ECER 2011 Berlin

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Learning Strategy Use in Development of Foreign Language Skills at Lower Secondary Educational Level

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Format of Presentation: Paper

Keywords: learning strategy, language skills, ISCED 2

Proposal Information

Learning strategies present a crucial concept of many disciplines. Since the 1960s, in the context of *constructivist theory*, they have been gaining an important place in the theory of first and *second language acquisition*. Nowadays, learning strategy is a concept that captures a wide range of linguistic behaviours. Strategies are defined as sets of potentially "conscious thoughts and actions that learner takes to achieve a learning goal" (Chamot 2004), or as operations to acquire, retain, retrieve or perform (Rigney 1978). The concept is connected with *self-regulation*, *metacognition*, *learning style*, and *cognitive style*. Strategies are most often classified according to psychological functions – *cognitive, metacognitive, socio-affective* (O´Malley, Chamot 1990), or 4 basic *language skills* (Cohen, Weaver 2006).

Our research is based on Cohen and Weaver´s (2006) language learning strategy classification based on language skills and adapted, enlarged *Young Learners´ Language Strategy Use Survey* (Cohen, Oxford 2002). Strategies are divided into 5 groups (listening, reading, writing, speaking, vocabulary and translation strategies). **Listening strategies** are strategies to become familiar with the sounds of the language and to listen to a conversation in it. **Reading strategies** are used to improve reading ability such as skimming for the main idea and summarizing materials strategically. **Writing strategies** aim, for instance, at planning, writing, and reviewing essays. **Speaking strategies** are used to practise speaking, engage in conversation, and keep the conversation going when words or expressions are lacking. **Vocabulary strategies** help learn, review, or recall new vocabulary. **Translating strategies** are related to translating back into the native or dominant language to understand or retain information, and working in the target language as possible. (Cohen, Weaver 2006)

The **research questions** were: Do the pupils use strategies differently in the development of the 4 language skills? Which skill is the most supported by strategy use? Is any language skill development at risk because of low strategy use? Which strategies do pupils most use? Do pupils use strategies more at the end of lower secondary level than at the beginning of this educational level? Do pupils learning German and English differ in their strategy use? Does strategy use depend on the teacher in all language skills?

Methodology or Methods/ Research Instruments or Sources Used

Translated, adopted and enlarged Young Learners´ Language Strategy Use Survey (Cohen, Oxford 2002) used as an on-line questionnaire consisted of 72 items with a reduced binominal scale (no – 1/ yes – 2) with Cronbach´s alpha .89. Students reported their strategy use in a foreign language they studied at school; 84 per cent reported use of strategies in English, 16 per cent in German.

A non-random sampling conducted in 2010 comprised 776 pupils from the 4-9th grades (ISCED 2) of 18 lower secondary schools (with average of pupils per school being 43.11). They were taught by 38 different teachers. The pupils were on average 13 years old (SD = 1.67, min. = 9, max. = 17).

Mann-Whitney U-test and Kruskal-Wallis H-test were used to compare groups with non-parametric data distribution. Pupils learning English and German did not statistically significantly differ in strategy use. Only single strategies differed, for example, those who learnt German used more vocabulary strategies, those who learnt English used more listening practising strategies. Younger learners used strategies more than older ones (Z = 2.87, p = .00). Pupils differed in strategy use depending on different teachers H (38, N = 776) = 110,13; p = .00.

Conclusions, Expected Outcomes or Findings

The average use of strategies is 1.59 on a scale (SD = 0.15, Me = 1.59). The less frequently used strategies were using words from Czech language, and adding suffixes from the target language (writing strategy, x = 1.24, SD = .43); reading a lot to practise reading skill (x = 1.28, SD = .45); going to cinema to watch films in English or with subtitles (x= 1.29, SD = .46) as a strategy to practise listening.

The most often used strategies were compensatory or communication types, such as asking for advice when writing (x= 1.85, SD = .35) or not understanding the listening (x = 1.86, SD = .35); or trying to elicit important words when listening (x = 1.89, SD = .32).

Pupils tended to use strategies to develop language skills. The skills most supported by strategy use were translating (x = 1.64, SD = .24) and listening (x = 1.65, SD = .17). For speaking (x = 1.60, SD = .18) and reading (x = 1.60, SD = .21), strategies were used on average the same. Vocabulary (x= 1.51, SD = .23) as well as writing strategies (x = 1.54, SD = .20) were least used.

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1st file **No upload yet.**

Session Details

27 SES 12 B: Teaching and Learning Foreign Languages
Time: **Friday, 16/Sep/2011: 8:30am - 10:00am**   *Location:* **KL 24/222**
Session Chair: **Viveca Lindberg**   1 FL., 64

Paper Session

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