Dusting Tommy's and Grace's Portfolios: ADocument Analysis of L2 English Learners' Language Learning Strategies

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Abstract

This study intended to depict the process of L2 English learners' strategy use by utilizing document analysis as a major method. In-depth interviews were conducted to corroborate the document analysis as a means of triangulation.The research question of this study was: What language learning strategies are being used by the participants of the study?Two participants were purposely selected from the ESL learners studying at the undergraduate and at the graduate level in an Eastern US university.The data from the interviews and documents yielded major themes and case examples.

Keywords: language learning strategies, document analysis,triangulation

Introduction

A great deal of the previous studies haveutilized a quantitative approach to examine L2 English learners' strategy use, especially using the Strategy Inventory of Language Learning (SILL) survey (Oxford, R. L., 1990).Chen (2005) criticized that "strategy research only offers a partial picture out of a quantitative perspective" (p. 19).While self-report questionnaires have become the most important part of the LLS research methodology,researchers cannot be certain that learners actually employ the strategies they claim to use(Poole, 2005). As indicated by Chamot (2004), learners might not remember what language learning strategies they actually used, but claim to use them. In addition, they might check a survey item whose written description is not comprehensible to them. Similarly, Lee (2000)pointed out that the method of questionnaires creates an attitude for participants to adopt because theytend to make an impression onresearchers. That causesthem to collect biased data.

Recently, more and more researchers are aware of the need to use qualitative methods for a richer description of the employment of language learning strategies(Griffiths&Oxford, 2014).These qualitative methods might include interviews; think-aloud protocols, diaries, observation, and so on. Nevertheless, few studies usedocument analysis as a method. At best, it is marginalizedas a supplement to other qualitative methods(Ahmed, 2010).Therefore, documental studies on Language Leaning Strategy (LLS) arescarce and urgently needed in order to include more process-oriented or qualitative studies of this nature.

This study intended to delineate the process of L2 English learners' strategy used by utilizingdocument analysis as a method.In-depth interviewswere conducted to corroborate the document analysis as a means of triangulation.Hodder (1994)indicated that "texts can be used alongside other forms of evidence so that the particular biases of each can be understood and compared."

The specific research question designed was: What language learning strategies are being used by the participants of the study?

It is structured as follows. The second section presents a literature review of document analysis as a research method. The third section offers the means by which the strategies are elicited and analyzed. The fourth section presents major themes and case examples. Finally, the last section concludes the study.

Methods

Participants

Two ESL learners participated in this research under the pseudonyms, Tommy and Grace. They were purposely selected from the ESL learners studying at the undergraduate and at the graduate level in an Eastern US university. Given that international students at the university were required to meet its language requirements beforeadmission, their English competence was considered to be either at the intermediate or at the advanced English proficiency level. In order to select a suitable participant for this study, the researcher interviewed each of the possible candidates in English to check their level of English competence and willingness to participate in the study. As a result, the participants selected for the study were Tommy and Grace, two Malaysian undergraduates at the university. Tommy's major is Business and Grace's Psychology.

Document Analysis

Document analysis is a systematic process in which eitherprinted or electronicdocuments are analyzed and evaluated (Bowen, 2009). As indicated by Gaborone (2006), documents are naturally-occurring written texts and not created for any research purposes.Atkinson and Coffey (2004) considered documents as a social fact because "they are produced, shared and used in socially organized ways" (p. 58). Documentary data range from public records to private documents (Schwandt, 2001). As noted by Schwandt, the list of public records includes political and judicial reports, government documents, medial accounts, television scripts, yearbooks, minutes of meetings, and so on. In addition, private documentary sources cover medical history, letters, diaries, school records, personal journals, and memoirs, etc.

Ahmed (2010)argued that document analysis is commonly marginalized or once used, it merelyfunctions**as** an additive to other research methods. As commented by McCulloch (2004), "a distinct lack of interest in the use of documents in educational and social research" has been observed in the recent years (p. 10).Thus, documentary studies are scare and given little attention. However, its marginalization is not always the case. In fact, documentary-based studies enjoyed popularity in the first half of the twentieth century, as shown by the fact that many important studies were based on completely or partially on document analysis.

As indicated by McCulloch (2004), several causes lead tothe marginalization of document analysis. First, there were so many documentary studies around by the 1960s that they became too familiar to be popular. As a result, many researchers turned to other research methods in that they appeared more novel and challenging. Second, documentary studies used to offer the perspectives of social and political elites, rather than the ordinary people. That might cause the researchers who wanted to study common people to lose interests in this method. Third, some researchers found documentary analysis boring for the reason that documents usually were in existence before their studies and might not be related to the issues that concerned them.Owing to these, documentary studies are considered esoteric, dry, and narrow, and its marginalization seems irreversible.

Even if document analysis might be a marginalized method, some researchers still adhere to this method for the following reasons. As noted by Jennifer (2002), researchers choose document analysis as a method because of the ontological position that documents are considered constituents of the society, Through this method, traces of the social world could be found. Naturally, texts, written records, or documents can be treated as proof of these ontological characteristics. For one thing, the use of document analysis is a practical decision, driven by the availability of data. For example, if a researcher intends to study a historical eventbut no living witnesses are found, document analysis might be the only available choice. Furthermore, while document analysis might not be a mainstream method, some researchers still use it to triangulate other forms of data, considering that it might be advantageous in some ways.

Denscombe (2014)clarified that there are three advantages for document analysis. To begin with, a large amount of information is recorded in documents, and can be accessed easily and cheaply. Second, document analysis is a cost-effective method on the grounds that documentary data is offered publicly and usually free of charge. Third, documents are a source of data that is in existence permanently and open to inspection publicly. However, Denscombe also cautioned us about their disadvantages in equal numbers. Researchers may need to ensure whether documents are credible, especially those found in the Internet. In addition, documents are usually produced for other purposes, so they are secondary data that are not directly related to researchers' studies. What is more, documents do not represent objective reality because they are imbued with their producers' interpretations.Hence, with the disadvantages in mind, researchers need to assess whether the documents are authentic, credible, representative, and meaningful (Gaborone, 2006)

Data Collection. The data-collection of the study relied on two sources aiming to corroborate each other: documents and interviews. To start with, after getting the two L2 English learners' informed consents, the researcher collected private documents from them. The documents included the notebooks for a statistics and for a biology class and the portfolios of an English writing course. After the documents were collected, the two L2

English learners were asked both open-ended and closed questions.

Most of the documents in the study came from Tommy's and Grace's portfolios prepared for the same course requirements which included their recollective narratives.In-depth interviews were conducted to corroborate the document analysis as a means of triangulation.

The Coding Scheme. More than a dozen of classification systems emerged in the LLS arena in the 1990s (Rebecca L. Oxford, 1994). The emergence of the classification schemes causes a major problem for LIS studies because of "a lack of coherent, well accepted system for describing these strategies" (Oxford, 1994, p.4). In fact, strategy classification is still one of the most controversial issues in the field of language learning strategies (Griffiths & Oxford, 2014).

Despite of the incoherence of strategy taxonomies, Madhumathi, Ramani, and Prema(2014) stated that Oxford's (1990) Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) is "recognized as comprehensive and is a widely used instrument to assess the strategy use of second language learners "(p. 456). Currently, many researchers world-wide regard the SILL as the most

comprehensive and widely-used tool to elicit language learning strategies (Nisbet, Tindall, & Arroyo, 2005; Tseng, 2011). Besides, a large number of studies adopted the SILL as an instrument to diagnose language learners' strengths and weaknesses (Nakatani, 2006).

Because the SILL is a widely-recognized and well-tested system for identifying learners' learning strategies, it would be unpractical for me to develop a coding scheme without using any system that already exists. Therefore, a priori approach was adopted to identify the themes of the study. As pointed out by Ryan and Bernard (2003), priori themes could be formulated "from already agreed on professional definitions found in literature reviews; from local, commonsense constructs" (p. 88). In order to produce the themes regarding the learners' strategies, I utilized the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (Oxford, R. L., 1990) as the coding schemebecause "there's no point in reinventing the wheel" (Bernard, 2011,p. 420).

Oxford's (1990) revised version of the SILL was used as a major reference for the decoding the data collected from my observation at the main library of the

IUP (See Table 1). This version of the SILL containing fifty items included six major categories of learning strategies: memory, cognitive, comprehension, metacognitive, affective and social strategies. Furthermore, the six major strategies can be grouped into two classes: direct and indirect strategies. Direct strategies refer to the behaviors related to direct use of the target language, while indirect strategies support language learning without using the language (Ehrman & Oxford, 1990). Nevertheless, if additional strategies which were identified in document analysis and interviews, but were not accounted by Oxford's coding system were categorized and added to the list of strategies.

Table 1

Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (Oxford, R. L., 1990)

Strategies	Class	Examples
Memory	Direct Strategies	Grouping, imagery, rhyming, and structured reviewing
Cognitive	Direct Strategies	Reasoning, summarizing, analyzing, and general practicing
Compensation	Direct Strategies	Guessing meaning from the context, and using synonyms and gestures
Metacognitive	Indirect Strategies	Paying attention, consciously searching for practice opportunities, playing for language tasks, self-evaluation, and monitoring
Affective	Indirect Strategies	Anxiety reduction, self-encouragement, and self-reward
Social	Indirect Strategies	Asking questions, cooperating with native speakers, and becoming culturally aware

Findings and Discussions

Table 2
The Types of Language Strategies Used by Tommy and Grace

Tommy's Strategies	Grace's Strategies
I think about my progress in learning English.	I think about my progress in learning English.
I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better.	I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better.
I try to learn about the culture of English speakers.	I try to learn about the culture of English speakers.
I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English.	I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English.
I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English.	I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English.
I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English.	I ask for help from English speakers.

Emergent Themes Based on Document Analysis

Seven themes emerge in the document analysis. All of them could be labeled with SILL taxonomies. The themes include three direct and four indirect strategies. The three direct strategies areall cognitive strategies, including"I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English ", "I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English", and"I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English". The four indirect strategies include two metacognitivestrategies," I think about my progress in learning English" and"I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better.",and two social strategies,"I try to learn about the culture of English speakers"and"I ask for help from English speakers". The following table illustrates the themes produced by the researcher.

As indicated by the table, both Tommy and Grace employed seven language learning strategies and five of the same are exactly the same. In addition, theyutilized the same types of language learning strategies: metacognitive, cognitive and social ones. Oxford (1989) listed task requirements as a factor of influencing the choice of language learning strategies.Sincemost

of the documents came from the two learners'portfolios preparedfor the same course requirements, they might utilize a similar set of strategies to complete their assignments.

Table 3

The Subscales of the SILL Identified in Tommy and Grace

Memory Strategies	Cognitive Strategies	Compensation Strategies	Metacognitive Strategies	Affective Strategies	Social Strategies
−	+	−	+	−	+

Furthermore, in the document analysis, all the language strategies used by the two learners were the SILL ones. Nevertheless, as shown by this table, the researcher could not detect any strategies from the three SILL subscales: memory, compensation and affective strategies. Since most of the documents come from the portfolios the learners prepared for a writing course, it was difficult to detect memory strategies which were usually employed to learn a new English word and to find compensation strategies which in the most cases were used in reading and conversation.Besides, the affective strategieswere probably easier to be found in the learners'personal diaries and journals rather than in an academicportfolio graded by their teachers.In other words, the types of assessment might dictate the learners' strategy use.As indicated by(Oxford, 1996), types of assessmentwould influencethe elicitation of language learning strategies. Tommy's and Grace's portfolios included their recollective narrativessuch as reflective notesand narrative essays, which might not yield their currently used strategies.Below are the case examplesof strategies used by the two L2 English learners.

Direct Strategies

Case Example 1. "I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English "and "I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English" are two cognitive strategies listed in the SILL. In the summary of a Hollywood movie "Last Samurai" written by Tommy, the researcher detected the use of the two language strategies by him. The following excerpt illustrates that Tommy is capable of writing summaries ofinformation that he read, hear or watch in English:

The movie was also about the war and battle between Westerners and Japanese culture and heritage which was passed down from their ancestors 200 years ago. The

movie's plot was not accurately based on Japanese history because the producer wanted to simplify the story of the movie. In this movie, you're able to see how Samurai fight during the battle and the spirit that carried by the Samurai warriors. Besides, this movie shows the materialization, civilization and the technology of the Westerners during 19th century who tried to colonize Japan for economic trading purposes as well as the natural resources. The whole idea of this movie is to show the viewer about the Japanese culture and the spirit of Samurai warriors.

As shown by the feedbacks Tommy's instructor scribbled on one pageofthiswriting assignment, his English professor stated that Tommy's movie plot summary was too long and too detailed. Nevertheless, in point of fact, by writing a movie summary for a class assignment, Tommy had already employed this cognitive strategy to some extent even though its employment might be resulted from task requirements in class(Oxford, 1989). In addition, as shown by the above excerpt, Tommy had already utilized this cognitive strategy, watching English language TV shows spoken in English or going to movies spoken in English, in

life. As indicated by Hyland (2004), watching television is the most common way of improving English listening for L2 English learners when they are out of class. It is speculated that watching movies or television might have been a common activity for Tommy.

Case Example 2. Under the SILL subscale of the cognitive strategies is another strategy item "I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English." In Tommy's introductory essay written for his English 101 portfolio, he stated:

This new portfolio is presented as a final work from a set of essays that I have written in the past three months. The collection of writing from the old portfolio is a set of essays which carries six different types of essay by using different writing skills; and the topics are related to my personal experiences and interests, and the titlesgiven by the professor.

Since Tommy had already successfully fulfilled the course requirements, he actually used this cognitive strategy and knew how to use it. In addition to the English Writing portfolio, I found a stack of notes Tommy took for a basic statistics course. To my surprise, in this relatively thick stack of course notes around one

hundred pages, Tommy only used English to take notes. As indicated by this document, he indeed knew how to keep notes in English.

Taking the same required writing course as Tommy did, Grace also wrote six different essays and a letter to her instructor during the semester and got an A as her final grade. That indicated that she was also capable of employing this strategy. In addition, in the course notes she took for her biology course, all of the notes were written in English, illustrating her ability to take notes in English. Based on the neatness of her note-taking, these notes may have taken by her in private, not in class.

Indirect Strategies

Case Example 3. "I think about my progress in learning English" is one item in the SILL which belongs to the subscale metacognitivestrategies which are aimedto manage language learning processes(R. L. Oxford, 2003). Based on Tommy's portfolio he submitted for the English 101, College Writing, I detected his use of this metacognitive strategy. Following is one passage from his introduction to the English 101 portfolio illustrating the use of this strategy:

The goals and the objectives were stated clearly in the course structure and I can see myself improving to become better gradually. Except for writing and speaking abilities, the most important skills that I need to learn are reading skill and the ability to understand the English language. These skills are essential because they will help me capture the ideas and subject content in much efficient and effective ways for other subjects.

In the introduction Tommy wrote for his college writing course, he reflected on the gradual progress he made in the writing course after taking it for three months. In addition, he believed that these language skills were also important for being an efficient learner in other content areas.

Grace, who came to Indiana University of Pennsylvania(IUP)one semester later than Tommy and also took the same course, English Writing 101, submitted a portfolio as her final work to the same instructor. She was also required by the instructor to write an introduction for her portfolio in which I identified the use of this SILL strategy. She commented her progress in this writing class:

As I read back to the first few papers I have written, I found out

my gradual improvement in writing skills. I have learned to develop ideas and give specific examples in order to let my audience understand my essay.

The fact that the two ESL learners used the same metacognitive strategy was likely caused by the similar task requirements given by the same instructor.

Case Example 4. Another SILL metacognitive strategy item is "I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better." In the introduction passage written by Tommy for his English 101 writing class, I identified his use of this metacognitive strategy:

The tiles of the essays are "Cross Culture", "Magazine Spread: Vince Carter's Signature Shoes" and lastly "Raw Food Diet". There are three different skills required to write these essays. For "Cross Culture", it is a narrative essay. This essay helps me detect my error that I often make such as verb, tense, past tense, present tense and subject verb agreement.

As indicated by the documents provided by Tommy, by writing the essays for the course and by getting the instructor's feedbacks after the essays had been graded, the leaner was able to detect the errors he made such as subject-verb agreement as well as English tense usage. With better awareness of the grammatical mistakes he made, Tommy felt more confident about his English competence. As he said in the last paragraph of his essay, "I feel comfortable to write and speak English language in a proper manner. I will keep improving to become a better writer and speaker."Schmidt (1990)stated that when a language form is noticed by language learners either purposely or incidentally, it becomes an intake which fosters language development.

In the introduction of the portfolio which Grace wrote one semester later, propelled by the similar course requirements, she utilized the same metacognitive strategy in her writing:

For magazine spreadsheet, I changed some paragraph organizations that have been mentioned by professors and tutors. I also rewrote some paragraphs that seem unclear and confusing. Lastly, for the researcher paper, I rewrote the sentences that are confusing, and use some other appropriate words to make my statements clearer and readable.

While using the same strategy employed by Tommy, Grace did not notice local errors as Tommy did. Rather, she paid attention to the global ones, making her essays more comprehensible to her audience.

Case Example 5. The last item of the ESL/EFL version of the SILL is a social strategy, "I try to learn about the culture of English speakers". In an essay Tommy wrote for his English 101 portfolio, he utilized this social strategy to deal with a cultural shock he experienced when trying to adapt to the new environment in his university. This essay entitled "Cross Culture" described a new and shocking bathroom experience which differed from what he had back in his country Malaysia. Tommy illustrated what a culture shock meant in the following description:

> *Besides the hot water supply, western public toilets in airports and dorms will be a pail and a scoop which are ready for washing legs, usually located outside the house in Malaysia. Lastly, the Western public shower room and the toilet were not fully close. The shower room that they are using had a white cloth that works as a door and the bathroom is not fully covered as well. When the bathroom is not fully covered, other students in the dorm are able to see*

> *through the legs from outside and worst came to worst, if both toilets are occupied, the person can smell the unpleasant smell and see each other legs! It is very comfortable for me if someone occupies the toilet right next to me.*

To anyone who was already accustomed to American culture, hot water supply which in Malaysia was only available in the luxury hotels, the lack of additional foot-washing water supply and the bathrooms described by Tommy were nothing unusual. However, for an ESL leaner like Tommy, such experiences were not only bizarre, but also daunting sometimes. Culture shock is rooted in "the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse" (Oberg, 2006, p. 142).

As shocking as these experiences were for the new comer to the U.S.A., Tommy recognized the fact that "after all, it is a new experience for me and yet it is one of the challenges for me to adapt new environment in the new university "as he concluded at the last paragraph of the essay. Employing this social language learning strategy, Tommy tried to come to terms with the experiences he had at the bathrooms of the IUP dormitories.

Grace who was also required to

write several essays in this English 101 coursealso found some cross-cultural experiencesperplexing. She reported:

> However, the friendliness sometimes makes me feel awkward. Sometimes I found out they are easy to be friendly and kind to strangers and normal friends, but they are not easy to become friends with you. Most of the time, after saying "hi" to each other, our conversation would not continue and end up in a weird way.

Grace found her initial concept of American friendliness changed after her attempt to make friends with her American classmate was responded with standardized greetings. However, the use of this metacognitive strategy helped her find meanings in these cross-cultural experiences. As she commented, "No doubts, both the Asians and Americans are friendly and kind. It is just the way they express their friendliness is different."

Case Example 6. "I ask for help from English speakers" is one item on the social strategy subscale of the SILL. Some of the words in the letter to her instructor illustrated that using this social strategy increased her confidence about her writing. Grace wrote in her letter:

> Before I printed out my second paper, I went to Writing Center and some of the students in charge helped me. I realized my mistakes and corrected them. I'm not sure if this is a good paper, but I have confidence that it is better than my first paper.As a L2 writer, we are usually short of the confidence to compose our L2 writing fluently because of our limited English competence in general. However, by asking help from the English speakers, we are more aware of our errors and of the ways to make them right. In so doing, the L2 learners enhanced their confidence about the appropriateness of their L2 writing as demonstrated by Grace.

Social strategies are of importance since language learning cannot be separated with others (Hardan, 2013). They are employed to maximize the chances of exposure to an English learning environment. For instance, Grace was not confident about her English writing. Instead of working on papers by herself, she sought help from the English speakers in the writing center who mighthelp her adjust to the academic community better.

Emergent Themes Based on Interviews

Sixteen themes emerge in the analyses of semi-structured

reviews.Fourteen of them could be labeled with SILL taxonomies, while two couldn't. The fourteen themes, identified as SILL strategies, are eight direct and six indirect strategies. The eight direct strategies are three compensation strategies"If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing", "When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures", and "I read English without looking up every new word",four cognitive strategies," I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English", "I read for pleasure in English","I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English", and "I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English", and one memory strategy, "I connect the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of the word to help me remember the word".

The six indirect strategies are four social strategies that include "I ask questions in English", "I try to learn about the culture of English speakers", "If I do not understand something in English, I ask the person to slow down or say it again", and "I ask for help from English speakers", one affective strategy, "practicing English without other students", and one metacognitive strategy, "I look for people I can talk to in English". The two non-SILL strategies refer to "using reference books in the second language learning" and "listening to English songs for increasing English competence". The following table illustrates the themes produced by the researcher.

As indicated by the table, Grace used four more language strategy types than Tommy. Tommy utilized compensation, metacognitive, cognitive and social strategies and Grace compensation, metacognitive, cognitive, social and memory strategies.

Table4

The Types of Language Strategies Used by Tommy and Grace

Tommy's Strategies	Grace's Strategies
Using reference books in the second language learning	Using reference books in the second language learning
If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing.	If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing.
When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures.	When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures.
I ask question in English.	I ask question in English.
Tommy's Strategies	Grace's Strategies
I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English.	I read for pleasure in English.
I read for pleasure in English.	I look for people I can talk to in English.
I look for people I can talk to in English.	I try to learn about the culture of English speakers.
I try to learn about the culture of English speakers.	Listening to English songs for increasing English competence
Listening to English songs for increasing English competence	If I don't understand something in English, I ask the person to slow down or say it again.
If I don't understand something in English, I ask the person to slow down or say it again.	Practicing English without other students.
Practicing English without other students.	Watching English language TV shows spoken in English or going to movies spoken in English.
	I write notes, messages, letters or reports in English.
	I read English without looking up every new word.
	I ask for help from English speakers.
	I connect the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of the word to help me remember the word.

As indicated by the table, Grace used four more language strategy types than Tommy. Tommy utilized compensation, metacognitive, cognitive and social strategies and Grace compensation, metacognitive, cognitive, social and memory strategies.

Table 5

The Subscales of the SILL Identified in Tommy and Grace

Memory Strategies	Cognitive Strategies	Compensation Strategies	Metacognitive Strategies	Affective Strategies	Social Strategies
+	+	+	+	−	+

In the analyses of the interviews, I detected two non-SILL strategies, confirming that the SILL is not an exhaustive list of language learning strategies. Unlike the results of the document analyses, the only SILL strategy type the researcher could not detect in the interviews was affective strategies. In addition, more language strategies were elicited in the interviews than in document analysis. By directly asking the two learners open-ended and closed questions, it was easier to elicit the answers I wanted to know. Being acquainted with the learners for some time, I was in a rapport with the participants in the interview, making them less reserved in terms of revealing their perceptions, values and beliefs.

Below are the case examples showing some of the strategies found in the interviews with the two ESL learners.

Direct Strategies

Case Example 7. "If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing" and "When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures" are two SILL compensation strategies (Oxford, 1990). Both of the SILL learning strategies were identified in the interviews with Tommy and Grace. The following excerpts illustrated what one of the learners Tommy reported on his use of the two strategies.

> I: *If you speak English and cannot find a right word to say, what do you usually do?*
>
> T: *That happens all the time. I will probably describe the thing with some other words. If the American still does not understand, I will just keep going.*
>
> I: *You use gestures in this situation?*
>
> T: *Yes, I will use it.*

Using an open-ended and a closed question in my interview with Tommy, I elicited his use of the two SILL learning

strategies. Tommy indicated that when he could not think of the right words to express in his conversations with native speakers, he described the thing he wanted to say with some other words. That is, Tommy used the synonyms of the words which he could not think of to make his interlocutor understand what he wanted to express. According to the interview, when this compensatory strategy did not function as he expected, he just put aside his problems of finding the right words to express and kept the conversation going. And when asked whether he used gestures in similar conversational situations, he gave a nod to it admitting his use of this compensatory strategy.Hardan (2013) elaborated that "compensation strategies are employed by the students to compensate the missing knowledge in the target language due to lack of vocabulary" (p. 1722).

Case Example 8. Reading English without looking up every new word is one SILL compensation strategy (Oxford, 1990). Because Tommy liked to know the details of the new words by making references to the dictionaries, this compensation strategy was only employed by Grace. Grace reported her use of the strategy by saying:

But, right now, I try not to use the

dictionaries. I will read the articles several times in order to get the meanings of the new words. In short articles, I will use the dictionaries to check out the meanings of the words. However, in long articles, I will not use the dictionaries. Just like I said, I will read the articles several times until I get the meanings of the words.

Even though Grace did not rule out using the English-English dictionaries, when reading short articles, she tried to read the articles several times in order to understand the meanings of the new words, instead of relying on the dictionaries all the time.

Case Example 9. "I read for pleasure in English" is one SILL item which belongs to subscale of cognitive strategies (Oxford, 1990). Even though both of the learners reported to use this language learning strategy, Grace admitted that she was not the type of the person who liked to read in the past time. For this reason, I think that she was not a frequent user of this cognitive strategy. The following dialogues in the interview illustrate Tommy's use of this SILL language learning strategy.

I: *What materials do you read for pleasure in addition to the textbooks used in your classes?*

T: I like to *play basketball, so I like to read basketball magazines. I used to buy them in Malaysia, but not in here. Second, personally I like meaningful quotes.*

I: *Why do you like to read quotes?*

T: *I just need some guidance. I like to read them to increase my knowledge and understanding of some problems.*

Since Tommy liked to play basketball in his free time, reading basketball magazines was a pleasurable activity which was related to his hobby. Asked why he liked to read English proverbs, he stated that reading these famous English sayings not only gave him personal guidance and that it provided him some useful information about how to counsel his friends in trouble. Reading for pleasure in English, or free voluntary reading, is still considered "an effective way of increasing literacy and language development, with a strong impact on reading comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, and writing" (Krashen, 2003, p. 15).

Case Example 10. The case shows how Grace employed the cognitive strategy, "I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or go to movies

spoken in English". In the analyses of the transcriptions of the interviews, I found only Grace employed this strategy.

I: *Why do you think watching English programs/dramas is one way of improving your English ability?*

G: *I like to watch English TV shows or movies because I can imitate the intonation of the English native speaker. When I was in Malaysia, I liked to watch movies to improve my English listening ability. As I watched a movie, I tried not to read the subtitle of the film on the screen.*

A singular-skill activity such as reading might not be an appealing out-of-class activity for Grace. In my interview with her, Grace admitted that she was not the type of the person who liked to read in private. Her way of improving her English in past time was watching English TV shows or movies because she could imitate the native speaker's pronunciation and intonation. L2 English learners may choose watching TV or movies as an out-of-class activity due to the multiple language skills it comprises (Maros &

Saad, 2016).

Indirect Strategies

Case Example 11. I ask questions in English" is one item on the SILL subscale of social strategies (Oxford, 1990). I found both Tommy and Grace reported to use this SILL learning strategies. The following excerpts of the interview illustrated how one of the learners Tommy used this strategy.

> I: *When you have difficulties understanding the lectures in class, what will you do? And why?*
>
> T: *I will go to the professor asking what he meant by that. And I will ask him what the word means. Basically, I will talk to the professor about it. I will talk to him on the spot in the class or after the class. If he is not there, I will make an appointment with him. Let's say. When I am revising a paper and have some problems with it, I will e-mail the professor to make an appointment with him.*

In this session of the interview with Tommy, I asked him two open-ended questions to find out what learning strategies he employed when he had difficulties understanding the lectures in class and his reasons for using them. Without providing me a direct answer to my second question, Tommy reported his employment of this social learning strategy. In another session of the interview with him, I found a seemly contradiction between the low self-esteem he claimed he had and his employment of the social learning strategy in class. He indicated:

> *I am a lazy person. I am not active. I have certain beliefs that I have low self-esteem. I don't like to hang out with people I am not close to. Because of these beliefs, I don't like to socialize with people.*

What Tommy experienced is language learning anxiety rooted in interacting with others. Williams and Andrade (2008)reported that most of the L2 English learners "attributed the cause of anxiety to the teacher or other people" (p. 188). However, even though Tommy did not like to socialize with people with whom he was not close to, he did not hesitate to ask his professors questions. When he had difficulties with his writing, he volunteered to make appointments with his instructors via e-mails to discuss how to revise his course papers. A possible explanation for the seemly contradiction between the low self-esteem he claimed he had and

his employment of the social learning strategy was that asking his instructors questions was not considered to be an act of making friends with people. To Tommy, asking his professors questions in and off classes was an academic business with which he had to be engaged in order to be successful in his academic life.

Case Example 12. On the subscale of the social strategy is one of the items "If I do not understand something in English, I ask the person to slow down or say it again" (Oxford, 1990). As confirmed by Hayati (2010), slow rate speech could serve as a shortcut for comprehending natural English speech. In the following excerpts of the interviews, I identified this language learning strategy used by both of the learners.

I: *If you don't understand something in a conversation with an American, what do you do?*

T: *It depends on the situation. If the man is close to me, face to face, I will ask him to repeat it or to rephrase it. But, let's say. If the man is at a distance, he says something which is not clear to me. I will just walk away in a confused manner.*

Unless his American interlocutor was at a distance from him, Tommy would employ this language learning strategy to increase his understanding of the words said by the native speakers in the conversations. Likewise, Grace, she also reported to use this strategy, but for a different reason

I: *When communicating with native speakers, do you feel nervous?*

G: *Yes, I do. Especially when they said something I did not understand. In this case, I will ask them to repeat what they just said to me.*

When Grace did not understand what a native speaker said in a conversation and felt nervous about it, she employed this strategy to relieve her anxieties with her communication with the English native speakers.

Case Example 13. "I look for people I can talk to in English" is a statement on the SILL subscale of metacognitive strategies and "I try to learn about the culture of English speakers" an item located in the SILL subscale of social strategies (Oxford, 1990). In my interviews with Tommy and Grace, I found that both of the learners employed the two learning strategies to make friends with the Americans. The following excerpt of the interviews illustrated what Tommy

reported on his use of the two strategies.

> I: *Do you volunteer to make friends with the American?*
>
> T: *Yes. For example, in the dining hall where I work. It has nothing to do with racism. But personally I like to make friends with the black. I like to learn their culture, the way they shake hands, gestures and things like that. I get the confidence from them. And when I get used to it, I can talk to the white guys. The reason why I like to make friends with the black is that I can get confidence and practice my speaking.*

While Tommy claimed that his selection of conversational partners was not related to racism, he might have suffered White Prestige Ideology. This term, coined by Liu and Tannacito (2013), was defined as "racialized ideology that fantasizes whiteness, intertwined with other ideologies influences students' literacy practices" (p. 357). Because of the promoted superiority of the whitepeople, they appeared formidable to him. However, hemight feel more equal and comfortable with his African American friends. For instance, he liked to look for the blacks who worked in the school's dining hall with him as conversational partners.Interacting with them at work, he tried to learn their cultures such as greeting, hand-shaking, and gestures. After getting confidence from the interaction with them, he was able to take risks talking with the whites in the future.

Case Example 14. Specifically asking the learners how they deal with their language learning anxieties, none of the learners reported to use any SILL affective strategies to solve anxiety problems. Instead of employing affective strategies, they both utilized the social strategy, practicing English without other students, to cope with their negative feelings about learning. Note that while practicing English without other students is considered a social strategy, this strategy is employed without face-to-face contact. Hyland (2004)stated that although there are many activities available outside the classroom, L2 English learners prefer private over public activities because the former does not involve face-to-face contact. Following is the excerpts of the interview showing Tommy's use of the social strategy.

> I: *When you feel anxious about using the new language, or about learning, what will you do?*
>
> T: *It happened when I was at the elementary and the secondary*

school. At that time, I was required to do a presentation. I felt nervous about it. It was not until I went to a college and took a public speaking class that I realized the reasons for my problems. My problem was that I was under prepared. Therefore, about the questions you just asked, my way to deal with anxiety is that you need to prepare for it very well. So, I use cue cards and talk to a wall and try to prepare for the class project very well.

It is interesting to note that instead of going to his friends to talk about his language learning anxieties, Tommy dealt with them in private by making more preparations for the upcoming oral presentations in class. Using a wall as an audience, he practiced his presentations orally.

Non-SILL Strategies

Case Example 15. When L2 English learners come across a new word, "one of the possible strategies is consulting a dictionary" (Peters, 2007, p.37).Consulting a dictionary has been proved to be beneficial to incidental vocabulary learning(Laufer& Hill, 2000).However, this commonly-used strategy is not listed in the SILL.While both of the learners reported to use this strategy in her L2 reading, Tommy revealed his heavy reliance on this non-SILL language learning strategy to me. At the beginning of the interview, I asked Tommy to create an open-ended list of language learning strategies. He spent a few minutes thinking about it and wrote online dictionaries, English-Malaysian dictionaries and the thesauruses on his list. Based on this list, I began the following interviews with him.

> I: *Why do you prefer to use online dictionaries as one of the ways of learning English?*
>
> T: *I like to use online dictionaries because it gets more words than the books. Also, it is in the computer, so it is very easy to use. Convenience is the most important point, I think, to use the website dictionaries. As long as you have a computer, you can use it. Compared with the books, it gets a lot of the words. That's why I prefer to use it.*

In addition to the convenience of using the online dictionaries and its enormous vocabulary size, Tommy told me that his study habit led to his preference of using the reference books

such as the website dictionaries. Tommy told me:

> *From my study habits, I don't study paragraphs. I go word by word. That's why I prefer to use website dictionaries. Even though I tried to change the way of learning, I still like to know the meanings of the words because of my study habits. Therefore, I prefer to use website dictionaries. However, if I don't understand the explanation in the website dictionaries, I will use the English -Malaysian dictionaries. And that helps me a lot.*

Due to Tommy's past language learning habit, in his L2 reading, he liked to go word by word, instead of guessing the meaning of the word from the context. Because of his bottom-up reading strategy, he had to rely on his understanding of the words as a starting point to comprehend the reading passages. This learning habit led to his heavy reliance on the reference books such as the website dictionaries and the English -Malaysian dictionaries. As he mentioned, when he had difficulties understanding the English explanation of the new words in the website dictionaries, he resorted to using the English-Malaysian dictionaries in order to grasp the meanings of the new words.

Because Tommy listed using the thesaurus as one of his top language learning strategies, I was somewhat curious about whether he had different reasons for making reference to the thesaurus compared with his use of the online dictionaries and the English-Malaysian dictionaries. Thus, I asked Tommy:

> I.: *You list using the thesaurus as one of your ways of learning English. Why and when do you use the thesaurus?*
>
> T: *When I fully understand the meaning of the word, I will go to the website to use the thesaurus. The reason why I use it is to expand my vocabulary. But I am not sure if it is a good way or not.*

Due to Tommy's lack of endurance of the ambiguity about new words, when he encountered a new word in his L2 reading, he usually used the website dictionaries and the English-Malaysian dictionaries to check them up. Using the thesaurus was just another employment he utilized to meet his needs to know every new word in detail.

Case Example 16. Listening to English songs for increasing English competence is not a SILL learning

strategy even though it is a commonly used language learning strategy. Theoretically, Schoepp (2001) listed three reasons of using songs for language learning. To begin with, listening to music is a relaxing activity which can lower language leaners' affective filter and benefit language learning (Dulay et al., 1982). Further, it can help learners develop automaticity because it can be used in a repetitive and communicative manner. Finally, some songs are full of authentic English which learners may encounter in real life. By the same token, as indicated by Shayakhmetova, et. al. (2017), listening to English songs has positive effects on L2 English learners' intercultural competence development. Both Tommy and Grace reported to use this non-SILL strategy to increase their English competence in the ensuing dialogues.

I: *I am more interested in the way you learn English after the class such as participating in English-speaking clubs or finding some opportunities to make friends with native speakers.*

T: *Okay. My personal way is listening to music. Especially English music. The English songs are full of English words. When I listen to English songs, I*

will try to figure out the lyrics. Therefore, listening to music, I listen and read. There is another thing. There are different kinds of music, slow or fast. For slow and medium-tempo music, I was able to catch up. When I listen to rap music, I think I improve my listening from listening to this type of music. I try to follow the tempo of the rap music and in this way my English improved a lot. Secondly, by speaking to my American friends, my English also improved a lot.

By listening to English music, Tommy tried to listen to the words sung by the singers and read the lyrics of the songs to comprehend their meanings. In so doing, he claimed that he not only improved his listening competence, but also his reading.

Likewise, Grace also reported to use this non-SILL learning strategy to facilitate her L2 learning.

I: *You put listening to music as one of your most frequently used language strategies. Are there any special reasons for that?*

G: *When I studied English in my high school, my teacher recommended us to listen to music to improve our English. According to our English teacher, listening to music is more interesting*

than regular English classes. Listening to music also would make me feel happy.

As indicated by the above dialogues, Grace found this language learning strategy more interesting compared with her regular English classes in her country. However, differing from Tommy, Grace's use of this strategy was led by her English teacher's recommendations.

Conclusion

Tommy and Grace utilized a similar set of strategies in the first phase of the study. Seven language learning strategies are employed by them and five of the same are identical. In terms of the strategy types, they utilized the same types of language learning strategies: metacognitive, cognitive and social ones. Most of the documents came from the two learners' portfolios prepared for the same course requirements, sothe writing tasks might dictate their strategy employment.

Task requirements might have impact on their strategy use in the first phase (Oxford, 1989).The researcher could not detect any strategies from the three SILL subscales: memory, compensation and affective strategies. These types of strategies were not employed because they might not be demanded by the writing tasks. For instance, the affective strategies were probably easier to be elicited in diaries and personal journals which they were not required to write by the writing tasks.

Furthermore, the type of assessment would influence the elicitation of language learning strategies in the first phase of the study and the elicited strategies might not be used by Tommy and Grace currently (Oxford, 1996). Theirportfolios included their recollective narratives such as reflective notes and narrative essays, which might not yield their currently used strategies.

In conclusion, more language strategies were elicited in the interviews than in document analysis. Sixteen themes emerge in the analyses of in-depth reviews. Fourteen of them could be labeled with SILL taxonomies, while two couldn't. Grace used four more language strategy types than Tommy. The rapport between the researcher and the participants in the interviews may make them more willing to talk about their strategy use. The results of the second phase might reveal their current strategies due to the

specific type of assessment. Thus, adhering to document analysis as the only method might not be a wise decision in the field of language learning strategies because its elicitation of strategies seems to be compromised by factors such as task requirements and types of assessment.

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