

# **Inclusive Education in Chinese as a Second/Foreign Language: An Overview and Research Agenda\***

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## **Abstract**

In recent years, research on pedagogy has begun to focus increasingly on inclusive education. This overview explores what inclusion means as a theoretical construct, its past and future applications in the CSL/CFL field, and where Chinese is situated in regard to other languages. Major agenda items are proposed. Finally, a brief summary of the papers in this collection is also provided.

*Keywords:* inclusion in CSL/CFL, accessibility, diversity, equality, tolerance

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In recent years, research on pedagogy has increasingly focused on a previously overlooked field – that of inclusive education. Research into what makes classrooms more inclusive has grown out of cultural and political movements for tolerance, accessibility, diversity, and the equal rights of all human beings (Hockings, 2010; Burgstahler, 2015; Tobin & Behling, 2018). This collection of the papers on the topic of inclusive education in Chinese as a second/foreign language (CSL/CFL) affords us an opportunity to review what inclusion means as a theoretical construct, its past and future applications in the CSL/CFL field, and where Chinese is situated in regard to other languages. Building on this, we propose several major agenda items so as to encourage practitioners in the field to join forces in tackling this important yet much neglected area of research and practice. In the end, how the papers in this collection address the broad issues mentioned here is also discussed.

## **1 GENERAL BACKGROUND**

Universal interest in inclusive education by organizations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the World Bank is based on the idea that inclusion is a human right (Crawford, 2008 as cited in Joy & Murphy, 2012). The paradigm of Education for All (UNESCO, 1990) has been considered the first recognition of the value of diversity, based on a global inclusive model which attempts to accommodate the educational needs of all students, implements procedures that motivate participation of the students, and aims at reducing exclusion (Booth & Ainscow, 2002 as cited in Rojas Tejada et al., 2012). With this particular education initiative set as a goal, research conducted that is relevant to inclusive education or inclusion-related issues has surged in the field of teaching second or foreign languages.

Outside of CSL/CFL, researchers (Peacock, 2001; Minaya-Rowe, 2002; Rojas Tejada et al., 2012; Joy & Murphy, 2012; López & Iribarren, 2014) have

called for more professional training and development opportunities for teachers in foreign language programs. There is extensive scholarly work, such as in ESL, French and Spanish teaching, focusing on how foreign language programs have been re-designed to satisfy the educational needs of, for example, specific educational needs students (SEN students). Inclusive education in the context of English and major European languages has been wide-ranging, from K-12 to higher education and beyond.

## **2 INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN THE CONTEXT OF L2 TEACHING AND LEARNING**

In the US, where English is the majority language, there are at least three senses in which “inclusive” and “language” can be associated with one another. The first is regarding the English language itself, where nonsexist pronouns have been encouraged to be used as alternative to sexist language since the 1970s (Mitchell, 1994). The second one applies to context where educators are called to use inclusive language so as to avoid isolating students. As one teacher puts it: “language matters”, and “to build inclusive schools, focus on inclusive language” (Vargas, 2019). Finally, in the third sense, which is the focus of the current volume, it is related to language education.

Much of the research on inclusive education in the K-12 setting in the US has been on what state-run schools are legally mandated to provide to students enrolled in them. This is because, according to Dutcher (1995), “at the federal level there is no reference to language in either the Declaration of Independence (1776) or the United States Constitution (1789), the two foundation documents of the nation”. However, research into inclusive education in institutions of higher education broadly, and in foreign language instruction more specifically, has emerged as an important area of inquiry in its own right.

Some of the major concerns of inclusive education in both higher education foreign language classrooms and K-12 classrooms and other environments

include: are students of different backgrounds (understood in a broad sense, including growth, educational, and language learning backgrounds), identities (again understood in a broad sense, including race, sex and gender, sexuality, ethnicity, heritage/non-heritage, etc.), and abilities (e.g. learning, psychological and physical abilities) made to feel welcome and able to participate fully? Is course content presented in multiple modes (such as digital, vs. in print; in-person vs. online, etc.), so as to be accessible to students with different needs? But there are additional challenges presented by the subject matter and learning goals of CSL/CFL, including linguistic diversity (language/script forms and standards) and the negotiation of identity (the dynamic form-identity link) throughout the process of language learning and socialization (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1987; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Effective foreign language instruction often requires immersion in the target language and culture, which challenges students to attain technical mastery as well as pragmatic competence. Inclusive education requires the cultivation of a fair, equitable, and accessible classroom culture as well, so an inclusive foreign language classroom must be the meeting point and combination of (at least) this inclusive classroom culture, the wider culture of the institution and society, and aspects of the target culture – a difficult balancing act.

### **3 INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AS AN UNDER-RESEARCHED FIELD IN CSL/CFL**

To date, very little research has explicitly asked how we might achieve a more inclusive classroom environment for CSL/CFL instruction. There are many reasons for this: for English speakers, Mandarin is a very difficult language to learn, with an unfamiliar orthography and tone system; thus, much of the existing research in CSL/CFL journals focuses on content-related challenges. Cultural differences also present challenges for helping students develop pragmatic competence in the target culture, while they also have ramifications for differences in pedagogical practices. Most of the research in CSL/CFL journals has been done

with the intent of making CSL/CFL instruction more effective and learning easier, but largely without taking into account students as a diverse group with diverse needs. The focus on the instruction method and content rather than its processing by learners has led to a relative lack of empirical research on how CSL/CFL might best reach today's diverse student body.

#### **4 MAJOR MILESTONES IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN CSL/CFL**

As stated earlier, inclusive education has been very much an under-researched area in CSL/CFL. However, although the notion of “inclusion” or “inclusive classroom” is relatively new in the field, discussions and practices of linguistic and sociocultural diversity in CSL/CFL classrooms may be dated back to as early as the 1940s, with YR Chao's Mandarin Primer (Chao, 1949/2013) including a variety of regional dialects along with Mandarin in the same lesson, to the 1980s when, two additional textbooks - *A Speaker from Tianjin* (Liang, DeFrancis, & Hen, 1982) and *A Speaker from Taipei* (Kubler & Ho, 1984) - were published “to prepare students to cope realistically with actual speech situations” since native speakers of Chinese usually have “a dialectal accent” (Liang, DeFrancis, & Hen, 1982, p.1). These pioneering textbook projects, featuring non-standard modern Chinese, can be seen as the first major efforts embracing diversity and differences in CSL/CFL history.

As the number of students taking Chinese language classes has increased dramatically in the past few decades due largely to China's rise in status on the international economic and political scene, the learner population of Chinese has become increasingly diverse, and conflicts in race, gender, economic class, religion, and other dimensions have posed challenges for many CSL/CFL practices. Linnell (2001) is perhaps the first scholar to notice the challenges and point out the need for major adjustments in the CSL/CFL field. He especially emphasizes the need for “the awareness of diversification,” to accommodate students' linguistic, cultural,

educational, professional, and social needs, with adjustments needed in such areas as instructional expectations, assessment techniques, and curriculum design.

In this regard, Chinese as a heritage language (CHL) education has been the one subfield receiving perhaps the most attention. Some earlier collections focusing on CHL include Tao (2006) and He and Xiao (2008). Many of the papers in these collections address the issues of CHL learners' identity struggles, curriculum planning for mixed classes with heritage and non-heritage students, instructional resources, assessment procedures, and so forth.

The establishment of the U.S. government funded critical foreign language programs, represented by the Language Flagship (initiated in 2002) and STARTALK (created in 2006), can be seen as having made CSL/CFL classrooms more inclusive and diverse, in terms of both diversifying CSL/CFL pedagogy and improving accessibility for all students.

A prominent change in terms of curriculum and assessment in recent years has been the revision of Advanced Placement (AP) Chinese language and culture course and exam description (2019 fall version), where diversity and inclusion are covered throughout the suggested course themes in the new curriculum.

Another noticeable development has been the effort to directly promote inclusion in various practical terms. Wang and Kuo (2016), for example, conducted the first survey that highlights CSL/CFL teachers' lack of preparation in supporting students with disabilities in K-12 Chinese language classrooms. Another example is Ji et al. (2017), which provides empirical evidence showing that students' perception of equity – equitable treatment regardless of students' race, class, gender – is closely associated with their motivation for learning the Chinese language.

More recently (as of summer 2021), the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has thrust CSL/CFL instruction into an online/remote mode that few had prepared for, engendering an “emergency curriculum” (Wang & East, 2020) that features heavy use of technology and raises a wide range of issues - from equal access to resources, digital literacy, to special needs of both students and

instructors. Wang and East (2020) is among the first to explore such issues for Chinese.

## **5 AGENDA FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN CSL/CFL**

As discussed earlier, inclusive education is rooted in the conviction in tolerance, accessibility, diversity, and the equal rights of all human beings. Inclusive education provides all students, especially traditionally underrepresented groups, equal opportunities and access to knowledge, regardless of their race, gender, ethnicity, religion, social class, and physical/mental abilities (Forest & Pearpoint, 1992).

Given the gaps in CSL/CFL, we would like to take this opportunity to propose a few agenda items that we believe are significant and urgent for the field to tackle: advocacy for inclusive education, teaching material development, teacher training, technology and language teaching, and inclusive pedagogical research.

First, advocacy and participation in policy-making processes for inclusive education. In recent years, institutions and organizations across the U.S. have issued statements of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) to demonstrate their commitment to equitable opportunities and resources to all members in the community. For example, in 2019 ACTFL released its diversity and inclusion statement. Many institutions also request such a statement from prospective employees in the hiring process. We believe that the commitment to providing equitable opportunities in learning Chinese as a second/foreign language and culture for all students is just as strong as other fields, but not all practitioners are aware of the issues involved and what this entails for practices in the classroom. As such, it is crucial for professional organizations and institutions in the CSL/CFL field to actively promote the concept of inclusive classrooms, whether through EDI statements, guidelines, professional workshops (more on this next), or other professional venues such as CLTA-USA special interest groups (SIG) and online resource sites. Participation by CSL/CFL practitioners in policy and institutional

decisions related to inclusive education is also necessary to ensure that it is tailored to the specific characteristics and needs of CSL/CFL teaching.

Second, training of Chinese language instructors in inclusive education. This may cover both pre-service and in-service teacher training, with institution-specific qualification requirements for trainers. Some institutions have incorporated relevant elements in their regular curriculum (see Lu's paper in this issue), but many others have not. It is therefore important for institutions and programs to offer such training opportunities to instructors and promote inclusive education with concerted effort and in a systematic fashion. At the same time, it is also important to provide guidelines for teachers to deal with what Rojas Tejada et al. (2012: 287) call "diversity-related burnout" when there are many demands of teachers working with culturally diverse student groups, and on ways to deal with potential cultural conflicts in understanding inclusive education.

Third, with a better understanding of what inclusive education may entail, reexamination of existing teaching materials and development of new materials to cater to the growing demographic and cultural diversity of the learner population may be in order. For instance, adding more characters of traditionally underrepresented groups and revising the dialogues accordingly can help making teachers and students of minority groups more engaged with the materials; inclusion of non-dominant linguistic and cultural forms (such as regional linguistic and cultural conventions and heritages) can expose students to diverse forms of the Chinese language and culture. In addition to demographic and cultural diversity, future teaching materials should also increase their accessibility in terms of presentational modes to engage students with different accessibility needs and learning strategies.

Fourth, the role of technology in education has become considerably more central due to the outbreak of COVID-19, posing additional challenges, but also opportunities, for inclusive education in the CSL/CFL field. Most programs are implementing an "emergency curriculum" (Wang & East, 2020) as of this writing,

but the use of technology has grown well beyond what was anticipated or planned for, occupying a central role in the education process. It is clear from existing and emerging studies such as Wang and East (2020) that a host of inclusion related issues will figure prominently in the days to come. Digital literacy, equal access to electronic/internet resources, special needs of students with disabilities, training of teachers, and building a conducive community without much face-to-face interaction are just some of the issues that need urgent attention.

Finally, as inclusive education emerges as a critical aspect of language teaching and learning, much has yet to be understood and fed into pedagogical practice. For example, what are the diverse needs (e.g. in Hong Kong the issue of Non-Chinese Speakers (NCS) figures prominently) as well as the political and cultural biases in inclusive education across different regions and nations? Should issues in inclusive education be addressed explicitly or implicitly? Are there any differences between the instructor's point of view and the students' points of view? When multiple types of demands are at play, how should one prioritize such demands, and on what principles? Is it possible to talk about articulation between different educational levels and settings? What are the effective models that can be readily translated into classroom teaching? Since we are at the inception of an emerging field, we hope more colleagues in the field can join the effort in conducting relevant research, and such research efforts should be encouraged and supported by professional organizations such as CLTA-USA and by institutions of all kinds.

## 6 THE PAPERS

This collection of papers, likely the first of its kind in the field of CSL/CFL, addresses the aforementioned broad issues from a number of perspectives. We begin with Liz Carter's paper, *What does the post-secondary mandarin foreign language inclusive classroom look like? The state of the art and some practical suggestions*, as it provides a comprehensive survey of the existing literature in

the *Journal of the Chinese Language Teachers Association* (currently known as *Chinese as a Second Language*) from the past twenty years. Furthermore, the paper offers suggestions on inclusion and its applications in CFL, taking into account the unique aspects of the CSL/CFL content, classroom, and greater environments.

Der-lin Chao, Ming-Ying Li, Bing Ying Hu, Chun-Yi Peng, and Wei Lai draw our attention to the issue of resource allocation as a matter of inclusion in the community college environment, with a case study on inclusive pedagogy strategies adopted by a four-year college program for Mandarin Chinese learners. They show that community college students, if provided with resources such as the Language Flagship Linkage program and paired up with their four-year college peers, can perform as well as those peers.

Based on a corpus of spontaneous conversations, Wenhao Diao and Yi Wang address the issue of gender inclusivity in Chinese language teaching by examining female learners' discourse in a study-abroad context in China. Their findings on female students' discourse topics concerning sexual harassment, gender relationships, and the female body, which have been taboo topics in much of the CSL/CFL landscape, have direct implications for the design of language teaching materials and pedagogical practices.

On a similar topic, Lu Lin's study on explicit and implicit discrimination of gender/sexual orientation in the context of a private high school in Northern California raises the question about gender/sex related microaggression. Based on the results of a multiyear survey, this study points out that both textbook language and teacher's expressions in the CSL/CFL classroom have room to improve in terms of avoiding microaggressions and promoting inclusivity.

Finally, the study by Yan Zhou, based on both theoretical discussions and student surveys and interviews, is concerned with the issue of accented Mandarin and teaching linguistic diversity in the Chinese second language classroom. It raises important questions about the status of standard language and regional varieties, with consequences for language teaching: how to situate the so-called

non-standard varieties in the CSL/CFL classroom both as a matter of language choice and in regard to teacher qualification.

We hope that, as an initial effort, this collection will help spur the momentum in research in inclusive education in CSL/CFL, and that more effort – both diverse and inclusive – will be put into this important area in the near future.

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## 中文二语包容性教育的回顾与展望

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### 摘要

本文是有关汉语二语平等包容教育特刊的引言。我们希望该专辑的出版可以促使汉语二语学界对相关重要问题予以应有的关注。文章探讨平等包容语言教育理念的具体含义以及在汉语二语学界的实践应用，同时也在这方面将汉语和其他语言的内涵与措施加以比较。本文的另一个目的是对汉语二语学界在平等包容教育方面所面临的若干重大议题提出看法。最后我们也对该特刊所收集的论文在相关问题方面所作出的贡献做了简介。

**关键词：**平等包容教育 汉语二语 可及性 多元化

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