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Do you know where I can find the new center which is called "Cognitive styles and language learning strategies link"?

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Abstract

This article reports on research into the language learning strategies used by a group of Iranian learners. The aims of this study were to explore levels of the strategy use among the Field dependent (FD) and Field independent (FI) learners, and to examine levels of relationship between strategy use and cognitive style. Firstly, the findings suggest that language learning strategies should be taught to language learners (regardless of their cognitive style group), in the classroom environment. Secondly, the teaching methods should be compatible with language learners' choice of the language learning strategies.
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1. Introduction

This study discusses the language learning strategies that have been chosen by the field dependent and field independent students who are learning English in the EFL context. English is considered a foreign language in Iran; learning English officially starts in the first level of the secondary school and continues until the end of high school. The students attend classes for English language for one and half-hour twice a week. The students learn English under this system for the duration of 7 years. After finishing the seven years, those who are interested to pursue their English language studies will continue either academically in universities or as general knowledge in private language school. This research focuses on the Iranian field dependent/independent students who have been learning English in university as their major and the strategies they have used to facilitate the learning process. Every individual has a style for learning foreign language and the differences between the individual makes the language learning an interesting task.

The language learning strategies have been discussed widely in researches (See, e.g., Brown, 2000; Oxford, 1991; Rubin & Thompson, 1994; Shipman & Shipman, 1985). In recent years language-learning research have explored the factors which may affect the language learning strategy choice among learners. In studies done by Cohen (1990), Macintyre and Gardner (1989), Reid (1987) and Ehrman and Oxford (1989) these factors have been identified as motivation, gender, learning style and previous experience, language learning strategies and cognitive styles. In this paper only two of the above factors are highlighted which are language-learning strategies and field dependence (FD)/independence (FI) which are one of the cognitive dichotomies. This study tries to find out the answer to following questions:

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1-   What are the types of strategies Iranian field dependent/independent learners use?
2-   Do the students' 'cognitive styles (FD/FI) affect their choice of learning strategies?

2. Cognitive Styles and FD/FI

Ellis (1990, p. 114) asserts that: "cognitive style is a term used to describe the manner in which people perceive, conceptualize, organize, and recall information." Therefore it can be stated that cognitive style is the preferred way in which individuals process information or approach a task, and each person is considered to have a more or less consistent mode of cognitive functioning. Various aspects of cognitive style have been identified in psychological literature, and few of these have been investigated for their second or foreign language learning implications. The dimension which has received the greatest attention, where foreign language learning is considered, is field dependence/independence (from now on FD/FI).

Table 1 Characteristics of field dependent/field independent individuals

Field dependence	Field independence
1. Personal orientation i.e. reliance on external frame of reference in processing information.	1. Impersonal orientation i.e. reliance on internal frame of reference in processing information.
2.Holistic, i.e. percieve a field as a whole; parts are fused with background	2.Analytic, i.e. perceives a field in terms of its component parts: parts are distinguished from background
3.Dependent, i.e. the self view is derived from others	3.Independent, i.e. sense of separate identity
4. Socially sensitive, i.e.greater skill in interpersonal/social relationship	4.Not so socially aware, i.e.less skilled in interpersonal /social relationship

Adapted from   Ellis, 1993; based on Hawkey: 1982

1. Language Learning Strategies

Theories of learning try to explain the way people learn and what common characteristics occur in all learning. While all humans inherited the potentialities of learning, each individual approaches a problem or learns a set of factors from a unique prospective. One of the major reasons for the above statement is due to cognitive variations in learning a foreign language that are employed by individual and are labeled under three major titles which are 1-processes 2- strategies 3-styles (Brown, 2000).

Many researchers have defined language learning strategy. Wenden and Rubin (1987) defined language learning strategy as "…..any sets of operations, steps, plans, routines used by the learner to facilitate the obtaining, storage, retrieval, and use of information." Richard and Platt (1992) believed that language-learning strategies are "intentional behaviors and thoughts used by learners during learning so as to better help them understand, learn, or remember new information," while O'Mallley and Chamot (1990) described learning strategies as particular ways or abilities which the learner adopts to analyze information for the purpose of better understanding and making better use of it.

Bialystock (1985) thus defined learning strategies as the actions employed by the learner intentionally or unintentionally to show the real ability of the learner in analyzing the linguistic issue or the related things to this area but under specific related conditions.

Kouraogo (1993, in Wenden & Rubin, 1987) conceptualized learning strategies in three aspects relating to:
1-The language learning behaviors that learners actually engage in to learn and regulate the learning of a second language.
2-what learners know about the strategies they use.
3-what they know about aspects of their language learning, for example, about personal factors facilitating L2 learning and about general principal to follow for successful learning (Kouraogo, 1993).

This study is based on the Oxford definition and classification of language learning strategies. In Oxford's (1991) strategy system each of these six was categorized in to two levels, the first level containing 19 strategy sets, while the second level contained 62 specific strategies. Other research studies have been conducted in this area with different objectives and for different tasks. Naiman et al. (1978), Rubin (1981), Oxford (1991), Tarone (1977) and many more, have conducted research on language-learning strategies.

2. Samples and Instruments

The subjects who participated in this study are 140 Iranian female students majoring in English. Due to incomplete responses, data gathered from 23 students were eliminated. The remaining 117 students were the main subjects of the study.

The two instruments used to collect data from the subjects included:

a) A test entitled GEFT (Group Embedded Figure Test) (Witkin et al., 1971)
b) A questionnaire on language learning strategies called SILL (Strategy Inventory for Language Learning)

3. Findings

3.1. Cognitive Style and Learning Strategies

The findings of this study indicated that being field dependent and field independent has no impact on choosing language learning strategies. Table 2 shows the language learning strategies used by each group of FD/FI students. Although there are differences in level of strategy use by each group, all means for the six categories fell within the range of 2.7 to 3.9 (Table 3), which is defined by Oxford (1991) as medium use. It can be concluded that the use of learning strategies is common among subjects in this study.

Table 2 The overall language learning strategies used by the learners

Factor name	Frequency	Mean	Standard D	Rank order of use
Metacognitive	117	3.9	71	1
Cognitive	117	3.6	42	2
Social	117	3.54	70	3
Compensatory	117	3.51	53	4
Memory	117	3.2	40	5
Affective	117	2.9	77	6

The language learning strategies were ranked according to the language learners' preferences. The data show the ranking of the language learning strategies preferred by the two groups of language learners. (See Table 3).

Table 3 Language learning strategies preferred by different groups of learners

Language learning strategies	Mean score			
	Field dependent	R	Field independent	R
Metacognitive	3.6 high	1	3.9 high	1
Cognitive	3.5 high	2	3.65 high	2
Social	2.9 middle	6	3.56 middle	3
Compensatory	3.1 middle	4	3.60 high	4
Memory	3.4 middle	3	3.30 middle	5
Affective	2.7 middle	5	3.0 middle	6

3.2. Relationship between cognitive style and language learning strategies

For the purpose of comparing language learning strategies used by the two groups (FD /FI), the mean scores of the SILL were calculated. The language learning strategies were ranked according to language learners' preferences. The data showed in Table 3 displays the ranking of the language learning strategies preferred by the groups of language learners.

4. Conclusions and Implication

Based on the results the researchers found that learners from the different groups of cognitive style (FD/FI) have their own preferences in choosing the language learning strategies. The results implied that there were no relationships between Field dependent/field independent and choices in language learning strategies among learners in this study. The students chose the learning strategies which facilitate the learning task that help them to be better language learners.

Although, the results pointed out that all groups had chosen metacognitive and cognitive strategies as their first and second language learning strategies, FD learners preferred memory and compensation strategies followed by affective and social strategies, while the FI learners utilized social, compensatory and memory followed by affective strategies. The findings of this study hold some implication for teaching and learning of English for the purpose of communication. Firstly, the findings suggest that language learning strategies should be taught to learners (regardless of their cognitive style group), in the classroom environment. Secondly, the teaching method should be compatible with language learners' choices of language learning strategies, to enable them to use the appropriate strategies to acquire English language proficiency. Thirdly, the examination format should also be designed according to language learners needs. Finally, English teachers should recognize the student's use of the language learning strategies.

It is very important to incorporate language-learning strategies into language classes. This could give the learners better chances to learn and to develop their skills in the use of language learning strategies; they will be able to practice their language skills. After practicing continuously, learners will be able to identify the learning strategies related to their learning task and will be able to direct their learning to overcome their problems in their language-learning environment.

Language learning strategies, however, reflect the problem language learners face while learning the language. Language teachers can help their learners to find ways to solve their learning problems. Although the relationship between FD/FI and choices in the language learning strategies cannot be found in this research, teachers should still consider the need of each group of learners and choose the suitable teaching methodologies relevant to each group.

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