Chinese as a Foreign Language Learners' Strategy Use and Writing Achievement

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Abstract

This study reports on the relationship between four college-level Chinese as a foreign language learners' strategy use and their writing achievement. Data included the learners' responses to Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) survey, learner interviews, classroom observations, and learners' writing samples. This study found that the two learners whose instructor regularly trained them to use specific writing strategies, such as repeating and translating, tended to be at a higher writing level compared to the other two learners whose instructor emphasized the practice of oral skills. This finding implies that language instructors need to help develop learners' four language skills equally and explicitly teach learning strategies that help develop them.
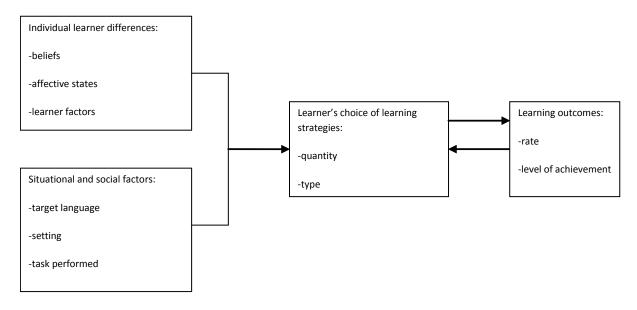
Introduction

Language learning strategies, defined as "specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations" (Oxford, 1990, p. 8), provide learners means of active involvement, which are necessary for developing second language proficiency (Oxford, 1990). Research shows that learners who intentionally select and combine strategies relevant to a given language task show improved proficiency in the target language (Grenfell & Macaro, 2007). Most importantly, strategies are teachable to learners; hence, studying learners' strategy use provides language educators data regarding which strategies students are unaware of, which helps language educators determine what strategies need to be explicitly introduced.

The learning phenomenon of strategy use is important to investigate as strategies are associated with successful learning (Grenfell & Macaro, 2007). However, studies of foreign language learning, specifically language learning strategy use, have predominantly focused on learning English as a foreign or second language (Peacock & Ho, 2003; Poole, 2005; Shmais, 2003; Yongqi, 2005). Currently, there is a lack of research on strategy use in learning Chinese as a foreign language. This study of Chinese language learners' strategy use and its relation to language achievement provides valuable findings and suggestions which add to the existing knowledge of the Chinese language teaching and learning field.

Theoretical Framework

Ellis' Strategy Framework

Language learning strategies are positioned by Ellis (1994) as having the "mediating role" between learner factors and learning outcomes (p. 529). Figure 1, adopted from Ellis (1994), illustrates the relationship between individual learner differences, situational factors, learning strategies, and learning outcomes.

Figure 1. Strategy Framework: The Relationship between Individual Learner Differences, Situational Factors, Learning Strategies, and Learning Outcomes. From Ellis (1994, p. 530).

Ellis (1994) defines strategy as "a mental or behavioral activity related to some specific stage in the overall process of language acquisition or language use" (p. 529). He explains that individual learner differences, together with different social factors, influence learners' strategy use. For instance, individual learner factors such as second language (L2) learners' motivation in learning the target language with social factors such as teaching instruction received, may affect the learners' strategy use. Ellis (1994) points out that learners' choices of strategies affect the degree of success in language learning in terms of the rate of acquisition and the level of achievement. For example, certain strategy use in a given language task may result in higher L2 performance while certain strategy use may not be as efficient in the same type of language task. Finally, Figure 1 shows that the level of success experienced and the level of L2 proficiency affect learners' strategy use. This study focused on the last segment of Ellis' (1994) framework in which

learners' choice of language learning strategies in relation to their writing achievement were investigated.

Oxford's Taxonomy of Strategies

Researchers in the second language acquisition field have attempted to identify learners' strategy use and categorized them into different types of strategies. For example, Oxford (1990) proposes six categories of strategies: cognitive, metacognitive, memory, compensation, affective, and social strategies, and explains how each category aids the development of communicative competence. Oxford (1990) explains that the six categories of strategies are grouped into two different types: direct and indirect. Memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies are direct strategies which are used by learners for immediate response to language tasks. They are considered direct strategies because all three categories require "mental processing of the language" (p. 37). Each of the three types does the processing in different ways for

different purposes. For example, Oxford (1990) defines memory strategies as having the function of helping learners group comprehensible input and retrieve information. Memory strategies such as using flash cards or grouping words of similar functions help learners remember newly learned vocabulary. Next, cognitive strategies, defined as "manipulation or transformation of the target language by the learner" (Oxford, 1990, p. 43), have the function of helping learners to understand and produce L2. For instance, learners use the cognitive strategy of skimming to locate the main idea in a text. Last, compensation strategies, "intended to make up for an inadequate repertoire of grammar and, especially, of vocabulary" (Oxford, 1990, p. 47), allow learners to use clues for guessing, leading to more comprehension.

On the other hand, metacognitive, social, and affective strategies are indirect strategies learners use to prepare for language tasks and help learners gain more control of their learning. Metacognitive strategies are those used to organize learning so that learners may more easily coordinate the second language acquisition process. For example, learners set goals and identify the purpose of a language task. Next, affective strategies, defined as strategies which help learners be more active in language learning, include strategies such as giving oneself a valuable reward for a good language performance and writing a diary to keep track of one's personal experience in the language learning process. Social strategies are used to learn the target language through interaction with others. Together these strategies aid the development of communicative competence. Among the many categorizations of strategies created by scholars, Oxford's (1990) taxonomy of strategies is considered the most comprehensive (Ellis, 1994). Hence, Ellis' (1994) language learning strategy

framework and Oxford's (1990) taxonomy of strategies were used to guide the study in investigating language learners' strategy use and its relation to their writing achievement.

Literature Review

Chinese Language Learning Strategies

Language learning strategies have been seen as one of the most important factors in predicting foreign or second language performance (Oxford, 1990). Several studies (Shen, 2004; Wang, 1998) on Chinese language learning strategies primarily focused on a specific aspect of Chinese learning skill and Chinese character learning. For instance, Shen (2004) investigated the effects of three encoding strategies for Chinese character learning among students learning Chinese as a foreign language. The three encoding strategies identified in the study were rote memorization, student self-generated elaboration, and instructor-guided elaboration. Rote memorization refers to the use of repetitive rehearsal strategies such as listening to the instructor present the sound, shape, and meaning of words repeatedly without elaboration, and have been observed to be related to shallow processing in the memory. Students' self-generated elaboration strategies, in which learners use any elaboration strategy they prefer, and instructor-guided elaboration strategies, in which the instructor explains the meanings or gives examples of the lesson taught, both resulted in a deeper processing in the memory, resulting in a significantly higher retention of sound and meaning of a character than shallow processing (Shen, 2004).

In another study of Chinese language learning strategy use, Wang (1998) investigated 15 first-year Chinese language learners in an American university. Results indicated that 80% of the learners used repetition strategy in practicing writing

Chinese characters. Ninety-three percent of the learners reported that they used memorization strategy. In examining students' cognitive strategy use, only 20% of the learners used a categorization strategy to study Chinese characters. Sixty percent of the class used a read aloud strategy to study Chinese, and 73% of them used a translation strategy. Wang (1998) concluded that the low percentage of certain Chinese character learning strategies could be due to the instructions learners received. The Chinese instructor did not spend time teaching Chinese characters, but placed more emphasis on listening and speaking skills. Wang (1998) suggested that even though the learners have used a wide variety of strategies in learning Chinese, they could have benefited more if they were provided with more Chinese character learning strategies in class. This suggestion may imply that teachers' instructions and beliefs about effective strategy use may affect learners' strategy use.

Although language learning strategies have long been identified as important factors in learning a second language, research on Chinese language learning strategies is still in its infancy. Current studies on Chinese language learning strategies are scarce. Hence, this study is needed in hopes that it will contribute to the current literature.

Strategy Use and Language Achievement

Current studies on strategy use and language achievement seem to suggest that certain strategies lead to more successful learning. In other words, among language learners who use a variety of learning strategies, some learners are more successful in learning the target language than others. For example, participants who identified their own ways of learning English in Yongqi's (2005) study on English vocabulary learning strategies researched different degrees of language achievement in class. A participant who used the strategy of making frequent contact with native speakers of the target language reached higher achievement on vocabulary tests than a participant who spent the majority of her time on memorizing word lists. Moreover, Andreou, Andreou, and Vlachos' (2004) study showed that the more successful students used combinations of strategies more frequently compared to others. The interpretation of the finding is that common strategies students used alone were not adequate to move learners to higher proficiency levels. It is the diverse combinations of strategies the successful learners used to promote high achievement in language learning. Although these studies suggest that certain strategies lead to more successful learning and others yield minimum language achievement, the studies only reviewed English as a foreign language. Chinese, a logographical language, on the other hand, has distinct features compared to English. Hence, my study adds value to the literature with a comprehensive description of language learning strategy use and language achievement with an emphasis on American learners of Chinese language.

Methods

Research Sites

This study involves two first-year Chinese classes in two research sites, Santos and Triangle Universities, both of which are higher education institutions located in a large metropolitan city in Texas. The following paragraphs briefly describe the Chinese language programs in the two universities.

Santos University: Santos University in Texas is one of the state's fastest-growing public schools, with more than 20,000 students in graduate and undergraduate programs in 2007. Starting in 2006, the College of Education and the

College of Business at Santos University cooperatively developed an elementary Chinese language course in response to increasing student needs for learning Chinese language skills. The demand from students for learning Chinese is evident as the Chinese language course expanded from one class to two in 2007.

Triangle University: Triangle University, a private institution, is one of the only two universities in Texas to offer an undergraduate degree in Chinese. The program has existed since 1990, and has continued to expand.

Participants

In order to eliminate the effect of writing level difference on the measurement of writing achievement, this study intended to only look for novice learners in Chinese writing with CHLL or non-CHLL backgrounds. The participants involved in the study were four first-year Chinese language students in their second semester of study, which represented the majority of student backgrounds in the first-year Chinese classrooms. The four participants included one Chinese heritage language learner (CHLL) and one non-CHLL from Santos University, and one CHLL and one non-CHLL from Triangle University. Tim (non-CHLL) and Luke (CHLL) were enrolled in Professor Le's class at Santos, and Jenny (non-CHLL) and Yaoming (CHLL) were enrolled in Dr. Fu's class at Triangle. The two non-CHLLs, Jenny and Tim, are native speakers of English who had no Chinese language experience prior to the Chinese class. One of the CHLLs, Yaoming, whose father immigrated from Hong Kong and mother from Beijing, was born in the United States. At home Yaoming's parents' language of communication was Cantonese, but they talked with Mandarin-speaking friends in Mandarin. Growing up Yaoming always spoke English with his brother and

parents even though his parents spoke Cantonese to the children. The other CHLL, Luke, whose parents are Mandarin speakers from Ningpo, China, came to the United States when he was 3 years old. Luke's parents sometimes spoke in Mandarin Chinese, sometimes in English, and sometimes mixed the two languages. However, Luke only responded to them in English. Despite the family domain, Luke's friends were American; therefore, he never used Chinese in the school domain. Both Yaoming and Luke were sent to Mandarin Chinese Saturday schools when they were in fifth and sixth grades, but neither of them had interest in learning Chinese and withdrew after a couple lessons. Based on the previous Chinese language experiences described above, the two CHLLs who did not have any informal or formal training in Chinese writing at home or in school prior to enrolling in the classrooms under study fitted the criteria for the participants in this study.

Data Collection and Analysis Methods

Data for this study were collected in the two research sites from February to May in 2008. I used several data collection methods to investigate strategy use and language achievement. In particular, the learners' writing samples were used as their language achievement measure, and their responses in the SILL surveys and pair interviews were used to summarize their strategy use. The classroom observation data served as the learning context in this study. The following paragraphs discuss how each data collection instrument was designed and used.

Oxford's strategy inventory for language learning (SILL) survey. In order to measure language learning strategy use, Oxford's (1990) SILL for native speakers of English learning another language was used in this study. The SILL was used because it

is a widely used language learning strategy survey with high reliability and validity. The SILL for native speakers of English learning another language comprises of a five-point Likert-scale that assesses the frequency of learners' use of strategies. The scores range from 1, being "never or almost never true of me" and 5, being "always or almost always true of me." The SILL contains 80 items grouped into the six categories of strategies in Oxford's (1990) taxonomy of language strategies. The four participants' average score in each of the six strategy categories were calculated.

Samples of learners' writing. The participants were asked to complete a writing assignment consisting of two writing prompts toward the end of the school semester. I decided to use the learners' writing and not other language skills as part of the language achievement data due to the limited writing activities and assignments given in class. The participants' only writing assignments were character writing practices in which they copied new characters learned multiple times. Thus, it would be difficult to evaluate the participants' writing skill based on such writing practices. Also, making my own evaluation of the learners' writing would ensure consistency, as it is possible that the instructors would not apply the criterion the same way. As a result of these factors, I designed a writing assignment containing two writing prompts, each of which allowed the learners to use vocabulary and language structures learned throughout the semester in the class in completing the writing assignment. The learners' writing samples were evaluated and levels determined in order to investigate their writing levels and strategy use. The writing proficiency section in the ACTFL language proficiency guidelines were used to guide the evaluation of the learners' writing samples. The guidelines helped determine the Chinese writing level of the learners in regard to the amount of expressions, characters, vocabulary, and grammar utilized and the accuracy of their writing. The ACTFL guidelines are divided into four levels: Novice, Intermediate, Advanced, and Superior. The Novice, Intermediate, and Advanced are further subdivided into Low, Mid, and High, e.g., Novice-Low, Novice-Mid, and Novice-High. The analysis took the narrative form in which the learners' writing samples or segments of the writing samples were described using the criteria of the rubric and thus helped determine their writing levels in the ACTFL guidelines. In order to increase the inter-reliability of the result, I asked two Chinese speaking colleagues in the field of second language learning to help evaluate the writing samples. When the results of the two graders' evaluations were not consistent, I acted as the third grader to determine the writing level of the learners.

Pair interviews. A total of two interviews were conducted toward the end of the school semester in May 2008. Each of the interviews lasted 90 minutes and was conducted with the participants from the same class. The intention of pairing up the participants from the same class is based on the belief that in a strategy use interview, interviewees in small groups tend to build on the response provided by others by adding strategies of their own (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). In the semi-structured pair interviews, the results of the SILL survey were presented to the participants. In reviewing the results, the participants were given the opportunity to elaborate and explain the strategies they tended to use, and to describe how effective they thought these strategies were. The interviews were open-ended and sought to elicit any information relevant to the study.

Classroom observations. I observed the classes 50 minutes each time, three times a week over a 10-week period from February to April in 2008. The observation intended to capture the learning context of the four learner participants in order to give readers rich background of this study. Specifically, when I observed the classes, I attempted to document Professor Le's and Dr. Fu's weekly teaching routines in my notes. All teaching themes were identified and coded using Nvivo software.

Findings

Weekly Routines in the Classrooms

The classroom observation data indicated that the two instructors had different emphases in teaching Chinese. Professor Le emphasized vocabulary, reading, and verbal translation in each lesson. For example, she frequently asked her learners to read the vocabulary and the textbook aloud after her. In addition, she wrote new words on the board, explained the meaning of each character or word, and placed each new character or word in different phrases or sentences orally. Next, she asked learners to translate verbally between English and Chinese by asking the "how do you say….in Chinese/English?" questions. On the other hand, Dr. Fu's class was highly structured in which every day in a week had specific tasks. For example, Dr. Fu began with a quiz over the previous segment on Wednesday and focused on the new segment's grammar and new vocabulary, which included character learning. On Fridays, the class continued with vocabulary drills, and practiced the newly learned language structure and vocabulary in games and in role-playing. On Mondays the class continued with games and role-playing exercises with a focus on practicing and memorizing the textbook dialogue. Dr. Fu discussed the translation exercises they did before class every Tuesday.

The types of language tasks practiced in each of the focal classrooms are introduced in Table 1. This table illustrates the two instructors' teaching routines from February to April in 2008, including number of language learning tasks and total minutes observed for each task.

Table 1

Language Learning Tasks in Professor Le's and Dr. Fu's Class

Professor Le's Instruction			Dr. Fu's Instruction		
Language Tasks	# of Tasks Observed	Total Minutes	Language Tasks	# of Tasks Observed	Total Minutes
Vocabulary	21	433	Structure and Vocabulary	18	413
Reading	13	236	Games and Role-Playing	7	152
Conversation Practice	5	87	Dialogue Practice	9	194
Tasks not categorized	Not Applicable	394	Translation Exercise	9	352
All tasks		1150	Tasks not categorized	Not Applicable	439
			All tasks		1550

The tasks not categorized in each class include quizzes, exams, student presentations, video watching, and any other learning tasks which were not regularly practiced in class. For example, Dr. Fu's class took weekly quizzes which usually lasted 20 to 30 minutes. The total number of minutes for weekly quizzes is included in the "tasks not categorized" column.

Learners' Writing Achievement

The learners' writings were sampled by asking them to complete a writing assignment toward the end of spring 2008. The learners had one week to complete the writing assignment. The writing assignment consisted of two questions. The first question asked the learners to write a paragraph using at least five of the 10 vocabulary words listed. The 10 words included were basic pronouns, verbs, time expressions, and adjectives which the learners were taught in the classes. The second question asked the learners to write a letter introducing themselves to a Chinese pen pal. The directions specifically instructed the learners to describe personal preferences and daily routines.

In order to increase the reliability of the results, I asked two Mandarin Chinese speaking colleagues who received higher education in the Mandarin Chinese-speaking country, and have received professional research and teaching training in the field of second language learning, to evaluate the writing samples using the ACTFL guidelines. When the results of the two graders' evaluations were not consistent, I acted as the third grader to determine the writing level of the learners. The learners' writing levels would be the level identified by at least two of the three graders. Table 2 shows the evaluation from each grader and the final writing level of each learner.

Table 2
Learners' Writing Levels

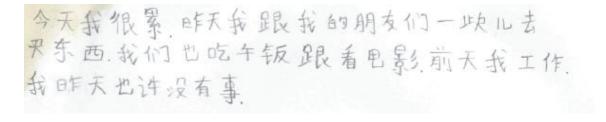| Name	Grader 1	Grader 2	Grader 3	Final
Jenny (non-CHLL) (Fu's class)	Intermediate-High	Advanced	Intermediate-High	Intermediate-High
Yaoming (CHLL) (Fu's class)	Intermediate-Mid	Intermediate-High	Intermediate-High	Intermediate-High
Tim (non-CHLL) (Le's class)	Intermediate-Low	Novice-High	Novice-High	Novice-High
Luke (CHLL) (Le's class)	Intermediate-Mid	Intermediate-High	Intermediate-Mid	Intermediate-Mid

Table 2 illustrates that even though the evaluation for each learner from Graders 1 and 2 are not consistent, the levels identified are always back to back (e.g. intermediate-high vs. advanced for Jenny, or intermediate-low vs. novice-high for Tim).

Learners' Writing Samples

    The learners' writing samples are shown along with the evaluations from the three graders, which are summarized below.

    Jenny - intermediate high level. Jenny's writing level was determined to be at the intermediate high level according to the ACTFL guidelines. Jenny's writing for the first question illustrated that she was able to correctly use the time expression words to express time and tenses (See Figure 2).

Figure 2. Jenny's writing sample 1.

Translation: [*I am very tired today. I went with my friends to go shopping yesterday. We also ate lunch and saw a movie. I worked the day before yesterday. I might be free yesterday.*]

    In the paragraph, Jenny used the time expression words, "today," "yesterday," and "day before yesterday" to describe events in each day. Although the last sentence, "I might be free yesterday" was not semantically correct, and Jenny made writing errors on two characters, 块 and 许, the rest of the paragraph was comprehensible to readers.

    Figure 3 is Jenny's answer to writing question 2, writing a letter to introduce oneself to a pen pal.
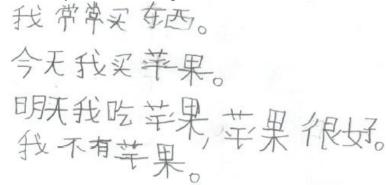

Figure 3. Jenny's writing sample 2.

Translation: [*I am Jenny. I like to read, listen to music, and play cards. I like to write letters the most! I hate making phone call the most. I go to school every day. I learn Chinese, math, science, and history. I like to learn Chinese the most. I also watch TV, take a walk, and receive emails every day. What do you like to do?*]

    Jenny briefly expressed her likes and dislikes, and her school experience in the paragraph. She knew how to use different

verbs such as *to read*, *to play*, *to write*, *to make a phone call*, and nouns such as *music*, *card*, and *letter* to indicate her likes and dislikes. In addition, she was able to use the word, 最 *(/zui/the most)* to indicate the level of preferences and dislikes. The paragraph has conscious organization in which Jenny first talked about her likes and dislikes followed by her school experience. At the
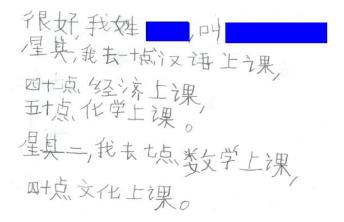
end of the paragraph, Jenny posed a question in order to find out her pen pal's likes and dislikes. Jenny's letter shows that her ability to narrate in paragraphs was emerging.

Tim - novice high level. Tim's writing was determined to be at the novice high level. Figure 4 shows Tim's writing for writing question 1.

Figure 4. Tim's writing sample 1.

Translation: [*I often go shopping. I buy apples today. I eat apples tomorrow, apples are very good. I no have apples.*]

Tim tried to describe what he did yesterday and today. He correctly used the time expression words, *today* and *tomorrow*. However, his vocabulary seemed limited. Throughout the paragraph, the only object he described was *apple* and the only adjective he used was *very good*. In addition, Tim's character writing

performance was inconsistent. For example, the word, *apple* written in the last sentence was partially wrong, while the same word in the other sentences were correct. Finally, Tim used the grammatically incorrect word, 不有 *(/bu you/no have)* instead of 没有 *(/mei you/do not have)* to express that he did not have apples in the last sentence. Tim's letter to a pen pal shows the same writing pattern (See Figure 5).

Figure 5. Tim's writing sample 2.

Translation: [*Very good. My surname is Smith, and my full name is Tim Smith. Monday, I go 11 the Chinese to class, At 40 o'clock, to the Economics class, At 50 o'clock, to the Chemistry class. Tuesday, I go at 7 o'clock Math to class, At 40 o'clock to the Culture class.*]

Tim tried to write 你好 *(/ni hao/how do you do?)* to greet his pen pal at the beginning of the letter, but it seems that he mistakenly wrote 很好 *(/hen hao/very good)* instead. He was able to use the sentence structure learned in class, "My surname is _____, and my full name is _____." in the next sentence. In the rest of the paragraph, Tim tried to describe the times and dates, and the classes he went to; however, he failed to correctly use the sentence structure to describe them. The correct sentence structure should be:

星期二	七点	我	去上	数学课
Tuesday	7 o'clock	I	go to	the math class
(Date)	(Time)	(Subject)	(Verb)	(Object)

Sometimes Tim omitted the first character of the verb 去 in 去上 *(/qu shang/, to go)* and misplaced the second character of the verb 上 in the object. He also misplaced the time word and the verb. For example, he wrote, 星期二我去七点.... *(/xing qi er wo qu qi dian/Tuesday I go to 7 o'clock...)* Instead of 星期二七点我去... */xing qi er xi dian wo qu/ (Tuesday at 7 o'clock I go...)*. The earlier sentence is considered grammatically incorrect in Chinese. In Chinese, the time expression words have to be written together either before or after the subject and should not be separated. Finally, Tim did not successfully indicate the times of the class. He wrote 40 o'clock and 50 o'clock, times that do not exist. Tim was not able to compose simple sentences and was determined to be at the phrase writing level, which is identified as the novice-high level in ACTFL.

Yaoming – intermediate high level. Yaoming's writing assignment was considered at the intermediate high level. In the first writing question, Yaoming explained why he decided to buy Chinese food (See Figure 6).

Figure 6. Yaoming's writing sample 1.

Translation: [*Today I feel very hungry. I love to eat French food, but it is too expensive. It will be better tomorrow. I have 10 dollars. I buy Chinese food now.*]

The content of Yaoming's paragraph was well-organized. He first expressed that he felt hungry and his preference of having French food. Later he explained the reason he decided to buy Chinese instead of French

food. Yaoming used three time expression words: today, tomorrow, and now. However, his statement about being better tomorrow in the paragraph was not clear as to what it

referred to. Besides the odd sentence, Yaoming had enough vocabulary and language structure knowledge to make the paragraph comprehensible to his readers.

Figure 7. Yaoming's writing sample 2.

Translation: [*My name is Yaoming. I live in the U.S. and am 19 years old. I like to eat Chinese food. I like to play ball and cards. I hate shopping, but going window-shopping is better. I love to sleep in the morning. In the afternoon I study until the evening. I feel that you like me.*]

In Figure 7, Yaoming's letter provided information about his name, age, home country, his likes and dislikes, and his daily routine. Occasionally, he made character writing and grammar errors. For example, he mistakenly wrote the character, 子 instead of 字 in the word 名字 *(/ming zi/name)* in the first sentence. In regard to grammar, he incorrectly used the conjunction word, 跟 *(/gen/and)* in the second sentence to connect two clauses while the conjunction is only used to link nouns. The structure of the sentence with the misused conjunction word appeared to resemble literal translations from English to Chinese. Yaoming was able

to successfully describe activities he liked and disliked in the next few sentences. In terms of describing daily routine, Yaoming described the events he did in the morning, the afternoon, and the evening. He used the character, 多 *(/duo/more)*, in front of the sentence, *I love to sleep in the morning*, which created confusion as to what information he tried to add to the sentence. On the other hand, Yaoming was able to use the "…until…" structure, in the sentence, 下午我念书念到晚上 *(/xia wu wo nian shu nian dao wan shang/In the afternoon, I study until the evening)*, which is usually taught in the second year Chinese class. Overall, Yaoming was able to produce Chinese writing that is mostly cohesive and comprehensible.

Luke – intermediate mid level. Luke's writing assignment was considered to be at the intermediate mid-level. Figure 8 shows Luke's answer for the first writing question.

Figure 8. Luke's writing sample 1.

Translation: [*I went to the market to buy (?). I like to eat noodles very much. After I bought it, I went home. Tomorrow I have a class.*]

Luke described series of events he did and will do. He correctly used three time expression words: today, after, and tomorrow. The content of the paragraph followed a time sequence; however, Luke made a couple errors. He invented the last character in the first sentence, and created confusion as to what object he indicated buying in the market. Moreover, in the sentence, 我买了以后我回家 (/wo mai le yi hou wo hui jia/After I bought it, I went home), the second 我 (I) in the sentence is usually unnecessary and omitted in Chinese. Despite the minor errors, Luke's paragraph was organized and showed his emerging ability to narrate events.

Figure 9 illustrates Luke's letter to his pen pal. He knew to use the letter format, having the greeting word, 你好 (/ni hao/how do you do) in the first line. He provided information in regard to his name, school name, class information, his likes and dislikes, his hometown, and his desired occupation.

Figure 9. Luke's writing sample 2.

Translation: [*How do you do. My name is Luke. The University I go is University A. I go to class everyday. I have 5 classes. I like biology. I want to be a doctor. In the U.S., sports are very important. I like to play balls. I am from Ningbo, so I like to eat sea food. What do you like?*]

The information Luke provided in the paragraph was clearly written. He was able to correctly use different verbs and nouns to describe the aforementioned information. However, the paragraph as a whole did not seem cohesive. For example, he wrote that he liked Biology and that he wanted to be a doctor. The relation between

Biology and doctor was implied, but not explicitly linked in the paragraph. Luke also made character writing errors. For example, He wrote 用动 instead of 运动 (/yun dong/to exercise)and 五们课 instead of 五门课 (/wu men ke/ five classes). The character writing errors and the loosely connected ideas illustrated that Luke's writing is at the intermediate-mid level.

The Relationship between Learners' Strategy Use and Writing Achievement

Table 3 summarizes strategy use reported by the learners in the SILL survey.

Table 3

Learners' Strategy Use Reported in the SILL Survey

Categories of Strategies	Jenny (Mean)	Tim (Mean)	Yaoming (Mean)	Luke (Mean)
Memory	3.07	3.33	3.07	3.07
Cognitive	2.92	2.92	3.44	3.36
Compensation	2.75	2.88	3.88	4.63
Metacognitive	3.31	2.88	3.69	3.50
Affective	2.29	2.71	2.43	2.71
Social	3.00	2.92	2.78	4.67
Total Average	2.89	2.94	3.22	3.66

Jenny and Yaoming, who had the same writing level, appeared to use different types of strategies. Jenny tended to use Metacognitive strategies ($M = 3.31$) more while Yaoming tended to use compensation ($M = 3.88$) and Metacognitive strategies ($M = 3.69$). Luke, whose writing was at the intermediate-mid level tended to use social ($M = 4.67$) and compensation ($M = 4.63$) strategies. Tim, who had the novice-high writing level tended to use memory ($M = 3.33$) strategies more. In regard to the average use of all six categories of strategies, Jenny ($M = 2.89$) and Tim ($M = 2.94$) used the strategies less frequently in general compared to Yaoming ($M = 3.22$) and Luke ($M = 3.66$). The SILL survey provided the general idea of the learners' categories of strategy use. However, it is difficult to determine if there is a relationship between their strategy use reported and their writing achievement as not all the strategies are relevant for learning Chinese writing. This study takes on another method to investigate the potential relationship between strategy use and writing achievement. In the following paragraphs, the learners provided in-depth information in the interviews about the strategies they used that may have helped increase their writing achievement and their confidence in writing Chinese.

Learner interviews. When asked how Chinese writing was practiced, both Jenny and Yaoming mentioned character writing and responded that they used the repeating strategy. They both would write things over and over again. Jenny indicated using another strategy, the associating strategy. She would make association between characters and things that look

similar to the characters. These strategies might have increased Yaoming's and Jenny's knowledge of Chinese vocabulary and writing levels. Both Yaoming's and Jenny's writing samples showed that they used a fair number of vocabulary words and made only minor character writing errors that would not affect readers' comprehension of the writings. Another aspect of writing is sentence structure. In Dr. Fu's class, the learners did weekly translation exercises that emphasized on the sentence structures and vocabulary taught in class. Yaoming and Jenny both agreed that the weekly translation exercises were helpful in terms of developing the knowledge of sentence structures. Yaoming stated,

> I use it (the workbook) a lot for the translation exercise. It gives you a general idea of the sentence structures. They give a lot of examples too.

The translation exercises also helped the development of Chinese grammar. Jenny said,

> It kind of forces you to try to figure out how to work things out, the grammar works, so it helps you understand why that isn't the way you thought it was. Like by doing it, you see a mental note of what's going on.

In evaluating Yaoming's and Jenny's sentence structures used in their writing samples, the graders found that the majority of the structures used were correct with only a couple words misplaced. Furthermore, I noticed that the sentence structures they used were practiced in the translation exercises. Hence, there seemed to be certain level of influence of strategy use on the learners' writing achievement.

In the interview with Luke and Tim, I found that neither of them was confident about Chinese writing. Tim stated,

> Writing is by far the hardest for me. Going from English to Pinyin or Pinyin to English is easy, but going from English to character I think it's the hardest thing for me to do. Pinyin to character is hard too.

Tim expressed that Chinese writing was difficult for him; however, he did not spend time practicing writing to improve it. He said,

> I practice reading a little bit, especially when I know there is a quiz or tests. I will practice before those. But I don't practice writing that much and it's really hard to write characters for me. But I am also really bad at writing in general.

Luke seemed to be in a similar study habit in terms of Chinese writing. Luke stated,

> I don't really practice writing that much cause…yeah I don't practice writing at all. It's confidential right? Yeah I don't practice writing. I only write when Professor Le tells me I have an assignment to do.

Luke expressed that Chinese writing was difficulty for him compared to speaking when asked about the difficulty of the Chinese course he was taking. Luke explained,

> Sometimes it (the class) can get really easy, sometimes it can get really hard. For me like speaking, it's like, she (Professor Le) asks how do you say high school? I already know it, so in that aspect it's very easy. But then she will be like how do you write *体育馆 (gym)*, ok, I have no idea. Reading and writing are super hard for me. I don't know why.

Tim and Luke did not seem to have specific strategies in mind for practicing writing. As a result, they did not spend any time practicing writing after class. When the learners tried to find the reasons they encountered difficulties in Chinese writing,

Tim blamed his generally bad writing skills and Luke expressed that he did not know the reason. The classroom observation data informed me that Professor Le only stressed the teaching of writing at the character level. She would show students how to write characters, but the rest of the class time would be spent repeating vocabulary or phrases orally. The effect of not having any strategies specific for practicing writing has shown in Tim's and Luke's writing. Both of them had lower writing levels compared to Jenny and Yaoming at Triangle University. In particular, Tim's writing used limited vocabulary and had few and repeated sentence structures. Luke's writing was more advanced compared to that of Tim's; however, the organization of his writing was weaker compared to that of Jenny's and Yaoming's.

Based on the learners' writing levels and their strategy use, it seems that there was a relationship between their strategy use and writing achievement. Jenny and Yaoming's use of the repeating strategy to practice character writing and the translating strategy to practice using different sentence structures taught in class seemed to help increase their writing ability. On the other hand, Tim and Luke, who did not use any specific strategy to practice writing in or after class seemed to have lower writing achievement.

Conclusion

The study found the influence of strategy use on the learners' writing achievement based on the classroom observations, the SILL survey results, and learners' writing samples and interview data. Dr. Fu's learners, Jenny (non-CHLL) and Yaoming (CHLL), who used the *repeating* and *translating* strategies for writing, tended to be at higher writing level compared to Professor Le's learners, Tim (non-CHLL) and Luke (CHLL), who were not able to

identify specific strategies to practice writing. This finding confirms Ellis's (1994) strategy framework in which learners' choice of strategies influence learners' rate of acquisition and language achievement. In addition, Professor Le's learners, Luke and Tim, who expressed that they did not use specific strategy to practice writing, did not seem to have a clue as to why they felt Chinese writing was difficult. According to Ellis's (1994) strategy framework, "the success that learners experience and their level of L2 proficiency can also affect their choice of strategies" (p. 529). In other words, the influence goes both ways between strategy use and L2 achievement. In this study, since Luke and Tim never had to write in Chinese except for character writing practices, they did not have opportunities to try any strategies for writing. Their lack of successful writing experience in Chinese could not help them confirm effective writing strategies which lead to a high level of writing achievement. On the other hand, Dr. Fu's learners, Yaoming and Jenny, who achieved higher writing proficiency, confirmed the effective use of the writing strategies adopted from the weekly translation exercises.

One other possible reason that Jenny and Yaoming wrote better in Chinese than Tim and Luke could be attributed to the type of institution where they studied. Jenny and Yaoming were in a private institution where the environment, teaching style, and learning resource distribution may be different compared to those in a public institution where Tim and Luke studied. In other words, factors other than the writing strategies taught by the instructors may have influenced the participants' writing strategy use and their writing achievement. Drawing upon Ellis's (1994) strategy framework in which both individual and social factors may affect a learner's choice of strategies and language achievement, the current study is

limited in terms of the number of factors (teaching environment) investigated and the type of language achievement (writing samples) analyzed. Future research is needed to find more factors which explain language learners' strategy use and confirm the relationship between strategy use and language achievement in all four language skills. Nonetheless, the finding about Jenny and Yaoming using specific writing strategies learned in class to reach high writing achievement implies that language instructors need to help develop learners' four language skills equally and to explicitly teach learning strategies that would help develop the language skills. In other words, language instructors should help learners identify effective strategy use in learning each of the four language skills and encourage them to try combinations of effective strategies. Successful or failed learning experiences resulting from experimenting with the use of different strategies will help direct learners toward finding the most effective and suitable strategies for themselves.

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