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The comparison of characters compiled in the Graded and EBCL through an evaluation of two textbooks for teaching CFL (Chinese as a foreign language)

Panel: Chinese language learning and teaching in European countries: past and present

The study scrutinizes the Chinese characters of two reference works which are compiled by two groups of researchers: the Grade One of the Graded is funded by the Hanban which is the Confucius Institute Headquarters in P. R. China (<http://www.hanban.edu.cn/>), whereas the A1 and A2 of the EBCL is funded by the European Council including a number of European scholars (<http://ebcl.eu.com/>). Both lists consist of characters that are set to be acquired by CFL beginners. These two character lists are evaluated through an examination of two textbooks. *New Practical Chinese Reader* (Volume 1; NPCR 1 henceforth) and *A Key to Chinese Speech and Writing* (Volume I; KCSW 1 henceforth). NPCR 1 is estimated to be used in approximately 2,000 universities across the world (Tinnefeld-Yeh, 2014). It is written chiefly by a team of scholars from mainland China. The other textbook, KCSW 1, has been primarily used by schools and universities in France but has been known world-wide (Jian, 2012). NPCR 1 does not put a particular focus on Chinese characters and it introduces both characters and pinyin from the beginning. In contrast, KCSW 1 employs the character-based approach to emphasize the study of Chinese characters and pinyin is not introduced until a later stage. Despite the differences, both textbooks are set for the beginning learners of CFL.

The results show that a large number of characters from A1 of EBCL are represented in KCSW and NPCR (87.5% and 65% respectively). However, only 12.6% and 25% characters from A2 are included in KCSW and NPCR respectively. Furthermore, 57% characters from A2 are even not contained in either textbook. As both textbooks are for an ab initio level, this finding indicates that the EBCL character list emphasizes the development in character acquisition at different levels of language proficiency (from A1 to A2). On the other hand, because of the large number of characters in the Graded 1 (i.e. 900), nearly 59% of characters from this list are not included in KCSW. Even though KCSW adopts a character-based teaching method and consequently prioritizes the acquisition of characters, 51% of the Graded 1 still cannot be found in KCSW. Therefore, the Graded 1 might be further divided in order to offer a clear guidance for character learning at different levels. The comparison of these two character lists will shed light on the use of each list for pedagogy and teaching material development.