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## **The Use of Strategies in Foreign Language Learning of Undergraduate Students**

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### **Abstract**

The objective of this study was to study and compare the use of strategies in foreign language learning of undergraduate students based on their gender and grade point average. The samples used in the study were undergraduate students majoring in English, Japanese and Chinese in Faculty of Arts, Dhurakij Pundit University, Bangkok, Thailand.

The research instrument was a rating scale questionnaire adapted from Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning version 7.0 with reliability value at .92. The statistics used in data analysis consisted of mean, standard deviation and t-test.

The results of the study found that:

1. Male and female students used strategies in learning foreign languages differently with a significant statistic at 0.05. The level of female students using strategies in learning foreign languages was significantly higher than of the male students in overall.
2. In general, students with different grade point averages used strategies in learning foreign languages differently with a significant statistic at 0.05. In details, the significant differences were on Cognitive Strategies, Compensation Strategies, and Social Strategies respectively.

**Keywords:** Strategies in Foreign Language Learning, Foreign Language, Strategies in Learning

### **1. Background and Importance of the Study**

A foreign language is any other language that people do not use in their daily communication. It is a language for a specific purpose or for building relationship or other advantages, such as in business, trading, diplomatic negotiation, military affairs, tourism, etc. In the modern world with borderless communication, foreign languages are necessary the most because they are the medium in global communication.

According to The National Education Development Plan Volume 8 onwards, educational management strategies of Thailand have stipulated foreign language learning in educational levels in order to prepare students to confront with the global changing situations. From those

strategies, 6-year-English learning is assigned for primary school level, 6 years for secondary school level and another 3 years for high school level. Students in secondary school level onwards have to choose one of foreign languages other than English for their minor language, such as Chinese, Japanese, French etc. for not less than 6 years in school study. In undergraduate study, Thai students have to learn one or two foreign languages at least 1-2 years.

Although foreign language learning has been stipulated as the national policy, but the ability and quality in languages of graduates are not satisfactory to society and workforce market. The report of strategic plan in English teaching and learning reform to increase competitive ability in national level of Ministry of Education (2006 - 2010) (<http://www.moe.go.th>) specified that the achievement in English learning of students had an average level below 50% and the result of "A Study of the Required Qualifications of Graduates in Tourism Business" (Somporn Gomaratur, 2012) showed that the required qualifications of graduates in tourism business were knowledge, excellent English communication, and ability in other foreign language communication in a good level. In actual situation, communication ability in English or other foreign languages of Thai students was below standard criteria.

The English learning system of Thai students revealed that the achievement in foreign language learning was not only dependent on learning durations. The successful foreign language learners usually use several strategies in their learning and those strategies are suitable to themselves and types of work. (Naiman, Frohlich and Todesco, 1975 in Praewpan Pimprom, 2008)

Language learning strategies mean methods, specific actions or techniques that the language learners bring into use to achieve the highest advantage in language learning. The use of appropriate strategies helps improve language ability of the learners (Oxford, 1990). So, to be successful in foreign language learning, learners must have learning strategies and apply those strategies in their learning appropriately and regularly as MC. Groarty and Oxford (1990) found that strategies in language learning were the supportive tools for learners in responsibility and choosing an appropriate learning strategies. Studies of language learning strategies have been continually done since 1970, i.e. by Naiman et al in 1978, Rubin in 1981, Brown and Palinscar in 1982, O. Mary et al in 1985, and Oxford in 1990. Oxford divided language learning strategies into 2 types; Direct Strategies, strategies depending on brain procedures, i.e. memory strategies, cognitive strategies, and compensation strategies, and Indirect Strategies; strategies used in learning management, mistakes solution, and support and control learners' learning, i.e. metacognitive strategies, effective strategies and social strategies.

As a foreign language teacher, the researcher considers that learning strategies of Oxford is beneficial to language learning, and is interested in the study and comparison in the use of foreign language learning of undergraduate students based on their sex and learning achievement from GPA in order to use the study result as a guideline in application of appropriate strategies in foreign language learning to students, in teaching preparation and language teaching and learning improvement.

### **3. Objectives of the Study**

1. To study the use of strategies in foreign language learning of undergraduate students, and
2. To compare the use of strategies in foreign language learning of undergraduate students based on their sex and GPA.

### **4. Hypotheses of the Study**

1. Students with different sex use different strategies in foreign language learning.
2. Students with different GPA use different strategies in foreign language learning.

### **5. Literatures and Research Works Concerned**

Many educators have given definitions of language learning strategies. For this study, language learning strategies mean methods, specific actions or techniques that the learners apply in language learning to make it easier, faster and more effective and to achieve the best advantage in language learning and to transfer it to new knowledge and new situation. (Wenden and Rubin, (1987: 7-8, Oxford, 1990: 1, Weaver and Cohen, 1998: 68, Brown, 2000: 113, Chamot, 2005: 14-15).

In this study, two types of foreign language learning strategies of Oxford Rebecca; Direct Strategies and Indirect Strategies are used as follows:

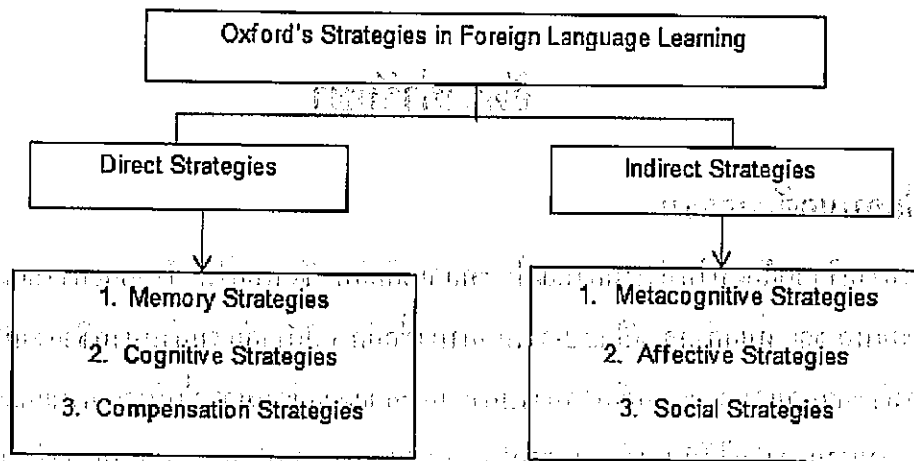


Chart 1: Concept in Language Learning Strategies of Oxford Rebecca

#### Research Works Concerned

Bremner (1999) studied the relation between the use of language learning strategies and language learning achievement of students in Hong Kong, and found that students used compensation strategies and cognitive strategies the most, while affective strategies and memory strategies were used the least. The relation between the use of language learning strategies and language learning achievement was varied.

Wharton (2000) surveyed the use of language learning strategies bilingual students learning foreign languages in Singapore. The populations in the study were bilingual students coming from different cultures and studying Japanese and French as foreign languages in Singapore University. The result of the study found that students with high GPA used more language learning strategies than those having low GPA, and male students used more strategies in learning than female students with a significant level.

Lee (2003), in A Study of the Relation between sex, years in study and GPA and the Use of English Language Learning Strategies of secondary School Students in Pusan, Korea, found that, in general perspective, students used language learning strategies in their learning in a moderate level. The most strategies used were compensation strategies and the least ones were affective strategies. Female students used more strategies in language learning than did the male students. Students having high GPA used language learning strategies more frequent than low GPA students. Cognitive strategies were used among the high GPA students more than the low GPA students at a significantly statistic level.

Naruemol Khotosombat (2003) studied strategies in English language learning of graduate students in faculty of Science, Mahidol University.

The populations were M.A. and Ph.D. students. The research instrument was a questionnaire from language learning strategies of Oxford. The result of the study showed that students in general used every type of strategies in their language learning, but when considered in each aspect, compensation strategies were mostly used.

Su (2005), in Relation between the Use of Language Learning Strategies and Language Ability Evaluation of Students Majoring in Foreign Languages in Taiwan, found that students used language learning strategies in their learning in a moderate level totally. The most strategies used by students were social strategies and the least ones were memory strategies. Students with high language ability evaluation used language learning strategies more often than students with low language ability evaluation.

Chang and others (2007), in The Influence of Sex and the Use of Language Learning Strategies of University Students Learning English as a Foreign Language in Taiwan, found that there was no any difference in the use of strategies in each aspect, and in overall, the use of language learning strategies was in a moderate level. The strategies mostly used were compensation strategies, and affective strategies were used the least. Sex had an influence to the use of language learning strategies. Female students used language learning strategies at a significantly statistic level more than did the male students in every aspect, especially in cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies and social strategies.

Praewpan Pringprom (2008), in her comparative study, in the use of English language learning strategies based on gender and years in study of the first and second year students of Bangkok University, found that students used all types of strategies in English language learning in a moderate level in overall. The most strategies used by students were compensation strategies, followed by metacognitive strategies. The use of language learning strategies among female students was significantly higher than of male students, and students in different years of study used language learning strategies with a significantly statistic difference.

## 6. Scope of the Study

1. The samplings are undergraduate students majoring in English, Japanese and Chinese in Faculty of Arts, Dhurakij Pundit University, Bangkok, Thailand.

2. Variables;

2.1 Independent variables are sex and grade point average.

2.2 Dependent variables are 6 language learning strategies; 1. Memory strategies, 2. Cognitive Strategies, 3. Compensation Strategies, 4. Metacognitive Strategies, 5. Affective Strategies, and 6. Social Strategies.

### 7. Research Instruments

The data were collected through 5-rating scale questionnaires adapted from Oxford's strategy inventory for language learning version 7.0. Content confidential of the questionnaire was evaluated by 3 specialists and the questionnaire reliability was tried out with 50 students learning fundamental English. Reliability value of the questionnaire was 0.92.

### 8. Data Collecting Method

The researcher contacted English lecturers and collected the data individually in the eleventh week of the second semester in academic year 2014.

### 9. Data Analysis Method

The data were analyzed by mean, standard deviation and t-test with independent samples.

### 10. Results of the Study

Results of the study and hypotheses were as follows:

Table 1: Mean, standard deviation and levels of using foreign language learning strategies

Language learning strategies	Mean	Standard deviation	Using levels
Memory Strategies	2.87	.50	Moderate
Cognitive Strategies	3.07	.48	Moderate
Compensation Strategies	3.07	.51	Moderate
Metacognitive Strategies	3.33	.56	Moderate
Affective Strategies	2.83	.55	Moderate
Social Strategies	2.96	.62	Moderate
<b>Total</b>	<b>3.04</b>	<b>.42</b>	<b>Moderate</b>

Frequency levels in using strategies:

1.00-2.49 means a low level

2.50-3.49 means a moderate level

3.50-5.00 means a high level

It was found in Table 1 that the use of foreign language learning strategies of students was in a moderate level ( $X=3.04$ ) in overall and in each aspect. In details, the highest level was in metacognitive strategies ( $X=3.330$ , followed by cognitive strategies and compensation strategies ( $X=3.070$ , social strategies ( $X=2.96$ ), memory strategies ( $X=2.87$ ), and affective strategies ( $X=2.83$ ) respectively.

Table 2: A comparison of using foreign language learning strategies of students according to their sex

Language Learning Strategies	Male		female		t	Sig
	X	S.D.	X	S.D.		
Memory Strategies	2.55	.61	3.01	.39	-5.57*	.000
Cognitive Strategies	2.76	.45	3.19	.44	-6.82	.186
Compensation Strategies	2.87	.39	3.14	.53	-4.22*	.000
Metacognitive Strategies	3.07	.48	3.43	.56	-4.61	.981
Affective Strategies	2.53	.58	2.94	.50	-5.50	.138
Social Strategies	2.62	.69	3.09	.54	-5.00*	.000
Total	2.75	.43	3.15	.37	-6.83*	.009

P < 0.05

From Table 2, it indicated that students with different sexes used foreign language learning strategies differently in total with a significantly statistic figure at .05. In aspects, male students and female students used memory strategies, compensation strategies and social strategies differently with a significant level at .05.

Table 3: A comparison of using foreign language learning strategies of students based on their GPA

Language Learning Strategies	GPA						t	Sig
	High			Low				
	X	S.D.	Level	X	S.D.	Level		
Memory Strategies	2.86	.55	Moderate	2.90	.44	Moderate	-.622	.449
Cognitive Strategies	3.04	.56	Moderate	3.11	.34	Moderate	-1.06*	.008
Compensation Strategies	3.16	.53	Moderate	2.93	.44	Moderate	3.62*	.017
Metacognitive Strategies	3.41	.63	Moderate	3.21	.42	Moderate	2.99*	.015
Affective Strategies	2.81	.58	Moderate	2.85	.52	Moderate	-5.537	.425
Social Strategies	2.97	.68	Moderate	2.94	.53	Moderate	.309*	.035
Total	3.05	.48	Moderate	3.02	.32	Moderate	.717*	.044

P < 0.05

The Table 3 showed that students having different levels of GPA used foreign language learning strategies differently with a significantly statistic level at .05. in aspects, students used cognitive strategies, compensation strategies, metacognitive strategies and social strategies in different levels with a significant statistic at .05.

In details, students having high GPA used metacognitive strategies the most, and then followed by compensation strategies and cognitive strategies respectively. While students with low GPA also used metacognitive strategies the most, followed by cognitive strategies and social strategies.

## 11. Conclusion

1. Thai students used language learning strategies in a moderate level in total. This result was related to the work of Bremner (1990), Lee (2003), Naruemol Khotosombat (2003), Su (2005), and Chang and others (2007), Praewpan Pringprom (2008). The strategies mostly used were metacognitive strategies. This type of strategies offers how to learn and how to succeed in learning a language, such as intention, learning management, learning plan, and learning evaluation. The least strategies used by students were affective strategies that cover attitude, motivation, and values influencing to language learning, such as how to reduce stress in language learning, building confidence in communication, and compensation. This result was relevant to the works of Lee (2003) and Chang and others (2007).

2. Students with different sex used language learning strategies differently. Female students used language learning strategies at a higher level than of the male students which was relevant to the studies of Oxford (1993), Taguchi (2002), Lee (2003), Chang and others (2007), and Praewpan Pringprom (2008). It could be possible that ability in memory, learning management, learning planning, learning intention and evaluation, learning adjustment, practice, information receiving and sending system, interest in language activities and social skills of women was higher than of men. (Oxford, 1990: 17)

3. Students with different GPA used language learning strategies differently. Students having high GPA used language learning strategies higher than those with low GPA. The result was related to the studies of Wharton (2000) and Lee (2003). The observation was that both high GPA students and low GPA students used metacognitive strategies and cognitive strategies the most. Metacognitive and cognitive strategies were Direct Strategies, So, Direct Strategies were the must-strategies in foreign language learning. Direct Strategies consist of intention, learning concentration, learning management and planning, practice, analysis, information receiving and sending system, and self-learning evaluation. Brown (2000: 123) said that the qualifications of successful language learners were composed of learning method selecting, management ability, learning planning, language information connecting, opportunity finding in language practice, good memory, application of what having learnt, learning from mistakes, no resistance or tire of difficulties in language learning, application of mother tongue to a target language, guessing techniques, and identification of spoken and written language patterns. All these qualifications are included in Direct Strategies and Indirect Strategies according to Oxford Rebecca.

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