

A STUDY ON CHINESE LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES FOR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS AND POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS IN BULGARIA

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The term “strategy” comes from the Greek language and means “command of a general”. In Ancient Greece, a “strategy” involved a general’s plan to win a war (Oxford 2000). In broad modern usage, a “strategy” is a plan that is consciously aimed at meeting a goal (Oxford 2003).

The term “strategy” in Chinese language consists of two Chinese characters: 策 and 略. In Ancient China, the two Chinese characters were used separately as two words, but both of them had a meaning of “plan” and “attempt to find a solution”. For the first time the two Chinese characters were used as one word in the book named *History of the Three Kingdoms* (Shi Yaofang 2001). “Strategy” means “tactical plan” and “tactical method”.

Using strategies is beneficial for solving a problem. Learning strategies are defined as “specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques, such as seeking out conversation partners, or giving oneself encouragement to tackle a difficult language task – used by students to enhance their own learning” (Scarcella & Oxford 1992).

Chinese learning strategies can be efficient and effective for students’ Chinese language learning. Although there has been an increasing research on Chinese language learning strategies in recent years, the issue of the learning strategies of Bulgarians learning Chinese has been neglected.

I. Questions of the study

This study aims at investigating the Chinese language learning strategies employed by university students and postgraduate students in Bulgaria. For this purpose, the research questions would be: 1. What is the general condition of the Chinese learning strategies used by university

students and postgraduate students who learn Chinese as a second language in Bulgaria? 2. What kinds of strategies do they commonly use?

II. Methodology

1. Instruments

The investigation instruments in the study included a questionnaire and SPSS.

The questionnaire was designed of three parts. The first part is instruction. The second part is SILL which was revised for Chinese learners and consists of fifty items (Oxford 1990). The Likert-style scale was used to research which language learning strategies participants employed. The third part is a background used to know the participants information such as gender, age, mother tongue, total duration of learning Chinese and the reasons to learn this language. Every participant's scores were determined by summing up the points of each statement. Master participants and participants of Grade four of Chinese studies in Bulgaria were provided to choose between three language versions of the questionnaire (Bulgarian, Chinese and English). The rest of the Chinese language learners in Bulgaria were provided to fill in Bulgarian language version of the questionnaire. Those participants, who, at the time of the research, were learning in China, were provided to fill in the questionnaire in Bulgarian language, because the main purpose of the study is to investigate Bulgarians' Chinese learning strategies.

2. Participants

Most of the participants came from the universities in Bulgaria, providing Chinese language education programs. For those participants the investigation has been conducted in their classrooms. Some Bulgarian participants, who were learning in China at the time of investigation, took part in the questionnaire by e-mail. They had learned Chinese language course in Bulgaria before they went to China to continue their Chinese language education. The participants in Bulgaria were students from three Bulgarian universities:

(1) The Department of East-Asian Language and Culture Studies of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski";

(2) The Department of English and a Second Language-Chinese of "St. Cyril and St. Methodius" University of Veliko Tarnovo;

(3) The elective Chinese lessons in University of National and World Economy.

The participants from Sofia University included Bachelors from Grade one to Grade four and Masters in Grade one. The participants from University of Veliko Tarnovo and University of National and World Economy included Bachelors from Grade one to Grade four. The Bulgarian participants who were learning Chinese in China were Bachelors or Masters.

3. Procedures

The surveys were conducted in the participants' classrooms or through e-mail in November and December of 2010. There were altogether 128 university students and postgraduate students' valid answers to the questionnaire. There were 39 male students and 89 female students who ranged in Chinese proficiency from beginner to advanced and in ages from 18 to 33 ($M=21.36$, $SD=2.43$). All the questionnaires were checked one by one and the data were analyzed by SPSS.

III. Results

1. What is the general condition of the Chinese learning strategies that are used by university students and postgraduate students who learn Chinese language as a second language in Bulgaria?

The score of the general condition of the learning strategies used by university students and postgraduate students has been calculated to be 3.3.

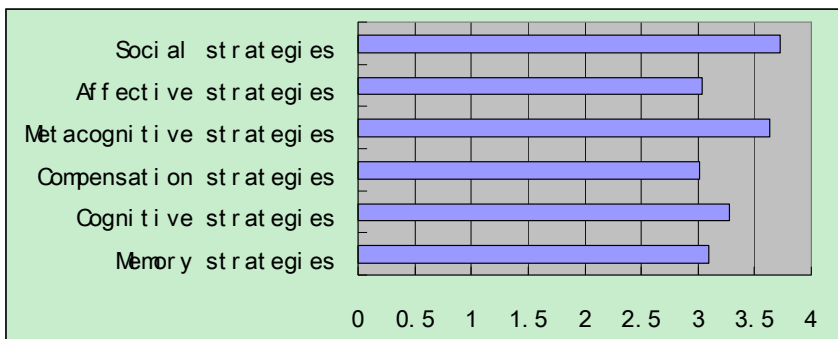
According to Profile of Results of Oxford (Oxford 1990), the scores averaging from 4.5 to 5.0 are regarded as high, which means that the participants always or almost always use the learning strategies. The scores ranging from 3.5 to 4.4 are also labeled as high, which means that these strategies are usually used. The scores averaging from 2.5 to 3.4 are regarded as medium, which means that the participants sometimes use the learning strategies. The scores ranging from 1.5 to 2.4 are considered low, which means that the participants generally do not use the learning strategies. The scores averaging from 1.0 to 1.4 are also labeled as low, which means that the learning strategies are never or almost never used.

As a result, university students and postgraduate students in Bulgaria sometimes use the Chinese learning strategies at medium level.

2. What kinds of strategies do they commonly use?

There are six strategy groups in Chinese language learning strategies. The scores of the six strategy groups are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The Scores of the six strategy groups



From the Figure 1 above, the results show that Social strategies have the highest mean of 3.7 ($SD = 0.76$). The strategies of the second highest mean are Metacognitive strategies, whose mean is 3.6 ($SD = 0.77$). The mean of Cognitive strategies is 3.3 ($SD = 0.65$), thus they rank third. All the means of the other three strategies are respectively: Memory strategies – 3.1 ($SD = 0.50$), Affective strategies – 3.0 ($SD = 0.60$) and Compensation strategies – 3.0 ($SD = 0.72$).

The six groups of language learning strategies used by university students and postgraduate students, presented in Figure 1, are as follows (listed from most to least frequently used): Social strategies, Metacognitive strategies, Cognitive strategies, Memory strategies, Affective strategies and Compensation strategies.

The Social strategies are the most commonly used kind of strategies. According to Profile of Results of Oxford, the Social strategies and Metacognitive strategies are between 3.5 and 4.4, thus the results mean that university students and postgraduate students in Bulgaria usually use Social strategies and Metacognitive strategies in the process of learning Chinese and the use frequencies are at high level. Except for those two groups of strategies, all of the remaining four strategies fall within the range of 2.5 to 3.4, thus those figures mean that university students and

postgraduate students in Bulgaria sometimes use these four strategies in the process of learning Chinese and the use frequencies of these four strategies are at medium level. The frequency of the six strategy groups is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Frequency of use for each of the six strategy groups

Rank	Strategy name	Frequency	Evaluation
1.	Social strategies	High	Usually used
2.	Metacognitive strategies	High	Usually used
3.	Cognitive strategies	Medium	Sometimes used
4.	Memory strategies	Medium	Sometimes used
5.	Affective strategies	Medium	Sometimes used
5.	Compensation strategies	Medium	Sometimes used

The results show that the use frequencies of Social strategies and Metacognitive strategies are at high level while the other five strategy groups (those are Cognitive strategies, Memory strategies, Affective strategies and Compensation strategies) are at medium level.

IV. Discussion and conclusion

1. Regarding the general condition of the Chinese learning strategies used by university students and postgraduate students who learn Chinese language as a second language in Bulgaria:

University students and postgraduate students who learn Chinese language as a second language in Bulgaria sometimes use learning strategies. They can use Chinese learning strategies to learn Chinese and to improve the level of their Chinese, even though they only sometimes use them.

Learning strategies can be efficient and effective for students' language learning. It is important for students to use learning strategies in the process of the Chinese language learning. Those results show that university students and postgraduate students have room to elevate the frequency of the Chinese language learning strategies they use, while teachers can further encourage the use of these strategies.

2. Regarding the kinds of strategies that are used by high school and middle school students who learn Chinese language as a second language in Bulgaria:

From high to low order of using the learning strategies, university students and postgraduate students in Bulgaria use Social strategies, Metacognitive strategies, Cognitive strategies, Memory strategies, Affective strategies and Compensation strategies. They always use Social strategies and Metacognitive strategies and only sometimes they use the other four kinds of strategies.

Each of the six groups of strategies is very important in the process of learning Chinese language. Using Social strategies means to study with others. When students study a language, they should master its spoken and written forms. No matter which form they use, the students should use the foreign language to communicate with others both inside and outside the classroom. Metacognitive strategies mean organizing and evaluating Chinese learning. The strategies help students plan how to learn Chinese efficaciously. Cognitive strategies let the students use all the mental processes to learn and practice Chinese. Through speaking or writing Chinese repeatedly, practicing Chinese phonetics, using Chinese words in different ways, making summaries of Chinese information, etc., students improve the level of their Chinese. Memory strategies can help the students remember Chinese effectively. Affective strategies help students to manage their emotion in learning Chinese. Compensation strategies work to correct the students' deficiency in Chinese language.

The score for each of the six groups of strategies is above 3.0. This result shows that the use frequency of university students and postgraduate students in Bulgaria is at ideal level. University students and postgraduate students are adults and already have experience in foreign language learning. So they know more methods and techniques to learn foreign languages.

3. Conclusion

(1) University students and postgraduate students in Bulgaria sometimes use the learning strategies, employing them at medium level.

(2) The most commonly used by university students and postgraduate students in Bulgaria kinds of strategies are Social strategies and Metacognitive strategies. Their use frequencies are at high level.

The other four groups of strategies (Cognitive strategies, Memory strategies, Affective strategies and Compensation strategies) are used only sometimes and their use frequencies are at medium level.

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