

## MORE THAN THE SUM OF ITS PARTS: CASE STUDIES OF TWO GOOD LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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### **Abstract**

This study is aimed to shed light on the learning processes by presenting two advanced second language learners' case studies. To fulfill a course requirement, the participants kept learning journals to record their learning processes and to examine important factors that affected the processes. Their retrospections and interpretations reveal that such factors as motivation, learning strategy and social identity play critical roles in good language learners' learning processes.

**Key Words:** Good Language Learner, Second Language Acquisition, Qualitative Study, Diary Studies

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## **FOREWORD**

This study involves two participants, Cheryl Wei-Yu Chen and Beryl Chinghwa Lee. They are Ph. D. students of a TESOL program (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) in Taiwan. In 2003, they were admitted to the English department of National Taiwan Normal University. As they managed to pass the extremely competitive Ph. D. entrance examination, suffice it to say that they are “good language learners.”

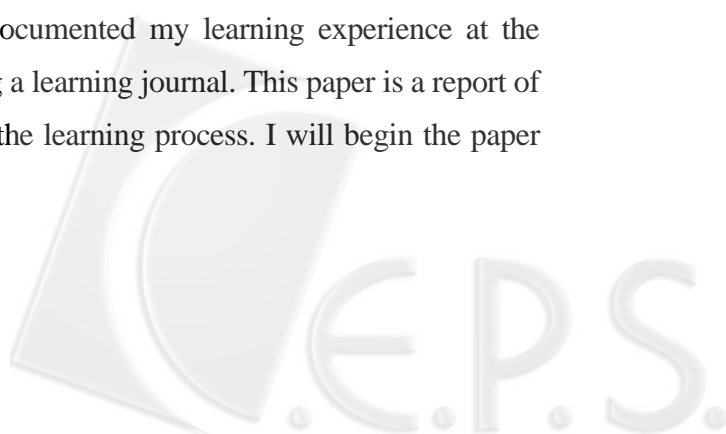
To fulfill the requirement of their Second Language Acquisition (SLA) course of their 1<sup>st</sup> academic semester, they kept learning diaries to track their learning processes. At the end of the semester, they were requested to examine the data they collected and to analyze them on the basis of current language learning theories. Their qualitative studies in this sense provide important information about the learning processes of good language learners.

Studying good language learners has been reported to be a useful way of investigating how various factors affect language learning (Ellis, 1994). For example, journal entries consisting of records of events and reflections reveal aspects of language learning which are normally hidden from the view of an outside observer. In this study, we present these two Ph. D. students’ case studies to illuminate the factors involved in the learning process of advanced language learners. It is hoped that other researchers and learners may gain insights into learners’ complex learning process from this study.

## **CASE STUDY ONE: CHERYL**

### **Introduction**

In the past three months, I have documented my learning experience at the English Department of NTNU by keeping a learning journal. This paper is a report of some of the observations I made during the learning process. I will begin the paper



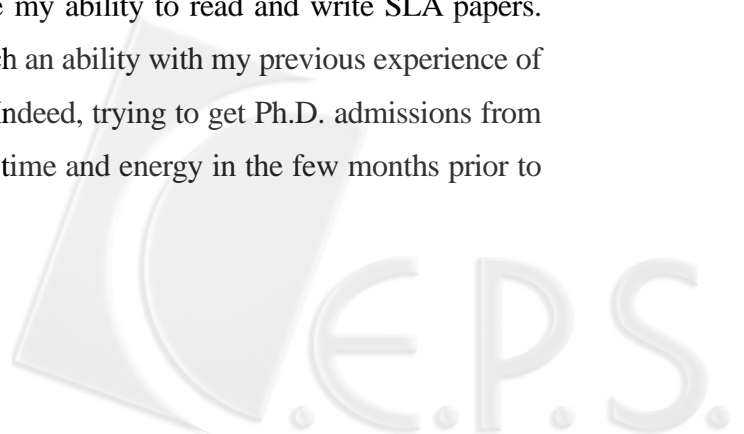
by providing the baseline data and some more background information about myself. Then, my observations will be organized around four major themes – learning styles, learning strategies, becoming a member of the SLA/TESOL community, and social identity. Finally, I will provide some thoughts about the experience of keeping a learning journal.

### **The Baseline Data**

In the first SLA class on September 18, 2003, I was told that I should begin the learning project by providing an evaluation of my knowledge about the SLA discourse community and my ability to read and write SLA papers in English. The following is what I wrote later on that day:

**September 18** -- Keeping a learning diary is a new concept and experience for me, and I'm not exactly sure what I have to do in the diary or for the final project. I am keeping Dr. Cheng's guidelines beside me as I'm writing to get more ideas about what to do. I think I'm supposed to reflect on at least two questions – how much I know about the SLA community and how well I can read and write SLA papers. My answer for the two questions is quite positive. I became quite familiar with many SLA terms after cramming for the Ph.D. entrance exam this year. I have confidence in writing, reading, and understanding SLA papers. The thing I worry about is whether I will be able to understand statistical procedures and research designs. Hopefully, the statistics course will help.

The first entry was rather short mainly because I did not know what to write at that time. Nevertheless, I did briefly evaluate my ability to read and write SLA papers. It is interesting to see that I connected such an ability with my previous experience of preparing for the Ph.D. entrance exams. Indeed, trying to get Ph.D. admissions from schools in Taiwan occupied much of my time and energy in the few months prior to



the summer of 2003. During that period of time, I tried to review and study SLA to prepare myself for the exams. This experience later helped me to see myself as a competent reader and writer in SLA, although I did express some worries about my lack of training in statistics.

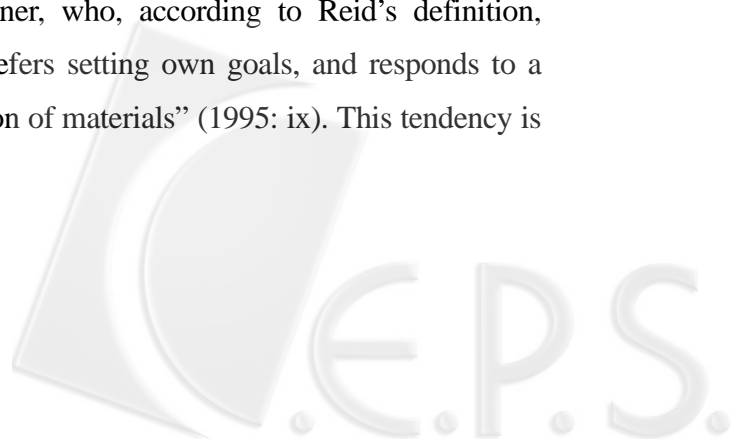
Other personal data about myself include:

1. I am a female student in my mid-20s; besides studying, I also teach at the Language Center of National Taiwan University.
2. I earned a B.A. in Linguistics from a Canadian university and a MSED (Master of Science in Education) in TESOL from an American school. The first time I took SLA was in the Fall semester of 1999 (my first semester in the master program).
3. Before moving to Taipei for my Ph.D. study, I had taught in my hometown Chia-yi for two years.

The fact that I took a course on SLA before helps me to see myself as a competent SLA reader and writer. One thing that I did not mention in the baseline data is that when I was a MA student, I enjoyed the SLA course very much. Part of the reason for me to take SLA again was that I thought as a Ph.D. student in TESOL, it is important for me to have a solid understanding of SLA. Emotionally, I did not want to overwhelm myself with too many new subjects in the first semester at NTNU, so I thought taking SLA would be a good idea.

### **Theme 1: Learning Styles**

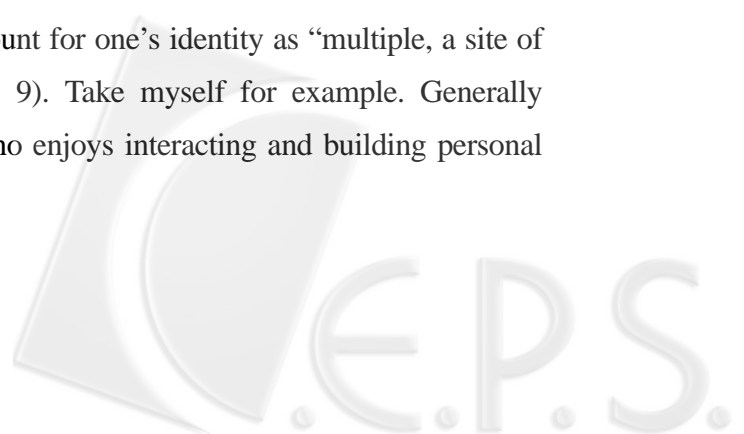
It is rather difficult for me to use many of the dichotomies proposed by SLA theorists to characterize my learning styles. For example, at times, I would characterize myself as an *analytic* learner, who, according to Reid's definition, "learns more effectively individually, prefers setting own goals, and responds to a sequential, linear, step-by-step presentation of materials" (1995: ix). This tendency is illustrated in the following journal entry:



**November 12** – Prof. Cheng suggested that we could record our own think-alouds to enrich the data for the learning projects. She also gave us an opportunity to practice think-aloud in class today. I got very distracted during the process. I think I'm the type of person who needs to work very quietly by myself in order to concentrate. I also dislike having to do group work. I like to work by myself and set my own goals and deadlines.

However, the analytic learning style does not always account for how I learn. On many other occasions, I can also be described as a more *global* learner who learns more effectively by interacting with other people (Reid 1995: ix). In fact, as a student and researcher, it is impossible for me not to interact with others. I highly value my interactions with other people. For example, I found the speech given by Dr. Sharwood Smith at our department on November 14 very informing and stimulating. Personally, since the beginning of the semester, I also have had many opportunities to interact with many classmates and teachers who constantly provide me with new thoughts and inspirations. On the entry for November 26, I wrote, "I have always been a 'serious' and 'intellectual' person. In this program, I have met some people who are even more 'serious' and 'intellectual' than me. Pursuing a Ph.D. degree really suits this part of my character well." I seem to like the challenges I face in the Ph.D. program.

I see learning-style dichotomies as continuums which describe one's learning styles in relative terms. Therefore, as aforementioned, it is difficult for me to use a set of fixed terms to describe my learning styles. As Peirce suggests, many SLA theorists "have drawn artificial distinctions between the language learner and the language learning context" (1995: 10). Such distinctions result in a rather unidimensional portrayal of an individual, failing to account for one's identity as "multiple, a site of struggle, and subject to change" (ibid.: 9). Take myself for example. Generally speaking, I am an extroverted person who enjoys interacting and building personal



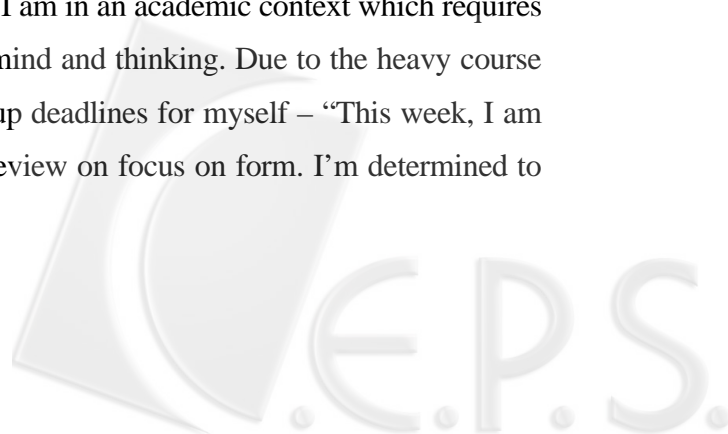
relationships with other people. However, I may be seen as a somewhat introverted student in one of the classes this semester. Especially when the semester just started, I felt somewhat uncomfortable with the power structure of this particular class and remained mostly silent during class discussions. Because of this personal experience, I can really relate to Peirce's point that all learning is situated in the broader social context and that a more comprehensive theory is needed to describe the relationship and interaction between the learner and the learning context. As I wrote in the entry for December 10, "Humans and their behavior are just too complex to be explained by those simple terms!"

### **Theme 2: Learning Strategies**

Learning styles and learning strategies are often closely related (Cohen 2003; Ehrman et al. 2003). For the purpose of this paper, the following six major groups of L2 learning strategies identified by Oxford are used (1990, as cited in Ehrman et al. 2003):

1. Cognitive strategies
2. Metacognitive strategies
3. Memory-related strategies
4. Compensatory strategies
5. Affective strategies
6. Social strategies

From the journal entries, I found myself using many cognitive (e.g., reasoning, analysis, note-taking, and synthesizing) and metacognitive (e.g., identifying one's own preferences and needs, planning, monitoring mistakes, and evaluating task success) strategies. I think this is because I am in an academic context which requires frequent and conscious control of one's mind and thinking. Due to the heavy course load, I often have to plan ahead and set up deadlines for myself – "This week, I am mostly occupied by writing a literature review on focus on form. I'm determined to



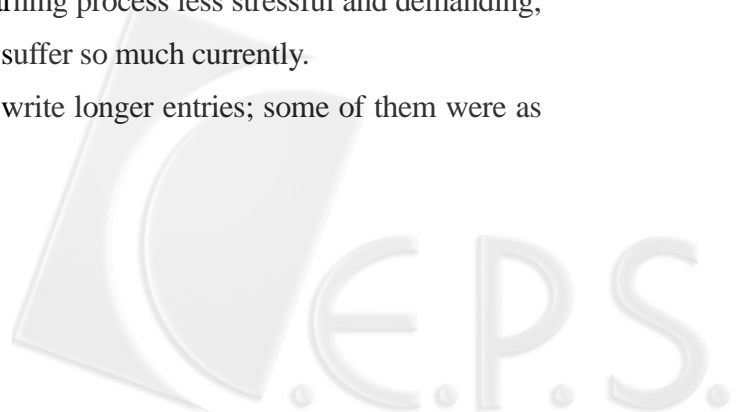
finish the first draft by tomorrow. I feel that I am always in a hurry, always need to finish everything as soon as possible while trying to stay patient at the same time” (November 28).

Another group of frequently-used strategy is the affective ones. Especially at the early stage, I used many negative words to describe my learning process; some examples are:

1. **October 4** – During the past ten days or so, my inability to understand statistics and research designs continued to be a major source of frustration for me.
2. **October 21** – I have been highly frustrated by the workload again. It seems that I’m unable to finish most of the readings. Very tired of always having to chase the schedule and not time to think and breathe.

When I read through all the journal entries to gather ideas for writing this paper, I found that many of the earlier entries were rather short and focused mainly on my unsettling emotions. This is probably because I had to deal with many physical and emotional changes when the semester just started. I was also overwhelmed by the difficulty level of many of the readings we had to do for the course. Compared with the relatively easy time I had when I took SLA in the master program in the U.S., I was becoming more and more frustrated with my inability to finish readings most of the papers and understanding the statistical figures and research designs. I think when I was in the master program, I did not have to read that many empirical studies. Many of my teachers conduct mainly qualitative research and did not require us to know a lot about quantitative studies. Although not having to worry too much about statistics in the MA program made the learning process less stressful and demanding, this is also one of the main reasons why I suffer so much currently.

As the term progressed, I started to write longer entries; some of them were as

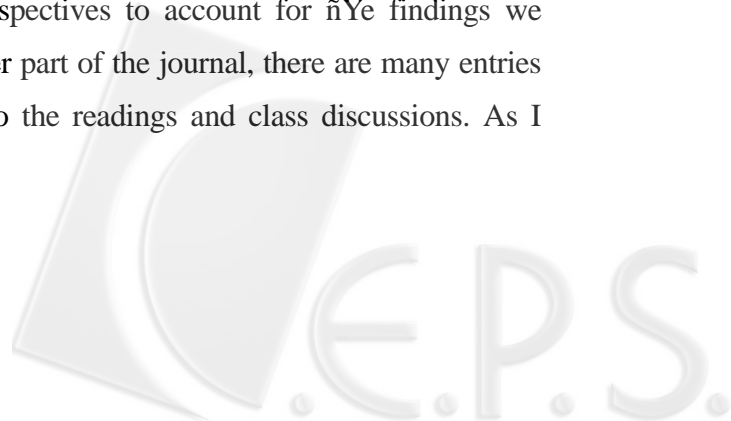


long as three type-pages. Keeping the learning journal turned out to be an effective means for managing my anxiety and maintaining a high motivation level. On November 26, I wrote:

Actually, as I am writing this journal, I really start to think more positively about my experience in the program so far. I mean, when I am really busy with reading papers, typing handouts...you know, doing those “school” things, sometimes, once in a while, I ask myself, “Why did you put yourself in this situation?” But when I have time to really reflect on my experience and growth over this period of time, I start to see some positive things and also the parts of the study which I enjoy.

In the first few weeks of the semester, I struggled to find themes to write about in the learning journal. But gradually, I developed a habit of recording the daily events which happened around me in the journal. The journal became an affective strategy by which I released all the pressure I experienced. In a way, the journal became a faithful and understanding friend who would always listen to my words.

While writing some of the later entries, I also began to respond specifically to the class readings and discussions. In this regard, writing the journal serves as a kind of cognitive strategy by which I synthesize and analyze the course materials. The following is part of my response to the speech given by Watson-Gegeo – “The talk titled “Mind, Language, and Epistemology: Toward a Language Socialization Paradigm for SLA” by Karen Ann Watson-Gegeo is quite inspiring for me for many reasons She suggests that we need not only *thick descriptions*, but also *thick explanations*. I think this is very inspiring because we as researchers should try to provide explanations from different perspectives to account for ñYe findings we have” (December 3). Throughout the later part of the journal, there are many entries in which I wrote about my responses to the readings and class discussions. As I





became more comfortable with the psychological and emotional changes, I was able to do more reflection at the more “professional” level.

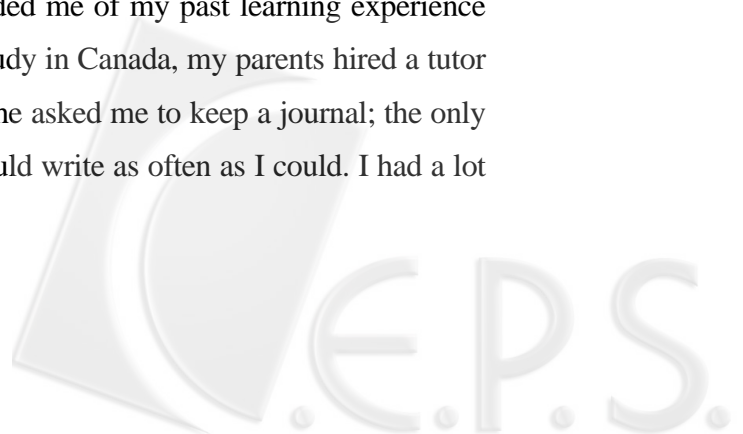
Another learning strategy or learning approach which I often used is *deep processing*. According to Ehrman, *deep processing* refers to (Ehrman 1996, as cited in Ehrman et al. 2003: 317):

an active process of making associations with material that is already familiar, examining interrelationships within the new material, elaborating the stimulus through associations with it and further development of it, connecting the new material with personal experience, and considering alternative interpretations. The learner may use the new material to actively reconstruct his or her conceptual frameworks.

Indeed, as a Ph.D. student who is required to take a critical stance, I often have to engage in deep processing. In the Ph.D. program, I do not think that I can do *surface processing* too much, defined as the “completion of the task with minimum conceptual effort” (Ehrman et al. 2003: 318).

Among the many components of deep processing described above, I think while writing the learning journal, I often connected the new materials with my personal experience. For example, I can really identify with the issues which Pierce raises in her paper “Social Identity, Investment, and Language Learning” (1995) mainly because I was once in the same position as the subjects in her study were, i.e., being an immigrant to Canada. Reading this paper also made me realize that actually, keeping a learning journal is not a brand new experience for me. On December 10, I wrote:

Reading this paper also reminded me of my past learning experience in Canada. When I began to study in Canada, my parents hired a tutor to help me with my English. She asked me to keep a journal; the only instruction I got was that I should write as often as I could. I had a lot



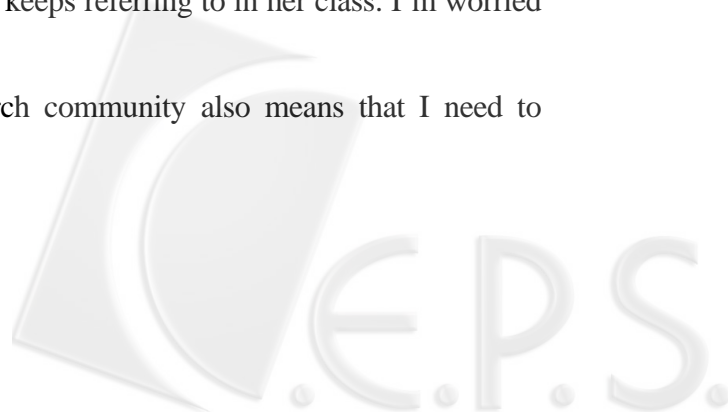
of fun writing the journal entries, and I was a very productive writer. Now, I'm about to begin analyzing my journal entries for the learning project. I could not help but wonder what I wrote when I was in Canada. In that context at that time, I was an English learner, an immigrant, learning English in a second-language context. I think those entries would look more like those which we had read about in the SLA class.

In the baseline data, I wrote that I did not have any previous experience of keeping a learning journal. At that time, I was still quite confused with the purpose of keeping the journal and what to do for the learning project; I was certainly not familiar with the idea of analyzing my own learning experience. It was near the end of the semester and after reading Peirce's paper that I recalled that I had kept a learning journal in the first two years of living in Canada. Diary study is always a possible research method, and there has been many previous studies in which the researcher kept a journal to record his/her own experience of learning a second or foreign language (e.g., Schmidt and Frota 1986, in which Schmidt kept a journal throughout his five months of exposure to Portuguese in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil). Therefore, one possible future research idea for me is to re-read the many journal entries I had written in Canada and analyze them from the broader sociocultural perspectives.

### **Theme 3: Becoming a Member of the SLA/TESL Community**

My ongoing struggle to become a member of the SLA discourse community is well-documented in the journal entries. At first, I expressed some reservation and anxiety about having to become a member of this community. In the October 7 entry, I wrote, "I'm actually a bit anxious about becoming a member of the research community; this is a term which Dr. Chu keeps referring to in her class. I'm worried that I'm just not good enough."

Becoming a member of the research community also means that I need to

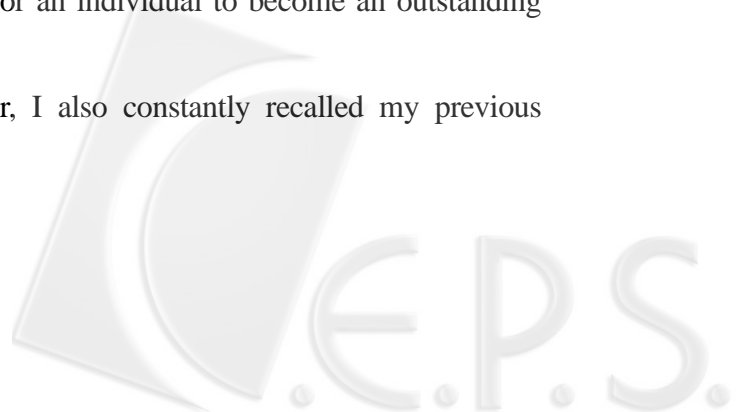


behave professionally. In my learning journal, I documented the following two events:

1. **October 17** -- During the past ten days, a couple of significant events took place. The first one is that my DA teacher responded to the two abstracts (reaction papers) I submitted. She thinks that I should avoid using the first-person pronouns in my writings so that the points I made won't sound too personal or subjective. I was kind of worried about the two abstracts before handing them in because of the same reason. Being an experienced writer in SLA, I think it is rather unacceptable of me to make this kind of mistake.
2. **October 27** -- Last Saturday, I went to National Chengchi University to present my paper. Just when I thought that everything was going well (I had finished the main talk at that time), I started coughing. As a result, I missed the question which was asked by the mediator of the session, a professor of the English Department at NCCU. Because I was coughing badly, I could only guess what the question was about and answered it in a trembling voice. What an embarrassment!

I see these two journal entries as a documentation of my struggle to become a member of the academia. In the first event, I sounded rather “unprofessional” in the papers I submitted to my teacher because I made some use of the first person pronoun “I”. In the second event, I could not respond to a question at a conference because I was coughing uncontrollably due to a bad cold. These two events remind me of the demands which are required for an individual to become an outstanding member of the research community.

During the course of this semester, I also constantly recalled my previous



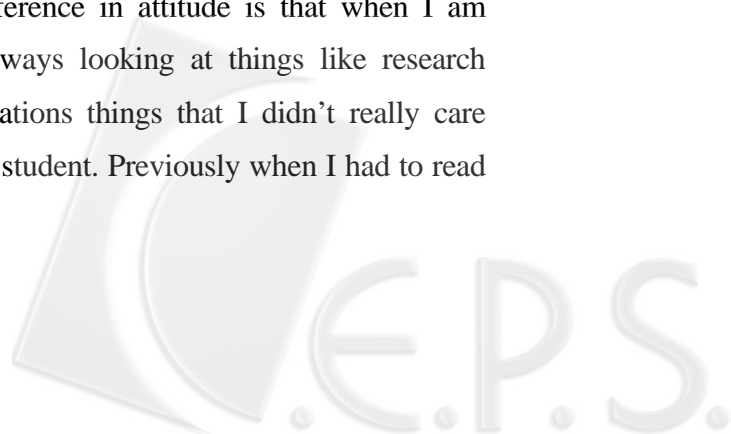
learning experience in the master program. I think this feeling of nostalgia can be explained by the fact that it was not long ago when I did my master study; I still have vivid memories from that period of time. I also had very pleasant experience from studying in the U.S. As I struggle to fit in now, I cannot help but constantly look back to my previous life to search for comfort and strength. I wrote on October 17:

As I am buried in frustration and pressure, I constantly think about Dr. Pica and all the encouragement she has given to me. She said that I'm going to be an excellent researcher in the future. She has great faith in me, and I'm depending on this belief to go on with my study.

As an emotional person, I found that after beginning my study in the Ph.D. program, I often have to consciously monitor my feelings by thinking more positively. When I need emotional support, one source is the words of my mentor Dr. Theresa Pica who is always generous and inspiring. I think I am still seeking for this kind of bond in the Ph.D. program. As a person who will thrive in a supportive and inspiring learning environment, it is very important for me to establish some kind of emotional bond in the new place. However, I am also fully aware of the demand of becoming an independent and insightful researcher who should be calm, not emotional. I think I am still trying hard to be myself while trying to establish my status as a newcomer in the SLA/TESOL community.

As I am often drenched in memories, I am also fully aware of the different circumstances here and now. Professionally, I have pushed myself to try to become a member of the research community. This effort can be seen in the following journal entry:

**November 26** -- Another difference in attitude is that when I am reading SLA papers, I am always looking at things like research design, limitations and implications things that I didn't really care much about when I was a MA student. Previously when I had to read

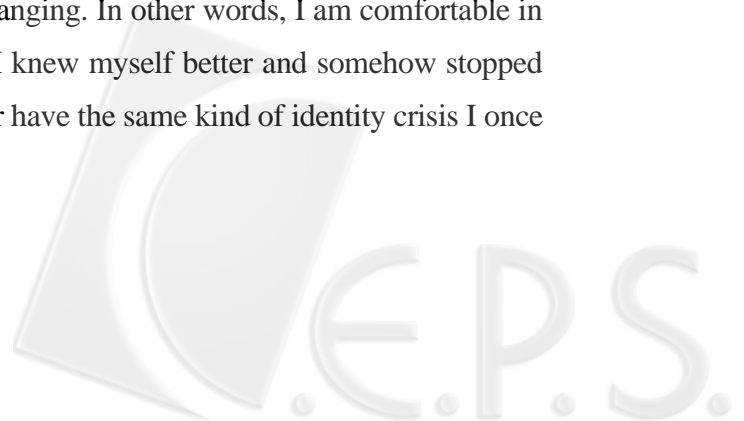


papers, I only cared about the literature review, results, and conclusions. Of course these things are still important, but I'm paying more attention to the parts which I used to ignore. When I am reading a paper, I often think about possible research questions. I guess you can call this behavior of "poking a hole" an "improvement." So far, this is one of the things that the Ph.D. program has pushed me to do.

At first, I was actually quite uncomfortable with always having to "poke a hole," a term often used by Dr. Chu in our class "Theories and Practice of EFL Teaching." I once asked myself in a journal entry, "If I cannot 'poke a hole', will this make me an ineligible member of the SLA/TESOL community?" (November 15). Although I become more or less comfortable with the idea of having to "poke a hole" when reading research papers, I am not sure if I am always capable of doing so. Professionally, I think I am expected to grow up as fast as possible.

#### **Theme 4: Social Identity**

This theme is closely related to the above one. I see myself as having to form a new identity in the Ph.D. program – as a new member of the research community. Although studying has occupied much of my time and energy, I still play many other roles in the daily life, e.g., as a teacher, a daughter, a friend, a classmate, and etc. As Pierce states, "the individual language learner is not ahistorical and unidimensional but has a complex and contradictory social identity, changing across time and space" (1995: 25-26). I certainly see myself as a complex individual whose social identity is constantly changing. I do not think I am experiencing the kind of "identity crisis" which I once experienced when I first lived overseas. This may be because that I am a more mature person now who can accept that fact that my identity is often multifaceted and ever-changing. In other words, I am comfortable in my own skin now – "When I got older, I knew myself better and somehow stopped being philosophical. Although I no longer have the same kind of identity crisis I once



had as an adolescent, my interest in studies related to one's social identity remains high. I think this interest can explain why I found the course Sociolinguistics in my MA program, Peirce's paper, and Watson-Gegeo's speech very stimulating and inspiring" (December 10).

### **Conclusion**

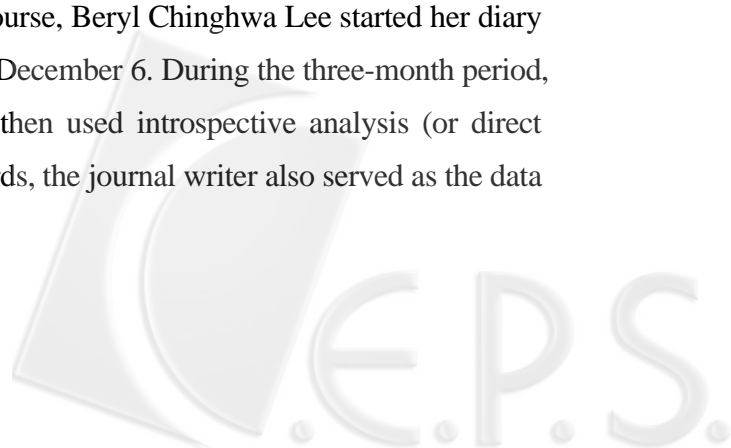
Keeping a learning journal and writing about it has been an enjoyable experience for me. In the journal, I recorded my thoughts and feelings as a first year Ph.D. student at the English Department of NTNU in Taiwan. Writing this paper provides me with an opportunity to go back and read the journal entries and re-examine my learning process in the physical, emotional, and intellectual contexts. In many ways, this learning project has enabled me to see my growth and struggle. I feel that I know myself better now.

## **CASE STUDY TWO: BERYL**

### **Introduction**

The qualitative study is one of the requirements of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) course of the graduate program of National Taiwan Normal University (NTNU) in the fall semester of 2003. According to the professor, Ms. Cheng, the task-based assignment is aimed to help students gain the insights of the complexity and dynamics of learning processes. The professor asked her students to study themselves. She gave them three general guidelines to accomplish the task, i.e., to provide baseline data, to keep journal to collect data, and to interpret their own observations on the basis of the theories covered in the SLA course.

As one of the learners of the SLA course, Beryl Chinghwa Lee started her diary writing on September 10 and stopped on December 6. During the three-month period, she recorded twenty-seven entries. She then used introspective analysis (or direct analysis) to analyze the data. In other words, the journal writer also served as the data



analyzer. However, as a novice qualitative researcher, Beryl felt uneasy to assume both roles. She therefore decided to adopt a third person perspective to report this case study in the hope of distancing these two roles to achieve objectivity.

### **The Baseline Data**

Beryl Chinghwa Lee, 45, is a first-year student of Ph. D. TESOL program of NTNU. As a full-time lecturer, she has taught Freshman English for more than 15 years in China Medical University; therefore, she has obtained some very basic concepts of SLA. However, most of her knowledge in this regard was intuitive in that she had never verified the hypotheses in any empirical studies.

Beryl was admitted to NTNU in 2003 by passing a notably competitive entrance examination. In the past two years, to prepare for the examination, she devoted herself to intensive studies of H. Douglas Brown's *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*. The book serves as a main source of her SLA background knowledge. However, since the exposure is rather limited, she needs extensive reading and exposure to approximate the SLA community.

### **Study Purpose and Term Definition**

This study is aimed to investigate Beryl's learning strategy use and other factors related to the issue in concern. Specifically, the learner's processes of SLA knowledge learning in her reading and writing tasks will be closely examined.

Learning strategies here are defined as "specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations" (Oxford, 1990). Oxford (2003) elaborates learning strategy and states that a strategy is useful under the following conditions:

- (1) The strategy relates well to the L2 task at hand.
- (2) The strategy fits the particular student's learning style preferences to one degree or another.
- (3) The student employs the strategy effectively and links it with other relevant

strategies.

According to Oxford (1990), strategies could be classified into direct and indirect strategies. The former refers to strategies “working with the language itself”. They include

- (1) memory strategies for remembering and retrieving new information,
- (2) cognitive strategies for understanding and producing the language, and
- (3) compensation strategies for using the language despite knowledge gaps.

On the other hand, indirect strategies refer to strategies used for general management of learning. They include

- (1) metacognitive strategies for co-coordinating the learning process,
- (2) affective strategies for regulating emotions, and
- (3) social strategies for learning with others.

Oxford’s definition is adopted in this study mainly because she seems to view strategies as essentially behavioral (Ellis, 1994). In this sense, observation and analysis in the retrospective report will be easier to conduct for the researcher. The second purpose of this study is to examine whether joyfulness is a concomitant of the strategy use, as proposed by Oxford in her definition.

### **Observation and Interpretation**

The diary entries revolve around two main tasks—SLA reading and writing. The data collected will be presented and interpreted in a chronological order in the hope of illuminating the profile of the subject’s personal growth history in the SLA course.





### Academic Reading

As the diary entries show, at the earlier stage, the subject does not enjoy her academic reading at all.

**September 13**—I'm tired and not interested in reading this article. Although the categorization of 4 types of the cloze test was interesting, the statistics jargons intimidate me in some way. I gave up reading the article and chose to read another paper, i.e. "What Does Language Testing Have to Offer".

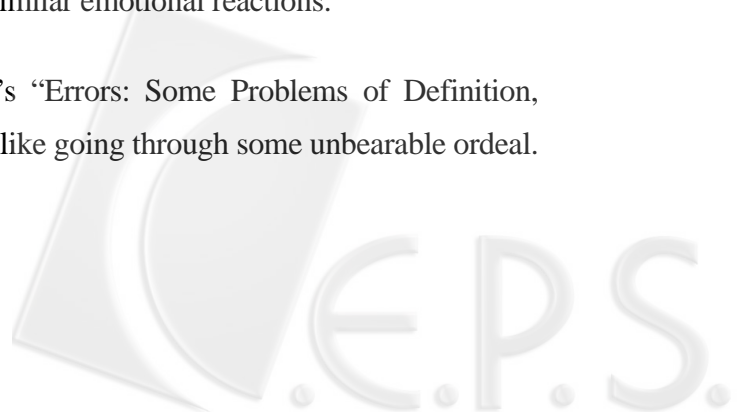
**September 21**—I finally finished McNamara's "Interaction in Second Language Performance Assessment: Whose Performance?". My goodness, reading this paper is great torture. I really don't want to cast eyes on it. The author used a lot of long sentences and inserted distracting structures here and there. I had to be very attentive; otherwise, I lost the flow of the sentence. During the reading process, I lost my temper and yelled to my sons when they interrupted me.

The entries present Beryl's attempts to deal with the stressful situation. Specifically, she uses metacognitive strategies, such as moving to read a lighter paper and directing more attention to McNamar's paper. However, as far as the final result is concerned, the outcome is not very productive or satisfactory. Although she manages to finish reading the paper, she does not acquire the knowledge transmitted by the author.

The futility can be attributed to her deficiency in statistical knowledge and lack of experience of decoding SLA paper. Because of this, her learning motivation is affected. Her strategy use is severely restricted under this circumstance—she once gives up making attempts and even claims not to read the paper anymore.

In October, another paper triggered similar emotional reactions.

**October 4**—Today I read Lennon's "Errors: Some Problems of Definition, Identification, and Distraction". It is like going through some unbearable ordeal.



There are all sufferings; no delight at all.

However, as shown by the following entry, she has different reading purpose in this case as she is assigned to present this paper in early October. To cope with her first oral presentation in the SLA course, she is highly motivated to use various strategies. It seems the process and outcome are both affected by the purpose and therefore they are dramatically different from what is reported in her earlier experience.

**October 5**—I read the paper for the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> times, trying to figure out the links between each segment. I found that I misunderstood some of the important parts. When decoding an SLA paper, especially the sophisticated ones, even an advanced reader like me may have difficulty reading the writer's mind. Since I have to present this paper, I am determined to get the whole picture clear.... After reading it for numerous times, the familiarity helped me connect links between the important ideas and construct the overview of the article. At that moment, the top-down mechanism was activated and the global picture of the discourse is getting clear...I accidentally found Lennon's article is a classic work on error analysis. All of a sudden, my motivation to comprehend the paper is heightened. If I had known that he was one of the most important figures involved in shaping the SLA history, I would have been more patient and willing to tolerate the ambiguity...

First of all, it is noticed that the kinds of the strategies applied increase to a great degree. Among other things, she uses cognitive strategy (reading many times), memory (associating the article with the author's social status), and metacognitive strategies (setting oral presentation as her goal, self-monitoring the accuracy of interpretation, self-evaluating the outcome).

To decode the article, the subject manipulates a wide variety of strategies in a flexible and sophisticated way, just like a skillful weaver knitting different fabric



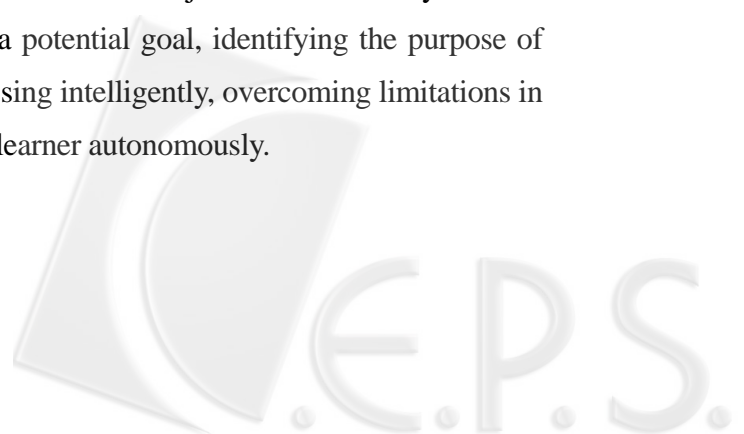
together to compose texture of a blanket. In some cases, the strategies used seem to cluster into one strand; it is therefore difficult to distinguish one strategy from another.

To make things more complicated, at this point, motivation comes into play in the process of strategy choice and use. At the first sight, it is tempting to conclude that her large repertoire of the strategy use is solely attributed to Gardner's instrumental motivation. In other words, it is suspected that the subject's task of oral presentation pushes her to enhance her reading performance. However, a closer look at the last three lines reveals her strong intention to approximate the SLA community. At this moment, it is clear that integrative motivation is also involved in triggering the learning strategy use. According to Kathleen Bailey's (1986, as cited in Brown, 2000) categorization, both the instrumental and integrative motivations of the subject fall into the intrinsic side and they have positive impact on her learning outcome.

After the long entry documented on October 5, the subject's negative feelings about reading subside to a great extent. It seems that her tolerance of ambiguity is enhanced.

**November 12**—I like “Why Are You Learning a 2<sup>nd</sup> Language? Motivation Orientations and Self-Determination Theory”. Although this is a quantitative study with lots of unintelligible statistical analysis, I enjoy reading this article. Reasons: (1) I am interested in the part of motivation assessment. (2) The author invites the readers to replicate this study since this study only focuses on Anglo-Canadian students in a bilingual context. I hope I have time to study this paper again and see how I can make use of it for my future research plan.

Compared with the case involving an oral presentation, the situation described in this entry imposes no immediate pressure on the subject. It is fair to say that the indirect metacognitive strategies (setting a potential goal, identifying the purpose of reading) and compensation strategy (guessing intelligently, overcoming limitations in epistemic schema) are summoned by the learner autonomously.



### **Academic Writing**

In contrast to the academic reading, the subject has very positive attitude toward the writing assignment from the beginning. She never labels the assignment with strong negative terms that she uses to describe the academic reading task.

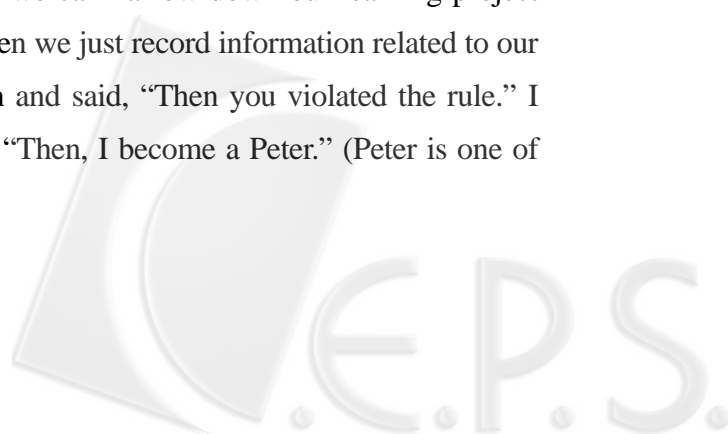
**September 10**—To do the learning project is a very exciting part for me since I can study myself and I hope the process may help me in two ways: (1) to be more tolerant with my students; (2) to have an experience of a case study and to learn how to accomplish the task and present the outcome. I like peer-editing, too. In this way, we have chances to learn from our group members.

Even so, her positive belief in the assignment does not help reduce her negative affective. Her anxiety level about the learning project remains to be extraordinarily high all the way through her diary keeping process.

**October 11**—I haven't written the journal for 2 weeks. Reason: On September 26, Professor Cheng mentioned the journal keeping issue again. She elaborated how we should make use of journal data to write our case study. She also said we should provide rationales to justify the phenomena we observed. Suddenly, I felt what I had done was all on the wrong track. Her explanation inhibited my writing in some unexplainable way. And I just couldn't produce anything since then. Whenever I tried to write, I asked myself "Will what I'm going to write be helpful for my case study?".

To cope with the thorny situation, the subject discusses her problem with one of her classmates, Cheryl. They negotiate with each other about the learning project.

**October 11**—I told Cheryl "Maybe we can narrow down our learning project and determine our topics first and then we just record information related to our topics." She rejected my suggestion and said, "Then you violated the rule." I realized immediately and answered "Then, I become a Peter." (Peter is one of



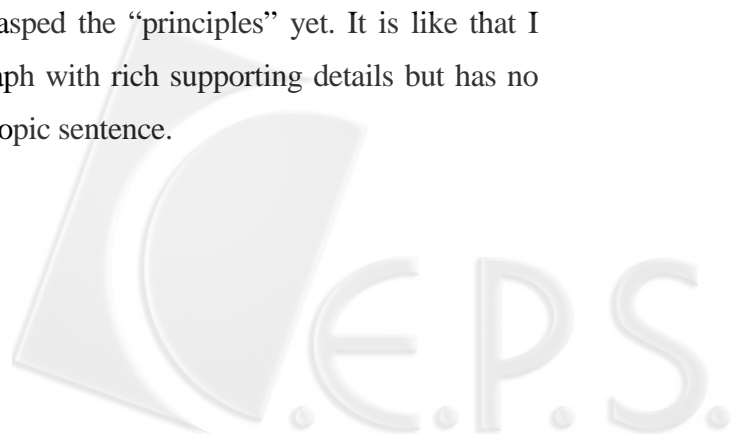
the subjects in the paper of “The Eye of the Beholder: Authenticity in an Embedded Assessment Task.” He was required to follow the teacher’s guideline to elicit authentic data. However, he violated the rule and practiced the interview questions beforehand with his interviewee. His purpose in doing so was to gain adequate scores to pass the course.) After the peer negotiation, I resume my journal writing. At least I learn keeping an open attitude when recording the data is the right thing to do at this moment.

This is the first time the learner mentions the use of social strategy. Obviously, her aim is to lift the learning barrier. When she detects that her inhibition impedes her writing task, she begins to search for ways to solve the problems. She raises the question to clarify her puzzle. Through discussion, negotiation and reflection, she effectively eliminates the inhibition.

Since then, the indirect social strategy has been used more and more often, mainly to alleviate her negative emotional responses when conducting the writing task. Chances are that her frequent use of the social strategy is related to her first successful experience documented in this entry.

On the other hand, the subject does not acquire a once-for-all cure as she does in the case of academic reading. She never gets rid of her anxiety about her writing task. The apprehension keeps haunting her.

**November 22**—This week I read “Focusing on Learning Styles and Strategies: A Diary Study in an Immersion Setting”. It gives me a clear picture of my learning project. However, I think the main difficulty lies in the theoretical grounds. I have to learn how to analyze the raw material and how to categorize the entries on the basis of some significant theoretical principles. I feel anxious because I have not grasped the “principles” yet. It is like that I successfully produce a long paragraph with rich supporting details but has no idea of how to write an appropriate topic sentence.



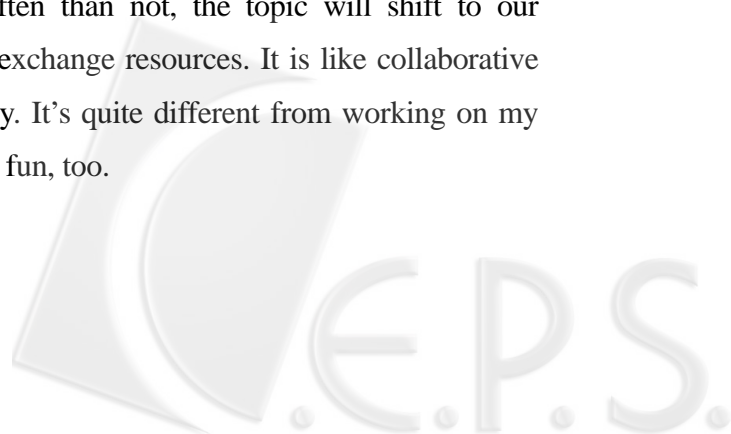
As noted, although the learner is under great strain, she makes steady progress in the writing process. The previous entry shows that she succeeds in generating a rough plan of her learning project. Her success in this regard might result from her use of affective strategies to monitor and regulate her emotion. Her metacognitive strategies also help her to arrange and plan her learning. In this sense, the strain that she experiences should be categorized as facilitating anxiety. The following entry validates this assumption.

**November 22**—Anxiety has been the main topic for these three weeks. Professor Cheng informed us that there are debilitating anxiety and facilitating anxiety. This is a topic that I am eager to investigate. It's really hard to tell if anxiety is good or bad for a certain individual. I am very anxiety-prone. I know it very well. To cope with the stress, I like to start planning and conducting my tasks earlier than other people.

The following entry illustrates her success in overcoming her writing anxiety again.

**November 25**—A couple of minutes before Discourse Analysis course began, my classmates and I talked about the topics of our final papers. Since November was coming to an end, we were all very nervous. I happened to mention that I would focus my learning project on strategy use. My classmate, Lee, immediately informed me that a current issue of *System* was on learner differences. She believed the references would be helpful for me. I was thrilled about the source.

I like to talk to my friends. We usually chat for a while before the teacher steps into the classroom. More often than not, the topic will shift to our academic studies. By chatting, we exchange resources. It is like collaborative learning, only in a more casual way. It's quite different from working on my own. It helps a lot and there is more fun, too.



Interestingly, in this entry, the subject employs metacognitive strategies to evaluate the effectiveness of her social strategy use. She expresses her delight in the strategy use. Her success of the social strategy use seems to co-occur with the process of her socialization in the learning community. As shown in the following entry, while she is undergoing acculturation, she creates a new identity and builds up new perceptions of her new world (Peirce, 1995).

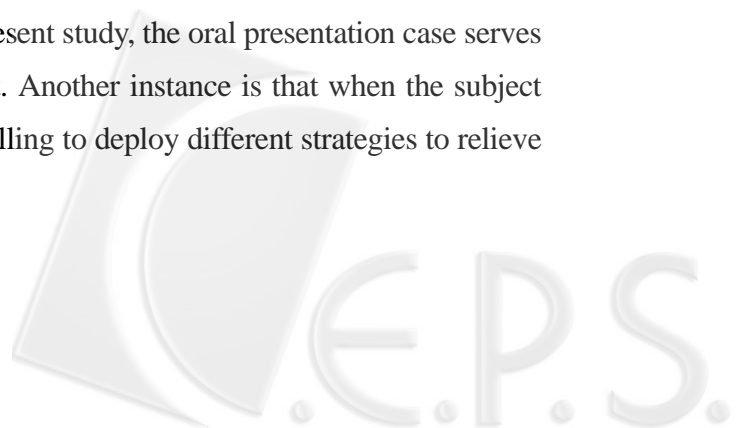
**December 6**—I started my learning project writing today. I reviewed my diary again and again but still felt confused. I went downstairs to my study room to see if I had any book that would help me in some way. Lucky me! I found “*Pursuing Professional Development: The Self as Sources*”. One of its chapters is “Teaching journals: Pieces of the puzzle”. The chapter shed plenty light on my writing task. I got the inspiration from one of the sentences. I decided to entitle my paper “More Than the Sum of Its Parts.” I would copy this article to share with Professor Cheng and my classmates.

In the very last entry of the diary, the subject grows to be an autonomous, independent and self-directed learner. She searches for the resources to help herself and her peers. Because of the conductive learning strategies, she turns herself from a passive information recipient into an active knowledge donor at the end.

## Discussion

From the analysis of the diary entries, several significant implications about learning strategy use are revealed.

First of all, the effectiveness of strategy use might be task-specific. For instance, reading a paper under immediate pressure may render the participant to recruit more strategies to decode the content. In the present study, the oral presentation case serves as a good example to illustrate this point. Another instance is that when the subject confronts the writing task, she is more willing to deploy different strategies to relieve



her strain. It seems that strategy use is more effective and productive when the learner approaches a task with definite purposes. The result agrees with what Oxford (2003) states: “A strategy is useful when it relates well to the task at hand”.

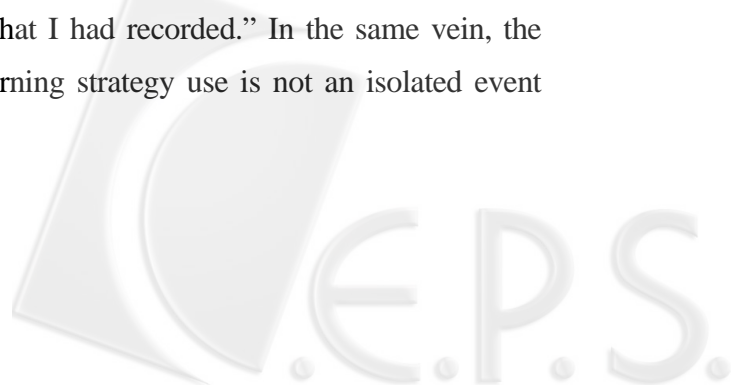
Secondly, given that the strategy use is task-specific, a strategy good for one situation is not necessarily helpful for another. In other words, strategy learning is more than mounting up strategy items. Equipping an individual with multitudinous strategies does not guarantee a learner to be successful unless he/she has full awareness of the communal culture and knows how to use his/her strategies flexibly to respond to the context. Dexterous integration and use of an array of strategy is as important as strategy acquisition.

Thirdly, peer learning plays a vital role in triggering and promoting strategy use. The subject’s success of overcoming the learning barriers has been closely related to her intensive interaction with her classmates. It seems that the learner has to be supported by his/her peers to fully develop his/her learning strategies.

Finally, according to Oxford’s definition, strategy is an action taken to make the learner more enjoyable. In the present study, no solid supporting evidence is found in this regard. The subject’s learning process shows various painful struggles. Her delight emerges rather late. It is fair to say that not all strategy use is accompanied with positive affective. The finding echoes Noels, Pelletier, Clement, and Vallerard’s (2003) conclusion: “To foster sustained learning, it may not be sufficient to convince students that language learning is interesting and enjoyable; they may need to be persuaded that it is also personally important for them”.

## **Conclusion**

Brita Butler-Wall (1979, as cited in BvWley, 2001) states in her teaching journal “It seems that a diary is more than the sum of its parts: although I was the one who recorded every item, I did not realize what I had recorded.” In the same vein, the present case study demonstrates that learning strategy use is not an isolated event





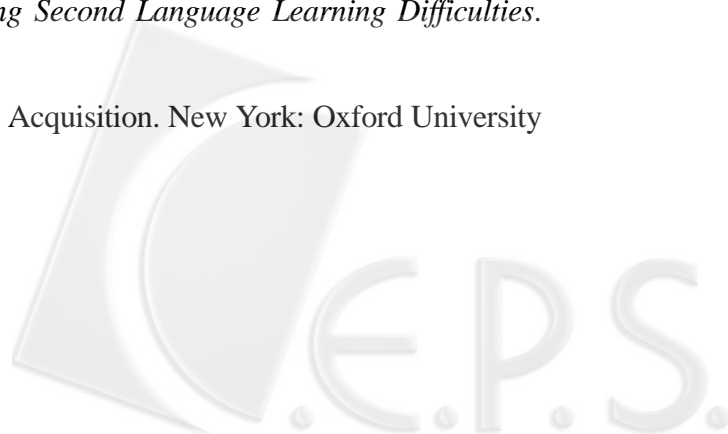
taking place on its own. It is influenced by multiple factors such as task, motivation, belief, and acculturation. The interactions between these variables help determine the kinds and ways of strategy use. They also affect its outcome as well. To sum up, like the diary study, the whole picture of learning strategy use is much more complicated and dynamic than the sum of its parts.

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## 整體大於部分之和：兩位語言學習好手之個案研究

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### 摘 要

本研究組合兩位英語教學博士生的個案研究，以呈現語言學習好手（good language learner）的學習經驗、學習過程、以及相關之影響因素。這兩位研究參與者應授課教授要求詳細記載學習日誌，並於學期末援引當代第二語言習得之重要理論分析個人日誌的資料，以期瞭解自己的學習歷程及影響因素。兩位研究者不約而同指出學習動機、學習策略、及社會認同等，在語言學習過程中扮演重要角色。

關鍵詞：語言學習好手、外語習得、質性研究、日誌研究

