

Language Learning Strategies in Kuwait: Links to Gender, Language Level, and Culture in a Hybrid Context

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Abstract: *The present study revisits the link between culture, gender, language level, and learner's choice of language learning strategies. This is done by answering three questions: (1) what are the major Strategy Inventory of Language Learning (SILL) factors in Kuwait (a hybrid context)? (2) Which factors are related to gender? And (3) which factors are related to language level? The results of the study indicate a relationship between gender and active naturalistic language use, cognitive-compensatory strategies and repetition-revision strategies. They also indicate a relationship between language level and active naturalistic strategies and affective strategies. Based on these results, it is proposed that learning contexts in a cultural milieu are perhaps the strongest variable affecting strategy choice. Finally, proposals are made for a more contextualized approach to strategy research.*

Introduction

The proliferation of research into language strategies in recent years has been perhaps due to the appealing promises such research carries to all parties involved in the business of teaching and learning foreign or second languages. Research promises learners ways that would lead them to success in achieving their goal of learning a target language (Oxford, 1990). It promises teachers ways that would help them in shifting the responsibility of their students' success off their shoulders onto those of their students (Holec, 1987). Moreover, it promises administrators a path to the success of their language courses (Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995).

Reaching generalizations, however, regarding the relationship between learning strategies and a multitude of variables has not been achieved. Ambitious attempts have been made to relate certain learning strategies to gender, age, proficiency, ethnicity, and styles. Generalizations have been made about the tendency of females to report using more strategies than males, proficient students using strategies more than less proficient ones, certain cultures promoting the use of particular strategies more than others, and certain learning styles leading to the use of certain strategies (Grainger, 1997; Kaylani, 1996; Oxford, 1989, 1996).

We are, however, still a long way from making such generalizations with any degree of certainty. This is perhaps due to contradictory findings and unresolved discrepancies in each of these areas, as well as lack of replication studies. Consequently, calls continue to be made for more studies in these areas in order to ascertain these findings and resolve the discrepancies.

The present study came in response to appeals made for continuous investigations of strategies in relationship to culture. Kuwait is a hybrid context (El-Dib, 1999b) which Green and Oxford (1995) defined as a context which "fits neither the description of a second language setting nor that of a foreign language environment." (p. 268) The cosmopolitan nature of the