An Exploration of Task-based Approach to Making Chinese Learnable: A Teacher-research Action Project

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Declaration

I declare that except where due acknowledgement has been made, this research proposal 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 Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references is given.

...............  

Siyu Dai

31 March, 2015
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Abstract

This research focuses on the exploration of a suitable task-based language teaching (TBLT) approach to make Mandarin learnable. A qualitative action research is designed to improve the research consistent with the teacher researcher’s teaching practice in Gaoxing high school. The aim of this study is to develop a framework of TBLT that adapt to the real scenario of Mandarin learning, with the consideration of continuity between lessons and tasks. Through this action research, different types of tasks are examined and developed with the major considerations of real-world connection and continuity. Moreover, teaching strategies of different learning stages are explored according to students’ learning condition over time. Last but not least, a framework of TBLT that includes three phases – pre-task phase, task cycle and language focus – is developed to suit the real situation of Mandarin teaching.
Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Background to this research project

This research explores task-based method in Mandarin teaching, aiming to increase the learnability of Mandarin as a second language to Australian school students. The teacher researcher observed that in western Sydney schools most Mandarin teachers focus on teaching Chinese words and grammar. It seems that guiding students to apply the learned elements to the completion of a real life task is not given priority in Mandarin teachers’ classes. The aim of this study is to develop a task-based teaching method that suits Chinese second language learners in Australian schools through action research.

1.1.1 Australian Context

Asia’s rise is changing the world. This is a defining feature of the 21st century—the Asian century. These developments have profound implications for people everywhere (Australia Government, 2010, p. 1). Asia’s, including China’s, extraordinary ascent has an enormous impact on every aspect of Australia, including economy, politics, and culture. As cited in this white paper, it is in the interests of all Australians - and therefore in the national interest - to develop the capabilities and connections that Australia will need, so that we can contribute to, and learn from, the region and take full advantage of these opportunities (p.3). Therefore, Asian languages have been assigned great importance to engage in such relationships and equip Australian young generations with competitiveness in future globalisation (MCEETYA, 2008; DEEWR, 2008).

In 1994 the Australian Government launched the National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools (NALSAS) program (Asia Education Foundation, 2012, p. 4). One of the targets of this program is to “improve participation and proficiency levels in language learning in four languages – Japanese, Modern Standard Chinese, Indonesian and Korean, and to support the studies of Asia across
the curriculum”. NALSAS turned out to be a success and doubled the number of students learning Asian languages. After this program finished, a program named National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools (NALSSP) was released to enhance the implementation of Asia literacy. With funding of $62.4 million to 2011, the program aimed to ‘increase opportunities for school students to become familiar with the languages and cultures of Australia’s key regional neighbors, namely China, Indonesia, Japan and Korea’ (Australia Government, 2010, p. 5)

China, as one of the world’s biggest economic entities, is gaining increasing attention from the Australian government. There is potential to develop the present positive Australia-China relationship to great mutual economic and social benefit, and the new situation suggests this should be done. This can only be achieved if there is a solid pool of Australians in a range of sectors who deeply understand China and who can speak Chinese well (Orton, 2008, p.8). Therefore, Chinese is given the top priority in Asia literacy policy.

Although great efforts have been made, the status quo is not as ideal as expected. 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 one China-related subject (Orton, 2007). At Year 12 nationally, a scant 3% of students take Chinese, more than 90% of whom are Chinese. Even in Victoria, where 33% of the country’s Chinese learners reside, 94% of those who begin Chinese at school quit before Year 10 (Orton, 2008, p.8). The cause generally comes down to them finding it hard and/or boring, and feeling they are not making much progress despite their best efforts (Orton, 2013). Such frustration becomes a great obstacle to the popularisation of Chinese in Australian schools.

Another hindrance is the lack of appropriate teaching materials and learning environments. Chinese is a language, which is totally different from English, or other European languages. It bears an entirely different phonetic and writing system, which therefore requires extra effort for students to learn well. However, as Orton (2013) stated in her articles, by Australian standards Chinese lessons are often narrow and dull, and the learning made more difficult than necessary as nothing is done to alleviate the huge burden on memory that Chinese, with its strange vocabulary and
all those characters, presents. Students find it difficult to engage in the completely unfamiliar context of a new language within these unengaging teaching contexts, and confidence is undermined day by day. In addition, students are learning Chinese in Australia, where they cannot practice and apply what they have learnt in school. One government report states, “the big issue in terms of benchmarking is that we are talking here today about Asian languages in the Australian context, and it's difficult to find a comparative environment to benchmark our work against” (Asia Education Foundation, 2010, p. 2). Students found themselves attempting to learn the language in an often unsupportive environment at school, in their family, and in the community. All the factors mentioned above generate the deficiencies of Chinese learning in Australia.

1.1.2 Refining the Research Questions

The development of the research questions of this study is partly due to the researcher’s own education experience. The researcher labels herself as teacher researcher in this study as she was assigned to be a beginning Mandarin teacher who does her practice teaching in Western Sydney schools and was at the same time conducting research around her Mandarin teaching.

All primary, secondary and tertiary education the researcher received was from China. It is an education system based on textbooks and driven by standard examinations. The teachers and students focus on the same target – a good score in the final exam. The college entrance examination for example, is an obligatory examination for all high school students if they want to further their study at the tertiary level. Teachers usually set a series of targets for students to reach certain goals, which are all related to the college entrance examination. This kind of education system was experienced by the researcher and her peers throughout their school years and university study.

English lessons were one of the most interesting subjects the researcher experienced in her high school. Her English teacher was a young woman who just graduated from university. The teacher organised interesting games and activities in each lesson to enhance students’ learning, including role-play, word puzzles, and story-making. By
engaging in this kind of learning, the students never felt bored, and new knowledge was acquired and digested without being noticed by the learner. The researcher’s most impressive experience was the annual festival held across the whole school – the English Drama Festival. During the festival, each class chose a famous English drama, fairy tale or movie plot to perform on stage. Each class spent about a month rewriting the script, deciding on the actors, borrowing the costumes, and rehearsing. The whole process was conducted in English. From planning, through rehearsals, to the final performance, no one felt that English was boring or difficult to learn. This particular English-learning experience caused the researcher to consider conducting research around task-based teaching of Mandarin as a second language in Australia.

In July 2013, the researcher was selected as a volunteer to teach Mandarin in Western Sydney schools. The first assignment was to observe a month of Mandarin lessons given by local teachers in Western Sydney schools. During the observation, the researcher found that there was no fixed curriculum and teachers provided the only guidance. There was little continuity between lessons. The subsequent lesson was not based on the content and knowledge from previous lessons, and there was little knowledge reinforcement. Due to this discontinuity, the students tended to forget what they had previously been taught.

The researcher also had conversations with her peers who are also volunteer teachers and had observed Mandarin classes in other Western Sydney schools. From these interviews, the researcher concluded that most of the Mandarin teachers focused on the teaching of Mandarin words instead of sentences, and teaching knowledge of the language rather than its use. Most of the lessons were separated from or had little connection with previous lessons. The researcher’s own education experience as well as observations of local Mandarin classes and conversations with her peer teacher researchers triggered her thinking about her own research questions regarding continuity between lessons and real-life application of the language after the learning.

The researcher also found that the activities held in the Mandarin classes were mainly the repetition of new knowledge, and students were not fully engaged. In one lesson for example, after teaching students how to pronounce the five sense organs,
the teacher asked them to come up to the front to introduce the names of their body parts, using the sentence: 这是我的眼睛/鼻子/耳朵…… (zhèshì wǒde yǎnjīng / bízi/ ěr duō……). Some of the students were reluctant to go to the front, and those who did were unable to remember the expressions and the words they learned from the previous weeks. Most of the activities held in the classes focused on the simple repetition of words or short sentences, and students were unable to engage with what they learned at deeper level.

When the researcher reflected on what she observed in Australian schools compared to her own learning experience, she noticed that Mandarin learning in Australian schools always remained in the initial stage, meaning that students could only remember isolated Chinese words or sentences. The lessons delivered by Mandarin teachers usually focused on vocabulary, and the lessons planned by teachers lacked an internal connection. Each lesson tended to be independent from the other lessons. This triggered the researcher to think about the idea of using task-based teaching method, that is, to design lesson plans systematically and continuously through engaging students with fulfilling and interesting tasks.

1.2 Research question

The main research question of this study is: How to develop an effective task-based language teaching approach to make Chinese learnable for students in Western Sydney schools?

The contributory research questions are:

1) How to design tasks to contribute to the continuity of learning content between lessons?
2) How to develop effective teaching strategies adaptable to the students’ learning level?
3) How to develop a suitable TBLT framework for Mandarin teaching and learning?

The research questions are generated from considerations of the teachers’
capability of making lesson plans, as well as students’ capacities to absorb new knowledge in learning a new language. This research focuses on the development of teachers’ knowledge, particularly pedagogical knowledge in developing a task-based Chinese teaching approach. It also considers teachers’ knowledge of students’ capacities to learn Chinese language content and the application of the language as real implementation.

The purpose of this action study is to explore how beginning Chinese teachers’ capabilities of lesson design using task-based teaching method impacts on students’ learning outcomes in schools of the Western Sydney region.

1.3 Significance of the study

The researcher explored and developed a task-based Mandarin teaching method through action research in schools of the Western Sydney region. It contributes to the improvement of lesson designing in the Australian context, thus responding to the Australian policy of Asia literacy.

1.3.1 Significance for the ROSETE program

The researcher applied for the Research Oriented School Engaged Teacher Education (ROSETE) Program, and was selected to come to Western Sydney as a teacher-researcher to teach Mandarin. This program is defined as “an innovative, flexible and intellectually challenging program that has Chinese graduates researching the teaching of Chinese to non-background speakers” (Centre for Educational Research, UWS, 2011). This is the sixth year of the program. Chinese is a family of closely related but mutually unintelligible languages. These languages are known variously as fāngyán (regional languages), dialects of Chinese or varieties of Chinese. In all over 1.2 billion people speak one or more varieties of Chinese.

Here the concept Mandarin is used instead of Chinese because of the consideration of the abstractness of Chinese. Mandarin refers to more specific spoken language that is regarded as standard way of speaking. It is used by national Media. There might be
‘Chinese’ used somewhere in the thesis, but it is more an equivalent to Mandarin than referring to the abstract Chinese language.

The definition suggests most of the volunteer teacher-researchers share similar backgrounds, with little teaching experience before coming to Australia. Through this program, all the teacher-researchers will explore approaches to making Mandarin more learnable, and contribute to the implementation of the Australian Asia literacy policy, and finally, facilitate cooperation between the Ningbo Education Bureau and the Department of Education and Communities (DEC) of the Western Sydney region.

1.3.2 Significance for languages education in Australia

Australia’s efforts to engage citizens, especially school students, to learn Asian languages began in 1994 with the launch of the National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools (NALSAS) program. Asian languages have been assigned great importance, to engage in relationships that will equip Australia’s young generations with competitiveness in future globalisation (MCEETYA, 2008; DEEWR, 2008). For almost 20 years, the Australian government has endeavored to popularise Asian languages. Mandarin, the language of one of Australia’s most intimate partners, has been given a preferential place. A report released by Melbourne University (Orton, 2008, p. 5) says that to develop the present relationship with China to mutual economic and social benefit would require a solid pool of Australians in a range of sectors who deeply understand China and who can speak Mandarin well.

The researcher is one of the Chinese volunteers of the ROSETE6 group, and she conducted three terms of teaching implementation of her Chinese teaching in Australian schools. Her study focuses on the task-based language teaching approach, which aims to make Mandarin learnable within Australia context. She endeavors to improve the pedagogy of Mandarin teaching. Therefore, this study contributes to Australia’s policy of Asia literacy, and more specifically, Chinese literacy.
1.3.3 Significance for the Schools and Students involved in the ROSETE Program

As earlier stated, although efforts have been made, the effect is not ideal. In total, 84,000 first language (L1) background speakers (BS) and classroom second language (L2) students combined are learning Mandarin in Australia in 2008, but fewer than 4,600 of them are in Year 12 (Orton, 2008, p. 25) The reasons for such a high dropout rate are the intrinsic difficulties Mandarin presents to the English-speaking learner, combined with inadequate teaching in certain aspects, and a totally inadequate provision of time needed for the task (Orton, 2008, p. 5). Students always complain about the difficulties of learning Chinese.

This study uses task-based language teaching approach to explore a different but effective way to teach Mandarin based on the researcher’s real teaching process. The researcher mandated an action research that provides teacher researchers with a method for solving everyday problems in schools so that they may improve both student learning and develop teachers’ teaching (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2008, p. 486). By adopting action research, the researcher determined advantages and disadvantages from her teaching and made improvements immediately following her reflection. The study achieved an improved teaching outcome all along the teaching process, thus the lessons the researcher conducted were directed at the real circumstances of students in school, and in turn, easing the burden upon them. In addition, a task-based language teaching approach cannot only raise students’ interest in Mandarin learning by making lessons more practical in real life, but also enhance the continuity in teaching and learning. Therefore, it enables students to go beyond learning sentences and isolated words, and focus on completing tasks in Mandarin.

1.3.4 Significance for the Education Field

Chinese is a language different from European languages. Students may need to develop new understandings of the Mandarin phonetic system, vocabulary, grammar, and discourse. Students are easy threatened by these huge difficulties. According to the literature, Chinese lessons are often conducted narrow and dull, and the learning is made more difficult than necessary yet nothing is done to improve the teaching
methods (Orton, 2007).

Task-based teaching approach is a method that enable the learner to complete real life task through using the accumulated words and grammar that have been learned (Wang, 2005, p.3). Tasks are divided into ten major types by Brown (2001, p.179): ‘games, role-play and simulations, drama, projects, interview, brainstorming, information gap, jigsaw, problem solving and decision making, opinion exchanges’.

However, there has been little investigation on designing continuous and systematic tasks with appropriate content to suit students’ learning levels and little research on the task-based approach, particularly in Chinese teaching, to contribute to the continuity of Mandarin second language learners. This research contributes to the examination of the task-based language teaching method, as well as the improvement of Chinese teaching pedagogy.
Chapter 2 Review of Recent Research Literature: From Task to TBLT

Two parts of the literature review will be included in this chapter. Firstly, the task-based language teaching (TBLT) approach will be comprehensively introduced. The definition of task will be reviewed, as it is the basic element of the TBLT approach and this research. The researcher will then review task components, including knowing a task, designing a task and implementing a task. After that, literature regarding the framework for the TBLT approach will be reviewed. The second part of the literature review will cover the key research into the application of TBLT in language teaching, particularly in second language teaching.

2.1 Task-based language teaching approach

In this part, an overview of the task-based language teaching approach will be offered. The researcher will first review literature regarding the basic element of this approach: the definitions of task. Then the components of tasks will be reviewed. Next will follow a review of the framework of TBLT, as it plays a vital role in this teaching approach, and lends direction to this research as well. Finally, the researcher will review the literature about the assessment of the task-based language teaching approach.

2.1.1 Definition of ‘Task’

Task-based language teaching approach emerged at the end of the 1970s. The emergence of this approach is connected to what became known as the Bangalore Project (Prabhu, 1987), initiated in 1979 and completed in 1984. The program aimed at improving the SOS (‘situational-oral-situational’) approach and the emphasis lay on competence and communication (Sanchez, 2004). Prabhu (1987) claimed that the most important responsibility of teachers is to create the conditions for the learners to engage in meaningful situations. After this project, the task-based language teaching
triggered deep thinking among educators.

According to the Oxford Dictionary, the word *task* means ‘a piece of work to be done or undertaken’. This is the most commonly held view, however *task* in task-based language teaching cannot be understood the same way. In task-based language teaching, task is indeed a piece of work to be accomplished but not completely the same. Nunan (2004) states in his book that tasks should be divided into two parts: target tasks, and pedagogical tasks. He explains that target tasks refer to the uses of language in the world beyond the classroom, while pedagogical tasks are those occurring in the classroom. The tasks to be explored in this study are pedagogical ones, as this research will be conducted on the basis of the teacher researcher’s classroom teaching her Mandarin class.

Task-based language teaching approach has attracted people’s attention since 1980, but the definition of *task* is still a hot topic among educators. For the past few decades, the definitions given by scholars differed from person to person. The following offers an overview of the major definitions.

Long (1985, p. 89) introduced the concepts of *task* early on, defining it as “a piece of work undertaken for oneself or for others, freely or for some reward”. Thus:

Examples of tasks include painting a fence, dressing a child, filling out a form, buying a pair of shoes, making an airline reservation, borrowing a library book, taking a driving test, typing a letter, weighing a patient, sorting letters, making a hotel reservation, writing a check, finding a street destination and helping someone cross the road. In other words, by ‘task’ is meant the hundred and one things people do in everyday life, at work, at play, and in between. Tasks are the things people will tell you they do if you ask them and they are not applied linguists (p. 89).

As can be seen from Long’s understanding, he casts *task* broadly, that it is something, almost everything, people encounter every day. This view is closely related to the real world, but obviously has almost nothing to do with language teaching. Moreover, these kinds of tasks are difficult for learners to implement in classrooms. For this reason, more specific views of *task* appeared with respect to language teaching. Breen (1987) tries to define task from the pedagogical perspective:
any structured language learning endeavour which has a particular objective, appropriate content, a specified working procedure, and a range of outcomes for those who undertake the task. “Task” is therefore assumed to refer to a range of work plans which have the overall purposes of facilitating language learning—from the simple and brief exercise type, to more complex and lengthy activities such as group problem-solving or simulations and decision-making (p. 23).

Breen defined *task* as the work plans teachers use to promote language learning – a close relationship between language teaching and learning. However, this point of view is still too broad in that people cannot separate tasks from activities or exercises. According to this definition, it seems that any activities conducted in the class that relate to language can be considered a task.

Differing from Breen, Willis (2000) introduces the notion that task is an activity where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome (p. 231). This definition is simple yet substantial. It carries the idea that task is for communicative purposes and an outcome is expected from the task. The task-based language teaching approach is obviously a teaching method concerning language teaching, therefore, linking the definition of *task* with the communicative purpose gives people a direct view of TBLT. This definition also emphasises the importance of outcome, as it is a necessary part of a task. However, this definition is still vague as between activities and tasks.

Skehan (2001), drawing on other educators, proposes that a *task* is an activity in which meaning is primary, there is a problem to solve, the performance is outcome-evaluated, and there is a real world relationship (p.12-13). In this definition, meaning, rather than grammatical form, is the focal point of task, and there will be a problem, which should be problem related to communicative issues for learners to solve, an outcome to be reached at the end of the task, and also, a link to the real world. This definition covers major characteristics of *task* in the task-based language teaching approach and affords educators a deeper understanding.

More recently, a definition given by Nunan (2004) draws a relatively comprehensive view of *task*. In his book he explains himself as follows:
A pedagogical task is a piece of classroom work that involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning, and in which the intention is to convey meaning rather than to manipulate form (Nunan, 2004, p. 4).

This definition gives readers a detailed description of learners’ positions when they are involved in task-based language teaching. Nunan also stresses that conveying meaning is the priority of a task, but grammatical knowledge is important as well. Different from other definitions, this one takes the learners’ perspective to see what a task should be like in a language class.

Although ideas differ in the literature, there are several similarities generated from those definitions. Firstly, task has ‘some sort of relationship to comparable real-world activities’ (Nunan, 2004, p. 3). Language teaching and learning is not only something confined to the classroom, it should enable learners to use the language in the real world. This similarity points out that task in task-based language teaching concerns more about conveying meaning than learning grammatical form. It is not saying that grammatical form is not important, but enables learners to deliver the meaning more correctly and accurately. For this reason, the third similarity is that task is designed for a communicative purpose, which intends to make the learners reach the level of communication rather than recognition. Finally, the assessment of a task is measured by its outcome. An outcome is expected from each task, and it is very important to be regarded as the means of assessment.

Literature about the definitions of task given by a number of educators has been reviewed above. The definition of task is regarded as the most fundamental and primary concept when talking about TBLT. The components of the task are also essential to discuss in this chapter. An overview about the different views about the classification of task components will be reviewed in the part to follow.

2.1.2 Components of tasks

Each task is composed of several components. During the last two decades, the
discussion about how to classify task components has never stopped, and the view of this classification keeps changing, becoming more and more comprehensive.

In 1981, Shavelson and Stern suggested that task designers should take into consideration the following elements while designing tasks:

- **Content**: the subject matter to be taught.
- **Materials**: the things that learners can observe/manipulate.
- **Activities**: the things that learners and teachers will be doing during a lesson.
- **Goals**: the teachers’ general aims for the task (these are much more general and vague than objectives).
- **Students**: their abilities, needs and interests are important.
- **Social community**: the class as a whole and its sense of ‘groupness’.

(Shavelson and Stern 1981, p. 478)

This classification mainly concerns the components which have a direct relation to task designing, offering a clear view of several basic elements. However, this view does not cover the details of the task, and also ignores the teacher’s role in task designing.

Candlin (1987) proposes his classification of tasks on the basis of Shavelson and Stern’s point of view. He points out that tasks should contain input, roles, setting, actions, monitoring, outcomes and feedback. As can be seen from this classification, more detailed and specific elements are listed here. It covers the whole process of task, which is from the initial input to the very end.

Wright (1987) also gives a classification of task components. Different from Candlin, he suggests that tasks need to contain only two elements. These are input data, which may be provided by materials, teachers or learners, and an initiating question, which instructs learners on what to do with the data (Nunan, 2004, p. 41). In this classification, task outcome is not regarded as one of the components, because the result of a task is unpredictable and cannot be designed before the task is implemented. This point of view is simple but clear.

Most recently, Nunan (2004) presented his own viewpoint about the classification of task components, which he generated from the former three opinions. It is
represented diagrammatically below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals</th>
<th>TASK</th>
<th>Teacher role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Input</td>
<td>TASK</td>
<td>Learner role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedures</td>
<td>Settings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Nunan, 2004, p. 41)

Nunan’s view listed six elements of task designing. The three components listed on the left are the arrangement of a task on the basis of time sequence, while the three listed on the right side concern the elements which are not directly related but necessary to the task designing. If all six components were taken into account beforehand, the task would be both logical and considered.

The components of a task are the basic aspect of TBLT the researcher needs to review and think about before implementing the task into real teaching. Although different people hold different points of view, the general idea is the same. In this thesis, the researcher has adopted Nunan’s idea about the classification of the task, and analysed the tasks accordingly.

2.1.3 A framework for task-based language teaching

The first two parts give an overview about the definition of task and the classification of the components of tasks. These two are the foundation of task designing, but the framework for TBLT is indispensable part. In this part, the research will review the literature about the process of TBLT and the principles.

i. Process of TBLT

The process of TBLT usually refers to the real application of the tasks. Though differences about this exist, most researchers share similar opinions. Various designs have been presented (e.g. Estaire and Zanon, 1994; Prabhu, 1987; Skehan, 1996; Willis, 2000). However they all have three principle phases in common: pre-task, task cycle (or during task) and post task.

Willis (2000) provides a framework of TBLT, the aim of which is to provide a
substantial environment for language teaching, to improve the initiative of students, and to achieve fluency and accuracy of language use. His suggested TBLT framework is the most widely recognised and used. It is shown in Table 2-1:

Table 2-1 Willis (2000)’s TBLT framework

PRE-TASK PHASE

INTRODUCTION TO TOPIC AND TASK

Teacher explores the topic with the class, highlights useful words and phrases, and helps learners understand task instructions and prepare. Learners may hear a recording of others doing a similar task, or read part of a text as a lead in to a task.

TASK CYCLE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TASK</th>
<th>PLANNING</th>
<th>REPORT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students do the task, in pairs or small groups. Teacher monitors from a distance, encouraging all attempts at communication, not correcting. Since this situation has a &quot;private&quot; feel, students feel free to experiment. Mistakes don't matter.</td>
<td>Students prepare to report to the whole class (orally or in writing) how they did the task, what they decided or discovered. Since the report stage is public, students will naturally want to be accurate, so the teacher stands by to give language advice.</td>
<td>Some groups present their reports to the class, or exchange written reports, and compare results. Teacher acts as a chairperson, and then comments on the content of the reports.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Learners may now hear a recording of others doing a similar task and compare how they all did it. Or they may read a text similar in some way to the one they have written themselves, or related in topic to the task they have done.

LANGUAGE FOCUS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANALYSIS</th>
<th>PRACTICE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students examine and then discuss specific features of the text or transcript of the recording. They can enter new words, phrases and patterns in vocabulary books.</td>
<td>Teacher conducts practice of new words, phrases, and patterns occurring in the data, either during or after the Analysis.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sometime after completing this sequence, learners may benefit from doing a similar task with a different partner.
As can be seen from this framework, three phases are delivered: pre-task, task cycle, and language focus. Pre-task is a phase that is regarded as the premise of each task, where an explanation of the task is given by the teacher. The second phase is the core part of the framework, and is divided into three parts: task, planning and report. This phase covers the whole process of completing a task from the planning stage to the presentation stage. The third phase is called language focus, which combines the review of the old knowledge and the study of the new knowledge. In this framework, the roles of teachers and students when implementing a task are explained in detail, and the process of conducting a task is reasonable and comprehensive. This framework is regarded as the standard for researchers to conduct a task.

Other than Willis, other designs of the process of task are also proposed by other researchers. The following are two most well known designs which are proposed by Ellis and Skehan respectively. Ellis (2006) also divides the process of task into three phases, shown as follows:

**Table 2-2: A framework for designing task-based lessons (Ellis 2006, p.80)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Examples of options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| A. Pre-task | * Framing the activity (e.g. establishing the outcome of the task)  
* Planning time  
* Doing a similar task |
| B. During task | * Time pressure  
* Number of participants |
| C. Post-task | * Learner report  
* Consciousness-raising  
* Repeat task |

The aim of the pre-task is to make the preparations for the task, providing students with background knowledge, such as the rules, to properly frame the task. The ‘During’ phase concerns the execution of the task, which, according to Ellis (2006), presents teachers with two basic kinds of methodological options: ‘task-performance options’ and ‘process options’. ‘Task-performance options’ is concerned with ‘how the task has to be undertaken that can be taken prior to the actual performance of the task and thus planned for by the teacher’ and ‘Process options’ is about ‘how to perform a task as it is being completed’(Ellis, 2006, p. 85). Different from Willis and
Ellis, Skehan divided the task framework into four parts:

**Table 2-3: Methodological stages in implementing tasks (Skehan 1996. P.54)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Typical techniques</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-emptive work</td>
<td>Restructuring</td>
<td>Consciousness-raising Planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Establish target language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Reduce cognitive load</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During</td>
<td>Mediate accuracy and fluency</td>
<td>Task Choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pressure Manipulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post 1</td>
<td>Discourage excessive fluency</td>
<td>Public performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Encourage accuracy and restructuring</td>
<td>Analysis and Testing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post 2</td>
<td>Cycle of synthesis and analysis</td>
<td>Task Sequences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Task Families</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Skehan’s opinion, the performance of the task should be classified as a post-task phase. He also pays attention to the accuracy and fluency of language use, and the focal point should change in different phases.

By seeing these three viewpoints of the process of task, it can be concluded that the teachers are the mandator, while the students are the executor or performer of a task. Teachers will design, prepare and guide the whole task, while students follow the teacher’s guidance and practice the task. The consequence of a task will be achieved through the efforts of both sides. In this study, although Willis’s idea about the process of TBLT is the main guide of the researcher’s teaching, the proposals of other educators are still used for reference while teaching.

**ii. Task design**

In order to design an appropriate task for students, task design should be well planned before the class. The following illustrates three basic issues to consider while designing a task. By taking these factors into consideration, the task becomes more appealing and acceptable to students, and also contributes to the continuity of the teaching.

In addition to task types, another issue to consider is the level of difficulty of tasks. This is of central importance to researchers, curriculum developers, syllabus designers, materials writers and classroom teachers, and it is therefore not surprising that it has been the subject of considerable research (Nunan, 2004, p. 85). Brown, Anderson, Shilecock, and Yuele try to build task difficulty on an ‘empirical basis’. They conclude that static tasks (e.g. description) are easier than dynamic tasks (e.g. narration), which are easier than abstract tasks (e.g. opinion giving). They emphasise ‘the number of elements, participants, and relationships in a task make it more difficult’ (cited in Skehan, 1996, p. 40). Skehan (1998) sets out to develop a scheme that would make complexity criteria and actual tasks transparent. His model proposes a three-way distinction between code complexity (this relates the language required), cognitive complexity (the thinking required), and communicative stress (the performance conditions demanded by the task) (cited in Nunan, 2004, p. 85). Another model developed by Foster and Skehan measures the difficulty of tasks by accuracy, complexity and fluency. Nunan (2004) presents three levels of task activities as beginners, pre-intermediate and intermediate. Prubhu gives a direct
measurement of difficulty levels that ‘the glancing evaluation for reasonable challenge is that at least 50% of students can complete half of the tasks fluently’ (Prabhu, cited in Wang, 2005, p. 4).

Task continuity is also an important issue to be considered. Nunan (2004) proposes a “possible instructional sequence requiring learners to undertake activities which become increasingly demanding, moving from comprehension-based procedures to controlled production activities and exercises, and finally to ones requiring authentic communicative interactions”. According to his proposal, the researcher develops her own plan as listed in the form below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2-4 Nunan’s proposal of instructional sequence in TBLT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phases</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Processing (comprehension)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Productive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Interactive</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this ten-step sequence, the demands on the learner gradually increase, within each phase, and from one phase to the next (Nunan, 2004, p.126). The continuity of the task enables learners to acquire knowledge one step after another, and obtain knowledge in series instead of unrelated fragments.
2.1.4 Assessment of task-based language teaching

Assessment of task-based language teaching is considered to be vital because it can contribute not only to the outcomes of language teaching, but also the development of task designing. The way people look at assessment varies. Gronlund (1981) holds that assessment needs to satisfy three types of validity. Nunan (2004) further developed his idea and presents it thus:

Table 2-5 Assessment standards of tasks (Nunan, 2004)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Procedure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content validity</td>
<td>How well does the sample of tasks represent the domain of tasks to be measured?</td>
<td>Compare the test tasks to the test specifications describing the task domain under consideration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criterion-related validity</td>
<td>How well does test performance predict future performance or estimate current performance on some valued measures other than the test itself?</td>
<td>Compare test scores with another measure of performance obtained at a later date (for prediction) or with another measure of performance obtained concurrently (for estimating present status).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construct validity</td>
<td>How can test performance be described psychologically?</td>
<td>Experimentally determine what factors influence scores on the test.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This form gives readers a direct view of how to assess tasks from different angles. Criteria-referenced tests are also a way of assessment generated by Glaser and Nitko (1971). These tests are designed to assess students’ mastery of course objectives, as they describe in their book: ‘A criterion-referenced test is one that is deliberately constructed to yield measurements that are directly interpretable in terms of specified by defining a class or domain of tasks that should be performed by individual’(p.653). Norris et al. (1998) suggest that task-based testing is part of a broader approach to assessment called performance assessment, which has three characteristics. Firstly, it must be based on tasks; secondly, the tasks should be as
authentic as possible; and finally, “success or failure in the outcome of the task, because of their performances’, must usually be rated by qualified judges.”(p.8).

The view of the assessment of task-based teaching varies widely, and still requires effort for the researcher to find one that is comprehensive and practical, which will enable teachers to assess the task-based language teaching from the perspectives of the teacher, student, and task itself.

2.2 Literature of the application of task-based language teaching approach

In this part, the researcher will review the real application of the task-based language teaching approach in different classes. Articles about the classroom use of TBLT in Korea, Japan, and Turkey, of practical significance of this study, will be reviewed.

In-Jae Jong (2006) is a Korean scholar who investigated 228 English as foreign language (EFL) teachers at 38 different middle and high schools in Korea. He states that “the purpose of this study is to explore Korean EFL teachers’ perceptions of task-based language teaching in a Korean secondary school context”(p. 192). He raises three research questions in his article:

1. How well do teachers understand TBLT concepts?
2. What are the aspects of teachers’ views on TBLT implementation?
3. For what practical reasons do teachers choose, or avoid, implementing TBLT? (p. 193)

In examining EFL teachers’ understanding and application of TBLT he found that teachers like to use TBLT for its group work basis and motivational traits. However, he also found that almost half of the teachers have negative views on implementing TBLT in the classroom, the major reason being their lack of confidence. He concludes that:

Since teachers’ views regarding instructional approach have a great impact on classroom practice, it is necessary for the teacher, as a practical controller and facilitator of learners’ activities in the classroom, to have a positive attitude toward TBLT in order for it to be successfully implemented (p. 204).
Although this study does not give a direct description of how TBLT is implemented in Korean schools, his exploration of teachers’ stances in TBLT also lends some reference for this study, which is especially beneficial to the researcher’s position while conducting TBLT.

Lochana and Deb (2006) conducted a project undertaken with a group of second language learners from a school in Bangalore, India, where the medium of instruction was Kannada. This research “began with the hypothesis that task based teaching enhances the language proficiency of learners” (p. 140). They comprehensively introduce how they implemented TBLT in EFL classes, from the theoretical basis to real examples. They give a real example of teaching Unit 1, from Day 1 to 5, using the TBLT approach. All the phases are described in detail. They conclude that “students showed interest in learning English. The reasons they gave were: classes are full of activities and play” (p. 156). Also, teachers can feel that students started taking in English, and the midterm exam results showed improvement in students’ performances. Moreover, “teachers involved in this project showed interest in using tasks for teaching. This was noticed in their diaries” (p. 156). However, some students involved in this research did not show any progress.

To sum up, in Lochana & Deb’s (2006) research, both students and teachers were highly engaged in task-based classes, but negative effects also emerges as not all students are in favor of this approach. Attention should be paid to these individuals.

Another paper describes “how a task-based approach was used to develop materials and methods for a content-based course in Canadian Studies for second-year students in a Japanese university” (Lingley, 2006, p. 123). Before teaching, students are limited to being able to name a few natural wonders and a couple of major cities. Therefore, “teachers may want to use tasks which help to build and practice the vocabulary needed for discussing Canadian issues more comfortably” (p. 130). After showing a set of materials and a methodological framework for a task-based approach in the EFL context, Lingley concludes his research this way:

Using tasks to facilitate content-based instruction in a Canadian Studies course for intermediate-level Japanese EFL students is offered here as one example of how task based teaching can be used to meet divergent
student needs. The approach and materials have been developed to show that teachers can create ways to use authentic materials to teach target content aims in content-based EFL courses (p. 136).

Lingley does not show specific outcomes from adopting TBLT in EFL classes, but the description of the materials and process of implementation nonetheless have referable significance.

Another paper about TBLT in EFL is based on research conducted in Turkey, where 54 students from two English classrooms and the researcher, a Turkish teacher, participated. Ruso (2007) lists his research questions:

1. What is the influence of TBL on EFL students’ classroom performance?
2. What are the students’ opinions about classic classroom situations in which only a limited number of tasks are used?
3. To what extent are students able to recognize the change in their classrooms after TBL approach has been implemented?
4. What are the students’ opinions about TBL?
5. To what extent are students satisfied with pre-task lessons (TBL not being implemented) and with task lessons (TBL being implemented)?
6. How far does the researcher carrying out action research in her own classroom as a reflective practitioner improve her teaching? (Ruso, 2007, p. 2)

These research questions display a comprehensive consideration of the issues concerned with task-based language teaching. Ruso takes both students and teachers into consideration while she conducted this research, concluding that:

The findings indicate that all students realized a change within their classroom after TBL was implemented. The change was felt when the teacher started to use a variety of tasks like presentations and music. Furthermore, students realized the change through different tasks and positive classroom atmosphere (p. 11).

Students are engaged in task-based classes and knowledge is effectively acquired by implementing the TBLT approach. Moreover, the researcher herself felt that her self-confidence as a teacher increased after preparing daily lesson outlines because within the TBLT approach, all her lessons were prepared step by step before class, and she had nothing to worry about while conducting the teaching.

The above researcher reviewed several articles about the real implementation of task-
based language teaching approach. Merits and demerits generated from their works provided the researcher with precious references for future study. However, as it is clearly shown, although many countries implement TBLT in language teaching classes, the focus is solely on EFL classes. There is a lack of research into teaching Chinese by TBLT approach in this field. This study explores the aspect of using TBLT in teaching Chinese to non-background students by which to address the current research gap.
Chapter 3 Research Methodology and Methods

In this chapter, the researcher will introduce the methodology and method for this study. It includes the theoretical and practical aspects in terms of the conduct of this study and data analysis. Firstly, it provides an understanding of qualitative research and action research, so as to give the background of this research. Then principles guiding research procedures are provided, as they are the most elementary issues concerned. The research design is then provided in detail, including a clear blueprint about the future implementation of this research. Finally, data collection and analysis are comprehensively explained as they form the basis and source of the research.

3.1 Qualitative Research

Qualitative research and quantitative research are the two main research methodologies in education. Quantitative research focuses on the scientific aspect of everything that happened on the earth, and should be exactly exact. Most quantitative researchers do straightforward comparison and correlational studies, mixing in experimentation, paying attention to how conditions, often many conditions, change together (Stake, 2010). But each of the divisions of science also has a qualitative side, in which personal experience, intuition, and skepticism work alongside each other to help refine the theories and experiences (Stake, 2010). Different from quantitative research, which values objectivity, qualitative research attaches importance to subjectivity. It relies primarily on human perception and understanding (Stake, 2010). Qualitative research seeks to answer ‘what’, ‘why’, and ‘how’ questions, rather than ‘how often’ or ‘how many’ (Buston et al, 1998). In this study, the researcher focuses on qualitative research because the strategies or processes of teaching can be better examined by answering the questions of what, why, and how, rather than how often and how many.

Qualitative research concerns more about human activities and standing from the researcher’s point of view. Stake (2010) says there are several characteristics of qualitative research:
(1) It keys on the meaning of human affairs as seen from different ways. It acknowledges the fact that findings and reports are researcher-subject interactions.
(2) It is experiential, and it emphasizes observations by participants.
(3) It is oriented to objects and activities, each in a unique set of contexts.
(4) It is personalistic, and seeks people’s points of view, frames of reference, values commitments. The researcher is often the main research instrument.

As can be seen from this overview of the features of qualitative research, the researcher is usually regarded as the main driver of the research, whose view is considered an important source of the study. Moreover, the research about human affairs is usually carried out by qualitative research, which enables researchers to observe and experience and implement by themselves. These features are consistent with the content and aim of this research. The researcher will personally conduct Chinese teaching at one primary school and one high school in the Western Sydney region. The task-based language teaching approach is the being studied here. The attempt to apply this approach to Chinese teaching is experiential, taking into account the researcher’s experience, as well as the participants’ engagement and feedback, and will be the main body of the research foundation. The search for a better way to design a good Chinese task in the Australian context and to implement the TBLT approach will be continual, relying on all participants’ – including the researcher herself – exploration.

Although its benefits are numerous, qualitative research still has its weaknesses. By adopting qualitative research, misunderstandings can occur, partly because we researcher-interpreters are unaware of our own intellectual shortcomings; also partly because we treat contradictory interpretations as useful data (Stake, 2010). There is a risk that the subjectivity of the researcher would reign over the real data. This problem is considered by the researcher and a careful research design is conducted to minimise the impact that the limitations of qualitative research might cause.

3.2 A teacher’s action research

3.2.1 What is Action Research
Action research is frequently used in education for teachers and researchers interested in improvement and adjustment in teaching. As Carr & Kemmis (1986) pointed out:

Action Research is simply a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out (p.162).

It can be seen that action research is suitable for researchers who undertake practices to improve research and work consistent with their own practices. In educational action research, teachers, who traditionally have been the subjects of research, conduct research on their own situations and circumstances in their classrooms and schools (Pine, 2009, p.21). It involves exploring and discovering more about a specific issue which has significance for a teacher in relation to his or her own classroom and students (Burns, 2009, p. 115). Another definition given by Pine (2009) gives a comprehensive explanation of action research:

Action research is a process of concurrently inquiring about problems and taking action to solve them. It is a sustained, intentional, recursive, and dynamic process of inquiry in which the teacher takes an action-purposefully and ethically in a specific classroom context—to improve teaching/learning. Action research is change research, a nonlinear, recursive, cyclical process of study designed to achieve concrete change in a specific situation, context, or working setting to improve teaching/learning. (p. 30)

As can be seen from this definition, action research always concerns improvement in both teachers and students. It is a recursive, cyclical study where teacher-researchers are making progress by conducting each cycle and attaining a higher goal with the experience generated from the previous cycle. Regarding improvement, action research aims at improvement in three areas: firstly, the improvement of a practice; secondly, the improvement of the understanding of the practice by its practitioners; and thirdly, the improvement of the situation in which the practice takes place (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, 155).

To conclude, the ideas mentioned above show action research relies upon the
teacher-researcher’s perspective, tries to improve teaching-related issues by conducting real teaching processes, and enables the researcher to reach a higher level within the area. Action research is composed of a spiral of cycles which contributes to the improvement of the whole body of research.

3.2.2 Validity of action research

Action research is considered valid for this study because it is consistent with the researcher’s intention of improving task-design and making Chinese learnable in Australian schools. One of the most important categories of action research is engaging, extending, and transforming the self-understandings of practitioners by involving them in the research process, and involves practitioners directly in theorising their own practice and revising their theories self-critically in the light of their practical consequences (Kemmis, 1986, p.198). The researcher is a new Chinese teacher with little teaching experience, and she taught Australian students Chinese for a year and a half. For this reason, improving teaching ability is the most important thing this researcher had to deal with. Through action research, the researcher could examine her teaching performances past and present, and adjust her teaching skills within the progress of her research. The engagement, extension and transformation of the researcher constitute the major evidence of this study, and the practice as executed by the researcher will reflect directly upon this study as well.

One thing that makes action research ‘research’ is that it aims at the systematic development of knowledge in a self-critical community of practitioners (Kemmis, 1986). The researcher’s knowledge of teaching and task-designing will be developed through self-evaluation. As the research process gets under way it becomes a project aiming at the transformation of individual and collective practices, individual and shared understandings, and the situations in which participants interact (Kemmis, 1986). The individual experience of the researcher is valued and important in this study. By action research, the practice and experience will be fully presented, and improvements can be realised step by step during the research process.

Action research aims at three areas of improvement: the improvement of a practice, the improvement of the understanding of the practice by its practitioners, and the
improvement of the *situation* in which the practice takes place (Kemmis, 1986, p. 155). This thesis tries to improve the design of tasks during the teaching process to enable students to learn Chinese within their capabilities, yet challenge them. However, because the researcher is new hand and her teaching is the foundation of this research, the improvement of her teaching practices is the highest priority. Moreover, understanding the task-based language teaching approach is significant for the researcher, and her improvement in task-design is based on her understanding of the former work of other academics.

In terms of the method, a self-reflective spiral of cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting is central to the action research approach (Kemmis, 1986, p. 162). This self-reflective process is ideal for an inexperienced teacher-researcher to carry out both teaching and researching. The researcher conducted this research on the basis of this process of cycles according to Kemmis and McTaggart (1988)’s explanation:

- **Planning**: to develop a plan of critically informed action to improve what is already happening
- **Action**: to act to implement the plan
- **Observation**: to observe the effects of the critically informed action in the context in which it occurs
- **Reflection**: to reflect on these effects as a basis for further planning, subsequent critically informed action and so on through a succession cycles

(Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988, p. 10)

It can be seen that action research begins with an overall research plan, and takes effect with reference to this plan. Observation is a necessary and vital link between practice and research. It enables the researcher to go through the process of the practice of teaching, and lead to the next step – reflection. Reflection is the core through which the researcher analyses all the works that have been done before, and transforming them into theory or written work. Carr & Kemmis (1986) said the self-reflective spiral links reconstruction of the past with construction of a concrete and immediate future through action. It links the discourse of those involved in the action with their practice in the social context (p. 187). The researcher’s teaching implementation is regarded as the practice, while writing a self-reflection journal is the process of, well, reflection.
3.3 Principles Guiding Research Procedures

3.3.1 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are valued to protect the well-being and interests of research participants (Stringer, 2008, p. 44). This study is carefully designed to guarantee the privacy and safety of all the participants.

Northway (2003, cited in Flick, 2009, p. 40-41) states, ‘all aspects of the research process, from deciding upon the topic through to identifying a sample, conducting the research and disseminating the findings, have ethical implications.’ Attention should be carefully given to every step of the research. Principles of research ethics ask that researchers avoid harming participants involved in the process by respecting and taking into account their needs and interests (Flick, 2009, p. 36).

Another ethical issue is confidentiality and anonymity in writing about the research. It was guaranteed that none of the participants could be identified from the paper (Luders, 2004. cited in Flick, 2009, p. 42). Participants’ identities should not be revealed in the research out of concern for their privacy and safety. Moreover, it was also important to store all the data including students’ answer sheets, recordings and transcripts in a secure container, so that others would not be able to access these data (Luders, 2004, cited in Flick, 2009, p. 42). Students, as a vulnerable group, should be given extra intention, and works generated from their knowledge should be carefully preserved as well.

In this study, the major participants were primary students and classroom teachers from Gaoxing high school (an alias). Before undertaking the study, access to the school in which the study was to be conducted was sought. This included the NSW Department of Education and Training (DET) as well as the school Principal. All the participants were informed about this research before it took place, and all the participants were involved voluntarily and willingly. As the students were vulnerable group requiring extra protection, documents or policies concerning children’s safety in Australia were applied before the research was conducted. Beyond this the
researcher guarantees participants’ confidentiality, meaning that information about them is only used in a way rendering it impossible for other persons to identify them or for any intuition to use it against the interest of the participant (Flick, 2009, p. 40).

3.3.2 Triangulation

Triangulation is employed as the major strategy to achieve the validity and reliability of a study. Triangulation refers to combining different sorts of data on the background of the theoretical perspectives, which are applied to the data (Flick, 2009, p. 445). By triangulation, the research would be more trustworthy and the data base would be more solid.

In this study, the researcher applies data triangulation and methodology triangulation. Data triangulation entails gathering data through several sampling strategies, so that slices of data at different times and social situations, as well as on a variety of people, are gathered (Denzie, 1970). According to the research design, in this study, the researcher collects data from three groups of people, including the researcher herself as a teacher-researcher, students from two classes, and the classroom teachers of these two classes. Sources from these three angles are sufficiently applied to lay a solid foundation for this research. Meanwhile, data were gathered all along through the implementation of the three cycles of this action research.

Methodology triangulation refers to the use of more than one method for gathering data (Denzie, 1970). In this study, as stated before, triangular data from interviews as well as a self-reflection journal will present a clear picture of how the researcher conducted this research.

3.3.3 Generalisability

Merriam (1995) says this about generalisability: ‘the extent to which findings from an investigation can be applied to other situations is determined by the people in those situations’ (p. 58). This is an important aspect for the researcher to keep in mind when conducting qualitative research.
This study applies action research to study how to make Chinese more learnable by using the task-based language teaching approach. Action research is often viewed as less generalised as it is ‘localized and conducted with an existing group of people, who may or may not represent a random selection from a larger population’ (Pine, 2009, p. 89). Therefore, the findings of this research may not be highly generalised. The researcher performed this research as a volunteer teacher-researcher in the ROSETE program, which is a special context, hence emerges the limitations. Thus, attention has been paid to enhancing generalisability when conducting this research. Sufficient information (and background information), details of methodology, findings and assertions are clearly provided to enable readers to analogise between this study and their own work. Beyond this, this research contributes to the study of task-based language teaching approach and its application in teaching Chinese.

### 3.4 Research Design

The main research question of this study is how to develop an effective task-based teaching method to make Mandarin learnable to the students in Western Sydney schools. Therefore, the research’s design emphasises the improvement of Chinese teaching strategies based upon the task-based language teaching method.

#### 3.4.1 Site selection

The researcher is a volunteer teacher-researcher (VTR) of the Research Oriented School Engaged Teacher Education (ROSETE) Program. Under the aegis of this program, the researcher taught Chinese in the Western Sydney Region and concurrently conducted this research. Gaoxing high school, in the Western Sydney Region and one of the partner schools of the ROSETE program, was selected as the research site. This school provided strong support to this researcher and Mandarin teacher in her implementation of this action research.

There are two Mandarin classes involved in this research, one of year 7 students and one year 8. The researcher was scheduled to teach one lesson of 75 minutes to each class, every week. The research was conducted over three consecutive terms.
Since the researcher was a volunteer teacher-researcher, the regular teachers for these two classes were always in the classroom to assist while her lessons were being conducted.

3.4.2 Participants

The main research focus determines that students and teachers are indispensable for this research. Therefore, two groups of participants are included.

The first group is the students of the two classes in Gaoxing High School, a total of 38 students. These year 7 or year 8 students were beginning Chinese learners, therefore, all had similar a level of Chinese. The research was implemented under almost same conditions in these both classes.

Another group of participants were the two classroom teachers of these classes, as well as the researcher herself. Since the two classroom teachers remained in the classroom, they observed and assisted the researcher’s lessons and were a useful resource as part of this action research. The researcher herself was also an indispensable participant in this action research.

3.4.3 Cycle implementation

Action research is to provide the teacher researcher with a method for solving everyday problems in schools so that they may improve both student learning and teacher effectiveness (Gay, Mill, & Airasian, 2008, p.486). Any action research study or project begins with one pattern of practices and understandings in one situation, and ends with another, in which some practices or elements are continuous through the improvement process while others are discontinued (new elements have been added, old ones have been dropped, and transformations have occurred in still others) (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 182). As the project continued, the researcher was always seeking a better way to solve problems or improve the current situations. The process of action research is a process of change. Carr and Kemmis (1986) state that ‘a self-reflective spiral of cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting is central to the action research’ (p.162). The process of this cycle is well illustrated by the
In this diagram, action research is divided into several cycles, each of which consists of four steps: planning, acting, observing and reflecting. Each cycle contributes to the development and perfection of the next cycle.

The researcher conducted teaching in the Gaoxing High School for three terms, using task-based language teaching approach to make Chinese learnable. The researcher divided the study into three cycles, one for each term. References will therefore be made to cycle 1 (term 1), cycle 2 (term 2), and cycle 3 (term 3). The researcher implemented the task-based language teaching approach throughout these three cycles and made improvements based on the cycle preceding. Each term consisted of 10 lessons, thus six to nine small tasks were given in each cycle, and a large task was assigned in the last lesson of each term. All the small tasks were related, and viewed as components of the large final task.

As indicated in the Action Research Spiral, each cycle is divided into four parts.
Before each term, the researcher would plan the contents of the whole term, and design all the tasks. Each lesson the researcher conducted was considered as an Act, as indicated in the diagram, above. After each class and each term, the researcher would interview classroom teachers as well as students; and this is the process of observation (Observe). After these three steps, the researcher would form a conclusion of the entire process and write reflective journal entries to overview and analyse the past cycle. This would affect the planning of next cycle. The design of each cycle the researcher is to conduct can be viewed in the diagram below:

Figure 3-2 The design of action research cycle in this study

Figure 3-2 gives a direct view of one of the three cycles. Three such cycles were conducted with each cycle forming the basis of the cycle subsequent. Changes and improvements were made according to reflections made upon the previous cycle.

3.5 Data Collection

Data collection is an essential part of a research, and fundamental to each study. In
this study, data collection involved interviews and a self-reflection journal.

3.5.1 Interview

The interview is a primary method of data collection in qualitative research. It typically involves a researcher asking questions and, hopefully, receiving answers from the people being interviewed (Robson, p. 269). It provides opportunities for participants to describe situations in their own terms. It is a reflective process that enables the interviewee to explore his or her experiences in detail and to reveal the many features of that experience that have an effect on the issue investigated (Stringer, 2007, p. 69). One of the major purposes of the interview is to find out about ‘a thing’ that the researchers were unable to observe themselves (Stake, 2010, p. 95). It enables researchers obtain an overall view of every aspect of the research.

Interviews are usually divided into three types according to the degree of structure or standardisation of the interview: Fully structured, semi-structured, and unstructured interview. In this study, the researcher selected the semi-structured interview as the major source of data collection.

A semi-structured interview is one where the interviewer has a clear picture of the topics that need to be covered (and perhaps even a preferred order for these) but is prepared to allow the interview to develop in unexpected directions where these open up important new areas (Richards, 2009, p. 186). The interview schedule of a semi-structured interview will be likely to include the following:

- Introductory comments;
- List of topic headings and possibly key questions to ask under these headings;
- Set of associated prompts;
- Closing comments.

(Robson, 2007, p. 278)

The researchers have to schedule all possible questions related to the topic ahead of the interview, and guide the interviewees to answer the core questions.
In this study, classroom teachers were interviewed in the form of a semi-structured interview. They were witnesses to every class and because of their familiarity with the researcher’s teaching and the students, accurate and valuable feedback was received. Questions were mostly aimed at the students’ performance from the class teachers’ points of view, their evaluation of lesson content and teaching methods, and suggestions for improvements. Interviews were taken following each cycle, and more questions were addressed after the last classes of each cycle.

3.5.2 Self-reflection Journal

The self-reflection journal was a very important method of data collection in this study as action research was conducted. Teachers’ journals can provide teacher-researchers with the chance to maintain narrative accounts of their professional reflection on practice (Mertler, 2009, p.12). It is a vehicle for understanding oneself as teacher. It also offers a place for teachers to explore the planning and outcomes of curricular, instructional, relational and other classroom activities (Cole & Knowles, 2000). Weisberg and Duffin (1995, p. 22, cited in Pierson, 1998) identify journal writing as offering ‘writers the opportunity to become participant/observers of their own learning, to describe a significant experience and to then reflect on that experience to see what they can learn from having had it’. By writing a self-reflection journal, the teaching process can be clearly presented on paper, and improvements can be made according to the reflections. Reflection is important in order to sustain the professional health and competence of teachers and the ability to exercise professional judgment which is, in fact, informed through teachers’ reflection on their practice (Day, 1999). John Dewey (1933) said: ‘We do not learn from experience. We learn from reflecting on experience’ (p. 78).

Stanley (1998), says developing a reflective teaching practice can be represented as a series of phases: (a) engaging with reflection, (b) thinking reflectively, (c) using reflection, (d) sustaining reflection, and (e) practicing reflection. The phases do not represent a sequence that is followed but rather moments in time and particular experiences that constitute a particular phase (p. 585). These phases effectively explain the basic aspects of how to write a comprehensive and valuable journal.
Reflection is ongoing throughout the process, and each step is necessary in its own way but all contribute to the improvement of the next action.

In this study, journals were written after each lesson, and written in English. The journal covered three major themes. The first is the lesson plan the researcher wrote before the class, the second part is each lesson the researcher conducted, and the third is the reflections of the interview of both students and teachers at the end of each cycle. For the first part, the researcher wrote a specific lesson plan for each lesson. In the second part the researcher recorded every detail of the lesson related to this research, and analysed and made reflections on the merits and demerits. For the last part, the researcher recalled the content of the interview, and wrote down questions and answers related to this study, then combining them with the reflections of the first part, and comparing the real outcomes with the planned one, thus creating an overview of the whole lesson and enabling the researcher to implement these reflections in the next cycle.

3.5.3 Data Analysis

The collection of data is just the first step of the research. The analysis of data can generate ideas and conclusions and thus contribute to the final outcomes of the research. It is important for the researcher to explain in detail information of the process of both data collection and data analysis. In this study, the data collected and generated from interviews and self-reflection journals were all analysed and interpreted through open coding and context analysis, thoroughly and systematically.

While the emergent design of qualitative research lends itself to analysing data as it is collected in the field, there are certain tasks that must be accomplished before in-depth analysis can occur. Coding can be regarded as the initial phase of data analysis. It is the process of organising and sorting the data. Codes serve as a way to label, compile and organise the data. They also allow the researcher to summarise and synthesise what is happening in their data. Open coding is a fundamental analytic procedure to identify and develop concepts (Flick, 2009). It refers to the initial phase
of the coding process in the grounded theory approach to qualitative research (generating theory from data) espoused by Anslem Strauss and Juliet Corbin. They call this initial stage of data analysis open coding because they view the process as the “opening up” of the text in order to uncover ideas and meanings it holds (Benaquisto, 2008, p. 3).

The process of open coding begins with the collection of raw data (e.g., interviews, field notes, art, reports, diaries). The intent of open coding is to break down the data into segments in order to interpret them. Detailed word-by-word and line-by-line analysis is conducted by researchers asking what is going on (Benaquisto, 2008, p. 3). Strauss and Corbin (1990) provided directions for researchers to implement open coding, which include asking questions about the data, and making comparisons for similarities and differences between incidents, events, or other phenomena. Similar ones are grounded to form categories. In this study, students’ classroom behavioral/verbal responses to tasks implemented in class were coded and marked as positive/negative using different colors. Teachers’ and students’ interviews were coded by asking relevant questions including what, how, when, how long, what for, and consequences (Flick, 2009).

As earlier stated, open coding is just the initial phase of data analysis; therefore, after categorisation of the data, an in-depth analysis is required. In this study, the researcher used thematic analysis to further analyse the data. Thematic analysis is a poorly demarcated and rarely acknowledged, yet widely used qualitative analytic method (Boyatzis, 1998; Roulston, 2001, cited in Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 77). Boyatzis (1998) gives a definition about the thematic analysis, saying it:

‘is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail. However, it frequently goes further than this, and interprets various aspects of the research topic.’ (Boyatzis, 1998, cited in Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 79)

By using thematic analysis, data is divided into several themes, which are related to the topic – ‘a theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 82)’. Braun and Clark (2006) state that there
are usually six phases if one wants to conduct thematic analysis. The researcher reviewed these six phases carefully and combines them with the specific situation of this research. The following is adapted from the article written by Braun and Clarke (2006) and combined with the researcher’s own design, to explain these six phases in detail:

**Table 3-1 Data analysis phases in this study**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Description of the process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Familiarising yourself with your data:</td>
<td>Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Generating open coding:</td>
<td>Collecting raw data (e.g., interviews, reflection journals) and breaking down the data into segments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Categorising and Searching for themes:</td>
<td>Categorising the codes into several categories and collating them into potential themes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Defining and naming themes:</td>
<td>Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Thematisation:</td>
<td>Selecting vivid, compelling extract examples, analysing selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature. Thematising these materials, and give a clear clue of the themes – categories - codes – raw data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Conceptualisation:</td>
<td>Conceptualise the result of thematisation with respect to the main concerns of this study.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Adapted from Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 8)

The data are analysed deeper and deeper according to these six phases. In this research, the researcher combined open coding with thematic analysis, as shown in the table above. The researcher analyses the data through these six phases, and the sample result of the combination of open coding and thematic analysis is shown in the following table:
Table 3-2 The sample result of the combination of open coding and thematic analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-task Phase</td>
<td>Task Explanation</td>
<td>Teacher’s role</td>
<td>Extract 1: I ask students to come up to the front and tell them the rules of this game, and make sure they all get the point.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task Cycle</td>
<td>Task Practice</td>
<td>Students are involved</td>
<td>Extract 2: One of the students gets a piece of paper, which has the Chinese name of the sport on it, and he informs his partner that he is ready. After that, he does the movement to let his partner guess the name of sport in Chinese.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Management</td>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>Students are engaged in this game</td>
<td>Extract 3: I feel that they really liked this game. Some of them asked me to do another round after they finished.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task Cycle</td>
<td>Teaching Outcomes</td>
<td>Teaching goals achieved.</td>
<td>Extract 4: At the end of this class, I had a quick review of today’s lesson with students, and most of them can remember the Chinese names of six sports.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This form delivers the process of the former five phases of thematic analysis directly. The final phase, which is conceptualisation, was conducted after analysing this table, and then the researcher drew certain conclusions after conceptualising the content of the table. Thus the phases of open coding and thematic analysis were completed.

To sum up, there are three strands of data collected in this study. They were displayed, analysed and discussed in the following three evidentiary chapters. The first strand is the teaching contents and the tasks the teacher researcher prepared and designed in her lesson plans before class teaching throughout the three semesters (Chapter 4). The second strand is the data collected through her teaching, including language clarification and task instruction during pre-task phase, which occurred in
class (Chapter 5). The third strand of data includes students’ task-based performance, worksheets and exam papers, which occurred in and after class (Chapter 6).
Chapter 4 Designing task-based lesson plans - Essentials of the designing of teaching content and task in task-based classes

In this chapter, evidence extracted from the researcher’s lesson plans, reflective journals, and the interview with classroom teachers and students shows that, in the early stage, the teaching content design and task design were mainly influenced by the researcher’s reflection about her observation of her peer teacher researchers, her prior knowledge about language teaching, as well as the reflection of abundant of literatures. Data also shows that with the progress of teaching practice, and the researcher’s reflections about teaching effects, and feedbacks from both students and classroom teachers, the researcher adjusted and improved her design in the teaching content and task over time. To the last stage, she were able to use her acquired experience and knowledge from different aspects, achieving a better understanding of how to design suitable teaching contents and tasks for the students in her task-based classes.

4.1 Factors considered in teaching content design

In this study, the researcher considered teaching content design an important component of the entire teaching process and an indispensable part of task-based language teaching implementation. As no textbook is given in Australia, the designing of the teaching contents was the first thing to think about. As is suggested in Nation’s book, under this circumstance, “teachers can draw on a bank of exiting materials from which they select the most appropriate material for the course” (Nation, 2010, p.140). Teaching content provides direction, clarity, and focus around worthy ends (Ravitch, 2010, p.231). Criteria for content selection give guidance on the selection of materials and learning activities and assist in assessment and evaluation (Nunan, 1988, p.5). Teachers have opportunities to adapt and create teaching contents appropriate to the needs, aspirations and interests of the students (Mickan, 2003). When designing the teaching content, there are certain elements to be considered from the students’ perspective. Can the students accept the words or sentences? How can the content be better understood and learnt by the students? Are
the things taught in class closely related to their daily lives, or can they actually use this knowledge to communicate in Chinese? Can the knowledge involved in the teaching content work and allow students to communicate? The researcher asked herself these questions while designing the task. In this research, the teacher’s design of teaching content determines what students are going to learn, and conversely, students’ learning capabilities and preferences were taken into account.

4.1.1 Designing lessons connecting to the real world

The researcher read abundant of literatures before she launched her teaching, which gave significant impact on the early stage of her teaching content designing. The researcher reviewed a body of literature regarding the definition of task in TBLT. She found that although definitions vary from person to person, scholars believe in one criterion – that “task-based syllabuses require a needs identification to be conducted in terms of the ‘real-world’ target tasks learners are preparing to undertake (Dyer, 1996, p.313)”.

Also, literatures about the Communicative Language Teaching approach and TBLT states that the aim of language teaching is to hone students’ abilities to use the target language for communication, and the teacher should try to teach the language based on a view of language as a system for meaning expression (Nunan, 1999; Skehan, 2001). “Language teaching is based on a view of language as communication. Learning a language is learning to take part in community practices with language (Mickan, 2013)”. “Language is a social tool that speakers use to make meaning; speakers communicate about something to someone for some purpose (Savignon, 2008, p.6)”. This aim became the priority for this teacher researcher while designing the teaching content. The following displays and analyses the evidence on the design of the teaching content from the researcher’s lesson plans and reflective journals.

In the first lesson of cycle one, the researcher was uncertain about the students’ learning condition, and how much they knew about China and Mandarin. Therefore, except for a brief introduction about China, the course and the teacher researcher herself, she decided to teach one Chinese sentence as a start. The following is an excerpt from her reflective journals while preparing the lesson:
The last part is the most important part. I am going to teach them to say the sentence *nihao, woshi*..., which means *hello, my name is* ... Because year 7 just comes to a new school, so students don’t know each other. I am going to use this sentence as a means to get to know the students’ names, and also, give them the chance to know each other by introducing themselves in Chinese, plus it is short and easy to learn, and they get to combine their name with the sentence, which might be fun and fresh to the students. Moreover, saying hello is the basic manners in daily life, and the sentence of introducing name can also be used in any situation when they meet a new Chinese guy. (The teacher researcher’s reflection journal during lesson planning stage, Term1, 2014)

The teacher intended to use the new Chinese sentence as a medium to get to know students. The aim is to make students use the sentence in a real-life situation as soon as they have learned how to pronounce the sentence, in a setting where they are all new to each other. The reasons why this sentence was decided upon are listed in the excerpt: Saying hello, and introducing one’s name in Mandarin enables students to use the basic greetings in daily life, therefore, teaching this simple sentence as a starting point shows a connection to the real world. One student said to the researcher after class that, he was not expecting himself to use Chinese in the first class (Focus group, Term 1, 2014).

The students’ positive feedback firmed the researcher’s thinking of teaching topics that can be used in daily conversations. In the same vain, the second lesson the researcher planned for the students was a *how are you* conversation in Chinese, because it is the most common conversation in both Australia and China. Students were having fun using the words they were most familiar with in Chinese (The teacher researcher’s reflection journal, term 1, 2014).

After including the basic greeting conversations in her first two lessons, the researcher tried to decide the topics of the future classes, with the consideration of the real-world connection. Below is an excerpt from the researcher’s reflective journal describing her thoughts when struggling to decide on a topic:

I listed a set of possible topics. I went through several Chinese textbooks, my observation notes of other Chinese teachers, and also some records of my interview with them, and I had topics like family members, sports, numbers, colours, face organs, stationaries, etc. However, I still didn't feel quite right with these topics. I was aware that these topics are the
most commonly appearing topics in books or in classes, but I can’t see their practical value to the students. Obviously we get in touch with these topics quite often, but no one would go to Chinese people and say, this is a yellow colour, this is my nose, this is a pencil, and this is a basketball. Moreover, I do not want my students just learn the words. Learning a new language is not just the accumulation of vocabulary. (The teacher researcher’s reflection journal during lesson planning stage, Term1, 2014)

The researcher was assigned to observe the peer teacher researchers’ classes for two terms in 2003, which influenced her view of teaching content designing in the early stage of this study. As can be seen from this excerpt, many choices were open to the researcher as the result of the observation. However, she found that topics that are taught most often are not in line with her thinking about language teaching. These topics seem to have a very close relationship to daily life, but if given a second thought, they are rarely brought up in a daily conversation, especially for a beginning learner. The researcher then went through these topics again and decided to make concept maps of all the topics she could think of. Concept map brainstorm the initial ideas, provide information about how these ideas are related, and interpret the results of the analyses (Trochim, 1989, p.1). It starts with generating words relevant to the topic and sorting them into associated words or sentences (Ojima, 2006). She reflected the process in her journal.

I wrote each of the topics on one blank paper, and drew concept maps of these topics respectively. I tried to write down all the possible vocabulary and sentences that can be involved in a topic. The picture (Figure 4-1) given below is the example of the topic sports:

Figure 4-1 Concept map of the topic Sports
The researcher examined all the topics she observed from other peer teacher researchers’ classes, and listed out all the possible language points can be taught. As the Sports concept map shows, there are certain words and sentences that can be brought up during a daily conversation, however, according to the researcher’s observation before this study, combining her own life experience, she considered these words and sentences to be too difficult or unnecessary for beginning learners. Same cases apply to other topics, such as face organs, stationaries, and colours. However, when it comes to the concept map of the topic ‘numbers’, the researcher found it different.

Figure 4-2 Concept map of the topic Number

According to the Figure 4-2, the researcher found the topic Numbers and its related
subtopics not only connected to the real world, but also within the acceptable range of students’ learning capabilities. Counting, as well as doing mathematics in a new language, might be an interesting and an easy-to-learn topic to students. Beyond this are subtopics such as asking about age, date, birthday, phone number, and time – all common topics of daily conversation. These topics are also beneficial for making it possible for a beginning learner to have a conversation when encountering a new Chinese friend. Beyond these basic daily conversations, the topics of money and shopping are also frequently used, as shopping is an inevitable social activity. Although more learning ability may be required of the students, this topic is nonetheless worth learning. All in all, the topic of *Numbers* and its topics by extension coincide with the researcher’s thinking that learning a language is for the purpose of communicating with the target language in daily life, and enabling the learners to convey the meaning they want to express. For beginning learners, these topics are probably appropriate.

In summary, according to nature of TBLT, the Communicative Language Teaching approach, and the researcher’s observation of peer teacher researchers, as well as her own understanding of language teaching, she drew the conclusion from the evidence that the decision about teaching content has to take one element into consideration – whether the topics have a connection to the real world. This element determines the learning orientation for the students. The researcher elaborated upon her way of finding the original topics by showing evidence from her own case, and her finding that the topic of *Numbers*, as a whole, is consistent with the researcher’s ideas of choosing a topic. The researcher set up this topic as the main line of her three-term teaching, however, how to well deliver the language points still needs to be discussed in Chapter 5 and 6, evidence will be given to show the real effects.

### 4.1.2 Designing content with continuity between lessons

Continuity is one of the core principles the researcher values most when designing teaching content and tasks. This realisation came to her before she began her teaching. She was required to observe for one term before teaching, and as previously mentioned, all the Chinese teachers she observed used topics as the unit of teaching, but there were no links between topics. This way of teaching has its
advantages in that students are involved in more topics and are able to acquire more words. However, the researcher also noticed that because topics were changed quite often and there was nothing to link them, students were only capable of remembering the words of the current topic, and forgot what they had learnt during previous weeks. Moreover, teachers usually moved on to another topic after teaching some vocabulary, or some simple sentences, and students are only able to speak the words or basic introductory sentences, such as *Zheshi qianbi* (This is a pencil), *Wo xihuan zuqiu* (I like football).

However, from the results of her observation, the researcher found that moving on to another topic after learning a limited number of new words would not enable students to communicate in the target language, not to mention convey what they want to express. And this is when ‘continuity’ was brought to her attention. During the lesson planning stage, the researcher valued continuity as a significant element.

In this part, the reasons of why the teaching contents are designed, as well as the arrangements of teaching sequence are elaborated to illustrate the researcher’s consideration of continuity during the teaching contents planning stage.

### 4.1.2.1 Continuity design in content selection

What should I teach? How can I allow my students to communicate in Chinese as much as possible in three terms? How can I make them feel more interested and less stressed? These are the questions the researcher asked herself all along with her teaching in Gaoxing High School. The design of the teaching content decides how the researcher answers these questions. As stated in 4.1.1, by holding to the idea of a real-world connection, the researcher decided to use the topic of *Numbers* as the main theme of her teaching implementation, however, the details of each lesson were still waited to be designed, as continuity is another vital element for the researcher to consider.

In the first two lessons the researcher gave an introduction of China and Mandarin, and taught students the sentence of self-introduction and the dialogue of *how are you*. The teaching of the numbers was designed as the content of the third lesson, and
thereafter numbers were designed as the medium throughout the whole study. However, although the main direction of the teaching content was set, the details of each lesson were still waited to be written and revised within the study progress.

As can be seen from the concept map (Figure 4-2), there are six subtopics, namely, counting, age, phone number, date and week, time, and money. These topics are considered to frequently appear in daily conversation, and also can be easily noticed that, they all involve numbers. The researcher caught this characteristic, and had some thoughts about it when she was arranging the teaching content, which is presented in the passage below:

First, I think I should start with teaching numbers, as this is the foundation of the other topics. But the problem is what I should teach next. I picked three topics out of all the topics, which are age, phone number and birthday. According to my life experience, if the students get the chance to make a Chinese friend, they must start with making friends with each other. And making friends always starts with the exchange of personal information. So teaching these three topics as a starter might be useful and make them interested. (The teacher researcher’s reflection journal during lesson planning stage, Term1, 2014)

In this excerpt, the researcher recorded her thoughts about starting with the most common daily conversation. She picked three topics people commonly talk about when they are making friends. However, the researcher still needed to think of a way to link them together, and make it easier for the students to build up connections between each other.

After practicing the conversation of asking for phone number, Jimmy asked me “Hey, Miss, can I be Bruce Lee again? I want to know Bruce Lee’s phone number”. I remember I was like, “yeah, why not? Why not let them be the same character, and practice both conversations (asking for age and phone number)”. I then granted my permission and let them practice. (The teacher researcher’s reflection journal after class, Term1, 2014)

Before the lesson was implemented, the researcher had the thought of linking these lessons together, however, how to do it remains unsolved. The student’s response elaborated in this excerpt gave a hint to the researcher, and became an important strategy of her later teaching. The student asked to act as the character he acted in the
last lesson, which is the lesson of ‘asking for age’. The researcher realised that if she uses these characters can be a link to different language topics. All the lessons related to these three topics were like a series of lessons with numbers as the medium, and with making friends as the background setting. Moreover, the new dialogue always merges with the previous ones, therefore, while acquiring new knowledge, the old dialogues are always brought up and reviewed. Unlike replacing one topic with another, by the end of the learning of the three topics, students would not have forgotten the first and second ones, but be more familiar with them.

The same case applies to other topics. The researcher tried to plan all her topics in the same background, therefore, student would not feel totally strange when a new topic comes up. For instance, the first few lessons are about exchanging personal information by asking age, birthday, and phone number, which shows them how to make friends with Chinese people at the beginning. Later on, more topics are introduced as they kept in touch with their Chinese friends, they would have more chances to know each other better by knowing and using more topics. This is how the researcher planned to introduce the topics of date and week, time, and money to the later classes. These topics allow the students to set the appointments with Chinese friends, plan the time, and go shopping – all common activities between friends. All the lessons that the researcher planned fit the theme which enabled them to use these dialogues to make friends and communicate with Chinese people by using these commonly used daily conversations. Also, all the dialogues were reviewed constantly, and combined with each other within the teaching process. Therefore, all the lessons were linked and associated, and the language base would build up in students’ mind, hence more and more words and dialogues could take place when having conversations with Chinese people. Above illustrates researcher’s teaching content design in a macroscopic view, the details of each lesson were still needed to be adjusted according to students’ feedback and learning effects.

The researcher regards the design discusses above as snowball making. One starts with a very small ball, and by rolling the ball on the snow, it will become bigger and bigger. Layers build upon layers, attaching to earlier layers, and they cannot be separated. With the layers combined, the maker will finally have made one big snowball. Similarly, in this study, students had no Chinese background, therefore
they all began with nothing. Then from learning numbers, to using the dialogues of asking for age, until the last topic, the whole process is like making a snowball. Numbers are the starting point of this Chinese ‘ball’, and all the topics learnt subsequently were built upon the former classes, making the ‘ball’ bigger and bigger. Eventually, with the combination or unification of all the dialogues, students finally can make the big Chinese ‘ball’, and are able to mobilise these collective dialogues and put them to real use. Therefore, the researcher’s snowball theory contributes to continuity of teaching content design.

4.1.2.2 Continuity design in teaching sequence

The previous two parts gave an introduction to the selection of the topics by asking whether the topics have a connection to the real world, and how they can be linked together. After the topics are decided upon, the next step for the researcher to decide is how she can reach the goal of teaching the dialogue and allowing the students to communicate in Chinese.

The researcher referred to several Chinese textbooks, and found out that all of them started with words, then phrases, then sentences, and then dialogues. This is similar to the researcher’s experience in learning English. Small units of language are easier for students to grasp and remember, and bigger units can be built upon the smaller units, thus the learning of the bigger and bigger units becomes a continuous process. Therefore, all the lessons the researcher conducted began with smaller units, and the units built upon each other. Below are the PowerPoint slides (Figure 4-3) of one of the lessons, which give an example of how the researcher prepared her lessons following the order of words-phrases-sentences-dialogues:

Figure 4-3 Slides of teaching the dialogue ‘what is the date today?’
Figure 4-1 shows how the researcher planned to teach the dialogue of asking for date: 今日是几月几号? (What is the date today?). As can be seen from the PowerPoint, the researcher starts with the smallest unit – month, and follows with the names of twelve months, as they are all derived from the word month (yuè in Mandarin). Another minimal unit then to be taught is the day, which again follows with the way of saying all the days in a month by following the number sequence. Once students are able to say all the dates in Chinese, the teacher can move to the second step – phrases, finally reaching the last two steps – sentences and dialogues.

However, when learning a unit involving sentences and dialogues, higher learning ability is required. The students not only have to get the correct pronunciation, but also the right word orders and meanings. At the beginning of this research, the researcher followed the common sequence of teaching the answer first and then the answers. However, a student’s question triggered her thinking. Following is an excerpt from the researcher’s journal:

Shantae asked me “How can they be in a same order, but one is the
answer, and the other one is the question”? I answered her without even thinking that, “Chinese questions and answers always follow the same order, it is how it works”. After I answered this question, I suddenly realised that I should use this characteristics to arrange my teaching sequence. After class, I used two Chinese dialogues (Figure 4-4) to find out how I should execute it. (The teacher researcher’s reflection journal after class, Term1, 2014)

**Figure 4-4 Chinese dialogues and their corresponding English**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chinese Dialogue</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>今天是几月几号？</td>
<td>Today is which month which day?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3月18号。</td>
<td>March 18th.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>今天是星期几?</td>
<td>Today is which day of the week?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>今天是星期三。</td>
<td>Today is Wednesday.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The slide shows that the answers follow the same word order as English sentences do, but the questions do not. However, it is not hard to notice that in Chinese dialogues, the questions and the answers share the same word order. As shown in the slide, the question asking for the date is Today is which month which day, which has an exactly same word order as the answer. According to this, the researcher learned that when teaching the sentence and the dialogue, it is more efficient to teach the answer first because it follows the same word order as the English, thus making it more acceptable to the students. The teaching of the question comes after, and it would be easier to learn if the teacher emphasised the same pattern of the questions and answers, and drew students’ attention to it. The teaching effects of this design will be elaborated in chapter 5 and chapter 6. All in all, in this research, the researcher teaches the Mandarin sentences begin with the answers, highlighting the same word orders as the English sentences, and then extending to the teaching of the questions, which just need the replacement of the question words. This way, both
answers and questions would be more acceptable and easier to the students, thus reducing their burden, and making the learning more interesting.

It should be noted that not all the Chinese sentences follow the same word order as in English. In this condition, the researcher nonetheless learned that the teaching of the answers still should come first. On the one hand, answers are assertive sentences that are more useful and easier to master. On the other hand, the answers, again, can be learnt following the word order of the answers.

Although it is important that teaching content be well considered before classes, the teaching sequence can also influence the effectiveness of the lessons. In this part, the researcher gives examples of how she designed her lessons based on the topics she decided to teach, and learned that the relatively acceptable teaching sequence of Chinese is word – phrase – answer as dialogue – question as dialogue – dialogue, the teaching effects of such design will be revealed in chapter 5 and chapter 6.

4.2 Tasks focus – Oral tasks

Task plays a significant role in this study. Tasks were conducted in most of the lessons, and the whole process, from the pre-task phase to post-task phase, usually takes half an hour at the end of each lesson. The aim of conducting tasks in the language classes is to “provide opportunities for learners to experiment with and explore both spoken and written language through learning activities that are designed to engage learners in the authentic, practical and functional use of language for meaningful purposes (CDC 1999:41)”. In this study, the researcher mainly focused on the spoken language, and tasks were designed mainly for the students to apply what they learned from the class into real use, and enable them to communicate with these language points. In addition to the design of the teaching content, the design of the tasks is also vital. The researcher linked the real world and the classroom with the aid of tasks, at the same time offering the students chances to practice language points, as well as examine their learning outcomes. Therefore, how to design the tasks has become the crucial point in this study.
In this part, an overview about the tasks involved in this study, as well as the awareness of continuity while designing the tasks is provided. The data mainly extracted from the researcher’s lesson plans and her reflection journal.

4.2.1 Task types designed in this study

The categorisation of the task types has long been discussed by the scholars. Opinions are varied. For instance, in the Bangalore project, three principal task types are used: information gap, reasoning gap, and opinion gap (Prabhu 1987: 46-7). Another well-known way of categorising the tasks is raised by Nunan (1999), who divides tasks into five types: cognitive, interpersonal, linguistic, affective and creative, under which subtypes are given, such as diagramming, role-playing, summarising, and self-evaluating. This study lasted three terms, more specifically, 30 lessons for each class. Based on the researcher’s understanding of literature on proper tasks, she mainly designed and conducted two types of tasks in this study – role-play and self-illustration.

4.2.1.1 Role-play

Role-play is the type of task the researcher conducted the most in this study. The using of role-play as a task was widely proposed by many scholars. Moreover, the researcher’s own learning experience during her high school English class was also a big motivation for her. It is a useful means for learners to gain pragmatic competence (Fraser, Rintell and Walter, 1980). “Learners play the parts of characters in an unfolding narrative, collaborating on tasks in small groups, a method which combines the use of language skills with practical work” (Ahlquist, 2013). Accordingly, while doing role-play, the students usually follow background scenes and characters the teachers set up for them. The design of the role-play is the decisive point in this study, and it is the teacher’s job to design it properly. The exploration of how to better design proper tasks for English speaking students to learn Mandarin was a long way throughout this action research.

In the first lesson, the researcher planned to teach students how to introduce themselves in Chinese with a simple sentence. She planned to introduce three
Chinese characters for the students to practice using these characters, and to enable them to put themselves in the Chinese context.

**Figure 4-5 Slides of the introduction of three Chinese characters**

The three characters above are Chinese stars representing different walks of life. Yáo Míng is a basketball star and well known to students; Lǐ Xiǎolóng, is a Kung Fu star and Zhōu Jiélún, is currently the most famous pop star in China. The researcher explained her reasons of choosing these characters in her reflective journal:

I think by introducing Chinese characters to the students, it can firstly put the students into the Chinese context. And these characters are very famous not only in China, but also all over the world, and they all have different expertise, therefore, students must be interested and be glad to act as these characters. Also, letting the students talk as if they are Chinese people will give them the feeling that they can actually use the language in China, or with Chinese people. (The teacher researcher’s reflection journal during lesson planning stage, Term1, 2014)

The researcher’s original intention was to build an atmosphere of Chinese learning in the classrooms, and by asking students to act as these characters, their interest would be aroused. The students reaction was positive after the first lesson, as the teacher researcher heard the students saying words “cool”, “who are these people”, “I want to be Bruce Lee”, “Oh, man, their Chinese names are weird”. Students were very curious about these three Chinese characters, and were getting involved in different ways. Therefore, the researcher decided to use the same background scenes in her
following classes. In the next lesson, the teaching content was the *how are you* conversation, and again, when it came to the task session, the researcher decided to ask the students to perform as these three characters and use the conversation they learned. In this role-play, the researcher planned to create a scene as a party that Chinese celebrities would attend and make friends with each other. Music was planned to provide the background. With the accumulation of words and dialogues in this analogy, the researcher would put more and more information into the role-plays.

**Figure 4-6 The change of name cards of three Chinese celebrities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Birthday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yao Ming</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>9 yue 12 hao</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Li Xiaolong</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>11 yue 27 hao</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhou Jielun</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>1 yue 18 hao</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4-6 is of the slides prepared for two different lessons. More information was added to the name cards as the lessons progressed. By referring to the pictures, the researcher planned to let the students to role play these characters again, and gather further information from each other, like a normal conversation between new friends. The content of the role-plays in each lesson is designed to connect previous or following lessons, and the background scenes are similar, as “task repetition may have the learners’ attention fully taken up with becoming familiar with the story in a narrative task, and will consequently have additional mental space to pay attention to linguistic forms (Batsone, 2012, p. 460)”1. Also, the scenes the researcher set up could happen in the real world, thus may give students the feeling that these Mandarin dialogues they learned could be useful in their daily lives.
The first few lessons successfully attracted students’ attention. Although students were not as active as expected due to researcher’s way of lesson delivery (refer to Chapter 5 and 6), however, one can still see that students were interested as they were still fresh to the characters, and this form of learning. However, problems emerged after lesson of the topic ‘birthday’, below is an excerpt from the researcher’s reflection journals:

I invited Jemima and Joseph to do the role-play. They first said hi and greeted each other. The *how are you* conversation was still a bit long for them. Joseph stopped twice, but Jemima whispered to him and helped him out. Then Jemima asked about name, age and birthday as these are the only little dialogues I had taught them to that point. The *name* and *age* dialogue were very good, but the *birthday* dialogue was not smooth because the sentence was too long (*Ni de shengri shi yue ji hao?*). I reminded them several times and then they finished the dialogue. At last, they said *thank you* and *bye-bye* to each other. After that I named Sharni to perform, but she said ‘no, I don’t want to do this, it’s boring and stupid, why are we doing this all the time?’ I was so embarrassed and did not know what to say. Fred (*the classroom teacher*) asked her to be respectful and stopped her. After class, I talked with two of the students and asked whether they liked the way I was teaching. They said that ‘role-play is fine, it is a lot of fun sometimes. But we have done this too many times, plus we feel so tired, you know, it is the last period’. (The teacher researcher’s reflection journal, Term 1, 2014)

The students started to feel bored after a few lessons. Although new conversations were added each time, the form was still the same. There is a saying in China says “换汤不换药 (huàn tāng bú huàn yào)”, which means change the water that goes with the medicine, but not the medicine itself. This saying coincides with the researcher’s task designing. The researcher set up role-plays in different classes, but the students were doing the same thing as they were asking and answering the questions with limited content. Because the content was limited, the students would feel restrained when they were doing the task. The researcher tried to set up scenes that could happen in real life, or scenes that they could imagine, however, the tasks turned out to be more like the reciting of dialogues with different scenes. Students had already lost the fresh feeling of being Chinese celebrities. Therefore, while designing the task, the teacher should take this into consideration, and create more flexible tasks that can attract students’ attention.
In the later classes, the researcher adjusted her task designs according to the students’ performance and feedbacks. The first example offered is from a class conducted in the middle of cycle two. After teaching how to say time in Chinese, the researcher designed a task that requires the students to think of the timetable of their idol, and they can act as their idols and get information from each other. Moreover, students were given more autonomy. The following is an extract from the researcher’s self-reflective journals about the students’ performance of that lesson:

Max and Shantae volunteered to do the task. ‘Please introduce your character first’, I said. ‘Nǐmen hǎo, wǒ jiào Kobe Bryant’, said Max, and then Shantae introduced herself as Justin Bieber. After that, I announced that they could start the conversation. They greeted with each other as usual. Max is a very humorous boy who always does something funny. He stood on his tiptoe and shook hands with Shantae, and said in a deep voice ‘Nice to see you, I am Kobe, I really like your music’, with both Chinese and English. Shantae was very happy and said thank you in Chinese many times. They then formally started the conversation. They were all very happy in their characters. Max even made some basketball moves when he told Shantae his training time. When Shantae was introducing the singing exercise time to Max, the whole class tried to get her to sing, but it did not happen since she was not prepared. We all enjoyed their performance. (The teacher researcher’s reflection journal, Term 2, 2014)

This task was fun for the students, judging from their performance, and the response of the class. The task still followed the same form as the tasks carried out in cycle one as introduced in the last part, which is doing the role-plays and making dialogues by using the Chinese sentences learned in the classes, however, the difference was that the students were given more autonomy and initiative in this case. In the example given above, Max and Shantae had the chance to pick the character they liked, and because of this, they were more interested in arranging the timetable for those characters as can be seen from the fact that they were trying to act out things that were not required. Full autonomy was given to them to arrange the timetable, which became a good chance for them to mobilise new language points, which is saying the time in Chinese, as well as the sentence structure of ‘do something at some time’. Moreover, during the role-play, students were not restrained by the Chinese context, they were also allowed to speak English when it was necessary, and this gave them more initiative when they performed since they could add their own creativity to the performance. As the evidence shows, Max socialised with Shantae in
English at the beginning of the conversation.

The researcher concludes from the examples in the case given above, as well as other cases in cycle two that tasks with more openness would give students more initiative and incentive to complete. It is always better to link the tasks to the interests of the students, thus they would be more willing and delighted to do the tasks.

Another example is one of the lessons in cycle three. After a few weeks’ learning, the students were able to discuss price, the dialogues of asking for price, as well as bargaining, therefore, they were ready to generate these language points together and do a big task. In this task, a Chinese store was set up as the pictures showing below:

Figure 4-7.1 Scene set up for the task ‘Vendor shop’

Figure 4-7.2 Scene set up for the task ‘Vendor shop’
As the picture shows, handcrafted goods were set up in the classroom, and prices were at the back so that they could only be seen by the shopkeeper. Fake Chinese money was given out to the students to purchase the goods. One of the students acted as the shopkeeper, while other students acted as customers. The students were required to social, to use Chinese conversation to purchase goods, to negotiate the price – just like the most common conversation that could happen in the grocery stores.

This task is different from the previous one. Although conversation was still required in this task, the scene of this task was more lively and real. As can be seen from the pictures, the scene was set up in the classroom, hence when students did the role-play, they had real things to talk about, thus making it easier for them to link with real life. Also, the craft goods set up in the class were all items the students were familiar with, and they were allowed to say English names but not strictly in Chinese. Through this way pressures on students were decreased. According to the students’ performance (refer to chapter 6), by moving the real life scene into the classroom, students were more devoted to role-play. They were taking this task very seriously as if it was real. Therefore, in the later stage of the classes, more and more scenes were set up in the classrooms, and more props were used during the role-play. Furthermore, this task enabled the students to engage a large amount of the knowledge they acquired from the Chinese class. After a long period’s learning, students were able to make bigger conversations. This task not only gave them a good opportunity to mobilise their Chinese skills, but also gave them the feeling of the self-achievement.

‘This class was awesome. Miss, you really should do more tasks like this. It is like we are really at a Chinese shop. And I didn't realize I could say so many Chinese sentences until today. And I could bargain in Chinese as well, that is so cool. I have to go to China town and give it a try.’ (Interview with student Emily, Term 3, 2014)

It can be noticed from the student’s words that she felt very proud of herself by doing the task of this lesson. The engagement of the considerable number of sentences and dialogues in one task gave students confidence in themselves. Meanwhile, the practice of bargaining, which could happen in the real Chinese market, interested the
students and gave them incentive to try in a real Chinese market. This coincides with the researcher’s aim of language teaching, which is enabling the students to use the language in the real life, instead of remaining at the role-plays stage inside the classrooms.

To sum up, the researcher planned role-plays as the main tasks to be completed in the classes. Through this method, new and old knowledge could be consolidated and utilised throughout the process, and the students could also build the connection with real life by acting as celebrities. In order to engage students, the teacher researcher learned to create various scenes, thus students would not become bored and be more willing to engage in different tasks. The researcher summarises her three criteria while designing the tasks that: 1. Involve all the language points; consolidating new knowledge while reviewing what was previously acquired; 2. Set up daily life scenes in the classrooms that enable the students to link with the real world; 3. Observe students’ feedback and listen to their advice, attract their interest and engage them in learning.

4.2.1.2 Self-illustration

Self-illustration is another main task the researcher conducted in classes. Different from role-play, which requires students to have conversations with each other, self-illustration requires the students to use their acquired knowledge to illustrate certain topics. This type of task gives students the opportunity to summon and utilise all the sentences they learned. Self-illustration requires greater ability in organising sentences, and the capability of expressing what needs to be said.

In this study, the self-illustration tasks the researcher designed usually asked the students to make a speech using a few sentences, and a topic would be given around which they could design and organise the speech. This type of task was conducted at the later stages of the study, since students were required to mobilise knowledge acquired over time, and use a number of sentences to finish the whole speech.

One of the tasks the researcher planned is asking the students to introduce themselves and their families, requiring them to try to engage all the possible sentences they
have learned in their classes. At this point, students would have learned how to introduce themselves, including name, age, birthday, phone numbers, and the sentence *I like something*; they also would have known how to say the date, time, the sentence about doing something at certain time. Before the task, the researcher planned to give an overview of those language points, in order to refresh students’ memories to help them to use as many sentences as possible. The researcher recorded her reasons of designing such task in her reflection journal.

So far, students have learnt a lot of words and sentences. And during previous classes, I always ask them to do role-plays, by using more and more language points. I think now they are already very familiar with those dialogues, so I want to see if they can use these language points to make a short speech to describe their own life. Through this way, not only could the students apply the longer-term knowledge they have acquired, but also allowed me to examine whether they truly understand how to use these sentences, and what are their weak points. (The teacher researcher’s reflection journal during lesson planning stage, Term 4, 2014)

The researcher considers that by the time of this lesson, students were suppose to be familiar with considerable amount of sentences and dialogues, therefore, she tried to design a task which can involve most of the language points, and put them together. After these considerations, she found self-introduction a good task to be conducted. This task requires the students to understand all the language points, and know how to use them. More importantly, they can examine their own short comes while executing the task.

Another self-illustration task the researcher planned was at the very end of the study. By this time, students had for several weeks been learning the names of different countries, different languages, and different people. To help them link this related knowledge together, the researcher planned a practice task involving a short speech about three political leaders. The information is shown in Figure 4-8:
These pictures provide personal information of three political leaders. Using these pictures, the students were required to engage the language points they learned in that period of time, and illustrate all the information given in the pictures. Students should first remember all the sentences, organise them into a passage, and then present their speech, paying attention to their pronunciation. To accomplish the task they are required to grasp sentence patterns, and pronunciation, as well as the ability to organise a speech. Through this, all these aspects will be given opportunity to practice.

A self-illustration is believed to be beneficial for students in terms of engaging the knowledge they have acquired over an extended period of time, in which all aspects are involved, including pronunciation, the grasp of the words, phrases, sentences, and the ability to organize their speech. In the real execution, the researcher found this task more difficult to accomplish than role-play, therefore, different degrees of help was offered accordingly to reduce the burden.

4.2.2 Continuity as a mainstay in task designing

In part 4.1.3, the researcher elaborated upon two aspects of continuity that are involved in lesson plans – teaching content and the teaching sequence. With continuity taken into consideration while designing lessons, students can acquire the language points that are closely related, thus enabling them to communicate in a broader context, instead of accumulating unrelated words and sentences. However, continuity between topics is just a stepping-stone for students to link language points together, and further efforts still need to be made on how to enable students to link topics together.
The aim of designing tasks is to set up scenes for the students to apply what they have learned earlier and make connections with the real world. As stated earlier, most of the tasks the researcher designed were role-plays, and self-illustrations. When performing these tasks, the researcher or the students, could use their imaginations, set up scenes in the classroom to be acted out, and use the acquired language points. The components of a task are the characters, plots, and related conversations. By using the same characters in different tasks, and joining the tasks together in a series of related plots, connections could be made between the tasks which would enable the students to link the related language points. In the following section, the researcher will present the story line set up in this study, and elaborate the tasks mode adopted, which contributes to the continuity of the tasks.

4.2.2.1 Story-line as the medium

After the researcher decided what topics to teach, she still had concerns about how to link those topics together. Although stated in 4.1.2.2 that all the topics are related together, and all the lessons are connected, the researcher still felt more needs to be done in order to joint these topics together. As stated 4.2.1.1, the first task the researcher designed was to use three Chinese celebrities as the means to let the students practice, and the stepping-stone to the Mandarin world. This task triggered the researcher’s thinking. The researcher elaborates in the later parts that how she designed the tasks by using these characters and the story lines derived from them, and how this can benefit the language learning.

The researcher introduced three Chinese celebrities in the first lesson – Yao Ming, Zhou Jielun and Bruce Lee. This was the introduction of the students to these Chinese people who became the main characters of all the tasks conducted in this study. Although new characters are added now and then, they are all presented as the friends of these three central personalities. For instance, Jackie Chen appeared as the friend of Bruce Lee, as they are both kung fu stars. All in all, students are required to act as different characters in different tasks, but these three characters remained the protagonists throughout this study.
With the progress of learning, students may become more and more familiar with these characters. Meanwhile, according to students’ performance in the classes, and their suggestions after class, new characters and corresponding adjustments were made now and then to make the tasks more attractive. Placing the same or related characters in different tasks enable the students to link the tasks together. Moreover, the friendship between these personalities can be developed by the students through different tasks. Whenever they perform the tasks, there would always be something familiar to them. The characters in the tasks act as mediums, for the students to chain all the tasks together.

The story lines embedded in this study are another medium through which the students can link their knowledge together. All the plots in the different tasks are related. For example, in the first lesson the three main characters became to know each other, and as the classes progress, these characters could learn more and more about each other, by which students were required to mobilise more and more knowledge, such as asking each other’s name, age, and birthday. After they got to know each other well, the researcher set up the scenes related to the teaching content for them to do together, such as attending an interview, going shopping, and travelling. More importantly, students’ suggestions were always taken as the perfection of the next task design. Each of the tasks had a link with another, but with an increasing number of knowledge points being added. By the end of each cycle and the study, the students were able to find out that they are able to put many sentences and dialogues together to make extended conversations.

The researcher considered that by using the same characters and associated plots, and a story line for the duration of the study, which functioned as a medium connecting classes, tasks, and different language points, the students should be able to link the knowledge acquired from different classes. And also, because of the story line, students could feel that all the topics they learned are closely related, rather than separate without any connection. The researcher planned to use this method to enable the students to feel that it is easier to grasp the language points over a longer period of time, and experience less stress while performing the tasks.
4.2.2.2 Task mode as the rising tide

For each of the lesson involved in this study, the language points covered are not just the knowledge to be conveyed in that very lesson, but as many knowledge points as possible since the beginning of the cycle one.

Except for the first lesson, all the tasks included in the plans of the lessons were linked between lessons. For example, whenever the students perform role-play, they were required to use the conversation of *how are you*, because it is the most commonly used conversation in daily life, and by setting up real life scenarios in the classes, it was natural to have the conversations as well. The more they repeated the conversations, the deeper the impression was made upon them.

For another example, in the task about political leaders mentioned in 4.2.1.2, the students were required to make a speech about the name, age, birthday, nationality and the capability of speaking different languages. This task includes at least six language points, and the students had to engage all of them to finish the task. Through this task, students are not only able to practice their more recently acquired knowledge, but also deepen the impression of the knowledge learned before. The task mode of this study is to add new language points to the tasks that is given previously. While practicing new language points, the old knowledge points would be repeated again and again, thus the students would be more familiar with the usage of these words or sentences. Although the background information would be different, the tasks always include repetition of the old dialogues. In this way, the content of one task would grow and expand, and require the students to mobilise language points learned from different lessons into one task, and enable them to put these language points into one large context and apply them as a whole.

In summary, the tasks conducted in this research are not independent individuals, but a series of tasks that have links with each other. The researcher suggests this kind of task mode as rising tide. With the teaching progress, the students start from a small task, and putting more and more knowledge points into increasingly complicated tasks, just like the rising tide.
4.3 Discussion

This chapter elaborated upon the lesson preparation before the class launched. It includes designing the teaching content and the tasks. The designing of the teaching content over the teaching period is vital as it outlines what students learn in the school term, which also determines the content of the tasks. Therefore, the designing of teaching content is done before each cycle, to be adjusted over time according to the progress of the teaching process. The general designing of the teaching content and the tasks was done before each cycle, with consideration being given to the language points that need to be included in the tasks, as well as task modes and forms. Before each class, further designing would be done according to the real teaching effects, and the feedbacks from the students. In this section, the researcher will discuss about the necessity of the consideration of real-world connection in the designing stage, and also the significance and effectiveness of continuity in Chinese language teaching.

“Task-based learning involves a high level of creativity and dynamism on the part of the teacher. If the teachers are restricted to more traditional roles or do not possess time and resources to provide task-based teaching; this type of teaching may be impracticable (Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu, 2011, p.50)”. Therefore, the researcher’s efforts putting into the designing of the TBLT classes is crucial to the teaching results. The language teacher has an active role in choosing, adapting and designing tasks and then building these tasks in keeping with learner needs, expectations, interests and language skill levels (Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu, 2011). Task-based approach aims at presenting opportunities for learners to master target language via learning activities designed to engage learners in the natural, practical and functional use of language for meaningful purpose (Lin, 2009), focusing attention on learners who were learning languages because they needed to use them in an ever-shrinking world (Benson & Voller, 1997, p. 11, cited in East, 2012)”, which requires the tasks to have the real-world connection. In this study, both teaching content and task backgrounds are designed by upholding the criteria that students would in the real world be able to use the knowledge they acquired in class, and the tasks set up in the classes would be stepping stones for the students in applying the language before they stepped into the real field. Different from most of the Chinese teaching content,
the researcher did not plan to teach Chinese in single and isolated topic units, but teach words and sentences in a larger context over time, and generate expanding conversations within the teaching process. The teaching content of this study includes most common conversations such as greetings, making friends, asking for details of personal information (age, birthday, phone number), shopping, bargaining, and travelling. These conversations are practical in the real world as they are being used every day. Moreover, the scenes of tasks set up in the classes are closely connected to the real world, such as going to a party or interview, shopping and bargaining with the shop owner, and asking for travelling details. While designing the tasks, the researcher tried to bring real-life scenes into the classroom, and let the students experience the real language usage, thus “giving learners the chance to communicate and interact and enhancing learners’ ability to deploy the target language and sort out communicative problems (Lin, 2009)”. After three-cycles of teaching implementation, the students found these conversations applicable in real life, and were willing to use Mandarin when encountering Chinese people (referring to Chapter 5 and 6). By embedding real-world connections into teaching content and tasks, students would be able to communicate in the target language, and also build a bridge to the real world.

“Most learning occurs in small advances as learners develop better understandings, deeper knowledge and higher levels of skill as a continuous process (Masters, 2005, p.18)”, learning language is not an exception. In this study, the researcher views the process of learning a new language equates with the process of making a snowball. The first lesson is the starting point of the rolling, and within the teaching progress, the students begins to roll the ball. The ball would become bigger and bigger, and all the layers attached are on the basis or foundation of the previous layers, and finally a big snowball will be generated. In this study, all the lessons are linked in terms of teaching content and tasks. The teaching content of different lessons is related, just like the fusion of the snow layers, and also, the knowledge acquired earlier would aid the introduction of subsequently learned knowledge. “Sequences of tasks can consolidate memories for previous efforts at successfully resolving problems arising in communication, on previous versions, thereby strengthening memory for them” (Robinson, 2011). In this study, almost all the tasks used the same or related characters, and the plots of each task were part of the same story line. Therefore,
whenever the students perform the task, it is more like adding to their existing database, and mobilising the data in a larger context. This also parallels the process of making a snowball, by which more and more snow is added to the existing layers, and an ever-growing ball would be at the disposal of its maker. Learning becomes an ongoing, cumulative acquisition of knowledge, where actors gradually increase their knowledge through experience (Hernes & Irgens, 2012). Through this, the students would not experience stress when they encounter new knowledge, as the knowledge learned in the former classes will help them learn the new knowledge, ultimately adding to their database of the language. The process of embedding continuity in the language teaching process as snowballing proved to be useful.

To sum up, the planning stage before the class plays a vital role in this research. The researcher started as an inexperienced beginning teacher, and improved her teaching through accumulating teaching experience and learning from classroom teachers and students’ feedback. The teacher researcher’s improvement includes her understanding of TBLT approach, which should include two key elements. That is, while planning lessons and designing tasks, it should give priority to the real-world connection and content continuity between lessons and tasks.
Chapter 5 The pre-task preparation phase

The Pre-task preparation phase, as the name suggests, is the phase before the students formally perform the tasks. In this study, the pre-task preparation phase is divided into two parts. The first part is the process of teaching implementation. It may seem that this part has nothing to do with the task, and it is not included in any TBLT frameworks proposed by other scholars, however, the researcher considers the fact that the language points the teacher teaches are targeted at the content of the tasks, and the effect of the teaching implementation may directly influence the outcomes of the tasks, language focus teaching is considered to be one of the focuses in task-based teaching. The second part is the preparatory work before the tasks are launched, as suggests in Willis’s (2000) work, during which the teacher clarifies the language focuses of the tasks with the students, and the instructions are explained to the students in the interests of the ultimate success of the tasks. Beyond these two parts, the progress the researcher made during this three-cycle study are revealed in this chapter.

In this chapter, the researcher uses data extracts from the researcher’s reflective journals, and interviews with the classroom teachers. Language focus teaching and the introduction to the topic and task are displayed through those data.

5.1 Three teaching strategies of task-based classes

In Task-based class, task is the chief means for the teacher to consolidate and utilise the language acquired, however, how the language points should be taught in the first place still matters a lot. In this part, the researcher elaborates three teaching strategies she concludes from her three-cycle teaching, which are duck-feeding style, deduction and DIY study. Scaffolding lays the foundation of all these three strategies, which essentially means doing some of the work for the student who is not quite ready to accomplish a task independently (Dodge, 1998). “With scaffolding the task itself is not changed, but the task the learner should initially perform is made easier with assistance” (Jung, 2007, p.12). “A temporary intellectual support was offered by the teacher in order to draw the learner up towards a higher level of understanding.
5.1.1 The necessity of duck-feeding style

Pekin Duck is famous for its fat and tender meat. All the ducks were made into roasted ducks after they were born 20 days. Within these 20 days, in order to keep the fat and make them grow bigger, these ducks were fed as much food as possible. Therefore, in Chinese, duck-feeding teaching style is used to describe the teaching method that the teachers push students to recite as much knowledge as possible within a short time, without considering their learning capabilities. The duck-feeding style of teaching is always considered to be a bad teaching strategy when it is discussed. However, the researcher has discovered that such duck-feeding is inevitable during the language teaching process, especially at the beginning phase. Most of the students involved in this research are from Anglophone background and they were learning Mandarin as a new language. The teacher, as suggested by Bruner (1975) and Wood et al. (1976), played the role of a single, more knowledgeable person who helped learners to move forward by giving them certain guidance. The following is an excerpt from the researcher’s reflective journal of her first lesson:

I showed them a slide of PowerPoint on the board, with the pinyin and characters 你(nǐ) 好(hǎo) on the top and the English words knee and how at the bottom. I said that this is the way of saying hello in Chinese, 你(nǐ) means you, which sounds like knee, and 好(hǎo) means good, which sounds like how, so when we say hi in China, we are literally saying you are good. Students nodded their heads and repeated after me. I then said remember to ask “how are your knees” to Chinese people whenever you come across them. Students laughed and kept practicing for several times. After it, I said I hope everyone can say nǐ hǎo to me next time you see me on campus. (The teacher researcher’s reflection journal during lesson, Term 1, 2014)

The above excerpt is about the researcher’s first lesson, and how she taught the first Chinese word to the students. The students had no clue of the pronunciation system, the vocabulary or the grammar of this new language, therefore, the only thing they could do was listen to the researcher and remember the words. The researcher used scaffolding, which here refers to some mnemonic devices, to help students to remember the word “nǐ hǎo”. Because students had no Chinese background, the only
way they could do it was to rely on memory. In this case, duck-feeding was the most direct and effective way of learning and teaching. Berk (2000) indicates that a changing quality of support over a teaching session in which adults adjust the assistance they provide to fit the child’s current level of performance. Direct instruction is offered when a task is new; less help is provided as competence increases. This definition indicates that direct instruction is at the top level of scaffolding. Therefore, the researcher considers Duck-feeding style the top level of scaffolding, and inevitable in the beginning stage of teaching. The same strategy applies to situations when the researcher taught students the word xìè xìè (thank you), bù yòng xìè (you are welcome), duì bù qǐ (sorry), and zài jiàn (bye-bye) during the beginning phase of her teaching. These words are the most frequently used in both languages, yet have entirely different pronunciations. Teachers use mnemonic devices to help students to pronounce the words, and students have to memorise them through no other means but to learn by rote – just like feeding ducks.

While teaching the students’ Chinese names, the researcher found another inevitable situation to use this strategy. It is universally acknowledged that the pronunciation system of Chinese is completely different from the Germanic language group, which includes English. There are four tones in Chinese, which are the most difficult part for foreign students to learn. Moreover, there are certain sounds in Chinese that are really difficult to articulate by Anglophone students. The researcher gave each of her students a Chinese name in order to have them sense the difference between Chinese and English sound system. An example is given below:

I called out students’ Chinese names and asked them to guess who I was calling. Students became excited and ready to accept the challenge. Students yelled the corresponding English names every time they heard, and they looked really happy when they got the right answer. Something happened that I did not think of when I was preparing the lesson. Students kept asking me the meanings of their names in Chinese, they found it interesting and fresh as if they were given new names. Because the pronunciation of their names is totally new to them, I corrected each of their pronunciations and asked them to keep practicing. And I told them that I am going to call their Chinese name in my future classes. Students kept practicing their names with each other and they helped their classmates to correct the pronunciations. (The teacher researcher’s reflection journal, Term 1, 2014)
As can be seen from this example, students had no prior knowledge about Chinese pronunciation. The learning of their Chinese names was the starting line. Therefore, students had no choice but listened to the teacher and memorized it through practice. Following teachers’ instructions, of what they should do, the students were led to the learning goal. Here the researcher considers that Duck-feeding teaching style also occurred when the new knowledge had no relationship with students’ prior knowledge. That is when students couldn’t link the new knowledge to any existing resource in their memory. When it came to such a situation, the teacher’s strategy was to guide them using duck-feeding to feed them the knowledge.

According to the former two examples, we can see that memorisation plays an important role in the process of duck-feeding. Therefore, instead of forcing students to dryly memorise all the new words and sentences, help should be provided by teachers to help students learn in a happier way, and keep them from falling asleep, or put another way, make the ducks eat the food in a good mood. An example is given below about one of the researcher’s lessons:

Last week I taught students the whole dialogue of greeting with each other by saying the how are you dialogue. There were five completely new sentences in this dialogue, which left them no choice but memorising all the strange sentences. They managed to say these sentences somehow, but I had the feeling that the class was dry and they all felt bored. However, after the class, I found a video online which perfectly covers the whole dialogue in it with a very catchy rhythm. I played video at the beginning of the lesson to catch their attention. They followed the video immediately, and all the memory came back all of a sudden. I can see the sparkling in their eyes. They found the video funny and easy to remember. I even heard them sing the song when I ran into them on campus. (The teacher researcher’s reflection journal, Term 1, 2014)

The researcher found that students were bored to her lesson because they have to memorise the long and new Chinese conversation. In this case, duck-feeding teaching is inevitable, but the ways the teacher can feed the ducks are various. The teacher realised her original way of teaching the dialogue was boring and forceful, so she came up with another way to refresh students’ memory. In her second lesson, the teacher was still trying to follow the duck-feeding teaching method by giving students a whole five-sentence Chinese dialogue to remember, however, the use of
video decreased students’ pressures, thus make them become willing to acquire the knowledge.

The duck-feeding teaching style is inevitable in the language teaching process. At the beginning phase of the teaching, students usually did not know anything about the new language, so the teacher had to forcibly give students knowledge and asked them to remember. The same strategy applied to situations when the teacher taught language points that had no relationship to students’ prior knowledge. This strategy may seem unfeeling, but it is proved to be direct and effective when it came to certain situations. Moreover, strategies might have reduced students’ tension. The teacher researcher was aware that reading and reciting are not the only ways of memorisation. Extra help such as mnemonic devices, songs, or catchy poems were all used during the teaching.

5.1.2 Using direct deduction in teaching

Direct instruction is offered when a task is new; less help is provided as a competence increases (Berk 2000, p 261). Duck feeding teaching can be seen as the direct instruction, and it can be regarded as the highest level of scaffolding. As time goes by, the students had a general understanding of the Chinese pronunciation system and how Chinese works. Evidence shows that the continuing of using duck-feeding style made the students relying on the teacher so much that they asked for help whenever new knowledge comes up. The researcher found it hard for students to develop independent learning capacity. After these situation kept happening for several times, the researcher realized that high level of scaffolding such as duck-feeding should be reduced by the teacher with students’ further learning. Therefore, after the researcher found duck-feeding style not as effective as before, and is not applicable in most of the situations, she began to explore another effect teaching strategy that suits students’ learning capacity. “Gradually the level of assistance decreases as the learner takes more responsibility for the performance of the task. (Jung, 2007, p.12)”

Pronunciation is the first problem to solve when people are learning a new language.
Just like English has the International Phonetic system (IPA), Chinese also has its own phonetic system – *pinyin*. The understanding of the phonetic system of a new language is like the opening ceremony to this new language. As stated in the previous part, the researcher used duck-feeding teaching to teach students pronunciation at the very beginning of her lessons. However, after students became more familiar with pronunciation, the researcher felt repetitive and pointless telling the students the pronunciation of every single word, therefore, she decided to offer less help. Below is an example showing how the researcher gradually reduced her assisting students with their pronunciation.

I showed a slide of numbers from 0-10 on the board with digits, characters and pinyin on it. I said to students that we had already had three Chinese lessons, now I want you to figure out the pronunciation of these words by looking at the pinyin. Students seemed encouraged to try. They tried to say the words immediately after I said start, and then asked me if they have got the correct answer. I did not answer them one by one but showed them a rap number video. They all got excited and tried to follow the video. After they became familiar with the pronunciation, I practiced with them, and used some mnemonic devices to correct their pronunciations. For example, three, whose Chinese is sān, sounds like the beginning of the word sandwich; six, whose Chinese is liù, sounds like the English name Leo; seven, whose Chinese is qī, sounds like the beginning of the word cheese. Students nodded their heads and practiced for several times. This way enabled students to think before all the pronunciations were given without thinking, and made them easier to remember the words because efforts has been put into the learning process. (The teacher researcher’s reflection journal, Term 1, 2014)

In the case above, the researcher stopped giving students direct instructions when they learned the new words. Before teaching the correct pronunciation of words, she asked them to try to guess how they should be pronounced and then she asked them to check with the rap Chinese video. After they became really familiar with the sound, she then started to correct their pronunciation and taught them the right way of saying it by using mnemonic devices. Through this way, students were able to gain their ability to recognise and read *pinyin* increasingly. The researcher found through experimenting for several times that this could help students sense the self-achievement during the process, and stimulates them to use their prior knowledge, and knowledge learned from their previous lessons to deduce the new knowledge. Reversely, like what happened in the previous lessons, if the teacher kept giving
students direct answers without letting them think and try, students would rely on the teacher every time, and they would never have the ability to learn on their own. The researcher decided to name this way of teaching deduction, and considers this pedagogy as a lower level of scaffolding compared to the duck-feeding style.

Below is another example showing how the researcher implemented deduction in her second lesson on numbers. The first example already showed us how she taught the pronunciations of numbers 1 to 10. In the second lesson she taught students how to count from 11 to 999. This may seem to be a big challenge for just one lesson, but she managed to do it by using deduction.

I told students that we are going to learn the numbers left. I showed them the slide that has numbers 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80, 90, 100 on it but without the pinyin. I asked students to tell me how to say 10 (which is shi in Chinese) first. Then I asked them to tell me how to say 2 (er) and 10 (shi). They all followed my instructions. Then I said that’s it, because 20 is two tens, so 20 is pronounced as ershi in Chinese. Students said “wow, that’s easy”. I could tell that they really got the idea at that moment. Then I asked them to figure out how to say from 30-90 all by themselves. Students were competing to call out the numbers faster than others. They were so proud of themselves because they can figure out the new words by themselves. (The teacher researcher’s reflection journal, Term 1, 2014)

The extract shows that the teacher used students’ knowledge formed in precious classes as well students’ prior knowledge to derive new knowledge. Students’ reactions to this lesson were the best evidence to prove the effectiveness of using deduction in teaching. Students could understand and remember the knowledge more profoundly, and they could also gain a sense of achievement through this way. Once students acquire the knowledge, this knowledge can become embedded as part of the database formed in their memory. This database is like a capital pool, which allows the students to get capital from it and make more profit afterwards. Using students’ knowledge gained in the class to derive more related knowledge makes the students learn easier and more thoroughly. Therefore, the researcher applied the same strategy to teach the rest of the numbers

After this, I turned to the next slide that has some math equations on it,
for instance, $10+5=15$, $80+9=89$, etc. I told them that $15$ is $10$ (shí) +5 (wǔ), and then asked them to guess how to say 15 in Chinese. They couldn’t wait to give me answers and yelled out the numbers. Most of them got the right answer, which is shíwǔ. They asked me not to tell them how to say the rest of the numbers on the slide, and they were going to tell me the answer. I laughed and said “oh, year 7, now you became my Chinese teacher”. They all laughed. Although it took a while for them to figure out the rest of the numbers, they got all the answers correctly. One of students said to me that “Miss, this is much easier than English. Chinese is easy”. I was really happy with their performance. (The teacher researcher’s reflection journal, Term 1, 2014)

As the extract illustrates, students came up with all the numbers just by a hint from the teacher. The using of old knowledge to deduce new knowledge aroused students’ interests and enabled them to think and motivate all the knowledge together, hence reducing students’ stress when they were facing the new language. In this case, the known knowledge became a stepping-stone for the new knowledge, thus helped students climb higher and easier. Moreover, because they deduced the knowledge by using their own brain, it would be useful for retaining the knowledge in their memory, because students gain the knowledge through their own effort instead of passively receiving it from others.

The learning of the numbers is the frontline of the researcher’s study. During the three-cycle teaching conduction, other than the language of greetings and daily routines, all the teaching contents are related to numbers more or less, for instance, asking for phone numbers, age, date, time, birthday, price, etc. Therefore, every time the researcher started a new topic, students would be somewhat familiar with it partially. Namely, all the researcher’s new lessons were built on the basis of numbers and former lessons. Following excerpt is an example from the researcher’s journal:

After we learned 月(yuè, meaning month), I showed them another character: 号(hào, meaning st/nd/rd/th). I explained the meaning first. I said, in English, when we say the date, we have 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th, etc. But in Chinese, 号 (hào) can stand for all these meanings. And just like the way we say the month, we put the number plus the character to express the day. A student handed up and said, “Miss Dai, Chinese always follows the similar logic, that’s easy to remember”. I said “exactly” and then I asked Rhyth to guess how to say the first day of the month. He said yīhào, which is definitely the correct answer. Then I showed some of the Australian’s public holidays, students told me the
Numbers became the known knowledge in this case. The learning of saying the date was built on the fact that students already possess the knowledge of how to say numbers in Chinese. Students were learning a new topic yet part of the knowledge was already well learned. During the researcher’s study, she found that students were always excited when they saw the knowledge that they already learned, and learning the new knowledge is more like the application of the old knowledge, rather than starting a strange and unfamiliar new journey. As can be seen from the example listed upon, students worked out how to say the dates by combining the old knowledge they formed in the former classes with the new word. To them, the process of learning to say the date is just like applying the numbers into different usages. The whole process of the lesson is like the classic game Treasure Hunt, during which students hold what they already possess, find the clues on the map, and find the treasure at last, which is full of joy as well.

Beside the examples of teaching dates in Chinese, deduction can be seen throughout the researcher’s teaching. Her students were able to ask for age, to say any time of a day, and any price in Chinese. With the accumulation of the knowledge about Chinese, deduction was used more often as more prior knowledge was preserved for the students to use. Students were even volunteered to learn the knowledge without the teacher’s direct instructions.

5.1.3 DIY with minimum scaffolding

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term DIY is the abbreviation of *do-it-yourself*, which is “characterized by the carrying out of a task oneself as opposed to relying on or employing other people or resources”. This term is in accordance with the lowest level of scaffolding, in support provided to the learner fades, leaving them control and taking responsibility for learning (Puntambekar & Hübscher, 2005). Some scholars define it as *self-scaffolding* (Holton & Thomas, 2001), which refers to situations where an individual is able to provide scaffolding for her(him)self when
any problem or concept that is new to the individual is being tackled. According to Vygotsky (1978), the cognitive processes that first occur on an interpsychological plane move on to an intrapsychological plane, a process he called *internalisation*. There is a transfer of responsibility from the teacher to the learner, and the scaffolding can then be removed as the learner moves toward independent activity. Internalisation always happens at the later stage of teaching and learning, especially in language study. In the later stage of teaching, a considerable amount of language points were acquired by the students, therefore, inspired by the literatures, as well as the students higher capability in acquiring knowledge, the researcher tried to fade away her assistance gradually, and the researcher considers this stage of scaffolding coincides with the definition of DIY, hence in this study this stage of the teaching implementation was labeled as DIY study.

In cycle 3, by which time students had accumulated a certain amount of knowledge about the Chinese language system and culture, the researcher attempted to implement DIY study in her teaching, slowly and steadily reducing her instructions. However, given that the researcher only had three terms of teaching, it was difficult for students to develop a sufficiently complete understanding of the Chinese language, and she faced obstacles.

In the following example, instead of teaching smaller language units such as words or phrases, the researcher tried to apply DIY study in the teaching of sentences and dialogues. From cycle 2, the researcher intentionally emphasised sentence structure whenever she taught new dialogue. Unlike English, in Chinese dialogue the word order of the questions and the answers always share the same structure. For example, instead of saying “How old are you?”, the word order of the question in Chinese is “you are how old?” (Nǐ jǐ suì le?), and the answer is the same as English (e.g. I am 13 years old – Wǒ shísān suì le.). For another example, instead of saying “What are you doing?”, the sentence in Chinese is “you are doing what?” (Nǐ zaì gàn shénme?). During the researcher’s teaching, she managed to always teach the answers first, given that answers are declarative sentences that can be used independently, and can be digested better than the question sentences. After students satisfactorily grasped the answers, this researcher started to teach the questioning words embedded in
question sentences. The same structures of the questions and answers are always highlighted in her lessons, and by doing so, the researcher hoped that students could form a concept of Chinese sentence orders in their minds and separate them from English.

Starting cycle 3, students had already learnt several Chinese dialogues and were quite familiar with them. Therefore, the researcher tried to give students opportunities to work on the questions in the new dialogue by themselves. Below is an excerpt from her reflection journals.

After some of the students shared their daily timetable with the class by saying the sentence, for instance, I wake up at 7 o’clock (wǒ qiǎodiǎn qǐ chuǎng, which literally means I 7 o’clock wake up.), I told them that we are going to learn how to ask people “what time do you do something?”. I did not show the sentence on the board as usual, instead, I encouraged students to give me the question. I asked them to imagine and tell me the similarity of all the Chinese dialogues they learned, and what do I emphasise all the time. A student raised his hand and told me the answer in a very low voice – they usually have the same sentence order. I said yes and asked them if anyone could tell me how to say “What time do you have meals?” in Chinese. Students looked so confused and did not know how to respond. A few of them said that the question should start with nǐ (you), but they had no clue what to say next. I encouraged them to look at the declarative sentence “wǒ 12 diǎn chīfàn (I 12 o’clock have meals)”, however, students still cannot link the answer to the question. Later I gave up, and showed them the question. (The teacher researcher’s reflection journal, Term 3, 2014)

It is not difficult to conclude from the excerpt above that the teacher researcher intended to let students come up with the right question by themselves. However, they became confused and could not follow the teacher’s steps. Unlike words and phrases, the learning and understanding of Mandarin sentences require a deeper comprehension of the language system. It includes the usage of words, phrases, and sentence structures, which is not easy for beginning learners. The researcher analysed this lesson in her self-reflection journal after class:

I still cannot forget the confusion in students’ eyes. I thought I had spent enough time let them digest the structure of the Chinese sentences, however, their reaction told me that it is still too hard for them. I think there are several reasons leading to this result: 1. The sentence orders are
too various and too different from English that takes away from students’ confidence; 2. I asked students to tell me the sentence order so quickly that they could not drag themselves out of the situation where they always get direct answers from me without thinking; 3. Although emphasis was made during cycle 2, never had I given them any exercise specifically aiming at sentence orders. (The teacher researcher’s reflection journal, Term 2, 2014)

The piece of reflection indicates the reasons that may contribute to the unsatisfactory results from the researcher’s first trial. The researcher was a beginning Chinese teacher who had no teaching background, especially when teaching Australian students, her judgment of the teaching content may not have been as sound as experienced teachers. This case demonstrated that she overestimated students’ capability of analysing the word orders of the sentences, and made the teaching content beyond students’ learning scope. She then decided to design a graph to explain the logic between Chinese questions and answers. The graph is shown as below:

**Figure 5-1 Display of six questions and answers**

```
A: Nǐ jiào shén me míng zì?
A: 你叫 什么 名字?

B: Wǒ jiào Yāo Míng.
B: 我叫 姚 明。

A: Nǐ jǐ suì le?
A: 你 几岁 了?

B: Wǒ 15 suì le.
B: 我 15 岁 了。

A: Jīn tiān shì jǐ yuè jǐ hào?
A: 今天 是 几 月 几 号?

B: Jīn tiān shì 3 yuè 18 hào.
B: 今天 是 3 月 18 号。

A: Jīn tiān shì xīng qī jǐ?
A: 今天 是 星期 几?

B: Jīn tiān shì xīng qī sān.
B: 今天 是 星期 三。

A: Nǐ dé shēng rì shì jǐ yuè jǐ hào?
A: 你的 生日 是 几 月 几 号?

B: Wǒ de shēng rì shì 3 yuè 18 hào.
B: 我的 生日 是 3 月 18 号。

A: Nǐ jǐ diǎn chī fàn?
A: 你 几点 吃饭?

B: Wǒ shí èr diǎn chī fàn.
B: 我 十二点 吃饭。
```
The six slides are the dialogues of “what is your name?”, “how old are you?”, “what is the date today?”, “what day is it today?”, “when is your birthday?” and “what time do you have lunch?” As can be seen from these slides, other than the changing of the subjects, the positions and the contents of the parts without underlines are entirely the same, while the underlined parts of A are the question words, and the underlined parts of B are the answers, which share the same positions. This graph gives a direct view of how Chinese questions and answers work. The researcher gave the paper to students and explained every slide in detail. Beyond this, the researcher designed another exercise to deepen students’ impressions of the sentence structures, which is shown below:

**Figure 5-2 Exercise of strengthening the sense of sentence structures**

1. 几岁了你？

2. 名字什么你叫？

3. 五点晚饭吃我。

4. 几月几号你的生日？

5. 今天星期三。

6. 现在几点？
This worksheet requested students to relocate the words and put them into the correct order. This exercise is very commonly used in the early stages of English classes in China. The researcher thought about her own learning experience, and adapted the exercise to her Chinese teaching. This exercise placed all the words in front of the students, therefore, they could judge the meanings of the sentences through these words without too much struggle, and meanwhile, during the process of recognising the word orders, they could strengthen their understanding of the sentence structures.

After a few times of practicing and reemphasising, the researcher decided to teach another question using the DIY study. Similarly, the researcher taught the students how to say the answer first, and practiced several times before asking them to think of the question.

I said to students that now we know how to say “there are X members in my family (X refers to numbers)” (wǒ jiā yǒu X kǒu rén, literally translated as ‘my family has X members’), we are going to figure out how to ask the question about this, and I am not going to help you, it is your time to teach me Chinese. Students laughed. I said I am just going to give you one hint, tell me the question word for numbers, which we already used in so many dialogues. “几 (jǐ)!”, a couple of students yelled. “Good, and now look at the sentence we just practiced, and write the possible question for this sentence”, I said. A few minutes later, some of the students raised their hands and said they were finished with excited and nervous voices. I approached to them and checked, and was so pleased to see that most of them got the right sentence. (The teacher researcher’s reflection journal, Term 3, 2014)

As can be seen from this excerpt, compared with the last time, students had become more confident when the teacher asked them to think of the question. Grasping sentence structures is considered to be the most difficult part in learning the language, therefore, it is necessary for the teacher to design certain exercises to decrease students’ burden and accelerate their learning efficiency. Before conducting the lesson, the researcher designed the graph and exercise, especially targeting the formation of the Chinese sentences, and by using these methods, the theory between sentences and answers is provided to the students. Eventually, with the researcher’s aid students were able to understand the theory, and enabled them to make the new sentences, thus realising DIY study by themselves.
In cycle 3, the researcher did not succeed in completely reaching the goal of DIY study as she planned at the beginning of her research, since removing support and letting students learn by themselves proved rather difficult and there was not enough time. Moreover, she encountered difficulties when trying to conduct the DIY study, because she overestimated the students’ ability. However, after the exercise she designed following the first trial, the students were clearer about what they needed to understand and grasp. Although assistance was still provided along the way, students still came up with the sentences on their own.

To sum up, DIY study is desirable for students to learn how to learn, specifically how to remember the words, phrases or sentences. However, more time and effort were needed to be put into the teaching to help students form the ability of do-it-yourself. Moreover, the teacher should be more aware of what she is trying to teach, which would perhaps help students to follow instructions and learn.

In this part, the researcher discussed the three main teaching strategies deployed during her teaching practice. These strategies were related to scaffolding, combined with the researcher’s learning experience and the real-life situation she witnessed and experienced in the schools where she was teaching. At the beginning phase of the teaching, the learners usually experienced difficulty and confusion in trying to learn the language, and the teacher researcher resorted to using a ‘duck-feeding’ teaching strategy. She gave the students new knowledge and asked them to memorise it. Though this might seem to be the least desirable teaching strategy, the researcher pointed out that it was inevitable in the beginning stage of language teaching as there was no existing base for these beginning learners, and it was considered necessary to give them what they needed to learn and ask them to do memory job as the most direct and clear way to familiarise them with the new language. She also pointed out that although ‘ducks’ were being ‘fed’, the manners in which they could be fed still varied. Mediums such as mnemonic devices, songs, and catchy rhymes could be used to make the ‘duck-feeding’ process enjoyable and effective. Another important teaching strategy in her teaching practice was Deduction, in which she used the students’ knowledge and understanding from prior lessons to help them deduce more knowledge. The students constituted the main learning body, following the teacher’s
guidance throughout the process, and finally reaching the goal. Both old and new knowledge was activated in their minds, and made the learning process full of fun. In the later stage of the researcher’s teaching, she planted DIY study into her teaching strategy. Because this strategy needs a considerable amount of practice time and a high level of teaching and learning ability, both of which were in short supply, the researcher found it difficult to implement. Therefore, further studies need to be done concerning this teaching strategy.

5.2 Language focus in task preparation

After the teaching of the language focuses, tasks need to be carried out toward the end of each class, putting the newly-learned language to real use, as well as examining the learning outcomes of the lesson. Before the tasks formally began, the language elements contained in the tasks were usually highlighted by the teacher, and instructions and rules explained and made clear so students could be certain about what sentences they were going to use, and how they were going to use them. The researcher divided this portion into two parts: highlighting language focus, and the clarification of instructions. Data were extracted from the researcher’s lesson plans and self-reflection journals.

5.2.1 Language focus before task

After the teaching process of new words, sentences and dialogues, the classes the researcher conducted come to the last stage – the implementation of task. Before the task officially launched, there are preparation works needs to be done at the first place. Skehan’s cited in his book that one major type of pre-task activity would be to ease the processing load that learners will encounter when actually performing a task, releasing more attention for the actual language that is used (Van Patten 1994, cited in Skehan 1996, p 54), which shows the necessity of the pre-task phase. In this part, evidence emerged in the researcher’s teaching are given to highlight this necessity and its process of perfection.

At the beginning period of her teaching practice, the researcher lacked experience
and was unfamiliar with Australian students. As mentioned in Chapter four, in the second lesson, she taught students how to say hello and to greet in Chinese. Then she introduced three Chinese celebrities, Bruce Lee, Yao Ming, and Jay Chou. She then simply asked students to imagine they were one of the characters and to role-play, using the sentences they used that day. Below is the excerpt from her self-reflection journal:

Amber and Joseph volunteered to do the role-play. Amber wanted to be Lǐ Xiāolóng (Bruce Lee) and Joseph wanted to be Yáo Míng. Then I said now you can imagine you are at the party and do the role-play. I thought everything was clear, because they just learned the new dialogue of greeting. But unexpectedly, Amber asked me “So Miss, what do we say now?” I said, say Hi to each other first. They then said Hi to each other. After that, they both looked at me and I can read from their eyes that they were looking for my help. So I said, “Remember the conversation we learned today? Greet with your new friend.” They then realised and finished the conversation. At the end, I reminded them that they needed to say zàijiàn (bye-bye) to each other to show their politeness. (The teacher researcher’s reflection journal, Term 1, 2014)

This was the second lesson the researcher conducted. She asked students to do role-play after they learned new dialogue. However, she did not realise that this activity was new to students, and may not have been clear as to what to say and do. It seems that students just needed to use the conversation of greetings they learned from this lesson, but the researcher was expecting them to combine the conversation with the language learned in the previous lesson, for instance, say hi and goodbye. Because students just learned those new language points, they were yet to be familiar with these new language points. In the later classes especially, the language points students acquired and the language to be used in a task would become increasingly complicated. Given that the language focuses were not clarified ahead of the tasks, students were confused, even reluctant to undertake the tasks. She realised that highlighting and clarification of the language focuses would be helpful in the reviewing of the new knowledge and summarising the new language points. Therefore, the researcher adapted a form from Nunan (2004), and made forms of the language focuses of each task before each lesson. For instance, the researcher rethought her lesson and prepared the form below:
Table 5-1 Preparation of language focuses clarification of task ‘greeting party’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tasks</th>
<th>Functions</th>
<th>Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| You are at the party. Make some new friends at the party by introducing yourself to them, and greet with other people in the party. | Socialising: exchanging personal information and greeting | • Hello  
• My name is …  
• How are you?  
• I am good, thanks.  
• And you?  
• Bye-bye |

There are three columns in this table. The first one is tasks, which is the brief introduction of the content of the tasks. The second column, functions, is the researcher’s purpose of designing, and the goals she wants students to reach and the third column is language, in which she lists all the possible words that are going to be used in the task. This table gives the researcher a clear view of what she should do and say during the task-conduction session. The researcher could follow the content of this table, and review all the language points with students before the task, and researcher tried this method again in the later classes.

As previously stated, tasks would become increasingly complicated and difficult over time. Therefore, the clarification of the words becomes more significant in the later classes, and the table becomes more necessary to the researcher. For example, in table 5-2, the researcher intended to conduct a series of two tasks in two lessons respectively, and created the form ahead of the two lessons being conducted. The form is below:
Table 5-2 Preparation of language focuses clarification of task ‘timetable exchange’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tasks</th>
<th>Functions</th>
<th>Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Write down a timetable of your daily life. Introduce your day to your partner. | Self-illustration: be able to say do different things at different time. | • Hello  
• Time  
• Get up, have breakfast, go to school, have lunch, finish school, have dinner, go to bed  
• E.g.: I get up at 7 o’clock. |
| Exchange the timetable with your partner. Exchange information with him/her by asking him/her questions about what time he/she does something. Check if they have the same answers on the paper. Don’t forget to be polite and greet with them before you start your questions. | Socialising: be familiar with the expression of time and get to know the questions of “what time do you do something?” | • Hello  
• greetings  
• Time  
• Get up, have breakfast, go to school, have lunch, finish school, have dinner, go to bed  
• E.g.: What time do you get up?  
• E.g.: I get up at 7 o’clock. |

As can be seen from table 5-2, task, function and language are listed here, which can give the teacher a direct view of what she should do. In this task, students are required to ask questions about time and introduce the timetable by using the specific sentence. Moreover, in order to combine all the learned language together, the teacher can require students to greet with each other before they launch the conversation. Therefore, if the researcher start the task without listing all the language focuses out, students would be lost and do not know what to say. The teacher could follow the content of the table and go through all the language points with students.

In conclusion, with the progress of this action research, the researcher found the necessity of highlighting the language focus that is featured in the tasks. It is necessary to do this because not only the new-learnt language is used in the task, but in most of the researcher’s lessons, language learned from the former classes is involved. Therefore, the teacher researcher believed that going through all the language points to be employed in the tasks was necessary and helpful to the success of the tasks.
5.2.2 Teacher’s passion in introducing tasks

The table introduced in 5.2.1 offers a view of the content of the language to be used in the tasks, which gives the teacher a clearer view of the language focuses to be clarified in this stage. However, the teacher still has to organise the way of explaining the language focuses. The teacher needs to provide students with language that, being meaningful is understandable enough for students to successfully complete the task (Krashen, 1985). At beginning of the research, the researcher wrote down all the possible language points on the board, and reviewed them with the students. The following reflection journal recorded one of the lessons at an early stage of her teaching.

After having learned all the things I planned for today’s lesson, I told students that we are going to do the role-play. I explained the scene first and then said to them that before we do the task, let us go through all the sentences we will use first. Then I referred to the table I made before the class, which is shown as below:

Table 5-3 Preparation of language focuses clarification of task ‘interview’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tasks</th>
<th>Functions</th>
<th>Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| One student will be Bruce Lee, and now he is going to the auction of a new character; another student will be the interviewer. The interviewer should ask as many as questions as you can to get information from Bruce Lee. | Socialising: exchanging personal information and greeting | • Hello  
• The “How are you?” conversation  
• What is your name?  
• My name is …  
• How old are you?  
• I am XX years old.  
• When is your birthday?  
• My birthday is……  
• Thank you  
• You are welcome  
• Bye-bye |

I said, first, you are going to say hello and greet with each other, just like what we did before. I wrote down the words on the board in pinyin. “After that you can ask the questions we learned in these two lessons. For example, you can ask Li Xiaolong about his name, his age, and his birthday.” I said. Similarly, I wrote the related sentences down on the board. “Last thing you can do is to say thank you and say bye-bye to each other”. I said at last. (The teacher researcher’s reflection journal, Term 2, 2014)
In this excerpt, we can see that the teacher made a list of the words and sentences that students could use in the task, and write on the board one after another. There was limited interaction with the students. She reflected upon this part of her lesson in her journal:

After I wrote all the words and sentences on the board, I asked them whether they understood everything I wrote. Students nodded their head. The classroom was so quiet that I could hear the needle dropping on the ground. It seemed that students were not interested in doing the task. Some were leaning their heads on their arms, and I saw two students were really sleepy with their eyes about to close. (The teacher researcher’s reflection journal, Term 2, 2014)

It can be concluded from the researcher’s conversation with the students that they began to feel tired and bored after a day’s classes. It is not difficult to understand that students would feel tired after 45 to 50 minutes’ intense learning. However, when the researcher listed all the language to be used in the role-play, she did not interact with them and instead mechanically wrote the sentences referring to her prewritten form, and left the students bored and without passion. Although the language points were made clear, students did not think through these words and sentences using their own minds. This led to a scene where students recited the sentences while doing the task, rather than being motivated to act by the knowledge in their own minds. According to the students’ reaction, the researcher tried to make changes, which could make students, think of all the language points by themselves. An example is given below about another lesson, and the form of the language focuses is shown first to illustrate the background information.
### Table 5-4 Preparation of language focuses clarification of task ‘vendor shop’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tasks</th>
<th>Functions</th>
<th>Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One of the students is going to be a vendor with all the goods</td>
<td>Exchanging goods and services: asking about and stating prices</td>
<td>• Hello</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>displaying in front of you. Sell the items to the customers, who</td>
<td></td>
<td>• The “How are you?” conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>are some of your classes. Ask for and tell the prices, and try to</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Names of the certain goods: hamburger, coke, bread, chips, chocolate, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bargain with each other.</td>
<td></td>
<td>• E.g.: How much is the Timtam?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• E.g.: It is ¥ 3.50.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Can I get a cheaper price?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• All right/ Sorry, I can’t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Thank you/ No worries</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘Ok, now, year 7, tell me all the Chinese sentences you may say if you are the customer.’ I said. ‘Hànbǎobāo duōshao qián, Miss. (Meaning how much is the hamburger.)’. Braden said the sentence immediately. ‘Come on, Braden, you just care about the hamburgers. Tell me, what else can you buy from my Chinese store?’ The whole class laughed. ‘Miss, I know qiǎokèlì(chocolate), kělè (coke)’, Braden said. ‘Good boy. Who else, tell me what else can we say?’ I then said. ‘Greeting, Miss’, Max yelled with his voice dragging very long behind. ‘I know you guys all know this very well, guess I don’t have to write this on the board’, I said. ‘Ok now, what about the vendor, what should the vendor say? Let’s see who can tell me the most sentences. Hands up! …… Ok, Steve, give it a go.’ ‘Vendor also has to greet, and say the price as well, and probably some words if the customer bargains’. ‘Excellent, guess you are going to be a good shopkeeper.’ I said after Steve. I did not write all the sentences on the board, but a few English words highlighting the contents. (The teacher researcher’s reflection journal, Term 2, 2014)

This was a lesson the researcher conducted at the end of cycle 2. By that time, she became familiar with her students, which enabled her to instruct students naturally and to control the lesson at a better pace. As can be seen from the excerpt, the task of this lesson was to open a Chinese store, and for students to practice the sentences related to the exchanging of goods, as well as a simple way of bargaining in Chinese. During the process of reviewing and clarifying the words and sentences, the teacher did not give students the language points directly, but asked them to imagine the scene and create the dialogue using the language knowledge they had learned. During the process, the teacher was more like a guide who gave students clues and encouragement. All the sentences to be used in the role-play were totally covered and highlighted through students’ own efforts. Students became excited and felt proud of
themselves. The teacher did not write down all the language points as she did before, but simply a few simple tips. In this way the words and sentence structures that stored in the students’ memory could be mobilized before they performed the task.

After three-cycles of implementation, it can be concluded that the language highlighting session before each task plays a vital role in the task-based language teaching process and affects how well the task will progress. Not only can it enable students to activate their knowledge, but it also gives them a direct insight on what they are going to say during the tasks. The way of highlighting the language focuses could be improved. In future teaching, various ways of reviewing words could be explored to replace the mechanical repetition. Also the teacher could try speedy competition to stimulate students to speak the words quickly and loudly, using comments like ‘Come on!’, ‘Sorry, I forgot how to say it, who can help me?’, ‘Hurry up, I really need your help’, ‘What is another word?’ Such comments can be used to encourage students to think actively and independently. This can stimulate students’ active thinking and performing

5.2.3 Teacher’s instruction language in introducing tasks

In the last part, the researcher illustrated the language focuses clarification, through which students could review what they learned, and form a clear picture of what language points they were going to use in the tasks. After the language focus clarification, an explanation of the task rules was given by the teacher. This part was to make all the instructions related to the tasks clear and understandable. Given that the researcher was a beginning Chinese teacher whose mother language is Chinese, she had to not only ensure the tasks are well designed and prepared before class, but also to constantly improve her English, especially her instructions to the students. During these three cycles, the researcher was always trying to make progress with her classroom language. The following part provides the evidence from her reflective journals, showing her progress in formulating task instructions.

At the beginning of the researcher’s teaching, she was not sufficiently familiar with the way of conducting a proper language lesson, or the manner of dealing with
Australian students. Limited fluency in English hindered her ability to use ideal classroom language, including giving correct instructions, which is essential to the success of the task. The researcher was therefore obliged to work continuously to improve her classroom language and skills throughout her three cycles of teaching. Here is an example of one of the lessons at a very early stage of the researcher’s teaching:

I said to the class that we had finished all the words and sentences we should learn, and now I want you to finish a task. The students were quite curious, and asked me what the task is. I think it is probably because this was the first task I wanted them to do. Then I said that ‘Here are two pictures of two Chinese people, Yao Ming and Bruce Lee, and their Chinese names are Yáo Míng and Lǐ Xiǎolóng. Today, I want some of you to be these two famous Chinese people and then you two meet on a party. Use the words and sentences we used and do the role-play’. To be honest, I did not get much response from the students. They were all looking at my face or the board, as if they were still processing what I said. Amber and Joseph volunteered to do the role-play. (The teacher researcher’s reflection journal, Term 1, 2014)

In this lesson, the teacher did give students an illustration of what they were going to do in the task but the students did not become active after her introduction. The students finished the task by the end of the lesson, but the classroom atmosphere was ‘cold’ throughout. In the researcher’s original plan, role-play was supposed to be a motivating classroom activity as the students had an opportunity to act as Chinese celebrities. The real situation was worse than expected. The reason was because she did not interact with the students during the process, and also because she explained the rules as though reciting from a book. The researcher reflected the reasons why she failed after each lesson, and made changes accordingly. Evidence shows that after a term’s improvement, progress can be noticed in the later classes. Below is an example from the cycle two.

‘Ok, now, guys, your show time’, I said. Some of the students asked me what they were going to do this time. I said today we are going to hold an auction in our class. I raised my voice, and tried to speak in a mysterious tone. Students felt very curious and excited, they strove to ask me questions. I said ‘hey, guys, calm down, listen to me first’. Students became quiet after a while, and a few of them said sorry to me. I then said ‘this auction is different from the other auctions. Now I want a volunteer to be the host ….. (Students handed up). OK, Max, you are
the fastest, come up here’. Max was happy and he ran to me with my permission. Good, now you stand here, and put these items in front of the desk…… (Max did what I said), year 7, you see Max possesses all this stuff here, he will auction all these things, but instead of selling the goods by reaching the highest price, he will sell the goods when you guess the right price at the back. And Max, your job is to tell them the items you are going to sell, and tap the table when someone guesses the right price. Now, am I clear? Hands up if you have any questions’. ‘Miss, where is the money, how can we buy?’ Andrew asked. I said I forgot, and gave out Chinese play money I printed. Then Emma asked me do they have to say the price in Chinese, I said ‘yes, what class you think you are at?’ Students laughed. At last, I gave Max a cap to make him look different, and said to the class ‘now, let’s start, remember to speak Chinese, say the price loud, and let’s see who can get the most items’. Students were excited and some of them even stood up. (The teacher researcher’s reflection journal, Term 2, 2014)

As can be seen from this part of the researcher’s reflective journal, she interacted much more with the students when explaining the task. She tried to attract their attention and make them curious. Students were more focused on and interested in the task at hand. Then the researcher invited one of the students to be part of the introduction, in order to make it easier for the students to imagine and understand the rules, which makes the process more than a simple explanation, but an activity or game that they will be a part of. The teacher did not forget to encourage the students to ask her questions, not only as a way of interacting with them and getting them motivated, but also a way to make sure they understood the rules. From this example, better effects can be noticed after more than one term’s teaching implementation.

The teacher’s manner of introducing a task directly influences students’ attitudes toward the tasks. The researcher noticed in her first few lessons that students felt unattracted and bored if the teacher introduced the task using uninspired language and tone, as she was not confident enough at that period of time. Conversely, if the teacher passionately or excitedly introduced the task, as can be noticed from the later stage of this study, the students would be convinced that the task would be full of fun. Meanwhile, the teacher’s interaction with students while introducing the task is helpful for classroom engagement and students’ understanding of the rules for completing tasks. Beyond these two strategies, the researcher found other ways of introducing the task in order to attract the student’s attention and motivate them. She reflected on one of her lessons in her journals. In order to make it clearer, table 5-5 is
given.

Table 5-5 Preparation of language focuses clarification of task ‘travelling details’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tasks</th>
<th>Functions</th>
<th>Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Role-play. A kid is going on a vacation. Dad and mom are asking him/her about the details of the journey. | Socialising: exchanging information about where and when. | • Where are you going?  
• When are you leaving?  
• When is the flight?  
• When will you be back?  
• Take care.  
• Thanks. |

Before I introduced today’s task, I told the students that I needed a dad and a mom. They were curious and kept asking me what they were going to do. I did not tell them on purpose, and asked them to be patient. Shantae and Lachlan volunteered. Students laughed a lot because they looked really mismatched. ‘Now’, I said, ‘Shantae and Lachlan, I want you to adopt a kid from our class’. The students burst into laughter. The two students had no idea what I was trying to do, but they did as I asked, and named Azeal to be the kid. Finally, I told them that Azeal was going on a vacation, and Shantae and Lachlan, were going to be two very caring parents who asked their son as many questions as possible to get information about the vacation. The laughter never stopped, and one of the students told me that he thinks it’s funny even imagining such a combination of family members. At last, I told them that we will do the task three times, and I will give out two awards: Best parent, and Best Kid. Students couldn't wait to start and most of them raised their hands and fought to get the chance. I asked them if they understand everything about the task, and started the role-play afterwards. (The teacher researcher’s reflection journal, Term 3, 2014)

In the example above, the teacher invited students to be a part of the introduction, and the students felt that they were part of this session. This not only attracted their attention, but also made this session more interesting. In order to make the students more focused, the teacher deliberately created a mysterious atmosphere and held the actual content of the task until the end. Students had no choice but to listen carefully to learn what their task was. Also, in this example, the researcher explained to the students before head that there will be a competition during the task, knowing this fact really aroused students’ interests. Evidence shows that by introducing a competition to students during task performance is helpful to attract students’
attention, and gave them incentives to better prepare the tasks.

In summary, from the three-cycle teaching practice that the different ways of explaining tasks would cause different effects among the students, determining their appeal, and how well they can understand the tasks, how attractive the tasks are to them, and how much difference it would make in helping students learn the new language through the tasks. After the three teaching cycles, the researcher has changed from an inexperienced Chinese teacher who spoke only passable English to one who could grasp the tone and appropriate pace to attract students’ attention during the introduction session. According to this researcher’s own experience, some important points for effective task introductions are proposed: first, introducing the task is not strictly teacher’s obligation. She can be the guide to explain the rules, but it is never wrong to let the students take part in the process and let them ask questions, rather than have them simply sit and watch the teachers’ one-person performance. Second, the teacher’s tone or manner of expression in introducing the tasks can result in different effects. A teacher should introduce the rules as if she is telling a story, and changing of her tone of voice will build a different atmosphere, and make the task an interesting game and not just another boring problem waiting to be resolved. Finally, introducing competition or awards prior to beginning the task will create incentive and a desire to win, increasing their level of engagement in the task. The introduction of a task may seem small and insignificant but by attaching importance to it the teacher can still use it to make difference.

5.3 Discussion

In this chapter, the researcher illustrates the pre-task phase of her teaching process. The two parts reported in this chapter are the strategies the researcher used when teaching language focuses, and the preparation part, during which language focuses are again highlighted, and instructions for the tasks are given to the students. The following section is a discussion on teaching strategies for Mandarin lessons and a discussion on how action research can help a teacher researcher to improve teaching, a discussion also includes the process of language focus clarification and the introduction session before the tasks launched.
Firstly, Willis (2000) says the framework of the Task-based Language Teaching approach should be divided into three phases: Pre-task Phase, Task Cycle, and Language Focus. This framework laid a solid foundation for the researcher’s teaching practice in this study. Although this framework offers a good example of how the TBLT approach should be deployed, the researcher nonetheless found that it was not totally applicable in the real situation. In Willis’s proposal of TBLT framework, the class is started with the pre-task phase, which excludes the language teaching process. However, in this study, as Mandarin is the target language, which shares few similarities with English, students were not able to do the task without the language points being taught at the first place. Therefore, before the task is implemented, all new words or knowledge contained in the task were explained to the class, so that students would clearly understand the goal of the task, and also have a straightforward view of what words and knowledge should be used when completing the task. The researcher argues that the process of teaching language focuses targeting at the tasks should all be considered part of the pre-task phase, since it is the decisive point of the success of task in Mandarin classes.

Secondly, three teaching strategies were involved when the teacher researcher taught language points regarding different stages of teaching progress. As a result of her three-cycles of teaching, she found that in the beginning phases, the ‘duck-feeding’ teaching style was the most effective approach. The researcher argues that although ‘duck-feeding’ is considered to be boring and minimally effective, how teachers ‘feed the ducks’ can still make a huge difference. Such things as mnemonic devices and songs can help the teachers ‘feed the ducks’. After the students form a basic understanding of the new language, and accumulate some vocabulary and sentences, deduction can be introduced for teaching the language. Through this process, students can deduce the new language based on former lessons or their own knowledge, and review their learned knowledge at the same time. Students would find it fun and build confidence in learning the new language. In the later stage of learning, in this case cycle 3, DIY study is suitable for the teacher to adopt to explore a new dimension of teaching and learning. In using this strategy, the teacher’s role is less obvious, and the students begin to take greater control of their learning. Less and less support is provided while students gain the ability to derive more knowledge.
based on what they already know. However, being limited to three terms only, the researcher found it difficult to fully develop the potential benefits of DIY study during this period. This teaching strategy is still to be recommended for those students learning the language over a long period of time. The researcher was a beginning Chinese teacher when she started cycle one, yet by conducting action research, she was able to develop her own teaching strategies in a real-life situation with students. All three of her teaching strategies are inseparable and complementary. The experience she gained from her teaching became the foundation for her later classes. Although the strategies the researcher tried here were by no means exhaustive, they served to demonstrate strategies that can benefit teacher and students in teaching and learning a new language.

Lastly, language focuses highlights and task instruction clarification play a significant role in the Task Based Language Teaching approach. As Hismanoglu (2011) states that some training for pre-task is prominent for language learners. These training activities may include topic introduction, specifying task instructions, assisting students in learning or recalling beneficial words and phrases to make the task accomplishment easy, and offering partial display of task process. The researcher has presented examples extracted from her reflective journals indicating the results of the training activities in different ways. The researcher was inexperienced at the very beginning, and with a growing familiarity with Australian students and increased awareness of classroom management, progress was evident across the three cycles. The conclusion can be drawn that if the teacher explains the language focus in a detailed manner, and avoiding stiffness and undue repetition, students would find it more appealing and easier to remember. Similarly, teachers’ different attitudes in explaining task instructions can affect students’ degrees of preference for the tasks. If task instructions are explained in the context of a game, for example, rather than as a must-do task, the students would be more willing to engage. Furthermore, instead of informing students all the task rules by telling them, teachers should let the students get involved in this session, because the students would feel as one part of this and would be engaged better.
In summary, in this chapter the researcher firstly emphasised the necessity of considering the teaching process as a part of the pre-task preparation phase due to the uniqueness of Mandarin. Three teaching strategies are explored according to the students’ learning scenarios. They are adjusted along the teaching process. This chapter gives an overview of the pre-task preparation stage of the TBLT approach used in the researcher’s classes, and how the preparation was improved throughout the three-cycle action research.
Chapter 6 Task performance and Assessment

The previous chapter explored the pre-task stage of the Task Based Language Teaching approach, which includes the teaching process of the language focus, as well as an explanation of the task rules before the task formally began. This chapter focuses on the task cycle and post-task session in class, and the assessment methods applied to evaluate the teaching effects. The task cycle includes students’ planning stage and the performance stage. The post-task session, also known as the Language Focus session, highlighted specific language features from the texts or transcripts used earlier in the task cycle (Willis, 2000, p. 101). The assessment methods played a significant role in evaluating the effect of the tasks, thus facilitating improvements in task design for later lessons.

The third strand of data, includes students’ task-based performance, worksheets and exam papers, is given in this chapter. Students’ task-based performance, reflected by the researcher’s reflection journals, transcripts of students focus groups and classroom teachers’ interviews, shows the students’ improvement of learning effects with the progress of this action research. Worksheets and exam papers are shown to give evidence to the researcher’s exploration of the reinforcement of choosing more suitable post-task activities and assessment, with the evidence of the students’ feedbacks and researcher’s self-reflection journal.

6.1 Task Cycle

As stated in Chapter 5, in the pre-task phase, the teacher and the students formed an understanding of the language to be used in the task, as well as the rules for the different tasks. This is the precondition of the execution of the tasks, namely, that students know what they are going to say and do after the pre-task phase. The task cycle stage can be seen as the main body of the task, during which the students prepare the task, and later perform it. According to Willis’ (2000) framework of TBLT, there are three sessions in the task cycle: task, planning, and report. However, in this study, the researcher adapted the framework to real classes in the Western Sydney region, and changed it according to the real situation.
In this part, evidence from the researcher’s reflection journal, students’ focus group, and the classroom teachers’ interview are given to show the researcher’s improvements on handling the task cycle pace, examples of different cycles are provided and analysed. Worksheets and exam papers are presented as the evidence of post-task phase and task assessment.

6.1.1 Planning stage: teacher and students’ role

The planning stage is considered to be necessary after the pre-task phase and before the performing stage. Different from all the other stages elaborated in chapter 4 and 5, in the planning stage, the students become the main body, who dominate the whole process. In this part, teacher’s role as the assistant, and student’s role as the main body are illustrated through data.

6.1.1.1 The teacher as the assistant

In this study, the tasks were usually conducted after the teaching of the language focus. The researcher usually left four to six minutes for the students to prepare the task. As previously mentioned, before the planning session, the language to be used in the task and the task rules were clearly explained by the teacher. In the planning stage therefore, all that was left for the students to do was recognise the language they acquired, and design their own words for use in the task.

The planning stage is the time for the students to think what they are going to do in the task. They are central during this stage, and the teacher is more like an assistant. Willis (2000) suggests that the teacher needs to have the self-control and courage to stand back and let the learners get on with the task on their own, and resist the temptation to go round and help. However, it is nonetheless difficult for beginning teachers to control themselves and step back, and the researcher, though fully aware of this, she still did not know in the beginning how much or how little assistance was appropriate.

In the beginning, she wanted to assist the students in case they did not know how to
prepare the task. She tended to walk around while the students were preparing the tasks, but students would often ask questions when they saw the teacher standing next to them. The questions fell into three categories. Representative examples appear below in the table for the researcher’s reflective journal:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question types</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pronunciation</td>
<td>• Miss, how do you say Jay Chou’s name? (12/02/2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Miss, why is Q pronounced chee in Chinese? (12/02/2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How do you pronounce this again? (19/02/2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Miss, how do you say and? (19/03/2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words or sentences</td>
<td>• Miss, what’s the question for age? (26/02/2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Miss, is 月 month or day? (19/03/2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Miss, how do you say half past one in Chinese? (16/04/2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasks rules</td>
<td>• What do we do now? (12/02/2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Who is going to present, Miss? (26/02/2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Miss, please don’t ask me to perform. (26/03/2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Are we going to guess the price? (18/06/2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Can I have a go? (18/06/2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What do you mean by auction, are we bidding or not? (18/06/2014)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most of these questions in the above form could be solved by students themselves. For instance, in the *pronunciation* category, the students were asking questions simply about the pronunciations of the different words. All these words had been taught during the class, and reviewed before the planning stage, but the students still asked these questions because they were not fully focused on their tasks, and the teacher’s presence and accessibility made students rely on her more for help. Therefore, after the first few lessons, the researcher noticed the side effects of her walking around, she decided not to walk among the students too often so that they could be more focused.

The data of the three-cycle teaching implementation reveals that, the teacher, acting as an assistant at this stage, should exercise good judgment as to what questions must be answered and what support must be given. She concludes from the evidence that certain types of questions might be raised by the students after their due consideration:
1. Asking how to say words they have not learnt yet, but consider necessary for use in the tasks.

2. Asking about the cultural background behind the language, especially when it is different from their own culture. E.g. the students asked the researcher whether they could bargain at any place in China.

3. Asking if they can put something into the task that is not required by the task rules. E.g. In one of the tasks, the researcher made some handcrafted goods for the students to sell with the fake Chinese money. One of the students asked the researcher if she could sell her own belongings, such as her pen, and her schoolbags.

For the first type of the question, the researcher would choose to answer some of them, depending on what sentences they asked for. For example, there were often students asking how to say the word but, please or therefore in Mandarin during the planning stage. These words are quite often used when Australian people are talking, therefore, the researcher chose to tell the students the answers. However, some of the students asked about nouns that were either too difficult for them to grasp, or had little or no relationship with the tasks, and the researcher chose not to tell them. It is the teacher’s responsibility to judge what spare words can be taught. If the teacher tells the students all the words they want to know, it will potentially confuse them.

The researcher actually encouraged the second kind of the question. She was a beginning Chinese teacher who had been in Australia for a year when the research was conducted There are many cultural differences between China and Australia not known to the researcher. The raising of such questions may reflect that students had noticed cultural differences behind the language, and they were thinking seriously during their preparation time. It might also be that if one student had a question about culture, given that they had all been growing up in Australia, it may be a question for all of them. Therefore, this kind of question should be explained to the whole class, instead of answering only the one who asked the question.

Questions also encouraged by the researcher are those of the third type. Such questions can be closely related to the tasks, an indication that students are trying to inject creativity into their planning for the performance of the tasks. The researcher
proposes that as long as requests of this type are related to the tasks, and do not involve an excessive number of new words or phrases, the students should be allowed to use their imaginations and creativity.

In summary, the data reveals that during the planning stage, the students should drive the process while the teacher plays a supportive assisting role. “The teachers’ roles have been altered from instructor to establishers of study setting, assistants, guides, and advocates of the learning activities (Hismanoglu, 2011, p.51)” If the teacher interferes too much during the planning stage, the students would rely too much on them and the language or the knowledge they acquired would not be actually grasped and digested. It is necessary for the teacher to steer clear of the students while they are preparing the tasks, in order to avoid distracting their attention and ask unnecessary questions. Moreover, the questions raised by the students should be answered selectively by the teacher. With the experience gained during her three-cycle teaching practice, the researcher has learned to exercise better judgment in deciding whether students are asking questions because they genuinely do not understand, and she has developed an improved sense of how to answer the students’ questions in an appropriate way.

6.1.1.2 The students as the centre

In the planning stage, the students are the central figures and drivers of this part of the process, since they are already clear about what to say and to do in the task, and the time needed to design the tasks belongs to them. In this part, the researcher offers evidence of the students’ behaviour during the planning stage, and how these behaviours can reflect the necessities of this session.

At the beginning of the Cycle 1, students were quite shy and seemed to be at a loss when the researcher asked them to perform the tasks, because they were not familiar with her teaching style, or with each other, particularly those in year 7. However, after a few lessons, they were more at ease. These changes were manifested in the students becoming more talkative during the classes, bolder in asking questions, and chatting with fellow classmates. At the onset of the planning stage, some of the
students would raise their hands and ask to change seats to become partners with their best friends, or with preferred classmates. The researcher usually allowed changes, hoping they would be better motivated when with their ideal partners, and most of the tasks required the students to cooperate with other in using their learned Chinese words and sentences to design their passages or dialogues. During the planning stage, the researcher could see students talking enthusiastically as they tried to mobilise their knowledge to design the tasks in order to impress the teacher and the classmates. Below is an excerpt from the researcher’s diary describing their behaviour during the planning stage. In order to give the readers a clear perspective, the content of the task is briefly introduced at the beginning.

(Today’s task is to ask the students to think of a schedule for their idols, and role-play with their partners. Students have to make up a reasonable schedule for their idols according to their different jobs. When they do the role-play, they have to ask for all the information.) After telling the rules, and the word review, students started to prepare their dialogues. Students really concentrated today. I think it is because the sentences we learned today were rather hard, and we learned a lot of new words. Max and Shantae were talking loudly. Max wanted to be Kobe Bryant, and Shantae wanted to be Justin Bieber. But Max disagreed with her because Shantae is a girl, and he thinks that she cannot act as a boy. Finally, I went to them and allowed Shantae to be Justin Bieber, and they finally calmed down. Students of other groups were also discussing fiercely. They were all thinking very carefully to imagine the lives of their idols and make a perfect schedule for them. Because there were a lot of new words, I can see them referring to their books all the time. And sometimes, if one student forgot the word, his/her partner would quickly help. Some of the students asked for the new Chinese, such as play basketball, practice singing, have a party, because they want to put these words into the dialogue. I answered them selectively. When I announced that time is up, I can feel that they still want to have more time. (The teacher researcher’s reflection journal, Term 2, 2014)
This excerpt described students’ behaviour during the planning session. Students were very focused in thinking and discussing with their partners. From the case of Max and Shantae, it can be concluded that the planning stage was like the grinding-in period as they were discussing, even quarrelling, with each other in order to work out a better performance. Students were reminding each other with the vocabulary, therefore, the researcher found the planning stage was also a time for them to help and cooperate with each other. Questions were also raised by the students for the teachers to answer as they planned the schedules. It is very natural for the students to come up with questions during the planning session; giving them these four to six minutes is a perfect time for them to brainstorm, and think of the things beyond the words the teacher taught. All in all, during the planning stage, there were some noticeable advantages, beginning with the students using the time to choose their partners, and have the grinding-in period so that they could figure out the best plan for their performance. Students could consolidate their new knowledge by discussing it with and helping each other, and finally, questions would pop up in their minds when they were thinking carefully during the planning session, as they were able to think of things they had not considered during the classes.

To sum up, students were the main body of the planning stage. They are not empty vessels to be filled by the teachers any more but torches to be lit via offering appropriate learning settings and tasks (Hismanoglu, 2011). They used this period to design, discuss, and practice the tasks. New language points were digested along with their preparation. These further proved the necessity of having a planning stage prior to beginning the tasks.

6.1.1.3 The necessary planning before the task performance

Willis (2000) argues that in the task cycle, the first part should be the Task. He says the students should do the task immediately following the pre-task stage. Therefore, there is no planning stage before the tasks begin, and students are required to perform the task directly after the instructions are given. This way, students can be triggered to be more creative when they are performing the tasks. However, Willis’ theory was based upon teaching students who spoke Germanic or Romance languages, which to
some extent share similar vocabularies and grammar with English. Below is a graph extracted from her book where she introduces the tasks for beginners:

**Figure 6-1 A Framework for Task-based Learning (Willis 2000, p. 116)**

![Graph showing a framework for task-based learning in languages like English, German, and Spanish]

It can be seen from this graph that the teacher is trying to teach German by using
comparisons between German, English and Spanish. Even if the learners cannot speak German or Spanish, it is still evident that these three languages share related forms of certain words, for instance, the word *hotel* in these three languages are *hotel*, *hotel*, *un hotel*. The similarities can be recognised by students, and quite likely memorised more easily. However, this is not the case in Chinese. First of all, Chinese characters in their written form can only be recognised after they were taught. Germanic and Romance languages all use alphabets as their written form, meaning the learner would at least feel a degree of familiarity when encountering the new language. There are barely any similarly familiar words or phrases in Chinese. Most of the Germanic languages and Romance languages share the same origin, such as Latin, and many words are adapted from other countries, such as France. They have similar spellings or pronunciations which make it much easier for students to recognise and memorise. However, Chinese originated in East Asia, and is unique and different compared to the languages of western countries. Learners of Chinese have no other way to learn but start from the beginning and proceed step by step under the guidance of a teacher. Even after the new Mandarin language points have been taught, students still need more time to digest the new knowledge, think over and organise it before going on to finish the task.

This study was conducted in the Western Sydney region, where nearly all the students grew up in Australia speaking English as their first language. The language points of Chinese they are taught in their classes are their only points of reference to be adopted in the tasks. The researcher encouraged the students to use their imaginations and creativity to mobilise as much knowledge as possible about Chinese, but the limitations of the vocabulary and Chinese knowledge hinder the students nonetheless. Also, the language points the students just acquired from the class are fresh and strange to them. Their planning time would serve not only for preparation to perform the task, but also for digesting their new knowledge, as well as the mobilisation of the knowledge learned before. The researcher found during her teaching over time that there was a necessity to leave a certain amount of preparation time for the students to digest the language points acquired from the classes, and then figure out the way to perform the tasks.
6.1.2 The task performance stage

The task performing is the most important stage of the task cycle, as it is when the students show what they have learnt from the class, and how they are going to use them. By this stage, the students have already finished the process of old language points accumulation - new language points acquaintance – task language points highlighting – task rules illustration – task planning, therefore, the task session is the time when the students combine the results of all these stages, and present them to the teacher and their classmates.

In this session, the teacher’s part of role is reduced. The teacher basically monitors the class during this period, naming the students, timing them, and giving help if necessary. The students are the central figures, and act out what they acquired from the classes in their group-designed tasks, to distinguish themselves from the other groups.

The students’ performance is the most important reference for the teacher researcher to adjust her lesson design and teaching strategy. It directly revealed the students’ learning effects and their interests to the task, thus gave researcher the most authentic feedbacks. According to the evidence from the researcher’s classroom observation and reflection journal, the students’ performance varies time to time. In the beginning stage (refer to chapter 4 and 5), the students’ were quite shy as they were new to the language and the tasks, therefore, their performance was somehow not as expected. Also, the researcher concluded from her reflection journals that the teacher’s ways of lesson designing and delivery were considerably influential to their performance.

According to the students’ performance, the researcher adjusted her teaching content and task design along with the study progress, her teaching strategies, as well as her ways of delivering the language highlights and task instruction. Therefore, in the later stage of this study, the students’ performances were growing better. Following is an excerpt from the researcher’s reflective journal describing the students’ performance in the task ‘vendor shop’:

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I gave Ronan the pink cap to distinguish from the other students. It looked so funny on him that everyone was laughing. Brody was the first one volunteered to be the customer. He went to the shop and said *Nutella duoshaoqian* (*How much is the Nutella?*) in Chinese. “Say how are you to me first, you idiot!”, says Ronan. “Ok, fine. Ni hao ma (*how are you*)”, Brody asked. “Wo hen hao, xiexie (*I am good, thanks*)”. They finished the greeting conversation, and started the conversation of shopping. At the end, Brody decided to buy Nutella, Shapes, and picnic. Accident happened in the middle because Brody had the problem of adding the price together while using the Chinese, and this made the rest of the class burst into laugh. At last, they had a really impressive show of bargaining in Chinese, and they engaged all the Chinese words they could use to bargain. There was so much fun during their conversation. Brody couldn’t help to say English for many times, and Ronan refused to talk to him only if he says Chinese. Finally, they made the first deal. Brody took the craft goods away as if he really bought something from the shop. After Ronan, a lot of students volunteered to be the shopkeeper or the customers. It was really a lot of fun. (The teacher researcher’s reflection journal, Term 3, 2014)

This evidence shows that the students were involved in this task as they were following the instruction, having fun with each other, and talking in Chinese willingly. Beyond that, the students’ were even supervising each other by asking their partner to stay in the content. In the later stage of the task cycles, as the researcher’s teaching skills were proved, students could better grasp the language points. The task was better designed with the experience gained over time and students’ feedbacks given now and then. “The teacher is in a unique position to assess how far the contribution of learners to tasks and further classroom-based studies would help develop the potential in task-based learning (Murphy, 2003, p.359)”. “The critical evaluation by learners of previously undertaken tasks provides valuable input for devising future tasks (Murphy, 2003, p.354)” Therefore, the students’ task performance was increasingly better with the progress of the task cycles. Reversely, their task performance gave the best reference for the researcher to improve herself.

There is a four-character word in Chinese says 相辅相成 (*xiāng fǔ xiāng chéng*), which means two things are inseparably interconnected, one is changed or proved because of the other one. This word best describes the relationship between the students’ performance and the researcher’s improvement of all different aspects. Students’ performance made contributions to the perfection of the researcher’s improvement, while the improvement decided the effects of the students’ performance.
6.2 The post-task stage – the expansion of the task performance

Post-task stage launched after the task has been carried out. Conclusions or analysis were made to highlight the language points again for the sake of consolidation, and moreover, to emphasise the weak points that appeared during the task performing stage. Beyond this, activities related to the language points are also a necessity to be done after the task, which Willis (2000) calls consciousness-raising activities. In this part, the researcher will give evidence about how she reviews the language points after the tasks, as well as the activities implemented afterwards.

6.2.1 The evaluation of language use in the performance

As stated above, tasks require students’ ability of mobilising and applying the words or sentences they learned from the class. Therefore, during the process of performing the task, both teacher and students can have a clear view of how well the students grasp the knowledge, and spot the weak points. The researcher usually spend a few minutes reviewing the language points and highlighting the weak points after the tasks finished, and this phase shares the similarities of the language focus clarification during the pre-task phase. However, differences can still be noticed that at this phase as the teacher has a better focus point, and knows what to emphasise. To take the following table as an example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tasks</th>
<th>Functions</th>
<th>Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| One student will be Bruce Lee, and now he is going to the auction of a new character; another student will be the interviewer. The interviewer should ask as many as questions as you can to get information from Bruce Lee. | Socialising: exchanging personal information and greeting | • Hello
• The “How are you?” conversation
• What is your name?
• My name is …
• How old are you?
• I am XX years old.
• When is your birthday?
• My birthday is……
• Thank you
• You are welcome
• Bye-bye |
The main language point of this lesson is to ask for people’s birthday. For all the sentences listed above, the *how are you* conversation and dialogue of asking for the names are already very familiar to the students since almost all the tasks they had done included these two dialogues. The dialogue of asking for age was learned the previous week, while birthdays were a fresh new topic. During the task performance, several students refer to their books when they try to ask the birthday, moreover, some students complain that the sentence is too long to speak. As the matter of fact, *nǐde shēngrì shì jǐyuèjǐhào (When is your birthday)* is the longest sentence they have learnt by that time. Therefore, the teacher specifically emphasised every component of this sentence, and asked students to make similar sentences. For example, after explaining and repeating several times, the researcher asked the students to make sentences like ‘my mum/ dad/ brother/ sister’s birthday is + a date’. By doing so, the sentences were repeated more in the students’ heads, and impressions were deepened again. Therefore, this example reveals that the reviewing of the language points is carried out on the basis of the language points tables used in the pre-task phase, as the tables cover most of the language points that would be involved in the tasks. However, the difference is that the researcher would not list all the language points, but the weak points revealed during the performance time.

In conclusion, the review of the contents involved in the tasks can ease the knowledge in students’ minds, and strengthen the impression after they have practiced. The weak points during the task performance can be analysed accordingly, thus making them better understood by the students.

6.2.2 ‘Adding to’ post-task activities

Within a full lesson’s learning, students were given a rich exposure to the language, and the completion of the task gives them opportunities to use the language by themselves. At the end of the lesson, activities that practice the words, phrases, patterns, and sentences involved in this lesson are used to consolidate the knowledge. In this study, different kinds of written activities were given to the students concerning the words, sentences and patterns. The following are several sample activities conducted in this research. Explanation and analysis are given after the
display of the worksheets.

6.2.2.1 The transformation of Bingo in post-task phase

Bingo is an effective and attractive game to be played when a set of new vocabulary words are involved in one lesson. For instance, one of the lessons is to teach students to speak which country they come from. Therefore, knowing different countries is the precondition. However, as about ten of the most commonly known countries were taught in one lesson, the researcher found that during the task the students were still finding it hard to respond quickly. Under this condition, the researcher decided to do three rounds of Bingo game after the task. Different from English Bingo, students were required to write down nine of the ten countries in pinyin and fit them into nine boxes. Then the teacher would say the English of three different countries, and whoever got the three words in a line would win the game. Below is the picture of one of the students’ work:

![Bingo samples](image)

The advantages of this game are that Bingo is very close to the game that students are familiar with, and at the same time, all the words can be reviewed through this game yet without becoming boring. Compared to repetition of the words to
strengthen the memory, this way is more fun and more acceptable to the students. Students even asked for one more round after the class had finished. As an activity, it is best aim at small improvements, recognising that language learning is an organic process (Willis, 2000, p.110). Activities that occurred in this stage should function as a consolidation of the new knowledge that students just acquired, given the extension to the next lesson, thus making small improvements. The game Bingo gives contribution to the consolidation of the new learnt words, especially when a series of words were taught intensively in one lesson.

6.2.2.2 Activities regarding the language points that follow rules

In the researcher’s teaching content, many of the topics contain different rules. For example, as numbers were taught for the first time, the topics of date and time were followed on the same basis. Numbers are the mediums between these topics. As rules can be found in these topics, it is easier for the learners to grasp the language points following these rules. Therefore, designing the activities targeting at the rules is rather beneficial to the consolidation of the knowledge. To list ‘telling the date’ as an example, the way of saying January 1\textsuperscript{st} in Chinese is yi yue yi hao, which literally means the first month and the first day. Therefore, as long as students remember the new words month and day, as well as numbers 1-31, they would be able to pronounce all the dates year round. Although the rule seems to be understood easily, when it came to the real task performance, the researcher found the students responded slowly when they were required to say the dates. Therefore, in order to make the students be more familiar with the Chinese order of saying dates, and also the new vocabulary, the researcher designed another activity as shown below:
Two students work in a pair as student A and student B, and each of them circles five important dates on the calendar, and introduces the five dates to his partner. The dates have to be spoken in Chinese, and the partner has to recognise the dates. This game does not ask the students to pronounce the dates just for the purpose of practice, but to combine the language with their own lives. Students were more familiar with the way of saying Chinese dates after practiced for several times.

Another example is when the students learned how to say the price in Chinese. The researcher found they still had to think for quite a while before they spoke out, for the reason that they had to remember three units as kuai (yuan), mao (10 cents), fen (cent), and combine them with numbers. The researcher found it necessary to have an activity to familiarize students with the Chinese way of saying prices after the task performance. Therefore, the researcher downloaded several pages of catalogues from Coles and Woolworth, and asked the students to find the things they would like to buy and state the price, just like the pictures showing below:
Because the items on the catalogues were very familiar to the students, therefore, they found it interesting and exciting to say the price of the Australian goods in Chinese. Still, this activity is only aiming at one specific language point when the researcher found it weak during students’ task performance.

The common ground for these topics is that they follow the rules of numbers, therefore, the students could follow the rules and practice without the teacher’s help. The more they practiced, the more familiar they were with the patterns. Hence the researcher proposed that the teachers should design activities that are attractive and interesting enough for the students to practice. These activities are for the practice of phrases or sentence patterns, as well as the consolidation of the specific new language points.

Above are the two examples of the activities that the researcher did with the students. These activities were mainly aimed at the important language points or the weak points that were spotted during the task. These activities are the repetition of those language points, yet in a fun and varied ways. Students would not feel disinterested while doing the task. Moreover, because activities are held after the tasks have been done, students would have a better understanding of the language points contained in
these activities, and would find their own focus points accordingly.

The post-task phase is where language points are re-highlighted following performance of the tasks. This phase is considered necessary as the emphasis is on the learners doing the noticing themselves, which helps develop learner autonomy, and they talk about the language they produced and then question or correct their language production (Swain&Lapkin, 2001).

6.3 The post-task assessment

Assessments are considered necessary to examine students’ learning outcomes, especially when it comes to language learning. During the language learning process, the students have to learn the vocabulary, phrases, sentences, and grammar, as well as how to speak them and put them to real use. Assessments can give students a direct view of what they have already grasped, and what they are still weak at. Teachers can also have a clear view of the learning outcomes, as well as the effectiveness of the tasks.

In this study, assessments are divided into two categories: small assessments and big assessments, and they all appeared with the form of paper exams. By conducting a paper assessment, the teacher can have a through view of the each student’s mastery of vocabulary, phrases, and sentence patterns and examine the effectiveness of the tasks. However, the emphasis of the small assessments and big assessments are different. In this chapter, the researcher gives examples of both language focused quiz and comprehensive paper assessment collected from the three cycles.

6.3.1 Language focused quiz

Language focused quiz were held frequently in this study. It can be viewed as both exercise and small tests for the students. Usually, after a new important language point has been taught, the researcher would design a little test, which would take about 15 minutes for the students to finish. The content of the tests is usually focused on the specific language points, and different forms of exercise are presented on the
test paper for the students to finish. The test is usually held at the beginning of the next lesson after the new language point has been taught. Following is the work sheet of the test when the students just learned numbers:

**Figure 6-5 Work sheet – number matching**

1. Match the characters to the *pinyin* and the Arabic numerals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>四</th>
<th>Shí</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>二</td>
<td>wǔ</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>五</td>
<td>qī</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>七</td>
<td>sān</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>九</td>
<td>bā</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>六</td>
<td>sì</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>十</td>
<td>yī</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>八</td>
<td>èr</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>一</td>
<td>jiǔ</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>三</td>
<td>lìù</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 6-6 Work sheet – Doing Math with characters**

3. Math Fun: Chinese Math

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{十七} + \text{七} &= \\
\text{三十二} + \text{五} &= \\
\text{十九} + \text{二十} &= \\
\text{二十七} + \text{四十五} &= \\
\text{三十六} + \text{十二} &= \\
\text{五十一} + \text{四十八} &= \\
\text{十七} + \text{六十一} &= 
\end{align*}
\]
The first exercise is considered to be the most basic test to examine the students’ learning outcomes. It requires them to match the three items together. This exercise is direct and effective since all ten numbers are contained in this exercise, and the teacher can have a general view of whether students have a clear idea about meaning, pronunciation and characters. This kind of exercise is useful when a lesson has taught many items, for instance, after the students learned nine different countries, the researcher designed a little test and asked them to match the country flag to Chinese names of each country. This exercise is not difficult for the students since it directly lists vocabulary the students learned in one class, but students can gain self-confidence through this exercise, and have a clear idea about their own learning outcomes.

Figure 6-5 is an extension of figure 6-6. The characters in the boxes are random numbers picked from 1-99. Students are required to recognise all the characters and give the right answer in Chinese characters. This exercise can examine whether students can tell the numbers through characters, and also their ability in writing the characters. The students have to translate characters into English, and then translate the result back to Chinese characters. Students found this game very interesting, as this is not a boring repetition of the words, but an exercise in which they can use their Chinese knowledge. Moreover, the fact that they can recognise all the Chinese characters from 1-99 is a big encouragement to them.

There is another example of the paper assessment that is very attractive to the students as can be seen from the pictures below.
Students are required to link all the numbers together by following the order of the numbers. Still, they have to recognise all the characters to finish the test. Because students are eager to know what the picture eventually looks like, they pay full attention to this exercise, and complete it as best as they can. This exercise merges the knowledge with students’ interests, while giving a comprehensive test about students’ learning outcomes.

As can be seen from the above three examples, the Language focused quiz conducted in this study are mostly the repetition of certain language points, but in different forms. The assessments are usually very simple and direct, and the purpose of this kind of paper assessment aims at the examination of the degree of mastery of the new language points, and tests the effectiveness of the tasks, namely, whether these tasks can help the students better grasp the knowledge. On the other hand, the assessments can also give students themselves an objective view of their own learning outcomes, thus giving them a hint of their weaknesses.
6.3.2 Comprehensive paper assessment

Comprehensive paper assessment is usually held after a long period of learning. The content of the task is not simply focused on one specific language point, but generate all the language points learned in this period of time, or even trace back to the beginning stage. The test usually takes 45 to 50 minutes, with different forms of exercise. The aim of the comprehensive paper assessments is to check students’ learning outcomes within a period of time, thus helping prepare for the next stage of learning.

As the limitation of the school rules, during this study, only two comprehensive paper assessments were held, which were conducted in cycle two and three. By that time, the students had already formed a basic understanding of Chinese, and their interest in Chinese was increasing. Both assessments took 50 minutes in total, and the test papers covered almost everything students had acquired from the class, not only the vocabulary or phrases, but also the daily conversations that had been taught and practiced in the classes, as well as the Chinese culture mentioned during the classes. In order to finish this test, students were required to grasp all the language points given in the Chinese classes, as well as the cultural backgrounds of different topics. This kind of assessment was the best reflection of the learning outcomes for that period, as well as an inspection of the achievements of the task-based language teaching approach.

There are a considerable number of English tests internationally and in China as well, such as IELTS, TOFEL, Test for English Majors (TEM-8), and CET (College English Test). Among these tests, the researcher found one similarity – they all follow the patterns of listening, reading, and writing. Therefore, the researcher designed her Chinese test with these three question types. The test paper is attached in the appendix 10.

Among the three types of questions, the listening part is the most special. During an interview with a classroom teacher, he said that he thinks the listening test is really important, but people can hardly find this kind of test in any Australian subjects nowadays (Interview with classroom teacher, 13/08/2014). Because the students did
not have too many chances to do a listening test, they found this part very interesting. The listening test requires students to be very focused in case of mishearing or failing to hear something. It also covers a considerable number of knowledge points, from words to dialogues, therefore, students’ learning standards can be reflected through the test. Beyond this, listening also plays an important role in one’s communication with others. Therefore, a listening test is essential in language learning.

To sum up, the comprehensive paper assessment is beneficial to the teacher’s examination of the students’ learning outcomes over a long period of time. Different from the language focused quiz, which aims at the repetition and consolidation of a certain language point, the comprehensive paper assessment usually includes all the knowledge, language and culture that has been involved over a long period of time, and aims at the students’ ability in utilising the knowledge in a broader context. Because of this, the comprehensive paper assessment enables teachers to evaluate how tasks can help students learn the language over a long period of time, thus examine the tasks’ contribution to the continuity of the language learning.

6.4 Discussion

In this chapter, the researcher elaborated upon two stages of the task-based language teaching approach, which are the task-cycle and post-task phase, as well as the way of task assessment. The task-cycle is the main body of TBLT, since students’ performance is presented during this stage, and the learning effects of the pre-task phase are reviewed in this stage. The post-task phase is the phase where language points are reviewed with a more accurate focus according to students’ performances during the tasks. Moreover, activities targeting the new language points are conducted as well.

The researcher valued Willis’s (2000) framework of TBLT as the foundation of this study at the very beginning. However, after three-cycles of teaching implementation and tasks practice, the researcher found this framework inapplicable when it comes to Chinese teaching. In this discussion, the researcher will discuss the reasons for this inapplicability, as well as the researcher’s findings of a better-adapted framework of
Chinese teaching.

Willis’s framework, which is recognised and adopted by most scholars as the model of the TBLT pedagogy, is targeting the languages of western countries. All these western languages share same vocabularies or grammar systems to some extent. Therefore, in his framework, students planned and performed before any instructions are given, since they can mobilise their knowledge by finding the similarities the two languages. However, the same strategy cannot be applied to Chinese learning. English is completely different from Chinese, which shares almost no similarities in terms of pronunciation, written forms, and so on. Therefore, if no instructions are given before the students perform the task, they would have no clue how to do it. Whether planning time should be given before students perform the task has been discussing for a long time, below is an excerpt from Yuan & Ellis’s (2003, p. 2) article:

Over the past decade or so, a number of studies have investigated the impact of planning on language production (eg. Crookes, 1989; Ellis, 1987; Foster and Skehan, 1996; Mehnert, 1998; Ortega, 1999; and Wendel, 1997). These studies, either explicitly or implicitly, claims that humans possess a limited processing capacity and, as a result, are not able to attend fully a limited processing capacity and, as a result, are not able to attend fully to all aspects of a task (Anderson, 1995; Newell and Simon, 1972). However, when L2 learners have the opportunity to plan the linguistic and propositional content of an upcoming task, they can compensate for these processing limitations and, as a result, the quality of their linguistic output is enhanced (Skehan, 1996).

The scholars in the excerpts agrees and investigates the importance of planning stage before tasks are performed, as they believe the learners need the time to process the language points targeting the tasks, as well the task contents. Giving the student more time to prepare is beneficial to their better performance. Also, Studies by Grookes (1989), Foster and Skehan (1996), and Wendel (1997), among others, report that pre-task planning results in increased fluency and greater complexity of language, as more time is given for the learners to digest and reorganize the language points they acquired. The researcher agrees with their proposal, and after three-term’s teaching implementation and practice, the researcher suggests that when applying TBLT to Chinese teaching, enough planning time needs to be given to students for them to
digest the newly acquired knowledge, and enable them to design the task. Assistance can still be given when necessary, but students still have the initiative in their own hands.

Another thing to be discussed here is the learning effects assessment, which here in this study, means paper test after tasks were implanted. Paper test is a very commonly used method to examine the students’ learning effects, which was also adopted in this study. In this study, two kinds of paper assessments were conducted, which aim at different aspects. The language focused quizzes were held every two to three classes, targeting at the new language points. The purpose of the tests is not only to examine the learning effects, but also to consolidate the important language focuses. The comprehensive paper assessments were held after a long period of learning, usually once a term. Different from the language focused quiz, they usually target at the mastery conditions of all the knowledge acquired in a long period of time, including vocabulary, grammar, culture, as well as students’ ability of utilising them. During three-cycle's practice, the researcher found the combination of both kinds of paper assessments achieved the best effects, as the teaching effects can be examined constantly and thoroughly over time.

In conclusion, this chapter covers the field practice of two important stages of the TBLT approach, including the task-cycle and the post-task phase. In this stage, the researcher discovered from her real teaching practice that the TBLT framework that suits most of the language teaching classes is not applicable when it comes to Mandarin teaching. Reasons and suggestions were given on the basis of the real teaching practice. The importance and advice about the post-task assessments were elaborated in this chapter through examples.
Chapter 7 Discussion, Implications and Recommendations

This thesis explored the application of the Task-based Language Teaching approach in Mandarin teaching, and the development of the beginning teacher-researcher’s knowledge in real-life task designing through action research within the context of the ROSETE program. Data was collected from the teacher-researcher’s actual classroom teaching, including her lesson plans, her reflections on her teaching, and the students’ and classroom teachers’ feedback collected through interviews. All the data were categorised through thematic and conceptual analysis and were presented as evidence through the Chapters 4 to 6.

Based on analysis of the data, the conclusions and discussions of the key findings concerning the research question, as well as the limitations and implications of this study are presented in this chapter.

7.1 Conclusions and discussion of findings

This researcher explored the application and adaptation of the Task-based Language Teaching approach in Mandarin classes in Australian high school classes. Based on the data analysis with engagement of the teacher-researcher’s prior knowledge and previous literature, key findings are crystallised focusing on the three contributory research questions in this study: 1) How to design tasks to contribute to the continuity of learning content between lessons? 2) How to develop effective teaching strategies adapt to the students’ learning level? 3) How to develop a suitable TBLT framework for Mandarin teaching and learning?

7.1.1 “学以致用” (xué yǐ zhì yòng): Learning for application

The Chinese idiom “学以致用” (xué yǐ zhì yòng) means that the learners are acquiring knowledge in order to apply it in their lives. This is an ideal outcome learners should expect from their learning, especially language learners. This idiom fits well with one of the most important standards of tasks in TBLT approach – the real-world connection. Through this research, it was found that designing lesson plans and task content by upholding the criteria of real-world connection arouses
students’ interest in learning, and increases their willingness to use the language in their real lives.

Real-world connection is taken into consideration by the teacher in selecting the topics she will teach, which includes related vocabularies, phrases and sentences. Most beginning teachers and textbooks start with basic greetings, followed by topics that are interesting or familiar to the students such as sports, body parts, names of stationaries, colours, and numbers, as such topics can easily attract the students’ attention. However, most of these topics cannot be practically applied in daily life. For instance, topics such as body parts, names of stationaries, or colours can hardly be brought up in daily conversations, especially for beginning learners who have limited contexts to utilise. Therefore, even if the students remember all the vocabularies or sentences, they still could not apply them in a normal conversation using the target language. It is the teacher’s responsibility to choose appropriate topics which can not only attract students’ attention, but will also allow them to apply the language points acquired from classes in real use. To enable the students to communicate in the target language, the researcher in this study chose topics based on the real life scenario of making friends, as this was considered the most probable event the beginning learner would encounter when starting to learn a new language. Subtopics were derived from this main topic, which included greetings, asking for names, ages, phone numbers, birthdays, time, nationalities, and timetables, as well as the most common social activity – shopping. Sentences related to these subtopics, such as “what is your name?”, “where do you come from?”, “what time do you have lunch?”, and “how much is it?” are very commonly utilised while making new friends or participating in daily social activities. Students found these conversations useful and easy to remember as they could practice them with their Chinese friends or people from Chinese shops after class. This suggests that selecting proper topics that have real-world connections can enable the students to apply the language in their lives after classes, and also give them incentives to utilise the language when chances are given.

The real-world connection was also taken into consideration when designing the tasks involving background scenes. These tasks play a vital role in task-based learning as they offer students the chance to practice the language they acquired.
They should have “some sort of relationship to comparable real-world activities” (Nunan, 2004, p.3). Such tasks can be seen as a rehearsal for the students before they apply the language in the real situations. In this study, role-play and self-illustration were the two major types of tasks implemented. Real-world connected scenes were set up as going to parties, making friends, exchanging personal information, attending interviews, going shopping, and travelling. These scenes were the most common social activities one could encounter in real life and provide authentic contexts for the students to practice the language. It was frequently noted that students engaged in these tasks as they saw the possibility of these scenarios occurring in real life, moreover, they would be more willing to try the language in the real situation as they had already practiced in class.

In summary, it is of great importance for the teachers to choose proper topics that enable the students to communicate in the target language, and to design real-life scenes as task backgrounds so that the students can have a rehearsal before they apply the language in the real situation. More importantly, this attracts students’ interests of learning, and gives them incentives to use the target language after class.

7.1.2 “聚沙成塔” (jǜ shā chéng tǎ): The sand accumulating to form a pagoda

Continuity was one of the most important standards upheld in this study. Continuity in designing lessons and tasks that were closely related and cumulative over time enabled the learners to mobilise the language points in a large, united context. This can be expressed in Chinese as “聚沙成塔” (jǜ shā chéng tǎ), which literally means to accumulate sand together in a certain order eventually forms a pagoda. It was found in this research that learning a new language was similar to this pagoda-building process, in which the learners began with only sand – simple words – and combined the grains in a certain order to build a larger cohesive structure.

Continuity was taken into account while designing teaching content. Lessons were not treated as isolated, with no connection to each other. Relations needed to be built between so all the language points could be united after a period of learning. In this study, the researcher used numbers as the medium across lessons, through which the
topics were related. For example, ages, phone numbers, dates, birthdays, times, and prices were all related to numbers. Each new topic made a further contribution to building the pagoda, rather than standing alone, as a new pile of sand. Consequently, it was found that embedding continuity into lesson planning enabled the students to build up connections between each lesson, namely, students build up their new knowledge on the basis of the previous classes, rather than start a new chapter every time a new topic is introduced, thus all the topics were linked into a larger context, which made it possible for the students to communicate in the target language and mobilise all the language points they had acquired.

Continuity should also be considered in arranging the teaching sequence. Languages are composed of words, phrases, sentences, and dialogues, and arranging the teaching sequence of these elements directly influences the teaching outcomes. Usually, the teaching of a new topic starts with the words, followed by phrases, sentences and then dialogues. The smaller language unit is always easier to grasp, and can be seen as the basis of the larger unit. In other words, the learning of the phrases is built upon the learning of the words within it. For instance, in this study, the learning of the word “January - December” and “1st – 31st” laid the foundation for the learning of “date”. Same cases applied to the learning of sentences and dialogues. As the learning of a dialogue was the accumulation of smaller units, the students found it easier to grasp, even if the dialogue was long. Moreover, it was beneficial for the teacher to find the similarities between the L1 and L2 languages to help arrange a more adaptive teaching sequence. As an example, it was found that after a period of teaching during this study, the students found it easier to learn answers in a dialogue, as the words in Mandarin shared the same word order as in English, and answers could similarly be used to assist in learning to the formulation of questions. To sum up, the learning of each dialogue is a continuous process that starts from the learning of word, and accumulates toward the achievement of the larger context.

Continuity in designing tasks also played a vital role in TBLT classes. Performing the tasks was a significant means for the students to practice newly acquired language points in class. Therefore, building connections between tasks enabled the students to mobilise the language points they had learnt not just in the lesson at hand, but as
much as they could recover from their existing, accumulated knowledge. For instance, in this study, the researcher used the friendships between Bruce Lee, Yao Ming, and Jay Chou as a plotline. It started with these three characters becoming friends at a party, and becoming better friends by knowing each other more and more and participating in different kinds of social activities together. Therefore, every time the students performed a new task, they were not only practicing the language points taught in that particular lesson, but had to combine previously learned sentences or dialogues. It was found that with the accumulation of different tasks, by the end of each term and of this study, the students had amassed a much larger body of language information that contained all the language points acquired in previous lessons. This suggests that designing a series of continuous tasks, using consistent characters or plots, enables learners to link their knowledge, thus increasing their versatility of language use.

To sum up, it is essential and advantageous to take continuity into account from the perspectives of the teaching content design, teaching sequence arrangement, and task design, which contributes to the first research question: how to design tasks to contribute to the continuity of learning content between lesson? The accumulated language points contribute to knowledge that is joined and linked to form a more unified body of knowledge – the pagoda.

7.1.3 “因时制宜” (yīn shí zhì yí): Right crop for right time

The Chinese idiom”因时制宜” (yīn shí zhì yí), means the right crop for the right time, which literally means one should act according to the circumstances. Through this research, the second research question “How to develop effective teaching strategies adaptable to the students’ learning level” is addressed throughout the progress. It is found that students reacted differently to the teacher’s ways of teaching at the different stages of learning, therefore, teaching strategies needed to be adjusted over time according to their reactions.

The ‘duck feeding’ style of teaching has been found to be the most effective teaching strategy in the beginning stages of language teaching. At this point, the students are
new to the language and have no idea about the new language. This teaching style was the most direct and useful approach in the beginning. It can be seen as the highest level of scaffolding, in which the teacher tells the students everything they need to know, and has them memorise. This approach may seem brutal and ineffective to some, however, students find this way to be direct and clear, as they know what they should remember without having to question much. However, in order to help the students more easily remember, different aids can be offered. In this study, the researcher used mnemonic devices and songs to help the students, and they turned out to be effective and fun. This suggests that although duck feeding gives the students a clear understanding of what they should do in the beginning stages of learning, the different ways in which the ducks are fed can still make a difference.

Deduction is usually used when solving mathematic problems, where a solution is found using limited clues. This has proved to be effective once the students have established a certain foundation in and basic understanding of the new language. Through the use of phonetic and grammar systems a certain amount of vocabulary is accumulated which makes it possible for learners to use what they already grasped to infer new knowledge. With assistance from the teacher the students are required to go beyond memorisation and develop an ability to deduce new knowledge using the existing knowledge, and thinking more independently.

DIY (Do It Yourself) study is used when the learners become reasonably familiar with and formed a comprehensive understanding of the language through the accumulation of vocabulary, phrases and sentences. By using DIY study, which is the lowest level of scaffolding, the teacher’s assistance consistently fades away, and responsibility is transferred from the teacher to the learner. By mobilising all the knowledge and the language patterns, students are able to learn what has not been taught, and with practice, form the ability to learn new language points on their own. DIY study is desirable so that students can learn how to learn.

In summary, teaching strategies should be changed time to time to adapt to the learners’ real learning conditions. Moreover, the purpose of change is to strengthen the learner’s ability to learn. In this study, the duck feeding style, deduction, and DIY study were used as the researcher found them to be useful. It is advantageous for the
teachers to explore their own teaching strategies according to their students’ learning conditions, and make adjustments over time, as suggested by the Chinese idiom “因时制宜” (yīn shí zhì yí) – the right crop for the right time.

7.1.4 “量体裁衣” (liàng tǐ cái yī): Cutting the dress according to one’s figure

The Chinese idiom”量体裁衣” (liàng tǐ cái yī) originally meant cut the dress to fit one’s figure, and was later adapted to describe where something changes according to the actual circumstances. At the beginning of this research, the teacher-researcher decided to use Willis’s (2000) framework (see Table 2.1) of TBLT as her model. This is one of the most recognisable TBLT frameworks, and has been widely used by scholars and teachers. However, it was found from the field experience of this research that Willis’s framework was not adaptable when it came to Mandarin teaching. The exploration for a framework that better fit Mandarin teaching and learning remained one of the most significant themes of this study, which contributes to the third research question of this study “How to develop a suitable TBLT framework for Mandarin teaching and learning?”.

Most literature regarding the TBLT approach was about teaching English as a second language to learners who spoke European languages, such as German, French, Spanish and Italian. These languages share certain similarities, as they all use the Roman alphabet for their written forms, and their vocabularies are mutual to some extent. However, Mandarin is very different as it uses logograms in its written form, and the pronunciations of the words rarely share similarities with English. Without the benefit of an alphabet, or knowledge of Chinese characters, Mandarin can only be understood and utilised after the pronunciation and meanings of new words have been taught. In Willis’s (2000) framework for example, he introduced tasks at the very beginning of each lesson, so learners could use their prior knowledge to derive new language points through the tasks. Moreover, in the task-cycle, there was no planning stage to be carried out before the learners undertook the tasks.

The researcher found this framework inapplicable after attempting it for a few weeks. Firstly, all the students were Australian native English speakers and none could
understand Mandarin words without them first being taught. Secondly, teaching by using tasks, such as role-plays and self-illustrations, was still new to the students, therefore, they needed time to prepare the tasks before they performed. Thirdly, as Mandarin was a completely new and strange language to the students, they needed time to digest the newly taught language points before they could perform better. On the basis of Willis’s (2011) framework and the researcher’s field experience, it was found that Table 7-1 could better adapt to Chinese teaching in the Australian context.

Table 7-1 Finding a TBLT Framework for Chinese Teaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-task Phase</th>
<th>Language teaching</th>
<th>Introduction to topic and task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language teaching</td>
<td>Teacher teaches language points that target the tasks. Make sure students understand and know how to use them.</td>
<td>Teacher explores the topic with the class, highlights useful words and phrases, and helps learners understand task instructions and prepare.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task Cycle</th>
<th>Planning</th>
<th>Task performance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students choose the partners, deciding the characters, design the words, and practice. Teacher can help answering questions and giving instructions.</td>
<td>Students do the task. Teacher monitors from a distance, encouraging all attempts at communication, not correcting.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language Focus</th>
<th>Language Consolidation</th>
<th>Practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher guides students recall the tasks performance, highlights the weak points, makes sure students understand the meaning and usage of the new language points.</td>
<td>Teacher conducting small activities targeting at the weak points reflected during task performance.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen from this framework, language teaching is listed as the first step of
the pre-task phase, as the language teacher equips the students with the language they are going to use in the tasks. In the task cycle, the planning stage is carried out prior to the task performance, which allows the students to choose their ideal partners, choose favorable characters, work out the best plots together, and get familiar with the language points needed in the tasks. In the language focus phase, the researcher replaces Analysis with Language Consolidation, as it was found that reinforcing the weak points immediately after the tasks were completed was very effective in helping to achieve a grasp of the new knowledge. The second step of the language focus phase remains as “Practice”, however, evidence shows that it is better to design activities targeting the weak points, rather than all the new language points. Also, those activities are more effective when they are entertaining and emphasise repetition of the language points.

In summary, it is of great importance for teachers to find suitable teaching frameworks according to the objectives and their learning conditions. In this study, the researcher adapted her own framework to suit the uniqueness of Mandarin, and the learning effects on her students. Moreover, a suitable framework enables the teacher to achieve better teaching outcomes.

7.2 Implications

This study contributes to the development of the TBLT framework in Mandarin teaching and the exploration of better lesson planning and teaching strategies. This research has three implications in regard to: the selection of task types, the importance of the teacher’s classroom language, and the development of the question types of examination papers.

7.2.1 Implications for the selection of task types

Viewpoints about the categorisation of tasks vary from person to person. By upholding real-world connection as a criterion, task types such as role-play, problem solving, information sharing, and decision-making become the most easily recognised. Although all these task types meet the criteria of TBLT, the selection of
specific task types is crucial to the effectiveness of teaching outcomes. On one hand, different kinds of students react differently to different task types. On another, the teaching content affects the choosing of the task types.

There are two reasons why the researcher chose role-play as one of the major task types. Firstly, the researcher found during her observation that the students were active in class, had a desire to express themselves, and liked fresh and interesting things. Therefore, the she decided to use tasks that required participants to speak rather than write, and to make them interesting and creative. Secondly, all the topics chosen for her teaching practice were easily linked back to real-life scenarios, such as greetings, asking for phone numbers, and shopping. Combining these two aspects, the researcher found role-play the most suitable task type, which served to motivate the students and achieve good teaching results.

All in all, there are abundant task types relating to TBLT, however, the selection of the task types is not random, and depends on the students and teaching content. Good choices can enhance the teaching effects, and bad choices can decrease the students’ level of interest toward tasks, thus affecting the whole learning process.

7.2.2 Implications for the importance of teacher’s classroom language in task-based classes

The improvement of a beginning language teacher’s classroom language can make a big difference. Beginning teachers do not usually know how to speak in such a way as to attract and keep the students’ attention. Moreover, native L2 language teachers deliver lessons using L1, the students’ native language, hence difficulties and misunderstandings may occur. Therefore, it is of great importance to improve a beginning language teacher’s classroom language.

Teachers need to make their instructions clear. As in this research, task rules needed to be made very clear so that students could understand. Another way to improve classroom language is to learn from an experienced teacher, one who knows how to
speak in the right way at the right time. Teachers must learn to put emotion into their language. Students’ emotions can be easily effected according to the teacher’s tone of voice. For instance, if the teacher explains the tasks in a mysterious tone, the students would curiosity could be aroused, or if the teacher explains the tasks as if they will be a lot of fun, the students would become interested and active. Last, teachers should explain or correct mistakes whenever misunderstandings occur. As two languages are being used in the same class, it is inevitable for teachers to misuse words or sentences during the class. When this occurs, it is better for the teachers to explain themselves immediately, otherwise the students would remain confused and be unable to catch up.

Classroom language plays a vital role in a task-based class. The four suggestions for beginning language teachers, given above, are based on conclusions that were reached as a result of the researcher’s own teaching implementation experiences over one and half years, though further work remains to be done according to different situations.

7.2.3 Implications for the development of question types on task assessments

Examination papers are one of the oldest and most effective forms of assessing the learning of students, which in this study were used as the means to assess task effectiveness. The researcher found through field practice that designing more various question types could arouse students’ interest.

It is universally acknowledged that learning a language is about listening, speaking, reading and writing. As speaking cannot be presented on students’ examination paper whereas the other three aspects can be covered through paper test. However, it is found through interview with an experienced classroom teacher that Australian language exam papers are usually focused on reading comprehension and essay writing, that is to say, listening is usually not listed as part of the language examination papers. The researcher designed listening test as a significant part in the first paper test, and received unexpected results. Because listening was still new to the students, they first felt funny, but later paid full attention to the test, hoping that
they could everything right. The adding of the new question type stimulated students’ interest and made them more willing and focused to finish the test paper.

Except listening comprehension, question types such as matching, word/sentence searching, and picture drawing were tried in this study to attract students’ attention. The application of these rarely seen question types made the examinations become more than just boring tests, but one of the fun things to deal with. Thus, with students’ full attention putting into the examinations, the results reflected from the examinations would be more accurate.

In summary, developing novel question types in the examination papers can increase the interestingness of examinations. Students’ interests can be aroused, and be more focused on the questions, hence reveal their real learning condition. This way, tasks can be assessed more accurately.

### 7.3 Recommendations

The first recommendation is that a larger number of participants should be involved to better develop the generalisability of the research. There were only 38 students who participated in this research at Gaoxing high school where the researcher had been assigned by the ROSETE program. All were high school students in years 7 and 8. The characteristics and personalities of Australian students can vary among different schools and classes. Therefore, the findings pertaining to these students might not be applicable to students of other ages or in other circumstances or conditions. In addition, there were only two classroom teachers who participated in this study. This relatively small sample size might be a concern for some researchers as the data collected may not be convincing and generalisable. Therefore, a larger number of participants can contribute to the generalisability of the result of the study, and can be applied in a larger scope.

The second recommendation is that research should be conducted for a longer time to examine the effectiveness of the TBLT approach, so as to make the findings more comprehensive. This research was conducted over three terms. During this time the
researcher was only able to teach relatively simple words and sentences. The teaching effects of higher-level language points by using the TBLT approach still remains to be explored. Moreover, while searching for suitable teaching strategies, the researcher found it difficult to implement DIY study as the time was too limited for the students to sufficiently develop the ability of independent learning. Therefore, with longer time, the effectiveness of TBLT approach of higher-level, as well as the teaching strategies of different learning stages, can be examined thoroughly.

The third recommendation is that more task types should be introduced in future studies to develop more useful task types. In this study, only two task types were attempted – role-play and self-illustration. As the researcher found these two task types the most effective in the beginning, she stuck with them throughout the study. The introduction of different task types in other research might find the outcomes of this researcher not as applicable. Therefore, more task types can be applied to examine their effectiveness and to make contribution to the perfection of the TBLT approach.
References


Centre for Education Research. (2011). *VC’s excellent award learner*. UWS.


Murphy, Jacky. (2003). Task-based learning: the interaction between tasks and


Robson, C. (2007). *Real word research: A Resource for Social Scientists and*


APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Approval of University Ethics Committee

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

10 June 2014

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 H10478 “An Exploration of Task-based Approach to Making Chinese Learnable: A Teacher Action Research Project”, until with the provision of a progress report annually if over 12 months and a final report on completion.

Conditions of Approval

1. A progress report will be due annually on the anniversary of your approval date.

2. A final report will be due at the expiration of your approval period as detailed in the approval letter.

3. Any amendments to the project must be approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee prior to the project continuing. Amendments must be requested using the HREC Amendment Request Form: http://www.uws.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0038/491130/HREC_Amendment_Request_Form.pdf

4. Any serious or unexpected adverse events on participants must be reported to the Human Ethics Committee as a matter of priority.

5. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the Committee as a matter of priority.

6. Consent forms are to be retained within the archives of the School or Research Institute and made available to the Committee upon request.

Please quote the registration number and title as indicated above in the subject line on all future correspondence related to this project. All correspondence should be sent to the email address humanethics@uws.edu.au.

This protocol covers the following researchers:
Jinghe Han, Michael Singh, Silyu Dai

Yours sincerely

Professor Elizabeth Deane
President Member,
Human Researcher Ethics Committee
Appendix 2: State Research Approval Process (SEARP) Approval

Miss Siyu Dai
Building XJ
University of Western Sydney
Penrith Village
KINGSWOOD NSW 2747

Dear Miss Dai

I refer to your application to conduct a research project in NSW government schools entitled *An Exploration of the Task-based Teaching Approach to Making Chinese Learnable: A Teacher-researcher Action Project*. I am pleased to inform you that your application has been approved. You may contact principals of the nominated schools to seek their participation. **You should include a copy of this letter with the documents you send to schools.**

This approval will remain valid until 10 June 2015.

The following researchers or research assistants have fulfilled the Working with Children screening requirements to interact with or observe children for the purposes of this research for the period indicated:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Approval expires</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Siyu Dai</td>
<td>13/05/2019</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 information 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.

When your study is completed please email your report to: serap@det.nsw.edu.au.

You may also be asked to present on the findings of your research.

I wish you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely

Dr Susan Harriman
**Leader, Quality Assurance Systems**

© July 2014

Policy, Planning and Reporting Directorate
NSW Department of Education and Communities
Level 1, 1 Oxford Street, Darlinghurst NSW 2010 – Locked Bag 53, Darlinghurst NSW 1300
Telephone: 02 9244 6000 – Email: serap@det.nsw.edu.au
Appendix 3: Participant Information Sheets (Parents/Caregiver)

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: An exploration of task-based approach to making Chinese learnable: a teacher action research project

Who is carrying out the study?
Miss Siyu Dai, the HDR student from the School of Education, UWS.

Your child is invited to participate in a study conducted by Miss Siyu Dai. Center for Education research, School of Education, and will form the basis for the degree of Master of Education (Ed.Lons) at the University of Western Sydney under the supervision of Dr. Jinghe Han and Professor Michael Singh.

What is the study about?
The purpose is to explore the task-based language teaching approach to enhance the learnability of Chinese by second language learners in an English speaking context.

What does the study involve?
During the course of normal Mandarin lessons, your child will be asked to take part in the teacher-researcher’s teaching practice once every week. The researcher will come every Wednesday and teach for one period for 45 minutes until the end of 2014. Your child is invited to take part in focus group interviews to give his/her opinion about the teacher-researcher’s teaching practice at the end of each term. Focus group interview transcripts and written feedback will be used as data anonymously in the study with your permission.

How much time will the study take?
Your child will be involved in three interviews of a total of one and a half hours across three terms.

Will the study benefit me?
The study may directly or indirectly enhance your child's understanding of Chinese language and culture.
Will the study have any discomforts?
The study will not cause any discomfort for the children. Participation is voluntary. If you and your child decide not to take part, it will not affect your relationship with the researcher. Your child will undertake regular lessons with other teachers. If you and your child change your mind about participation after the study has started, you can withdraw at any time. Any information already collected from your child will be destroyed.

How is this study being paid for?
The study is voluntary. No payments are involved.

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.

Can I withdraw my child from the study?
Your child's participation in the study is entirely voluntary; you are not obliged to consent. Your child may withdraw from the study at any time - or you may withdraw your child from the study at which point all written and 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?
When you have read this information, Miss Siyu Dai 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 Siyu Dai by calling 04115273720 or via E-mail jiahui82050@student.uws.com.au Dr. Jinghe Han by calling 0422652972 or via E-mail j.han@uws.edu.au Professor Michael Singh by calling 045168539 or via E-mail 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 [H10473].

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 4: Participant Information Sheets (Classroom teachers)

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.

Notes: If not all of the text in this 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: An exploration of task-based approach to making Chinese learnable: a teacher action research project

Who is carrying out the study?
The Mandarin teacher Miss Siyu Dai is carrying out this study.

You are invited to participate in a study conducted by Mandarin teacher Miss Siyu Dai. It will form the basis of the degree of Master of Education (Hons) in the University of Western Sydney. The study is being supervised by Dr. Jinghe Han and Professor Michael Singh.

What is the study about?
The purpose is to explore the task-based language teaching approach to enhance the learnability of Chinese by second language learners in an English speaking context.

What does the study involve?
During the course of normal Mandarin lessons, you will be asked to observe the teacher-researcher’s teaching practice and student’s performance once every week. You will be interviewed to give your opinion about teacher-researcher’s teaching practice every term. Interview transcripts and written feedback will be used as data in the study with your permission.

How much time will the study take?
Observation will be conducted in term 1-4 during normal Mandarin lessons. Interviews will be conducted during term 1-4.

Will the study benefit me?
The study may directly or indirectly enhance your understanding of Chinese language and culture.

Will the study involve any discomfort for me?
The study will not cause any discomfort for the teachers. Participation is voluntary. If you decide not to take part, it will not affect your relationship with the researcher. If you change your mind about participation after the study has started, you can withdraw at any time. Any information already collected from you will be destroyed.
How is this study being paid for?
The study is voluntary. No payments are involved.

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 researchers and her supervisors have access to the original data provided by you. Your interviews will be stored in paper or audio-recorded from. Paper information will be stored in files in a locked cabinet for 5 years, after which they will be shredded; computer file containing audio-recorded interviews will require a password for access and be stored for 5 years, after which they will be completely deleted. A thesis, based on the result of this study, will be submitted for the requirements for the degree of Master of Education (Honours).

Can I withdraw from the study?
Participation is entirely voluntary; you are not obliged to be involved and - if you do participate - you can withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without any consequences.

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?
When you have read this information, Miss Siyu Dai 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 Siyu Dai by calling 0411527372 or via E-mail siyu.dai@student.uws.edu.au
Dr. Jinghe Han by calling 0422652572 or via E-mail j.han@uws.edu.au
Professor Michael Singh by calling 0451068539 or via E-mail m.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 [H10478].

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: Participant Consent Forms (Parent/ Caregiver)

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 rows 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: An exploration of task-based approach to making Chinese learnable: A teacher action research project

I, ____________________________, give consent for my child ____________________________ to participate in the research project titled [An exploration of task-based approach to making Chinese learnable: A teacher action research project].

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 child’s involvement in the project with the researcher.

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 having my child participate in the focus group conducted by Miss Siyu Dai about her teaching practice. I consent the focus group being audio recorded. 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: J.G.13 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: H10473

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 humaneethics@uws.edu.au. Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
Appendix 6: Participant Consent Forms (Classroom teacher)

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: An exploration of task-based approach to making Chinese learnable: A teacher action research project

I, _______________________________ consent to participate in the research project titled [ An exploration of task-based approach to making Chinese learnable: A teacher action research project ].

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 observing Miss Siyu Dai’s teaching practice and students’ performance during Mandarin lessons once every week, and completing an evaluation form while observing. I consent to being interviewed at during form 1-4 to give my opinions about Miss Siyu Dai’s teaching practice and students’ performance. I consent that my interview being 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: J.G.13-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: H10478
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 7: Language focused quiz 1

Quiz 1: Chinese (Mandarin)

Student Name: ___________________________  Score: __________________

Section 1: Dialogue of Chinese greetings.
Instructions to Students
1. This section will take approximately 5-7 minutes.
2. Fill in the blanks in Section 1 in blue or black pen.
3. The left box is the Chinese pinyin, which we learned during all our lessons; the right box is the English meaning of the Chinese correspondingly as the reference of the words you should fill in.

In your answer you will be assessed on:
*Whether you fill in the right Chinese pinyin we have learned. Tones are preferred but not a must.

A: Nǐ hǎo!  
B: Nǐ hǎo!  
A: ___________________  
B: Wǒ hěn hǎo, xiè xiè. ___________________  
A: ___________________ , xiè xiè.  
B: ___________________  
A: Hello! 
B: Hello! 
A: How are you? 
B: I'm very good, thanks. And you? 
A: I'm also very good. Thanks. 
B: Bye-bye.

Section 2: Write down the numbers
Instructions to Students
1. Allow approximately 10-12 minutes for Section 2.
2. Question 1-10 are numbers written in Chinese pinyin, write down the corresponding digits in the box given; question 6-10 are numbers written in digits, write down the corresponding Chinese pinyin in the box given; question 11-15 are numbers written in Chinese characters, write down the corresponding digits in the box given.

In your answer you will be assessed on:
*Whether you fill in the right answer or not. Tones are preferred but not a must.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>数字</th>
<th>中文</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Shí sān</td>
<td>三十</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Wǔ shí</td>
<td>五十</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Qī shí èr</td>
<td>七十二</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Liù shí yī</td>
<td>六十</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Yī bǎi</td>
<td>一百</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>十四</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>三十</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>二十八</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>四十七</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>八十九</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>五</td>
<td>五</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>八</td>
<td>八</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>四十</td>
<td>四十</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>十一</td>
<td>十一</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>三十七</td>
<td>三十七</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 8: Language focused quiz 2

1. Match the characters to the pinyin and the Arabic numerals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>四</th>
<th>Shí</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>二</td>
<td>wǔ</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>五</td>
<td>qī</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>七</td>
<td>sān</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>九</td>
<td>bā</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>六</td>
<td>sì</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>十</td>
<td>yī</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>八</td>
<td>èr</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>一</td>
<td>jiǔ</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>三</td>
<td>liù</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Write down the numbers you hear in Arabic numerals or characters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>①</th>
<th>②</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>③</td>
<td>④</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>⑤</td>
<td>⑥</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>⑦</td>
<td>⑧</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>⑨</td>
<td>⑩</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>⑪</td>
<td>⑫</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Math Fun: Chinese Math

十七 + 七 = 
三十二 + 五 = 
十九 + 二十 = 
二十七 + 四十五 = 
三十六 + 十二 = 
五十一 + 四十八 = 
十七 + 六十一 =
4. Discover a secret picture by connecting the dots in number order. Use a pencil in case you make a mistake!
1. Please write down the following important dates in English and characters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Holidays</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Characters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Year’s Day</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Day</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easter Monday</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anzac Day</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queen’s Birthday</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christmas Day</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boxing Day</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Please write down the time in pinyin at the bottom of the clocks.
Appendix 10: Comprehensive Paper Assessment

Chinese Test

Name: _______           Score: _______

Part I Listening

1. Listen to the numbers. You will hear ten numbers all together. Each number will be said twice. Choose the number you hear and write A, B OR C in the brackets at the front.

[   ] 1. A. 4     B. 2     C. 9

[   ] 2. A. 38    B. 76    C. 62

[   ] 3. A. 86    B. 41    C. 83

[   ] 4. A. 28    B. 36    C. 94

[   ] 5. A. 80    B. 75    C. 71

[   ] 6. A. 45    B. 97    C. 39

[   ] 7. A. 15    B. 26    C. 64

[   ] 8. A. 73    B. 66    C. 19

[   ] 9. A. 85    B. 30    C. 89

[   ] 10. A. 21   B. 74    C. 53
二. Listen to five dialogues, choose the right answers and write A, B OR C in the brackets at the front.

[ ] 1. A. Li Xiaolong  B. Zhang Zhilin  C. Li Lei

[ ] 2. A. 34  B. 36  C. 35


[ ] 5. A. Saturday.  B. Tuesday.  C. Thursday.

三. You will hear two passages. Each passage will be said twice. Fill in the blanks with pin yin according to the passages.

Passage 1

今天是__________三。

今天是李斯的__________。

Passage 2

你们好，__________武大郎，

我__________了，

我的生日是__________。
Part II  Reading

一。 Right or wrong. √ means right, and × means wrong. If the information given in the first box matches the second box, then put the √ in the last box, if they do not match, then put the × in the last box.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>bā shí èr</th>
<th>八十二</th>
<th>√</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sān shí liù</td>
<td>二十七</td>
<td>×</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Míng zì</td>
<td>age</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>yuè</td>
<td>day</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Xīng qī</td>
<td>week</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>五十四</td>
<td>57</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Shēng rì kuài lè</td>
<td>Happy Birthday</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Bú yòng xiè</td>
<td>Thank you</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Jiǔ yuè shíyī hào</td>
<td>9th of Nov.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Jīn tiān</td>
<td>Today</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Shén me</td>
<td>Question word for numbers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Zài jiàn</td>
<td>Bye</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
二． 1-6 are six questions, and A-F are six answers. Choose the right answer from A-E and fill the letters into the boxes correspondingly.

```
例：
1. 你好吗？
   nǐhǎoma
   C

2. 你叫什么名字？
   nǐ jiào shén me míng zi
   shì sān suì
   A.

3. 今天是星期几？
   jīn tiān shì xīngqī jǐ
   wǒhěnhǎo xièxiè
   B.

4. 你几岁了？
   nǐ jǐ suì le
   wòde shēngrì shì jǐ yuè jǐ hào
   D.

5. 你的生日是几月几号？
   nǐde shēngrì shì jǐ yuè jǐ hào
   jīntiān shì xīngqī sān
   E.

6. 今天是几月几号？
   jīntiān shì jǐ yuè jǐ hào
   jīntiān shì sānyuè jiǔhào
   F.
```

三．Multiple choices. Choose the right answer, and write A, B OR C in the brackets at the front.

[   ] 1. Which food below is Chinese traditional birthday food?
    A. Moon cakes  B. Noodles  C. Dumplings

[   ] 2. In the tradition ZHUA ZHOU, what does PEN mean?
    A. Scholar future  B. Official  C. Businessman

[   ] 3. According to Confucius, what should people do when one reaches 30 years old?
    A. Become an adult
    B. Gain stability and clarity on life
    C. Family and careers established
4. In the movie Red Cliff, what does Zhūgēliàng use to get the arrows from his enemy Càocāo?
   A. Wind    B. Fog    C. Turtle

5. In the Chinese name Zhou Jie lun, which one is the family name?
   A. Zhou   B. Jie    C. Lun

四. Writing. Write a short passage in pin yin or characters. This passage should include the introduction of your name, age, birthday, as well as today’s date, and what day is it today.