak Chinese well (Orton. 2008). “Members of the Government and a few community leaders such as the CEO of BHP Billiton and the Chairman of ANZ have been calling for an Asian-literate workforce with high Chinese language and intercultural competence” (Orton, 2008, P.38). As Louie (2002) stated, the study of Asia and its languages is essential for Australia’s national interest. Asian studies have been independently pursued on the education agenda in terms of Australia's national interests (Henderson, 2003).

In recognition of the importance of Asian languages and Asian studies, reports have been put forward to address the importance of Asian Language education for a long time. According to Henderson (2003), there are five identifiable stages that have emphasised differing aspects of Asian studies and reflected different phases in the campaign to mainstream Asian studies. Each stage indicated that the lack of
attention to Asian language skills and cultural knowledge had intellectual, philosophical, educational, economic, trade, strategic and political consequences for Australia (Henderson, 2003). The five developmental stages of Asian languages and Asian studies in Australia are stated in the following part.

Under the context of “steady growth in the economic, cultural, political and military links between Australia and Asia during the last two decades” (ibid, 7; cited from Henderson, 2003, p5) and in recognition that “it was in Australia's national interests to challenge the prevailing Anglocentric traditions that dominated Australian intellectual and cultural life”, the first stage starts from 1970, focusing on awarding Asian studies “parity of esteem” (Auchmuty, 1970) with European studies in the Australian education system (Henderson, 2003). The Auchmuty Report (1970, 90) identified the need to lift the profile of Asian languages and studies in the school curriculum to the same level as European languages and cultures. The report was really about “establishing a notion of balance in language offerings” (Henderson, 2003). As the Rudd Report (1994) observed, the Auchmuty Report "was among the first to recommend the expansion of Asian language teaching in schools and universities". Led by Auchmuty, other policy documents continued to push forward Asian studies in the Australian education system, such as the FitzGerald Report (ASAA, 1980) which acknowledged the utilitarian aspects of the national interest in terms of the urgency to mainstream Asian studies for Australia's long term benefit (Henderson, 2003, p.6).

With the advent of the 1980s, Asian studies came into a new stage with increasing awareness that Asian studies was in the national interest (Henderson, 2003). This period focused broadly on the need to establish a culture of foreign language learning in Australia along with calls for a national policy on languages (Henderson, 2003). The Commonwealth Department of Education agreed to some of the issues brought up in the FitzGerald Report (ASAA 1980) in its 1982 document *Towards a National Language Policy*. This document demonstrated a paradigm shift in government direction on policy prescription for languages, and influenced Asian languages and cultures policy, for it saw language as a "resource", as well as a "need" and a "right" (Henderson, 2003).

In 1984, the Senate Standing Committee on Education and the Arts noted in its report, *A National Language Policy*, that:
Australia's interests required that many Australians especially in business and in government should be proficient in languages other than English (Senate Standing Committee on Education and the Arts 1984, 120).

In 1987 the Lo Bianco Report took up further analysis into the creation of a national policy on languages. The report, *National Policy on Languages* (Department of Education, 1987) recognised Asian languages as particularly important to the country.

Commencing in 1986, the third stage presented a national interest argument for Asian languages and studies and centred on the need for government intervention to promote Asian languages and studies for intellectual, cultural and utilitarian reasons (Henderson, 2003). That is, the study of languages and cultures would provide the stimulus for Australians to think beyond the constraints of their cultural mores and historical context, and prepare them for engagement with the region in various capacities (Henderson, 2003). Key policy documents in this phase, such as the Scully Report (Scully 1986), the *National Strategy* (Asian Studies Council, 1988) and the Ingleson Report (Asian Studies Council, 1989), drew together the themes of the previous stages and set them in a wider national, economic and strategic setting (Henderson, 2003).

The fourth stage ran from 1988 during the time of economic restructuring (Henderson, 2003). Its discourse emphasised the utilitarian outcomes of Asian studies in terms of its purported benefits to the national economy (Henderson, 2003). Influenced by the utilitarian view of knowledge, a range of national education and language policy documents were informed from 1988 onward, some of which merged with the push for Asian languages and studies (Henderson, 2003). This was evident in the Higher Education White Paper (Dawkins 1988), and the Hobart Declaration that set Common and Agreed National Goals for Schooling in Australia (AEC 1989) (cited in Henderson, 2003). The publication of the Garnaut Report in 1989 lifted the debates about prioritising Asian languages and cultures onto the mainstream political agenda; that is, Asian Studies was finally given high priority in education policy (Henderson, 2003).

Around 1991, the fifth stage came during a period of recession and record unemployment in Australia, therefore its focus was on the economic benefits of Asia literacy for domestic employment and for trade in the East Asian region (Henderson, 2003). The stage intensified the rhetoric of the previous phases and elevated Asian languages above the study of Asian cultures (Henderson, 2003). In
December 1992 the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) decided to establish a high level working group to develop a strategic framework for the implementation of a comprehensive Asian languages and cultures program in Australian schools, which marked a turning point in the push for Asian languages and studies in schools (Henderson, 2003). Two years later in 1994, COAG accepted the Working Group’s report “Asian Language and Australia’s Economic Future”, or the Rudd Report (Henderson, 2003). Its 15-year plan was aimed at producing an Asia-literate generation to boost Australia's international and regional economic performance. It set the goal that by 2006, 15% of Year 12 students study one of the four priority Asian languages, Mandarin, Japanese, Indonesian and Korean, selected for their perceived economic significance to Australia. The report emphasised that a national Asian languages and cultures strategy should be developed in the context of second language provision. It recommended that four priority Asian languages be studied through a school-based program. This report was arguably a political and ultimately practical solution to the Commonwealth Government’s inertia on developing a national strategy for Asia (Henderson, 2003).

The implementation of the Report, overseen by the National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools (NALSAS) Taskforce, commenced in 1995. As about $220 million was invested by government from 1995 to 2002 (Bianco, 2005), the result was fruitful. During its first quadrennium, the study of Asian languages went up by more than 50% (NALSAS, 1998). The January 2002 evaluation of the NALSAS Strategy, indicated that by 2000 more than 23% of all Australian students were studying a NALSAS language at some level (Erebus Consulting Partners 2002a: x). Thus it seemed that the Rudd Report's long term strategy was taking effect with 73.5% of Australian schools teaching an Asian language (Henderson, 2003).

The overview of the five major stages for Asian studies in Australia, from 1970 when the Gorton government commissioned the Auchmuty Report to the release of the Rudd Report in 1994, presents the commendable and consistent official support for Asian studies driven by the national interest rationale (Henderson, 2003).

Over the past ten years, Asian languages and studies have continued to develop. “In March 2008, all governments through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and its Productivity Agenda Working Group (PAWG) agreed to an
implementation plan for the development of the Australian Government’s National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program (NALSSP)” (DEEWR, 2008). “This plan included agreement to an aspirational target for NALSSP that, by 2020, at least 12 per cent of students exit Year 12 with a fluency in one of the target Asian languages (Mandarin, Japanese, Indonesian and Korean) sufficient for engaging in trade and commerce in Asia and/or university study)” (DEEWR, 2008). That means a fourfold increase on the number doing so in 2008 (Orton, 2008). “It also aims to increase the number of qualified Asian language teachers and develop a specialist curriculum for advanced students” (DEEWR, 2008). $62.4 million was committed by the Australian government as funding to support Asian Languages and Studies in NALSSP from 2008-09 to 2011-11(DEEWR, 2008). “This funding offers considerable opportunity for a phased implementation approach across a three-year period for programs that provide an immediate stimulus to the teaching and learning of Asian languages and cultures” (DEEWR, 2008).

However, such emphasis on Asian languages and studies has not promised such a bright future in Australia. The underlying national economic and political purposes are unable to encourage Australian young students to study Mandarin for example, a script-based language, on their own initiative (Henderson, 2007). “Figures from the end of 2007 show that fewer than 20% of Australians working in China can speak the language at all, and only 10% have studied even one China-related subject” (Orton, 2007; cited from Orton, 2008, p.5). Nationally, a scant 3% of students in Year 12 took Chinese, 94% whose first language was Chinese and nearly 94% of students gave up learning Mandarin immediately beyond the compulsory years (Orton, 2008). “Even in Victoria, where 33% of the country’s Chinese learners reside, 94% of those who begin Chinese at school quit before Year 10; and beginners at university drop out at rates close to 75%” (Orton, 2008). “By senior secondary school, the teaching and learning of Chinese in Australia is overwhelmingly a matter of Chinese teaching Chinese to Chinese” (Orton, 2008). According to Orton (2008), it is highly necessary to ensure the availability of a sufficient number of educated, work-initiated, China-literate, young people to develop Australia’s deeper engagement with China. Therefore, urgent development in the breadth and quality of Chinese teaching and learning in Australian schools is needed as a matter of national strategic priority (Orton, 2008)
task. “Over their secondary schooling, Australian language students receive some 500 hours of instruction. The Foreign Service Institution in Washington DC (and similar bodies somewhere) estimates that it takes a native English speaking beginner learner approximately 600 hours to become proficient in a European language such as Italian and French, and 2200 hours to reach the same standard in Chinese” (Orton, 2008). The difficulty of learning Mandarin increases due to the high time cost.

Another barrier is concerned with proficiency, owing to the intrinsic difficulties of Mandarin. “Chinese has four challenges for the English speaking learner: tones, homophones, characters, and the system of particles and verb complements. They are very particular challenges, the first three peculiar to Chinese among languages taught in Australian schools, and the result is that the average competent learner will take 3.5 times longer to master Chinese than s/he would take to master a European language” (Orton, 2008). “In the New South Wales HSC Chinese as a Second Language, students are required to have mastered only some 250 characters. Candidates taking Chinese as a Second Language in the Victorian Certificate of Education are required to have mastered some 430 characters from a given list. Students from the more dedicated programs may have mastered closer to 600 characters by the end of Year 12” (Orton, 2008 p15). “Children in China, Taiwan and Hong Kong are required to master 500 characters in their first year of primary school. It takes mastery of some 4000 characters to read a Mainland Chinese newspaper” (Orton, 2008 p15). “By Year12 the same diligent, reasonably bright L2 student has the Chinese characters of a Grade 1 student in China: they can’t compete” (Orton, 2008 p27).

Besides the two barriers discussed above, another one mentioned frequently is the lack of qualified Mandarin teachers and lack of quality teaching methods. Rudd himself admitted that it was one of the major reasons that the NALSAS Program could not be completed immediately (Henderson, 2007).

To sum up, there are three barriers to Mandarin learning, including the limited time devoted, the intrinsic difficulty of the language itself, and the lack of qualified teachers/ methods. This context provides a fertile ground to explore a teaching approach to assist non-Chinese-background beginners in primary school with their Mandarin learning. To be specific, the approach targets lowering learners’ time cost, making Mandarin learnable from a linguistic perspective, and providing some new ideas for teachers.
1.1.2 Personal experience

This section includes the researcher’s own language learning experience in China as well as teaching as a beginning Mandarin teacher in the WSR. All of these experiences developed the belief that there exist similarities between Mandarin and English, which will assist learners in foreign language acquisition.

1.1.2.1 The researcher’s learning experience

I began to learn English when I was in Y3. It was quite difficult for me to remember English words and expressions in the beginning. Then I came up with an approach to assist my memory which really worked. Take “how old are you” for example. I used Chinese pinyin to indicate the pronunciation of English words. “How” sounds similar to “hǎo” in pinyin. “ol” equals “ou”. And “d’ are” is for “da”. As for “you”, it takes the same form in pinyin. So “hao ou da you” in pinyin indicates the pronunciation of “how old are you” in English. With this approach, I found no further difficulty in speaking the sentence.

1.1.2.2 The researcher’s teaching experience

I currently teach Mandarin in a local primary school in the WSR. When I taught twelve Chinese zodiac animals, I used cross-linguistic similarities to assist my teaching. For example when I taught “shé (in Chinese pinyin)” that is the word for “snake”, I showed the class a picture in which there was a snake on a T-shirt. I chose the picture because “shé” sounds similar to “shir” in “T-shirt”. So when students remember the picture, they remember how to say “snake” in Mandarin. When I asked my students whether the approach helped or not, they all gave me a positive answer.

Based on my experience in both learning and teaching, I decided to research the teaching approach to assist students’ Mandarin learning, using positive transfer through cross-linguistic similarities. Specifically, I am interested in exploring an approach to assist students’ second language learning through applying their prior knowledge (e.g. first language knowledge). Cross-linguistic similarity has been a hot debate at the theoretical level and has been explored within the practice of teaching two alphabetic languages (such as English and German). However, there is little systematic research that has focused on two languages that are from two different systems (e.g. English and Mandarin).
The negotiation of identities that takes place in contexts where there are power differences results in the struggles in which individuals resist, negotiate, change, and transform themselves and others (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004).

How speakers use language to position themselves, others, and discourses results in the formation of social identities. As Wenger (1998) states, “We define who we are by the ways we experience ourselves through participation as well as the ways we and others reify ourselves” (p. 149). The different social roles that we assume in our lives also shape our sense of self and how others see us in the context of our social activities (Achugar, 2009). Professional identity is defined as an appropriation of voice and a presentation of self (Erickson, 1999; Sarangi & Roberts, 1999).

Communities, like other ecosystems, are not defined by what their participants have in common, but by how their interdependence on one another articulates across differences of viewpoint, beliefs, values, and practices (Lemke, 2002, p. 74).

1.2 Research questions

The research studies the impact of language transfer on Mandarin learning. The research questions are: (1) what is the linguistic similarities between Mandarin and English? (2) What is the impact of language transfer on Mandarin learning? (2) How can a beginning teacher assist Australian non-Chinese-background students to learn Mandarin through language transfer?

1.3 Significance of the study

This research responds to the Australian Asian Literacy Policy. Orton (2008) claimed that if there were not considerable dropouts, the number of students learning Mandarin as a foreign language in Australia in 2008 would be likely to satisfy the 2020 goal. Thus, in order to reach the number required, an exploration in second language teaching should be the priority.
1.4 Proposed research outcomes

The proposed outcomes of the research will be:

- Clarifying a set of cross-linguistic similarities between Mandarin and English
- Identifying students’ verbal and behavioural response to language transfer
- Exploring the impact of language transfer on the TL learning of non-Chinese-background primary school students in WSR.

1.5 Outline of the thesis

Chapter Two reviews the literature and is of two parts. The first part reviews the literature on language transfer including its theoretical underpinning and empirical studies. The second part focuses on beginning teachers which encompasses teachers’ knowledge and talk.

Chapter Three introduces the methodology of this study. It illustrates the application of qualitative case study as study design, triangulated data collection approaches (reflective journal, participant observation) and thematic analysis. Ethical issues, validity, reliability and generalizability of this research are also addressed.

Chapters Four to Six presents discussions and findings generated from the data.

Chapter Seven provides the conclusions of this research, and presents the key limitations, implications and recommendations for further study.
Chapter Two: Literature review

This chapter includes two parts, language transfer and beginning teachers. It reviews the previous studies on language transfer including its theoretical underpinning and empirical studies. In addition, it reviews researches on teachers’ practical knowledge and teachers’ talk.

2.1 Language transfer

The term “transfer” has been defined by quite a few studies. Bransford and his colleagues (2000) claim that transfer is “the ability to extend what has been learnt in one context to new contexts” (p.51). That is to say, transfer is a learner’s competence in applying knowledge in a new context. For school students, the new context could be a new problem within a course, a new school year, or a new place (e.g. community, workplace) (Bransford et al., 2000, p.51).

Bransford and his team give “transfer” a richer meaning. In their book, it is also mentioned that transfer is the ultimate goal of learning.

> The ultimate goal of learning is to have access to information for a wide set of purposes – that the learning will in some way transfer to other circumstances. In this sense, then, the ultimate goal of schooling is to help students transfer what they have learned in school to everyday settings of home, community, and workplace.

(Bransford et al., 2000, p.73)

Although the two definitions look similar to each other, they focus on different aspects. When transfer is viewed as ability, it highlights a learner’s competence in acquiring knowledge. When transfer is viewed as a goal, quality learning means not only gaining knowledge, but also increasing the capacity of extending knowledge to new situations. To sum up, transfer means learning ability and the ultimate goal of learning as well.

Bransford (2000) defines “transfer” in the view of general learning while Ringbom (2007, p.2) examines the concept in a more focused way. He pointed out in the context of language learning that transfer is “the use of cross-linguistic similarities”. The definition unveils two premises of language transfer. First, the transfer is based on influences between one language and another. Second, the transfer entails “the use” that is learners’ mental effort. In this sense, Ringbom
(2007) indicates at least two accordant research areas on language transfer. One is what similarities there are between languages, the other how learners make use of the similarities.

Comparing the definitions above, there are two major differences. First, Bransford (2000) defines “transfer” from the perspective of general learning across all disciplines while Ringbom (2007) focuses the attention on language learning only. Second, Bransford (2000) views “transfer” as learning ability and the ultimate goal of learning while according to Ringbom (2007) “transfer” is more of a strategy deriving from theories of language and theories of language learning. The following part discusses the theoretical underpinning of language transfer.

2.1.1 The theoretical underpinning

The theoretical underpinning of language transfer entails three parts. They are “learning with understanding”, “the linguistic interdependence principle”, and “cross-linguistic similarity”.

2.1.1.1 Learning with understanding based on prior knowledge

The new science of learning put its emphasis on learning with understanding (Bransford et al., 2000, p.8). Learners should have opportunities to make sense of topics in order to acquire “usable knowledge” (Bransford et al., 2000, p.9). The idea of learning with understanding leads to one of the primary characteristics of the new science of learning: its focus on the processes of knowing.

Humans come to formal education with a range of prior knowledge, skill, beliefs, and concepts that significantly influence what they notice about the environment and how they organized and interpret it. This, in turn, affects their abilities to remember, reason, solve problems, and acquire new knowledge (Bransford et al., 2000, p.10).

Prior knowledge is rich in meaning. It includes learners’ personal and idiosyncratic experiences, a generic set of experiences attributable to developmental stages through which learners may have passed, and the kind of knowledge that learners acquire because of their social roles (i.e. race, class, gender, culture) (Bransford et al., 2000, p.71).

Prior knowledge serves as a basis on which learners construct new knowledge and understandings. It greatly affects the way they organize and interpret new learning
content, which would significantly influence the learning outcome.

Not only do Bransford and his colleagues see the importance of prior knowledge, but other researchers also make the same point.

Table 2.1 review on learner’s prior knowledge

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researcher</th>
<th>View</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ausubel</td>
<td>If I had to reduce all of educational psychology to just one principle, I would say this: the most important single factor influencing learning is what the learner already knows. Ascertain this and teach him accordingly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neuner</td>
<td>it is a general and basic law of any kind of learning that we associate new elements, items, and structures with elements, items and structures already stored in our memory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ringbom</td>
<td>The natural procedure in learning something new is to establish a relation between a new proposition or task and what already exists in the mind</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Empirical studies also support the idea of learning with understanding and prior knowledge. In a famous early study comparing the effects of “learning a procedure” with “learning with understanding” (Chase and Simon, 1973, cited in Bransford et al. 2000), two groups of children practised throwing darts at a target under water. One group received an explanation of the refraction of light, which causes the apparent location of the target to be deceptive. The other group only practised dart throwing, without the explanation. Both groups did equally well on the practice task, which involved a target 12 inches under water. But the group that had been instructed about the abstract principle did much better when they had to transfer to a situation in which the target was under only 4 inches of water. Because they understood what they were doing, the group that had received instruction about the refraction of light could adjust their behaviour to the new task. The experiment illustrates that the learners who understood and had the existing knowledge about the refraction of light performed much better in the new context (“the target was under only 4 inches of water”) than those who did not. In other words, learning with understanding and prior knowledge facilitates transfer.

In another study (Bransford et al., 2000, p.35), a chess master, a Class A player (good but not a master), and a novice were given 5 seconds to view a chess board position from the middle of a chess game. After 5 seconds the board was covered,
and each participant attempted to reconstruct the board position on another board; the procedure was repeated for multiple trials until everyone received a perfect score. On the first trial, the master player correctly placed many more pieces than the Class A player, who in turn placed more than the novice. The experiment illustrates that people make sense of a context by relating it to prior knowledge. The stronger the relationship is between a new thing and existing knowledge, the deeper the understanding is.

To sum up, previous research and experiments support that learning underscores understanding and prior knowledge. Therefore, what learners have known should be engaged in learning. In the context of language learning, it is necessary to assist the target language (TL) acquisition with L1 knowledge which is part of existing knowledge. Therefore, language transfer, the use of cross-linguistic similarities, is of high necessity in TL learning.

2.1.1.2 The linguistic interdependence principle

L1 and L2 academic skills are interdependent; that is to say, there is an underlying cognitive / academic proficiency that is common across languages (Cummins, 1998). The interdependence principle has been stated formally as follows (Cummins, 1981, p.29):

To the extent that instruction in Lx is effective in promoting proficiency in Lx, transfer of this proficiency to Ly will occur provided there is adequate exposure to Ly (either in school or environment) and adequate motivation to learn Ly.

The interdependence principle applies to languages that have little in common (e.g. Japanese / English) as well as to languages that have common roots (e.g. Japanese / Vietnamese) (Cummins, 1998). However, cross-linguistic relationships are stronger for similar as compared to dissimilar languages (Genesee, 1987).

Transfer literacy-related skills can occur both ways in bilingual programs: from minority to majority and from majority to minority languages under certain conditions (Verhoeven, 1991). However, generally speaking, transfer is more likely to occur from minority to majority language because of the greater exposure to literacy in the majority language outside of school and the strong social pressure to learn it (Cummins, 1998).
2.1.1.3 Cross-linguistic similarities

Three cross-linguistic similarity relations are discerned by Ringbom (2007, p.5). They are “a similarity relation”, “a contrast relation”, and “a zero relation”.

A similarity relation means that an item or pattern in the TL is perceived as formally and / or functionally similar to a form or pattern in L1 (Ringbom, 2007, p.5). Take English and Swedish for example. The two languages work in much the same way in the noun morphology: there are only two cases, nominative and genitive (Ringbom, 2007, p.6).

A contrast relation means that the learner perceives a TL item or pattern as in important ways differing from an L1 form or pattern, though there is also an underlying similarity between them (Ringbom, 2007, p.6). Take English and German for instance. In both languages there exists the system of adding personal endings to the present tense of verbs. But the system works differently in each language. The English learner who is used to a specific third-person ending of the present tense of verbs will notice that German has a host of other personal endings for the verb as well (Ringbom, 2007, p.6). In this sense, English and German pose a contrast relation to learners.

A zero relation means that items and patterns in the TL at early stages of learning appear to have little or no perceptible relation to the L1 the learner knows (Ringbom, 2007, p.6). There are some linguistic universals common to all languages. But the level of abstraction in these universals is so high that an average beginning language learner cannot easily notice features that a totally different TL has in common with L1 (Ringbom, 2007, p.6). Ringbom takes English and Chinese for an example in his book (2007). He pointed out:

A learner who knows only Indo-European languages and starts learning Chinese will find it difficult to relate anything to his previous linguistic knowledge. The zero, or near-zero, relation of Chinese to English poses great difficulties at the early stages of learning.

However, Singh & Han (in press) maintain an opinion different from Ringbom’s zero relation between Chinese and English. They advocate using the cross-linguistic similarities between the two languages as a strategy for increasing the retention of beginning Chinese learners. The paper also presents quite a few empirical cases, for example, learning the Chinese number eight “bā” through sound similarity between the word and the sound made by a sheep in English.
speaking countries. In a word, the paper explores a similar relation between the two languages.

Kellerman (1997; citing Ringbom, 2007, p.7) concludes that the three cross-linguistic similarity relations relate to what the learner perceives to be similar between the TL and the L1.

2.1.2 The empirical studies

There are quite a few empirical studies about language transfer. Singleton and Little (1984/2005) studied the degree to which native speakers of English were able to understand a text in Dutch. Subjects who know German and made use of their German knowledge performed much better than those who know French but no German (citing Ringbom, 2007, p.11). The study shows German knowledge is transferred to facilitate understanding in Dutch. There is a stronger cross-linguistic relationship in German and Dutch than French and Dutch.

Likewise, in another study by Gibson and Hufeisen (2003), the subjects were asked to translate a text from Swedish to their L1 aided by a picture. It was found that English and especially German L1 speakers showed a much greater understanding than those whose L1 was Hungarian, Portuguese and the Slavic (cited in Ringbom, 2007, p.11). This study seems to illustrate that there is a stronger cross-linguistic relationship in German / English and Swedish than other languages, which facilitates the transfer. However, the same picture can convey different meanings to the subjects due to their cultural background, which could also lead to the differences in the subjects’ performances.

In regard to cultural understanding, Finland is a country that is in many respects ideally suited for studies of second or third language acquisition (Ringbom, 2007, p.34). The reason is that there are two official languages of the country, Finnish and Swedish. The study by Palmberg (1985) in Finland showed that Swedish-speaking 10-year-olds in Finland knew a fair number of spoken English words before they began to read English at school. 40 concrete high-frequency words were tested, and all 74 children knew some of them. 15 out of the 20 that were most frequently understood showed close phonological and semantic similarity to the Swedish equivalent (cited in Ringbom, 2007, p.11). Following the study of Palmberg (1985), a similar research by Pitkanen (1991) that focused on Finnish-speaking children revealed a much smaller number of understood words than Swedish-speaking children (cited in Ringbom, 2007, p.11). Comparing the two
studies above, they show a stronger cross-linguistic relationship in Swedish and English than Finnish and English, making transfer more likely to happen between the former pair.

Language transfer happens not only between European languages but also between Asian languages. Wang, Koda, and Perfetti (2003) compared the performance of Korean-English and Chinese-English bilinguals in a semantic category judgment task that required participants to decide whether an English word belonged to a semantic category. It turned out that Korean-English bilinguals showed a homophone effect; that is to say, they were more likely to mistake homophones (e.g. Is bare an animal?). In contrast, Chinese bilinguals performed more poorly in a phonological awareness task, compared with Korean readers. The mappings for Korean and Chinese produced the observed effects which show that writing system mapping principles are subject to transfer to a second language (Perfetti & Dunlap, 2008).

Language transfer can also happen between two languages from different systems. Su (2001) found that Chinese English learners transferred their Chinese sentence comprehension skills to processing English; that is, the Chinese learners tended primarily to use word order information and contextual cues in processing English sentences (cited in Wang & Yang, 2008).

Most transfer studies so far can be regarded as insufficient (Ringbom, 2007, p.31). Transfer studies have been concerned mainly with how cross-linguistic similarities are manifested in production as errors, especially grammatical errors (Ringbom, 2007, p.32). The emphasis in transfer studies has thus consistently been on negative transfer, while positive transfer has at most been given some remarks in passing (Ringbom, 2007, p.30). Therefore, it is theoretically necessary to examine the positive transfer, that is, how L1 has influenced good and correct expressions in the TL.

### 2.2 Beginning teachers

“Beginning teachers” refers to “those who are still undergoing training, who have just completed their training, or who have just commenced teaching and still have very little (e.g. less than two years) experience behind them” (Gatbonton, 2008, 162). Beginning teachers are often described as survival, stressful or struggling because of the obstacles and challenges they are confronted with (Watzke, 2007; Le & Paré, 2010). It is especially true when it comes to making appropriate
decisions on content and pedagogy, classroom management, and learners’ individual needs (White & Moss, 2003; Jones & Eick, 2007; Langdon, 2011). For instance, Crosswell, Beutel & Henderson (2011) find that the graduates under study are eager for practical strategies, especially for student behaviour management.

Quite a few studies have been conducted in the area of beginning teachers’ professional development. One significant approach to that is mentoring (Van Velzen, Volman & Brekelmans, 2011). In addition, teaching education programs are also regarded as guidance for beginning teachers in their practice, especially in their initial weeks (Leshem, 2008).

Teachers’ professional development undergoes different stages (Watzke, 2007; Langdon, 2011). Beginning teachers are more likely to be concerned about their identity, survival and classroom management, while experienced teachers tend to focus on students’ learning (Watzke, 2007; Langdon, 2011).

Watzke (2007) concludes that there are four characteristics that experienced foreign language teachers possess. First, they tend to apply prior knowledge of their own teaching experience rather than their own learning experience. Second, they tend to not regard control of students as part of teaching. Third, they tend to assist students in enhancing their language performance and communication in real life rather than asking them to memorize language knowledge. Fourth, they try to win students’ affection through a specific language focus rather than academic purpose.

Although early research has been done in terms of the practical challenges, knowledge insufficiency and knowledge development for beginning teachers, there are few studies on the beginning Mandarin teachers’ professional development.

According to Fuller’s concerns theory (1969), there are three developmental stages across teachers’ career (cited from Watzke, 2007). Beginning teachers are usually in the first stage known as concern for self, that is, they care a lot about receiving good evaluations by administrators, and acceptance by students and colleagues. Such social acceptance and recognition would usually pose great pressure on beginning year. Recent years has witnessed much beginning teachers’ turnover (Goddard, 2006). According to Committee for the Review of Teaching and Teacher Education, 25 to 30% of beginning teachers left their position within the first three year and the number surged to 50% after five years (Goddard,
2006). The high rate of withdrawal is closely related to students’ challenging behaviour management (Kyriacoua & Kuncb, 2006). Therefore, it is of high importance to develop an effective teaching strategy that engages students in the classroom.

The features of beginning Mandarin teachers in Australia are presented in the table below.

Table 2.2 the features of beginning Mandarin teachers in Australia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspects</th>
<th>Features</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Origin</td>
<td>Some 90% of teachers of Chinese in Australia are native Chinese speakers, most by far coming from the Mainland. Approximately 60% of the teachers are female.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position</td>
<td>At least in its first few years a Chinese program will not support a full-time position, which makes it hard to find applicants in the first place, and also hard to hold any who are appointed. The staffing problem increases in country areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social recognition</td>
<td>Many native speaker teachers are rejected as unsuitable, due to poor self-presentation socially and linguistically, and to doubts about their ability to relate well to Australian children and manage a local classroom. Compared with L1 teachers, L2 teachers whose L1 is English and Mandarin the second are keenly sought after by schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional development</td>
<td>Some intending teachers of Chinese get no training in how to teach tones, characters and the special grammatical features of Chinese. Some L1 teachers do not know how to relate to Australian school learners,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
L2 teachers’ language proficiency level in almost all areas is often not at the desired level in phonological aspects, grammatical correctness and extent of vocabulary and characters.

2.2.1 Teachers’ practical knowledge

Teachers’ practical knowledge encompasses their knowledge and beliefs that guide their teaching practices (Chou, 2008; Van Velzen, Volman, & Brekelmans, 2011). The knowledge is personal, related to context and content, often tacit, and based on (reflection on) experience (Meijier et al. 1999). The characteristics of teachers’ practical knowledge is well concluded by Van Driel, Beijaard and Verloop (2001) as “action-oriented”, “person and context-bound”, “implicit or tacit”, “integrated” and “beliefs” (142). Zanting, Verloop, Vermunt & Van Driel (1998, 16) defines teachers’ practical knowledge as the “amalgam of all teachers' cognitions” such as “declarative and procedural knowledge, beliefs and values” which “influences their proactive, interactive, and post-active teaching activities”; that is to say, “practical knowledge underlies the visible teaching behaviour, and insight into teachers' practical knowledge can therefore be of help to understand their teaching” (Zanting, Verloop, Vermunt & Van Driel, 1998, 16). To summarize, the previous research shows that teachers’ practical knowledge affects teaching practice contextually and it encompasses teachers’ cognition (i.e. knowledge, belief).

Teachers’ practical knowledge has common parts (Elbaz, 1981; Meijer et al., 1999; Chou, 2008). Furthermore, the study of its content can provide a systematic perspective on the teaching process as dynamic expression of knowledge (Elbaz, 1981; Golombek, 1998). Therefore, early researchers have explored the components of teachers’ practical knowledge.

2.3 review on teachers’ practical knowledge

<table>
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<th>Researcher (date)</th>
<th>Components of teachers’ practical knowledge</th>
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</table>
The previous studies highlight the importance of how teacher use her understanding of the subject matter, knowledge of students, teaching context to teach the subject effectively.

2.2.1.1 Concerning the subject matter

Schwab (1964) describes the knowledge of subject matter as an understanding of the various ways a discipline can be organized or understood, as well as the knowledge of the ways by which a discipline evaluates and accepts new knowledge (Schwab, 1964, cited in Ben-Peretz, 2011, 4). Shulman (1986) defines the knowledge of subject matter as the understanding of the major subject matter and the structure of the subject matter.

The subject matter in the research refers to Mandarin. The Chinese language refers to a number of varieties or dialects. Mandarin, the most widely spoken Chinese language, is the official language of the People’s Republic of China (PRC). It serves as the national *lingua franca* in China and is used as the language of instruction in schools, workplaces, etc. (Wang & Yang, 2008). As such, it is also a second language for the many speakers of Chinese dialects other than Mandarin. One thing of note is that all the Chinese varieties share the same writing system.

To facilitate young children learning Mandarin in China, Pinyin is engaged. Pinyin is the official phonetic system for transcribing the Mandarin pronunciations of Chinese characters into the Latin alphabet. Pinyin is orthographically transparent (Perfetti & Dunlap, 2008). However, pinyin is virtually never encountered in Chinese writing for adults.

*Characteristics of Chinese phonology*
The syllable is the basic speech unit of Chinese and there are four types of syllable structure in spoken Chinese: vowel, consonant – vowel, vowel – consonant and consonant – vowel – consonant (Wang & Yang, 2008). The relatively simple syllable structure results in a large number of homophones in spoken Chinese. The number of homophones is reduced by the use of tone in the language, since a change in the tone of a syllable indicates a change in meaning. Take Mandarin, for example. There are four tones in Mandarin including high-level, high-rising, falling-rising, and high falling (Wang & Yang, 2008).

Characteristics of Chinese morphology

Morphology is the branch of linguistics which studies the form of words (Hu & Jiang, 2002). It identifies the smallest meaningful units in a language which are called morphemes and looks into the ways the morphemes are arranged to form words (Hu & Jiang, 2002). Packard (2006) defines word in Chinese as a form that can stand as an independent occupant of a syntactic form class slot, in other words, a syntactically free form (p.12). He offers two reasons for the syntactic definition of word in Chinese. First, the syntactic definition is the one that most closely comports with the intuitive notion of “word” among native speakers of Chinese (p.18); second, the syntactic definition of “word” motivates the concept in most other languages (p.19).

Chinese morphology has two levels of meaning. One is the radical level, the other the word level (Shu & Anderson, 1997; cited in Wang & Yang, 2008). At the first level, within an individual character, there are semantic components, referred to as semantic radicals, which provide information on the meaning of the whole character (Wang & Yang, 2008). Radicals are formed by strokes combined by following a certain stroke-positional constraint (Wang & Yang, 2008).

The second level of morphological structure is at the word level. A word in Chinese is defined as the “smallest independently useable part of language” (Wang, 1953; cited in Packard, 2000, p.16). In other words, a Chinese character is a morpheme; a word can include one character or more than one character. For words that consist of two characters, each character represents an independent meaning that contributes to the meaning of the word (Wang & Yang, 2008).

Characteristics of Chinese syntax

Syntax is the branch of linguistics which studies the rules governing the combination of words into sentences (Hu & Jiang, 2002). Syntax identifies the
permissible sequence of words in a language and the relationship between elements in sentence structure (Hu & Jiang, 2002). Some aspects of linguistic analysis suggest that syntactic and semantic relations of Chinese are parallel to that of English (Wang & Yang, 2008). The canonical word order in Chinese is SVO (subject-verb-object); so is English an SVO language. For example, in Chinese, as in English, the sentence, /xuéshēng shàng kè/, “Students have lessons” is different in meaning from /kè shàng xuéshēng /, “Lessons have students”. In both Chinese and English, the syntactic and corresponding thematic mappings of the two sentences are quite distinct (Taylor & Taylor, 1995, cited in Wang & Yang 2008). In other words, word order in both languages plays an important role in determining these mappings.

However, Chinese and English are different in an important language-specific sentence property (Wang & Yang, 2008). Chinese is topic-centred; that is to say, a Chinese sentence is characterized by a topic which does not necessarily have a direct relationship with the subsequent verb(s) (Wang & Yang, 2008). In contrast, English is subject-centred; that is to say, an English sentence is characterized by a subject that has a direct relationship with the verb (Wang & Yang, 2008).

At the morpho-syntactic level, Chinese has a far simpler system compared to Indo-European languages (Wang & Yang, 2008). For instance, there is no subject-verb agreement; there is no case marking; there is generally no plurality marking; there is no grammatical inflection providing information about tense (Li & Thompson, 1981, cited in Wang & Yang 2008). As a consequence, Chinese words remain constant in form and do not generally undergo morphological transformation. Due to the characteristics of Chinese morpho-syntactic structure, the reader of Chinese must focus on the individual word meanings and their semantic relations in order to uncover the meaning of a sentence (Wang & Yang, 2008). Also, word boundaries are not marked in Chinese written texts, since there is no space between words, which requires readers to examine the syntactic and semantic relations among neighbouring characters in segmenting a character string into words (Hoosain, 1991; cited in Wang & Yang, 2008).

2.2.1.2 Concerning learners

Another important component of teachers’ practical knowledge concerns learners. It is regarded as an essential part of teaching and a vital element for a good teacher (Mayer & Marland, 1997; Mullock, 2006; Leung & Lewkowicz, 2006;
Harmer, 2007; Woodgate-Jones & Grenfell, 2012). Teachers’ practical knowledge concerning learners has a rich meaning. It includes the knowledge of “prior understandings that students of given ages and backgrounds bring with them to the study of particular topics”; “developmental differences among students”; “cultural and social characteristics”; and students’ “motivations, aspirations, learning modes, cultural and linguistic backgrounds” (Shulman & Sykes, 1986, cited in Tamir, 1988, 106).

2.2.2 Teachers’ talk

The monolingual approach has long been promoted by official policies in the field of foreign language teaching (Wang & Kirkpatrick, 2012, p.3). As Higgs (1982) states:

> In making the unavailable available, the teacher’s role is one of facilitating the active use of the target language in the classroom, presenting the best possible model for the language, providing feedback, guidance, and reinforcement, and making available target-language data in terms of “Comprehensible input”, that is, the natural unconstrained use of the target language in the classroom (p.8).

From the point above, it can be seen that comprehensible input was much emphasized for second language acquisition. For instance, in Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) teaching, the “Chinese-only principle” continues to be the dominant pedagogy (Wang & Kirkpatrick, 2012). Article 20 of the Law on the Commonly Used Language and Script in China, which covers the policy for CFL teaching across China, states that Mandarin should be taught in classes for foreigners who are learning Chinese (Wang & Kirkpatrick, 2012). The government office in charge of overseas Chinese studies, which is also known as Hanban, issued a new set of teaching syllabuses in 2002 saying that CFL teachers need to “… maximize the target language and diminish the use of [English] as a medium of instruction” (Wang & Kirkpatrick, 2012). Liu (2006) pointed out that CFL teachers should strictly follow the “immersion approach” and use Chinese exclusively in class (cited in Wang & Kirkpatrick, 2012). The argument above shows that it is the official line and dominant belief that Chinese is best taught through Chinese only, and that the use of English or other L1 always results in negative transfer in the process of acquiring Chinese (Wang & Kirkpatrick, 2012).

However, recent pedagogical and sociolinguistic research holds that a multilingual

Debate above shows the two conflicting language learning principles, the monolingual principle and bilingual principle. This study involves a discussion about the language use in a Mandarin beginners’ classroom.

Through the literature review above, it is quite apparent that little research has been conducted in the WSR about how to relate learners’ L1 knowledge to their TL acquisition. Given an active role that prior knowledge plays in learning, it is necessary to research into the similarity between Mandarin and English and how that would impact on learning. Additionally, the outcome of using teaching strategies is closely related to teachers’ practical knowledge and their talk. Therefore, it is essential to explore how these two aspects influence the use of language transfer.
Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Qualitative Research

The main purpose of this research is to gain a deep understanding of how to implement the approach of language transfer through learner’s L1 and L2 similarity in a beginning teacher’s Mandarin class. Qualitative methodology is selected to investigate this research.

Qualitative methodology is “oriented toward analysing concrete cases in their temporal and local particularity and starting from people’s expressions and activities in their local contexts” (Flick, 2009, p.21). Qualitative research enables the researcher to discover or to develop/generate empirically-based theories, to achieve the validity through reference to the study rather than through abstract academic criteria as occur in quantitative research (Flick, 2009, p. 15). Qualitative research takes into consideration that knowledge and practices in the field are different because the various subjective perspectives and social backgrounds are related to them (Flick, 2009, p.16).

Qualitative methods take the researcher’s communication with the field and its members as an indispensable part of the knowledge; that is to say, the subjectivity of the researcher and of those being studied becomes part of the research process. Researchers’ reflection on their actions and observations in the field, their impressions, feelings, all become data in their own right, documented in research observation notes, self-reflection journal, or other context protocols (Flick, 2009, p.16).

This research excludes the quantitative method for its inappropriateness in this research context. The quantitative method is widely used in natural sciences and takes the object studied under controlled circumstances. In contrast, education research is centred in an ever-changing context full of complicated interactions and practice; it includes researchers or participants’ habits, understanding, experience, etc. (Flick, 2009). The controlled quantitative study results, if applied in education research, can easily lead to simplistic conclusions and less applicability due to their lack of relevance and familiarity with everyday life (Stake, 2010). In this sense, the quantitative method is not suitable for this research. Furthermore, it is impossible to understand and explain educational problems or phenomena in isolation. The influence and interaction among
subjects cannot be excluded (Flick, 2009). Based on the two reasons above, the quantitative method is excluded and the qualitative method included.

The data for this research were gathered over a period of one year. Qualitative methods of data collection were used. The specific methods used included the teacher researcher’s lesson observation and self-reflection journal.

3.2 Research Design

A case study was designed in this research. Data were collected through the teacher’s participant observations of her own teaching and her self-reflection journals after teaching, and the students’ feedback on her teaching in her Mandarin class.

3.2.1 Case Study

A case study is “a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence” (Robert Yin, 1981; 1994).

Case studies aim to precisely describe or reconstruct a case. The term “case” is a broad concept. It can be persons, social communities (e.g., families), organizations and institutions (e.g., a nursing home) (Flick, 2009, p.134). It is the situation, individual, group, organization or whatever researchers are interested in (Robson, 2002). The central defining characteristic of a case study is concentration on a particular case (or small set of cases) studied in its own right though an in-depth study of the context or setting (Robson, 2002, p.179). Researchers need to identify a case that would be significant for their research question and to clarify what else belongs to the case and what methodological approaches it requires (Flick, 2009, p.134). In this research, the “case” refers to the teaching approach, language transfer, which is transferring the learner’s L1 knowledge in the TL acquisition.

To address the research questions, the teacher researcher collected data through noting down lesson observations and self-reflection journals on her own teaching experiences.

3.2.1.1 Site

The research was conducted in a public school located in WSR. All the student
participants speak English as their L1 without TL background. However, the school has a strong Mandarin focus where every class is learning Mandarin for at least 40 minutes per week. The Mandarin bilingual program in 2012 at this school offers 5 hours of Mandarin instruction per week to ten classes from Kindergarten to Year 4. It has a sister school, Ningbo Experimental Primary School in China. The teacher researcher started her Mandarin teaching at this school in July 2012 and will continue until the end of 2013.

3.2.1.2 Participants

There are three groups of participants. They are the teacher researcher, the teacher researcher’s students and those students’ classroom teachers.

The Teacher Researcher

The teacher researcher has been working on her Master’s Degree in Education (Honours) in the University of Western Sydney since 2012, when she received her Bachelor of Arts degree in her home country, China. During her four-year university degree, she studied English linguistics and the culture of major English-speaking countries. Therefore, she is able to speak English quite fluently. The teacher researcher taught Mandarin at the research site once a week from July 2012 to December 2013. She gave lessons to seven classes in the research site, each with a 40-min period. At the same time, she researched into her teaching approach. Given the fact that she was a teacher and researcher, she is referred to as “the teacher researcher” in the thesis.

The teacher researcher was also involved in the teacher research program, namely “Research Oriented School Engaged Teacher Education (ROSETE) Program”. The program aims to research into teaching Mandarin to non-background speakers and introducing Chinese theoretical knowledge to the local context. The program provides supervision and research education for up to 10 new graduates annually from China. All those students are able to speak Mandarin and English fluently. Engaged in the program, they need to critically examine their practice and classroom reality to transform it in ways that are meaningful in the context of WSR. The teacher researcher is a member of the cohort that arrived in 2012.

ROSETE Program is a program of teacher research. Teacher research is seen as a tool for professional development (Torre, 1999, p.467) and for producing
knowledge and generating theory as well (Torre, 1999 p.466). Its importance has been highlighted in previous studies. According to Richards and Lockhart (1996):

Teacher research can help achieve a better understanding of one’s own assumptions about teaching as well as one’s own teaching practices; it can lead to a richer conceptualization of teaching and a better understanding of teaching and learning processes; and it can serve as a basis for self-evaluation and is therefore an important component of professional development. (p.2; cited in Torre p.467)

Teacher research seeks to increase the teacher’s understanding of classroom interaction and to make improvements in classroom practices (Gregory, 1988; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). It is suggested that experiencing teacher-based research should be part of the preparation of pre-service teachers (Torre, 1999). Evidence seems to indicate that if students are not introduced to the power of practitioner research during initial teacher training, chances are that they will never be involved in it (Kincheloe, 1991, p.15; cited in Torre, 1999 p.467).

Teacher research programs benefit their participants, teacher researchers, in gaining the skill to interrogate their own practices, question their own assumptions, and to understand contextually their own situations (Carr & Kemmis, 1968, p.18). In the context of ROSETE, the teacher researcher was involved to encourage the development of reflective and investigative skills as a strategy for improving classroom practice. Over her stay in the program from July 2012 to the end of 2013, the teacher researcher examined articles on beginning teachers’ professional development and teaching approaches; she learned the process of research through discussions and interactive activities (e.g. workshops, seminars); and she observed her own teaching practice (Torre, 1999, p.454).

Student participants

The student participants were the students of the teacher researchers. The student number was around two hundred. They were mainly non-background primary school students, ranging from six-year-olds to twelve-year-olds. Their first language was English and their Mandarin, the TL, at the beginners’ level. Although they were Anglophones with very basic TL knowledge, they had more exposure than those in other schools because of the bilingual program in the school. For example, they celebrated China Open Day every year with all kinds of
cultural experiences (i.e. paper cutting, singing classic Chinese songs, making dumplings); they had the students from their sister school in China to visit them; some of them even had the chance to go on an excursion to cities in China such as Beijing, Shanghai and Ningbo (the city two-hours’ drive from Shanghai where their sister school is located and which happens to be the teacher researcher’s hometown). If the students saw an Asian face at school, they would greet the person in Mandarin. A few of them showed a strong interest in speaking Mandarin. When they saw Mandarin teachers, they spoke anything they learnt in class to them. In a word, the student participants are Anglophones learning Mandarin as a foreign language.

*Teacher participants*

The teacher participants are the classroom teachers of the student participants. Three classroom teachers were recruited from seven of the teacher researcher’s classes. The classroom teacher normally sat in the class while the teacher researcher was teaching. The classroom teacher’s normal role in a Mandarin class was to assist with classroom management and some of them chose to learn Mandarin with their students. They did not have knowledge of the Chinese language. However, they were experienced teachers with rich pedagogical knowledge. The teacher researcher invited three classroom teachers to participate in the research, who were interested in Mandarin learning and teaching.

### 3.2.2 Data Collection Methods

Data collection involves reflective journals and participant observation.

#### 3.2.2.1 Participant observation

Participant observation is commonly used in qualitative research. According to Denzin (1989b):

> Participant observation is a field strategy that simultaneously combines document analysis, interviewing of respondents and informants, direct participant observation, and introspection. (pp. 157-158)

A key feature of participant observation is that the observer seeks to become a member of the observed group. This involves not only a physical presence and a sharing of life experiences, but also entry into their social and ‘symbolic’ world through learning their social conventions and habits, their use of language and non-
verbal communication, etc. The observer also has to establish some role within the group (Robson, 2002, p.314).

The differences from non-participant observation and its aims are elucidated in the seven features of participant observation listed by Jorgensen (1989):

1. A special interest in human meaning and interaction as viewed from the perspective of people who are insiders or members of particular situations and setting;
2. Location in the here and now of everyday life situations and settings as the foundation of inquiry and method;
3. A form of theory and theorizing stressing interpretation and understanding of human existence;
4. A logic and process of inquiry that is open-ended, flexible, opportunistic, and requires constant redefinition of what is problematic, based on facts gathered in concrete settings of human existence;
5. An in-depth, qualitative, case study approach and design;
6. The performance of a particular role or roles that involves establishing and maintaining relationships with natives in the field; and
7. The use of direct observation along with other methods of gathering information. (pp.13-14)

Participant observation was employed in this research for two reasons. First, the teacher researcher studied her teaching approach, language transfer, which provided a perfect opportunity to observe as an insider and to uncover the hidden factors underlying her field practice.

Second, the student participants were young children under twelve years old, so they could not express their opinion about their TL learning as accurately as adults. However, their emotional state and mental processes were indicated by their behaviour, talk, eye contact, facial expression, etc. Through close observation, the teacher researcher got to monitor and facilitate the students’ learning.

The teacher researcher took down her observation notes immediately when the lesson finished. The notes include the verbal communication between the teacher
researcher and the students, their behaviour / body language, the teacher researcher’s emotional state and mental processes, and so on.

However, the researcher was confronted with a few problems while implementing the participant observation method. First is the teacher researcher’s limited observational perspective; that is, not all aspects of a situation could be grasped at the same time. For example, it was impossible to observe every student’s situation at a time, thus data related to those neglected ones was lost and such loss usually could not be compensated for. In addition, sometimes what the teacher researcher saw could be deceptive. Students who were looking to the front and sitting beautifully did not mean that they were cognitively engaged, which makes interpreting data quite demanding.

This research addressed the problem by conducting data through involving student participants and classroom teachers. They were asked about their opinions, feedback, and suggestions for the lesson. In this way, the teacher researcher was able to grasp a more thorough understanding of the field practice. Furthermore, it was a chance to probe the factors underlying the classroom interaction.

Second, the observation record depended heavily on the teacher researcher’s memory. Human beings have only a very limited competence for remembering and reproducing amorphous incidents of an actual social event (Bergmann, 1985, p.308). However, whether the observer’s awareness of the situation is correct or not may directly influence the following coding, even the research results (Stake, 2010). Therefore, it is critical to develop ways to ensure the reliability of data. What the teacher researcher did was take down key words of her observation immediately, when the lesson finished and complete the observation notes within the day.

3.2.2.2 Self-reflection journals

The self-reflection journal, or sometimes referred as reflective journal, is an account provided by research participants of their experience in a particular setting or situation, and a reflection on that experience; it can be viewed as an unstructured variant of a diary (Robson, 2002, p.260). In the research, the self-reflection journal encompasses the teacher researcher’s analysis of her observation, for example, exploring the underlying reason for students’ certain behaviour or speech, investigating her own practice (e.g. talk, mental processes, emotional state), or examining the classroom teacher participants’ feedback, etc. Also, previous studies were engaged to inform the research.
The self-reflection journal method is of great significance in this study because of the following benefits. First, it provided the means of generating substantial amounts of data. Second, it deepened the researcher’s understanding of the teaching setting and the student participants. Third, it served as a tool to develop professionalism and to trace its change. Last but not least, it enabled the teacher researcher to gain insight into the effectiveness of the approach, language transfer, through the indications of classroom interaction.

The method has its limitations. Data from the self-reflection journals can be accused of being subjective, integrated with the teacher researcher’s personal knowledge and understanding. To address this limitation, this research is designed to collect data from other resource (Numrich, 1996; Bailey, 1987; Van Lier, 1988).

3.2.3 Data analysis

This study adopted thematic analysis.

Thematic analysis is defined as “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2008, 79; cited in Qiu, 2013). Themes are concepts that represent key features of the collected data as they relate to the research questions and context studied, which enables the researcher to synthesize and illustrate the data briefly and systematically (Qiu, 2013). As is shown in the table below, the process of thematic analysis consists of six steps.

Table 3.1 six steps of thematic analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Description of the phase</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Familiarization with data</td>
<td>Transcribing, reading, re-reading and noting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Generating initial codes</td>
<td>Coding features of data systematically and arranging data in order according to codes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Generating initial themes</td>
<td>Integrating codes into themes and arranging data in order according to</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To begin with, the teacher researcher familiarized herself with all the evidence. She reviewed the data thoroughly to gain a comprehensive understanding of them. Then the data were put in a chronological order. The words that seemed to be closely related to the research questions were highlighted. The teacher’s thoughts were noted down in the margins of the pages.

Second, the teacher researcher started to generate initial codes. Coding is a process “by which data are broken down, conceptualized, and put back together in new ways” (Flick, 2009, 307). This study adopted open coding as a fundamental analytical procedure to identify and develop concepts (Flick, 2009). The data were coded and categorized in the way shown below, based on the outline developed by Strauss and Corbin (1990; cited in Qiu, 2013).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4. Refining themes</td>
<td>Checking initial themes by examining both semantic and latent content of collected data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Defining and naming themes</td>
<td>Giving appropriate names and explicit definitions for themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Producing the report</td>
<td>Selecting and analysing compelling extracts; connecting the analysis with literature and research questions; giving systematic and academic analysis reports</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Adapted from Braun & Clarke, 2008, 87; cited in Qiu, 2013)

1. Probing the data by asking questions such as:
   a. What is happening in the observation notes?
   b. What is the major argument of the self-reflection journal?

2. Tagging the data according to its main idea with a word, a phrase, or a short sentence

3. Relating the evidence to each other by comparing their similarities and differences
4. Grouping similar data into the same category.

Through open coding, substantial codes describing the phenomenon under study were developed. Take the evidence below for example. “T” stands for “teacher”, “S” for “students”. S_1 is a student.

T: When you say “qiú”, you need to raise your tone.

S [looked puzzled]: … [Giving T little response]

S_1: What does “raise your tone” mean?

T: Good question! Show me your right hand! Whole class together! Qiú! Qiú! Qiú! [T showed a raising gesture to indicate the tone]

S: Qiú! Qiú! Qiú! [The class was copying T’s raising gesture. They looked passionate and were enjoying making movements. Their eyes were on T. Their voices became louder and more firm after each time]

T: Excellent! Your pronunciation was not much different from a native speaker!

(The teacher researcher’s observation, Term 2, 2013)

The content of the evidence was identified that it is about the teacher researcher facilitating students in learning the tone of “qiú”, the word for “ball”. The evidence was tagged as “tone acquisition”. Take another piece, for example.

T: Can you find an English word that sounds similar to ‘wǒ’?

S_1: War.

T: Can you spell it?

S_1: w-a-r. [The moment he finished his word, some S gave out a sigh, “that’s what I am going to say!” Hah! It was somewhat hilarious to see the disappointed look on a young kids’ face. At the same time, a few hands were still high up.]

S_2: Wore.

T: Which “wɔː”?

S_3: Like “I wore a watch”. [When asked for further explanation, S_3 could
not wait to clarify the word for S_2]

S_4; Wolf! [S_4 was in such an excitement when the word came out of her mouth. Her voice low and deep, she tried to imitate a wolf howling]

T: Umm…wolf? Yeh…part of its sound is close to ‘wǒ’. Good thinking! [The children were thinking hard, but no one put their hands up. It seemed they had exhausted their ideas] There is another word that sounds similar! [T pointing to the wall of the classroom] What’s this?

S: Wall! [The children called out the word at once]

T: Yes! “Wall” also sounds similar to “wǒ”. Read after me! “Wǒ”!

S: Wǒ! [T came to find their voices were bigger and more confident. They were smiling and looked relaxed]

(The teacher researcher’ observation, Term 2, 2013)

In the evidence, the teacher researcher facilitated learning by transferring the students’ L1 phonological knowledge to the TL sound acquisition. It was tagged with “phonological similarity”. Then the two pieces of data were related and they were found to share similarities in dealing with phonology. With more data found, related to phonology, they were put in the category named “phonological transfer”.

3.3 Ethical Considerations

Stige, Malterud, and Midtgarden (2009) define research ethics as “how values and moral principles are integrated in the actions and reflections of research”. Ethical issues should be taken into full consideration during the whole process of study since they can be generated in every step of the research (Flick, 2009). The researcher strictly followed the principles of research ethics and considered the needs and interests of classroom teachers and students to keep them from any harm.

The classroom teachers and students were well informed of the main content of the research and all give consent (Flick, 2009). They were free to withdraw when feeling uncomfortable or unwilling to continue. No participants were identified (names, etc.) to ensure confidentiality, but the general information of the whole case were provided (Flick, 2009). During the data collection, the time of
interviews and observations were considered to accommodate the participants’ schedules. Furthermore, no harsh questions were asked and no private life was disturbed. The data collected from individual participants were not be judged and compared to each other (Flick, 2009). The data was not used for other purposes except research. All the interpretations were based on the data themselves (Flick, 2009).

Ethics approval for this study were applied for and sought from the University’s Human Ethics Committee.

### 3.4 Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability are two essential criteria to ensure the quality of qualitative research. Validity is “a contingent construct, inescapably grounded in the processes and intentions of particular research methodologies and projects” (Golafshani, 2003, 602). Mishler (1990) redefined this concept as “the social discourse through which trustworthiness is established includes such familiar shibboleths as reliability, falsifiability, and objectivity” (Mishler, 1990, cited in Flick, 2009, p.389).

In this study, to guarantee validity, the researcher will follow the four points suggested by Wolcott:

1. The researcher will refrain from talking in the field but rather listen as much as possible during the interviews with classroom teachers and focus groups.

2. The researcher will produce notes that are as exact as possible.

3. The researcher will write early, and in a way which allows readers of her notes to see for themselves. This means providing enough data for readers to make their own inferences and follow those of the researcher.

4. The researcher will seek feedback on her findings in the field and from her supervisors and colleagues (Wolcott cited in Flick, 2009, p. 390).

Reliability is traditionally referred to as:

The extent to which results are consistent over time and an accurate representation of the total population under study is referred to as reliability and if the results of a study can be reproduced under a similar methodology, then the research instrument is considered to be reliable.
Reliability gains its importance as a criterion for assessing qualitative research only against the background of a specific theory on the issue under study and through the use of methods.

In this study, to ensure reliability the researcher will:

1. Explicate the genesis of the data in a way that makes it possible to check what a statement of the subject is and where the researcher’s interpretation begins.

2. Make explicit procedures in the interview and with the text in training and rechecking, in order to improve the comparability of different interviewers or observers’ conduct.

3. Document the research process in as much detail as possible (Flick, 2009, p387).

In this study, these essential qualities will be taken into full consideration and put into practice.

3.5 Triangulation

Triangulation is used as a strategy for improving the quality of qualitative research by extending the approach to the issue under study (Flick, 2009, p.405). It is defined as:

Triangulation means that researchers take different perspectives on an issue under study or – more generally speaking – in answering research questions. These perspectives can be substantiated in using several methods and / or in several theoretical approaches. Both are or should be linked. Furthermore it refers to combining different sorts of data on the background of the theoretical perspectives, which are applied to the data. As far as possible, these perspectives should be treated and applied on an equal footing and in an equal consequent way. At the same time, triangulation (of different methods or data sorts) should allow a principal surplus of knowledge. For example, triangulation should produce knowledge on different levels, which means they go beyond the knowledge made possible by one approach and thus contribute to promoting quality in research (Flick, 2009, p. 445).

In this research, triangulation will be achieved by including different sorts of data (Flick, 2009, p.405). Data collection involves reflective journals, participant
observation, and interviews (including focus groups). Hence data will come from the perspectives of the teacher-researcher herself, classroom teachers, and students. Triangulation strategy in this study will enable the researcher to produce knowledge on different levels, and to go beyond the knowledge made possible by one method and therefore contribute to promoting the quality of this research (Flick, 2009, p.445).

3.6 Generalizability

Generalizability refers to “the extent to which findings from an investigation can be applied to other situations [and] is determined by the people in those situations” (Merriam, 1995, p. 58). It is another strategy of grounding qualitative research (Flick, 2009, p. 407). The central points of generalizability are first the analyses and, second, the steps taken to arrive at more or less general statements (Flick, 2009, p. 407).

The problem of generalization in this study is that its statements are made for a certain context or specific cases (Western Sydney Region) and based on analyses of relations, conditions, processes, etc., in them. This attachment to contexts allows the study a specific expressiveness (Flick, 2009, p. 407). To reach a certain generalization, two strategies will be provided about the case. First, detailed description will be provided about the case, so that readers will be able to make a judgment about whether the findings or conclusions derived from this study can be applied or transferred into other settings (Merriam, 1995). Second, the collected material will be systematically compared (Flick, 2009, p. 407).
Chapter Four: Phonological Transfer

- A benefits and limitations approach based on a beginning teacher’s field experience

This chapter examines phonological transfer from a beginning teacher’s perspective. It consists of two sections. The first part discusses the benefits of the strategy and how it makes Mandarin learnable for non-background primary school students in the WSR. The second part investigates the limitation of the strategy and how this can be dealt with. Through the discussion of both sides, the reader will see a general idea of the use of phonological transfer in a second language classroom.

4.1 Benefits

This section sets out to seek a justification for the influence of phonological transfer upon Mandarin learning. The issue is examined from two aspects. One focuses on the language itself to see if the strategy makes learning content accessible; the other concentrates on Mandarin learners, like their learning autonomy and classroom engagement. Overall, this part aims to explore whether the strategy makes Mandarin learnable for non-background primary school students in WSR.

4.1.1 Coping with the intrinsic difficulty of the Target Language (TL)

This section discusses how phonological transfer deals with the intrinsic difficulty of Mandarin. It examines the effectiveness of the strategy from the perspective of the language itself. Questions will be addressed: Does phonological transfer lower / increase the difficulty of learning content? Does it make Mandarin learnable for non-background primary school students in WSR?

Mandarin presents learners with difficulties, for example, tones, characters, homophones, and the system of particles and verb complements, etc. (Orton, 2008). The research will focus on pronunciation, or producing correct sounds. Two pieces of data are discussed below on how phonological transfer addresses the issue of pronunciation.

The evidence below is a case where students were acquiring the sound of “yóuyǒng”, the Mandarin word for “swimming”. The teacher researcher put the
word on the board and asked the students to make a guess about its sound according to its spelling. The subsequent part of the lesson will be depicted below in the form of dialogue. T stands for “Teacher researcher”, S for “Students”. S_N (N=1, 2, …6) represents one student. Numbers are used to differentiate students. The content in the square brackets includes two parts. One is of the teacher researcher’s visual observation from the angle of an outsider; the other is a description of what is going on her mind. Those in the brackets are the teacher researcher’s comments for making the evidence more readable.

[S_1 put his hand up]

T: Yes, please.

S_1: you yǒng. (The first sound “you” is incorrect, the second one “yǒng” correct)

T: The word “yóu yǒng” is composed of two parts, “yóu” and “yǒng”. You’ve got “yǒng” correct. As for “yóu”, why do you think it sounds as the English word “you”?

S_1: Because it looks like “you”.

T [smilingly]: It looks like “you”, but it does not sound as “you”. Actually it is “yóu”.

[T modelled the sound for three times. After each time she asked the S to repeat after her. After practice, T invited some of them to say the word individually.]

S_2: Yóu. (That’s correct)

S_3: Yóu. (That’s correct)

S_4: You. (That’s incorrect)

T: Not “you”. It’s “yóu”. Repeat after me “yóu”.

S_4: You. (That’s incorrect)

[S_4 stuck to the incorrect “you” sound. It seems she could not distinguish the two sounds by hearing. T felt frustrated. To improve her pronunciation, T changed her way of teaching]

T: I will give you some hints. “óu” in “yóu” sounds as “ow” in “yellow”.

[T noted down “yóu = yellow” on the board. While explaining that, she heard the young learners murmuring to themselves “Yóu! Yóu! Yóu! …”] Who would like to have another go? Put your hand up! [Many hands were seen]

S_5: Yóu. (That’s correct)
S_6: Yóu. (That’s correct)

[After many students gave a go, T finally turned to S_4 again]

S_4: Yóu. (That’s correct!) (Teacher researcher’s observation)

(The teacher researcher’s observation, Term 1, 2013)

The evidence above displays the situation where the students were learning the sound of “yóu yǒng”, the word for “swimming” in the TL. Some of them were able to acquire the sound by hearing; they produced the correct word after the teacher researcher’s modelling. Among them were S_2 and S_3 while S_4 represents another type of learning style, visual learners. Those learners prefer watching a demonstration to listening to things being explained. Taking different learning styles into account, the teacher researcher compared the “óu” sound in “yóu” with “ow” in “yellow”. She wrote it on the board to facilitate visual understanding. Transferring the sound in L1 to TL in a visual way turned out well. S_4, when given another chance, was able to produce the sound correctly.

In the case below, students were learning the word “bǎn qiú” which means “cricket”. A dialogue among students and the teacher researcher is recorded. T stands for “the teacher researcher”, S for “students”. S_1 and S_2 are two students. The content in the square brackets includes two parts. One is of the teacher researcher’s visual observation from the angle of an outsider; the other is a description of what is going on her mind. Those in the brackets are the teacher researcher’s comments for making the evidence more readable.

[T put the word “bǎn qiú (cricket)” and a photo of cricket on the board.]

T: Take a look at the word here. Who can make a guess about its sound? How would you say the word for ‘cricket’?

[A few students put their hand up.]

S_1: bǎn key. (S_1 had no problem with “bǎn”, but did not get “qiú” correctly. His “qiú” sounded like the English word “key”.)

T: “bǎn” is correct. The second sound “q-i-ú” seems dodgy. I will give you guys a clue. ‘Q’ in Mandarin sounds as “ch” in “teacher” or “cheese”; “iu” in Mandarin sounds as the English letter U.” [At the same time, T put “qiú = teacher” “qiú = U” on the board.] Who would like to have another go?

S_2: bǎn qiú.

T: bǎn qiú? Are you sure? [S_2 hesitated for a while]
S_2 [nodding his head]: Yep.

T [asking the S]: Tā duì ma? (It means “is he right”)?

S: Duì! [The S said “correct” in Mandarin firmly]

T: Duì (correct)! Hěn hǎo (excellent)! Whole class together, bǎn qiú!

S: bǎn qiú! [Beautiful pronunciation!]

T: Put your hand up if you think you like the way of comparing Mandarin sound with English sound or you think it’s helpful. Keep your hand down if it does not work with you. [A majority of the students put their hand up including the classroom teacher]

(The teacher researcher’s observation, Term 1, 2013)

The evidence shows how the students acquired the sound of “bǎn qiú” through phonological transfer. In the beginning they were able to acquire “bǎn” without effort because “b” and “an” sound the same in Mandarin and English. As for “qiú”, it was challenging for them in that “q” and “iu” sounds in the two languages are completely different. “q” in English usually has a “k” sound like “queen”, “quiet”, “qualification”, etc. while in Mandarin it has a “ch” sound like that in “teacher”, “cheese”, “touch”, etc. “iu” is rarely seen in English while it is quite often used as a vowel in Mandarin. It sounds very close to the English letter “U”. Besides oral explanation, the teacher researcher put “qiú = teacher” “qiú = U” down on the board to enhance understanding visually. The outcome turned out well since the students were able to produce the sound of “bǎn qiú” correctly in the end. Both the learners and the classroom teacher gave positive feedback about the strategy of comparing sounds. Most of the students and the classroom teacher agreed it was beneficial to learning.

The two pieces of data above demonstrate how phonological transfer assists learners in producing correct sounds. A number of sounds in L1 are the same as or close to those in TL, which provides a chance for language transfer. Phonological knowledge in L1, as part of learners’ existing knowledge, if it could be used to elaborate sounds in TL, means that learning a new language is transformed to reviewing the prior knowledge in a new context, or in the TL situation, to be accurate. Apparently “revision” demands less mental effort and cognitive load than learning something completely new. Phonological transfer therefore lowers the difficulty of the learning content. Furthermore, engaging prior knowledge is actually how people learn. Prior knowledge significantly influences what learners notice about their environment, and how they organize and interpret their
observations (Cummins, 2008). New understandings are constructed on a foundation of existing understandings and experiences (Donovan & Bransford, 2005). It is safe to say that engaging prior understanding in L1 is an indispensable contribution to effective TL learning (Bransford et al., 2000).

In summary, phonological transfer lowers the difficulty of producing some Mandarin sounds in a correct way. It activates students’ L1 knowledge in phonology and builds relevant background knowledge for TL learning, thus making Mandarin learnable for non-background primary school students in the WSR. Plus, the first evidence implies that implementation of the strategy should cater to the needs of various types of learning style (i.e. visual learners), thereby giving full play to its benefit.

4.1.2 Promoting learning autonomy

This section discusses how phonological transfer exerts an influence upon learners’ autonomy. It investigates the relations between the strategy and learners’ autonomy. Questions will be addressed: Does phonological transfer promote / decrease learning autonomy? Does it make Mandarin learnable for non-background primary school students in WSR?

The evidence below is an example of learning a Mandarin word “wǒ” meaning “I” or “me”. It explores the correlations between phonological transfer and young students’ autonomy in learning Mandarin. “I” below refers to the teacher researcher herself.

When I taught the word “wǒ”, I put it down on the board and asked students, “look at the word on the board! Who can make a guess about its sound?” I heard a few learners making the “who” sound. I asked one of them, “Why do you think it sounds as ‘who’?” She answered, “because there is a ‘w’.” Several other students nodded their head to show agreement.

(The teacher researcher’s observation, Term 1, 2013)

The teacher researcher put the word on the board so that students could see the spelling of “wǒ” that is W-O in the falling-rising tone. They were asked to observe and work out the sound independently. The spelling reminded them of the English word “W-H-O” because W-O and W-H-O look similar to each other. It is no wonder that the student would assume “wǒ” sounds the same as “who”.

It is quite apparent that the students were transferring their phonological knowledge in English (the sound of “who”) to Mandarin learning (the sound of
“wǒ”) based on the similarity observed. Phonological transfer allowed them to summon what they had known in L1 and to apply it in TL learning. The learning process, therefore, became more interactive and intellectually stimulating compared with the situation when students sit at the feet of a teacher, passively waiting to be taught. To some extent, the strategy enables learners to self-teach Mandarin pinyin by taking advantage of their phonological knowledge in English. It increases the chance that learners would practise speaking Mandarin outside the classroom; they would continue to speak Mandarin when lessons at school finish. In this sense, phonological transfer increases students’ learning autonomy.


Table 4.1 review on autonomy

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>About people taking more control over their lives – individually and collectively.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy in learning</td>
<td>About people taking more control over their learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy in language learning</td>
<td>About people taking more control over the purposes for which they learn languages and the ways in which they learn them.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Benson’s definition, language learners’ autonomy lies in two aspects. One is their purpose / goals, the other, their learning strategies. In another article, Lee (1998) viewed learners’ autonomy as the ability to take charge of or take responsibility for one’s own learning, so, in his view, autonomy is ability and responsibility. The two definitions basically do not conflict. They both emphasize learners’ attitudes and motivations; they believe that autonomous learning is strategic. Taking the context of learning Mandarin, into account, Autonomous Mandarin learners are able to answer these questions: “Why am I learning Mandarin?” “What level am I going to achieve?” “How can I reach my goal?”
Phonological transfer helps answer the third question. It is not the only way of learning but just offers an alternative to make learning more strategic and easier.

Improving learners’ autonomy does not apply in the absence of teachers’ support. Instead, it requires professional assistance. This is because phonological transfer is based on sound similarities between Mandarin and English. The two languages share quite a few sounds in common. Consequently students are able to get a close sound in most cases but not always. Using the strategy could result in mistakes if learners, especially beginners, lack necessary support. In the evidence above, “wǒ” does not sound like “who”. “W” in “wǒ” sounds like that in “wall”. The mistake unveils an important point that needs taking into consideration by a teacher; that is teachers’ support. Lee’s claim (1998) is illustrative, “how the necessary supportive circumstances and contexts can be provided to help learners develop the necessary capacity”. Put simply, learning autonomy entails teachers’ support. Professional assistance remains essential to improve pronunciation. The evidence below describes the teacher researcher’s practice based on this understanding. “I” below refers to the teacher researcher herself.

I went on to explain the “w” sound in Mandarin, “W in wǒ sounds the same as that in wall.” At the same time, I put down “wǒ = wall” on the board to facilitate visualization. To my delight, the moment I finished the elaboration, the students could not help calling out, “Wo! Wo!” I nodded my head, “now you’ve got it!”

(The teacher researcher’s reflections, Term 1, 2013)

When it was pointed out that “w” in “wǒ” sounds like that in “wall”, the students were able to transfer their “w” sound in “wall” to that in “wo” immediately. With the teacher researcher’s scaffolding, they could work out the correct sound of “wǒ” without much effort. A teacher’s assistance helps learning autonomy become feasible and achievable for learners at a young age. Based on the argument above, it is safe to conclude that phonological transfer plays a role in improving learners’ autonomy, with teachers’ support engaged.

In summary, phonological transfer promotes Mandarin learners’ autonomy. Autonomous learners would acquire the habit of learning outside the classroom; they would maintain learning the language after they have completed their formal studies; they would have a capacity for critical reflection and decision making, as well as the skills necessary to carry out a self-directed learning program (Little, 1991, p.14; Holec, 1985, p.180; cited in Dickinson, 1995). Hence, learner autonomy results in a consistent, sustainable, and quality learning style, thus
making Mandarin learnable for non-background learners in primary school.

4.1.3 Increasing learners’ engagement

This section discusses the influence of phonological transfer upon classroom engagement. It examines the relations between the strategy and learners’ engagement in a Mandarin class. Questions will be addressed: Does phonological transfer increase / decrease classroom engagement? Does it make Mandarin learnable for non-background primary school students in WSR?

The evidence below, like the two pieces of evidence displayed above, is also related to learning the Mandarin word “wǒ” meaning “I” or “me”. To avoid confusion, it should be noted that the class mentioned below is different from the one in the previous evidence, and the students’ responses are not the same. The evidence below illustrates the correlation between phonological transfer and young students’ engagement in learning Mandarin.

To make the evidence more concise and focused, marginal information has been retrieved and will be made clear here. The word “wǒ” was put on the white board. Students were asked to observe the spelling and guess the sound. To the teacher researcher’s surprise, quite a few learners worked out the sound at once and called it out. Their sound was acceptable if it was not accurate. To improve the pronunciation, they practised with the teacher researcher for several times. The evidence below displays the subsequent learning activity. The dialogue among students and the teacher researcher was recorded. “T” stands for “Teacher researcher”, “S” for “Student”. “S_1” “S_2” “S_3” and “S_4” are four students. The content in the square brackets includes two parts. One is of the teacher researcher’s visual observation from the angle of an outsider; the other is a description of what is going on her mind.

T: Can you find an English word that sounds similar to ‘wǒ’?

S_1: War.

T: Can you spell it?

S_1: w-a-r. [The moment he finished his word, some S gave out a sigh, “that’s what I am going to say!” Hah! It was somewhat hilarious to see the disappointed look on the young kids’ face. At the same time, a few hands were still high up.]

S_2: Wore.
T: Which “wǒ”? 

S_3: Like “I wore a watch”. [When asked for further explanation, S_3 could not wait to clarify the word for S_2] 

S_4: Wolf! [S_4 was in such an excitement when the word came out of her mouth. Her voice low and deep, she tried to imitate a wolf howling] 

T: Umm... wolf? Yeh... part of its sound is close to ‘wǒ’. Good thinking! [The children were thinking hard, but no one put their hands up. It seemed they had exhausted their ideas] There is another word that sounds similar! [T pointing to the wall of the classroom] What’s this? 

S: Wall! [The children called out the word at once] 

T: Yes! “Wall” also sounds similar to “wǒ”. Read after me! “Wǒ”! 

S: Wǒ! [T came to find their voice was bigger and more confident. They were smiling and looked relaxed] 

(The teacher researcher’s observations, Term 2, 2013) 

In the evidence, the students came up with the correct sound of the target word immediately. When asked to find an English word that sounds similar to “wǒ”, they enthusiastically offered four different answers, one of which was developed with hints given by the teacher researcher. Engaging what they had known in L1 (literacy of “war” “wore” “wolf” “wall”) while learning TL (“wǒ”) resulted in ‘wǒ’, a new word, becoming less strange and more familiar. The outcome consequently stirred positive feelings such as confidence and pleasure among the children. To investigate the correlation between phonological transfer and school engagement, the data is categorized and further analysed below.

**Category One**

Four entries have been extracted from the evidence. The analysis focuses on the students’ mental involvement.

Entry_01: Some students came up with an answer but did not get the chance to let their opinion be heard. Their disappointed looks and the verbal expression (“That’s what I am going to say!”), indicates the mental effort the learners exerted.

Entry_02: When S_1 found a required word “war”, others did not stop looking for more (“a few hands were still high up”). They were not content with one example and willing to intellectually challenge themselves.

Entry_03: S_3 cut in the talk between S_2 and T. S_3 clarified S_2’s idea and
made it clear for other learners. In this way the interaction mainly between one student and the teacher was optimized. It evolved into interaction among all the students on task, with the teacher’s role undermined. The “take-over” of the lesson is a display of an increase in learners’ cognitive endeavour or “investment in learning (Fredricks 2004)”.

Entry_04: Having popped up three answers, they continued their searching as put in the evidence above “The children were thinking hard”. That shows the learners’ preference for hard work and persistence when faced with difficulty (“It seemed they had exhausted their ideas”).

Key words from the entries are “mental effort” “cognitive endeavour” “willingness of intellectual challenge” “preference for hard work” “persistence in face of difficulty” “investment in learning”. Each of them is a strong indicator of the learners’ high cognitive engagement.

Cognitive engagement entails two dimensions (Fredricks, 2004). One highlights a psychological investment in learning (Fredricks, 2004). That is to say, learners desire to go beyond requirements and prefer to take a challenge. Usually they have a positive attitude in the face of frustration. In this case, the students were eager to voice their opinions (Entry_01); they were willing to seek for a variety of answers (Entry_02); they built a student-centred classroom which stressed learners’ intellectual contribution (Entry_03); they worked hard and made continuous effort (Entry_04). Overall, the students’ psychological investment in Mandarin learning can be argued.

The other dimension aims at being strategic (Fredricks, 2004). Learners who are cognitively engaged create more connections among ideas, and achieve greater understanding of ideas compared with those who are not. The implementation of phonological transfer associates the words in L1 “war” “wore” “wolf” “wall” with the target word “wǒ”. It boosts learners’ self-assurance (“a bigger and more confidence voice)” and contributes to a desirable learning mood (“smiling and relaxed”). Learning Mandarin, therefore, becomes quite strategic.

In summary, phonological transfer encourages learners’ psychological investment and makes learning strategic. It is safe to conclude that the strategy engages learners cognitively.

*Category Two*
Entry_05 - Entry_07 have been extracted from the evidence. The analysis concentrates on the students’ emotional involvement.

Entry_05: When the teacher researcher asked S_2 to clarify his idea which “wɔ:” he referred to, S_3 volunteered her idea, “Like I ‘wore’ a watch”. The impatience and eagerness showed her strong interest in the lesson.

Entry_06: S_4 suggested “wolf” sounded similar as “wǒ”. She imitated a wolf howling in a low and deep voice excitedly. She enjoyed the lesson without doubt.

Entry_07: Towards the end of the activity, the students practised the target word again. It was observed that their voice was bigger and more confident before the implementation of the transfer strategy. By connecting with the learners’ prior knowledge, ‘wǒ’, a new word, was becoming less strange and more familiar. No wonder “they (the students) were smiling and looked relaxed”.

Three entries above discussed the learners’ emotional reaction in the classroom. Key words like “strong interest” “enjoyed” “more confident” “smiling” “relaxed” imply high emotional engagement.

Emotional engagement refers to students’ affective reactions in the classrooms, including interest, boredom, happiness, sadness, and anxiety (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Skinner & Belmont, 1993; cited in Fredricks, 2004); that is, emotionally engaged learners have positive feelings (i.e. interest, happiness) for their learning. Informed by the literature, the researcher maintains that the students were emotionally engaged in the lesson.

The high emotional engagement found its root in the adoption of phonological transfer. The strategy helped build new knowledge upon the students’ prior knowledge. It made connections between material to be learnt in TL and existing knowledge in L1. In this way the new word, ‘wǒ’, became less strange and more familiar. That increased learners’ sense of security and self-assurance. Such personal level of comfort accounts for their reactions to a class, as students who are more confident struggle less with anxiety (Ewald, 2007), and there appears to be a significant, inverse relationship between anxiety and achievement (Phillips, 1992). Overall, phonological transfer helps learners relieve excessive anxiety, reach a sense of achievement and hence engage emotionally, in general.

*Category Three*
Entry_08 - Entry_11 have been extracted from the evidence. The analysis highlights the students’ behavioural involvement.

Entry_08: During the activity, the students were quite well behaved. No disruptive behaviour was observed.

Entry_09: The students followed the teacher researcher’s instructions “to find a word in English sounded as ‘wǒ’”. The teacher researcher saw them thinking hard to retrieve words from their L1 vocabulary. When they got an answer, they put their hand up to answer the question in a respectful manner.

Entry_10: After S_1 volunteered his answer, other students were ready to offer more ideas (“At the same time, a few hands were still high up”), which exhibits their readiness to participate.

Entry_11: When S_2 had trouble making his point clear, his peer voluntarily contributed to class discussion (“like I wore a watch”). The behaviour manifested her strong interest and concentration on classroom interaction.

The analysis above manifests learners’ engagement in another aspect, behavioural engagement. Differentiated from cognition and emotion, this one is more observable and intangible. Behavioural engagement is conceptualized as positive conduct, such as following rules and adhering to classroom norms (“The students followed the teacher researcher’s instructions ‘to find a word in English sounded as wǒ’” in Entry_09), as well as the absence of disruptive behaviours (“No disruptive behaviour was observed” in Entry_08) (Finn, 1993; Finn, Pannozzo, & Voelkl, 1995; Finn & Rock, 1997; cited in Fredricks, 2004). It focuses on students’ contributions to a learning-friendly classroom, an environment supportive for learning (Entry_08 and Entry_09). It also concerns involvement in learning and academic tasks, such as effort, persistence, concentration, attention, asking questions, and contributing to class questions (Entry_10 and Entry_11) (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Finn et al., 1995; Skinner & Belmont, 1993; cited in Fredricks, 2004). In summary, the analysis above demonstrates that the students in Evidence E were highly engaged behaviourally.

In summary, the analysis above elaborated the benefit of phonological transfer in the perspective of classroom engagement. The author argues from three angles:
cognition, emotion, and behaviour. It is concluded that phonological transfer increases learners’ overall engagement in the Mandarin classroom. Engagement is associated with positive academic outcomes, including achievement and persistence in school (Fredricks, 2004); that is, engaged learners are more likely to be successful in learning and to sustain their learning in the longer term than those who are not. Therefore, high engagement makes Mandarin learnable for non-background primary school students in the WSR.

4.1.4 Phonological transfer: learning facilitation

This section investigates the approach of phonological transfer from the perspective of a Mandarin beginning teacher. It illustrates the benefits of the strategy from three perspectives, intrinsic difficulty of the language, learners’ autonomy, and learners’ engagement. The researcher argues that the strategy lowers the difficulty of producing some Mandarin sounds; it promotes learners’ autonomy; it increases learners’ classroom engagement. Overall, phonological transfer plays a positive role in learning Mandarin and making the language learnable for non-background primary school students in the WSR.

4.2 Limitations and suggestions

This section examines the limitations of phonological transfer in Mandarin learning. It is explored from two perspectives. One concerns linguistic features of the language, for example, unique sounds and tones. The other concerns learners, such as their prior knowledge and ages. This part aims to inform readers that the strategy is not perfect. Its limitations, however, can be compensated for.

4.2.1 Concerning linguistic features

This part discusses the limitations of phonological transfer from the perspective of linguistic features of Mandarin, for instance, some unique sounds and tones. Questions that will be addressed are: What is the limitation here? How to cope with it?

4.2.1.1 Unique sounds

Mandarin and English share some sounds in common, which form the basis for phonological transfer. Nevertheless, Mandarin has some unique sounds that cannot be found in English, so it is not always possible to find the same sound between L1 and TL. Thus, the implementation of phonological transfer could be
Evidence F takes the Mandarin sounds “ü”, for example. The “Ü” sound does not exist in English. There is not even any close sound. In such a case, phonological transfer can hardly happen.

In the dialogue below, T stands for “Teacher researcher”, S for “Students”. S_1 and S_2 are two students. The content in the square brackets includes two parts. One is of the teacher researcher’s visual observation from the angle of an outsider; the other is description of what is going on her mind. Those in the brackets are the teacher researcher’s comments to make the evidence more accessible for readers.

(This was T’s first lesson in the class. When she introduced herself to the S, she put Mandarin pinyin "Xǔ lǎo shī" on the board. “Xǔ lǎo shī” means “Miss Xǔ”, “Xǔ” her family name.] (The original form of “Xǔ” is “Xū”, but when “ü” comes after “x”, it is written in ũ and the sound remains the same)

T: Who would like to guess the sound of ‘Xǔ lǎo shī’?

S_1: eks yoo lǎo shī (“eks yoo” is wrong sound; “lǎo shī” is correct).

T [giving S_1 a thumb-up]: ‘lǎo shī’ is correct, but the first word “Xǔ” seems a little bit dodgy. I’ll give you guys some hints. [T paused for a second to gather the children’s attention.] “X” in Mandarin sounds similar to “sh” in English, like ‘fish’, ‘sheep’. [While elaborating, T put down “Xǔ = sheep” on the board to facilitate understanding visually] Everyone repeat after me, X!

S: X!

T: Fabulous! Now let’s get down to “ũ” in “Xǔ”. This is “ũ”. Everybody repeat after me, “ũ”? [T modelled the “ũ” sound for three times]

S: ũ! [T can tell the “ũ” sound is challenging for the learners. They could not get the sound correctly at first, not even close. Through repetition for a few times their pronunciation improved gradually]

T: Who would like to have another go? [A lot of hands were seen]

S_2: "shoo."

T: Well done! You’ve got the “x” sound in “Xǔ”. As for ũ, it’s not “oo” sound but “ũ”. [Several more learners had a try. None of them got the “ũ” sound a hundred percent correct. T modelled the sound for a few more times and the class repeated after her together each time. Their pronunciation improved little by little through practice]

(The teacher researcher’s observations, Term 1, 2013)
The evidence depicts part of the first lesson the teacher researcher had with the students. She was introducing her surname “Xū” to them. To make the “x” sound accessible for the students, the teacher researcher introduced the “sh” sound from their L1 vocabulary like “sheep” “fish”. While “x” and “sh” are not exactly the same, they are close. It turned out that the students were able to acquire a fair and understandable sound in a short time.

As for “ǔ”, no sound in English can be compared with it. As is mentioned, the sound was “challenging” for the learners for no existing knowledge could be referred to. The learners gradually improved their pronunciation through the teacher researcher’s modelling and repetitive practice with their peers.

Phonological transfer lays its foundation on sound similarity between TL and L1. Since the two languages share a limited number of the same sounds, the implementation of phonological transfer can be hindered. Fortunately, other learning strategies like teachers’ modelling, repetitive practice and peer support also contribute to producing correct sounds. One thing of note is that improving pronunciation comes a long way and requires patience both from learners and teachers.

### 4.2.1.2 Tone

Mandarin is a tonal language while English is not. In Mandarin, by changing the tone of a word, its denotation also changes. However, in English the denotation of a word will not be changed with the tone. Generally speaking, transfer does not work in Mandarin tone acquisition because of the absence of that in English.

The second piece of data in this chapter discusses the acquisition of the Mandarin word “qiū”, which means “ball”, through phonological transfer. Though the approach worked well, it did not help with getting the correct tone, so further scaffolding was therefore required and is depicted in the evidence below.

In the dialogue below, T stands for “Teacher researcher”, S for “Students”. S_1 refers to a student. The content in the square brackets includes two parts. One is of the teacher researcher’s visual observation from the angle of an outsider; the other is a description of what is going on in her mind. Those comments in the brackets are the teacher researcher’s comments, to make the evidence more readable.

T: When you say “qiū”, you need to raise your tone.
S [looked puzzled]: … [Giving T little response]

S_1: What does “raise your tone” mean?

T: Good question! Show me your right hand! Whole class together! Qiú! Qiú! Qiú! [T showed a raising gesture to indicate the tone]

S: Qiú! Qiú! Qiú! [The class was copying T’s raising gesture. They looked passionate and were enjoying making movements. Their eyes were on T. Their voices became louder and more firm after each time]

T: Excellent! Your pronunciation was not much different from a native speaker!

(The teacher researcher’s observations, Term 2, 2013)

The evidence exhibits the limits of phonological transfer on tone acquisition. The students were not able to get the correct sound of “qiú” through phonological transfer. Therefore, other strategies were adopted, such as body language (“T showed a raising gesture to indicate the tone”), teachers’ modelling (“Qiú!”), and repetitive practice with peers (“Qiú! Qiú! Qiú!”). A set of strategies worked well together. The young learners loved to show their hands and to make movements. They felt comfortable and confident when they had the teacher say the word first and then could say it together with their classmates. Repetition further enhanced their confidence. Their voices became louder after each time. The learning outcome indicates that, with its limit in learning tones, phonological transfer can be well implemented by engaging other strategies such as body language, modelling, and repetitive practice.

There are quite a few examples of implementing phonological transfer with other strategies. It has been discussed in acquiring the sound of the Mandarin word “wǒ” (wǒ: I; me) by phonological transfer. When it comes to the tone, other strategies are required.

[The students called out “wǒ”. Their pronunciation was all good except for the tone]

T: Listen up first and then repeat after me, “wǒ”! [At the same time, T moved my head in a half circle to indicate the tone]

S: Wǒ! [The class also moved their head with T]

T: Wǒ! Wǒ! Wǒ!

S: Wǒ! Wǒ! Wǒ! [To her delight, T found the learners’ pronunciation including the tone was correct]
The evidence is another case in point of implementing phonological transfer with other strategies in learning the tone of “wǒ” such as the teacher’s modelling (“Listen up first and then repeat after me, wǒ!”), repetitive practice with peers (“Wǒ! Wǒ! Wǒ!”), and body language (“the students also moved their head with me”).

One intriguing question is how body language facilitates tone acquisition. This method is very much like the strategy of the total physical response (referred as TPR below). According to James (1969), TPR is to have students listen to a command in a foreign language and immediately obey with a physical action. The approach produces rapid, non-stressful learning to understand a second language (James, 1969). The evidence that explain body movement and the correct tone producing in their mandarin learning aligns with James’ arguments. That may explain why moving one’s head assists the students in producing the correct tone in TL.

In conclusion, phonological transfer through L1 and L2 similarities has its limitations in tone learning. However, through combing the strategies of modelling, repetition, and TPR, Mandarin learners’ achieved their learning goals effectively.

4.2.2 Concerning learners

This part discusses the limitations of phonological transfer from the learners’ perspectives, for instance, the learners’ prior knowledge and ages.

Learners are the subject to use the transfer strategy. They play a dynamic role in learning activities. Their performance inevitably influences the outcome of the strategy use in the teacher researcher’s mandarin class. The three situations outlined below are found disadvantage the learners through the employment of this strategy.

Firstly, the learners lacked the necessary prior knowledge in L1. Phonological transfer lays its basis on sound similarities. Lack of necessary L1 knowledge means there is nothing that can be transferred. Thus, the strategy was groundless and hampered in this situation.

Second, learners demonstrated sufficient L1 knowledge but were not able to
transfer it to assist TL acquisition. For example, in the evidence mentioned above, the students knew the word “who” and “wall”. While learning “wǒ”, they transferred the “wh” sound from “who”, which is a wrong choice. “W” in “wall” sounds the same as that in “wǒ”. In such a case, though the learners had the related knowledge background, it did not contribute to TL learning. The second situation calls for teachers’ assistance in using the strategy.

Third, the learners understood the similarity/connections between TL and L1 but failed to produce the correct sound. The reason is explored below.

The evidence below is about students learning the Mandarin word “huì (meaning: to know how to do something; can)”. T stands for “Teacher researcher”. The content in the square brackets includes two parts. One is the teacher researcher’s visual observation from the angle of an outsider; the other is a description of what is going on her mind.

T [Put the word on the board]: Look at the word on the board. Who would like to make a guess about its sound?

[Lots of students put their hands up and were eager to give this a go. Many tried, but no-one was right]

T: All right. I will give you some hints. “uì” in Mandarin sounds like the English word “way”. [At the same time, T wrote “huì = way” on the white board]

[Many hands were up. The students were murmuring to themselves]

T: Guys! You will have 3 minutes. Talk to people in your group. Have a discussion and work out the sound of the word together. Every group should come up with one final answer only. After that, you will report group by group. Does it make sense?

[A heated discussion among the students]

(The teacher researcher’s observations, Term 2, 2013)

The evidence above is about learning the Mandarin word “huì”. It means “to know how to do something” or “can”. The lesson involves three stages. (1) The teacher researcher asked the students to make a guess about its sound. Various answers were offered but no-one got it correct. Even Y5 and Y6 students failed to work it out, not to mention the little ones. (2) The teacher researcher did more scaffolding by making a comparison between “uì” in TL and “way” in L1 because they share the same sound. In addition, she put down “huì = way” on the board to assist visual learning. (3) The teacher researcher asked the students to have a group
discussion and to figure out the sound together. Every group only had one answer to report so that group members needed to compromise and make decisions. The “one group one answer” principle ensures the students’ answers were typical and representative, the data thereby more reliable.

After the discussion, all the groups reported their opinions one after another. When each group finished, the teacher researcher said “xiè xiè” to them which means “thanks”. No feedback was provided at that point just to ensure that the students could speak their mind, which is also a strategy to enhance data reliability. The teacher researcher found the learners at different stages performed in a different way. The three pieces of data below detail the performance of Stage One, Stage Two, and Stage Three respectively.

The table below illustrates the performance of a Stage One (Y1 and Y2) class. As is shown in the first row, six groups were involved. The second row demonstrates the accuracy of the students’ reports. “√” means the answer was correct. “˟” indicates the other way, followed by further explanation.

Table 4.2 the performance of Stage One

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group No.</th>
<th>Group One</th>
<th>Group Two</th>
<th>Group Three</th>
<th>Group Four</th>
<th>Group Five</th>
<th>Group Six</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accuracy</td>
<td>*sounds like “who” and “I” combined together</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>*sounds like &quot;high&quot;</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>*sounds like &quot;hoo&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The table shows that among six Stage-one groups, three of them got the correct sound of “hui” while the other three failed to. Group One’s guess sounded like combining the English words “who” and “I” together. Groups Four’s sounded close to the English word “high”. Group Six produced a “hoo” sound.

To sum up, the accuracy of Stage One is 50%.

The table below illustrates the performance of a Stage Two (Y3 & Y4) class. The first row shows there were six groups altogether. Like the table above, the second row demonstrates the result of the students’ guess. “√” means the answer was correct. “˟” indicates the other way. The wrong answer got further explained following the cross.

Table 4.3 the performance of Stage Two

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group No.</th>
<th>Group One</th>
<th>Group Two</th>
<th>Group Three</th>
<th>Group Four</th>
<th>Group Five</th>
<th>Group Six</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accuracy</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>✖ sounds like &quot;hee&quot;</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>✖ sounds like &quot;her&quot;</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One thing of note is that just before the teacher researcher was going to invite the first group to share their idea, someone called out “hui” and that was correct! That person was the classroom teacher, a man in his late thirties or early forties.

(The teacher researcher’s observations, Term 2, 2013)

The table shows among six Stage-two groups, four of them got the correct sound of “hui” while the other two did not. Group Two produced a “hee” sound and Group Four a “her” sound.

In summary, the accuracy of Stage Two is 66.7%.

The table below illustrates the performance of a Stage Three (Y5 and Y6) class. The students were in six groups. The accuracy of their
answers is indicated in the second row. “√” means the answer was correct, “˟” incorrect.

Table 4.4 the performance of Stage Three

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group No.</th>
<th>Group One</th>
<th>Group Two</th>
<th>Group Three</th>
<th>Group Four</th>
<th>Group Five</th>
<th>Group Six</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accuracy</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>sounds like &quot;Hi&quot;</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table shows that among six Stage-three groups five of them got the correct sound of “huì”. The other one, Group Two, produced a “hi” sound, which was incorrect.

In summary, the accuracy of Stage Three is 83.3%.

The three pieces of data display the performance across the three stages, but also indicate their difference in accuracy, which is demonstrated in the diagram below.

Graph 4.5 the accuracy of learners’ answers across each stage

Accuracy of learners' answers(%)
The x-axis shows the stages from one to three and the y-axis the accuracy of their answers, 50%, 66.7%, and 83.3% respectively. It is quite apparent to see the direct correlation between the accuracy of the answers and the stage. The higher the stage is, the more likely learners work out the accurate sound. Since the stage indicates learners’ age, it means older primary school learners show more capability in transferring sounds from L1 to TL.

Due to the limited amount of data, it would be dangerous to draw the conclusion that there is direct correlation between age and the capability of transferring. However, it raises issues concerning the performance of primary school learners in phonological transfer. It implies future work in the field could investigate how age influences phonological transfer ability.

4.2.3 Phonological transfer: not omnipotent

As is shown in the diagram below, the section discusses the limitations of phonological transfer from two aspects. First, Mandarin is featured in tones and some unique sounds that are absent from English. Since the strategy is based on sound similarity between the two languages, the transfer cannot really happen. Nevertheless, other strategies can be engaged to complement phonological transfer such as TPR, teachers’ modelling, repetition with peers.

Second, primary school learners are young in age and their English is improving. These two factors can limit phonological transfer, for the strategy requires engaging learners’ prior knowledge in L1. It is advised that, though such a situation seems inevitable, it can be improved through teachers’ scaffolding and patience.
4.3 Phonological transfer: a two-sided approach

This chapter has taken a critical attitude toward the role phonological transfer plays in the TL learning. On the one hand, it decreases the difficulty of learning content; it promotes learning autonomy; it increases learners’ classroom engagement. On the other hand, the strategy has its limitations due to some linguistic features of Mandarin and learners’ characteristics. It is suggested that other strategies be engaged while implementing phonological transfer, which contributes to making Mandarin learnable for non-background primary school students in the WSR.
Chapter Five: Morpho-syntactic Transfer

An Approach Highlighting Teachers’ practical knowledge

This chapter examines how beginning teachers can facilitate morpho-syntactic transfer through their practical knowledge. It is composed of two parts. The first part is about exploring teachers’ practical knowledge for supporting morpho-syntactic transfer. The second part is about facilitating morpho-syntactic transfer through teachers’ practical knowledge. This chapter aims to take a close look at the morpho-syntactic transfer from the perspective of a beginning teacher.

Morphology is the branch of linguistics which studies the form of words (Hu & Jiang, 2002). It identifies the smallest meaningful units in a language which are called morphemes and looks into the ways the morphemes are arranged to form words (Hu & Jiang, 2002). Chinese morphology has two levels of meaning. One is the radical level, the other the word level (Shu & Anderson, 1997; cited in Wang & Yang, 2008). At the first level, within an individual character, there are semantic components, referred to as semantic radicals, which provide information on the meaning of the whole character (Wang & Yang, 2008). Radicals are formed by strokes combined by following a certain stroke-positional constraint (Wang & Yang, 2008). The second level of morphological structure is at the word level. A word in Chinese is defined as the “smallest independently useable part of language” (Wang, 1953; cited in Packard, 2000, p.16). In other words, a Chinese character is a morpheme; a word can include one character or more than one character. For words that consist of two characters, each character represents an independent meaning that contributes to the meaning of the word (Wang & Yang, 2008).

Syntax is the branch of linguistics which studies the rules governing the combination of words into sentences (Hu & Jiang, 2002). Syntax identifies the permissible sequence of words in a language and the relationship between elements in sentence structure (Hu & Jiang, 2002). Some aspects of linguistic analysis suggest that the syntactic and semantic relations of Chinese are parallel to that of English (Wang & Yang, 2008). For example, the canonical word order in Chinese is SVO (subject-verb-object), so is English an SVO language. However, Chinese and English are different in an important language-specific sentence property (Wang & Yang, 2008). Chinese is topic-centred; that is to say, a Chinese
sentence is characterized by a topic which does not necessarily have a direct relationship with the subsequent verb(s) (Wang & Yang, 2008). In contrast, English is subject-centred; that is to say, an English sentence is characterized by a subject that has a direct relationship with the verb (Wang & Yang, 2008).

Morphology and syntax are examined together in the chapter due to their close relationship. Packard (2006) defines word in Chinese as a form that can stand as an independent occupant of a syntactic form class slot, in other words, a syntactically free form (p.12). He offers two reasons for the syntactic definition of word in Chinese. First, the syntactic definition is the one that most closely comports with the intuitive notion of “word” among native speakers of Chinese (p.18); second, the syntactic definition of “word” motivates the concept in most other languages (p.19).

Based on the previous research, morpho-syntax in this research refers to the study of the internal structure of words and the way in which words are put together to form phrases and sentences. At the morpho-syntactic level, Chinese has a fairly simple system compared to Indo-European languages (Wang & Yang, 2008). For instance, there is no subject-verb agreement; there is no case marking; there is generally no plurality marking; there is no grammatical inflection providing information about tense (Li & Thompson, 1981; cited in Wang & Yang, 2008). As a consequence, Chinese words remain constant in form and do not generally undergo morphological transformation. Due to the characteristics of Chinese morpho-syntactic structure, the reader of Chinese must focus on the individual word meanings and their semantic relations in order to uncover the meaning of a sentence (Wang & Yang, 2008). Also, word boundaries are not marked in Chinese written texts since there is no space between words, which requires readers to examine the syntactic and semantic relations among neighbouring characters in segmenting a character string into words (Hoosain, 1991; cited in Wang & Yang, 2008).

Transfer is “the ability to extend what has been learnt in one context to new contexts” (Bransford et al., 2000). In the context of language learning, transfer is the use of cross-linguistic similarities (Ringbom, 2007). In this study, the morpho-syntactic transfer is an approach of transferring learners’ existing morpho-syntactic knowledge in TL acquisition.
5.1 Teachers’ practical knowledge

Teachers’ practical knowledge encompasses their knowledge and beliefs that guide their teaching practices (Chou, 2008; Van Velzen, Volman, & Brekelmans, 2011). The knowledge is personal, related to context and content, often tacit, and based on (reflection on) experience (Meijer et al. 1999). The characteristics of teachers’ practical knowledge is well concluded by Van Driel, Beijaard & Verloop (2001) as “action-oriented”, “person-and context-bound”, “implicit or tacit”, “integrated” and “beliefs” (142). Zanting, Verloop, Vermunt & Van Driel (1998, 16) defines teachers’ practical knowledge as the “amalgam of all teachers' cognitions” such as “declarative and procedural knowledge, beliefs and values” which “influences their proactive, interactive, and post-active teaching activities”; that is to say, “practical knowledge underlies the visible teaching behaviour, and insight into teachers' practical knowledge can therefore be of help to understand their teaching” (Zanting, Verloop, Vermunt & Van Driel, 1998, 16). Likewise, Gholami and Husu (2010) also maintain that teachers’ practical knowledge “includes all teachers’ cognitions (e.g., beliefs, values and motives) guiding their actions”. To summarize, the previous research shows that teachers’ practical knowledge affects teaching practice contextually and it encompasses teachers’ cognition (i.e. knowledge, belief).

Teachers’ practical knowledge has common parts (Elbaz, 1981; Meijer et al., 1999; Chou, 2008). The study of its content can provide a systematic perspective on the teaching process as dynamic expression of knowledge (Elbaz, 1981; Golombek, 1998). Therefore, early researchers have explored the components of teachers’ practical knowledge.

Table 5.1 components of teachers’ practical knowledge

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researcher (date)</th>
<th>Components of teachers’ practical knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Golombek (1998, 451)</td>
<td>knowledge of self, subject matter, instruction and context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meijer et al. (1999)</td>
<td>knowledge of subject matter, students, student learning and understanding, educational purposes, curriculum, and</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From the table it can be seen that though the components of teachers’ practical knowledge varies from research to research, they all put emphasis on the knowledge of subject matter.

5.1.1 Concerning the subject matter

Schwab (1964) describes the knowledge of subject matter as an understanding of the various ways a discipline can be organized or understood, as well as the knowledge of the ways by which a discipline evaluates and accepts new knowledge (cited in Ben-Peretz, 2011, 4). Shulman (1986) defines the knowledge of subject matter as the understanding of the subject matter major, including the structure of the subject matter and knowledge of what students already know within the subject. In this section, teachers’ practical knowledge concerning the subject matter focuses on their understanding of TL.

In the evidence below, students were learning the word “yóuyǒng” which means “swimming”. The lesson aimed at two targets. (1) Speaking: the learners were able to say the word “yóuyǒng (swimming)” in a correct way. (2) Grammar: they were able to get a rough idea about the concept of “word” in Mandarin. To make the evidence readable, some of the evidence recorded in Mandarin is translated in the brackets that follow.

The teacher researcher showed students the word “yóu yǒng” and a photo in which a person was swimming. She asked them, “Guys, make a guess! What does “yóu yǒng” mean?”

The students called out together, “Swimming!”

The teacher researcher gave them a thumbs-up, “Dui (correct)! Hěn hǎo (excellent)! ‘Yóu yǒng’ means ‘swimming’.”

A student asked, “If ‘yóu yǒng’ means ‘swimming’, what do ‘yóu’ and ‘yǒng’ mean?”

The teacher researcher did not expect such a question and her brain went blank for a second. She then replied, “Good question! Well, ‘yóu yǒng’ is one word like “swimming”, that is one word. ‘Yóu’ or ‘yǒng’ alone does not make sense. Umm…actually ‘yóu yǒng’ here should be written as ‘yóuyǒng’ without a space between ‘yóu’ and ‘yǒng’. Sorry it’s my fault!”

The student nodded the head to show her understanding, “fair enough.”
The evidence records a lesson of learning “yóuyǒng”, the Mandarin word for “swimming”. The teacher researcher put down the word incorrectly with a space between “yóu” and “yǒng” as “yóu yǒng”. The space was not supposed to be there. The mistake aroused a question from her student, asking about the meaning of the constituent part of the word, “yóu” and “yǒng”. The teacher researcher answered the question by comparing “yóuyǒng” with “swimming” as she explained “‘yóuyǒng’ is one word like ‘swimming’, that is one word”, by which time she had realized her fault. Morpho-syntactic transfer was implemented to enhance understanding of the notion of “word”.

Two points are to be discussed. First is the reason why the student would pop out the question. She saw the space between “yóu” and “yǒng” and took them as two words. Her assumption was based on her understanding in English. For an English speaker, the concept of the “word” is particularly salient and robust; that is the written material that occurs between the spaces (Packard, 2000). Clear and intuitive, the notion of “word” led the young learner to assume that it is universal (Packard, 2000). That is the reason for her regarding “yóu” and “yǒng” as two words and asking about their meaning.

Second is the reason why the teacher researcher would put a space between “yóu” and “yǒng”. The mistake was due to her ignorance in pinyin orthography; that is, she lacked the knowledge of how to segment pinyin alphabetic phonetic writing into discrete orthographic units. Pinyin orthography is not written as an unsegmented string of letters nor is it segmented according to the syllable (as with the character orthography) (Packard, 2000, p.16). The teacher researcher here segmented pinyin as with character orthography, which is grammatically incorrect. Her lack of knowledge in the subject caused confusion among learners, which led to the incorrect assumption that “yóuyǒng” were two words. Though morpho-syntactic transfer was implemented, the students could still be puzzled: “if they are one word, why were they written separately?” In that sense, morpho-syntactic transfer failed to be implemented effectively due to the teacher’s lack of the subject knowledge.

In summary, teachers’ knowledge of the subject matter influences the implementation of morpho-syntactic transfer. Absence of that would disadvantage the implementation of the approach and affect TL learning in a negative way.
5.1.2 Concerning TL learners

Besides the knowledge of the subject matter, there are other components of teachers’ practical knowledge related to morpho-syntactic transfer.

The evidence below is about learning the sentence “wǒ huì yóuyǒng”. It means “I can swim”. For readers’ information, the meaning of every word is listed in the table below.

Table 5.2 glossary of TL words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>wǒ</td>
<td>I; me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>huì</td>
<td>can; to know how to do something</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yóuyǒng</td>
<td>to swim; swimming</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The evidence is based on the teacher researcher’s observation and is written in the tone of an outsider. It is in two parts, marked as Part One and Part Two respectively. Part One is a table recording the classroom interaction between T (short for ‘the teacher researcher’) and S (short for ‘the students’) including their speech, behaviour, and the teacher researcher’s mental process.

Table 5.3 anecdote: teaching the sentence for “I can swim”

Part One

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>T</th>
<th>She put the English sentence “I can swim” on the board and turned to the class, “Who can read the sentence here? Put your hand up!”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>Almost everyone put their hands up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>“Let’s read it out together! One, two, start!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>The kids called out in a confident voice, “I –</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
She felt pleased, “Great! I can swim. Too easy! Today we will learn how to say ‘I can swim’ in Mandarin.” She paused for a second to collect everyone’s attention and then continued, “I will give you guys some hints. For ‘I’ the word is …”

“WǑ!”

“Fabulous! How about ‘swim’? Together!”

They called out in one voice, “yóuyǒng!”

“Nice! ‘I’ is ‘wǒ’ and ‘swimming’ ‘yóuyǒng’. We have figured out two words and there is just one more. For ‘can’ the word is ‘huì’.”

Hui!

She nodded, smiling “Excellent! Now I want you to work out ‘I can swim’ in Mandarin with the words we just mentioned. You will work in groups and come up with one sentence you think is likely to be right. Put it down on the sticky note I’ll give you later on. Should you have any question, put your hand up! No? Five minutes for discussion! Here you go!”

(The teacher researcher’s observations, Term 4, 2013)

Part Two, the subsequent part of the lesson, is the teacher researcher’s observation of the group discussion in class. For clear reference in the analysis that follows, some sentences are marked by numbers.

Part Two

The students started to discuss with each other enthusiastically. (1) In one group, a boy said, “It’s ‘yóuyǒng wǒ huì’!” His group member disagreed,
“Nah! I think it should be ‘wǒ hui youyong’.” Another person agreed, “Yeh… I agree…” (2) In another group, some kids lay flat on the desk in order to get close to their group members. Their heads were together and the voice was deliberately lowered as if they were talking about some top secrets. (3) When the teacher researcher gave each group a sticky note, they scrambled for that, eager to be the person to take notes. (4) Sometimes they felt stuck and secretly brought the teacher close “Miss what is the answer?” Hah, that was sort of cheating! (5) Looking around the class, the teacher researcher could see that most of them were on task. No misbehaviour was observed. (6) When the majority got close to the end, she started to collect the sticky notes. One group had not reached a consensus yet, by then. They begged for more time with pleading eyes “please just one more minute”, making it very hard for the teacher researcher to say “no”.

Finally all the groups had handed in their sticky notes. The discussion was ended. The teacher researcher said, “Alright guys! Now let’s report your sentence group by group.”

(The teacher researcher’s observations, Term 4, 2013)

The evidence is about learning the sentence “wǒ hui youyong (I can swim)”. It consists of two parts. Part One describes the teacher researcher’s scaffolding of implementing morpho-syntactic transfer based on her practical knowledge concerning the learners. She carefully used the strategy by engaging the learners’ prior knowledge. To put it in detail, she took two steps for scaffolding. First she introduced the English sentence “I can swim” which was well known by the students. The syntactic and semantic relations in the sentence are parallel to the target sentence “wǒ hui youyong (I can swim)” because both of them follow an SVO (subject-verb-object) word order. In this way, the teacher researcher laid the foundation of transferring the syntactic relations from the English knowledge to Mandarin learning. Second, the teacher researcher prepared the students with vocabulary. Three words were involved. Only one of them is a new word so they could not be overwhelmed. In this way, she finished paving the way for syntactic transfer both in the sentence relations and the vocabulary. In conclusion, Part One is about the scaffolds the teacher researcher built for syntactic transfer, based on her knowledge about what the learners already knew.

Part Two exhibits the learning outcome of adopting the syntactic strategy. It depicts the scene where the students were developing the target sentence through group work. That was the time when they directed their learning independently.
Lots of activities were involved, such as brainstorming, choosing strategies, sharing ideas, communicating, arguing, persuading, compromising, being a team player, exercising leadership, time management, etc. In a word, this section of the lesson was the real time of learning for the students; for the teacher researcher, it was a test of her strategy, syntactic transfer. Was the strategy effective? Was the understanding of the students’ prior knowledge correct? Those questions would find their answers in the learners’ performance, i.e., their classroom engagement, learning autonomy, and group reports. The following part makes an analysis of those aspects to unveil the result.

*Classroom engagement & learning autonomy*

(1) describes how the students argued and supported each other. It shows that they were thinking and mentally involved, which indicates their psychological investment in learning (Fredricks 2004). The learners’ behaviour is a strong indicator of cognitive engagement.

(2) depicts how the students discussed and worked as a team. Their behaviour like “lay flat” “heads together” “a low voice” presents a vivid picture. It reflects that they were highly motivated and possessed a positive attitude towards learning. In Lee’s (1998) words, that exhibits “the ability to take charge of or take responsibility of one’s own learning” and was a showcase of “learners’ autonomy”.

(3) presents a picture: the students were scrambling for sticky notes. Usually a note taker plays a leading part in group work; that is, quite a few of the learners were ready to exercise their leadership and to make an effort. It implies “a preference for challenge” (Fredricks 2004) and hard work. Like (1), (3) is also an example of cognitive engagement.

(4) is about the students turning to the teacher researcher for help when they were stuck. They asked her in the middle of the discussion, which means they had already been thinking and searching for solutions by themselves. Confronted with difficulty, they sought for external assistance, which virtually is very strategic. Benson (2006) believes that language learners’ autonomy lies in two aspects. One is their purpose / goals, the other learning strategies. Therefore, asking for professional advice and suggestion showcases the learners’ capacity and autonomy.
(5) exhibits the overall learning environment, “on task”, “no misbehaviour”. The positive conduct and the absence of disruptive behaviours contributed to an environment supportive for learning. According to Fredricks (2004), “behavioural engagement entails positive conduct, such as following the rules and adhering to classroom norms, as well as the absence of disruptive behaviours such as skipping school and getting in trouble”, so it is safe to conclude that the learners were behaviourally engaged.

(6) depicts the circumstance where the students asked for more time to finish the task. That shows they were interested in what they were doing and enjoyed it. They possessed positive emotional reactions to the lesson and were thereby emotionally engaged.

**Group report**

The outcome of syntactic transfer is also illustrated by the students’ group report on their anticipation of the target sentence, that is, what is “I can swim” in Mandarin. The result is listed in the table below in the descending order of the students’ ages. There are four columns, one each for class, the number of groups, the number of groups that got the correct guess, and the accuracy of the class. Take 6H, for example. Altogether, there were four groups, among which three got the right answer, so the accuracy was 75%.

Table 5.4 the result of group report
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Total groups</th>
<th>Correct groups</th>
<th>Accuracy (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6H</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6M</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6S</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5/7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5T</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5B</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4A</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/3C &amp; 2L</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8/11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2S &amp; 2G</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7/8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1H</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1B</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>63</strong></td>
<td><strong>59</strong></td>
<td><strong>94</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data shows that 94% of the groups got the correct answer; that is the majority of the students were able to work out the sentence correctly through the teacher researcher’s scaffolding and syntactic transfer.

To summarize, Part Two shows that the implementation of syntactic transfer increases learners’ classroom engagement, promotes their learning autonomy, and increases the accuracy of their prediction of the learning content, which is presented in the graph below. In conclusion, this section illustrates that teachers’ practical knowledge concerning learners influences the implementation of morpho-syntactic transfer. Teachers with a good knowledge of this are more likely to use the approach effectively and to bring about a fruitful learning experience.

Figure 5.5 the outcome of using syntactic transfer
5.2 Facilitating morpho-syntactic transfer through teachers’ practical knowledge

Language learners transfer their L1 morpho-syntactic knowledge in comprehending TL sentences; this issue has been studied in early research (Wang & Yang, 2008). For example, Su (2001) found that Chinese English learners transferred their Chinese sentence comprehension skills to processing English (cited in Wang & Yang, 2008). A logical extension of the view that TL morpho-syntactic knowledge is constructed from existing knowledge in L1 is that teachers need to pay attention to the misunderstandings of the similarity between TL and L1 that learners bring with them. This is especially true for young Australian Mandarin learners, given “the functional and structural differences of the two languages” (Wang & Yang, 2008). Teachers then need to help students achieve a more mature understanding and facilitate morpho-syntactic transfer through their practical knowledge.

5.2.1 Facilitating syntactic transfer through knowing the subject matter

Syntactic transfer is generally about learners transferring their L1 syntactic knowledge in their TL acquisition. With the growth of learners’ syntactic knowledge in TL, that part of their knowledge is also available for transferring in
new learning.

The previous data has illustrated that syntactic transfer happens when students are learning TL. The following evidence describes the subsequent lesson. It is about learning the sentence “wǒ huì gǎnlǎn qiú (I can play rugby)” through syntactic transfer. It is displayed in the table below. There are two columns. The left one shows the speaker and the right one shows the speech.

For readers’ information:

T = the teacher researcher.
S = the students

“S_” followed by a number is an individual student. Numbers 1-6 are used to differentiate one student from another.

Non-verbal classroom interaction is noted down in the brackets.

Translation follows the Mandarin words in the square brackets.

Table 5.6 anecdote: teaching “I can play rugby”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>T</th>
<th>Guys, we have learnt “wǒ huì yóuyǒng [I can swim]” and also learnt how to say ‘rugby’. That is …</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>Gǎnlǎn qiú!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| T | Hěn hǎo [that’s correct]! “Rugby” is “gǎnlǎn qiú”.

(It was written on the board:  

{  
Wǒ huì yóuyǒng.

I can swim.

}  

{  
gǎnlǎn qiú

Rugby

})

Now I want you to think about how you would say ‘I can play rugby’.
<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>(thinking and murmuring)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>Talk to people in your group. Work out the sentence ‘I can play rugby’ together. You have five minutes for discussion. Should you have any question, put your hand up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>(no hand seen)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After the discussion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>T</th>
<th>All right guys. Now we will share ideas with each other. Who would like to go first?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S_1</td>
<td>We think it is “Wǒ huì gānlǎn qiú”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>“Wǒ huì gānlǎn qiú”. You replace “yóuyǒng” with “gānlǎn qiú” in “Wǒ huì yóuyǒng”. Is that what you mean? Okie dokie. Put your hand up if you agree!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>(Among seven groups, two groups put their hands up)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>So, two groups think that’s correct. Hands down! Put your hand up if you disagree!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>(Many hands were seen)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>So what is your idea?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S_2</td>
<td>We think “wǒ huì play gānlǎn qiú”. I don’t know the word for “play”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>For ‘play’ the word is “dǎ”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S_2</td>
<td>Okay then “wǒ huì dǎ gānlǎn qiú”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>All right! This group believes it is “wǒ huì dǎ gānlǎn qiú”. If you agree with them, put your hand up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>(It turned out that all groups put their hands up, including the two groups who seconded the first sentence. Apparently they changed their minds!)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| T | Hah, it seems we are on the same page now. I will put the two
In the evidence, the problem is that the students had difficulty in learning the new sentence “wǒ huì gǎnlǎn qiú (I can play rugby)”, which found its root in the previous learning experience. When they learnt “wǒ huì yóu yǒng (I can swim)”, they assumed that “huì” and “can” were the same. The misunderstanding is because, while the teacher researcher taught “wǒ huì yóu yǒng (I can swim)”, she introduced “I can swim” first and then translated each word into Mandarin. On the one hand, the teacher researcher demonstrated a good understanding of her
students, especially their L1 syntactic knowledge. Based on that, the target sentence was well scaffolded so that the learners could bring their prior knowledge into full play. On the other hand, the syntactic transfer implanted the wrong idea in their minds that “hūi” was used in the same way as “can”, thereby creating trouble for them to understand “wǒ hūi gǎnlǎn qiú (I can play rugby)”.

The teacher researcher tried to solve the problem by reinterpreting the meaning of “hūi”. She emphasized its usage; that is, it can be used with an object but also with a verb. Nevertheless, the outcome was not satisfactory, which was indicated by the students’ response (“silent” “vacant”) and their feedback (“Mandarin is hard”, “it’s so confusing”).

The data indicates that if the teachers’ subject matter knowledge failed to direct syntactic transfer well, further learning would be hindered. In this case, the teacher researcher did not make the usage of “hūi” clear, when it first occurred to the students. In the short term they could acquire “wǒ hūi yóuyǒng (I can swim)” without much effort while in the long run they would find it hard to transfer “wǒ hūi yóuyǒng (I can swim)” syntactically to “wǒ hūi gǎnlǎn qiú (I can play rugby)”.

To sum up, the teachers’ knowledge of the subject matter needs to take a directive role while implementing syntactic transfer.

5.2.2 Facilitating morphological transfer through knowing about learners

Morphological transfer is generally about learners transferring their L1 morphological knowledge in their TL acquisition. The case below happened on China Open Day in the school where the teacher researcher worked. Parents were invited to the classroom. The lesson was about doing calligraphy with a brush pen.

The teacher researcher was explaining the concept of “stroke” and “stroke order” to her students, “Each Chinese character is composed of basic strokes, the smallest building materials for characters. There are twenty-four basic strokes. When you write a character, you need to follow a certain stroke order. Strokes cannot be written randomly. Does it make sense?” The students replied “yes” but their voice was vague and hesitant. Then the teacher researcher demonstrated calligraphy for the students and their parents before the students got down to practising by themselves.

A lady who must be someone’s mum asked the teacher researcher, “Excuse
me Miss, what is ‘stroke’? Sorry I still don’t quite get it.” The teacher answered, “Strokes are a basic part of a character. Every character is made of one or more strokes.” The mum still looked confused, “Well… tell me if I’m wrong. Is that like an alphabet in English?” The teacher nodded her head, “Yep, that’s actually a very good thinking!” The mum smiled in relief, “Okay! Cool! Makes sense now.” She started to talk to other parents about her idea.

The conversation with the mum made the teacher researcher aware that the concept of “stroke” could still be very dodgy for the young learners, so she continued to elaborate on that, “Characters are made of strokes just like you know that English words are composed of alphabets, a, b, c … As we know there are twenty-six alphabets that make up English words. For Chinese characters there are twenty-four basic components and they are called ‘strokes’. Does it make sense?” The students nodded their head, “yup!” Their voices sounded more firm and confident than the first time. The teacher researcher went on, “Sweet! Now let’s talk about ‘stroke order’. When you write an English word, you need to put down letters in a certain order, say, “brush”. You write down b-r-u-s-h. Similarly, when you write a Chinese character, you also need to put down strokes according to a certain order. Put your hand up if that is oaky for you to understand.” The teacher researcher took a glance around the classroom and the majority of the students had put their hands up.

When the lesson was over, the teacher researcher asked the classroom teacher who observed the lesson for advice and suggestions. She said one of the best parts of the lesson was “relating ‘characters’ to alphabets” and that was “awesome”.

(The teacher researcher’s observations, Term 4, 2013)

The evidence is about students learning the concept of “stroke” and “stroke order” by transferring their L1 morphological knowledge. The main issue depicted here was the teacher researcher’s interpretation of the notion. Her first try was based on her perception only, which was not well accepted by the students and their parents. When asked whether they had got the idea, the learners’ confirmation was “vague and hesitant”, which indicated that they did not quite understand it. Furthermore, the parents were also confused. A mum asked the teacher researcher to clarify the notion of “stroke”. When she got that, she shared it with other parents who had the same question. In sum, the teacher researcher failed to explain the content from a non-background English speaker’s perspective, which resulted in the audience’s confusion.
The problem was solved when the teacher researcher moved from the teacher’s “here” to the learners’ “there”. She explained the concept of “stroke” and “stroke order” again by comparing them with “English alphabet” and “English spelling” respectively. A stroke is to a character as an alphabet is to an English word. An English word needs correct spelling, so in a Chinese character, the strokes need to be written in order. The comparison worked well. The majority of the learners found the concept more accessible, which was indicated by their oral response (“yup” in a firm and confident voice) and physical response (the majority had their hands up to show a sound understanding). Furthermore, the strategy of relating characters to alphabets was also liked by the classroom teachers.

The analysis above shows the importance of teachers’ knowledge concerning students in terms of facilitating morphological transfer. Teachers cannot use the approach well until they get to know about their students and take their existing knowledge (i.e. the morphological knowledge in L1) into consideration. In the book “How people learn” Bransford and his colleagues (2000) maintain that:

There is a good deal of evidence that learning is enhanced when teachers pay attention to the knowledge and beliefs that learners bring to a learning task, use this knowledge as a starting point for new construction, and monitor students’ changing conceptions as instruction proceeds.

In a word, teachers’ knowledge of learners serves as a starting point for new learning and takes a fundamental role when teachers facilitate syntactic transfer. Below is another case in point. It is a dialogue among the teacher researcher and her students about learning the Chinese character “再” which means “once again”. The students were asked to observe it and share its features with each other.

The evidence is presented in a table of two columns. The left one shows the speaker and the right one the classroom interaction. T stands for “the teacher researcher” and S for the students. “S_” followed by a number represents one student. Numbers are used to differentiate the students. To make the evidence readable for non-Mandarin speaking readers, explanation is added in brackets.

Table 5.7 anecdote: teaching the character “再”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>T</th>
<th>Take a close look at the character “再”. What characteristics does “再” have? What features does</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

“再” have according to your observation?

| S_01 | It has lots of “一” (一 is the character for “one”. It is pretty much a horizontal line). |
| S_02 | It has “三” (三 is the character for “three”. It is made of three horizontal lines with the bottom one longest and the middle one shortest). |
| S_03 | It has “五” (五 is the character for “five”). |
| S_04 | There is “四” (“四” is the character for “four”). |
| T   | Where is “四”? Come to the front and point it out! |
| S_04 | Here! |
| T   | Hah! Umm…Not exactly but close! Hěn hǎo (not bad)! |
| S_05 | It has a “T” shape. |
| S_06 | There is another “T” upside down. |
| S_07 | It has an “I” shape. |
| S_08 | There is a “J” shape. |
| S_09 | There is an “L” shape. |
| S_10 | There! Something like a farm! That square stuff! |
| T   | A farm? Come to the front and point it out! |
| S_10 | Here! |
| T   | Okay. In the centre there are four little squares that look like a farm. You are creative! |
Hey look! Those squares also look like a window!

The character looks like a house.

A house?

The squares are like the windows of the house.

Umm...good thinking... and the top horizontal line could be ...

Roof!

(The teacher researcher’s observations, Term2 2013)

In the evidence, various answers popped out from the students about the characteristics of “再 (once again)”, which can be categorized in three groups. One is about numbers like 一 (one), 三 (three), 四 (four), and 五 (five). The second group is about English alphabets such as I, J, L, and T. The last group came up with picture stories about a farm, a window, and a house. It can be seen that while learning the character, the students constructed their new understanding from their prior knowledge, including L1 morphological knowledge, TL morphological knowledge and life experience.

In How people learn (Bransford et al., 2000), it is beautifully said:

Humans are viewed as goal-directed agents who actively seek information. They come to formal education with a range of prior knowledge, skill, and beliefs and concepts that significantly influence what they notice about the environment and how they organize and interpret it. This, in turn, affects their abilities to remember, reason, solve problems, and acquire new knowledge.

In the evidence, the students came to learn the character “再 (once again)” with a prior knowledge kit (e.g. Chinese numbers, English alphabets, and their life experience). All of those influenced the way they perceived the character. Especially the picture story part (i.e. “like a farm”) would serve as a mnemonic device, helping the learners memorize the character. Since schools and classrooms must be learner centred (Bransford et al., 2000, p.23), it is necessary for teachers to use the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that learners bring into the classroom.
Teachers’ practical knowledge concerning their students should be engaged in facilitating morphological transfer.

5.3 Morpho-syntactic transfer highlighting teachers’ practical knowledge

Morpho-syntactic transfer highlights teachers’ practical knowledge which includes a variety of components. Two are examined in the research. One concerns the subject matter. It takes a directive role while implementing morpho-syntactic transfer. In other words, the approach entails teachers’ expertise.

The other component is teachers’ practical knowledge concerning the TL learner. Students come to the classroom with their existing knowledge and understanding which new knowledge and understanding is constructed from. That is the way how people learn. Since schools and classrooms must be learner centred, it is essential to take learners, especially their prior knowledge, into consideration when teachers facilitate morpho-syntactic transfer.
Chapter Six: Pragmatic Transfer

An Approach to Understanding Teachers’ Talk

Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics whose main goal is to account for any meaning in an utterance excluding truth-conditional meaning (Levinson 1983, italics added). It is “the study of language from the point of view of users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication” (Crystal, 1997, p.301, italics added). Transfer is “the ability to extend what has been learnt in one context to new contexts” (Bransford et al. 2000). In the context of language learning, transfer is the use of cross-linguistic similarities (Ringbom 2007). Takahashi and Beebe (1987) define pragmatic transfer as transfer of L1 sociocultural communicative competence in performing TL speech acts. Based on the previous studies, this chapter also defines pragmatic transfer as transfer of L1 sociocultural communicative knowledge in understanding TL speech acts.

This chapter examines how beginning teachers can facilitate learners’ understanding in TL speech acts through their L1 sociocultural communicative knowledge. Since the research participants were non-background primary school students in WSR, they had little chance of being immersed in the TL environment besides the Mandarin class. The most TL that they were exposed to was from the teacher researcher’s talk. Therefore, the research focuses on learners’ understanding of teachers’ talk in TL.

This chapter investigates the issue from two perspectives. The first is to justify the adoption of different language systems in teachers’ talk; the second is to develop methods to facilitate learners’ understanding of teachers’ talk in TL. It aims to explore the implementation of pragmatic transfer from the perspective of a beginning teacher, thus making Mandarin learnable for non-background primary school students in WSR.

6.1 Teachers’ talk: L1 vs. TL

The adoption of the language systems (TL and L1) in teachers’ talk has aroused increasing interest over the past decades (Liu 2010). It is generally agreed that, for successful classroom second language development, the classroom must create an input-rich environment which provides learners with optimal opportunities for
meaning use of TL through many types of interactional modification (Kim & Elder, 2008). Teachers’ use of TL has a potential role not only as the prime source of comprehensible input but also as a facilitator of meaning interaction during the instructional process, particularly for learners who have limited access to the TL community (Kim & Elder, 2008). Furthermore, research shows that using TL as a medium of instruction results in subtle metalinguistic, academic and intellectual benefits for bilingual children (Cummins, 1998). Those children exhibit a greater sensitivity to linguistic meanings and may be more flexible in their thinking than are monolingual children (Cummins & Swain 1984); they should be more adept at certain aspects of linguistic processing (Cummins 1998).

The previous studies illustrate that using TL in teachers’ talk in a beginners’ class is not only necessarily but also crucially important in determining the success of classroom TL learning. The point arouses an issue of whether the TL should be used exclusively as the medium of instruction or not. This concern is discussed through the data below:

At the beginning of her first lesson, the teacher researcher introduced herself to her students. She thought, “It was a Mandarin lesson, so I’d better speak Mandarin”. She started, “Nǐmen hǎo! Wǒ shì nǐmen de zhōngwén lǎoshī. Dàjiā kěyǐ jiào wǒ Xǔ lǎoshī.” The class was staring at her silently. They looked vacant and puzzled. A student put up her hand, “Sorry Miss but I didn’t get a single word. Do you speak English?” The teacher researcher nodded her head, “Yup!” The class looked in relief. The teacher researcher therefore did the introduction again in English, “Hello guys! I’m your Mandarin teacher. You can call me Miss XU.” When she finished, the children were murmuring “Miss XU” to themselves.

(The teacher researcher’s observations, Term 1 2013)

The evidence is that the teacher researcher introduced herself to the class in the first lesson. She started to make an opening remark in TL, which did not turn out to be a nice touch: the students were confused. They “stared at her (the teacher researcher) silently”, looking “vacant and puzzled”. Their bewilderment also got manifested by the feedback: “Sorry Miss but I didn’t get a single word”. The problem was solved when the teacher researcher re-introduced herself in L1. This time the learners felt more comfortable (“looked in relief”) and were responsive (“murmuring to themselves”).

The data indicate that it is not feasible to use TL exclusively in teachers’ talk in a beginners’ case. The learners were at a basic level of TL proficiency, so they could not catch up with a TL-only class. If they were pushed too hard, it would virtually
put them off, as is shown in the evidence that follows. The students’ names are replaced by A, B, C, and D.

A group of students came to the teacher researcher when the first lesson finished and started to talk about their Mandarin study in the past.

Student A said, “The former Mandarin teacher didn’t say an English word at all … Mandarin only.”

Student B cut in, “Yea … We could hardly understand him.”

Student C said, “I felt sort of bored when I had no idea what he was talking about.”

Student D laughed, “So true! I couldn’t help falling asleep in class… Learning Mandarin was just a waste of time. I told my mum how the class was going on and she agreed on that.”

(The teacher researcher’s self-reflection journal, Term 1 2013)

The evidence records a complaint from the students concerning that “the former Mandarin teacher” used “Mandarin only”. That resulted in their negative feelings for the former learning experience. Their response is categorized in the table below. To make the evidence readable, the researcher’s comments are added in the brackets.

Table 6.1 negative feelings towards previous learning experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative feelings</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confusion</td>
<td>“could hardly understand him (the former Mandarin teacher)”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boredom</td>
<td>“felt sort of bored when I had no idea what he (the former Mandarin teacher) was talking about”, “couldn’t help falling asleep in class”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frustration</td>
<td>“learning Mandarin is just a waste of time”; “she (Student D’s mum) agreed on that (that learning Mandarin was just a waste of time)”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table shows how the students emotionally reacted to the TL-only teachers’ talk which includes confusion, boredom, and frustration. Evidently, the way was not desirable for the beginners.
Therefore, neither L1 nor TL is suitable to be used alone in teachers’ talk for a beginners’ class. The two language systems should be used alternatively. The alternative use by bilinguals of two languages in the same conversation is referred to as code switching (Muysken 1995 P 7). So, under which circumstance should the code be switched? The issue is examined in 6.1.1 and 6.1.2.

6.1.1 The circumstances of engaging L1 in teachers’ talk

Teachers’ use of the learners’ L1 appears to be a widespread phenomenon in monolingual foreign language classrooms (Kim & Elder 2008). To gain further insight into engaging L1 in teachers’ talk, this part undertakes an analysis to identify the categories of classroom activity that L1 is commonly used for.

6.1.1.1 Giving instructions and managing the class

Teachers’ instruction and classroom management is an indispensable part of a lesson. It is also greatly involved in teachers’ talk.

The evidence below is a conversation between T, short for “the teacher researcher, and S which stands for her students. In the bracket is the teacher researcher’s classroom observation.

T: Guys, you have one minute to get your Mandarin notebook ready, come back to your seat, and sit down. I shall not hear a word. No running. Always walk. Does it make sense?

S: Yes, Miss XU!

T: Beautiful! Here you go!

(The students started to talk while fetching their notebook)

T: Ah sit back down everyone!

(The students stopped talking and sat back in their seat)

T: Excuse me. That’s not what you are supposed to do. I think I have made it very clear: no talking, lips together. Mind your manners, please. I will be watching. The group with beautiful manners will get ten table points. Should you understand the instruction, stand up and get your book now.

(The students left their seat quietly and got their notebooks quickly. If their table mates were slow, they would urge them in a very low voice, “Come on! Be quick!”)

T: Okay! Group Three is ready. I’ll give them ten points.
(Group Three looked at each other smilingly. Other groups hurried to their seat with arms folded. They looked at the teacher researcher, in eagerness to win table points)

(The teacher researcher’s observations, Term 2 2013)

The evidence shows that the teacher researcher asked the students in L1 to get their Mandarin notebooks ready in a quiet and safe manner. It consists of two parts. Part one is about the instruction. First, she made the task clear: “get your Mandarin notebook ready”, “come back to your seat”, and “sit down” in “one minute”. Second, she put emphasis on manners, which are quietness (“I shall not hear a word”) and safety (“no running” “always walk”). Third, she checked the effectiveness of the instructions with the students by asking “does it make sense?”.

Part two shows that the teacher researcher managed the class in L1 when the students started to talk. First, she gathered their attention by asking them to “sit back down, everyone”. Second, she pointed out the problem (“that’s not what you are supposed to do”). Third, she tried to improve the learners’ behaviour by restating the expectation (“no talking”, “lips together”, “mind your manners”). Fourth, she encouraged positive behaviour by giving away table points (“the group with beautiful manners will get ten table points”).

This management turned out to be effective, which is quite obvious by comparing the students’ former and latter behaviour.

Table 6.2 the contrast of students’ behaviour before and after the instruction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behaviour</th>
<th>Key words for the students’ behaviour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Former</td>
<td>Talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latter</td>
<td>Left … quietly; got … quickly; urge … in a low voice; hurried; arms folded</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The analysis illustrates that L1 assists teachers in managing the class effectively. It is certain that effective classroom management entails more than using L1. However, L1 forms the basis of understanding. It plays a fundamental role in getting the teacher researcher’s instructions across to the class. The examples of engaging L1 in classroom instruction and management are not unusual. The evidence below shows another example. For readers’ information, “T” is short for
“the teacher researcher” and “S” for “students”. In the brackets are the teacher researcher’s classroom observations. Translation is added in the square brackets for English-speaking readers.

T: Now we are going to play a ball game.

S: Yeah! (The children gave out a cry)

T: I’m going to explain how you would play the game. Show me you are ready.

(The students sat straight up in a second. They put their index finger vertically on the lips. Their eyes focused on the teacher researcher. If someone was talking, others would frown at the person, “Stop talking! She’s waiting!”)

T: Thank you people who are being sensible! Alright, eyes on board. Here is the rule of the ball game. When you catch the ball, you say “wǒ hěnhǎo [I am fine]” and “xièxiè [thanks]”. Then you throw the ball to another person, asking “nǐ hǎo mā [how are you]?” After the question, you need to sit down so that everyone will have a fair go. If you are a boy, throw the ball to a girl. If you are a girl, throw the ball to a boy. Throw the ball gently and sensibly. Be safe. Otherwise, the game would be stopped at once. Those who are still on their feet when the game finishes are the winners! Every of them will get a sticker. Does it make sense?

S: Yup! (sounds excited)

T: Raise your voice when you speak so we can hear you clearly. Return the ball to me when the game finishes. Should you have any questions, put your hand up without calling out.

S: Miss, will you put the instruction on the board when we play the game?

T: Yep! I will leave the instruction on the board and everyone can refer to it later on. No more questions? Excellent! Okay, guys, after my instruction, stand on your feet …

(The students could not wait for the teacher researcher to finish the instruction)

T: Ah wait! I have not done talking yet. Sit back down. Be patient. After my instruction, stand on your feet and tuck in your chair. Find a spot in the classroom where everyone can see you. Move quietly without a sound. You have ten seconds to move. Ready? Here you go!

(During the game, a girl threw the ball deliberately to the ceiling and made a big noise. The class gave out laughter.)

S: Sorry Miss!

T: It is not an accident. I have made it very clear that you should throw the
ball gently and sensibly. If the rule is broken, the game stops.

(The teacher researcher’s observations, Term 2 2013)

In the evidence, the teacher researcher gave instructions about a ball game and managed the class in L1. The data is interpreted in two categories below, “before the game” and “during the game”.

Before the game:

1. The teacher researcher got the students ready for the game instructions by saying “show me you are ready”, “eyes on the board”, etc.
2. She explained how the target dialogue should be practised through throwing and catching.
3. She addressed the issues such as fair play, safety, and rewards.
4. She checked the effectiveness of the instructions with the students by asking “does it make sense?” and “is there any question?”

During the game:

1. The teacher researcher got the students ready for the game: “stand on your feet”, “tuck in your chair”, “find a spot”, “move quietly”, etc.
2. She initiated the game.
3. When the rule was challenged (“a girl threw the ball deliberately to the ceiling and made a big noise”), the teacher researcher took it seriously. She stopped the game and made the reason clear (“It is not an accident. I have made it very clear that you should throw the ball gently and sensibly. If the rule is broken, the game stops”).

In the evidence, L1 was engaged by the teacher researcher to explain the game rules and to manage the class during the game. The evidence again demonstrates the supportive role L1 plays in the communication and understanding among learners and teachers, which would contribute to a well-managed learning environment. There is one more case of engaging L1 in teachers’ talk when it comes to classroom instruction and management.

(The students were talking and not listening to the teacher researcher)

T: Guys, too much talking!

(The students kept talking)
T: Put your hand up if the person on your left is talking.

(The voices quietened down immediately. The students looked at each other. Several hands were seen)

T: Thanks! Hands down! Put your hand up if the person on your right is talking.

(The class was completely settled now)

T: No one put the hand up this time. Great! That means everyone is doing the right thing. Let’s continue the lesson.

(The teacher researcher’s observations, Term 3 2013)

The evidence depicts the situation where the students were off-task during the lesson (“talking”, “not listening”), and the teacher researcher gave English instructions to calm them down. First, she gave them a reminder “too much talking” which did not seem to work well (“kept talking”). Next, she asked them to check each other (“put your hand up if the person on your left is talking”, “put your hand up if the person on your right is talking”). The result turned out to be satisfactory (“the voices quietened down immediately”, “the class was completely settled now”).

Based on the three pieces of data above, it is argued that L1 plays a fundamental role in getting teachers’ instructions across to the class. It supports the communication and understanding among learners and teachers. Thus, L1 contributes to a well-managed learning environment. Besides classroom instructions and management, L1 can also be engaged in other situations.

6.1.1.2 Establishing teacher-student rapport

Teaching involves a process of relational development and requires effective interpersonal communication skills to achieve a satisfying outcome (Schaller 1992). Teachers’ talk in L1 is closely related to establishing positive teacher-student rapport.

The evidence below is a conversation between T, short for “the teacher researcher, and S which stands for her students. In the brackets are the teacher researcher’s classroom observations. In the square brackets is the English translation of the teacher’s talk in TL.

S: Miss XU, I lost my sticker. (Looking sad)
T: Sorry sweetheart! It is your responsibility to look after your sticker. If you lose it, you cannot get another one. Otherwise, it would be unfair to others.

S: Okay… (Nodding his head, with tears almost in his eyes)

T: All right! Will you do me a favour? Nǐ néng bǎ dēng guāndiào mā [will you turn off the light please]? Then come and see me.

(The child did as the teacher researcher said)

T: Thanks for being helpful! You can get a sticker from me.

(The student gave the teacher researcher a big smile at once)

T: Here you go!

S: Thank you! (The student gave the teacher researcher a quick hug and bounced to his sticker chart)

(The teacher researcher’s observations, Term 2 2013)

The evidence offers a case where the teacher researcher consoled a student. The student lost his sticker and asked the teacher for another one (“Miss XU, I lost my sticker”). On the one hand, it would be unfair to other students if he got a second one. On the other hand, the teacher researcher did not want the student to feel down (“looking sad”). The problem was solved when the teacher asked the student to do her a small favour “nǐ néng bǎ dēng guāndiào mā [will you turn off the light please]” and gave him a sticker in return “Thanks for being helpful! You can get a sticker”. The student was overjoyed. He “gave the teacher researcher a quick hug” and “bounced to his sticker chart”.

The evidence illustrates that the healthy student-teacher relations require a set of teachers’ skills, like fairness, being positive, and so on, among which, L1 serves as the basis. It lays the foundation for their good communication and mutual understanding. Without L1, the teacher’s talk would make no sense to the learners, thus leaving their close rapport groundless. In a word, L1 benefits the teacher-student rapport. Such examples are not unusual. The evidence below is another case in point.

There was a popular game called “heads down thumbs up” among kindergarteners. One rule of the game was that if your thumb got pinched, you needed to stand up. Once it happened that a child jumped to his feet excitedly when his thumb actually did not get pinched. The teacher researcher said to him, “Jimmy, I’m sorry that you were not picked. On your bottom, please.” The boy looked so disappointed that his tears almost welled up. He got slowly down to his knees and buried his head in his hands. When
the next round of the game was about to begin, everyone got ready except for Jimmy. When he was reminded, he replied, “I’m not playing.” The teacher researcher felt kind of bad because some kids could be more sensitive than she expected.

Days later the teacher researcher ran into the same situation again. This time she carefully chose her words, “Emily, you were not picked this time. Sit down please darling. Don’t worry. You would be picked later on. We are going to play more rounds.” The child quickly sat down. She looked fine. When it came to the next round, the teacher researcher asked the class, “If you haven’t been picked, put your hand up.” Emily put her hand high up. The teacher continued, “People in the front, look carefully. Choose those who haven’t had a go.” Emily waved to the students in the front, “Pick me! Pick me!” When the lesson finished, Emily came to me, “thank you for teaching us Mandarin, Miss XU!”

(The teacher researcher’s observations, Term 2 2013)

Note: Jimmy and Emily are pseudonyms.

In the evidence, the teacher researcher improved her L1 communicative skills in dealing with the student-teacher relationship. The case happened thus: a student did not follow the rules while playing a game, so the teacher researcher reminded him, but in a blunt way (“Jimmy, I’m sorry that you were not picked”, “on your bottom, please”). The student got disappointed (“tears”, “slowly got down to his knees”, “buried his head in his hands”) and quit the game (“I’m not playing”). When such an incident happened again, the teacher researcher became more positive (“don’t worry”, “you would be picked later on”, “we are going to play more rounds”). The result turned out to be very different from the last time: the student “quickly sat down”, “looked fine”, and was ready to participate in the game (“Pick me! Pick me!”). Besides, the teacher researcher’s effort got appreciated by the students (“thank you for teaching us Mandarin, Miss XU!”).

The evidence shows the teacher’s talk in L1 plays a critical role in improving the teacher-student rapport. Engaging L1 is a skill for teachers, who need to be fair and positive. More importantly, it is also an art which requires being caring and considerate. To sum up, the art of using L1 in teachers’ talk could greatly influence the teacher-student rapport.

Teachers’ talk in most cases is in a verbal form, but teachers also get their message across to the class in a written form, i.e., a survey.

When a term finished, the teacher researcher did a survey among her students, asking for their feedback on the lesson including learning content, teaching strategies, their interest, etc. The last question went like this “is there
anything you want to let the teacher know?” Most of the students put down the topics, expressions, games, etc., that interested them. There was one answer that touched the teacher researcher – “I have family problems”. The teacher researcher knew the student. He was a trouble maker. He would walk around the classroom without the teacher’s permission during a lesson; he was reluctant to learn Mandarin and actually his other school work was at a basic level. He looked like someone who cared about nothing. But that day he told the teacher he had family problems, which unveiled deep inside his heart he wanted to be cared about. Later the teacher researcher got to know more about the student through talking to the classroom teacher. His father has a lot of problems and his mother left them. He had a brother five years younger than him. He took care of his younger brother and was pretty much the man of the house. The teacher researcher came to realize what a difficult situation this Year Six boy had to go through. Since then, the teacher researcher had given him more attention and encouragement. She let him know how awesome he was when he made a small amount of progress. The student also changed. He started to greet the teacher in Mandarin when he met her at school.

(The teacher researcher’s self-reflection journal, Term 2 2013)

The evidence is that the teacher researcher did a survey among the students, through which she got a chance to know a “difficult” one and worked out ways to improve their student-teacher relationship. The survey was in L1, making it quite accessible to the learners. Besides, they were able to talk about things that could be embarrassing in a face-to-face talk such as “family problems”. The survey opened up a chance for a big improvement in the teacher-student rapport. The student turned from a “trouble maker” to a “sweetheart” student (“started to greet the teacher in Mandarin when he met her at school”).

In conclusion, this part provides another situation of engaging L1 in teachers’ talk, which is improving the teacher-student rapport. Besides the aspects of classroom instruction / management and teacher-student rapport, there are other types of situations where L1 can be engaged in teachers’ talk.

6.1.1.3 Explaining TL grammar

Grammar learning is an indispensable part of TL acquisition. Explaining TL grammar therefore is frequently involved in teachers’ talk.

In the evidence below, the teacher researcher was explaining the concept of “stroke” and “stroke order”.

Characters are made of strokes just like you know that English words are composed of alphabets, a, b, c ... As we know there are twenty-six alphabets that make up English words. For Chinese characters there are twenty-four
basic components and they are called ‘stroke’. Does it make sense?” The students nodded their head, “yup!” “Sweet! Now let’s talk about ‘stroke order’. When you write an English word, you need to put down letters in a certain order, say, “brush”. You write down b-r-u-s-h. Similarly, when you write a Chinese character, you also need to put down strokes according to a certain order. Put your hand up if that is okay for you to understand.” The teacher researcher took a glance around the classroom and saw that the majority of the students had put their hands up.

(The teacher researcher’s observations, Term 3 2013)

In the evidence, the teacher researcher is explaining the concept of “stroke” and “stroke order” in L1. She explained the concept of “stroke” and “stroke order” by comparing them with “English alphabet” and “English spelling” respectively: a stroke is to a character as an alphabet is to an English word; an English word needs correct spelling, so in a Chinese character, strokes need to be written in order. The comparison works well. The majority of the learners found the concept more accessible, which could be indicated by their oral response (“yup” in a firm and confident voice) and physical response (the majority put their hands up to show a sound understanding). In this example, the evidence provides a third situation of engaging L1 in teachers’ talk, which is explaining linguistic points. There are two more cases in point below.

The evidence below is a conversation between T, short for “the teacher researcher, and S which stands for her students. In the brackets are the teacher researcher’s classroom observations. Translation is added in square brackets for English-speaking readers.

T: Guys, we have learnt “gǎnlǎn qiú [rugby]”, “bǎn qiú [cricket]”, and “wǎng qiú [tennis]”. Take a close look at the three words. Can you find something common among them?

S: They all end with qiú.

T: That’s a very good point. They all end with “qiú”. Why do they end with “qiú”? What does “qiú” mean?

S: Sports?

T: Sports? Good thinking! But “yóuyǒng [swimming]” is also a sport and it does not end with “qiú”. Thank you for your trying! Is there any other opinion?

S: Ball?

T: Why do you think “qiú” is “ball”?

S: Because “gǎnlăn qiú [rugby]”, “bǎn qiú [cricket]”, and “wǎng qiú [tennis]” are all ball games. “Yóuyǒng [swimming]” is not a ball game, so it doesn’t have “qiú” in the end.

T: Well done! That’s correct! “Qiú” means “ball”.

(The teacher researcher’s observations, Term 2 2013)

The evidence is another example of engaging L1 in teachers’ talk when it comes to TL linguistic learning. It is a dialogue among the teacher researcher and her students in a lesson on the word formation of the sport words (“gǎnlăn qiú [rugby]”, “bǎn qiú [cricket]”, and “wǎng qiú [tennis]”). First, the teacher researcher asked the students to observe the three words and to find out the common trait (“take a close look at the three words”, “can you find something common among them”). Second, she led them to explore the reason for the word-formation similarity (“why do they end with ‘qiú’?”, “what does ‘qiú’ mean?”). Third, she gave the learners more clues and encouraged more ideas (“yóuyǒng [swimming] is also a sport and it does not end with qiú”, “is there any other opinion?”). Fourth, she asked a student to elaborate his idea and concluded the discussion (“why do you think ‘qiú’ is ‘ball’?”, “‘Qiú’ means ‘ball’”).

Talking about TL in L1 is attributed to the learners’ low TL proficiency. The beginners need to understand how TL works through explanation in L1 because learning comes with understanding; that is to say, learners should have opportunities to make sense of topics in order to acquire usable knowledge (Bransford et al. 2000). In the sense that L1 facilitates learners’ understanding in TL, it is quite necessary to engage L1 in teachers’ talk.

T: Guys, we have learnt “河 [river]”, “湖 [lake]”, and “海 [sea]”. Take a close look at the three characters. Can you find something common among them?

S: They all have three lines on the left.

T: That’s a very good point. They all have three dots on the left. (The teacher researcher circled the three-dot part of every character). Why do they all have that part? What does that mean?

S: water!

T: Why do you think the three-dot part is related to “water”?

S: Because “river”, “lake”, and “sea” they all have water.

T: Fabulous! That’s correct! The three words all include the three-dot part on their left. That part usually indicates the character has something to do with “water” like here “river”, “lake”, and “sea” all related to “water”. Another
example in point is “汁”. With the three-dot part on the left, it could mean “juice” which is also “watery”. So, next time when you come to a new character and find the three-dot part on its left side, you would know the character must have something to do with “water”.

(The teacher researcher’s observations, Term 2, 2013)

In the evidence, L1 was engaged again in teachers’ talk when it comes to TL grammar learning. It is a dialogue among the teacher researcher and her students in a lesson on the character formations, (“河 [river]”, “湖 [lake]”, and “海 [sea]”). First, the teacher researcher asked the students to observe the three characters and to find out the common trait (“take a close look at the three characters”, “can you find something common among them?”). Second, she led them to explore the reason for the character-formation similarity (“why do they all have that part?”, “what does that mean?”). Third, she asked a student to elaborate her idea and concluded the discussion (“why do you think the three-dot part is related to ‘water’?”, “the three-dot part … usually indicates the character has something to do with ‘water’”).

In conclusion, this section offers three situations of engaging L1 in teachers’ talk. They are, as is illustrated below, classroom instruction and management, teacher-student rapport establishment, and TL grammar explanation.

Figure 6.3 the outcome of engaging L1 in teachers’ talk
6.1.2 The circumstances of engaging TL in teachers’ talk

Teachers’ use of the TL has been strongly recommended for teachers and learners in input-poor TL contexts (Chaudron 1988; Halliwell 1992). To gain further insight into engaging the TL in teachers’ talk, this part undertakes an analysis to identify the categories of classroom activity that the TL is commonly used for.

6.1.2.1 Establishing classroom routine

Classroom routine refers to some TL practised in every lesson and used in a particular context.

When the students had learnt how to do greetings in TL, i.e. “nǐ hǎo”, which is used to greet one person and “nǐmen hǎo”, used to greet a group of people (at least two persons), the teacher researcher began to involve greeting in TL as part of the classroom routine. At the beginning of every lesson, she would greet the students in TL, “Tóngxué men, nǐmen hǎo!” which means “Hello everyone”. The students then would greet her back, “Xǔ lǎoshī, nín hǎo!” meaning “Hello Miss Xu”.

(The teacher researcher’s classroom observations, Term 2, 2013)

In the evidence, the teacher researcher engaged TL (“nǐmen hǎo”) when she greeted her students at the beginning of every lesson. The students had learned the expression already, so they had no problem in understanding and were able to respond properly (“Xǔ lǎoshī, nín hǎo!”). In a word, the evidence is a case of engaging the TL in teachers’ talk as part of classroom routine. Below is another case in point.

When the students had learnt “zàijiàn”, which is “goodbye” in TL, the teacher researcher began to involve the expression as part of the classroom routine. At the end of every lesson, she would speak to the students in TL, “Tóngxué men, zàijiàn!” which means “Bye everyone”. The students would reply, “Xǔ lǎoshī, zàijiàn!” meaning “Bye Miss Xu”.

(The teacher researcher’s classroom observations, Term 2, 2013)

In the evidence, the teacher researcher engaged the TL (“zàijiàn”) when she concluded a lesson. Since the students had learned “zàijiàn” already, they had no problem in understanding and were able to respond properly (“Xǔ lǎoshī, zàijiàn!”). The evidence from this example is another case of engaging the TL in teachers’ talk as part of classroom routine.

When the students had learnt “xièxiè”, which is “thanks” in TL, the teacher researcher began to involve it as part of the classroom routine. For example,
when a student distributed the Mandarin notebooks to the class, the teacher researcher would say to the student “xièxiè”; when a student came to the teacher and gave her a hug saying “you are the best Mandarin teacher we’ve ever had”, she would reply “Hah! Xièxiè for letting me know this!”

(The teacher researcher’s classroom observations, Term 4 2013)

In this evidence, the teacher researcher used the TL (“xièxiè”) when she wanted to express gratitude, which became part of the classroom routine. When she appreciated students for trying, she used “xièxiè”; when she thanked students for being helpful, she said “xièxiè”; when she received compliments from a learner, she expressed her gratitude by saying “xièxiè”. To sum up, the examples above are about involving TL in teachers’ talk in the circumstance of establishing classroom routine.

6.1.2.2 Giving simple instructions

Despite learners’ low proficiency, they are able get teachers’ simple instruction in TL.

The teacher researcher wanted to collect the attention from her students. She said, “Yǎnjīng kàn hēibǎn (eyes on the board).” When she said “yǎnjīng”, she pointed to her eyes. When she said “hēibǎn”, she pointed to the board. The students looked at the gesture of the teacher researcher and directed their attention to the front. While the majority did the right thing, some students were not listening. They kept talking. So, the teacher put her index finger on her lip “bù shuōhuà (no talking)” and pointed to her ears “zǐxì tīng (listen up)” Finally the class calmed down.

(The teacher researcher’s classroom observations, Term 3 2013)

In the evidence, the teacher researcher gave the simple instructions (“eyes on the board” “no talking” “listen up”) in the TL (“yǎnjīng kàn hēibǎn” “bù shuōhuà” “zǐxì tīng”). To facilitate the learners’ understanding, she made the accordant gestures like pointing to her eyes / ears, putting her index finger on her lip, etc. The instruction in the TL turned out to be effective (“the students … directed their attention to the front”, “the class calmed down”). To sum up, the evidence is a case of engaging the TL in teacher’s talk. Below are two more examples related to this point.

In one lesson, the students were asked to work in groups and one group did a good job. The teacher researcher said to them, “duì (correct)! Jiā shífēn (give your group 10 points)!” She pointed to their group point chart and made a
gesture. One student in the group got it at once. He ran to the chart and marked 10 points on it. The teacher researcher smiled, “nǐ hěn huì tīng!” At the same time, she pointed to her ears and gave the student a thumbs-up. The student looked at the teacher and nodded his head to show his understanding.

(The teacher researcher’s classroom observations, Term 2, 2013)

In the evidence, the teacher researcher gave the simple instruction “give your group 10 points” through the TL “jiā shífēn”. To ensure the learners’ understanding, she made the accordant gestures e.g. “pointed to their group point chart”, showing two palms. The instruction in the TL turned out to be effective which can be seen from the learner’s behaviour, as he “got it at once”, “ran to the chart”, and “marked 10 points”.

In one lesson, a student got a question correct. The teacher researcher said to him, “lǎoshī gěi nǐ yīgè sticker (come and get a sticker).” The student beamed and happily came to fetch the sticker.

(The teacher researcher’s classroom observations, Term 2, 2013)

In the evidence above, the teacher researcher gave the simple instruction “come and get a sticker” through the TL “lǎoshī gěi nǐ yīgè sticker”. To assist the learner’s understanding, she adopted intra-sentential switching which refers to switching the language system between the TL and the L1 within the clause vocabulary (Qian et al. 2009). In the evidence, the teacher researcher inserted the English word “sticker” in her instruction which was predominantly in the TL. Intra-sentential switching has been disapproved of by some researchers. As Macaro said in his book Target language, collaborative learning and autonomy (p.27) “do not mix FL and L1 in the same utterance or block of language”. Despite the advocacy of L1 avoidance, it is contended that the intra-sentential switching is of necessity in the context. On the one hand, it exposed the learners to the TL to a large extent; on the other hand, it ensured that the learners were able to follow the instruction.

In conclusion, this part offers two situations of engaging TL in teachers’ talk. They are, as is illustrated below, establishing classroom routine and giving simple instructions.
6.1.3 Bilingual principle in teachers’ talk

The discussion in the section above shows that both L1 and TL need to be engaged in teachers’ talk. Recent pedagogical and sociolinguistic research holds that a multilingual approach to teachers’ language use can enhance foreign language learning and serve important cognitive, communicative, and social functions in foreign language classrooms (Wang & Kirkpatrick 2012). Code switching should take on-the-spot circumstances into consideration. The study shows that L1 is widely used in classroom instruction and management, establishment of teacher-student rapport, and TL grammar explanation, while TL is involved in establishing classroom routines and giving simple instructions in teachers’ talk.

6.2 Methods to facilitate pragmatic transfer

This part sets out to develop methods to facilitate learners’ understanding in teachers’ talk in TL.

6.2.1 Body language

Teachers’ talk in TL is often accompanied by the use of body language. The evidence below is a related case. Translation is added in square brackets for English-speaking readers.

The teacher researcher often said “hěnhǎo [excellent]” when she praised her students. One day after a lesson, the classroom teacher suggested that she could use more variation and gave her some options that the classroom teacher used in her class like “fireworks”, “sparkling flicks”, etc. When the teacher said “fireworks”, the students would first clap their hand and then move their arms in a full circle like a big bang.

In the next lesson, when a student got a difficult question correct, the teacher researcher said, “yānhuā [fireworks].” The students looked vacant at the first, and then they came to realize what it was when they saw the teacher researcher clapped her hands and moved her arms. One student called out, “fireworks!” They did “yānhuā” along with the teacher and mumbled the word. The next time the teacher researcher said “yānhuā” again, the students were able to do the gesture immediately without the teacher’s modelling.

(The teacher researchers’s self-reflection journal, Term 2 2013)

In this evidence, the teacher researcher helped the students understand the meaning of “yānhuā” by transferring the body language of “fireworks”. When the teacher researcher first said the word, the students could not understand it
(“looked vacant”). They came to understand the word when the teacher researcher “clapped her hands and moved her arms” which reminded them of “fireworks”. The evidence illustrates that body language is an effective strategy to help the learners perceive the teachers’ talk in TL. The evidence below is another example in point. It is a conversation between T, short for “the teacher researcher, and S which stands for her students. In the brackets are the teacher researcher’s classroom observations.

T: Who remembers what we learnt last lesson?

S: We learnt animals!

T: That’s correct. Excellent memory! Nǐ zhēn bàng!

(At the same time, the teacher researcher did a thumbs-up gesture) What does “nǐ zhēn bàng” mean? Make a guess!

S: That’s correct!

S: Good job!

S: Well done!

T: It mean “good job”, “well done”, or “you are awesome”!

(The students were wearing a big smile)

(The teacher researcher’s observations, Term 2 2013)

Above is a case where the teacher researcher helped the students understand the meaning of the TL by transferring the body language of “well done”, “good job”, etc. In the evidence, the teacher complimented a student by saying “nǐ zhēn bàng” with the thumbs-up gesture. The students had not learnt the word yet but they were able to work its meaning out by the body language (“good job”, “well done”). The evidence illustrates that body language plays a positive role in understanding TL in the teacher’s talk.

One thing of note is that there is a prerequisite in using this strategy; that is, the body language should share the same meaning in the culture of TL and L1. Otherwise, the strategy would be confusing and misleading. In this evidence, a thumbs-up gesture means “good work” in both Chinese culture and Australian culture, based on which, the students were able to understand the word “nǐ zhēn bàng”. Take the sign 🌟 for another example. This in Australian culture means
“peace” while in Chinese culture it stands for “victory”. Suppose a teacher said “shènglì (victory)” and showed the sign. More likely than not Australian students would think the teacher meant “peace”. In this sense, the sign could not support the learners’ understanding. In conclusion, while using the strategy of body language, teachers need to be cautious about its cultural meaning.

Besides body language, there are other strategies to enhance learners’ pragmatic transfer.

6.2.2 L1 knowledge

Beginning learners have very limited TL knowledge while their L1 knowledge is quite rich. Since learning is based on prior knowledge (Bransford et al. 2000), it is necessary to assist learners’ understanding, with their L1 knowledge.

The teacher researcher said to a student, “Nǐ bāng lǎoshī bǎ dēng guāndiào hǎomā?” She pointed to the light and then crossed her upper arms. The student looked vacant. Apparently he did not get it, so the teacher researcher repeated her word and the gesture. The student still did not move. At that time, another student called out, “Turn off the light!” The teacher gave the second student a thumbs-up and turned to the first one. He asked, “Do you want me to turn off the light?” The teacher researcher nodded her head smilingly.

(The teacher researcher’s observations, Term 3 2013)

In the evidence, the student figured out the teacher researcher’s instruction in TL “Nǐ bāng lǎoshī bǎ dēng guāndiào hǎomā (will you please turn off the lights)” by transferring his L1 knowledge. When asked to turn off the light by the teacher researcher, he did not get that (“looked vacant”) until his classmate reminded him of “turn off the light!” The data indicates that engaging L1 knowledge is a method to help learners perceive TL in teachers’ talk. Below is another case in point.

Students were playing a game called “charades”; that is, a student would come to the front of the class and be shown a flashcard of an animal by the teacher researcher. Then the student needed to act out the animal without a sound. The rest of the class should guess what it was and say the animal word in TL. The students looked excited about acting out animals. When the teacher researcher said, “Who would like to have a go?”, everyone put up their hands. The teacher researcher then said, “wǒ yào yīgè nǚhái” which means “girls’ turn”. Apparently the students did not quite get it, because the boys were still with their hands high up. The teacher therefore turned to individuals, “Taylor!” with a falling gesture. Taylor looked confused but slowly put down his hand. She turned to another boy, “Tom!” again with a falling gesture. Tom also put his hand down. When the teacher turned to the third one, some students could not help calling out, “It’s the girls’ turn!” Now
the class got it and all the boys put their hands down.

(The teacher researcher’s observations, Term 2 2013)

Note: all the names used the evidence are all pseudonyms.

In the evidence, the students figured out the teacher researcher’s instruction “wǒ yào yīgè nǚhái (girls’ turn)” by transferring their L1 knowledge “it’s the girls’ turn”. At the beginning, they did not quite get her point (“the boys were still with their hands high up”). Then some students figured it out, through the teacher researcher’s scaffolding, that she asked some boys to put their hands down (“a falling gesture”). Finally, the whole class came to understand the teacher’s talk when those “quick” learners called out “it’s the girls’ turn”. The case indicates that L1 knowledge assists learners’ pragmatic transfer, i.e., understanding TL in teachers’ talk.

Besides body language and L1 knowledge, there is one more strategy to be discussed here, about enhancing pragmatic transfer.

6.2.3 Spatial literacy

Spatial literacy is an ability to “capture and communicate knowledge in the form of a map” and to “recognize and interpret patterns” (Goodchild 2006). Learners’ spatial literacy is closely related to their pragmatic transfer.

This was a cultural lesson introducing a social networking service popular among young people in China called Renren. She showed her homepage of Renren to the class and asked them to observe the interface. It was roughly in three parts, as is shown below. In the middle was the main part, presenting all the news feed from the friends. The left part was a list of hyperlinks through which the user can access their photos, pages, apps, etc. The right one was mainly commercials.
Before the teacher researcher could finish her introduction, the students began to talk to each other. “It’s just like Facebook!” “It’s the Chinese Facebook!” “They looked the same.” “The only difference is that Renren is in Mandarin and Facebook in English.”

(The teacher researcher’s observations, Term 4 2013)

In the evidence, the students got to “Renren” (a popular social networking service in China where its users can share their status, photos, and videos with their Renren friends) by engaging their sociocultural communicative knowledge in Facebook.

The pattern of the interface of Renren looks like that of Facebook, which the learners were familiar with. Based on the similarity, the teacher researcher assisted their perceptions about Renren by engaging what they knew about Facebook. The students were encouraged to “observe the interface” and to identify its pattern. By relating that to Facebook, the students were able to work out what Renren is (“it’s just like Facebook”; “it’s the Chinese Facebook”). A person’s “perception and understanding of spatial objects and relationships” is described as spatial literacy (de Lange 2003). Spatial literacy “makes a picture truly worth a thousand words” (Goodchild 2006). This data illustrates that pragmatic transfer is facilitated by engaging learners’ spatial literacy.

In conclusion, three strategies have been proven to be effective in enhancing pragmatic transfer: body language, L1 knowledge, and spatial literacy.
6.3 Understanding teachers’ talk through pragmatic transfer

Both L1 and TL should be engaged in teachers’ talk. Bilingual teaching principles not only create an input-rich environment, but also suit learners’ needs due to their low proficiency. Therefore, code switching, a common phenomenon of language contact in bilingual societies (Qian et al. 2009), is of great importance. Code switching is highly contextualized. L1 is used in managing the class, building teacher-student rapport, and explaining TL grammar; TL is engaged in establishing classroom routines and giving simple instructions in teachers’ talk. There are various methods of facilitating learners’ pragmatic transfer, such as body language, L1 knowledge, and visual literacy.
Chapter Seven

Conclusion, discussion, and implications

This thesis explores the teaching approach, language transfer, from the perspective of a beginning teacher, through the case study within the context of the WSR. Data were collected from the authentic classroom teaching of the teacher researcher. Three main transfer domains, namely phonological transfer, morphosyntactic transfer, and pragmatic transfer, were categorized through thematic analysis and were illustrated one by one through Chapter Four to Chapter Six. Based on the data analysis, discussion of the key findings and conclusions, as well as the implications of the research, are presented in this chapter.

7.1 understanding phonological transfer, morphosyntactic transfer, and pragmatic transfer

Phonological transfer played an active role in assisting learners to acquire phonological knowledge in the TL. Mandarin and English belong to different language systems, but they share some sounds; that is to say, a few Mandarin sounds are the same with English sounds. This lays the foundation for phonological transfer. Some examples are included in the table below. The left column is for pinyin, the phonetic system of Mandarin Chinese. The right column is for English words. The underlined part sounds the same as the pinyin on its side.

Table 7.1 examples of the sounds that two languages share

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mandarin sound (pinyin)</th>
<th>English</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>Ah</td>
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<td>e</td>
<td>word</td>
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<td>c</td>
<td>moments</td>
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<tr>
<td>s</td>
<td>snake</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Through the table, it is seen that quite a few consonants in Mandarin pinyin are the same with English, such as /b/, /p/, /m/, and /f/. The research shows that when these common sounds were explicitly pointed out, the difficulty of learning a second language was lowered. In addition, the learning autonomy was increased. The learners were more motivated and strategic. Furthermore, they were more
engaged. They were more willing to involve high order thinking, more interested in the TL learning, and less likely to interrupt the class.

However, there are some Mandarin sounds that cannot be compared to those in English. Generally speaking, these unique sounds would pose difficulty to learners because their phonological knowledge in the L1 cannot be transferred to that in the TL. Due to the limit of phonological transfer, it should be complemented by other strategies such as teachers’ modelling, peer learning, and repetitive practice. Apart from sounds, Mandarin phonological learning also showed limitation in tone acquisition. Mandarin is a tonal language while English is not, thus learners’ L1 cannot be engaged.

Morpho-syntactic transfer is a strategy of assisting learners to understand words and sentences in TL based on their L1 knowledge. This research explored into using the strategy in learning about strokes, character formation, and sentence making. Implementing morpho-syntactic transfer highlights teachers’ knowledge including the subject matter knowledge, learners’ prior knowledge in their L1, and their cognitive level.

Pragmatic transfer, as a teaching strategy, helped learners use the TL properly based on their classroom language in English. The research has come up with two related circumstances of using TL in the classroom, establishing classroom routine (e.g. greeting each other between the teacher and students) and giving simple instructions (e.g. asking students to listen and not to talk). Body language assists students’ understanding in teachers’ talk in the TL.

7.2 Re-conceptualization of language transfer

Language transfer not only happens between two languages, but also exists in a language itself. The research found that with the improvement of the learners’ TL level, they were able to transfer prior TL knowledge in the new learning. Take phonological transfer, for example. There are some unique sounds in Mandarin which are absent from English. They posed great difficulty for the student participants. But when it was pointed out to the learners that the same sound occurred in their previous learning experience, they were likely to transfer the existing knowledge to the new context. This view is slightly different from Ringbom’s (2007) definition of language transfer, which is the use of cross-linguistic similarities. In fact, transfer exists in both inter-language and intra-language contexts.
7.3 Teaching principle: bilingualism vs. monolingualism

Whether learners’ L1 should be engaged in TL learning has been under debate. This research argues for the bilingual teaching principle; that is, learners’ L1 should be engaged in the TL acquisition.

First, engaging L1 is largely due to the learners’ TL proficiency. The students in this case are non-background primary school students in WSR. They are beginning learners and have very basic TL knowledge. Besides, they live in a community with limited TL exposure. If they were spoken to in TL only, they would get confused, bored, and frustrated as well, which would undoubtedly hinder their TL learning. Therefore, L1 needs to be engaged.

Second, L1 provides a rich source for the TL acquisition. This is especially true when it comes to linguistic learning. Although the L1 and the TL belong to two different language systems, there exist similarities between them, including similarity relations, contrast relations, and zero relations. In terms of phonology, there are the same or similar sounds in the two languages, which enable the phonological transfer from the L1 to the TL. In terms of morpho-syntax, the languages both follow the S (subject) + V (verb) + O (object) sentence structure, which also entails the morpho-syntactical transfer. In terms of pragmatics, Chinese culture and Australian culture partly share gestures or body language facilitating the expression of meaning. Consequently, a large amount of linguistic similarity makes the L1 a great assistance for the TL learning.

Third, L1 has a significant meaning for maintaining sound teacher-student relations. It is a medium through which students can talk to the teacher about their problems, needs, feedback for lessons, etc. L1 facilitates communication between teachers and students and achieves a mutual understanding, thereby paving the way for sound teacher-student relations.

Therefore, bilingualism, engaging learners’ L1 in teachers’ talk or other classroom interaction, is intrinsically required because of beginning learners’ needs. It is academically and socially significant.

One aspect of note is that, although L1 plays a vital role in the TL teaching and learning, it should not be abused. Rich TL input is an indispensable part for successful language teaching (Kim & Elder, 2008). Non-background primary school students in WSR, however, do not have much chance of immersing
themselves in the TL environment. Given the conflict, it is necessary to create a TL-input rich classroom for the learners, that is, involving the TL in teachers’ talk. The research finds that despite the learners’ basic TL level, they are able to understand teachers’ talk if facilitated by strategies such as body language, and engaging their spatial literacy. In this way, learners’ TL input is enriched and in addition, the teacher-student understanding is enhanced.

In conclusion, both L1 and TL should be engaged in teachers’ talk or other classroom interaction, thus creating a bilingual learning environment.

7.4 Teachers’ practical knowledge underlying language transfer

Language transfer necessitates teachers’ practical knowledge, especially in linguistics and the cultures of both languages. Two components of teachers’ practical knowledge were examined in the research. One concerns the subject matter, which takes a directive role while implementing language transfer. In other words, the approach entails teachers’ expertise.

The other component is teachers’ practical knowledge concerning the TL learner. Students come to the classroom with their existing knowledge and understanding from which new knowledge and understanding is constructed (Bransford et al. 2000). That is the way people learn. Since schools and classrooms must be learner-centred (Bransford et al. 2000), it is essential to take learners and especially their prior knowledge into consideration when teachers facilitate language transfer.

7.5 Implications

There are several implications of this study for the implementation of language transfer and beginning Mandarin teachers’ professional development.

First, there may be more similarities between the TL and the L1. This research provides quite a few similarities between Mandarin and English, but they have not been exhausted. Take phonological transfer, for example. There are 23 initials and 24 finals in Mandarin pinyin. Future research could study similar sounds in the L1 for each of them.

Second, language transfer could be an effective teaching approach for other language teaching. It fully engages learners’ prior knowledge, especially their L1
knowledge in phonology, morpho-syntax, and pragmatics. The approach can not only be used in Mandarin teaching, but also in other second / foreign language teaching.

Third, the methods of taking classroom observation notes and writing self-reflection journals on one’s own TL teaching experience can be a way of self-development for other foreign language teachers. Taking classroom observation notes enables the teacher to have a good understanding of what is going on during a lesson (e.g. how the teacher implements a teaching approach, what is the outcome of using the approach, how students respond to the way of teaching, etc.). Writing self-reflection journals helps teachers reflect on their teaching practice regularly (e.g. what is the reason behind the teacher’s practice, what improvement can be made to use the approach in a better way, etc.). These methods are effective ways to improve teachers’ competence in implementing language transfer.

7.6 Limitations

The research has limitations because of the following aspects. First, the method of data collection is not highly varied. All the data comes from the teacher researcher’s classroom observations and her self-reflection journal. Although the students’ feedback and their classroom teachers’ advice are included in the observations or the journal, the source of data is dominantly from the teacher researcher.

Second, the research is highly contextualized. The research site is set in one primary school in WSR. Since learning environments vary from place to place, applying the findings in other situations should be dealt with carefully.
References


APPENDIX 1: UWS Ethics Approval
HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

15 January 2013

Doctor Jinghe Han
Centre for Educational Research

Dear Jinghe

I wish to formally advise you that the Human Research Ethics Committee has approved your research proposal H9969 “Connecting Australian students’ prior knowledge in their second language learning 0 A Mandarin beginning teacher’s exploration of strategies through cross-linguistic similarities”, until 31 December 2013 with the provision of a progress report annually and a final report on completion.

Please quote the registration number and titled as indicated above in the subject line on all future correspondence related to this project.

This protocol covers the following researchers:
Jinghe Han, Dacheng Zhao, Michael Singh, Yingyang Xu

Yours sincerely

Dr Anne Abraham
Chair, Human Researcher Ethics Committee
APPENDIX 2: SERAP APPROVAL
Dear Miss Xu,

I refer to your application to conduct in NSW government schools (Western Sydney Region) a research project entitled: connecting Australian students’ prior knowledge with their mandarin learning.

I am pleased to inform you that your application has been approved and that you may now contact the principals of the nominated schools to seek their participation.

Your approval will remain valid until 1 April 2014.

You should include a copy of this letter with the documents you send to the schools.

I draw your attention to the following requirements for all researchers in NSW government schools:

- School Principals have the right to withdraw the school from the study at any time.
- The approval of the Principal for the specific method of gathering data must also be sought.
- The privacy of the school and the students is to be protected.
- The participation of teachers and students must be voluntary and must be at the school’s convenience.
- Any proposal to publish the outcomes of the study should be discussed with the research Approvals Officer before publication proceeds.

Yours sincerely,

Kerrie Ikin
School Education Director, The Hills
Western Sydney Region Education Research Manager
8 March 2013
Dear Principal,
As part of research project for the degree of Master of Education (Hons), researcher Yingying XU, a volunteer-teacher-researcher, would like to conduct interviews with three classroom teachers and fifteen Y5/6 students. The study is to explore a teaching approach and to assist primary students' Mandarin learning with their prior knowledge. Should you agree, the researcher would schedule interviews. Participation in this research will be totally voluntary. Participants may withdraw from this project at any stage. Should any do so, unprocessed data would also be withdrawn. If you wish to know more about the research, please contact Yingying XU by E-mail: 17554406@student.uws.edu.au

Thank you in anticipation of your valuable contribution to this research project.

Yours sincerely,

Yingying XU

Centre for Educational Research, UWS

This study has been approved by the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. The Approval number is H9969. If you have any complaints or reservation about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Office of Research Service on Tel 02-4736 0083 Fax 02-4736 0013 or email humanethics@uws.edu.au. Any issue you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
APPENDIX 4: General Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet (General)

An information sheet, which is tailored in format and language appropriate for the category of participant - adult, child, young adult, should be developed.

Note: if not all of the text in the row is visible please ‘click your cursor’ anywhere on the page to expand the row. To view guidance on what is required in each section ‘hover your cursor’ over the bold text. Further instructions are on the last page of this form.

Project Title: Connecting Australian students’ prior knowledge with their Mandarin learning —— A beginning teacher’s exploration of strategies through language transfer

Who is carrying out the study?
The researcher (Yingying XU)

You are invited to participate in a study conducted by Mandarin teacher Miss Yingying XU. It will form the basis for the degree of Master of Education (Hons) at the University of Western Sydney under the supervision of Dr. Jinghe HAN and Professor Michael Singh.

What is the study about?
The study is to explore a teaching approach and to assist primary students’ Mandarin learning with their prior knowledge.

What does the study involve?
You will be interviewed to give your opinion about teacher-researcher’s teaching practice. Interview transcripts will be used as data in the study with your permission. The interview will be audio recorded.

How much time will the study take?
The study will take about 30-40 minutes.

Will the study benefit me?
The study will help the teacher researcher improve her teaching and make Mandarin learnable for your students.

Will the study involve any discomfort for me?
No. The interview will only focus on the Mandarin teacher’ teaching practice. You are not obliged to consent. You can withdraw at any time at which point all audio records related will be destroyed.

How is this study being paid for?
The research is sponsored through UWS $2000 per year as scholarship.
Will anyone else know the results? How will the results be disseminated?
No one will be able to identify you from the results of the study. Only the researcher and her supervisors have access to the original data provided by you with the ethical permission. Interviews with you will be on audio-tape which will require a password for access and be stored for 5 years before being completely deleted. Thesis to be submitted for the requirements for the degree of Master of Education (Honours).

Can I withdraw from the study?
Yes. Your participation in the study is entirely voluntary. You are not obliged to consent. You may withdraw from the study at any time and all audio records related to you will be destroyed.

Can I tell other people about the study?
Yes, you can tell other people about the study by providing them with the chief investigator’s contact details. They can contact the chief investigator to discuss their participation in the research project and obtain an Information sheet.

What if I require further information?
If you require further information, Miss Yingying XU will discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage, please feel free to contact: Mandarin teacher Yingying XU by calling 0468478963 or via E-mail 17554406@student.uws.edu.au; Dr. Jinghe HAN by calling 0422652972 or via E-mail by j.han@uws.edu.au; Professor Michael Singh by calling 045106539 or via E-mail by m.j.singh@uws.edu.au

What if I have a complaint?
This study has been approved by the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. The Approval number is [H9969]

If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Office of Research Services on Tel +61 2 4736 0229 Fax +61 2 4736 0013 or email humanethics@uws.edu.au.

Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

If you agree to participate in this study, you may be asked to sign the Participant Consent Form.
APPENDIX 5: Parent/Caregiver Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet (Parent/Caregiver)
An information sheet, which is tailored in format and language appropriate for the category of participant - adult, child, young adult, should be developed.

Note: If not all of the text in the row is visible please ‘click your cursor’ anywhere on the page to expand the row. To view guidance on what is required in each section ‘hover your cursor’ over the bold text. Further instructions are on the last page of this form.

Project Title: Connecting Australian students’ prior knowledge with their Mandarin learning —— A beginning teacher’s exploration of strategies through language transfer

Who is carrying out the study?
The researcher (Yingying XU)

Your child is invited to participate in a research conducted by Mandarin teacher Miss Yingying XU. It will form the basis for the degree of Master of Education (Hons) at the University of Western Sydney under the supervision of Dr. Jinghe HAN and Professor Michael Singh.

What is the study about?
The study is to explore a teaching approach and to assist primary students’ Mandarin learning with their prior knowledge.

What does the study involve?
Your child will be interviewed in a group and share his/her opinion on the teacher’s teaching approach with his/her classmates. The interview will be audio recorded.

How much time will the study take?
About 20-30 minutes.

Will the study benefit me?
Yes. The study will help the teacher researcher improve her teaching and make Mandarin learnable for your child.
Will the study have any discomforts?
No. The interview will focus on the Mandarin teacher teaching practice and no child will be observed as an individual. If you change your mind about participation after the interview starts, you can still withdraw. Any information already collected from your child will be destroyed.

How is this study being paid for?
The research is sponsored through UWS $2000 per year as scholarship.

Will anyone else know the results? How will the results be disseminated?
No one will be able to identify your child from the results of the study. Only the researcher and her supervisors have access to the original data provided by your child with the ethical permission. The interview with your child will be recorded which will require a password for access and be stored for 5 years before being completely deleted. Thesis to be submitted for the requirements for the degree of Master of Education (Honours).

Can I withdraw my child from the study?
Yes. Your child's participation in the study is entirely voluntary. You are not obliged to consent. Your child may withdraw from the study - or you may withdraw your child from the study at any time at which point all audio records of your child's participation will be destroyed.

Can I tell other people about the study?
Yes, you can tell other people about the study by providing them with the chief investigator's contact details. They can contact the chief investigator to discuss their participation in the research project and obtain an information sheet.

What if I require further information?
If you require further information, Yingying XU will discuss it with you further and answer any question you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage, please feel free to contact: Mandarin teacher Yingying XU by calling 0468478963 or via E-mail 17554406@student.uws.edu.au; Dr. Jinghe HAN by calling 0422652972 or via E-mail by j.han@uws.edu.au; Professor Michael Singh by calling 0451068539 or via E-mail by m.j.singh@uws.edu.au

What if I have a complaint?
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Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

If you agree to participate in this study, you may be asked to sign the Participant Consent Form.
APPENDIX 6: Student information sheet

Participant Information Sheet (General)

An information sheet, which is tailored in format and language appropriate for the category of participant - adult, child, young adult, should be developed.

Note: if not all of the text in the row is visible please 'click your cursor' anywhere on the page to expand the row. To view guidance on what is required in each section 'hover your cursor' over the bold text. Further instructions are on the last page of this form.

Project Title: Connecting Australian students’ prior knowledge with their Mandarin learning —— A beginning teacher’s exploration of strategies through language transfer

Who is carrying out the study?
The researcher (Yingying XU)

You are invited to participate in a study conducted by your Mandarin teacher Miss Yingying XU. It will form the basis for the degree of Master of Education (Hons) at the University of Western Sydney under the supervision of Dr. Jinghe HAN and Professor Michael Singh.

What is the study about?
The study is to explore a teaching approach and to assist primary students’ Mandarin learning with their prior knowledge.

What does the study involve?
You will be interviewed in a group and share your opinion on the teacher’s teaching approach with your classmates. The interview will be audio recorded.

How much time will the study take?
About 20-30 minutes.

Will the study benefit me?
Yes. The study will help the teacher researcher improve her teaching and make Mandarin learnable for you.

Will the study involve any discomfort for me?
No. The interview will focus on the Mandarin teacher’s teaching practice and no one will be observed as an individual. If you change your mind about participation after the interview starts, you can still withdraw. Any information already collected from you will be destroyed.

How is this study being paid for?
The research is sponsored by UWS $2000 per year as scholarship.
Will anyone else know the results? How will the results be disseminated?
No one will be able to identify you from the results of the study. Only the researcher and her supervisors have access to the original data provided by you with the ethical permission. The interview with you will be recorded which will require a password for access and be stored for 5 years before being completely deleted. Thesis to be submitted for the requirements for the degree of Master of Education (Honours).

Can I withdraw from the study?
Yes. Your participation in the study is entirely voluntary. You are not obliged to consent. You may withdraw from the study at any time and all audio records related to you will be destroyed.

Can I tell other people about the study?
Yes, you can tell other people about the study by providing them with the chief investigator's contact details. They can contact the chief investigator to discuss their participation in the research project and obtain an information sheet.

What if I require further information?
If you require further information, Miss Yingying XU will discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage, please feel free to contact: Mandarin teacher Yingying XU by calling 0468478963 or via E-mail 17554406@student.uws.edu.au; Dr. Jinghe HAN by calling 0422652972 or via E-mail by j.han@uws.edu.au; Professor Michael Singh by calling 0451066399 or via E-mail by m.j.singh@uws.edu.au

What if I have a complaint?
This study has been approved by the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. The Approval number is [H9969]

If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Office of Research Services on Tel: +61 2 4736 0229 Fax: +61 2 4736 0013 or email humanethics@uws.edu.au.

Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

If you agree to participate in this study, you may be asked to sign the Participant Consent Form.
APPENDIX 7: General Consent Form

Participant Consent Form

This is a project specific consent form. It restricts the use of the data collected to the named project by the named investigators.

Note: if not all of the text in the row is visible please 'click your cursor' anywhere on the page to expand the row. To view guidance on what is required in each section 'hover your cursor' over the bold text.

Project Title: Connecting Australian students’ prior knowledge with their Mandarin learning — A beginning teacher’s exploration of strategies through language transfer

I, ................................, consent to participate in the research project titled [Connecting Australian students’ prior knowledge with their Mandarin learning — A beginning teacher’s exploration of strategies through language transfer].

I acknowledge that:

I have read the participant information sheet [or where appropriate, ‘have had read to me’] and have been given the opportunity to discuss the information and my involvement in the project with the researcher/s.

The procedures required for the project and the time involved have been explained to me, and any questions I have about the project have been answered to my satisfaction.

I consent to observe Miss Mingyang Xin’s teaching practice and students’ performance during Mandarin lessons once every two weeks, and complete a evaluation form while observing. I consent to be interviewed at the end of term 2-4 to give my opinions about Miss Mingyang Xin’s teaching practice and students’ performance. I consent that my interview can be audio recorded.

I understand that my involvement is confidential and that the information gained during the study may be published but no information about me will be used in any way that reveals my identity.

I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time, without affecting my relationship with the researcher/s now or in the future.

Signed: ______________________________

Name: ______________________________

Date: ______________________________

Return Address: 1.21 School of Education, University of Western Sydney, Locked Bag 1797, Penrith NSW 2751

This study has been approved by the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee.

The Approval number is: H9699
If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Office of Research Services on Tel +61 2 4736 0229 Fax +61 2 4736 0013 or email humanethics@uws.edu.au. Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
APPENDIX 8: Parents/Caregivers Consent Form

Participant Consent Form for Parents/Caregivers

This is a project specific consent form. It restricts the use of the data collected to the named project by the named investigators. Where projects involve young people capable of consenting, a separate consent form should be developed. A parental consent form is still required.

Note: if not all of the text in the row is visible please ‘click your cursor’ anywhere on the page to expand the row. To view guidance on what is required in each section ‘hover your cursor’ over the bold text.

Project Title: Connecting Australian students’ prior knowledge with their Mandarin learning — A beginning teacher’s exploration of strategies through language transfer

I, ................................................................., give consent for my child ...................................to participate in the research project titled [Connecting Australian students’ prior knowledge with their Mandarin learning — A beginning teacher’s exploration of strategies through language transfer].

I acknowledge that:

I have read the participant information sheet and have been given the opportunity to discuss the information and my child’s involvement in the project with the researcher/s.

The procedures required for the project and the time involved have been explained to me, and any questions I have about the project have been answered to my satisfaction.

I have discussed participation in the project with my child and my child agrees to their participation in the project.

I understand that my child’s involvement is confidential and that the information gained during the study may be published but no information about my child will be used in any way that reveals my child’s identity.

I understand that my child’s participation in this project is voluntary. I can withdraw my child from the study at any time, without affecting their academic standing or relationship with the school and they are free to withdraw their participation at any time.

I consent to the my child’s feedbacks to be used as part of the research data. Please cross out any activity that you do not wish your child to participate in.

Signed (Parent/caregiver): ___________________________ Signed (child): ___________________________

Name: ___________________________ Name: ___________________________

Date: ___________________________ Date: ___________________________

Where projects involve young people capable of consenting, a separate consent form should be developed. A parental consent form is still required.

Return Address: 1.21-School of Education, University of Western Sydney, Locked Bag 1797, Penrith NSW 2751
This study has been approved by the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee.

The Approval number is: H9969

If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Office of Research Services on Tel +61 2 4736 0229 Fax +61 2 4736 0013 or email humanethics@uws.edu.au. Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.