Assessment of Language Learning Strategies Used by Palestinian EFL Learners

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Abstract: *This article assesses the language learning strategies (LLSs) used by 194 high school and 184 university English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) learners in Palestine, using Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). It also explores the effect of language proficiency and gender on frequency of strategy use. The findings show that proficiency level and gender have a main effect on overall strategy use, but their effects on the use of each of the six categories of strategies and individual strategies are variable. The findings have significant implications for research on LLSs, classroom instruction, materials design, and teacher preparation.*

Introduction

It is not uncommon to hear complaints voiced by second language (L2) teachers and educators about the "unsatisfactory" language performance of L2 learners. These complaints have motivated applied researchers in the field of L2 learning and teaching to try to diagnose the causes of this problem and recommend remedies. Until the 1970s, the majority of L2 research focused on the evaluation of competing teaching methods and instructional materials. However, since the early 1970s, great emphasis has been placed on the investigation of social, psychological, and affective variables that enhance or hamper L2 success and achievement. Among these variables are: motivation, attitudes, personality, learning styles, and learning strategies. Research, in general, has provided evidence that these variables correlate with success in L2 learning (See Dornyei, 1990; Ehrman & Oxford, 1990; Oxford & Cohen, 1992; Peng, 2001).

The observations made by L2 researchers about the differences in learning among L2 learners have motivated second language acquisition (SLA) researchers to explore the sources of these differences with the objective of providing instruction that facilitates learning. These differences were identified by researchers who tried to describe the characteristics of the "good language learner." Chamot (1987), Naiman, Frohlich, Stern, and Todesco (1978), Rubin (1975), Stern (1975), and Stevick (1989) identified the strategies that successful language learners employ to facilitate learning the L2. For example, Rubin (1975) stated that the good language learner is a willing and accurate guesser, has a strong motivation to communicate, is often not inhibited, is prepared to attend to form, practices, monitors his own speech and the speech of others, and attends to meaning. On the basis of the findings of the above-mentioned studies, it was hypothesized that if less successful learners are taught how to use these types of strategies (i.e., if they learn how to learn), they become more effective and independent learners.

The description of the strategies used by successful language learners provided a stimulus for further research into the establishment of taxonomies of language learning strategies (LLSs). O'Malley and Chamot (1990) divided LLSs into three major types: cognitive, metacognitive, and social-affective. Oxford (1990), on the other hand, classified LLSs into six broad categories, namely memory, cognitive, compensatory, metacognitive, affective, and social. She defined 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." (p. 8). Because the present

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