

## ปัจจัยที่ทำให้เกิดการเปลี่ยนแปลงการใช้กลยุทธ์การเรียนรู้ภาษาอังกฤษ : กรณีนักศึกษาจีนในมหาวิทยาลัยเอกชนในประเทศไทย

The Factors Causing Changes in English Learning Strategy Use: the Case of  
Chinese Students at Thai Private Universities

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### บทคัดย่อ

มีปัจจัยหลายประการที่ทำให้การใช้กลยุทธ์การเรียนรู้ภาษาอังกฤษสามารถเปลี่ยนแปลงหรือพัฒนาได้ งานวิจัยครั้งนี้จึงมีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อตรวจสอบปัจจัยที่เป็นสาเหตุของการเปลี่ยนแปลงการใช้กลยุทธ์การเรียนรู้ภาษาอังกฤษของนักศึกษาจีนหลังจากการศึกษาในประเทศไทย เป็นการวิจัยแบบผสมวิธีรูปแบบเชิงอธิบายเป็นลำดับ โดยมีนักศึกษาจีนจำนวน 200 คนจากมหาวิทยาลัยเอกชนในกรุงเทพมหานครเป็นพลวิจัย เก็บข้อมูลโดยแบบสอบถามภาษาจีนกลางและการสัมภาษณ์เพื่อตรวจสอบและเก็บข้อมูลในรายละเอียด วิเคราะห์ข้อมูลโดยวิธีวิเคราะห์แก่นเนื้อหา และมีการตรวจสอบความเที่ยงภายในตัวผู้ประเมิน ( $r_{xy} = 0.970$ ) ผลการวิจัยปรากฏว่ามีปัจจัยเชิงบริบท 5 ปัจจัย และปัจจัยด้านตัวผู้เรียน 2 ปัจจัย ปัจจัยเชิงบริบท ได้แก่ สภาพแวดล้อม วัฒนธรรมการเรียนการสอน วิธีสอน การออกเสียงภาษาอังกฤษของคนท้องถิ่น และสื่อบันเทิง ส่วนปัจจัยด้านตัวผู้เรียน ได้แก่ แรงจูงใจในการเรียนและความจำเป็นในการดำรงชีวิตให้อยู่รอดนอกจากนี้ยังพบว่าทั้งสองปัจจัยมีความสัมพันธ์กับปัจจัยด้านคุณลักษณะทางจิตคือ เจตคติเชิงบวกต่อภาษาอังกฤษ ความวิตกกังวลในระดับที่ลดลง ความมั่นใจ และความอดสาหัส

คำสำคัญ : กลยุทธ์การเรียนรู้ภาษาอังกฤษ/ นักศึกษาจีน/ ปัจจัย/ ประเทศไทย

### Abstract

The use of English learning strategies changes or develops over time due to several factors. This study aimed at examining the factors that cause changes in the English learning strategy used by Chinese students after they have studied in Thailand. It took the form of an explanatory, sequential, mixed-methods research design having as the subjects 200 Chinese undergraduate students in four private universities in Bangkok. Data were collected using Chinese language questionnaires. Interviews were also conducted to probe and gain insight. Data were analyzed by thematic analysis attempting to derive key words for data categorization. Reliability was ensured by intra-rater reliability ( $r_{xy} = 0.970$ ). The findings revealed five contextual factors and two learner factors. The contextual factors were environment, academic culture, teaching methods, the English pronunciation of local people, and entertainment media. The learner factors involved learning motivation and survival necessity. Then, it was found that the contextual and learner factors related

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to the affective factors which were positive attitudes toward English, lower anxiety, self-confidence, and effort.

**Key words:** English Learning Strategies/ Chinese Students/ Factors/ Thailand

## Introduction

The term 'language learning strategies' (LLSs) is defined in different ways by scholars in the field. Oxford (1990) refers to LLSs as tools for active, self-directed involvement, which is essential for developing communicative competence which is the main goal of an appropriate use of all LLSs. This is supported by Nunan (1995: 168), who views that 'learning strategies are the neural processes which learners employ to learn and use the target language'. O'Malley and Chamot (1990: 1) define learning strategies as 'the special thoughts or behaviors that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information'. Their view has been greatly affected by the cognitive theory.

Although differently defined, LLSs appear to contribute to language learning. They help to improve English learning effectiveness. Research shows that there is a positive and highly significant correlation between students' LLSs use and their ESL proficiency (Dreyer and Oxford, 1996). Moreover, students can be taught or trained in how to effectively use LLSs. However, the uses of English LLSs can change or develop over time due to several factors (Oxford, 1990). Among them are the following:

In regard to *English proficiency level*, it was found that more advanced learners with more learning awareness are likely to use better LLSs to a greater extent than low proficiency ones; namely, reading strategies (Wimolkasem, 2001) and writing strategies (Boonpattanaporn, 2008).

*Motivation* also determines the use of LLSs. Learners with higher motivation employ a significantly greater range of appropriate LLSs than learners with lower motivation. Learners with different motivation for learning a language; namely, integrative or instrumental motivation, will use different LLSs.

*The culture and context* of a learner is partly made up of prior formal and informal educational experience (Kaylani, 1996). The selection and acceptability of LLSs are strongly influenced by the learner's goals, the context of the learning situation, and the cultural values of the learner's society (Chamot, 2004).

In many cultures around the world, the *gender* factor reveals that male and female students report different LLS use, although this is not always the case. Females report more use of LLSs than males do in many different cultures and with many different target languages (Kaylani, 1996; Oxford, 1996a). However, Swatevacharkul (2013a) found that the use of the English LLSs of male and female Chinese students in Thai private universities was not significantly different.

A rationale for learning about the factors causing LLS use which affect learning and teaching effectiveness is clearly provided by Oxford (1996b). She asserts that awareness of the factors that influence language learning strategies or a cross-cultural, multilingual view of language learning strategies can lead to better practice, improved and extended research, and more strategic and skillful student performance. In addition, these ideas can lead to more efficient

and effective instruction by language teachers, which results in a more successful experience for teachers and students. However, little attention has been paid in empirical research to the possible influence of the learning environment on LLS use (Gao, 2003). This led to the objective of this present study.

It should be noted that this paper is part of a research report on an investigation of the English LLS use of Chinese students after they have studied in Thailand and the factors causing changes in that use. Using Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning or SILL, version 7.0 (ESL/EFL) to collect data, the findings revealed that, on average, the Chinese students in Thai private universities *sometimes* use LLSs; however, Compensation Strategies are *usually* used (Swatevacharkul, 2013a). Furthermore, a larger number of students were seen to change their English LLS use after they have studied in Thailand. Speaking and listening skills were reported as the most changed skills. In China, 59% said they had little opportunities to speak English both in and outside the class. In contrast, in Thailand, 87% reported that they tried to find opportunities to speak English in and outside the class. (Swatevacharkul, 2013b). This paper will report on the findings of the factors causing changes in LLS use.

## Research Objective

To identify factors that cause changes in the English LLSs used by Chinese students in private universities in Thailand.

## Research Methodology

### Population and Subjects

Drawn from 1,800 Chinese students studying at 17 private universities in Bangkok using a two-stage random sampling technique

(stage one employed a 'cluster sampling' technique to randomly select four universities, and then stage two utilized individual random sampling), the subjects were 200 Chinese students that concentrated on business-related programs, including international business, marketing, and finance, at four private universities in Bangkok. They took courses in international and Thai programs.

Although varied to a certain extent in terms of their background, these Chinese students came from different provinces; namely, Yunnan, Guilin, Beijing, and Guangxi, and a few other provinces whose names are not quite familiar to Thai people. In regard to their educational background, those in the Thai program completed high school (Grade 12) and studied international business at a university in China for either one or two years, and then they furthered their tertiary study in Thailand in the 1+3 or 2+2 year programs. For those in the international program, they were recruited by a university in Thailand when they were going to complete their schooling in China. They spend four years in the Thai university. Generally speaking, the Chinese students in this present study did not have overseas educational experience before studying in Thailand.

### Research Design

This research project took the form of an explanatory, sequential, mixed-methods research design.

### Research Instruments

A questionnaire in Chinese, consisting of open-response items, was used to collect the data. The subjects were asked whether they thought they had changed their use of English LLSs and to explain the causes or factors for such changes for their individual English skills. In addition, interviews were employed to gain

insight into and illuminate the questionnaire findings.

### Data Collection Procedures

Thai, English or Mandarin was allowed for completing the questionnaire. The questionnaires filled in in Mandarin were translated into Thai by a Chinese translator that was bilingual in Chinese and Thai. All completed questionnaires were finally in English.

### Data Analysis

Thematic analysis which is one type of content analyses was carried out to analyze the

qualitative data. In so doing, a theme or concept was chosen for examination, and the number of its occurrences within the text is recorded. Reliability was ensured by intra-rater reliability ( $r_{xy} = 0.970$ ).

### Findings

There were five and four main factors, except the "others" factor, that emerged from the findings, reported as causing changes of speaking and listening strategy use. The frequency and percentage of each factor are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Factors Causing Changes in Speaking and Listening Strategy Use

Factors: Speaking	Frequency	%	Factors: Listening	Frequency	%
Environment	43	66.1%	Environment	15	53.6
Academic culture	7	10.8%	Teaching methods	5	17.9
Motivation	5	7.7%	Pronunciation of Thais	3	10.7
Survival	3	4.6%	Entertainment media	3	10.7
Instruction methods	2	3.1%	Others	2	7.1
Others	5	7.7%			

## 1. Changes in Speaking Strategy Use

### 1.1 Environment

The most outstanding factor causing changes in speaking strategy use was the changing environment (66.1%). Thailand, a new environment, with opportunities to speak English both in and outside the class, as can be seen in the following statements of the students:

- In China, scores are very important. There's no environment for English speaking. In Thailand, English is used more than in China. Learning in Thailand is better.

- I want to get used to both speaking and the English environment. I want to change my English learning approach.

- We can talk with foreigners. This is an important reason.

The new environment, which offered more opportunities to use English for communication in real life, was seen to give rise to an affective factor which played a major role in changing speaking strategy use.

- My English when I was in China was zero. I didn't get anything from learning English in China. But when I came to Thailand, I dare to speak, more than before.

- I'm not afraid to speak English with my teachers or class mates even though I don't say it correctly.

*- I have opportunities to practice my English, and this makes me feel that English is important.*

*- According to my learning experience, I've done exercises for 10 years, but I can't even say simple sentences. If I don't open my mouth, how can I speak English?*

Clearly noted were some affective factors; namely, self-confidence, low anxiety in speaking English, positive attitudes toward English, perception of English value, and effort to use English to communicate.

### 1.2 Academic Culture

Academic culture was the second factor in priority in terms of causing changes in speaking strategy use (10.8%), and it was strikingly reflected in the use of English as a medium of instruction, which was reported by students in the international program only. English was therefore given a high and important status, especially for those that did not possess Thai literacy.

*- Our university uses English to teach us, and we don't know how to speak Thai, so English is becoming our first language.*

*- English is important as I study in English. Since the very beginning, I had not been familiar with studying in English, but now I have gotten used to it.*

### 1.3 Motivation

The motivation of both integrative and instrumental kinds as the next factor causing changes in speaking strategy use in the new environment in Thailand (7.7%).

*- Because I want to make English like a skill, not only for exam.*

This excerpt shows a strong desire and effort to improve English for effective use. English was no longer considered as important merely for the purpose of passing examinations.

This clearly reflects integrative motivation. However, most comments related to motivation manifested the instrumental motivation type.

*- I want to work in China, so I must study English well. I like international business. I must study hard.*

*- I must be able to communicate with foreigners. I need to get a job.*

It was strongly believed that getting a good job was possible with good English skills, especially communication skills, and this had an influence on their making their best efforts to improve their English, particularly their communication skills.

### 1.4 Survival Necessity

Survival necessity was reported (4.6%) as the Chinese students are currently living in a foreign country; therefore, English was considered to be essential for authentic communication and real use in both academic and real life contexts.

*- We must change. We worry if we speak English and other people don't know. What should we do? We're in the new and different environment. Everyone speaks English in school. If we must know what they're talking about, we need to practice, try to speak English to teachers, class mates, taxi drivers, etc.*

### 1.5 Instruction Methods

Teachers that reflect their teaching philosophy through a communicative approach were seen to contribute to changes in speaking strategy use (3.1%) of their Chinese students.

*- Teachers emphasize communication.*

*- There are a lot of opportunities to practice speaking.*

In conclusion, five major factors causing changes in speaking strategy use were revealed; a new and different environment that increased opportunities to communicate in English, the academic culture which employed English as a

means of instruction, learning motivation, survival in a foreign country, and pedagogical approaches and methods. Next, the factors causing changes in listening strategy use will be described.

## 2. Changes in Listening Strategy Use

### 2.1 Environment

Likewise, the majority (53.6%) reported the environment as the first and foremost factor causing their changes in listening strategy use.

*- I think learning English in Thailand, which is different from the China's environment, makes me change the method.*

*- I need to listen and understand what people are saying, so I need to change my listening strategies.*

### 2.2 Teaching Methods

The teachers and teaching methods were the second contributive factor (17.9%). Students reported that in Thailand, teachers pay attention to every English skill, and importantly, teachers speak English while teaching. This is particularly the case for the international programs.

*- Learning and teaching causes a change.*

*- I listen to the teacher in class.*

### 2.3 English Pronunciation of Local People

The English pronunciation of Thai people which is not familiar to Chinese students was also a factor causing changes in their listening strategy use (10.7%).

*- To be harmonious with the English spoken by Thai people.*

*- To improve my English ability. I study Thai style English: l-ล, r-ร, b-บ, d-ด.*

To elaborate, the interviews showed that these students needed to practice listening in order to get used to the Thai people's English pronunciation so that they could understand what Thai people said in English. The second excerpt

above shows that they exploited their Thai literacy to learn English by remembering the Thai sounds and letters which corresponded to the English sounds and letters.

### 2.4 Entertainment Media

It should be noted that environment in Thailand, which facilitates an opportunity for listening practice to English, is related to entertainment media and technology applications (10.7%).

*- The different English skill should be listening skill. When I was studying in China, I had to find an English textbook with a tape cassette, which I could listen to. I followed the textbook to study English. But nowadays I can practice it (listening) by watching TV or listening to the Internet radio.*

Briefly, the most important factor causing changes in listening strategy use was the environment, which increases opportunities to listen to and speak English. Teaching approaches which emphasize communication in class, the English pronunciation of Thai people, and entertainment media TV and radio or the Internet were the next contributive factors.

In conclusion, five contextual and two learner factors emerged from the findings on both speaking and listening strategy use, following Gao's (2003) factors categorization. The contextual factors were environment, academic culture, instruction or pedagogical methods, the English pronunciation of local people, and entertainment media. The learner factors were motivation and survival necessity in a foreign country.

## Discussion

### 1. Contextual Factors

#### 1.1 Environment

Among the various factors, a change of social environment was the first and ultimate

factor influencing changes in the speaking and listening strategy use of the Chinese students. Even though China and Thailand are EFL countries, they are different in terms of the environment that provides an opportunity for language production. Having a lot of tourists, foreigners, and international business firms, Thailand possesses an international image and social environment which provides a higher degree of exposure to English than China does.

At the international university and programs where English is widely used, Chinese students immerse in a new and different environment. As such, English exposure provides them with a chance to use English for communication. As such, they learn how to develop their English communicative competence, and learning strategies are part of such development. Therefore, to be successful in their communication they need tools or learning strategies, and appropriate learning strategies need to be developed to cope with the environmental requirements. In this case, speaking and listening strategies were therefore reported as being the most changed. This is also the reason why in Thailand Chinese students use compensation strategies the most (Swatevacharkul, 2013a). According to Oxford (1990), compensation strategies allow for the successful use of the language, even if the person lacks full understanding in language knowledge.

### 1.2 Academic Culture

Use of English as a medium of instruction is considered as a unique academic culture for international programs. With this type of academic culture, English plays a very vital role in and outside the class. Consequently, they need to adjust their learning strategy use in

order to deal with the learning requirements of the new context.

### 1.3 Teaching Methods

It is clear from the results that the teaching methodologies for English subjects in China and Thailand are relatively different. In China every English skill is focused on, except speaking and listening. In Thailand, more emphasis is placed on teaching English for communication. Students are given opportunities to practice speaking in class, as per the excerpt: In China, the most different thing when compared to Thailand is speaking. In China most students speak English for a very little time. Most time is for writing. A little time we are speaking. This encourages the social interaction that will increase learning motivation. Compensation strategies were therefore reported as the most used group of learning strategies in terms of coping with the new teaching methodologies the Chinese students encounter in Thailand.

### 1.4 English Pronunciation of Local People

The English pronunciation of Thai people, which the Chinese students are not familiar with, is also a factor causing a change in their listening strategy use. They need to understand what Thai people are saying so that they can interact appropriately. This is the reason why most of the Chinese students tried to practice listening in order to be familiar with the English spoken by Thai people. Interestingly, in the case of Chinese students that have Thai language knowledge, a unique strategy to cope with the English pronunciation of Thais is developed: making use of their Thai literacy for their English learning by transferring the language skills developed from L2 to L3. Although it is unclear whether English is their second or third language, it is evident that there

is a transfer of literacy skills developed in L2 to L3. Chinese students link the corresponding English and Thai sounds to facilitate intelligibility and to be harmonious with the English spoken by Thais during a conversation.

### **1.5 Entertainment Media**

Entertainment media such as TV, movies, songs, radio, or the Internet radio are also factors that cause changes in the listening strategy use of Chinese students living in Thailand. In China, the main listening practice is with course cassette tapes or CDs; however, in Thailand, Chinese students are likely to practice their listening skills with a variety of entertainment sources. Many Chinese students in this study came from small counties in China, where entertainment media may not be widely accessible when compared to Bangkok, the capital of Thailand. This provides them with opportunities to practice their listening skills or to develop their English from social activities.

## **2. Learner Factors**

### **2.1 Motivation**

Motivation is the first learner factor that can cause a change in speaking strategy selection. Integrative and instrumental motivation was noted from the findings, although the instrumental motivation was more obviously noted. Many Chinese students have a strong desire to improve their English ability in order to get a good job when they complete their course in Thailand and return to China. The interviews showed that unemployment in China is rather high, and the job market is consequently highly competitive. In addition, course requirements in particular for the international program students are a strong drive for these students to improve their English ability so that they can pass the course and obtain good grades, which will enhance opportunities to get a good job.

In regard to integrative motivation, some students no longer want to learn English merely to pass exams, which is the strong case in China. This is reflected in their level of awareness of using English for communication, which has possibly emerged from the contextual factors that have a casual influence on their motivation to learn English and especially to use it for communication. Therefore, motivation is an important cause of the change in the speaking strategy use of Chinese students in Thailand.

### **2.2 Survival Necessity**

Living in a foreign country with a new and different environment and academic culture, Chinese students unavoidably need to use English for real communication, both inside and outside the class, and with people outside the academic area, such as taxi drivers, food or clothes sellers. Real conversational situations, consequently, force them to adopt more strategies for successful communication and to survive.

To conclude, the five contextual factors environment, academic culture, teaching methods, the English pronunciation of local people, and entertainment media, and the two learner factors negative and instrumental motivation and survival necessity, can be seen to make a great contribution to changes in the speaking and listening strategy use of the Chinese students in Thailand. Exploring their relationships, it was found that the contextual factors which provide opportunities for language production in real conversational situations help increase their motivation to master English. Additionally, survival in a new and different environment is essential. The contextual factors, therefore, are associated with the learner factors, and they give rise to affective factors that can cause changes in LLS use. The next part will discuss the affective factors.

### 3. Affective Factors

There are four affective factors that are emerged from the contextual and learner factors, and that have relationships with the first two factors. These affective factors are positive attitudes toward English, lower anxiety, self-confidence, and effort.

#### 3.1 Positive Attitudes toward English

The contextual factors that increase exposures and opportunities to speak English both in and outside the classroom help the Chinese students develop positive attitudes toward English. They feel that English is important or essential, and they feel good about using English for real communication. Their positive attitudes also help reduce their anxiety when they have to converse in English, which they were not adequately trained for in China.

#### 3.2 Lower Anxiety

Chinese students do not feel that it is strange to speak English in a foreign country, as it is fundamentally necessary to use English for communication, and this definitely lowers their anxiety in speaking English. The necessity to use English for daily communication and survival makes them feel that making mistakes in

speaking English is a normal phenomenon, and that it is acceptable.

#### 3.3 Self-Confidence

Self-confidence is reflected in the feeling of daring to speak English even if Chinese students still make some mistakes. The new and different environment in Thailand makes them dare to speak, and this helps increase their confidence in using the target language for communication.

#### 3.4 Effort

The effort of the Chinese students to learn and improve their English was noted from the findings. Most students mentioned that they needed to practice speaking and listening, and they believed practice to be the best and most effective way to develop their English competence. This clearly shows their intention and effort to improve their English.

In conclusion, the findings revealed that contextual and learner factors cause changes in the LLS use of Chinese students in Thailand. However, these two types of factors also lead to affective factors, which also make a contribution to such changes. Therefore, there are relationships among these three factors, as displayed in Figure 1.

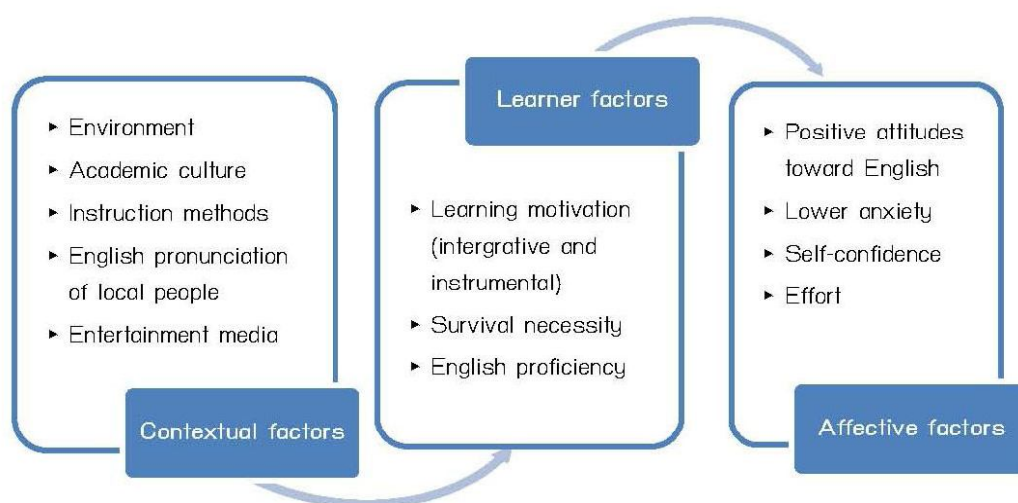


Figure 1: Relationships among the Factors Causing Changes in English LLS Use

## Recommendations

1. The implication lies on the fact that teachers and their teaching methodologies can cause changes in LLS use; therefore, this raises the awareness of the teachers of English so that they can help their students use a wider range of learning strategies. Explicit learning strategy teaching is, therefore, suggested so that students can be aware of the learning strategies that they should use and use them on a regular basis.

2. In addition, an integration of entertainment media, such as TV and radio, into an English course is recommended since it makes listening and speaking skills practice fun and enjoyable.

Students may be assigned to perform independent learning outside the class by exploiting these media; in particular, the Internet, which is easily accessible in Thailand, is appropriate for online lessons. Learner autonomy can be enhanced, and English proficiency can be improved, as a result.

3. In terms of research, a longitudinal comparative study on a range of LLS use when Chinese students just arrive in Thailand and after they finish their study is suggested in order to confirm positive effects of the factors influencing the change in LLS use of the Chinese students, as being revealed by this present study.

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