

УНИВЕРЗИТЕТ „ГОЦЕ ДЕЛЧЕВ“ - ШТИП
ФИЛОЛОШКИ ФАКУЛТЕТ

UDC 80 (82)

ISSN 1857-7059

ГОДИШЕН ЗБОРНИК

2021

YEARBOOK

2021



ГОДИНА 12
БРОЈ 18

VOLUME XII
NO 18

GOCE DELCEV UNIVERSITY - STIP
FACULTY OF PHILOLOGY

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ул. „Крсте Мисирков“ 10-А п. факс 201, 2000 Штип

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LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES TO LEARNERS OF ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract: In foreign language teaching methodology, the learning strategies are still a subject of debate and their significance is emphasized from the viewpoint of many scientists on the field along with the recommendation of different classifications. This paper demonstrates the results of the SILL survey conducted to higher education students at the Faculty of Biotechnical Sciences – St Kliment Ohridski University-Bitola, N. Macedonia. In administering Rebecca Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning survey, the author aims to examine the language learning strategies focusing not only to English as a Foreign Language but English for Specific Purposes among higher education students with B1 to B2 proficiency level.

Keywords: *Strategy Inventory for Language Learning, English for Specific Purposes, Language learning strategies, English as a Foreign Language*

СТРАТЕГИИ ЗА ИЗУЧУВАЊЕ НА СТРАНСКИ ЈАЗИК КАЈ ИЗУЧУВАЧИТЕ ПО АНГЛИСКИ ЗА СПЕЦИФИЧНИ ЦЕЛИ ВО ВИСОКОТО ОБРАЗОВАНИЕ

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Апстракт: Стратегиите за изучување на странски јазик во рамките на наставата за странските јазици сè уште се предмет на расправа меѓу научниците така што нивното значење е актуелно од аспект на многу истражувачи од оваа област, а притоа постојат и доста препораки за различни класификации на истите. Овој труд ги прикажува резултатите од анкета во која се користи Стратегиски инвентар за изучување на странски јазик, а која беше спроведена кај студенти од високо образование, поточно на Факултетот за биотехнички науки-Универзитет Свети Климент Охридски-Битола,

Република Северна Македонија. Во спроведувањето на анкетата со помош на прашалникот креиран од Ребека Оксфорд, авторот има за цел да ги испита стратегиите за учење на странски јазик фокусирајќи се не само на изучувањето на англискиот како странски јазик, туку на англискиот за специфични цели во високото образование кај студенти со ниво на владеење Б1 до Б2.

Keywords: *Стратегиски инвентар за изучување на странски јазик, англиски за специфични цели, стратегии за изучување на странски јазик, англиски како странски јазик*

Introduction

The second half of the last century was marked as the beginning of the research on foreign language learning strategies. From that period onwards, the number of studies and research dedicated to defining the actual concept of strategy learning is constantly increasing, yet still searching for a complete and a single definition. We encounter many denominations in an attempt to explain the concept of learning strategy, such as skill, or skills, tactics, technique etc., therefore the definitions are quite numerous as well. While working on research of students who have successfully mastered a foreign language Rubin (Rubin, 1975: 43) mentions strategies as techniques or tools that students use to acquire knowledge. According to Tarone (Tarone, 1981: 287) strategies represent a means by which foreign language learners acquire the ability to adapt to different social contexts in the target language. On the subject of strategies Weinstein and Mayer (Weinstein & Mayer, 1986: 316) imply on learner's behavior and thoughts during learning that aim to influence the learner's coding process. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) consider strategies to be special modes for processing information that promote understanding, learning, and retention of information. Rod Ellis (Ellis, 1994: 532–533) believes that strategies promote the efficient use of available language input. Rebecca Oxford (Oxford, 1990: 8–14) attempted to redefine the concept of strategies arguing that strategies in the context of acquisition of the target language should be considered as activities that students use during the learning process, not only aiming towards mere storage of information and their use, but also to acquire more effective skills in an appropriate manner, thus being able to adapt to various situations (Oxford, 1990: 8). In terms of strategies Cohen (1998) refers to the moves that a student makes partially consciously to improve the learning process. According to Professor Shopov, learning strategies aim to determine the characteristics of a good student (Shopov, 2014: 261).

It is believed that Rebecca Oxford (1990: 18–21) established the most complete division of strategies, separated into two basic categories - indirect and direct strategies, which are further divided into six subcategories, considering that the indirect include social, affective and metacognitive strategies, while memory, cognitive and compensation strategies are considered to be direct. Even though that most of the strategies present in Oxford's taxonomy were already demonstrated in

previous attempts to establish categorization, one of the important advances is the introduction of *compensatory strategies*, aimed to overcoming problems caused by lack of skills necessary to solve tasks (Oxford, 1990: 47). There are conflicting and inconsistent opinions as well as many questions about the classification of language learning strategies, to which the author Oxford tries to answer by emphasizing that the classification may be imperfect, but offers a comprehensive framework for a good understanding of strategies. This view is confirmed by the Strategic Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) questionnaire, which is the most commonly used tool for assessing the implementation of foreign language learning strategies, authored by Oxford (Oxford, 1990).

Methodology

The aim of this research was to investigate the Language learning strategies among university students- learners of English for Specific Purposes- English for Biotechnology. The respondents were given a Strategic Inventory for Language Learning questionnaire, to be filled online, adapted in Google Forms -due to the fact that their lessons and practical classes were solely done online as of the Covid-19 pandemic. The respondents were asked to evaluate how frequently they employ a certain language learning style by responding to the 1-5 Likert scale. Higher numbers correspond with higher self-reported use of the particular strategy described in each item. The respondents of the study were 42 Macedonian-speaking undergraduates, 21 females and 21 males, aged 18 to 50, at a public university in Macedonia. English as a foreign language is a mandatory subject in elementary and secondary school in Macedonia, therefore their proficiency level is ranged between B1 to B2. The respondents were students from the Faculty of Biotechnical Sciences – St. Kliment Ohridski University – Bitola, R. of Macedonia, who completed their first year of study, attended and passed English for Specific Purposes – English for Biotechnology as a compulsory course in both semesters. The survey was conducted at the end of the spring semester, whereas the participants were asked to complete it honestly and in a timely manner, therefore it was completed consensually from all respondents. The samples were timely submitted, fully summarized and properly analyzed. Furthermore, survey questionnaires were analyzed, and the results of the survey are presented and discussed in details below.

Instrument

This research explored language learning strategies based on Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). The instrument specifies six learning strategies represented by a number of statements each with a corresponding Likert scale. This scale has proven to be successful and valid for objective research, therefore it has been widely used by many researchers on the field. The Likert scale format is consisted of item from 1 to 5 as follows:

1. Never or almost never true of me
2. Usually not true of me
3. Somewhat true of me
4. Usually true of me
5. Always or almost always true of me.

The SILL (Strategy Inventory for Language Learning), version 7.0 (ESL/EFL) by R. Oxford aimed for non-native speakers is comprised of 50 items which are divided into direct and indirect strategies. Direct strategies are further divided into Memory strategies (item 1 to 9 and total of 9), Cognitive strategies (item 10 to 23 and total of 14 items), and Compensatory strategies (item 24 to 29 and total of 6 items). The indirect strategies are divided into Metacognitive strategies (item 30 to 38 and total of 9 items), Affective strategies (item 39 to 44 and total of 6 items), and Social strategies (item 45 to 50 and total of 6 items). According to R. Oxford (Oxford, 2003:12-15) the general description of the strategies is given as follows:

- Memory strategies are used for inserting new information into memory storage and for retrieving it via sounds, images, pictures, combination of all above-said and body movement, when needed for communication.
- Cognitive strategies help learners to handle the learning material including reasoning, analyzing and reorganizing information with existing schemas practicing formal structures and sounds in naturalistic settings as well as classifying it.
- Compensatory strategies include as guessing and using gestures. Such strategies are needed to fill any gaps in the knowledge of the language through usage of synonyms and “talking around”.
- Metacognitive strategies are techniques used for organizing, planning, focusing and evaluating the success of any type of learning strategy, including monitoring mistakes and identifying one’s own learning style.
- Affective strategies are used for identifying one’s mood and anxiety level, moreover handling and talking about feelings, discussing attitudes and motivations.
- Social strategies are used for asking questions and clarifications of confusing points, getting help, conversing with a native speakers and raising cultural awareness and social norms.

Results and Discussion

In order to demonstrate the results clearly, the author provides a PrTSc of Rebecca Oxford’s (1990) classification that indicates the strategy user’s frequency ordering them as low, medium and high, ranging from 1.0 to 1.4; 1.5 to 2.4 - low; 2.5 to 3.4- medium and 3.5 to 4.4 and 4.5 to 5.0 as high.

Table 2 Key to determine high, medium, and low frequency of LLS use (adapted from Oxford, 1990 with permission)

		Range of means per strategy category or overall
High	Always or almost always used	4.5 to 5.0
	Usually used	3.5 to 4.4
Medium	Sometimes used	2.5 to 3.4
Low	Generally not used	1.5 to 2.4
	Never or almost never used	1.0 to 1.4

*Adapted by Carmen M. Amerstorfer, *Past its expiry date? The SILL in modern mixed-methods strategy research* https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322520343_Past_its_expiry_date_The_SILL_in_modern_mixed-methods_strategy_research

Table 1. Mean value of the Total Strategy Use according to Oxford's Strategy subcategories

Strategy subcategory	\tilde{x} (mean)
Memory Strategies	2.19
Cognitive Strategies	2.75
Compensation Strategies	3.19
Metacognitive Strategies	4.36
Affective Strategies	2.3
Social Strategies	4.18
Overall strategy use	3.44

According to the results of the descriptive statistics and as of Table 1 regarding the classification of the six LLS, it is shown that the mean value of the strategy use by the participants was 3.44 indicating that they are *medium users of LLS*.

Table 2 further on expresses the results in percentage ranging from most used, often used and least used strategy, as the most used are the first two highest with the percentage according to type of strategy, often used would be the middle percentage according to type of strategy and the least used would be the final ones with the lowest percentage, indicating the least used strategy.

Table 2. Classification of Rebecca Oxford's Language Learning Strategies types according to frequency of use per strategy

	Type of Strategy	Strategy Categories	Percentage by sub-category	Global percent %
1.	Type D Metacognitive Strategies	Centering learning	61.5%	65.8%
		Evaluating learning	76.1%	
		Planning learning	59.8%	
2.	Type F Social Strategies	Asking Questions	48.5%	61.9%
		Cooperating with others	40.2%	
		Cultural Awareness	48.5%	
3.	Type C Compensation Strategies	Paraphrasing	56.1%	57.8%
		Using gestures	45.4%	
		Guessing	40.7%	
		Coining words	21.4%	
4.	Type B Cognitive Strategies	Skimming & Scanning	53.8%	40.95%
		Practicing	20.4%	
		Analyzing & Reasoning	15.8%	
		Summarizing	53.8%	
5.	Type E Affective Strategies	Reducing Anxiety	57.8%	36.23%
		Encouraging oneself	30.2%	
		Emotional state	20.7%	

6.	Type A Memory Strategies	Visual	49.6%	32.48%
		Auditory	15.95%	
		Perception	31.9%	

As shown in Table 2 the findings of this study present the following learning strategy ranking:

**Metacognitive,
Social Strategies,
Compensation Strategies,
Cognitive Strategies,
Affective Strategies and
Memory Strategies.**

The higher the mean score, the higher would be the tendency for the respondents to use the strategy. Therefore, the most used strategy is the Meta-cognitive (65.8%) which refers to the fact that the respondents are the best in organizing, planning, focusing and evaluating the success, including monitoring mistakes and identifying one's own learning style. However, the least used strategy is the Memory strategy (32.48%), which indicates that the respondents are the poorest in inserting new information into memory storage and for retrieving it via sounds, images, pictures, combination of all above-said and body movement, when needed for communication.

It is also remarkable to note that the respondents tend to use the indirect strategies (considering the results with the highest percentage shown for the meta-cognitive and the social strategies), however, this is not confirmed in full, because the affective strategy, as the third in the category of indirect is shown to be almost half less in percentage than the other two in the group of indirect ones. The same applies for the direct strategies- Memory and Affective appear as quite poor among the respondents, however, the Cognitive strategy appears to be quite close to the Compensatory which is listed in the third best position according the calculation of most used strategy as well as with the mean value, which indicates that the respondents are not fully inclined to use the indirect strategies only, and at the same time having the direct ones on their lowest level of usage. This actually refers to the fact that all of given strategies are considerably important and above all necessary in order to result in proficient language learner, regardless of their frequency of use and preference.

Conclusion

The present research was aimed to provide a closer look to the language learning strategies used by a group of participants- learners of English for specific purposes- English for Biotechnology with a proficiency in English, students at a public university in N. Macedonia. As of the results it is well shown that all of them

are users of the Language learning strategies, however with differences regarding the type, the category and the frequency. The most used type of strategy appeared to be the Meta-cognitive and the Social strategy, both belonging to the group of Indirect strategies, however, the third place by frequency of usage belongs to the Compensatory, which on the other hand is a sub-category of the group of Direct strategies. As claimed by Pupura, (in Oxford,2003:12)” ... metacognitive strategies had “a significant, positive, direct effect on cognitive strategy use, providing clear evidence that metacognitive strategy use has an executive function over cognitive strategy use in task completion”. Oxford (2003:13-14) as well adds up that the social strategies “...help the learner work with others and understand the target culture as well as the language.”, which is one inevitable factor for the good learner; and finally the Compensatory strategies “...help the learner make up for missing knowledge”. However, the absence of the usage of Cognitive strategies or handling learning material including reasoning, analyzing and reorganizing information and practicing formal structures and sounds, the Affective or identifying one’s mood and anxiety level, talking about feelings, discussing attitudes and motivations, and the Memory strategies or storing and retrieving information via sounds, images, pictures, combination of all above-said and body movement, when needed for communication, can negatively affect learners from effectively following and acquiring new content, especially if the memory strategies are at a poor level, along with the other two range at a low level. Therefore, instructors need to identify the weaknesses and reflect on them with suitable solutions, also being cautious not to induce discouragement among the learners. To sum up, as of the findings it can be concluded that implementing language learning strategies facilitates and improve language learning as well as contribute the language learner in different manners.

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