

LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES OF ROMANIAN AND TURKISH STUDENTS – A COMPARATIVE STUDY – PART II

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Abstract . *The present research has been devised as a complement to our previous comparative study describing the language learning strategies (LLSs) applied by Romanian and Turkish college students at the Banat University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine "Michael I of Romania" from Timisoara (Romania) and the Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University (Turkey). 241 Turkish and Romanian participants in our project have completed the Oxford five-scale questionnaire consisting of 50 items and displaying language learning strategies divided according to five major scopes. Descriptive statistics tools have also served in the assessment of the students' scores regarding the use of strategies in the language learning process. The objectives of the study have been to determine, analyse, and contrast learning strategies preferred by students from both countries, while assessing the relevance of other factors upon their respective predilections. Extensive differences have been identified between the learning strategies employed by Romanian and Turkish students, corresponding to differences in terms of performance or grade levels as well. Initially, the questionnaire examination set out to assess the efficiency of LLSs (language learning strategies) used by both groups of students in accordance with their grades, while also putting forward practicable learning strategies that highlighted the metacognitive approach most often associated to language proficiency. The analysis we continue in this extended research attempts to verify proficient learners' preference for metacognitive strategies, which corroborates our instructional suggestions for the use of language trainers.*

Keywords: *English learning/teaching; language learning strategy, comparative study, Turkey, Romania.*

INTRODUCTION

The paper presents some outputs and follow-up on our previous comparative research which we conducted in cooperation (ARSLAN ET AL. 2012). This study has received feedback and additional considerations from researchers from the University of Madeira, Portugal (SOUSA, 2015) and others. Language learning strategies (LLSs) are of great consequence in learning to communicate more effectively in a foreign language – EFL in our case. Strategy researchers such as OXFORD (1990) OR RUBIN (1975) have amply considered such strategies in terms of their being exploited in a cognisant manner, in order to acquire knowledge more judiciously. Thus, as soon as language learners become aware of the strategies they apply in the learning process, levels of proficiency and self-confidence improve considerably (OXFORD, 1990). It is OXFORD (1990:8) who has taken into account additional aspects when defining LLSs, seen as procedures which "aid acquisition, storage, retrieval, and use of information", while also making learning processes "easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations". Moreover, LLSs have also been associated

to different behavioural patterns by Weinstein & Mayer (1986) and O'MALLEY & CHAMOT (1990).

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Our comparative research looks at the differences between students in two very different learning systems in order to see what we may learn from each other to further enhance our underdeveloped areas. Our approach builds on the relevance of employing LLSs in the English class and the methodology relies on Oxford's SILL questionnaire (1990), which provided a general framework and subsequent coherence among researchers and participants from numerous countries.

In the process of data collection, Oxford's SILL (1990) consisting of six clusters of language learning strategies was delivered to the participants, as follows.

Group A: Memory strategies (Remembering more effectively)

Group B: Cognitive strategies (Using all mental processes)

Group C: Compensation strategies (Compensating for missing knowledge)

Group D: Metacognitive strategies (Organizing and evaluating learning)

Group E: Affective strategies (Managing emotions)

Group F: Social strategies (Learning with others)

DISCUSSION

The comparative study was conducted at the BUASVM (six agriculture-related faculties) and at the COMU (Faculty of Education at Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Turkey). We collected data from Romanian and Turkish students who are non-native speakers of English. The total number of participants included 120 Romanian and 121 Turkish students. The participants aged 17-25 had studied English for 5-18 years at the time of data collection.

The present study endorses Oxford's position, while making use of the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL, 1990), extensively applied across a range of cultural groups (HSIAO & OXFORD, 2002). This highly consistent system of learning strategy assessment has been of assistance in providing proficiency ratings by correlating levels of proficiency in language learning processes with factors such as grades. Oxford's SILL, which has been applied to our target groups, consists of six clusters of items pertaining to language learning strategies: memory strategies, cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, compensation strategies, affective strategies, social strategies. Our initial assessment indicates the high frequency of LLS use by the participants, with memory and metacognitive strategies preferred by Turkish students and cognitive and social strategies favoured by Romanian students.

We have also relied upon numerous studies by other researchers in the field, who have classified LLSs (ANDERSON, 2005; CARSON & LONGHINI, 2002; O'MALLEY & CHAMOT, 1990; O'MALLEY ET AL., 1985; OXFORD, 1990; RUBIN, 1981; WEINSTEIN & MAYER, 1986). Experts are in agreement upon discriminating between direct language learning strategies (memory strategies, cognitive strategies, and compensation strategies) and indirect strategies (metacognitive strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies). While the former are used by learners to process and remember new information, the latter support the entire organization of the learning process, helping students to manage their own communicative experience (ADAMS, 2006; OXFORD, 1990).

Furthermore, we have considered the findings of previous studies regarding learners' preferences for certain strategies. For instance, Turkish learners have been reported to draw on compensation and social strategies such as asking for repetition and slowing down (DURSUN,

2007; HIÇYILMAZ, 2006; YALÇIN, 2006). SIMILARLY, RAZI (2012) confirmed that Turkish students generally prefer compensation and metacognitive strategies, while often disregarding affective strategies. Alptekin's (2007) investigation provides further evidence that compensation strategies are the ones most frequently used in both tutored learning of English and non-tutored acquisition of Turkish.

The analysis proposed by the present study aims to demonstrate that language learning strategies are highly significant in language teaching, as confirmed by cross-research. It also clarifies that cognitive strategies and language proficiency undeniably function in correlation with one another. This survey is corroborated by Oxford's differentiation between mnemonic and conceptual strategies, as well as her hypothesis that memory strategies may be unrelated to second language proficiency (OXFORD, 2003). Based on the questionnaires that have been completed by respondents, we compare target groups and check whether students are adept at using cognitive and metacognitive strategies, which allow them to organize and control their own learning styles.

For this purpose, the study looks at mnemonic, conceptual, and functional skills, as well as speaker interaction patterns. First and foremost, cognitive strategies uphold an awareness of the structure and mental schemata of the target language in order to confer learners a practical command of that language (MCARTHUR, 1992). Therefore, they are considered to be language learning facilitators found in a proportional relationship with higher second language proficiency (CHAMOT & O'MALLEY, 1987). By using cognitive strategies, learners develop interaction modalities with language items in a variety of complex ways, so as to develop stronger mental images or structures, which may thereafter be practiced in realistic settings (OXFORD, 2003).

The research also looks at compensation strategies, which are meant to achieve contextual interaction despite target language insufficiency. Strategies such as paraphrasing or even the use of gestures work as substitutes for communication between language learners. As for affective strategies, these are deemed the students' least preferred LLSs by CARSON & LONGHINI (2002) AND EHRMAN & OXFORD (1990), revealing an area which has yet to be improved. Yet, affective strategies like lowering one's own anxiety level by "positive self-talk" are considered to also have a positive impact on language learning (OXFORD, 2003:14). Moreover, social strategies facilitate communication through peer interaction, which should be encouraged in order to naturally enhance language production in cooperative contexts. Proficient learners have a penchant to use such strategies, as they comprehend the importance of exposing themselves to the target language while being aware of the underlying strategic implications.

Regarding metacognitive strategies, these are considered essential for successful learning (OXFORD, 1990), as they allow learners to plan their learning and thus support classroom language acquisition. Given the skilled use of anticipation and the perception of similarities between current and previous learning tasks, this type of learning has also been referred to as "metacognitive awareness" (PRESLEY & AFFLERBACH, 1995). The applied questionnaires also enable us to investigate in what ways self-management abilities like learner planning and goal setting are mastered by our students. As soon as a preference for metacognitive strategies is confirmed, it works as an indication that learners have achieved self-management skills, thus successfully becoming independent learners.

The paper lays emphasis on the relevance of enforcing metacognitive strategies in the language class, thereby promoting learner autonomy, self-management and self-monitoring skills in the learning process. Moreover, communicative competences should also be developed by implementing strategy training as such in the EFL curriculum. DÖRNYEI (2005) suggests

combining strategy training with raising awareness regarding the learners' preferences and identifying the most suitable strategies in each case. Other research findings corroborate that learners need not only be aware of the learning strategies they employ, but also with regard to their appropriateness in a given context (ANDERSON, 1999). Finally, CARRELL (1989) points to the great relevance of raising learner awareness regarding LLSs, as well as to the importance of identifying the right context where they may be called for to facilitate learning.

CONCLUSIONS

It was concluded that the choice of particular LLSs are significant in learning English as a foreign language. Findings suggest that the participants make use of a variety of LLSs in learning English, the most commonly used ones being social strategies and cognitive strategies in Romanian students, while Turkish students display a preference for memory strategies and metacognitive strategies. Therefore, it may be concluded that the participants displayed a tendency of preferring social strategies and cognitive strategies in the case of Romanian students, but memory strategies and metacognitive strategies over others in the case of Turkish students.

The data gathered from Romanian and Turkish participants in the study were later corroborated by further comparative studies conducted at the University of Madeira, Portugal (SOUSA, 2015) and at the University of Tetovo, Macedonia (KAMBERI, 2018, forthcoming). The results of our collaborators are compatible with our findings. A positive correlation has been established between the use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies and language proficiency. In conclusion, it is important for language teachers to promote the acquisition of these skills. With a view to further enhancing communicative competences, this type of activities should be implemented in the EFL curriculum. Regarding the statistically lower to average use of social and affective learning strategies, we suggest more research and focus should consider these highly relevant aspects which would lead to the development of more interactive learning communities.

Above all, findings (OXFORD, 2011) regarding the importance of cognitive, metacognitive and socio-affective LLSs have been best substantiated by our own results. We have reflected on the levels displayed by language learners and their relatedness to the application of efficient cognitive strategies. Our findings will hopefully be valuable in the assessment of proficiency, but language trainers are called upon to further reflect upon those items which displayed low scores, so as to enhance awareness of language learning strategies. The present study points out the significance of strategy training, as it transfers relevant knowledge and skills while teaching a foreign language. For this reason, we propose that such strategies be introduced into the English class, in order to effectively encourage students to become independent learners by applying appropriate language learning strategies. Finally, the practicality of this research lies in that it recommends directions for restructuring foreign language materials and, possibly, the curriculum, so as to enable students to acquire and practice language learning strategies in relevant contexts.

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