

## Challenges and Innovation in Non-Common Language Teaching: Hungarian as an Example

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### Abstract

The Belt and Road Initiative has expanded exchange and cooperation between China and the outside world in the fields of politics, economics, education, humanities, science and technology, and tourism, and has increased the demand for non-common language specialists in various industries in China. Currently a number of foreign language universities in China offer non-common language majors. Upon graduation, students of non-common language majors provide services to China's party and government organisations, universities, research institutions and major enterprises. As society develops and career requirements increase, the overall quality of non-common language students need to be enhanced. Non-common language teachers in universities must be innovative in their theoretical and practical approaches if they are to help non-common language students meet the demands of the modern world. They need to summarize the experience and lessons learned from the teaching process, address any challenges that may arise, and explore ways to improve the quality and efficiency of their teaching. From the perspective of sustainable development, a practical path that can ensure the quality of non-common language teaching and learning is explored in terms of subject specialization.

**Key words:** Non-common languages; Higher education teaching; Challenges; Innovation

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The development of the times has put forward new requirements on the objectives, methods and results of foreign language teaching in China. The Belt and Road initiative<sup>1</sup> expands the exchanges and cooperation between China and the outside world in the fields of politics, economy, education, humanities, science and technology, tourism, etc., and also provides high-quality jobs for graduates in non-common<sup>2</sup> languages (Lu, 2012).

The increase in demand in the non-common language market has energized the job market. At the same time, the quality and competence of non-common language personnel must be constantly improved in order to meet the refined development and standardization of this market. As a foreign language university, Beijing International Studies University<sup>3</sup> (BISU for short) is oriented towards serving the national strategy and the needs of the capital, and its fundamental mission is to cultivate "multilingual, multidisciplinary and complex" international talents with national sentiments and international perspectives, producing a large number of

<sup>1</sup> The Belt and Road Initiative, officially known as the 'Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road', is a trans-national economic network proposed and spearheaded by China. The idea of building the inter-continental economic network was first promoted by President Xi in 2013. Inspired by the ancient Silk Road, the development strategy aims to establish a new platform for international cooperation and to facilitate global development. <http://onebeltonearoad.com/en/intro> (2023.05.11).

<sup>2</sup> English has been widely recognized as a universal language. In a broad sense, non-common language majors refer to majors other than English, such as Japanese, Korean, German, Arabic and Eastern European languages so on. Non-common language, in its narrow sense, refers to languages other than the working languages prescribed by the United Nations.

<sup>3</sup> Beijing International Studies University (BISU) is a renowned multi-disciplinary institution of higher education, offering courses such as literature, management, economics and philosophy, with foreign languages and tourism as its dominant and specialized disciplines. It is an important base in China for talent training in and research of foreign languages, translation, tourism, and economics and trade. <http://en.bisu.edu.cn/aboutbisu.html> (2023.05.06).

outstanding specialists in the fields of diplomacy, foreign trade, translation, tourism and research in China. It is essential to objectively assess the state of non-common language teaching, actively respond to the challenges posed by subjective and objective factors, and actively pursue innovative paths with subjective initiative in order to promote the high-quality development of non-common language teaching in China and to enable non-common language graduates to meet the needs of national strategies, social development, and enterprises.

## 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of the difficulties and motivations of non-common language education is growing in popularity day by day as a result of the evolution of society and the need for non-common language education. As the standards for proficiency among graduates of non-common languages rise steadily, the lecturers need to develop more useful ways to promote the efficiency of teaching and the ability to deal with new problems. According to Hong Li (2012), the outstanding outcomes of the non-common language teaching at Communication University of China include “Bilingual training”, “Trinity faculty staffing”, “3+1 outreach schooling”, “media composite talent training” and other educational models. These will provide a valuable basis for the construction of non-common language specialties in China. Ruan Yubing’s (2008) book discusses non-common language professional development and talent training, teaching and learning in non-common languages, language comparison and transfer, and non-common language students. The book is divided into five sections: reflections on the cultivation of non-common language talents, an assessment of the current situation of pashto teaching, the application of authentic language materials in the development of teaching materials, and analysis of emotional factors and countermeasures affecting the teaching of English in Non-common languages. The book can be used as a reference book for those working in related fields. According to Zhang Xihua and Chang Hongmei (2020) it is necessary to clarify the positioning of talent cultivation and precisely match the market demand; make efforts from both inside and outside the university to build a high-quality “dual-teacher” team; strengthen the construction of teaching resources and optimize the curriculum and teaching materials system. It is also important to fully utilize the language advantage, take advantage of opportunities for collaboration, and promote international development. Carole Edelsky (1978), Laura Collins, Carmen Munoz (2016) and Yi’An Wu (2001) also emphasize the importance of the innovation and the development of foreign language proficiency.

## 2. CURRENT STATUS OF NON-COMMON LANGUAGE TEACHING

At present, almost all China’s foreign language universities offer non-common language courses. For example, BISU is one of the universities has Hungarian major in China. In 2015, BISU resumed the creation of majors in Hungarian and other non-common European languages in order to support The Belt and Road Initiative. At present, there are five lecturers employed in the Hungarian language department, including one special professor, one Hungarian expert and three other lecturers. Besides Beijing International Studies University, Hungarian language courses are offered at Beijing Foreign Studies University, Communication University of China, Shanghai Foreign Studies University and Xi’an Foreign Studies University. The Hungarian major at BISU offers two levels of specialization: high school plus undergraduate course and undergraduate course, as well as a joint interdisciplinary minor within the university. At present, the Hungarian program at BISU has established links with four Hungarian universities and is cooperating in various ways. In addition, the Hungarian program has also established long-term cooperation with the Hungarian Embassy in China, the Hungarian Cultural Centre and the Kodaly Music Teaching Centre, providing Hungarian language students with richer opportunities for practise, further study and employment.

Teachers play a key role in the field of teaching and professional development of the major. The professionalism, teaching ability and teaching style of teachers are important factors in facilitating students in better access to the language acquisition track, crossing cultural barriers, mastering the language foundation and understanding national customs particularly for non-common language majors. Almost all teachers of Hungarian in China have studied abroad, and some young teachers are upgrading their qualifications through in-service studies and doctoral studies in order to better serve the teaching of Hungarian. In addition to academic upgrading, domestic foreign language universities also regularly organize seminars and training sessions on Hungarian language teaching and research capacity, thus promoting the teaching and research capacity of Hungarian language teachers. The Hungarian language teachers at BISU have a variety of teaching methods to suit the needs of the students, such as video conferencing and offline seminars to meet the needs of the students, thus stimulating their interest in learning and enhancing their learning efficiency.

With the continuous promotion of exchanges and cooperation between China and Hungary, the quality requirements of the state, society and the market for Hungarian language students have further increased, and a single language and literature course can no longer

satisfy the practical requirements. As a result, the Hungarian language course at BISU has been extended to include practical courses in history and humanities, international relations, party politics, economic diplomacy and folklore tourism. Students can actually develop advanced foreign language skills by enrolling in a wide variety of electives. The teachers and students, the graduates of the Hungarian language course at BISU have achieved good results in the field of further studies and employment thanks to the joint efforts of the school. Six of the graduates from the two classes have continued their studies at top Hungarian universities, one studies a master's degree at the university in the UK, one studies a master's degree at Beijing Normal University, and one studies a master's degree at Shanghai Foreign Studies University. Other graduates work in the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of China, in the head office of the China Construction Bank, at a university in China and in the Huawei translation team in Shanghai, etc.

### 3. CHALLENGES OF TEACHING NON-COMMON LANGUAGES

In the traditional universities' classrooms, the teacher is the dominant role and the student is the main subject of the course; in the flipped classroom teaching model, student participation and ownership are increasing. With the development of technology and the innovation of educational methods, foreign language teachers in higher education institutions are placing more and more emphasis on enhancing students' sense of experience and access to learning in the classroom. Teachers believe, that students' interest and motivation to learn, determines their own learning outcomes and the interactive atmosphere of the classroom. It is an important issue for non-common languages teachers to enhance students' interest in learning and to help them overcome the barriers to learning caused by a lack of motivation.

By means of questionnaires and interviews the author investigated the reasons for the lack of motivation of the students to study their Hungarian major in the universities in China. Some students said that their parents decided the major for them, rather than themselves, prior to the university entrance examination. The main cause of the students' lack of enthusiasm in learning was therefore their lack of psychological preparation for the major. Some students felt that they had 'backed off' because of the disparity between the language's actual difficulty and what they had imagined it to be like before learning it. The problem of students' lack of interest in learning Hungarian should be addressed by teachers through active guidance, coaching and regular communication. In order to increase students' interest in learning in a variety of ways and to move them away from "learning for the

sake of learning" and toward "enjoying learning and loving learning," lecturers should introduce topics like cultural comparisons between China and other countries, extracurricular activities, music and art appreciation, etc. early on in the language-learning process.

Compared with English, the teaching of non-common languages has limited resources. These problems hinder students' learning paths at a practical level and bring about a negative impact on their learning outcomes. Let's look at the Hungarian language textbooks in China, for example, are mainly concerned with grammar, reading, translation and writing, but there is a lack of materials for listening and speaking, which poses a number of challenges to students' overall learning and mastery of Hungarian. At present, a large number of English-language films and videos have been introduced into China, bringing convenience to English learners. However, there are currently very few Hungarian language films and videos available in China and students have little access to Hungarian language taster resources outside of the classroom, making it difficult to improve their language skills outside of school hours.

Context is very important for foreign language learners. In order to compensate for the lack of context in China, where students are unable to use the language in practice, Chinese universities have made improvements by employing foreign teachers and sending students to study abroad for a short period of time in the target country. However, in practice, the shortage of foreign teachers and the uncertainty of the duration of students' study abroad remains a problem that needs to be solved. In addition, the cultural differences between China and Hungary may be a barrier to students' engagement in a foreign language for beginners. This is especially true in the case of literary and artistic expressions, which are distinctive and different in China and in Hungary. Teachers should explain the aspects, that students do not understand and guide them to look at intercultural differences in an objective way. This will clear the way for students to learn more about non-common languages.

### 4. DEVELOPMENT OF LECTURERS AND INNOVATION IN NON-COMMON LANGUAGE EDUCATION

Teachers currently focus on improving their theoretical and practical skills in language and related to language teaching when it comes to teacher training and the promotion of teachers' qualifications in non-common languages. As a result of the lack of comprehensive quality training and awareness of the renewal of pedagogy, teachers currently have more passion than strength when it comes to implementing innovative teaching methods. In

such a situation, the promotion of educational innovation in the teaching of non-common languages is made possible by the enhancement of teachers' general quality and their awareness of pedagogical innovation.

A non-common language lecturer's overall qualities can be broken down into the following categories: moral qualities, professional qualities, teaching skills, communication skills and other relevant knowledge reserves. Among them, moral quality, professional quality and teaching ability are the basic qualities required of non-common language teachers in higher education institutions. Higher education institutions have established a more complete mechanism for assessing teachers in the three areas. However, with the development of the times, society demands university students not only have a level of knowledge and expertise, but also requires graduates to be responsive to national strategies, social needs, market and company requirements. The state, society and the market have set higher standards for university students. As a result herefore, as the leading classroom teacher, the non-common language teacher should also constantly improve his or her multiple skills in accordance with these new standards in order to meet the new benchmarks established for educators in the modern era.

Specifically, in addition to completing teaching, research and students' work, non-common language teachers should focus on developing the ability and habit of investigation and research. They should go deeper into the society and employers to understand effectively the market demand for students' quality, so that not only to cultivate students who can meet the needs of the country and the times, but also be competent to work in the actual work of the company as soon as possible. The generational gap that exists between teachers and students can also act as a barrier to communication between teachers and students. Teachers cannot give students pragmatic career guidance if they do not realize their students' demands, neither understand that there is a link between their plans for their future careers and the jobs offered by the real world. For non-common language teachers in particular, the professional attributes of non-common languages are both scarce and specific. The former reduces the relative competitive pressure on non-common language graduates, but the latter requires students to have a strong personal suitability. This suitability is subject to change as society develops and the profession continues to refine. The dynamics of employment and market demands must therefore be understood by non-common language teachers so that they can stay up with the times and teach students in a relevant manner. Thus, non-common language teachers should constantly improve the teaching content, innovate teaching methods and enhance their teaching ability.

## 5. INNOVATION AND THE FUTURE OF NON-COMMON LANGUAGE TEACHING

Innovation in the teaching of non-common languages should be based on existing teaching theories and practices, and should be targeted according to the needs of the country, society and the times. At the theoretical level, the content of non-common language teaching should be in line with the practical requirements of China's interaction and cooperation with target countries in the fields of politics, economy, trade, education and scientific research in the "new era". While ensuring that students have a solid linguistic foundation, a deep cultural heritage and intercultural communication skills, students are guided to develop from "specialism" to "specialism + characteristics". Where possible, students are encouraged to study another subject, such as economics, media, law, etc., while ensuring that they have a good grasp of the main subject that they are studying. To develop into true "foreign language +" abilities, interested students are urged to try their hand at multidisciplinary study.

With the development of technology, the combination of online and offline education has become a new trend in the future of foreign language teaching. Non-common language lecturers should focus on exploring the possibilities of online education to compensate for the lack of language scenarios that hinder students' language skills. By introducing students to places of employment where non-native speakers are necessary, teachers can integrate real-world situations into the learning process. Students will gain a more tangible and visible understanding of the demands of the industry as a result. Due to the nature of university education, lecturers must prioritize the needs of their students in the classroom while also addressing the difficulties of teaching non-common languages with the development of students' language ability, multiple skill and the requirements of the state, society and enterprises. To that end, constantly explore the innovative ways of education.

In addition to this, there is an urgent need to explore a path for non-common language education that matches the needs of employment units, guided by national strategic needs and the market. According to research, the requirements of non-common language employers for non-common language personnel are as follows: firstly, strong language skills, high overall quality, good service awareness and practical experience; secondly, the ability to learn constantly, not to be satisfied with the status quo and to learn to subtract in the workplace; thirdly, the combination of foreign language and specialism is the trend for the development of non-common language personnel. These show that the requirements of employers for non-common language skills are now required by employers in a more complex and specialized way than just at the language level.



## 6. CONCLUSION

In the university education, the teacher plays a leading role and the student is the subject of education. It is an ideal design for university education to combine the dominant and the subject in an organic way so that they can interact with each other and thus enhance the effectiveness of teaching and learning in the classroom. In the future, lecturers should adopt innovative techniques to increase student participation and motivation in the teaching of non-common languages. Students' interest in learning is stimulated through ways of enhancing their sense of access. The traditional teaching model is teacher-centred and textbook-based, neglecting the role of students' emotional factors in their motivation to learn. As a result, students tend to fall into the trap of passive learning. When faced with this situation, teachers should pay attention to the differences of individual students during the teaching process, tailor their teaching to their needs. They should also develop an educational model that is suitable for students to master their professional knowledge while quickly adapting to work in society according to the actual needs of the job market, thus avoiding students being trapped in a cycle of mental exhaustion. The teaching of non-generic languages is both challenging and has vast scope for improvement. How to grasp the specific requirements of schools, society and companies for students is a prerequisite for responding to the new era of non-common language teaching.

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