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A Textbook-Based Study on Measure Word Acquisition in Learners of Chinese as A Second Language

Shaofang Wang
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A TEXTBOOK-BASED STUDY ON MEASURE WORD ACQUISITION IN
LEARNERS OF CHINESE AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

A Thesis Presented
by
SHAOFANG WANG

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

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A TEXTBOOK-BASED STUDY ON MEASURE WORD ACQUISITION IN LEARNERS OF CHINESE AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

A TEXTBOOK-BASED STUDY ON MEASURE WORD ACQUISITION IN
LEARNERS OF CHINESE AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

MAY 2016

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The Chinese language features a rich class of words called measure words that serve as units for counting objects and actions. In comparison with English and other Indo-European languages, Chinese makes much more extensive use of measure words. American students who study Chinese as a second language often find it hard to acquire the usage of Chinese measure words. To obtain a comprehensive and objective evaluation of students’ measure words acquisition, I designed an experiment where measure words as introduced in Integrated Chinese are collected.

In the current study, measure words are divided into two categories by their semantic features: Concrete Measure Words and Abstract Measure Words. If a measure word directly relates to its object’s concrete exterior shape, and image thought plays an important role when people try to use this measure word, it is called a concrete measure word. Abstract measure words are those which have no obvious relation to an object’s exterior image, and whose usages mainly rely on people’s abstract thought. Students are divided into two grades based on how long they have studied Chinese: Grade 1 and Grade 2. Survey results show that students’ acquisition of concrete measure words is significantly better than their acquisition of abstract measure words. Furthermore, there is no obvious
difference between measure words acquisition of the two grades; visual aids can facilitate concrete measure words acquisition to some extent.

Conclusions of survey results reveal some practical principles of measure words teaching. First, concrete measure words and abstract measure words should be treated differently in classroom teaching. Second, different teaching strategies should be adopted to teach students from different grades. Third, analyzing semantic features and providing visual aids are useful methods when teaching concrete measure words. I discuss these principles in more detail after experimental results analysis. Let us now turn to look at the structure of this thesis.

This thesis includes five chapters. Chapter One summarizes related work in previous studies and points out the importance of future research on Chinese measure words acquisition. Chapter Two focuses on the design of the survey where experimental settings, including objects, participants, survey design, and study methods, are introduced. In Chapter Three, I discuss the experimental results in more detail and summarize typically misused measure words. Chapter Four focuses on the teaching material study where I analyze the arrangements of contents related to measure words, and discuss the merits and shortcomings of the teaching materials currently used. In the last chapter, I summarize some suggestions on teaching strategies inspired by this study.

**Keywords**: measure words, concrete, abstract, survey, acquisition, *Integrated Chinese*
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Chinese language features a rich class of words called measure words that serve as units for counting objects and actions. Compared with English and other Indo-European languages, Chinese makes much more extensive use of measure words. In fact, measure words are used routinely by Chinese speakers in their daily lives. Thus it is important for learners of Chinese to master the usage of measure words. However, there are two major challenges faced by learners of Chinese. First, Chinese measure words exist in large quantities; there are 902 of them covered by Hanyu Liangci Cidian (汉语量词词典) (1988). Second, their usages are complicated; the same measure word can collocate with different nouns and verbs, while the same noun or verb can be used with different measure words to express different meanings.

Because of the characteristics mentioned above, American students who study Chinese as a second language often find it hard to acquire the usage of Chinese measure words. On the one hand, these students do not have a clear concept of measure words in their native language. As a result, they are not familiar with using a measure word with a numeral and a noun/verb. On the other hand, they need to understand and follow complicated collocation rules. In the process of learning Chinese measure words, American students usually feel confused by questions like which measure word should be used to match a certain noun/verb, or in what condition a measure word can be used.
1.1 Why Studying the Acquisition of Measure Words Plays Such an Important Role in Teaching Chinese as a Second Language?

For many American students, measure words have become the bottleneck of their Chinese language study because of two reasons. First, complicated colocation rules make the usage of measure words hard to acquire. Second, students assume misuse of a measure words does not affect meaning expression of the whole sentence. However, one’s appropriate use of measure words can actually determine whether one is speaking idiomatic Chinese.

Many instructors do not pay enough attention to measure words acquisition. These instructors are usually native Chinese speakers, and gradually acquire measure words usage without asking why. As a result, they use their instincts to choose measure words. Sometimes it is difficult for them to explain why a specific measure word is chosen and why it is used in this way. Currently, we do not have a complete and effective teaching methodology to help learners understand measure words usage.

Though second-language learners deserve more explanation on language rules, we actually do not have enough introduction of measure words in textbooks to meet their needs. Many textbooks rely on some examples of measure word – noun/verb collocations to attract students’ attention and do not provide further details about measure words’ semantic features.

For all these reasons, studies on Chinese measure words as well as investigations into second language learners’ acquisition patterns are both important and urgent.
1.2 Definition and Classifications of Measure Words

1.2.1 Classifiers or Measure Words?

According to Allen, a numeral classifier is an independent morpheme which “denotes some salient perceived or imputed characteristic of the entity to which the associated noun refers” (Allen, 1977, p. 285). Chao (1968) refers to classifiers — individual measures — as the most important kind of measure word. Tai (1990) further points out that “[a] classifier categorizes a class of nouns by picking out some salient perceptual properties, either physically or functionally based, which are permanently associated with entities named by the class of nouns; a measure word does not categorize but denotes the quantity of the entity named by a noun”. They also provide a technical method to distinguish classifiers from measure words: if the de (的) particle can be inserted between the classifier/measure word and its noun, then it is a classifier. Otherwise, it’s a measure word (Kuo, 1998; Tai and Chao, 1994).

While linguists like Tai and Chao maintain a distinction between classifiers and measure words, these two terms are sometimes interchangeably used. Especially in the area of teaching Chinese as a second language, classifiers are usually called measure words. Teaching materials also generally refer to classifiers as measure words. The corresponding term in Chinese is liangci (量词). The term “measure words” in this

---

1 Chinese classifiers/measure words are not limited to nominal ones. There are also some verb classifiers/measure words, although when compared with noun classifiers/measure words, they are in much smaller quantity. In this thesis, the term “measure words” includes both noun measure words and verb measure words.
paper follows this rule. It includes classifiers, which refer to the inherent countable units, and measure words, which denote particular quantities of things.

### 1.2.2 Classifications of Measure Words

According to different standards, scholars categorize measure words in different ways.

**A. Dividing Measure Words into Three Categories: Noun Measure Words, Verb Measure Words, & Adjective Measure Words**

According to different inner functions, measure words can be divided into three categories. Liu (1957), and Guo (1979) are representative scholars who categorize measure words into noun measure words, verb measure words and adjective measure words. Hu (1962) also divides measure words into three groups: the first group includes measure words like *chi* (尺), *cun* (寸), *jin* (斤), *liang* (两), *gong jin* (公斤), *ke* (克), *mu* (亩), *gong qing* (公顷), *dian* (点), *xie* (些); the second group includes *ge* (个), *zhi* (只), *jian* (件), *tiao* (条), *gen* (根), *jia* (家), *dui* (对), *shuang* (双), *fu* (副); the third group includes *xia* (下), *ci* (次), *bian* (遍), *tang* (趟), *chang* (场), *hui* (回), *fan* (番), *zhen* (阵).

Some scholars further classify noun measure words into several small groups. He (2001), from a static angle, categorizes measure words into six groups: individual measure words, group measure words, partitive measure words, borrowed measure words, temporary measure words and measurements measure words. According to the bi-directional combination relationship between nouns and their measure words, Shao
(1993) categorizes noun measure words as the ones with obvious exterior characteristics (外形特征类; *wài xìng te zhēng leí*), the ones without exterior characteristics (非外形特征类; *fēi wài xìng te zhēng leí*), and the ones indicating containers and places (附容处所类; *fù róng chu suǒ leí*). He also makes another classification by the combination functions of measure words’ semantics: specialized measure words (专用型; *zhuan yòng xìng*), combination measure words (合用型; *hé yòng xìng*), and all-purpose measure words (通用型; *tōng yòng xìng*).

**B. Dividing Measure Words into Several Small Categories**

Chao (1968) divides measure words into nine categories: classifiers (单位词; *dān wèi cì* or 个体量词; *ge tǐ liàng cì*; Mc), verb – objective classifiers (动-宾式结构特有的单位词; *dòng-bīn shì jī gou te you de dān wèi cì*; Mc’), group measure words (群体量词; *qún tǐ liàng cì*; Mg), partitive measure words (部分量词; *bù fèn liàng cì*; Mp), container measure words (容器量词; *rónɡ qì liàng cì*; Mo), temporary measure words (暂时量词; *zhàn shí liàng cì*; Mt), standard measure words (标准量词; *biāo zhùn liàng cì*; Mm), quasi-measure words (准量词; *zhùn liàng cì*; Mq), and measure words for verbs (动词用量词; *dònɡ cí yònɡ liàng cì*; Mv).

Lü’s (1980) classification of measure words is largely affected by Chao (1968). He also divided measure words into nine categories.

Zhu (1982) divides measure words into seven categories: individual measure words (个体量词; *ge tǐ liàng cì*); group measure words (集合量词; *jí hé liàng cì*); measurement measure words (度量词; *dù liàng cì*); indefinite measure words (不定量词; *bù dìng liàng cì*); temporary measure words (临时量词; *lín shí liàng cì*);
quasi-measure words (准量词; Zhun liang ci); verb measure words (动量词; Dong liang ci).

C. Dividing Measure Words into Two Main Categories: Measurements Measure Words & Non-Measurements Measure Words

According to Chen (1973), there are two main categories of measure words: measure words for measurements (度量衡量词; Du liang heng liang ci) and measure words for shape units (形体单位的量词; Xing ti dan wei de liang ci). Gao (1986) refers to measure words as digital words (数位词; Shu wei ci) and divides them into three categories: measurements measure words (度量衡量词; Du liang heng liang ci), partitive measure words (部分量词; Bu fen liang ci) and standard words (范词; Fan ci).

D. Measure words classification of this thesis

Most classifications of measure words mentioned above are static classifications. They describe and classify measure words only by features of measure words themselves. In contrast to the static classifications, Shao’s (1993) uses a dynamic method to classify measure words according to their relationships with their nouns/verbs. He points out that the relationship between measure words and their nouns/verbs is mutual selection. On the one hand, nouns/verbs are the main factor. They decide the selection of measure words. On the other hand, semantic features expressed by measure words can be converted to their nouns/verbs.

Dividing measure words according to mutual selection is important in measure words teaching. First of all, only after understanding how mutual selections are formed
can learners make accurate measure words selection. Secondly, the process of investigating mutual selections is also a process of analyzing the semantic features of measure words, which is an effective way to help learners acquire measure words usage.

As Shao’s (1993) measure words classification can better reflect measure words’ semantic features, out of the demand of the study, measure words classification in this thesis is mainly based on his classification. The chart below shows the details of Shao’s classification.

Chart 1: Shao’s Classification of Measure Words
Note: N stands for Noun. V stands for Verb. MWs stands for Measure Words.

Shao (1993) divides noun measure words into three main categories: measure words with exterior features (外形特征类; wai xing te zheng lei), measure words without exterior features (非外形特征类; fei wai xing te zheng lei), and measure words indicating containers and places (附容处所类; fu rong chu suo lei). He also divides verb measure words into four main categories: versatile measure words (通用量词; tong yong liang ci), autonomic measure words (自主量词; zi zhu liang ci), borrowed measure words (借助量词; jie zhu liang ci), and modal measure words (情态量词; qing tai liang ci). Each of these categories is further divided into several small groups.

If a measure word directly relates to its object’s concrete exterior shape, and image thought plays an important role when people try to use this measure word, it is called a concrete measure word in this thesis. For example, measure words with exterior characteristics (外形特征类; wai xing te zheng lei) and measure words indicating containers and places (附容处所类; fu rong chu suo lei) can directly reflect the shapes of their objects, thus they are concrete measure words.

It should be noted that one single measure word may have different semantic features that lead to different usages, and sometimes these usages can be divided into different categories. As long as one of its usages is included in concrete measure words—even Shao classifies its other usages into the category of measure words without exterior features (非外形特征类; fei wai xing te zheng lei)—I consider it as a concrete measure word.
Let’s take the measure words *tou* (头) and *ba* (把) as examples.

a.  

\[ yi \ tou \ niu \qquad yi \ ba \ dao \]

one MW cattle  

一 头 牛  

one MW knife  

一 把 刀

b.  

\[ yi \ tou \ hui \qquad yi \ ba \ mi \]

one MW dust  

一 头 灰  

one MW rice  

一 把 米

*Tou* (头; head) and *ba* (把) in Group a are representing measure words (替代型; *ti dai xing*). *Tou* (头; head) is the most important and obvious part of a cattle, thus, people use *tou* (头) to represent and measure cattle. The same goes for *yi ba dao* (一把刀; one MW knife; a knife). One meaning of *ba* (把) is the handle of a knife, thus, people use *ba* (把) to measure knives.

*Tou* (头) and *ba* (把) in Group b are measure words indicating containers and places (附容处所类; *fu rong chu suo lei*). The former is an adhering measure word (可附型; *ke fu xing*), and the latter is a holding measure word (可容型; *ke rong xing*). *Hui* (灰; dust) is something adhering to *tou* (头; head). *Yi* (一; one) here means ‘whole’, thus, *yi tou hui* (一头灰; one MW dust) means a full head of dust. Similarly, *mi* (米; rice) is something held in one’s hands. *Yi ba mi* (一把米; one MW rice) means a full hand of rice. The shapes of *tou* (头; head) and *shou* (手; hand) respectively imply the shapes of *hui* (灰; dust) and *mi* (米; rice) as a whole.

To sum up, we can use *tou* (头) as both a representing measure word (替代型; *ti dai xing*) and an adhering measure word (可附型; *ke fu xing*); *ba* (把) can be used as
both a representing measure word (替代型; \( ti \ dai \ xing \)) and a holding measure word (可容型; \( ke \ rong \ xing \)). I consider both of them as concrete measure words.

Some verb measure words, like organ measure words (器官量词; \( qi \ guan \ liang \ ci \)) and instrument measure words (工具量词; \( gong \ ju \ liang \ ci \)), can also serve as measure words with exterior characteristics (外形特征类; \( wai \ xing \ te \ zheng \ lei \)) or measure words indicating containers and places (附容处所类; \( fu \ rong \ chu \ suo \ lei \)). These verb measure words are also included in concrete measure words. For example, the measure word yan (眼) in deng yi yan (瞪一眼; glare one MW; glare at) is a verb measure word. It can also serve as an adhering measure word (可附型; \( ke \ fu \ xing \)) and a representing measure word (替代型; \( ti \ dai \ xing \)). Thus it is a concrete measure word. Usually image thought plays an important role when people try to use these verb measure words.

Measure words without exterior characteristics (非外形特征类; \( fei \ wai \ xing \ te \ zheng \ lei \)) and most verb measure words are summarized as abstract measure words in this study. They have no obvious relationship to objects’ exterior images, and their usages mainly rely on people’s abstract thought.

To conclude, measure words are divided into two categories in this thesis: concrete measure words and abstract measure words. One principle I used is whether a measure word can imply the concrete exterior shape of its object, and whether image thought plays an important role when people try to use this measure word.

There are some practical reasons why I divide measure words using this standard. First of all, though Shao has done a systematical classification of measure words, in
practice it is too complicated to guide measure words teaching and help second language learners grasp the relationships between measure words and their nouns/verbs. According to Shao (1993), the relationship between measure words and their nouns/verbs is mutual selection. However, due to the number of combinations used to associate a measure word with a noun/verb, there are numerous standards of mutual selection. By dividing measure words into concrete measure words and abstract measure words, this thesis provides a straightforward standard to help learners grasp the dominant feature of measure words, especially concrete measure words. Second, in teaching, I find that it is easier for students to understand measure words that indicate exterior shapes. The difference between concrete measure words and abstract measure words affects the acquisition sequences of these two kinds of measure words, though students may not realize the difference between them. Third, the number of concrete measure words is considerable. Their common feature of indicating the exterior shapes of their objects can enable learners to utilize their cognitive skills. How do learners acquire the usage of concrete measure words? Are learners’ acquisitions of concrete measure words better than abstract measure words and, if so, why are they better? Answers to such questions may provide a direction for finding effective teaching strategies.

1.3 Previous Studies of Chinese Measure Words Acquisitions in Teaching Chinese as a Second Language

Early studies of measure words acquisitions focus on error analysis, comparisons of Chinese measure words and similar structures in English, comparisons of measure
words acquisition patterns between first and second language learners, and teaching methods of Chinese measure words.

Some researchers analyze misusages of measure words in second language learners. According to Tang (2008), these misusages include the generalization of the measure word ge (个), misuses of measure words with similar meanings or sounds, and misuses of individual measure words with group measure words. Shi (2010) focuses on the phenomenon of the generalization of ge (个). Zhang (2010) investigates measure words acquisitions of American students who study in China, and points out the lack of measure words, the addition of unnecessary measure words, and the misuse of measure words as three main error types. He also provides some associate teaching strategies.

Some researchers study measure words acquisitions from the angle of language comparisons. Li (2000) analyzes the cultural implications of Chinese measure words through the comparison of Chinese and English; Zhou (2010) compares usages of both individual and group measure words in English and Chinese. She further points out that the reason for the existence of measure words in both Chinese and English is to fulfill people’s need for cognition and meaning expression, thus measure words in these two languages are essentially the same.

There are also some researchers investigating measure words teaching strategies from various angles. Hou (2006) and Zhang (2011) discuss teaching strategies of measure words from a cognition angle. Some researchers notice the particularity of measure words that imply shapes of their nouns. Wang (1996) argues that there are five
kinds of measure words that could imply the shapes or physical features of their nouns. Zhang (2008) suggests classifying measure words by shapes indicated by their nouns. Hou (2009), Kong (2010), Hou (2006) and Luo (2010) analyze usages of certain measure words in detail and provide corresponding teaching suggestions. Hou (2009) emphasizes the usages of gu (股), shu (束), lv (缕) and liu (绺), and analyzes their cognition foundations. Kong (2010) points out the particularity of the measure word hui (回). He further argues that there are two ways to use the measure word hui (回): verb + numeral + hui (回) and numeral + hui (回) + verb. Shi (2010), in response to the phenomenon of the overgeneralization of ge (个), analyzes errors of ge (个) among foreign learners and proposes that instructors should emphasize the semantic color of measure words. Hou (2006) uses principles and methods of cognitive linguistics to compare two groups of measure words: zhang (张)/mian (面)/pian (片) and ben (本)/bu (部)/juan (件). Luo (2010) exclusively is concerned with the difference of dui (对)/fu (副)/shuang (双).

In the past decade surveys, as an effective manner to collect first-hand linguistic materials, have been identified and used by more language researchers. Through a questionnaire, Sun (2006) gathers some first-hand materials and discusses the reasons and foundations of the overgeneralization of ge (个). On that basis, she provides a reasonable teaching sequence of individual measure words. Hu (2012) explores acquisitions of measure words of foreign students through an examination paper. Then he summarizes four types of common errors: overgeneralization, failing to establish a mutual selection between measure words and nouns, failing to establish a semantic
connection between actions and measure words or borrowed measure words, and failing to differentiate meanings of different measure words that could be used before the same noun. In her master’s thesis, Wang (2007) describes and summarizes the current situation of noun measure word teaching by analyzing the results of surveys conducted among Chinese learners and their teachers. Others, like Li (2011) and Jiang (2007), also provide valuable information on foreign learners’ difficulties in measure words acquisition.

Though great achievements have been made in the acquisition study and teaching methodology study of Chinese measure words, they are far from enough to guide Chinese measure words teaching. Further surveys and studies on American students’ Chinese measure words acquisition are still needed because of two reasons.

First, few researchers have done surveys of measure words acquisition at American colleges. As a matter of fact, for learners whose native language is English, the difference between Chinese and English brings great difficulty to their measure words acquisition. Thus such surveys and relative studies are both necessary and urgent. This thesis tries to conduct a comprehensive and systematic study on measure words acquisition of American students who learn Chinese as a second language. To achieve this goal, a survey is designed to collect first-hand data. 80 American students from a university in the New England area participated in the survey.

Second, measure words are currently taught in isolation from each other. The lacking of a systematic methodology to guide measure words teaching has become a problem that cannot be overlooked. New angles and methods of measure words
teaching are urgently needed. This thesis classifies measure words from a teaching angle and investigates learners’ acquisitions on the basis of this kind of classification. It is an attempt to summarize semantic features and teaching methods of Chinese measure words from a new and more straight-forward angle.

Third, *Integrated Chinese* is one of the most popular teaching materials in America; the content selection of this series of books is closely related to students’ acquisitions of measure words. But at present, there isn’t a comprehensive evaluation targeting the effectiveness of the content selection of this series of books. This thesis also studies the arrangements of measure word in the textbooks that are used by participants: *Integrated Chinese Level 1 (Part 1 & Part 2)* and *Integrated Chinese Level 2 (Part 1 & Part 2)* (Cheng & Tsui Company, 2009). This work gives us a complete picture of the advantages and disadvantages of measure words arrangements in this series of textbooks. Through textbook study, we can receive a better understanding of whether the content selection is effective, whether the organization of contents as relating to measure words is reasonable, or whether the explanations of measure words are sufficient. These kinds of investigations may provide instructors a better angle of view about how to organize their teaching and how to help students obtain an in-depth understanding of the usages of Chinese measure words.
CHAPTER 2

DESIGN OF THE MEASURE WORDS SURVEY

2.1 The Objects

The objects of the study are measure words from *Integrated Chinese Level 1 Part 1* and *Integrated Chinese Level 1 Part 2*. There is a total of 29 concrete and abstract measure words that are mentioned in these two textbooks. Among these measure words, 15 of them are concrete measure words, and 14 are abstract measure words. This series of textbooks also introduce measure words like *yuan* (元), *jiao* (角), *fen* (分) and time measure words (measure words that represent time) like *tian* (天), *yue* (月), *nian* (年), *xiao shi* (小时). As these measure words exist in most languages, and the usages of them are basically the same, they are excluded from this study.

This series has four textbooks. But the introduction of measure words is concentrated in the first two textbooks. Most measure words that appear in the last two textbooks are mainly reviews of measure words learned before. Besides, measure words introduced in the initial learning stage are usually the common ones. Thus, the objects of this study are limited to the 29 measure words introduced by *Integrated Chinese Level 1 Part 1* and *Integrated Chinese Level 1 Part 2*. Please see the table below for details of these measure words.
Table 1: Measure Words that Are Introduced in Integrated Chinese Level 1 Part 1 and Level 1 Part 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concrete MWs</th>
<th>Abstract MWs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>kou(口)、dian’er(点（儿）)、ping(瓶)、bei(杯)、jiao(节)、</td>
<td>ge(个)、xia(下)、wei(位)、pian(篇)、jian(件)、shuang(双)、</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zhuanzhi(枝)、zhang(张)、feng(封)、tiao(条)、zhan(站)、pan(盘)、</td>
<td>zhong(种)、lu(路)、xie(些)、ci(次)、bian(遍)、tao(套)、</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wan(碗)、ben(本)、ba(把)、pian(片)</td>
<td>jia(家)、fen(份)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.2 The Participants

Participants of the study are students from Chinese classes of a university in the New England area, who have used Integrated Chinese as teaching materials for at least two semesters. Students of Grade 1 have studied Chinese at the university for two or more semesters, and they have used two books of Integrated Chinese: Level 1 Part 1 and Level 1 Part 2. Students of Grade 2 have studied Chinese at the university for four or more semesters, and they have used four books of Integrated Chinese: Level 1 Part 1, Level 1 Part 2, Level 2 Part 1, and Level 2 Part 2. The 80 participants are undergraduate or graduate students from various departments. 69 of them are native English speakers. 5 of them are heritage students of Chinese. 3 students’ native language is Korean, and 3 students’ native language is Japanese. As ethnic diversity is a common phenomenon in American colleges, we treat all these subjects as a whole
and no longer investigate the specific circumstances of measure words acquisitions of
students from each ethnic group.

2.3 Study Questions

Question 1: is there a significant difference between students’ acquisitions of
concrete measure words and abstract measure words?

Question 2: is there a significant difference between measure words acquisitions
of Grade 1 and Grade 2?

Question 3: whether visual aids could facilitate student’s acquisition of concrete
measure words?

2.4 The Survey

We collect 65 effective surveys.

We design the survey based on subjects’ learning situations of Chinese. To avoid
a possible negative effect caused by their lack of vocabulary, we use Chinese
characters that had been learned by all participants, and use English to mark the ones
that are not learned by every student.

The survey consists of three parts: (1). Fill in blanks with appropriate measure
words. Four choices are given after each sentence. Students are supposed to select all
appropriate options. (2). Fill in blanks with appropriate measure words. No options are
provided to choose from. Students are encouraged to provide more than one answer if
they can. (3). Circle appropriate pictures to match provided measure words. (Please see
the appendix for the content of the survey).
We consider the following scenarios when designing the survey.

First of all, a noun/verb can collocate different measure words to express different meanings. Many factors restrict the choice of a measure word to match a specific noun or verb. For example, what are the semantic features of the target measure word, whether this collocation is in compliance with people’s expressive habits, whether this measure word could properly match the emotional color of the noun/verb or the style of writing, etc. To investigate such abilities of participants, I designed Part 1 and Part 2. The difference between these two parts is that Part 1 provides both context and answer options while Part 2 provides only context. Part 1 can provide us with information about which measure words are easily mixed up with the target measure words. Part 2, compared with Part 1, is more difficult for students to produce. This part focuses on an investigation of students’ abilities to use the target measure words in concrete contexts. A synthetical study of subjects’ responses in the two parts can help us get a comprehensive and thorough understanding of their measure words acquisitions.

Secondly, a specific measure word could collocate with different nouns/verbs. This open ability of measure words makes each of them compatible with a correspondent nouns/verbs group. Setting up such a group with a fair amount of nouns/verbs is the basis for flexibly using a certain measure word. To investigate such abilities of the participants, I designed Part 3.

Thirdly, visual images are always more intuitive than characters. As visual aids can imply shapes of objects, through the method of providing visual aids we may get a
clue of the cognition foundations of certain measure words and the reasons why students misuse one measure word with another. In Part 3, more than 10 pictures are provided for each measure word. Participants are asked to choose the ones which can collocate with the target measure word.  

2.5 Study Method

With the collected first-hand materials, I use a statistics method to sort out and analyze the data.


This paper also studies and analyzes the rationality of measure words teaching schedules in Integrated Chinese Level 1 Part 1 and Level 1 Part 2.

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2 Refer to the appendix for the details of the survey.
CHAPTER 3

RESULTS OF THE SURVEY AND ERROR ANALYSIS

3.1 Results and Results Analysis of the Survey

3.1.1 The Comparison of Concrete Measure Words and Abstract Measure Words

To compare acquisitions of concrete measure words with abstract measure words, in a sequence of from high accuracy rate to low accuracy rate, I list accuracies of target measure words in both Part 1 and Part 2.

To reduce the negative effects introduced by failing to recall the correct characters, we allow subjects to use pinyin instead of characters in Part 2. We consider it as a correct answer if the pinyin of the target measure word is spelled correctly.

Table 2: Accuracy Rates of Measure Words in Part 1 and Part 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>13 Concrete MWs</th>
<th>Accuracy Rates</th>
<th>11 Abstract MWs</th>
<th>Accuracy Rates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ben 本 (2)</td>
<td>97.69%</td>
<td>shuang 双 (1)</td>
<td>73.85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pan 盘 (1)</td>
<td>83.08%</td>
<td>jia 家 (1)</td>
<td>58.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ping 瓶 (1)</td>
<td>70.77%</td>
<td>ge 个 (4)</td>
<td>57.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zhang 张 (2)</td>
<td>68.46%</td>
<td>ci 次 (4)</td>
<td>53.85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bei 杯 (1)</td>
<td>63.08%</td>
<td>pian 篇 (1)</td>
<td>43.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tiao 条 (1)</td>
<td>63.08%</td>
<td>tao 套 (2)</td>
<td>40.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ba 把 (2)</td>
<td>56.16%</td>
<td>jian 件 (2)</td>
<td>37.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measure Word</td>
<td>Accuracy Rate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jie 节 (1)</td>
<td>55.38%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wei 位 (1)</td>
<td>30.77%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zhan 站 (1)</td>
<td>53.85%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xie 些 (4)</td>
<td>25.00%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feng 封 (2)</td>
<td>36.16%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bian 遍 (1)</td>
<td>21.54%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pian 片 (1)</td>
<td>33.85%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zhong 种 (2)</td>
<td>8.46%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zhi 枝 (2)</td>
<td>29.23%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*ming 名 (1)</td>
<td>1.54%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dian('er)点(儿) (1)</td>
<td>26.15%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *Ming (名)* is excluded from the calculation of students’ accuracy rate of abstract measure words, because the usage of *ming (名)* as a measure word has not been introduced by students’ textbooks though students do know this character as a noun.

Numbers in brackets indicate how many times the measure words are designed as target measure words. Accuracy Rate is the ratio of the number of subjects who select the target measure word and the total number of effective surveys (65). If a measure word is tested more than once, we calculate the averaged accuracy rate of each test.

The concrete measure word with the highest accuracy rate is *ben (本)*, with an accuracy of 97.69%. This rate is about 24% higher than the highest rate of abstract measure words (73.85%). The lowest accuracy rate of concrete measure words is 26.15%, and it is about 16% higher than the lowest rate of abstract measure words.
The average accuracy rate of concrete measure words is 56.68%, and it is 15.74% higher than the average rate of abstract measure words (40.94%).

If we use the data in Table 2 and mark them in a CDF chart, we can get the two curves shown below.

![Chart 2: CDF Chart of Results of Part 1 and Part 2.](image)

For any percentage data of these two curves, the accuracy rate of concrete measure words is always higher than abstract measure words.

If we calculate accuracy rates of concrete measure words and abstract measure words of two different grades, and then calculate the average rates, we can obtain the results tabulated below.

Table 3: Accuracy Rates of Two Grades in Part 1 and Part 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>13 Concrete MWs</th>
<th>Accuracy Rates</th>
<th>11 Abstract MWs</th>
<th>Accuracy Rates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1</td>
<td>Grade 2</td>
<td>Grade 1</td>
<td>Grade 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ben 本 (2)</td>
<td>97.30%</td>
<td>98.22%</td>
<td>shuang 双 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character</td>
<td>Grade 1</td>
<td>Grade 2</td>
<td>Character</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pan 盘（1）</td>
<td>83.78%</td>
<td>82.14%</td>
<td>jia 家（1）</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ping 瓶（1）</td>
<td>67.57%</td>
<td>75.00%</td>
<td>ge 个（4）</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zhang 张（2）</td>
<td>68.92%</td>
<td>67.86%</td>
<td>ci 次（4）</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bei 杯（1）</td>
<td>64.86%</td>
<td>60.71%</td>
<td>pian 篇（1）</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tiao 条（1）</td>
<td>51.35%</td>
<td>78.57%</td>
<td>tao 套（2）</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ba 把（2）</td>
<td>59.46%</td>
<td>51.79%</td>
<td>jian 件（2）</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jie 节（1）</td>
<td>64.86%</td>
<td>42.86%</td>
<td>wei 位（1）</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zhan 站（1）</td>
<td>62.16%</td>
<td>42.86%</td>
<td>xie 些（4）</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feng 封（2）</td>
<td>36.49%</td>
<td>35.72%</td>
<td>bian 遍（1）</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pian 片（1）</td>
<td>37.84%</td>
<td>28.57%</td>
<td>zhong 种（2）</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zhi 枝（2）</td>
<td>28.38%</td>
<td>30.36%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Number of Test Times 18  Average 57.51%  56.15%
Total Number of Test Times 23  Average 43.04%  41.77%

Note: There are 37 subjects of Grade 1 and 28 subjects of Grade 2.

One-way ANOVA with repeated measure is used to compare the groups. (One outlier is excluded from the test.)

For students of Grade 1, the difference between their acquisition of concrete measure words and abstract measure words is significant: F (1, 39) = 5.8244, P < 0.05. The result of Grade 2 is similar to the result of Grade 1: F (1, 39) = 5.7794, P < 0.05.

If we consider students of Grade 1 and Grade 2 as a whole, the difference between their acquisition of concrete measure words and abstract measure words is also
significant: F (1, 39) = 7.2736, P < 0.05. Types of measure words—concrete measure words or abstract measure words—have a significant effect on students’ accuracy rates. Students’ acquisition of concrete measure words is better than their acquisition of abstract measure words.

3.1.2 The Comparison of Grade 1 and Grade 2

The main effect of students’ grades on measure words acquisition is negligible. If we compare Grade 1 and Grade 2’s accuracy rates of concrete measure words, the result is: F (1, 35) = 0.0238, P > 0.05. If we compare Grade 1 and Grade 2’s accuracy rates of abstract measure words, the result is: F (1, 45) = 0.0075, P > 0.05. If we do not categorize measure words and treat all of them as a whole, the difference between students’ accuracy rates of Grade 1 and Grade 2 is still negligible: F (1, 81) = 0.0349, P > 0.05. There is no significant difference between Grade 1 and Grade 2’s acquisition of measure words.

3.1.3 Conclusions of Results Analysis of Part 1 and Part 2

We can draw a conclusion from the above results that types of measure words—concrete measure words or abstract measure words—make a significant difference in students’ acquisition. In contrast, students’ grades have a negligible effect on their acquisition.

As semantic meanings of different kinds of measure words are different, and concrete measure words always have obvious connections with noun’s exteriors shapes, we choose two typical concrete measure words, zhang (张) and tiao (条), to
test in Part 3. With visual images provided, we expect to answer the following questions: whether there is a difference between accuracy rates of different types of tests, with or without visual aids? How do students understand the usage ranges and semantic meanings of these two measure words? Whether the visual aids could facilitate students’ acquisition of concrete measure words?

3.1.4 Results and Results Analysis of Part 3

This part is multiple choice. Subjects are asked to circle appropriate pictures to match the provided measure words. Two measure words with very obvious image features, zhang (张) and tiao (条), are selected as target measure words. More than ten pictures are provided for each of them.

A. Results and results analysis of No. 1 Part 3

No. 1 Part 3: 一张______

yi zhang ______

Chart 3: Results of No. 1 Part 3.
A bed, B paper, E table, H picture, K face and L bow are correct answers for No.1. From the statistics of Chart 3 we can see that the proportions of A bed, B paper, E table and H picture are relatively high, especially the first two options. The accuracy rate of A bed is 80.00%, and the rate of B paper is 92.31%. However, the proportions of K face and L bow are very low. Both of their accuracy rates are below 10%.

To investigate the reason for the difference of accuracy rates of different options, it’s necessary to investigate the semantic meanings of zhang (张) first. According to <说文>, “张，施弓也” (zhang, shi gong ye; stretching bows). This is the original meaning of zhang (张): stretching bowstrings. Here zhang (张) is a verb. As the meaning developed, zhang (张) has changed from a verb to a measure word that measures the number of bows. Afterwards, it could also be used to measure planar objects that could be stretched and shrunk. At the last stage, it is used to measure objects with the feature of flat. The verbal meaning of zhang (张) has almost completely faded.

The high proportion of B paper and H picture is because the flat feature of both paper and picture is very obvious, and students are fully aware of the flat image expressed by zhang (张). The flat forms of A bed and E table are functionally important: they directly contact with the human body. As a result, their accuracy rates are also relatively high. In addition, these four nouns are all familiar to students. These factors explain why they have high accuracy rates.
Though the collocation of zhang (张) and bow has a long history, the inner connections between them are not recognized by most students. Besides, neither the textbooks nor subjects’ teachers have introduced this collocation; thus, the accuracy is very low, which is less than 5%.

38.46% subjects select G letter. As letters are written on paper and students are very familiar with the collocation of paper and zhang (张), some subjects generalize the usage of zhang (张) to letter.

There are also some students who select F chair. They mix up measure words for tables and chairs. Though the flat form of chairs also make contact with the human body, the back of a chair is more visually significant, and it could be handled by hands. Thus ba is the appropriate measure word for chairs.

35.38% subjects select C leaf. The proper measure word for leaf should be pian (片). Originally, pian (片) was a verb. <说文>: “片，判木也” (pian, pan mu ye; cleaving woods). That is to say, the meaning of pian (片) was to cleave a block of wood into two pieces. Afterwards, the meaning of pian (片) switched from the action of cleaving to the cleaved pieces of wood and then extended to objects with the features of flat and thin, such as bupian (布片, pieces of fabric), zhipian (纸片, pieces of paper), roupian (肉片, pieces of meat), kapian (卡片, cards), etc. After that, the meaning of pian(片) further developed. It could be used to measure objects with the features of flat and thin. For example, we can say yi pian mianbao (一片面包; one MW bread; ‘a piece of bread’), yi pian yao (一片药; one MW medicine; ‘a pill’), or yi pian shuye (一片树叶; one MW leaf; ‘a piece of leaf’).
Here is the question: both K face and C leaf have the feature of a flat surface. Why do we have to use different measure words to collocate with them? From the analysis above we can see that the original meanings of measure words zhang (张) and pian (片) are different. This has led to the difference of their ranges when they are using as measure words. Usually, zhang (张) is used to measure an entire object with a regular shaped flat surface, while pian (片) is usually used to measure an object portion with an irregular shaped flat surface. As objects like tables and faces are integrated objects, zhang (张) is the proper measure word for them. However, pieces of bread or leaves exist as a part of entirety according to our common sense, and the shapes of them are not unique. Thus, we use pian (片) to measure them. Only by exploring the inner difference of these two measure words can we help students to make the right choice.

B. Results and results analysis of No.2 Part 3

No.2 Part 3: 一条_____

yi tiao ______

Chart 4: Results of No. 2 Part 3.
Originally, \textit{tiao} (条) is a noun. \textit{说文}: “条，小枝也” (\textit{tiao}, \textit{xiao zhi ye}; small branches). There is a classical poem with the following sentence: 万条垂下绿丝绦 (\textit{wan tiao chui xia lv si tao}; ‘thousands of wickers hang down and look like green silk ribbons’). Thus, we can see that as a noun, \textit{tiao} (条) indicates thin and soft branches such as willow branches. In modern Chinese, \textit{tiao} (条) is used as a measure word, and always collocates with nouns indicating slender and soft objects.

Chart 4 shows that, similar to the result of \textit{zhang} (张), students are quite familiar with collocations that have been introduced in textbooks. Thus the proportion of \textit{G pants} is the highest.

Though the slender and soft feature of \textit{H shorts} is not as obvious as pants, the proportion of shorts is preceded only by pants as it has a very similar function with pants.

\textit{A belt} and \textit{J rope} have typical features of slender and soft, thus their proportions are also relatively high.

The collocation of \textit{E fish} and \textit{tiao} (条) has been introduced by the textbook, thus, it’s not unfamiliar to the subjects.

Compared with \textit{G pants} and \textit{A belts}, the three-dimensional character of \textit{D river} and \textit{I snake} is more obvious. Thus, many subjects did not know whether they should choose these two selections.

\textit{K SMS} has an abstract feature. Its accuracy rate is lower than 10%.

Some subjects selected \textit{C branch}. However, the branch in the picture is short and hard. \textit{Gen} (根) or \textit{zhi} (枝) would be proper measure words for it.
3.1.5 The Comparison of Part 3 and Part 1& 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Zhang (张)</th>
<th>Tiao (条)</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Part 3</td>
<td>52.87%</td>
<td>45.83%</td>
<td>49.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 1&amp;2</td>
<td>68.46%</td>
<td>63.08%</td>
<td>56.68% (Concrete MWs)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The accuracy rate of *zhang* (张) in Part 3 is 52.87%, which is 3.81% lower than the average accuracy rate of concrete measure words (56.68%) and 15.59% lower than its accuracy rate in Part 1&2 (68.46%). The accuracy rate of *tiao* (条) in Part 3 is 45.83%, which is 10.85% lower than the average accuracy rate of concrete measure words (56.68%) and 17.25% lower than its accuracy rate in Part 1&2 (63.08%). Compared with their accuracy rates in Part 1 & 2, the average rates of both *zhang* (张) and *tiao* (条) have an obvious decrease in Part 3.

On average, the accuracy rate of Part 3 (49.35%) is 7.33% lower than concrete measure words’ accuracy rate of Part 1&2 (56.68%).

If we use the one-way ANOVA Test to compare the accuracy rate of Part 3 and the accuracy rate of concrete measure words of Part 1 & 2, the following result is achieved: F (1, 41) = 4.2038, P < 0.05. This indicates that there is a difference between them: the accuracy rate of Part 3 is significantly lower.

This means that types of tests make a difference in the accuracy rates of concrete measure words. Part 1 and Part 2 provide context. Sentences are used as contexts that guide students to choose proper measure words to match given nouns. Instead of
context, Part 3 provides pictures. Pictures are visual cues to help students with forming a proper measure word – noun compound.

There are some possible reasons for the relatively lower average accuracy rate of Part 3.

Firstly, most collocations of measure words with nouns/verbs in the first two parts are the ones students are familiar with. In Part 3, however, due to the increased quantity of choice options, collocations of measure words with nouns/verbs are not limited to the ones that have been introduced by textbooks. Nouns with low proportions are always the ones whose collocations with *zhang* (张) or *tiao* (条) have not been introduced by textbooks. For example, students seem unfamiliar with some collocations like *yi zhang gong* (一张弓; one MW bow; ‘a bow’) or *yi tiao mao jin* (一条毛巾; one MW towel; ‘a towel’), as these collocations are new to subjects.

Secondly, students do not understand the inner semantic meanings of the target measure words, and thus cannot make an accurate judgment about the ranges of their usage. For example, some subjects select nouns that cannot be measured by *zhang* (张), thus forming some incorrect structures like *yi zhang shu ye* (一张树叶; one MW leaf). This is because students cannot distinguish *zhang* (张) from other measure words with similar semantic meanings but different usage ranges.

Thirdly, though sometimes pictures can provide cues for students to make right choices, the given pictures could also confuse students in some circumstances. For example, as shown in the pictures, both the paper and the leaf have an exterior feature of flat and thin, but they should collocate with different measure words. Another
example is that the bow doesn’t have a flat surface. However, zhang (张) is exactly
the measure word to collocate with bow (弓) because they have an inner connection.
These ostensible similarities or differences may confuse students and thus lead to
effects.

However, if we compare the accuracy rates of the same collocations in Part 1 &
2 and Part 3, results seem quite different.

The collocations of yi zhang chuang (一张床; one MW bed; ‘a bed’), yi zhang
zhi (一张纸; one MW paper; ‘a piece of paper’) and yi tiao ku zi (一条裤子; one MW
pant; ‘a pair of pants’) have been tested in both Part 2 and Part 3. In Part 2, they are
tested in No. 4, No. 17 and No. 16 respectively.

No. 4 Part 2: 卧室里有一____床。

wo shi li you yi ___ chuang.

bedroom inside have one ___ bed.

‘There is a bed in the bedroom.’

No. 17 Part 2: 他拿出____纸放在桌子上。

ta na chu yi ___ zhi fang zai zhuo zi shang.

he bring out one ___ paper put table on.

‘He brings out a piece of and put it on the table.’

No. 16 Part 2: 她买了____裤子。

ta mai le yi ___ ku zi.

she buy one ___ pants.

‘She bought a pair of pants.’
In Part 3, option A and B of No. 1 and option G of No. 2 test the same collocations.

No. 1 Part 3: 一张______

yi zhang ______

A

B

No. 2 Part 3: 一条______

yi tiao ______

G

The accuracy rates of these collocations in Part 2 are 80.00%, 56.92% and 63.08%. Their accuracy rates in Part 3 respectively are: 80.00%, 92.31% and 89.23%.

As we can see, accuracy rates of yi zhang zhi (一张纸; one MW paper; ‘a piece of paper’) and yi tiao ku zi (一条裤子; one MW pant; ‘a pair of pants’) are significantly increased in Part 3. The rate of the former increases 35.39% and the rate of the latter increases 26.15%. With regard to yi zhang chuang (一张床; one MW bed; ‘a bed’), its accuracy rate in Part 2 is equal to its accuracy rate in Part 3, which is 80.00%. As the rate of this collocation is already as high as 80.00% in Part 2, it is
reasonable that it does not further increase in Part 3. Thus in Part 3, accuracy rates of all these three collocations are equal to or higher than 80.00%.

Though result of the one-way ANOVA Test ($F(1,5) = 6.8569, P > 0.05$) suggests that the difference between the accuracy rates of the three collocations in Part 2 and Part 3 is not significant; it should be noted that the P-Value (0.0589) is very close to 0.05. It's very likely that visual aids can increase accuracy rates when testing the same collocations of concrete measure words in different tests. In other words, visual aids may facilitate students’ acquisition of concrete measure words to some extent.

### 3.2 Error Type Summaries and Analysis

By analyzing results of the survey, we found that students have grasped the frame of ‘numeral + measure word + nouns/verb + numeral + measure word’ after a period of study. They are fully aware of the circumstances under which they must use a measure word. However, the overall accuracy rate of using measures words is not high, and it is necessary for us to analyze the various errors that occurred in the survey.

Errors can be divided mainly into the following types.

#### 3.2.1 Generalization of Measure Words

The phenomenon of generalization of measure words is very common, especially for the measure word $ge (个)$. $Ge (个)$ is a measure word exposed to students in the very early stages of Chinese learning, and it has a relatively wide range of usage.
Many students regard it as a universal measure word and use it whenever they need to use a measure word.

Through the survey, we found that many subjects use *ge (个) when it is not appropriate to use. For instance, almost every blank in Part 2 is provided with the answer *ge (个) by some students. Of course, sometimes it is acceptable to use it. But usually *ge (个) is not the best answer, or is inappropriate to use. Such examples can be found in some students’ answers of No. 19 Part 2: * si ge ke (四个课; four MW class) and No. 15 Part 2: * na ge xie (那个鞋; that MW shoe).

The phenomenon of generalization also exists in usages of other noun measure words. Let’s take *zhang (张) as an example. As collocations of *zhang (张) with tables and beds are very familiar to students, they generalized the usage of it to all furniture. That’s how the expressions such as *yi zhang yi zi (一张椅子; one MW chair), *yi zhang jia ju (一张家具; one MW furniture) come about. There are also some students that generalize the usage of *jian (件) to all kinds of clothes. A typical example is *yi jian ku zi (一件裤子; one MW pant).

3.2.2 Failing to Make the Right Judgment about When to Use a Verb Measure Word

We can see such examples from the results of Part 2:

No. 8 Part 2: 你 每 次 要 吃 几 ___ 药？

           ni mei ci yao chi ji ___ yao?

           you each time have to eat how many MW medicine?

No. 17 Part 2: 他 拿 出 一 ___ 纸 放 在 桌 子 上。
ta na chu yi zhi fang zai zhuo zi shang.

he take out one MW paper put at table on.

The target measure words for these two sentences are *pian!* (片) and *zhang!* (张) respectively. When some students see a verb is in front of the numeral, they just assume a verb measure word should be used and neglect the overall meaning of the whole sentences. They see the verbs *chi* (吃) and *na* (拿) in front of the numerals and assume that the verb measure word *ci* (次) should be inserted.

### 3.2.3 Mixing up Similar Measure Words

Through the survey, we find that measure words with similar semantic meanings but different usage ranges are easy to be mixed up by students.

Though different measure words could measure a noun, semantic meanings of their collocations are different from one another. However, students’ acquisitions of measure words are always limited to the general usages of these measure words. A lack of rational cognition of measure words’ semantic meanings makes it hard for them to pick the appropriate measure word in certain circumstances. Let’s take the verb measure words *ci* (次) and *bian* (遍) as an example.

No. 10 Part 2: 我 今 天 听 了 三 ____ 录 音。

\[ \text{wo jin tian ting le san __ lu yin.} \]

I listen three ___ tape.

Both *ci* (次) and *bian* (遍) are correct answers. *Tingle san bian lu yin* (听了三遍录音; listen three MW tape; ‘listened to the complete tape three times’) means to
listen to the tape from the beginning to the end three times. *Tingle san ci lu yin* (听了三次录音; listen three MW tape; ‘listened to the tape three times’), on the other hand, means to listen to the tape three times, and not necessarily the complete tape. Most subjects (66.15%) chose A *ci* (次). 21.54% subjects chose B *bian* (遍). Only 3.08% subjects chose both of them.

That is to say, many students ignore the semantic difference of these two measure words. In comparison with *bian* (遍), subjects are much more familiar with *ci* (次), so when they were asked to make a choice according to a provided context, they simply chose the one that is more frequently in use and relatively familiar to them.

### 3.2.4 Interferences of Homophones and Characters with Close Sound

Errors are apt to occur when students need to pick one from several measure words with same or similar sound. An example is No. 7 Part 2.

No. 7 Part 2: 我 把 最 喜 欢 的 那 ___ 笔 送 给 小 红 了。

*wo ba zui xi huan de na ___ bi song gei xiao hong le.*

I BA most like DE that ___ pen give little hong LE.

‘I gave the pen I liked the most to little hong.’

The target measure word is *zhi* (枝). A few students filled in the blank with *zhi* (只) or *zhi* (支). (One thing should be pointed out is that *zhi* (枝) and *zhi* (支) can be used interchangeably in some circumstances. Though the measure word introduced by the textbook is *zhi* (枝), the latter is also acceptable here.)
Besides, characters with sounds close to target measure words may also cause interference. For example, a student provides *zhi* (纸) as an answer to the question just mentioned. Another example is that when *pian* (篇) is the target measure word, students may write down the characters of *bian* (遍) or *bian* (扁). This is caused by similarities in these characters’ written forms. Adding different radicals to a character or a component could make it another character. Usually, the new character has a sound close to the old one, and students are often unable to distinguish them clearly. This may cause interference with students’ acquisitions.

### 3.2.5 Failing to Establish a Measure Words Group and a Nouns/Verbs Group for Mutual Selections

According to Shao (1993) (1996), a noun/verb may collocate with several measure words and these measure words could be considered as a measure words group. In the meantime, a measure word could be used to measure different nouns/verbs—the nouns/verbs group.

For example, the measure words group of the noun *bu* (布; fabric) includes measure words like:

- *pi* (匹)、*fu* (幅)、*tiao* (条)、*kuai* (块)、*ceng* (层)。
- *tuan* (团)、*zha* (扎)、*kun* (捆)、*pi* (批)

Now let’s take the measure word *fu* (幅) as an example. Its noun group includes nouns like:

- *bu* (布; fabric)、*chou* (绸; silk fabric)、*ni* (呢; woolen material)。
- *rong* (绒; nap)、*cixiu* (刺绣; embroidery)、*tu’an* (图案; pattern)。
**jianying** (剪影; sketch)、**shanshuihua** (山水画; landscape)

Under different circumstances, the noun *bu* (布; fabric) can collocate with different measure words (its measure words group), including the measure word *fu* (幅). In the meantime, the measure word *fu* (幅) can be used to measure different nouns (its nouns group), including the noun *bu* (布; fabric). Measure words groups and nouns/verbs groups provide multiple possibilities when people are trying to form a “numeral + measure word + noun / verb + numeral + measure word” structure.

To investigate students’ acquisitions of the mutual selection quality of measure words, subjects of the survey are told that they can make multiple choices in Part 1 and provide more than one answer in Part 2. However, the result shows that most students are apt to provide a single answer to each problem. This indicates that students in the initial stage of Chinese learning haven’t been able to construct their own mutual selection groups. Students at this stage mostly rely on a kind of linear study, thus, it’s not hard to tell why they could only provide one measure word in a given context in the survey.

**3.2.6 Other Errors: Missing or Indiscriminate Using of Measure Words**

When students are asked to fill in blanks with appropriate measure words, some of them just ignore the problems if they feel it is hard to find proper measure words, and instead leave them as blanks. There are also some students that just pick a random measure word. For example, students provided various answers to No. 5 Part 2.

No. 5 Part 2: 宿舍里很安静，一...都不吵。
Su she li hen an jing, yi dou bu chao.

dormitory inside very quiet, one no noisy.

‘It’s very quiet in the dormitory, and it’s not noisy at all.’

Some students fill in the blank with measure words ge (个), xie (些) or ci (次).

Some students fill in the blank with nouns like fang jian (房间; room) or ren (人; people). Many students do not provide any answer.

Another example is No. 3 of Part 2.

No. 3 Part 2: 我 给 老 师 发 了 很 多 电 子 邮 件。

wo gei lao shi fa le hen duo die zi you jian.

I to teacher sent many email.

‘I sent many emails to the teacher.’

Answers provided by students include measure words jian (件), pian (片), xie (些), tiao (条), and the auxiliary word de (的).
CHAPTER 4
TEACHING MATERIAL STUDY

Measure words are frequently used in discourse and thus are a very important kind of part of speech in Chinese. Because of this characteristic of measure words, the main part of measure words teaching is usually accomplished in the initial stage of students’ Chinese learning and always focuses on the grammatical function of measure words. Introduction of measure words in most teaching materials emphasize the structure of “numeral + measure word + nouns” and the function of this structure. By doing so, the grammatical function of measure words has been emphasized from a theoretical angle, and most students have fully acknowledged that a measure word should be inserted between a numeral and a noun in most situations. However, instead of a communicative language, what students have learned are rules of language. Students often feel confused when they need to decide which measure word to use. We can see that either the teaching focus has deviated or the teaching is incomprehensive. In this chapter, we will discuss this problem by investigating measure words arrangements of one of the most popular Chinese teaching materials in America: Integrated Chinese.

The textbooks used by subjects of the survey are third edition Integrated Chinese Level 1 Part 1 and Level 1 Part 2. All target measure words are chosen from these two books. In the following section we will inspect the arrangements of contents related to measure words in these two textbooks from various angles.
4.1 Arrangements of Measure Words in *Integrated Chinese Level 1 Part 1* and *Level 1 Part 2*

4.1.1 Distributions and Frequencies of Measure Words in *Integrated Chinese Level 1 Part 1* and *Level 1 Part 2*

There are two parts to each lesson in this series of textbooks. The two parts are relatively independent. They could be two dialogues, or a narrative and a dialogue. Every part includes Text, Vocabulary, Grammar and Language Practice. Sometimes there are Language Notes besides texts. Our investigation of measure words arrangements includes all parts mentioned above.

To investigate the arrangement of contents related with measure words, I perform statistical analysis on when and how many times each measure word appears in text and language practice. Please see the table below for details.

Table 5: Measure Words in *Integrated Chinese Level 1*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MWs</th>
<th>Concrete</th>
<th>Abstract</th>
<th>Appearing in Text</th>
<th>Appearing in Practice</th>
<th>Total Number of Times</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ge 个(2)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>62</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kou 口(2)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xia 下(5)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dian'er 点(儿)(5)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ping 瓶(5)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word</td>
<td>Pinyin</td>
<td>Stroke</td>
<td>Grade</td>
<td>Character</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>bei</td>
<td>杯</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wei</td>
<td>位</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jie</td>
<td>节</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zhi</td>
<td>枝</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zhang</td>
<td>张</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pian</td>
<td>篇</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feng</td>
<td>封</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jian</td>
<td>件</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tiao</td>
<td>条</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shuang</td>
<td>双</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zhang</td>
<td>种</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lu</td>
<td>路</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zhan</td>
<td>站</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pan</td>
<td>盘</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wan</td>
<td>碗</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xie</td>
<td>些</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ci</td>
<td>次</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ben</td>
<td>本</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ba</td>
<td>把</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pian</td>
<td>片</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bian</td>
<td>遍</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tao</td>
<td>套</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The numbers in brackets indicate the lessons that contain the first appearances of measure words. Times Appearing in Text calculates how many times these measure words have been found in texts when they serve as measure words. Times Appearing in Practice calculates how many times these measure words have been found in practices when a practice is designed with the aim of reviewing measure words, or when measure words must be used in every single task to accomplish the practice. Each task is calculated as one time.

Table 5 shows the 29 measure words that are introduced in *Integrated Chinese Level 1 Part 1 and Level 1 Part 2*. The distributions of these measure words in the two textbooks are tabled as shown below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concrete MWs</th>
<th>Abstract MWs</th>
<th>Total Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IC Level 1 Part 1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IC Level 1 Part 2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

IC stands for *Integrated Chinese*.

There are 15 concrete measure words and 14 abstract measure words introduced in *Integrated Chinese Level 1*. The quantity of concrete measure words and abstract measure words are approximately equal, while their distributions are not.
10 concrete measure words are introduced in *Level 1 Part 1* (Lesson 1 to Lesson 10) and 5 are introduced in *Level 1 Part 2* (Lesson 11 to Lesson 20). As for abstract measure words, 8 are introduced in *Level 1 Part 1* and 6 are introduced in *Level 1 Part 2*. Thus, we can see that most concrete measure words (66.7%) are introduced in the first textbook, while the difference of quantities of abstract measure words in the two books is not so obvious.

As a whole, *Level 1 Part 1* introduces 18 measure words, and *Level 1 Part 2* introduces 11 measure words. That is to say, more than half of the measure words (62.1%) first appear in *Level 1 Part 1*.

Table 7 is about the frequency of each kind of measure word shown in *Integrated Chinese Level 1* (in both texts and practice).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Concrete MWs (15)</th>
<th>Abstract MWs (14)</th>
<th>Total Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IC Level 1 Part 1</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IC Level 1 Part 2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Numbers in brackets indicate the numbers of each kind of measure word.

In both textbooks of *Level 1*, the frequency of abstract measure words is much higher than the frequency of concrete measure words. This means that students who use these textbooks have more opportunities to review and practice abstract measure words.
What’s more, the frequency of measure words in the first book is more than three times higher than in the second book. That is to say, measure words are mainly introduced and practiced in the very initial stage of students’ Chinese study.

For comparison purposes, frequency data of the 29 measure words (15 concrete measure words and 14 abstract measure words as introduced in *Integrated Chinese Level 1*) in *Integrated Chinese Level 2* is also collected.

Table 8: Frequencies of the 29 Measure Words in *Integrated Chinese Level 2.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concrete MWs (15)</th>
<th>Abstract MWs (14)</th>
<th>Total Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IC Level 2 Part 1</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IC Level 2 Part 2</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>262</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Consistent with data collected in *Integrated Chinese Level 1*, the frequencies of abstract measure words in both *Integrated Chinese Level 2 Part 1 & Level 2 Part 2* are much higher than the frequencies of concrete measure words. However, the difference between frequencies of measure words in *Level 2 Part 1* and *Level 2 Part 2* is not very obvious.

4.1.2 Whether Frequency Plays a Role in Accuracy Rates of Measure Words in the Current Study?

As for students of Grade 1, though they have more opportunities to review and practice abstract measure words in their textbooks (*Integrated Chinese Level 1*), their accuracy rates of concrete measure words are significantly higher than abstract measure words. It seems that the frequency of measure words has little effect on accuracy rates.
The difference of students’ acquisitions between concrete measure words and abstract measure words may mainly be caused by different features of the two kinds of measure words.

To further verify this speculation, a linear correlation test on correlations between accuracy rates and frequencies of measure words is conducted. As students in Grade 1 used two textbooks of *Integrated Chinese (Level 1 Part 1 and Level 1 Part 2)* and students in Grade 2 used four books of *Integrated Chinese (Level 1 Part 1, Level 1 Part 2, Level 2 Part 1, Level 2 Part 2)*, correlation tests are conducted separately for the two grades.

Table 9: Frequencies and Accuracy Rates of the 29 Measure Words.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MWs</th>
<th>Showing Times</th>
<th>Accuracy Rates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>Lever 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ben 本</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>ping 瓶</td>
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<td>dian’er 点(儿)</td>
<td>26</td>
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<td>lu 路</td>
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<td>wan 碗</td>
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<td>fen 份</td>
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</table>

For Grade 1, the correlation test calculates the correlation of the two groups of data: the frequencies of measure words in *Integrated Chinese Level 1* and accuracy rates of Grade 1. For Grade 2, the correlation test calculates the correlation of frequencies of
measure words in both *Integrated Chinese Level 1 & Level 2* and accuracy rates of Grade 2. As the last 5 measure words in Table 9 are not designed as target measure words in the survey and their accuracy rates are unknown, their data is not calculated.

The results of the linear correlation test suggest that, for both Grade 1 and Grade 2, the frequencies and accuracy rates of measure words are not linearly correlated. For Grade 1, the value is 0.04 (1 shows that two groups of data are correlated, and 0 shows that two groups of data are not correlated). For Grade 2, the value is -0.002. Both of the two values are very close to 0.

The result of the linear correlation test shows that, in the current study, the frequencies of measure words have a negligible effect on accuracy rates of these measure words. In other words, the difference between accuracy rates of concrete measure words and abstract measure words is not caused by the frequencies of these measure words in students’ textbooks. The difference between the two kinds of measure words is more likely attributed to their different acquisition patterns.

4.2 Evaluation of the Arrangements of Measure Words in *Integrated Chinese Level 1 Part 1 and Level 1 Part 2*

4.2.1 The Merits

*Integrated Chinese Level 1 Part 1 & Part 2* introduce 29 measure words in total. Though the total amount of measure words is not large, most introduced measure words are in common usage, and this arrangement is consistent with the actual communication needs of students.
"Hanyu Shuiping Cihui yu Hanzi Dengji Dagang" (汉语水平词汇与汉字等级大纲(2001)) includes more than 130 measure words, and they are distributed in 4 grades: Jia (甲), Yi (乙), Bing (丙), and Ding (丁). More than half of these measure words are included in the grade of Jia (甲). This means that most measure words should be introduced in early stages of students’ Chinese learning.

Among the 29 measure words introduced by Integrated Chinese Level 1 Part 1 & Part 2, 24 measure words are from the grade of Jia (甲), 4 from the grade of Yi (乙), and 1 from the grade of Bing (丙). Thus we can see, most measure words included in these books are from the grade of Jia (甲). Measure words from the grade of Yi (乙) and Bing (丙) are mostly introduced in the second textbook. On the whole, the measure word selections in these two books are consistent with students’ Chinese acquisition levels.

B. The order of the arrangement is reasonable.

Firstly, at the very beginning (Lesson 2) of the textbooks, measure words are introduced to students in detail as a part of speech in grammar part. This may help students realize the importance of measure words and acquire some of their general usages and functions. After students’ acquisition of measure words has reached a certain amount, a summary of measure words is arranged in Lesson 9 to help students review what they have learned.

Secondly, measure words that are extremely common in use like ge (个), kou (口), wei (位) and zhang (张) are introduced in the very first few lessons. Verb measure words and the ones that are relatively less important are introduced later.
C. This series of books has a very prominent merit, which is the recycling of knowledge points. This feature is particularly obvious in the arrangements of measure words:

Firstly, some difficult measure words are not only introduced as grammar points, but also recycled in different lessons. This approach is very helpful to draw students’ attention and thus assist them with acquiring target measure words. For example, the measure word *dian’er* (点(儿)) first appears in Lesson 5 and has been introduced as a grammar point. Then, the dialogue of Lesson 7 reviews *dian’er* (点(儿)) as follows: “汉字有一点儿难” (*han zi you yi dian’er nan*; Chinese characters are a bit difficult). The usages of *you yi dian’er* (有一点儿) and *yi dian’er* (一点儿) are compared in the grammar part.

Secondly, some measure words recur again and again in the text. For example, the measure word *dian’er* (点(儿)) first appears in Lesson 5: “你们想喝点儿什么？” (*ni men xiang he dian’er shen me*; what do you want to drink). Then it is recycled in Lesson 7 (“汉字有一点儿难” (*han zi you yi dian’er nan*; it’s a little difficult to learn characters)) and Lesson 11 (“今天会暖和一点儿” (*jin tian hui nuan he yi dian’er*; it will be a little warmer today)). The verb measure word *ci* (次) appears in both Lesson 13 (“中国城我去过很多次” (*zhong guo cheng wo qu guo hen duo ci*; I went to Chinatown many times)) and Lesson 15 (“上了好几次厕所” (*shang le hao ji ci ce suo*; went to the restroom several times)).

Thirdly, as some measure words have more than one usage, the textbooks would mention each usage but only one would be used when the measure words first appear.
The other usage would be mentioned when they are recycled. Let’s take the measure word *kou* (口) as an example. *Kou* (口) is first used to measure the number of family members in Lesson 2: “你家有几口人?” (*ni jia you ji kou ren*; how many people are there in your family?). When it appears the second time, it serves as a verb measure word: “我吃了几口(蛋糕)” (*wo chi le ji kou dan gao*; I had a few bites (of cake)). Other measure words, like *ba* (把), *tao* (套) and *fen* (份), appear in different lessons with different collocations. Such an arrangement is very good for students as it can help them obtain a comprehensive understanding of the usages of target measure words.

Fourthly, when explaining a grammar point, measure words are consciously used in example sentences. In Lesson 17, when trying to explain the grammar “都/也不”, the measure word *tao* (套) is used in the example sentence: “这些公寓我哪套都不租 (*zhe xie gong yu wo na tao dou bu zu*; I am not renting any of these apartments)”. This is also a kind of reappearance of measure words.

D. Annotations of new words in these two books can facilitate students’ study to some extent. All measure words that appear in vocabulary parts are marked as “measure word for”. Annotations also provide general introductions to features of measure words and indicate their ranges of use. For instance, *wei* (位) is introduced as a “polite measure word for people”; *jie* (节) is a “measure word for class periods”; *zhi* (枝) is a “measure word for long, thin, inflexible objects such as pens, rifles, etc.”

E. Sometimes, there are language notes next to the texts that provide relevant supplementary knowledge. When introducing the measure word *kou* (口) in Lesson 2,
it is pointed out in the language note that the usages of measure words are different in different part of China: “in northern China, people usually use kou as the measure word for the number of family members. But in the south, people use ge instead”. Another example is the measure word jie (节). The difference between 三节课 (san jie ke; three MW lesson) and 三门课 (san men ke; three MW lesson) is compared in the language note part in Lesson 6: “the former is three class periods, and the latter is three courses”. This approach allows students to learn some Chinese language customs and thus help them memorize usages of target measure words.

F. Although few exercises are designed against measure words, many of them take into account of the practice of measure words. In many situations, students have to use measure words when they are trying to accomplish a task in practice. For example, an exercise is designed to practice le (了) in Lesson 5. This exercise asks students to make sentences according to given pictures. Here’s the provided example:

🧳 × 4 小高昨天喝了四杯咖啡。

Xiao Gao zuo tian he le si bei ka fei.

We can see that the way the exercise is designed requires students to use a measure word in each response sentence.

4.2.2 The Shortcomings

While the merits of Integrated Chinese Level 1 Part 1 and Part 2 deserve approval, this series of textbooks also has some shortcomings with regard to the arrangements of measure words.
A. Introductions of measure words are very brief. Almost all introductions are limited in the vocabulary part and are limited to just a few words. There are no detailed semantic descriptions or summaries about collocation rules. For instance, *zhang* (张) is described as a “measure word for flat objects, paper, picture, etc.” (Lesson 7), and *tiao* (条) is a “measure word for pants and long, thin objects” (Lesson 9). From such a rough explanation, it is very difficult for students to understand the usages of these measure words and why they could be used to measure certain kinds of objects. For example, *shu ye* (树叶; leaves) are flat, but cannot collocate with the measure word *zhang* (张); *gou* (狗; dog) is not a typical long, thin object, but usually its measure word is *tiao* (条). The textbooks fail to provide such multiple collocations or differentiations.

For students who have finished these two books, both their vocabulary and knowledge of Chinese grammar are expected to reach a level that can allow them to carry out basic daily communication. In this case, how to choose appropriate measure words in communication has become a realistic problem. These two textbooks rely solely on a few groups of collocations of measure words to direct students’ attention on measure words, thus, students who use these textbooks lack knowledge about inherent semantic features of measure words. This approach neither enables students to truly understand the language habits of Chinese measure words nor to effectively acquire their usages. This may partly explain why the overall accuracy rate of the survey is relatively low.
B. The arrangement of measure words in these textbooks fails to differentiate and analyze measure words that are easily misunderstood. A noun could collocate different measure words to express different meanings. For example, the meanings of念一遍 (nian yi bian; read one MW; ‘read (from the beginning to the end) once’) and念一次 (nian yi ci; read one MW; ‘read once’) are different. Why would a person choose to use a specific measure word but not other ones? What’s the reason and principle to choose an appropriate measure word? We cannot find these answers from the textbooks.

Sometimes, the way they introduce measure words may even mislead students. Let’s continue with the example of bian (遍) and ci (次). To review these two measure words, an exercise is provided in Language Practice of Lesson 15. Here is the dialogue given as an example of this exercise.

A: 你每天听几遍/次录音?

*ni mei tian ting ji bian/ci lu yin?*

‘How many times do you listen to tape everyday?’

B: 我每天听______录音。

*wo mei tian ting ___ lu yin.*

‘I listen to tape ___ time(s) everyday.’

Students are supposed to fill in the blank to complete the sentence. We can see from the example that the measure words bian (遍) and ci (次) are implied to be interchangeable in this example though they express different meanings. From my point of view, it’s important to guide students in noticing the difference between two
measure words similar in usage and help students in choosing the most proper measure word in a certain situation. However, the provided example in the language practice part is confusing. Neither approach can help students differentiate similar measure words. The results of the survey show that most students incline to provide *ci* (次) as the answer when both *ci* (次) and *bian* (遍) are acceptable or even when *bian* (遍) is a more appropriate answer.

Another example is the measure word *feng* (封). The textbook introduces it as a measure word for letters. In fact, *feng* (封) can also collocate with 电子邮件 (dian zi you jian; ‘email’), and the expression of 一封电子邮件 (yi feng dian zi you jian; one MW email; ‘an email’) is very common in people’s daily use. However, when the expression of 一个电子邮件 (yi ge dian zi you jian; one MW email; ‘an email’) appears in the text, it has not been mentioned that the collocation of *feng* (封) with 电子邮件 (dian zi you jian; email) is more formal and standard. Thus, we may see that because of the introduction method of measure words in these textbooks, students’ acquisitions of measure words are limited to some specific collocations and have not reached the presupposed learning targets.
CHAPTER 5

STRATEGIES AND SUGGESTIONS OF MEASURE WORDS TEACHING

Conclusions of survey results and textbook analysis bring about some revelations. In this chapter, some teaching strategies and suggestions are provided based on conclusions drawn in former chapters.

5.1 Concrete Measure Words and Abstract Measure Words Should Be Treated Differently in Teaching

Results of Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 indicate that student’s acquisitions of concrete measure words is better than abstract measure words while abstract measure words are reviewed and practiced in textbooks much more frequently. This conclusion shows that in comparison with abstract measure words, concrete measure words are easier to acquire.

There are two possible reasons. Firstly, image features of concrete measure words are very obvious; thus, the usage of this kind of measure word is more visually direct. This characteristic of concrete measure words can facilitate students’ acquisition. Secondly, it’s relatively easy to find equivalent words with similar functions of concrete measure words in English. The positive transfer of native language can also facilitate students’ concrete measure words acquisition.

The analysis above reminds us that, as two kinds of measure words have different characteristics and different acquisition patterns, they should be treated differently in teaching.
When teaching concrete measure words, there are some specific methods that should be used by teachers. First of all, visual aids, such as pictures or objects with obvious physical features, are useful tools to facilitate teaching. Comparisons of visual aids, on the one hand, can help students summarize common features of the noun group of a certain measure word; on the other hand, it can also help differentiate measure words with similar semantic features. Secondly, comparisons of Chinese and English are important to concrete measure words teaching. For example, we can find some words in English which can be used in a similar fashion as Chinese measure words indicating containers. 一杯水 (yi bei shui; one MW water) can be literally translated as ‘a cup of water’; 两碗面 (liang wan mian; two MW noodle) can be translated as ‘two bowls of noodle’; 一张纸 (yi zhang zhi; one MW paper) is a piece of paper, etc. The similarities of these structures in English and Chinese can facilitate students’ acquisition of certain kinds of measure words. Thirdly, etymological introduction is especially suited for concrete measure words teaching. It may strengthen students’ memories of measure words, as they can obtain a rational understanding of hidden connections between measure words and some nouns which collocate with these measure words.

As for abstract measure words, their inner relations with their nouns/verbs are relatively abstract. Thus, classification and discrimination are especially important in abstract measure words teaching. Teachers and teaching materials can provide some classification summaries to students. For example, there are some abstract measure words that can be used to measure people: ge (个), wei (位), ming (名), yuan (员), etc;
there are also some measure words that can be used to measure affairs: *jian* (件), *xiang* (项), *zhuang* (桩), *qi* (起), etc; measure words for buildings: *zuo* (座), *zhuang* (幢), *dong* (栋), etc. These kinds of classifications and summaries can help students understand general usage ranges of abstract measure words. On this basis, further clarification can be provided to differentiate minor differences of measure words in the same group.

5.2 Teaching Measure Words in Stages: Teaching Methods of Different Grades Should Be Different

Survey results indicate that measure words acquisition process of Grade 1 and Grade 2 are different. Because of a greater length of study, the average Chinese language level of students in Grade 2 is obviously higher than that of students in Grade 1. However, their acquisition of measure words has not increased accordingly.

There are some possible reasons why measure words acquisition of Grade 2 students does not improve as their Chinese language level improves. Firstly, the measure words concept and common measure words are usually introduced in the initial stage of students’ Chinese study. Textbooks of students in Grade 2 no longer focus on the concept of measure words, and introductions about measure words are usually reduced. After investigating measure words arrangements of *Integrated Chinese Level 2 Part 1* and *Part 2*, we find that these two books continued the method of measure words introductions as they appeared in the first two books. The only difference is that they introduce 18 new measure words. Secondly, students in this stage also do not put much effort on measure words study. After acquiring some basic
usages of measure words, students in Grade 2 may reach a plateau of measure words study. Their knowledge about measure words covers their basic needs of conversations. They may be still confused about how to select the most appropriate measure word in a certain circumstance; however, the eagerness to explore collocation rules between measure words and nouns/verbs is decreased.

Students’ study patterns require instructors to take the level of students’ measure words acquisition into consideration and select appropriate teaching content in different teaching stages.

For beginning Chinese learners, especially those who are just starting to learn measure words, teachers must help them to establish the concept of using a measure word between a numeral and a noun. It’s very important for Chinese learners of this stage to realize the collocation of measure words and nouns.

Teachers could provide some typical collocations as examples. As we know, usually there is only one particular collocation of a measure word that appears in a particular text. However, it’s unrealistic to expect a beginning learner to form a mature learning system and explore other possible collocations of this measure word by themselves. Thus it is necessary for textbook editors to provide some other collocations. That is to say, without specific context, explanations about which noun can be used with a certain measure word and which one can not should be further informed.
Practices, like filling in blanks, or matching appropriate measure words with nouns, can help students familiarize themselves with the grammar rules and firmly establish the awareness that a measure word should be used with a noun.

After a period of learning, learners may have accumulated a certain amount of measure words. At this time, learners would find out that not only can a measure word collocate with various nouns, but a noun can also collocate with different measure words in different situations. Thus, students in this stage often feel confused. They are anxious to know under what kind of circumstances a certain measure word could be used. It’s an important job for teachers to help students understand how to select the appropriate measure words in this stage.

Semantic analysis is a good way to help them understand the difference between quantities, ranges, and shapes of measure words, as well as language styles and attitudes expressed by different measure words. For example, the difference between 一条面包 (yi tiao mian bao; one MW bread; ‘a loaf of bread’) and 一片面包 (yi pian mian bao; one MW bread; ‘a piece of bread’) underlies in their shapes; people say 一伙强盗 (yi huo qiang dao; one MW robber; ‘a band of robbers’) or 一个强盗 (yi ge qiang dao; one MW robber; ‘a robber’) instead of *一位强盗 (yi wei qiang dao; one MW robber) because the measure word wei (位) shows respect. That is to say, to make students accurately and appropriately use measure words in their language practice, teachers must teach collocation rules from a semantic and pragmatic angle, and teaching in context will facilitate semantic analysis.
Practice of this stage should emphasize measure word selections under different circumstances. Students can be asked to choose different measure words to collocate with a certain noun given in different contexts. By doing this, they may have an intuitive feeling about the different semantic features of a target measure word.

For intermediate level students, teachers can analyze the etymological information and the extended meanings of target measure words. Students at this stage have accumulated a considerable amount of vocabulary, and their understanding of Chinese language has reached a certain level. At this time, if teachers introduce the etymology or initial meaning of a target measure word, they may have an epiphany of their understanding of this measure word. Besides, this learning method may also increase their interest in measure words or even in Chinese language as a whole.

After students have acquired the basic meanings of measure words, teachers can help them clarify their extended meanings on different levels, thus deepening their understanding of the mutual selection between measure words groups and nouns/verbs groups. For example, students at this stage already have the existing knowledge that zhang (张) is used as a measure word for flat objects, papers, pictures, etc. Beyond this, it could be introduced to students that this measure word was used as a verb initially, and its meaning was “to open”. Thus in modern Chinese, it also can be used to measure planar objects that could be stretched and shrink: zuì (嘴; mouth), gōng (弓; bow), etc. From the example we may see that though the images of zhuo zì (桌子; table) and zuì (嘴; mouth) are quite different, both of them can collocate with zhang.
(张), and that this phenomenon can be explained by the inner relationships of the word’s different semantic meanings.

To sum up, it’s an important endeavor to let students realize that the collocations between nouns/verbs and measure words are not without rules. Instead, there are always inner rules that restrict their collocations, and it’s very interesting and meaningful to explore and discover these inner rules. This process of exploration is just the right way to learn Chinese language and culture.

We should note that not all measure words are suitable for the teaching method of etymological exploration. Too much etymological introduction may increase the burden of memory on learners.

For advanced level learners, an important aim of their measure words learning is to master the rhetorical function of measure words and pursue the diversity and vividness of expression. At this stage, rather than accurately using measure words, their learning would be concentrated on how to use measure words expressively. Thus, the teaching focus should be on the rhetorical function of measure words and the collocations between them and abstract nouns. For instance, after the introduction of collocations between the measure word pian (片) and concrete nouns such as cao di (草地; lawn), lou fang (楼房; building), or hu po (湖泊; lake), teachers should also introduce the collocations between pian (片) and abstract nouns like xin yi (心意; regard), or zao yin (噪音; noisy). Besides, some temporary measure words also should be introduced at this stage, such as the measure words lian (脸; face), shou (手; hands), and shen (身; body) in phrases like 一脸汗 (yi lian han; one MW sweat; ‘a
full face of sweat”), 一手鲜血 (yi shou xian xie; one MW blood; ‘a full hand of blood’), and 一身疲惫 (yi shen pi bei; one MW tired; ‘(feel) tired with the whole body’).

5.3 Teaching Contents about Measure Words in Textbooks Should Be Reasonably Arranged

Textbooks are the carriers and basis of classroom teaching. Without textbooks that are reasonably arranged in contents, teachers have to put forth more effort to prepare for an effective class and students may encounter more difficulties when they are trying to take in and use target measure words. In general, additional attention should be paid to the following principles when arranging contents about measure words:

First, measure words, especially the important ones, should be consciously recycled in different lessons. For most American students, measure words are a new and special part of speech. Besides, most college students are adults, and they have finalized their internal language parameters. Failing to repeatedly reinforce the parameters and modes of a new language in their mind will lead to rapid deterioration.

Introductions of new nouns or verbs can provide valuable opportunities for reinforcing measure words. It is very effective to teach measure words when they are cross-explained with other parts of speech such as nouns and verbs. For example, ci (次) is a measure word for frequency. It can collocate with many verbs. If it could be reiterated and reviewed when introducing new verbs, students would have a deeper impression and the acquisition of this measure word would be more comprehensive.
Secondly, it’s important to analyze semantic features of measure words and summarize their collocation rules. A measure word may collocate with different nouns/verbs, and a noun/verb may have different measure words to express different meanings. Are there rules of collocations between nouns/verbs measure words? What are these rules? Answers to these questions should be found in textbooks.

Textbooks should introduce different possibilities of collocations specific to certain measure words, and should introduce them in sequence. Introductions could start with simple and common collocations. The uncommon ones or the ones that collocate with abstract nouns could be introduced later. In the meantime, the common features of nouns/verbs which can collocate with the measure word and the inner relationships between them should be presented to students. Let’s take the measure word tao (套) as an example. Tao (套) is a measure word for suite or set. Initially, it is a verb indicating the action of sheathing. Now the central meaning of it is objects in sets. Objects measured by tao (套) have features in common: multiple in quantity, made with same or similar materials but independent from each other, have a relationship of existing in a set. Starting from these features, some objects can be selected to collocate with it, such as clothes: 一套西服 (yi tao xi fu; one MW suit; ‘a set of suit’), 一套内衣 (yi tao nei yi; one MW underwear; ‘a set of underwear’), etc; or books: 一套词典 (yi tao ci dian; one MW dictionary; ‘a set of dictionary’), 一套书 (yi tao shu; one MW book; ‘a set of books’), etc; or articles for daily use: 一套被子 (yi tao bei zi; one MW cup; ‘a set of cups’), 一套邮票 (yi tao you piao; one MW stamp; ‘a set of stamps’), etc. After students have mastered this kind of usage of tao
(套), the collocations between it and abstract nouns can be introduced, such as: 一套乐曲 (yi tao yue qu; one MW tune; ‘a series of tunes’), 一套计划 (yi tao ji hua; one MW plan; ‘a series of plans’), etc.

Besides, textbooks should help students distinguish similar measure words. For example, tiao (条) and gen (根), ke (棵) and ke (颗), shuang (双) and dui (对) are several pairings of measure words that always confuse students. They need to be treated differently in teaching, and this should be reflected in textbooks.

Third, all sectors of teaching materials should cooperate with each other. When editing textbooks, several factors should be taken into consideration: have measure words been recycled in texts, exercises or example sentences of grammar parts in different lessons? How to design these reappearances and utilize them to help deepen students’ understanding of target measure words? How to design these reappearances and avoid the negative effect of them on the practice of other grammar points and vocabulary? Where could a summary of measure words or a comparison between similar measure words best be provided?

5.4 Thorough Study in Chinese Measure Words Is Still Needed

A thorough study in Chinese measure words is the prerequisite of measure words teaching. In modern Chinese, measure words are large in quantity and complicated to divide. Only by thoroughly studying their semantic meanings and usage rules can we help students truly understand and acquire measure words.
Specifically, different objects need different measure words to collocate with. As indicated before, a noun/verb can be measured by its measure words group and a measure word can be used to measure its nouns/verbs group. These two kinds of groups provide multiple possibilities when people are trying to from a “numeral + measure word + noun / verb + numeral + measure word” structure. To a very large extent, errors are generated because students lack sufficient understanding of the inner rules of mutual selection. Due to this reason, Chinese language instruction may only provide some simple or imprecise introductions to measure words, and this in turn can only lead to more confusion among students.

In a word, the study of measure words must be strengthened. Only by thoroughly and deeply studying usages of measure word can we find and summarize rules of collocations, thus improving the level of measure words teaching in TCSL.

5.5 Moderate Tolerance Is Necessary: Admitting the Flexibility of the Selection of Measure Words in Daily Conversations

Measure words are an open part of speech. Not only is the quantity of measure words growing, but also the combination capacities of them with nouns/verbs are varied. A noun/verb could have different measure words. Even in the same context, collocations of a certain noun/verb with different measure words can be accepted. For instance, both feng (封) and ge (个) could collocate with 电子邮件(dian zi you jian; ‘email’). The former is relatively formal and accurate, and the latter is more casual and is often used in people’s spoken language. Both collocations are acceptable. Then, as a teacher, what kind of standard should we use to measure students? No matter
what the standard, moderate tolerance of students’ measure words usage is necessary.

The aim of our teaching is to help students communicate more smoothly in the target language. Thus, making a judgment between right and wrong is a method, not an aim. Especially in student’s daily conversations, it is necessary to moderately admit the flexibility of their measure words selection.
APPENDIX

THE SURVEY

**Background information**

1. Are you a heritage student whose parents speak Mandarin Chinese at home with you?
   _____Yes, _____No.

   If yes, how would you rate your speaking ability in Mandarin?
   _____Native like, _____very good, _____fair, _____poor.

2. Besides English, do you speak any other languages/dialects at home?
   _____Yes, _____No. If yes, what is it?_________________

   How well do you speak?
   _____Native like, _____very good, _____fair, _____poor.

3. Have you been to China or Taiwan to study Chinese?
   _____Yes, _____No. If yes, how long? _____weeks, _____months, _____years.

4. Number of semesters formally studying Mandarin (high school or college):
   High school _____ semesters     College _____ semesters.

5. From the scale of 1 to 10, how hard is it to learn Chinese Measure Words?
   1-extremely easy  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10-extremely hard

6. When you are learning measure words, which kind of knowledge or help you want to obtain from your instructor? (you can choose more than one answers) _____________
   A: more practice
   B: to explain the correct usage of measure words
   C: to compare the differences among measure words
   D: Other ____________________________

7. Your methods of learning measure words (you can choose more than one answers)____
   A: memorize the usage of measure words and review
   B: watching or listening Chinese TV or radio programs, talking to Chinese people, reading
   C: using context to infer the meaning of measure words, or use other words to replace them
   D: try to use less or do not use measure words in conversation and writing
E: try to find out the connection between measure words in Chinese and measure words in your native language

F: Other: ______________________________________

一、Fill in the blanks with appropriate measure words given after each sentence. (You can choose more than one answers)

1. 我们班有十五______学生。  A 口  B 个  C 位  D 名
2. 昨天我写了三______信。  A 个  B 封  C 件  D 张
3. 服务员，来一_____家常豆腐！  A 个  B 盘  C 碗  D 下
4. 这_____中国饭馆儿的菜很好吃。  A 站  B 套  C 家  D 个
5. 我想送给姐姐一_____花。  A 把  B 条  C 些  D 枝
6. 他给我买了一_____西瓜。  A 些  B 个  C 点儿  D 种
7. 爸爸喝了好几_____啤酒。  A 遍  B 杯  C 瓶  D 个
8. 上个星期我写了三_____日记。  A 张  B 片  C 篇  D 个
9. 我去过好几_____北京。  A 次  B 遍  C 下  D 站
10. 我今天听了三_____录音。  A 次  B 遍  C 下  D 篇
二、Fill in the blanks with appropriate measure word. (Please use Pinyin if you forget how to write the character. You can provide more than one answers if you could.

1. 教室里有二十______椅子。
2. 妹妹今天买了六______衬衫。
3. 我给老师发了很多______电子邮件。
4. 卧室里有一______床。
5. 宿舍里很安静，一______都不吵。
6. 请问去 Northampton，公共汽车坐几______下车？
7. 我把最喜欢的那______笔送给小红了。
8. 你每个星期打几______网球？
9. 他每天上午有四______课。
10. 我搬家的时候，买了一______新家具。
11. 这______书和那______书一样贵。
12. 这______菜够我们吃了。
13. 这______公寓对我很合适。
14. 你每次要吃几______药？
15. 他一点儿都不喜欢那______鞋。
16. 她买了一______裤子。
17. 他拿出一______纸放在桌子上。
18. 这______衬衫只有红色的。
19. 小音家里有很多______水果。
20. 找工作是一______大事。
三．Multiple choice. Circle the appropriate pictures to match the provided measure words.

1. 一张__________________________________________________________

A B C D E F G H I J K L M

2. A             B            C
D             E             F
G        H               I
J          K

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Shorts


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