

On the Content and Training of Chinese Character Learning Strategies

Jingying Yang

Xi'an Shiyou University, Xi'an, Shaanxi 710065, China

Abstract: Chinese character learning is a major focus and difficulty in learning Chinese as a second language. In order to learn Chinese characters more efficiently, learners can adopt appropriate Chinese character learning strategies. The article firstly classifies the Chinese character learning strategies in second language acquisition and analyses the main influencing factors of Chinese character learning. Secondly, the target learners of Chinese characters are classified into two categories: Chinese character circle and non-Chinese character circle, and the differences of their Chinese character learning strategies are analysed. Finally, the training process of Chinese character learning strategies is analysed. The aim is to further understand the use and training of Chinese character learning strategies, and to provide help and guidance for future Chinese language teachers to train learners in Chinese character learning strategies in a targeted manner.

Keywords: Learning Strategy; Chinese Character Learning Strategy; Second Language Acquisition; Strategy Training; Chinese Circle.

1. Introductory

The use of language learning strategies plays an important role in the language learning process. Chinese is different from other languages with its special characteristics, and it is recognised as one of the difficult languages to learn in the world. Learning strategies for Chinese as a second language are also different from general learning strategies, especially those for Chinese characters. Choosing appropriate learning strategies for Chinese characters will bring better results to the learning of Chinese characters, and even get twice the result with half the effort. This paper studies Chinese character learning strategies by analysing the classification of Chinese character learning strategies and their influencing factors, and comparing the differences in Chinese character learning between Chinese character circles and non-Chinese character circles. It aims to further understand the use and training of Chinese character learning strategies, and to provide help and guidance for Chinese teachers to train learners in Chinese character learning strategies in the future.

2. Classification of Chinese Character Learning Strategies

Language learning strategies are the methods used by learners in the process of language learning in order to achieve good learning results. There are many classifications of language learning strategies, such as those based on the purpose of the learning strategy, the form of its expression, the user of the strategy, the cognitive and psychological process of learning, whether the strategy is directly applied to the learning process, the level of the learner, and the purpose of its use, etc. Most of the Chinese learning strategies are classified according to the Oxford classification, which is the most comprehensive classification system used so far. Most of the Chinese learning strategies are classified according to the Oxford Classification of Language Learning Strategies, which is the most widely used and comprehensive classification system so far, i.e., they are classified into two categories, namely, direct and indirect strategies, according to

the relationship between the strategies and the language materials. Among them, direct strategies include memory strategies, cognitive strategies and compensation strategies; indirect strategies include metacognitive strategies, affective strategies and social strategies. When analysing the research on Chinese learning strategies, Wu Yongyi (2001) stressed the importance of distinguishing not only general learning strategies from language learning strategies, but also language learning strategies from Chinese learning strategies.[1] The relevant theories of language learning strategies are based on the Western Indo-European language system, and the specificity of the Chinese language is destined to the specificity of Chinese learning strategies. In this way, the study of Chinese learning strategies has an important research value in the education of Chinese as a second language. According to Cui Weizhen (2021), the research direction of learning strategies in Chinese as a second language acquisition is roughly divided into four parts, namely, the research on the definition and classification of learning strategies, the research on the influencing factors of learning strategies, the research on the correlation between learning strategies and language elements and skills, and the research on the training of learning strategies.[2]

Since Chinese is a language different from the epigraphic system, especially in terms of writing, it has its own special characteristics. The author believes that classifying Chinese learning strategies according to linguistic elements is more capable of reflecting the special characteristics of the Chinese language, and therefore advocates that Chinese phonological learning strategies, vocabulary learning strategies, Chinese character learning strategies, and grammar learning strategies be taken as the first class of Chinese learning strategies. The classification of each category according to the characteristics of each linguistic element of the Chinese language can not only reflect the characteristics of the Chinese language, but also cover representative learning strategies such as Oxford. For example, Gao Xiaoping (2024), in his review of Chinese as a second language Chinese character learning strategies, incorporated Malley & Chamot's and Oxford's classification of language learning strategies into Chinese character

learning strategies, and summarised Chinese character learning strategies at home and abroad. The radical strategies, stroke strategies, application strategies, listening strategies, paying attention on one's own, watching stroke animation, typing practice, induction strategies, association strategies, and compensation strategies were categorised as cognitive strategies; the strategies for supervising and managing the execution of cognitive strategies, such as previewing, reviewing, and making plans, were categorised as metacognitive strategies; and the strategies for how to manage anxiety when learning Chinese characters, self-encouragement, social strategies for interacting with others, and learning through communication were categorised as social strategies. Learning in communication were categorised as social-emotional strategies.[3]

3. The Main Factors Affecting the Learning Strategies of Chinese Characters

Factors affecting language learning strategies can be generally classified into language level, individual factors (age, gender, nationality, native language background, geography, etc.), psychological factors (motivation, learning attitude, learning anxiety, self-efficacy, cognitive styles, etc.), and external environments (teaching methodology, online environment, etc.). The main influences on Chinese character learning strategies can be categorised into the structural characteristics of the characters themselves, the learners' language level and the learners' native language background.

The structural characteristics of Chinese characters are the main factors affecting the learning strategies of Chinese characters. Unlike English, which has an alphabetic system, Chinese characters are a special kind of script, which is a combination of form, sound and meaning. There are four commonly used structural methods for Chinese characters, namely, pictogram, referent, huiyi, and xingyin. Pictographs express meaning in the form of shapes or symbols, ideographs express meaning by adding special symbols to shapes, huiyi expresses meaning by combining multiple parts to form a new character, and xingyin expresses meaning through a combination of phonetic and ideographic parts. Some Chinese characters are able to express sound, some are ideographic, some are a combination of sound and translation, and some are no longer visible due to the evolution of character forms. Therefore, L2 learners face great challenges in learning Chinese characters. Therefore, the influencing factor of the structural characteristics of Chinese characters should be added to the influencing factors of Chinese character learning strategies. Gao Xiaoping (2024), in his analysis of descriptive research on Chinese character learning strategies, states that "the teaching of Chinese character learning strategies should be examined in terms of skills (recognition and writing), taking into account the characteristics of the characters (construction, number of strokes, recurrence rate), individual learner factors (Chinese language proficiency, mother tongue) and external factors (e.g., teaching, testing)."[3]

Learners' language proficiency is the main factor affecting Chinese learning strategies, as well as Chinese character learning strategies. Jiang Xin (2000) pointed out as early as the early stage of research on Chinese learning strategies that "there is a significant correlation between the use of international students' Chinese learning strategies and the

Chinese language proficiency level rating, which indicates that the use of strategies is related to the level of Chinese language proficiency, but it does not indicate that the use of learning strategies is necessarily the reason for the level of Chinese language proficiency." [4] When analysing the influencing factors of learning strategies, Cui Weizhen (2021) points out that learning level is the primary factor affecting learning strategies, and that learning strategy research should first differentiate between learners' levels before talking about other influencing factors.[2]

The learner's native language background is the main factor influencing the learning strategy of Chinese characters. Japan and Korea in East Asia are part of the Chinese character circle due to the strong influence of Chinese culture. Japanese and Korean languages contain a large number of Chinese characters, and there are similar or even the same characters in Japanese and Korean in terms of glyphs and sounds. However, learners from non-Chinese culture circle countries do not have the same "foundation" for learning Chinese characters as Japanese and Korean learners, so there are some differences in the process of acquiring Chinese language between the two. Jiang Xin (2001) points out that the use of Chinese character learning strategies is related to the students' native language background. Students in the "Chinese Character Circle" used more phonological and application strategies than students in the "Non-Chinese Character Circle", and less use of morphological and revision strategies.[5]

4. Comparison of Chinese Character Learning Strategies in Chinese Character Circles and Non-Chinese Character Circles

Due to the spread and development of the Chinese language throughout history, the Chinese language and Chinese characters have influenced the establishment and development of the languages of neighbouring countries. Countries with greater influence, such as Japan and Korea, formed what we call the Chinese Character Circle today, while countries with less influence or no relation to Chinese have relatively become the Non-Chinese Character Circle. The learners in the Chinese character circle can be directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously, exposed to Chinese and its deformations in non-target language environments. For example, when the author was teaching the word "grape" in Korean, since the word "grape" and the Korean word "포도 (grape)" are similar in pronunciation, the learners were able to quickly guess the word "포도 (grape)" through the compensatory strategy of "포도 (grape)". learners were able to quickly guess the meaning of "grapes" through compensatory strategies.

Jiang Xin (2003) compared a study on the relationship between pinyin and meaning knowledge of Chinese characters among foreign students with different native language backgrounds. The results of this study further indicated that there is a relationship between native language background on the achievement of pinyin and meaning of Chinese characters. There was no strong relationship between knowing the pronunciation of Chinese characters and knowing the meaning of Chinese characters for Japanese and Korean students in the Kanji circle, but there was a strong relationship between knowing the pronunciation of Chinese characters and knowing the meaning of Chinese characters for

Indonesian and American students in the non-Kanji circle. Jiang Xin points out that there may be two reasons for this result. One is that foreign students' Chinese character processing strategies are influenced by their native language word processing strategies, and students transfer their native language word processing strategies to Chinese character learning when they engage in Chinese word processing strategies. The second is that the "zero foundation" of Japanese and Korean students is not strictly "zero foundation", and their mother tongue characters have the same or similarities with Chinese in terms of glyphs and meanings.[6]

Liu Lu (2018) investigated the Chinese character learning strategies of students in the Chinese character circle and non-Chinese character circle, and found that there are many differences in strategy choices between the Chinese character circle and the non-Chinese character circle: students in the Chinese character circle subscribe to the difference view rather than the method view; the Chinese character circle uses the planning strategy more often; and students in the Chinese character circle use the functional drilling strategy more frequently, and do not use the mother tongue strategy as often. Therefore, Chinese language teachers need to provide targeted learning strategy training to students in the Chinese character circle and those in the non-Chinese character circle in the process of teaching Chinese language to learners, in order to achieve the desired learning effect.[7]

5. Chinese Character Learning Strategy Training

Wu Yongyi (2001) categorises Chinese learning strategies research into descriptive and interventional research. "Descriptive research is research on learners and the learning process from the perspective of "learning", while interventional research is research on the teaching of learning strategies from the perspective of "teaching". The "interventional research" is a research on the teaching of learning strategies from the perspective of "teaching". It should be noted that learning strategy training is the strategy training carried out by teachers for students, which is not the same concept as teaching strategies.[1] Yanmei Liu (2009) conducted an experimental study on the effects of strategy training on the use of Chinese character strategies. The results showed that learners who participated in strategy training were more aware of the use of strategies and their use than those who did not participate in strategy training. Learners who participated in strategy training also reduced their writing load when memorising Chinese characters. The necessity, teachability and effectiveness of strategy training in Chinese characters were concluded.[8]

Regarding the training model of learning strategies, Cohen (1998) summarised the strategy training tasks into seven aspects: helping learners to self-diagnose their deficiencies in language learning; making learners aware of different ways to improve their teaching strategies; equipping learners with a wide range of problem-solving techniques; prompting learners to become proficient in their common learning strategies and to try out new ones; helping them to identify the best way to complete a language project; knowing that learners strengthen the monitoring and evaluation of their own learning behaviour; and guiding learners to transfer successful learning strategies to new learning environments. They can help learners to identify the best way to complete a language project; they can learn to monitor and evaluate their

own learning behaviours; and they can be guided to transfer successful learning strategies to new learning environments. Jiang et al. (2002), on the other hand, divided the learning strategy training model into four steps: to distinguish the types of learning strategy deficits and identify the reasons for the deficits; to design supporting exercises according to the relevant variables affecting the training of learning strategies; to clarify the applicability of the learning strategies and select appropriate training strategies; and to adhere to the correct training steps to achieve the desired results.[9]

Regarding the training methods of learning strategies, they can be divided into centralised and decentralised training according to time; OXford can be divided into awareness training, one-time training and long-term training according to awareness and time; and they can also be divided into direct training and indirect training, etc. Wen Qiufang (1996) summarised the above three methods of learning strategy training and proposed the training methods of centralised training, decentralised training and individual guidance.[10]

Yanmei Liu (2009) also conducted a component strategy training for a natural class, and conducted teaching experiments through both decentralised and centralised training. It was concluded that strategy training helps learners to increase the frequency of strategy use and that distributed training is more effective than centralised training.[11]

6. Reach a Verdict

Firstly, in Chinese language acquisition strategies, in order to improve the learning effect of Chinese language elements, it is advocated that learning strategies should first be classified according to language elements. Secondly, Chinese characters are the focus and difficulty of Chinese language learning, and in order to solve the problem of difficult to learn Chinese characters, it is advocated to use Chinese character learning strategies reasonably in the process of Chinese language learning. This paper analyses that the main influencing factors of Chinese character learning strategies are the structural characteristics of the characters themselves, the learners' language level and the learners' native language background, especially the learners' native language background. Therefore, the objects of Chinese character learning are classified into two categories of Chinese character circle and non-Chinese character circle and compared, which confirms that there are differences in the use of learning strategies in Chinese character learning between the two. Finally, the training process of Chinese character learning strategies is investigated to emphasise its effectiveness and necessity. The aim is to further understand the use and training of Chinese character learning strategies, and to provide assistance and guidance for future Chinese language teachers to train learners in Chinese character learning strategies in a targeted manner.

References

- [1] Wu, Yongyi. Descriptive and interventional studies of Chinese "learning strategies"[J]. *World Chinese Language Teaching*, 2001 (04):69-74.
- [2] Cui Wei-Zhen. A review of research on Chinese learning strategies in the past 20 years[J]. *Research on Chinese as a Foreign Language*, 2021(01):122-132.
- [3] GAO Xiaoping, WU Chunxiang. Research on Chinese character learning strategies in Chinese as a second language:

- a systematic review[J]. *International Research on Chinese Language Education*, 2024(01):148-171.
- [4] Jiang X. A preliminary study of strategies for learning Chinese as a second language[J]. *Language Teaching and Research*, 2000(01):61-68.
- [5] Jiang X. Zhao G. An investigation of Chinese character learning strategies of foreign students at the elementary level[J]. *Language Teaching and Research*, 2001(04):10-17.
- [6] Jiang X. A study of the relationship between phonetic knowledge and meaning of Chinese characters in foreign students with different native language backgrounds[J]. *Language Teaching and Research*, 2003(06):51-57.
- [7] Liu Lu. A survey study on Chinese character learning strategies of Chinese character circle and non-Chinese character circle students [D]. Nanjing Normal University, 2018.
- [8] Liu Yanmei. An experimental study on the necessity, teachability and effectiveness of Chinese character strategy training[J]. *World Chinese Language Teaching*, 2009,23(02): 280-288.
- [9] Jiang YJ Li G. Research on learning strategy training model[J]. *Modern Education Science*, 2002(06):22-24.
- [10] Wen, Qiu-fang. *English Learning Strategies* [M]. Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 1996.
- [11] Liu Yanmei. A study on the effect of component strategy training in teaching Chinese characters[J]. *Language Teaching and Research*, 2009(02):61-66.