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RESEARCH PAPER

Comparison of English Language Learning Strategies Used by Punjabi and Pashto Undergraduates

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PAPER INFO	ABSTRACT
Corresponding Author: m.shahbaz@gcwus.edu.pk	For the last three decades, there has been an emphasis on autonomy in language learning. An important feature of this phenomenon is research into language learning strategies (LLS). Several studies have been conducted to find out relationship between LLS and several other variables including gender, class and academic achievement. However, there has been no study till date about the relationship between second/foreign LLS and different L1s. The present study tries to fill the same gap. Using data from 200 students, half whom had Pashto as their first language and the other half Punjabi, the study tried to understand whether L1 plays any role in choice and employment of LLS. Results revealed that both the students belonging to both the speech communities reported lower frequency of LLS use. There was no significant difference in the reported frequency of LLS use in five out of the six subscales of LLS. The study makes certain recommendations for future research.

Introduction

Pakistan is a multilingual country and a home to almost seventy regional languages. These seventy languages, though not as powerful as English, the official language and Urdu, the national language, create seventy speech communities having a distinct culture and outlook. English, from its introduction till date remains the language of power. Every Pakistani student learns English at least up to the graduation level.. Its degree of influence is not confined to a particular region or a speech community but can be felt throughout the country. Students belonging to all the speech communities learn and use it. The first learnt language and the strategies to learn it have an impact on the second learnt language. However, there has been no

investigation into the differences of Language Learning Strategies (LLS) use by the students of these speech communities.

Punjabi and Pashto are respectively the most widely spoken languages of Pakistan (Census, 2001). The students from these two speech communities, like others, learn and use it in their day to day affairs. It remains to be seen whether L1 of the students coming from these speech communities has an impact on the LLS employed by them.

Statement of the Problem

There is a need to describe and compare the LLS employed by the students belonging to different speech communities in Pakistan. The present study is an attempt in the same direction.

Significance of the Study

English language teachers of the Punjabi and Pashto speech communities will benefit from this study as it brings forth findings regarding the LLS used by the students of these speech communities.

Terminology (Literature Review)

It was first suggested by Rubin (1975) that there was a difference between the ways good and bad language learners learn a language. Since then, the applied linguists and researchers have focussed their attention on specific ways of learning used by language learners. A considerable body of research establishes a positive relationship between LLS and students' language proficiency (Wharton, 2000; Magogwe and Oliver, 2007). There has been a great debate on what constitute these strategies (O'Malley, J. M., Chamot, A. U., Stewner-Manzanares, G.; & Küpper, L., 1985). Strategies are the conscious choices that the language learners make while learning a language (Anderson, 2005). Oxford provides an all-inclusive definition of the LLS as the "…operations employed by the learner to aid the acquisition, storage, retrieval and use of information" (2001:166). Oxford (1990) has classified the LLS into six broad categories and in each category she has outlined a number of sub-categories. Broadly speaking, these categories include, Cognitive, Memory, Affective, Meta-cognitive, Compensatory, and Social strategies.

These operations, according to Kaylani (1996), are employed as a result of a number of factors including self-perception of proficiency, gender, motivation, time devoted to studying the foreign language and one's major subjects at the university. To Oxford, in addition to these factors, beliefs, attitudes and cultural backgrounds, the nature of the task and students' learning styles also affect the language learning strategy choice (Oxford, 1990). However, it may neither be possible nor desirable to replicate these findings to the language learners living in completely heterogeneous

contexts and cultures. Therefore, a few other variables that affect these choices still need to be explored.

 In a multilingual country like Pakistan, an important variable may be the particular speech community that the students belong to. Speech community is a group that lives in a defined place and shares a common language. To use Patrick's (2003) term, a speech community is an "interactional collectivity". In addition to having a common code i.e. language, the members of the speech community must share as to how they will use that particular language (McKay, 2005:283).

Several studies have shown that a child's L1 plays a decisive role in determining his/her proficiency in L2 learning. In particular, a child's LLS use in his/her first language is carried on to the second language (Lindfors, 1987).

Since Oxford's inventory, there has been a considerable research into the field of LLS use by learners. Cohen (2007) established that majority of the researchers agree that use of strategies depends on certain variables like the learner, environment in which s/he is learning as well as the task. Several studies report on LLS use by students of foreign language or second language. Chou (2013), for instance, undertook a study to investigate the types of strategies students use while reading an article in for testing purpose as compared to their LLS use in nontesting situation He used interviews, questionnaire as well as retrospective reports, and found out that students use various cognitive strategies like note taking, translation and dictionary use when they know that they will not be tested. However, when they students were subjected to a testing condition, the frequency of cognitive LSS use decreased, and they were more concerned with strategies related to test management like checking their answers, attempting the easier questions first and reading the questions over and over again.

Oxford, Cho, Leung & Kim (2004) administered questionnaires to learners with varying achievement levels. Their results showed that the low-proficiency learners used more strategies than the high-achievers in reading tasks that were difficult. However, these strategies did not benefit them a great deal.

Through an analysis of students' diaries, Hallbach (2000) investigated the use of LLS. His analysis showed that the students mainly reported use of meta-cognitive strategies. However, Hallbach found considerable differences in the LSS use among students, with high-achieving students employing more strategies than those who achieved lowers in academic terms. Nevertheless, Halbach (2000) claimed the data was not conclusive enough to suggest any direct relationship between LLS use and academic performance of the students. The students who achieved more in academic terms were more vocal in their explanation of the use of LLS. Such students seemed to benefit more from training in LLS use. Hence, Halbach (2000) called for training in LLS use particularly in critical self-awareness.

Oxford & Nyikos (1989) undertook a study with 1200 college students to investigate the relationship between LLS and gender. They found that the reported

LLS use was higher among girls than boys in at least three types of strategies. These included formal rule-related practice strategies, conversational input elicitation strategies and general study strategies. On the remaining two types of strategies, boys and girls reported similar patterns.

Ali, Ghani, Malik & Ahmad (2016) carried out a study to investigate LLS used by Pakistani MA English students. They reported that the reported frequency of the LLS use by these students was less than what Oxford recommended. They further found a medium frequency of LLS use by these learners in all the subscales of SILL, and the only exception was the metacognitive strategies where the learners reported a higher frequency than the one Oxford had set.

Research Question

How far are the English LLS related to undergraduates' native/first language?

Hypothesis

There is no relationship between foreign LLS and undergraduate students' native language.

Research Design

This study is descriptive in nature and employed the survey method The researchers used an amended version of the Strategy Inventory of Language Learning (SILL) for speakers of other languages learning English (Oxford, 1990) to collect data from the respondents. The SILL has 50 items. It was amended so as to leave out those strategies that were foreign to the Pakistani context and a few strategies that were commonly observed among the Pakistani students were added.

Population and Distribution of the Sample

The English language learners of Punjabi and Pashto speech communities who were enrolled in undergraduate programs in two universities in Islamabad formed the population of the study. 200 students who passed the higher secondary school examination in the session 2015-2016 and were the students of third year in these public sector universities were selected as the sample. The researchers made sure that only those students that were high achievers in their last terminal exam were selected as sample for the study. The Sample was equally distributed on the bases of locale, gender and the socio-economic class.

Data Analysis Procedures

For the purpose of this study, we used SILL inventory, which categorizes LLS into six subscales including the memory strategies, the cognitive strategies, the compensation strategies, the metacognitive strategies, the affective strategies and the social strategies. The data was analyzed through SPSS XIV in terms of mean scores for

the respective subscales of SILL. We applied t-test to find out the difference between the LLS of students belonging to the two speech communities. The researchers assigned the following scale values to each of the responses:

	Level		Value
A.	Never True.		1
B.	Mostly Untrue.		2
C.	Neutral.		3
D.	Mostly True.		4
E.	Always True		5

Mean was calculated through the following formula

$$\frac{5(FE)+4(FD)+3(FC)+2(FB)+1(FA)}{Number}$$

Results

This section of the paper provides analysis and interpretation of the comparison of L2 LLS use by Punjabi and Pashto speakers before discussing the implications of these findings. We set probability level of 0.05 for t-test.

Table 1

Comparison of L2 Memory strategies employed by Punjabi and Pashto speaking students

Memory	Mean	St. Dev.	St. Error of Mean	t-value	p-value
Punjabi	3.2	0.49	0.049	1.101	0.316
Pashto	3.1	0.86	0.086		

Findings clearly suggest that mean scores for students belonging to both the speech communities are less than 3.5 for the reported memory strategies. The mean score for Punjabi students is slightly higher than that of the Pashto speakers; However, as the p-value is greater than 0.05, it means that the difference is not statistically significant.

Memory strategies are part of the direct strategies that L2 learners employ. These help the learners in retrieving and retaining information. The process of retrieval is orderly in that the learners associate words with mental images to make their language learning easier. Hence, their importance is undisputed. Nevertheless, the findings show that neither the Punjabi nor the Pashto speakers reported the desired frequency of memory strategies as a subclass of LLS. This finding is surprising because it is commonly believed that Pakistani learners take to rote memorization instead of understanding the concepts. However, it should be noted that this frequency is higher when compared to the metacognitive strategies employed by the same learners (cf. Table 3). In fact, Punjabi speakers also reported higher frequency in memory strategies than they did with regard to the social strategies.

Table 2
Comparison of L2 Cognitive strategies employed by Punjabi and Pashto speaking students

Cognitive	Mean	St. Dev.	St. Error of Mean	t-value	p-value
Punjabi	3.64	0.74	0.074	0.24	0.809
Pashto	3.67	1.00	0.100		

Comparison of the Cognitive strategies employed by the Punjabi and Pashto speaking students shows that they reported almost similar trends in employment of these strategies. There is a negligible difference in the mean score of reported LLS use, which is evidenced from the fact that the value of t is just 0.24 and the p-value is quite high, i.e. 0.809. It should be noted that this is the subclass of LLS in which the sample reported higher than the required level of mean, which means that they routinely use these strategies for effective L2 learning.

Cognitive strategies involve language learning through reasoning, note-taking, summarizing things, outlining and synthesizing information and using language in natural settings. If a learner employs Cognitive strategies, it means that s/he practices new words and sounds, watches English shows and reads for pleasure, and also analyzes and interprets English words in order to better understand them (Oxford, 1990).

Table 3
Comparison of L2 Compensation strategies employed by Punjabi and Pashto speaking students

Compensation	Mean	St. Dev.	St. Error of Mean	t-value	p-value
Punjabi	2.56	0.50	0.050	2.85	0.004
Pashto	2.79	0.63	0.063		

Table 3 reports findings on comparison of L2 compensation strategies employed by Punjabi and Pashto speaking students. Although we can see that the mean scores of both the groups is quite low, i.e. 2.56 and 2.79, yet there is a statistically significant difference which tilts towards the Pashto speaking students as the value of t is 2.85 and the p-value is 0.004. This does not show that one group, Pashto speaking students, are better than the other, i.e. the Punjabi speaking students. In fact, it can also be interpreted as the other group being worse than the first one because the mean score of both the groups is very low on reported strategy use.

Compensation strategies are quite significant as far as strategic competence in L2 is concerned. If a learner employs these compensation strategies, it means that s/he can intelligently guess things and can also overcoming communication barriers

in writing as well as speaking. It involves using nonverbal communication, making up new words and using synonyms

Table 4
Comparison of L2 Metacognitive strategies employed by Punjabi and Pashto speaking students

Metacognitive	Mean	St. Dev.	St. Error of Mean	t-value	p-value
Punjabi	2.72	0.73	0.073	0.43	0.66
Pashto	2.67	0.89	0.089		

Comparison of the metacognitive strategies by learners belonging to the two speech communities shows that these strategies do not find favour with these groups. The mean scores are quite similar to those of the compensation strategies (cf. Table 3). There is hardly any difference between the two groups as is clear from the t-value, which is 0.43 and p-value that is 0.66.

Metacognitive strategies involve finding different ways of using English, noticing mistakes in use of English and using that information to improve, paying attention to others' speech, trying to become better learners, planning, looking for people with whom they can communicate in English, and taking responsibility for their learning. It means that the learners who employ these strategies try to find opportunities not only to learn English but also to use it in natural settings. These strategies ultimately lead to autonomy in learning (Paredes, 2010)

Table 5
Comparison of L2 Affective strategies employed by Punjabi and Pashto speaking students

Affective	Mean	St. Dev.	St. Error of Mean	t-value	p-value
Punjabi	3.15	1.13	0.113	1.23	0.219
Pashto	3.34	1.05	0.105		

When we compared the affective strategies employed by the students belonging to the two speech communities, it was found that though the frequency of the reported use was much higher than the compensation strategies and metacognitive strategies, it was still lower the standard set by Oxford (1990). It is clear from the above table that the mean scores of the Punjabi and Pashto speaking students stood at 3.15 and 3.34 respectively. Although the Pashto speaking students reported a higher frequency use than their counterparts in the Punjabi speech community yet the difference was not statistically significant as the p-value is higher than the selected probability value of 0.05.

Affective strategies involve overcoming fear of English, encouraging oneself to speak English, rewarding oneself when one's performance is good, understanding

one's nervousness, keeping a diary to report one's feelings and sharing with others how one feels about learning English. Hence, these strategies basically deal with learners' perseverance and confidence level. The students who employ such strategies ultimately get higher self-esteem as they can counter their fears, and have the ability to laugh at their own mistakes (Vlckova, Berger & Vlckova, 2013).

Table 6
Comparison of L2 Social strategies employed by Punjabi and Pashto speaking students

Social	Mean	St. Dev.	St. Error of Mean	t-value	p-value
Punjabi	3.23	0.94	0.094	1.855	0.065
Pashto	3.44	0.63	0.063		

Findings contained in the table on comparison of L2 social strategies used by Punjabi and Pashto speaking students show that Pashto speaking students reported a higher frequency of these strategies as compared to their Punjabi speaking counterparts. Although the difference between the reported strategy use was not statistically significant yet there is a marked difference between the two. Moreover, it should also be noted that although both the groups fall short of the required mean of 3.5, yet they reported that these strategies were the second most used strategies after the cognitive strategies.

Social strategies involve collaborative learning like asking others' help when one is unable to understand something, asking others to correct one's mistakes, practicing English speaking with fellow students, asking questions in English and trying to learn English speakers' culture. As these strategies are collaborative in nature, there are chances of increased cooperation among the learners.

Discussion

Findings of this study suggest that the students belonging to both the speech communities were unaware of the strategies that can help them in learning English better. The learners were found to be medium and low frequency strategy users in at least five of the six subscales of LLS. The learners reported highest frequency in the use of cognitive strategies, and that score was found to be in acceptable range, i.e. above 3.5. However, out of the remaining five subscales, they reported very low in metacognitive and compensation strategies and medium score in memory strategies, affective strategies and social strategies.

Higher frequency of reported cognitive strategy use is quite significant in that these help the learners to process new information, and involves language learning through reasoning, note-taking, summarizing things, outlining and synthesizing information and using language in natural settings. These findings are consistent with

those of several other studies. However, the lower frequency of metacognitive strategies is not consistent with the findings of Kazi & Iqbal (2011) and Ali, Ghani, Malik & Ahmad (2016) who reported that the learners preferred metacognitive strategies to other subscales,.

Implications of the Research

The most important implication of this research is finding a relationship between the LLS and the speech communities. It shall open new vistas, particularly in Pakistani ELT context, as far as the impact of the regional languages on learning English is concerned.

Conclusion

LLS play an important role in second/foreign language learning. The groups with higher frequency of reported LLS use are typically comprised of autonomous and independent learners. Findings of this study have shown that L1 makes no considerable difference in LLS use. There is a need to carry out further studies with greater sample size to investigate whether there is any relationship between the methods of instructions in Pakistani educational institutions and the LLS employed by the foreign/second language learners.

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