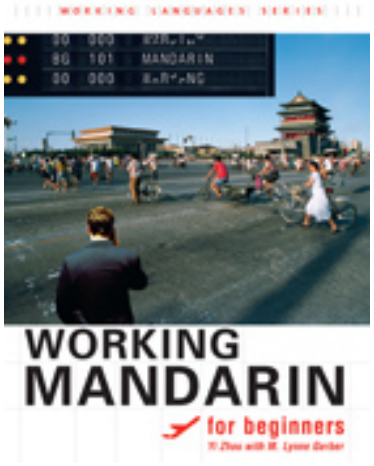
February 2013, Volume 17, Number 1
pp. 56–59

REVIEW OF *WORKING MANDARIN FOR BEGINNERS*

Working Mandarin for Beginners Yi Zhou, with M. Lynne Gerber 2007 ISBN: 9781589011373 (student edition) ISBN: 9781589011397 (teacher edition) US $64.95 352 pp. Georgetown University Press Washington, DC	

Review by Haidan Wang, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

Working Mandarin for Beginners is an agreeable attempt to integrate traditional business language teaching materials and an audio CD supported online via *Quia Books* (http://books.quia.com), creating an interactive environment. This textbook is part of the Working Languages Series sponsored by the Kenan-Flagler School of Business at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC), a series that aims to teach the basic language skills needed for business tasks and cultural awareness. Using a similar template to other textbooks in this series, *Working Mandarin* was developed by Chinese language educators in the language department of UNC with the assistance of the managerial staff of the UNC Business School. It is intended to help business students and practitioners communicate in everyday Chinese-speaking work environments. This textbook is designed for use primarily by people studying beginning level Mandarin for professionals, but is also appropriate for self-directed learners.

AN OVERVIEW

Working Mandarin comes in both a teacher and student edition. The textbook is organized into six thematic units, totaling twenty-four lessons. Each of the first five units consists of three content lessons and one review lesson. The themes range from business relationship-building, communications, and activities in the workplace to exchanges for daily social situations. The three content lessons contain their own sets of objectives of (a) functional language skills, (b) grammar and phonetics and (c) cultural and business understanding. Since Mandarin listening and speaking skills are the focus of this textbook, the first five units present Chinese in the form of *pinyin*, a Roman-letter spelling system for Mandarin Chinese. Unit 6 introduces the fundamentals of Chinese Characters. After a series of exercises familiarizing them with the content of this unit, students are directed to work on a project related to Chinese characters.

Both the teacher and the student editions come with a CD. The CD for the teacher's edition contains audio files with exercises, answer keys for homework, quizzes, and a midterm examination, in addition to student worksheets and other resources that are commonly provided in teachers' manuals. This version

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also includes several other useful packages, which will be elaborated in the following section. The CD for the student's edition contains only audio files for dialogues and listening exercises for all lessons. The CDrom and online support via *Quia* provide the ideal program for teachers to develop a hybrid environment, combining face-to-face teaching with online and classroom activities to create a virtual second language world.

THE RESOURCE RICH CD FOR TEACHERS

The richness of the CD for teachers is evidenced by the variety of packages in addition to those listed above. Every package is an ensemble of integrated communicative tasks, simulated contexts, and scenarios designed and structured for authentic language use.

The *Conversation Practice* package provides teachers with the tools to enforce the immediate student application of learned material in real world, authentic situations. Each practice suggests a role-play activity consisting of a series of scenarios with detailed instructions and clues for complete conversations, a pragmatic necessity missing in many business Chinese teaching materials available in the market (Wang, Tschudi, & Jiang, 2007). Instructions for all participating roles as well as for instructors as organizers are also included. The *Supplementary PowerPoint* is the biggest package in the CD-rom. Twenty-six PowerPoint files correspond to the 24 lessons, with an introduction to pinyin and one midterm review. Each PowerPoint summarizes the language points covered with follow-up speaking exercises, and most of them are supported with pictures suggesting parts of the scenarios. The second half of each PowerPoint introduces the content of the following lesson with functional expressions.

The *Mini-Immersion* package is a well-designed kit for learners to solidify and utilize extensively what they have learned in current units. It provides five folders of immersion tasks labeled as "hotel station," "restaurant station," "shopping station," "theater station," and "travel agency station," and all are essential situations for living and working in China. The general instructions in this package provide (a) thorough guidelines for both teachers and native Chinese speaking volunteers participating in the exchanges; (b) an all-inclusive check to ensure each immersion is well prepared and smoothly conducted; (c) a glossary for volunteers to match students' linguistic levels at the time of performance; (d) printable signs and props for these stations; and (e) grading rubrics. In each station folder, instructions are presented comprehensively for both students and volunteers to facilitate students' completion of the tasks. Each folder also provides semi-finished worksheets for students to complete.

There is also a separate package for *Student Worksheets*. Some worksheets are for listening comprehension and some for speaking purposes, for which detailed instructions and situations are provided. The last but most fascinating task sheet is *Skit*, wherein students design and develop a play with guidelines and rules to simulate a work environment and authentic communications in real-life contexts. Students have free rein to choose any topics ranging from business meetings to negotiations. The delivery may be either humorous or serious. The unique *Skit* provides an authentic, open-ended task that requires participants' collaboration and problem solving, thus providing a scaffolded environment for learning (Arnó-Macià, 2012). In sum, the multiple packages in this CD not only supplement the printed textbook, but also enrich the instructional materials for Chinese for working professionals, responding to the continuous call for adequate resources for less commonly taught languages (Grosse & Voght, 1991, 2012).

THE TEMPLATE VIA *QUIA*

Working Mandarin is one of the few Chinese textbooks for business professionals employing an online teaching management system such as *Quia*. The *Quia* system provides users of this textbook with a template. Teachers can create their own course page by using the key printed inside the teacher's edition at http://books.quia.com. Students registering for a course using this textbook need to purchase an access

key from *Quia* Bookstore and receive a course code from their teacher in order to log in to the course page.

The course homepage has an instructor workstation and a student workstation. The instructor workstation features a series of tab-buttons: *Dashboard*, *Classes*, *Books*, *Files*, *Announcements*, and *Options*. The *Dashboard* has a calendar for reminders and also a range of alerted items, such as items to be graded and new submissions from students and students' performance monitoring. The *Classes* section is a management folder in which teachers may view the results of students' work on their assignments, view the roster of their class, and set up the due dates for current class assignments in the assign section. In the *Books* section, teachers may create and customize four kinds of activities—"flashcard," "matching," "concentration," and "word searching"—to engage students in fun practice and review activities based on textbook or classroom instruction. The activity creation is quite effortless and unlimited. Having created different activities, teachers can assign these to their class sections, and check the statistics of the students' practice time, what they have been working on, and so forth. All homework exercises from *Working Mandarin* are transferred to the customized section in the formats of matching, true-or-false, multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, and questions for short answers. Students can also record their oral responses and submit them for their teachers' review and commentary. Assignments can be automatically graded upon submission, or the teacher may adjust points after reviewing the results. The adjustment option is very useful for grading speaking and writing exercises. The options in this section are particularly appropriate for grading pronunciation using the pinyin-system in Mandarin since it can match the accent or tones. The *Files* section enables teachers to upload files or create new folders. The *Announcements* and *Options* sections are for the purpose of course management.

POTENTIALS AND SUGGESTIONS

Working Mandarin, for beginning level learners, offers abundant supplementary materials, much more so than most other Chinese textbooks for business practitioners. With the technological support available via *Quia*, if the authors of this textbook upload all materials in the CD-rom to their *Quia* course website, *Working Mandarin* will present an ideal blended learning environment, an environment that research has shown to be especially appropriate for learning language for specific purposes (Arnó-Macià, 2012). Research has also demonstrated the feasibility of this approach (Wang, 2012) to extend the learning environment and promote learner autonomy and motivation (Nicolson, Murphy, & Southgate, 2011). Packages in the teacher's CD such as *Conversation Practice*, *Mini Immersion*, and *Skit* are apt to be improved and expanded in the web platform. If the internet connectivity is fully utilized, the existing activity kits and props may become more vivid and thus be closer to authentic real-life situations that students may be exposed to. Current audio files in the CD can be transformed to click-on button kits, making each button match one individual sound, thus more accessible and easier to click.

In sum, *Working Mandarin* is comprehensive and promises to facilitate beginners' listening and speaking acquisition in Mandarin. When used as part of a blended learning environment, it will become more user-friendly, and thus more attractive to business Chinese educators and learners.

ABOUT THE REVIEWER

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