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Chapter 5

Discussion and Implication

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This chapter consists of two main sections; a discussion on the findings as reported in Chapter 4 and its pedagogical implication.

5.1   Contextual Influences on Language Learning Strategies (LLS) Use

In the following words by Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew, the quote explains the language situation in Singapore.

> "People who speak Mandarin to me are the older people; the younger people speak English, they learnt CL2 [Chinese as a Second Language]. Furthermore, we've got Indians, Eurasians and others, they will feel excluded. When they are around, we have to speak English. The language environment, inevitably, makes us use English more than any other language." (Chua 2005: 61-62)

The dominance of English in Singapore society certainly has an effect on students' language attitude and learning. In the next section, we shall discuss the contextual influences on language learning strategies use by SAP students who are learning English and Chinese as a first language.
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5.1.1   The Educational System

From the findings in Chapter 4, we see that most students use memory strategies of "placing new words into a context" and "using *Hanyu Pinyin* in memory". These two strategies can be attributed to the availability of dictionary and vocabulary handbook in the educational system that enables the students to learn Chinese language. Most importantly, the teacher seems to have a role to play in teaching the Chinese language learning strategies.

Prior to 2006, only students who are taking the GCE 'O' level Chinese language (CL) and Higher Chinese language (CL) composition examinations, were allowed to use print dictionaries approved by the Singapore Examinations and Assessment Board (SEAB). Later, these approved print dictionaries were allowed in the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) CL and HCL composition. From 2006, handheld electronic dictionaries were also introduced but were only allowed in composition examinations in school-based assessments. But from 2007, they were allowed to be used in composition examinations for both PSLE and GCE 'O' level examinations. According to the Press Release by Ministry of Education (MOE), it is hoped that such new measure will help in reducing the "burden of memorization and encourage practical use of the language" (MOE Press Release 2005).

This "burden of memorization" could refer to the memorization of Chinese characters, as we shall see from the comment made by Student 2, "Because I usually forget a lot of words, then I can recognize some of the words [when I see it in the dictionary]". And in the case of Student 4 who had expressed that Chinese is her familiar language and the language she speaks at home, she uses the electronic dictionary very often when writing composition. As she puts it "When I am not sure how to write the characters or when I forget or when I'm not confirmed with it, I will check the [electronic] dictionary very often". The approved

electronic dictionary is not without limitations. While Student 4 commented that "sometimes the idioms (成语) are quite hard to find", Student 6 pointed out that "Some words, the meaning and sentence are very short". Despite some negative remarks, both students felt that it has helped them in writing the characters. As Student 6 has said "it can help us in reducing the amount of wrong characters you write in a compo [composition]".

The type of handheld electronic dictionaries used is recommended and also approved by the Singapore Ministry of Education. The organization also worked with the vendors on the production of handheld electronic dictionaries (MOE Press Release 2005). While these electronic dictionaries enable the students in writing Chinese characters, students seem to use them for examinations purposes, as understood from the comments made by Student 7 and Student 12. Both said that they have turned to other dictionaries as an alternative for learning Chinese, particularly for memorizing its usage and meaning. Student 7 said that she is using a dictionary that "has a lot of dictionaries", implying that it has "English dictionary, Chinese dictionary and encyclopedia" within the dictionary. As she said about the dictionary she is using, "So I don't think they'll [MOE] allow. And you can also like type in an English expression or word and they will translate into English for you. I only use MOE dictionary during exam". Student 12, on the other hand, also mentioned about the dictionary he is using.

> "Besta[1] got English and Chinese is better. But MOE one is for exam, so there's no English. Because if you are better in English, so you'll use English to like translate to Chinese. Because it's [Besta dictionary] like English and Chinese combined. If you input the Chinese word, then there is the Chinese meaning plus the English meaning together. (Student 12)

Student 10 pointed out the disadvantage of using the dictionary as seen in the following quote.

> "Sometimes you get too reliant on the dictionary and when you're trying to write an essay, you've have to keep searching the dictionary and waste time. Unless I really don't know how to write the word as in I've no idea on how to write the word, then I'll use the dictionary. If not, I'll just keep writing and writing. So after I finish writing, like when I write, I'll just leave blanks in between for the words I don't know, so when I finish writing, when I start to check it, then I'll just fill in those blanks. (Student 10)

From the students' comments, it seems to show that they mainly use the electronic dictionary approved by MOE for the purpose of writing the Chinese characters during examination. However, they also use other types of dictionaries (that have bilingual function) to learn and memorize its usage and meaning. Another resource for the students is the vocabulary handbooks. As pointed out by Student 2, "For instance, I cannot write a word in composition, then I don't know how to write, I will use the Chinese dictionary. But it didn't help because there is no sentence construction (造句) inside, only the vocabulary handbook (词语手册) have only". Student 2 further explains that "The sentence constructions provided in the dictionary is very little, is about 10% of the whole dictionary. Then, sentence constructions are very short, so I can't find out the meaning from there. Like let say, they give you a word '*gao xing*' (高兴) , so they just put it like sentences like '*xiao ming hen gao xing*' ('小明很高兴'， translated as 'Xiao Ming is happy') , so I don't know the meaning from the sentence construction (造句)".

The vocabulary handbook is used to complement the Chinese language textbook and mainly published by Singapore Asian Publications (新亚出版社). As Student 2 had said,

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[1] Besta All Pass 1 (Silver) is approved by Singapore Examination and Assessment Board 2008. It does not have a translation or English dictionary function as compared to the rest of Besta electronic dictionaries.

"Usually I will check those guidebooks (词语手册) and look for the meanings, then I'll remember the meanings". Student 6 also mentioned that "We got extra materials in reading like vocabulary handbook (词语手册) , then the handbook inside also got meaning so you can refer to see (参考) which one is better".

Although electronic dictionary and vocabulary handbooks are available, the teacher seems to play a central role in teaching the Chinese language learning strategies. Student 1, 4, 5 and 11 had mentioned about memorizing from the notes given by the teacher. In this way, they also use cognitive strategy of "taking notes" to aid memory strategy of "placing new words into context". As seen from the comments below;

> Every time in Chinese class, teacher will give us notes (笔记) to do. She will give you one chart, there is a list with the vocabulary (词语) and the sentences (句子) You copy them into your notebook. I remember the sentences and when there is a test, I check the meaning again so that I make sure what is the meaning. (Student 1)

> Sometimes teacher will ask us to do the notebook (笔记). We will note down the words and then we'll write the *pinyin* and meaning on our exercise books. Then, we can just flip through like recap on what we've learned. Sometimes teachers will give us papers. On the papers, we will fill in those new words that we have learnt. (Student 5)

In the case of Student 1, she pointed out the limitation in the use of dictionary.

> Inside the dictionary, there are sentences (句子) and meanings also, so usually I'll go and check the meaning . But sometimes really the sentences are not very good, you know, in the dictionary. Compared to my teacher's one, my teacher's one is better. It's better and then can express the meaning of the word. The short sentence [in electronic dictionary], you'll score lesser marks. Not longer the better but you have to really express the meaning of the word in the sentence so sometimes the sentences is very short right, then after that there's no meaning at all. (Student 1)

While the above factors in the Singapore educational system have an influence on the Chinese language learning strategies, the role of English and Chinese in the educational system and their status in Singapore society also seems to have another contextual influence on Chinese language learning strategies. This could be a reason for the use of *Hanyu Pinyin* as a memory strategy by the students.

5.1.2   The Language Status of English and Chinese

From the findings reported in Chapter 4, we have seen that the mixing of English and Chinese at home is rather common among the students. However, within the home, this mixing of languages has to be further understood. For this group of SAP students, more students expressed that they use Chinese in their communication with their grandparents and parents. A fairly distributed number of them use English, Chinese or "Others" (mixing of English and Chinese) in their communication with their siblings. And most of them mix English and Chinese outside the home; particularly with friends and classmates in school.

Although SAP was established with the objective to "preserve the ethos of the Chinese medium schools and to promote the learning of Chinese Language and culture" as mentioned in Chapter 3, the result shows that only 3% of the students expressed that they use Chinese with their friends and classmates in school. As Student 3 had said, "This is a Chinese school, so here got a lot of people very good in Chinese. This school although is Chinese

school, a lot of people very good but most still use English to communicate, except for those came from China or Taiwan." And even though Chinese is studied as a first language in SAP schools, it might not be perceived as first language by the students. As expressed by Student 12, "Because mostly in our school, we speak in English. So English is more familiar and Chinese is our second language." The figure is rather low when compared to the use of Chinese in the communication between students and their friends or neighbors outside the school, which is 15%. It is no doubt that the number of students mixing English and Chinese shows the highest percentage, English could be a more dominant language than Chinese. In the communication with friends and classmates in school, and with friends and neighbor outside the school, each situation has 38% of students who use English. The dominance of English could be a factor in influencing Singaporeans preferred use of *Hanyu pinyin* input for computers, as observed by Lu (2001: 15)

Hanyu pinyin was first introduced in China after the establishment of a language planning committee in 1954. One of the objectives for this measure as it was pointed out, "Chinese is a pictograph, which is hard to read, write, and remember. *Pinyin*, the phonetic notation system, is a useful instrument to help overcome those difficulties" (Lin Li 2004: 83-84). In Singapore, *Hanyu Pinyin* was introduced in 1973 as a measure by the Ministry of Education to help students overcome difficulty in reading Chinese (Ang 2001:341). According to Lu (2001:15), the teaching of *Hanyu Pinyin* was initially introduced to Primary 4 students in order not to make them confused it with English alphabets. However, from 1998, *Hanyu Pinyin* was introduced to Primary 1 students at some selected schools as a pilot project regardless of some mixed opinions. This is because not all students are said to be without problems in understanding the phonetic system. And there is fear that students might be confused since some of them would have learnt the Chinese characters in preschool. In addition to this, insufficient supplementary readings with *Hanyu Pinyu* and an over-reliance on it were also some of the concerns (CLCPRC Report 2000: 66). And in 1999, the approach of using *Hanyu Pinyin* was extended to all primary schools. As stated in the objective stated in the speech by Dr Aline Wong below;

> "In this approach, our Primary One pupils learn *Hanyu Pinyin* exclusively during their first 10 weeks of school, before they are systematically introduced to the Chinese characters. *Hanyu Pinyin* is used not only as a tool for learning Mandarin pronunciation; it is also used as a phonetic tool to facilitate the learning of Chinese characters." (Wong 2000)

This measure seems to take into the consideration the language shift to English and difficulties faced by students in Chinese language learning, and *Hanyu Pinyin* is regarded as a tool to help students in their Chinese reading at an early age. This follows the teaching approach that was adopted by some experimental schools in China that focuses on the pedagogical principle of "Recognize First, Write Later" (先识字，后写字) . And as it was stated in the report (CLCPRC Report 2004: 35), it has hoped that "the frequent use of *Hanyu Pinyin* to type CL characters can enhance character recognition". Thus, technological tools such as handheld dictionaries that allow the conversion of *Hanyu Pinyin* input into characters can be seen to facilitate Chinese language learning.

Below are two students' comments on "using *Hanyu Pinyin* in memory" and Student 10 commented on the use of *Hanyu Pinyin* for electronic dictionary.

> They[English] use English alphabets, I think English is easier than Chinese. The *pinyin* will help me to remember the Chinese words. (Student 2)

> Because the *pinyin* is a bit associated with English as well so it's easier. Because I cannot recognize the Chinese words, then sometimes the *pinyin* helps. It just come naturally. When you see the *pinyin*, then you suddenly remember the character (Student 7)

> I use both book and electronic dictionary. If I know the *Hanyu Pinyin* of the word, then I'll use the electronic dictionary because it gives a faster search. (Student 10)

Student 9 had commented on such measure, "I build up the foundation in Primary One, because in Primary One, they keep teaching us *Hanyu Pinyin*, then at home, I have this *Hanyu Pinyin* chart, so I learn every day". Similar to Student 9, Student 8 also expressed that her familiar language and the language she speaks at home is Chinese, but they do not show any confusion with *Hanyu Pinyin* through its use of English alphabets in the phonetic system, rather it is also used as a search tool in dictionary to facilitate learning. And here, we could also see the dominance of English in Chinese language learning. As Student 9 had said, "Type in the *Hanyu Pinyin*, see the word. Use bilingual dictionary. It is easier to read in English. I look at the English explanation if can't understand".

It seems that students have used English as a way to learn Chinese, such as the case of Student 7 and 3. Student 7 mentioned that her dictionary can translate the meaning, so she will write the English meaning beneath the Chinese meaning and memorize the English meaning. As she puts it,

> Like if I don't know how to read this word then I can just write the word in the dictionary, then it'll come out then it'll explain all the meaning, and then most of the time it translates the meaning into English, it's easier for me to understand. I just use it for revising. (Student 7)

> I also have one dictionary, English-Chinese one. So you search on the Chinese words, they tell you the meaning in English. They also tell you how to use the word. (Student 3)

And Student 10 had used the cognitive strategy of 'translating'.

> I check the meaning of the word using the Chinese dictionary. And if I cannot find it, I'll use the Chinese to English dictionary, so at least I get the meaning in English, then I know the rough meaning of the word then translate back to Chinese again. (Student 10)

'Translating' was seen second after the cognitive strategy of 'formally practice writing systems' as reported in Chapter 4. All students have expressed the use of the latter strategy, showing the need to master the writing system of Chinese language.10 students have expressed that they used 'translating' which sees using English to learn Chinese language, as seen from following comments.

> Because you read, got other materials right. They give you English and Chinese together one, so you can take the materials, then you see the English meaning, you try to translate it back to Chinese, then maybe you can find the word. (Student 6)

It's only because like when the Chinese passage is quite easy to understand and like not a lot of difficult words all these, so I will read the context in Chinese form. But if there is a lot of words that I don't know, then it's very difficult, so I'll try to find all the meanings, then after that I'll like have the rough meanings （大概大概）, then I'll form the storyline in English [help to remember when it's difficult][2]. (Student 12)

Here, I have to point out the close relationship between "translating" and "compensating". Translating, according to Oxford's definition (1989: 46), is "*Converting a target language expression into the native language* (at various levels, from words and phrases all the way up to whole texts); *or converting the native language into the target language*; using one language as the basis for understanding or producing another". However, translating could be used as a strategy for 'analyzing and reasoning' in order to facilitate understanding, but it may not lead to direct or exact conversion of one language to another. Rather, it could result in the use of compensation strategies such as adjusting or approximating the message, in order to 'overcome limitations in speaking and writing'. As Student 9 had said, "I'll translate it to English first, think of an English word that replace that expression then I will find a simpler Chinese word to write down".

Translating and compensating strategies as mentioned by Student 9, explain the use of two languages which can be also be attributed to a common underlying proficiency as proposed by Cummins (2000), a model which we shall discussed later in this chapter. Here, in general, the use of two languages by this group of SAP students, see their predominant use of English over Chinese. And this seems to be inevitable with English being the primary language of education and Chinese being a mother tongue subject which is being relegated to the status of a 'second language' in the educational system.

5.1.3   The Value of Meritocracy

Meritocracy is seen as another factor influencing Chinese LLS. Although former Education Minister Shanmugaratnam (2006) had pointed to "a need to shift from the exam meritocracy to a talent meritocracy that is based on a wider interpretation of success that includes the arts, sports and other creative skills", the evaluation performance in the educational system based on results does not change the exam-oriented mindset of students, and as we shall see from the comments below that the students usually have their strategies to prepare and score for the examinations.

I learn the sentences that will come up in the exam. The sentences can help you to score well in exam. You memorize the meaning and then you can score well. (Student 1)

Before exam, I would like memorize how to write the Chinese characters, then sometimes they have test on sentence construction (造句). I will memorize the sentence construction and not come up one for myself because it is quite difficult for me. (Student 2)

So if you have exam right, you don't know what'll come up, they will give you an area to be tested (范围) . You just have to study inside what you required to study. (Student 6)

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[2] [ ] is used to show missing information.

In addition to memory strategies, students use compensation strategies such as "adjusting or approximating the message" in order to score marks as seen from the following comments.

> When I don't know, I don't use the sentence, I use a simpler one. Because you use the wrong one, you minus marks. So why not use the simpler ones, at least you won't get minus marks, right? (Student 1)

> I will also use another word because if you are not sure of the expression, then you don't know how to use it, you will lose your marks in the exam, so there are a lot of words in Chinese and some is the similar meanings, so you can replace the word. (Student 6)

The above comments have reflected the students' concern to do well in exam. Such as the case in Student 1, 3, 5 and 6 who expressed that they do not plan goals for Chinese learning but merely want to do well for examinations. And Student 7 had pointed out, "Because everything the teacher said is very important for your exam so everybody in class wants to know. As the teacher suggest and she say it's better so the whole class write the notebook because everybody wants to do well in the exam". Student 4 did not mention about exam but the motivation to do well seem high, as she said, "I don't know why I study very hard but I want to maintain my position [class, level position] so that I will get better and better. I don't want to fall behind (deprove), I want to improve".

Although Student 9 said, "Because we are Chinese, then it's natural we do well in Chinese", reflecting a sense of Chinese identity for learning Chinese, we had seen in Chapter 4 that the instrumental motivation to learn Chinese is high. And as indicated from the above comments, we understand that students have their strategies to score well in the Chinese exam.

Because of a high instrumental motivation to learn Chinese, all students expressed that they do 'self-evaluating'; that is monitoring their progress through tests and examinations. As Student 3 had said, "I compare with the previous test and the other tests to see how well I do". Similarly, Student 6 also said, "Like from my last test and the test that I'd set now, then I'll compare". , He further elaborates, "I only see the test marks. If I never got my aim right, then I will work harder, I will take more time to study on my Chinese instead of other subjects, I mean like replace the time". Student 7 also expressed, "I will compare [the marks] and see like what area I can improve on. Sometimes, when I see my grade drops, then I'll panic then I'll just like try to do better in the next test". Student 10 sees test as a way to motivate him, as he said, "For a test, I will set certain score for this test, try to go higher up again, say 5 marks or 10 marks higher than this test. I set to motivate myself and to study harder. Because I know if I study harder, maybe I can get a higher score that what I'm getting now."

And this monitoring of progress is reinforced through the educational system in the schools, as seen from the comments below.

> When test or exam coming, then I revise because the test throughout the year got a lot. So it's quite constant every time got test so test already, then another test. So still have to revise. Because the test is like every week all have, so every week still have to read. (Student 3)

> Because our school we have like small test regularly, like once a week or once every two weeks like that, so like I'll see my grading like if I have improved or not doing well (deproved). If I improve, then continue to work hard. But if I don't do well (deprove), then I try to find out what is wrong, and continue to study hard. (Student 5)

However, it is to note that language achievement may not necessarily be a good indication of language proficiency. According to Baker (2006: 24), language achievement is defined as "the outcome of formal instruction" and language proficiency as "the product of a variety of mechanisms such as formal learning and/or informal acquisition". He further explains that "language proficiency is sometimes used synonymously with language competence; at other times as a specific, measurable outcome from language testing". He also points out that "language proficiency is distinct from language achievement". And this is true in the case of Student 11 who said that he is more comfortable with English, "But my Chinese is very poor. I get A for PSLE [Primary School Leaving Examination], but normally I don't get A. Now failed".

While Student 11 feels that his Chinese language achievement is good and his proficiency is poor, Student 9 could have felt her proficiency is good but her language achievement did not meet her expectation. This is because she thinks she has a strong background in Chinese. She had expressed that Chinese is her familiar language and the language she speaks at home, and mentioned that she had a recent score of A2 for Chinese and C5 for English. As she said, "Sometimes I'll feel sort of disappointed in myself. Because in PSLE [Primary School Leaving Examination], it's the only A* [A star] subject, then I think that it's the only subject I can do very very very good in. Then I've have to really buck up because I'm not doing very well now".

The focus on language achievement in this study thus seems to show students' exam-oriented mindset towards Chinese learning and might not reveal a 'real' interest in the subject. For instance, Student 7 expressed that she was not sure if she plans goals for Chinese learning, "I don't know. But it's like if we pass our 'O' level Higher Mother Tongue, then we don't have to take Chinese in JC [Junior College], right? Or is it something like that. I think so".

The above analysis shows that students' LLS use were affected by several contextual factors in Singapore: the educational system, the language status of English and Chinese, and the value of meritocracy. From the students' reports, the next section shall discuss the patterns of LLSs identified during the interview.

5.2   Patterns of LLS Use As Indicated By Qualitative Data

In addition to the quantitative data, the qualitative findings of this study allow us to gain an understanding and insight into the Chinese LLS use of Singapore SAP students. As reported in Chapter 4, the overall results show that students have a high frequency use of compensation strategies as compared to the other 5 strategies which have a medium frequency use. Among the 12 selected students, 6 students gave their highest score to compensation strategies. And 4 of these students have English as their familiar language while 2 of them have Chinese as their familiar language.

The quantitative data in overall *SILL* score shows a 'high' frequency use of compensation strategies, and half of the 12 selected students have a high score for them. On the other hand, the qualitative data show that five strategies that were reported and identified under 'compensation strategies' (See Table 4.17 in Chapter 4). From the qualitative findings reported in Chapter 4, we see that all the 12 selected students have used the following strategies; formally practice writing systems (cognitive strategy), self-evaluating (metacognitive strategy) and asking for clarification (social strategy) but the level of

frequency use varies according to individual student. Based on Oxford's classification scheme, the cognitive strategies identified in the findings have the most number of items. As Oxford and Burry-stock (1995: 5) had explained that these 'cognitive strategies possess the greatest variety, covering strategies related to practice and to all-important "deep processing" in which learners analyze, synthesize, and transform new information", and hence they constitute the largest group among the strategies'.

The fact that all 12 students "formally practice writing systems" could imply the need to learn the Chinese characters to facilitate reading and writing. This perhaps explain why SAP students in the overall findings reported in Chapter 4, expressed that reading and writing in Chinese are relatively difficult as compared to the rest of the language skills in English and Chinese and thus, having more students who are proficient in English reading and writing than Chinese (See Chapter 4, p.71-72). However, based on Likert Scale of 4 and 5 combined, the percentage of those who expressed that reading in Chinese is "very difficult" and "difficult" are 17% and for writing in Chinese is 14%. In contrast, the Likert Scale of 1 and 2 combined, the percentage of those who expressed that reading in Chinese is "very easy" and "easy" are 48% and for writing in Chinese is 42%. From this, the group of SAP students can be said to be able to cope relatively well in studying Chinese as a first language since the result could have been different if the survey is done on non-SAP students who are not studying it as a first language. However, when compared to English, it is apparent that Chinese has relegated to a less dominant position.

Next, all the 12 students have used the metacognitive strategy of "self-evaluating" to monitor their progress, particularly in using tests and examinations for performance evaluation. And as we have discussed earlier, this explains for students' high instrumental motivation as reported in Chapter 4; that is to score well in exam. In the words of Student 1, "My goal is to pass exam very well. My mother said that Chinese is very useful in future. When you go out to work, Chinese is very useful. Because as a student, I think one of my part is to really pass my exam with flying colors". Despite this being the case, when comparison is made, one has to be reminded of the students' higher instrumental motivation in learning English (See Chapter 4, Table 4.10b). Another point to make is the fact that obvious differences between older and young learners are also likely to occur. For instance, in Duff and Li's (2004: 451) study of issues related to Mandarin language instruction at the university level, they reported students' motivation to learn the foreign language in order "to be able to communicate well with native speakers in the future", hence reveals "the students' particular concern about their need to receive constant correction by the teacher to ensure flawless Mandarin production". While the motivation could be said "integrative", their concern might result in the use of metacognitive strategy in the form of 'self-monitoring'; that is "identifying errors in understanding or producing new language" (Oxford 1990: 140). Or it might also lead to the use of social strategy such as asking for correction.

The difference between 'asking for correction' and 'asking for clarification or verification' needs to be mentioned here. As Oxford (1990: 170) had said, "It [Asking for correction] is related to the strategy of self-monitoring, in which students notice and correct their own difficulties". Thus, in the case of older learners as we have discussed earlier, they are learning Mandarin as a foreign language and the concern would be to monitor and minimize errors in the targeted language. In contrast, the young learners in this study are not learning it as a foreign language. When they encounter problems in Chinese learning, someone whom they had consulted will 'guide and explain'. This could perhaps explain why the social strategy of "asking for clarification" is used by all students. As Student 11 said, "Everytime, I ask her [my mother] the meaning of the words." And Student 12 said, "I'll ask my parents. Because they know me well, then they know how I can remember well, so they

tell me the meaning, then after that they show me how to write the word." Purdie and Oliver (1999: 376) had pointed out Fillmore's (1985) identification of social strategies as the most important by young learners. According to Palfreyman (2003: 356), Norton (2000) had referred to it as "social resources for learning" and Brookfield (1980) had regarded it as "network or sources for learning from people outside the formal educational setting". And because the participants in this study are young learners, it could be the reason why 11 of them had looked for their mothers for assistance when they encounter problems in Chinese learning. This could bring importance to the role of parents in the study of bilingualism in Singapore. And the findings show that parents are likely to reward the students. When students were asked if they reward themselves when they have done something well in their Chinese, Student 1 said "No. But my parents do. My parents will take me travelling and sometimes they will buy electronic stuff". Other comments that show parents rewarding their children were also reported in Chapter 4 (See page 92).

In addition to the above three strategies used by all students, compensation strategies have a high frequency and they are generally used by this group of SAP students. Purdie and Oliver (1999: 384) in their study of LLS used by bilingual children aged from 9-12 years old, claimed that Oxford's classification had led them to find out "this group of students used strategies to compensate for missing knowledge more than several other 'types' of cognitive strategy". The study did not mention the kinds of compensation strategies used, though the list of language learning strategies were listed in the appendix (For the list, see Purdie and Oliver 1999: 385). The types of compensation strategies identified here might differ from Purdie and Oliver's study, and the findings show that this group of SAP students is inclined to tap on their 'language resources'.

Referring to Table 4.17 (See Chapter 4, page 87), the first three kinds of compensation strategies used were "adjusting or approximating the message", "using synonym" and "using linguistic clues". This reveals that more students would likely use another language as a resource than simply "avoid expression totally" or "get help". These SAP students show a high frequency use of compensation strategies which can be attributed to their bilingual abilities. However, it might also be argued that the frequent use of compensation strategies could possibly prevent acquisition. The strategies are used to overcome limitations in speaking and writing, to make up for insufficient linguistic knowledge and thus it does not necessarily mean that the learner has acquired new ones. And these compensation strategies also seem to be used frequently more by students whose familiar language is English (Student 3, 7, 10 and 11) than Chinese (Student 8 and 12) (See Table 4.12 in Chapter 4). It is to note that further qualitative data through interview shows that students have actually used more of 'translation' (cognitive strategy) for 'compensation' purposes. For instance, when Student 12 was asked whether he had tried to find words or expressions in English if he did not know the right ones in Chinese (compensation strategy), he said, "I'll *translate* it into English, then I'll think of the English word again and I'll try to like turn it back into Chinese" (Emphasis is mine). This strategy, according to Student 12, "it's very natural".

In sum, the 12 selected students expressed that they had use these strategies: formally practice writing systems (cognitive strategy), self-evaluating (metacognitive strategy) and asking for clarification (social strategy). Half of the 12 selected students show a high score for compensation strategies; that reveals 1 student having a "medium" frequency use and 5 students having a "high" frequency use (See Chapter 4, Table 4.12). Although the cognitive strategy of translation was used to complement compensation strategies, resulting in two different categories of strategy used, both translation and compensation does show the activation of two language resources; a characteristic for this group of selected SAP students.

5.3   Limitations of Research Study

The advantages and disadvantages of strategy instruments were listed by Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995) and thus, it will not be elaborated here. Rather, we shall look at some of the limitations related to this study. The use of a mix approach in quantitative and qualitative data collection is used to complement the strengths and weakness of each method. However, this research study is not without its limitation. Due to some overlapping of terms, special care and attention have to be given when one is analyzing, interpreting and classifying the strategies that were reported by the students. It is also important to know that students do not report a single use of strategy but an eclectic mix of strategies towards a learning task. Since this study is not looking at the LLS use on a task-based activity research, it shall not be concerned with the variety of strategies use on a learning task. Rather, it focuses on the LLS use by SAP students in Chinese language learning in general. Some of the problems faced are discussed below.

The first difficulty lies in distinguishing the use of translation and compensation strategies; both have been discussed earlier. In the study which was conducted by Purdie and Oliver (1999: 384), the classification scheme by O'Malley et al. (1985a, b) had led them to see cognitive strategies as the most frequently used LLS. However, they further subdivided the cognitive strategies according to Oxford's classification, and found that compensation strategies were used more than cognitive strategies. Although, in this present study, compensation strategies have a high frequency use in the overall *SILL* scores as well as in the individual score of 5 students, the qualitative findings show that more students had used translation (cognitive strategy).

Translation is listed as one of the cognitive strategies. And I argue that it can bring forth one or two strategies under the main category of compensation, and thus leading to the possibility of more compensation strategies being used. This shall be further explained by using the sentences written by the students from the translation activity conducted during the survey. But before that, we shall look at some examples made by the students in an earlier survey at Singapore primary schools (Yeo 2008). According to Oxford (1990: 84), word-for-word (verbatim) translation is common among beginners. This seems to be true as reflected in the following Chinese sentences written by the primary school students. The Chinese sentences show a direct translation from English.

	E.g. (1)	E.g. (2)
Chinese sentences written by student :	狮子　舞	华文　新年
English:	Lion　Dance	Chinese　New Year
Chinese:	舞狮	农历新年

E.g. (3)

Chinese sentence written by student :	<u>第一个东西</u>我做的就是刷牙。
English	**<u>The first thing</u>** I did is to brush teeth.
Chinese	<u>第一件事情</u>我做的就是刷牙。

E.g. (4)

Chinese sentence written by student :					
	因为	我	打扫	不好的东西	出屋子。
	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
English	Because	I	sweep away	the bad things	out of the house.
Chinese	因为我把不好的东西扫出屋外。				

And in the English sentence from the translation task as shown below, a beginner is likely to write as follows;

English   :   Why were you not in school today?
E.g. (5)   :   为什么　你　不在　学校　今天？

      Example 5 shows a word-for-word translation without taking into consideration the word order in Chinese sentence. Unlike English, it is grammatically incorrect to place "今天" (today) at the end of the sentence. "今天" can be placed at the beginning or within the sentences as shown from the different sentences written by the students (Student 1, 2, 7 and 9)below.

Student 1   :   今天你为什么没来学校上课？
Student 2   :   你今天为什么没上学？
Student 3   :   你今天为什么没来上课？
Student 5   :   你今天为什么没来学校？
Student 6   :   你今天为什么不在学校？
Student 7   :   为什么你今天没来上学？
Student 9   :   你今天怎么没来上学？

      From the above sentences, do we say that the students have used 'translation' or "compensation"? The use of "没来" (did not come) seems to derive from the understanding of "不在" (were not in), so can we say that the students seek to adjust or approximate the message to overcome any limitation in writing? Or do we say the students have translated it after grasping the meaning? Likewise, the use of "上课、上学" can be seen as the equivalent for not "being in school", so is it regarded as a "translation" of the meaning or "using synonym"?

      When Student 8 said, "Sometimes, translate into English and then Chinese" or when Student 10 said, "If I translate, I'll get rough idea of that word, then I'll put it back into Chinese", there is a possibility that in the process, he or she is using translation strategy or compensation strategies, which they themselves might not be able to distinguish or consciously aware. However, given the quantitative and qualitative findings, we could conclude that these SAP students have made use of their 'linguistic capital" in translation and compensation strategies.

      Another difficulty in classification can happen between "placing new words in context" and "guessing". As Oxford (1990: 41) had pointed out clearly that the former is seen as a memory strategy in which the learner is able to associate the new information with a context. Thus, it is not taken as "placing the words in context" to see if the meaning fits or trying to guess the words in the context. "Guessing", on the other hand, is seen as a compensation strategy. It concerns with guessing the meaning from linguistic and non-

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linguisitic clues (Oxford 1990:49). Hence, we have to understand whether students are "placing new words in context" as a memory strategy or compensation strategy.

Other distinctions also have to be made such as the difference between "getting help" and "asking questions". The former is taken as a compensation strategy and the latter a social strategy. The difference seems to lie in the way the information is being filled up. In the case of "getting help", the learner totally rely on someone "to provide the missing information", whereas in "asking questions", the learner either seeks someone for "clarification or verification" or for "correction" (Oxford 1990: 50, 146-147). Moreover, we have to know that strategies are not used individually, there is usually a mix of strategies. That is to say, "taking notes" (cognitive strategy) can be used in order to aid memorization (memory strategy).

Despite the limitations, the results have attempted to fulfill the purpose of investigating the contextual factors that are particular to Singapore and its effects on language use and language learning strategies. Also, it has identified the patterns of Chinese language learning strategies use of Singapore SAP students. This could thus enable us in understanding the pedagogical implication on teaching and learning which will be discussed in the next section.

5.4   Pedagogical Implications

Before discussing the pedagogical implications, the dominance of English as understood from the survey shall be discussed.

5.4.1 Dominance of English

The qualitative findings have allowed us to gain some understandings on the quantitative data. For instance, the results in Chapter 4 shows that more students "always" and "often" listen to radio in Chinese than English, and also a higher percentage of students who always watch Chinese TV programs, however these might not be regarded as resources to learn Chinese by the students.

As Student 7 commented, "If I can't hear what they are talking [on the TV], then I read the English subtitles". [3] And Student 9 said, "I also read the English subtitles if they are any. Because sometimes when they use very difficult Chinese characters, then I watch the subtitles, maybe I understand the English". Student 12 had expressed that he does not learn new expressions by watching TV shows or movies or listening to the radio in Chinese, as he said "I only see the English subtitles". It seems Chinese is learnt indirectly through the availability of English subtitles, hence watching Chinese TV programs may not necessarily be regarded as a resource.

Also, from some of the responses, we also came to understand students' perception of Chinese in Singapore. Student 7 said, "Then movies, I don't know like sometimes watch those Jack Neo's [Singaporean film maker and actor] shows right, then it's [Chinese] just all so broken, then you don't really get anything out of it". And Student 4 commented, "Listen radio everyday morning I got listen but Singapore they won't use very hard words like 933

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[3] Here, we could perhaps interpret "hear" as "understand", since the student can adjust the volume if she really cannot "hear" what was on television.

[Singapore Chinese Radio Station], they won't use all the very *chim* [difficult] vocabulary". These responses seem to ascribe Chinese language (or Mandarin) in Singapore with less prestige and a low language status.

Reported in Chapter 4, reading (newspapers, magazines, books and comics), surfing the internet and writing email/letters are predominantly in English. Table 5.1 (a) , Table 5.1 (b) and Table 5.1 (c) are provided to have a view on frequency in using English and Chinese on 'books', 'surfing internet' and 'emails/letters'. These are discussed here because of the assumption that they are closely related to the access of knowledge related to students' project work or academic learning, and thus their language use is more significant than others such as radio, comics or movies. Table 5.1 (a) is presented based on students who have expressed English as their familiar language and have chosen the Chinese text first and translate it into English. Table 5.1 (b) and Table 5.1 (c) are presented based on students who have expressed Chinese as their familiar language. However, Table 5.1 (b) has students who have chosen the Chinese text first and translate it into English whereas it was vice versa in Table 5.1 (c)

If English is the familiar language, it might explain the higher frequency use of English than Chinese as shown in Table 5.1 (a). This could also affirm the assumption that students would find it easier to translate from L2 text into L1 (L2→ L1), should L1 be the familiar language.

	Books		Surfing Internet		Emails/Letters	
	English	Chinese	English	Chinese	English	Chinese
Student 2	Often	Sometimes	Always	Never	Always	Never
Student 3	Often	Rarely	Always	Rarely	Always	Rarely
Student 7	Always	Rarely	Always	Rarely	Always	Rarely
Student 10	Always	Sometimes	Always	Never	Always	Never
Student 11	Often	Rarely	Always	Rarely	Always	Never

Table 5.1 (a) Language Use Frequency on Books, Surfing Internet and Emails/Letters

However, how can the assumption explain the case of the 4 students (Student 4, 8, 9 and 12) who have expressed Chinese as their familiar language, and chose Chinese text first and translate it into English?

From Table 5.1 (b), we see that Student 8, 9 and 12 "always" access books in English and "always" use English for emails/letters. Student 4 expressed that she "sometimes" reads Chinese books while she "rarely" reads English books. It might explain that Student 4 has a higher proficiency in Chinese and hence find the recommended websites from her teacher uninteresting. As she puts it,

> "Because if teacher gives us the educational websites. I would think that it is actually very easy. Then, the teacher says it's through games right, I think that the games are boring and simple. Other than watching the shows, actually I seldom go to the educational websites."

Accessing internet to watch show has also helped Student 4 to learn Chinese,

> "Because I always watch on websites, like Youtube is very hard to find movie, so that I'll either watch drama or variety shows from internet. Everyday I go Youtube. Actually, it's not like purposely go and learn Chinese but actually if you watch the shows, you will learn quite a lot of vocabulary from there.

As mentioned earlier, Student 9 and 12 had relied on English subtitles when watching Chinese TV shows. Student 12 explained, "Because I can read English faster than Chinese. Sometimes they talk those Chinese movies, then talk is like very fast, so I'll try to look at the English subtitles so I'll understand". It may be argued that despite Chinese being the familiar language, the dominant use of English would have influenced students' language use in reading and writing. In the case of Student 4, she "often" write emails/letters in English as compared to she "rarely" writes them in Chinese, this may explain the habitual use of English for writing. And since she "sometimes" read Chinese books than she "rarely" reads English books, the language habit for Student 4 would seems to be reading in Chinese and writing in English. This can be understood from her statement "I thought it would be easier actually from Chinese to English [meaning to choose Chinese text and translate it into English] then when I do already halfway, actually I thought it is very hard but cannot regret anymore so I continue writing".

	Books		Surfing Internet		Emails/Letters	
	English	Chinese	English	Chinese	English	Chinese
Student 4	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Often	Often	Rarely
Student 8	Always	Rarely	Sometimes	Sometimes	Always	Never
Student 9	Always	Often	Always	Rarely	Always	Never
Student 12	Always	Rarely	Always	Rarely	Always	Rarely

Table 5.1 (b) Language Use Frequency on Books, Surfing Internet and Emails/Letters

Then, how do we explain the case of Student 1 and 6 who 'always' write English email/letter, yet do not choose the Chinese text and translate it to English?

	Books		Surfing Internet		Emails/Letters	
	English	Chinese	English	Chinese	English	Chinese
Student 1	Always	Rarely	Always	Rarely	Always	Never
Student 6	Always	Rarely	Always	Rarely	Always	Never

Table 5.1 (c) Language Use Frequency on Books, Surfing Internet and Emails/Letters

Before attempting to answer the question above, we shall examine the two students' comments below.

At first I read the passage right, I felt the passage is easier to translate into Chinese because I think I am better in Chinese. I prefer to translate into Chinese and write in Chinese. (Student 1)

Because I think my Chinese is better but then I see the Chinese word is a lot, then I think the English is easier to translate first. The English content is easier than the Chinese content. (Student 6)

No doubt, Student 1 and 6 think better in Chinese, both feel English text is easier to translate than the Chinese one. "*At first I read the [English] passage right, I felt the passage is easier to translate into Chinese*", "*The English content is easier*", all seem to suggest a close relation to the dominant use of English in reading (books and surfing internet)as seen in Table 5.1 (c) . Thus, it might also argue that reading in English is easier and writing in Chinese is preferred for these two students. As pointed out by Student 6 who said, "I see the Chinese word is a lot, then I think the English is easier to translate first".

The dominant use of English is evident as seen from Table 5.1 (c). It shows the two students 'always' read books, surf internet and write emails/letters in English. Despite expressing Chinese as their familiar language, they 'rarely' read books or surf internet in

Chinese and they 'never' write emails/letters in Chinese. Hence, even if they write in Chinese, there is a high possibility for them to use compensation strategy.

Because when asked if they would translate them into English (cognitive strategy) in reading and writing Chinese, Student 1 answered, "Usually I'll use a substitute. Because when I want to say it in Chinese, then after that thought in English, thinking "Can I translate this into Chinese?", then after that, I'll try to find a substitute". Likewise in the case of Student 12 who commented, "Translate into English but it's like very natural. Just say Chinese, very natural. If I don't know the words, suddenly I'll translate into English. Translate into English, then after that think of the words, then I'll say the Chinese word again". This could mean the use of simpler Chinese words, as in the case of Student 9 who said, "I'll translate it to English first, think of an English word that replace that expression then I will find a simpler Chinese word to write down". This also happens in the case of Student 5 who expressed that English is his familiar language but chose English text first and translated it into Chinese. As he said, "I can understand English better, so it's easier for me to translate Chinese because can just use simple words". It is to note that the use of 'translation strategy' mentioned by the students here could be "compensation strategies" which they do not know they are using.

In sum, English is generally the dominant language for the students, even for those who had expressed that Chinese is their familiar language. In addition to this, compensation strategy was identified as having a high frequency in the overall *SILL* score as compared to the other five strategies. And 6 students among the 12 selected, gave their highest score to compensation strategies. While 4 (Student 3, 7, 10 & 11) of them have expressed English as their familiar language, 2 (Student 8 & 12) have expressed Chinese as their familiar language. It might appear that the former group is likely to use compensation strategies for Chinese learning than the latter group, but the reverse may be true. Table 5.2 will be used to explain this.

Table 5.2 gives an overview on SAP students' language background, language choice and *SILL* scores for compensation strategies. As it was mentioned earlier, it is more likely to see those students who expressed English as their familiar language to use compensation strategies in Chinese learning to 'overcome knowledge limitations in all four skills' (Oxford 1990: 90). However, viewing from Table 5.2, we see that the familiar language of Group 2 is Chinese, and the students had chosen Chinese text first and translated it into English. It does not affirm the assumption that students would find it easier to translate from L2 text into L1 (L2→ L1), should L1 be the familiar language. Also, Group 2 with Chinese as the familiar language and English as the dominant language, shows the highest average *SILL* score of 4.4 (high frequency) for compensation strategies. This may imply that they are able to tap on wider linguistic resources from English and Chinese.

Group 1 has a slightly lower average *SILL* score (3.56, high frequency) for compensation strategies than Group 2. English is predominant in Group 1 and students may need to have a high frequency use of compensation strategies, yet they may not have the wider linguistics resources as compared to Group 2.

The familiar language of Group 3 is Chinese, and the students chose English text first and translated it into Chinese. The translation task is easy for them based on the assumption mentioned earlier and thus may account for the average *SILL* score of 3.4 (medium frequency). Only 1 student appeared in Group 4, may explain that not many students who expressed English as their familiar language would choose English text and translate it into Chinese because of the difficulty in writing Chinese characters. As discussed in Chapter 4

(See Table 4.12), Student 5 has the highest *SILL* score of 3.2 for memory strategies as compared to the rest of the strategies.

GROUP 1						
	Most familiar language	**Language(s) you speak at home**	**First choice of text to translate**	**Translated text**	***SILL* Score for Compensation Strategies**	**Frequency**
Student 2	E	EC	C	E	2.8	Medium
Student 3	E	E	C	E	3	Medium
Student 7	E	E	C	E	4	High
Student 10	E	E	C	E	4.25	High
Student 11	E	ECD(Hakka)	C	E	3.75	High
Average Score					3.56	High

GROUP 2						
	Most familiar language	**Language(s) you speak at home**	**First choice of text to translate**	**Translated text**	***SILL* Score for Compensation Strategies**	**Frequency**
Student 4	C	C	C	E	4.3	High
Student 8	C	C	C	E	3.8	High
Student 9	C	ECD(Hokkien)	C	E	4.5	High
Student 12	C	C	C	E	5	High
Average Score					4.4	High

GROUP 3						
	Most familiar language	**Language(s) you speak at home**	**First choice of text to translate**	**Translated text**	***SILL* Score for Compensation Strategies**	**Frequency**
Student 1	C	EC	E	C	4	High
Student 6	C	EC	E	C	2.8	Medium
Average Score					3.4	Medium

GROUP 4						
	Most familiar language	**Language(s) you speak at home**	**First choice of text to translate**	**Translated text**	***SILL* Score for Compensation Strategies**	**Frequency**
Student 5	E	EC	E	C	3	Medium

Table 5.2 SAP students' language background, language choice and score for compensation strategies

Overall, Group 1 and Group 2 have a high frequency as compared to Group 3 and Group 4 that have a medium frequency as seen from Table 5.2. And the first two groups have a majority of the students (9 students) who chose Chinese text first and translated it into English as compared to the latter two groups that has 3 students who chose English text and translated it into Chinese. In addition to this, the assumption that students would find it easier to translate from L2 text into L1 (L2→ L1), should L1 be the familiar language, would seem too simplistic in a complex linguistic situation like Singapore. Also, as it has been pointed out that compensation strategies may help to overcome limitations in speaking or writing, its frequent use could possibly prevent language acquisition as well and thus affect the degree of language proficiency.

Language choice in relation to the translation task and frequency use of compensation strategies are discussed here, because of the bilingual abilities of these SAP students. They may vary in the frequency of using compensation strategies and further research could be

done in this area to study its relation to language use by different groups of students from different language background.

In the next section, we shall discuss the pedagogical implication of this survey on Singapore Chinese language education and Chinese language learning.

5.4.2 Singapore Chinese Language Education and Chinese Language Learning

García (2009: 62) identifies the differences between a receptive and productive bilingual according to the "the levels of *language ability or skills*" and also associate the latter to the term "*language function*". According to her, there is a close relationship between language ability and language function, since "the ability to engage in language practices that use either or both of the languages is developed when one has the possibility to function and use a specific language or two languages". If this is true, then the dominance of English as discussed in the earlier section would have implied that the SAP students have a higher ability in English than Chinese, even though they are studying English and Chinese as first language.

In schools, assessing the Chinese language ability is based on the results that show the outcome of Chinese language instruction and students' language achievement/attainment. Certainly, this enables one to understand the students' level of language understanding and their production. However, this language performance may or may not reflect their language competence. That is to say, even though a student may have got high marks that show a good command of language use, it does not necessarily show their underlying language competence. Likewise for a student who may have got low marks, this also does not necessarily imply the lack of language competence. In short, the level of language achievement merely measures part of the student's language use, and does not assess his/her language ability in a wider scope. However, since students admitted to SAP schools were selected based on their good academic results and their performances in languages, they seem to posses a wider linguistic resources as compared to non-SAP students. The use of compensation strategies which is a characteristic of this group of SAP students can be further be understood using the theory of "Common Underlying Proficiency" as proposed by Cummins.

Referring to Figure 5.1, the "Common Underlying Proficiency" is explained by using an Icerberg Model. Above the surface level, there are two different languages each with their distinct characteristics. Below the surface level, the two languages are sharing a "central operating system". That is to say, even though there are two languages, there is one central system that enables the processing of concepts and knowledge that are related to the acquisition of the two languages. For instance, a bilingual child who reads a story in English and understands its content could have retold the story to his friend in English or to his grandmother in Chinese. On the surface, he is using two languages but cognitively, he has a "central operating system" that enables the processing of these two languages, thus he needs not read the same story in Chinese. In this case, he can be regarded as an effective bilingual having cognitive advantages, and be called a "balanced bilingual" according to the Threshold theory.
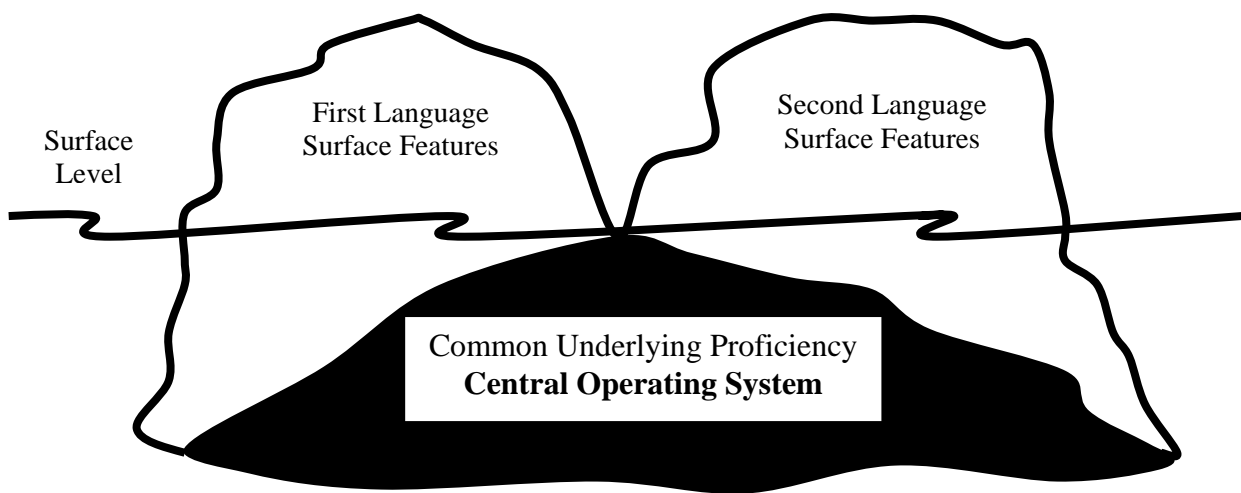
Figure 5.1   Iceberg Model

The Threshold Theory (See Figure 5.2) is used to explain the relationship between the degree of bilingualism and cognition and this is supported by several studies as observed by Baker (2006: 171-172). According to Baker, the study by Dawe (1983) showed that students' skill of deductive mathematical reasoning increased when the competency in two languages also increased. Likewise, negative cognitive outcomes were produced when the competency for both languages were limited. And the study by Bialystok (1988) also proved the cognitive effects in relation to the level of bilingualism. Based on the theory, a student has to cross two thresholds, in order to progress from being a limited bilingual to a balanced bilingual.

Types of Bilingual		Cognitive Effect
Balanced Bilinguals	Children have age-appropriate competence in both languages	There are likely to have positive cognitive advantages
Second Threshold		
Less Balanced Bilinguals	Children have age-appropriate competence in one but not two languages	There are unlikely to be positive or negative cognitive consequences
First Threshold		
Limited Bilinguals	Children have low levels of competence in both languages	There are likely negative cognitive effects

Figure 5.2   The Threshold Theory-
Different Types of Bilinguals and Their Cognitive Effects of Bilingualism

The two thresholds refer to the levels of competency in two languages. It is assumed that changes would occur in the child's language and cognitive abilities once a level of threshold is crossed. In other words, a limited bilingual child who has low levels of competence in both languages would likely to have negative cognitive outcomes. For instance, a child who has low levels of competence in both languages could have difficulty in understanding the lessons, and therefore have negative effect on his or her academic performance.

However, a child with age-appropriate competence in one but not two languages would be seen as a less balanced bilingual who has crossed the first threshold. There would be not much difference when this child is compared to a monolingual child, since there are unlikely to have positive or negative cognitive consequences. In addition to this, when

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another level of threshold is crossed, the child is called a balanced bilingual. This child is able to use both languages effectively in class, thus he or she is seen as having positive cognitive advantages than a monolingual child.

According to the Threshold Theory, a balanced bilingual child has to cross the first and second threshold. However, the problem lies in setting the criteria to measure the child's level of proficiency. The main point of this theory seems to show that negative effects of bilingualism can be avoided when competency in first language is achieved. And in the next level where competency in both languages is attained, there will be positive advantages of bilingualism.

However, due to its ambiguity, as it was pointed out, educators in countries such as America and New Zealand made use of the theory and delayed in introducing the teaching of reading and writing abilities in English (Cummins 2000: 176). This was justified by assuming that the majority language (L2) was unable to be introduced without a mastery of the minority language (L1) that was needed to cross the threshold level. This view on 'transfer' seems to be one-way and neglect its interactive or two-way function. In other words, transfer needs not be from L1 to L2, but also can be from L2 to L1. Thus, if there are opportunities provided to increase the motivation in learning a language, L2 can also be emphasized and assumingly enabled the effective learning of L1. And in accordance to the "Developmental Interdependence Hypothesis", skills and linguistic knowledge related to the two languages can be mutually transferred.

Taking the case of Malaysia, some students who graduated from the Malay-medium schools are called partial bilinguals (Tusi et al. 2007: 58). This is because even if they had obtained good results for English at the Malaysian School Certificate Level, they were unable to analyze, synthesize and evaluate information in English. Thus, such linguistic competence would not enable a transfer from L2 to L1 that would lead to positive effects on learning, whether it is cognitively or academically, likewise for the reverse situation. As a result, there was a need to raise language proficiency for the purpose of note-taking, summarizing and synthesizing task as stated in the 1985 Cabinet Committee Report (cited in Matnor Daim, 1997). In such instance, the threshold theory could be used for nationalistic purpose so as to protect the Malay language and delayed the teaching of English language. However, the Malaysian government seems to recognize the importance of English in the globalized world, and the effort to raise its proficiency seems to understand the positive effects of learning English that could enable a transfer of cognitive and academic skills to the learning of Malay language.

Based on the above discussion, be it one-way or two-way transfer, the threshold theory proposed that it would be easier for second language competence to develop together with the development of first language competence. In addition this, we should also not neglect the distance of two languages and the difference in writing system that could have an effect on language learning. Thus, it would be relatively easier for a student to learn English and German than a student who learns English and Chinese.

Also, the discussion of the bilingual education systems in Chapter 1 shows that the aim of language outcome in a strong from of bilingual education is the achievement of bilingualism and biliteracy. This is the objective of the Singapore bilingual education system that aims to produce balanced bilinguals but in actual fact, there exists some practical difficulties.

In the Singapore bilingual education system, English is the medium of instruction and Chinese is studied as a subject. Moreover, the language distance between English and Chinese is rather significant, thus giving some difficulties for transfer. However, language competence can be increased when there are more opportunities to use it. As we can see from the survey, students use English and Chinese in different situations, and this might explain their use of compensation strategies which is a characteristic of this group of SAP students. However, students who use mostly English and comes from English speaking homes might bring about different survey outcomes. And this group of SAP students is likely to be called 'balanced bilinguals' who show equal proficiency of two languages, but they seem to have shown more proficiency in one (which in this case is English) of the two languages and thus may be more appropriate to be called 'dominant bilinguals' (Li 2000). Yet, at the same time, there is a possibility for them to become 'weak bilinguals' who are relatively monolingual or have limited bilingualism.

In view of the above discussion, the Threshold theory does not seem to adequately describe the case of SAP students in this survey. And the term 'balanced bilinguals' may not applied to this group of students appropriately. Even though English and Chinese are official languages in Singapore, the functional role of English and its higher language status in Singapore society seems to give it a higher language use as compared to Chinese. Thus, this group of SAP students might appear to be 'balanced bilinguals', studying both English and Chinese as first language but in actual fact, they are dominant in the use of English. As mentioned earlier that there is a close relationship between language ability and language function, therefore it may conclude that this so-called SAP students have shown a higher ability in English than Chinese, since the language function for English seems to be relatively higher.