



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**UTILIZATION OF LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES BY IRANIAN
POST-GRADUATE STUDENTS AND THEIR ATTITUDE AND
MOTIVATION TOWARD LEARNING ENGLISH**

**FATEMEH PEZESHKIAN
FPP 2010 6**

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BY

FATEMEH PEZESHKIAN

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,
in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science**

April 2010



To my dear father,

My loving mother,

My supportive husband, Reza, and

My cute son, Aryan

Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science

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Chairman: Prof. Dr. Kamariah Abu Bakar, PhD.

Faculty: Educational Studies

This study investigated utilization of language learning strategies by Iranian post-graduate students and the influence of motivation and attitude on the students' use of language learning strategies. Kerman province was selected according to cluster sampling. Then, 156 second semester post-graduate students in Kerman province were included in the present study. Data were collected through language learning strategy questionnaire developed by Oxford (1997) and Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) adapted from Zarafshan (2002). Descriptive statistics showed that Iranian post-graduate students were high strategy users. The respondents reported the use of metacognitive, affective, compensation, social, cognitive, and memory respectively based on the frequency of use while cognitive and memory strategies were reported at a medium level and other strategies were reported at a high level. Descriptive statistics also indicated that Iranian post-graduate students had positive

attitude toward learning English. Although students with positive attitude utilized the strategies more than students with negative attitude, independent sample T-test showed that attitude did not have a significant influence on utilization of language learning strategies. To determine motivation level of students, mean score for each motivation level was calculated. It showed that Iranian postgraduate students were instrumentally motivated rather than integratively motivated. It was indicated that integratively motivated students utilized strategies more than instrumentally motivated ones except for memory strategy. However, t-test indicated that instrumental motivation increased the use of memory strategies while integrative motivation increased the use of cognitive strategy. Other differences were not found to be significant.

To determine the use of strategies by students of art and science, mean scores of both groups of students in strategy utilization were calculated. It showed that Arts students utilized strategies more than Science students. Overall, t-test showed that the Arts and Science majors had a statistical significant influence [$t= 0.546$] on the choice of cognitive strategy.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah master sains

**PENGUNAAN STRATEGI PEMBELAJARAN BAHASA OLEH PELAJAR
SARJANA DARI IRAN DAN SIKAP SERTA MOTIVASI MEREKA
TERHADAP PEMBELAJARAN BAHASA LUGGERIS**

Oleh

FATEMEH PEZESHKIAN

April 2010

Pengerusi: Prof. Dr. Kamariah Abu Bakar, PhD.

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Kajian ini dijalankan bagi menyelidik penggunaan strategi pembelajaran bahasa oleh pelajar sarjana Iran dan pengaruh sikap serta motivasi ke atas pembelajaran bahasa. Daerah Kerman telah dipilih melalui kaedah persampelan kelompok, ia itu Kesemua 156 pelajar sarjana semester kedua di Daerah Kerman telah dipilih dalam kajian ini. Data dikumpulkan menerusi soal-selidik strategi pembelajaran bahasa yang dibina oleh Oxford (1997) dan AMTB yang diadaptasi daripada Zarafshan (2002). Statistik deskriptif menunjukkan bahawa pelajar sarjana Iran adalah pengguna strategi yang tinggi. Responden melaporkan mereka menggunakan strategi metakognitif, affektif, kompensasi, sosial, kognitif dan memori. Berdasarkan kekerapan, penggunaan strategi kognitif dan memori dilaporkan pada tahap sederhana dan strategi-strategi lain dilaporkan pada tahap yang tinggi. Statistik deskriptif juga menunjukkan bahawa pelajar sarjana Iran mempunyai sikap yang positif terhadap pembelajaran Bahasa Inggeris. Walau bagaimanapun, pelajar ber sikap positif menggunakan strategi-

strategi yang dinyatakan lebih banyak berbanding dengan pelajar yang menunjukkan sikap negatif, namun ujian t untuk sampel bebas menunjukkan bahawa sikap tidak ada kesan yang signifikan ke atas penggunaan strategi pembelajaran bahasa. Bagi menentukan tahap motivasi para pelajar, skor min bagi setiap tahap motivasi telah dikira. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa pelajar sarjana Iran mempunyai motivasi instrumental yang tinggi berbanding dengan motivasi integratif. Walau bagaimanapun dapatan menunjukkan pelajar bermotivasi integratif lebih banyak menggunakan strategi berbanding dengan yang bermotivasi instrumental kecuali untuk strategi memori. Selain itu, ujian- t telah menunjukkan yang motivasi integratif meningkatkan penggunaan strategi memori manakala motivasi instrumental meningkatkan penggunaan strategi kognitif. Perbezaan yang lain didapati tidak signifikan.

Dalam menentukan penggunaan strategi oleh pelajar sastera dan sains, skor min kedua-dua kumpulan pelajar dalam penggunaan strategi dikira. Dapatan menunjukkan bahawa pelajar sastera secara signifikan lebih banyak menggunakan strategi berbanding pelajar sains. Ujian t secara signifikan juga menunjukkan perbezaan antara pelajar major sastera dan sains dalam pemilihan strategi.

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I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 6th of April 2010 to conduct the final examination of Fatemeh Pezeshkian on her thesis entitled “**Utilization of language learning strategies by Iranian postgraduate students and their attitude and motivation toward learning English**” in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P. U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The committee recommends that the student be awarded the Master of Science.

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DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis is my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously, and is not concurrently, submitted for any other degree at Universiti Putra Malaysia or at any other institution.

FATEMEH PEZESHKIAN

Date: April 2010

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

LSs: Language Strategies

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

FL: Foreign Language

TEFL: Teaching English as a Foreign Language

SILL: Strategy Inventory for Language Learning

AMTB: Attitude/Motivation Test Battery

ESL: English as Second Language

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

In recent years, the researchers and language instructors showed their interest in autonomous learning. For this reason, they focused mostly on learning and the factors which may affect the learners' process of learning (Chamot, 2001; Grenfell and Macaro, 2008). According to O'Malley and Chamot (1995), learners should take responsibility of their language learning and continue their learning even in the absence of teacher and classroom environment. To achieve such a goal, Littlewood (1996) and Little (2000) believe that learner-centered approaches should be promoted and employed in curriculum designing and teaching.

Furthermore, the most important tool to make a learner-centered classroom is language learning strategies. They help learners to internalize L2 rules and learn independently (Littlewood, 1999). For this reason, strategy instruction significantly enhances the autonomous learning among the learners (O'Malley and Chamot, 1995; Oxford, 1990).

Thompson (1994) believed that language learning strategies are among the most contributing factors to learners' successful language learning. He continued that use of language learning strategies is a dominant characteristic of good language learners. Therefore, finding language learning strategies of good learners will

facilitate teachers' job since they can teach good learners' language learning strategies to poor learners and enhance their learning (Grenfell and Macaro, 2008).

According to Zarafshan (2002), researches have been done on different areas of language learning strategies. Some of the studies focused on identification of strategies used by good and poor learners. Some other studies tried to find out relationship between language learning strategies and other variables such as achievement, proficiency, and gender. However, few numbers of studies tried to identify the factors which may affect strategy choice by the learners that is why more recent studies focused on this area (Oxford and Ehrman, 1995; Zhengdong, 2003; Park, 2005; Lu, 2007).

1.2 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Education in Iran

English as a foreign language (EFL) education has been conducted for over a century in Iran. English language has been a compulsory course beginning in junior high school and continuing until a student graduates from a university. Undergraduate and postgraduate students must pass a course named General English which is offered two hours per week.

In recent years, however, many educators believe that the starting age is the crucial factor in achieving greater overall language success and suggest that English education in Iranian public schools should start in elementary schools. Due to the insufficient quality and quantity of language teachers, presently only private elementary schools provide one-to two-hour courses per week to pupils.

Teacher-centered approach is still the most popular model of teaching in all schools in Iran (Mohammadi and Mojtahedzadeh, 2003). Language teachers are seen as the central figures in the classroom; therefore, teachers have become information-givers and repositories of knowledge in most of the language classrooms in Iran.

Teaching in the classroom at the university usually consists of formal lecturing by teachers and note-taking by students. Large classes, in which the student-teacher ratio is around 40 to 1 in a typical high school or university, result in little time for meaningful or communicative language activities (Tavakol, 2005). As a result, speaking and listening are rarely emphasized in language classrooms (Ku, 1995). The typical method of teaching English in secondary school and college level consists of reading the text in small segments, explaining its meaning in Persian or English, discussing grammar-translation approach. Teachers use the grammar-translation approach to help students prepare for examinations. This method encourages the belief that learning language involves a lot of memorizing.

Although English in Iran has been viewed as one of the greatest assets in personal academic pursuits and career development, most students study English as a subject rather than as a living language. Students hardly use the language outside of the school context. Despite its popular appeal and support of EFL education as a compulsory subject in all school levels, this curriculum results in poor language acquisition.

To summarize, the phenomenon of Iranian EFL education may potentially influence the learning strategies that students employ in order to meet their learning goals. For

example, large classes imply that learners may have to use certain type of strategies to approach learning tasks in the classroom. The grammar-translation method used in preparing for examinations may have an additional impact on students' choice of strategies.

1.3 Language Learning Strategies

Since 1975, various theorists have contributed to the definition of language learning strategies. Language learning strategies as determinant factors in the facilitation of learning a new language have been defined in different ways. Strategies are “the thoughts and actions that learners use to accomplish a learning goal” (Chamot, 2004: 14). Cohen (1998) broadly defines foreign language learner strategies as encompassing both foreign language learning and foreign language use strategies. In his terms, language learning and language use strategies are:

those processes which are consciously selected by learners and which may result in action taken to enhance the learning or use of a second or foreign language, through the storage, retention, recall, and application of information about that language”. (p. 7)

In addition to action, Cohen (2007) adds another aspect to the definition of language learning strategies. He proposes to define language learner strategies as activities done by the learners consciously and mentally in order to facilitate learning. Goal and learning situation are two components of such activity. He further states that a mental action is subconscious. However, when it is accompanied by a goal and learning situation, it is no longer subconscious but conscious.

Different researchers called language learning strategies differently. Some researchers called them learner strategies (Wenden & Rubin, 1987) while some other researchers called them learning strategies (O'Malley and Chamot, 1995). The most complete terminology may be used by Oxford (1990; 2001). She called them as language learning strategies. According to Zarafshan (2002), all these terms share some specific characteristics as follows: language learning strategies improve and facilitate language learning. They are mostly on the side of learner rather than teacher, that is, they are formulated and employed by the learners. Furthermore, language learning strategies may be visible or invisible. For example, draw a picture of a word is a type of visible strategy while mental imagery is an instance of invisible language learning strategies.

Oxford's classification as the framework of the current study will be explained in more detail. Oxford (1997; 2001) defines language learning strategies 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). Her strategy taxonomy includes six categories: (a) *memory strategies*; (b) *cognitive strategies*; (c) *metacognitive strategies*; (d) *compensation strategies*; (e) *social strategies*; and (f) *affective strategies*. *Memory strategies* help learners store and retrieve new information. Specific examples include remembering new words by creating mental linkages and making associations between what is known and what is new. *Cognitive strategies* facilitate the understanding and production of new language. English language learners, for instance, may practice the sounds of English or they could infer the meaning of a new English word by segmenting it into known roots, prefixes, and suffixes. *Metacognitive strategies* are used by the learner

to coordinate the learning process, such as planning and evaluating their own learning. *Compensation strategies* allow learners to bridge over large knowledge gaps to make meaning. Examples include using circumlocution and making guesses. *Social strategies* facilitate learning through learner interaction with others. Learners, for instance, may form study groups to learn a new language or seek help from proficient users of that language. *Affective strategies* help the learner to regulate their emotions, motivations, and attitudes. Examples include anxiety reduction and self-encouragement. As the definition shows, *Metacognitive strategies*, *social strategies*, and *affective strategies* help regulate the learning process and learners' emotional responses.

1.4 Factors Influencing Language Learning Strategies

According to Ellis (1994), all factors influencing language learning strategies are categorized under individual learner's differences and situational/social factors. Individual learner differences consist of beliefs, affective states, learner factors, and learning experience. Situational/social factors include gender, task performed, target language, and setting. This study investigates the influence of motivation, attitude, and field of specialization on the use of language learning strategies. Motivation and attitude are among individual learner's differences since they are affective factors. Affective factors such as learning styles, personality types, motivation, attitude, anxiety, autonomy, and self-concept are emotional factors which influence the use of language learning strategies and consequently learning (Ellis, 1994). They may have a positive or negative influence on learning. Situational/social factors consist of gender, task performed, target language, and setting. Field of specialization as one of

Situational/social factors which are investigated in the current study .More details will be provided for motivation, attitude, and field of specialization as the factors which are investigated in the present study.

1.4.1 Attitude

A major area of foreign language learning research is the role played by affective variables in the process of learning. Among the affective factors influencing the success of students in learning a language, attitude is a determinant. Since the mid 1980s, learners' attitudes have become a topic of research interest and have received an increasing amount of attention from both first and foreign language researchers (Barcelos, 2003). Most of the researchers believed that attitude has a significant role in second/foreign language learning; therefore, it should be considered seriously. They mention two reasons for considering attitude as an important factor in language learning. First, students' attitude may affect their behavior in language learning (Weinburgh, 1998; Yin & Oxford, 2006). For example, it may affect the students' effort to speak in a foreign language. Second, several researches showed relationship between students' performance in language and their attitude (Weinburgh, 1998; Chou, 2002; Espinosa, 2007).

How attitudes toward language learning are formed, and how attitudes affect language learning have been among the interests of language teachers and researchers as well since it is believed that attitude affect learners' behavior toward learning; therefore, negative or positive attitude affect language learning. However, the learners' attitude itself is under the influence of various stimuli.

There are many definitions for attitude. According to Brown (2001: 61), attitude is mostly consisted of emotional involvement like "feelings, self, relationships in community". Kırımsoy (1997: 23) stressed "the power of culture, thereby shaping our life and feeling" and also our attitude towards the world.

Students come to class with different attitudes about foreign language learning, some of which will enhance their success and some will have the opposite effect. They may have positive or negative attitudes. Gardner and Bernaue (2008) declare that learners' positive attitude toward the language they are learning will result in their success in the process of language learning. If learners have a high regard for the language, the people who speak it, and the foreign culture, they will have a high desire to learn that language.

Language learners, on the other hand, may develop a negative attitude toward the language they are learning. Brown (2000) states that negative attitudes toward foreign language, its speakers, and its culture have been shown to influence the success of language learning negatively. If learners expect the language to be difficult to learn or if they are resentful about having to study a foreign language, they might arrive in class with negative attitudes which result in their failure in learning.

1.4.2 Motivation

Different researchers defined motivation differently. However, most of them share this notion that motivation is among the most important predictors of foreign/second language achievement (Zarafshan, 2002). The term motivation comes from the Latin verb *movere*, which means to move (Pintrich, 2003). Motivation theories endeavor to “answer questions about what gets individuals moving (energization) and toward what activities or tasks” (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). In foreign language learning, motivation provides “the primary impetus to initiate L2 learning and later the driving force to sustain the long and often tedious learning process” (Dornyei, 2005: 65). Further, “all the other factors involved in foreign language acquisition presuppose motivation to some extent” (Dornyei, 2005: 65).

Yeok-Hwa (1998) believes that motivation affects how active a learner is in the process of learning. He continued that motivation may influence attitude of a learner. For this reason, it is quite necessary to seriously consider motivation in the process of language learning. However, different researches showed that there is a difference in students' type of motivation and their choice of strategies, that is, the students' motivation may affect their choice of language learning strategies. (Chu, 2008; Al-Otaibi, 2004)

Gardner's social psychological model of foreign language motivation distinguishes between two motivational orientations: integrative versus instrumental orientation, a distinction highly acclaimed among foreign language researchers and practitioners (Dornyei, 2005).