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Language learning strategy use and proficiency:

The relationship between patterns of reported language learning strategy (LLS) use by speakers of other languages (SOL) and proficiency with implications for the teaching/learning situation

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ABSTRACT

This thesis begins with the premise that strategies are important if students are to learn effectively, and that this applies no less to language than to any other field of learning. After issues of terminology and definition are addressed, there is a discussion of the theoretical underpinnings of the language learning strategy concept. Since the concept of proficiency is also central to the thesis, issues relating to the definition and assessment of proficiency are considered before previous research in the language learning strategy field is reviewed.

This research was carried out in three stages in a private language school in Auckland, New Zealand. Part A, Section 1 used the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) (Oxford, 1990) as the basic instrument to investigate the relationship between language learning strategies and proficiency and to examine the strategy patterns used by more proficient students. Part A, Section 2 used the same data to investigate language learning strategy use according to learner variables (nationality, gender, age). Part B used interviews to investigate language learning strategy use by individuals and Part C used a classroom based programme to explore means of instructing students in language learning strategy use and also to construct an original questionnaire using student input (the English Language Learning Strategy Inventory or ELLSI). This questionnaire was used to further investigate the relationship between language learning strategy use and proficiency and also changes in strategy use over time as well as teachers' perspectives on language learning strategy use.

The results of the SILL phase of the study revealed a significant relationship between language learning strategies and proficiency (a finding supported by the results of the ELLSI study) and also significant differences in strategy use according to nationality, while the interviews revealed some useful insights regarding the use of language learning strategies by individuals. From the longitudinal section of the study it was found that those students who made the most progress were the ones who most increased the frequency of their language learning strategy use. The results of the teachers' survey indicated that teachers regarded language learning strategies as highly important, an encouraging result in terms of positive implications for a good accord between teachers and students in the teaching/learning situation. The classroom programme, however, aimed at exploring ways to promote language learning strategy use among students, was only a lukewarm success and much work remains to be done to find ways of making insights regarding language learning strategies available to students.

The thesis concludes by bringing together the key findings and suggesting areas for further research.

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to Professor Rebecca Oxford, whose article co-authored with John Green (1995) provided the initial impetus for this research, and for whose advice and support over the time involved in this project I have been most grateful.

Also to my father, who encouraged me in everything I ever did, but who is not here to see the end of this project

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And she was right.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>LIST OF TABLES</u>	ix
------------------------------	----

<u>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS/ACRONYMS</u>	xi
--	----

1. INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF THE THESIS

<u>Overall aims of the study</u>	1
<u>Key terms</u>	5
<u>Strategies</u>	5
<u>Speakers of other languages</u>	6
<u>Design of the study</u>	8
<u>How this study differs from previous studies</u>	10

2. CONCEPTUAL ISSUES AND RESEARCH REVIEW

<u>Definition of language learning strategies</u>	14
<u>Language learning strategy theory</u>	20
<u>Definition and assessment of proficiency</u>	34
<u>Previous research into language learning strategies</u>	40
<u>Studies involving successful and unsuccessful language learners</u>	41
<u>Studies investigating individual factors affecting strategy choice</u>	44
<u>Nationality</u>	46
<u>Sex</u>	47
<u>Age</u>	48
<u>Studies of the effects of strategy instruction</u>	50
<u>Concluding comment</u>	53

3. THE STUDY - PART A, SECTION 1: FREQUENCY OF LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGY USE AND PROFICIENCY (SILL)

<u>Rationale</u>	55
<u>Research questions</u>	56
<u>Method</u>	56
<u>Overview</u>	56
<u>Research setting</u>	59
<u>The participants</u>	61
<u>Assessing proficiency levels</u>	62

<u>Materials</u>	64
<u><i>Oxford Placemant Test – OPT</i></u>	64
<u><i>Strategy Inventory for Language Learning – SILL</i></u>	65
<u>Data collection procedures</u>	71
<u>Data analysis procedures</u>	72
<u>Results</u>	74
<u>Reported frequency of language learning strategy use overview (SILL)</u>	74
<u>Reported frequency of language learning strategy use and proficiency (SILL)</u>	77
<u>Discussion with implications for the teaching/learning situation</u>	80
<u>Patterns of strategy use</u>	80
<u>“Core” strategies</u>	82
<u>“Plus” strategies</u>	83
<u>“Base” strategies</u>	87
<u><i>The issue of confidence</i></u>	90
<u>Conclusion</u>	91
4. <u>THE STUDY – PART A, SECTION 2:</u>	
<u>LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGY USE AND</u>	
<u>PROFICIENCY ACCORDING TO LEARNER VARIABLES (SILL)</u>	93
<u>Rationale</u>	93
<u>Research questions</u>	94
<u>Method</u>	95
<u>The participants</u>	95
<u>Materials</u>	95
<u>Data collection procedures</u>	96
<u>Data analysis procedures</u>	96
<u>Results</u>	97
<u>Reported frequency of language learning strategy use, proficiency and nationality (SILL)</u>	97
<u>Reported frequency of language learning strategy use, proficiency and sex (SILL)</u>	101
<u>Reported frequency of language learning strategy use, proficiency and age (SILL)</u>	101
<u>Discussion with implications for the teaching/learning situation</u>	102
<u>Conclusion</u>	108

5. <u>THE STUDY - PART B:</u>	
<u>LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES AND THE INDIVIDUAL</u>	
<u>(INTERVIEWS)</u>	109
<u>Rationale</u>	109
<u>Research questions</u>	112
<u>Method</u>	112
<u>The participants</u>	112
<u>Materials</u>	113
<u>Oxford Placement Test (OPT)</u>	113
<u>Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)</u>	113
<u>Interview guide</u>	114
<u>Data collection procedures</u>	114
<u>Data analysis procedures</u>	115
<u>Student profiles and summary of results</u>	116
<u>Student profile 1: Nina</u>	117
<u>Student profile 2: Kira</u>	118
<u>Student profile 3: Fernando</u>	119
<u>Student profile 4: Kim</u>	120
<u>Student profile 5: Mikhail</u>	121
<u>Student profile 6: Yuki</u>	122
<u>Student profile 7: Hiro</u>	123
<u>Student profile 8: May</u>	124
<u>Student profile 9: Kang</u>	125
<u>Student profile 10: Lily</u>	126
<u>Discussion and amplification of results</u>	129
<u>Key strategies</u>	155
<u>Relationship of interview data to qualitative findings</u>	160
6. <u>THE STUDY - PART C:</u>	
<u>LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES</u>	
<u>IN A TEACHING/LEARNING SITUATION (ELLSI)</u>	163
<u>Rationale</u>	163
<u>Research questions</u>	167
<u>Method</u>	168
<u>The participants</u>	168
<u>Materials</u>	169
<u>Oxford placement Test (OPT)</u>	169
<u>Strategy Inventory for language learning (SILL)</u>	169
<u>English Language Learning Strategy Inventory (ELLSI-students' version)</u>	170
<u>English Language Learning Strategy Inventory (ELLSI-teachers' version)</u>	173
<u>Data collection procedures</u>	173
<u>Data analysis procedures</u>	175
<u>Results</u>	177
<u>Reported frequency of language learning strategy use overview (ELLSI)</u>	177
<u>Reported frequency of language learning strategy use (ELLSI) and proficiency</u>	179
<u>Longitudinal study</u>	181
<u>Teachers' perspectives</u>	184

Language learning strategies: The classroom experience	186
<u>Discussion and amplification of results</u>	188
<u>Patterns of strategy use</u>	188
<u>“Core” strategies</u>	189
<u>“Plus” strategies</u>	190
<u>“Base” strategies</u>	192
<u>Longitudinal study</u>	194
<u>Pedagogical issues</u>	197
<u>Conclusion</u>	200
7. <u>CONCLUDING DISCUSSION</u>	203
<u>General comments</u>	203
<u>Key findings and recommendations</u>	205
<u>Limitations of the study</u>	213
<u>Suggestions for further research</u>	215
<u>Conclusion</u>	216
<u>REFERENCES</u>	220
<u>APPENDICES</u>	
A Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)	249
B Component Matrix (SILL)	253
C Interview guide	254
D English Language Learning Strategy Inventory (ELLSI–Students’ version)	255
E English Language Learning Strategy Inventory (ELLSI–Teachers’ version)	257
F Component Matrix (ELLSI)	258

LIST OF TABLES

<u>Table 3.1</u>	Average reported frequency of language learning strategy use (as itemised in the SILL) with standard deviations (SD).	76
<u>Table 3.2</u>	Average reported frequency of language learning strategy use for elementary level (E), advanced level (A) and all students (AS) with number of strategies reportedly used highly frequently.	79
<u>Table 4.1</u>	Average proficiency levels and average reported strategy frequency of use according to nationality and across all students.	98
<u>Table 4.2</u>	Average reported frequency of language learning strategy use (SILL) for Japanese (J), Taiwanese (T), Koreans (K), Europeans (E) and all students (AS) with number of strategies reportedly used highly frequently.	100
<u>Table 4.3</u>	Average levels of proficiency and average reported strategy frequency of use according to gender and across all students.	101
<u>Table 4.4</u>	Average levels of proficiency and average reported strategy frequency of use according to age and across all students.	102
<u>Table 4.5</u>	“Plus” strategies reportedly used highly frequently by the most proficient groups of students	105
<u>Table 5.1</u>	Reported frequency ratings of language learning strategy use (SILL) by interviewees 1-10 with progress in terms of levels per month.	128
<u>Table 6.1</u>	Average reported frequency of language learning strategy use (ELLSI) with standard deviations (SD).	178
<u>Table 6.2</u>	Average reported frequency of language learning strategy use (ELLSI) for lower level, higher level and all students with number of strategies reportedly used highly frequently.	181

Table 6.3 Entry and re-survey averages for reported frequency of language learning strategy use (ELLSI), with differences between the averages and the number of levels of promotion. 184

Table 6.4 Average levels of importance ascribed to language learning strategies by teachers (T) and average reported frequency of strategy use by lower level, higher level and across all students (AS) with number of high importance/frequency items. 186

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS/ACRONYMS

CAE Cambridge Advanced English

CC	Communicative competence
CPE	Cambridge Proficiency in English
ELLSI	English Language Learning Strategy Inventory
ESOL	English for speakers of other languages
FCE	First Certificate in English
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
IL	Interlanguage
LLS	Language learning strategy
OPT	Oxford Placement Test
QPT	Quick Placement Test
SILL	Strategy Inventory for Language Learning
SOL	Speakers of other languages
TOEFL	Testing of English as a Foreign Language