

Learning Styles of Chinese Students in Universities of Foreign Languages in Myanmar

Wai Hnin Ei ^{1*} 

¹*English Department, Yangon University of Foreign Languages, Myanmar*

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Abstract

If one has never lived in another culture, they are oblivious of the significant distinctions that exist and effect every aspect of life. Foreign language teachers from University of Foreign Languages find many Chinese students well-travelled to Myanmar for their Myanmar language studies. The students bring with them the beliefs and expectations they have formed from their own life experiences. They also bring their language and their beliefs about education based on their native culture. The objective of this study was to investigate the learning styles of Chinese students in universities of foreign languages in Myanmar. This study includes a discussion of East Asian learning styles and some prescriptions concerning their practice. According to the data, it has been found that Chinese students moderately follow the assumptions and rules from their respective cultures to govern the aspects of communication. Moreover, a careful observation of the aspects of communication by the researcher and lecturers in the classrooms lead to the conclusion that Chinese students led to East Asian learning styles

*Corresponding author.

E-mail address: eiwainnin2020@gmail.com

as they have experienced a long influence of a stable cultural milieu in East Asia.

Keywords: Chinese students, East Asian learning styles, Learning styles, University of Foreign Languages of Myanmar

Introduction

Learning styles are defined as the complex manner in which and conditions under which, learners most effectively perceive, process, store and recall what they are attempting to learn (James and Gardner, 1995: 20). According to Mortimore (2003), learning styles are seen more in terms of the strategies that learners use to deal with learning and are considered to be less stable. Therefore, learners of a language use different forms of learning styles to learn a target language. And the method they use should be effective in their learning process. Teachers and students will naturally follow the assumptions and rules from their respective cultures. Discourse rules govern such aspects of communication as: Opening or closing conversations; Taking turns during conversations; Interrupting; Using silence as a communicative device; Knowing appropriate topics of conversation; Interjecting humour at appropriate times; Using nonverbal behaviour; Expressing laughter as a communicative device; Knowing the appropriate amount of speech to be used by participants; Sequencing of elements during discourse. A careful review of the literature concerning these aspects of communication by a lecturer will lead to the conclusion that practically everything one does in a classroom can lead to cross-cultural misunderstandings. Chinese students are visual learners. They enjoy reading and get a lot of visual stimuli from it. They are shy, but they have the ability to quickly repeat sentences they hear or read. When they come across native speakers, they continue to converse in Myanmar. They converse in the language they are learning. The author decided to choose Chinese students as they are the highest majority among foreign scholars whose interest is to learn Myanmar Language. Myanmar is the nearest neighbouring country and if they are influence in Myanmar Language, they have the highest opportunities to get high salary jobs.

Literature Review

1. East Asian Learning Styles

Reid (1987) carried out studies indicating that lecturer-student mismatches in teaching and learning styles cause learning failure, frustration and demotivation. Significant study of learning styles across cultures began in the 1980s in the USA, driven by teachers of English to speakers of other languages. Reid (1998) critically reviews the literature on learning styles and examines in detail of the most influential models. Egri and Ralston (2004) have demonstrated the long influence of a stable cultural milieu in East Asia, with major international interactions being between neighbouring countries, has led to a unique cultural cluster in East Asia, which has in turn led to a particular learning style on the part of students from the area. In theory, there exist as many learning styles as there are learners, but national groups have proven to demonstrate similarities. Various theorists have defined several schemes of classifying learning styles as follows:

1.1 Introverted Learning

For this style, knowledge is something to be transmitted by the teacher rather than discovered by the learners; the students receive learning from the teacher rather than interpret it. Harshbarger et al. (1986) reported Japanese and Korean students are often quiet, shy and reticent in classrooms. Chinese students likewise name "listening to teacher" as their most frequent activity in senior school classes.

1.2 Closure-oriented Style

Sue and Kirk (1972) found Asian students to be autonomous, more dependent on authority figures, and more obedient and conforming to rules and deadlines. Harshbarger et al. (1986) noted that Closure-oriented students maintain that the teacher be the authority and are disturbed if this does not happen.

1.3 Analytic and Field-independent Style

Field dependence means being “holistically oriented”, going from the big picture to the detail. Generally, field independent learners are better at spatial tasks, math, and science.

1.4 Individuals with an Analytical Learning Style

Individuals with an analytical learning style tend to focus on sequential details rather than the overall structure. People with a relational (global) learning style tend to relate all of the information to the overall structure and focus on the interactions involved. Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995) state that the Chinese, along with the Japanese, are often detail-and precision-oriented, showing some features of the analytic and field-independent styles.

Research Objective

The objective of this study was to investigate the learning styles of Chinese students in universities of foreign languages in Myanmar.

Methodology

The researchers used a questionnaire that was distributed to 35 Chinese students at the Myanmar language department at Universities of Foreign languages in Myanmar; the statements of the questionnaire in terms of discourse rules were designed to answer the research questions. Also, the researchers conducted interviews with 11 instructors and asked them questions regarding learning styles of Chinese specialization students. After that, the researchers analysed the questionnaire and discussed the results of both, the questionnaire, and the interviews.

Results

These traditional teaching approaches have resulted in a number of common learning styles. Confucius emphasized by example and in his teaching the importance of education and self-cultivation in the service of the community and to achieve good government. His teachings have contributed to the development of a tradition of a ruthlessly competitive education process as

a preparation for the holding of high office and as qualification to enter the bureaucracy. This kind of bureaucracy has governed China and continuously recorded this experience over several thousand years, in a manner unknown in the rest of the world. However, this respect for education is linked with a tradition of unquestioning obedience to superiors, teachers, parents, and a reverence for antiquity.

1. Questionnaire Survey

The result has shown that the Chinese specialization students using silence as a communicative device first and opening and closing conversations followed by knowing the appropriate amount of speech to be used by participants compared to other learning styles of learning a language. The first method they prefer completely follows the discourse rules and their second and third preferred methods follow the discourse rules, too. They desire to learn opening and closing conversation first to have an effective and successful communication. Table 1 describes the learning styles of Chinese specialization students in terms of discourse rules.

Table 1

Learning styles of Chinese Specialization Students in Terms of Discourse Rules

SN	Discourse rules	Responses					Calculation		Interpretation
		Never	Rarely	Some times	Often	Always	M	SD	
1	Opening or closing conversations	11%	12%	13%	33%	31%	3.61	1.33	Follow the discourse rules
2	Taking turns during conversations	10%	23%	17%	25%	25%	3.32	1.33	Just follow the discourse rules
3	Interrupting	17%	32%	21%	22%	8%	2.72	1.21	Just follow the discourse rules
4	Using silence as a communicative device	3%	3%	11%	32%	51%	4.25	0.97	Completely follow the discourse rules

Table 1 (Continued)

SN	Discourse rules	Responses					Calculation		Interpretation
		Never	Rarely	Some times	Often	Always	M	SD	
5	Knowing appropriate topics of conversation	8%	20%	31%	20%	21%	3.26	1.22	Just follow the discourse rules
6	Interjecting humour at appropriate times	22%	35%	22%	12%	9%	2.51	1.21	Moderately follow the discourse rules
7	Using nonverbal behaviour	8%	24%	30%	25%	13%	3.11	1.15	Just follow the discourse rules
8	Expressing laughter as a communicative device	13%	29%	31%	17%	10%	2.82	1.16	Just follow the discourse rules
9	Knowing the appropriate amount of speech to be used by participants	4%	16%	33%	29%	18%	3.41	1.08	Follow the discourse rules
10	Sequencing of elements during discourse	6%	20%	35%	24%	15%	3.22	1.11	Just follow the discourse rules
	Average	10.20%	21.40%	24.40%	23.90%	20.10%	3.22	1.27	Just follow the discourse rules

Note. 1.00-1.80=Slightly follow the discourse rules; 1.81-2.60=Moderately follow the discourse rules; 2.61-3.40=Just follow the discourse rules; 3.41-4.20=Follow the discourse rules; 4.21-5.00=Completely follow the discourse rules

Learning style plays an important role in the lives of learners. When students recognize their own learning style, they will be able to integrate it into their learning process. And, in the light of what the data has revealed, it is seen that the Chinese prefer and apply using silence as a communicative device (Mean=4.25), opening or closing conversation (Mean=3.61) and knowing the appropriate amount of speech to be used (Mean=3.41) by participants

strategies compared to other styles in their learning process. Most students used silence as a communicative device, and they completely follow the discourse rules. The second highest mean score 3.61 confirms the fact that they know the importance of opening and closing conversation and they have the ability to make friends or like meeting new people as well as making that there is no further questions or issues that needed to be addressed. The third highest mean score recommends how they follow the discourse rules. Chinese specialization students introduce the appropriate amount of speech to be used by participants.

In the lives of students, learning style is quite significant. Students will be able to incorporate their individual learning style into their learning process once they recognize it. In light of the findings, it is clear that the Chinese prefer and employ quiet as a communicative device (Mean=4.25), initiating or closing discussion (Mean=3.61), and knowing the proper quantity of speech to use (Mean=3.41) by participants methods in their learning process over other types. The majority of students chose silence as a means of communication and strictly adhered to the conversation guidelines. The second highest mean score of 3.61 demonstrates that they understand the importance of starting and ending a discussion and that they can create or break friendships.

2. Classroom Observation

All the following claims are supported by the classroom teachers. They reported the participation of Chinese students in the classroom interaction. It was found that the Chinese took significantly fewer speaking turns than did their classmates. Chinese students are reluctant to "stand out" by expressing their views or raising questions, particularly if this might be perceived as expressing public disagreement.

2.1 Introverted Learning

It has been found that student participants are often quiet, shy and reticent in their classrooms. They dislike public touch and overt expressions of opinions or displays of emotions, indicating a reserve that is the hallmark of

the Western definition of introverts. As described in the introverted learning style, a teacher participant expressed her thoughts on Chinese students' learning styles in terms of Asian learning styles, stating that they are often quiet, shy, and reticent in their classrooms.

Classroom observation 1:

Chinese students took significantly fewer speaking turns than did their Myanmar classmates. Chinese students are reluctant to "stand out" by expressing their views or raising questions, particularly if this might be perceived as expressing public disagreement.

Closure-oriented style

Chinese students often want rapid and constant correction from the teacher and do not feel comfortable with multiple correct answers. One of the teacher participants stated her views towards learning styles of Chinese students in terms of Asian learning styles as they often quiet, shy, and reticent in their classrooms as mentioned in closure-oriented style.

Classroom observation 2:

Chinese students dislike ambiguity, uncertainty, or fuzziness; to avoid these, they sometimes jump to hasty conclusions from incomplete information. They often want rapid and constant correction from the teacher and do not feel comfortable with multiple correct answers. They are, nevertheless, astute enough to know which books to consult, how to locate them, and which texts are well-known and exact for their studies. When they are attempting to learn anything, they are never depressed. They are comfortable speaking in Myanmar and like conversing with locals of various levels. They have learned a lot of vocabulary, collocations, and idioms.

2.2 Analytic and Field-independent Style

Chinese learners are sequential, orderly and organized, and focus on details and tend to formulate plans. One of the instructor participants expressed her thoughts on Chinese students' learning styles in terms of Asian learning styles, stating that they are frequently quiet, shy, and reluctant in their classes, as described in the closure-oriented approach.

Classroom observation 3:

Chinese students are able to focus on the relevant details and not be distracted by unnecessary details. Some students are bright enough to learn new terms, and when they do, they only use Myanmar when they have a chance. Their aural sensitivity and listening skills are among the greatest. They don't waste any time in expressing what they've learned.

2.3 Individuals with an Analytical Learning Style

It has been found that Chinese students to be visual learners. This visual learning style stems from a traditional classroom teaching in East Asia, where most teachers emphasize learning through reading and tend to put a great deal of information on the blackboard. As indicated in the closure-oriented approach, it is in individuals with an analytical learning style, to which one of the instructor participants presented her thoughts on Chinese students' learning methods and defined them as bashful, quiet, and hesitant in class. But they have the ability to pick up the most suitable ones from the wordings and unfamiliar words they heard, read or accidentally learned and are floated in their speaking atmosphere and surroundings.

Classroom observation 4:

Chinese students like to read and obtain a great deal of visual stimulation. For them, lectures, conversations, and oral directions without any visual backup can be very confusing and anxiety-producing. They are bright enough to remember each and every new word they heard and keep trying practise with the natives. They can speak fluently but the difficulties they encounter are not everyday usage, but the special language used in special occasions and some important ceremonies. Therefore, they prefer to learn the opening or closing conversation first to apply them in their daily conversation. They also use silence as a communication device in order to take time in their dialogue.

Discussion

Teaching tertiary education necessitates creating a sense of balance between learning and performance in pupils. The lecturer's goal is to convey knowledge; parents, professors, admissions offices, and employers have all pushed students to achieve high performance ratings, often at the price of in-depth knowledge of a subject. The teacher is usually responsible for ensuring that performance metrics promote learning. According to the findings, Chinese students in the classroom participate in a significant degree of interaction and give-and-take. They'll have to carefully plan and nurture the interaction's growth. The lecturer can guide the class to build oral interaction between students and teachers by using the attributes of "expecting to be told what to do" and "obeying and not challenging superiors." Students who are learning the second language in another country know the discourse rules but if they always use silence as a communicative device, it may delay them from acquiring the target language in a short time. The highest mean score 4.25 confirm that following completely the discourse rules is a barrier to have the job they are dreamed of. The second highest mean score 3.61 calculated those Chinese students follow the discourse rules of opening and closing conversation. The third highest mean score that is the proof of following the discourse rule that is knowing the appropriate amount of speech to be used by participants. The more they follow the discourse rules, the less chance they must get high paid job. Chinese students learn Myanmar as a second language to get an effective communication or to be a Myanmar language teacher in the nearest future but the discourse rules they follow will hinder their ambition. They brought along their belief to be a perfect interpreter, but they unexpectedly practised silence as a communicative device. To be a quite fluent speaker of their target language they must avoid these discourse rules.

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