Chinese learning strategies: An ethnographic study on a Japanese mature age beginner learner

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Chinese learning strategies:
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My Background

- Born in Taiwan
- Migrated to Australia
- Came to Japan as exchange stu.
- Currently teach "academic English" at Kyoto Univ.

"Typical English classes"

So
Why teaching Chinese?

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1. Rising importance of Chinese

- Second largest (fastest growing) economy
  2010 Forecast GDP: 10%
- Most populous country (1.3 billion)
  ¼ Chinese speaking population globally:
  1) China 1.3 billion
  2) Taiwan 22.2 million
  3) Singapore 3 million……etc

2. Low motivation towards English learning/teaching

- Students' low interest
- Teachers' motivation decrease

Video (BS school) 1min 17sec

3. L2 and L3 relation

- Similarities
- Differences
- Possible influences of L2 ⇔L3 ?
- Correlations between elements of L2 and L3
- Can elements of L2 be used as predicators for measuring L3 elements and vice versa ?

Contemporary Chinese written language: Traditional and simplified system

Simplified Chinese

- Initiated in 1950s & 1960s – promote literacy
- Officially used in China and Singapore
- Used by most schools and universities(except Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau)
- 1977: second round of simplifications
- Pinyin

Traditional Chinese

- In Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau
- Most overseas Chinese communities
- Uses BoPoMoFo (36 alphabets)

Comparing Pinyin and注音符号 (bepemofo)

ㄅ B	ㄒ X	ㄟ EI
ㄆ P	ㄓ ZH	ㄠ AU
ㄇ M	ㄔ CH	ㄡ OU
ㄈ F	ㄕ SH	ㄢ AN
ㄉ D	ㄖ R	ㄣ EN
ㄊ T	ㄗ Z	ㄤ ANG
ㄋ N	ㄘ C	ㄥ ENG
ㄌ L	ㄙ S	ㄦ ER
ㄍ G	ㄚ A	ㄧ I
ㄎ K	ㄛ O	ㄨ U
ㄏ H	ㄜ E	ㄩ IU
ㄐ J	ㄝ EH	
ㄑ Q	ㄞ AI	

Learning Chinese as a foreign language

- Simplified - most schools and universities
- Traditional - previously in west coast of the United States
- Currently more schools are turning to simplified
- UK univs. – require simplified and then traditional
- Teachers are expected (encouraged) to know both
- Japan - simplified

The study

One Japanese female mature age student

- Our encounter
- Her desire to learn 'Taiwanese style' Chinese
- April- Nov (once/wk/60-90mins/ one to one)

Subject profile

Age
Family structure
No previous Chinese learning experience
Work
Social circle
Purpose for studying☆

Study behaviors

- Diligent
- Study everyday
- Self-study with textbook/ internet
- Struggled with learning traditional system
- Struggled with getting the "right" textbook
  No Jap-traditional Chinese dictionary! Surprise

Over emphasis on 'Taiwanese' pronunciation?

- Writing and reading is easy
- Not so much Listening
  (more output over input)
- Favors mimicking pronunciation

Self pronunciation learning strategy

1) Japanese → simplified Chinese (meaning)
2) Simplified Chinese → Traditional Chinese
3) Traditional Chinese → bepemofo

For example:
1) りんご → 苹果
2) 苹果 → 蘋果
3) 蘋果 → ㄆㄧㄣˊㄍㄨㄛˇ

Japanese Chinese (Simplified and Traditional) online dictionary
http://www.excite.co.jp/world/chinese/

Bepefomo online dictionary
http://py.kdd.cc/

Short conversation recording

Conversation transcript

T: yi-qian	T: Before
S: m (intention unclear)	S: M (intention unclear)
T: mai-le	T: Before
S: m (intention unclear)	S: M (intention unclear)
T: yi-qian	T: Before
S: yi-qian?	S: Before?
T: yi-qian, mai-le	T: Bought it before
S: m, arh! (express understanding) yi-qian (confirms)	S: M, Arh! (express understanding) before (confirms)
T: liang-nian yi-qian	T: Two years before
S: liang-nian, Arh! (express understanding) yi-qian?	S: Two, Arh! (express understanding), one year?
T: yi-nian	T: One year
S: yi-niang	S: One year
T: liang	T: Two
S: liang nian	S: Two years
T: liang-nian	T: Two years
S: m (agreement)	S: M (agreement)
T: yi-qian	T: One year
S: qian, qian?	S: Year, year?
T: いぜん (use Japanese)	T: いぜん (use Japanese)
S: arh, arh, m, m,	S: arh, arh, m, m,
T: liang-nian yi-qian	T: Two years before
S: m, m	S: m, m
T: liang-nian yi-qian mai-de	T: bought it two years before
S: m, m	S: m, m

Analysis of conversation strategy

- Used many "m" with different intonation for different meaning
- Did not formulate Qs nor confirms
  Kept giving deep "m" signals until she got help from the teacher
- "mmm" intonation changed (lights up gradually) with increase in understanding
- Finally produces utterance
- Gave false understanding, trying to stay in the conversation
- Repeat the same word asking for help

Sounds she used

- "m" (5 times)
  First 3 "m" for false understanding/ lack of interest?
  Last 2 "m" for agreement
- "Arh" (2 times)
  Express clear understanding
- Formulate question by mimicking teacher utterance

Teacher reflections

Writing strategy

Chinese character learning
- Reflects to Japanese Kanji
- Sounds the word out using Japanese kanji knowledge (high accuracy)
- Traditional Chinese is similar to Japanese
- Very different from English learners

Grammar
- Habit of direct Japanese translation
- Order of sentence is reversed.

Email exchanges
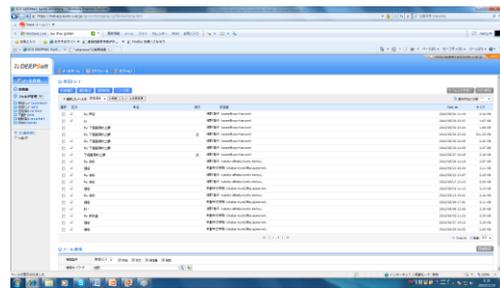
Email example

親愛的 nancy 小姐
早安！！我們很高興，明天你要參加我們的聚會！
我們開始七點。請來浜大津車站。 從跟上車站乘地鐵是20分。
你乘地鐵時候請打電話。09039927344（我的行動電話）
或 0775256674（我們的辦公室） 我要去浜大津車站。很近。
可以嗎？浅野

親愛的 nancy 小姐
早安！！ 我們很高興明天你要參加我們的聚會！
我們七點開始。請來浜大津車站。 從跟上車站乘地鐵是20分。
你乘地鐵時候請打電話。09039927344（我的行動電話）
或 0775256674（我們的辦公室） 我要去浜大津車站。很近。
可以嗎？浅野

Email example

士晨小姐！早安！你好嗎？20號，我要去瀬戶内海，看芸術祭。對不起。 下個星期四，你有事兒？有空，我可以上課。 如果有你事兒，我可以上課星期三。 怎麼？智子

士晨小姐！早安！你好嗎？20號我要去瀬戶内海看芸術祭。對不起。 下個星期四，你有事兒？有空，我可以上課。 如果有你事兒，我可以星期三上課。 怎麼？智子

To sum up

- Interesting teaching/interacting experience
- Rapid improvement – especially communication ability (the ability to use limited Chinese ability for communication)
  Confidence in using Chinese
- FL learning can be successfully within a short period of time.

Reflections (for future L2 and L3 teaching in Japan)

- Increase in teacher motivation
- Slow down my teaching in my English classes, more tolerant and more frequently revise teaching points
- Learners share similar learning behaviors and strategies in L2 and L3 – reluctant to speak up, passive, wait for cues (even one on one relaxed environment)
- Teachers need to take more proactive approach
- Never under or over estimate students – do not assume students understand

Some references

- Shen, H. (2005). An investigation of Chinese-character learning strategies among non-native speakers of Chinese, *System*, 33, 49-68.
- Wang, J., Spencer, K., & Xing, M. (2009). Metacognitive beliefs and strategies in learning Chinese as a foreign language, *System*, 37, 46-56.

Chinese (Traditional and Simplified) translation sites
- http://www.excite.co.jp/world/chinese/
- http://py.kdd.cc/

Qs or comments?
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