

**毕 业 论 文**

论文题目： 动机、应对策略与第二语言学习

— 基于英国朴茨茅斯大学中国留学生的田野调查

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**Motivation, Coping Strategies and Second Language Learning**

**--- A Field Research into Life of Chinese Students**

**at University of Portsmouth**

by

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Submitted to Continuing Education College

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摘 要

影响学习者动机的因素包括有经济考量和个人语言接触网络，该研究应用第二语言学习理论，建立了主要包括住宿模式和交往模式的理想的个人语言接触网络，考察了中国留学生在英国一座大学城采用的寻找住宿和交友的策略，发现经济考量（尽量寻租价格低廉的住房）限制了住宿模式选择，使之局限于中国人合租住房的模式，进而决定个人语言接触网络的范围。中国留学生未能沉浸于完全的英语环境中，他们倾向于抱团生活在一起：一起居住，一起交友，一起购物，一起挨着坐在教室，一起旅游，等等。他们的语言接触网络局限于中国留学生的很小的圈子里。因此最初的学习语言的强烈动机受到了抑制，语言学习机会大大减少，导致语言技能的提高未能令人满意。结论是，中国留学生应充分意识到在母语国家中生活应对策略的内在不利因素，建立真正的英语接触网络，以确保言语接触的质和量。

关键词

动机； 应对策略；二语学习；住宿模式；个人语言接触网络（INLC）

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Abstract

Among factors that influence learner motivation are economic concern and individual network of linguistic contact (INLC). By drawing on the second language learning theory, the research has established an idealized INLC consisting mainly of accommodation pattern and company keeping. After a close examination on the strategies Chinese learners of English used to find accommodation and seek company in a university town in the UK, the research provides strong evidence that economic concern limits the accommodation pattern to Chinese shared housing, which in turn determines the structure and content of individual network of linguistic contact. Instead of immersing themselves in the English environment, Chinese students in the UK tend to socialize among themselves: they live together, make friends with other Chinese students, sit together in lecture rooms and go travelling and shopping together. Their network of linguistic contact is confined to a tiny Chinese-speaking society. Therefore, the initial high motivation of the students is restrained and language learning opportunities are reduced, resulting in an unsatisfactory advancement of language skills. It is highly advisable that Chinese learners of English in English-speaking countries be informed of the disadvantages inherent in their coping strategies and establish an individual network of genuine English contact in order to ensure the amount and quality of language exposure.

Key words

motivation; coping strategy; second language learning; accommodation pattern; individual network of linguistic contact (INLC)

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**Contents**

摘要 ……..................................................................................... i

Abstract …………………………………................................... ii

1. Introduction ……………………………….…………............ 1
2. Literature Review .................................................................... 2
3. Research Aims ………………………….……….................... 3
4. Methodology …………………………….………….……….. 3

4.1 Idealized Individual Network of Linguistic Contact (INLC) ... 4

4.2 Defining Coping Strategy ..................................................... 5

1. Observations and Discussions …………………..................... 6
   1. Economic Concern Limiting Accommodation Choices .............. 6
   2. Accommodation Pattern Confining INLC …………………….. 9

5.2.1 Making Friends with Chinese-Speaking Housemates ……..…. 10

5.2.2 Seating near Chinese Classmates in a Lecture Room ............... 10

5.2.3 Going Travelling and Shopping with Fellow Countrymen …… 11

5.2.4 Summary ……………………………………………………… 12

1. Conclusion ……………………………………..................... 13

References

Acknowledgements

分节符

Motivation, Coping Strategies and Second Language Acquisition

--- A Field Research into Life of Chinese Students

at University of Portsmouth

**1 Introduction**

The number of Chinese learners of English studying in English-speaking countries has been rising steadily in recent years. This is due to a number of factors. First, as a result of economic development, more and more Chinese people can now afford the tuition fees and living expenses needed for studying abroad. Secondly, China’s continuous open-door policy has further enhanced the importance of the ability to use English. A degree from an English-speaking country proves to be a premise of success in one’s professional future. Thirdly, language learning theories seem to have confirmed that English learning is most efficient in true language environments. Chinese learners of English believe they will learn English better there than they do in China. At least, they assume, their oral English will be greatly improved if they live and study in a foreign country. Before their departure, each of them are highly motivated by a perception of coming back as a near-native speaker of English and a promise of an ideal job in international organizations. However, foreign language learning is not as simple a matter as people think. Some individuals who have returned from pursuing degrees abroad feel frustrated when they re-enter the Chinese society as they find their competitive advantages do not stand out as much as they had expected. Why hasn’t their foreign experience brought about the much-desired language skills? How did they fare/do in the foreign land? Why didn’t their high motivation work favourably in their academic pursuit? The present author finds it necessary to answer these and other questions so as to reveal the truth behind the obvious failures.

**2 Literature Review**

Learner motivation has been widely recognized as one of the key personal factors that influence the outcome of second language learning. Various models of theories have been advanced to reveal the nature of motivation and account for the role of motivation in second language learning. Among the major frameworks are (1) socio-educational model by Gardner (1985, 1992), emphasizing the combination of desire to achieve a goal, effort expended, and the pleasure associated with a task; (2) the expectancy-value model by Pintrich and associates (1991), examining the role of expected achievement/reward in present effort making; (3) the action control model by Kuhl (1994), raising the issue of non-equivalence between motivation and action taking; (4) “Willingness to communicate (WTC)” model by McCroskey and Baer (1985), (5) social context model by Clement and Kruidenier (1985), which examines social-psychological forces of integrativeness and fear of assimilation, and individual learner’s language use anxiety; and (6) the macro-sociostructural and micro-interactional model by Allard and Landry (1994), which is expounded in two concepts: the individual network of linguistic contact (INLC) and subjective ethnolinguistic vitality (EV). It’s evident that motivational components and process have been studied from diverse aspects of various disciplines, which implies the complexity of this issue.

More recent research on language learning motivation draws on various perspectives on understanding self and identity. Dornyei (2002, 2005) explore the theory of “possible selves” (also see Markus, H. and Nurius, P. 1987) of what they might become, what they would like to become and what they are afraid of becoming. Lamb (2004) develops the concept of bicultural identity, which he speculates determines the motivation to learn English.

It seems that the studies on the key factors that bear close relations with learner attitude and motivation will continue and embrace even broader concepts. Most of the research is started from the premise that learner motivation correlate positively with the rate and success of L2 learning. However, “motivation does not imply action. Placing a high value on a task will not necessarily mean a correspondingly high action level. Motivation may be regulated, restrained and offset by considerations of interpersonal relations, students’ INLC, economic problems, etc. (Kuhl 1994: 12)” Therefore, while it is essential for a learner to assume (through various ways such as parental encouragement ) a high motivation in SLL, the distance between motivation and action has yet to be covered by closely examining the factors that determine the actual decision-making process and decision-effecting strategies of the learner in the target language environment/situations. The present research is an attempt to illustrate how motivation of Chinese learners of English in UK is affected by their coping strategies in the English environment.

**3 Research Aims**

Based on the understanding that quality and frequency of L2 contact in the target community are reliable predictors of the achievement of L2 learning, the present research seeks to find answers to the following questions:

1. Where and how do Chinese learners of English at the University of Portsmouth fit into their socio-cultural community? In other words, what coping strategies do they take?

2. How and to what extent are their L2 motivations related to their coping strategies?

**4 Methodology**

An idealized frame of reference is established in terms of quality and frequency of language contact with native speakers of the target language, English in the present study. Since the study is a quest for the interaction between coping strategies and learning motivation within a context of English language community, it is evident that practically every decision/action of a learner may have an effect on his/her integration with that community. In the present study, the following aspects of a student life are brought under scrutiny:

1. Finding accommodation;

2. Making friends;

3. Seating in a lecture room;

4. Travelling and shopping;

A student pursuing his/her academic goal in the host community is supposedly immersed in the rich environment to be explored and exploited. Needs for physical sustaining and psychological satisfaction constantly pose questions for the student. And it is in tackling these problems that the student is communicating with the native speakers. Since “the most significant action one can take in language learning is speaking the L2 (McIntyre 1996)”, how to solve the problems in daily life and academic pursuit represents an attitude toward the target language and determines the amount of speaking that language. Therefore, strategies adopted to cope with such problems as preoccupy most of the learner’s waking hours will, to a vast extent, dictate the efficiency of the student in exploiting the language environment, which in turn predicts the proficiency of the target language. The strategies concerning the above-listed aspects are assessed against the idealized INCL to find out answers to the research questions posed above.

**4.1 Idealized Individual Network of Linguistic Contact (INLC)**

An ideal language learning environment for a student can be described as one having full access to communications in the target language and/or creating a context/situation that motivates the student to use the target language.

Required qualities in an idealized INLC are thus described in Table 1.

Table 1: An Idealized Individual Network of Linguistic Contact (INLC)

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Home-stay / shared-house | Item 1  (House-owners) | Item 2  (Other tenants) | Item 3  (Topics/Interest) | Item 4  (Food) |
| Qualities | Native | Native | Shared | Shared |

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Friends | Item 1 (Members) | Item 2  (Engagement) | Item 3  (Topics/Interest) | Item 4  (Food) |
| Qualities | Native | Close to hang around with | Shared | Shared |

In summary, in an ideal English learning environment, native speakers of English should always be there to ensure the quality and quantity of input, and the learner’s mother tongue should be inhibited to guarantee the frequency of exposure to English.

(1) Accommodation

Accommodation pattern and company-keeping have a profound and immediate influence on other activities in a student life. By establishing a new circle within the English context the student will have native partners in such activities as travelling and shopping, seeking and sharing information, seeking assistance, chatting on line, visiting pubs (and even casinos), going for picnics and barbecues.

Naturally, finding accommodation, perhaps the first challenge in the student’s coping history, should reflect the learner’s considerations on:

1. whether or not he/she will live only with native English house-owners;

2. whether or not he/she will live with other native students;

3. whether or not he/she will be provided with both lodging and full board;

4. whether or not he/she will be provided with access to the Internet and English TV programmes;

In a word, his/her considerations center around the concern of whether or not it is likely for him/her to become “a part of the crowd”.

(2) Company-keeping

With whom a student hangs around may predict precisely what language he will use in his social, cultural and even academic contacts. Keeping company with native speakers will establish and expand “an individual network of linguist contact, which consists of interpersonal contacts, contacts through the media, and educational support (Allard and Landry 1994)”.

**4.2 Defining Coping Strategy**

A coping strategy in the present study is understood as a studied choice from available situational alternatives to deal with issues arising from trying to settle down and fare well in the target linguistic/cultural community.

**5 Observations and Discussions**

A true coping history of students at the University of Portsmouth will then be presented and accessed against the idealized INLC.

The source of information involves 21 (15 females and 6 males) Chinese learners of English working toward an MA degree in the School of Languages and Area Studies (SLAS) at the University of Portsmouth, UK, over a period of 6 months from January 2006 to July 2006. Their motivation level, judging from parental encouragement and support, desire and pressure to obtain an MA degree, and needs to survive and fare well, is high. .

**5.1** **Economic Concern Limiting Accommodation Choices**

Before a new student from China sets foot on Portsmouth, he is already introduced by the course administrator to an existing student or a Chinese-native advisor so that accommodation for the newcomer can be arranged. This apparent facilitation directly affects “the structure and content of the learner’s individual network of linguistic contact (INLC) (Allard and Landry 1994)” because typically accommodation is found among providers with Chinese language background, as is shown in Table 2.

Such accommodation may change during their stay in the UK (Tables 3 and 4). The reasons vary. Location, house rental, neighbourhood condition, and relationship with the house-owner are among the major considerations. A sheer benefit of a pure English language environment is the last reason for a necessary move, although exceptional cases do exist. For example, the first move of No. 4 was, in part, a result of such a motivation. Unfortunately, he found two of the other four housemates also spoke Chinese only after he moved in.

Table 2: 1st Accommodation of 21 Students

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Type of accommodation | Chinese family | Chinese shared house | Home-stay (lodging only) | Multi-national shared house | Total |
| No. of cases | 3 (No. 1-3) | 16 (No. 4-19) | 1 (No. 20) | 1 (No. 21) | 21 |
| Percentage | 14.29% | 76.19% | 4.76% | 4.76% | 100% |

Table 3: 2nd Accommodation of the 19 Students

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Type of accommodation | Chinese family | Chinese shared house | Home-stay (lodging only) | Multi-national shared house | Total |
| No. of cases | 0 | 12 (+2 intended) | 4 | 1 | 19 |
| Percentage | 0% | 73.69% | 21.05% | 5.26% | 100% |

Note: No. 13 and No. 20 didn’t move during this phase of stay.

Table 4: 3rd Accommodation of the 5 Students

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Type of accommodation | Chinese family | Chinese shared house | Home-stay (lodging only) | Multi-national shared house | Total |
| No. of cases | 0 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 |
| Percentage | 0% | 100% | 0% | 0% | 100% |

Note: No. 4, 6, 10, 11, 12 moved again in this phase of stay.

Table 5: Percentages of Observed Accommodation Patterns

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Type of accommodation | | No. of cases | Percentage (%) | Price/pppw |
| Home-stay | One-tenant | 2 | 4.44 | average rental≦₤60 per person per week |
| Multi-tenant | 3 | 6.67 |
| Multi-national shared house | | 2 | 4.44 |
| Chinese shared house | | 38 | 84.45 |
| Total | | 45 | 100 |

Of the observed 45 cases of accommodation (Table 5), there are 5 home-stays, 2 cases of multi-national shared house, and 38 cases of Chinese shared house. Of the 5 home-stays, only two one-tenant home-stays (No. 20 with a landlady and 2nd accommodation of No. 1 with a landlord) seem to be in closest contact with the English domestic culture. But still they keep British food out of their life.

The five home-stay providers in the above table are invariably one-member family, which means the tenants are living only with their landlord or landlady and real family communication is not available in such home-stays.

In the two multi-national cases, there are Chinese-speaking tenants from Malaysia, rendering them the same as Chinese shared cases.

Three intended but not effected moves are also significant in that they point toward the same ideology in accommodation seeking: “Let’s live together.” Sharing a house among Chinese students is the most convenient choice.

Such an accommodation pattern falls far short of the idealized native full-board home-stay. The interpersonal contact thus becomes one ‘between Chinese people and in Chinese language’. But according to Allard and Landry (1994), one’s INLC determines one’s linguistic competence and ‘cognitive and affective disposition’ and these two factors interactively determine one’s language behavior. It follows that, given the accommodation pattern, the student’s desire of speaking English is greatly reduced and opportunity of using the language is deprived.

What, then, lies behind the strategies? A quick look at the accommodation prices (Table 6) will reveal the driving force for choosing such a pattern.

Table 6: Advertised Prices for Available Accommodations (January, 2007)

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Types of accommodation | Shared house | | Home-stay (lodging only) | |
| Standard | Premium | Non-British | British |
| Advertised Price  (bills excluded)  (￡/per person per week) | 48 - 60 | 55-75 | 60-85 | 65-120 |

Source: International Student Office (Housing Support), Nuffield Center, University of Portsmouth

In all the observed 45 cases, a student pays less than 60 pounds a week for their accommodation, resulting in a narrow choice from only shared houses. Although the first accommodation is usually not a choice made by the student who uses it, and can’t fully reflect user’s true intention, the second and the third accommodations strongly confirm the role of monetary concern in finding accommodations. Tables 7 and 8 show the changes in prices when some students find their second and third lodgings.

Table 7: Change in Prices as Compared with Previous Accommodation

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Price change | Number of cases (1st move) | Number of cases (2nd move) | total | Percentage |
| Higher | 2 | 1 | 3 | 13.64% |
| Lower | 15 | 4 | 19 | 86.36% |

It is evident from the above compared prices that a great majority of students are looking for cheaper accommodation for their next phase of stay. Where a higher price occurs, lack of sufficient facilities (for example, weak heating system, insufficient space for the visiting family members, lack of access to the Internet) for a normal stay in the previous house is responsible for such moves, thus underplaying such motives as “an improved language learning micro-environment”. In such an accommodation pattern, with only a few exceptions of home-stays, language contact simply does not occur within the house.

Therefore, economy is the motivation for such an accommodation-seeking strategy, which is to say, economic concern is perhaps the most notorious de-motivator in language learning. This also lends evidence to Kuhl’s view that motivation “may be regulated, restrained and offset by considerations of … economic problems (1994)”.

Accommodation pattern has a profound impact on the other aspects of the student life. In order for communication in target language to happen, a student has to turn to the world outside his house. In such accommodation patterns, the outside world for a student is normally an extension from his own housemates to other people with the same language background because there is a strong tendency to identify with and form a frame of comparison within people of the same culture. This is so because, according to Lamb (2004), a student in the target community is pursuing “a bicultural identity – that is, a global or world citizen identity on the one hand, and a sense of local or national identity on the other”. The preservation of the sense of local identity is best achieved by becoming part of the system of that culture. The following section looks into the problem of how the network of the learner’s national culture is structured abroad in terms of such major occasions as keeping company, seating in a lecture room, travelling and shopping.

**5.2** **Accommodation Pattern Confining INLC**

Economic concerns/problems have limited Chinese students’ choices of accommodation patterns. They can’t afford to live in British home-stay houses with native landowners, nor can they freely choose to live in non-British homestay houses with English-speaking non-Briton landlords. A Chinese shared-house is nearly always the most convenient choice, which, to a great extent, confines their INLC within Chinese-speaking fellow countrymen. This is evidently substantiated by their strategies of seeking company, seating in a lecture room, going shopping and travelling.

**5.2.1 Making Friends with Housemates**

It is a conspicuous phenomenon that students of the same language background huddle together. They share a house, go shopping and travelling together, become partners in computer games, take the same courses in school, and even play truant together. This is, to a large degree, the result of selecting friends. Starting a friendship with another student of shared culture is so much easier than with one from a different culture. Although a student may have some friends from other countries, there is a difference in the ‘closeness’ among friends. They don’t hang around as often. For example, No. 9, a Chinese student studying International Business at this University, shared a house with two English natives and a Spanish girl for six months, but she usually spent weekends with her Chinese friends. Chinese students seem to be more tightly knit among themselves than other student groups. Of the 21 Chinese students known to the present author, only No. 20 keeps regular correspondence with her UK friends.

If accommodation confines a student from being exposed to the language environment, then friends-making restricts him from possible amendments and constrains and inhibits the initial motivation for learning. Accommodation pattern and friend-making strategies also have direct and profound effect on other aspects of a student’s life, since most of the interpersonal communication outside the classroom will take place within the living quarter and in relation to the people with whom the learner is keeping company.

**5.2.2 Sitting near Chinese Classmates in a Lecture Room**

To ensure a better result of classroom discussion on topics of cross-cultural communication, the teacher usually has to re-seat the students after the discussion topic is given. This is because he finds that students of the same language background invariably sit next to each other, with national borders marked by an empty seat, if there are spare seats in the room. If a Chinese student comes into the lecture room, and finds the following vacancies available (Figure 1),

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Chinese |  | Vacancy 1 |  | Chinese |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| Chinese |  | Vacancy 2 |  | Non-Chinese |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| Non-Chinese |  | Vacancy 3 |  | Non-Chinese |

Figure 1: Seats Available in a Lecture Room

it is most likely that he will fill in Vacancy1!

When Vacancy 2 is filled, the chair is sometimes drawn closer toward the Chinese neighbour, resulting in the seating pattern with an invisible wall between the Chinese and the neighbouring non-Chinese.

Students of other nationalities do the same. For example, the two Greek girls in Second Language Learning class always sit next to each other.

**5.2.3 Going Travelling and Shopping with Fellow Countrymen**

From February to June, the International Students Office of the University of Portsmouth has organized three major trips, namely a Cambridge tour on April 1; a Brighton tour on May 6; and a Stonehenge and Bath tour on June 10. Seating pattern on the tour coach resembles that of the lecture room. In some cases, for lack of an adjourn seat, some students may be “forced” to sit next to a “stranger”. Once arriving at the tour sights, students quickly reorganized themselves by joining their classmates and friends of the same language background. They would stick together, following one route, taking pictures for each other, sharing pre-packed lunch, stopping to use toilet, etc. until the call time for return.

A special case in point is that on the Cambridge tour. Somehow, Student X boarded on Coach C while the rest of her friends were on Coach A. Coach C broke down on its way and arrived much later than other coaches after repair. As a result, Student X was left alone, and did her sightseeing all on her own. This seems to have left an unusually unpleasant memory on her. Consequently, when booking the seat for the tour to Stonehenge and Bath, she reserved six consecutive seats (No. 15 – No. 20) on one and same coach for her friends and asked them to buy the seats reserved under her name to ensure that they would be on the same coach. Obviously, the previous experience prompted such a reservation. The desire to identify oneself socially with people of the same culture has a lot to play in making decisions on how to involve in the target language environment.

Shopping in today’s supermarkets does not offer many opportunities for language learning and practicing since it is a self-service experience. Still people would like to have company. And with whom do they go along? Housemates and friends. They tend to buy the same items after consulting each other in their own language!

**5.2.4 Summary**

The above-discussed situations show that the coping strategies Chinese students took to fare well and learn English in Britain consisted largely of decisions to find accommodation, seek company, seat themselves in a lecture room and go travelling and shopping. The decision to choose the accommodation pattern is mostly determined by their economic concerns, resulting in Chinese shared house, which is obviously unfavorable for English learning. Other coping strategies by a student tend to be guided by, among others, the rule of economy in terms of mental resources since using one’s first language demands far less mental resources than speaking a second language. The result is that, instead of mixing with the authentic crowd and enhancing their motivation, the learners tend to be de-motivated by creating a network of their native culture and sticking to it. This way runs contrary to the theory of maximal exposure.

**6 Conclusion**

The present research has observed that strategies Chinese learners of English in the UK tend to exhibit a common trait of economy in terms of both financial and mental resources. Economy in financial terms restricts the students’ choice of accommodation pattern to Chinese-shared house, depriving them of the opportunities to integrate themselves in the real English environment. As monetary concerns often override requirements for an authentic language environment, this accommodation pattern is unlikely to change in the near future. Economy in mental resources can be most effectively achieved by setting up an ‘individual network of linguistic contact in Chinese’, since in each case the student chooses to deal with the situation in his first language before he is obliged to use English. These decisions of ‘living with the Chinese’ and ‘hanging around with the Chinese’ have restrained and even offset the efforts driven by motivation, which is to say that the gap between motivation and action-taking remains to be filled. This gap points towards answering the question why learning English in Britain didn’t improve the desired language skills as much as expected. Therefore, it is highly advisable that students be informed of the disadvantages of those strategies and overcome monetary concerns so that they will be immersed in situations where both chances of exposure to English and demand for mental resources are the greatest.

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Appendix

[本文未包括附录]

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