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Strategies, Styles and Attribution:

Learning to Learn English

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PREFACE

Since the 1960s , the study of learner strategy has received more and more attentions in the field of English learning and teaching , and a great deal has been discovered about the learning process and learner strategies. We take these findings as a starting point and develop the discussion in the context of English teaching and learning in China. Our intent is to set out the theoretical principles and practical justifications for studying learning strategies and working to develop them with our learners. Underpinning this discussion is a desire to enhance classroom methodology and promote the autonomy of language learners , since raising achievement and language proficiency is a central concern of every language learner and teacher.

Many researchers , such as Rubin and Stern (1975) , O'Malley et al. (1985) , Brown (1987) , Oxford (1990) , Ellis (1994) , have made significant attempts to clarify the distinction between learning strategies and learning styles. They have been seeking to carefully define them based on their researches with respect to the theory of learning , learner strategy and learner differences in cognition. However , the difference between learning strategies and learning styles has often been unclear. According to Reid (2002 :F34) , learning strategies can be described as “external skills that students use , often consciously , to improve their learning”. In this sense , they might be understood as study skills that can be taught and that can enhance

or expand their existing learning styles. Learning styles , in contrast , are “internally based characteristics , often not perceived or used consciously , that are the basis for the intake and understanding of new information ; students can identify their preferred learning styles and stretch those styles by examining and practicing various learning strategies ”. However , just as Cohen (2000 :15) said , “ Learning strategies do not operate by themselves , ” they are actually directly in connection with “ the learner’s underlying styles and other personality-related variables such as anxiety and selfconcept in the learner ”. On the basis of these arguments and findings , we attend to deal with these notions of learning strategy both theoretically and in terms of their practical implementation.

Similar to some of the research literature on second – language acquisition and learner strategies , the scope of our present research is mainly concerned with the learning of English by English majors and non-English majors. But our probe into the domain of learning strategies , learning styles and attributions is within three main spaces. The first deals with aspects located both within and outside the learner , such as strategy use and its relationship to proficiency , achievement motivation , and attributional beliefs , factors such as sex , age , motivation , and personality , which contribute to variation of learning styles. The second is mainly concerned with learning techniques , affective factors , cooperative learning , constructivist macro strategies and their relations to the teaching of English in China. In other words , this part discusses these elements in more specific learning situations. The third brings us to the interactional space , where the resources at our disposal are put to use , laying emphasis on investigation and discourse analysis of Teacher Talk in the classroom. We believe that improved learning comes through improved teaching and understanding of learning process , learning strategies , and learner differences.

Accordingly ,our discussions in this book aim to bring together some of the varied facets of the whole picture for the reader , and those who specialize in language teaching. They , hopefully , can find much in this book to guide them to think fresh and further about their practice. Bearing this purpose in mind , we recognize the place of both theory and practice since neither could be ignored when dealing with language learning and teaching. Thus , a basic theoretical introduction to each topic is properly provided , and then some empirical suggestions for the foreign and second language classroom are included.

Chapter 1 *The Influence of Achievement Motivation and Attributional Beliefs on EFL Learning Strategies Use* sets out the context for our concern with learning strategies , styles and attribution. It investigates how achievement motivation and attribution beliefs affect the use of learning strategy by English learners in China. Specifically , this chapter is to provide some empirical evidence that these two factors have an effect on the choice of learning strategies and shed light on the study of learning strategy , strategy training and pedagogy. We should , first , examine more factors affecting the use of learning strategies so as to find our proper learning strategies for individual learners. Second , enhance achievement motivation in foreign language learning. Motivation directs learner's behavior , and people with high achievement motivation tend to use more strategies whenever possible , with the aim of more efficient learning and better outcome. Third , shape positive beliefs about the causes of success and failure , which will affect learners to select and use learning strategies in foreign language learning.

Chapter 2 *A Relationship Study of English Learning Strategies , Learning Styles and English Achievement* explores the relationship between learning styles , learning strategies and the

independent factors (motivations , sex , personality and learner's observation of language) influencing learner's English achievement in the Chinese cultural context. First , based on the relevant theories about English learning strategies , learning styles , motivation , interest , sex and English achievement test , and the findings of the previous researches , a tentative theoretical framework and hypotheses are proposed. Second , Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) and Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) are introduced and selected as research tools. Third , it discusses the selection of sample , collection of data , and the statistical analysis of the results. Lastly , based on the findings , some suggestions for its implication in English teaching are provided. It is necessary to (1) monitor students' learning styles and learning strategy uses ; (2) widen students' learning styles and learning strategies ; (3) enhance students' strategy training in listening ; (4) enhance memory strategies ; (5) further improve students' ability to use metacognitive , social , compensation and cognitive strategies ; (6) strengthen normal university students' understanding of learning styles and implementing " learning strategy instruction " training.

Chapter 3 *Learning Techniques for Non-English Majors* presents and examines learning techniques engaged in different learning tasks , particularly those in listening , speaking , reading , writing , and learning new vocabulary , and their implications for English language learning and teaching. The study of leaning techniques can help learners learn a foreign language effectively , enhance their autonomy and independence in language learning , strengthen their confidence in foreign language learning , and prevent them from the painful , effort-taking and time consuming hard task of learning a foreign language. As a result , teachers should present not only knowledge but also learning techniques to

students , which can lead students to form the habit of using strategies both consciously and subconsciously. In this way , learners can “ become not only of their own preferred way of learning but also of the fact that there are choices , not only in what to learn but also in how to learn ” (Nunan , 1991).

Chapter 4 *Cooperative Learning : Affective Factors and the Teaching of College English in China* deals with cooperative learning and its implication feasibilities and evaluations in the teaching of College English. Based on the prior studies on the four most influential factors (motivation , attitude , self-esteem and anxiety) in foreign language learning , a combination and the relationship between cooperative learning and affective factors are explored. This discussion emphasizes the affective domain of language learning and teaching , showing that cooperative learning encourages and supports most of the affective factors such as input , output and context. The relevance of cooperative learning to affective factors as well as to input , output and context of second language acquisition constitutes rationales for using CL in College English teaching.

Chapter 5 *Constructivism and Macrostrategies for FLT* , combining the view of constructivism , which emphasizes cognition , active construction , experience and environment in the process of knowledge construction , with the features of FLT , presents a constructivist model of the macrostrategies for FLT , with cognition and autonomy as its core , experience and interest as the middle layer , and social relevance as the out layer. On the basis of the constructivist model , five constructivist macrostrategies for FLT are put forward : self-awareness of language construction , activating intuitive heuristics , contextualizing linguistic input , integrating language skills and raising cultural consciousness.

Chapter 6 *An Investigation and Analysis on Teacher Talk in*

EFL Classroom Context explores the features of teacher talk in EFL classroom in China. Its specific purpose is to provide some pedagogical suggestions to the Chinese English teachers on what types of teacher talk would be beneficial to learner's language acquisition and therefore would be employed in classroom teaching. This chapter, with its empirical findings, provides us with some useful insights on EFL teaching given to English majors at tertiary level in the Chinese context, in which teachers are expected to 1) reflect frequently on their teaching, find out which kind of classroom behaviors and teacher talk would better benefit learner's target language acquisition, and use effective teacher talk strategies to improve their teaching; 2) create opportunities for learners to be involved in more genuine, meaningful communication in the target language for the purpose of cultivating and increasing learners' initiative in learning; 3) use appropriate teacher talk such as asking more referential questions and employing more confirmation checks and clarification checks; 4) provide positive and effective feedback such as praises for learners' classroom performance and offer appropriate treatment of errors, so as to create a relaxed and unthreatening environment and therefore enhance learners' motivation in foreign language learning.

As Wenden (1985) pointed out, that "learner strategies are the key to learner autonomy, and that one of the most important goals of language training should be the facilitating of that autonomy". Not only teachers but also learners, therefore, can benefit from an understanding of learning strategies, learning styles, learning techniques, affective factors, and some practical methods of investigating strategies, attributions, and styles, and establish in the classroom a milieu for the realization of successful strategies. It is helpful for learners to learn to arouse their awareness of making use of strategies in their learning process