

A Study on the Rhetorical Features and Register Construction of Chinese Readers for Young Children: A Case Study of Lancang - Mekong Countries

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Abstract:

Against the background of the deepening Lancang–Mekong cooperation and the regional development of international Chinese language education, the construction of Chinese readers for young children in Lancang–Mekong countries has become an important issue in promoting children’s Chinese language learning, Chinese heritage education, and the dissemination of Chinese culture. Young children are at a critical stage of language acquisition, reading development, and cultural cognition. Therefore, Chinese readers for this group should not only control vocabulary, sentence length, text length, and the proportion of text and images, but also pay attention to the influence of rhetorical expressions on children’s language comprehension, sense of language, emotional experience, and cultural identity. Existing studies have mainly focused on Chinese language dissemination in Southeast Asian and Mekong countries, Chinese learning among ethnic Chinese children, the compilation of graded readers, and rhetoric teaching in teaching Chinese as a foreign language. However, systematic discussion of the relationship between rhetorical features and register construction in Chinese readers for young children remains insufficient. Taking Chinese learning among young children in Lancang–Mekong countries as the background, this paper integrates research findings from international Chinese language education, child language acquisition, graded reading, and rhetoric teaching, and constructs an analytical framework of “regional context—children’s cognition—rhetorical features—register construction—pedagogical transformation.” The study argues that Chinese readers for young children in Lancang–Mekong countries should highlight rhetorical features such as imagery, repetition, contextualization, interaction, and culturalization. On this basis, they should develop a child-oriented register, a pedagogical register, a narrative register, and a cross-cultural register. Future compilation of Chinese readers should follow the principles of cognitive adaptation, rhetorical grading, text-image coordination, cultural mutual interpretation, and classroom transformation, so as to enhance the readability, attractiveness, and cultural communication effectiveness of Chinese readers for young children.

Keywords:

Young Children, Chinese Readers, Rhetorical Features, Register Construction, Lancang–Mekong Countries, International Chinese Language Education

1. Introduction

Lancang–Mekong countries and China are geographically close and culturally connected, with natural links in language education, cultural exchange, and regional cooperation. As early as the beginning of the 21st century, the “Chinese language fever” in the Greater Mekong Subregion had continued to rise. Countries such as Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam showed increasing demand for Chinese language professionals and educational resources, while Yunnan played an important role in promoting Chinese language education toward Southeast Asia [1]. With the continuous deepening of the Lancang–Mekong cooperation mechanism, the relationship among new Chinese immigrants in Mekong countries, educational exchange, and regional cooperation has become increasingly close. Chinese language dissemination is no longer merely a language teaching activity, but has gradually become an important component of people-to-people connectivity and cultural interaction in the Lancang–Mekong region [2]. At the same time, research on the cultivation of students from Mekong countries studying in Yunnan shows that regional educational cooperation needs to further respond to practical issues such as learner differences, curriculum adaptation, and the improvement of teaching quality [3]. From a broader perspective, there is a certain correlation between Chinese language dissemination in Southeast Asian countries and cognition of China’s national image. Language learning, cultural contact, and communication media all influence learners’ understanding of Chinese culture and China’s image [4].

In this context, the construction of Chinese readers for young children in Lancang–Mekong countries is of particular significance. Young children are generally at a critical stage of language acquisition, reading interest formation, and cultural cognition development. Compared with adult learners, children learning Chinese rely more heavily on images, sounds, actions, stories, and contexts. Their reading materials should therefore place greater emphasis on vividness, rhythm, and interest. Earlier studies on Chinese learning among ethnic Chinese children in Southeast Asia pointed out that children are characterized by strong imitation ability, weak abstract comprehension, and limited life experience in learning Chinese; therefore, teaching should fully consider the laws of child language acquisition and psychological development [5]. For ethnic Chinese children, Chinese language learning is often closely related to family language environment, cultural identity, and ethnic identity. Wang Aiping pointed out that the motivation of ethnic Chinese students in Southeast Asia to learn Chinese is closely associated with their identification with Chinese culture and Chinese ethnic identity; the process of learning Chinese is also a process in which cultural identity is continuously formed and strengthened [6]. Huang Hairong also emphasized, from the perspective of the characteristics of Southeast Asian ethnic Chinese adolescents, that short-term Chinese language teaching should take into account learners’ age, cultural background, and practical communicative needs [7].

However, research on Chinese readers for young children in Lancang–Mekong countries remains insufficient. First, existing studies mostly focus on adult learners, international students in China, or ethnic Chinese adolescents in general, while relatively limited attention has been paid to readers for children aged 3 to 12. Second, existing research has discussed textbook selection, teaching models, and grading standards more frequently, while insufficient attention has been given to the rhetorical features within readers and their register functions. Third, children in Lancang–Mekong countries have multilingual, multicultural, and multi-educational

backgrounds. Therefore, reader design cannot simply transplant children's Chinese textbooks used in China, nor can it directly apply adult-oriented international Chinese language textbooks.

Rhetoric is an important means of achieving vividness, aesthetic value, emotional expression, and communicative effectiveness in language. For young children, rhetoric is not merely an additional literary decoration; rather, it is an important way to help children understand meaning, develop a sense of language, enter story contexts, and come into contact with culture. For example, metaphor can transform abstract concepts into concrete images, personification can enhance the intimacy of a text, repetition and parallelism can strengthen linguistic rhythm, and rhetorical questions and dialogues can increase children's participation. Therefore, studying the rhetorical features of Chinese readers for young children not only helps improve the theory of reader compilation, but also contributes to the localized, graded, and engaging development of Chinese language education for children in Lancang–Mekong countries.

Based on the above, this paper aims to answer the following three questions. First, what rhetorical features should Chinese readers for young children in Lancang–Mekong countries possess? Second, how do these rhetorical features participate in the register construction of Chinese readers for children? Third, what design strategies should be developed for future reader compilation and pedagogical application?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Studies on Chinese Language Dissemination in Southeast Asia and the Lancang–Mekong Region

Studies on Chinese language dissemination in Southeast Asian and Mekong countries mainly involve regional cooperation, policy environment, learner cultivation, and national image communication. Relevant reports show that countries in the Greater Mekong Subregion have a continuous demand for Chinese teachers, Chinese courses, and Chinese language professionals. Universities and educational institutions in Yunnan have played an important role in promoting Chinese language education toward Southeast Asia [1]. Liu Haidan and Yu Haiqiu, from the perspective of Lancang–Mekong cooperation, explored the role of new Chinese immigrants in Mekong countries and pointed out that these immigrants can promote the deepening of Lancang–Mekong cooperation in economic, trade, cultural, and educational exchanges [2]. Cao Zhonghan studied the cultivation of students from Mekong countries studying in Yunnan and pointed out that international student education in China faces problems in training objectives, curriculum systems, teaching implementation, and cross-cultural adaptation [3]. Wang Zulei, taking five Southeast Asian countries as research objects, analyzed the correlation between Chinese language dissemination and cognition of China's national image, indicating that Chinese language dissemination has the dual function of language teaching and cultural communication [4].

These studies provide the regional background for this paper. Chinese readers for children in Lancang–Mekong countries are not isolated teaching texts, but language resources embedded in regional cooperation, Chinese heritage education, cultural dissemination, and cross-cultural communication. Therefore, reader design should

serve both children's Chinese language learning and the practical needs of people-to-people exchange in the Lancang–Mekong region.

2.2. Studies on Chinese Learning among Ethnic Chinese Children in Southeast Asia and Teacher Support

Regarding Chinese learning among ethnic Chinese children in Southeast Asia, Jin Ning conducted an early analysis of the characteristics and teaching strategies of Chinese learning among ethnic Chinese children in Southeast Asia, pointing out that children have particularities in age, language environment, psychological development, and cultural background [5]. Wang Aiping, from the perspective of cultural identity and learning motivation, pointed out that Chinese learning among ethnic Chinese students in Southeast Asia is often related to their identification with Chinese culture and Chinese ethnic identity [6]. Huang Hairong, from the perspective of group characteristics and short-term teaching, emphasized that Chinese language teaching for ethnic Chinese adolescents in Southeast Asia should pay attention to learners' existing cultural experience and practical needs [7]. Lian Rong and Tian Shouhua, from the perspective of teacher professionalization, pointed out that the insufficient professional development of preschool teachers in Southeast Asian Chinese schools affects the quality of early childhood Chinese heritage education, and that improving teacher professionalization is an important path for improving Chinese heritage education at the preschool level [8].

These studies show that Chinese learning among young children is not only constrained by children's cognitive development, but also influenced by family, school, teachers, and the ethnic Chinese community. Therefore, Chinese readers for children should not only serve as materials for vocabulary and grammar input, but should become comprehensive learning resources that teachers can operate, children are willing to read, families can participate in, and cultures can connect with.

2.3. Studies on Chinese Language Teaching for Southeast Asian Children and Country-Specific Textbooks

In recent years, research on Chinese language teaching and textbook construction for Southeast Asian children has gradually increased. Jiang Nan studied online elementary comprehensive Chinese courses for ethnic Chinese children in Southeast Asia and pointed out that online Chinese teaching has advantages such as breaking through time and space limitations and providing rich teaching resources. However, it also faces problems such as insufficient interaction, difficulty in maintaining children's attention, and high requirements for teaching activity design [9]. This indicates that Chinese learning materials for children should have stronger interactivity and greater potential for classroom transformation. Li Shuang studied the selection and compilation of Chinese teaching materials for ethnic Chinese children with Chinese family backgrounds in Laos and pointed out that localized Chinese textbooks in Laos are relatively scarce. Existing general-purpose textbooks lack sufficient relevance and interest for ethnic Chinese children in Laos. Therefore, textbook selection and compilation should emphasize country-specific adaptation, localization, and child orientation [10].

These studies suggest that Chinese readers for young children in Lancang–Mekong countries should move beyond the simple approach of “lowering the age level of adult textbooks” or “exporting Chinese domestic textbooks.” Instead, they should be redesigned according to children's language foundation, family background, local

culture, classroom organization, and teachers' abilities. Rhetorical expression is an important entry point for achieving child orientation, interest, and localization.

2.4. Studies on Chinese Reading Textbooks and Graded Readers

Research on Chinese reading textbooks and graded readers provides an important foundation for the design of Chinese readers for children. Wei Wulin reviewed the development of reading textbooks for teaching Chinese as a foreign language and pointed out that such textbooks have gone through a process from emergence to development and then to prosperity. In recent years, reading textbooks for children and Chinese graded reader series have become new highlights in the development of reading textbooks for teaching Chinese as a foreign language [11]. Huang Wen, taking the content grading standards of graded reading for ethnic Chinese children as the research object, argued that graded reading for ethnic Chinese children should examine such factors as vocabulary, sentence length, subject matter, genres, exercises, text-image ratio, and section design from cognitive, psychological, and ecological perspectives [12]. Li Xueli explored the design and compilation of Chinese graded readers based on the YCT syllabus, emphasizing that graded Chinese readers for children should be based on learners' language level, psychological development, and cognitive characteristics, and should provide overseas child learners of Chinese with reading materials that are highly targeted, practical, and interesting [13].

Research on graded reading provides an important insight for this paper: the difficulty control of children's readers should not remain only at the level of vocabulary and grammar, but should also extend to the level of rhetorical expression. Different rhetorical devices vary in comprehension difficulty. Reduplicated words, repetition, and onomatopoeia are usually more suitable for beginner-level children, while puns, metonymy, allusions, and highly condensed symbolic expressions are more suitable for advanced learners.

2.5. Studies on Rhetoric Teaching and Rhetorical Culture in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language

Research on rhetoric teaching is an important theoretical source for this paper. Tan Ruwei pointed out that Chinese rhetoric is closely related to Chinese culture. Chinese rhetoric embodies national cultural spirit, cultural psychology, and characteristics of linguistic expression; therefore, teaching Chinese as a foreign language should attach importance to rhetorical-cultural factors [14]. Hou Youlan, in a review of rhetoric teaching in teaching Chinese as a foreign language, pointed out that rhetoric teaching and the cultivation of rhetorical competence are important issues in the field [15]. Qin Huilan further proposed that rhetoric teaching in teaching Chinese as a foreign language should clarify teaching objectives, rhetorical items, level arrangements, and teaching methods, and that its core lies in cultivating learners' appropriate, vivid, and effective Chinese expression ability [16]. Liu Jiayin, from the perspective of textbook development for international Chinese language education, pointed out that there are currently limited Chinese rhetoric textbooks for international Chinese language education, and that rhetoric textbook development should strengthen localization, practicality, and digitalization [17].

However, existing studies on rhetoric teaching mainly target adult learners or university-level international students, while insufficient attention has been paid to rhetorical phenomena in Chinese readers for young children. For children, rhetoric teaching should not focus on terminological explanation. Instead, children should

experience the vividness and rhythm of Chinese expression in specific contexts through readers, stories, images, reading aloud, and performance.

2.6. Studies on Country-Specific Policies and Language Characteristics of Mekong Learners

Chinese language dissemination in Southeast Asian countries is also influenced by local education policies and language environments. Wu Yinghui and He Hongxia analyzed the influence of policies in Southeast Asian countries on Chinese language dissemination from a diachronic and country-comparative perspective, pointing out that policy environments, education systems, and social needs in different countries affect the pathways of Chinese language dissemination [18]. Worrachaiyut conducted a systematic study of Thailand's Chinese language education policy and its implementation, showing that the development of Chinese language education in Thailand is closely related to policy promotion, teacher support, and curriculum implementation [19]. Zheng Bo studied Chinese character teaching for students from the Mekong River Basin, indicating that learners in the Mekong River Basin have particularities in Chinese character cognition, Chinese character learning, and teaching adaptation [20]. These studies further demonstrate that Chinese readers for young children in Lancang–Mekong countries should take into account country differences, learner differences, and differences in teaching environments.

3. Research Design and Analytical Framework

3.1. Research Objects

The “Lancang–Mekong countries” discussed in this paper mainly refer to Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, and other countries closely connected with China under the Lancang–Mekong cooperation framework. The research objects include Chinese readers, Chinese heritage textbooks, graded readers for children, picture-book-based Chinese learning materials, and children's Chinese reading resources for young children aged 3 to 12. The learners include both ethnic Chinese children with Chinese family backgrounds and non-ethnic Chinese children who learn Chinese as a second language.

3.2. Research Approach

This paper combines theoretical construction with textual analysis. Based on existing literature and the research direction established in the project proposal, it discusses rhetorical features in Chinese readers for young children and their role in register construction. The focus of this study is not to fabricate statistical data from a certain set of readers, but to establish an analytical framework that can be used for subsequent empirical research and textbook compilation.

3.3. Research Methods

First, the literature analysis method is adopted. This paper reviews research on Chinese language dissemination in Southeast Asia and the Lancang–Mekong region, Chinese learning among ethnic Chinese children, graded reading, rhetoric teaching, and country-specific textbook studies.

Second, the textual analysis method is adopted. The paper analyzes the linguistic features that Chinese readers for children should possess from the perspectives of

vocabulary, sentence patterns, rhetorical devices, discourse structure, and text-image relations.

Third, the register analysis method is adopted. The paper examines how rhetorical expressions participate in the construction of a child-oriented register, a pedagogical register, a narrative register, and a cross-cultural register.

Fourth, the pedagogical transformation method is adopted. The findings of rhetorical analysis are transformed into principles for reader compilation and suggestions for classroom teaching.

4. An Analytical Framework for Rhetoric in Chinese Readers for Young Children

The Figure 1 shows the detail of the analytical framework for rhetoric in Chinese readers for young children.

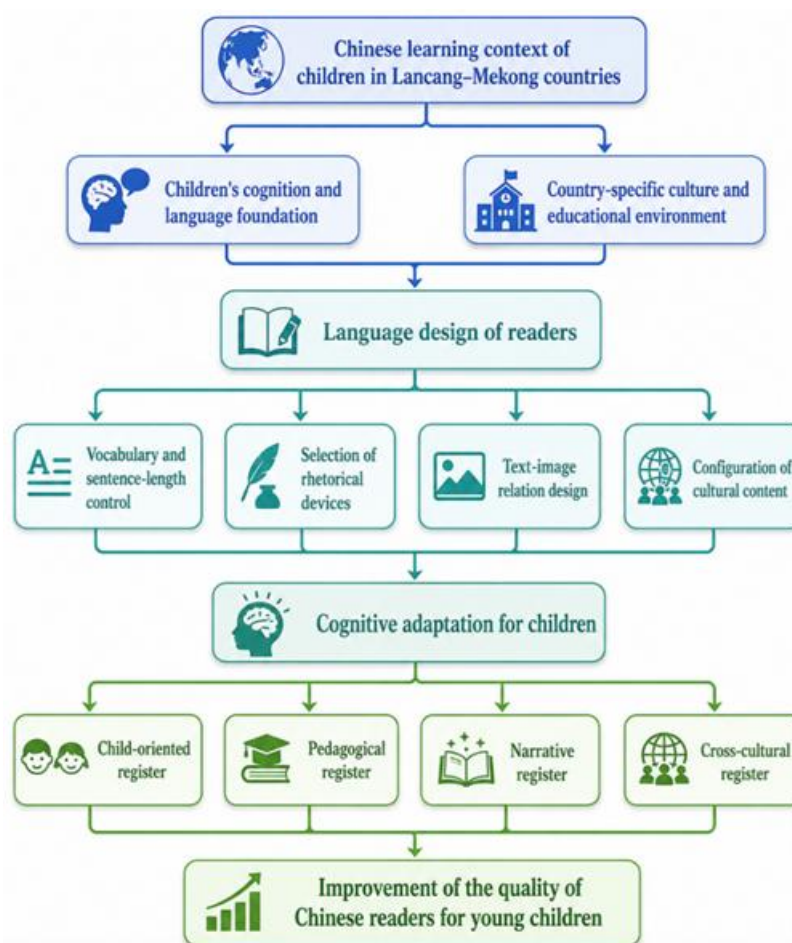


Figure 1. Analytical Framework for Rhetoric and Register in Chinese Readers for Young Children.

This framework emphasizes that rhetorical design in readers is not merely a matter of selecting several rhetorical devices. Rather, it requires comprehensive consideration of children's age, Chinese proficiency, reading ability, local cultural background, and classroom teaching needs. Rhetorical expression not only serves language comprehension, but also participates in the formation of the register style of readers. The Table 1 shows the details.

Table 1. *Analytical Dimensions of Rhetoric in Chinese Readers for Young Children.*

Analytical Dimension	Specific Indicators	Focus of Observation	Educational Function
Language difficulty	Vocabulary, sentence length, sentence patterns	Whether they match children's Chinese proficiency and avoid excessive abstraction	Reducing reading burden
Rhetorical types	Metaphor, personification, repetition, parallelism, rhetorical questions, reduplication, onomatopoeia	Whether rhetorical devices match children's cognitive level	Enhancing vividness of expression
Register style	Child-oriented, pedagogical, narrative, cross-cultural	Whether the language is friendly, natural, readable, and teachable	Forming the style of readers
Text-image relation	Visual support, visual cues, scene presentation	Whether images help children understand rhetorical meaning	Supporting meaning construction
Cultural content	Chinese culture, local culture, cross-cultural comparison	Whether cultural mutual interpretation is achieved rather than one-way transmission	Promoting cultural understanding
Pedagogical application	Reading aloud, performance, question-answer activities, retelling, imitation writing	Whether the text can be transformed into classroom activities	Enhancing teaching operability

5. Major Rhetorical Features of Chinese Readers for Young Children

5.1. Imagery-Based Rhetoric: Transforming Abstract Meaning into Concrete Images

Young children rely heavily on concrete images when understanding language. Rhetorical devices such as metaphor, personification, and onomatopoeia can transform abstract concepts into images and actions familiar to children. For example, expressions such as “the moon is like a small boat,” “the sun smiled,” and “the light rain goes sha-sha-sha” can help children understand Chinese words and sentences through visual, auditory, and action-based experience.

In Chinese readers for children in Lancang–Mekong countries, imagery-based rhetoric is particularly suitable for themes such as nature, family, school, festivals, animals, and body movements. These themes are closely related to children's life experience, are easy to coordinate with illustrations, and are also convenient for teachers to conduct activities such as reading aloud, picture-based speaking, and role play. For children with a weak foundation in Chinese, rhetorical images should not be overly unfamiliar. Expressions with high visualizability and low cultural barriers should be prioritized.

For example:

“The Mekong River is like a long ribbon, flowing past our hometown.”

This sentence uses metaphor while connecting with the geographical experience familiar to children in the Lancang–Mekong region, thereby helping establish a connection between language learning and local life.

5.2. Repetitive Rhetoric: Strengthening Language Memory through Rhythmic Input

Repetition, reduplication, and parallelism are very important rhetorical forms in children’s readers. Children need a large amount of predictable, imitable, and repeatable input in the process of language learning. Repetitive rhetoric can reduce language processing difficulty and enable children to memorize words and sentence patterns through rhythm. For example:

“The little bird flies and flies, flies over the river, flies over the woods, and flies to my window.”

This expression strengthens verb memory and sentence-pattern awareness through repetition of “fly” and continuous action structures. For young children, repetition is not simply mechanical duplication; it is a form of rhythmic input. It helps children master words while also enhancing their interest in reading aloud.

5.3. Contextualized Rhetoric: Presenting Linguistic Meaning in Children’s Life Scenes

Young children’s understanding of language often depends on concrete contexts. Contextualized rhetoric emphasizes placing rhetorical expressions in familiar life scenes, such as going to school, eating, playing games, celebrating festivals, family conversations, and making friends. Chinese readers for children in Lancang–Mekong countries especially need to pay attention to local life experience. For example, children in Laos may be familiar with the Mekong River, temples, schools, and local festivals; children in Thailand may be familiar with the Water Festival, Chinese classes on campus, and multilingual environments; children in Vietnam and Myanmar also have their own distinct life scenes.

Therefore, rhetorical expressions in readers should avoid presenting only the experience of children in China. Instead, they should adopt the method of “Chinese expression + local scene.” For example:

“Clear water is like happy little hands, gently patting our faces.”

This sentence contains elements of metaphor and personification, and it can also be connected with festivals and life scenes familiar to Southeast Asian children.

5.4. Interactive Rhetoric: Enhancing Children’s Participation in Reading

Children’s readers differ from adult reading materials in that their language should have stronger dialogic and interactive qualities. Rhetorical questions, direct address, dialogue, and onomatopoeia can enhance children’s sense of participation. For example:

“Little cat, where are you going?”

“I am going to look for my red hat!”

Such expressions can guide children to engage in role reading, action performance, and question-answer practice. Interactive rhetoric transforms children from passive

readers into participants in the text, which is conducive to cultivating oral expression ability and classroom participation.

5.5. Culturalized Rhetoric: Integrating Cultural Understanding into Linguistic Expression

Chinese rhetoric often carries cultural meaning. For children in Lancang–Mekong countries, culturalized rhetoric should follow the principle of “understandability at the surface level and expandability at the deeper level.” Young children should not be exposed too early to highly condensed allusions, puns, or complex symbols. However, they can gradually come into contact with Chinese culture through themes such as festivals, family affection, nature, food, animals, and games.

For example:

“Red lanterns light up like little suns.”

This expression presents the cultural atmosphere of the Spring Festival through metaphor. It is vivid and easy for children to understand with the help of images. The key to culturalized rhetoric does not lie in piling up cultural knowledge, but in conveying cultural emotions through language forms that children can understand. The Table 2 shows the details.

Table 2. *Common Rhetorical Devices in Chinese Readers for Young Children and Their Adaptability.*

Rhetorical Device	Typical Expression	Comprehension Difficulty	Suitable Stage	Main Function
Reduplication	red-red flowers, walk slowly-slowly	Low	Beginner	Enhancing intimacy and rhythm
Repetition	fly and fly, look and look	Low	Beginner	Strengthening memory and sentence input
Onomatopoeia	sha-sha-sha, meow-meow	Low	Beginner	Stimulating interest and supporting auditory perception
Personification	the sun smiled; the grass nodded	Relatively low	Beginner–intermediate	Stimulating imagination and emotional experience
Metaphor	the moon is like a small boat	Medium	Beginner–intermediate	Establishing visual association
Parallelism	I love my father, I love my mother, I love my school	Medium	Intermediate	Strengthening sentence patterns and expression layers
Rhetorical question / question-answer form	Where did the little cat go? It went to find friends	Medium	Intermediate	Enhancing interaction
Exaggeration	so happy that one jumps into the sky	Relatively high	Intermediate–advanced	Cultivating humor and expressive power

Pun and metonymy	Strong cultural dependence	High	Advanced	Should be used cautiously
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6. Rhetorical Features and Register Construction in Chinese Readers for Children

Rhetorical features are not isolated linguistic phenomena. Together, they participate in the formation of the register of readers. The register of a reader refers to the relatively stable linguistic style formed through vocabulary, sentence patterns, rhetoric, narration, text-image relations, and cultural expression. Chinese readers for young children in Lancang–Mekong countries should at least develop the following four types of registers.

6.1. Child-Oriented Register

A child-oriented register emphasizes friendly, concise, concrete, and rhythmic language. Its typical features include frequent use of short sentences, dialogues, reduplicated words, onomatopoeic words, and action-oriented expressions. For example, expressions such as “little hands,” “bright stars,” “run a little,” and “take a look” can enhance the intimacy and perceptibility of language.

A child-oriented register does not mean making language childish in a simplistic sense. Instead, it means designing expressions according to children’s cognitive characteristics. Children aged 3 to 6 are more suited to image-based, action-based, and repetition-based expressions; children aged 7 to 12 can gradually be exposed to more complex narration, simple metaphors, rhetorical questions, and cultural explanations.

6.2. Pedagogical Register

A pedagogical register refers to reader language that serves Chinese learning objectives. Rhetorical expressions in children’s readers should be integrated with vocabulary, sentence patterns, and functional items, rather than using rhetoric for its own sake. For example, when learning the sentence pattern “there is/there are,” the following text can be designed:

“I have a small schoolbag.

What is in the schoolbag?

There are books, pens, and my little drawing book.”

This passage naturally presents the sentence pattern “there is/there are” through question-answer structure, repetition, and enumeration. It has a clear teaching objective while maintaining children’s reading interest. The core of a pedagogical register is to integrate language knowledge into stories and contexts, allowing children to acquire language naturally through reading.

6.3. Narrative Register

Stories are an important form of children’s reading. A narrative register emphasizes characters, plots, conflicts, dialogues, and emotional experience. Personification can turn animals, plants, and natural objects into story characters; rhetorical questions can promote plot development; repetition can create story rhythm; and metaphors can enhance imagery.

For example: “The little raindrops came running. They knocked on the window and

said, ‘Children, come out and play!’”

This expression turns “little raindrops” into story characters through personification and dialogue, helping children enter the textual situation.

6.4. Cross-Cultural Register

Children in Lancang–Mekong countries have multilingual and multicultural backgrounds. A cross-cultural register requires readers not only to present Chinese culture, but also to respect and incorporate local culture. Readers can adopt the expressive mode of “Chinese culture + local experience + children’s life.” For example:

“The Spring Festival has red lanterns, and the Water Festival has clear water.

The red lanterns are bright; the clear water is cool.

They both send blessings to everyone.”

This expression connects different cultures through equal comparison. It presents Chinese culture while respecting local children’s experience, helping form cross-cultural understanding. The Figure 2 shows the relationship model between rhetorical features and register construction.

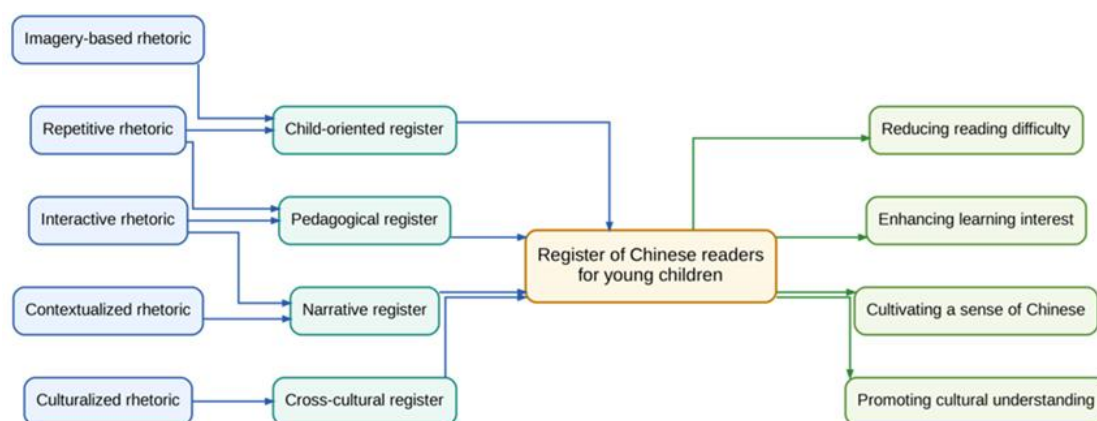


Figure 2. Relationship Model between Rhetorical Features and Register Construction.

7. Rhetorical Design Strategies for Readers in Lancang–Mekong Countries

7.1. Adhering to Cognitive Adaptation and Controlling Rhetorical Difficulty

Chinese readers for young children should select rhetorical devices according to children’s age and Chinese proficiency. At the beginner level, reduplication, repetition, onomatopoeia, simple personification, and explicit metaphors are recommended. At the intermediate level, parallelism, rhetorical questions, contrast, and simple exaggeration can be gradually introduced. At higher levels, idioms, fixed expressions, symbols, and cultural metaphors may be appropriately introduced. Such grading can prevent children from encountering comprehension barriers caused by overly difficult rhetoric.

7.2. Establishing Rhetorical Grading and Forming a Progressive Reader System

The grading of children's Chinese readers should focus not only on vocabulary and grammar, but also on rhetorical items. Readers at different levels can set different rhetorical goals. For example, Level 1 readers can focus on children's perception of sounds, colors, actions, and repeated sentence patterns; Level 2 readers can introduce simple metaphors and personification; Level 3 readers can include rhetorical questions, parallelism, and contrast; Level 4 readers can gradually introduce cultural images and simple idioms (Table 3).

Table 3. *Suggested Rhetorical Grading for Chinese Readers for Young Children.*

Level	Learner Characteristics	Recommended Rhetoric	Not Recommended for Frequent Use	Design Focus
Beginner	Children aged 3–6 or zero-beginner learners	Reduplication, repetition, onomatopoeia, simple personification	Metonymy, puns, allusions	Sounds, actions, images
Beginner–intermediate	Children aged 6–9 or approximately YCT 1–2	Metaphor, rhetorical questions, parallelism, dialogue	Abstract symbols, complex exaggeration	Sentence training and contextual understanding
Intermediate	Children aged 9–12 or approximately YCT 3–4	Contrast, exaggeration, simple idioms, cultural images	Highly condensed allusions	Story comprehension and cultural explanation
Extended level	Children with relatively high proficiency	Symbolism, fixed expressions, integrated rhetoric	Overly literary expression	Expression training and cross-cultural comparison

7.3. Strengthening Text-Image Coordination and Reducing the Burden of Understanding Rhetoric

When children understand metaphor, personification, and cultural images, they need visual support. Illustrations in readers should not merely serve as decoration; they should perform functions such as explaining meaning, indicating contexts, and supporting comprehension. For example, if the text says “the moon is like a small boat,” the illustration should clearly present the visual connection between a curved moon and a small boat. If the text says “the sun smiled,” the illustration may present a personified sun, enabling children to intuitively understand personification.

7.4. Highlighting Cultural Mutual Interpretation and Connecting Chinese Culture with Local Experience

Chinese readers for children in Lancang–Mekong countries should avoid one-way cultural transmission. Readers may present Chinese cultural content such as the Spring Festival, the Mid-Autumn Festival, Chinese characters, the Chinese zodiac, and traditional games. At the same time, they should appropriately incorporate cultural scenes familiar to children, such as the Mekong River, the Water Festival, tropical fruits, and local school life. Through cultural mutual interpretation, children can understand new cultures through familiar experiences and re-examine their own life world through new cultures.

7.5. *Serving Classroom Transformation and Enhancing Pedagogical Operability*

Rhetorical expressions in children's readers should facilitate teaching activities. Teachers can design activities such as reading aloud, performance, drawing, question-answer practice, imitation speaking, and rewriting based on rhetorical expressions in the readers. For example, around the metaphor "the moon is like a small boat," teachers can ask children to draw and say "What are clouds like?" or "What is a banana like?" Around the personified sentence "the sun smiled," teachers can ask children to perform "the sun smiled" or "the little flower nodded." In this way, rhetoric learning is no longer an explanation of terms, but becomes a language practice activity.

7.6. *Attaching Importance to Country Differences and Developing Localized Reader Plans*

The Chinese learning environments of children in Lancang–Mekong countries are not identical. Chinese education in Thailand is strongly influenced by policy promotion and school curriculum systems. Laos faces a relative shortage of localized Chinese teaching materials. Learners in Vietnam and Myanmar also have different language backgrounds and cultural experiences. Therefore, Chinese readers for children should be localized according to the actual situation of different countries. The Table 4 shows the details.

Table 4. *Key Points in Rhetorical Design for Chinese Readers for Children in Lancang–Mekong Countries.*

Country	Learning Background Characteristics	Key Points in Reader Design	Rhetorical Strategies
Laos	Relatively insufficient localized Chinese teaching materials; some children have Chinese family backgrounds	Enhancing relevance, interest, and life orientation	Incorporating scenes such as the Mekong River, family, school, and festivals
Thailand	Chinese language education is strongly promoted by policy; Chinese courses are relatively common in schools	Strengthening classroom interaction and oral expression	Using more dialogue, rhetorical questions, and performative rhetoric
Vietnam	Frequent Sino-Vietnamese cultural contact; complex language and cultural relations	Emphasizing cultural comparison and semantic distinction	Using contrast, analogy, and text-image explanation
Myanmar	Great differences in ethnic Chinese communities, schools, and family language environments	Emphasizing basic input and interest in reading	Using more repetition, reduplication, and narrative expression

8. Discussion

8.1. *From "Rhetorical Knowledge" to "Rhetorical Perception"*

Chinese readers for young children should not teach rhetoric as abstract knowledge. Children do not necessarily need to master terms such as "metaphor," "personification," or "parallelism." However, they can perceive the vividness, rhythm, and emotional color of Chinese expression through abundant and cognitively appropriate input. Therefore, the goal of rhetorical design in children's readers is not to ask children to memorize rhetorical concepts, but to help them form rhetorical perception through listening, reading, speaking, acting, and drawing.

8.2. From “Language Input” to “Register Construction”

Chinese readers for children should not only serve the function of vocabulary and grammar input; they should also form a stable register style suitable for children. Rhetoric is an important resource for register construction. Reduplication and repetition strengthen the child-oriented register; rhetorical questions and dialogue strengthen the pedagogical register; personification and plot development strengthen the narrative register; cultural metaphor and cultural mutual interpretation construct the cross-cultural register. Only by combining these factors can readers truly become language materials suitable for children’s reading and learning.

8.3. From “General-Purpose Textbooks” to “Regionalized and Country-Specific Readers”

Chinese learning among children in Lancang–Mekong countries has obvious regional characteristics. Reader design should consider both the commonalities of Chinese learning and country-specific differences and local experiences. In the future, a corpus of Chinese readers for children in Lancang–Mekong countries can be further developed. The rhetorical devices in different countries, age groups, and reader types can be statistically analyzed, and the actual effects of rhetorical design can be verified through children’s reading comprehension tests, teacher interviews, and classroom observation.

9. Conclusions

The construction of Chinese readers for young children in Lancang–Mekong countries should go beyond the simple grading of vocabulary and grammar, and incorporate rhetorical features and register construction into the reader design system. This paper argues that the rhetorical features of Chinese readers for young children are mainly reflected in imagery, repetition, contextualization, interaction, and culturalization. These rhetorical features jointly participate in the construction of a child-oriented register, a pedagogical register, a narrative register, and a cross-cultural register. For children in Lancang–Mekong countries, appropriate rhetorical expressions not only help reduce comprehension difficulty, enhance reading interest, and cultivate a sense of Chinese, but also promote understanding of Chinese culture and cross-cultural communication.

In the future, the compilation of Chinese readers for young children in Lancang–Mekong countries should adhere to five principles. First, cognitive adaptation should be emphasized to control the difficulty of rhetorical comprehension. Second, rhetorical grading should be established to form a progressive learning system. Third, text-image coordination should be strengthened to reduce the burden of abstract expression. Fourth, cultural mutual interpretation should be promoted to connect Chinese culture with local life. Fifth, classroom transformation should be realized so that rhetorical expressions can serve activities such as reading aloud, performance, retelling, and communication. Only by organically integrating language learning, children’s cognition, rhetorical expression, and regional culture can a register of Chinese readers truly suitable for young children in Lancang–Mekong countries be constructed.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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