

How to Study: With a Focus on Studying Chinese

This useful guide covers topics such as learning strategies, learning styles, maintaining motivation, overcoming barriers, memorizing vocabulary, and various other issues. Now freely available online, with hard copies available at [our school in Wudaokou](#), this practical study guide will help you improve your Chinese!

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Chapter One

How to Study

Humanly speaking, you -- the language learner -- are the most important factor in the language learning process. Success or failure will, in the end, be determined by what you yourself contribute. It is vitally important, therefore, that you take charge of your language learning program. Plan your study time -- and stick rigidly to it. Program in talking time-- either straight after class or in the evenings -- and go out and talk! **Try to maintain this balance between 'input' and 'output' right from the start.**

People learn in different ways. Some need to be very analytical: they need a rule for everything. Others are more intuitive: they gather examples and imitate. Some need lots of repetition, others less. You know yourself best and therefore will need to experiment in order to discover what works best for you. Set out below are some ideas which should prove helpful to you:

PREPARING FOR CLASS

Learning a new language involves remembering many rules about grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary. Although your textbook and teacher will organize this information in certain ways, you will still need to systematize the material for reference and review.

It is also vital that you establish a regular schedule and stick rigidly to it. Strict self-discipline is essential to mastering any language -- especially Chinese! However, ensure variety in your studies by 'ringing the changes' from time to time. Don't keep on with the same thing until you are bored with it. Here are some suggestions which should help give you a varied approach to learning Chinese. Try them out and discover the ones which best suit you:

Vocabulary

- a. Write the vocabulary items on individual cards or slips of paper with their translation on the reverse side. See how many words you can remember from the English definition by turning them

over one by one; then try it the other way round. (This game is more fun if played with two or more people!) Separate out the ones you find hard to recall and carry them around with you in your pocket, reviewing them while waiting for buses, standing in line to buy tickets, etc..

- b. Learn the words in the context of the sentences in the dialogues of your textbook.
- c. Say the words out loud as you study them.
- d. Write down the words you find most difficult to memorize on a separate sheet of paper and give extra time to them.
- e. Record the words and their definitions; then listen to it several times. Use the 'pause' button to test yourself.
- f. Associate words with pictures.
- g. Group them by generic categories, e.g. furniture, foods, etc.; or according to the situations in which they occur, e.g. under 'Post Office' you can put stamps, aerograms, printed matter, etc. Another way is by function, e.g. greetings, partings, thanking, conversation starters, etc.
- h. Make sentences using the new vocabulary (and grammar patterns) ready for use in class.

NOTE: with Chinese words, it is as important to remember the tone as it is to remember how to pronounce it; if you can't remember the tone, you've forgotten the word!

Dialogue

Always try to obtain recordings of the dialogues and the new vocabulary of your textbooks. First listen to the recording of the dialogue just to get a feel for the content of the lesson. Use the 'pause' and 'rewind' buttons on your player to give yourself time to absorb the content. Only when you have listened to it several times and have understood the meaning should you try reading along with the recording. This will aid fluency and intonation. Listen to the tape or CD as many times as possible before class -- you can't listen to it too much!

Grammar

Some people perform better when first given a rule and then told to use it to make sentences. Others

prefer to be given lots of input and deduce the rules for themselves. Find out which method works best for you. Keep a notebook in which to write down the major grammar patterns. Then use this for review, adding any new information you may acquire. Memorize the key sentences in the dialogues. If there is something in your textbook you don't understand, leave it for a while. A week or so later, you'll suddenly discover that you understand it now!

Ear or Eye?

Use both your ears and eyes. Experiment to see if some tasks are better accomplished through the eye while others are better accomplished through the ear. For example, you may find that listening to tapes & CDs helps you improve your oral comprehension and memorization of dialogues; but you may retain vocabulary better if you use flash cards. Remember that applying the same strategy to all tasks does not work. And try to find strategies that will help you compensate for your weak areas.

USING CLASS TIME TO YOUR BEST ADVANTAGE

It cannot be over emphasized that the key to getting the most out of class time is to be thoroughly prepared -- not only by being familiar with the content of the lesson but by having any questions prepared beforehand.

As a group, try to work out a pace with your teacher which is neither too fast nor too slow. If you have tutorials with your teacher and are properly prepared, it may help if you suggest to your teacher where you would like to be by the end of the lesson. If there is something you would like to particularly work on (e.g. a difficult grammar pattern or sound), ask your teacher if you could spend extra time on it after class (and remember to show your appreciation!). Keep the classroom atmosphere as congenial as possible. Learn to laugh at yourself. And don't forget to thank your teacher for correcting you.

Throw yourself into the activities and imagine yourself communicating in real-life situations. Try to think in the language right from the start.

Note each teacher's strong points and build on them, i.e. save your questions on grammar for the teacher who can explain it more clearly; get the teacher who is sharp on pronunciation to keep a close watch on your sounds; and the one good on correcting tones to work with you on them, possibly after class.

Have a pronunciation 'check-up' once a month: ask a teacher to note down all your regular pronunciation and tonal problems and then work on them one at a time. Make beauty your aim!

Try to be as creative as possible. Experiment with grammar rules and vocabulary. Don't just use the sentences in your textbook -- try using words in new contexts. When going over the vocabulary in class, you may find it helpful to see if the word usage is the same in English as in Chinese (e.g. the Chinese word for 'dormitory' has a wider meaning in Chinese than in English). Experiment by making sentences using the word in a particular context and see if it is acceptable. In order not to frustrate the other students in your class, some of this should best be done in your tutorial class!

AFTER CLASS -- REVIEWING

Plan your review time. Review at least one lesson each day. Think how you can use your computer to help you review.

Talk to yourself as you walk around or prepare a meal. Listen to the tapes & CDs over and over again as you ride your bicycle or do mundane things. Write a story using the new vocabulary and grammar patterns and get your teacher to correct it.

Note the vocabulary you had difficulty remembering when in class and work on it specifically. This is where flash cards come in handy. Write up your notes on the new grammar patterns in your notebook.

Find a sympathetic Chinese friend with whom you can practice regularly what you have just learnt. And when talking with your Chinese friends, deliberately use the new words and grammar patterns just learnt -- don't be lazy and use only what you already know. Your aim is to try out what you've learnt recently on anyone who will listen!

SOME OTHER USEFUL IDEAS

Try and make your learning of the Chinese language as enjoyable as possible by inventing games for practicing Chinese. Note how others learn -- especially the good language learners -- and try out their ideas yourself.

Ask other students how they arrange their notes, rules and vocabulary. Ask them how they organize their practice, where they seek out native speakers, etc.. If you can possibly learn with someone else, you will be able to help each other and practice together.

Why not try out these ideas:

1. Label objects in your dormitory or apartment, e.g. furniture, utensils, rooms, etc.
2. Attach vocabulary lists to the walls of the bathroom and toilet.
3. TV programs teaching English to Chinese young people are helpful as they usually use simple Chinese, often translate the English into Chinese, and tend to speak at a slower pace.
4. Hold an imaginary conversation with yourself -- small children often do this to great advantage.
5. Before going out to buy something, rehearse beforehand the things you will probably need to converse about; you will find that this will make the communication process easier and more rewarding. Then, having purchased what you wanted, go over in your mind the conversation you just had and try to note what errors you made.
6. Record yourself reading the dialogues in your textbook as this will make you more aware of your common errors and therefore what you will need to work on.
7. Maintain an insatiable curiosity -- every situation is a learning opportunity! Try to use everything around you to reach your language goals.
8. Keep a small notebook in your pocket and jot down new words as you hear them.

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Chapter Two

What Good Language Learners Can Teach Us

What makes a language learner an effective acquirer of a foreign language? What methods and approaches do they use that enables them to become fluent more quickly than the average language learner? What can we learn from their techniques that we can pass on to other language learners?

They take and create opportunities to use the language

Many language learners avoid using the language in the early stages for fear of a breakdown in communication. The good language learner, on the other hand, uses the language at every available opportunity. They are forever seeking out opportunities both to use and to hear the language, e.g. chatting with storekeepers (rather than just purchasing the goods they have gone there to buy); asking people at the bus stop how to get to where they want to go (even though they are clear on this already!) instead of just getting on the bus; asking someone in the street to explain some unusual object or event (rather than just passing it by); asking someone on the bus or train to explain something in their Chinese textbook, etc.. All the while, therefore, they are taking and creating opportunities to use the language.

They practice what they have just acquired

Many language learners practice in class, but few practice enough outside the classroom. The good language learner practices what they have just learnt as soon as possible. For example, while on bus or bicycle, they are going through in their mind what they have recently learnt in class by holding an imaginary conversation with someone. And straight after class, or in the evening, they visit their sympathetic listeners (whether they be neighbors, street vendors, store assistants, etc.) telling them what they have just learnt that day.

They are willing to try anything in order to get their message across

Many language students, if they don't know the correct word or phrase for what they wish to communicate, simply avoid the subject completely or use English. The good language learner, possessing such a strong desire to communicate, is willing to try out different ways in order to get their message across. For instance, if they don't know the word for 'language school', they might say (in Chinese), "the place where I learn Chinese". They even resort to acting if necessary! They are willing to try almost anything, even to appear foolish if necessary, in order to communicate.

They are willing to live with uncertainty

The average language learner, when hearing something which they don't understand, often feels embarrassed and may try to change to another topic of conversation. The good language learner doesn't give up so easily! They are able to overcome their initial feelings of uneasiness, and in fact, may even enjoy it -- seeing it as a game to be played! They hazard a guess as to what the meaning might be, trying out their hunches by asking suitable questions which they hope will shed light on the matter. The good language learner uses all the clues which the context of the conversation offers them. And they are content to rest with a general conclusion as to what the meaning might be, knowing that everything will clarify itself later (hopefully!).

They monitor their own speech as well as the speech of others

Many language students are so bound up with getting their message across or trying to understand what the other person is trying to say that they learn little from the communication process. The good language learner, however, is firstly monitoring their own speech -- listening to themselves speak and noting how their speech is being received by their listeners (e.g. facial expressions, etc.). To them, such feedback is very important. Then, secondly, they are monitoring the other person's speech -- noting how they use words and phrases, as well as grammar structures.

They are constantly looking for patterns in the language

Many language learners absorb only what they are taught in class about the language; if the teacher or their textbook hasn't yet covered that point, they shut their minds to it. The good language learner is constantly analyzing, categorizing and synthesizing their new language. They know that learning a new language is a very complex matter -- like putting together the pieces of a huge jigsaw puzzle. They absorb what they are taught in class, but they are also actively involved in discovering where new pieces fit in to the overall picture. And so they are constantly trying to find schemes for classifying the information they have gathered.

They are a systematic organizer

The poor language learner often lacks a planned and systematic approach to acquiring the language, and hence fails to reach a reasonable standard of performance. The good language learner, however, recognizing the magnitude of the task, sets down a plan of campaign, dividing their study program into attainable goals, and organizing regular times for study. Then they systematically record what they learn about the language -- whether pronunciation, grammar or vocabulary -- so that it is readily available for reference.

They are willing to experiment with different learning methods

The poor language learner, upon discovering that the way they were taught to learn the language has proven ineffective, complains and gives up! The good language learner tries out different approaches to acquiring the language, chooses those that work for them and discards the rest. They also note how other people learnt the language, trying out their methods to see if they are suitable for them.

They make errors work

The poor language learner is so afraid of making mistakes that they say nothing until they are sure that they can say it absolutely correctly -- and that day never arrives! The good language learner knows differently. They recognize that errors are a part of the learning process itself and looks upon them as a

potential source of information, as well as a way of improving their language skills. They not only note their errors, but also try to understand why they made them and how to avoid making them again in the future.

They are a friendly initiator of conversation

For many language students, it must be the other person who initiates a conversation before communication takes place. The good language learner knows that it is best if they start the ball rolling by initiating the conversation with a question or comment. And by doing it in a warm and friendly tone of voice, they find that the other person is usually very happy to chat with them.

Conclusion

People often say, "Extroverts get the language much more easily than introverts." This is only partly true. Extroverts do have the advantage of being less shy than introverts, but they often lack the discipline and determination that learning a language requires. The person who succeeds is the restless searcher after clues -- one whose mind is constantly looking for the thousands of pieces in the jigsaw that will eventually fit together to complete the puzzle. They understand how to use the people all around them to help reach their goal of fluency in Chinese and hence successfully integrate into the local community

(This article is adapted from 'What the Good Language Learner can Teach Us' by Rubin & Thompson)

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Chapter Three

Some Good Language Learners

Here are profiles on three good language learners and three poor language learners:

Tim -- An Outstanding Language Learner

He worked hard at his studies. Even though Tim is an exceptionally gifted language learner, he spent many hours each day in either preparing for class or reviewing lessons learnt.

He regularly put himself in situations where he could hear and use Chinese. Each day he spent 2-3 hours visiting his local friendly shopkeepers to chat with them. Even in his early days in China, he wasn't afraid to use the little he had to go out and buy things. And when communication broke down, he would go back to his teacher and try to find out why. He also went regularly to the local park and teashops for conversation practice. Sometimes he would take his teacher to the shops or market to help him practice the content of the lesson.

He spent time improving his listening comprehension. He didn't spend all his practice time just looking for opportunities to talk with people; some tasks were simply for improving his listening comprehension. For example, he would often go visiting students whom he had got to know, or listen to selected television or radio programs geared to his present level.

As soon as he learnt a new word, he brought it into the conversation. He understood that by focusing attention on a new word, especially in the context of a conversation, it is easier to retain in one's memory than simply learning words from a vocabulary list in a textbook. So in this way, he got new vocabulary into his long-term memory more quickly and efficiently. I remember one time we were traveling on a long-distance bus together; in our conversation -- we were talking in Chinese -- I had used three words which were new to him. Not only did he repeatedly bring them into our conversation, but as we arrived at our destination, he repeated all three words back to me!

He used everything around him to help reach his language goals. For instance, during breaks between class, he would chat with the teacher. Also, he would often invite his Chinese friends out for a meal.

Tommy -- A Slow Beginner With A Good Ending

Tommy had all the potential for not getting Chinese! Lacking in language learning aptitude, somewhat conservative and rather shy, he preferred tasks which used his hands rather than his head. He could easily have given up when, after a few weeks of language study, he realized just how slow he was progressing. And whereas his wife enjoyed studying Chinese as well as going outside and chatting with the neighbors, in the early days Tommy didn't really enjoy either. And yet he made it. In fact he got Chinese well. Why?

First and foremost, he had a good attitude. Although he's not the bookish type and doesn't really enjoy the classroom, yet he knew that he had to work hard at his studies -- in fact harder than the average language student if he was going to get anywhere in the language. And he did.

Secondly, he was willing to face up to his weak areas -- and do something about them. So when he found that memorizing vocabulary didn't come easily to him, he re-doubled his efforts by using flash cards and forced himself to review at regular intervals those words that didn't stick easily.

Also, recognizing his somewhat shy personality, especially when in a new and uncertain environment, yet at the same time knowing that fluency only comes through much practice, he was willing to spend 20 minutes after language school each day talking with someone who understood his low level and who therefore kept the conversation simple. For although Tommy is somewhat shy, this doesn't mean that he isn't a 'people person'. What he prefers is making deeper relationships with fewer people. So when he found a person with whom he really related well, he would spend much time with them talking on many and varied issues.

Tommy had the advantage that he had learnt another foreign language before coming to China. That one hadn't been easy for him either, yet eventually he got it to a good level. This proved to be of real help when learning Chinese because it enabled him to recognize his learning curve, and most important, that

whereas learning that language had been an uphill struggle, he did eventually make it, thus giving him hope for learning Chinese.

The end result was that, after six months of struggling with learning Chinese, he gradually obtained the self-confidence needed to help him progress faster and hence fuel motivation to press on.

Joachim -- A Learner Who Spent Much Time on the Street

Joachim was a learner who, right from the start, loved looking for people to chat to! Being warm, friendly and outgoing, he would go up to people in shops, markets and local parks and simply begin chatting with them. The presence of a Chinese person meant yet another opportunity for practicing his Chinese! And he enjoyed every minute of it! If he got himself into a situation where he couldn't understand what the conversation was about, he would simply say (in Chinese), "I'm sorry, I must be going now, but I've enjoyed getting to know you!" -- and then leave. Also, between classes, he would spend the time chatting with his teachers because he knew that they understood his level of Chinese and so would keep the conversation simple.

Joachim had an agile mind that allowed him to use the little vocabulary he knew in a creative way. And when he didn't know the correct word, he would be happy to act it out. One day he wanted to buy some glue. Not knowing the word, he said that he wanted something that puts two things together. The shopkeeper was still mystified as to what he wanted so Joachim drew a picture and gradually the shopkeeper understood! Joachim's friendly approach helped tremendously. When he made a mistake, he would laugh about it along with everyone else! Joachim knew that, because he was only a beginner, he would naturally make many mistakes. He also recognized that other people not only were willing to accept him as he was but were also willing to help and encourage him. So he used this to his advantage.

He is also someone who is willing to learn by trial and error. What works for him he continues to use; what doesn't work, he simply discards. He tried using flash cards (because he was told that this is a good way to memorize vocabulary). He found that this method didn't suit his approach to learning Chinese and so dropped it, simply writing out those words he found difficult to memorize on slips of paper. He also

found that trying to memorize vocabulary in the evenings didn't work for him. So he switched to the early morning and soon discovered that vocabulary stuck much quicker. He also knew that he couldn't sit down at his desk for hours on end poring over his textbooks; soon he was up and off looking for people to practice with. He realized that vocabulary retention is more efficient when actually using it in conversation rather than simply sitting down at his desk and going through new vocabulary over and over again. This doesn't mean, however, that he didn't spend time preparing for his lessons; in fact, for every hour of class he spent an hour going over the lesson beforehand. But once he had done this, he was off outside!

Some Who Didn't Make It -- And Why

Like Tommy, John had a low language learning aptitude. Yet whereas Tommy's humble attitude allowed him to be open to advice and be willing to take the punishing daily humiliation of continually being corrected by his teachers, John's psychological defenses resulted in him projecting the blame for his slow progress on to the language teachers and the textbooks, rather than on to himself. By blaming others instead of making himself responsible for his slow progress and taking the necessary remedial action, he cut himself off from the very people who could have helped him succeed. Hence slow progress resulted in loss of motivation and the will to press on.

Jim failed to grasp a key point which Donald Larson makes in 'Guidelines for Barefoot Language Learning': "People who develop competence in another language do so because they go at it intensively". Coming to China and discovering that learning Chinese was much harder than he had originally imagined, he decided to miss class whenever he felt in need of a break from language study. Sad to say, what is learnt rapidly (intensively) is also lost rapidly; unable to sense that he was making much progress, he soon lost all motivation to continue studying Chinese.

Jack's problem was that, although he covered the language material in class at a good pace, he never found communicating with Chinese people easy. Words were difficult to recall, and his sentences never came out smoothly. Talking with people outside on the street was always a struggle for him. His dormitory room was the only 'safe' place and he therefore retreated there after class each day. It wasn't

that others hadn't tried to help him find friendly people to talk with; he simply couldn't or wouldn't discipline himself to go out and practice.

An excellent book on the subject of good language learners is Earl W. Stevick's book Success with Foreign Languages (published by Prentice Hall). Stevick looks at seven outstanding language learners -- how they approached learning a foreign language and why they were so successful at it. It is an interesting and helpful book as it makes you realise that there is not just one way to learn a language; finding the right approach that works best for you is therefore vitally important -- and this very readable book will help you do just this.

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Chapter Four

Chinese Language Learner's Strategies I

As I observe students of Chinese, I notice that they use different learning strategies, some which are more effective than others. What are some of their good strategies which will help you acquire Chinese faster than the average student? Let's first look at some memory strategies. These enhance the storage and retrieval of information.

The linguist Earl Stevick in his book *Memory, Meaning and Method* says that the greater the personal investment of mental energy that we spend on vocabulary, the easier it is to get it into our long-term memory. If this is true, what types of activities will be of more use to you in achieving your goal?

Flash cards: the one most commonly used is flash cards, i.e. blank name cards (or pieces of paper) with the Chinese written on one side and the English (or your mother tongue) on the reverse side. Writing them out yourself is better than buying ready-made ones as the actual process of writing them aids memory. But, having written them out, what should you do with them? Here are a couple of ideas:

Place them on a table with the English facing upwards and try to guess the Chinese; then try it the other way round. This game is more fun if two or three people play it together. Another idea is to take a small oblong-shaped box and divide it into sections. After learning the new vocabulary of the first lesson, place the flash cards in the front section of the box. Then move on to the next lesson. When you have completed that lesson, take out the cards in the front section and test yourself. Those that you remember, place them in the next section back (thus freeing up space for the new vocabulary cards); those that you failed to recall, leave them in the front section, and so on through the textbook. When you fail to recall the Chinese on any flash card no matter where it is in the box, place that card in the front section. For those vocabulary words which stubbornly refuse to stick in your long-term memory, place the flash cards in your top pocket (or purse/wallet) and go through them when you have a few spare moments.

Record New Vocabulary: record the new vocabulary -- the Chinese plus the English definition; then listen to it several times. Use the 'pause' button to test yourself.

Counting: in order to memorize the numbers, carry some loose change with you (9 @ RMB1, 9 @ RMB10, etc.) and when you have a few minutes, get the money out and count it.

Saying the Action: naming actions as you do them will help you memorize faster. For example, the daily routine of getting washed and dressed: "I shave my face, I brush my teeth, I take a shower, I dry myself, I comb my hair, I put on my clothes" (naming each item of clothing). Another example would be cooking: "I turn on the gas, I fill the pan with water, I slice the meat and vegetables, etc."

Labeling Items: label household items and the rooms in your apartment or dormitory, e.g. curtains, window, chair, light switch, kitchen, bedroom, etc., and then say the word aloud when you use that item or enter that room.

Grouping under Topics: group or classify vocabulary under different subjects. Use your computer or a loose-leaf card system and divide it into topic areas, e.g. post office, weather, place names, food items, transport, etc.. Then as you learn new vocabulary from either your textbook or Chinese friends, write the vocabulary items under the relevant topic area. When you have sufficient words under a particular topic, write a story using those words and get your teacher to correct it. For example, when you have acquired several 'animal' words, write a story about 'A Day on the Farm'; or 'weather' words, write 'Tomorrow's Weather Forecast for China'. Then when you exchange English for Chinese conversation or have someone for talking practice, you can choose one topic area each time you meet, using the vocabulary you have acquired as a basis for conversation.

Looking for Similarities: look for similarities between Chinese and English (or any other language you know). This isn't easy to do with Chinese! But have a go anyway. One good example I heard was the Mandarin word for 'head' sounds just like the English word for 'toe' -- right at the opposite end of the body!!

Drawing Diagrams and Pictures: drawing diagrams and pictures will also help you memorize groups of words. For example, draw pictures to represent the Place Prepositions 'behind', 'in front of', 'opposite', 'next to', etc. Drawing faces to express different emotions (happy, sad, angry, bored, etc.) will also aid memory.

Remember that applying the same strategy to all tasks does not work, so try to discover those strategies which best help compensate for your weaknesses. And once you have found them, continue using them, discarding those strategies that are ineffective.

Chinese Language Learner's Strategies II

In the article [The Good Language Learner's Strategies 1](#) we looked at memory strategies. In this article we will be thinking about [communication](#) strategies, i.e. those learning strategies which help make conversation easier and more profitable in terms of gaining in fluency. Here are some useful ideas:

Create Your Own Personalized Dialogues: re-writing the textbook dialogues, substituting your own personal details, will help vocabulary stick quicker. When you've done this, go out and find people with whom you can practice.

Making a Trial Run: rehearsing for a conversation will help your language flow more smoothly and give you greater confidence. In my early days in China, before setting off to buy something, I would first go through in my mind the likely conversation I was going to have with the shopkeeper, e.g. size, color, make, price, etc.. Several years later when working in an office in China, before making a telephone call, I would first run through in my mind the likely drift of the conversation I was about to have, looking up any word I didn't know or asking my Chinese secretary, before calling the other person.

When exchanging English for Chinese or hiring someone for Chinese conversation practice, having chosen your topic, first run through the main talking points before meeting with your friend. This builds

confidence which helps the conversation go more smoothly. Another way of practicing is to hold an imaginary telephone conversation -- let the 'actor' in you come out!

Memorize Commonly-used Phrases: in our early days in China, when chatting with Chinese people whom we meet casually on the street, we spend most of our time answering the same few questions, e.g. "How long have you lived in China?", "Why have you come to China?", "Which country have you come from?", "Where do you study Chinese?". It is helpful, therefore, if we spend a little time memorizing the answers to these commonly-asked questions as this will build confidence. At the same time, memorize some useful 'friendly phrases', such as "I like living in China", "Chinese people are very friendly", as well as common greetings and leave-takings.

Try Interpreting: translating from Chinese into English will help check whether or not you have remembered the vocabulary as well as understood the meaning. For instance, play back the recording of the dialogue in your textbook with your hand on the 'pause' button and see how fast you can translate the dialogue into English. When your Chinese has reached a higher level, translate out loud a children's story on the radio or the weather forecast on the television. At an even higher level, act as 'interpreter' to taped lectures or translate the television news into English (-- although it is best first to read the English-language newspaper or listen to the English-language news so that you have some idea of the day's main news items).

Repeat Aloud: when meeting a new word in conversation, repeat it to yourself several times. One good language learner I know immediately says the new word aloud three times, and then tries to use it in his conversation in the next few minutes.

Summarize the Grammar: summarizing grammar patterns will help you know whether or not you have fully understood the pattern. When summarizing, compare and contrast the new grammar pattern with the grammar of English or any other language you know, noting the similarities and differences. Then decide to bring the new grammar pattern into your conversation at least once a day for the next week. Because we naturally tend to avoid using new grammar patterns, instead sticking to what is already familiar to us,

we need to make ourselves use the new grammar as soon as we meet it, even if we use it incorrectly the first few times.

Compensate for a Lack: One final type of strategy that good language learners employ is called 'compensation strategies'. These enable learners to use the language despite their limitations of grammar and vocabulary. For example, one common strategy is using mime or gesture. For instance, you want to buy a cup, so you say to the shopkeeper (in Chinese), "I want to buy a ..." (while miming the action of drinking from a cup). By deliberately hesitating, you can normally elicit the missing word, e.g. "I want to buy a ... a... a..." (while doing the action). Hopefully, the shopkeeper will supply the Chinese word for 'cup'.

Using circumlocution will enable you to communicate your meaning even though you can't recall the exact word. For example, "Do you have a thing you dry your hands on?", when you can't recall the word for 'towel'. Then if your Chinese acquaintance doesn't supply the word -- only the article -- don't forget to ask them, "How do you say this in Chinese?".

The good language learner is constantly thinking up creative ways to use the language. So ask other students which strategies they employ; then try them out to see if they work for you. The good language learner uses everything around them to help them reach their goal!

A helpful book on learning strategies is Rebecca Oxford's Language Learning Strategies published by Newbury House

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Where Am I Aiming For?

In the busyness of your language learning schedule, have you ever stopped to ask yourself the important question: "Am I actually learning what I need?"

Too often we are so taken up with getting through the Chinese curriculum that we fail to ask ourselves this most basic yet vital question. In other words, for the work which I've come to China to do, am I acquiring the Chinese vocabulary that will enable me to function adequately?

In the article ['Where am I Going? How am I Doing?'](#), we looked at levels of proficiency in Chinese and thought about a simple way of measuring progress. Now you may be asking, "What's the difference between those 'levels of proficiency' and what we are thinking about here?"

It is important to note that levels of proficiency simply indicate a degree of comprehension and fluency in Chinese; the tasks measured are of a general nature. Now we need to look at our language learning from another aspect -- that of broadening our language in the areas where our needs and interests lie. You see, the language curriculum gives you a foundation in everyday conversational Chinese -- the basic core -- as well as covering some aspects of Chinese culture. However, if you plan to live in China for some while -- to make it your home -- this is hardly adequate for normal living. In order to live comfortably (linguistically speaking), you will want to broaden your Chinese in two major areas -- firstly as regards your work, and secondly in the area of your personal interests -- for what we are interested in is what we will want to talk to others about. So, why not decide now in which areas you would like to expand your Chinese? Then set about finding the resource materials on these subjects.

"But," you might be saying, "that's all very fine, but after I've completed the basic Chinese language course, I won't have any textbooks from which to get the language I want."

Our problem is that we become so used to getting our Chinese from textbooks that we seem to think

that this is the only way to acquire Chinese. So let me offer some practical suggestions:

If your interest is Chinese cooking, first buy a Chinese cookbook. (Even better is if you can find one that has the recipes in both Chinese and English). Then invite a Chinese friend round for the evening and cook one of the dishes together (having first gone out with them to buy the ingredients). As you cook, chat about what you are doing, and you will soon discover that your knowledge of Chinese cooking terms is expanding rapidly. There are also television programs on Chinese cooking. Watch them with a Chinese friend and then discuss the content together.

What about Chinese painting and calligraphy? Find someone in the arts department who would be interested in teaching you. If you can find some books in English which give you the background and basic terminology, so much the better. Or possibly one of your Chinese teachers may be interested in teaching you.

Should your interest be sports, try to join in with those who are playing it on the college campus. Also make sure you watch the game on television whenever possible.

If it's Chinese music, go to some of the concerts held either in college, local cultural centers or concert halls. There you will meet people with the same interests who can keep you informed about future concerts.

For other interests, if the college where you are studying Chinese has a department that teaches that topic (e.g. Chinese literature or poetry), try to make friends with students or professors in that department.

So, basically, having decided on your work needs and interests, look around for suitable materials and friends who share your interests. Reading magazines, attending lectures, watching television, reading English-language books and talking with friends with common interests are all useful resources. And as you start to broaden your Chinese, you will discover that you are becoming a more interesting person to your Chinese friends and you will also feel much more at home in China.

Chapter Five

Learning Styles I

In recent years in the area of teaching languages there has been a shift in focus from how the teacher should teach to how the student best learns. Researchers in how people learn languages are trying to discover what goes on in the mind of the student -- how do learners absorb (internalize) - process - and output what they are learning?

We all know that language students differ in several respects:

- a. rate of progress: some learn faster than others.
- b. degree of independence: some students are more independent -- they have their own ideas -- and are not so heavily reliant on the teacher, while others are very passive and constantly look to the teacher for direction and assistance.
- c. consistency of performance: some make few errors, while some are constantly making errors.
- d. the final level reached: some do well, while others do poorly (even though they both had the same number of class hours).

What are some of the reasons for these differences? Factors include age, intelligence, aptitude, motivation, attitude, personality, learning style and learning strategies. All these interact together in the student. Also the quality of teaching (interesting and stimulating?), the textbooks (meeting the student's communicative needs?), and the learning environment (plenty of opportunities to interact with local people?) -- all these have an influence on the learner's progress in mastering Chinese.

So what is a learning style? Simply stated, it is how learners instinctively process the language as they learn it -- using their MIND - BODY - EMOTIONS. In this and the next article, we will focus on how the mind processes language material. Then in the last two articles, we will concentrate on the body and the emotions.

MIND

This is to do with how language is ordered and sequenced; how a learner goes about solving problems, and whether information is handled more efficiently in concrete form or abstract form.

Analytical (Linear) vs. Relational (Global)

Unless the 200 million nerve fibers that connect the left-brain to the right-brain have been severed, learners use a combination of both sides of the brain when learning a language. Most people, however, show a preference for one side or the other.

Answer the following questions:

1. I prefer to learn from a) details and specific facts, or b) a general overview of things by looking at the whole picture.
2. I prefer to use a) logic, or b) my gut feelings.
3. In High School I preferred a) math, or b) art.
4. I like classes or work to be a) planned so that I know exactly what to do, or b) open, with opportunities for change as the class progresses.
5. When reading or studying by myself, I prefer a) total quiet, or b) background music.
6. I'm good at a) putting ideas in logical order, step-by-step, or b) showing relationships among ideas.
7. When learning languages, I prefer a) the grammar over stories, or b) stories over the grammar.
8. I like to a) organize my daily routine, or b) be spontaneous.
9. I remember a) names more easily than faces, or b) faces more easily than names.
10. When reading, I prefer to look for a) specific details and facts, or b) the main ideas.

The more 'a' answers you checked off, the more left-brain and analytical you are. The more 'b' answers you checked off, the more right-brain and relational you are.

What do these two types look like?

ANALYTICAL: They are organized, logical, step-by-step, disciplined, make lists, like to look at the details and facts, are task-oriented and goal-oriented, and prefer factual decision-making. They like analyzing and gradually building up the big picture from the parts. Their problem, however, is that they can't see the wood for the trees.

RELATIONAL: These types, on the other hand, can't see the trees for the wood! They prefer the new and novel to the familiar, tend to deal with problems intuitively, prefer loose guidelines, dreams, play with ideas and enjoy having fun with no particular goal in mind.

How do these two types of learners differ in the way they approach, organize and deal with the language? What different 'mindset' (mindstyles) do they have?

ANALYTICAL learners love the grammar -- you can tell one a mile off by the amount of high-lighting they have done in their grammar book! They prefer being given the grammar rule and may well create their own summary of the grammar system in a separate notebook. They probably enjoy being in the classroom or studying by themselves more than socializing with people outside.

RELATIONAL learners prefer to begin with the whole picture, whereas analytical learners begin with the separate parts and piece them together to make a whole. Relational learners also enjoy being with their teachers and friends. They prefer learning through using their intuition, as well as through concrete experiences as they interact with people. They use their creative right-brain to make language learning fun!

What learning strategies will aid these two types?

When learning a language, some language skills involve more analytical, sequential, left-brain processing (e.g. grammar rules), while others involve right-brain skills such as guessing a meaning, grasping the overall idea of the story, or doing an activity. Whatever preference you have (analytical or

relational), you can achieve a high level of ability in Chinese. However, relational (global) people are likely to progress quicker, reaching a higher degree of fluency in the early stages (women more than men?). Analytical learners, on the other hand, tend to be more accurate because they concentrate on the structure of the language (men more than women?).

ANALYTICAL learners should try not to let an ambiguous learning situation (e.g. a difficult-to-grasp point of grammar) overly frustrate them, but be willing to give it time. (Time is a great clarifier of grammar and difficult vocabulary!) Don't set your goals unrealistically high, but find out from other students the average time each textbook takes to complete. Ensure that you allot sufficient time for conversation practice -- don't just sit at your desk poring over your books all day.

RELATIONAL learners should find creative ways to communicate. Think up language learning activities and games to make learning more fun! Use pictures to help you remember words. Use your intuition to guess meanings from the context without necessarily feeling you need to work out all the details. But remember that you can't achieve real proficiency in a language without being accurate as well as fluent

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Learning Styles II

How Learners Perceive & Process the Language

In the previous article, we looked at the different learning styles of the Analytical learner compared to the Relational learner. In this article, we will continue on this theme but further divide these two categories into four.

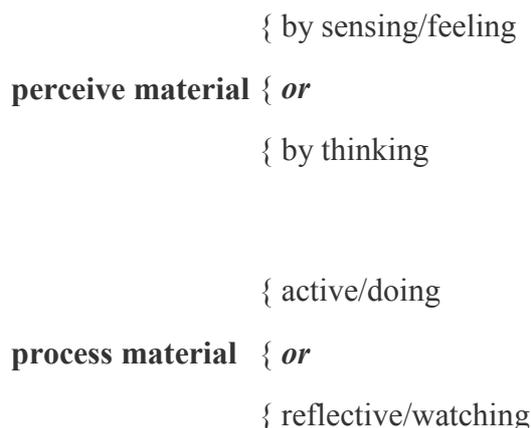
David Kolb, a well-known linguist, claims that there are two ways people approach learning situations: the way in which they PERCEIVE material from the outside world (by sensing/feeling or by thinking) and the way in which they PROCESS that material (by active/doing or by reflective/watching).

Which of the following statements describes you most accurately?

1. I like making things happen.
2. 'Being' is more important to me than 'doing'.
3. I like applied sciences, business and engineering.
4. I am interested in science, math and research.
5. I seek variety in what I do.
6. I am sensitive to other people's needs.
7. I like to see projects well managed.
8. I love the grammar section of each (textbook) lesson best of all.
9. I like to be where the action is.
10. I am more affected by feelings than by logic.
11. I like things to be useful (utilitarian)
12. Principles are more important to me than practices.
13. I thrive on fresh challenges.
14. I particularly value harmonious relationships.
15. I like to be under a teacher who is well organized and in control.

16. I am more affected by logic than by feelings.
17. I am a risk-taker.
18. I prefer to learn cooperatively with others.
19. I like to apply ideas and see them working.
20. I strive for academic excellence.
21. I seek to influence others.
22. I am an intuitive person.
23. I like to be productive.
24. I like discussion to be rational.

Kolb used the distinctions within these two dimensions -- PERCEPTION and PROCESS -- to divide all learners into 4 basic learning styles:



'Sensing/feeling' refers more to right-brain activity, while 'thinking' is more to do with left-brain activity. 'Reflective' students are cautious, needing time to think through the possible options before venturing an opinion, resulting in greater accuracy. 'Impulsive' learners, on the other hand, respond rapidly and are more willing to take risks. Fluency is more important to them than accuracy. In language learning, a balance between the two seems desirable as both accuracy and fluency are equally important.

For those familiar with the DISC profile patterns, High D approximates sensing/feeling + active/doing, High I approximates sensing/feeling + reflective/watching, High S approximates thinking + active/doing, and High C approximates thinking + reflective/watching.

With regard to the above questionnaire, if you checked off questions 1, 5, 9, 13, 17, 21, you are a 'High D learner', perceiving language concretely (sensing/feeling) and processing it actively. If you checked off questions 2, 6, 10, 14, 18, 22, you are a 'High I learner', perceiving language concretely and processing it reflectively. If you checked off questions 3, 7, 11, 15, 19, 23, you are a 'High S learner', perceiving language abstractly (thinking) and processing it actively. If you checked off questions 4, 8, 12, 16, 20, 24, you are a 'High C learner', perceiving language abstractly and processing it reflectively.

It is important to bear in mind that you are probably not simply a 'High S' (for instance), but a combination of personality types, one possibly being stronger than the others.

How do these 4 types of learners differ in the way they learn the language? What different learning styles do they have?

High D learners learn by trial and error. They like change, flexibility and risk taking. They get enthusiastic about new challenges. They are often seen as impatient and pushy. They discard theories if they do not fit the facts. However, their tendency may be to act on gut feelings rather than on logical analysis, learning primarily from hands-on experience. When learning languages, they learn well when there is plenty of variety and new material (becoming quickly bored with routine tasks). Although they are not as sensitive as the 'High I learner', they like to be on good terms with the teacher. However, if their needs are not met in the classroom, they may try to change the system or opt out and get on with their own thing. Of all four types of learner, they're least concerned with evaluations.

High I learners seek personal involvement and are interested in people as well as exploring the culture. The teacher is their motivator. They approach problems reflectively and look for meaning. They enjoy situations that call for generating a wide range of ideas, such as brainstorming, and their favorite question is "Why?". Their approach to situations is to observe rather than take action. Their imaginative ability and sensitivity to feelings helps them relate well to people. When learning languages, they value personal relationships with teachers and other students (and everyone else!). They are very empathetic, sensitive to the feelings of others. They need positive feedback and affirmation to keep them motivated. Evaluation of

their work is taken very seriously and personally. Also, meaning is important to them as well as the need to know the relevance of what they are learning.

High S learners start with an idea, then try it out to see if it works -- thereby integrating theory with practice. They do not tolerate fuzzy ideas. They are good at finding practical solutions to problems, as well as in decision making and practical application of ideas and theories. They value common sense and pragmatism. They would rather deal with technical tasks and problems than with social and interpersonal issues. However, this doesn't mean that they don't enjoy interacting with people. When learning languages, they like structure and clear instructions concerning what is expected of them. They usually enjoy school and feel at home in the traditional classroom, seeking to please the teacher. They try to do all the set work but are not so happy working on unsupervised projects. They like learning facts but are uneasy when required to use ingenuity and imagination. The teacher is respected by these solution-oriented learners and so teachers comments are taken seriously. High S students respond well to criticism and evaluations.

High C learners develop theories from integrating their observations with what is already known. They need to know what the experts (i.e. teachers) think. They value sequential thinking and details spelt out step-by-step, and appreciate traditional classrooms. They are more concerned with abstract concepts and ideas than with people. Facts are more important than feelings, and they have a constant quest for knowledge. When learning languages, these 'science research analysts' types like the lesson presented in concise, logical form. They love analyzing the grammar! They tend to interact only with the teacher and other 'bright' students whom they see as intellectual equals. Recreation and social activities may be seen as a waste of time -- resulting in slow progress in fluency. They prefer the library to attending social events. These types need to succeed, since competence is highly valued. Failure can be devastating, yet they often set unrealistically high standards for themselves.

What learning strategies will aid these four types?

High D's enjoy getting out and using the language in meaningful social contact. In the classroom, if their teacher isn't very creative, they should ask the school to change her for someone who is more active

and action-oriented, or find their own tutor who suits their personality. If they don't, they will quickly become frustrated, bored, and will lose their motivation for study.

High I's will enjoy using Chinese to build relationships with Chinese people. If all those grammar rules don't grab them, they should just glance over them before the lesson and concentrate on talking!

High S's have the self-discipline, are structured and orderly, and will work hard at their studies. They must remember to maintain the balance between study and outside practice, always bearing in mind that their purpose in learning Chinese is to build friendships with Chinese people.

High C's are in danger of being more interested in learning about the Chinese language (the grammar, etc.) than achieving a high degree of fluency in the language. They must also beware of setting their standards too high -- success in language learning takes time, so they should set realistic goals for themselves.

Spotting the D-I-S-C Teacher

High D teachers' classrooms have a creative atmosphere with plenty of variety. They may not always stick to the curriculum. They motivate their students by their enthusiasm and are in turn motivated by helping students achieve their language learning objectives.

High I teachers see their students as their friend, genuinely wanting to help them progress in Chinese.

High S teachers seek to give their students the sort of teaching they decide the students will need in order to attain their learning objectives. They, in turn, expect their students to work hard. They are traditional teachers, combining clear explanations with appropriate practice.

High C teachers' basic aim is to transmit knowledge and to share their own love of knowledge (e.g. seen in their enthusiastic explanation of a fresh insight into Chinese grammar they had recently!). Their lessons are presented in a systematic and orderly fashion. There will be lots of facts. They will enjoy teaching the bright students, but may easily get frustrated with a slow one. In the classroom they are fair but authoritarian.

Learning Styles III

How Learners Use Their Sensory Channels to Process Language

In the previous two articles on learning styles, we looked at how the mind perceives and processes language. In this article, we will cover the sensory channels (ears, eyes, hands) through which the language materials are received (and transmitted), as well as various physical factors such as time and place, heating and lighting, etc. which may affect the learner's desire to study.

The Sensory Channels

Language is received and transmitted primarily through the sensory channels (ears, eyes, hands). Learners often show a preference for one of these sensory modes.

Which of the following statements are true of you?

1. When asked to do an assignment in class, I prefer written instructions rather than oral ones.
2. I remember more about a subject by listening than through reading about it.
3. I enjoy making things with my hands.
4. I enjoy looking at and deciphering graphs, charts and diagrams.
5. I prefer to have an oral explanation of diagrams and maps rather than simply reading them and working out for myself.
6. I like to learn something new by actually trying it out with my hands rather than by reading about it.
7. I try to remember something by picturing it in my mind.
8. I did better in High School when listening to lectures and/or tapes instead of reading books.
9. I can't sit too long at a study desk -- I have to get up and walk around.
10. I like to obtain information on interesting subjects by reading relevant material.
11. When someone gives me directions to a place, I prefer them to do it orally rather than draw a sketch map.

12. When I see a new household gadget, I like to pick it up straightaway and play with it.
13. When playing the party game which requires remembering the names of 20 objects on a tray, I always get a high score.
14. I'm good at remembering people's names, even if they only tell me verbally.
15. I can remember new vocabulary better when I actually hold the object in my hands.

When learning a language, the ears, eyes and hands are all actively involved. Some learners prefer using one sensory channel over the others, while some students prefer using a mixture of all three channels. Students with greater learning-style flexibility are also greater achievers as they are able to process information in whatever way it is presented.

With regard to the above questionnaire, if you checked off questions 1, 4, 7, 10, 13, you have a strong preference for using the visual mode; if you checked off questions 2, 5, 8, 11, 14, you prefer using the auditory mode; if you checked off questions 3, 6, 9, 12, 15, you prefer using your hands when learning. It is important to again stress that you probably do not simply use one mode but a combination of sensory channels, with one being stronger than the others.

The problem for you may be that the teaching method your teacher uses may not major on your preferred sense-mode (e.g. she likes giving lots of dictation). However, it is important to remember that becoming competent in a foreign language requires listening comprehension skills as well as reading skills. You need to be willing to use your ears more than your eyes to develop listening comprehension, and your eyes more than your ears to learn how to read. No matter what your preferred sense is, language educators believe that the best learning environment is one in which all the senses are involved. It seems that the more different associations we have with an item we are storing in our memory, the easier it is to retrieve.

How do these 3 types of learners differ in the way they learn the language? What different learning styles do they have?

VISUAL (eye-gate)

Visual learners learn better when they can read or see the information. However, it is important to note that there are two sorts of visual learners:

- a. those who prefer using the written form of the language to learn.
- b. those who prefer using pictures, charts and diagrams to learn.

These two learning types both use the eyes, but the first uses more of an analytical technique while the second has more of a global preference (see Analytical vs. Global). Many of us learn in school to write everything down and so we come to rely on writing to aid memory. The problem for learners with a strongly visual preference is that they feel they just can't remember anything unless it is written down. However, it is vital for them to bear in mind that the language skills they are aiming for are mainly verbal -- not written ones -- and that they must develop and come to rely on the auditory mode in order to learn to understand what people are saying.

AUDITORY (ear-gate)

Auditory learners learn better when the information primarily comes through the ears. But as with visual learners, it is important to note that there are two sorts of auditory learners:

1. those who are more comfortable processing input directly through lectures, tapes and films.
2. those who are more comfortable processing input when they are able to talk about it, for instance with the teacher or in small groups.

These two learning types both use the ears: the first uses more of an analytical technique while the second learner type demonstrates more of a relational preference (see Analytical vs. Relational). Auditory learners have a tremendous advantage when learning to communicate verbally in Chinese as they don't need to rely on the written form of the word!

HANDS-ON (touch & physical movement)

These types of learners learn best through total physical involvement with the learning environment, whether through handling objects or going on field trips. They prefer language learning activities that involve action. The problem for them is that most language learning classrooms major on auditory and visual skills -- often leaving the learner who has a strong 'hands-on' preference feeling frustrated and being branded as a 'poor learner'.

What learning strategies will aid these three types?

VISUAL (eye-gate)

- Write your own vocabulary cards (flash cards) -- the Chinese on one side and the English definition and sentences examples on the reverse side.
- When learning new vocabulary, copy it across to your own notebook which has been divided up into topic areas. Re-writing helps recall.
- When hearing a new word, try picturing the object in your head with the Chinese word next to it.
- Input the new vocabulary into your computer and use it for review.
- In order to strengthen your listening skills, when learning the dialogues and new vocabulary, first try using both textbook and tape or CD at the same time; then just listening to the tape or CD; or alternatively, ask a friend to read out the new vocabulary and you give them the Chinese equivalent.
- Visual learners can be frustrated when the teacher says, "Close the textbook and repeat after me". If your teacher insists on this method, ensure that you have first read it through several times.
- Use color to highlight the main ideas in your textbook.
- Most visual learners learn better by themselves.

AUDITORY (ear-gate)

- Recite out loud the new vocabulary, dialogues and drills. Try taping them, then playing them back. Also, when going through your vocabulary cards (flash cards), read the Chinese and English out aloud.

- Try studying with a classmate so you can discuss the lesson content together.
- Also listen to radio & TV programs where the content is at your present level of Chinese (e.g. programs teaching English to Chinese beginners which will therefore use simple Chinese as well as simple English).
- When you go out walking or shopping, have a topic ready for chatting with those whom you meet in the street.
- Find a Chinese friend and exchange English for Chinese.

HANDS-ON (touch & physical movement)

- When learning verbs, do the action as you say or read the word. This helps reinforce the visual and auditory modes. For nouns, physically touch/handle the object (or draw it if it is impossible to get hold of one -- e.g. an elephant!). For adjectives, draw the item you are describing.
- When learning grammar, draw pictures using the grammar point in the context of a real communication situation; or use colored rods -- different colors for the different parts of speech -- and lay them out on the table as you construct sentences in Chinese.
- Also, typing words into your computer or writing them down by hand may help you remember them.
- Whenever possible, go out and use the vocabulary in real-life situations, e.g. buying stamps at the post office, buying clothes or fruit & vegetables in the local market. This helps supplement visual and auditory input.

Other Physical Factors

Other physical factors may affect our motivation for learning. How do you respond to the following?

TIME: What time of day do you learn best -- morning/afternoon/evening?

POSTURE: Do you prefer to sit in a straight-backed chair at your desk or in the library, or do you prefer a comfortable chair, or even laying on your bed or the floor?

SURROUNDINGS: Do you prefer your study room / desk to be messy or tidy?

LIGHTING: Do you prefer bright lights or soft lights?

CLOTHING: In class, do you prefer to dress formally or informally?

SOUND: Do you prefer to study in a quiet place or with background music?

COMPANIONS: Do you prefer to study alone or together with other students?

MOBILITY: Do you prefer sitting down at your desk to study or frequently moving around?

TEMPERATURE: do you like the study room/classroom warm or cool?

SUSTENANCE: Do you like to eat and drink while studying, or not?

REWARDS: Do you promise yourself rewards for getting started on your studies? for finishing?

A knowledge of one's own learning preferences is important for enjoying language learning and hence maintaining motivation.

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Learning Styles IV

How the Learner's Personality Affects the Way They Learn

In the three previous articles, we looked at how the mind and the body process language. In this article, we will be concerned with the learner's personality, i.e. how they handle the feelings that are evoked during the learning process, what kind of motivation the learner brings to the learning task, as well as personal values, beliefs and attitudes related to learning; whether they prefer to work alone or in groups, and the kind of relationship the learner prefers to have with the teacher and other learners. These are all key factors in the learning process. The learner's personality type as well as these various emotional factors form the affective side of a learner's total learning style.

Personality

There is a close connection between a person's personality type and their learning style.

Answer the following questions:

1. Do you prefer a) group classes (which include student interaction), or b) 1 teacher - 1 student classes?
2. Do you prefer a) oral tests, or b) written tests?
3. Do you prefer a) practical application, or b) dealing with concepts?
4. Do you prefer a) being given an example first, or b) being given the rule first?
5. Do you prefer a) social interaction, or b) working by yourself?
6. Do you prefer a) being given the rule plus its many variations, or b) being given lots of examples so that you can deduce the rule for yourself?
7. Do you prefer a) memorizing lots of facts and details, or b) just grasping the general concepts?
8. Do you prefer a) the real, concrete and tangible, or b) meanings, symbols and abstractions?
9. Do you prefer a) observing specifics, or b) having flashes of insight?

10. With new material, do you prefer a) going step-by-step (according to the textbook or manual), or b) finding your own way?
11. Do you tend to be a) generally more skeptical, or b) generally more trusting?
12. Do you a) more value firm-mindedness, or b) more value harmony between people?
13. Are you a) more objective, or b) more subjective?
14. Do you a) prize more highly logical order, or b) warmth in friendships?
15. When coming to a decision, do you more a) use objective and impersonal criteria, or b) weigh human values and motives (my own and others)?
16. Do you a) work in a steady, orderly way, or b) work in a flexible, more impulsive way?
17. Do you prefer a) working on clearly laid out tasks, or b) working on discovery-type tasks?
18. When completing a task, is it important to you a) to finish it on time, or b) to remain open longer pending further detail?
19. Do you prefer a) formal, structured tasks, or b) informal, problem-solving tasks?
20. Are you a) a more goal-oriented type of person, or b) a more open-ended, play-it-by-ear, go-with-the-flow type of person?

What do the different personality types look like?

Many language learners are familiar with the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) -- an instrument widely used to help people discover the way they tend to take in information, make decisions and relate to people. The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator identifies preferences in four areas:

a. **Extroversion vs. Introversion**

Extroverts are usually energized by being with people and interacting with them, and can often think best if they can talk over their ideas with other people. Introverts, on the other hand, think best by themselves by processing ideas in their own minds. In the above questionnaire, the more 'a' answers you checked off in questions 1-5, the more extrovert you are, and the more 'b' answers you checked off, the more introvert you are.

b. **Sensing vs. Intuition**

Sensing (or concrete-sequential) types tend to take in information in a sequential way through the use of their five senses, and tend to be interested in the concrete and here & now. Intuitive types are more interested in theories and possibilities, and often make good guesses without going through sequential steps of reasoning it out. In the above questionnaire, the more 'a' answers you checked off in questions 6-10, the more 'sensing' (concrete-sequential) you are, and the more 'b' answers you checked off, the more 'intuitive' you are.

c. **Thinking vs. Feeling**

Thinking types tend to make decisions more objectively, on logical, impartial grounds. Feeling types, on the other hand, tend to come to a decision more subjectively on the basis of feelings as well as the effect of the decision on personal issues. In the above questionnaire, the more 'a' answers you checked off in questions 11-15, the more 'thinking' you are, and the more 'b' answers you checked off, the more 'feeling' you are.

d. **Judging vs. Perceiving**

Judging (or closure-oriented) types like things to be clear and settled, and strive for closure. Perceiving (or open-ended) types like matters to be open-ended for as long as possible. In the above questionnaire, the more 'a' answers you checked off in questions 16-20, the more 'judging' (closure-oriented) you are, and the more 'b' answers you checked off, the more 'perceiving' (open-ended) you are.

How do these 8 types of learners differ in the way they learn the language? What different learning styles do they have?

Our whole personality and emotions are fully involved when learning Chinese. Each of the above eight preferences that goes to make up a psychological type has its assets and liabilities when it comes to language learning.

Extroverts: the extroverted learner learns more effectively through concrete experiences, contacts with the outside world, and relationships with others. They value group interaction and classwork done together with other students. They are willing to take conversational risks, but are dependent on outside stimulation and interaction.

Introverts: the introverted learner learns more effectively in individual, independent situations that are more involved with ideas and concepts. Their strengths are their ability to concentrate on the task in hand as well as their self-sufficiency; however, they need to process ideas before speaking which sometimes leads to avoidance of linguistic risk-taking in conversation.

Sensing (or concrete-sequential) types: the sensing learner learns more effectively from reports of observable facts and happenings; prefers physical, sense-based input. Their great assets are their willingness to work hard in a systematic way, and their attention to details; however, they will be hindered should there be a lack of clear sequence, goals or structure in the language or language course.

Intuitive types: the intuitive learner learns more effectively from flashes of insight, using their imagination, and grasping the general concepts rather than all the details. Their strengths are their ability to guess from the context, structuring their own training, conceptualizing and model-building. However, they can be hindered by inaccuracy and missing important details.

Thinking types: the thinking learner learns more effectively from impersonal circumstances and logical consequences. Their strengths are in their ability to analyze and their self-discipline. However, they can suffer from performance anxiety because their self-esteem is attached to achievement.

Feeling types: the feeling learner learns more effectively from personalized circumstances and social values. They have the advantage of their strong desire to bond with the teacher, resulting in good relations

which lead to high self-esteem. However, they can become discouraged if not appreciated, and disrupted by lack of interpersonal harmony.

Judging (or closure-oriented) types: the judging learner learns more effectively by reflection, analysis, and processes that involve closure. They have the advantage of systematically working through a task, and wanting to get the job done. However, they suffer from rigidity and intolerance of ambiguity.

Perceiving (or open-ended) types: the perceiving learner learns more effectively through negotiation, feeling, and inductive processes that postpone closure. Their strong points are their openness, flexibility and adaptability to change and new experiences. However, they may suffer from laziness and inconsistent pacing over the long haul.

What learning strategies will aid these eight types?

Extroverts: learning together with others will be more effective than studying by yourself -- the stimulation received from group work will help you learn and understand new information better.

Introverts: you learn best when you work alone. You think better and internalize information more readily when studying by yourself. You will enjoy using computers for study and review.

Sensing (or concrete-sequential) types: organize your lesson preparation so that you include time for all aspects of the language -- grammar, vocabulary drills and dialogues, plus include time for review.

Intuitive types: don't get bogged down with the grammar -- just get a feel for the main point and move on!

Thinking types: if the grammar explanations or vocabulary definitions are unclear or confusing, get other students to explain them to you. Then make your own summary.

Feeling types: in order to build good relationships with your teachers, invite them round to your house for a meal or go out with them for an evening. Most teachers enjoy socializing with their students and appreciate those who take a personal interest in them.

Judging (or closure-oriented) types: ask other students to help you set realistic, short-term goals so that you can continually sense progress.

Perceiving (or open-ended) types: learning Chinese ought to be fun! However, beware of being too laid back.

Other Emotional Factors

Other emotional factors include: anxiety (high/low), attitude (positive/negative), motivation (strong/weak), self-confidence, persistence and personal sense of responsibility. Each student comes with their own constellation and intensity of emotional factors and all these affect their emotional involvement with the language learning task.

Conclusion

Learning how to learn is an empowering experience, and discovering one's learning style can lead to an increase in achievement and self-confidence. However, it is important to realize that no one style is better than another, although many language school programs favor certain types of learners over others. (Reflect back on your college course which probably favored the intrinsically motivated, analytical and independent student.) On the other hand, students should be prepared to expand their learning style repertoire so that they will be more empowered to learn in a variety of learning situations. Bear in mind, too, that you are probably not totally one 'type' (e.g. totally analytical or totally global) but somewhere along the continuum between the two. What you should aim for is to strengthen those areas where you are weak.

In order for you to become clearer on your own learning style, apart from the above questionnaires, some other useful ways are:

1. Keep a language learning journal, noting 'good days' and 'enjoyable moments' when you were studying or practicing the language and ask yourself, "What made those days 'good' or those moments 'enjoyable'?"

2. Describe your ideal teacher. What does she do which helps you feel relaxed, maintain motivation, help you understand the language, and participate in an active way?

3. Write down the names of your favorite and most disliked teachers. Then ask yourself, "What makes them my favorite or most disliked teacher?", i.e. what do they do that either stimulates and interests you or bores and frustrates you?

4. Which section(s) of each (textbook) lesson do you enjoy most? least? Why?

5. What 'turns you on' when learning Chinese?

6. Try experimenting with different learning strategies and see how you feel about them.

References: Learning Styles in the ESL/EFL Classroom by Joy M. Reid (Newbury House) Workbook for Independent Language Learners by Carol J. Orwig (SIL) The Impact of Differing Learning Styles on Language Teaching and Facilitation by Herbert C. Purnell (unpublished paper)

Chapter Six

Maintaining Motivation during Language School

For the language learner, motivation is an important topic for the vital reason that the motivated learner will always surpass the unmotivated learner in performance and outcome. People have an innate need to be competent and effective in their work and motivation is a key factor in helping them reach their goals. Furthermore, learners who leave full-time language study motivated about their Chinese communicative ability are more likely to continue acquiring the language, hence becoming lifelong learners.

There are two sources of motivation -- internal and external. Internal motivation -- "I want to get good Chinese" -- is the motivation that the newcomer brings with them, and strongly affects how they go about learning Chinese. External motivators include your organization which encourages you to 'aim high', language teachers who teach Chinese in a way that you find interesting, textbooks that give you what you need for communicating, and Chinese friends who encourage you.

It is important to realize that motivation doesn't guarantee success. Other factors, such as opportunity, ability, and quality of instruction are also important. But motivation will enhance high ability and good instruction, for people work longer, harder, and with more vigor and intensity when they are motivated. Concentration increases comprehension -- for greater alertness produces better learning.

Some Motivating Questions

1. **Do I come with a positive attitude to learning Chinese?**

It is worth asking yourself questions such as, "What are some of my fears and apprehensions about learning Chinese?" Write them down and then check them out with other learners to see whether or not they are justified. While learning Chinese, spend time interacting with positive language learners -- those who are enthusiastic about learning Chinese! Hopefully it's catching! Also spend time with Chinese friends who by nature are encouragers -- those who continually

make you feel good about your Chinese. Think through what are your personal strengths and abilities as related to language learning -- both personal character traits as well as natural learning strategies.

2. **Do I believe that the content of the course will meet my needs for life and work in China?**

Few learners ask themselves this extremely basic question. And if the answer is negative, then it is imperative for you to get hold of a copy of First Steps in Chinese or Chinese Made Easier in order to supply you with the everyday words that you will be needing for handling daily living needs in Chinese.

To find out about the textbooks used at your Chinese language center, ask other students for their comments and opinions. If you discover that the grammar explanations aren't clear enough, borrow a copy of H.S. Cheung's 'A Practical Chinese Grammar' (published by Chinese University Press in Hong Kong).

Be clear on your goals and objectives. Some issues worth thinking through are: "I want the course to help me" (complete the sentence). "An important goal for me is ...". "When I've completed my Chinese studies, I want to be able to: a) ..., b) ..., c) ...".

3. **As I live here in China, am I stimulated to learn Chinese?**

Are my teachers stimulating to be with -- or is a particular teacher's teaching method frustrating me? Then think about having a private tutor instead for that class hour. Am I finding it stimulating being with my Chinese friends each day -- or am I spending too much time with my English-speaking friends and colleagues? Then re-schedule your time. Am I finding the course stimulating -- or does it seem to drag on interminably? Then get hold of some helpful textbooks and study them instead (see the article 'Some Good Textbooks'). Am I stimulated to press on because I sense regular progress -- or does my goal seem far off and unreachable? Then break down your goal into smaller bites. Am I stimulated to go out each day into the local neighborhood and talk with friends and storekeepers -- or am I finding that my shyness or nervousness hinders me from going out and talking with people? Then ask friends or colleagues to introduce you to a

friendly 'talker', and set up a safe and secure place for practicing Chinese where you won't feel threatened or embarrassed.

4. Am I enjoying learning Chinese?

It's important to continue to enjoy learning Chinese and not to let it drag or become boring and tiresome. So keep a diary in which you jot down occasions when you sensed real progress, whether in handling daily living needs or making new friends and deepening relationships with those whom you've already got to know. Then read through it when feeling in need of a boost! Don't keep on with the same old boring routine -- ring the changes by getting fresh ideas for how to learn from other language learners, e.g. new places to go for practicing Chinese (friendly storekeepers), neighborhoods where people are more friendly to outsiders, people who are more empathetic to struggling newcomers. If you're dragging yourself through each language learning day, maybe it's time for a vacation!

Emotions that need immediate attention: apathy, boredom and anxiety. Emotions to be encouraged are: alertness, excitement, optimism, curiosity, and confidence. Can you think of any others?

5. Do I sense real progress?

Am I feeling more confident and competent in Chinese? People have an innate need to be competent and effective in what they do. We can't take being ineffective for too long. So ask your teacher for a pronunciation 'check up' once a month. Also ask the director of the Chinese language center for an assessment as to how you are progressing compared with the average student. Also use the Self-rating Checklist of Speaking Proficiency in the article 'Where am I Going? How am I Doing?'. Finding out exactly where you are along the road to your goal isn't easy, but if you can know objectively that you are progressing well, that will be motivating.

If you are experiencing obstacles to progress, try to find practical ways to remove them, e.g. if your living situation affords little regular contact with Chinese people, consider ways of improving this.

Motivation for On-going Language Learning after Full-time Language Study

Educators tell us that adults tend to be more motivated when effectively learning something they value. Successful mastery of Chinese is a very satisfying feeling! And when we sense progress and real accomplishment, we are usually motivated to continue on in our efforts. Competence builds confidence, confidence in turn brings competence, which gives us the motivation to press on. And our goal should be to become lifelong learners. The key to all this is what is called 'intrinsic motivation'. Intrinsic motivation is the pleasure or value that is associated with the activity itself. The 'doing' of the activity for its own sake is the main reason for that activity, e.g. reading a book purely for pleasure. Contrast this with 'extrinsic motivation' which emphasizes the value a person places on the end result of the action -- the goal rather than simply the doing of the task, e.g. reading a particular book in order to pass an exam. As people who are trying to become competent at living and working in China, what we want to encourage is intrinsic motivation. Factors which enhance intrinsic motivation are: choice, positive feedback, and optimum challenge.

Choice: up to now in your mastering of Chinese, you have had to follow a rigid curriculum. Now, in line with your particular work, you choose the topics most relevant to your communicative needs.

As you consider what topics you should now be studying, here are some questions which will help clarify your objectives:

- a. which of my living and work communicative needs have not yet been covered in the textbooks I've already studied?
- b. what will be my future status and role?
- c. with what types of people will I need to communicate?
- d. in what sorts of situations will I need to function? (e.g. university, neighborhood, government offices).

- e. what tasks will I have to be able to carry out in Chinese? (e.g. teach, attend committee meetings, entertain friends).
- f. what levels of proficiency will I need to reach in the four skills -- listening, speaking, reading, writing?

Positive feedback: Seek positive feedback by deliberately talking with your Chinese friends about what you are studying, and note their interested, positive reactions! They are finding you an increasingly more interesting person to be with!

Optimally challenging: choose topics and materials which are moderately difficult to achieve -- not too easy so that you become bored and disinterested, and not too difficult so that you lose heart and give up.

To summarize, the learning situations that develop intrinsic motivation are ones that provide positive feedback to people who are engaged in an optimally challenging, self-determined activity.

Those who are likely to continue enthusiastically learning Chinese after full-time language study is over are those who have already developed the mindset that in the local community are lots of people who are very happy to help me broaden my Chinese. So in your early days, establish relationships with local people in a way that will give you this mindset, so that the transition from full-time language study to ongoing learning in the community will be natural rather than traumatic.

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Chapter Seven

Overcoming Barriers I

When coming to China, we bring a lot of 'baggage' with us. I'm not referring here to our suitcases and trunks, however, but to our personality make-up.

We come with our degrees, diplomas and doctorates to prove that we are intelligent. We may also come with a high MLAT score (MLAT = Modern Language Aptitude Test). This tells us that we are able to learn languages well in a classroom setting. We may come, too, with some previous language learning successes. "I did well at getting basic Swahili when on a short-term program to Africa," you may recall.

We also come with our attitudes. "I had many Chinese friends back home and it was through them that I got an interest in China," you recount. Then we come with our motivational drives. "I want to become an accepted member of the local Chinese community as quickly as possible," you say.

Finally, we come with our own individual personalities -- introvert or extrovert, inhibited or outgoing, anxious or carefree. And soon we discover that our personality plays a large part in the speed with which we master Chinese. It sometimes hinders us doing the very thing that we desperately want to do, such as going up to strangers and talking to them in Chinese.

So let us now take a deeper look at some of these affective factors and see how we can find ways to overcome the negative ones.

High Self-Esteem vs. Low Self-Esteem

If you are confident in your ability to master Chinese, you have a tremendous advantage over those who have a low self-image. Confidence is extremely important. A colleague of mine loved learning Chinese and interacting with anyone whom she met, happily chatting to all her neighbors and local shopkeepers. No emotional energy was wasted on wondering whether she might not master the Chinese language. I don't think it ever entered her head!

The person who believes in their own capability at learning languages will approach the task with a greater measure of confidence and therefore be more open to allowing the new language to go deep into their memory. This person's confidence will not be undermined when they make stupid mistakes.

Uninhibited vs. Inhibited

Closely related to self-esteem is the concept of inhibition. People with higher self-esteem are more able to withstand threats to their existence and hence their defenses are lower, so allowing the language to penetrate deeper into their memory. People with weaker self-esteem maintain walls of inhibition to protect themselves.

I remember a pronunciation class where one of the students found it impossible to make one of the sounds. After a few futile attempts, he was heard to mutter, "What a stupid sound anyway!". He refused to keep trying. This kind of barrier inhibits, rather than facilitates learning. The lowering of our defense mechanisms involves self-exposure to a degree manifested in few other tasks. When faced with this threat to our ego, it is hard for us to lower our defenses, and yet keeping the barriers up will seriously slow down our rate of learning.

Extroversion vs. Introversion

The amiable, outgoing and talkative person has a tremendous advantage over the quiet, reserved person who has to exert great effort to open his or her mouth. I envied a friend of mine who loved making people laugh with their faltering attempts at communicating in Chinese. I quickly realized that the 'actor' who enjoys performing before an amused 'audience' has advantages over the person who can't stand people laughing at them, gets all embarrassed and so decides it is safest to keep quiet and say nothing.

Anxiety

Situations in which the language learner feels a high level of anxiety work against effective language acquisition. It seems that, when people are nervous, a 'shutter' goes up inside them which slows the language flow into and out of them, thereby hindering language learning. It also makes recall more

difficult. We have all experienced the anxious moment when we failed to recall the vital word we needed, yet as soon as we walked away from the other person, the word popped straight into our mind! I know of one language student who, when seeing a Chinese person coming up to him, would subconsciously say to himself, "I won't understand what that person is going to say to me". And so it happened -- just as he predicted it would! A high level on anxiety, by impeding the flow of input into the brain, slows down language progress to a considerable degree. As one linguist put it, "Anxiety brings on the very failure which so concerns them". The person with a low level of anxiety, however, is more open, so new language strikes deeper into that part of the brain responsible for language acquisition.

Empathy

One of the problems of communicating in a new language is that the culture is new too. The rules of social behavior are not yet clearly understood by the newcomer. People who possess a high degree of empathy will be more sensitive in their interaction with Chinese people, looking for clues as to how their speech is being received. Especially when learning pronunciation, the empathetic person, who essentially wants to become as Chinese as possible, will be more willing to throw themselves into making those strange new sounds. People who lack empathy are unable to let themselves go, preferring to retain their own cultural identity. There was a time when the English gentleman learning French prided himself on not stooping to adopt the effeminate and obviously degenerate way of speaking that the French have!

Conclusion

What if you lack confidence and are easily inhibited or are introverted, shy or nervous? Keeping a 'stiff upper lip' or forcing yourself to go out and talk with people who happen to cross your path would be too traumatic for you. Telling yourself to be less inhibited or less introverted will not help either. Is there some way that allows you to be yourself and yet enables you to communicate freely? Yes, I think there is.

You need to find Chinese people who are gentle, caring and empathetic, and set up 'safe places' for communicating with them. You can do this by analyzing how you feel when with different people. When at the local shops or market, for instance, as you try to chat with people, some will make you feel a little

nervous. Others, on the other hand, because of their gentle, empathetic personality, will allow you to relax and feel free to say whatever you want without feeling bad about your faltering attempts. It is this latter group with whom you especially want to spend time. You might ask them whether they have time during the week for chatting (maybe during their slack time each day), possibly exchanging English for Chinese. If you find it difficult going up to people to ask them, perhaps a friend or colleague could ask for you. It is best, however, if you first find your own conversation contacts as you will sense best those with whom you feel most at ease.

So note those people who make you feel good about your Chinese and spend as much time as possible with them. Why not think now who some of these people might be, and plan your schedule to spend time with them. You'll be glad you did!

Overcoming Barriers II

Perfectionism

It is important to note that a perfectionist trait can be either good or bad, depending on how you react to it. The student who says, "I will press on until I get it right" displays a good attitude. Their goal is to achieve as near native-like pronunciation as possible. They therefore continue to work at perfecting the sounds and are willing to take repeated correction until they get it right. However, the student who says, "I will not move on to the next lesson until I have mastered this one perfectly" does not understand that languages are not learnt in that way. Once they have grasped the major point of a lesson, they should move on to the next; grammar structures will become clearer as they receive more input and gradually intuitively comprehend the communicative point of the grammar pattern.

Rigidity

Learning a language requires a tremendous amount of flexibility and the willingness to try out different methods of learning. It also demands a tolerance for ambiguity during the early months when much is unclear. The student who insists on 'doing it my way' and is unwilling to accept the advice of others may find their progress to be extremely slow. For instance, the married couple who insist that they have no time to practice because of their need to spend quality time with their children in their apartment may not get very far in the language. They need to realize that 'quality time with the kids' need not be restricted to the home, and that taking the children to the local park will afford lots of opportunities for language practice as well as enabling their children to mix with the local kids.

The person who gets frustrated with ambiguity -- "There must be a clearer explanation for this grammar point if only I could find the right person/textbook to explain it properly" -- and allows their frustration to upset them, will find that this will have a negative effect on their progress.

Unimaginativeness

In the early stages of learning Chinese when your vocabulary is limited, you need some imagination to search out alternative ways of expressing your thoughts and ideas in Chinese. The person who can only think of one way of expressing their ideas is at a considerable disadvantage over the student whose agile mind is able to think out alternative ways of expressing the same concept. For instance, when asked by a Chinese friend, "Where do you go each day?", and wanting to reply "The Chinese Language Center", the unimaginative student may find themselves stuck for the right word. The student with an agile mind, on the other hand, might reply, "The place where I learn Chinese". The result is that the unimaginative person remains silent, uses English, or feels frustrated and embarrassed, while the creative student gets their meaning across adequately and feels the thrill of communicating in Chinese!

Coping Strategies

Frustration can be very debilitating. One person sees the task of learning Chinese as a challenge to be grasped, whereas someone else is quickly overwhelmed by the enormity of it all. The vital factor is not whether you are able to cope with the volume of materials to be studied (because slowing down one's pace a little by hiring a tutor instead of going to classes is a possible alternative). Rather, it is: are you able to cope with your feelings as to how you are doing? Or is being frustrated too much to handle?

Perseverance

Connected with coping strategies is the obvious need to be able to stick at the task until one's goal is reached. As the task is such an enormous one and the time needed to attain a reasonable level of proficiency so long, any lack of stickability will cause the learner to give up long before reaching their goal. Donald Larson in 'Guidelines for Barefoot Language Learning' says, "People who fail to develop competence in another language do so because they fail to go at it with sufficient intensity to reach the point where they can use the language well enough to continue learning it from the local people".

Some Answers

How can the language learner be helped in the above areas? Try a change of approach? Yes, because what you really need is advice on how to go about learning a foreign language.

The perfectionist needs to be told that their errors are probably the most valuable source of information about the language. You learn through making mistakes -- even if it hurts your pride! The over-rigid person needs to be supplied with alternative approaches to learning a language and strongly encouraged to try them out to see which ones suit them best. They must be told that continually asking "Why?" questions about the language is not helpful, but rather learn to ask "How?" questions, and wait patiently for things to clarify.

The unimaginative student would benefit from spending a little time teaching English-speaking children and noting how they adjust their speech in order to simplify the content so that the children understand their meaning. We must learn to do the same thing in our early stages of learning Chinese. The person for whom the enormity of the task is so overwhelming that they find it difficult to cope and hence become frustrated with their apparent (or real) lack of progress needs to be helped to divide the whole language course into smaller sections. Then they will regularly feel the thrill and satisfaction of having completed yet another section, thereby recognizing that they are making progress, even though they might not feel so. And those for whom perseverance is a problem, self-evaluating progress charts should prove helpful (see the article 'Measuring Progress').

Students who fail to master Chinese often try to justify themselves and their approach. They seem unwilling to acknowledge that their approach is not the best one. The student who succeeds has a childlike teachableness, open to the advice and counsel of others.

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Chapter Eight

Measuring Progress

What Level in Chinese Am I Aiming For?

Right at the start of your Chinese studies you need to decide on your language goals, i.e. what level in Chinese are you hoping to obtain? This means that you need first to look at your work needs, i.e. for the kind of work you have come to China to do, what level of proficiency in Chinese will you need in order to be able to function adequately? Then having decided on the level you wish to obtain, be determined to press on until you have reached your goal. What, then, are these different levels?

LEVEL 1: Survival

Level 1 will enable you to carry out minimal activities of daily living. You should be able to handle routine shopping, order a simple meal, ask and give directions, deal with travel requirements, tell the time, and be able to introduce yourself.

LEVEL 2: Conversational

Level 2 will enable you to interact with people in routine social situations and for limited work requirements. You should be able to engage in superficial discussions on current events, talk about yourself, your family and your work. You can handle limited work requirements such as giving simple instructions or simple explanations and descriptions. At Level 1 most of the things you could say had been specifically prepared. By Level 2 you can speak extemporaneously (although in a limited way) about many topics.

LEVEL 3: Minimum Professional

Level 3 will enable you to speak Chinese with sufficient structural accuracy and vocabulary to satisfy normal social and work requirements. You can handle professional discussions within a specialized field. You can participate effectively in all general conversations, and you can discuss topics of interest with

reasonable ease. Your vocabulary is broad enough so that you rarely have to grope for a word and you use the language well enough to establish close friendships.

LEVEL 4: Full Professional

Level 4 will enable you to use the language fluently and accurately with vocabulary that is always extensive and precise enough to enable you to convey your exact meaning. You can understand and participate in any conversation with a high degree of fluency and precision of vocabulary. Your speech is as effortless as your mother tongue, and you are always easy to listen to.

LEVEL 5: Native

Level 5 will mean that native speakers react to you as they do to each other. Your speaking proficiency is equivalent in every way to that of an educated native speaker.

Having read through these five levels of proficiency, now look again at the work you have come to China to do and decide which level you must aim for in order for you to be able function effectively.

How Am I Doing?

"That's all very fine," you may be saying, "but how do I know how I'm getting on? Right from the very first sentence I blurted out, my Chinese friends told me 'Your Chinese is spoken very well'. And six months later they're still saying the same thing! Then those tests on my school work which my teachers give me -- I find that they seem to give little indication as to how I'm really getting on in Chinese."

The self-rating checklist of speaking proficiency set out below should help you to know how you are progressing. It is very simple but very effective. Read each statement carefully and then ask yourself honestly whether or not you are able to perform that task in Chinese to a reasonable degree. If your answer is 'Yes', then check (tick) it off. Work through the statements one at a time until you are unable to check off any more. This will then indicate at which level you are at present. Approximately three months later, get it out again and start from where you left off last time, seeing how many more tasks you are able to perform compared to before. If you feel that your progress has plateaued off, get the chart out and

remind yourself just how far you have come in Chinese -- this ought to be an encouragement to you that you are progressing even though you don't feel so!

SELF-RATING CHECKLIST OF SPEAKING PROFICIENCY

LEVEL 1

(You are at Level 1 when you can confidently check each of the following Level 1 language activities)

I can initiate conversations and use appropriate leave-takings to close conversations.

I can order a simple meal.

I can ask and tell the time of day, day of the week, and the date.

I can go to the market and ask for vegetables, fruit, milk and meat, and I can bargain where appropriate.

I can ask and tell how to get from where I'm living to a post office, park, restaurant or hospital.

I can give directions to a taxi driver.

I can make a social introduction of someone else and also briefly introduce myself.

I can understand and correctly respond to questions about my age, marital status, nationality, occupation, and place of birth.

I can get the bus or train I want, buy a ticket and (most important!) get off where I intended to.

I can use the language well enough to assist a newcomer in all of the above Level 1 situations.

LEVEL 1 PLUS

I have a Level 1 Plus proficiency because I can do all the Level 1 activities and at least three of the following Level 2 activities.

LEVEL 2

(You are at Level 2 when you can confidently check each of the following Level 2 activities)

I can give detailed information about the weather, my family, my childhood home and my present living

arrangements.

I can take and give simple messages over the telephone.

I can give a brief autobiography and also talk about my plans and hopes for the future.

I can describe my most recent job or activity in some detail and also describe my present role as a language learner.

I can describe the organization I belong to.

I can hire household help, agreeing on salary, hours, and special duties.

I feel confident that my pronunciation is always intelligible.

I do not try to avoid any of the grammatical features of Chinese.

I feel confident that people understand me when I speak in Chinese, at least 80% of the time. I am also confident that I understand at least 80% of what Chinese people tell me on topics like those of Level 2.

I could use Chinese well enough to assist a newcomer on any of the Level 2 situations.

LEVEL 2 PLUS

I have a Level 2 Plus proficiency because I can meet at least three of the Level 3 requirements.

LEVEL 3

(You are at Level 3 when you can confidently check each of the following Level 3 items)

I now have sufficient vocabulary and grasp of the grammatical structure to complete any sentence that I begin.

I can speak at a normal rate of speech, with only rare hesitations.

I can confidently follow and contribute to a conversation between native speakers when they try to include me.

I am able to correctly understand any information given to me over the telephone.

I can understand a speech or discussion on a topic of interest to me.

I can speak to a group of native speakers on my professional subject and have confidence that I am communicating what I want to.

I can understand opposing points of view and can politely describe and defend my position.

I could cope with a social blunder, an undeserved reprimand by an official, or a plumbing emergency.

I can describe the geography of both my home and host countries.

I could serve as an informal interpreter for a newcomer in any of the Level 3 situations.

I feel that I can carry out the professional responsibilities of my work in Chinese.

LEVEL 3 PLUS

I have a Level 3 Plus proficiency because I can meet at least three of the Level 4 requirements.

LEVEL 4

(You are at Level 4 when you can confidently check each of the following Level 4 characteristics)

I practically never make grammatical mistakes.

I can always understand native speakers when they talk with each other.

I can understand humor and language puns, and I can actively participate in fun and humorous situations.

My vocabulary is always extensive and precise enough for me to convey my exact meaning in professional discussions.

I feel I have a comprehensive grasp of the local cultural knowledge bank.

I can appropriately alter my speech style for a public lecture, or a conversation with a professor, an employee or a close friend.

I could serve as an informal interpreter for a VIP at a professional or social function.

I feel that I could carry out any job assignment as effectively in Chinese as in English.

LEVEL 4 PLUS

My vocabulary and cultural understanding are always extensive enough to enable me to communicate my precise meaning.

Chinese people feel that I share their knowledge bank well enough to talk about and defend any of their beliefs or values.

LEVEL 5

Chinese people react to me just as they do to each other -- I am usually considered an insider.

I sometimes feel more at home in Chinese than in English.

I can do mental arithmetic in Chinese without slowing down (assuming that I can do mental arithmetic in English without slowing down!).

I consider myself to be completely bilingual and bicultural, with equivalent ability in English and in Chinese.

I consider myself a native speaker of Chinese.

[This article has been adapted from Language Acquisition Made Practical by Brewster & Brewster]

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Chapter Nine

Memorizing Vocabulary

Getting It In and Keeping It In

Many language learners have problems getting new vocabulary into their long-term memory. Some words are memorized easily while others stubbornly refuse to go in. So here is a simple method which many students have found helpful.

Buy a large box of chocolates. First eat the chocolates. (That's the fun part.) Then partition the box into six sections:

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
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Purchase a few boxes of blank name cards from a local store that prints name cards. You can buy them in boxes of 100 cards in different colors.

Write each vocabulary item of your new lesson (let's call this Lesson 1) on a separate card - the Chinese character and/or pinyin on one side, and the English translation on the other side. When you have written a card for each of the new vocabulary in Lesson 1 and have thoroughly memorized them, place them in section (1) of the box. While you are still studying that lesson in class, get the cards out each day and test yourself.

When you commence the next lesson (Lesson 2), test yourself once more on Lesson 1's vocabulary cards. Those words you remember, place them in section (2) of the box. Those you fail to recall, leave them in section (1) together with the new vocabulary cards from Lesson 2. While you are studying Lesson 2, get out all the cards from section (1) and work on them daily. Also, as time permits, test yourself with the cards in section (2).

When you commence Lesson 3, test yourself with all the cards from sections (1) and (2). Those in section (2) you remember are now moved up to section (3). Those in section (1) you remember are moved

up to section (2). Any vocabulary items in sections (1) or (2) that you fail to recall are all placed in section (1) together with the new vocabulary cards from Lesson 3. And so on. The principle is that, if at any time you fail to recall a vocabulary item, it is returned to section (1). Be strict with yourself - if you can't remember the tone, you've forgotten the word! It will therefore be necessary to make section (1) larger than the other sections! Those in section (6) that pass the test can be stored away and reviewed as time permits.

Are you an optimal monitor user?

"An optimal what?", you may be asking. Well, read on because what I have to say is very important. Have you ever read the book "The Inner Game of Tennis"? Probably not. Simply stated, its message is that, when we are receiving tennis instruction and are concentrating hard on each stroke made, we often find that we are not playing our best tennis. However, when we relax, forget about how we ought to be making the shots and simply enjoy the game, our tennis strokes become smooth, natural and accurate.

Now what has this to say to us language learners? Basically this: when we are learning how to play the language 'strokes', i.e. how to learn to speak Chinese, we need to be aiming for accuracy and, hence, need to be corrected repeatedly. However, when we are outside the classroom and enjoying the 'game' -- talking to Chinese people -- we should be aiming for fluency and, hence, need to relax and just talk.

"Now where does the 'monitor' fit into all this?" Well, think what happens when you are in class. Your teacher asks you to make a sentence using a particular word or grammar pattern -- and what do you do? Before saying it out aloud, you first process the sentence in your mind by throwing it up on the 'monitor', i.e. the 'screen' of your brain. You check that the grammar is in the right order, the tones are all correct, and then -- and only then -- do you say it out loud to your teacher. And of course, this is absolutely correct because you are striving for accuracy in your Chinese -- and this is slowly being accomplished through rule-learning and repeated correction.

However, after class is over and you are in the great outside world, it's important to practice what you've acquired of the language by talking with those around you. You're now going for fluency rather

than accuracy. And so it's important to learn to switch off your 'monitor' and just talk! Why? Because if you 'monitor' everything you wish to say when you're talking, it will make your language stilted and hesitant, thus militating against speaking smoothly and fluently. So, what I'm basically saying is this: There is a time to monitor and a time not to monitor. The time to monitor is when you're in class, because you're striving for accuracy through repeated correction. However, when you're outside talking with your friends, you need to learn to 'switch off' your monitor because you're now going for fluency through repeated talking.

There's one more important point. Have you noticed that, when you are talking with Chinese people outside of class, there are some types who, because of their personality (serious, strict, haughty, suspicious) make you feel slightly on edge? You feel forced to use your monitor when talking with them. Have you also noticed that there are other types of people (warm, kind, friendly, non-threatening) who make you feel that you don't need to monitor when talking with them?

The important point to note is that, when going for fluency and wanting to feel good about your Chinese, you need to major on the second type of person. What you need to do, therefore, is to analyze how you feel with the people you are with, and spend as much time as possible with the warm, friendly types who will allow you to unconsciously 'switch off' your monitor. The result will be that you will talk in a relaxed manner, you'll feel good about your Chinese, and therefore you'll increase in fluency much more rapidly.

So who is the 'optimal monitor user'? It's the person who monitors when it's right to do so -- especially when in class, but switches off the monitor when outside class and going for fluency. Why not try it and see?

Chapter Ten

Focusing on Output

Are you suffering from language indigestion? Do you daily stuff your head with new words and grammar, but find few opportunities to practice your Chinese? Well, if this is your problem, here are a few hints which should help you balance input with output.

WHERE to practice...

1. Friendly stall operators & shopkeepers:

Find those who are happy to chat with you and spend time talking with them, especially during their slack time each day. Ask other students where these people are and share the information around!

2. Sports & Recreation:

Basketball, soccer and jogging in the college sports ground are all opportunities to get to know Chinese college students in a relaxed atmosphere. Then, when you've finished playing, go off and have a meal together!

3. Long-distance train and bus journeys:

Fellow-travelers often have little to do and, seeing a foreigner sitting next to them, are happy to enjoy a conversation -- so long as you get it going!

4. Hire someone for conversation:

Especially if you are somewhat shy or find starting up conversation with people a little difficult, this is well worth trying. Why not ask a friend to find someone who would be willing to have Chinese conversation with you on a regular basis? Tell them that they are being paid not to use English, or can use it only in emergencies!

5. Exchange English conversation for Chinese conversation:

If you find it difficult hiring a talker, then agree to exchange one hour of English conversation for one hour of Chinese conversation.

6. Chat with children on the street:

Children don't get embarrassed in the way that adults do! You will find that they are more accepting of you, are willing correctors, have clearer pronunciation, and speak at your level.

7. Eat out:

Enjoy a relaxed atmosphere with plenty of time for chatting in pleasant company.

8. Hire a baby-sitter:

For families, this is an ideal way for you to obtain extra practice. Especially for mothers who find it difficult to find the time for study and practice, the 'baomu' is a great person to have around! So, when choosing one, your first consideration should be whether she speaks standard (biaozhun) Mandarin and whether she is a happy chatter. Never mind if she can't cook too well or wash the clothes very clean -- this is only of secondary importance!

9. Take the baby out in a pushchair:

White-skinned babies and young children attract Chinese people like flies! If you are single, maybe you could borrow a friend's baby and push it round the park!!

10. Caretakers & Cleaners:

In China, there are many people whose job is simply to sit at a desk in the entrance to a college dormitory. These 'fuwuyuan' often have little to do all day. Find the friendly ones and chat with them.

WHO to talk with...

Be on the lookout for those with whom you feel most at ease and relaxed -- and then major on them. When we want to increase in fluency, it is important to find people who are friendly and accepting of us

and who, therefore, don't make us feel embarrassed when we make a mistake. (see article 'Are You an Optimal Monitor User?')

HOW to make the most of each opportunity...

The key: PLAN AHEAD! You must be ready for each opportunity and be prepared to get the conversation going. But how?

- a. have a topic ready to talk about -- maybe a 'topic for the week'.
- b. have your school textbook with you and ask someone about something in a lesson.
- c. have something which you need to do, e.g. mail a letter at the Post Office.

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Chapter Eleven

Where are the high achievers?

When we finish the two-year course, there is a strong temptation to be content with the level we have reached. There are a number of reasons for this. For example, on most occasions, although we are unable to fully enter into what is being said around us, we are able to 'get by'. Also, our Chinese friends will often simplify their sentences or explain things that we don't quite understand. Furthermore, when we listen to Chinese people speaking, although we often realize that we would never have said it their way, we still continue to say things the way we've always said them.

It is important for us -- if we truly want to be accepted by our Chinese friends and work colleagues -- to be perpetually dissatisfied with the level we have reached. We need to realize that, while it is true that we have been sweating it out over those language textbooks for the last two years, we are only at the beginning stages in the areas of vocabulary, idiom, usage, appropriateness and style. We still have a long way to go!

To put it another way, we are now at the level called 'Limited Work Proficiency'. This means that we can engage in superficial discussions on current events and can talk about ourselves, our family and our work. We can also handle limited work requirements, but need help when things go deeper. We have got to this level by hard study! But to get to the level where we can really function adequately in our job takes strong motivation plus good opportunities for using what we've got and acquiring more.

Seeing that so many foreigners in China plateau out at an inadequate level, who are the ones who continue to press on? Who are these 'high achievers' in Chinese?

Those who live in a good environment -- and use it

The more educated the people are with whom you regularly mix, the more likely that the range of topics of conversation will be challenging to you and will thereby spur your Chinese on.

A friend of mine who works in an orphanage came to my apartment one evening. It just so happened that a couple of university students were in my home having a discussion on current events. I invited my western friend to join in the discussion. After the two students had left, my friend remarked, "I haven't talked in Chinese at that level for ages. It was so demanding on my Chinese!"

Not that simply living among more highly-educated people is sufficient -- you must be willing to use the opportunity that it affords you. Let it challenge you! Then, take up the challenge to spur you on. So stay in 'learner mode' and always be asking your Chinese friends about new words and phrases, attending lectures, watching the news on TV (and even recording it, playing it back and discussing the content with a Chinese friend).

Those who allow their personality to reinforce their learning

Peter, a good friend of mine, is insatiably curious (and friendly). Walking along the street with him one day, he spotted some unusual objects outside a shop. So he went straight up to someone standing nearby and politely asked them what they were. His curiosity enabled him to continue to expand his Chinese on a wide range of basic, everyday topics.

Now, I'm not like Peter, but I do have one admirable trait -- the perfectionist streak in me. I simply have to know the right word or the correct way of saying something! When I was working in an office for a while, I used to ask my Chinese secretary for the proper way to describe an action or object. I would then go and use that word or phrase straightaway so that it would immediately become mine! If there was a right word for something, I wanted to know it!

Some people are highly motivated, but feel guilty that they aren't using traditional study methods. I remember once talking with a frustrated western colleague. He told me that by the side of his bed was a pile of textbooks which he desperately wanted to review, but for which he could never find the time in his busy schedule. His sense of guilt was really getting him down! As we talked, he mentioned that in his pocket was a small notebook in which he would jot down new words that came up in conversation. Since

it seemed to me that he already had an excellent method of increasing (and reviewing) his vocabulary, I suggested that he throw away all those books and stop feeling so guilty!

Those who enjoy studying -- and have the time for it!

If you are one of these people, be thankful! One problem, however, are those higher level textbooks mainly cover Chinese literature and history (which is O.K., of course, if that is what you want). However, a useful source of study materials is the wide range of children's books in Chinese. These will help you make the jump to Chinese magazines and books written for adults. Then, of course, there's the daily newspaper.

Conclusion -- Are you a lifelong learner?

The person who is a lifelong learner betrays an attitude of heart as well as of mind. They are always actively exploring the language; they have an insatiable curiosity -- always asking, observing, reading, noting down. They are highly motivated. And if you persevere like them, you too will become a 'high achiever' in Chinese!

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