

“To Be or Not To Be” Metacognitive: Learning EFL Strategically

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Abstract

The present study is an off-shoot of a larger project, in which a significant statistical relationship was observed between learner variables of a large sample (n=1440) of Chinese Learners of English as a Foreign Language and their reported use of Language Learning Strategies. In this article, we report the use of a combination of metacognitive strategies, namely selective attention, organisational planning and self-management in two different learning contexts (in-class and out-of-class) as an investigation of the perceived usefulness of this combination in these contexts. An analysis of the listening and speaking tasks that students face both in and outside the classroom revealed considerable variation, notably with more use of the metacognitive strategies reported for speaking and listening when both were undertaken out-of-class. In addition, variation was reported along gender lines. These outcomes are elaborated with implications for the teaching and learning of speaking and listening of English in China.

1 Literature review

English language learning occupies a crucial place in the academic life of undergraduate and postgraduate students in Chinese universities. For example, even if students in BA programs do not intend to major in English, they are nevertheless required to pass the nationwide “College English Test – Band 4” (CET-4) before they can be awarded their BA degree. Similarly, students

wishing to enrol in Masters and PhD studies must pass the “Test for English Majors – Band 4” (TEM-4).

For most students, the CET is a pen-and-paper test of only three of the four macroskills (listening, reading and writing). There is a Spoken English test but, because of the obvious difficulties caused by the numbers of candidates involved, only those who score more than 80% in the other tests are eligible to sit the speaking test. The listening component currently is worth 35% of the total CET marks and it is predicted that this will soon be increased to 70% (Li, 2009; Yang, 2006; Zhu, 2003).

Because what is tested in a language program, especially through a “high-stakes” test like the CET-4 (Yan & Chen, 2005), has a major influence on classroom teaching, it was decided that this study would investigate the development of listening and speaking in the light of the potentially problematic nature of these two macroskills, given the historical isolation of Chinese learners of English from native English speakers over a considerable period of time. It is intended to describe briefly what occurs in listening and speaking both in-class and outside class for students who are studying for the CET. These descriptions are based on a number of recent ethnographies of English language classrooms at both the secondary and post-secondary levels (Jin & Cortazzi, 2002; Zheng, 2008; Zhu, 2003)

The in-class listening experience for these students is organised in three ways:

1. The most common activities revolve around a textbook which is linked to audio and visual resources based on authentic samples of spoken English recorded in English-speaking countries. In the typical listening lesson, a teacher plays an audio text up to two or three times and students are required to answer pen-and-paper test questions on the recorded material. The aim of the lesson is that the students will not just comprehend the spoken text, but they will develop strategies that will help them cope with the demands of the listening comprehension test. To facilitate this, the teacher structures the lesson to correspond to the stages of the listening comprehension test. As Ximin and Adamson (2003) note, the actual implementation here will be the result of a complex range of factors that emerge from the particular classroom context and the historical narrative that precedes it.
2. It is increasingly becoming the norm that students have access to supplementary materials often stored on a central classroom computer. These materials are from media sources such as BBC, VOA, and CNN etc. In dealing with these materials, students adopt procedures similar to those that they have used in their classroom listening comprehension activities.
3. In order that students’ individual interests may be catered for, access is available to on-line materials in class time. This may or may not be tied to a text that is used in class and students choose material that suits their needs in terms of both product and process, and follow software that has been developed specifically for listening comprehension.

The in-class speaking of the students tends to adhere to the textbook, if the teacher is Chinese. Teachers who are native speakers of English are more likely to produce their own handouts and use these as the basis for engaging in conversations with their students. Generally, however, the speaking class will involve a range of activities including group discussions, oral presentations, debating, retelling stories describing an event or picture etc. In these classes, Chinese teachers will give more attention to the formal aspects of language such as correct syntax, pronunciation and vocabulary than teachers who are native speakers of English, who will focus more on whether the ideas expressed are comprehensible. As Rao (2010) has noted, Chinese students may find this approach less than helpful from a number of perspectives and may have decidedly mixed feelings about the worth of the native speaker’s contribution to EFL teaching:

Closely related to open style is the intuitive-random style that NES teachers adopted in their classroom teaching. Sixteen of the students held that ‘NES (Native English Speaking) teachers’ intuitive-random style in class was helpful in creating a friendly and relaxed atmosphere in classroom, but such a style was in conflict with their traditional way of learning’ (Student O, I, 27 October 2005). They insisted that ‘a teacher behave like an authority, and offer his or her teaching in a concrete-sequential manner’ (Student M, I, 21 October 2005). (pp. 64–65)

Out-of-class listening and speaking are extremely important for students who are motivated by the possibility of studying in an English-speaking country. However, those who are not so motivated tend to restrict their language learning to in-class contexts. As might be expected, opportunities to practise listening and speaking in English outside the classroom are severely limited in China, particularly in provincial contexts. Consequently, most out-of-class activities are restricted to listening to short wave radio (BBC, VOA, and ABC etc.), satellite television (CNN), or the Internet. A facility such as Skype has a lot of potential, and is gradually becoming a more reliable resource (Hockly & Clandfield, 2010)

To date, the way that students use audio-visual equipment to access and comprehend spoken English is limited to procedures that their teacher uses in class. These are tied closely to the examinations that students take at the end of the course. However, some students make use of “English Corners” which are common throughout China and provide informal contact between students of English and native-speakers of English who are temporary residents (Pang, Zhou, & Fu, 2002). Students find that these out-of-class activities require a range of strategies that are seldom taught or practised in the classroom, but which are nevertheless essential for mastery of the skills that will be needed should they go on to study in an English-speaking country.

2 Literature review

2.1 *Strategies and macroskills*

The earliest language learning strategy (LLS) research adopted a macroskill framework as the most convenient and useful way to look at what learners do when they attempt to learn a second language (Oxford, 1985). Macroskills are processes which define the broad functions of language. Most learners define mastery of a language as mastery of its macroskills which, in turn, involves mastery of the processes which underpin the macroskills. This is in keeping with a cognitive view of language learning (Chomsky, 1977) which replaced the highly influential behaviourist views which dominated the 1950s and 60s (see Skehan, 1998).

According to theorists of information processing, limited cognitive capacity can restrict learners’ ability to manipulate information during tasks (see e.g. McLaughlin, Rossmann, & McLeod, 1983; Tomlin & Villa, 1994). There is a body of persuasive literature on the positive role metacognition plays in decision-making (Bartlett, 2008; Liyanage & Bartlett, 2010) and self regulation (Sawyer, Graham, & Harris, 1992) during learning. The effect of metacognitive knowledge on information processing for L2 productive (speaking & writing) and receptive (listening & reading) skills has been investigated over the last few decades in various studies (e.g. Fleming & Walls, 1998; Skehan & Foster, 1997; Zhang & Goh, 2006). Metacognitive strategies consist of thoughtful and reflective action-tactics about what one does to inform choices about where, when and how to deal with the processing elements of learning (Bartlett, 2010; Liyanage & Bartlett, 2010; Liyanage, Bartlett, & Grimbeek, 2010). There are many such strategies, but those used across the various taxonomies (see Oxford, 1990; O’Malley & Chamot, 1990; Cohen, 1999) are relatively modest in number and similar.

In the present study, the focus was on three metacognitive learning behaviours defined as selective attention, organisational planning and self-management, as featured in the O’Malley and Chamot’s (1990) taxonomy of strategies, which is based on a cognitive view of second language learning. According to O’Malley and Chamot (1990, p. 137),

- *Organisation Planning* - involves ... “strategies for handling an upcoming task; generating a plan for the parts, sequence, main ideas or language functions to be used in handling a task ...”
- *Selective attention*: involves ... “deciding in advance to attend to specific aspects of language input or situational details that assist in performance of a task; attending to specific aspects of language input during task execution.”

- *Self-management*: “Understanding the conditions that help one successfully accomplish language tasks and arranging for the presence of those conditions; controlling one’s language performance to maximise use of what is already known”

These three metacognitive strategies were chosen due to their demonstrated efficacy (Goh, 1997; Goh & Taib, 2006; Rubin, 2001; Yuan & Ellis, 2003) in assisting L2 learners become autonomous oral communicators. In combination, the two metacognitive strategies, *organisation planning & selective attention*, deal with strategic *how to* knowledge about differentiating critical information from supporting detail and planning how to do so, and, about scaffolding its yield. Their combination which is tested here in relation to speaking and listening is similar to what elsewhere has been conceptualised as top-level structuring (Bartlett, 2010; Bridges & Bartlett, 2009; Meyer et al., 2010). Although the two macroskills, listening and speaking, are separated theoretically and involve distinctly different cognitive processes, there is considerable overlap and interdependence of these two skills in teaching and learning practices aligned with the *in-classroom* preparation of Chinese students for CET-4 (Berne, 2004; Jing, 2006).

2.2 *Listening and speaking*

Ur (1996, p. 106) suggests a range of characteristics of the listening process that are important in considering what learners must address when attempting to comprehend spoken discourse:

1. What they know about the language;
2. Their familiarity with the subject under discussion;
3. Their knowledge of the real world;
4. Their acquaintance with or assumptions about the personal attitudes and interests of the speaker;
5. Their observation and interpretation of the circumstances of the utterance, including what has preceded it;
6. Their understanding of the cultural context in which it occurs; and
7. Their reading of paralinguistic cues.

Goodman (1967) described reading as a “psycholinguistic guessing game,” a perspective which could justifiably be applied to listening. Ur’s list provides clues for just such a “psycholinguistic guessing game” approach to listening comprehension and represents a range of features upon which listeners may position themselves to infer meaning from spoken discourse. For example, their knowledge of features of the language being spoken (e.g. phonology, vocabulary, syntax etc.) may provide them with the basis for using the metacognitive strategy of selective attention. Similarly, their *familiarity with the subject under discussion*, together with *their understanding of the cultural context of the discourse* (see Ur, 1996) may provide the listeners with the basis for monitoring the accuracy of their inferences about the meaning of the discourse.

Current thinking about the speaking process has been influenced by the work of Levelt (1993) and his integrated speech production model with its three components of *conceptualiser* (the pre-verbal conceptualisation of the message), *formulator* (the syntactic, morpho-phonological and phonetic encoding of the message) and *articulator* (the articulation of the message in the form of overt speech) which, although unidirectional, is able to explain much of the phenomenon of speech production as it occurs particularly within the classroom.

Bärenfänger, Beyer, Aguado and Stevener (2001) highlight the nature of second language (L2) – as opposed to foreign language (FL) – oral production that renders total reliance on a unidirectional model inadequate: there is a need to assume a dual formulator and mental lexicon in a bilingual context as well as the need to account for the role of an interlocutor in most oral speech production. This latter consideration highlights the close relationship between listening and speaking skills, and the inadvisability of separating these two macroskills, particularly in out-of-class contexts.

2.3 *Metacognitive strategies and speaking and listening in and outside class*

Arguably, the most influential contextual issue in L2 learning concerns whether language learning and use occur in or outside the L2 classroom (Jarvis & Stakounis, 2010; Springer & Collins, 2008). Nowhere is this more apparent than in the case of listening and speaking. With the exception of what occurs in immersion programs, generally speaking, tasks and activities in the language classroom have language learning as their goal. By contrast, outside the classroom, tasks and activities are the goals and language is used to achieve these goals. This distinction helps to elucidate the differences between using strategies inside and outside the classroom.

In order to adequately address the issue of what goes on in English language classrooms, the culture in which the classroom is embedded needs to be understood. Unless this is done, there is a risk of interpreting classroom practice through the lens of the researcher's own culture, an error which has been all too common when, for example, western “experts” have sought to remedy the “deficiencies” of Chinese language teaching practice. Jing (2006) recounts how the looming TEM-4 resulted in students' resistance to his program of metacognitive strategy development. The students resented the time that was taken up with reflection and the keeping of a diary, and would have preferred to have engaged in tasks that they felt were more relevant to the skills that they would need to pass the TEM-4, such as practising reading and listening comprehension tasks. One must sympathise with the students, considering that they needed to pass the TEM-4 in order to be accepted into postgraduate study. This is a telling example of how socio-cultural factors outside the classroom must be understood in order to appreciate practices within the classroom.

Birch (2001) encountered similar resistance when attempting to implement a learning strategies component in a French immersion program in an Australian high school. Many students resented what they saw as the imposition of a procedural component on an already crowded and extremely demanding curriculum (i.e. having to master the regular curriculum through the vehicle of a foreign language).

However, care must be taken to draw on reliable sources of information when attempting to understand the factors which impact upon the classrooms where English language teaching (ELT) takes place. Hu (2005) emphasises the diversity of modern China and illustrates the danger of generalisation by analysing four broad regions (CC – Capital cities in coastal provinces; OC – Other places in coastal provinces; CI – Capital cities in inland provinces; OI – Other places in inland provinces). Each of these regions displays its own particular characteristics which impact upon classroom practice in a myriad of ways. It needs to be remembered that Hu's analytic framework is not exhaustive and other divisions are no doubt possible. In addition, there is likely to be variation within divisions. Faced with this degree of diversity, Hu (2005) proposes an ecological perspective which “recognizes the multifaceted interaction between the language classroom and the particular political, economic, social, cultural, historical, educational, and institutional context in which it is situated” (p. 254). Such a perspective, of necessity, leads to the rejection of universally appropriate ways of teaching and learning. However, while it would not support a one-size-fits-all panacea for language learning, it does not reject the notion of a strategic approach to language learning and teaching.

In considering a small sub-set of metacognitive strategies (selective attention, organisational planning and self-management) and their use in the development of listening and speaking skills both inside and outside the classroom, it is important to understand the contextual complexity that is in play. For example, inside the classroom, the teacher has the clearly understood responsibility to develop the students' listening and speaking skills. What this means, however, needs to be interpreted within the context of a classroom whose role is to prepare students for an end-of-course examination. An item analysis of the examination will determine which strategies will be most helpful for students in their examination preparation for the listening test:

Listening comprehension is the first part in the CET. Students should be able to get the gist of the discourse, understand the main points and important details, and recognize the opinion and attitude of the speaker. The listening sub-test has two sections and lasts 20 minutes. Section A contains ten short

conversations and Section B contains three passages. After each passage, there are three or four questions about it. Each recording is played once only. The passages in Section B are stories, talks, etc. on personal life, social and cultural issues, and popular science. Item type includes multiple-choice questions and compound dictation. (Ying-hui, 2006, pp. 37–38)

For example, if listening comprehension involves listening to a passage being read aloud once and answering a set of questions on the content of the passage, then “selective attention” will be facilitated by reading the comprehension questions first and then listening for specific answers during the reading. After the reading, any remaining questions will be answered by means of *inferencing* (i.e. intelligent guessing). In their examination preparation for the listening test, the teacher will rehearse this procedure so that the students will learn the process for passing the listening comprehension exam (Berne, 2004). Ying-hui (2006) examined the phenomenon of *simulated CET* examinations, which account for a major aspect of inside classroom CET preparation. His analysis of the validity of such items endorses their informed use in promoting a positive form of *washback* which provides learners with manageable procedures for coping with what otherwise might be an unpredictable experience.

The context outside the classroom is very different. Students may watch the BBC news on television. As with the CET-4 listening comprehension, they will hear audio on an item only once, unless they have access to a recorder (which they might arrange as an outcome of the organisational planning strategy). But there will be no comprehension questions to guide their selective attention. Instead, to provide this guide, they may have film with “voice-over” or they may make use of supporting visuals. Jin and Cortazzi (2002) reported exciting developments in the use of World Wide Web and a range of video and multimedia systems in ELT at both secondary and university levels. They noted, however, that “the pedagogic techniques employed with these new media have changed little from the more traditional ones” (p. 58).

Sometimes, outside the classroom, they may combine listening and speaking in an “English Corner” conversation with a visiting tourist. In preparation, they may have engaged in organisational planning by mentally rehearsing the likely language and discourse they might need to use. So that communication will not break down completely, they will have compensatory strategies ready and will self-monitor and evaluate their performance.

It is clear that using strategies inside and outside the classroom varies because of both micro and macro contextual differences. There is clearly a clash between the demands of validity and pragmatics when one considers this difference. It is likely, however, that with the advance of technology, students will be presented with classroom activities which are authentic and yet do not jeopardise their chances to perform well in end-of-course examinations.

In order to discover the language learning strategies that students use both inside and outside the classroom, researchers have relied heavily on the LLS taxonomies developed by Chamot, Kupper and Impink-Hernandez (1987), Hu (2005), Oxford (1989, 1990), O'Malley, Chamot, & Küpper (1989) and by O'Malley & Chamot (1990).

Chamot et al. (1987) designed a Language Learning Strategy Inventory (LLSI), administered as a questionnaire, to elicit learning strategies used by students of Spanish and Russian as foreign languages. Liyanage (2004) adapted the instrument to investigate the reported LLS use by Sri Lankan learners of English as Second Language (n=886). The adapted 63-item LLSI comprised a total of 26 strategies clustered under metacognitive, cognitive, and social affective headings (20 items measuring metacognitive strategies, 34 items cognitive strategies, and 9 items social affective strategies). Participants used a 4-point Likert response scale to rate how often they utilized (‘never’ to ‘very frequently’) the behaviours described in each of 63 items. The adapted inventory was later translated into Sinhala and Tamil (see Liyanage, 2004; Liyanage & Bartlett, 2011), and Japanese (see Liyanage, Grimbeek, & Bryer, 2010), by competent translators. The same inventory was translated into Chinese for use in the current study by a native speaker of Chinese who is a professionally accredited translator of the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI), Australia. The English original and its Chinese translations are found in Appendices 1 and 2.

3 Method

In this study, the perceived usefulness of a combination of metacognitive strategies, namely selective attention/organisational planning and self-management, used by Chinese learners when learning to speak and listen in English in and outside class, was investigated.

Participants for this study comprised a large sample (n=1440) of students from three groups of universities in the Peoples’ Republic of China: Peking University, Sichuan University and Central South University. Of these participants, 35.1% (n= 506) were male, 64.9% (n= 934) were female. Participants were similar in terms of age range (18–20 years) and in terms of the length of time that they had studied English (approximately 9–11 years).

The Chinese version of the LLSI was administered to participants within their university environments and it took approximately 30–40 minutes for the participants to respond to the instrument.

3.1 Analyses and results

Scale scores for the three strategy types – metacognitive, cognitive, and social affective – were obtained by summing across items and then dividing by the number of items to generate reliability statistics. The reliability scores (Alpha coefficient levels) for the three scales were as follows:

Scale	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Metacognitive	20	0.782
Cognitive	34	0.847
Social-affective	09	0.595

Table 1: Reliability statistics

A MANOVA was performed with learning context (in class, out of class) and metacognitive strategies (Selective Attention/Organisational Planning; Self-Management) as the two repeated measures outcomes, and with gender as the between-groups predictor.

The multivariate main effects for context and measure were both statistically significant (Pillai’s Trace, $p < .001$), and the interaction effect for context by measure was also statistically significant (Pillai’s Trace, $p < .01$). The ANOVA main effects for learning context ($p < .001$) and metacognitive strategy ($p < .001$), and the interaction effect for context by metacognitive strategy ($p < .01$) were statistically significant. As indicated in Table 2, irrespective of gender, participants reported significantly more positive scores outside of class than in-class (across the two measures).

Context	Mean	SE	- 95% CI	+ 95% CI
In class	1.430	0.011	1.409	1.452
Outside class	1.714	0.010	1.695	1.734

Table 2: Significant main effect for context

As indicated in Table 3, participants reported a significantly higher preference for selective attention/organisational planning than for self-management in and outside class while learning to listen and speak.

Metacognitive Strategy	Mean	SE	- 95% CI	+ 95% CI
Sel Att/Org Planning	1.600	0.010	1.581	1.619
Self-management	1.545	0.010	1.525	1.565

Table 3: Significant main effect for metacognitive strategy

As indicated in Table 4, a greater difference between the preferences for selective attention/organizational planning and self-management was observed while learning to listen and speak outside of class than inside class.

Context	Measure	Mean	SE	- 95% CI	+ 95% CI
In class	Sel Att/Org Planning	1.440	0.014	1.413	1.467
	Self-management	1.420	0.014	1.394	1.447
Outside class	Sel Att/Org Planning	1.760	0.012	1.737	1.783
	Self-management	1.669	0.013	1.643	1.695

Table 4: Significant interaction effect for context by measure

As indicated in Table 5, when the differences between males and females for selective attention/organisational planning and self-management were compared, females scored higher than males for selective attention/organisational planning. However, males scored higher than females for self-management.

Gender	Metacognitive Strategy	Mean	SE	- 95% CI	+ 95% CI
Male	Sel Att/Org Planning	1.584	0.016	1.553	1.614
	Self-management	1.549	0.016	1.518	1.581
Female	Sel Att/Org Planning	1.616	0.011	1.594	1.638
	Self-management	1.540	0.012	1.517	1.563

Table 5: Marginally significant effect for gender by measure

4 Discussion

An overall indication from this study is a positive response to the Shakespearian question posed in our title. Students preferred “To Be” metacognitive with the strategies we investigated when learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in listening and speaking contexts – whether inside their classroom or outside it. But the frequency of strategy use was considerably greater outside the classroom than inside it. This finding is not too surprising, if one focuses on what transpires in these two contexts. For example, in the listening class, students are being prepared for their final end-of-course examinations. The examination is an important and tangible gatekeeper that doubtless channels a teacher’s planning in such preparation, tying it to tasks that he/she knows their students must complete to demonstrate their understandings of the spoken text, as Berne (2004) observed. In the examination, students answer a list of questions, their answers informing examiners about their comprehension. In other words, prior knowledge about the nature of the questions signals to students where they should place their effort – a very critical aspect because of consequences associated with students’ examination performances. The equivalent gatekeeper for learning outside the classroom is far more lenient; and conceivably, this plays some part in accounting for students’ decidedly wider preferences for the strategies in speaking and listening learning contexts outside the classroom.

Back inside the classroom, an effective teacher will prepare students to address both the product and the procedural aspects of the listening comprehension test that is part of the examination.

The product component concerns tangible topic and content issues that are likely to be raised in the text of the listening comprehension. The process component involves a discussion of the comprehension questions such as the multiple choice (MC) questions on the CET and how these will provide the signals that will direct the learner's comprehension. It is this procedural element of text processing where strategic action and its benefits are concentrated (Bartlett, 2010; Meyer, Young, & Bartlett, 1989; Wegner & Bartlett, 2008).

Wu (1998) has conducted a very insightful analysis of the effect of MC questions on various learners. In broad terms, he found that the MC format assisted high proficiency students – but often caused confusion for those less able, resulting, at best, in correct inferencing and, at worst, in uninformed guessing. Yang (2006) discussed issues involved in validating a simulated CET, describing a process through which students can benefit from the coaching involved with extensive exposure to a well-constructed simulated CET. In such an approach, the procedural aspect is the focus of students' preparation for their test. By the time they are ready to sit for the CET-4, they should have developed a range of limited but reasonably effective strategies to cope with its requirements.

Outside the classroom, however, the context is significantly different. For a start, students have to cope with real time. Messages are not repeated (unless they have access to a play-back button) and students do not have questions to guide their attention. Consequently, outside the classroom, they must choose what works in a context where a teacher is no longer exercising a controlling influence and there is no set examination format acting as a guide.

Nisbet, Tindall and Arroyo (2005) have linked self-reliance with the development of learning strategies and autonomy. Therefore, it is possible to hypothesise that students will become more strategic when they are required to be more self-reliant, that is, in outside-classroom situations when they do not have the direct presence of teachers' strong, focused and repeatable influence on how to self-manage or how to selectively attend to information and plan its organisation. The data presented in this study support speculation about this relationship; it is only the direction of causality among self-reliance, context and strategy use that needs further investigation. Where Oxford (2001) argues that the development of (i.e. the teaching of) language learning strategies leads to self-reliance (i.e. autonomy), we raise the possibility that language learning outside the classroom sets up a fertile environment for self-reliance and autonomy and that if the learner has already experienced in the classroom what is involved in language learning, this insight will foster its further development. These conditions clearly apply to students who are required to cope with the variability of listening in the out-of-class context.

An important difference between the way listening and speaking skills play out in the two contexts is that within the classroom they tend to be treated as discrete skills. This is much less common outside the classroom where the two skills interact for a good proportion of the time. For example, in conversational discourse, speakers will often manipulate the interaction in such a way that they will choreograph a routine to avoid unfamiliar discourse and orchestrate successful communication. They self-manage more often and more obviously. The key difference between in-class and out-of-class listening and speaking is that the purpose of the latter is the maintenance of communication; while in the former, the main function of the discourse is to promote language learning. As a result, strategies used in the classroom will be largely cognitive; while outside the classroom, learners are operating metacognitively to manipulate the successful joint maintenance of meaning.

It is entirely appropriate that strategy use should be significantly different between in-class and out-of-class contexts. How strategies are used naturally differs depending on the functions of the particular discourse. Since one of the important functions of in-class teaching is preparation for a listening comprehension test, it is appropriate that the teacher should guide the learners to mastering the limited but specific strategies which will lead to success in this test.

Outside the classroom, because of the large number of variables that are in play, the situation for listening and speaking is much less predictable. To operate successfully in this environment, the learner must draw on a range of communication strategies which involve the *organizational planning* of discourse, *selective attention* to linguistic and contextual features that emerge as rel-

evant, and *self-management* relating to an understanding of how personal levels of communicative competence may be best mobilised to achieve appropriate communication.

Canale and Swain (1980) developed a model of communicative competence which included linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence. The first three of these are legitimate contents of what makes up a language learning course. The fourth enables the first three to be deployed for communication by means of a range of communication strategies and thus brings authenticity and elegance to the others through their practical application. This may occur in-class or out-of-class, but is likely to be, of necessity, more self-directed when it takes place out-of-class. Language teaching which follows the *communicative* paradigm tends to be less teacher-controlled and more learner-centred than in previous eras where there was an attempt to control the language learning process in order to minimise the possibility of error (Richards, 2006). While Communicative Language Teaching allowed much more scope for creative language use than in the era of audiolingualism, the classroom teacher proved unwilling to relinquish control of what occurred in the classroom, especially in cultures such as China (Hu, 2002).

However, when the second language learner moves out of the classroom, the emphasis shifts from learning to communicating, no matter how elementary a learner's command of the language. Under these circumstances, learners are required to draw on their own resources, mobilising any language they possess together with any communicative strategies and tactics that might help them communicate. Since they respond to the learners' learning styles and preferences, the strategies that have proved effective under these circumstances are likely to be adopted and retained.

5 Conclusion

Data from this study strengthen the field of evidence that students use metacognitive strategies in the interest of learning EFL through listening and speaking tasks in that they have shown the significant contextual effect in what students have told us of their preferences. Within the limitations of our study, these outcomes offer suggestions for practical consideration by practitioners and researchers. For the first, it is apparent that preparation for national tests such as the CET throughout China's educational systems has impacted upon the use of metacognitive strategies which become part of students' procedural knowledge of what it means to function well when using English language. However, there is considerable danger that what students – and possibly their teachers, schools and systems – build as their schemas of understanding is concentrated artificially by this impact, because such schemas are an attenuation of the broader contexts in which functionality applies in the adult worlds of business, communication, and social contribution. As Chinese links with the West have increased over recent decades, and the role of English has expanded, the need for students to use and comprehend spoken English outside the classroom has increased. Consequently, the kind of preparation that brought success in the CET-4 is unlikely to be adequate for the variety of tasks which confront, for example, those students preparing for study in an English-speaking country, or who step quickly into international commerce where the English language is increasingly the dialect of trade.

The dilemma which faces curriculum developers in these changing circumstances is to find ways through which classroom practices may prepare students for out-of-class activities and test outcomes in real or valid ways without sacrificing the purposes, validity and reliability of the testing. The purposes include selecting for further study those students with greatest capacity to succeed and to progress the common good with their advanced levels of EFL. A subsidiary purpose is to ensure that those who miss such cut-offs, nonetheless have ongoing access to progression of their capacities in English so that they, too, may benefit themselves and society from their confident, competent usages. Students will need to be strategically aware and proficient to achieve and maintain a competent and confident level of participation in English outside the classroom and their preparation for out-of-class activities will require considerable changes to pedagogy, such as broadening of strategy instruction to address the increased variability which is a feature of the out-

of-class context. Fortunately, the work of researchers such as O'Malley & Chamot (1990), Oxford (1990), and Cohen (1999) has much to offer and has already proven to be transferable to the Chinese context (Nisbet et al., 2005).

However, it would be unrealistic to downplay the complexity of the implications that attend any attempt to test students' performance on authentic out-of-class tasks. But unless this performance is tested, it is unlikely it will be addressed seriously in the classroom. For this reason, it is to be hoped that the issue of the testing of listening and speaking skills will be revised to include authentic tasks and be given the priority it deserves in the Chinese education system. Those in our study were metacognitively competent, as we saw with the strategies, modes and contexts we investigated. This suggests that the Chinese educational systems have helped to establish the capacity and are well placed to widen what students know and do as they come “to be” metacognitive in order to learn EFL strategically.

There are important implications in our findings for further research. For example, any move from suggestion of revision to enacted revision of significant national testing to be more inclusive of out-of-class functionality in English should be guided by systematic, objective studies to ensure that change is both informed by the process and informing of it. The issues of determining mitigation which we outlined above and of establishing roles played and effects created by metacognitive strategies other than those we investigated (e.g. logical reflection) and by other strategy types (e.g. cognitive and socio-affective strategies) also require systematic observation. Similarly, the nature of effect as strategies do their work with EFL learning might be more stringently delineated – for example, by separating what a strategist, being metacognitive when learning EFL, comes to know of the person, task and strategy features that apply as a strategy is used – and how such features adapt with changes in context and in a dominant language macroskill. Such additional research-driven information doubtless will further theory-building concerning strategic metacognition and its practical applications in education.

The crossroads suggested in the title of our work are helpful in pinpointing that Chinese EFL students at the university are metacognitive in their approaches to learning. However, it also has spawned in our minds a view that the current system that has encouraged Chinese youth's capability might be broadened to the advantage of the nation and individuals, if out-of-school realities for apperception and use of English is better recognised and included in classroom learning, teaching and assessment.

Dedication

Dr Gary Birch, one of the authors of this article, died on 25th April 2012 as a result of a sudden illness. Gary was a faculty member of Griffith University for over 30 years where he was an excellent second language teacher-educator, researcher and teacher. He was a positive influence on his students, colleagues and friends. He will be deeply missed. He made a tremendous contribution to this article, and we dedicate it to his memory.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Adapted Language Learning Strategy Inventory (English Version)

LEARNING ENGLISH IN CHINA

Instructions

We want to ask about what you do when learning English. Students sometimes have special ways of studying, speaking to others, or listening that help them in learning another language. We want to know if you do some of these things as you learn English.

On the following pages you will find statements about learning English. Please read each statement. Then circle one number (1, 2, 3, or 4) that tells if the statement is:

- | | | |
|---|---|-----------------------|
| 1 | Almost <i>Always</i> true of you | [76-100% of the time] |
| 2 | <i>Usually</i> true of you | [51-75% of the time] |
| 3 | <i>Sometimes</i> true of you | [26-50% of the time] |
| 4 | Almost <i>Never</i> true of you | [0-25% of the time] |

There are no right or wrong answers. There are only answers that describe what you do. Try to rate yourself on what you actually do when learning English.

Example

The following example shows how you should mark your answers to the questions on the following pages. Read the example below and draw a circle around the number that tells how often you do the behaviour described.

I write down any new words, phrases or rules my teacher says.

1 (Always)

2 (Usually)

3 (Sometimes)

4 (Never)

If you almost always write down new words your teacher says, circle number 1. If you usually write down new words, circle number 2. Similarly, if you sometimes do this, circle number 3, and if you never do this, you would circle number 4.

A short paragraph at the top of each page describes the scenario in which each statement occurs (listening, speaking, writing, or reading).

Listening in Class

Scenario

In a typical class period your teacher uses English to: give directions, explain new material or review old material, and to ask the class questions.

Remember to draw a circle around the number that tells how often you actually do what is described in each statement below.

- | | | | | | |
|----|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1) | When I listen, I plan in advance to pay more attention to what the teacher is going to talk about in general than to specific words and details | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2) | I write down any new words, phrases or rules my teacher says so I'll be sure to remember them. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3) | I question the teacher when I don't understand what he or she is saying. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4) | When I hear a new English word, I try to learn the teacher's pronunciation of that word by copying or imitating it. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5) | When I hear a new English word that sounds like a familiar Chinese word, I assume it has a similar meaning. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 6) | I find myself translating what the teacher says back into Chinese so that I can understand. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 7) | When I learn a new word or phrase, I play it back in my mind to remember it. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 8) | When listening to the teacher, I apply grammar rules to understand what the teacher says. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

- | | | | | | |
|-----|---|---|---|---|---|
| 9) | When I hear a new word, I think of a sentence in which I might use it later. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 10) | When I don't understand what the teacher says, I get help from a classmate. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 11) | I try to relate what the teacher is saying to my own experiences or to the information that I already know. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 12) | I guess at the meaning of unfamiliar words by using my knowledge of word formation (EG. prefixes & suffixes). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 13) | I pay more attention to some words and phrases than to others when the teacher is talking in English. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 14) | After I listen, I try to summarise mentally what the teacher has said to understand it better. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

Speaking In Class

Scenario

The teacher requires class participation. This means that you have to speak English in class, including asking and answering questions, participating in oral drills, reading aloud and perhaps giving a short oral presentation.

Remember to draw a circle around the letter that tells how often you actually do what is described in each statement below.

- | | | | | | |
|-----|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1) | When the teacher calls on me in class, I plan my answer in my head before I say a word. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2) | I listen carefully to what I say and correct myself when I make a mistake. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3) | If I have to give a talk to the class, I do it in front of a friend first so that he or she can tell me how it sounds. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4) | If I have to give a talk to the class, I practise the talk several times paying attention to the meaning of the talk before I actually do it. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5) | If I have to give a talk to the class, I mentally practise the talk before I actually do it to reduce anxiety. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 6) | If I can't recall a word or phrase when I speak in English, I try to use another word or phrase to replace it. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 7) | I think in Chinese of what I want to say and then I translate it into English | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 8) | When I speak, I am generally unaware of any mistakes I might be making. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 9) | I consciously apply the rules of grammar when I speak English. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 10) | I volunteer answers in class so I can practice using English. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 11) | I try to answer all questions mentally, even when the teacher is addressing someone else. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 12) | When I learn a new word, I say it in a sentence as soon as possible. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

Listening and Speaking Outside of Class**Scenario**

You have an opportunity to speak in English outside of class. For example, you meet several native speakers of English.

Remember to draw a circle around the number that tells how often you actually do what is described in each statement below.

- 1) I listen especially for words or phrases that I already know to help understand what is going on in a conversation.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---
- 2) I talk about the same sorts of things in English that I talk about in **Chinese**.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---
- 3) I ask native speakers the correct way to say things.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---
- 4) I try to talk with native speakers and keep the conversation going, because I get more practice that way.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---
- 5) If I don't completely understand what the other person says to me, I think about the words I did understand and try to guess what he or she might be saying.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---
- 6) I relate the English I hear in conversations to what I've learned in class.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---
- 7) If I don't understand what the other person says to me, I ask them to speak slowly or to say it in a different way.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---
- 8) When I know I'm going to be around native speakers, I plan a few things to say.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---
- 9) I go home afterwards and think about what I said to see if I made any mistakes.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

Reading English**Scenario**

The teacher assigns a reading selection for homework. This may be a short story or an article from a newspaper, or a passage on culture.

Remember to draw a circle around the letter that tells how often you actually do what is described in each statement below.

- 1) Before I read, I plan to pay more attention to the general meaning of the passage than to specific words, phrases and details.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---
- 2) Before I actually read (a passage or book), I arrange myself a treat to enjoy on completion of the task.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---
- 3) When I find the meaning of a new word, I read it over and over again to remember its meaning.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---
- 4) I take notes when I read, listing the new words or phrases I find in the passage.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---
- 5) I scan for special words, phrases or information to get the most important points when I read.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---
- 6) When I read, I organise information under different headings according to their attributes.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

- | | | | | |
|---|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| 7) I try to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words by looking at the words around it in the rest of the sentence. | <i>1</i> | <i>2</i> | <i>3</i> | <i>4</i> |
| 8) I get the major ideas of a reading selection by checking the comprehension questions before I begin reading. | <i>1</i> | <i>2</i> | <i>3</i> | <i>4</i> |
| 9) When I read, I try to visualise what I read. | <i>1</i> | <i>2</i> | <i>3</i> | <i>4</i> |
| 10) I first skim the material I must read in order to get the main idea and concepts. | <i>1</i> | <i>2</i> | <i>3</i> | <i>4</i> |
| 11) I practice my reading skills by trying to read extra materials in English (such as newspapers, magazines, ads, etc.). | <i>1</i> | <i>2</i> | <i>3</i> | <i>4</i> |
| 12) When I read new words, I think of what other situations they might be used in. | <i>1</i> | <i>2</i> | <i>3</i> | <i>4</i> |
| 13) I try to relate what I'm reading to my own experiences or to material I already know. | <i>1</i> | <i>2</i> | <i>3</i> | <i>4</i> |
| 14) I use a dictionary to understand additional meanings of the words I read. | <i>1</i> | <i>2</i> | <i>3</i> | <i>4</i> |
| 15) After I finish reading, I check my understanding by seeing if I can remember the main ideas of the passage. | <i>1</i> | <i>2</i> | <i>3</i> | <i>4</i> |
| 16) After I finish reading, I try to summarise mentally, what I have read to understand it better. | <i>1</i> | <i>2</i> | <i>3</i> | <i>4</i> |

Writing in English

Scenario

The teacher has assigned a short composition or paragraph to be written entirely in English. This might be to write a report or to describe a picture or a personal experience.

Remember to draw a circle around the letter that tells how often you actually do what is described in each statement below.

- | | | | | |
|---|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| 1) Before I actually do a writing task (e.g. an essay or a letter) I arrange myself a treat to enjoy on completion of the task. | <i>1</i> | <i>2</i> | <i>3</i> | <i>4</i> |
| 2) I use what I know about writing in Chinese (structure, organization, etc.) to help write in English. | <i>1</i> | <i>2</i> | <i>3</i> | <i>4</i> |
| 3) Before I write the actual essay, I write it a few times to see whether it conveys the intended meaning. | <i>1</i> | <i>2</i> | <i>3</i> | <i>4</i> |
| 4) When I write, I replace words and phrases that I can't recall with other words or phrases that have the same meaning. | <i>1</i> | <i>2</i> | <i>3</i> | <i>4</i> |
| 5) I write the assignment first in Chinese , and then translate it into English. | <i>1</i> | <i>2</i> | <i>3</i> | <i>4</i> |
| 6) I consciously use grammatical rules when I write in English. | <i>1</i> | <i>2</i> | <i>3</i> | <i>4</i> |
| 7) For accuracy, I ask a friend to read over what I've written. | <i>1</i> | <i>2</i> | <i>3</i> | <i>4</i> |
| 8) I Use a dictionary or other English reference materials when I write in English. | <i>1</i> | <i>2</i> | <i>3</i> | <i>4</i> |
| 9) I use my textbook and dictionary to look up spelling, verb conjugations, and gender agreement, etc. | <i>1</i> | <i>2</i> | <i>3</i> | <i>4</i> |
| 10) I carefully reread what I've written to make sure there are no mistakes. | <i>1</i> | <i>2</i> | <i>3</i> | <i>4</i> |

- | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5) 如果听到新单词的读音与一个中文词的相似, 我会认为两者的意思相近。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 6) 在老师讲英文时我会把英文翻译成中文以便于理解。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 7) 学新的单词或短语时, 我会在脑子里回过来记住它。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 8) 在听老师讲时, 我会套用语法规则来帮助理解老师的话。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 9) 我在听到一个新单词时, 我会用它造个句子。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 10) 听不懂老师讲话时, 我会请同学帮助。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 11) 我把老师所讲的内容尽量与自己的经历或者已知的知识相联系。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 12) 遇到不认识的单词, 我会用构词法知识(如: 前缀、后缀)来猜它的意思。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 13) 老师讲英文时, 我对某些词和短语会特别关注。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 14) 听老师讲后, 我会在心里总结老师所讲的东西, 以便更好地理解。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

课堂口语

背景: 老师要求参与课堂活动。也就是说你必须在课堂上讲英语, 包括提问、回答、口头训练、朗读、简短陈述。

- | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| 1) 老师要求我在课上讲英语时, 我在开口讲之前会先在心里练习多次。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2) 我在用英语讲话时会仔细关注自己的语言, 犯错时会自我纠正。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3) 如果必须面对全班发言, 我会先对着一个朋友讲以获得他的建议和意见。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4) 如果必须面对全班发言, 我会在讲之前多次练习, 尤其关注讲话内容。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5) 如果必须面对全班发言, 我会在讲之前在心里练习来减少紧张感。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 6) 讲话时如果想不起某个词或短语, 我会用别的来替代。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 7) 我先用中文思考要讲的内容, 在把它翻译成英文。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 8) 在讲话时, 我一般意识不到自己所犯的错误。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 9) 在讲话时, 我有意识的运用语法知识。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 10) 在课堂上我主动回答问题, 以便练习口语。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 11) 我在心里回答老师的所有问题, 即使老师让别人回答。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 12) 在学新单词时, 我立即把它用在句子中。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

课堂外的听与说

背景：在课堂外，你有机会讲英文，比如，你遇到了几个母语为英语的人。

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|--|---|---|---|---|
| 1) 我注意捕捉熟悉的词和短语，以帮助理解对话。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2) 我用英语谈论的内容跟我用中文谈论的是一样的。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3) 我向母语为英文的人询问英语的表达方法。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4) 我尽量跟母语为英语的人交流，因为这样我能得到更多锻炼。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5) 如果我没有完全理解别人的讲话，我就以我听懂的词来猜他的意思。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 6) 我会把跟人谈话时听到的英语跟我上课听到的联系起来。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 7) 如果跟人交流时没有听懂对方的讲话，我会让他将慢一点或者换一种方法表达。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 8) 如果知道要跟母语为英语的人打交道，我会先想好一些事情来说。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 9) 跟外国人交流后，我会回想我说的语言，检查一下是否犯了什么错误。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

英语阅读

背景：老师布置了课后阅读任务，可能是一片篇故事，或者报纸文章，或者关于文化的文章。

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|-------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| 1) 读之前，我计划多关注文章大意而不是具体的词、短语等细节。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2) 读之前，我先安排好一件事或东西用来在读完后犒劳自己。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3) 我知道一个生词的意思后，我反复读它来记住它的意思。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4) 阅读时，我记下遇到的新单词和短语。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5) 阅读时，我快速浏览找寻一些特殊的词和短语以了解最重要的信息。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 6) 阅读时，我根据信息的特征把它们整理归纳在不同种类。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 7) 遇到不认识的单词时，我根据句中其它部分来猜生词的意思。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 8) 我在阅读正文前先读文章后的问题以了解文章的大意。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 9) 阅读时，我想象出所读内容的画面。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 10) 我先浏览文章以了解文章大意和概念。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 11) 为练习阅读技巧，我尽量阅读英文材料，如英文报纸、杂志、广告等。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 12) 在读到新单词时，我会想象它能在其它什么情形下使用。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 13) 我尽量把读到的内容和自身的经历或别的材料相连系。 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

