

Second Language Acquisition and English Learning Strategies

第二语言 习得与英语学习策略

○主 编：丁言仁 文秋芳

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INTRODUCTION

Teaching English for China's Tomorrow

The papers included in this collection were presented at the **International Symposium on the Teaching of English**, held in July 1997 at Nanjing University. The theme of this conference was “**Teaching English for Our Tomorrow.**” The presence of both Chinese and international participants in this conference evidenced the dramatic growth of EFL in China, and the worldwide interest in this growth. ESL/EFL researchers and teachers from China as well as other countries like the United States, Australia, Japan, Singapore and Thailand met at the conference to exchange their recent discoveries. This sharing highlights the increasingly international context and significance of English language teaching in China.

English in China

In the world today, the number of EFL students in China is among the largest. Every year, millions of college and university students take the CET-4 exam, a national requirement for students of all majors. And the worldwide statistics for the TOEFL show that the largest group of students taking the test consists of students from China.

The rapid growth of English learning and teaching in China is a reflection of the changing sociolinguistic situation in the world at the turn of the millenium. Despite the end of the colonial period, English has continued to be an official language in many post-colonial countries. It is an official language of international structures such as the United Nations and the European Union, and is the dominant lingua franca of the internet, scientific publications and conferences, air traffic control, and international business. According to census data that take into account bilingual and multilingual speakers, non-native speakers of English outnumber native speakers by a ratio

of 2 to 1, in a total of approximately 1.4 billion speakers of English in the world (Edwards 1994: 32). These figures may still be conservative.

The figures cited above show that English is increasingly becoming not the property of native speakers, but a universal tool for international communication. For this reason, great emphasis is being placed on the development of English language skills in the educational system in China, as it is in many other countries. The development of English language skills means the development of international communication skills; it also means access to instruction and expertise at the highest echelons. Thus, English language teaching and learning are vital for China's international competitiveness, and for a prosperous future for the young generation of Chinese college graduates.

The Need for Research-Based Studies

The need for English teaching and learning in China raises questions which need urgent investigation. Proposals for reform include the incorporation of a more communicative teaching methodology into the curriculum. At the same time, however, the possibility of introducing this methodology should be evaluated with respect to the needs and preferences of Chinese learners, and the capability of their teachers. The present volume presents papers which address these questions from the research perspective, through classroom-based survey and experimental research and theoretical analysis. They thus constitute an effort to contribute to the scientific grounding of ELT curriculum reform.

The principal goal of this book is to share our research methods, findings and conclusions with all TESOL professionals. In order to make a clear presentation, this volume is divided into three parts:

Part I : English Language Learning, which focuses on the learner;

Part II : English Language Teaching, which focuses on the teacher and teaching methodology; and

Part III : Testing and Curriculum Reform, which addresses the issue of the reform of the ELT curriculum in China.

Equipped with research-based teaching approaches and with improved teaching materials and techniques, we believe, English teachers in China will be better able to serve the needs of the students for the development of communicative competence, and to prepare them for today's competitive international marketplace and for China's tomorrow.

(Joanna Radwanska Williams)

Table of Contents

Part I: English Language Learning	(1)
Chapter One: Learner Characteristics	(2)
• Modifiable variables in high and low English achievers, by Wen Qiufang	(2)
• Learner variables and English proficiency of Japanese university students: An exploratory study, by Sachiko Okuda, Hideko Midorikawa, and Masaru Kurihara	(11)
• Motivation and classroom behavior, by Chen Ting	(17)
• Changes in college English majors' beliefs, by Su Xiaojun	(20)
• One text, two readers: A case study, by Wang Jian	(24)
• Beliefs, strategies and vocabulary size: Chinese EFL learner's vocabulary retention strategies, by Wang Wenyu	(34)
Chapter Two: Development of Linguistic Competence	(45)
• Problems in learning and using English tense-aspects by Chinese ESL learners, by Huang Yueyuan and Yang Suying	(45)
• Why some Chinese students cannot be efficient readers, by Liang Jianping	(54)
• Why do Zhuang speakers have difficulty pronouncing the English stops? by Zhang Mingqiu	(56)
• The effect of writing tasks on the organization of ESL composition, by Ting Yenren	(63)
• Influence of tasks on oral performance, by Zhu Lingzhi	(80)
• Analysis of lay-out discourses by beginning EFL writers, by Hu Ruiyun	(90)
• Differences in cohesive patterns between English and Chinese, by Xu Yuchen	(99)
• Lexical cohesion in EFL reading comprehension, by Qiu Wei	(106)
Chapter Three: Development of Communicative Competence	(111)
• Communicative competence, "communicative adequacy," and the me	

- taphors of language proficiency, by Joanna Radwanska Williams ... (111)
- Promoting EFL learners' pragmatic competence, by Wu Caixia ... (121)

Part II : English Language Teaching (131)

Chapter Four: Communicative Approach to English Language Teaching (132)

- Context and English teaching, by Zhu Yongsheng (132)
- Classroom management: drawing attention and encouraging participation, by Lin Xiaohong (137)
- Group work in intensive reading class, by Liang Qinghe (143)
- Affective learning in the EFL classroom and the potential of video films, by Lu Danyun (147)
- Free discussion: an effective method for English teachers' on-the-job training, by Shi Yunzhong (152)
- Beyond language points: Integrating communicative activities in intensive reading classes, by Yu Xiaojian (157)
- Communicative methods for teaching grammar, by Yu Mei (161)
- Promoting oral competence in the intensive reading class, by Lin Lihua (164)
- Communicative approach in intensive reading, by Qiu Mingjuan ... (168)
- Communicative activities for exercises in college English, by Zhu Xiaoming (171)

Chapter Five: Cultural Differences and English Language Teaching (176)

- Teaching of English speaking culture and its implications: Teaching conversation and socio-cultural norms, by C. Ruth Pritchard (176)
- Intercultural communication training in language courses, by Don Snow (183)
- Cultural differences and foreign language teaching, by Chen Dongdong (193)
- Vocabulary teaching and inter-cultural communication, by Dong Naiting (196)
- The difference "foreign teachers" make, by Zheng Guolong (203)

Chapter Six: Teaching Methods and Techniques (208)

- Teachers learning, learners teaching, by Kate Parry (208)
- Enhancing language development of at-risk students with computer

technology and combined teaching and learning strategies, by Chen Aiyen	(220)
• Immersion program and English proficiency of Chinese students, by Eva Fungkuen Lai	(227)
• Integrating reading and writing in the classroom, by Li Junwei ...	(235)
• Can we write poems in English? by Sui Gang	(240)
• Creative writing for college freshmen, by Xu Ping	(246)
• Vocabulary presentation with the aid of morphological analysis, by Tong Yali	(253)
• Making a word blossom, by Du Hui and Guan Hongdi	(264)
• Techniques for speech error correction, by Yin Hua	(270)
• Dictation in the classroom, by Zhao Jun	(276)
• Extensive reading and schema, by Qian Yufang	(282)
Part III : Testing and Curriculum Reform	(285)
Chapter Seven: Testing	(286)
• Subject reading: what to expect after College English Band 4, by Yang Zhizhong	(286)
• Achieve beneficial backwash effect: How to improve College English Test Band 4, by Wang Wangzhu	(290)
• Influence of TEMs 4 & 8 upon English majors, by Duan Lingli ...	(297)
Chapter Eight: Materials Design	(300)
• Improving the course book English for four-year vocational schools, by Dai Qingning	(300)
• Make the most out of our textbooks: Adaptation of <i>Focus Listening</i> (<i>Band 1—Band 4</i>), by Zheng Haicui	(306)
• Suggestions for improvement of <i>College English Focus Listening</i> , by Lu Jianna	(310)
• Short-answer questions in testing: Reading comprehension in college English, by Wang Haixiao and Clifford Hill	(317)
• New textbook for middle school students, by Zhu Minghui	(338)
References	(345)

Part I: English Language Learning

Part I reflects a growing emphasis on the learner and learner-centered language teaching. This new approach includes the recognition of the significance of the learner's individual characteristics; these are addressed in **Chapter One: Learner Characteristics**. It also includes the recognition of the complexity of the process of language acquisition, which includes not only the development of linguistic competence, but also that of communicative competence, i. e. , the ability to use the language appropriately, in a native-like way, in a variety of social situations. These two related aspects of language acquisition are addressed in **Chapter Two: Development of Linguistic Competence** and **Chapter Three: Development of Communicative Competence**.

The first chapter consists of a number of primary studies that focus on learner characteristics. Wen Qiufang compared high and low second language achievers in a survey study and found that high achievers have higher Deep Motive, higher Management and Functional Beliefs, lower Mother-Tongue Belief, and use Management, Formal and Functional Strategies more frequently but Mother-Tongue Strategy less frequently. Sachiko Okuda, Masaru Kurihara and Hideko Midorikawa found that 44% of the variance of learner proficiency is explained by the combined effects of four variables, namely, "Grade," "Organizing," "Guessing" and "Grammar Analysis." Su Xiaojun studied the general trends of changes in beliefs about language learning on the part of Chinese EFL learners. Wang Jian compared two learners' reading strategies while Wang Wenyu identified third-year university students' beliefs and strategies in vocabulary retention.

Chapter Two: Development of Linguistic Competence, has a coverage as broad as the title suggests. One topic in this chapter is the particular difficulties which Chinese EFL learners encounter. **Huang Yueyuan** and **Yang Suying** analyze the difficulties students experience when they learn and use English tense-aspects. **Liang**

Jianping attempts to answer the question why some students cannot be efficient EFL readers. **Zhang Mingqiu** investigates why Zhuang people, a minority nationality in China, experience difficulty in pronouncing English stops. Another topic in this chapter is the effect of learning tasks upon students' performance. As **Ting Yenren** shows in his study that the organization of ESL writing varies partly depending on the difficulty level of the writing tasks. **Zhu Lingzhi** shows that different task types influence, in different ways, the fluency, complexity and accuracy of the students' oral performance. The third topic concerns discourse competence. **Hu Ruiyun** studied the recurrent patterns of rhetorical structure and "There + Be" construction in EFL writing. Xu and Qiu study cohesion and explore its role in EFL learning. **Xu Yuchen** makes a comparison of cohesive patterns in English and Chinese narratives and provides suggestions for use of cohesion in EFL writing.

In **Chapter Three: Development of Communicative Competence**, **Joanna Radwanska-Williams** proposes to introduce a relative scale definition of "Communicative Adequacy," i. e., adequacy of competence relative to the speaker's social role and sense of cultural identity. **Wu Caixia** examined the differences between high and low achievers in pragmatic competence and found grammatical competence to be a necessary but not sufficient condition for the development of high pragmatic competence. Other papers in this chapter also call for further research on the conditions for optimal development of communicative competence or adequacy, especially in the Chinese context, where the learners' contact with native speakers is limited.

Chapter One: Learner Characteristics

Modifiable Variables in High and Low English Achievers

Wen Qiufang, Nanjing University

I . Introduction

Every year more than two million university students learn

English as a required course in China but only 40% of them can be expected to pass College English Test-Band 4 (Wen & Wang 1996). Why are so many undergraduates unsuccessful in learning English? Very often, students attribute the failure to teacher-related factors rather than to learner-related factors, particularly not to the factors that can be controlled by themselves. Although since the 70s' an increasing number of studies from the learner's perspective have been carried out in the West, there are only a few studies in China. Furthermore, the few available studies only focused on English majors (e. g. Huang 1984; Liu 1989; Wen & Johnson 1997). The study reported here was part of a large-scale project on the relationship of non-English majors' motivation, beliefs and strategies to English achievement. The study attempts to identify the differences between poor and good non-English majors in the modifiable learner variables.

II . Research design

1. Subjects

In March 1993, about 1,700 second-year non-English majors in three tertiary institutions in Jiangsu, Heilongjiang and Shandong Provinces responded to the Language Learner Factors Questionnaire. In order to compare the differences in modifiable learner variables between the high achievers and low achievers, 236 students were identified as belong to the top group and another 236 as belong to the bottom group respectively. The selection was made by identifying subjects whose scores were above 80 as high achievers, and those who scored between 50 and 65 as low achievers. Note: The students whose scores were below 50 were excluded from the study since their low scores might be mainly due to their low proficiency at the entry level or their evidently inadequate efforts. Others were excluded from the study because their responses were unscorable (see below). A total of 1,081 students were included in the study. Table 1. 1 presents information about high and low achievers in terms of sex and majors and Table 1. 2 displays the distribution of their scores on College English Test-Band 4 (CET4).

TABLE 1.1 Distribution of the subjects

Sex		Majors	
Males	Females	Arts	Science
787 (73 %)	294 (27 %)	131 (12 %)	950 (88 %)
1081 (100 %)		1081 (100 %)	

TABLE 1.2 Distribution of high and low achievers

Achievers	Sex		Majors	
	Males	Females	Arts	Science
High	140 (59 %)	96 (41 %)	40 (17 %)	196 (83 %)
Low	207 (88 %)	29 (12 %)	22 (9 %)	214 (91 %)

TABLE 1.3 Distributions of high and low achievers' scores on CET4

Higher achievers		Lower achievers	
99 - 90	23 (9.7 %)	65 - 60	163 (69.1 %)
90 - 85	66 (28 %)	60 - 55	52 (22 %)
85 - 80	147 (62.3 %)	55 - 50	21 (8.9 %)
Mean: 84.33	S. D. : 3.63	Mean: 60.44	S. D. 3.38

2. Instruments

The instruments used in this study were one questionnaire and one language proficiency test.

Questionnaire

Content. The Language Learner Factor Questionnaire consists of two parts. Part A concerns personal details (that is, name, sex, date of birth, scores on the English and Chinese Matriculation tests, mother's and father's education levels). Part B includes three clusters of modifiable learner variables. The first cluster is motivation, which consists of three variables. The first is Effort, which refers to an estimate of time spent in studying English outside of class. The second is Deep motive and the third is Surface motive. These two kinds of motives were established through the students' responses to the different kinds of reasons for learning English which were rated by the students on a three-point scale from "Not important" (1) to "Important" (3). The second cluster is beliefs,

and contains five types: Management Belief, Formal Belief, Functional belief and Mother-tongue belief. The students indicated their beliefs in terms of a three-point scale from “Disagree” (1) to “Agree” (3). The third cluster is strategies, and includes four types: Management strategies, Formal Strategies, Functional strategies, and Mother-tongue strategies. Students again responded on a three-point scale from “This statement is usually not true of me” (1) to “This statement is usually true of me” (3). The operational definitions of the modifiable variables involved are presented in Table 1.4. The beliefs and strategies variables are in pairs in order to find the relationship between beliefs and strategies. The essential difference between them is the former refers to students’ opinions about how a foreign language is learned and the latter refers to the students’ corresponding behaviors. The questionnaire was written in Chinese rather than in English to avoid misunderstandings due to low English proficiency.

Development. The questionnaire was adapted from the one Wen used in investigating tertiary-level English majors (1993). The changes were made in three steps. First, the questionnaire items concerning reasons were modified based on the responses given by the students from one Arts class and one Science class who were asked to answer an open-ended question “Why do you want to learn English?” Secondly, the items about beliefs and strategies were examined by an experienced College English teacher to make sure they were fit to non-English majors’ situations. Finally, the revised questionnaire was piloted in two classes.

College English Test – Band 4 (CET4)

CET4 is designed to measure non-English majors’ overall language proficiency after two years’ learning in tertiary institutions. It is a nation-wide test that started in 1989 and now is held in June and January every year. It consists of five sections: (1) Listening comprehension (20%); (2) Reading comprehension (40%); (3) Vocabulary and structure (15%); (4) Cloze (10%) and (5) Writing (15%). The test lasts two hours.

3. Procedures for data-collection and data-analysis

At the beginning of March 1993, the questionnaire was mailed

to the heads of Departments of Applied Languages in the three tertiary institutions who had expressed their willingness to join the study. Instructions on how a questionnaire should be responded to were sent together with the questionnaire. At the end of March, the second-year students in these three universities responded to the questionnaire by writing down their responses on an answer sheet which can be read by machine and then in June of the same year, they took College English Test – Band 4.

The answer sheets were read by machine and those which could not be recognized by the machine were excluded from the study. The scores on CET4 were keyed into the computer manually. The Statistical Package for Social Science was used in analyzing the data. The data-analysis consisted of four steps: (1) using the mean to replace the missing value of a few individual items; (2) analyzing item-total relations to check internal consistency within the items of the same scale; (3) operating T-tests to identify the differences in modifiable learner variables between high and low achievers. Table 1.4 presents a brief description of 11 modifiable variables involved in this study.

TABLE 1.4 A brief description of modifiable variables

Variable name	Brief description of variables	Item	Alpha
(1) Effort	The self-estimated amount of time spent by learners outside class in studying English.	1	/
(2) Surface motive (Mean: 1.93; SD: 0.47)	Learning English because of external requirement, e. g., "I learn English because English is a compulsory course."	3	0.57
(3) Deep motive (Mean: 2.52; SD: 0.49)	Learning English because of interest in the language and culture, and desire for getting information from the outside world, e. g., "I am interested in learning a foreign language."	3	0.54
(4) Management Belief (Mean: 2.60; SD: 0.35)	Learners' views on the importance of planning study, setting learning goals, evaluating progress and effectiveness of learning strategies, e. g., "Frequently evaluating the effectiveness of learning strategies used is very important for success in learning an L2."	5	0.51

(续表)

Variable name	Brief description of variables	Item	Alpha
(5) Formal Belief (Mean: 2.47; SD:0.38)	Learners' opinions on the importance of repetition, memorization and intensive study of texts, e. g., "Memorizing sentence patterns is very important for success in L2 learning."	5	0.51
(6) Functional Belief (Mean: 2.54; SD: 0.34)	Learners' opinions on the importance of extensive exposure to and communicative use of the target language, e. g., "Reading in English extensively is very important for L2 learning."	5	0.40
(7) Mother-tongue Belief (Mean:1.63; SD: 0.51)	Learners' opinions on the necessity of the use of mother tongue in listening, reading, speaking and writing,	4	0.62
(8) Management Strategy (Mean:2.13; SD: 0.46)	Strategies used in planning and regulating the learning process cognitively and effectively, and learners' study habits, e. g., "I have clear goals for my English study"; "I plan time so that I have sufficient time for my English study."	8	0.78
(9) Formal Strategy (Mean:2.04; SD: 0.34)	Strategy used in Formal activities and text-based intensive study, e. g., "I memorize the texts I have learned."	8	0.54
(10) Functional Strategy (Mean: 1.63; SD: 0.38)	Strategies used in communicative activities and in seeking exposure to the language, e. g. "I listen to English broadcasts outside class on my own initiative."	8	0.70
(11) Mother-tongue Strategy (Mean: 1.82; SD: 0.53)	Deliberate effort exerted in avoiding the use of the mother tongue in learning, e. g., "I try to not to think in Chinese when communicating in English."	4	0.65

(Note: The mean here is not the average of one individual item. Take Surface motive for example. It consists of three items and its mean is calculated in the following way: (Item 1 mean + Item 2 mean + Item 3 mean.)