

Language Learning Strategies of Chinese Students at Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University in Thailand

G. Anugakul, S.Yordchim

Abstract—The objectives were to study language learning strategies (LLSs) employed by Chinese students, and the frequency of LLSs they used, and examine the relationship between the use of LLSs and gender. The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) by Oxford was administered to thirty-six Chinese students at Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University in Thailand. The data obtained was analyzed using descriptive statistics and chi-square tests. Three useful findings were found on the use of LLSs reported by Chinese students. First, Chinese students used overall LLSs at a high level. Second, among the six strategy groups, Chinese students employed compensation strategy most frequently and memory strategy least frequently. Third, the research results also revealed that gender had significant effect on Chinese Student's use of overall LLSs.

Keywords—English language, Language Learning Strategy, Chinese Students, Gender.

I. INTRODUCTION

IN recent years, the focus on teaching has shifted from the teacher to the learner. It means that educators put more stress on learners and learning – especially in considering some factors which affect English language learning; for instance, gender, nationality, level of language proficiency and, in particular, language learning strategies, that individual learners apply during the process of acquiring a second language. Consequently, LLSs at the present time play a key role in language learning and this area of teaching has become one of the most interesting fields of research in second language acquisition [1], [2].

It seems that most of the language students who have achieved in their studies have the competency to orchestrate and combine particular types of learning strategies in effective ways according to their learning need. To facilitate, therefore, students' language learning and to promote learner autonomy, LLSs are a key point for instructors, to which one must pay attention. These learning strategies, moreover, are actions taken by second and foreign language learners to control and improve their own learning. The researcher is anxious to know what kind of strategies other academics are using and which strategy is the best to use.

Before utilizing these strategies, however, it is necessary to find out which strategies learners report using most frequently and how reported frequency of strategy use relates to variables, which the researcher focuses on this study. Moreover, all strategies should be learned before they can be enhanced or implemented, but surprisingly, some students

never managed to acquire this kind of procedural knowledge.

Several studies can be seen in the field of language learning strategies. Moreover, researchers have investigated variables in the use of language learning strategies that affect the choices of strategies, such as gender, and language proficiency [3]-[8].

However, existing research on LLSs has heavily relied on learners' strategy use in English as a second language / a foreign language. In Asia, English is used as a second language in countries like Singapore, Hong Kong, Philippines etc and it is also studied as a foreign language in many countries such as Japan, Chinese, Thailand etc. Like researchers in other countries, Thai researchers conduct their studies in LLSs in all levels of education. Several of them investigate the students' learning strategies at tertiary or university level. Because of the aforementioned reasons, this caused the researcher to have an inspirational idea and interest in investigating the learning strategies used by Chinese students studying at Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University in Thailand.

The objectives of this research were to study LLSs employed by Chinese students, look for the frequency of LLSs they used, and examine the relationship between the use of LLSs and gender.

II. METHOD

A. Subject

Thirty-six exchange students from the People's Republic of China were sponsored by the Yunnan Normal University (YNU). They were third-year exchange students studying in the Tourism Industry Program at Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University (SSRU). For the purpose of this study, these thirty-six students were grouped under gender: males and females.

B. Instruments

To collect data on students' use of LLSs, Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), was used. The SILL instrument comprises 50 questions divided into six parts: memory, cognitive, compensation, meta-cognitive, affective, and social strategies. Students answered each item statement using a five-point Likert scale that ranged from 1 (never or almost never) through 5 (always or almost always). This instrument has been used worldwide for students of second language. The alpha co-efficient for reliability of the SILL is 0.92 and content validity is 0.99 [8]-[10].

C. Data Analysis

The computer program was used to complete the analysis of the collected data. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies,

G. Anugakul and S.Yordchim are both Professors at Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Bangkok, Thailand. Website: Ssru.ac.th. Final edit provided by Editor: Toby Gibbs (e-mail: kannika.an@ssru.ac.th).

percentages, means, and standard deviations, were carried out in order to examine the use of LLSs. Moreover, chi-square test was employed to investigate the effect of LLSs on their gender. The 0.05 level of statistical significance was set at all statistical tests in this study.

III. RESULTS

Discussion of the findings is based on the mean values of the scores gained by students on overall strategies, strategy classes, strategy groups and specific strategies. They are put in the ranges of the frequency of the strategy use and categorized into three levels– high, medium, and low– which is based on Oxford's SILL average analysis. This is shown in Table I.

TABLE I
KEY TO UNDERSTAND STUDENTS' AVERAGES

| Level | Averages | Statement |
|--------|-----------|------------------------------|
| High | 4.5 - 5.0 | always or almost always used |
| | 3.5 - 4.4 | often used |
| Medium | 2.5 - 3.4 | sometimes used |
| | 1.5 - 2.4 | seldom used |
| Low | 1.0 - 1.4 | never or almost never used |

A. Use of LLSs Reported by Chinese Students

The finding indicates that Chinese students reported their use of overall LLSs at a high level ($\bar{x} = 3.70$). Regarding the use of strategy class, it was found that Chinese students used direct strategies ($\bar{x} = 3.71$) and indirect strategies ($\bar{x} = 3.52$) at a high level. This is shown in Table II. The direct class is made up of memory, cognitive and compensation whereas the indirect class is composed of meta-cognitive, affective and social strategies.

TABLE II
USE OF OVERALL STRATEGY AND STRATEGY CLASS

| Strategy Class | \bar{x} | S.D. |
|------------------|-----------|-------|
| Direct | 3.71 | 0.788 |
| Indirect | 3.52 | 0.877 |
| Overall strategy | 3.70 | 0.750 |

When considering the strategy group use, it was found that Chinese students employed four strategy groups at a high level, except the memory and meta-cognitive strategies. The first two strategy group uses with the highest means, the compensation strategy came first with the mean value 4.08 ($\bar{x} = 4.08$) and followed by cognitive strategy ($\bar{x} = 3.88$). However, they used memory ($\bar{x} = 3.30$) and meta-cognitive strategies ($\bar{x} = 3.47$) at the medium level. This is shown in Table III.

TABLE III
USE OF STRATEGY GROUP

| Strategy Group | \bar{x} | S.D. | Level |
|----------------|-----------|-------|--------|
| Memory | 3.30 | 0.855 | Medium |
| Cognitive | 3.88 | 0.820 | High |
| Compensation | 4.08 | 0.937 | High |
| Meta-cognitive | 3.47 | 1.081 | Medium |
| Affective | 3.55 | 0.998 | High |
| Social | 3.61 | 0.837 | High |

B. Frequency of LLSs Chinese Students Used

The five most frequently used strategies by Chinese students, of which the mean values are between 4.11 and 4.36, fall into the often-use range (3.5-4.4). Among these five strategies, there are one direct strategy (compensation) and two indirect strategies (one social and one affective strategy). The most frequently used strategy (social strategy) is item 46, "If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again" The other three most frequently used strategies fall into compensation strategies. They are item 29, "If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing", item 28, "I try to guess what the other person will say next in English", and item 27, "To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses." The fifth most frequently used strategy (affective strategy) is item 40, "I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake. These five most frequently used strategies can be seen in Table IV.

TABLE IV
FIVE STRATEGIES USED MOST FREQUENTLY

| Rank | Strategy Groups | | Strategies |
|------|-----------------|-----------|--|
| | Direct | Indirect | |
| 1 | | Social | 46. If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again. ($\bar{x} = 4.36$, S.D. = 0.866) |
| 2 | Compensation | | 29. If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing. ($\bar{x} = 4.25$, S.D. = 1.052) |
| 3 | Compensation | | 28. I try to guess what the other person will say next in English. ($\bar{x} = 4.16$, S.D. = 1.045) |
| 4 | Compensation | | 24. To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses. ($\bar{x} = 4.13$, S.D. = 1.125) |
| 5 | | Affective | 40. I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake. ($\bar{x} = 4.11$, S.D. = 0.918) |

The five least frequently used strategies by Chinese students, of which the mean values are between 2.52-2.86, fall into sometimes-use range (2.5-3.4). Among these five strategies, there are two direct strategies (cognitive and memory strategies) and only one indirect strategy (affective).

The least frequently used strategy (cognitive strategy) is item 23, "I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English." The other three least frequently used strategies fall into memory strategy. Item 5 states, "I use rhymes to remember new English words", item 7 states, "I physically act out new English words, and item 3 states, "I connect the sound

of a new English word and an image or picture of the word to help me remember the word.” The fifth least frequently used strategy (affective strategy) is item 41, “I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English.” These five least frequently used strategies can be seen in Table V.

TABLE V
FIVE STRATEGIES USED LEAST FREQUENTLY

| Rank | Strategy Groups | | Strategies |
|------|-----------------|-----------|---|
| | Direct | Indirect | |
| 1 | cognitive | | 23. I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English. (\bar{x} = 2.52, S.D. = 0.940) |
| 2 | memory | | 57. I use rhymes to remember new English words. (\bar{x} = 2.55, S.D. = 1.054) |
| 3 | memory | | 7. I physically act out new English words. (\bar{x} = 2.80, S.D. = 1.037) |
| 4 | memory | | 37. I connect the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of the word to help me remember the word. (\bar{x} = 2.86, S.D. = 0.960) |
| 5 | | Affective | 41. I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English. (\bar{x} = 2.86, S.D. = 1.268) |

C. Relationship between the Use of LLSs and Gender

Chi-square tests were performed to determine the relationships between the LLS use of 36 Chinese students and gender.

In illustrating the results of data analysis, the students' used of overall LLSs and the LLS classes were examined to discover whether gender had an effect on the LLS use of Chinese students.

The results of chi-square test revealed that there is a statistically significant relationship between the overall LLS use of Chinese students and gender, chi-square = 6.21 (df = 2, N = 36), $p < .05$. This finding indicates that gender had an effect on Chinese students' use of overall LLSs. The calculated value for the contingency coefficient (0.383) suggests the presence of a moderate association between the overall LLS use of Chinese students and gender. This is shown in Table VI.

TABLE VI
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE OVERALL LLS USE AND GENDER

| Gender | N | Overall LLS Use | | | χ^2 | P-value |
|--------|----|-----------------|--------|-----|----------|---------|
| | | High | Medium | Low | | |
| Male | 7 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 6.21* | 0.45 |
| Female | 29 | 20 | 8 | 1 | | |

* $p < .05$, Contingency coefficient = 0.383

When considering the relationship between the LLS class use of Chinese students and gender, it was found that the use of direct strategy (memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies) and gender are significantly related, chi-square = 6.21 (df = 2, N = 36), $p < .05$. This finding indicates that gender had an effect on the use of direct strategy of Chinese students. The calculated value for the contingency coefficient (0.383) can be interpreted to provide a moderate association between their use of direct strategy and gender. However, the results of chi-square test revealed that there is no statistically significant relationship between their use of indirect strategy

(meta-cognitive, affective, and social strategies) and gender. This is shown in Table VII.

TABLE VII
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE LLS CLASS AND GENDER

| Learning Strategy Class Use | Gender | | χ^2 | P-value |
|-----------------------------|--------|--------|----------|---------|
| | Male | Female | | |
| Direct | 7 | 29 | 6.21* | 0.045 |
| Indirect | 7 | 29 | 5.19 | 0.075 |

* $p < .05$, Contingency coefficient = 0.383

IV. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was to study the LLSs employed by Chinese students, look for the frequency of LLSs they used, and examine the relationship between the use of LLSs and gender.

The main findings show that Chinese students use the overall language learning strategies at a high level. This is probably because the demand for university graduates with high English competency has increased more quickly in the Chinese job market. Therefore, it forces Chinese students to pay more attention to English learning strategies in order to develop their English learning and get good jobs. Moreover, Chinese students are often highly motivated to study English, because they need English for communication when they study abroad. Whenever they communicate in Thai language in Thailand, they can use English instead. This makes them have high motivation to use LLSs for further education.

In regard to the frequency of LLSs Chinese students used, three out of five most frequently used strategies fall into compensation strategy while three out of five least frequently used strategies involve memory strategy. These findings are congruent with several studies in this area since the students employ compensation strategies to overcome limitation of language when they encountered language use problems. In addition, compensation strategy allows learners to produce spoken or written expression in the new language without complete knowledge. However, Chinese students sometimes used memory strategy, it might be that students do not use memory strategy very much or they are unaware of how often they actually apply memory strategy [11]-[14].

The results also demonstrate that there is a statistically significant relationship between the overall LLS use of Chinese students and gender. It indicates that gender has an effect on the students' use of overall LLSs. Furthermore, Oxford suggested that the gender difference might be related to women's greater social orientation, stronger verbal skill, and greater conformity to academic and linguistic norms.

Further research should be carried out in different programs and universities, together with a larger sample size of Chinese students, in order to determine the findings that might be generalized to other studies in this area.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Very special thanks to Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University for funding this project and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ponlasit Noochoochai, Prof. Dr. Udom Warotamasikkhadit, and Dr.

Cholticha Sudmuk for their inspiring guidance, unlimited patience and constant page.

REFERENCES

- [1] M. Lessard-Clouston, "Language Learning Strategies : An Overview for L2 Teachers," *The Internet TESL Journal*, 3 (12), December 1997.
- [2] R.L. Oxford, *Language Learning Strategies: What Every Teacher Should know*. New York : Newbury House, 1990.
- [3] A.L. Wenden and J. Rubin (eds), *Learner Strategies in Language Learning*. London : Prentice Hall, 1987.
- [4] A.D. Cohen, *Language Learning : Insights for Learners, Teachers, and Researchers*. Boston, MA : Heinle & Heinle, 1990.
- [5] J.M. O'Malley and A.U. Chamot, *Learning Strategies in Second Language Acquisition*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- [6] M.E. Ehrman and R.L. Oxford, Effects of Sex Differences, Career Choice, and Psychological Type on Adult Language Learning strategies. *Modern Language Journal*, 73, pp. 1-13, 1989.
- [7] J.M. Green and R.L. Oxford, A closer Look at Learning Strategies, L2 Proficiency, and Gender. *TESOL Quarterly*, 29 (2), pp. 261-297, 1995.
- [8] C. Griffiths, *Language Learning Strategy Use and Proficiency : The Relationship between Patterns of Reported Language Learning Strategy (LLS) Use by Speakers of Other Language (SOL) and Proficiency with Implications for the Teaching / Learning Situation*. Doctoral Dissertation, Department of Education, University of Auckland, 2003.
- [9] R.L. Oxford, Second Language Learning Strategies : Current Research and Implication for Practice. *ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 278273*, 1986.
- [10] R.L. Oxford and J. Burry-Stock, Assessing the Use of Language Learning Strategies Worldwide with the ESL / EFL Version of the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). *System*, 25 (1) : 1-23, 1995.
- [11] M. Hao, M. Liu and R.P. Hao, An Empirical Study on Anxiety and Motivation in English as a foreign Language. *Asian Journal of English Language Teaching*, 14, pp. 89-104, 2004.
- [12] N. Kaotsombut, *A study of Language Learning Strategies of Graduate Science Students at Mahidol University*. Master's Thesis, Mahidol University, 2003.
- [13] W. Sootsuwan, *Learning Strategies : A Case Study of Third Year Students from Mahidol University International College and King Mongkut's Institute of Technology North Bangkok Majoring in Scientific Field*. Master's Thesis, Department of Languages, Graduate College, King Mongkut's Institute of Technology North Bangkok, 2005.
- [14] J. Zhao, *Language Learning Strategies and English Proficiency : A Study of Chinese Undergraduate Programs in Thailand*. Retrieved January 12, 2010, from <http://www.journal.au.edu/scholar/2009/word/JuanZhao28-32.doc>, 2009.