

# HOW OFTEN IS *OFTEN*?

## REFERENCE AMBIGUITIES OF THE LIKERT-SCALE IN LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGY RESEARCH

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*Studies in second language acquisition, especially in the area of language learning strategies, frequently employ the survey method alone as their means of investigation. Incongruent results are normally explained in terms other than the survey measure as such. One of our recent qualitative studies, however, revealed that respondents have different reference systems in mind when answering Likert-type questions. In this study, we call into question the ambiguities of the Likert-type five-point scale in learning strategy elicitation. Four parallel questionnaires consisting of the same batch of 20 items taken from Oxford (1990) were administered among a group of 120 tertiary level non-English majors in China. Questionnaire 1 directly took Oxford's scale without specifying dimensions of reference; Questionnaire 2 told the respondents to choose their answers by comparing with their peers in the same grade; Questionnaire 3 asked them to select their present behavioral frequency as compared with their own past learning experience in secondary schools; and in Questionnaire 4, subjects were told to tick the relevant frequency of a behavior by comparing its frequency of occurrence with that of other language skills. Data from the four questionnaires were subjected to repeated measures MANOVA analysis using SPSS/PC+. Results showed that out of the 20 items, 13 were significantly different among the four questionnaires. Methodological implications for questionnaire research are next discussed and suggestions for future research proposed.*