

# Study on the Learning Strategies of Chinese High School Students Using English as a Second Language

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**Abstract:** By analyzing the theory of second language learning strategies, this paper discusses the common mistakes of senior high school students in the process of English learning, and puts forward the problems that should be paid attention to in the application of second language learning strategies in senior high school teaching.

**Keywords:** English; Second Language Acquisition; Learning Strategies.

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## 1. Definition of Related Concepts in Second Language Acquisition Theory

### 1.1. Mother Tongue

The fifth edition of the Modern Chinese Dictionary defines the mother tongue as the language that a person first learns, usually a specific ethnic group or dialect. Mother tongue, sometimes referred to as the first language, is the language that people first come into contact with, learn, and manage. We have been exposed to our mother tongue since childhood and continue to use it during adolescence or beyond. In addition, a person's family or formal education, especially early childhood education, is mainly taught through their mother tongue. Some people believe that dialects are the actual mother tongue, such as Guangzhou dialect being the mother tongue of Guangzhou people, Shanghai dialect being the mother tongue of Shanghai people, and so on. The mother tongue in this article refers to the language of our country, which is the national language of China. Because Mandarin is used in Chinese classrooms, defining Mandarin as the mother tongue of Chinese students is more representative and common.

### 1.2. Second Language

People often believe that a second language is a foreign language, and in the theory of second language teaching, second language and foreign language are not two similar concepts. According to Ellis (1994), any language other than the first language acquired by learners is referred to as a "second language". For example, if I am a Chinese and grew up in China, my first language of study is Chinese. I studied English in junior high school and French in college, so both English and French are my second language. This statement emphasizes the order of language acquisition. For many overseas Chinese groups, distinguishing between first language and second language is more complex and controversial. Therefore, it will not be taken as a research focus and will not be further elaborated. This article is based on Ellis' viewpoint.

### 1.3. Acquisition

In second language acquisition research, "acquisition" and "learning" are defined as corresponding concepts. Krashen (1981,1982) believes that "acquisition" is the effortless

acquisition of language "subconsciously" under natural conditions, similar to the way children acquire their mother tongue. Learning "is the conscious use of rules in formal language learning through classroom teaching, similar to the current way of acquiring English in primary and secondary schools in China. Ellis (1985a, 1994) believes that it is difficult to distinguish between two processes and has always regarded the two as concepts of interactive use. In his view, second language acquisition includes both subconscious and conscious processes. The content in the following text also follows Ellis' viewpoint, but the discussion of high school students in the English learning process is more about the conscious process of classroom teaching.

## 2. Learning Strategies in Second Language Acquisition

The initial stage of learning strategy research was in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when Carlton discussed inference strategies in detail and divided them into intra linguistic cues, inter linguistic cues, and extralinguistic cues. Gardner and Lambert conducted research on learning attitudes and motivation, and in the mid to late 1970s, they studied the characteristics of successful foreign language learners. After the 1980s, scholars placed them in the framework of cognitive theory for further research. In the 1990s, the main classification of learning strategies was based on Skehan, O'Malley, and Oxford. O'Malley classified learning strategies into cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, and social situation strategies based on information processing models. Oxford classified strategies into direct strategies and indirect strategies based on their relationship with language materials. Recently, Wen Qiufang proposed input strategy, storage strategy, output strategy, and then subdivided them. Different scholars have different classifications of learning strategies based on different perspectives. This article proposes input strategies, absorption internalization strategies, and output strategies based on the above.

## 3. A Study on the Learning Status of Chinese High School Students Using English as a Second Language

The study focuses on the second-year teachers and students of Dongming County No.1 High School in Shandong

Province. In this high school, each English teacher leads two classes, but there are differences in English learning performance among different classes of the same teacher. The English grades of students in the same class of the same teacher also vary greatly. The researchers believe that in addition to class atmosphere and special circumstances of individual students, the main reason is the different level of use of learning strategies. For example, the students in Class 15, whom I teach, mainly rely on the teacher's knowledge in their input strategies. They do not review in a timely manner after class, resulting in low input efficiency. They do not absorb other knowledge outside of class to develop their own thinking. In the input strategy, Class 16 students mainly rely on teacher knowledge feeding, supplemented by learning committee members assigning knowledge points to explain and learn, resulting in relatively good English grades in the class. After conducting a survey on 42 classes of students in the first high school and second high school, it was found that being able to use learning strategies correctly during the English learning process can help improve students' English grades. Therefore, it is particularly important to conduct in-depth research on how to impart English knowledge to students while explaining learning strategy knowledge in specific teaching processes.

## **4. The Impact of Native Chinese on English Learning for High School Students with a Second Language of English**

### **4.1. The Positive Impact of Native Chinese Language on High School Students' English Learning**

#### **4.1.1. The Impact of Similarity**

Xu Guozhang, a famous English educator and linguist in China, once pointed out that in the process of learning English, English learners have always thought that Chinese and English are very different, but neglected their similarities. English and Chinese are two different types of languages, and they have differences. However, in fact, they also have commonalities, which means that learning Chinese well lays the foundation for learning English well.

Firstly, in terms of part of speech. There are many similarities in the classification and function of words between English and Chinese. In English word classification, nouns (n.), verbs (v.), adjectives (adj.), adverbs (adv.), and so on, there are similar words in Chinese, and there are also similarities in the interpretation of part of speech and usage methods. Therefore, it can be concluded that mother tongue has a positive impact on English learning, reflected in part of speech and its usage. Therefore, we not only need to work hard to learn English, but also to master our own language.

Secondly, in terms of grammar. English and Chinese sentences can generally be divided into the following components: subject, predicate, table, object, definite, and adverbial. They actually play the same role in both languages. For example, "The joker is on me." They are all structures of subject, system, and table, which reflects the positive impact of Chinese on English learning.

Thirdly, in terms of sentence meaning, there are also many commonalities. A large amount of vocabulary transfer occurs in the early stages of English learning, especially for English students who are already proficient in using their mother

tongue. When they learn, they can easily match the vocabulary used in their mother tongue with the English words they have learned, bringing incomprehensible words into their mother tongue and becoming concrete. For example, when learning the word "TV", they will first understand it as "电视" and consider "TV" as "电视". Then combine "watch" with the Chinese word "看", so "watch TV" is "看电视".

#### **4.1.2. The Impact of Cognitive Ability**

During the learning process, learners have some primitive native language knowledge in their minds, and the main basis for learning new knowledge is this knowledge. Some new information itself contains the same content as the original information, especially the development of children's language has gone through a simple and complex process. The development of language ability is closely related to the development of cognitive ability. It is necessary to use one's mother tongue as the cognitive foundation in the process of English learning. Therefore, learners can use this existing information to learn and manage English rules, thereby improving their English learning abilities. English learners rely on their native language thinking during the learning process, especially in the writing and reading processes. Through investigation and research, learners can learn the thinking process of English. For example, when students understand and think, they mostly use their mother tongue for analysis and evaluation, and the content they express is mostly in their mother tongue. Although Chinese and English are not the same language, the mother tongue plays an important role in the process of English writing. It is precisely because of the connection between languages that these two languages are identical in many places. For example, in both English and Chinese, there are subjects, predicates, objects, adjectives, adverbs, etc. Chinese proficiency has a positive impact on English learning, which can fully utilize Chinese learning ability and improve English proficiency.

### **4.2. The Negative Effects of Native Chinese Language on High School Students' English Learning**

#### **4.2.1. The Impact of Vocabulary**

There is a significant difference between Chinese and English. The reason is that Chinese is a part of the Tibetan Chinese system, while English is a part of the Indo European language system. The two language systems are different, resulting in a huge difference between Chinese and English. English uses sentences to express time. Different time formats represent different stages of event development, but Chinese is different. Chinese relies on expressing the meaning of sentences in order. For English learners, it is difficult to solve this problem in a short period of time. Therefore, they are accustomed to expanding Chinese collocations in the process of English learning, sometimes neglecting the polysyllabic features in English, or failing to clearly distinguish the usage of a and an, unable to understand what non finite verbs are, or directly expressing "you" as "have" in English. English focuses on using sentences through reasonable sentence changes, and then expressing different thoughts and emotions by reflecting the actual effect of English expression. English articles have a strong structure and have different contact information. The analysis and management of Chinese text structure mainly adopts distributed syntax, and the connection between words and phrases is mainly based on the core idea

and emotional meaning of the article, reflecting the cultural and spiritual power of the article. For example, expressing English paragraphs directly as goals and using a complete structure to complete the narrative, while Chinese paragraphs mainly use inductive expressions to help students understand the relevant content. When some students learn English, their native language transfer can affect them and develop English writing based on the characteristics of their native language article structure, leading to a serious decrease in the readability of English writing content. Students use dictionaries to supplement their English writing, which is not conducive to their long-term learning of English writing.

#### **4.2.2. Grammatical Impact**

Chinese grammar and English grammar are different. Therefore, after students master the basic knowledge of Chinese, Chinese grammar has a significant impact on English learning, which in turn enables students to learn English grammar with Chinese thinking. Firstly, in the learning of clauses, due to the absence of clauses in Chinese and the complex usage of clauses in English, learners are at a loss at the beginning of learning the complex clauses in English, and even have a limited understanding of grammar. Secondly, in the process of learning English, we often use Chinese word order, which has a high error rate. There is a little joke like this: “How are you?” Every word on the board literally translates to “怎么是你?” “How old are you?” “怎么老是你?” This precisely reflects the hindrance that native language has caused to English learning. Most beginners prefer to translate word for word, ignoring the rules of English grammar, which is why this situation occurs. As we often refer to it as “Chinglish”, for those of us who live in a Chinese context, to overcome this problem, we first need to read more English in our daily lives, form reading habits, and then become accustomed to English thinking patterns.

In short, when learning English, we need to understand what similarities and differences exist between English and Chinese. By organizing key points, we can avoid potential mistakes and improve our efficiency in learning English.

## **5. How to Inspire High School Students to Better Use Learning Strategies in English Learning**

### **5.1. Guide Students to Change Their Inherent Learning Thinking Patterns**

In order to avoid students from long-term negative transfer of their mother tongue during the English learning process, teachers should guide students to actively change their learning ideas in the actual teaching process, in order to improve students' English learning efficiency. The comparative analysis of English and Chinese content shows that English content is concentrated in the front of thinking, while Chinese content is concentrated in the back of thinking. For example, when categorizing logical thinking as English, it is necessary to emphasize facts and conclusions, and then apply relevant statements to analyze the actual situation. This requires teachers to adapt to students' actual learning situations, stimulate their enthusiasm, encourage them to actively learn English, and improve their comprehensive English learning abilities. Most of the errors made by students in the process of learning a second language stem from the negative transfer of their mother tongue. Therefore, teachers should help students overcome language differences and

establish confidence in learning a second language. Teachers should focus on explaining the similarities and differences in pronunciation, words, phrases, texts, and culture between Chinese and English, which can avoid pragmatic errors caused by negative transfer of their mother tongue during the second language learning process.

### **5.2. Encourage Students to Actively Embrace Foreign Language Cultural Factors**

As a second language, students should recognize the importance of learning a second language when learning English. In international communication, English is a universal language of communication, and its expressive ability can help students solve many practical problems, reflecting the practical value of English learning. Therefore, when learning English, teachers should remind students to maintain an open and participatory learning awareness, accept and actively accept foreign language cultural factors, promote the integration of Chinese and Western cultures, effectively improve cultural perspectives, and build the soft power of mother tongue culture. Do not make decisions behind closed doors. At the same time, teachers should also actively understand foreign power cultures and ideologies, in order to improve China's language education level, promote students' comprehensive English learning, and enable students to consciously compare the differences between Chinese thinking and English thinking. In the daily process of English teaching, English thinking patterns are effectively compared with the thinking patterns of Chinese people, and differences between them are explained through examples to help students understand effective information and avoid using incorrect language. Understanding the similarities and differences between these two not only provides a deeper understanding of China's language system, but also the English system. Negative transfer will weaken, while positive transfer will enhance, effectively promoting the improvement of English proficiency.

### **5.3. Teachers' Emphasis on English**

When English learners truly learn, they must highlight the importance of the language itself, reasonably avoid negative transfer of their mother tongue, avoid using Chinese learning thinking in the learning process, and gradually emphasize the subjectivity of English learning. Outside the classroom, students have relatively few opportunities to access and use English. Therefore, as one of the main sources of students' English speaking, in classroom teaching, we should adhere to English principles, try our best to use English throughout the entire process, increase students' English exposure and experience, cultivate students' English listening and speaking abilities. When students are unable to understand the meaning of words and phrases, teachers should make every effort to help students understand phrases, such as creating situations, simulating actions, and changing the format of words, instead of translating directly to students.

## **6. Conclusion**

At present, although the proportion of English in compulsory education has decreased, in today's globalized world, the study of learning strategies for Chinese high school students who use English as a second language is still very important. If teachers not only teach English knowledge but also strengthen the cultivation of students' learning strategies,

then teaching performance will greatly improve, making English teaching more scientific, reasonable, and efficient!

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