

AWARENESS IN THE USE OF LANGUAGE SPEAKING STRATEGIES IN BUSINESS ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

ABSTRACT

The study described in this paper was carried out with the aim of establishing the relationships between self-estimated and actually used language speaking strategies in Business English as a foreign language.

*The sample consisted of 84 Faculty of Economics and Tourism students who had been studying English for at least 8 years. They were divided in two groups: experimental and control. Students attending the experimental group were taught how to use speaking language learning strategies. Data about their level of awareness to use language learning strategies for speaking was measured by means of the questionnaire *Speaking strategies* (Kostić-Bobanović, 2004).*

Data analysis shows that there were significant differences between actually used and self-estimated use of strategies in both the experimental and control groups. However, students from the experimental groups are more aware of used strategies than those in the control group. The importance of teaching specific strategies was discussed.

Keywords: *language awareness, language learning strategies, Business English as a foreign language.*

INTRODUCTION

Language learning strategies are used by learners to complete speaking, reading, vocabulary, listening or writing activities presented in language lessons. Recognizing that there is a task to complete or a problem to solve (Oxford, 1990), language learners will use whatever metacognitive, cognitive or social/affective strategies they possess to attend to the language-learning activity. However, whereas experienced language learners can approach language-learning problems in a systematic way and are usually successful in selecting appropriate strategies to complete a language-learning task, novices may be less efficient at selecting and using strategies to task (O'Malley and Chamot, 1995). Regardless of language learning experiences, both groups of learners will need instruction in "how" to use strategies efficiently as a way to improve language learning and performance (Wenden, 1987; O'Malley and Chamot, 1995; Cohen, 1998.). One way to direct learners towards the efficient use of learning strategies is to integrate language learning strategy instruction into regular language lessons.

Language learning strategy instruction is a teaching approach that aims to raise learner awareness of learning strategies and provide learners with systematic practice, reinforcement and self-monitoring of their strategy use while attending to language learning activities.

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According to Oxford (1996) strategy instruction teaches students how to be better learners in several specific ways, including:

- 1) identifying and improving strategies that are currently used by individual;
- 2) identifying strategies that the individual might not be using but that might be helpful for the task at hand, and then teaching those strategies;
- 3) helping students learn to transfer strategies across language tasks and even across subject fields;
- 4) aiding student while evaluating the success of their use of particular strategies with specific tasks; and
- 5) assisting subjects in gaining learning style flexibility by teaching them strategies that are instinctively used by students with other learning styles.

Schmidt (1994) notes that the main contrast in strategy instruction is consciousness. Consciousness can be divided into four aspects: awareness, attention, intentionality, and control. He points that lack of any consciousness of strategies can be considered yet another aspect. Strategy instruction encompasses all of these.

Level of strategy instruction we are interested in is raising our students' awareness. This means waking students up to the idea of strategies when learning a language.

Awareness of language learning strategies often comes merely by taking part in a strategy assessment. Some strategy assessments, such as surveys, think-aloud protocols, and diaries, help students reflect on their strategy use and therefore spark strategic awareness.

Researchers have experimented with instructing language learners to use selected learning strategies as a way to improve language performance.

Cohen and Apeh (1980) trained learners of Hebrew how to recall new words by using "paired associations and found that better performance in recall tasks occurred when learners formed associations than when associations were not formed" (Ellis, 2002, 157).

In an investigation by Weinstein (1978) students were trained in how to use a variety of elaboration strategies and apply them to reading comprehension and memory tasks. The positive results showed students trained in elaboration strategies significantly outperformed the students who received no training (O'Malley and Chamot, 1995). In a training project to develop self-evaluation and monitoring strategies, Wenden (1987) reports that providing students with a checklist of criteria to self-evaluate their oral production resulted in successful use of self-evaluation as a learning strategy.

The consensus of these investigations and others (Bialystok 1983; Gagne 1985; Johnson 1999; Dadour 1996) tell us that language learning strategies are 'teachable' and training language learners to use selected learning strategies can have positive effects on task performance and the awareness in use of learning strategies.

The aim of this research was to examine whether our subjects are aware of using learning strategies in Business English as a foreign language.

The study was based on the following hypotheses:

1. The teaching and training of strategies can help develop awareness in the use of learning strategies.
2. Most of our subjects are unaware of the strategies that they use.

METHODS

The research was carried out on a total of 84 subjects, freshmen students majoring in tourism, marketing, and finance at the Faculty of Economics and Tourism “Dr. Mijo Mirković” in Pula. The subjects were divided into two equal groups, one of which was the experimental and the other the control group. All of the subjects were fulltime students. They attended lectures in Business English 4 hours per week.

None of the subjects spent more than two weeks in an English speaking country, nor were they in contact with a native speaker for more than two weeks. Neither of the two groups was ever taught about learning strategies.

The research was carried out in several phases.

The first survey was conducted at the beginning of the second semester of the 2000/2001 academic year.

In the first phase of research we:

- a) evaluated competence on a speaking level and
- b) tested the strategies that students used while learning new speaking skills.

With the experimental group of subjects, an integrated teaching process for learning strategies in speaking skills was carried through during one semester or 50 hours of English language lectures. As part of language training, students in the experimental group were taught to use of learning strategies. The professor stressed the use of strategies in developing of speaking skills. The subjects were exposed to the teaching of 41 learning strategies regarding speaking. The selection of teaching strategies depended on concrete scholastic material that we were working on.

With the control group of subjects, lectures were held in traditional format without teaching of strategies.

After 50 hours of lectures, the following elements were tested again:

- a) the communicational competence on a speaking level and
- b) the strategies that students used while learning new speaking skills.

The procedure

We briefly explained the aim of the study to the subjects of the experimental and control group, and requested their cooperation. The research was carried out in the classroom for foreign languages. Students' speaking performance was measured with the help of the communicational assignment *Conversation with a client (the negotiation of a tourist arrangement)*. In this assignment the students were placed in an imaginary situation. One student played the role of a receptionist in a hotel and the other the role of an English speaking guest seeking adequate lodging.

The purpose of communicational assignment was to offer the subjects the opportunity to use the largest number of strategies.

Measures

The use of speaking strategies was measured with think-aloud protocols and with the questionnaire *Speaking strategies* (Kostić-Bobanović, 2004). The students had 15 minutes for preparation and presentation. They were given oral instructions on how to solve the questionnaire.

Prior to the application of think-aloud protocols, the students were taught how to state thoughts out loud. We conducted a training, with the goal of emphasizing the use of those strategies, which the participants were only half aware of or complete unaware of, due to the fact that they are competent parts of procedural knowledge.

During the speaking performance the students stated their thoughts out loud, then explained where and why they used certain strategies. Their oral statement was recorded on audiocassette. The recordings were later transcribed and analyzed, with the goal of determining which strategies the students used in the assignment. After completing the assignment, the students filled out the questionnaire *Speaking strategies*, where they chose the strategies that they thought they had used.

Our students used a variety of strategies, some of them were covert, therefore they need a complex introspect ional method of research (for example: *I visualize the spelling of the new word in my mind*). Some of them were overt and they can be identified from the transcribed communicational assignment (for example: *I am aware of my mistakes and I try to correct them*). By analyzing the questionnaire *Speaking Strategies*, we set apart nine overt strategies which we identified from the transcribed communicational assignment. Therefore, we designed a new questionnaire that consists of the following strategies:

- ❖ Cognitive strategy number 5: *I recognize and use expressions in the English language which are appropriate for particular situations.*
- ❖ Cognitive strategy number 10: *I translate and directly use words and structures from my mother tongue in the English language.*
- ❖ Compensation strategy number 11: *When I can't think of the right expression in conversation, I use my mother tongue*
- ❖ Compensational strategy number 16: *If I can't think of the correct word to use, I make one up.*
- ❖ Compensational strategy number 17: *In conversation, when I can't think of the right expression to convey my thought, I use a synonym or describe what I wish to say.*
- ❖ Metacognitive strategy number 25: *I am aware of my mistakes and I try to correct them.*
- ❖ Affective strategy number 27: *Whenever I feel nervous about speaking the English language, I try to relax my muscles by breathing in deeply.*
- ❖ Affective strategy number 29: *When I feel nervous about speaking the English language, I laugh in order to relax.*
- ❖ Social strategy number 37: *I ask my fellow speakers to correct the mistakes that I make when speaking.*

Using the questionnaire, we identified the strategies from the transcription of the communicational assignment. We also used the transcription to verify the difference between the experimental group and the control group actual and self-estimated use of strategies in communicational assignment.

Data analysis

The results from the questionnaires were processed using SPSS for Windows (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). The difference between the actual and self-estimated use of strategies use was examined with χ^2 test.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of actual and self-estimated use of speaking strategies in both the experimental and control groups are shown in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1.

Rank list of actual and self-estimated use of strategies in the experimental group

<i>Rank</i>	<i>Actual use</i>		<i>Self-estimated use</i>		χ^2	<i>p</i>
	<i>Strategy name</i>	<i>Percentage %</i>	<i>Rank</i>	<i>Strategy name</i>		
1.	Cognitive strategy 5	(35) 83.3%	4.	Cognitive strategy 5	(26) 61.9%	4.84 .05
2.	Affective strategy 29	(21) 50%	5.	Affective strategy 29	(25) 59.5%	0.76 n.s.
3.	Metacognitive strategy 25	(17) 40.5%	2.	Metacognitive strategy 25	(29) 69.45%	6.92 .001
4.	Affective strategy 27	(14) 33.3%	9.	Affective strategy 27	(9) 21.4%	1.48 n.s.
5.	Compensational strategy 17	(13) 30.95%	1.	Compensational strategy 17	(32) 76.2%	17.26 .001
6.	Compensational strategy 16	(11) 26.1%	8.	Compensational strategy 16	(12) 28.6%	0.06 n.s.
7.	Compensational strategy 11	(9) 21.4%	3.	Compensational strategy 11	(27) 64.3%	15.75 .001
8.	Social strategy 37	(4) 9.5%	6.	Social strategy 37	(19) 45.2%	13.46 .001
9.	Cognitive strategy 10	(3) 7.1%	7.	Cognitive strategy 10	(14) 33.3%	8.63 .001

After analyzing the transcriptions, it became apparent that students who were taught language learning strategies tended overwhelmingly (83.3%) to use *Cognitive strategy no. 5*, in which they recognize and use expressions that are appropriate for particular situations. However, a smaller proportion (61.9%) was conscious of using the strategy.

Cognitive strategy no. 10, in which students translate words and structures from the mother tongue, was the least frequently used (7.1%) in practice. In their minds, however, students thought they were translating words and structures more frequently (33.3%).

These results indicate that not only was insufficient consciousness of used strategies the effect here, but the wrong recognition of the strategies used was also present. Our results revealed that the experimental group showed statistically significant differences between actual use and self-estimated use in *Cognitive strategies no. 5 and 10*, *Metacognitive strategy no. 25*, *Compensational strategies no. 17 and 11*, and *Social strategy no. 37*. In all of the above mentioned strategies, except for *Cognitive no. 5*, the estimated use is much higher than the actual one. Among the explored strategies, there were three strategies (*Affective strategies no. 27 and 29 and Compensational strategy no. 16*) in which there are no significant differences between actual and self-estimated use of the strategies.

Table 2.

Rank list of actual and self-estimated use of strategies in the control group

Rank	Actual use		Self-estimated use		χ^2	p
	Strategy name	Percentage and %	Rank	Strategy name		
1.	Cognitive strategy no. 5	(32) 76.2%	4.	Cognitive strategy no. 5	(22) 52.4%	5.18 .02
2.	Affective strategy no. 27	(18) 42.9%	8.	Affective strategy 27	(15) 35.7%	0.45 n.s.
3.	Metacognitive strategy 25	(9) 21.4%	2.	Metacognitive strategy 25	(30) 71.4%	21.1 .001
4.	Affective strategy 29	(9) 21.4%	3.	Affective strategy 29	(23) 54.8%	9.88 .01
5.	Compensational strategy 16	(8) 19.1%	6.	Compensational strategy 16	(18) 42.9%	5.57 .02
6.	Compensational strategy 11	(6) 14.3%	5.	Compensational strategy 11	(21) 50%	12.28 .01
7.	Cognitive strategy 10	(3) 7.1%	9.	Cognitive strategy 10	(13) 30.9%	7.72 .01
8.	Compensational strategy 17	(3) 7.1%	1.	Compensational strategy 17	(31) 73.8%	38.66 .001
9.	Social strategy 37	(2) 4.8%	7.	Social strategy 37	(18) 42.9%	16.8 .001

Cognitive strategy no. 5 (recognizing and using expressions appropriate for situations) also was the most frequently used strategy for students in the control group (76.2%). A much smaller percentage of the control group (52.4%) thought they used this strategy. Apparently,

students who are aware of the strategy (the experimental group) think they use it more frequently than students who are unaware of the strategy (the control group).

The least frequently-used strategy in the control group was *Social strategy no. 37* (asking fellow speakers the correction of speaking mistakes). In fact, only 4.8 % actually use it., but in their minds, however, students thought they were asking the correction of mistakes more frequently (42.9%).

Our results revealed that the control group showed significant differences between actual use and self-estimated use of *Cognitive strategies no. 5 and 10*, *Metacognitive strategy no. 25*, *Affective strategy no. 29*, *Compensational strategies no. 16, 11, and 17*, and *Social strategy no. 37*. As in experimental group, in all of the mentioned strategies, except for *Cognitive strategy no. 5*, the estimated use is much higher than the actual one. Among the explored strategies, there was only one (*Affective strategy no. 27.*) which showed no significant differences between actual and self-estimated use of the strategies.

Between the experimental and control groups, there were two significant statistically differences regarding the actual use of strategies. The experimental group more frequently used *Affective strategy no. 29* ($\chi^2 = 7.46$; $df = 1$; $p < .001$) and *Compensational strategy no. 17* ($\chi^2 = 5.48$; $df = 1$; $p < .01$) than the control group. The term “affective” refers to emotions, attitude, motivation and values (Oxford, 1990). It means that experimental group participants reduced anxiety when they feel nervous about speaking English by laughing. The participants of experimental group used *Compensational strategy no. 17* to overcome knowledge limitations in speaking by using synonyms or describing what they wish to say.

We may state that the obtained results are due to the positive effect of strategy training.

Concerning self-estimated strategies use, the only difference found between the experimental and the control group was in the use of *Affective strategy no. 29* ($\chi^2 = 4.86$; $df = 1$; $p < .01$). Control group participants estimated higher use of before mentioned strategy than those of experimental group.

A great number of our students are not aware of strategy use. Experimental group participants are more aware of actual use of strategies than those in control group. In experimental group there are three strategies *Affective strategies no. 27 and 29* and *Compensational strategy no. 16* while in the control group there was only one *Affective strategy no. 27* which showed no significant differences between actual and self-estimated use. We may say that teaching and training of strategies can help develop the awareness in the use of learning strategies.

CONCLUSION

Analysis shows that almost all of our students are unaware of strategies that they actually use when learning the Business English language. There were significant differences between actual and self-estimated use of strategies in both the experimental and control groups. However, students from the experimental group are more aware of strategies they actually use than are those in the control group.

We may assume that Business English learners may become aware of and familiar with the general idea of language learning strategies and the way such strategies can help them accomplish various language tasks.

We may conclude with words of Dadour and Robbins (Oxford, 1996, 166): “Though strategy instruction was not a “magic pill” to improve anyone’s speaking ability, it is an effective means of enhancing foreign language teaching and learning.”

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SVJESNOST UPOTREBE STRATEGIJÂ GOVORA ENGLSKOGA KAO POSLOVNOGA STRANOG JEZIKA

SAŽETAK

Svrha ovog članka je utvrditi odnos između samo procjene i stvarne upotrebe strategijâ govora engleskog kao poslovnoga stranog jezika.

U istraživanju je sudjelovalo 84 studenata Fakulteta ekonomije i turizma koji su učili engleski jezik najmanje 8 godina. Bili su podijeljeni u dvije grupe: eksperimentalnu i kontrolnu. Studente eksperimentalne grupe poučavali smo strategijama govora engleskog jezika. Za prikupljanje podataka o svjesnosti upotrebe strategijâ koristili smo se upitnikom Strategije govora (Kostić- Bobanović, 2004).

Rezultati istraživanja pokazali su da postoje značajne razlike između stvarne upotrebe i samo procjene upotrebe strategijâ kako u eksperimentalnoj tako i u kontrolnoj grupi. Studenti eksperimentalne grupe svjesniji su upotrebe strategijâ od studenata kontrolne grupe. Naglašena je značajnost poučavanja strategijâ govora engleskog kao poslovnoga stranog jezika.

Ključne riječi: jezična svjesnost, strategije učenja jezika, engleski kao poslovni strani jezik.

