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FREQUENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF STRATEGY USE IN SILL QUESTIONNAIRE USING AN INNOVATIVE ELECTRONIC APPLICATION

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Περίληψη

Στην παρούσα εργασία διερευνάται η εκμάθηση της αγγλικής γλώσσας από σαράντα-οχτώ μαθητές, μονόγλωσσους και δίγλωσσους. Μέσω του σταθμισμένου SILL, καταγράφεται η συχνότητα χρήσης των στρατηγικών αλλά και η βεβαιότητα των μαθητών για την αποτελεσματικότητά τους, με τη βοήθεια δύο καινοτομιών: α)τη χρήση της «ράβδου» αντί της κλίμακας Likert, και β) τη χρήση ενός νέου ηλεκτρονικού εργαλείου με δυνατότητα χρήσης υπολογιστή για συμπλήρωση και ταυτόχρονη επεξεργασία, για εξοικονόμηση χρόνου. Τα αποτελέσματα έδειξαν απόκλιση ανάμεσα στη συχνότητα χρήσης των στρατηγικών και στη βεβαιότητα για την αποτελεσματικότητά τους σε όλες σχεδόν τις ομάδες.

Keywords: strategies, bar, Likert scales, frequency, confidence, proficiency

1. Introduction

Research has shown that strategies may facilitate language learning. As a consequence, strategic behavior has greatly concerned research in language learning (Chamot 2007, Cohen 2003, Oxford & Nyikos 1989, Mochizuki 1999, Psaltou-Joycey 2003, Vrettou 2011, Wharton 2000). The frequency of language learning strategy use greatly depends on various factors (Tragant & Victori 2012) such as gender, age,

cultural background. Moreover, the different methodological tools selected to investigate LLS may lead to discrepancies between studies.

However, it would be interesting to see how confident learners are about the effectiveness of the specific strategy they employ each time. There has not been any research on the issue, at least to our knowledge. Therefore, an empirical research was conducted, in order to investigate not only the frequency of LLS conscious use but also the confidence of the learners about the effectiveness of the strategies they use.

2. Theoretical Background on Learning Strategies in Greece

2.1. Interaction of Frequency and some other Factors

Concerning gender, Vrettou (2011) reported more frequent use of cognitive, metacognitive, affective and social strategies by female students. Papanis (2008) reports higher use of metacognitive and cognitive strategies among bilingual Muslim female students while Gavriilidou and Papanis (2010) found no significant effect of gender in university students.

As for proficiency, Psaltou-Joycey and Kantaridou (2009) investigated multilingualism in relation to the use of learning strategies as well as learning styles of university students and found that higher level proficiency students made greater use of learning strategies. Similar results had Gavriilidou and Mitits (2016) regarding multilingual students and strategy use.

2.2. Confidence

The term confidence is regarded as the certainty of the subject that the required knowledge has been acquired. In English, the terms confidence, self-confidence or certainty can be used. There is some research regarding confidence in relation to other factors such as accuracy and cognitive style. Yule et al (1985) and Yule (1988) examined confidence in relation to accuracy and suggested that we can learn more about the learning styles of students investigating their confidence. However, extended research regarding confidence is not found in the bibliography.

Kambakis-Vougiouklis. Kambakis Vougiouklis (1990, 1992a, 1992b) investigated confidence and found that it was a factor that affected the strategic ability of the stu-

dents Later, Intze & Kambakis-Vougiouklis (2009), recorded great connection between accuracy and confidence. Intze (2010) investigating the connection between gender and confidence, did not find any significant differences. Mouti (2011) prefers to make connections between confidence, self-evaluation and self-control and she finds great relation between confidence and performance. Kambakis-Vougiouklis et al (2013) and Kambakis-Vougiouklis and Mamoukari (2016) conducted a series of oral applications of SILL questionnaire where students were asked to specify not only how frequently they used each strategy but also how confident they felt of its effectiveness. Results indicated that when the learners claim they use a strategy, they do not necessarily consider it effective. By contrast, they claim to appreciate strategies they do not frequently use.

2.3. An Alternative Statistical Tool: The [01] Bar

Likert scales are the most widely used statistical tool in every piece of research. However, the application of language tests, including SILL, to less sophisticated groups revealed certain drawbacks of the specific method the most prominent being the difficulty to make semantic refinements such as the difference between *generally not true of me* and *somewhat true of me*, or *seldom and almost never.* In order to provide some remedy for such as condition, the use of the bar [01] was suggested by Kambakis-Vougiouklis (Kambaki-Vougioukli & Vougiouklis 2008, Kambakis-Vougiouklis et al 2011, Vougiouklis & Kambaki-Vougioukli 2011), based on fuzzy theory (Zadeh 1965). The far left end 0 represents the completely negative answer/attitude and 1 the completely positive answer/attitude. What is required from the participants is to cut the bar at any point -actually infinite- they think that expresses their attitude towards any item at the specific moment.

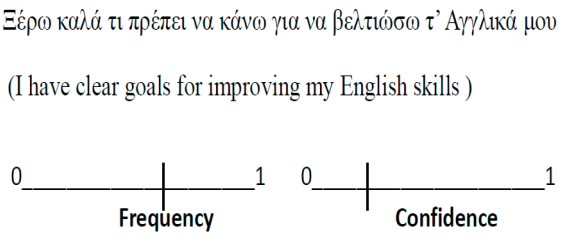

Figure 1 | An example from the SILL questionnaire employing the [01] bar to measure the frequency of strategy use and the confidence of strategy effectiveness

2.4. Research Questions

In the present study, we investigate not only the frequency of LLS use but also the confidence of the learners about each strategy's effectiveness, focusing on proficiency and gender. More specifically, these are the research questions to be addressed:

- Might the extra parameter called learners' confidence in the effectiveness of a strategy affect the process of learning?
- Does the learners' proficiency in English (in combination with their age) affect their strategic behavior and if so, how?
- Does the learners' gender play a role in the level of stated confidence regarding the effectiveness of certain strategy use?

3.1 Methodology

3.1. The Participants

The total number of the learners was *N*=48 (Greek monolingual and Turkish-Greek bilingual learners of English) and were recruited from the first three grades of a public secondary school in Thrace. There were a total of 48 participants (*N=12* male and *N=12* female), aged 12-15 years, learning English as a foreign language. The sample comprised a number of *N=16* students from each grade: *N=8* of low and *N=8* of high level in English.

The learners' level of English language proficiency was estimated according to their performance in class (beginners-advanced), as the researcher was also their teacher. Learners of intermediate English language proficiency were not included in the sample, because previous research found differences in LLS use only between learners of low and high proficiency in the target language (Magogwe & Oliver 2007).

3.2. The Instruments

The instruments used for the purposes of the research were the validated version of SILL (Petrogiannis & Gavriilidou 2015 together with Kambaki-Vougioukli & Vougiouklis 2008 and Kambakis-Vougiouklis 2012, 2013).

As for the actual processing, a program was introduced (Nikolaidou & Vougiouklis 2012) eliminating data collecting and transferring time. The application has been implemented using Visual Basic and the data is being saved on a Microsoft Access Database. The application is based on "events" and an OleDbConnection is used to connect the program with the database.

3.3. The Procedure

The learners were electronically administered the SILL questionnaire and they were instructed to indicate how often they used a strategy (frequency) but also how effective they thought each strategy was (confidence). The students read the questions on their computer screen, cutting the bar accordingly; they could certainly go back and check their answers.

There were 50 questions regarding the frequency of Strategy use, and each question was followed by a question checking the subject's confidence, overall 100 questions (bars) to be answered. The questions were read silently by each individual. If there was need for explanation the students would ask the researcher, and instant clarification was provided. The clarification was given aloud so that the rest of the students would also be informed. Their answers were saved only after all the questions had been answered. After saving, the answers would automatically be recorded in a numeric scale, starting from 0 as the lowest score, to 6.2 as the highest, so that the metric data produced could be used in the statistical tests.

The current study focused on *Memory* strategies, eight strategies/variables, investigating both frequency of strategy use and confidence, due to the fact that the Memory strategies were also investigated in the two previous smaller-scale pilot studies (Kambakis-Vougiouklis & Mamoukari 2016). In those past studies, great deviations were recorded between the frequency of use and the confidence of effectiveness of the strategies, therefore this greater – extent research, with a larger number of interviewees involved, was decided.

4. Results

An one-way between groups (gender, proficiency) ANOVA was conducted to investigate the differences between frequency of strategy use and the confidence of the

learners, as to whether and to what extent those strategies enhanced their language learning. In order to investigate the possible effect of the English language proficiency level on the use of strategy categories and overall the one-way ANOVA analysis of variance was used.

The questions asked investigated the use of the Memory strategies (8 SILL questions), each followed by a question investigating the confidence of the strategy's usefulness. There was particular focus on Memory strategies, as in previous research this group of strategies revealed statistically significant differences, where the frequency of use had a downward trend (the older the learners the fewer strategies they reported using).

The one-way ANOVA analysis of variance was conducted to determine the interaction effects of gender with respect to each of the six Memory strategies. It revealed that gender affects both the frequency of strategy use, as well as the confidence of the learners about the usefulness of the strategies.

4.1. Memory Strategies across Gender

According to the Means the variables that were significantly different between the male and female group ($p<0,05$), regarding frequency of strategy use, were:

- "Use words in Sentences"
- "I frequently revise"
- "Remember printed words"

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig.
Combine new with old	Male	24	3,8748	2,07934	,067
	Female	24	4,8406	1,42275	
	Total	48	4,3577	1,82881	
Use words in Sentences	Male	24	2,5828	2,08832	,011
	Female	24	4,0162	1,60598	
	Total	48	3,2995	1,98011	
Combine pronounciation with image	Male	24	2,4697	2,14966	,448
	Female	24	2,9060	1,78498	
	Total	48	2,6878	1,96701	

Use rhymes	Male	24	2,2287	2,24444	,767
	Female	24	2,4140	2,05775	
	Total	48	2,3214	2,13215	
Use flashcards	Male	24	1,1991	1,50761	,071
	Female	24	2,0302	1,60974	
	Total	48	1,6146	1,59897	
Act out words	Male	24	1,6462	2,22648	,495
	Female	24	2,0585	1,91486	
	Total	48	1,8524	2,06485	
Frequently revise	Male	24	2,9916	1,96787	,000
	Female	24	4,8247	1,22011	
	Total	48	3,9081	1,86587	
Remember printed words	Male	24	3,4908	1,77709	,005
	Female	24	4,8058	1,24816	
	Total	48	4,1483	1,65810	

Table 1 | Descriptives regarding frequency of strategy use (gender)

The variables that were significantly different between the male and female group, ($p<0,05$), regarding confidence of strategy's effectiveness, were:

- "Con use rhymes"
- "Con Use flashcards"
- **"Con Frequently revise"**

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig.
Con Conbine new with old	Male	24	3,9972	1,46081	,215
	Female	24	4,5034	1,32344	
	Total	48	4,2503	1,40243	

Con Use words in Sentences	Male	24	3,4118	1,79654	,051
	Female	24	4,3778	1,54060	
	Total	48	3,8948	1,72602	
Con combine pronounciation with image	Male	24	2,7735	2,13705	,092
	Female	24	3,7360	1,71892	
	Total	48	3,2548	1,97923	
Con use rhymes	Male	24	1,7019	1,57872	,050
	Female	24	2,6738	1,76344	
	Total	48	2,1878	1,72702	
Con Use flashcards	Male	24	1,6757	1,85458	,012
	Female	24	3,0449	1,76661	
	Total	48	2,3603	1,92070	
Con Act out words	Male	24	1,8878	2,19688	,140
	Female	24	2,7787	1,90286	
	Total	48	2,3332	2,08240	
Con Frequently revise	Male	24	4,1689	1,70348	,001
	Female	24	5,5338	,76468	
	Total	48	4,8513	1,47712	
Con Remember printed words	Male	24	4,1336	1,88173	,334
	Female	24	4,5680	1,09550	
	Total	48	4,3508	1,53891	

Table 2 | Descriptives regarding confidence of the strategy's effectiveness (gender)

4.2. Memory Strategies across Proficiency

The one-way ANOVA was used to investigate a possible variation by the students' proficiency level, which was estimated according to their achievement in school and their English grade. Comparison between groups across proficiency (beginners-advanced) investigated the variables that were statistically significant (<0.05). Statistically signifi-

cant differences on all Memory strategies were recorded. With respect to proficiency, the analysis revealed a downward pattern according to which the older the monolingual students are, the fewer Memory strategies they employed. Beginner students tend to make use of that strategy more than the advanced students.

The beginners presented great use of the strategies, and outperformed the advanced students in those strategies that involved visual representations, such as acting out the words, using flashcards or combing sound with image. However, it appeared that the advanced students believed it would enhance their learning, although they did not greatly use it. The advanced learners seemed to be much more reluctant to use rhymes in their learning procedure. Moreover, they did not regard it as a useful technique, recording very poor confidence as well.

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig.
Combine new with old	Beginners	24	3,8345	1,73606	
	Advanced	24	4,8809	1,80258	
	Total	48	4,3577	1,82881	,000
Use words in Sentences	Beginners	24	3,1946	1,76942	
	Advanced	24	3,4044	2,20416	
	Total	48	3,2995	1,98011	,820
Combine pronounciation with image	Beginners	24	3,0488	1,93835	
	Advanced	24	2,3269	1,96911	
	Total	48	2,6878	1,96701	,668
Use rhymes	Beginners	24	2,3861	2,17637	
	Advanced	24	2,2566	2,13177	
	Total	48	2,3214	2,13215	,739
Use flashcards	Beginners	24	2,0018	1,63044	
	Advanced	24	1,2274	1,50111	
	Total	48	1,6146	1,59897	,031
Act out words	Beginners	24	2,4616	2,08517	
	Advanced	24	1,2431	1,89475	
	Total	48	1,8524	2,06485	,676

Frequently revise	Beginners	24	3,4927	1,83106	
	Advanced	24	4,3235	1,84430	
	Total	48	3,9081	1,86587	,238
Remember printed words	Beginners	24	4,0822	1,75904	
	Advanced	24	4,2145	1,58582	
	Total	48	4,1483	1,65810	,631

Table 3 | Descriptives regarding frequency of strategy use (proficiency)

The variables that were significantly different between the two groups, beginners advanced ($p<0,05$), regarding frequency of strategy use, were:

- "I combine new with old words"
- "I use flashcards"

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig.
Con Conbine new with old	Beginners	24	3,5215	1,31621	
	Advanced	24	4,9790	1,08557	,000
	Total	48	4,2503	1,40243	
Con Use words in Sentences	Beginners	24	3,8372	1,69922	
	Advanced	24	3,9524	1,78706	,820
	Total	48	3,8948	1,72602	
Con combine pronounciation with image	Beginners	24	3,3794	1,88827	
	Advanced	24	3,1302	2,09930	,668
	Total	48	3,2548	1,97923	
Con use rhymes	Beginners	24	2,2722	1,48434	
	Advanced	24	2,1035	1,96894	,739
	Total	48	2,1878	1,72702	
Con Use flashcards	Beginners	24	2,9533	1,75584	
	Advanced	24	1,7672	1,92913	,031
	Total	48	2,3603	1,92070	

Con Act out words	Beginners	24	2,4606	1,82656	
	Advanced	24	2,2059	2,34333	,676
	Total	48	2,3332	2,08240	
Con Frequently revise	Beginners	24	4,5978	1,69198	
	Advanced	24	5,1048	1,20901	,238
	Total	48	4,8513	1,47712	
Con Remember printed words	Beginners	24	4,4592	1,28295	
	Advanced	24	4,2424	1,78017	,631
	Total	48	4,3508	1,53891	

Table 4 | Descriptives regarding confidence of the strategy's effectiveness (proficiency)

The variables that were significantly different between the beginners and advanced groups (p<0,05), regarding confidence of strategy's effectiveness, were:

- "Confidence – I Use flashcards"
- "Confidence – I Combine new with old words

5. Discussion

Within the content-analysis technique, all the answers were normalized into groups on the basis of two criteria: (a) confidence, where the deviation between frequency of use and confidence in the effectiveness of each strategy for every single question was examined; and (b) the questionnaire comprehension (wording of the questions that might have caused some problems).

According to the Means, the scoring in frequency of *Memory* strategy use was quite low in both male and female groups, indicating that neither group makes use of the Memory strategies and does not feel they could benefit from their use either. However, the data analysis revealed deviations between the male and the female group. It was found that there girls outperform boys with respect to the overall use of the six Memory strategies, revealing females' superiority over males' both on the frequency of strategy use and on confidence, possibly because girls present a higher level of metacogniti-

ve awareness, so that they are able to better self-organize their learning procedure, and work systematically (Mulac, Studley & Blau, 1990). The fact that both genders make little use of the Memory strategies in general could be interpreted as need for strategy instruction. Regarding gender, deviation between frequency and confidence in the results could be interpreted as a need for instruction of strategy use, as it indicates that learners either appreciate the effectiveness of the strategies but they do not know how to use them or use a strategy without being confident enough that it is useful.

However, it was not found that proficiency level in English made a significant difference in the overall strategy use of memory strategies. It was recorded that the more proficient learners used few strategies, as well as the less proficient ones, despite previous studies that had reached the conclusion that more proficient language learners use a greater variety and often a greater number of learning strategies (Oxford and Nyikos 1989, Wharton 2000, Psaltou-Joycey and Kantaridou 2009).

The use of the new electronic tool eliminated both time and effort, as the total number of the questions to be answered were 100 overall (50/frequency of LLS use – 50/confidence), meaning that it would have been time-consuming and tiring for the students to answer 100 question in writing. The bar appeared to be a suitable tool, as the questionnaire was not in all the learners' mother tongue. The bilingual students that had a very poor proficiency in Greek did not find it difficult or frustrating to understand the instructions and respectively answer to the questions. The use of the bar helped to avoid distortion of the results validity due to insufficient linguistic knowledge of the target language.

6. Conclusion

The frequency of strategy use as well as the actual choice of the employed strategies is greatly influenced by gender and language proficiency level. The girls appear to outperform the boys, both employing more strategies and considering their effectiveness as highly valuable (confidence). The learner's proficiency level does not appear to greatly affect the learner's strategy use. The low scores in frequency of strategy use, as well as in confidence could probably indicate need for strategy instruction.

6.1. Limitations

Although the sample of the study included all junior high schools in Komotini that have bilingual student population, a greater sample, including senior high school and primary school students would provide much more valid results in order to check the learners' confidence in strategy use. Despite the fact that there has been a small part of the data collected on the basis of qualitative methods using think-aloud protocols, this data is rather little so as to lead to valid assumptions. Therefore, a future study of mixed methods (qualitative and quantitative) for gathering and validating language learning strategy data could be used.

Even considering the fact that the electronic tool eliminated the overall time of the questionnaire, the total number of 100 questions is rather too long, as the learners, particularly the weaker ones, presented signs of tiredness towards the end. A further reduction of the questionnaire would make it much more applicable to learners of different levels. Moreover, additional research measuring the effect of a strategy-based intervention program could provide us with further evidence on how strategy training would contribute to the learning procedure.

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