

The Relationship between EFL Learners' Language Learning Attitudes and Language Learning Strategies

Mohammad Jafar Jabbari (Corresponding author)

Dept. of English, School of Humanities, Yasouj University, Yasouj, Iran

Tel: 89-171-411-227 E-mail: mjjabbari@yu.ac.ir

Negar Golkar

M. A. Student of TEFL

Dept. of English, School of Humanities, Yasouj University, Yasouj, Iran

E-mail: golkar.negar68@gmail.com

Received: February 1, 2014 Accepted: February 23, 2014 Published: June 21, 2014

doi:10.5296/ijl.v6i3.5837 URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5296/ijl.v6i3.5837>

Abstract

Language learning strategies and learners' attitude are two widely acknowledged elements contributing to students' successful learning. In this study, the researchers sought to provide insights into language learning strategies and learners' attitude and to investigate the probable relationship between EFL learners' attitude and language learning strategies. To do so, a quantitative approach was adopted. Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) and Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) were utilized to collect data. Through stratified sampling, 100 EFL students studying English at Yasouj University, Iran, were randomly selected to fill out the questionnaires. The SPSS package was used to analyze the data. In particular, descriptive statistics, correlational statistics and multivariate analysis of variances were used to analyze the research questions. The findings of the study showed that EFL learners with positive attitude are mainly better users of language learning strategies.

Keywords: Language learning strategies, Attitude

1. Introduction

Learners' attitude to learning and language learning strategies (LLSs) are two widely acknowledged elements contributing to students' successful learning. They have received great attention in the past few decades as an important factor in the process of learning a new language. This study aims to provide insights into these two elements and to investigate the probable relationship between them. Through stratified sampling, as many as 100 EFL students studying English at Yasouj University, Iran, were randomly selected to fill out the questionnaires. To collect the data, Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) and Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) were used. To analyze the data, the SPSS package were employed. In particular, descriptive statistics, correlational statistics and multivariate analysis of variances were used to analyze the research questions. The study manifested that EFL learners with positive attitude are mainly better users of language learning strategies.

2. Review of Literature

Language learning strategies (LLSs) have received great attention in the past few decades as an important factor in the process of learning a new language. They have been defined in various ways. Rubin (1975) defined LLSs as “the techniques or devices which a learner may use to acquire knowledge” (p. 43). In other words, they are “intentional behavior and thoughts that learners make use of during learning in order to better help them understand, learn, or remember new information” (Richards, Platt, and Platt, 1992, p.209). For Wenden and Rubin (1987, p.19) learning strategies are “... any sets of operations, steps, plans, routines used by the learner to facilitate the obtaining, storage, retrieval, and use of information”. Language learning strategies according to Cohen (1998, p.68) are “the conscious thoughts and behaviors used by learners with the explicit goal of improving their knowledge of the target language”. Oxford (1990, P.8), defines LLSs as “specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations”.

O'Malley and Chamot (1990) classify LLSs into three groups, i.e. meta-cognitive, cognitive and social/affective which is similar to the classification offered by Cohen. In another classification, Oxford (1990) groups language learning strategies as direct and indirect. Direct Language learning strategies directly deal with the target language including *Memory strategies*, such as grouping or using imagery, have a highly specific function: helping students store and retrieve new information. *Cognitive strategies*, such as summarizing or reasoning deductively, enable learners to understand and produce new language by many different means. *Compensation strategies*, like guessing or using synonyms, allow learners to use the language despite their often large gaps in knowledge" (p.37). This is while indirect learning strategies "support and manage language learning without (in many instances) directly involving the target language"(Oxford, 1990, p.135). It is involving "Metacognitive strategies that allow learners to control their own cognition-that is, to coordinate the learning process by using functions such as centering, arranging, planning, and evaluating. Affective strategies help to regulate emotions, motivations, and attitudes. Social strategies help students learn through interaction with others"(p.135).

Another crucial area in the field of second / foreign language learning research is the role of affective factors like attitude which are considered as determinant elements in the process of learning a new language. Holmes (2008) believes that “people develop attitudes towards languages which reflect their views about those who speak the languages, and the contexts and functions with which they are associated” (p.346). Sarnoff (1970) defined attitude as “a disposition to react favorably or unfavorably to a class of objects” (p.279).

Akbari and Talebinezhad (2003) conducted a study titled "The Relationship between the Uses of Language Learning Strategies by Iranian Learners of English, Their Foreign Language Proficiency and the Learners' IQ Scores". They found no significant relationship between the subjects' strategy use and their IQ scores, while the statistical analysis of findings indicated that learners of different proficiency level had different pattern of L2 strategy use.

Abedini, Rahimi and Zare-ee's work (2011) on the "Relationship between Iranian EFL Learners' Beliefs about Language Learning, their Language Learning Strategy Use and their Language Proficiency" revealed that EFL learners with more positive beliefs used the strategies more than others. They also had higher level of language proficiency.

Sadighi and Zarafshan, (2006) in the article titled "Effects of Attitude and Motivation on the Use of Language Learning Strategies by Iranian EFL University Students" reported that metacognitive, social, affective, and compensation strategies were used more frequently than memory and cognitive strategies. Moreover, in this study, attitude was a determinant factor which influences the use of Language Learning Strategies (LLSs).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Question

This study aims at investigating whether learners' attitudes towards language learning has any effect on the choice of language learning strategies.

Q: Is there any significant difference between the learner's attitudes and the choice of language learning strategies?

3.2 Sampling Procedure

In this research, Yasouj University was chosen through convenient sampling. This study was conducted with a total number of 100 Students (50 females and 50 males) with Persian as their first language and English as their foreign language. They were selected by stratified random sampling based on Morgan's formula with confidence level of 95% (margin of error=5%) out of 150 students. The participant answering questionnaires all majored in English Literature and Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), so the questionnaire was administered in English.

3.3 Instrument

The instruments used for gathering data of the study were two questionnaires. Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning proposed by Oxford (1990), which is a 50-item Likert-type questionnaire with five-scale responses regarding the six major strategy groups

ranging from 1=never true of me to 5=always true of me, and another standard inventory designed by Gardner (1985), i.e. Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB), which is a 10 likert-type items ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree.

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

In order to gather data for this study, two tests were given to the students who were selected randomly. The Oxfords 'Strategy inventory for Language Learning (SILL) - the version used for Speakers of Other Languages Learning English were given to both groups of males and females. All the above activities were conducted in the beginning of the semester (autumn, semester, 2012).

At the same time the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) was given to them. It is a two-scale test with the motivation part omitted. The data gathered from the tests were put in the SPSS to investigate whether there is any relationship between them.

To address the aforesaid research hypothesis, due to the quantitative design of the study the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was used to analyze the data. The multivariate analysis of variances (MANOVA) was used in order to analyze the findings of the two questionnaires. It "evaluates whether the population means on a set of dependent variables vary across levels of a factor or factors" (A Brief Introduction to MANOVA, 2009).

4. Results and Discussion

In order to investigate the current hypothesis multivariate analysis of variances was used. According to the information given in table 1, the significant differences at ($p < .05$) and F values demonstrate some significant differences between two scales of negative and positive attitudes in relation to the choice of language learning strategies. A one-way MANOVA revealed a significant multivariate main effect for attitude, Wilks' $\lambda = .654$, $F(6, 93.000) = 8.189$, $p < .005$, thus the first hypothesis was confirmed.

Table 1. Multivariate Tests

| | Effect | Value | F | Hypothesis df | Error df | Sig. |
|-----------|--------------------|---------|----------------------|---------------|----------|------|
| Intercept | Pillai's Trace | .993 | 2.355E3 ^a | 6.000 | 93.000 | .000 |
| | Wilks' Lambda | .007 | 2.355E3 ^a | 6.000 | 93.000 | .000 |
| | Hotelling's Trace | 151.926 | 2.355E3 ^a | 6.000 | 93.000 | .000 |
| | Roy's Largest Root | 151.926 | 2.355E3 ^a | 6.000 | 93.000 | .000 |
| Attitude | Pillai's Trace | .346 | 8.189 ^a | 6.000 | 93.000 | .000 |

| | | | | | | |
|--------------------|--------------------|------|--------------------|-------|--------|------|
| | Wilks' Lambda | .654 | 8.189 ^a | 6.000 | 93.000 | .000 |
| | Hotelling's Trace | .528 | 8.189 ^a | 6.000 | 93.000 | .000 |
| | Roy's Largest Root | .528 | 8.189 ^a | 6.000 | 93.000 | .000 |
| a. Exact statistic | | | | | | |

To investigate the difference between the two groups the Tests of Between-Subjects Effects was conducted. Given the significance of the overall test, the univariate main effects were examined. Significant univariate main effects for attitude in relation to cognitive strategy were, $F(1, 7.739) = 17.399$, $p < .001$, attitude for compensation strategy, $F(1, 17.631) = 26.591$, $p < .001$, attitude in relation to metacognitive strategy, $F(1, 10.622) = 24.135$, $p < .001$ and attitude in relation to social strategy, $F(1, 4.942) = 7.285$, $p < .008$ were obtained. As table 2 illustrates cognitive strategies, compensation, metacognitive and social strategies are used more frequently by the learners' with positive attitude than learners with negative attitude.

Table 2. Test of Between-Subjects Effects

| Source | Dependent Variable | Type III Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|----------|------------------------|-------------------------|----|-------------|--------|------|
| Attitude | Memory strategy | .092 | 1 | .092 | .243 | .623 |
| | Cognitive strategy | 7.739 | 1 | 7.739 | 17.399 | .000 |
| | Compensation strategy | 17.631 | 1 | 17.31 | 26.591 | .000 |
| | Metacognitive strategy | 10.622 | 1 | 10.622 | 24.135 | .000 |
| | Affective strategy | .594 | 1 | .594 | 1.328 | .252 |
| | Social strategy | 4.942 | 1 | 4.942 | 7.285 | .008 |

The results indicated that EFL learners with more positive attitude, generally, use the language learning strategies more than learners with negative attitudes do. In other words, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive and social strategies are used more frequently by learners' with positive attitude.

Based on the studies which have been done on language learning strategies, LLSs are outstanding and practical in the development of communicative competence, proficiency and learner autonomy (Oxford & Crookal, 1989, Oxford 1990). However, there are some other studies which show the importance of attitude and motivation in the choice of language learning strategies (Nyikos & Oxford, 1993; McIntyre & Noels, 1996).

Given the findings above, and given that the rather in-depth review of literature in Chapter pointed out some gaps to be filled in the current study, it is necessary to look at the findings in the broader context of the relevant literature to determine whether the findings of the present study are in line with previous findings or not.

To begin with what Yang (1993) found in the relationship between learners' language attitude and LLSs, it was concluded that there are some significant relationships between learners' belief and the use of language learning strategies. In another study by Abedini, Rahimi and Zare-ee (2011), 203 Iranian students of English were given Horwitz's (1987) "Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory" and Oxford's (SILL). The result of the study revealed that EFL learners who had more positive beliefs used the strategies more often and also had a higher level of language proficiency in contrast to others.

Sadighi and Zarafshan (2006) made another study that yielded similar findings to the present study. In that piece of research 126 students of English Translation and Teaching English at Shiraz Islamic Azad University were given two questionnaires. The results revealed that metacognitive, social, affective, and compensation strategies were used more frequently than memory and cognitive strategies. In addition, in this study, attitude was a determinant factor on the use of Language Learning Strategies (LLSs). That is, learners with positive attitude used LLSs more frequently than those with negative attitude.

5. Conclusion

Descriptive results indicated that the mean score of EFL learners' with positive attitudes is more than the mean score of learners' with negative attitudes. To explore the relationship between EFL learners' attitude and the choice of language learning strategies, multivariate analysis of variances was conducted. A positive significant correlation was observed between the learners' attitudes and the use of language learning strategies. Test of between-subjects showed that the EFL learners' with positive attitude were used more language learning strategies. It can be concluded that, they used cognitive strategies, compensation, metacognitive and social strategies more than the learners' with negative attitude.

Reference

- Abedini, Rahimi, & Abbas Zare-ee's. (2011). Relationship between Iranian EFL Learners' Beliefs about Language Learning, their Language Learning Strategy Use and their Language Proficiency.
- Akbari, & Talebinezhad. (2003). The Relationship between the Uses of Language Learning Strategies by Iranian Learners of English, Their Foreign Language Proficiency and the Learners' IQ Scores.
- Cohen, A. D. (1998). *Strategies in learning and using the second language*. Essex: Longman.
- Ehrman, M., & Oxford, R. (1990). Adult language learning styles and strategies in an intensive training setting. *Modern Language Journal*, 73(3), 311-327. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1990.tb01069.x>
- Gardner, R. C. (1985). *The Social Psychology of Language 4. Social Psychology and Second Language Learning. The Role of Attitudes and Motivation*. London: Edward Arnold, 8, 39-49,108.
- Holmes, J. (2008). *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* (3rd ed.). London: Longman.p.346.

- Horwitz, E. K. (1987). Surveying student beliefs about language learning. Learner strategies in language learning. In A. Wenden & J. Rubin, *Learner strategies in language learning*. Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ.
- MacIntyre, P. D., & Noels, K. A. (1996). Using social-psychological variables to predict the use of language learning strategies. *Foreign Language Annals*, 29(3), 373-386. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1944-9720.1996.tb01249.x>
- Nyikos, M., & Oxford, R. L. (1993). A factor analytic study of language-learning strategy use: Interpretations from information-processing theory and social psychology. *The Modern Language Journal*, 77(1), 11-22. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1993.tb01940.x>
- O'Malley, J. M., & Chamot, A. U. (1990). *Learning Strategies in Second Language Acquisition*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139524490>
- Oxford, R. (1990). *Language Learning Strategies: What Every Teacher Should Know*, New York. New Boston: Heinle and Heinle, 6-8, 37, 39, 43, 47, 136,293-300.
- Oxford, R. L., & Crookall, D. (1989). Research on language learning strategies: methods, findings, and instructional issues. *Modern Language Journal*, 73, 404-419. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1989.tb05321.x>
- Richards, J. C., Platt, J., & Platt, H. (1992). *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*, London: Longman. (p.209).
- Rubin, J. (1975). What the good language learner can teach us? *TESOL Quarterly*, 9(1), 41-51. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/3586011>
- Sadighi, & Zarafshan. (2006). Effects of Attitude and Motivation on the Use of Language Learning Strategies by Iranian EFL University Students.
- Sarnoff, I. (1970). *Social Attitudes and the Resolution of Motivational Conflict*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, p279.
- Wenden, A., & Rubin, J. (1987). *Learner Strategies in Language Learning*, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Yang, N. D. (1993). Beliefs about language learning and learning strategy use: A study of college students of English in Taiwan. *Proceedings of the tenth conference on English teaching and learning in the Republic of China* (pp.193-219). Taipei: Crane Publishing Co., Ltd.