

УДК 378.011.3-051:784

© Kostikova I., Liu G., 2023

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5894-4846>

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3160-9057>

<https://doi.org/10.34142/23128046.2023.55.07>

**I.I. Kostikova,
Gengchen Liu**

TEACHING CHINESE AS A STATE LANGUAGE USING NURSERY RHYMES IN PRIMARY CLASSES

Modern language education should consider different forms, methods, and means for effective language teaching. One useful approach is the use of nursery rhymes as a linguistic-didactic means for teaching Chinese efficiently as a state language in China's primary classes. Nursery rhymes are folkloric expressions that can be used in education of primary schools. Many Chinese primary schools have started using nursery rhymes as a teaching means for the Chinese language, it facilitates not only language learning, but also enables the integration of the national culture and traditions. The aim of this article is to analyse the use of Chinese nursery rhymes as a means of teaching the Chinese language in China's primary classes, promoting language education within the context of contemporary educational challenges. The methods of analysis are used, they are non-formalized or traditional, that belong to qualitative methods, and formalized, that belong to qualitative-quantitative methods of analysis. The results: the content and linguistic characteristics of nursery rhymes are examined in the context of modern language teaching theory. Certain functions to use rhymes as a teaching means are outlined, including the critical period of language acquisition, language development peculiarities, use of comprehensible language structures, and young learners' engagement during language learning. The integration of progressive educational approaches and the tradition integration are characterized, combining modernity and tradition, employing local sayings, and considering learners' interests and curiosity during language learning. The linguistic features of Chinese nursery rhymes used with young learners during Chinese language lessons are analysed, with a detailed focus on lexical-grammatical structures, rhyme schemes, rhetorical techniques of contrast, personification, anthropomorphism, metaphors, and examples of dialectal expressions. In conclusion, it is declared that nursery rhymes help young learners master the Chinese language effectively. Nursery rhymes create a vivid, interesting, informative, and strong local atmosphere. Young learners are encouraged to learn nursery rhymes, that contribute to the mastery of the Chinese language and the inheritance of folklore and local culture.

Keywords: state language, the Chinese language, young learners, primary education, nursery rhymes.

Костікова І.І., Лю Генчень. *Викладання китайської мови як державної в початкових класах віршованими засобами навчання.* Сучасна мовна освіта має враховувати новітні форми, методи, засоби для ефективного викладання мови. Одним із корисних засобів є використання дитячих віршів як засобу лінгводидактики для ефективного навчання китайської мови як державної в Китаї у початкових класах. Дитячі вірші – це народний фольклор, який можна застосовувати для навчання учнів початкових класів. У даний час багато початкових шкіл в Китаї почали використовувати дитячі вірші в якості засобу навчання китайської мови, що не тільки допомагає опануванню китайської мови, а й уможливорює засвоєння народної культури, традицій. Метою цієї статті є аналіз використання китайських віршів як засобу викладання китайської мови в Китаї у початкових класах, що сприяє вивченню китайської мови в контексті сучасних освітніх викликів. У роботі використовувалися аналітичні методи, неформалізовані або традиційні, які належать до якісних методів, та формалізовані, які належать до якісно-кількісних методів. Результат дослідження: в роботі аналізуються зміст і мовні характеристики дитячих віршів в контексті сучасної теорії викладання мови. Окреслено функції, які притаманні використанню віршів як засобу викладання, як-то: критичний період оволодіння мовою; особливості розвитку мови учнів; вживання зрозумілих мовних конструкцій; мотивація учнів при вивченні мови. Схарактеризовано інтеграцію сучасних освітніх підходів та наслідування традицій. Це: поєднання сучасності й традицій, вживання місцевих приказок, врахування інтересу й цікавості учнів при вивченні мови. Проаналізовано мовні характеристики китайських віршів при використанні з учнями початкової школи на уроках китайської мови. Ретельно окреслено лексико-граматичні структури віршів, римування віршів, художні прийоми протиставлення, персоніфікації, антропоморфізму, метафори, наведено приклади діалектизмів. Наприкінці дослідження зроблено висновок, що дитячі вірші допомагають учням краще опановувати китайську мову як державну. Дитячі вірші створюють яскраву, цікаву, пізнавальну, колоритну місцеву атмосферу. Учні пропонується навчання дитячих віршів, що сприяє опануванню китайської мови, успадкуванню фольклору, місцевої культури.

Ключові слова: державна мова, китайська мова, учні, початкова освіта, дитячі вірші.

Introduction. The teaching of Chinese as a state language in China is undergoing certain changes against the backdrop of linguistic communication diversification (Pettit, 2016). Modern language education needs to consider different forms, methods, and means for effective Chinese language teaching. One valuable approach is the use of nursery rhymes as a linguistic-didactic means for efficient Chinese teaching in primary classes.

As it is known in China, Chinese nursery rhymes refer to Chinese folk verses written for children. These nursery rhymes encompass the experiences of previous generations and the crystallization of wisdom acquired through daily life, work, and invention. For instance, in one of the Chinese provinces, there are nearly 200 nursery rhymes dedicated to folk customs. Nursery rhymes are rich and vivid from various regions, reflecting the local culture. Typically, nursery rhymes are divided into seven categories: lullabies, play-rhymes, instructive verses, humorous verses, lyrical verses, narrative verses, and tongue twisters (Liu Liheng, 2015).

Nursery rhymes have vivid imagery, short sentences, repetitive phrases, and explicit rhymes. From the perspective of language teaching theory, they are suitable for language instruction as they help young learners develop language skills and learn about the surrounding world. Therefore, nursery rhymes play an important role in young learners' acquisition of the Chinese language.

Nursery rhymes promote recitation, and young learners use them with great interest, easily understanding and memorizing them. Teachers are recommended to choose and utilize nursery rhymes as a teaching means for effective mastery of the Chinese language.

Using nursery rhymes enhances young learners' acquisition of their native Chinese language. Nursery rhymes were once used by the people to educate children, entertain them, and serve as an important means of strengthening the relationship between parents and young children. Nowadays, traditional folk language is gradually fading among the younger generation, making the inheritance of folklore a significant challenge.

Primary schools can apply fully folk resources to teach practical content. It is preserved the rich and wonderful experiences and culture of China (Liu Gengchen, 2023). It is appropriate to introduce young learners to various ethnic groups within the country, teaching them to embrace the diversity of human cultures and their differentiation. Undoubtedly, nursery rhymes are cultural resources with local characteristics, and their use in education helps young learners understand the world and effectively enhances the diversity of learning, ultimately assisting them in mastering the Chinese language.

The research of language teaching and learning actively explores the use of rhymes in Chinese methodology (Liu Ying, 2011), (Bo Huifang, 2013), (Gao Lanlan, 2016). However, in the Chinese researches, this topic has not received sufficient devotion. Consequently, the problem of using nursery rhymes in teaching Chinese as a state language in China demands analysing.

Aim and tasks. The aim of this article is to analyse the use of Chinese nursery rhymes as a means of teaching the Chinese language in China's primary classes, fostering language education within the context of contemporary educational

challenges. The tasks are to underline the functions of using nursery rhymes as a means of teaching the Chinese language; to show the integration of educational approaches and the preservation of traditions; to research the linguistic features of Chinese nursery rhymes.

Research methods. The methods of analysis are used, they are non-formalized or traditional, that belong to qualitative methods, and formalized, that belong to qualitative-quantitative methods of analysis.

Research results. Nursery rhymes serve as excellent learning materials for educational clarification. Recently, consideration has been drawn to rhymes as a means of language teaching, and their inclusion in the primary school curriculum. Observations in schools reveal that young learners who are familiar with local nursery rhymes, find it easier to use the Chinese language, recite, and to read aloud. As a teaching means, nursery rhymes serve four basic functions.

Firstly, they correspond to the critical period of young learners' language acquisition. As it is known, the biological language basis proposes the hypothesis of a critical period for language acquisition. This hypothesis states that there is a critical period for language acquisition. During a child's language development, both hemispheres of the brain should be engaged, creating linguistic unity. The critical period, which extends until the age of 8, is when learners have the strongest abilities to learn a language. This hypothesis applies not only to the mastery of learners' native language, but also to the acquisition of a second (foreign) language. Nursery rhymes contribute to language development and serve as a means of language learning.

Secondly, nursery rhymes align with the growing characteristics of child's language. Young children can start speaking their native language at just one year old. However, their vocabulary is quite limited, consisting of separate words. **100%** Around the age of two, children may speak in two-word sentences, where most sentences comprise only two separate words. When children are three years old, they can begin to learn certain language constructions. Simple nursery rhymes can help children learn more words and grammatical structures.

After three years, children enter a rapid language development, gradually becoming capable of uttering more two-word sentences. The structure of language starts to become complex, incorporating not only nouns and verbs (subject and predicate), but also prepositions, conjunctions, and adverbs. After the age of 3, children's vocabulary reaches from 500 to a thousand words, encompassing practically all basic words. Children at this age can understand and comprehend directly the word meaning, construct a language consciously and creatively, perform activities related to word and sentence building, and create relatively simple sentences with different types of syntax. Language development progresses rapidly during this time.

Thirdly, nursery rhymes are correspondent to the quantity of comprehensible language constructions. As it is known, learners' innate and acquired abilities and skills are two aspects of language acquisition. This innate language ability relates to the inherent presence of language acquisition mechanisms in the brain, it, however, require further development in life, enabling continuous language progress.

Young learners at primary schools learn by listening and repeating a language; they listen to words and sentences and then imitate and repeat them constantly, gradually transitioning to actively using a language. With physical maturity and cognitive development, young learners' language also advances. Therefore, young learners, before extensively expressing a language, acquire many words first. Hence, a large number of vivid nursery rhymes can fulfil the needs of young learners' speech.

Nursery rhymes, regardless their length or structural simplicity, are rich in content, they have both general and local characteristics. In terms of vocabulary, nursery rhymes encompass all aspects of life, making them well-suited for young learners. This usage of rhymes facilitates the mastery of phonetics, vocabulary, and grammar. Young learners learn pronunciation, expand their vocabulary, and acquire language skills through nursery rhymes.

From a grammar perspective, nursery rhymes have simple sentence structures. Each element in a sentence can be traced to the use of various linguistic elements, that can be combined and replaced by other language elements, creating a coherent vertical connection within the language. The repetition of words and sentences aids in the strong memorization of grammatical structures, which can be quickly applied in real-life situations, making a comprehensible horizontal connection within the language.

Moreover, nursery rhymes cater to young learners' enthusiasm for language learning. The rhymes of different content are fun and entertaining. As a teaching means, they not only serve for learning purposes, but also entertain young learners and inspire them to learn another (foreign) language. Short and simply structured nursery rhymes become natural for young learners. They can master simple syntactic structures and then use these structures to construct longer sentences.

Language teaching demands that teachers integrate different educational approaches while preserving traditions. In combination with modernity and innovative educational ideas, nursery rhymes first reinforce the traditional basic of language education. Teachers and young learners can gather and compare local nursery rhymes, teachers select them accordingly for lessons. Nursery rhymes, used as a teaching means, are interesting, they can be chosen based on the lesson's objectives, young learners' age, and interests. The lively and positive content of

nursery rhymes for learning allows young learners to learn more about local traditions and customs.

Furthermore, nursery rhymes reveal certain local proverbs that require explanations. Teachers discuss such proverbs with young learners, explain their meanings, and promote their understanding. From a teaching method perspective, teachers rely on young learners' interests, using fun activities and games involving nursery rhymes to create a relaxed and lively atmosphere in the classroom. Young learners listen to and repeat the rhymes, engage in the exercises connected to them, and develop their own speech, making it easier for them to read.

Nursery rhymes are playful and enhance the enjoyment of learning the Chinese language. By teaching them, young learners imitate recitation aloud. The use of them is not only for mastering the Chinese language, but also to learn joyfully, achieve better results with less effort in education, and help young learners learn through pleasure, without pressure, while exploring the surrounding world and cultivating love and respect for Chinese traditions.

Let's analyse the advantages of nursery rhymes in primary schools when learning the Chinese language. Nursery rhymes are characterized by lively words, simple structure, and excellent imitation for spoken expression, reading, and proper pronunciation, making them quickly memorable with a unique charm. The linguistic characteristics of them are of great significance. Let's list five main characteristics as follows.

1. There are short sentences and simple grammatical structure. Nursery rhymes consist mostly of short sentences that are not only easy to memorize, but also enhance the poetic effect. For example, a rhyme "Moonlight". "Moonlight helps when planting ginger; it's good when planting bamboo; Bamboo grows, and you can grow melons; melons can be ripe and big, they are harvested and sold. Let's learn to play with cotton. We will weave cotton thread; when it breaks, we will learn to repair it; Let's learn to weave baskets; Attach a handle to the basket. In the basket, we can sell sugar; Let's learn to sell sugar. Sugar is sweet, and salt is salty; we can also sell salt; salt is white, just like sugar. Let's learn to play the flute, playing the flute is difficult. Changing the flute's breath is difficult. We will switch the breath and learn to play songs and plays on the flute. Playing a play is difficult. Earning a living is difficult by playing songs and plays. If you can't learn anything you'll beg food".

Thus, the majority of words in the rhyme consist of real words, and most constructions have sentences with three words, only some of the sentences have five-word constructions. The grammatical structure in the rhyme is relatively simple, using a) simple structures like "moonlight," "ripe and big melons," "cotton thread," "sweet sugar," "white salt," and so on; b) the structure of moving objects, such as "let's learn to play with cotton," "let's learn to weave baskets," "let's learn to sell

sugar," and so on; c) component structures, such as "playing the flute is difficult", "changing the flute's breath is difficult," "playing a play is difficult," "earning a living is difficult," and so on.

Therefore, the grammatical structure of sentences composing the rhyme is simple, primarily consisting of three-word sentences. Four-word and five-word sentences are well-suited for elementary school learning.

Another example, the rhyme "Brother Xiao". "Wonderful boy, brother, gather snails, how many can you collect? Collect three baskets. Leave a basket for food, leave a basket for sale, leave a basket for grandma. Sit together and sing folk songs". This rhyme has a straightforward structure. The verse is shorter, and all sentences are simple, real, and lively.

2. Many words have a strong sense of rhyme. Nursery rhymes are rich in rhythm, with repeated syllables. When using repeated syllables, nursery rhymes can convey mood, state of people and things. In most nursery rhymes, there are two repeated syllables. Such word repetition enhances the application of nursery rhymes.

A sentence rhyme is one of the essential elements of nursery rhymes. A rhyme means placing the same or similar words at the end of the sentences, making nursery rhymes easy to pronounce and memorize. As a repeated rhyme is easily memorized, it spreads and easily perceives through sounds. Nursery rhymes are welcome. A nursery rhyme can rhyme with each sentence or rhyme with multiple sentences.

3. The use of rhetorical techniques of contrast. Contrast is one of the rhetorical techniques commonly used in nursery rhymes. It involves juxtaposing words of opposite meanings in the sentences. It is done to reflect words, make the sentences more rhymed, and enhance the expressiveness of the words. For example, "Zhao Lao Crab". "The old crab is in the centre of the pond, Under the water there are two snakes like two needles; My dad and grandpa are frightened."

Such rhetorical techniques evoke specific emotions, convey the atmosphere of the rhyme, coordinate the rhythm, determine the rhyme, and convey contextual meaning. Among them, the contrast "white – black", "light – darkness" in some nursery rhymes is often used, as in the names of animals like "light – firefly, darkness – blackbird."

This kind of contrast rhetorical technique can stimulate young learners' imagination and help them understand things around them through associative thinking, recognize the deeper meaning in the animal names, understand life truths. It contributes to motivating oral speech development. Subsequently, written speech becomes comprehensible, easy, and vivid.

4. There are frequently used rhetorical techniques such as elevation and personification, anthropomorphism, metaphor. Nursery rhymes usually use ordinary objects to evoke interest in other things for young learners. Usually, the techniques

are used at the beginning of a rhyme or stanza to stress the object words to quote them.

Nursery rhymes also use such rhetorical techniques as anthropomorphism, exaggeration, and metaphor. They shape vividly young learners' associative and imaginative abilities and skills, illustrate the thing metaphor, teach young learners to contribute to good deeds in everyday life; praise young learners, educate and inspire them, learn to laugh at certain life circumstances.

For example, the nursery rhyme "Sister Hua Xiao." The rhyme plot is simple. Thanks to anthropomorphism, the rhyme describes vividly a sister image who is playful, but lazy, neglecting household chores and imagining that animals help her complete the housework. "The first month is coming, the second month is coming, the spring month is coming. Geese bring water, ducks wash vegetables, frogs light the fire, cats boil vegetables, hens and dogs grind seeds, foxes make tea, pigs plow the land to plant persimmons."

5. There is rich vocabulary and some dialectal words. For example, the rhymes from the Hakka region contain dialectal elements specific to the Hakka region. In Hakka rhymes, they sing about the Hakka rural area and life in the mountainous region.

These rhymes depict the rural life and mountainous terrain characteristic of the Hakka region. For instance, the rhyme "Herding Cattle" from the Heyuan Yuancheng region. "There are many strange things, I raise my eyebrows in surprise. Herding cattle - cows - have many quirks, and I have a brother like a starling. My brother likes play-fighting with grasshoppers, and the herding cattle keeps trying to cross the river to eat. I am swollen from work, my back is hunched, my eyes are covered with tears (sounds like "juice is flowing from the eyes"). This nursery rhyme depicts cows as a herd of cattle that the child herds. The rhyme teaches the child responsibility for livestock and also it teaches all children to be obedient. In the rhyme, cows are herding cattle, a brother is like a starling, an eye tear is an eye juice, and so on, these are all local Hakka words in Heyuan Yuancheng.

Discussion. So, the experience indicates that using nursery rhymes in teaching the Chinese language has proven to be a beneficial approach in the regions of Meizhou, Heyuan, and Yuancheng, in Taiwan. We agree with Liu Liheng (Liu Liheng, 2015), there are some limitations of using nursery rhymes as a language learning means.

It is essential to consider certain limitations when using nursery rhymes as a language learning means. The classical Chinese language used in primary schools may not always reflect a context that is easily understandable for young learners. For example, many nursery rhymes depict life in the mountains and frequently mention various rural elements. It could pose challenges for urban-born young learners who

have the lack of such an experience. They are not familiar with rural animals, plants, insects, and rural culture in details. Therefore, explanations and appropriate teaching strategies are necessary for each nursery rhymes to ensure comprehension.

Conclusion. In conclusion, it can be asserted that young learners respond positively to the linguistic influence of nursery rhymes, leading to better mastery of the Chinese language. Nursery rhymes create a vivid, engaging, and informative local atmosphere. Young learners are encouraged to learn nursery rhymes, which aids in language acquisition, preserves folklore, and promotes appreciation of local Chinese culture. Future research may explore the use of songs as a means for teaching the native language in primary education in China.

ЛІТЕРАТУРА

- Bo Huifang. (2013). Another color in English teaching – On the effective assistance of multimedia teaching methods. *Education*. # 33. (薄惠芳. (2013). 英语教学中的又一份色彩——浅谈多媒体教学手段的有效辅助. 教育. # 33).
- Gao Lanlan. (2016). An innovative training model based on educational games – Exploration on the improvement of teachers' higher-order thinking ability. *Science and Technology Innovation Herald*. # 13(10):139-140. (高岚岚. (2016). 基于教育游戏创新培训模式——教师高阶思维能力提升的设想探索. 科技创新导报. # 13(10):139-140).
- Liu Gengchen (2023). Teaching the state language in China by rhythmic and song means. *Innovative pedagogy*. 56(1): 79-82. DOI <https://doi.org/10.32782/2663-6085/2023/56.1.16>
- Liu Liheng. (2015). On the role of nursery rhymes in children's language acquisition. *Modern Languages* (刘立恒. (2015). 关于童谣在儿童语言习得中的作用, 现代语言.)
- Liu Ying. (2011). Research on English game teaching in kindergartens. Hebei: Hebei University. (刘莹. (2011). 幼儿园英语游戏教学研究. 河北: 河北大学.)
- Pettit L. (2016). The Truth About Teaching at a Chinese Primary School. *Teach English in China*. URL: <https://teach-english-in-china.co.uk/the-truth-about-teaching-at-a-chinese-primary-school/>

REFERENCES

- Bo Huifang. (2013). Another color in English teaching – On the effective assistance of multimedia teaching methods. *Education*. # 33. (薄惠芳. (2013). 英语教学中的又一份色彩 ——浅谈多媒体教学手段的有效辅助. 教育. # 33). (in Chinese).
- Gao Lanlan. (2016). An innovative training model based on educational games – Exploration on the improvement of teachers' higher-order thinking ability. *Science and Technology Innovation Herald*. # 13(10):139-140. (高岚岚. (2016). 基于教育游戏创新培训模式——教师高阶思维能力提升的设想探索. 科技创新导报. # 13(10):139-140). (in Chinese).
- Liu Gengchen (2023). Teaching the state language in China by rhythmic and song means. *Innovative pedagogy*. 56(1): 79-82. DOI <https://doi.org/10.32782/2663-6085/2023/56.1.16> . (in Chinese).
- Liu Liheng. (2015). On the role of nursery rhymes in children's language acquisition. *Modern Languages* (刘立恒. (2015). 关于童谣在儿童语言习得中的作用, 现代语言.) (in Chinese).
- Liu Ying. (2011). Research on English game teaching in kindergartens. Hebei: Hebei University. (刘莹. (2011). 幼儿园英语游戏教学研究. 河北: 河北大学.) (in Chinese).
- Pettit L. (2016). The Truth About Teaching at a Chinese Primary School. *Teach English in China*. URL: <https://teach-english-in-china.co.uk/the-truth-about-teaching-at-a-chinese-primary-school/> (in Chinese).

Інформація про авторів:

Костікова Ілона: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5894-4846>; доктор педагогічних наук, професор, завідувач кафедри теорії і практики англійської мови, Харківський національний педагогічний університет імені Г. С. Сковороди, вул. Валентинівська, 2, Харків, Україна, 61000, Україна
e-mail: ilonakostikova@gmail.com

Лю Генчень: ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3160-9057>; аспірант кафедри освітології та інноваційної педагогіки, Харківський національний педагогічний університет імені Г. С. Сковороди, вул. Валентинівська, 2, Харків, Україна, 61000, Україна
e-mail: 1421634594@qq.com

Information about the authors:

Kostikova Ilona: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5894-4846>; DSc in Education, Ph.D in Education, Full Professor, Head of the Department, Department of Theory and Practice of the English Language, H. S. Skovoroda Kharkiv National Pedagogical University, Kharkiv, Ukraine, Valentynivska street, 2, Kharkiv, Ukraine, 61000
e-mail: ilonakostikova@gmail.com

Liu Gengchen: ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3160-9057>; Ph.D. Student, Department of Education and Innovative Pedagogy, H.S. Skovoroda Kharkiv National Pedagogical University, Kharkiv, Ukraine, Valentynivska street, 2, Kharkiv, Ukraine, 61000
e-mail: 1421634594@qq.com

Цитуйте цю статтю як: Костікова І. І., Лю Генчень. Викладання китайської мови як державної в початкових класах віршованими засобами навчання. *Теорія та методика навчання та виховання*. 2023. № 55. С. 77-86

DOI: [10.34142/23128046.2023.55.07](https://doi.org/10.34142/23128046.2023.55.07)

Дата надходження статті до редакції: 1.10.2023

Стаття прийнята до друку: 14.10.2023