Shallow Theory of English Learning Strategies

and Autonomous Learning

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When university students are required to acquire an even higher English language ability, it is evident that a compound teaching mode of teacher-facilitated, student-centred classroom work combined with computer-assisted spare-time autonomous learning will replace the traditional single and teacher-centred instruction. On the basis of defining the characteristics of English learning strategies on autonomous learning, this paper is to verify through an empirical research the impact of English language learning strategies on autonomous learning. Accordingly, students are expected to rely on the teaching ability of learning strategies for individualized and task-oriented learning strategies so that eventually effective autonomous learning is generated.

Keywords: autonomous learning, English learning strategies, interactive learning, cross-cultural communicative ability

Introduction

Existing evidence suggests that foreign language learning will be affected by gender, age, personality, learning environment, linguistics, learning attitude, motivation, emotional factors, cognitive style and learning strategy, and many other factors. Besides above restricted factors which will affect autonomous learning by all more or less, the consciousness of learning mainly depends on learners' language learning motivation and learning strategies.

English Learning Strategies

Definition of Learning Strategies

Since the 1970s, many language researchers both at home and abroad explain the connotation of learning strategy from different angles, such as the information processing theory, the relationship between strategy and language material, the purpose of the strategy and tactics, and the relationship between the learning processes (Andrew, 2000). Although the definition of learning strategy is not unified, the following definition of learning strategy method basically has no objection: Learning strategies are method and means taken in order to improve the level of foreign language learners, throughout the course of language learning and language use.

Driven by a problem, learning strategies are in the service of solving the problem of language activity; learning strategies have the characteristics of flexibility and diversity, and can be affected by many factors;

learning strategies can be either dominant external behavior, or a recessive psychological activity; learning strategies can be training and learning.

Classification of Learning Strategies

At present, the learning strategy mainly has four kinds of classification methods: Based on the cognitive theory framework and information processing theory of Anderson (1998), the learning strategy is classified into met cognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, and social/effective strategies. Cohen (1998) divided language learning strategies into learning strategies and tactics on the basis of the purpose of using strategies. Ox-ford (1990) thought language learning are indirect and direct strategies based on the relationship between learning strategies and language materials. WEN Qiu-fang (1993) in China both attached the relationship between learning strategy and learning process, and emphasized that learning strategies should be divided into management strategies and language learning strategies on the basis of the relationship between learning strategies and learning materials. Among them, the classification method of WEN Qiu-fang is the product of referring, summarizing, and supplying; it adds some Chinese characteristics, and has a great guiding significance for Chinese students' learning strategies under Chinese's environment (Brown, 2002).

Significance of Learning Strategies

WEN qiu-fang (1993) thought differences in English learning strategy have a decisive impact on performance when other things are equal. She also pointed out that any properly learning strategies are more likely to make the learners learning success. MacIntyre and Noels (1996) thought that learning strategy is helpful in understanding the process of learning. At the same time, learning strategy can also reduce confusion and anxiety for scholars, which will keep their learning enthusiasm and motivation. Besides, they also thought learning strategy will improve students' learning attitude, and enhance their learning motivation. In some people's view, met cognitive strategy will make learners get a comprehensive understanding of the learning process, have the ability of foreseeing and monitoring error, and eventually complete the reflection, evaluation, and construction of knowledge. Language starts from and meets the needs of society, so language learning should also be in the real society, and such learners will realize information exchange in communication and interaction. There is not only the phenomenon of information unequal, but also the lack of the language form when using the target language to express some content for foreign language learners. At this point, the communicator can complement each other with the aid of social communication strategy, improve their language form and content, and complete the communicative tasks by circuitous type when interlingua is still not perfect.

Autonomous Learning

Definition of Autonomous Learning

For the definition of autonomous learning, linguists and education experts always failed to reach a consensus. But this does not mean chaos, just shows the richness and personalization of autonomous learning research. Such differences are not bad, but good; it shows the wide attention of the importance of independent learning itself, and indicates that the research and results in the future will be more comprehensive. Synthesized, combined with the particularity of foreign language learning, foreign language autonomous learning can be

summarized as: the results of the unifying of external environment and internal environment harmonious. External environment consists of teachers, teaching facilities, and corpora; it has a promoting effect on internal environment, and it is the precondition to realize autonomous learning and material basis. Internal environment contains the learners' attitude and ability (Wennden, 1992, pp. 27, 432-441, 121, 163).

Characteristics of Autonomous Learning

College English autonomous learning has the following characteristics:

(1) The ability of using learning strategies effectively. Research shows that in the process of college English learning, students have unfamiliar feeling naturally and fuzzy understanding in final results, which makes the activation and train of the ability of college English learning strategy important particularly. Their first need is self-management ability, namely, "a high degree of self-discipline, enough self-organizing ability and rigorous planning", so having and effectively using met cognitive strategy is the key for them to achieve learner autonomy. At the same time, it is the first link to cultivate students' autonomous learning ability of English.

(2) The external environment is very important. First of all, in the college English autonomous learning, teachers must take the role of "organizer", "the instructor", and "helper" advocated by constructivism learning. Autonomy does not necessarily mean full independence. Secondly, modern teaching facilities are another important factor to realize the effective autonomous learning. A blackboard and a piece of chalk in the traditional single teaching mode do no good to develop cross-cultural communication ability of studying English, and cannot finish the request on time. And multimedia technology introduced to campus makes it possible to learn English autonomous learning in the technical environment. Finally, the diversification and three-dimensional corpus are the direct content sources for students to learn the target language culture, and is also the centre of autonomous learning for many students (Dornyei & Csizer, 1998, pp. 203-29).

(3) The learning process of interaction. Language communication is interactive, both interpersonal interaction and man-machine interaction. Therefore, autonomous learning in college English is not a simple personal learning for students; it must be born in the interaction between students and others. Autonomous learners should not only have an independent spirit, but also have the spirit of cooperation, deepen the understanding of their selves in the cooperation, and solve their own problems (Guay, Ratelle, & Channel, 2008, pp. 233-240).

Learning Strategies and Autonomous Learning of New Students

In this paper, we make a research on English learning strategies and autonomous learning making 80 freshmen in non-English major of grade 2013 as the research object. These new students are not strangers for learning strategies and autonomous learning. It can be found in the questionnaire that, students' previous learning experience and strategies of natural acquisition tend to be at work in "scene strategy" and "interactive learning". There are more than 80% freshmen being using and planning to use met cognitive strategy, only the "adjust" indicators have not reached 80%, which shows that the self-management for freshmen in autonomous learning already has a certain foundation, as long as being provided opportunities, they must be able to successfully do a good job in autonomous learning. It also reminds us to pay attention to some links, such as "self-assessment" and "self-adjustment". There is a classmate who said in an interview:

> I was able to set learning goals, also can separate the long-term and short-term planning, optionally using some basic

> learning strategies, and consciously to monitor their own learning process, but I don't know how to evaluate the effectiveness of the learning process and result of significant, the occurrence of unexpected situation and tend not to adjust itself when setbacks. (personal communication, September 21, 2005)

Freshmen have basic cognitive strategy awareness; they call it "learning method". The use of "memory strategy", "lexical grammar input", "translation strategy", and "recitation strategy" is respectively l00%, 100%, 94.5%, and 91%. But the information also shows that, most of the methods of freshmen's cognitive strategies are the most basic, traditional, and even may be time-consuming, which almost can only make students learn the target language in grammar translation. The ignorance rate of freshmen in more advanced and interactive learning strategies is quite high, which shows the senior learning strategies need activating and training, also suggests the guidance of middle school English teachers in the usual teaching method. There is a classmate who said:

> I learned from others how to learn English better, but my time is limited, and can only be centred on teachers and teaching materials, memorize the words and contents teacher said, as well as the follow final exam and quiz. (Spratt & Chan, 1979/1981, pp. 245-266)

Freshmen's English learning motivation is still dominated by instrumental; doing hard in learning English just for passing the exam is as many as 98%. The test drive not only determines the learning content and learning style, and also leads the student to ignore or be too busy to engage in independent learning. Learning the use of good foreign language environment in a real language context by understanding the target language culture is far from forming. Therefore, the understanding of the concept and significance of autonomous learning in freshmen is very shallow. At the same time, they have no ability to determine language requirements and choose corpora; teachers and textbooks are their most dependent external environment.

In addition, the study also found that variables related to autonomous learning have also changed when learning strategies change. Students must understand that the college English autonomous learning is not studying by themselves, they must cultivate communicative competence in the interaction of real situations. Learning motivation by instrumental to synthesizing type enhances the sustainability of English autonomous learning. With the students' ability in learning language being stronger, the possibility of autonomous learning will further increase. The improvement of the ability of meta-cognitive strategy in autonomous learning makes students learn self-management. At the same time, students will also learn to arrange specific learning tasks in the frame of the macro process, and achieve the goal of autonomous learning in the process of setting goals, making plans, monitoring and evaluating gain and loss. Learning to use cognitive strategies properly when implementing specific learning tasks will enrich the ways of autonomous learning, at the same time, it will further strengthen the confidence of the students' in autonomous learning. Promoting and realizing the college English autonomous learning by the media strategy is a new important means in the environment of new technology. To make the autonomous learning not restricted by the space-time, students should use the Internet and campus online to embody the corpus of real context, and use the activity and learning system specifically for autonomous learning. In fact, the improvement of college English autonomous learning ability should mainly express for: (1) timely and flexible use of various positive interactive communicative learning strategies, (2) reducing the dependence on teachers, and (3) doing more self-service learning by means of media resources and teaching materials. A science boy in the university entrance exam said:

> After trying to use learning strategies, I consolidate the classroom learning experience, learn more new knowledge, and I learned how to do autonomous learning. Besides, I can solve many problems without the teacher's help, and I have been able to determine what to learn and how to learn. (personal communication, December, 2013)

Conclusion

Although learning strategy is only a part of the autonomous learning ability, the formation of the ability of learning strategy makes it possible to autonomous learning. The consciousness of using learning strategies is stronger, the process of autonomous learning will be more complete, and the effect will be better. There is no doubt that learning strategy has a significant effect on autonomous learning, but it is not simple, its mature speed and quality will be effected by traditional education, examination system, and the external environment of independent study. At the same time, we must realize that learning strategy is a process, not an end, and cultivating autonomous learning ability is the final purpose, so that learning strategy training in the final analysis is to internalize the independent learning ability. In the state of improving the ability of autonomous learning, in addition to using the methods above, we also can try to put autonomous learning contents into regular examination or four, six levels of tests, play the drive function of test, and guide the autonomous learning ability of students. All in all, the successful implementation of "curriculum requirements" in new college English needs the support of students' autonomous learning ability, and the general language education workers, especially the college English teachers, need to find ways to create and provide a platform for students to learn theory and practice, and try their best to bring up a lifelong learner.

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