



LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES OF NARESUAN UNIVERSITY INTERNATIONAL COLLEGE STUDENTS

Abstract

The purposes of this study were threefold—1) to identify the most and least frequently employed language learning strategies in learning English by Naresuan University International College (NUIC), 2) to examine whether male and female students differed in their use of language learning strategies, and 3) to determine whether students with different English proficiency levels differed in their report use of language learning strategies. The subjects in the study were 81 first year students enrolled at NUIC. Oxford's SILL was administered to obtain the students' use of language learning strategies, and Quick Placement Test was administered to determine their levels of English proficiency. The most frequently used strategies employed by the students were metacognitive strategies, and the least frequently use strategies used by the students were memory strategies. Male students used metacognitive strategies most frequently and used affective strategies least frequently. The most frequently used strategies by female students were metacognitive strategies, and the least frequently used strategies were memory strategies. The most frequently used strategies for beginner students were metacognitive strategies, and their least frequently used strategies were memory strategies. Upper beginners used metacognitive most frequently and affective strategies least frequently. Students with different genders and those with different levels of English did not differ significantly in their use of language learning strategies.

Key Words : Language Learning Strategies, SILL, Proficiency Differences and SILL

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Kanchit Tagong



Statement of the Problem

In teaching and learning a second or a foreign language, the teachers' ultimate goal is to help students become proficient users of the target language. A proficient language user, according to Oxford (1990), is one who has "A more practiced eye, A more receptive ear, A more fluent tongue, A more involved heart, A more responsive mind" (p. ix). In order to achieve these characteristics, teachers must provide an environment conducive to student language learning. Students must be motivated to independently take charge of their own learning and depend less on a teacher. One way of doing this is to identify their language learning strategies, which according to (Rigney, 1978), are cognitive strategy which is "used to signify operations and procedures that the student may use to acquire, retain, and retrieve different kinds of knowledge and performance" (p. 165). For Bialystok (1978) language learning strategies are "optional means for exploiting available information to improve competence in a second language" (p. 71). In this way, language learning strategies become the means or the plans to achieve the goal of linguistic competence. O'Malley, et.al. (1985b) provided a similar definition of language learning strategies. For them, language strategies are referred to as "any set of operations or steps used by a learner that will facilitate the acquisition, storage, retrieval or use of information (p. 23). For Ghani (2003), learning strategies are "procedures, employed by the learners, in order to make their own language learning as successful as possible language learning strategies— specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques that students (often intentionally) use to improve their progress in developing L2 skills" (p. 31). The goal of strategy use is to "affect the learners' motivational or affective state, or the way in which the learn selects, acquires, organizes, or integrates new knowledge" (Weinstein and Mayer, 1986: 315). Thus, the language learning strategies allow students to have greater autonomy, meaningful learning, and responsibility for self learning. Students who use language learning strategies are more likely to learn the target language faster and better since they become the master of their own language learning. They use the strategies to help them master the

Kanchit Tagong



language, and acquire new words and expressions, grammatical structures, and other components of the language.

As mentioned above, language learning strategies are the specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques that students use intentionally to improve and facilitate their progress in developing L2/EFL skills, together with the internalization, storage, retrieval, or use of the new language, they are tools for the self-directed involvement necessary for developing communicative ability (Oxford, 1992/1993: p.18). Learning strategies may come in many forms such as (O'Malley and Chamot (1990: p. 43).

focusing on selected aspects of new information, analyzing and monitoring information during acquisition, organizing or elaborating on new information during the encoding process, evaluating the learning when it is completed, or assuring oneself that the learning will be successful as a way to allay anxiety.

Oxford (1990) also contends that "Although learning strategies are used by students themselves, teachers play an important role in helping students develop and use strategies in more effective ways" (p. ix). In L2/EFL teaching and learning, teachers may frequently find that some students seem to learn the language rather easily while others apparently have difficulties because they are not aware or do not make use of language learning strategies. Studies have also confirmed that learners vary considerably in both the overall frequency with which they employ strategies and also the particular types of strategies they use (O'Malley et al. 1985b; Chamot et al. 1987; 1988; Ehrman, 1990 cited in Ghani, 2003: p. 31). Different students adopt different behaviors or strategies to learn a new language. Some learners who are very shy and introvert learn a second language through grammar drills and sentence analysis. They do the rehearsal as much as they can in isolation. On the other hand, sociable and extrovert learners avoid grammar drills but seek out social conversations in English. They are satisfied when they can get the general meaning without knowing every word. Some learners constantly try to build a mental model or big picture of the

Kanchit Tagong



language. They avoid step-by-step language learning. Few of them are familiar more to the senses (movement, sound, sight, and touch) than to intuition, look for English texts that proceed one step at a time. They use flashcards, and with other classmates, they initiate "total physical response" exercises that involve all the senses (Ghani, 2003: 31). Therefore, in order to help students, teachers to bear in mind the question "What can I do to help my students become proficient in English?"

Since language learning strategies are tools for the self-directed involvement necessary for developing communicative ability, it is important to identify the patterns of English language learning strategies Thai students use in their learning English as a foreign language. Once these patterns or language learning strategies have been identified, teachers can then provide them with instruction on language strategies in order to help them learn to become independent, self-directed, and proficient language learners.

So far, not very many studies on language learning strategies used by Thai students have been carried out. The studies carried out by Kaotsombut (2003) and by Bulphong (2003) resulted in different orders of strategies used. In Kaotsombut, the order of strategies used by students were compensation, metacognitive, cognitive, social, affective, and memory language learning strategies, respectively, while Bulphong found that the three most frequently used strategies were metacognitive, cognitive, social, affective, and memory strategies.

Each year Naresuan University International College (NUIC) accepts about 70 -100 students to study in their programs, but their language learning strategies have never been examined and formal instruction on the learning strategies been given to them. In order to help them achieve greater control over their own language learning, it is important that teachers help students identify their current language strategies, assist individual students discern the strategies which are most relevant to their learning styles, tasks, and goals, and aid them in developing orchestrated strategy use. In addition to helping students identify their own language learning strategies, the findings of this study could be used by teachers to design instruction that

Kanchit Tagong



encourages the students to use their language learning strategies appropriate to their own learning styles and situations. Instruction and practice on the use of language learning strategies could be incorporated in the lessons when the students study all English courses in their chosen programs.

Objectives

Specifically, the objectives of this study were as follows:

1. What are the strategies most and least frequently employed by NUIC students?
2. Is there a difference in the language learning strategies between male and female students?
3. Are there any differences in the language learning strategies between students with beginner and upper beginner levels of their English proficiency?

Subjects

The subjects of the study were 81 first year NUIC students who were enrolled in Naresuan International collage during the 2010 academic year. Of this number, 13 (or 16%) were male and 68 (or 84%) were female.

Instrumentation

The instruments used in this study consisted of 1) Oxford Quick Placement Test, used to measure the students' English proficiency, and 2) Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (50 items Version 7.0 for EFL/ESSL, which Barbara Oxford developed in 1989. This version is the version that is still used in language learning strategies studies today.

Methodology

The SILL and the Oxford Quick Placement Test (QPT) were administered to 81 first year students on June 6, 2010—one day before they started their first day of classes. The QPT Placement Test was administered to determine the level of individual students' proficiency in

Kanchit Tagong



English, and on the five-level scale, the students' scores on the test were very low. Only one person was able to reach level 3 on the QPT test. To divide the students into groups based on their English proficiency, their numerical scores, not the level, were used. With their scores, only two groups could be formed—the beginner group (scores of 1 to 40) and the upper beginner group (scores of 41 to 60). Based on the result of the Oxford Quick Placement Test, 63 students were identified as beginner students, and 18, upper beginner students. The SILL was administered, after the students had finished their QPT placement test, in order to identify their language learning strategies report use.

The SILL scores were then analyzed based on their gender and English proficiency. The statistics used were mean, standard deviation, and t-test were employed in the analysis of the data.

Literature Review

As mentioned above, language learning strategies are mental steps or behaviors, or techniques that learners use to help them learn a new language and to regulate their effort to master that new target language (Bialystok, 1978; Oxford, R.L. (1990; O'Malley and Chamot, 1990; Rigney, 1978). These strategies are deliberate actions or plans that students take in order to facilitate their learning and recall of linguistic elements, skills and language learning processes. ESL/EFL learners who use these strategies are more likely to learn the language better than those who do not use them. Knowledge of language learning strategies can help teachers teach the students on how to use these strategies in their language classrooms.

There are numerous inventories available for researchers to employ in assessing learners' language learning strategies. These inventories include ESCOLA (Jimenez et al, 2009; MAI (Schraw and Dennison, 1994; and MARSI (Mokhtari and Richard, 2002), to cite only a few. However, the most comprehensive and widely used one was Oxford's classification, known as Strategy Inventory for Language Learning or SILL (Oxford, 1990). Unlike other inventories which place more emphasis on cognition, Oxford's inventory pays more attention to the social and

Kanchit Tagong



affective side of learners, more comprehensive and more systematic in linking individual strategies, as well as strategy groups, with each of the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing" (Zhang, 2005. P. 36; Alireza, S., et al., 2010. p. 36).

The strategies on Oxford's SILL are divided into two major categories: direct and indirect. Each group is made up of three subcategories, as shown below (Oxford, 1990, p.p.17 -21):

Table 1 Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning

Language Learning Strategies	
Direct Strategies	
Memory Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Creating mental linkages., e.g. grouping, associating/ elaborating/ placing new words into a contextb) Applying images and sounds, e.g., using imagery, semantic mapping, using keywords, and representing sounds in memoryc) Reviewing well such as structured reviewingd) Employing action such as using physical response or sensation; using mechanical techniques
Compensation Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Guessing intelligently, such as reasoning deductively, using linguistic clues, and using other clueb) Overcoming limitations in speaking and writing, such as switching to the mother tongue, using mime or gesture, avoiding communication partially or totally, selecting the topic, adjusting or approximating the message, coining words, using a circumlocution or synonym, getting help
Cognitive Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Practicing, such as repeating, formally practicing with sounds system, formally practicing with writing system, recognizing and using formulas and patterns, recombiningb) Receiving and sending message, such as getting the idea

Kanchit Tagong

Language Learning Strategies

- quickly, and using resources for receiving and sending messages
- c) Analyzing and reasoning, such as analyzing expressions, analyzing contrastively (across languages), translating, and transferring
- d) Creating structure for input and output, such as taking notes, summarizing, highlighting

Indirect Strategies

Metacognitive Strategies

- a) Centering your learning, such as over-viewing and linking with already material, and paying attention
- b) Arranging and planning your learning, such as finding out about language learning, organizing, setting goals and objectives, planning, identifying the purpose of a language task
- c) Planning for a language task
- d) Seeking practice opportunities
- e) Evaluating your learning, such as self-monitoring, and self-evaluating

Affective Strategies

- a) Lowering your anxiety, such as using progressive relaxation, deep breathing, or meditation, using music, and using laughter
- b) Encouraging yourself, such as making positive statements, taking risks wisely, and rewarding yourself
- c) Taking your emotional temperature, such as listening to your body, using a checklist, writing a language learning diary, and discussing your feeling with someone else

Social Strategies

- a) Asking questions, such as asking for clarification, asking for verification, and asking for correction
 - b) Organizing network, such as making friends with peer, making friends with proficient users of the new language
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Kanchit Tagong



Language Learning Strategies

- c) Empathizing with others, such as developing cultural understanding, and becoming aware of other thoughts and feelings
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Language learning strategy use by EFL/ESL students has been the subject of investigation for decades. In the early years, the instruments used were not comprehensive enough, so attempts to develop the inventories received quite much more attention by EFL/ESL scholars and psychologists. These scholars believed that strategies are important for language learning since they are tools for "active, self-directed involvement, which is essential for developing communicative competence" (Oxford, 1990, p. 1). After Rebecca Oxford's SILL taxonomy was invented, a large number of studies have been conducted using the SILL as the instrument. For example, in her investigation of the patterns of language learning strategy use among 120 female Arabic-speaking students majoring in English at a university in Qatar, using the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL, ESL/EFL Student Version), Abdolmehdi (2007) found that (1) this group of EFL learners featured medium bordering on high strategy users with an overall mean of 3.46 out of 5; (2) strategy categories used were, in decreasing order, metacognitive, cognitive, compensation, social, memory, and affective, respectively. (3) freshmen students reported the highest rate of strategy use with a mean of 3.64; and (4) except for compensation strategies, results did not show any significant difference among four educational levels regarding the use of strategy categories.

Since students are different, the language learning strategies they employ are also different. So far, no studies have shown a uniform pattern of strategies used by students. Some groups of students may be similar in the strategies they employed most frequently or those employed least frequently. The order of the strategies employed by the students is different. For example, in a study of the language learning strategies used by 320 low achieving learners of ESL (English as a Second Language) from both urban and rural schools in the state of Selangor,



Malaysia, Rajak (2004), using the SILL questionnaire and interview, came up with slightly different findings from those of Abdolmehdi in terms of the order of strategies used. Rajak found that in general students did use language learning strategies but their use was of moderate frequency. She also found that urban students used the strategies of memory, cognitive, metacognitive, affective, and social language learning strategies more often at moderate levels than rural learners who indicated rather low levels of the activity. Results obtained via interviews with teachers indicated that they were not aware of language learning strategies. They also expressed that the low achieving learners did not show interest in the English language lessons. When strategy training was conducted to determine the extent of benefit that could be derived by low achievers from such training, the findings revealed that low achieving learners who participated in the training performed better in both written and spoken aspects of language use in the post-tests than those who were not provided the training. It was also found that learners' perception of the strategy training was also positive and they expressed that they benefited from the training.

In another study, Wafa Abu Shmais (2003) examined 1) the use of English language learning strategies by 99 male and female Arabic-speaking English-majors enrolled at An-Najah National University in Palestine, and 2) the frequency of strategies use among these students according to gender and proficiency variables. Proficiency is reflected by students' learning level (i.e., sophomore, junior, senior), self-reported proficiency in English (i.e., the students' university average in English courses) and language self-efficacy (i.e., how good the students perceived themselves as English learners). The findings revealed that the students majoring in English used learning strategies with high to medium frequency, and that the highest rank (79.6%) was for Metacognitive strategies while the lowest (63%) was for compensation strategies. In general, the results showed that gender and proficiency had no significant differences on the use of strategies.

Kaotsombut (2003) conducted a study on the language learning strategies used by 39 graduate science students at Mahidol University, Thailand. These students were from the

Kanchit Tagong



Microbiology and Biology International Programs. The instruments used were the Quick Placement Test Version II was used to measure English proficiency, the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) questionnaire and individual interviews. The findings revealed that the subjects generally use compensation, metacognitive, cognitive, social, affective, and memory language learning strategies, respectively. Only compensation strategies were rated at a high level while the rest were rated at a medium level. The students employed compensation strategies to overcome limitations of language when they encountered language use problems, for example, (a) guessing intelligently in listening and reading, and (b) overcoming limitations in speaking and writing.

Another study conducted with the Thai subjects was carried out by Bulphong (2003) who investigated language learning strategies used by Thai hotel receptionists in developing their listening and speaking skills. Structured interviews with the use of 10 questions were conducted with 25 Thai hotel receptionists working in the front section in five-star hotels in Bangkok. The findings were quite similar to those found by Wafa Abu Shmais (2003) in that the subject employed three major language learning strategies: Metacognitive Strategies, Cognitive Strategies, and Social/Affective Strategies. First, for metacognitive strategies, the results in the area of selective attention showed that before performing listening and speaking tasks, Thai hotel receptionists were likely to listen carefully, keep everything in control, be self-confident, and assume control of the situations. With regard to Monitoring Strategies, most Thai hotel receptionists spoke naturally, clearly, and politely. When they faced problems while speaking, they always asked for help from their colleagues, repeated the sentences, and used body language. In Evaluation Strategies, while performing listening and speaking tasks, the hotel receptionists would sometimes get stuck when native speakers spoke fast. Their other obstacles while listening and speaking were problems concerning vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar. In terms of Cognitive Strategies, it was found that for Rehearsal, Thai hotel receptionists not only communicated with hotel guests in developing their listening and speaking skills, but they also used multi-media such as watching English TV news and movies, and listening to English radio programs and music. With Organization Strategies,

Kanchit Tagong



the findings showed that Thai hotel receptionists paid more attention to the meaning rather than the grammar. In Elaboration Strategies, Thai hotel receptionists tried to find the contexts that were relevant to the words they needed to remember. They linked new words with rhymes, dialogues, songs, or sentences seen or heard before.

Yang (2007) investigated the effects of ethnicity and language proficiency on the use of language learning strategies by junior college students. She specifically attempted to find out whether the frequency of strategy use across aboriginal and non-aboriginal junior college students and across high, intermediate and low English proficiency groups varies significantly. To identify the learning strategies that different ethnic and proficiency groups use, the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) was administrated to 451 junior college students. The results revealed that ethnicity did play a significant role in the selection of language learning strategies. Language proficiency influenced learners' use of language learning strategies. More proficient students reported using strategies more often than less proficient students. It was also found that students in the present study were found to employ compensation strategies most often, followed by social, cognitive, metacognitive, affective. The least frequently strategies used were memory strategies.

Zhang (2005) examined EFL college students' language learning strategies in the Chinese context, using 106 non-English majors from Hohai University at its Changzhou Campus. The findings revealed that students used compensation strategies, from the most frequently to the least frequently, compensation strategies, metacognitive strategies, and social strategies, respectively. The findings also indicated that the strategies used by male and female students, and student of arts and science and engineering were different.

Chang, C.Y, Lie, S.C., and Lee, Y.N. (2007) investigated the influence of gender and major on EFL learning strategy use of 1758 Taiwanese college EFL students. The participants completed two sets of self reported questionnaires, which included Background Characteristics and Strategy Inventory for Language Learning. The findings were as follows: 1) There was not a



great difference among the frequency of each strategy that Taiwanese college EFL learners reported using, all in the medium-use level, 2) Statistically significant differences were found in the use of cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, social strategies and overall strategies with regard to gender, and 3) Statistically significant differences were found in the use of six subcategories of language learning strategies and overall strategies with regard to major.

Kyungsim and Levell (2006), using the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) examined the language learning behaviors and thought processes of two geographically and socio-educationally different groups by comparing learning strategy use as reported by 428 monolingual Korean and 420 bilingual Korean-Chinese university students. The findings revealed that monolinguals reported using compensation strategies most and affective strategies least; and bilinguals preferred to use metacognitive strategies most and memory strategies least. Despite a less favorable formal English education environment in the Korean-Chinese community and less experience in learning English, bilingual Korean-Chinese reported higher use of learning strategies, which might be indicative of the positive effects of the bilingual context in learning a new language.

Yuanfang and Bing (2009) examined the LLS use of Chinese secondary school students of English as a foreign language (EFL) in Northeast China from the perspective of socio-cultural theory. Results revealed that Chinese secondary school EFL learners use memory and cognitive strategies more than other types of strategies. Information from semi-structured interviews indicated that Chinese EFL learner strategy use was greatly affected by the learning context, classroom practice and assessment method in the schools investigated. The current classroom practice and assessment methods do not help the learners develop communicative competence and autonomous learning, prescribed as the ultimate goal in the present pedagogy reform of EFL teaching and learning in China.

Chang, C.Y., et al. (2007), using SILL to study the language learning strategies used by 1758 Taiwanese students studying English as a foreign language. The findings revealed that there

Kanchit Tagong



was not a great difference among the frequency of each strategy that Taiwanese college EFL learners report using, and they used all the strategies at a moderate level. With regard to gender, statistically significant differences were found in the use of cognitive, metacognitive, social strategies and overall strategies. Furthermore, they also found significant differences between the use of six subcategories of language learning strategies and overall strategies with regard to the students' majors.

In a study on the use of language learning strategies after strategy trainings among 42 Form Four ESL students in Penang, Rajamoney (2008) found that the students used various language learning strategies such as metacognitive, cognitive, affective, social, and compensation strategies in their language learning process. She also found that students were not aware of the language learning strategies used and the benefits of using these strategies in their learning English. Strategy training did not help them much as there were other factors involved such as shyness, lack of self confidence, lack of motivation to learn, and anxiety.

At Naresuan University International College, students study English in small classes of 25 to 30 students. In their major classes, the number is slightly higher but not more than 50 students. The medium of instruction is English. The students are taught by both native speakers and non-native speakers of English. They are encouraged to use English both inside and outside of the classes. However, since most of the students are Thai and there are very few foreign students, students prefer to communicate with their friends in Thai. This is one of the constraints that discourage them to improve their communication in English. Furthermore, the learning and teaching of English in their secondary schools focus mainly on the contents in the textbooks, and the students are not normally taught about how to use language learning strategies to help them learn or master the English language.



Analysis of the Data

The SILL scores were then analyzed based on the student's gender and English proficiency. The statistics used were mean, standard deviation, and t-test were employed in the analysis of the data.

In determining the levels of strategies employed, Oxford's (1990) criteria were used, the detail of which were as follows:

Level of Use	Description	Score
High	Always or almost always used	4.5 - 5.0
	Usually used	3.5 - 4.4
Medium	Sometime used	2.5 - 3.4
Low	Generally not used	1.5 - 2.4
	Never or almost never used.	1.0 - 1.4

Results of Data Analysis

Question One : *What are the strategies most and least frequently employed by NUIC students?*

Table 2 The Overall Mean Score and Standard Deviation on 6 Strategy Categories (N =81)

Language Learning Strategies	Mean	Standard Deviation
Metacognitive Strategies	3.7695	.68848
Social Strategies	3.3560	.76046
Compensation Strategies	3.2901	.56074
Affective Strategies	3.1152	.74565
Cognitive Strategies	3.0000	.64137
Memory Strategies	2.9602	.50133
Total Average	3.2227	.48285



Table 2 illustrates that overall the subjects employed all language learning strategies at a moderate level (3.2227). The most frequently used strategies were metacognitive strategies, and the least used strategies were memory strategies. Metacognitive strategies involve control over one's language learning through planning, monitoring and evaluation. The first three sub-strategies employed by the students under this category, from decreasing order, were thinking about their progress in learning English (55.6%), finding ways to use English (43%), and planning their schedule so that they had enough time to study English. The order of strategies report use, in decreasing order, was as follows: metacognitive strategies, social strategies, compensation strategies, affective strategies, cognitive strategies, and memory strategies, respectively. From this, it seems that the subjects relied on metacognitive strategies the most in overcoming their language limitations, and social strategies (learning with others) were used second after metacognitive ones. The least strategies used were memory or remembering more effectively.

Question Two : Is there a difference in the language learning strategies between male and female students?

The Language Learning Strategies Used by Male Students.

Table 3 below indicates that male students used language learning strategies at a moderate level (3.1677). The only strategies that were use the most and at the high level (usually used) were the metacognitive strategies. After metacognitive strategies, were social strategies, compensation strategies, cognitive strategies, memory, and affective strategies, respectively. The results seem to indicate that male students tended to rely on centering, arranging and planning, and evaluating their learning more than any other strategies, and their lowest strategies were affective strategies which involve lowering the anxiety, encouraging themselves to study, and taking their emotional temperature.

Table 3 The Mean Score and Standard Deviation of Male Students on 6 Strategy Categories



Language Learning Strategies	Mean	Standard Deviation
Metacognitive Strategies	3.9231	.57446
Social Strategies	3.3205	.72156
Compensation Strategies	3.2564	.40032
Cognitive Strategies	2.9560	.62850
Memory Strategies	2.8462	.51026
Affective Strategies	2.7692	.69900
Total Average	3.1677	.43608

The Language Learning Strategies Used by Female Students

Table 4 below indicates that on the average, female students employed all six strategies at a moderate level (3.2332) and the patterns of their strategy use were similar to those of the male students in several aspects. First of all, their most frequently used strategies were similar to those of the male students—metacognitive strategies. The rest of their strategies were at a moderate level, similar to those of the male students. Their first three most frequently used strategies—metacognitive, social, and compensation strategies, respectively—were similar to those used by male students. The female students differed in their least frequently used strategies from those of the male students. While the least used strategies used by male students were affective strategies, the female students' least frequently used were memory strategies.

Table 4 The Mean Score and Standard Deviation of Female Students on 6 Strategy Categories

Language Learning Strategies	Mean	Standard Deviation
Metacognitive Strategies	3.7402	.70811
Social Strategies	3.3627	.77264
Compensation Strategies	3.2966	.58862
Affective Strategies	3.1814	.74074
Cognitive Strategies	3.0084	.61805



Language Learning Strategies	Mean	Standard Deviation
Memory Strategies	2.9820	.50046
Total Average	3.2332	.49358

Differences in the Use of Language Learning Strategies by Male and Female Students

As illustrated in Table 5 below, no significant differences were found between male and female students in their overall use of language learning strategies. When the report use of each type of strategies was compared between male and female students, no significant difference was also found. The results seemed to indicate that male and female students did not differ in their use of language learning strategies. Though the number of male students was fewer than that of the female students, the mean for each group of students in each category did not differ greatly. The difference between the mean scores in each pair was minimally insignificant.

Table 5 The Difference between Male and Female Students in the Use of Language Learning Strategies ((M = male; F = Female)

Strategy Classification	Sex	N	Mean	Standard. Deviation	t-test
Memory strategies	M	13	2.8462	.51026	-.894
	F	68	2.9820	.50046	-.882
Cognitive strategies	M	13	2.9560	.62850	-.268
	F	68	3.0084	.64805	-.274
Compensation strategies	M	13	3.2564	.40032	-.235
	F	68	3.2966	.58862	-.304
Metacognitive strategies	M	13	3.9231	.57446	.878
	F	68	3.7402	.70811	1.010
Affective strategies	M	13	2.7692	.69900	-1.854
	F	68	3.1814	.74074	-1.929
Social strategies	M	13	3.3205	.72156	-.182



Strategy Classification	Sex	N	Mean	Standard. Deviation	t-test
Total Average	F	68	3.3627	.77264	-.191
	M	13	3.1677	.43608	-.446
	F	68	3.2332	.49358	-.486

Question Three : *Are there any differences in the language learning strategies between students with beginner and upper beginner levels of their English proficiency?*

Language Learning Strategies of Beginner Students

Table 6 The Mean Score and Standard Deviation of Students with the English Proficiency at the Beginner Level

Language Learning Strategies	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Metacognitive Strategies	63	3.7937	.68808
Social Strategies	63	3.3862	.76366
Compensation Strategies	63	3.3175	.56536
Affective Strategies	63	3.1825	.74096
Cognitive Strategies	63	2.9637	.58521
Memory Strategies	63	2.9471	.45632
Total Average	63	3.2295	.44849

As shown in Table 6 above, the beginner students used the language learning strategies at a moderate level (3.2295). The strategies used, in decreasing order, were metacognitive, social, compensation, affective, cognitive, and memory strategies. However, they usually used metacognitive strategies (3.7937) when they encountered difficulty in learning English. The second most frequently used strategies were social strategies or strategies (e.g. asking other people to slow down or repeating when they didn't understand what was said during a conversation), and the least frequently used strategies were memory strategies.



Language Learning Strategies of Upper Beginner Students

Table 7 The Mean Score and Standard Deviation of Students with the English Proficiency at the Upper Beginner Level

Language Learning Strategies	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Metacognitive Strategies	18	3.6852	.70299
Social Strategies	18	3.2500	.76108
Compensation Strategies	18	3.1944	.54906
Cognitive Strategies	18	3.1270	.81535
Memory Strategies	18	3.0062	.64841
Affective Strategies	18	2.8796	.73388
Total Average	18	3.1989	.60233

Like the beginners, the upper beginners used the learning strategies at a moderate level (3.1989), and their most frequently used strategies were metacognitive strategies. The least frequently used strategies were affective strategies, which involve students to gain control over their emotions and motivations related to language learning through self-monitoring, self-reinforcement and relaxation. This can imply that these upper beginners did not self monitor their learning, nor did they reward themselves for good performance, nor give encourage themselves in language learning. They relied mostly on such things as finding between way to earn English monitoring learning process for errors, evaluating their progress, etc., which are elements of metacognitive strategies.

Differences between Beginners and Upper Beginners in their Use of Language Strategies Learning

Table 8 The Differences between Male and Female Students in their use of Language Learning Strategies (B= Beginner; UB = Upper Beginner)



Strategy Classification	English Proficiency	N	Mean	Standard. Deviation	t-test
Memory strategies	B	63	2.9471	.45632	-.439
	UB	18	3.0062	.64841	-.362
Cognitive strategies	B	63	2.9637	.58521	-.952
	UB	18	3.1270	.81535	-.793
Compensation strategies	B	63	3.3175	.56536	.019
	UB	18	3.1944	.54906	.833
Metacognitive strategies	B	63	3.7937	.68808	.587
	UB	18	3.6852	.70299	.580
Affective strategies	B	63	3.1825	.74096	1.533
	UB	18	2.8796	.73388	1.541
Social strategies	B	63	3.3862	.76366	.668
	UB	18	3.2500	.76108	.669
Total Average	B	63	3.2295	.44849	.236
	UB	18	3.1989	.60233	.200

Similar to those of male and female students, overall beginner students and upper beginner students did not exhibit any significant differences in their report use of language learning strategies, nor did they show any statistically differences in each subcategories. Their mean score in each subcategory differed only slightly.

Conclusion and Discussions

In general, the subjects in this study differed only minimally in the frequency of their use of the six categories of language learning strategies they reported using. Their use of language learning strategies was at a medium or moderate level. Metacognitive strategies were the most frequently used strategies by all the subjects, whether by gender or by English proficiency level. These findings were similar to those found by Shrimais (2003) and Bulpbong (2003). The strategies

Kanchit Tagong



employed by the male students were metacognitive strategies, social strategies, compensation strategies, cognitive strategies, memory, and affective strategies, respectively. The order of strategies used by female students was slightly different—metacognitive, social, compensation, affective, cognitive, and memory strategies, respectively. The only difference was the fourth place in the order. That is, female students used affective strategies while males students used cognitive ones.

That both the male and female students used social strategies second after metacognitive strategies indicated that they resorted to the most effortless strategies in their learning since this strategies involve asking other people questions either for clarification or correction, cooperating with other people especially those with proficient users of the new language, and becoming aware of others' thought and feeling. The least frequently used strategies for the male students were affective strategies, which involve the learners to lower their anxiety, or encourage themselves, or listen to their feelings, and write a language learning diary in order to improve their learning. The least frequently used strategies used by the female were memory strategies. This seems to indicate that the students did not attempt to learn the new language items through association such as grouping, elaborating placing new words into a context, using imagery, semantic mapping and other techniques. Since they did not put much an effort to learn and retain the new language items, their low proficiency might stem in part from their not using memory strategies.

When the use of language learning strategies and their English proficiency were compared, it was found that there was no significant difference, and these findings were different from that found by Zhao (2008), which indicated a positive correlation between the use of language learning strategies and their English proficiency. For beginners and upper beginners, they exhibited quite similar patterns as those of the male and the female students. The strategies used by the beginners were metacognitive, affective, compensation, social, cognitive, and memory

Kanchit Tagong



strategies, respectively whereas the strategies used by the upper beginners were metacognitive, social, compensation, cognitive, memory, and affective strategies.

In terms of gender, no significant differences were found in the students' use of their language behavior. This findings were not in line with those studies conducted by Ehrman & Oxford, (1989), Nyikos, M.(1990), and Oxford (1993).The same is true for their level of proficiency. Beginners and upper beginners showed no significant differences in their use of language learning strategies, both at the overall strategies and at the 6 categories of strategies. The reason might be that these students did not know how to use the strategies to help them learn a new language, nor were they aware of the strategies available to them.

Implication for Teaching

As shown in the findings above, the students in this study employed all six subcategories of language learning strategies but only at a moderate level. They relied mainly on metacognitive strategies, and did not make use much of other strategies. These students used memory the least, and they did not employ cognitive strategies much, either. Both of which are direct strategies, which involve creating mental linkages, applying images and sounds, reviewing practicing receiving and sending messages, analyzing and reasoning and creating structure for input and output. In fact, all six strategies could help them remember and learn new language items better. According to O' Malley et al. (1985a), students who are able to employ a wider range of effective metacognitive, cognitive, and communicative strategies, seem to be generally more successful language learners. The subjects in this study seemed not to put much effort to help themselves learn a new language. The reasons might be that they either were not aware of the strategies available for them to use or were averse to using them. In order to help students improve their proficiency and success in oral communication in English, teachers need to raise their awareness of the strategies, cultivate these strategies in their language classrooms, provide an opportunity for the students to practice them during the class time, and encourage them to practice using these

Kanchit Tagong



strategies outside the classrooms or whenever they want to reinforce new language items they have just learned. Once students are aware of advantages of using strategies in improving their linguistic competence and in their language learning process, they will be willing to employ these strategies to facilitate their EFL/ESL language learning. And some studies also found that use of appropriate language learning strategies often results in improved proficiency or achievement overall or in specific skill areas (Thompson & Rubin, 1993). Furthermore, they need to be encouraged to use a variety of learning strategies. If used in a highly orchestrated way, tailored to the requirements of the language tasks, these strategies may help the students to become good language learners (Chomot & Kupper, 1989). In combination, these strategies can facilitate their learning better, and sometimes one strategy may work for one student, or for one tasks, or for one situation and it may not for another student, another task, or another situation. Research also revealed that successful language learners tend to choose strategies that work well together in a highly orchestrated way, tailored to the requirements of the language task.

Implication for Further Research

One drawback of this study was that the number of the subject was small; especially the number of male students was much fewer than those of the female. It is suggested that further studies should have a more or less equal number of students of both gender and the number of the subjects should be much larger. It is also recommended that the student language learning strategies be studied together with such variables as their preferred learning styles (visual, auditory, etc.), age, major, and level of their study (e.g., elementary, secondary, or tertiary education) in order to gain a clearer perspective for future language teaching, planning of classroom activities and tasks, and curriculum development.



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Kanchit Tagong



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Kanchit Tagong



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