Research on Indonesian Breakthrough Level Students’ Oral Chinese Learning Strategies

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to analyze the learning strategies used by Indonesian breakthrough level students (CEFR A1) in attempt to master oral Chinese. The collected data are the answers made by students of Mandarin Language Department UNJ who attend Conversation I course (CEFR A1/breakthrough) on questionnaire given. The questionnaire is based on Oxford’s (2000) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) as well as is combined with Li Jiang (2006)’s SILL Oral Chinese. The research results can be used to develop the teaching techniques which stimulate students to use the most useful strategies to master oral Chinese.

Keywords: oral Chinese, learning strategies, Indonesian students

1. Introduction

The study of Second Language Learning Strategies so far, generally focuses on learning English as a second language. The study about Chinese as a Second Language is not widely practiced, especially study about oral Chinese. Nowadays, considering the increasing number of students and speaking skills become a necessity, the study on oral Chinese Learning Strategies is important to look forward to.

The need for Mandarin mastery in Indonesia is currently higher, teaching Chinese as a second language slowly began to be in demand and developed in many educational institutions. In State University of Jakarta alone, Chinese language was a cross-faculty elective course for years. Now it has become an educational department focus on producing Chinese teachers, with a total of over 100 students enrolled. Due to the increasing need for mastery of Mandarin, the studies about Chinese learning strategies are urgently needed.

The most interesting learning strategy to look at is when it first comes into contacting with Chinese, which is when students are still at CEFR A1/breakthrough level. Followings are the characteristics of Indonesian students in learning Mandarin:

A. Breakthrough level students who become the research object, begin learning Chinese
in a non-Chinese speaker environment. Even the Chinese descendants in Indonesia are no longer able to speak and use Chinese language.

B. Chinese is a foreign language learned after English, students mostly learn Chinese by the time they enter Chinese study program.

C. A small number of students who have studied Chinese before, only mastered how to write Han characters and have not been able to communicate actively.

D. According to Wijayanti (2011), oral Chinese is the most popular language skills to master among Indonesian students. They hope to be able to master oral Chinese in the shortest possible time.

E. Indonesian students find beside Han character, pronunciation especially tone is considered to be the hardest part. Indonesian write in Latin letters and speaking with a non-tonal language.

Although pronunciation is considered hard, the ultimate goal is to communicate and oral language is more than just the pronunciation of sounds or words (Tarigan, 1981:3-4). Oral language is a tool for communicating compiled idea which developed in accordance with the needs of the listener. According to Chen (2005:132), the general requirement of the initial stage of oral Chinese is that student has the basic ability of imitation and use of the sounds, rhymes, tones, light accents, tones of speech, etc., and can use the correct grammar to conduct simple questions and answers with appropriate words. To be more specific, students are required to read the text in the correct pronunciation and intonation at a speed of not less than 120 words per minute, to conduct simple quizzes, conversations and statements on simple and familiar daily life and learning topics with low speaking speed 100 words per minute.

To conduct conversations and statements on learning topics are not simple because students are in non-Chinese speaker environment. Wu (2008) stated that, in the context of Chinese as a second language (CSL), learners can not “touch” Chinese in the “ocean” of the target language as they did in the CSL environment, because there is not much chance of getting in touch with native speakers.

Research on second language learning strategies began to attract attention in the 70s. Some experts discuss the second language learning strategies such as Stern, Mayer, O'Malley, Chamot, Oxford, Cohen and others. According to Stern (1983), second language learning strategies can be understood as ways of learning that are used thoroughly by language learners. Mayer (1986) and Chamot (1987) add the previous exposure by stating that the learning methods used by learners are helping them to improve the mastery of the foreign language they studied. Ellis (1994) then summarizes several different views about
the second language learning strategy, namely: (a) Learning strategy is believed to be an invisible external activity; (b) Learning strategy is a certain skill; (c) Learning strategies are understood as a conscious behavior; (d) Learning strategies focus on the usefulness.

Second language learning strategies in this paper refer to methods, behaviors or activities undertaken by the learners, whether it is consciously or unconsciously, used to effectively obtain better learning outcomes. In reality, the use of a certain strategy is not necessarily influential to learning outcomes.

O’Malley and Chamot divide learning strategies into 3 types: cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, and socio/affective strategies. Meanwhile Oxford divides into 6 types: memory strategies, cognitive strategies, compensation strategies, metacognitive strategies, affective strategies and social strategies. In this study, the types of learning strategies are based on Oxford. The details about system of language learning strategies presented by Oxford as follows:

Table 1. The System of Language Learning Strategies (Oxford, 1990:38,136)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning strategies</th>
<th>Direct strategies</th>
<th>Indirect strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Memory strategies</td>
<td>Metacognitive strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cognitive strategies</td>
<td>Affective strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Compensation strategies</td>
<td>Social strategies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in the chart, the six types of language learning strategies can be described into:

A. Memory strategies:
   (a) Creating mental linkages
   (b) Applying images and sounds
   (c) Reviewing well
   (d) Employing action

B. Cognitive strategies:
   (a) Practicing
   (b) Receiving and sending messages
   (c) Analyzing and reasoning
   (d) Creating structure for input and output

C. Compensation strategies:
   (a) Guessing intelligently
   (b) Overcoming limitations in speaking and writing

D. Metacognitive strategies:
The purpose of this study is to analyze the learning strategies used by Indonesian breakthrough level students in attempt to master oral Chinese. Furthermore, this study classifies learners’ learning strategies into 6 types and does not consider whether the strategy is either direct strategies or indirect strategies.

According to Tan (2017: 388), the teaching of foreign languages at the university level should emphasize the liveliness of language use and self-directed skills of learners, the learning should be based on student centered learning. Meanwhile Rosario stated in (Li and Zhang, 2017: 458), self-directed learning is the main way to cultivate the spirit of free exploration, which can play a role in mobilizing students’ learning motivation and learning potential.

Previous research about Oral Chinese Learning Strategies that have been conducted is a research from Ye Huiheng. Things that are different from this research: Ye’s objects of research are intermediate level foreign students coming from various countries, that learning Chinese in a Chinese speaker environment. Ye (2015:24) found, previous research on Chinese oral Chinese learning strategies by Li Jiang (2007), Wu Yongyi (2007), Wang Fei (2012) has the following results: (1) Social strategies are the most widely used strategies; (2) Affective strategies are the least used strategies; (3) Compensation strategies are often used in target language environments, while very rarely used in CFL environment.

Ehrman mentioned, the use of learning strategies has a significant impact on the learning outcomes, learning strategy training (especially for beginners) is one of important parts of language teaching (in Liu Songhao, 2007:208). Strategy training needs to include several strategies:

(a) Centering your learning
(b) Arranging and planning your learning
(c) Evaluating your learning

E. Affective strategies:
(a) Lowering your anxiety
(b) Encouraging yourself
(c) Taking your emotional temperature

F. Social strategies:
(a) Asking questions
(b) Cooperating with others
(c) Empathizing with others
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aspects that describe when a strategy is useful, how to use it, how to evaluate its effectiveness, and how to implement this strategy to related tasks and environments. If strategy training can be combined with daily teaching, it works best.

The above explanation is the underlying purpose of this study. Moreover, research on Indonesian students’ learning strategies in oral Chinese is expected to give inputs to Chinese teachers in Indonesia on how to give a more student-centered learning, improve teaching techniques which can make student practice a self-directed language learning, and in the end providing input for the development of Chinese teaching materials.

2. Methods

2.1 Methods and instruments

Based on previous study by Ye, the foreign students who learn Chinese in China (Chinese speaker environment) are often use social strategies, compensation strategies, then cognitive strategies, meta-cognitive strategies, memory strategies, and they seldom use affective strategies. This study uses quantitative research methods with instruments in the forms of questionnaires and interviews, to investigate whether students who are in a non-Chinese speaker environment will use different strategies in Oral Chinese learning.

The questionnaire bases on Oxford’s (2000) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) combined with Li Jiang (2006)’s SILL Oral Chinese. The learning strategy tables used in most of the previous studies are based on the learning strategy scales designed by Oxford, but due to Chinese has a certain characteristic that are not all mentioned in SILL, therefore, researchers in the field of Chinese as a foreign language teaching in China have designed some experience scales based on SILL. In the field of Oral Chinese strategies, the SILL Oral Chinese questionnaire was made by Li Jiang.

Questionnaire consists of 2 parts. The first part contains the SILL table. A total of 46 statements cover 6 types of learning strategies. Number 1 to 11 covers metacognitive strategy, 12 to 23 covers cognitive strategy, 24 to 30 covers memory strategy, 31 to 36 covers social strategy, 37 to 41 covers compensation strategy, and 42 to 46 covers affective strategy. The second part contains 10 statements to analyze the correlation between students’ oral Chinese learning strategies and oral Chinese skill development.

The range of values using the Likert scale, with 1 = never, 2 = almost never, 3 = sometimes do, 4 = generally do, 5 = always. The use of Likert scale is appropriate in this case because it is a tool for measuring data with questions containing tiered options. Data are measured per section, by every summarized statement in its section, and are divided by total of statement to provide an average for each section. There are 6 sections for 6 types of language learning strategies. The average for each section of the SILL between 1.0 and 5.0.

The score on each statement multiplied by Likert scale, summarized and then averaged
based on the type of learning strategy. From the results of the score, we will get the average score.

The average score is interpreted based on Oxford (1990:291) which, an average of 4.5-5 can be interpreted as frequently used learning strategies; 3.5-4.4 as commonly used learning strategies; 2.5-3.4 as learning strategies that are sometimes used; 1.5-2.4 as learning strategies that not often used.

2.2 Participants

Conversation I course teaches Mandarin speaking skills with tones and correct pronunciation. This course aims to enable students to submit and receive information in the form of simple dialogues covering daily life with the mastery of vocabulary and simple sentence pattern level HSK level 1 (CEFR A1).

The data in this study are the answers made by students of Mandarin Language Education Department State University of Jakarta, who attend Conversation I course (CEFR A1/ breakthrough), on questionnaire given and interviews.

Conversation I course consists of 45 students. This course is to make the conversation practice more effective, and the students of Conversation I course are divided into 3 classes. Of all students, there are only about 5 people who have studied Chinese language before. Conversation I course was taught by 2 lecturers, 1 native speaker is paired with 1 local lecturer. There are two meetings in a week, one meeting taught by native speaker, while the other meeting taught by local lecturer.

3. Results and discussion

Wu (2008) states, Italian native language Chinese learners used compensation strategy combined with social strategy to overcome their limitations in Chinese language knowledge and Chinese language oral skills. Meanwhile, Li’s (2011) research on Japanese students’ oral Chinese shows, students often receive influence from their mother tongue. It also includes the similarity of Han character, which Japanese students see and directly connect with its own language. Accordingly, oral Chinese learning strategy for Japanese students is quite different, it must go through the pinyin approach.

A previous study conducted by Ye and Tan (2015) which targeted English native language Chinese learners analyzed the strategies into exploratory factor analysis and item analysis, then concluded: (1) Oral Chinese acquisition strategy comprises three dimensions: mother tongue thinking, semantic interpretation and multi-word chunking; (2) Oral expression strategy includes 4 dimensions: planning monitoring, expression reflection, social communication and resource utilization.

Above has explained about the characteristic of Indonesian students in learning Chinese. Viewed from the use of the mother tongue, the Indonesian language as well as English uses
Latin writing and it is not a tonal language. However, Sutami (2012) stated because the lack of textbooks, teaching Chinese in Indonesia emphasizes in writing skills. This fact is contrary to the desire of students to be able to master oral Chinese in short time. This paper tries to find out what strategies students use in learning oral Chinese.

3.1 The results on strategy inventory for language learning

The collected and analyzed data, can be described as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compensation Strategies</td>
<td>3.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metacognitive Strategies</td>
<td>3.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Strategies</td>
<td>3.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory Strategies</td>
<td>3.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective Strategies</td>
<td>3.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Strategies</td>
<td>2.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Average</strong></td>
<td>3.40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table shows the overall average is in the range 2.5-3.4. Based on Oxford (1990), 2.5-3.4 considered as learning strategies that are sometimes used, this shows that Indonesian students in using learning strategies are at the mid-level.

The above table also shows that compensation strategies are the most frequently used on oral Chinese learning strategies, meaning Indonesian students already mastered a certain method of learning oral Chinese. Students already see one’s way to overcoming their limitations in speaking, by getting help from others, avoiding communication partially or totally. If students can not express something or some words correctly, then they will ask someone else to tell them how to express.

The use of particular learning strategies has an effect on learning outcomes. In this case, students who have studied Chinese have become acquainted about this language, so it is possible they already have that particular strategy by knowing it is more effective to handle oral Chinese.

Metacognitive strategies and cognitive strategies (in average between 3.5-4.4) are the commonly used learning strategies, meaning after the previous oral Chinese learning, Indonesian students has mastered a certain method, but some methods are still inadequate. Students still have problems in centering their learning (overviewing and linking with known material, delaying speech production to focus on listening) arranging, planning and evaluating their learning. They have not set up a regular schedule to learn oral Chinese, and they have not yet found a suitable environment for practicing oral Chinese. Students also
having problems in formally practicing with sounds, practicing naturalistically, analyzing contrastively across languages, using resources for receiving and sending messages. In terms of producing oral Chinese, students stay on their comfort zone, for example almost never use Chinese when starting a conversation with other people, and they prefer using familiar words in drawing up a new sentence. They also disinterested in looking for the characteristic of Chinese pronunciation.

Memory strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies (in average between 2.5-3.4) are the sometimes used learning strategies, meaning Indonesian students when learning oral Chinese need some efforts to deal with grouping, using mental images or physical response to memorize, representing sounds in memory. Students generally like to read loud the new vocabulary in order to remember it, and would like to say it with other related vocabulary. Students also need efforts to take emotional temperature by writing a language learning diary and to encourage themselves by making positive statements. Indonesian students when learning oral Chinese are having less communication with proficient users of Chinese language, they also having problems in asking questions (for clarification or correction) and developing cultural understanding. Students do not have a Chinese speaking partner to learn, review or share information. They rarely ask help from Chinese speakers, and not willing to use oral Chinese to ask.

Based on the data obtained, it can be concluded that Indonesian breakthrough level students using compensation strategies. When dealing with limitations in oral Chinese, students still enable to use it for either comprehension or production. The breakthrough students say, they are generally almost never making up new words/coining words. They prefer to ask other person about the the desired idea, or either trying to avoid the certain theme of conversation by choosing a certain theme which consists of vocabulary and grammar they have mastered enough. These compensation strategies help students to more focus in target language, about how to comprehend and to produce utterances. Therefore, its use can be understood as something positive. Oxford mentioned, students skilled in compensation strategies sometimes communicate better than other students who are more familiar with target language words and grammatical structures (Oxford, 1990:49).

Social strategies are the least used strategies by Indonesian breakthrough-level students in oral Chinese. This reality is contrary to the importance of social strategies in language learning. Tao (2009) mentioned, the social basis of language production is the communicative function of language. Referring to the above explanation, language is a form of communication and can not be separated from social life. To be able to communicate, we always need another person. Hence, social strategies are very important.

In the context of Chinese as a foreign language, Chinese native speaker teacher is not only a trainer nor consultant of information, but also a potential communicator for students.
Due to limited course time, teachers often have little contact with students after class. Though there are native speakers, Indonesian students still mainly learn Chinese through the classroom, in Chinese as a second language environment. Students then prefer not to ask or interact with the native speaker teacher outside the classroom, even if they have any questions.

Based on students’ behavior towards oral Chinese, it is a must to have Chinese as a classroom teaching language. Teachers should use Chinese for teaching, asking questions, and more over communicating with students. By doing so, Indonesian breakthrough students who are more comfortable learning oral Chinese in classroom, will have conversation practice as though they were in the natural environment. Other than that, the classroom must have limited students, so that the compensation strategies and social strategies (that need to be obtained) will jointly form an interactive way of study.

3.2 The results of correlation analysis
The correlation between oral Chinese learning strategies and oral Chinese development can be viewed in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language Learning Strategies and Oral Chinese Development</th>
<th>Section Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affective Strategies</td>
<td>4.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compensation Strategies</td>
<td>3.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory Strategies</td>
<td>3.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metacognitive Strategies</td>
<td>3.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Strategies</td>
<td>3.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Strategies</td>
<td>3.59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The research data shows that affective strategies are considered as the most successful strategies. According to Oxford, good language learners are often those who know how to control their emotions and attitudes. Feelings, emotions, attitudes, motivation, self-esteem and so on are in the affective domain.

Indonesian students believe, giving spirit to oneself can improve their oral Chinese. With positive feelings, oral Chinese language learning can be more enjoyable and effective.

Compensation strategies, memory strategies and metacognitive strategies scored closely. Students have a tendency to avoid certain vocabulary or material they have not master, they assume using vocabularies that they already known of will helping them sound more fluent in oral Chinese. In addition, they consider reviewing the contents of the Conversation class course and remembering vocabularies can help improve their oral Chinese level.

Social strategies and cognitive strategies scored lowest. According to students, the intensity of meeting and communicating with partners in oral Chinese, trying to understand
Chinese culture has little to do with increasing their oral Chinese speaking level. Likewise with the practicing Chinese conversation, pronouncing tones of Chinese and using Chinese dictionaries.

4. Conclusion

![Figure 1. Frequently Used Language Strategies and Students Acknowledge on Oral Chinese Development](image)

Based on given questionnaire and interviews, it can be concluded that among 6 types of language strategies, Indonesian breakthrough-level students using compensation strategies in studying oral Chinese, while social strategies are the least used strategies. This study also shows that social strategies and cognitive strategies are considered as the less helpful strategies to improve oral Chinese. This reality is contrary to the importance of social strategies in language learning. The research data show that affective strategies are considered as the most successful strategies by students, and there are correlations between students' learning strategies and their oral Chinese development.

This study reveals Indonesian breakthrough-level students’ language learning behavior in terms of oral Chinese learning strategies. Taking into consideration the findings in this study, we suggest that students need to be informed and trained about language strategies, when a certain strategy is useful, how to use it and how to evaluate its effectiveness.

Learning strategies are closely related to learning motivation. Having strong learning motivation can encourage students to continually master learning strategies, learning strategies can also bring students to make self-improvement. Therefore, strengthen the motivation to learn, train learning strategies, are useful for improving the students’ ability
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in self-directed language learning. Teachers have a significant role in building students’ learning strategy and motivation. As mentioned earlier, motivation is part of affective domain. Teachers can influence the whole learning atmosphere in classroom. In oral Chinese context, a teacher can provide more naturalistic communication, using laughter to lowering students’ anxiety, making positive statements, rewarding students’ achievement, so that students will gain more self-esteem. With good self-esteem, students will have strong motivation and positive attitudes to make them keep on trying to learn oral Chinese.

Language learning strategies will help learners to be more active self-directed in communication, which leads to realistic interaction among learners using meaningful language, and in the end develop the communicative competence.

References