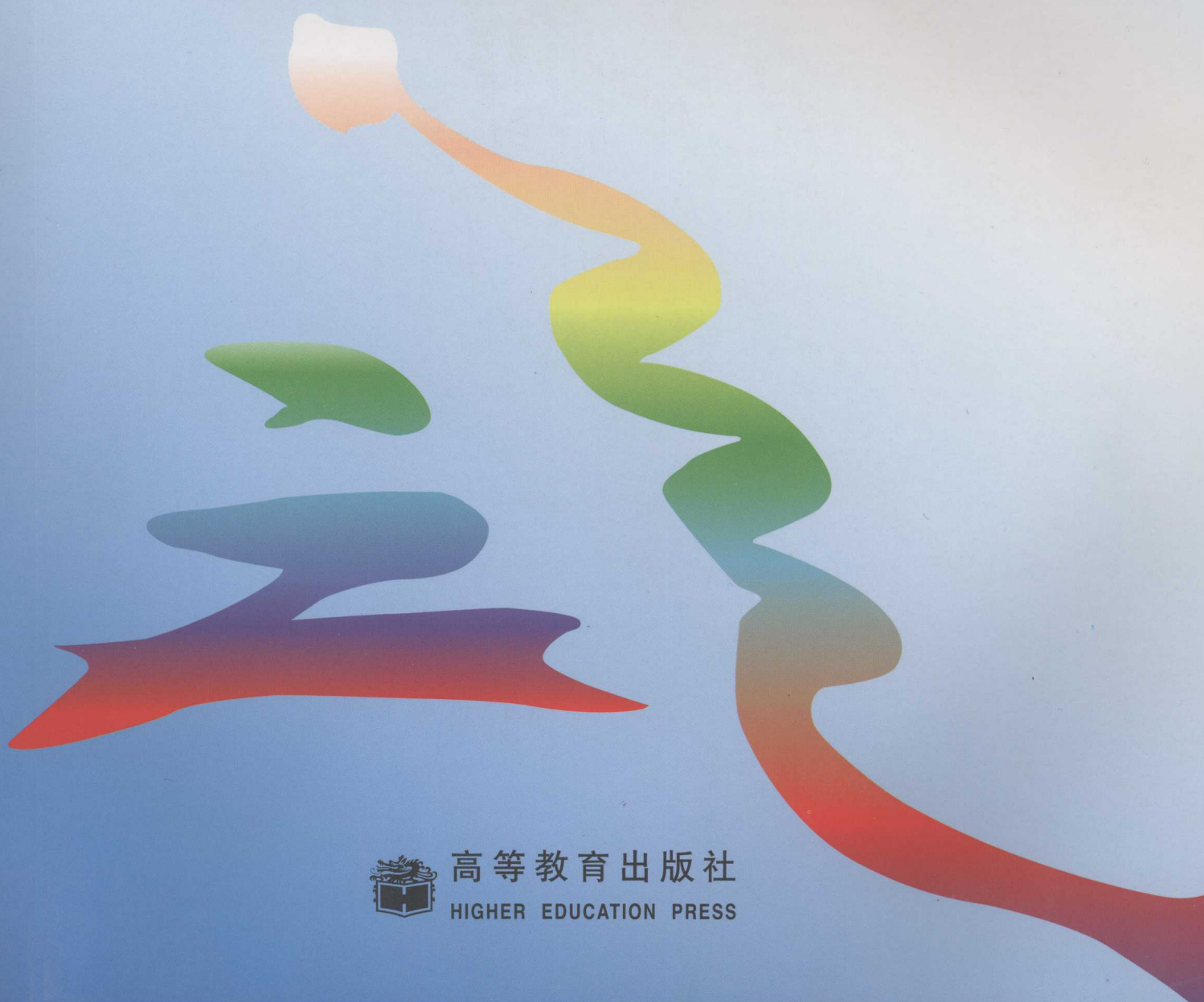




**3<sup>rd</sup> Asia TEFL  
International Conference  
Proceedings**

Edited by Hu Zhuanglin



高等教育出版社  
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## Foreword

November 4-6 of the year 2005 saw the successful convening of the Third Asia-TEFL International Conference in Beijing. A golden late autumn, a warm friendly gathering!

The conference was organized jointly by China National Advisory Commission on Foreign Language Teaching (NACFLT), College English Teaching and Research Association of China (CETRAC), China Research & Development Center for Foreign Language Teaching & Learning, as well as generously funded by China's Higher Education Press. We owe all the organization work to China Research & Development Center for Foreign Language Teaching & Learning and the journal *Foreign Languages in China*. Here. We would particularly mention the name of Ms Liu Yuan, Head of the Center and the journal, and her colleagues for their painstaking efforts throughout.

Over 1 000 participants (more than 400 from abroad), representing 31 countries and regions, attended this great event.

The conference was greatly honored to have Hu Zhuanglin (Peking University, China), and Bernard Spolsky (former President of TESOL, Bar-Ilah, Israel) as our special invited speakers and favored with their enlightening speeches. And we were proud of having David Nunan (the University of Hong Kong, China), Claire Kramsch (UC Berkeley, USA), Michael McCarthy (the University of Nottingham, UK), Donald Freeman (School of International Training, USA), Yang Huizhong (Shanghai Jiaotong University, China), Richard Day (the University of Hawaii, USA), as our plenary speakers and shared their highly qualified research expertise in their respective fields.

The conference was also highly valued with the presence of Liu Bin (Chairman of China Association of Education Exchange), Jiang Feng (Vice Head of Bureau of International Cooperation, MOE), presidents of English Teaching Associations from Asia, Europe, and America, leading figures of provincial associations, distinguished experts and experienced teachers in China, bringing the total turn-out to more than 1 000 on the opening ceremony.

The theme of this academic event is "TEFL for Asia: Unity within Diversity", including topics such as theories and practices of English language teaching, language competence and evaluation, education policy, curriculum planning, textbook development, multimedia-assisted language teaching, etc.

Overall, 1 200 (600 from China) papers were received and reviewed by a special team. For more than 400 (200 from China) papers selected were arranged in 22 sub-forums.

Some papers already appeared in the journal of *Foreign Languages in China* and journal of *Asia TEFL*, and others after the conference. And now, we collect some of the papers in this proceedings, as a token of this carnival.

In an era when one can see the growing integration of economies and societies of the world, it is acknowledged here and there that English has played the role of being an international language, a valuable tool for communication, and it is our boundless duty to examine its global significance.

Because of globalization, localization, and standardization, it is the task of us teachers of the English language, particularly in Asia, to swap our experience, to exchange our viewpoints and to face issues arising from our profession and to explore its solution together, if any, if possible.

Technology used to be isolated from language teaching in general, and foreign language in particular. It is the time for us foreign language educators to have a new look on multiliteracies, culturally and multimodally, so as to make our contributions to mutual communication, rapid growth in economy and poverty reduction, and ultimately to the rise of Asia.

Unity within Diversity!

Hu Zhuanglin

Conference Chair, 3rd Asia TEFL International Conference

Professor, Peking University

Honorary Director

China Research & Development Center for Foreign Language Teaching & Learning

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3<sup>rd</sup>  
Asia TEFL  
International Conference

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# TEFL Theory and Methodology



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# A Study of Language Learning Strategies Used by Chinese Graduate Students of Science at Qingdao Technological University in the People's Republic of China (PRC)

*Li Xuan*

*Archaraporn Chantarasorn*

*William Martin*

*Songsri Soranastaporn*

*Mohidol University*

**Abstract:** The purpose of this study was to investigate language learning strategies used by Chinese graduate science students at Qingdao Technical University, located in Shangdong Province, the People's Republic of China (PRC). In order to present a deep and rich picture of the use of learning strategies by Chinese students, multiple data collection methods were employed. Questionnaires, interviews, a think-aloud protocol and diary writing were used to investigate the use of language learning strategies by Chinese EFL students. The study found that the Chinese graduate students of science at Qingdao Technical University generally used all six strategy categories at the intermediate level. Specifically, they used metacognitive strategies most frequently and social strategies least often. The high-level students employed metacognitive strategies most often, followed by cognitive and compensation strategies. The low-level students preferred metacognitive, followed by compensation and cognitive strategies. There was a significant difference between the high-and low-level students in terms of their use of language learning strategies ( $p=.018$ ).

**Key words:** language learning strategies, metacognitive strategies, social strategies

## 1 Introduction

Language learning strategies are "steps taken by the learner to facilitate the acquisition, storage, retrieval, or use of information" (Oxford & Crookall, 1989). Specifically, language learning strategies mean "specific actions taken by the learner to make learning faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations" (Oxford, 1990). Language learning strategies are important for learners because the strategies involve learners taking charge of their own

learning process (Oxford, 1989; Hsiao & Oxford, 2002); furthermore, learning strategies are essential for developing the communicative competence of language learners. Thus, as Oxford (1992) highlights, language learning strategies are a key to greater autonomy and more meaningful and practical language learning.

The importance of language learning strategies as crucial issues in language acquisition has commanded the attention of researchers worldwide (Wenden, 1987; Chamot & Kupper, 1989; Oxford, 1989, 1990; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Chang, 1991; Hashim & Sahil, 1994; Green & Oxford, 1995; Bremner, 1999; Halbach, 2000; Wharton, 2000). Language learning strategy studies emerged in the 1960s. Early research of language learning strategies was primarily concerned with attempting to identify what good language learners do when learning a second language (Rubin, 1975; Stern, 1975; Wenden, 1987).

Later, some studies attempted to connect language learning strategies with language proficiency and also analyzed the frequency of language learning strategies (Chamot & Kupper, 1989; Oxford, 1989; Chang, 1991; Hashim & Sahil, 1994; Green & Oxford, 1995; Bremner, 1999; Halbach, 2000; Wharton, 2000). Most studies have found a relatively strong correlation between language learning strategies and successful language learning (Oxford, 1989; Chang, 1991; Green and Oxford, 1995; Halbach, 2000; Wharton, 2000; Griffiths, 2003; Shmais, 2003). Due to the complex integration of learning strategies with other factors, mixed results have been found by different researchers. Some researchers have found metacognitive strategies are the most preferred strategies (Oh, 1992; Hashim & Sahil, 1994; Gan, Humphreys & Hamp-Lyons, 2004). Others have found that compensation strategies are used most frequently (Klassen, 1994; Oxford & Ehrman, 1995; Bremner, 1999; Zhang, 2001; Lee, 2003). Still others claim that social strategies are "key strategies associated with good language learners" (Parks & Raymond, 2004). More recently, studies have shown that various factors such as motivation, sex, nationality, learning style and cultural background could influence the choice and use of language learning strategies (Oxford & Nyikos, 1989; Oxford, 1989; Park, 1994; Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995; Parry, 1996; Shmais, 2003).

However, the previously mentioned studies suffer from various limitations including issues such as the scope of language settings, the variety of learners as well as the range of research instruments. One obvious limitation is that most studies have been carried out in Western countries where English is used as the first language or focused on certain groups of learners who study English as a second or foreign language in the U.S. or other Western countries (Oxford & Nyikos 1989; Tan, 2001; Zhang, 2001; Parks & Raymond, 2004). Consequently, the applicability of these findings in different learning contexts seems questionable (Reid, 1987; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Thus, many researchers have called for more replication of these studies in different contexts and countries to compare results and determine their generalization and significance (Wharton, 2000). Consequently, over the past two decades, a few studies (Oh, 1992; Yang, 1994; Li & Munby, 1996; Goh & Kwah, 1997; Bremner, 1999; Wharton, 2000; Tan, 2001; Zhang, 2001; Takeuchi, 2003; Kaotsombut, 2003; Shmais, 2003) have focused on language learning strategies in various settings, such as China, Korea, Thailand and other areas which use English as a second or foreign language. Moreover, these studies have paid less attention to diverse groups of learners. In China, researchers have usually focused on arts students (Huang & VanNaerssen, 1987), especially those who are majoring in English, or on students who are studying abroad (Tan, 2001; Zhang, 2001), while science students have often been overlooked, not to mention those who are at the graduate level. Besides, most previous studies are quantitative, stressing the differences in overall strategy use and strategy categories, thus failing to give a detailed

picture of differences among individual learners as well as differences in the use of specific strategies. Additionally, few of these studies make a serious attempt to explain how individual learners use specific strategies.

## 2 Research questions

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Mindful of these limitations, this study attempts to provide a more detailed picture of the use of language learning strategies of Chinese science graduate students. Specifically, this study addressed the following research questions:

- (1) What language learning strategies did Chinese graduate science students in Qingdao Technical University use?
- (2) Were there any differences between the advanced learners and low-level learners in terms of the different language learning strategies they use?

## 3 Method

---

In order to present a deep and rich picture of the use of learning strategies by Chinese students, this study applied an approach of methodological triangulation.

According to Denzin (1994) and Mathison (1988), triangulation can be achieved through three approaches: 1) using multiple methods; 2) using multiple sources; and 3) using more than one investigator in the research process. The use of triangulation could help understand a complex picture and give understanding to the issues under investigation (Mathison, 1988; Kagan, 1990; Foss & Kleinsasser, 2001). Metz (2000) claims,

“The social world, even the enterprise of education, is far too complex to be captured by any single methodology. We need to clarify the assumptions and procedures of varied methodologies and to discourage wasteful struggles among them. If educational researchers explicitly matched their questions with the most appropriate theories, methodologies, and methods, it would be easier for all to see both strengths and limitations of each approach and its associated studies.”

Relying on these suggestions, the present study employed triangulation to collect data. In this study, multiple methods, namely, questionnaire (SILL), in-depth interview, think-aloud protocol, and diary journals, served as the main sources of information. In addition, the Quick Placement Test (QPT) was also used.

### 3.1 Subjects

The subjects were 30 Chinese science students who were studying at Faculty of Graduate Studies, Qingdao Technical University, PRC. They were all non-native speakers of English. They majored in different fields. The 30 participants included 10 Environment Engineering graduate students and 20 graduate students coming from the Faculty of Mechanical and Electronic Engineering. They were aged from 22 to 28. Most of them started to learn English in middle school and a few in primary school. They were randomly selected to participate in this study. All their names are pseudonyms. In line with their scores on the QPT, six participants were interviewed and were requested to participate in the think-aloud session as well as to write diaries.

### 3.2 Data collection procedures

To gain access to EFL graduate students, the researcher sent a consent form to potential participants in Qingdao Technical University. The form contained aims of the research and the research methodology used and clearly mentioned that learners' participation was completely voluntary.

After receiving the signed consent forms, the researcher asked all participants (n=30) to take the Quick Placement Test (QPT). In doing so, the researcher could divide all the participants into three levels (high-, intermediate-, and low-level) based on their scores.

In the meantime, the questionnaires were distributed to all participants. Before asking them to complete the SILL, the researcher explained every item to the participants in order to avoid students' misinterpretation of certain items. All questionnaires were finished within 30 minutes.

Then, six participants (3 from high-level, 3 from low-level) were chosen according to their QTP scores. They were requested to participate in interviews, think-aloud sessions and journal writing. The interview and think-aloud were carried out as scheduled by the participants on an individual basis. Apart from this, diary prompts were sent to the six participants.

### 3.3 Data analysis

Data from the questionnaire was analyzed using the Statistics Package for Social Science (SPSS) package. Mean, Standard deviation, and t-test were used to calculate average strategies used, distribution of means, and the difference of strategies used between high and low ability groups. Cronbach Alpha co-efficiency was used for calculating reliability of questionnaires. Qualitative data analysis was used with interview and think-aloud transcripts as well as diary entries. All interviews and written entries were analyzed by following Strauss and Corbin's (1990, 1998) open and axial coding technique. Moreover, regarding Mathison's (1988) comments, all data were analyzed simultaneously to depict convergence and divergence of the data.

## 4 Results

The results of the data analysis of the questionnaires were classified on the basis of Oxford's (1990) categories: memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, social and affective strategies. The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) (Oxford, 1990) was analyzed based on Oxford's (1990) SILL ranges of results (see table 1). Average scores between 3.5 and 5.0 were rated as "high", scored between 2.5 and 3.4 were rated as "medium", and scored between 1.0 and 2.4 were rated as "low". (Score from 3.41 to 3.49 is rated as "high". Score from 2.41 to 2.49, is rated as "medium").

**Table 1:** SILL Range of Results

Average Frequency of Use of Strategies		Average Mean Score
High	Always or almost always used	4.5-5.0
	Usually used	3.5-4.4
Medium	Sometimes used	2.5-3.4
Low	Generally not used	1.5-2.4
	Never or almost never used	1.0-1.4



#### 4.1 Application of all language learning strategies

To answer the first question, all participants' answers in the questionnaire were computed to reach the mean score. The descriptive results of all language learning strategies used by all graduate students of science are shown below (see Table 2).

**Table 2:** Frequency of Categories of Strategies Used by All Graduate Science Students (N=30)

Language Learning Strategies	No. of Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Cronbach's Alpha	Rank order	Frequency of strategies use
Metacognitive strategies	9	3.49	0.63	0.83	1	High
Compensation Strategies	6	3.30	0.67	0.62	2	Medium
Cognitive Strategies	14	3.14	0.58	0.82	3	Medium
Memory Strategies	9	2.90	0.51	0.54	4	Medium
Affective Strategies	6	2.86	0.57	0.51	5	Medium
Social Strategies	6	2.73	0.68	0.69	6	Medium
Total		3.17	0.50			Medium

Table 2 shows the application of all language learning strategies used by all graduate students of science. The SILL average summarized in Table 2 shows that learning strategies are moderate in overall use ( $M=3.17$ ) out of a possible 5.0. No strategy groups were reported as "generally not used" or "never or almost never used". In other words, Chinese students used all six categories of learning strategies at a medium level. Basically, the participants actively applied a variety of strategies to facilitate acquiring English. As can be seen in Table 2, Chinese students reported using metacognitive strategies more frequently than other strategies, and this was followed by compensation strategies, cognitive strategies, memory strategies, and affective strategies, which were rated at a medium level of use. Social strategies ranked the lowest. Additionally, metacognitive strategies fall in the high range, whereas the other five strategy groups fall in the medium range. What follows presents a detailed picture of what strategies were used and how these strategies were used by 30 graduate students. Transcripts of interviews, think-aloud protocol and diary were records of what the participants actually said or wrote. They have not been edited to remove language errors.

##### 4.1.1 Application of metacognitive strategy

The results from Table A1 (see Appendix) reveal that participants used all nine subdivisions of metacognitive strategy. Students were always concerned about how to be effective language learners (item 33). This subdivision was reported as a predominant strategy. For instance, Edlison, one unsuccessful student, said in the interview, "*I communicate with them (who are good at English), and ask them how to improve my English.*"

Data obtained from the qualitative approach indicated that all students were conscious of making use of many opportunities to learn English. All participants reported that they pay attention when someone speaks English (item 32) and to their own mistakes (item 31). Most interviewees mentioned that they would notice when others speak English because they think it is a good chance to learn English. Vivian, a second year student, said in her interview,

*"It's an opportunity to improve my listening. If that person can speak English very well, of course I can learn from him; if he speaks not very well, I also can find some*

*mistakes, and then I'll remind myself not to make the same mistakes."*

In conclusion, the data clearly show that the participants were aware of and were capable of controlling their learning process. The information provided by the participants demonstrated that Chinese graduate students of science use various metacognitive strategies in their English learning, such as centering one's learning, arranging and planning as well as evaluating one's learning.

#### 4.1.2 Application of compensation strategy

There is diversity in the use of compensation strategies. Adjusting the message to communicate (item 29) and guessing unfamiliar words (item 24) were used most frequently, based on the results of SILL (see Table A1 in Appendix).

Information derived from other qualitative measures provides more insight in terms of students' use of compensation strategies. Half of the interviewees reported that they employed changing words in order to communicate effectively. Nico, for instance, said, *"If I have to write something that I don't know, I'll use another word to take place."* Vivian then stated in the interview *"...maybe I'll use other words to take place...the best way is talking about other topics that I know very well."*

The findings indicate that students viewed compensation strategy as an important tool in their EFL learning. Information from qualitative resources matched the results of SILL and revealed that Chinese graduate students apply various compensation strategies, such as guessing unfamiliar words, substituting words and using gestures.

#### 4.1.3 Application of cognitive strategy

As can be seen from Table A1 (see Appendix), participants used all subdivisions of cognitive strategies. Saying or writing new English words several times (item 10) ranked as the most used strategy. Six participants reported that they applied this skill frequently. Vivian explained in her interview *"Read as many as possible sentences and then substitutes some words in my way. Last, try to speak as quickly as I can."* Later, she summarized by saying, *"Read more, recite more, note more and wrote more. No any short-cut!"* Lu Yun and Nico also mentioned that reading more and practicing more were ways to learn English.

Additionally, the results reveal that dividing words for meaning (item 21) and skimming (item 18) were also used frequently by students. Data obtained from the think-aloud demonstrate students' use of dividing words for meaning. Nico, in his first think-aloud, said,

*"When I read for the first time, I felt sort of puzzled about the long word 'biodiversity'. But if I break down the word into bio- and diversity, then it's easy to understand the word. Bio- is an affix and it means something related to biology. Diversity means variety, so biodiversity means a variety of biology or species."*

#### 4.1.4 Application of memory strategy

The results indicate that students used association (item 1) most frequently, and this was followed by reviewing lessons often (item 8) and putting new words into a context (item 2) as well as connecting sounds of a new English word with images (item 3).

Four interviewees reported that they liked associating new words with what they already knew (item 1) ( $M=3.67$ ). Half of the participants reported that they often reviewed what they learnt (item 8) ( $M=3.40$ ). For example, Vivian stated in the interview, *"I have my own way. I like repeating memorizing. For example, today I review*

*these words five times, then next week I review them again, but only three times.” Nico wrote in his second diary entry, “As I go to bed, I used to review the new words. All have been completed, and then I’ll go sleep.”*

Students in this study indicated a relatively high use of placing new words in a context (item 2) to help memorization. A good case in point was that Jerry claimed in his interview, *“I often put it (new word) in sentences. If I understand the meaning of sentences, then I can remember the words.”*

#### **4.1.5 Application of affective strategy**

As can be seen, affective strategies tend to be less significant for the participants. Students preferred to relax when they felt bad (item 39) and encourage themselves (item 40). In contrast, students reported seldom writing down their feelings (item 43). However, the standard deviation of writing down feelings (item 43) was quite high, indicating that not all students saw this technique as the least important strategy. Lu Yun reported in her diary that she kept writing English diary entries everyday and wrote down her feelings, puzzles, and even progress in her English learning.

As reported in the results of SILL, data from other approaches indicate students’ preference for relaxing. Edlison mentioned in the interview that if he felt uncomfortable when using English, he would *“go to a park to breathe fresh air, sleep and play PC games or hook around the campus.”* Similarly, Lu Yun said, *“If I feel nervous, I will switch to Chinese. I mean, chatting with my friends. Or find a simple article to read first, and then I’ll feel more confident.”*

In addition, students reported a relatively high use of encouragement (item 40). Jerry shared his experience that *“I often tell myself if I learn English well, I can get high salary and a fine job...so I’ll try my best to learn English well.”*

#### **4.1.6 Application of social strategy**

From Table A1 (see Appendix), it can be seen, among the six strategy categories, social strategies were the least used by the participants. No participants live in an environment with real communication demands. This fact might contribute to their infrequent use of social strategies. This results show that students often used asking for slower delivery or repetition (item 46). Actually, most of the participants indicated that they usually employ this technique. For instance, Edlison said in the interview, *“If I can’t understand these, I’ll ask others like my classmates or teachers for help; I’ll ask them to say it again...or tell them I don’t get the meaning.”* Lu Yun also mentioned, *“I’ll ask them to slow down or say it again.”* Vivian reported that she would guess first and ask other people to help; if all of these didn’t work, she would say *“I beg your pardon?”* or *“I’m sorry.”*

## **4.2 Difference of strategies used between high and low ability groups**

The second research question was “Are there any differences between the advanced learners and low-level learners in terms of the language learning strategies they use?” To answer the question, subjects’ answers to SILL were analyzed by SPSS for Windows. Details are presented in Table 3.