

Strategies used by Successful Language Learners: How effectively they use them in language acquisition process

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Abstract: *The paper discusses the importance of implementation of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) strategies and the analysis of the effects of utilizing these strategies in the language acquisition process. One of the main questions posed in the SLA area is why some L2 learners are better in comparison to others, whether they use some strategies to facilitate second or foreign language learning. The conducted research focuses on these questions and studies whether good language learners consciously and subconsciously use certain strategies to enhance their language competencies.*

Keywords— strategies, learning style, personality, motivational intensity, language aptitude, individual differences

1. INTRODUCTION

The topic of individual differences has been investigating over several decades since learners' individuality and preferences play a crucial role in Second Language Acquisition. The significant factors such as motivation, culture, language aptitude, cognitive abilities, learning styles, and strategies are those aspects that might contribute to ultimate success in language acquisition. Brown (2014) postulates that to provide the language classroom with effective assimilation of the learning materials for language acquisition, it is obvious that "teaching learners how to learn" is essential. Furthermore, strategies implemented by learners are the key to learner autonomy (Wenden 1985, cited in Brown 2014). The objective of this case study is to analyze and observe learning strategies of successful language learners, identify the impact of strategies on their academic success, implementing empirically suggested theories of several studies done by prominent researchers. At the initial stage, the personality type and learning style of the subjects have been identified. As Oxford (2003) points out the more it is known about a learner's ability, the more effective strategy use can be identified. Having considered all the background information, culture, personality type, learning style, and the length of the acquisition process of a second language, the subjects have been observed according to competence and performance. It is aimed that all possible personality and learning style dimensions of learners will be analyzed and compared with the help of questionnaires and language assessment tests. The procedure will help to find out good language learners' (GLLs) strategy preference, internal and external factors in SLA which could provide empirical interpretations or justifications on what strategies GLLs use, and whether they use them consciously or unconsciously, and whether it is successful strategy use provides them with good language skills.

2. Literature Review

One of the significant aspects of individual differences is strategies and styles of a second language learner. Strategies are very specific actions that learners take to tackle a given problem, and that alter profoundly within each individual (Brown, 2014). SLA researchers have conducted a plethora number of studies to identify the role of strategies in language acquisition. According to Scarcella (1992), learning strategies are specific ways, tactics, and techniques such as, finding out conversational topics or giving oneself the motivation to solve a difficult language task, used by students to enhance their language. Another prominent researcher Oxford (2003) classified learning strategies into six types: cognitive, meta-cognitive, memory-related, affective, compensatory, and social. She highlights the importance of strategy and style preference of a language learner, which contributes to a successful language acquisition if both aspects are in harmony. Nonetheless, if style and strategy usage are poorly-performed, it might lead to the occurrence of anxiety, lacking confidence, amotivation, which subsequently results in unsuccessful language learning. Similarly, Oxford (2003) cites that strategies are effective only in the following conditions:

1. The strategy provides an efficient approach to the L2 task
2. The strategy ought to match the student's learning style and personality
3. The student uses the strategy effectively, connecting it with other relevant strategies

If strategies have the aforementioned conditions "they make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferrable to a new situation" (Oxford, 2003). In terms of age factors in using strategies, Ellis (1994) mentions that young children are inclined to use strategies in a task-specific tendency, whereas older children and adults use strategies by generalizing and they implement them more flexibly. How do learners know the power of strategy use? SLL does not always have information about the

benefits of using particular strategies, which might make L2 learning quicker and more effective (Nikos and Oxford, 1993; cited in Oxford, 2003). Oxford (2003) points out that a skilled teacher ought to develop the comprehension of learning strategies and assist students to use them. According to Ellis (1994), there have been conducted two approaches on strategy usage by good language learners (GLLs). First, good learners are identified by questionnaires or interviews. Secondly, more successful learners should be compared to less successful ones. While Dornyei (2005) indicates that a high degree of motivation and aptitude are also crucial factors in implementing individualized learning strategies of GLLs, Wenden (1987) put forward the theory about the characteristics of language learning strategies. According to him, (a) strategies refer to specific actions or techniques, (b) not all of them are observable, (c) they are problem-orientated, (d) they may sometimes be consciously deployed and can become automatized. Another study which was conducted by Rubin and Thomson (1982) showed other strategy characteristics of GLLs: (a) GLLs take charge of their learning, (b) they are creative and experiment with the language, (c) they create their opportunities to practice a language, (d) they know how to make errors work for their advantage and are not afraid of making them, (e) they use mnemonics, (f) they use their linguistic knowledge which means applying L1 rules to L2, (g) GLLs can guess the message from context and constantly take risks, (h) GLLs learn to keep a conversation going, using idiomatic expressions, paraphrasing, and synonyms. Moreover, according to the theory of Dornyei (2005), although language aptitude and motivational intensity are significant factors, it is active and creative participation in language learning sessions that might highly contribute to the success of the L2 acquisition process. There have been put forward a hypothesis that there was no set of strategies that are regularly used by GLLs (Oxford, 2003). According to investigations of Oxford (2003) "effective learners show careful orchestration of strategies, targeted in a relevant, systematic way at specific L2 tasks". Another interesting point of some studies based on strategies of effective language learners by Chamot (2001) who postulated the theory that GLLs are active, control and monitor their output language, practice communicating in the target language more, use various techniques of memorizing such as mnemonics, and constantly ask questions to clarify topics. In terms of examining strategies Ellis (1994) stated the following types of data: (a) language use, (b) metalingual judgment, (c) self-report. Ellis (1994) points out that self-report data is a significant source in identifying learning strategies which could be obtained by surveys, questionnaires, interviews, and history of learner's language learning. Oxford (2003) mentions that the crucial factors of strategies' choice of L2 learners are motivation, gender, age, culture, learning style, and beliefs. In most respect, this review highlights that all findings and studies based on strategies and strategy use of GLLs have important results and findings, which is the foundation to further research. Owing to all the findings and theories, strategies of effective L2 learners ought to be

observed empirically, since each learner is a different individual, having various learning styles, motivational intensity, personality, and language aptitude. Having had examined all sources which are given in the Literature Review, this case study addresses the following questions:

1. Are GLLs aware of strategies? Do they utilize them effectively?
2. Do personality, culture, and learning style influence strategy choice? How are they correlated?
3. Do strategies provide success in the SLA process?

3. Methods

Participant profile. According to the chosen topic required participants were selected, considering their achievements in the English language acquisition. Subjects were two female language learners of almost the same age, who had already obtained an advanced level in English, possessing a Certificate on International English Language Testing System (IELTS) with a band score of 7.5. See Table 1. The first subject is being introduced as S1M and the second subject is S2H. Both subjects were exposed to learning English from a young age before puberty. S1M started learning English when she was 12 years old, yet did not have constant learning experience within 6 years. She had gaps and pauses in acquiring language, however, her grandmother showed a great deal of interest, encouraging and conducting her not to stop the language learning process. She learned the language in a direct method, having been taught mostly individually. As she mentioned in an interview, the language learning process was enjoying experience for S1M, she did not have any challenges, except speaking. She was aware of what strategies were and she always tried to use them effectively. Currently, she has established her way of learning and enhancing Vocabulary, Grammar, and Reading skills. However, from a cultural point of view, being grown up in a family with different outlook on life, having a strong appreciation of cultural identity, and being fully accustomed to the traditions of the country's traditions challenged her to understand the language globally. Being the only child and having some inhibitions in communication, it was not easy to enhance mainly speaking skills in the English learning process. Regarding the second subject, she started learning English when she was 11 years old, being taught topic-based basic vocabulary. Her interest was primarily generated by her aunt's son, who was the only person who encouraged, motivated, and supported her. She grew up in an extended family, therefore this had a crucial impact on her communicative skills. She mentioned in an interview that the learning process did not challenge her. S2H was aware of the importance of English from a very young age, being able to apply some strategies in learning all the skills. S2H considered reading a significant part of English, which helped her to improve her language acquisition tremendously. She was mostly taught by the Communicative Language Teaching method. Both subjects considered themselves autonomous language learners due to their own eagerness to assimilate the language. In terms of cultural parameters, as being exposed to

English for a pretty long time S2H has had already formulated her second culture, mixing and establishing the similarities between L1 and L2. She did not encounter any inhibitions regarding culture, as growing up she has found that it is a language that contributed her to be more open-minded and flexible. As a mature learner, she has accustomed to handling the ambiguities.

Table1. Information about participants

Participants	Age	The length of learning English (within a language course)	IELTS band score
Subject 1 (S1M)	27	10 years	7.5
Subject 2 (S2H)	25	10 years	7.5

4. Research Design

Procedure. The two successful ELLs willingly agreed to participate in this case study. The first step of the research was to interview them. The subjects were interviewed individually to get information relating to their background and the length of being exposed to language. The focus of the interview was to obtain some information on how they used to learn the language when they were younger and how they learn it now, challenges which they encountered in the language acquisition process, and whether they use any strategies or tactics; how culture helped or inhibit learning a foreign language. The interview was recorded into the Dictaphone with the permission of the subjects. Both participants were asked to provide a Certificate of Language Proficiency (IELTS). The subjects were given a supplementary Grammar test to check the speed of their Grammar comprehension and identify their current level on Grammar. They spent 40 minutes on a grammar test which was assessed in percentage. The next procedure was Vocabulary Test, which required matching words with their definitions. There were given 30 minutes for the test. The subjects were able to manage the tests, following the time limit. They completed tests individually in separate rooms. See Table 2.

Table 2. The Test Results

Participant	Duration of Grammar test	Result	Duration of Vocabulary test	Result
Subject 1 (S1M)	38 minutes	91%	30 minutes	85%
Subject 2 (S2H)	30 minutes	94%	30 minutes	90%

Having completed the tests, the scores were analyzed and the candidates were asked to explain the strategies which they had used in the tests. Obtaining information that strategies are based on understanding individual differences, which means other factors might influence their use, in the next stage, the subjects were given Learning Style Survey, Myer-Briggs

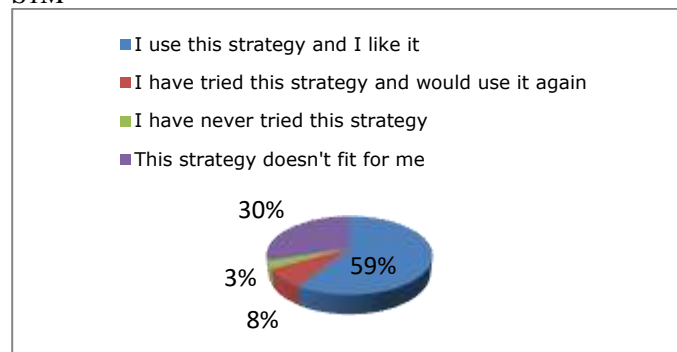
Type Indicator (MBTI), Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). The purpose of the questionnaires and surveys was to understand the correlation between the internal or external factors and strategy preference. As Oxford (2003) pointed out “the strategy fits the particular student’s learning style preferences”.

Materials. The Grammar Test was taken from New Headway Advanced (2015), which consisted of grammar and vocabulary tasks to check the level of the participants. In terms of Vocabulary, there was given a test designed by the researcher based on the Advanced Vocabulary Quizbook (2018) of New Headway Advanced (2015) to check how candidates were fast and were able to comprehend definitions. Other materials were the Myer-Briggs Type Indicator which was derived from the Student’s Book “Speak out Advanced” (2013), Learning Style Test by Cohen, Oxford, and Chi (2003) based on identifying personality and learning style of the participants. The locus test was SILL by Oxford (1990) and the newly designed test by Cohen, Oxford, and Chi (2003).

5. Data Collection and Findings

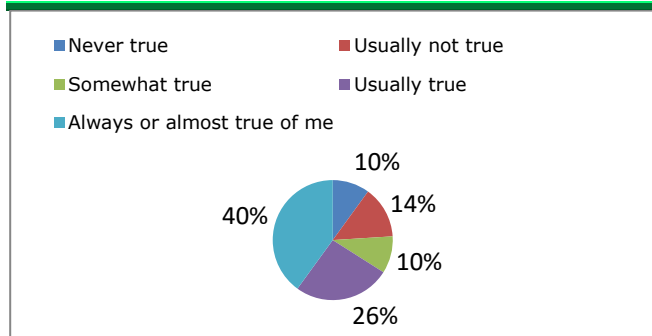
The correlation between the personality of a learner and strategy use. According to Myers-Briggs test S1M was identified as “The strategist”, which described her as an introspective, analytical, and determined with natural leadership ability, perfectionist, expecting a lot from herself. The test revealed that she was an effective strategy user. Comparing to Language Strategy Use Inventory, it can be found that the subject uses strategies effectively which coincided with her personality type and explained her success in learning the language. According to results, it was found out that the subject particularly uses affective and cognitive strategies like generating motivation, building positive attitudes, planning, and monitoring. In Table 3 the results are given as a chart, indicating how the subject uses tactics effectively.

Table 3. The Results of Strategy Use Inventory Test (2003) of S1M



Regarding SILL (1990) similar results were found. The results indicated the highest percentage of strategy use of a successful language learner. See Table 4.

Table 4. The results of SILL (1990)



According to the Myer-Briggs test, the results of the second subject represented that she was “The chief”, describing her as a strategic, organized natural leader. She can understand complicated organizational situations and quick to develop intelligent solutions. Similarly, as S1M the second subject is also an effective strategy user, which also found the proof in Language Strategy Use Inventory, having had the highest percentage of strategy use category. See Table 5 and 6.

Table 5. The results of language Strategy Use Inventory (2003)

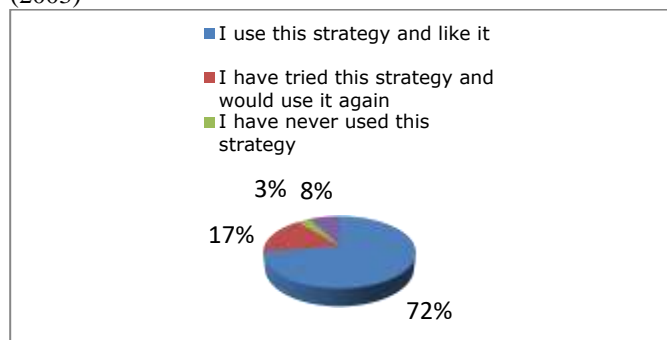
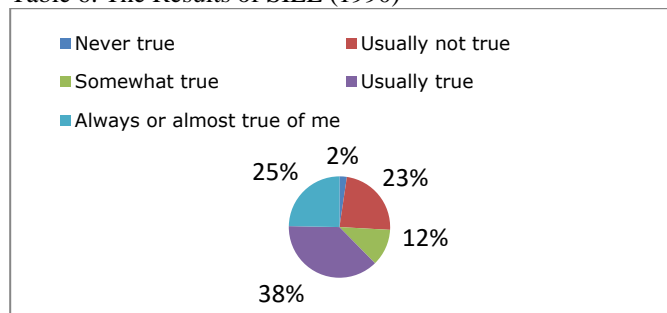


Table 6. The Results of SILL (1990)



As can be seen from all diagrams both subjects use strategies effectively and they are aware of which strategy is appropriate for them.

The correlation between learning styles and strategy use. In terms of findings from the Learning Style Survey, S1M was scrutinized according to 11 categories. While the results showed the subject was an auditory learner which could explain her highest result in the IELTS listening section, the test indicated that she was an introvert, justifying her lower score and challenge which she had in Speaking skills at the initial stage of learning. Being closure-orientated, she strives to meet deadlines and plan assignments which meant she

manages tasks due to deliberate planning. The further finding showed S1M as a synthesizing learner who enjoys guessing meanings and predicting results, summarizing materials well, and noticing similarities easily. This could prove that GLLs are risk-takers. To commit the material to memory she seeks distinctions among items, implementing mnemonics. The subject is a literal learner who prefers literal representation of concepts, working with language material more. These results signified the constant usage of the following cognitive strategies: (a) planning, (b) organizing, (c) monitoring, (d) using senses (e) activating knowledge, (d) contextualization, (e) going beyond the data (Brown. 2014). The correlation of learning style and strategy use of S2H showed almost similar results with S1M, yet their strategy choice varies. S2H is a tactile/kinesthetic learner, who benefits most from doing projects, and moving around, and touching objects. Unlike the first subject (S1M), the second subject is an extrovert, enjoying a wide range of social and interactive learning tasks. Being an extrovert could also explain her excellent speaking skills and her higher score in the IELTS speaking module (7.5). According to the survey she prefers communicative teaching strategies and speculates possibilities. The subject picks up information naturally, considering the language learning process relaxing and enjoying. She has global style preference, which means that even though there are some unfamiliar words, S2H can guess them from context, still feeling comfortable in communication. While enhancing her lexical resource, she eliminates and reduces differences, focusing on similarities. In terms of new grammar rules, she implements them without concern about accuracy. Being a metaphoric learner, the subject learns material by conceptualizing aspects – visualizing the grammar system as an engine that might be combined or separated. She always tries to find out more information about a topic by searching supplementary materials, attending English courses (even she is advanced levels), tries constantly interacting with native speakers. Taking into consideration learning styles and tactics which are generally used within language assimilation, S2H utilizes the following affective strategies: (a) activating supportive emotions, (b) minimizing negative emotions, (c) generating motivation, (d) building a positive attitude. In terms of socio-cultural-interactive strategies can be observed these techniques: (a) interacting to learn, (b) overcoming knowledge gaps, (c) guessing intelligently, (d) generating conversation, (e) activating sociocultural schema (Brown, 2014).

6. Conclusion

Analyzing the results of two successful language learners, additional literature materials, and collected data, it can be summed up that GLLs are perfect strategy users. They use all possible cognitive, affective, and sociocultural strategies which assist them effectively assimilate the language. Even though the subjects vary in personality type, learning style, and having more inclination and preference to a particular type of strategy, both are still successful and motivated to learn the language. They started using special techniques from young age unconsciously, yet having been conducted by good

teachers, they became aware of the effectiveness of strategies and have been implementing them in their learning process. While researching this case study, it has been found that strategies are significant tools of SLA, as other scholars have before mentioned it, such as Rubin and Thomson (1982), Ellis (1994), Oxford (2003), Brown (2014). Furthermore, GLLs always utilize and implement those strategies that fit their personality and learning style. From a cultural perspective, the first subject had communication difficulties, as being an only child and having more individual lessons at the initial stage of language acquisition. Due to the lack of communication in family and classroom, and being an introvert, SIM has had challenges in improving speaking skills. Regarding the second subject, who started learning English in a communicative atmosphere and being a member of a big family, and influencing her cousin's good English skills, she did not have challenges in learning the language. As being exposed to English much from a very young age, she formulated and combined two cultures and two languages. In most respects, both learners have their own logical and theoretical way of using strategies, having great experience in language learning. Despite being different, they have an equally clear vision and own belief of implementing strategies.

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