Chapter 2

A Discussion on the Literature Review in Language Learning Strategies

Before the discussion on the literature review pertaining to this study, there seems a need to give a working definition to the term 'language learning strategies', which in so far has also included the term 'language learner strategies'. There is also a need to point out that the learning strategies referred here, are strategies used by learners to acquire the knowledge of a second language or foreign language. In comparison with the learning of first or heritage language which is mainly determined by 'inherent development and experiential factors', the outcome in learning of second or foreign language is believed to be more likely influenced by learning strategies (O'Malley *et al.* 1985a: 559). This is because the latter already has the experience of learning the first language. Hence it is assumed that there is a wider repertoire of strategies that the learner can employ in the process of learning another language.

Early work on language learning strategies (LLSs) by Rubin (1975) and Stern (1975) had helped to identify several strategies that good language learners used. Early studies were also mainly within the cognitive and psychological field. In addition to this, there was "a focus on integrated use of LLSs in previous studies as compared to a focus on the use of LLS in specific language task in recent studies", as noted by Wu (2008). Oxford (1990) had designed the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) to assess the frequency of using language learning strategies and this research instrument is also widely used in the field. There are two versions of SILL, one for English speakers learning a new language and another for Speakers of other languages learning English. In Oxford's (1996) book "*Language Learning Strategies around the World: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*", there was a compilation of articles that focus on the cultural influences on language learning strategies. This is one aspect of external factors that affect language learning and another is the context that a learner is situated. Wharton (1997) had observed that "monocultural settings with most monolingual subject" was the trend in early research on language learning strategies, and his study turns to the multilingual setting in Singapore.

2.1　Defining Language Learning Strategies

The term 'strategies' as defined by Rubin (1975: 45) in his seminal work, are "the techniques or devices which a learner may use to acquire knowledge". Gu *et al*. (2005: 282) on the other hand, elaborates on these 'techniques or devices' and define strategy as "a goal driven, dynamic problem-solving process" and this process consists of "identifying a problem, analyzing the task, making a decision, executing the plan, monitoring progress, modifying the plan if necessary, and evaluating the result".

When applying strategies to language learning, the two terms 'learning strategies' and 'learner strategies' seem to be used synonymously and interchangeably in the

literature (Ellis 1985, Wenden 1985, Wenden & Rubin 1987, Zhang 2003, Gu *et al.* 2005). We shall look briefly at some of the definitions and seek to gain an understanding on the use of these terms.

Wenden (1987: 6-7) sees *learner strategies* as having the following characteristics.

1. Learners engage in language learning behaviors that help them to learn and regulate their language learning.

2. Learners know about the kinds of strategies they use

3. Learners know about the aspects of their language learning such as steps to take in achieving their goal of learning, awareness on the level of difficulty in the specific language and understanding one's progress in learning the language.

In the same book with Wenden entitled "*Learner Strategies in Language Learning*", Rubin (1987:23) views *learning strategies* as "strategies which contribute to the development of the language system which the learner constructs and affect learning directly". On the other hand, O'Malley & Chamot (1990:1) in their book "*Learning Strategies in Second Language Acquisition*" define *learning strategies* as "the special thoughts or behaviors that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn or retain new information". Similarly, Oxford (1989: 235) looks at learning strategies as "behaviors or actions which learners use to make language learning more successful, self-directed, and enjoyable". And according to one common definition of *learning strategies*, it refers to the "operations used by learner to aid the acquisition, storage, or retrieval of information" (Rigney 1978).

Based on these definitions, there seem to be no differentiation on the two terms, yet it seems to show that the emphasis is placed on the individual and it is learner-focused. On the other hand, there are definitions that focus on the process instead. For instance, Wenden (1985: 3) in her article "*Learner Strategies*" has defined it as the "process of learning", whereas Chamot (2005:112) has referred *learning strategies* as "procedures that facilitate a learning task". Bialystok (1978: 71) views *learning strategies* as the "optimal means for exploiting available information to improve competence in a second language", as pointed out by O'Malley *et al.* (1985a: 559).

All these seem to show that there has been difficulty to reach a full consensus in defining '*learning strategies*' as they can be understood as the thoughts, behaviors, actions, operations, means, process or procedures that the learners are engaged in. This, in its narrow sense, seems to reflect the learner's conscious use of strategies in acquiring a language; in other words the cognitive psychological aspect of the learner. On the other hand, the term itself seems to have a broad definition; encompassing learner strategies and language learning strategies. However, contextual factors such as educational system or pedagogical approach could have an influential effect on the strategies used by the learner as well as in the process of learning.

An attempt to distinguish the two terms was made by Macaro (2001:19). He gave the example of a language activity, that of reading a newspaper article. The task of that activity is to understand the article. Hence, the learner has to "refer to the context"; a reading strategy that will help the learner in accomplishing the task (learner strategy). While engaging in the activity, the learner has to make inferences and memorize the newly learned word (learning strategy). He also pointed out that there may not be a language task yet learning strategies can also take place. For instance, someone is speaking and another notices a new pattern in his or her language. As such, both "making inferences" and "noticing a new pattern" would be seen as part of the cognitive process, regardless of any language task. Based on Macaro's explanation, "learner strategies will often subsume learning strategies" but it is also worth to note that although strategy is a part of process, process is not necessarily a part of strategy. Despite the distinction, there still remains problem of agreement.

Ellis (1985: 166) has pointed out this clear distinction between 'strategy and process' that are identified by Faerch and Kasper (1980). The words are quoted as follows.

> "They define the former [strategy] as plans for controlling the order in which a sequence of operations is to be performed, and the latter [process] as the operations involved either in the development of a plan (the planning process) or in the realization of a plan (the realization process)"

Here, we see that strategy has an overall direction for the necessary steps to be undertaken and process as the necessary steps encompassed in the strategy. However, the definition would render the accomplishment of the task to the process; that is the learning strategy and not the learner strategy. This would differ from the distinction made by Macaro (2001: 19) who would see learner strategies as "those used by learners to help with the accomplishment of all language-related tasks". These strategies, in his interpretation, are 'techniques' in language learning.

Again, we have to note another lack of consensus here. According to Takač (2008: 47), Stern (1986) and Goh (1998), learning strategies are regarded as "learners' general approach to learning". However each of them accords the 'specific actions' under the terms of 'techniques' and 'tactics' respectively. For instance, a learner who uses the strategy of inferencing (general approach), he or she would recall another word that has a similar sound to the new word and infer its meaning from there (specific actions). If techniques and tactics are referring to the same kind of actions, then according to Seliger's definitions, both would be seen as behaviors and processes that are performed consciously. As pointed out by Gray (1993: 137), Selinger (1983) refers tactics to a "more conscious learning process" which can be controlled and learned as in contrast to strategy, which are seen as "unconscious, innate, and involuntary". This is in contrary to some of the views. Chamot (2005: 112) for instance, sees strategies as a conscious learning process at the beginning stage which will move into the subconscious level when the learner becomes familiar with its use, and then able to recall it when the need arises.

Anderson (2005: 757) also sees strategies as '*conscious* actions that learners take to improve learning'. Hence, the learner is an active participant, actively involved in the selection and use of strategies to facilitate effective language learning (Anderson 2005, Macaro 2001).

Based on the above discussion, we see that one tries to make a distinction and then find the definitions ran into the opposition of the other. Despite this difficulty to reach a consensus, Macaro (2001: 19) has rightfully pointed out that "sometimes by making distinctions we understand a problem better". Hence, for the purpose of this study, there is a need to make the distinction and search for a definition. As such, this study approaches the discussion on strategies by identifying a focal point, which is either the 'language learner' or the 'language learning'. Griffiths (2008) in her collection of articles from various authors, look at learner variables such as motivation, age, learning style, personality, beliefs, autonomy that makes a good language learner. In other words, the 'language learner strategies' focuses on the factors concerning the individual and those factors will be seen as affecting his or her way of approach in language learning.

In this aspect, we are merely gaining an understanding on the 'Who' and not the 'What' in the learning process. It is also believed that the latter has an effect on the former in determining the approach to be undertaken. For instance, learning English and Chinese, or English and German would affect the way strategies will be employed by the learner, since English and Chinese have two different writing systems; one alphabetic and one orthographic whereas English and German are both alphabetic in their writing systems.

In this study, we are looking at the Chinese Language, which is the second language in the bilingual education in Singapore. The discussion on strategies will be on the 'language learning' instead. That is, the focus is on the target language and it is this target language that will affect the learner's learning. Language learning strategies, thus, will be Chinese learning strategies and they are the procedures and actions taken by the learner in the process of learning the language--Chinese. Oxford's (1990) categorization of the strategies will be used as a framework in studying the language learning strategies. They are basically divided into two broad categories; direct and indirect strategies. This framework will be briefly introduced in the next section and discussed further in Chapter 3.

In the next section, the study on language learning strategies which is predominant in the cognitive psychological field will be discussed, so as to understand how 'language learning strategies' have been identified and developed with the objective of helping learners to enhance learning. However, "learning does not and cannot take place in a social vacuum" as in the words of Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005: 276). There is also the importance of studying the external factors and its effects on language learning strategies, therefore the culture and context should not be overlooked.

2.2 Language Learning Strategies: In Cognitive Psychological Field

It has been widely recognized that research on language learning strategies began with the work of Rubin (1975) and Stern (1975) because of their published work focusing on identifying the strategies of good language learners.

2.2.1 The Early Development

Prior to this, Carton (1966) had studied the role of inferencing in language learning. This was investigated in the field of foreign language learning, as contrast to Berko (1958) who did a study on preschool and first grade children (from 4 to 7 years old) in the field of first language acquisition.

Based on Carton's (1966: 1) definition, inferencing is "characterized by the fact that familiar attributes of the novel stimulus, or the context containing the stimulus, elicit a concept on the part of the individual". However, he also pointed out that the 'inference' he had used in the study of language learning is different from the 'inference' which is often used to discuss "scientific method, law and logic, and refer to the process of making conclusions, generalizations and predictions based on evidences"; which he called it as 'formal inferencing'. He further distinguished inferencing on a level of unconsciousness and consciousness (Carton 1966: 4). The former being the '*recognition of the familiar*' and the latter being the '*cognition of the unfamiliar*'. This aspect of 'cognitive' and 'unfamiliarity' requires the learner to exercise his brain and make deliberate use and conscious effort in learning the language. This conscious and informal inference is the one that has a role in language learning, as pointed out by Carton (1966:4). This cognitive strategy also shares a similar characteristic to 'guessing'. It is another cognitive strategy that was followed up by Rubin (1975: 45) who sees that a good language learner is a "willing and good guesser".

Rubin started the research on learning strategies in 1971 (Rubin 1987: 20) and Stern (1975) had his unpublished paper on '*What can we learn from the good language learner*' in 1974 (a bibliographical reference by Rubin 1975), which shares an almost similar title to Rubin's (1975) article '*What the "Good Language Learner" can Teach us*'. The main purpose of these two articles is to find out the strategies a 'good language learner' has, so that their success can be shared with the less successful learners in order to help them in their process of language learning. This sees a pedagogical paradigm shift from the teacher to the learner and also from "general psychology and linguistics towards cognitivism" (Gray 1993: 138). It henceforth gives rise to a research trend that focuses on "the personality characteristics, learning and cognitive styles, and the specific strategies employed by effective and ineffective learners" (Macleod 2002: 2).

Some of the strategies that Rubin (1975) has identified in a good language learner are guessing/inferencing, wanting to get meaning across in a communication or learning from a communication, making mistakes, understanding the form or patterns of language, seeking opportunities to practice, monitoring the speech of self and others, and

understanding beyond the surface meaning of the language; that is the learner knows who say what, when and where the speech acts takes place, how and why the it is said in the way it is.

While Rubin (1975) listed 7 strategies of a good language learner, Stern (1975) listed 10 strategies, as it is shown below (Also in Naiman *et al* 1996: 4-5).

1.	Planning Strategy	having a personal style or positive learning strategy;
2.	Active Strategy	engaging in an active approach to the learning task;
3.	Empathic Strategy	adopting a tolerant and outgoing approach to the target language and its speakers;
4.	Formal Strategy	possessing the technical know-how in tackling a language;
5.	Experimental Strategy	being methodical and flexible in approach, developing the new language into an ordered system and constantly revising it;
6.	Semantic Strategy	constantly searching for meaning;
7.	Practice Strategy	willing to practice;
8.	Communication Strategy	willing to use the language in real communication;
9.	Monitoring Strategy	self-monitoring and having critical sensitivity towards language use;
10.	Internalization Strategy	developing L2 more and more as a separate system reference system and learning to think about it.

The list of 10 strategies was initially used as a frame of reference for a study that focused on strategies and its relationships with "cognitive styles, personality characteristics, attitudes, and successful language learning" (Naiman *et al*. 1996: 144). In their study, it confirms the Rubin-Stern inventories of language strategies that their group of good language learners had used but the researchers found the necessity of a systematic organization of the strategies according to the interview statements elicited, and hence reclassified them into the following 5 general strategies and in addition to this, identified more specific techniques that are related to it (Naiman *et al*. 1996: 217). A list of all the techniques can be found in the work of Naiman et al (1996: 33-37). The 5 general strategies used by good language learners are:

1. active involvement in the language learning task;
2. developing an awareness of language as a system;
3. developing an awareness of language as a means of communication and interaction;
4. managing the affective demands of L2;
5. monitoring of L2 performance

Rubin (1987) has given a brief account on the research history of strategies in language learning and shown how the social strategies and metacognitive strategies have been identified in addition to the cognitive strategies, which is a dominant field for investigation. These strategies are referred by Oxford (1990) as direct and indirect strategies. Figure 2.1 shows a brief classification.

	Strategies	Examples
DIRECT	Cognitive	*Analyzing, practicing, reviewing*
	Memory	*Using mental associations, applying images and sounds*
	Compensation	*Overcoming limitations in language production*
INDIRECT	Metacognitive	*Setting goals, planning task, self-monitoring*
	Affective	*Rewarding oneself, listening to music for relaxation*
	Social	*Seeking clarification, cooperative learning*

Figure 2.1 Brief classification of direct and indirect strategies

2.2.2 Successful and Unsuccessful Learners

In a study by Ehrman & Oxford (1985), they found out that successful learners used cognitive strategies such as searching for patterns and using the target language to read for pleasure. On the other hand, O'Malley *et al* (1985b) found that metacognitve strategies are mostly used by higher level students to monitor their learning. 'Monitoring' is one of the learning strategies that a good learner will use, as Rubin has identified (1975: 47). However, Gray (1993: 146) pointed out that there are two kinds of monitoring; metacognitive and the other cognitive. The purpose of the former is to keep track of progress and the latter is to improve production.

For the study of successful learners, Macleod (2002) interviewed two male Italians. It was found out that on top of attitudes towards language learning, personal learning style, teaching method and certain personality characteristics, it was motivational level (high/low) rather than motivational orientation (instrumental/integrative) that seemed to affect the learners' strategy. Also, the study had proved the inadequacy of quantitative data for not revealing "individual learner differences and the complexity of each language situation" (Macleod 2002: 18).

There was another interview conducted by Pearson (1998) with five Japanese. Because the interviewees were in South East Asia, the languages they were exposed to, were considered as second languages and no longer foreign languages since in the latter, they were not officially recognized and widely used in the context of Japan. The study aimed to find out their learning strategies as speakers of second language. Based on the findings, speakers who were able to cope with emotional stress (affective strategies) were seen as those who were not succumbed to culture shock. They were able to seek opportunities to mix with the native speakers and practice the languages; this is called 'global practice strategies'. This term was identified by Wenden (1985) who also found that her interviewee, Miguel, had used the strategy to create practice opportunities with the British family while staying with them. The 'global practice strategies' mentioned

here is similar to what Rubin (1975) had identified in a successful language learner; the 'opportunities to practice'.

In addition to this, learners who are considered successful are usually those who are seen as more language-proficient; that is having a good command of the language. Hence, their language performance is said to have a relation to their language strategies. These are shown in the results on studies done by Dreyer & Oxford (1996), Park (1997) and Vann and Abraham (1987). Vann and Abraham's study is worth to note here because after their first study, they followed up with a second study on the learning strategies of unsuccessful learners. In the first study, comparison was made between a successful learner and an unsuccessful learner. These two learners were selected from a group of 15 research subjects from a program. These subjects were grouped according to their rate of progress and final performance evaluation at the end of the program; that is very successful, moderately successful and unsuccessful. Gerardo, the successful learner, and Pedro, the unsuccessful learner, were selected because of their shared background, hence giving significance to their differences. As predicted, the result did reveal that Gerardo used more and varied strategies than Pedro. However, further analysis of the data shows that unsuccessful learners also use almost the same number of strategies as the successful learners, thus leading to a second study on these unsuccessful learners (Vann and Abraham 1990). In the second study, two unsuccessful learners were chosen because their number of strategies fell within the same range as the successful learners. The study showed that these unsuccessful learners were also active in their use of strategies as compared to the successful learners but they were inappropriate in applying their strategies to the task. This seems to imply that an active use in the number of strategies does not necessarily ensure an effective learning outcome. Rather the appropriate application of the strategies to the task at hand would be of more importance. Therefore, it is not true for Wenden (1985: 7) to claim that "ineffective learners are inactive learners". This had been made clear by the counter-evidence provided in the second study by Vann and Abraham (1990).

This was also supported by Porte's (1988) study. It showed that his 15 interviewee, reportedly to be under-achieving learners, used strategies that were the same as, or similar to those good language learners in learning new vocabulary. The difference in their use of strategies is attributed to "the fact that they [underachievers] may demonstrate less sophistication and a less suitable response to a particular activity" (Porte 1988: 168). And in the words of Chamot (2005: 116), "less successful language learners apparently do not have the metacognitive knowledge about task requirements needed to select appropriate strategies". While knowing that good learners use more and varied strategies than poor learners, we also know that poor learners do not necessarily use lesser strategies than good learners do. In fact, they could also use the same number of strategies as the good learners. That means quantity in the learning strategies are not necessarily equated with quality in learning outcome, as effective learning can be attributed to more or less strategies used. It even happens for good learners to use lesser strategies than poor learners. This could be explained by a study pointed out by Chamot (2005: 120). It was a study by Oxford *et al.* (2004) that had a reference to the work of Ikeda and Takeuchi (2003). Two groups of ESL (English as a Second Language) college

students consisted of more and less proficient readers, were given two reading tasks; one easy and the other difficult. It showed that both groups do not differ much in their use of strategies for the easy reading. However, less proficient learners were seen as using more strategies because they felt the reading was difficult. The more proficient learners thought otherwise, as such they felt the lack of challenge in the 'difficult' reading, resulting the use of lesser learning strategies.

2.2.3 Task knowledge and Learning Strategies

How the learners perceive the task seems to have an effect on the use of the learning strategies. According to Wenden (1995:185), task knowledge consists of three components; that is *task purpose*, *task classification* and *task demands*. These make the learner thinks about why the task has to be done, what kind of task has to be done and how it should be done. These will likely determine how the strategies can be applied in the process of language learning, so as to ensure a completion or achievement in the learning outcomes.

In Takeuchi's (2003: 388) study, it showed that learner employed different learning strategies for reading at different stages. For example, at the beginning and intermediate stages, they would prefer to read aloud in order to gain an awareness of the linguistic system before they proceed to read a lot. At the intermediate stage, they would read analytically to gain an insight understanding of the passages. This suggests that the difficulty of task at different learning stage determines the use of language strategies.

Chamot (2005: 122) has also pointed out a study by Cohen & Brooks-Carson (2001), in which the results showed that students who were asked to write directly in French, had their essays rated higher than those who were asked to write in their L1 (First language) and then translate it to French. This could have proved that the students have reached a higher proficiency level of French since they were also reported to have used less English in their thinking during the processing of writing. This is particularly true when the learners at a beginning stage, still depends on the first language in their thinking process. This conscious use of strategy will eventually get into the subconscious level when the new language learnt has reached a 'reasonable level of fluency' (Gow *et al* 1991: 61). Although translation strategy might seems to be an approach to learn a language, Poedjosoadarmo's (2008) study shows there are teachers and student who have mixed feelings towards it, finding some who see it either potentially useful or not useful. Despite this being the case, Gow *et al* (1991: 62) noted in their study that "some students mentally translated two languages when faced a particularly difficult or abstract material". It is to note that the effect of translation strategies not only depends on the levels of students' competence but also the genre of target texts.

Based on the above, it seems that Cummins's (1984) theory of language-cognitive abilities along with the demands of task has an influence on the role of learning strategy. The model proposed by Cummins has a dimension that varies between the ends of cognitively demanding and cognitively undemanding, and it also has another dimension

that varies between the ends of context-embedded and context-reduced. Context-embedded would refer to those cues and clues support for understanding, and context-reduced will be otherwise. That is to say, when external cues and clues support are implicitly or explicitly contained, one only needs to look for contextual elements in order to understand the utterances completely. This situation can be referred to as "context-embedded" and its contrary would be "context-reduced". This gives rise to a four quadrants model (see Figure 2.2) which is used as a reference to "produce an appropriate teaching strategy", as noted by Baker (2006: 181). However, it is important to point out that this model can also have a role in determining the strategies used in the process of learning.

Cognitively Undemanding

Quadrant 1 Cognitively Undemanding Context Embedded	Quadrant 2 Cognitively Undemanding Context Reduced
Quadrant 3 Cognitively Demanding Context Embedded	Quadrant 4 Cognitively Demanding Context Reduced

Context Embedded (left) **Context Reduced** (right)

Cognitive Demanding

Figure 2.2 Four Quadrants Model on the Dimensions of Cognitive and Context

In Quadrant 1 where the task is cognitively undemanding and context embedded, it would be much easier and perhaps requires lesser learning strategies than a task that is cognitively demanding and context reduced such as the case in Quadrant 4. There seems to be a similarity between Cummins's model and Carton's model on "An Arrangement of Inference Situations" (Carton 1966:39). The concepts of 'complexity' and 'certainty' are adopted from Carton and the model is superimposed onto Cummins's model (See Figure 2.3). Cummins's model has been modified but its concepts (context-embedded and context-reduced, cognitively demanding and cognitive undemanding) are retained while the paper is attempting to explain the newly superimposed model together with Carton's concepts.

Carton (1966: 38) sees that different inference situations can occur along the continuum of "certainty they generate and the complexity they involve". The model seems to suggest that the number and the kinds of cue will determine complexity and certainty. Together with Cummins's model, four situations can occur and this can have an influence on the kind of strategies used for learning.

Although the cues and clues may determine the contextual support, too many cues may also cause more confusion and less clarity to the learners. This could lead to the task becoming more complex and requires more cognitive effort, in other words too many cues could be cognitively demanding for the learner. Therefore, a "reduction in the

number of cues reduces complexity" (Carton 1966: 38). Thus, few cues could be cognitively undemanding for the learner. The four situations are described below.

a) In Situation 1 where there are many cues but some contradictory, there is a lack of clarity and the context is thus reduced. This results low certainty and high complexity, and cognitively demanding for the learner.

b) In Situation 2 where there are many cues and all are concurring, the context is embedded and there is a high certainty. However, there is still a high complexity because there are many cues. This can be cognitively demanding because many cues may mean much effort and time are needed.

c) In Situation 3 where there are few cues and some contradictory, the context is reduced and there is low certainty. However, it is cognitively undemanding because there are few cues and thus less complexity.

d) In Situation 4, there are few cues and all are concurring, the context is embedded and there is a high certainty. It has low complexity because there are few cues, and thus cognitively undemanding for the learner.

Certainty

Low ——————————————————————

High

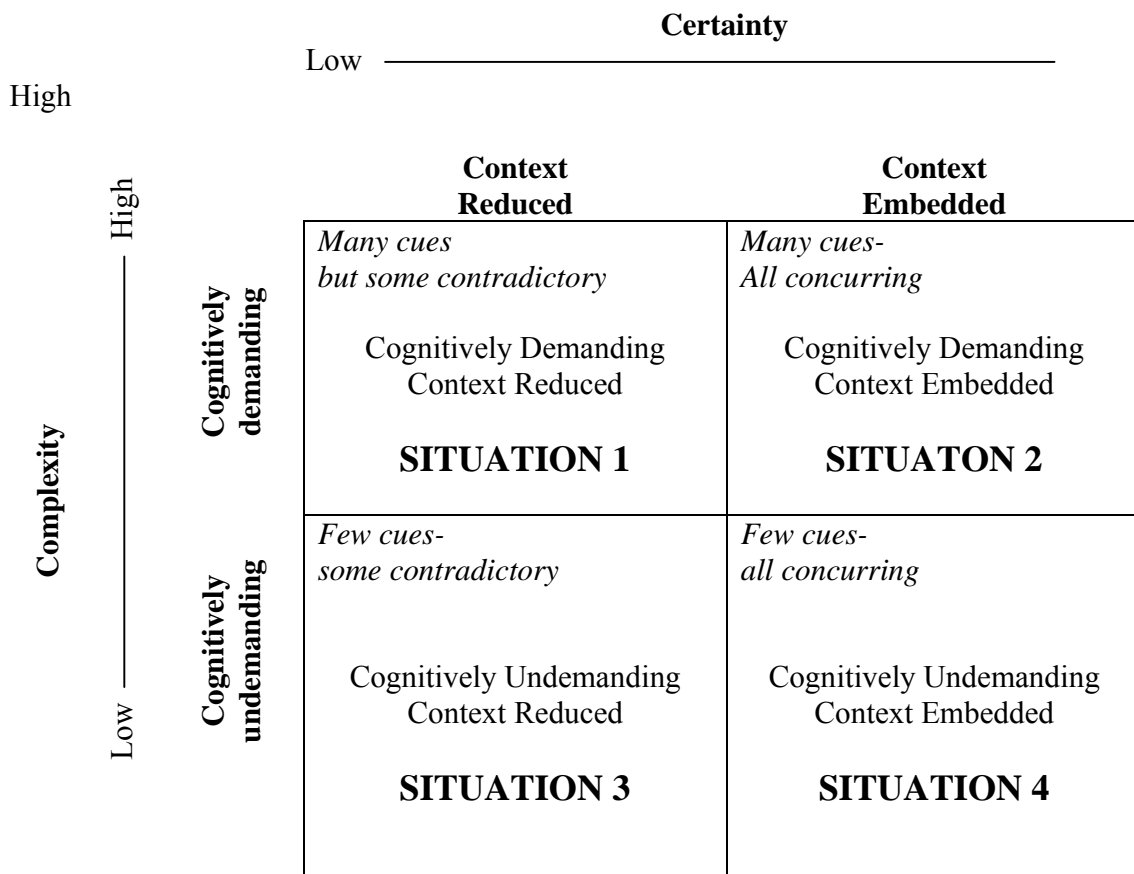|	**Context Reduced**	**Context Embedded**
Cognitively demanding (High)	*Many cues but some contradictory* Cognitively Demanding Context Reduced **SITUATION 1**	*Many cues- All concurring* Cognitively Demanding Context Embedded **SITUATON 2**
Cognitively undemanding (Low)	*Few cues- some contradictory* Cognitively Undemanding Context Reduced **SITUATION 3**	*Few cues- all concurring* Cognitively Undemanding Context Embedded **SITUATION 4**

Complexity

Figure 2.3 Four Possible Situations and its Dimension of Cognitive and Context

In the four situations, Situation 1 would be the most difficult situations and Situation 4 would be the easiest. Carton has given a detailed an analysis on 'inference' pertaining to Situation 4 under the paradigm of "What's-new?". Since this paper is not a study on cognitive strategies in particular, it will not be elaborated here. According to Tyers (2001: 298), Ellis (1996) said that "research which assumes that there are 'good' learning strategies is questionable, since different strategies will be employed in different tasks". What Figure 2.3 has attempted to show is the possibilities of different language learning strategies that could be used according to the different situations or tasks.

While language learning strategies are subjected to the "internal processing preferences", it is also "sensitive to the learning context" (Chamot 2005: 113). We know that the internal factor of the individual is constantly in interaction with the external environment, and it is the latter that this study shall focus, and with the purpose of investigating its influence on language learning strategies.

2.3 Language Learning Strategies: In the Realm of Culture and Context

Here, we are looking at two different factors in society that would have an influence on learning strategies; culture and context. There is a need to distinguish the two because both are used variedly and extensively in different research fields and literature.

2.3.1 Culture and Context: A Brief Discussion

Culture should be seen as the way how and why a group of people behave that form a characteristic of themselves in a given period of time. Wu (2008) in his paper, see Confucianism as the culture in Hong Kong. His study on language learning strategy focused on learner characteristics and the contextual factors-- the role of English in Hong Kong, the education system, and Confucianism. And Confucianism seems to be the contributing factor for the emphasis of practice strategies, because of its value placed on effort and perseverance. This was also identified by Lee (1996) and attributed the success of Asian students in Western countries to the tradition of Confucianism. If that is the case, how do we explain the performance of Asian students in different Asian countries? Does that mean that they all perform the same way?

Taking the same stance on Wu's (2008: 70) comment "We should remember that culture is only one among many contextual factors which determine the learning behaviors of learners". The contextual factors that Wu referred to would be solely related to the Hong Kong context and nowhere else. In the words of Paige *et al* (2003: 180), the "context is an overarching concept which subsumes many other variables including: the setting; the teacher; the learner; instructional methods; instructional materials; and assessment approaches". The variables here are also equivalent to the contextual factors that Wu had identified, and culture being one of the variables is associated with

Confucianism. Biggs (1996: 46) pointed out that Hong Kong, China, Taiwan, Singapore, Japan and Korea are cultures of "Confucian-heritage".

However, despite the so-called "Confucian-heritage" cultures, these countries all have different contexts, and 'these should not be over-generalized' (Usuki 2007: 17). This is because each of these countries in Asia is progressing at a different pace in terms of economic, political, social and educational development, thus 'this will inevitably result in many differences between them in social and learning' (Wharton 1998: 103).

Stern (1983: 275) has equated contextual factors with environmental factors, and looks into the wider social context that takes into account "*different social agencies*" (such as the school, the home, the neighborhood, the region, the national and international setting) and "*different factors in society*" (such as educational, economic or technological, linguistic, geographic, sociocultural, historical or political) that have pedagogical implications.

Palfreyman (2006: 354), on the other hand, noted the (presentation of) negative and ambiguous aspects of context. It is either seen as 'constraints' on learning or regarded as various 'capitals' that could affect learning. Hence, he had opted for the term 'resources' that focuses on the positive sides of context. At the same time, he also pointed out the physical resources that Tudor (2001:19) has referred to as 'pragmatic factors', under which structural factors are also included. Physical resources such as classroom equipment and structural factors such as examination systems can be seen as external factors related to the environment. There is also a constant reaction with the internal factors of the individual; that is the 'mental' factors. They are "the attitudes, beliefs and behavioral expectations which participants bring with them in the classroom".

Based on the discussion so far, if the topic revolves around Chinese education and Chinese tradition of learning, the discussion is likely to focus on Chinese culture in general and Confucianism in particular. In such a case, it is not uncommon for Singapore to make their references to China and Hong Kong, also because the Chinese Language in China is used as the language standard for Singapore, and Singapore shares the same historical past of British colonial rule with Hong Kong. The following is quoted from Singapore's former Education Minister, Shanmugaratnam's (2005) speech ,

> "In China and Hong Kong, there has been a shift in approaches to teaching and learning CL[Chinese Language] in recent years. During the lower primary years, more focus is being placed on character recognition, and less on script-writing. This approach principle facilitates early reading, enhances literacy and has been widely implemented in China and Hong Kong. "

The above quote could be seen as a reference for the new pedagogical approach in Singapore which is also reflected in the 2004 Report of the Chinese Language Curriculum and Pedagogy Review Committee. The report has also taken on *more focus being placed on character recognition, and less on script writing during the lower primary years*.

Even though Hong Kong might differ from China due to a historical past that has strong influence from the British colonialism, and serve as a better reference for Singapore, majority of them in Hong Kong speak Cantonese, with its Chinese characters dominantly used in the mass media. In addition to this, the geographical distance, as noted by Stern (1983: 278), can also be the contextual factor influencing the learning strategies. Hence, the geographical proximity between Hong Kong and China might have to be taken into account when references are made. In short, the contextual factors are relevant and not to be overlooked, in order to avoid the possibility of over-generalization.

In the following, this paper will look at some of the literature that investigates the cultural and contextual influences on language learning strategies and those that focus on language learning strategies studies in Singapore.

2.3.2 Cultural Influences on Language Learning Strategies

Shi (2006) conducted a study with 400 Chinese middle-school students about their learning of English. However, the focus on learning strategies was kept to a minimal because the purpose was to find out the Chinese culture of learning. For instance, one of the questions aim to "investigate students' strategies for memorizing vocabulary, practicing reading, speaking, listening and writing", so as to find out if "Chinese students are either passive learners who heavily rely on memorization, or active learners who apply different language learning strategies" (Shi 2006: 128).

According to Hu's (2002: 96) definition on 'Chinese culture of learning', as quoted by Shi, it is "a whole set of expectations, attitudes, beliefs, values, perceptions, preferences, experiences and behaviors that are characteristics of Chinese society with regard to teaching and learning". And the stereotypical perception of this is to see Chinese learners as passive, relying on rote-learning, lacking in critical thinking and collective. However, Shi's study had proved that that is not the case, and its research evidence is also substantiated by Gieve and Clark's study (2005). Both studies seem to suggest the need to move away these misperceptions, which Biggs (1996) had also attempted. Particularly in the present day, "the modern Chinese students are showing many characteristics in common with their Western contemporaries" (Shi 2006: 139). We have to understand that there are societal changes and development, and what applies to the past may no longer applies to the present. Therefore, we should be mindful in "characterizing groups of learners with reductionist categories" (Gieve & Clark 2005: 261).

However, the learners may not *always* but may *often* (emphasis is mine) "behave in certain culturally approved and socially encouraged ways as they learn" (Bedell and Oxford 1996: 60), thus there is still a need to gain an awareness and insight into the patterns and characteristics that is associated with them.

Culture is closely associated with national origin or ethnicity, and language. If one talks about Japanese culture, one would think of Japanese; the ethnicity and the language; likewise for other cultures such as French culture, Russian culture or Chinese culture. Again, we have to be alerted to the context where these cultural elements exist. It can even occur that Japanese culture can be found not in Japan but in Hawaii; more specifically Japanese culture within the Japanese immigrant community. Likewise for the case of Chinese culture, it could be studies on Chinese in Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore and their Chinese languages. Even one can talk of Chinese culture in countries such as Malaysia or Indonesian, where they have their own Chinese communities and their Chinese languages.

Bedell and Oxford (1996) listed summaries on the findings related to the strategies in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or English as a Second Language (ESL) from different cultures and ethnicities, to show its influence on the choice of language learning strategies. Studies on Chinese such as those from Mainland China, Taiwan and Singapore are part of the summaries. A single section devoted to a study of cultural variation in the choice of strategies used in People's Republic of China was added to give a new understanding in the literature. This was compared with other findings in the Strategies Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) studies. It confirms the similar patterns observed in other Chinese learners and states that Chinese in Taiwan or the US shows differences because of the environment they were in, and the different definitions that they have for strategies categories (Bedell & Oxford 1996: 59). This could be said as an influence due to contextual factors.

While some studies (Plitzer and McGroarthy 1985, Tyacke and Mendelson 1986) have shown Asian students' preference for rote memorization and practice strategies for rules, other studies look into the cognitive processing strategies. Abbot (2006) for instance, reported that top-down processing strategies (speculating, skimming and inferencing) are preferred for reading task by Arabic speakers, whereas bottom-up processing strategies (breaking whole into parts, analyzing complex structures with language rules and looking up definitions) are preferred by Mandarin speakers. However, in another study by Johnson & Yau (1996), it showed that the Chinese readers whose first language is Cantonese, used top-down lexical processing strategy to guess unknown words. This seems to indicate that learning strategies are not determined by learner's culture alone and that there is a need to look into other factors such as linguistic or pedagogical issues.

Next, one has to take note of the language being studied. This is a research area that has called for more attention by Oxford (1996: 249), since the "different target languages and different native languages might have major influences on language learning selection". Comparing one whose native language is Japanese and one whose native language is French, the strategies used to learn the target language Chinese, would have been different. Since Chinese characters are an integral part of written Japanese, Japanese students might require lesser memory strategies to learn the Chinese characters in Chinese. However, this would not be a case for a learner whose native language is an alphabetic language.

In the case of Spanish and Russian, it is likely that English speakers would find Spanish as an easier language than Russian. Chamot *et al* (1987) reported the use of more strategies by learners of Russian than Spanish. This seems to suggest that Russian is a difficult language for English speakers, hence the need for more strategies in learning. Politzer (1983) also reported the use of fewer strategies by learners of Spanish as compared to learners of other languages.

However, we have to note that the use of more strategies does not necessarily mean that the student is a good language learner, as what Politzer and MacGroarty (1985) would have expected. Their study showed that Hispanic students used more strategies similar to good language learners than Asian students did. However, Yang's (1999) study discovered that some of the students are aware of the language learning strategies, but did not report on them. This could have validated what Biggs (1996: 47) had found out from the comments he had collected and show that Asian students are seen as typically one who "take low profile, rarely asking questions or volunteering answers".

Suffice it to say that understanding the cultural influences on language learning strategies helps us to know the learner's background, their characteristics and patterns in learning. However, as Gieve and Clark (2005: 265) has alerted, we should be careful not to easily accept the notion of "a fixed, monolithic view of culture". Again, to quote from Gieve and Clark (2005: 274)

> "An appeal to culture as an explanation for variation in learning practices and preferences has the effect of making these practices appear less amenable to variation than if they were attributed to the context of situation, as we are presumed to carry our 'culture' with us unchanged whenever we go in a wide range of different contexts."

It is the importance of contextual factors that we would like to focus in the following section.

2.3.3 Contextual Influences on Language Learning Strategies

Levine *et al.* (1996) had taken a study on immigrants from the former Soviet Union (new-comers) and those who have lived in Israel for at least 5 years (old-comers). It shows that learning strategies had developed differently under two educational systems; one that is highly structured and uniformed, and another that is less structured and more democratic. It was noted that their habits indicated they were used to the system of "formal, structured learning and mechanical memorization or printed material" (Levine *et al.* 1996: 43). However, they also showed favorable response to the way the lessons that were conducted in the new environment, and thus began to show signs in differences of using learning strategies under the new system that was more spontaneous and informal.

It is interesting to note that the new-comers in the study are seen as diligent and obedient to teacher's authority, characteristics that were also reported in Asian learners that are said to be associated with Confucianism (Lee 1996). However, the education system in the old Soviet regime that places great importance in high grades achievement and positions the teacher as the authoritative figure could be the explanation for the characteristics shown. This shows that similar results could be achieved through completely different educational systems; one is Confucianism and the other is the old Soviet system. Thus, such characteristics of Asian learners like diligence and obedience to teacher's authority should not be attributed to mere Chinese culture but various contextual factors. Hence, the latter should be seen as having a role to play in influencing the culture of learning and the use of language learning strategies.

Zhang (2003: 303) has also pointed out two studies that show the role of contextual influences on language learning strategies. One was a study by Goh (1997) analyzing 40 Chinese ESL students' diaries in order to find out their learning experience on listening. As these students who were from the People's Republic of China had attended an English Communication Skills Program in Singapore, their exposure to the Program and the environment in Singapore could have an effect on their learning process. This is evident in a second study by Goh and Liu (1999). They discovered that the group of Chinese learners of English in Singapore did not use strategies such as memorization, translation and pattern drills as compared to the group of Chinese learners in mainland China. It concluded that this is because the first group is in an environment where there is comparatively more exposure to English, hence the foreign social context would have been a factor in influencing their language learning strategies.

The above studies on foreign social contexts seem to suggest that language learning strategies are subjected to the language learning environment. Tyers's (2001) study selected a group of 70 Japanese learners and investigated their frequency in strategies used for a course module. A 'pseudo-English-speaking environment' (Tyers 2001: 291) was created for the learners to practice the language, seeing the importance of creating conducive learning environment to learn the language. For example, the learners make use of their daily time during lunch and dinner, and talk in English with the Native Speaker teachers and two Japanese Catholic Sisters. Other examples were 'Marathon Days' set aside for college staff to visit the students during lunch time to practice the language and the setting up of 'English committee' which encourage students to participate in its bi-weekly tasks. The dormitory life and its activities are part of course module called "English in Life" in the first year of college.

Although Yashima & Zenuk-Nishide (2008) did not study language learning strategies directly, it shows that exposure to the target language environment such as study abroad experience can have an impact on proficiency, attitudes and communication behavior. In the project, comparison was made between study abroad group (SB) and stay-home group (SH); the study on first aspect of contextual influence on attitudes and proficiency. Students in SB had a one year academic experience abroad and students in SH were further divided into 2 groups; one in the communication-focused program (Course A) and another in the grammar/translation focused program (Course B).

In terms of proficiency, international outlook and willingness to communicate in second language (L2), the predicted findings ranked students in SB group first, followed by Course A and Course B. The concept of "imagined international community" (Yashima & Zenuk-Nishide 2008: 569) was used for English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners to be part of the community and to use English, so as to increase their motivation and willingness to communicate in L2. This imagined experience is in contrast to those learners who have a real experience when they study abroad and having the environment to interact with the members. Although not expressively identified, it shows the strategies used by the good language learner; one who uses "global practice strategies" (Wenden 1985: 5), has a "strong drive to communicate and often not inhibited" (Rubin 1975: 46-47).

Doubtless to say, the use of language learning strategies will also depend on the degree of exposure to a target language in an environment. Takeuchi (2003) in his investigation on books that published success stories in learning foreign languages, has concluded that some strategies reported were limited by the Japanese context; in this case a foreign language context. Because the resources are comparatively lesser in a second language context, the learners have to seek opportunities to maximize their input (metacognitive strategies). Also, the conscious learning would require the learners to put in more effort in memorizing or using other cognitive strategies for effective learning.

While Takeuchi has focused on the constraints in Japan's context that influences the language learning strategies, Palfreyman (2006) looked at the resources available in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) for the female university students studied. Although there was no lack of material resources, such as dictionaries, grammar books, novels or television channels, the social resources in terms of social network seems to be a question. The context was of a concern because of the women's positioning in UAE that seems not to allow them to have easy accessibility to the resources. For instance, they might be lack of opportunities to communicate in English because of the "physical segregation of women from public context". However, the use of material resource such as technology has helped to create a potential social resource for learning (Palfreyman 2006: 358).

The literature, thus far, has looked at the cultural and contextual influences on language learning strategies, and next we shall discuss the literature on language learning strategies in the Singapore context.

2.4   Language Learning Strategies: The Literature in Singapore

In contrast to studies on LLS that mostly focus on monolingual subjects in monocultural settings, Wharton's (1997, 2000) research was on bilinguals in a multilingual setting. The research participants were university students learning Japanese and French in Singapore. The 'multilingualism' setting is likely to be the contributing factor to account for some of the new findings that were contrary to past studies. One such finding was on gender. Wharton (1997: vi) pointed out that in previous studies,

"men reported using few strategies more frequently than women", but his project showed that "a larger number of strategies used significantly more often by men than women". Another finding was on Asian learners. Wharton has noted that differences exist in the patterns of strategy use, even though 90% of the subjects are of Chinese ethnicity, a large figure that can easily lead one to generalize the results based on the studies in mainland China and Taiwan.

Wharton's (1997: 125-126) study also showed that social strategies are the most popular and memory strategies are the least popular in Singapore. Referring to Figure 2.1 mentioned in the earlier section of this chapter, social strategies are indirect strategies whereby the students would involve others in the process of learning. On the other hand, memory strategies would be the use of mnemonics.

His findings supported his hypothesis that gender differences were not found in the use of strategies among his bilingual subjects. On the contrary, studies in mainland China and Taiwan had showed that social strategies were used more by the female than male (1997: 103). These differences among Asian learners made clear that 'culture'--Chinese culture, cannot be applied in the same way to Chinese ethnicity in general, the particularity of 'context' should be considered in explaining the language learning strategies. This particularity is, to quote the words of Wharton (1997: 104) 'for one thing, Singapore is a multilingual, multicultural society which is not the case in Taiwan and mainland China'. In this multilingual setting, it is also important to note that the research subjects are bilinguals.

Also, since bilinguals are already versed in two languages, they could have already had a wider repertoire of strategies and experiences in learning languages as compared to monolinguals. This is evident in Wharton's study (1997: 134) where it shows that there is a low ranking for affective strategies but high rankings for social strategies in the case of bilinguals who are considered 'experienced' language learners. That is, they have low anxiety and are more willing to communicate. This is in contrast to studies with predominantly monolinguals. Hence, if studies are used to compare with studies like those in mainland China and Taiwan, "bilingualism as opposed to monolingualism may well be a significant confounding variable" (Wharton 1997: 141).

Here, we have to be careful when applying results of studies on adults to children second language learners. Although not related to the Singapore context, Purdie, N and Oliver R. (1999) in their study of bilingual primary school-aged children, has alerted to adult and child differences due to their psychological and social differences. They noted that Hyltenstam (1992) for instance, pointed out the belief that the process a young learner would acquire a second language would be closer to the process they acquire their first language. It seems to imply that the older a person get, he or she will be further away from the process of first language acquisition and would thus consciously used strategies in the process of learning. This effort and conscious learning will thus determine their rate of acquisition and ultimate attainment.   .

Gu *et al* (2005) in their study on learning strategies by lower primary students (7-9 years old), had also pointed out the differences of adult and child in the process of learning. Unlike the usual studies reporting the list of strategies used in language learning, the study focused on problems related to eliciting language learner strategy data from children. As compared to adults, children are perceived to be less mature in capacity and skills, which explains the lack of think-aloud procedures in data collection. The study has proved otherwise and stated that appropriate probing and leading questions are necessary; that is to say there are difficulties but not without possibilities of finding out the patterns of strategies that children often use.

The study has observed a difference that "none of the primary 1 pupils organised their writing into paragraphs" as compared to the primary 3 pupils (Gu *et al.* 2005: 299). But Gu did not mention that the finding might be attributed to the influence of the teaching curriculum, which is likely to be designed taking into consideration the stages of maturity in cognitive and psychological development of the child. Thus, it could also explain why the study might have concluded that primary 3 pupils shows a better verbalization of ideas and mental processes as compared to primary 1 pupils.

Chang (1989, 1990) on the other hand, conducted two studies on the secondary school students in Singapore. Based on the results from the primary school examination, students are streamed into Special, Express or Normal classes. The Special class is considered academically the best, followed by Express and Normal. Both Special and Express classes take four years to complete the secondary school education, whereas Normal class takes five years. In the first study (1989), only Express and Normal classes were targeted for the project with 495 pupils. The second study (1990) took on a larger sample, consisting students from the three streams with 1,165 students.

Both studies used Biggs Learning Process Questionnaire to investigate students' learning approach and learning behavior. Biggs sees three approaches to learning; that is surface, deep and achieving. And each approach is accompanied by "a motive for learning and an associated strategy", as noted by Gow *et al* (1991 50). This is briefly illustrated in Figure 2.4.

Approach	Motivation	Strategy
Surface	Extrinsic *To pass an exam*	Rote learning
Deep	Intrinsic *To have an interest in the subject*	Understand the meaning
Achieving	Self-actualization *To succeed academically*	Managing learning effectively and efficiently

Figure 2.4   Biggs' three approaches to learning

There were three groups of students selected in the first study; Grade 8, 10 and 12. All have an important examination to take at those levels. A streaming examination at Grade 8, an 'O' level examination at Grade 10 and an 'A' level examination at Grade 12. The strategies used in the core subjects of the curriculum; Languages (English and Chinese), Mathematics and Science were studied. However, in the second study, it only

focused on English and Mathematics studied by Grade 8 and Grade 10. Since this paper looks into the learning of Chinese in Singapore, the attention is given to the findings on Chinese in the first study. It is reported that Grade 8 students preferred a surface approach while Grade 10 preferred an achieving approach. Deep and achieving approaches are much preferred by Grade 12 (Chang 1989: 6). This result suggests that learning approach differs according to grade levels and this could imply that the preference on the use of learning strategies may also differ.

The literature on learning strategies has been mainly focused on English, which is also the case in Singapore. This is because of the fact that English is an International language, the *lingua franca* of the world. Duff *et al* (2004) has called forth the need for more investigations on non-European target language, as they argued that "the cultures, contexts, and particularities of those languages offer important and possibly unique insights into larger theoretical issues that have been dominated to date by research on Western European languages".

This is also shared by Grainger (2005), who referred those non-European target languages or rather non-Western orthographic languages (such as Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Arabic) as Category Four languages; a term that is used by the Foreign Service Institute and The Defence Language Institute. It "classifies language to the length of time taken to attain varying levels of proficiency" (Grainger 2005: 328). However, it would be inadequate to conduct research on the role of learning strategies without taking into consideration the difference between Western and non-Western languages, hence Grainger's study used the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) to test its relevance with English-speaking learners of Japanese as a foreign language,

Another study on non-alphabetical language was undertaken by Shen (2005), who made a study on 95 English-speaking learners of Chinese and investigated their strategies in learning Chinese characters. Since Chinese character is logographic , the learning of Chinese characters itself would be to learn Chinese words. Examples were given in the paper to show that meaning can be derived from Chinese characters used either with other Chinese characters to form a word, or used singly as a word in sentences. As such, the importance of learning Chinese characters would require one to memorize the Chinese words, and the study looks into how this cognitive process and its current theories would be related to the learning behaviors. The purpose is to gain an understanding so as to help in overcoming the difficulty in learning Chinese characters. Although Shen (2005: 52) had reviewed some studies on character-learning strategies among non-native learners of Chinese (Hayes 1988, McGinnis 1999, Ke 1998 and Tseng 2000), she also pointed out the limited research in this area.

Given the rise of China and its economic power, research on strategies in Chinese language learning could be an emerging field. In 2008, Rebecca Oxford had given a presentation at the National Chinese Language Conference which was organized by the Confucius Institute, on the topic '*Four-Part Harmony: Chinese Language Learning Strategies for Self-Regulation and Success'*. The "Four-Part Harmony" refers to four types of learning strategies; that is metacognitve, cognitive, affective and

sociocultural-interactive, and she introduced how they can be used in the learning of Chinese language.

Considering the fact that there has been only a short history of research on language learning strategies since 1970s, there are abound possibilities and potential development in the research on non-European languages.

2.5   Further Exploration in the Field of Language Learning Strategies

The literature review here has the purpose of seeing the importance of conducting the investigation of learning Chinese. And with the focus on the context in Singapore, it is hoped that the findings could contribute to the field of language learning strategies.

Both Lee (1996) and Biggs (1996) had tried to prove the misconceptions of Chinese cultural of learning from the Western point of view. As Lee (1996: 33) has pointed out that "while much of the discussion on Eastern culture points to its collectivism, there is a tendency to neglect 'individualism' or individuality in the Eastern tradition". This 'individualism' would thus orientate one's outlook towards education and motivates one to put in effort and strive for excellence. Though it is a concept that is often associated with the West, we can also find such individualistic element in Eastern culture. An example to illustrate this would be Singapore, having a so-called 'Confucian-heritage' culture but emphasizes the value of 'meritocracy'.

Moreover, in the Singapore educational system, the language policy has a role to play in determining the status of English and Chinese, and has an effect on the attitude and motivation of the students. Also, given that the writing systems of English and Chinese are different, there are structural differences in terms of reading and writing. This could have posed difficulty for learners in Singapore, an area of concern which the 2004 Report of the Chinese Language Curriculum and Pedagogy Review Committee (CLCPRC) in Singapore has tried to improve. Also, given the dominance of English in the society, it has also reported the change in its emphasis on Chinese Language teaching and learning. Contrary to the equal emphasis given to listening, speaking, reading and writing in the past, the report has led to the current emphasis on developing students' oral fluency and their confidence in communication. It also focuses on developing an early proficiency in character recognition and reading skills.

However, as the report has stated "The emphasis on the four language skills will remain largely unchanged for those with the ability and interest in CL (Chinese Language). In general these are our HCL (Higher Chinese Language) students" (CLCPRC 2004: 12). So what are the language learning strategies of these students, or the good learners of Chinese language, who distinguished themselves from the rest? Taking on the same stance as Woodrow (2005: 96), the study agrees that

"What is required is an analysis of the effective strategy use in given contexts. In the area of LLS research, there is a need for richer rather than more generalizable descriptions of LLS use."

Therefore, this study focuses on the good learners of Chinese language in the Singapore context and looks at how its contextual factors have influenced their strategies in Chinese learning. Besides taking on a further exploration in the field of language learning strategies, this paper also hopes that the findings can be a reference for other learners in enhancing their learning process within the same context and to gain an understanding on bilingualism in Singapore. The methodology of this study will be discussed in the next chapter.