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The Role of Language Learning Strategies in Learning The Chinese

Language

Ph.D. dissertation

THESES

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I. Purpose of the research

The investigation of the strategies and style of the language learning strategies of Hungarian language learners reveals the characteristics Hungarian language learners show when studying Chinese, as well as the correspondences which define the process of successful acquisition of Chinese language. The research helps in having the results of strategy research be incorporated into the process of successfully teaching Chinese as a foreign language. The exploration of the learning styles of the Chinese language, and getting to know the strategies can constitute considerable help in the learning of the Chinese language.

II. Methodology of the research

The research took place from the Spring of 2011 to February 2013 with the participation of 231 students. I performed the assessment of the strategies of verbal language learning and language learning of the Chinese language with the modified Hungarian language version of the SIL (Strategy Inventory for Language Learning) questionnaire developed by Oxford. For examining the language learning styles I used the Hungarian version of the Learning Style Survey questionnaire developed by CALLA. I added an informational part to the items referring to the personal details and language learning background of the participants (gender, level of command of Chinese language, time spent learning the language, age, motivation of learning Chinese, language exam, scholarship).

Data entry was performed with the Excel program, and the analysis of the data of the questionnaires was executed with version 20 of the SPSS mathematical statistical program. During the analysis of the data I used variance analysis (Anova), discriminant analysis, multidimensional scaling, factor analysis and latent variables path analysis with partial least-squares estimation.

In order to better get to know the strategies, beyond the quantitative analysis I performed interviews with seven Hungarian language learners learning Chinese. My

aim with the interviews was to add individual and personal experiences of students to the quantitative partial results of the research.

III. The structure of the dissertation

The first chapter of the dissertation presents the history of teaching the Chinese language, the way of the development of the language learning theories, and it also articulates the problems teaching Chinese has to face in our times.

In the second chapter I summarize the definitions and classification of the language learning strategies and communication strategies, I also go through the constant and variable factors influencing the choice of strategies, and I give a description of the research results of the surveys of language learning and communicational strategies as well.

In the third chapter I present survey results dealing with the use of language learning, verbal language learning and communicational strategies of the Chinese language.

In the fourth chapter I analyze the empirical survey of the language learning strategies of Hungarian speakers learning Chinese, while in chapter five I analyze the use of verbal language learning strategies of Hungarian speakers learning Chinese.

In chapter six I examine the correspondences of language learner styles and strategies playing an important role in learning Chinese.

In the seventh chapter of the dissertation I review those problems in language teaching that may be eliminated in the knowledge of the Chinese language learning strategies and language learning styles of Hungarian language learners, and so Hungarian language learners' efficiency of learning Chinese may be improved

IV. Summary of the results of the survey

1. Background factors

I examined the influence of background factors playing a part in the learning of the Chinese language, that of the language learning strategies and verbal language learning strategies, as well as the language learning style on the successful acquisition of the Chinese language with the setup of the LVPLS model.

Out of the latent variable of the language level (language knowledge, scholarship, language exam and time spent learning the language) the manifest variable of language knowledge determines the language level with the largest weight (0,80). The language level is determined secondly by the language exam (0,74), thirdly by the scholarship (0,72) and only lastly by the time spent learning the Chinese language (0,57).

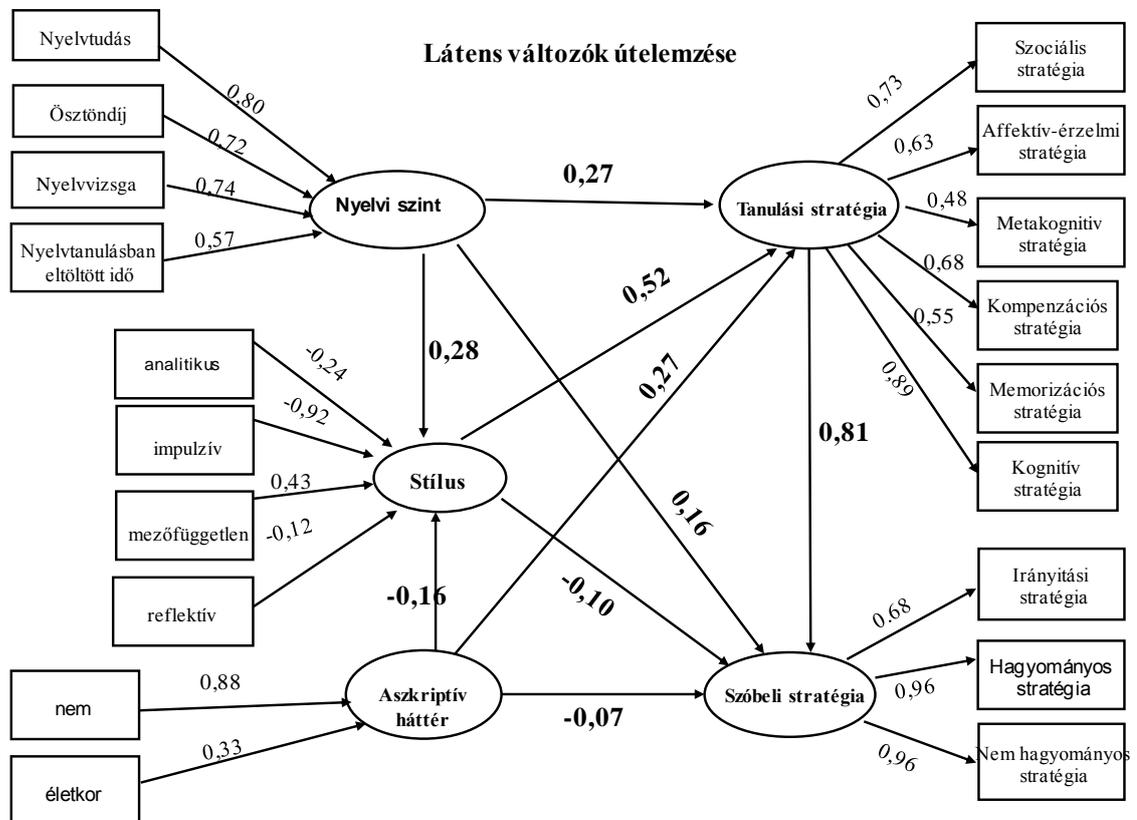
The unit change (0,27) in the language level increases the successfulness of the strategies chosen while learning the Chinese language with 0,27 unit, while it only has about half of the influence (0,16) on the use of verbal strategies. The latent variable of the language level (0,16) improves the choice and use of the verbal language learning strategies by 0,16 unit. The use of the verbal language learning strategies is determined by the same weight by the traditional (0,96) and non-traditional (0,96) strategies, so a good language learner intensively uses both verbal strategies in order to increase the efficiency of their verbal language knowledge. The use of management strategies interferes with this to a lesser extent (0,68).

In the case of gender and age (ascriptive background) gender plays a part in the learning of Chinese language with quite a large factor weight (0,88), while age has a smaller weight (0,33). The ascriptive background variable influences the latent variable of learning strategy positively (0,27), which is the third strongest structural influence.

The latent variable of style influences the use of the strategies in learning the Chinese language to the largest extent. The path coefficient (0,52) of the latent

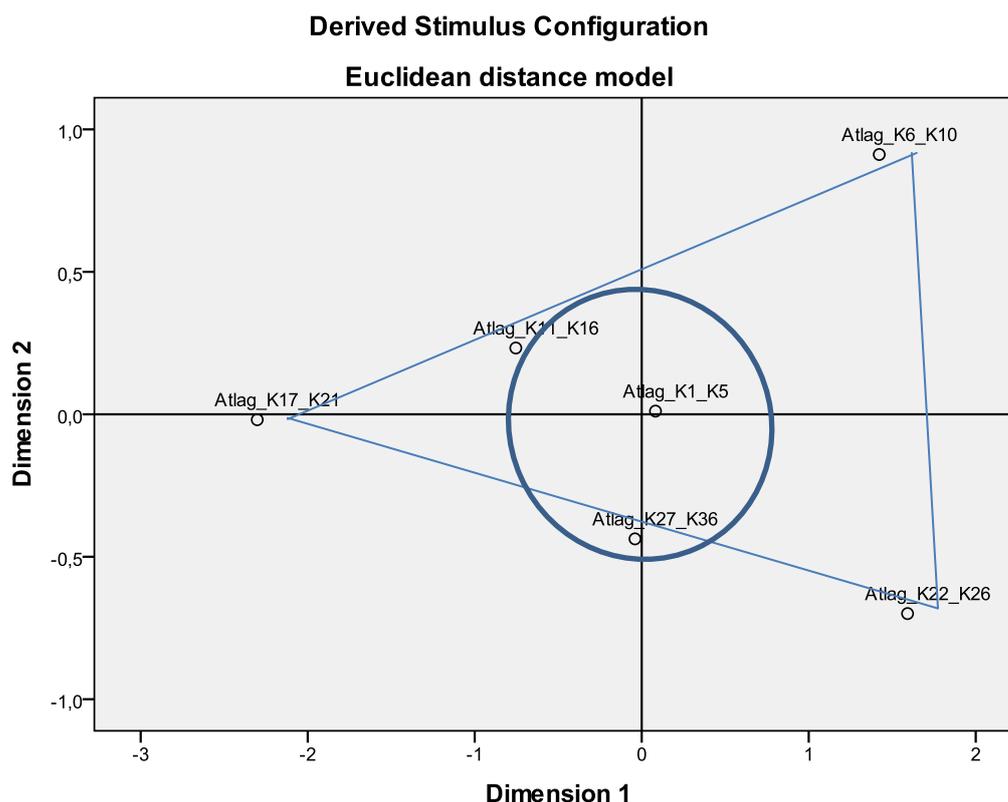
variable of the language learning style is the highest, this determines most the kind of strategy one chooses when learning the Chinese language. Out of the four manifest variables of the language learning style (analytic, impulsive, field independent, reflective) the field independent style has a positive weight (0,43), while in the cases of the three other styles, analytic (-0,24), impulsive (-0,92) and reflective (-0,12), the weights point to a negative direction. The style latent variable expresses impulsive vs. field independent bipolarity. The style latent variable expresses the field independent learning style in a positive direction, while in the opposite, negative direction it expresses the impulsive learning style. The impulsive style significantly influences the choice of verbal strategy (0,10). On the basis of the ascriptive background we can state that the younger male person someone is, the more is the field independent language learning style characteristic of them, this ascriptive background variable influences the latent variable of the use of the language learning strategy in a positive direction.

The language learning strategies are determined by the use of the cognitive (0,89) and the social (0,73) strategies to the greatest extent. The better language learner someone is, the more social and cognitive language learning strategies they use in order to become successful in the learning of the Chinese language. Out of the factor weights of all the strategies the factor weight of the metacognitive strategy (0,48) received the smallest value, although this can still be seen as a high value. The factor weight of the memorization strategy shows a little higher value (0,55) than the use of the metacognitive strategies.



2. Chinese language learning strategies of Hungarian language learners

With the help of the smallest space analysis of the multidimensional scaling, I created the model that describes the use of the Hungarian language learners' Chinese language learning strategies.



As for the situation of the six groups of language learning strategies in the space, we can say that the Hungarian language learners' Chinese language learning is determined by the frequent use of three strategies, the social (K1_K5), the metacognitive (K_11K_16) and the cognitive (K27_K36). These *primary strategies* are surrounded by three *secondary* – the emotional (K6_K10), the compensational (K17_K21) and the memorization (K22_K26) – *strategies* in a triangular shape. The opposition of the primary, central strategies to the secondary strategies means that these strategies are less dominant in the learning of the Chinese language. Those language learners who use emotional strategies, use memorization and compensational strategies less. Those who use compensational strategies, avoid the use of memorization and emotional strategies

Out of the strategies playing a primary role the use of the metacognitive strategies is the second most important for Hungarians in learning Chinese language.

The frequent use of the primary strategies of the Chinese language – the metacognitive, the cognitive and the social – is more characteristic of women.

The cognitive strategies are least used by the group of students learning the Chinese

language for less than a year, and they are most used by those who have been studying the Chinese language for four years already.

One possible explanation for the less frequent use of the cognitive strategies is that the mechanical, monotonous repetition of words makes the learning of the language boring. An other explanation is that the language learner less knows techniques that help the efficient use of the cognitive strategies.

The frequent use of the social and cognitive strategies is helped by the external motivation of acquiring the language exam.

Out of the *strategies playing a secondary role* in the Hungarian language learners' Chinese language learning, the use of the memorization strategies differentiates most the individual language learner groups possessing different language knowledge from one another. With the increase of the level of language knowledge the use of the memorization strategies becomes more frequent. The fact that the frequent use of the memorization strategies is characteristic of the beginner language learners is understandable, since in the initial phase of language learning the memorization of the characters and the pronunciation presents a certain challenge for the beginner Chinese language learner. However, not this language learner group, but the one having learned the Chinese language for over four years uses the memorization strategies most often.

The memorization strategies are preferred by the group of language learners possessing a good level of language knowledge, as opposed to the *average* or the *not good* language learner group.

The use of the memorization and the cognitive strategies showed a significant correspondence with the background variable of the time spent learning the Chinese language. The time spent learning the Chinese language positively influences the use of the memorization and cognitive strategies.

Connecting and using the cognitive and memorization strategies at the same time results in successful Chinese language learning, since these can help the learning of the structural buildup of the characters in a logical way supporting and supplementing each other. A year is enough in learning the Chinese language for the language learner

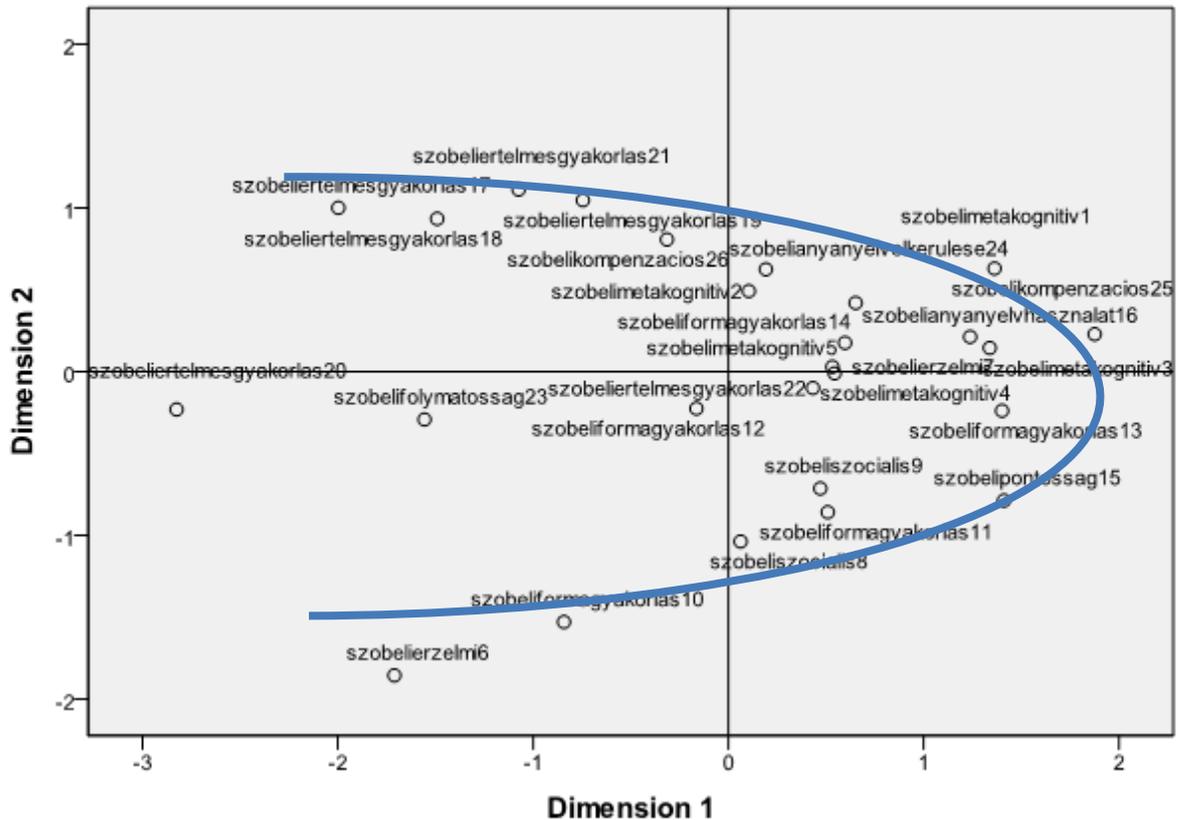
to realize the "secret coding" of the characters of the Chinese language, and also for them to prefer the cognitive strategies instead of the use of the memorization strategies.

The use of the compensational strategy during the learning of the Chinese language may be considered as a constant strategy of the Hungarian language learners (including also the language learner group possessing a *good language knowledge*). With the progression of the time spent learning the language the use of the compensational strategies does not decrease, but the increasingly frequent use of this strategy is identically characteristic of all language learner groups. The frequent use of the compensational and cognitive strategies changes depending on the background variable of the target language environment.

3. Verbal language learning strategies of the Hungarian language learners

According to the verbal strategy use model of the Hungarian language learners, the use of the verbal Chinese language learning strategy takes the shape of "a sideways leaning pot holder" (or a U shaped horseshoe), on which the individual strategies are strung almost without intermission, as chain links. The language learners use almost all of the verbal language learning strategies all the time and intensively in order to increase the level of their verbal Chinese language knowledge.

Derived Stimulus Configuration Euclidean distance model



However, four verbal strategies -two strategies of the meaningful practice, the strive for continuity and one strategy of the form centered practice- are situated as individual, separate points, the use of these is not preferred by the language learners during their verbal Chinese language learning. The use of the strategy of the strive for continuity is the least characteristic of the Chinese language learning.

In the verbal acquisition of the Chinese language the Hungarian language learners rely most on the traditional strategies, out of these the use of the mother tongue the strive for accuracy and the metacognitive strategy are the ones *used frequently*. Techniques striving for the language content and the accuracy of the forms are primarily used by those belonging to the group of the ones under 20, while the members of the older (above 30) language learning group use these strategies less.

Chinese language learners use the strategy of the **use of the mother tongue** intensively in the acquirement of the verbal Chinese language. The use of the mother tongue is more frequently applied by the language learner group possessing a good language knowledge, and less by those belonging to the language learner groups possessing average or not good language knowledge. The use of this traditional verbal strategy is not influenced by any other background variable, so this is a constant strategy which is definitely worth building on during Chinese language teaching. Only the variable of preparing for the language exam can influence language learner to give up the constant use of the strategy of the mother tongue, and in parallel they start to apply the strategy of avoiding the mother tongue.

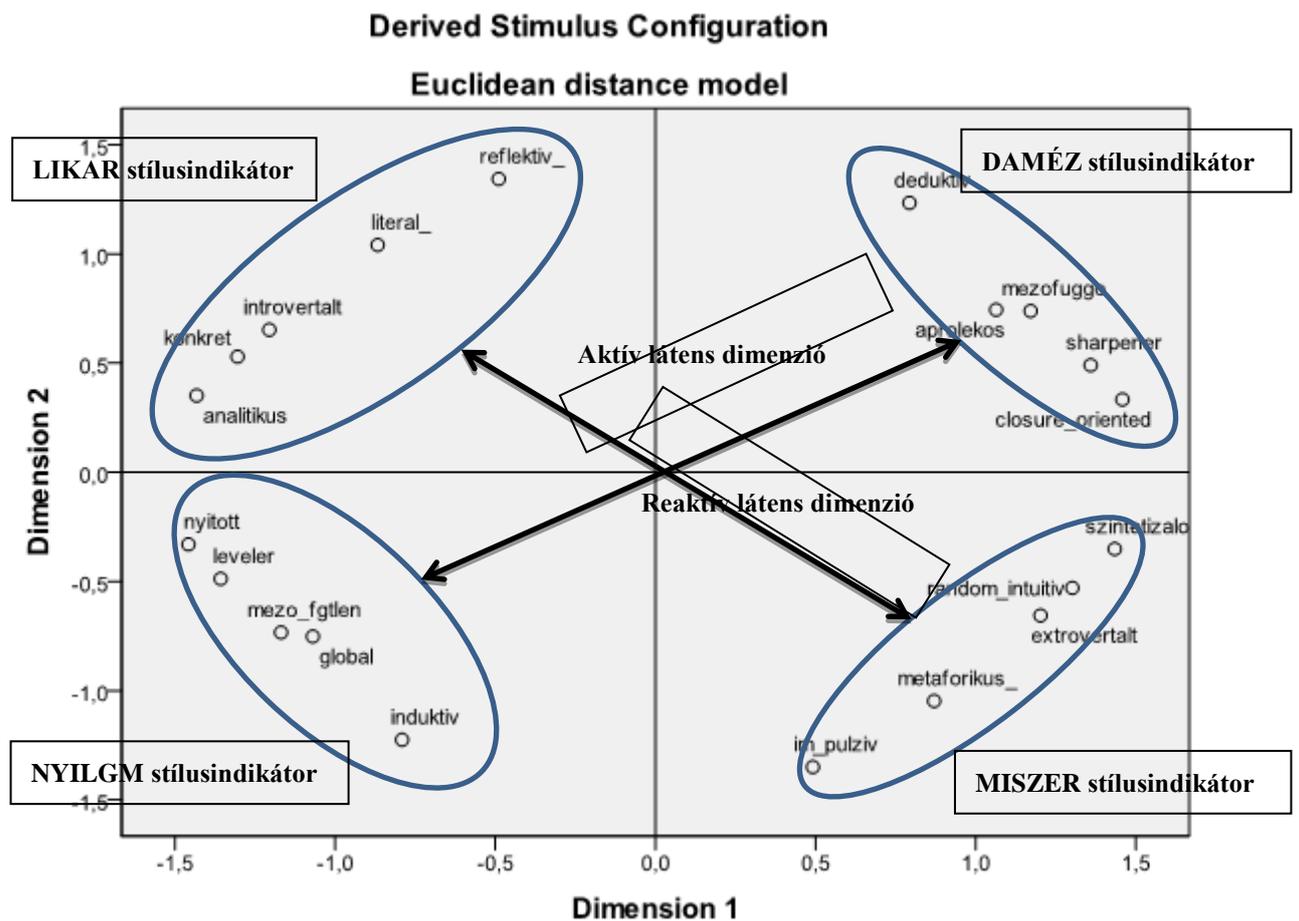
The background variable of the target language environment is the one that activizes the use of the most verbal strategies. The frequent use of the *verbal metacognitive strategies* is made more conscious in the group possessing a good language knowledge. It is also the target language environment that does not decrease but increases the use of the *verbal compensational strategies*. Communication experienced and practiced in target language environment is able to overcome those inadequacies which cannot be surmounted by the situations learned in the classroom or mother tongue environment. The target language environment can make one face the lack of the use of strategies coming partly from cultural deficiencies. While in the mother tongue environment the lack of the knowledge of the culture means the greatest hardship, in the target language environment the realization of the cultural lack, the exploration of the language and cultural differences is possible with the frequent use of the mother tongue. The variable of the target language environment plays a part in the use of the non traditional strategy of the meaningful practice, in the procession of the language and cultural inputs.

The efficiency and successfulness of the management, control and language use strategies of the verbal learning of the Chinese language are more influenced by the target language environment than by the level of language capabilities.

4. Language learning styles in Chinese language learning

The individual language learning styles prefer different language learning strategies, and the use of the strategies of Chinese language learning and verbal language learning can be isolated well along the lines of the language learning styles.

In the spatial illustration of the language learning styles of the Chinese language the smallest space analysis model of multidimensional scaling (ALSCAL) identified four different dimensions of language learner styles.



Two bipolar dimensions spread along the space of the Chinese language learner styles. The two hemispheres of the space are separated by two latent dimensions. I called one of them **ACTIVE** and the other one **REACTIVE** latent dimension. At one end of the **ACTIVE** latent dimension there are the deductive-field

dependent-particular-sharpening-closed type language learners – that is why I call the right hand pole of this dimension Deductive- Particular- Field-dependent- Sharpening- Closur-oriented (DPFSC) style indicator (*DAMÉZ in the Hungarian original*). The left side of the ACTIVE latent dimension, which is the lower part of the left hemisphere of the two dimensional space received the name Open-Inductive-Leveler-Global-Field independent (OILGF) (*NYILGM in the Hungarian original*) style indicator based on the style features found in the actual part of the space. In the lower quarter of the right hemisphere the parts of the second style indicator are the Metaphoric-Impulsive-Synthetising-Extrovert- Random-Intuitive, so I called it MISER (*MISZER in the Hungarian original*). In the upper quarter of the left hemisphere the third style indicator is located, which I called Literal-Introverted-Concrete-Analytic-Reflective (LIKAR) style indicator. As a matter of fact, this is the left hand style pair of the REACTIVE latent dimension.

In the reactive latent dimension the style pair of opposites determining most the Chinese language learning of the Hungarian language learners can be found: the impulsive and the reflective language learner styles. Impulsivity means quick reaction in language situations, while its style pair of opposite, reflectivity describes the collection and analysis of information before the answer. The third language learner style indicator, the analytic can also be found in this latent dimension. The procession of information takes place with the help of logical analysis, basically by focusing on the grammatical forms.

In the Active latent dimension the field independent language learner style indicator of Hungarian language learners can be found (*OILGF or NYILGM in the Hungarian original*). Students who prefer the field independent way of thinking are able to differentiate the stimuli from the situation and the environment, while in the case of the field dependent students the perception of objects is strongly influenced by the environment. The statement that the students preferring field independent way of thinking achieve better performances in learning Chinese has not been proved, since this language learner group was made up of students belonging to the average or not good language learner groups. However, field independence also means that the

language learner style does not choose strategies. Field dependent language learners – constituting a style pair of opposition with the before mentioned field independent learners – prefer the usage of three strategies: metacognitive, memorization and cognitive strategies.

The impulsive and reflective language learner styles can be conceptualized as pairs of opposition to each other in the use and choice of the strategies of Chinese language. In the successful acquirement of the Chinese language the impulsive language learner type can be seen as productive, since this language learner group is characteristic of the group of good language learners and not of the average or bad performance language learners. Language learners preferring the impulsive language learning style typically use social, emotional and memorization strategies frequently, while in verbal communication the avoidance of emotional and compensational strategies is characteristic of them. Independently of the fact that sudden response is characteristic of impulsive language learners, it does not exclude the use of the strategy of striving for accuracy. In the use of cognitive strategies they are characterized by inductive learning, that is language learning from special examples to general rules. Impulsivity requires a greater level of risk taking from the language learner, so this is an effective language learner style in the learning of Chinese language.

Of the use of the physical senses the use of the auditive sensory organs shows good performance with the learning of the Chinese language. In the case of the Chinese language it is students preferring the auditive style from the three types of information processing who achieve good results in learning the Chinese language.

The use of visual techniques is less characteristic of good language learners, however, they prefer the use of the strategies of metacognitive, memorization, cognitive, verbal metacognitive and form centered exercises.

V. Publications and lectures on the subject of the dissertation

Publication:

Anett Kozjek-Gulyás:

Xiongyali Zhongxue Hanyu Zuowei Dier Yuyan Biye Kaoshi Xitong Chutan

GUOJI HANYU JIAOYU / INTERNATIONAL CHINESE TEACHING 1: pp. 99-110. (2013)

匈牙利中学汉语作为第二外语毕业考试系统初探. 国际汉语教育. 外语教学与研究出版社. 北京 2013 年.

Lecture:

Anett Kozjek-Gulyás: The Role of Language Learning Strategies in Learning The Chinese. Előadások a 90 éves Csongor Barnabás tiszteletére, a Kelet-ázsiai / Távol-keleti Intézet 90 éves fennállásának alkalmából. Budapest, ELTE, Kodály terem, 2013. november 27.