

Exploring the Relationship between Language Learning Strategy Usage and Anxiety among Chinese University Students

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Abstract: Previous research in term of traditional classroom has indicated that the effectiveness of English learning depends significantly on the strategy usage and different anxiety-provoking situations during communication. Meanwhile, researches in terms of technology-enhanced environment showed that the technology itself also can be a source of anxiety. This paper aims to understand the correlation between LLS usage and two types of anxiety – communication and technology. We adopted the FLASC and SILL questionnaires in order to collect the data from 187 Chinese University Students. The results showed that learners more often used direct LLS than the indirect ones; the most popular are compensation strategies and the least - affective. In addition, findings indicated that there was no significant difference between technology anxiety and the LLS usage. However, the communication anxiety influenced significantly the choice of LLS, especially social, cognitive, affective and memory strategies.

Keywords: language learning strategies, technology anxiety, communication anxiety.

1. Introduction

The concepts of technology-enhanced environment have opened a new resources to assist the learning process. We aim to find out how different factors influences the language learning process of adults and how to make it more resultative and engaging. Language Learning strategies (LLS) are procedures used to facilitate learning and to enable learners to become more independent and autonomous lifelong learners (Chamot, 2004). In other words, LLS are actions that learners take to accomplish their learning goals.

As any learning activity, language learning has different anxiety provoking situations. Most researchers agree that feeling of stress, anxiety or nervousness may impede language learning and performance abilities (Zafaria, Biriab, 2014). It is also believed that anxiety is one of the main hurdle to be overcome while learning English or any other foreign language.

The main purpose of language learning is communication, that is why it is regarded as one of the most anxiety-provoking activities. In addition, as we have already mentioned, modern technologies penetrate in every sphere of our life, so they also can be a new source of stress.

Even though, there are a lot of studies devoted to LLS usage and learning anxiety in traditional classroom, a few researches are made in terms of technology-enhanced learning environment.

2. Literature Review

In the middle 1980s the researchers noticed that there is a correlation between LLS usage and anxiety. Most of them assure: the higher the level of anxiety is, the less strategies are used (MacIntyre & Noels, 1996; Noormohamadi, 2009). From the other point of view, Benjamin (1981) found that improper usage of LLS becomes a new source of anxiety. Later these ideas were confirmed by Warr and Downing (2000) who stated that learners who appropriately use more different types of LLS are more motivated and have lower levels of anxiety.

2.1 Language Learning Strategy Usage

The research of LLS usage began at 1970s and reached its peak at the 1990s when Rebecca Oxford (1990) stated that they can be divided into six basic types: memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. These six types of LLs have no hierarchical relationships and are operated at the same level. Among them, the first three can be classified as direct, and the last three – as indirect. The direct strategies refer to learning the subject matter of the second language, while indirect ones concern the ways or methods that support and manage the target language. In addition, Oxford (1990) also developed a scale to evaluate the level of LLs usage – SILL (Strategy Inventory for Language Learning) – that we have used in our research, as well.

2.2 Language Learning Anxiety

The majority of previous researches show that one of the main factors that has a negative impact on foreign language learning process is an anxiety (Khattak et al., 2011). In order to evaluate the level of anxiety, Horwitz (1986) designed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale, or FLASC.

One of the most difficult and important tasks of language learning is to make learner feel free and unstressed to communicate with others. Horwitz (1986) states that during the language learning, communicational activities provoke high level of anxiety.

Nowadays, the majority of researches is based on the traditional classroom learning environment, while the network environment provides new anxiety-provoking factors and situations. The little research in that sphere can not come to one general conclusion. On the one hand, Hauck & Hurd (2005) state that the network environment reduces anxiety level and motivates learners. On the other hand, Alison Lewis & Stephan Atzert (2000) state that online learning environment enhances learner's frustration and hinders the anxiety.

2.3 Research questions

The aim of the present study is to find out if there is any significant correlation between the anxiety and LLS choice. In addition, we tried to make a general overview of LLS usage in technology-enhanced environment. To meet our goal we answered the following research questions:

- 1) Is there any relation between learners' anxiety and their language learning strategy usage?
- 2) If yes, how does learners' anxiety relate to their language learning strategies?

3. Methodology

During the research we have collected the data from 187 Chinese university students – 103 males (55.1%) and 84 females (44.9%). We developed our questionnaire based on the FLASC by Horwitz (1986) and the SILL by Oxford (1990), mentioned earlier. But as these questionnaires are mainly focused on traditional classroom, we adapted them to meet the requirements of modern technology-enhanced learning environment.

4. Results

The results showed that participants had better performance in direct strategies than in indirect strategies. It correlates with the results of Yilmaz (2010), but contradicts those of Salahshour, Safari & Salahshour (2013) and Qasimnejad & Hemmaty (2014) who stated that the most efficient language learning strategies are metacognitive (indirect) and least favored – memory strategies (direct). Among the six strategies, the most used strategies were compensation, while the least ones - affective.

Table 1 shows the correlation between learners' communication/technology anxiety and their use of language learning strategies. As a result, there was a significant negative correlation between communication anxiety and language learning strategies, including the total usage of strategies ($r = -0.28$, $p < 0.01$), direct strategies ($r = -0.26$, $p < 0.01$) and indirect strategies ($r = -0.30$, $p < 0.01$).

TABLE 1. CORRELATIONS BETWEEN THE USAGE OF STRATEGIES AND ANXIETY

	1	2	3	4	5
Total usage of strategies	1				
Direct strategies	0.95**	1			
Indirect strategies	0.93**	0.91**	1		
Communication anxiety	-0.28**	-0.26**	-0.30**	1	
Technology anxiety	-0.02	-0.03	-0.01	0.04	1

Note: ** $P < .01$

We have not seen any significant correlation between the usage of LLS and technology anxiety. One of the possible reasons can be the constant penetrating of modern technologies into all spheres of human life. As our participants were university students, so the majority of them has already used modern technologies as part of their everyday studies. The relationship between LLS and technology anxiety can be further investigated regarding the age and personal background.

Further statistical analyses performed the relationship between communication anxiety and LLS. Two groups of participants were selected to represent learners with high communication anxiety (in the top 30% on survey) and those with low communication anxiety (in the last 30% on survey). The results suggested that language learners with less anxiety towards communication were likely to apply more strategies while learning English. Particularly, all the six subscales revealed the similar kinds of situations for the two anxiety groups, indicating that learners with less communication anxiety would perform better in language learning strategy test.

The limitations of the study are mainly connected with the fact that there are some contradictions in the results that we got and in the previous researches, especially those connected with the frequency of LLS usage and the influence of personal characteristics (like gender and age) on the strategy choice. These opposing results can be investigated in future researches.

Acknowledgement

This study is partly supported by the Humanities and Social Science Research Foundation of the Ministry of Education for young scholars "Research on critical thinking among college students in online collaborative learning environments" (15YJC880034).

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