An Exploratory Study of Language Learning Strategy Use

Dishari Chattaraj

PhD Research Scholar, Centre for Linguistics, School of Language Literature & Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India

Email: disharij@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Literature shows that Language Learning Strategies (LLS) are powerful language learning tools. The present study was conducted with 30 undergraduate Foreign Language multilingual students at JNU with an aim to find out how the use of language learning strategies varied for ESL and FL. Data was elicited by means of a questionnaire divided into four sections i.e. Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing strategies. Statistically significant differences were found in the use of Listening and Speaking strategies. The strategies were also analyzed from cognitive angle to gain a better insight about the difference in learning process for SL and FL. The study also discusses the impact of learner variables on LLS use.

Key Words: English Language Learning, Foreign Language Learning, ELT, Language Learning Strategies

1. Introduction

The proverb 'Give a man a fish and he eats for a day. Teach him how to fish and he eats for a lifetime' has been used by Griffiths (2013) and Feleciya et al. (2015) to explain the relevance of Language Learning Strategies (LLS) in the life of a language learner; the significance of the proverb is that while the immediate problems of the learners can be solved by providing them with answers to their queries, a language learner who is empowered with Language Learning Strategies will, in the long run, be capable of managing her own learning. Language Learning Strategies make learning, as Oxford (1990) says, more self-directed, effective and enjoyable, paving way for a confident and autonomous language learner.

The importance of Language Learning Strategies for accelerating the process of language learning is a well-established fact. However, the number of studies conducted in this domain are comparatively less, and, almost all the studies have been conducted are with Second Language Learners (SL) from a cognitive perspective (Hong-Nam and Leavell, 2006; De Silva, 2015 etc.). The present study is very different both in its approach and methodology hence it has been referred to as an exploratory study; the study makes a comparative analysis of

the use of language learning strategies by multilingual Foreign Language learners who have also learnt English as a Second Language. While the learners have been learning the Foreign Languages for a period of 1-3years, they have learnt ESL in school for at least 12-15years. The chief objective of the study is to find out whether there is a difference in the choice and frequency of the use of Language Learning Strategies. The study deals with seasoned ESL learners who are new bees in the domain of Foreign Language learning to find out strategies which are relevant for beginners' level on one hand and for advanced levels on the other. Methodology wise the study differs from the other studies in this field as it studies strategies from a skill based perspective and finds out how differently the learners apply learning strategies which directly contribute towards their LSRW skill development.

2. Literature Review

As mentioned earlier, most of the studies conducted in the domain of language learning strategy use deal with Second Language learners. Often the terms 'Second Language' and 'Foreign Language' have been used synonymously in the literature (Oxford, 1990; Stern, 1983). However, the socio-cultural contexts of learning a SL and a FL varies a great deal as Chattaraj (2017:69) points out "learning a second language provides immediate socio-economic benefits within the country where it is learnt, a foreign language doesn't have any in the country where it is learnt but is useful to communicate elsewhere." Evidently, as the

scope of communicating in a FL is highly restricted outside the classroom domain, it can be assumed that the use of certain strategies which are based on social interaction will be very limited. Due to lack of studies in the domain of LLS use in FL learning contexts, the studies that have been conducted in ESL domain in India are briefly reviewed.

The earliest study in this field of LLS use was carried out by Sheorey (1999). He studied the use of LLS by first year India undergraduate ESL students and found that the students used LLS from high to moderate frequency on a five-point scale.Patil and Karekatti (2012) conducted a study with 60 engineering students to Maharashtra and found that the most frequently used strategies were the metacognitive strategies (M=3.69) and the least frequently used strategies were the memory strategies (M=3.05) and the average use of strategies in all the domains were 3.37. P. Madhumathi et al. (2014) conducted a study with 60 1st year ESL B.Tech students of a private university in South India all of whose proficiency level in English was low. They found that the most popular strategies used were memory (M=3.30) and affective strategies (M=3.31) while the least preferred strategy was metacognitive strategy (M=2.48) and on an average the learners reported a low use of LLS (M=2.81). It can be seen that in spite of being carried out in the same contexts i.e. with 1st year Indian undergraduate engineering students, the studies yield completely opposite results as the figures suggest. One of the

explanation for this might be while one set of learners were low level learners, the other set weren't. The present study by drawing a parallel between strategies used in ESL and FL will shed further light on how the level of language learning impacts the use of Language Learning Strategies.

3. Methodology

The present study is a cross-sectional study where data was collected at a single point in time (Rasinger, 2010) and is based on primary data (Brown, 2001) collected from the classroom by the teacher-researcher. The questionnaire for the study has been designed such that it would find out the quantity and frequency of Language Learning Strategy use for both ESL and FL among learners. The questionnaire was circulated twice, once for ESL and the second time for FL among the learners who at the time when the data was collected were taking a course with the teacher-researcher of this study.

3.1 Participants

30 Foreign Language (FL) learning (Russian, Korean, Chinese and Japanese) undergraduate students at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India participated in the study. Among these 30 students, the Mother Tongue (MT) of 19 students were Hindi, 5 students had Bangla as their MT, 2 students had Maithili as their MT, 1 each had Magahi, Odiya, Maitei and Paite as their MT. 19 students had done their schooling from English medium schools while the rest of the 11 students had done it from regional medium schools. The students knew on an average 4 languages.

3.2 Tools

A Language Skill Development Strategy (LSDS) questionnaire was designed for this study; itconsisted of 47 questions the answers to which had to be given on a 5-point Likert Type scale ranging from "Never-Always". The questionnaire was subjected to Cronbach's Alpha test to test its reliability and it recorded an average alpha reading of 0.75 making it a reliable questionnaire. The questionnaire was broadly divided into four sections i.e. Reading Strategies (9 questions, alpha 0.7), Writing Strategies (17 questions, alpha 0.6), Listening Strategies (10 questions, alpha 0.89) and Speaking Strategies (11 questions, alpha 0.78). While designing the questionnaire, Top-down, Bottom-up and Metacognitive Listening Strategies (Yeldham, 2016), Pre-post Strategy Instruction questionnaire for Writing (Silva, 2015), LSD (Griffiths, 2013) and SILL (Oxford, 1990) have been consulted.

3.3 Analytical Procedure

After analyzing the results of the questionnaire in the above mentioned four categories, the questions are further divided into Cognitive (24 questions) and Metacognitive strategies (23 questions) and are analyzed; followed by this, the effects of the other variables on language learning strategy use are also examined.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion of Results

4.1 Reading Strategies

The learners have reported using 5 Reading Strategies (RS) highly frequently for learning both the FL and ESL; however, these five strategies are not the same. They have reported using the RS reading for information and for pleasure in English more frequently than in FL while they have reported using the strategy of writing notes in the margin and making summaries more frequently in FL. The strategies which they have reported using more frequently in learning both the SL and FL are underlining the sentences and revising them often, guessing the approximate meanings by using contextual clues and using dictionaries. The least popular reading strategies for learning both languages were using the library to obtain resources and skim reading the text. Overall, the learners reported making use of Reading Strategies highly frequently both ESL (3.52) and FL (3.65) and T-test revealed that there is statistically significant difference in the use of RS for ESL and FL.

4.2 Writing Strategies

Among the 17 Writing Strategies, the learners reported using only 8 strategies highly frequently; however, these 8 strategies are not the same. Whereas the learners reported using the strategies of writing letters, messages, emails etc. highly frequently in English and the strategy of attempting those questions which can be written in ones' own words, the learners reported the strategies of translating from MT, avoiding complex sentences while writing and using reference materials highly frequently in Foreign Languages. The strategies which were reported to be used highly frequently for learning both ESL and FL are the strategies of learning when mistakes are corrected, making notes in exams, planning before writing, using for synonyms etc., and supporting an idea while writing by using examples from the text. The strategies which were reported to be used least frequently while learning both the languages are the strategies of translating SL/FL sentences to MT to see if the message is clear, attempting questions which have been memorized, revising several times, trying out complex sentences, focusing on expressing meaning without worrying about the correctness and writing a diary. Overall, the learners reported a comparatively low use to Writing strategies for both the SL (3.45) and FL (3.36) and the difference in the use of Writing Strategies between the ESL and FL were not statistically significant.

4.3 Listening Strategies

The learners reported using 9 out of 10 Listening strategies for Foreign Language while they reported using only 6 of the strategies for ESL. The Listening Strategies that were reported to be used highly frequently for ESL and FL are the strategies of using media to practice listening skills, listening to key-words, predicting what other person will say based on context knowledge, avoiding translation while listening, guessing the meaning and listening to native speakers carefully. The Listening Strategies which were reported to be used highly

frequently only for learning the FL are listening to native speakers in public places and trying to understand what they are saying, asking the speaker to slow down, repeat or clarify their message and using the speakers' tone of voice and body language to guess the meaning. The strategy which was reported to be used least frequently was attending out of class events like seminars etc. where the learner can hear the TL. Overall, the learners reported using Listening Strategies frequently for both FL and ESL; however, they reported using the Listening Strategies more frequently in the context of learning the FL than the SL and the T-test also confirmed significant statistical difference (p < 0.05) in LS use between FL and ESL.

4.4 Speaking Strategies

The learners reported using 8 out of 11 Speaking Strategies highly frequently while learning the FL but for ESL they have reported using only 3 Speaking Strategies highly frequently. The strategies which were reported to be used frequently for learning both the languages are the strategies of remembering when the mistakes are corrected and avoiding making those mistakes, asking questions and using synonyms. The Speaking Strategies which were reported to be used only for FL are repeating structures for practice, seeking out people to talk in FL, planning sentences in advance, practicing in FL with other students and pronouncing FL like native speakers. The strategies which were least frequently used for both the languages are not worrying about correctness as long as

the meaning is communicated, translating from MT and using gestures to maintain a conversation. Overall, the learners reported using Speaking Strategies highly frequently only for learning the FL and T-test showed that there were statistically significant differences between the use of Speaking Strategies by the learners for FL and ESL (p < 0.05).

4.5 Cognitive Strategies

The learners reported using Cognitive Strategies more frequently for learning FL (M=3.54) than ESL (M=3.48). As the average means suggest, the difference is very less and not statistically significant. However, when the analysis was conducted sub-category wise, it was seen that statistically significant differences (p < 0.05) were present in the use of Memory and Creative strategies with the learners applying Memory strategies significantly more frequently for learning the FL whereas they reported applying Creative Strategies significantly more frequently for learning ESL. Memory strategies are relatively low-level strategies whereas Creative Strategies are high level strategies; the strategies thus are directly proportional to their level of language learning. For the other two sub-types namely processing and monitoring strategies, no statistically different usage are reported; but the learners reported using both the strategies more frequently for learning FL than ESL.

4.6 Metacognitive strategies

The learners reported using Metacognitive Strategies more frequently in the domain of

FL (M=3.6) than ESL (M=3.44); however, the differences are not statistically significant. Sub-category wise, statistically significant difference (p < 0.05) is noted only in the use of Social Strategies as the learners reported using Social Strategies much highly frequently while learning FL (M=3.9) than while learning ESL (M=3.28) which is unexpected given the fact that the domain of social interaction for the FL is highly restricted. In the categories of resourcing, planning and formulating, the learners reported using the strategies more frequently for learning FL than SL while they reported using compensation strategies equally frequently for both the languages and applying the affective strategies more frequently while learning ESL which might be because they identify with the ESL better than they can do with FL.

5. Learner Variables of LLS Use

5.1 Gender and LLS Use: Among the participants who participated in this study, 17 were female and 13 were male. The study found that gender did not have much of an impact in the use of strategies for both FL and ESL. While in FL the female learners (3.64) reported applying strategies slightly more frequently than the males (3.55), in case of ESL there was hardly any difference in the use of strategy among the females (3.49) and the males (3.45).

5.2 Medium of Instruction in School and LLS use: Among the participants who participated in this study, 11 were from regional medium schooling background and 19 from English medium schooling

background. It was seen while the medium of instruction in school had an impact on the frequency of the use of strategies in case of learning FL with the English medium students (3.74) applying more strategies than the regional medium students (3.35); however, the difference is usage was not statistically significant. In case of learning ESL, the learners from both the English (3.49) and regional medium (3.45) schooling background reported using strategies almost equally frequently.

5.3 Score and LLS Use: The learners were divided into three categories according the grades they obtained in the class. While for their FL score their performance in the FL exams were considered, for their English score, their performance in form of essays and interaction carried on in the class were observed. It was found that whereas the score obtained by the students in FL was directly proportional to their use of strategies as the high scoring learners made the maximum use of the LLS (3.83) followed by the medium scoring learners (3.76) and the low scoring learners (3.2). An ANOVA test revealed that the differences were statistically significant (p < 0.05). But, there was hardly any impact of the performance in ESL on the LLS use.

5.4 Level of Language Learning and LLS use: Among the 30 undergraduate FL learning students, who participated in the study, 8 belonged to 1st year, 12 belonged to 2nd year and 10 belonged to 3rd year. While the first year students made the maximum use of LLS (3.75) followed by the second year students (3.59) and the third year students

(3.37) in case of the FL, no such differences in the frequency of use of strategies were found among the ESL learners.

6. Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications

The study shows that not only is there a difference in the pattern of use of Language Learning Strategies but also in the frequency of its usage. Overall, out of the 47 strategies listed in the questionnaire, the learners have reported using 15 strategies highly frequently for learning both the languages. Among the rest of the 32 strategies, the learners reported using 13 of the strategies highly frequently for learning FL out of which many of the strategies were low-level memory and monitoring strategies. The learners reported using 5 strategies highly

frequently for learning ESL which were all high-level Cognitive Strategies dealing with processing and creating language. The results of the study prove the fact that the level of language learning has an impact on the pattern of their usage.

It is seen that the same learners apply more number of strategies (more than double) more frequently for learning the FL which is relatively a new language for them than they apply for learning ESL. Thus, it can be said that Language Learning Strategies are more useful tools for an early level learner hence strategy training, which had been found very effective in literature (Sarafianou & Gavriilidou, 2015; Silva, 2015; Yeldham, 2016), should be introduced at an early stage of language learning to procure the best results.

Appendix I

SL. No.	READING STRATEGIES	Cognitive(C) /Metacog. (M)	FL	ESL
1	I read extensively for information	Processing. C	3.16	3.96
2	I read for pleasure	Processing. C	2.83	3.68
3	I use a library to obtain reading material	Resourcing M	2.78	2.8
4	I first skim read a test then go back and read it more carefully	Processing. C	3.47	3.12
5	I underline the sentences I find important in the text and revise them often	Memory. C	4.21	3.76
6	I write notes in the margin to help remind me of the things I need to come back to after reading	Memory. C	4.04	3.44
7	I make summaries of what I read	Processing. C	3.60	3.04
8	I guess the approximate meaning by using clues from the context	Compensation. M	4.21	3.96
9	I use a dictionary to get the exact meaning	Resourcing M	4.52	3.96
	Average		**3.65**	**3.524444**
	Number of Strategies reportedly used highly frequently		**5**	**5**

Appendix II

SL. No.	WRITING STRATEGIES	Cognitive(C) /Metacog. (M)	FL	ESL
10	I write letters or emails to friends	Creative. C	2.5	4.2
11	When my mistakes are corrected, I learn from the corrections	Resourcing. M	4.29	4.4
12	I write a variety of text types (e.g. notes, messages, emails etc.)	Creative. C	3.16	4.4
13	Most of the writings I do in is for making notes for exams	Creative. C	3.5	3.52
14	I plan my writing before I start	Planning. M	4.08	3.72
15	If I cannot think of correct expressions I think of another way to express my meaning (e.g. synonyms)	Compensation. M	4.25	4.28
16	If I cannot think of a correct expression I translate it from my Mother Tongue	Monitoring. C	3.83	3.24
17	I translate the sentences I write into my Mother Tongue to see if the message is clear	Monitoring. C	3	2.64
18	I avoid writing complex sentences to reduce errors	Monitoring. C	3.62	3.24
19	In exams I only attempt those questions whose answers I can remember as it is in my notebook	Memory. C	2.75	2.68
20	In exams I attempt only those questions which I can write in my own words	Creative. C	3.16	3.52
21	I revise several times before submitting	Formulating. M	3.29	2.84
22	I support my ideas with examples from my readings	Formulating. M	3.58	3.6
23	I try out complex sentences that I have identified from reading	Formulating. M	3.37	3.4
24	I use reference material (e.g. dictionary, thesaurus or grammar book) to check what I am writing is correct	Resourcing. M	4.04	3
25	If I am unsure about something I want to write I try to express my meaning and do not worry too much about correctness	Affective. M	3.25	3.36
26	I write a diary	Affective. M	1.45	2.76
	Average		**3.36**	**3.458824**
	Number of Strategies used highly frequently		**8**	**8**

Appendix III

SL. No.	LISTENING STRATEGIES	Cognitive(C) /Metacog. (M)	FL	ESL
27	I attend out of class events (seminars, conferences, talks etc.) where I can listen to the new language (FL) being spoken	Processing. C	3.41	3
28	I use media (e.g. YouTube, TV, radio, movies) to practice my listening skills	Processing. C	3.87	3.6
29	I listen to native speakers in public places (e.g. shops, restaurants, buses) and try to understand what they are saying	Processing. C	3.83	3.28
30	I listen to key words which seem to carry most of the meaning	Processing. C	4	3.64
31	I predict what the other person will say based on context, background knowledge or what has been said	Compensation. M	3.62	3.56
32	I ask the speaker to slow down, repeat or clarify if I do not understand	Social. M	3.87	3.24
33	I avoid translating what I hear word for word	Monitoring. C	3.62	3.76
34	I use speaker's tone of voice, gestures, pauses or body language as a clue to meaning	Compensation. M	3.7	3.4
35	If I am unsure about meaning I try to guess it	Compensation. M	3.87	3.8
36	I listen carefully to how native speakers pronounce the language (FL) I am trying to learn	Processing. C	4.45	3.92
	Average		**3.82**	3.52
	Number of Strategies used highly frequently		**9**	**6**

Appendix IV

SL. No.	SPEAKING STRATEGIES	Cognitive(C) /Metacog. (M)	FL	ESL
37	I repeat new language (FL) to myself in order to practice it	Memory. C	4.12	3.32
38	I seek out people with whom I can speak FL	Social. M	3.95	3.08
39	I plan in advance what I want to say	Planning. M	3.83	3.28
40	If I am corrected while I am speaking, I try to remember the correction and avoid making the same mistake again	Monitoring. C	4.29	4.28
41	I ask questions	Social. M	3.83	3.68
42	I do not worry about correctness as long as I can communicate the meaning	Affective. M	3.12	3.28
43	When I do not get the correct expression in FL, I translate it from my Mother Tongue	Monitoring. C	3.25	3.28
44	If necessary, I use gestures to convey my meaning and keep a conversation going	Compensation. M	3.25	3.28
45	I practice FL with other students	Social. M	3.95	3.12
46	If I do not know the vocabulary I want to use, I use similar words or phrases	Compensation. M	3.95	4.28
47	I try to pronounce FL like the native speakers	Monitoring. C	4	2.88
	Average		**3.78**	3.432727
	Number of Strategies used highly frequently		**8**	**3**

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