

Learner strategies in Chinese as a foreign language. Case study at the Confucius Institute of the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria

Lili Wang and María Teresa Cáceres-Lorenzo

Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria

This present work about learning Chinese as a foreign language (ChFL) at the Confucius Institute of the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria (CI-ULPGC, Canary Islands, Spain) is a research on how teenagers use learning strategies and their possible relationship between their personal and academic factors (L1, gender, monolingual/bilingual schools and final exam score of HSK). This research was carried out with 60 14-year-old students who attended Chinese classes at the CI-ULPGC during 2012-2015 academic year, who participated in an investigation about factors mentioned above and a language learner strategies (LLS) questionnaire designed by Rebecca Oxford (Strategy Inventory for Language Learning, SILL, version 7.0).

This study is based on the conviction that LLS can be taught, especially if teachers include them in specific activities in their respective programs. Given the success of students when using ChFL communicatively, the teacher-researcher can detect their factors, motivation, and the procedures that each individual develops (Nisbet & Shucksmith, 1994; Griffiths & Oxford, 2014; Cáceres-Lorenzo, 2015). A classroom work plan that includes LLSs can guide, provide practice and stimulate self-assessment, so that students can reflect on their use of certain LLSs and transfer them to other situations. A good language learner (The Good Language Learner) plans LLSs on their own initiative to complement feedback from the teacher and other classmates (Magogwe & Oliver, 2007; Sung, 2011; Griffiths & Oxford, 2014; Fu & Nassaji, 2016). Learning a new language is a complex cognitive skill; that is, it goes from declarative knowledge ("knowing things") to procedural knowledge ("knowing how to use them in different communicative contexts").

In order to answer the initial question of how Spanish preadolescents learn ChFL and its possible relationship with personal and academic factors, we pose the following research questions: what learning strategy is the most used by our subjects of the case study? Is there any relationship between our subjects' personal and academic factors and the result of the final HSK exam?

The statistical analysis of the results shows novel quantitative data because preadolescents do not present a high frequency in the use of strategies; Furthermore, in general, the most used strategy is social, and the least is cognitive, although it is the effective and metacognitive ones that have a significant correlation with academic success.

After evaluating our results, we have noticed a certain limitation in the use of the Oxford questionnaire that should be completed with a greater collection of information on the individuals analyzed (number of hours dedicated to the study; previous experience in the use of LLS or attendance at official exams; level of motivation through real monitoring of classes; beliefs; styles). It is also possible that SILL needs some modification when it comes to learning Mandarin, as Grenfell and Harris (2015) point out, given the complexity of this language and the characteristics of its official exams.