



Learning strategy use of learners of Chinese as a foreign language in an exchange program

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Introduction

- Language learning strategies (LLSs) have been examined as one of central issues in language education since the late 1970s (Platsidou, Kantaridou, & Papadopoulou, 2017; Rose et al., 2018; Rubin, 1975; Stern, 1975)
- The current research mainly examines the identification/description of language learners' strategy use, relations between strategy use and various variables, and the effect of strategy use on language learning (Chamot, 2004; Gao, 2006; Macaro, 2006; Rivera-Mills & Plonsky, 2007)

Introduction

- Most research on language learning strategies over the past forty years have been conducted **on learning English as a foreign or second language** (O'Malley et al., 1985; Rose et al., 2018; Wharton, 2000)
- **A significant knowledge loss** for the scholar community of language education in terms of **language learning strategies used by learners of Chinese as a foreign or second language** (Chu et al., 2015; Jiang & Cohen, 2012; Ma, Gong, Gao, & Xiang, 2017)

Literature review: Language learning strategies (LLSs)

- First taxonomy of strategies emerged by the early 1980s, which consisted of learners' thoughts, actions, and social behaviors (Rubin, 1981)
- Language learning strategies are “specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations” (Oxford, 1990, p.8)
- Language learning strategies are active, conscious, chosen, goal-oriented, regulating, and for learning languages (Griffiths & Cansiz, 2015)

Literature review:

Language learning strategies of learning Chinese as a foreign or second language

- A tonal language: **four tones** in standard Chinese Mandarin
- A logographic writing system: integral and compound **characters** (physical structure), **strokes**
- **Characters, words, and vocabulary are different concepts**
- Syntactic relations: **word order and functional words**

- Fundamental challenges in learning Chinese: **lacking sound-to-grapheme correspondence, character identification, word segmentation, and lexical access** (Shen & Jiang, 2013)

Literature review: Language learning strategies of learning Chinese as a foreign or second language

- Mostly focusing on Chinese character learning strategy (e.g. Grenfell & Harris, 2015; Qian, Owen, & Bax, 2018; Shen, 2005, 2010), Chinese reading strategy (e.g. Lee-Thompson, 2008), and individual learner variables related to LLSs (e.g. Chu et al., 2015)
- Undertaking issues: **lacking rigorous theoretical foundations, no systematic studies yet, and lagging behind in the field of LLSs** (Jiang & Cohen, 2012)

Research questions

- The research is a part of a longitudinal investigation into native-English-speaker learners' experiential accounts of learning Chinese as a foreign language over an immersion period in China.
- RQ: What language learning strategies did learners of Chinese as a foreign language use?

Research context

- Economic, cultural and political relations between China and New Zealand have grown over since 1972
- China is one of the most important trading partners for New Zealand
- A dramatic increase of Chinese language enrolments in primary schools, secondary schools, and tertiary institutions in New Zealand from 2007-2016 (Ministry of Education, 2016)
- The Prime Minister's Scholarship for Asia (PMSA) program supports New Zealanders to study in China ranging from six weeks to 24 months

Participants

- 15 learners taking part in a six-week exchange program in a university in Beijing, China
- From internal class programs and distance class programs in a university in New Zealand (two programs used the same teaching and learning materials and studied at the same pace)
- Given limited opportunity of being exposed to Chinese language, listening, speaking, reading and writing ability of Chinese language learners in New Zealand improved relatively slowly
- Low motivation and low confidence in learning

Participants' profiles

- All names are pseudonyms.

No.	Name	Age	Gender	Language level	Study mode	Major
1	Carol	18	Female	Beginner	Internal class	Arts
2	Laura	22	Female	Intermediate	Distance class	Arts
3	Robert	44	Male	Advanced	Distance class	Arts
4	Sandra	19	Female	Lower intermediate	N/A	Design
5	Deborah	23	Female	Intermediate	Distance class	Chinese & Japanese
6	Allen	54	Male	Intermediate	Distance class	Arts
7	Steven	28	Male	Beginner	Internal class	Arts
8	Thomas	29	Male	Intermediate	Distance class	Arts
9	Lisa	44	Female	Intermediate	Distance class	Arts
10	Jason	31	Male	Intermediate	Internal class	Business
11	Richard	51	Male	Beginner	Distance class	Arts
12	Helen	24	Female	Beginner	Distance class	Arts
13	Donald	20	Male	Beginner	Internal class	Information science
14	Mark	45	Male	Advanced	Distance class	Arts
15	Susan	59	Female	Lower intermediate	Internal class	Linguistics

Data collection

- In order to address the research question, the data obtained from weekly reflective journals and groups interviews
- Weekly reflective journals: 86 entries (about one single-spaced typewritten-page in length), 50,254 words in total, and without edition.
- Group interviews: five participants each time, in English, and lasting around one hour
- Interview questions: reviewed and assessed by experts first and then pilot tested with a native-English-speaker student

Validation process: Member checking

- Member checking was conducted as a validation process to ensure the trustworthiness of results (Birt et al., 2016; Carlson, 2010; Thomas, 2017)
- 86 weekly reflective journal entries and three group interview transcripts were sent back to and confirmed by the study participants

Data analysis

- All weekly entries and interview data were coded based on Oxford's (1990) taxonomy
- Direct: 1) Memory strategies: used to store or retrieve the target language; 2) Cognitive strategies: selected by learners to better understand and produce the new language; and 3) Compensation strategies: chosen by learners to make up for lack of knowledge of the new language
- Indirect: 1) Metacognitive strategies: to regulate learners' own cognitive processes; 2) Affective strategies: to help the learner self-regulate attitudinal and emotional factors; and 3) Social strategies: to improve learners' understanding and enhance their production of the target language through interaction with others

Findings

- Participant one: Allen, high and fast achiever
- Allen is a CEO of a small company in New Zealand. His company does business with Chinese companies and he frequently goes to China
- In the immersion period, his Chinese language proficiency improved a lot
- An account from Allen: “the PMSA programme has provided an in-depth experience into China culture and society, enhancing my Chinese language skills and culture experience.”

Week	Language learning strategies used by Allen
1	<p>Direct: Cognitive (1) Example: <i>Having the opportunity to sit back to observe the interactions of our team members with surrounding Chinese people have been very valuable.</i></p> <p>Indirect: Social (2) Example: <i>I can see clearly how important to have good knowledge and understanding of Chinese culture with the correct applications of good etiquette.</i></p>
2	<p>Indirect: Metacognitive (2), Social (2) Example: <i>I have made myself a strong determination to live like a student so that I can enjoy the privilege of living in a student life in an environment that helps me focus to achieve my goal to improve my Chinese language. (Metacognitive)</i></p>
3	<p>Direct: Memory (2), Cognitive (1), Compensation (1) Example: <i>After the class, I put in a lot of efforts practicing writing new characters. (Memory)</i> <i>I could only have understood about 70% to 80% of their Chinese. I just guess the rest of them to make sense of the conversation. (Compensation)</i></p> <p>Indirect: Metacognitive (1), Affective (1), Social (2) Example: <i>I have taken every opportunity to be corrected so that I can speak it correctly. I did ask about the methods to remember Chinese characters. (Social)</i> <i>I believe I will make significant gain and improvement in my Chinese. (Affective)</i></p>
4	<p>Direct: Cognitive (4) Example: <i>There were many technical terms that I had prepared myself earlier so that I could pronounce them correctly.</i></p> <p>Indirect: Metacognitive (3) Example: <i>These are the key strategies that I have developed to do my presentation in Chinese. I am looking forward to many practices to come over the next couple of weeks.</i></p>
5	<p>Indirect: Social (1) Example: <i>I ... should understand the Chinese business culture and above all the Chinese language.</i></p>
6	<p>Indirect: Metacognitive (1), Social (1) Example: <i>I think I will find the final year easier as I had the opportunity to leap frog my Chinese through the PMSA programme. I will look forward to another opportunity to apply for the PMSA programme to further enhance my Chinese Language. (Metacognitive)</i> <i>Absorb the remaining Chinese culture exposure designed by the programme. (Social)</i></p>

Findings

- Participant two: Carol, low achiever
- Carol runs an e-commerce business and is a self-employee coffee machine producer. The coffee machines are manufactured in China
- For her, the six-week immersion learning seemed to be a fruitful cultural learning journey
- She concluded her learning as “the greatest lesson I’ve learnt through this experience has been to become far more accepting, understanding and knowledgeable of other cultures.”

Week	Language learning strategies used by Carol
1	<p>Direct: Cognitive (1) Example: <i>I ordered my meals with complete sentences as opposed to pointing with the expression zhege 'this'.</i></p> <p>Indirect: Metacognitive (3) Example: <i>This was an eye-opening situation for me as I was going to have to quickly improve my speaking skills if I were to get to know my new roommate!</i></p>
2	<p>Indirect: Social (1) Example: <i>If I go out with my Chinese language partner for a meal once a week or even just eat with her in the canteen, I feel I will be able to develop a deeper appreciation and knowledge of Chinese food and etiquette. I can use this as an opportunity to learn more about the dishes and etiquette from a first-hand account, while touching up on my Chinese at the same time!</i></p>
3	<p>Direct: Cognitive (1), Compensation (1) Example: <i>I was jotting down everything I heard, taking a stab in the dark as to what the meaning may be. (Cognitive)</i> <i>Notwithstanding, I am amazed by how much can be clarified by hand signals, pointing and drawing. (Compensation)</i></p> <p>Indirect: Metacognitive (1) Example: <i>I am also going to make a conscious effort to look up the vocabulary I am unfamiliar with. I think that this will help me to quickly get a handle on the classroom terminology.</i></p>
4	<p>Indirect: Metacognitive (1) Example: <i>I am going to do all I can in my control to make this process (learning Chinese) as fast as possible.</i></p>
5	<p>Indirect: Metacognitive (1), Social (1) Example: <i>I think the solution in regard to my personal development lies in regularly watching Chinese television as this will not only improve my insight into Chinese current affairs particularly concerning business which is invaluable to the bilateral trade relationship between New Zealand and China, but at the same time I can improve my language skills. This will be invaluable as without being immersed in the culture you have limited exposure to Chinese spoken language.</i></p>
6	<p>Indirect: Metacognitive (1), Social (1) Example: <i>One strategy that I am going to implement is to read the Chinese news on a weekly basis. (Metacognitive)</i> <i>Throughout my time in Beijing I have interacted with many other cultures all whom have diversified beliefs and values. (Social)</i></p>

Findings

- Participant three: Deborah, medium achiever
- Deborah has a double major in Chinese and Japanese.
- The immersion learning made her **more motivated in Chinese language learning**, and she expressed **“One thing is for sure: my motivation to study Chinese is stronger than ever!”**

Week	Language learning strategies used by Deborah
1	<p>Direct: Memory (1), Compensation (1) Example: <i>I prefer this to using apps like Quizlet or Memrise (digital flashcard apps) because for me it is easier to learn words in context – to see how and when they are used. (Memory)</i> <i>Through a mixture of Chinese, English and hand gestures, I eventually figured out that I had to use a computer to find the book's title and number, write it down and give it to the librarian. (Compensation)</i> Indirect: Metacognitive (4), Social (1) Example: <i>I have been studying Japanese for around 8 years and often find myself measuring my Chinese ability against my Japanese ability. I feel that the area in which my Chinese needs the most work is vocabulary. (Metacognitive)</i> <i>I think that learning about culture in this way has also given me a bit of insight into the mindset of Chinese people. (Social)</i></p>
2	<p>Direct: Cognitive (2) Example: <i>I've decided to work on learning the names of some of the basic ingredients. For breakfast, I have already mastered roubao 'pork bun' and jidan 'egg'.</i> Indirect: Affective (1) Example: <i>There were smarter ways I could get more confident at ordering food (in Chinese).</i></p>
3	<p>Direct: Cognitive (1) Example: <i>If I am eventually able to get confident in this setting, I feel that it would make conversation in a casual setting a lot easier.</i> Indirect: Metacognitive (2) Example: <i>There is a huge difference between recognising and creating a good sentence, and between thinking and verbalising. I think another problem I have is that, being an introvert, I find speaking in front of people very unnerving, even if it is just my classmates.</i></p>
4	<p>Direct: Cognitive (1) Example: <i>For example, the other day on the subway I wanted to ask a man if his young son wanted my seat. What I ended up saying translates roughly as 'does he want to sit?'. I spoke slowly and clearly as I would in the classroom.</i> Indirect: Metacognitive (1) Example: <i>To get more confidence in this area I have set two goals for the next couple of weeks.</i></p>
5	<p>Indirect: Metacognitive (1), Social (2) Example: <i>The main one is that I definitely want to be able to use Chinese in future work. (Metacognitive)</i> <i>I guess my biggest realisation is that cultural learning can come from anywhere, even where you least expect it. (Social)</i></p>
6	<p>Direct: Cognitive (1) Example: <i>I had a great chat with one of our taxi drivers and even though there was quite a bit I didn't understand.</i> Indirect: Metacognitive (2) Example: <i>I think that it can be really hard to make genuine connections with people in a new language which you may not have much mastery of, but when it happens it's a real milestone.</i></p>

Findings

- Allen (high achiever): Direct: 9 (36%) and Indirect: 16 (64%);
- Carol (low achiever): Direct: 3 (23%) and Indirect: 10 (77%);
- Deborah (medium achiever): Direct: 7 (33%) and Indirect: 14 (67%).
- Overall, much more indirect LLSs (68%) were used than direct LLSs did (32%)

Findings

- LLSs use diversity: Allen (25)>Deborah (21)>Carol (10)
- Direct: Cognitive (14)>Memory (3)=Compensation (3)
- Indirect: Metacognitive (24)>Social (14)>Affective (2)

Discussion

- Participating learners with different goals demonstrated different preferences and priorities in using language learning strategies, which is line with Macaro's (2006) statement that learning strategies comprises "a goal, a situation, and a mental action" (p. 332).
- Language learning strategy use seemed to be a dynamic and complex process (Winke & Abbuhl, 2007), and the learners generally consciously regulated its use on the basis of learning content, learning progress and learning goals.

Discussion

- Direct strategies seemed to contribute more to language proficiency improvement. In line with Carson and Longhini (2002), the total of indirect strategies used was higher than the total of direct strategies, with the most frequently used strategies being those in the metacognitive groups. The affective group was the least used one.

Conclusion

- Chinese language teachers need to pay attention to the differences of student LLSs use in different learning phases.
- Chinese language teachers should pay more attention to LLSs use repertoire of different students in order to provide more specific and effective facilitations in terms of Chinese learning.
- Chinese language teachers can consider to relieve students' learning pressure and courage them appropriately with regard to the scarce of affective LLSs use.

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- Many thanks

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