LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES OF EFL LEARNERS

Gökhan Edge YAPICI
Bahçe High School,
Turkish Ministry of Education

Dr. Erdoğan BADA
ELT Department,
Faculty of Education,
Çukurova University

ÖZET
Bu çalışmada Çukurova Üniversitesi Yabancı Diller Eğitim Merkezi'nde (YADİM) İngilizce öğrenen Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü ile Fen Bilimleri Enstitüsü yüksek lisans öğrencilerinin ne türdeki dil öğrenme stratejilerini kullandıklarının belirlenmesi amaçlanmıştır. Ayrıca, bu iki grup arasındaki olası strateji tipi ve strateji kullanım miktarının farklılığının tespiti de çalışmanın diğer bir amacını oluşturmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimler: Dil öğrenme stratejileri, öğrenme stratejileri, bilgiyi kullanma stratejileri, bilişsel stratejiler, sosyal/duygusal stratejiler.

ABSTRACT
The aim of this study is to describe individual language learning strategies employed by EFL learners - graduate students of social sciences (SS) and basic/applied sciences (SA)- at Çukurova University. The study also targets to compare the two groups in terms of strategy use in order to observe if there are any differences in the use of strategy type. The strategy types to be dealt with here are metacognitive, cognitive, and social/affective.

Key Words: Language Learning Strategies, Learning Strategies, Metacognitve Strategies, Cognitive Strategies, Social/Affective Strategies.

INTRODUCTION

It is now an accepted belief that the instruction in language teaching must be learner-centred for achieving an effective language learning and teaching atmosphere. And, to make the instruction learner centred, teachers and administrators should know much about their learners' language learning strategies, learning styles and interests. Among these characteristics, in this study, we will focus on language learning strategies (LLS).

Oxford (1990) defines LLS as being "specific actions, behaviours, steps, or techniques students use -- often consciously -- to improve their progress in apprehending, internalizing, and using the L2". Language learning strategies, thus, being specific actions, behaviours, tactics, or techniques, facilitate the learning of the target language by language learners. All language learners, in their learning processes, somehow, utilize language learning strategies, and these strategies to Oxford (1990) can be taught. Oxford (1994), in this respect, states that considerable research has been conducted on how to improve L2 students' learning strategies. In much of such research, attempts to teach students to use LLS (called strategy training or learner training) have produced encouraging results. Effective strategy training enables learners to practice how to use, adapt, evaluate, and transfer a strategy to new situations and tasks.

Nevertheless, before strategy training, a teacher's first act should be to identify students' learning strategies so that instruction can be adapted properly in order to provide opportunities for all, effective and ineffective students to control, modify, and/or change their learning strategies positively (Chamot & O'Malley 1990).

Language learning strategy studies begin with the questions (1) What are the successful approaches to learning a second language? and (2) Can successful strategies be taught to poor learners? Therefore, the studies in this field focused on several issues such as defining LLS employed by certain types of learners, identifying factors (age, sex, proficiency level, motivation, etc) affecting language learning strategy preference, and whether strategy training yields positive results.

The research conducted by Oxford et al. (in Chamot & O'Malley, 1990) demonstrated that some factors affect language learning strategy use. This study concludes that females use a wider range of learning than males; that students with higher self-rated motivation to learn the language had significantly higher scores; and that students with at least five years of study in the language used functional practice strategies significantly more frequently than students with four or fewer years.

Nevertheless, the most studied factor in LLS is the proficiency level. For example, in her longitudinal study, Chamot (1987) studied the differences between proficiency levels, the students were grouped as effective and ineffective according to their proficiency levels. The study showed that "effective" learners use a greater range of strategies than "ineffective" ones. Some researchers sought to answer whether ineffective learners can be taught the language learning strategies used by effective learners.

O'Malley (1987) carried out a research which examined the effectiveness of strategy training with students of English as a second language (ESL) on the three types of academic language tasks: vocabulary learning, listening comprehension, and oral production of 75 high school students. Results of this experimental research indicates that for two highly important academic language skills, listening and speaking, learning strategies were shown to be effective in enhancing initial learning.

Literature in LLS has indicated several classifications of LLS. For instance, Chamot & O'Malley (1990) divided language learning strategies into three main categories: (1) **metacognitive strategies** are higher order executive skills that may entail planning for monitoring, or evaluating the success of learning activity; (2) **cognitive strategies** (rehearsal, deduction, transfer, etc) operate directly on incoming information, manipulating it in ways that enhance learning. (3) **social/affective strategies** (cooperation with peers, self talk, etc) represent a broad grouping that involves either interaction with another person or ideational control over affect.

Oxford's (1994) categorisation is, however, different to Chamot & O'Malley's (1990) in that she introduces two main categories (1) **direct strategies**, (2) **indirect strategies**. The former consist of three subcategories: (a) memory, (b) cognitive, (c) compensation strategies, and the latter of (a) metacognitive, (b) affective, and (c) social strategies.

As stated above, LLS studies have generally focused on factors affecting language learning strategy use. According to Oxford (1994) there are some important factors affecting LLS. These factors are learning styles, gender, age, nationality, ethnicity, beliefs, previous educational and cultural backgrounds, and learning goals. In

this study, we aimed to explore if educational background can be a factor affecting LLS choice as well as identify the LLS used by SA and SS.

Thus, this study has two main concerns: (1) identifying individual language learning strategies employed by postgraduate students of social sciences (SS) and postgraduate students of basic/applied sciences (SA), and (2) comparing these two groups of learners in terms of strategy use, ultimately, detecting any possible strategy differences.

Method

Data Collection

The data for this study was collected at The Centre for Foreign Languages (YADIM) at Çukurova University in the Spring Semester of 2003. The participants were given 40 minutes to answer a questionnaire on LLS. The aim of the research was clearly explained beforehand, and the participants were also told that they were going to be administered a questionnaire designed to identify their language learning strategies they employ while learning English. In order to prevent any misunderstanding, each item in the questionnaire was thoroughly explained to the participants.

Participants

The participants of the study are 40 postgraduate students of basic/applied sciences (SA) and 40 postgraduate students of social sciences (SS), all at the time of the survey, were attending the Centre for Foreign Languages (YADIM) at Çukurova University. They all studied in different departments such as mathematics, biology, psychological counselling, agricultural engineering, etc. in their graduate programs. Equal numbers of male and female participants were randomly selected from 9 classes and placed in two groups on basis of their educational background

Instrument

A language learning strategy questionnaire adopted and adapted from Nunan (1989), Richards (1990), Skehan (1990), Richards and Lockhart (1994), and tailored by Şire (1999) was used in this study. Our aim in using this questionnaire was that it is brief, informative and in Turkish. The questionnaire has 28 items all written in the declarative form. Furthermore, it is structured so that it requires the participants to respond to a strategy description by selecting among three alternatives: “Yes”, “No”, “Not Sure”. The three scales of LLS to be investigated in it are Metacognitive, Cognitive, and Social/Affective Strategy.

Data Analysis

The scope of the analysis covered the following subtitles: Individual Metacognitive Strategies, Individual Cognitive Strategies, Individual Social/Affective Strategies and Preference of Language Learning Strategy Types (metacognitive, cognitive and social/affective strategies.) To identify preference of language learning strategies, the three types of strategies were analysed for each group of participants to see how each type was preferred by each group. Since the questionnaire consists of the three types, items for each type were collected and analysed to see the preference.

In the analysis of the questionnaire, the frequencies and percentages of responses falling into each category were collected for each item. Then, a chi-square of each item was computed on the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), in order

to observe any significance in differences in employment of strategies between SA and SS. The results will be presented in tabular form.

Individual metacognitive strategies. Metacognition can simply be defined as thinking about thinking. Learners who are metacognitively aware know what to do when they don't know what to do; that is, they have strategies for finding out or figuring out what they need to do (Anderson, 2002). Fedderholdt (1998) states that metacognitive strategies improve organization of learning time, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation.

As seen in Table 1, it was found that SA use planning (Items 2, 19, 24, 28), revising (Items 14,16), self-correction (Item 3), and self-evaluation (Items 26,27) strategies more than SS. Whereas, the self-rewarding strategy (Item 20) was favoured by SS more than SA and self-monitoring strategies (Items 4,5) and finding ways of practicing English strategies such as speaking English outside the class and trying to speak with native speakers (Items 1,9,10,23) were favoured in similar percentages by both groups. On the other hand, preparing for the day's lesson was the least preferred strategy by both groups (SA 40%, SS 25%).

Nevertheless, analysis of total metacognitive strategy use confirmed that SA (65,5 %) employ individual metacognitive strategies more than SS (53,2 %). The X^2 value for this type was found as 20,530 $p<.001$ and indicate a statistically significant difference between the two groups.

Table 1. Individual Metacognitive Strategies

Item No and definition	SA						SS					
	Yes		No		NS		Yes		No		NS	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1- I like learning English through games and songs	28	70	5	12,5	7	17,5	29	74	4	10	6	16
9- I like speaking English with my friends outside the classroom.	25	63	6	15	9	22	28	70	4	10	8	20
10- I like the teacher to use English as the medium of instruction in class.	24	60	6	15	10	25	25	62,5	7	17,5	8	20
23- I like to learn English by speaking to native English speakers.	31	77,5	6	15	3	7,5	31	77,5	5	12,5	4	10
2- I like to have my own textbook.	36	90	3	7,5	1	2,5	32	82	3	8	4	10
19- I arrange a study schedule before studying.	27	67,5	8	20	5	12,5	9	22,5	26	65	5	12,5
24- I prepare for the day's lesson.	16	40	18	45	6	15	10	25	26	65	4	10
28- I study best in a silent and luminous place.	36	90	3	7,5	1	2,5	19	47,5	10	25	11	27,5

14- I often revise what I have learnt.	25	62,5	10	25	5	12,5	12	30	15	37,5	13	32,5
16-I learn better if the teacher repeats the previous lesson.	29	72,5	2	5	9	22,5	35	87,5	3	7,5	2	5
4- I notice my own mistakes.	21	52,5	4	10	15	37,5	14	35	13	32,5	13	32,5
5- I can criticize and laugh at my own mistakes.	23	57,5	11	27,5	6	15	32	80	4	10	4	10
20- I sometimes reward myself.	12	30	23	57,5	5	12,5	29	72,5	9	22,5	2	5
3- I like to correct my own mistakes.	27	67,5	11	27,5	2	5	5	13	22	56	12	31
26- I think about my progress in learning English	32	80	0	0	8	20	21	52,5	6	15	13	32,5
27- I check my homework after finishing it.	27	67,5	8	20	5	12,5	8	20	21	52,5	11	27,5

Individual cognitive strategies. **"**Cognitive strategies operate directly on incoming information, manipulating it in ways that enhance learning" (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990, p.44). Rubin (1987) claims that cognitive strategies refer to the steps or operations used in learning or problem-solving that requires direct analysis, transformation, or synthesis of learning materials.

Table 2. Individual Cognitive Strategies

Item No and definition	SA						SS					
	Yes		No		NS		Yes		No		NS	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
11- I try to guess the meaning of the new words from the context.	27	67,5	10	25	3	7,5	25	62,5	6	15	9	22,5
12-I learn new words through memorization.	15	37,5	24	60	1	2,5	26	65	10	25	4	10
13-I use new words in sentences.	32	80	4	10	4	10	14	36	20	51	5	13
15-I can take notes while listening to the teacher.	34	85	4	10	2	5	29	73	6	15	5	12
21-I like summarising the recent learnt subjects.	34	85	3	7,5	3	7,5	21	54	4	10	14	36

As Table 2 shows, SA (71 %) were observed to use cognitive strategies more than SS (58,1 %). The X^2 value for this type was found as 14,358 $p<.01$ indicating statistically significant difference. Contextualization (Item 13) and summarizing (Item 21) strategies were favoured by SA significantly more than SS. Note-taking (Item 15)

and guessing (Item 11) strategies were found as popular among postgraduate students. Within this group of strategies, only memorization (Item 12) strategy was favoured by SS more than SA. While SA were observed to try to learn new words through contextualization and guessing, SS were seen try to learn through memorization and guessing.

Individual social/affective strategies. According to Oxford (1990) these strategies affect learning indirectly; affective strategies are used to regulate emotions, and social strategies are employed for learning with others. Rubin (1987) asserts that social strategies are activities learners engage in and offer them opportunities to practice their knowledge.

As Table 3 shows, SS (70,5 %) tend to use individual social/affective strategies more than SA (55,7 %). The X^2 value for this type (16,148 $p<.001$) represents a statistically significant difference between the two groups. Results indicated that SS study in cooperation with each other, while SA tend to study alone. Asking for clarification strategies (Items 22,25) were the most preferred ones by both groups, that is participants do not hesitate to ask teachers to clarify what they have said and request more examples and further explanation. It was also found that SS tend to use self-talk while thinking and self-encouragement strategies (Items 17, 18) more than SA.

Table 3. Individual Social/Affective Strategies

Item No and definition	SA						SS					
	Yes		No		NS		Yes		No		NS	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
6-I learn English better by studying in pairs.	15	37,5	17	42,5	8	20	35	87,5	4	10	1	2,5
7- I learn English better by studying in groups.	17	42,5	22	55	1	2,5	32	80	5	12,5	3	7,5
8-I like to study English by myself (alone).	26	65	12	30	2	5	14	36	24	61	1	3
17-I talk to myself while answering a question or thinking.	18	45	18	45	4	10	24	60	10	25	6	15
18-I encourage myself when I feel shy to speak in English.	19	47,5	14	35	7	17,5	27	69	2	5	10	26
22-When I don't understand what is spoken I request him/her to repeat or to speak slowly.	28	70	6	15	6	15	33	82,5	3	7,5	4	10
25-I request the teacher to explain something or to give examples whenever I need.	33	83	4	10	3	7	30	75	5	12,5	5	12,5

Preference of language learning strategy types. In this part of analysis, the use of strategy types (metacognitive, cognitive, and social/affective strategies) among SA and SS was studied in relation to the groups' educational background (being a student of basic/applied sciences or being a student of social sciences).

Table 4. Preference of Language Learning Strategy Types

Strategy Types	SA						SS						X^2
	Yes		No		Not Sure		Yes		No		Not Sure		
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
Metacagnitive Strategies	419	65,5	124	19,4	97	15,2	339	53,2	178	27,9	120	18,8	20,530***
Cognitive Strategies	142	71	45	22,5	13	6,5	115	58,1	46	23,2	37	18,7	14,358**
Social/Affective Strategies	156	55,7	93	33,2	31	11,1	196	70,5	52	18,7	30	10,8	16,148***
Total	717	64	262	23,4	141	12,6	650	58,4	276	24,8	187	16,8	10,078**

**p<.01 ***p<.001

As can be seen in Table 4, a statistically significant difference can be observed in the use of three types of strategies between SA and SS. Metacognitive strategy type was observed to be favoured by SA (65,5 %) more than SS (53,2 %). The X^2 value for this type was found as 20,530 p<.001 and indicate a statistically significant difference between the two groups. The other type, cognitive strategies, was also observed to be employed by SA (71 %) more
than SS (58,1 %). The X^2 value for this type was found as 14,358 p<.01. As for social/affective strategies, SS (70,5 %) were observed to be associated with this type of strategy more than SA (55,7 %). The X^2 value for this type (16,148 p<.001) represents a statically significant difference between the two groups. For the total strategy use, the percentage for SA was found as 64 % and the percentage for SS 58,4 %.

Table 5. Preference of Strategy Types for SA and SS

SA	SS
1. Cognitive Strategies	1. Social/Affective Strategies
2. Metacognitive Strategies	2. Cognitive Strategies
3. Social/Affective Strategies	3 Metacognitive Strategy

Table 5 above shows metacognitive, cognitive and social/affective strategy types from the most to the least preferred for SA and SS. As the table above show, cognitive strategies are the most preferred strategy type by SA, and their second priority is metacognitive strategies, and their least is social/affective. Whereas, SS give this priority to social/affective strategies, and cognitive strategies are preferred next, and the least preferred strategy type for this group is the metacognitive. Hence, each group has different preferences in terms of strategy use, that is, while the cognitive strategy type was employed most by SA, the social/affective was favoured most by SS.

CONCLUSION

This paper studied primarily the use of individual metacognitive, cognitive, and social/affective strategies among postgraduate students of basic/applied sciences and postgraduate students of social sciences who study at Çukurova University. Besides, the possible differences in the strategy type and strategy amount between the two groups were also main interest of this study.

To achieve this, a language learning questionnaire was administered both to see the nature of strategy use among postgraduate students and to detect any difference in strategy use between SA and SS. Analysis of the questionnaire clearly illustrates the nature of and difference in use of strategy by both groups. From the findings, two main points emerge as very significant: (1) that regardless of their educational background all postgraduate students (both students of social sciences and students of basic/applied sciences), needed to be trained in the use of language learning strategies, and (2) that the educational background can be a factor affecting preference of LLS. That is, students from different educational backgrounds were observed to have different strategy preferences. For instance, SA had a tendency more towards cognitive strategies while SS' preferences were social/affective strategies.

The results of this study may be useful for both teachers who teach postgraduate students and the students themselves. Teachers thus can be more certain about selection of methods, activities, and tasks relying on findings of this study. Being aware of the strategy type of learners, teachers can concentrate on learner-centred activities believed to make learners more autonomous.

This study can also form a basis for strategy training activities for postgraduate students overall. Based on the results obtained, teachers can implement strategy training activities separately or integrated into their teaching processes, since the study has, more or less, illustrated what type of strategies each group of postgraduate students used. For instance, while SS can be trained on metacognitive strategies since they use such strategies less, the training for SA can be done more on social/affective strategies, since this group employs such strategies much less than SS.

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