Language learning strategies and second language use in the academic context

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I. INTRODUCTION

We can hypothesize that a number of factors will influence the way input is processed by learners. Kumaravadivelu (1994) identifies intake factors – individual, negotiation, tactical, affective, knowledge and environmental – and intake processes – linguistic processes of grammaticalization and language transfer, and cognitive processes of inferencing, structuring, and restructuring. This author argues that these factors and processes interact in a synergic relationship, each shaping and being shaped by each other. Ellis (1994) focuses on the factors that potentially affect incidental second language vocabulary from oral input, and considers four sets of factors: the intrinsic properties of second language words, the nature of the input, the role of interaction, and individual learner factors. Both Kumaravadivelu and Ellis present an exhaustive classification of factors and look at them as factors which form part of a continuum rather than as separate factors. Besides, these authors suggest that input factors and individual learner differences must be considered in order to explain those instances in which an input factor may not have the intended effect. By input factors we mean the input features which the learner is exposed to. These input features are formal in nature and reflect the way in which oral and written input data is presented to the learner. With regard to the classification of individual learner differences, their classification is problematic since it is difficult to observe qualities such as aptitude, anxiety or motivation and most of these factors are related to one another.

In this paper, although we assume that it is not possible to divide the external and learners' factors, we will analyse the influence of two individual learner differences, motivation and extroversion, on learners' strategy choice. In an attempt to impose some order to individual learner differences, we will divide our literature review into learner factors and learner processes. Then, we will present a self-report questionnaire (adapted from Bacon & Finnemann, 1990) used to measure learners' representation of the two traits selected. Results of the study will be explained taking into account our pilot study which can serve as a starting point for empirical research.

II. BACKGROUND RESEARCH

1. Learner factors

Several individual factors have been found to play a role in second language acquisition: age, motivation, anxiety, extroversion, aptitude, cognitive style, individual learning techniques...

All of these variables and many more have been shown to be related to L2 learning in various ways (Skehan, 1989; Jonassen and Grabowski, 1993) Of these variables motivation and extroversion appear to play an important role in input processing.

Motivation has been frequently linked with attitudes towards the community of the target language. The most influential work in the field has been that of Gardner and Lambert in Canada (Gardner and Lambert, 1959, 1972; Gardner, 1968, 1980, 1985, 1988). They draw a basic distinction between integrative and instrumental motivation. The former occurs when the learner wishes to identify with the culture of the L2 group, and the latter occurs when the learner wishes to learn the language for practical reasons (to find a job, pass an exam...). The results of the empirical research based on Gardner and his colleagues' studies are mixed and difficult to interpret. It seems clear that motivation has a causal influence on language-learning success, but the distinction between integrative and instrumental motivation is not so obvious. Dörrnyei (1994) and Oxford & Shearing (1994) have also suggested that research on motivation and second language acquisition would benefit from a consideration of motivational constructs from other research areas. Besides, different contextual differences might modify such a distinction and present a wider range of orientations than was previously supposed (specially outside Canada).

As far as extroversion is concerned, Fillmore (1979) shows that learners get benefit from the amount of input they are exposed to. Conversely, Strong (1983) claims that exposure to input is not the necessary condition to turn input into intake. According to Strong, extrovert learners tend to participate in the interaction actively, and as a result of this participation develop the second language. Strong's point of view is shared by Seliger (1977, 1983). According to Seliger, by participating in interaction, learners are involved cognitively and affectively to learn the language. Although Seliger seems to imply that learners benefit from the input they generate, there is research evidence which suggests that the learner's individual and cognitive style must be taken into account before generalizing on the effect of certain individual factors on second language acquisition (Alcón, 1994). Alcon (1994) showed that it is essential to relate the language learners' individual factors and cognitive styles to their approach to the learning task. The author analyzed empirically the impact of generated input on the process of learning a language. The implication that seems to rise from the study, in line with Allwright (1980) and Slimani (1987), is that the way input is processed by the learner depends on affective and cognitive factors which, in turn, have been proved to influence the strategies and procedures employed by learners to process L2 data for acquisition and use.

2. Learner processes

Learner processes, which reflect individual cognitive capability, are the operations that are required for language learning. According to Kumaravadivelu (1994), these processes are linguistic or cognitive. On the one hand, the processes that are linguistic in nature include grammaticalization, as a process that considers the role played by Universal Grammar, and language transfer, a process that takes into account the interlingual identification from L1 to L2 input. On the other hand, the cognitive processes guide what learners have to do to develop their L2. These cognitive processes, which appear frequently under the rubric of learner strategies (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990), focus on describing how information is stored and retrieved rather than how language can be enhanced. The literature on learning strategies in second language acquisition emerged from a concern for identifying the characteristics of the

"good language learner" (Naiman et al., 1978; Rubin, 1975; Stern, 1975). Since that time several strategy classification systems have been suggested: systems based on psychological functions such as cognitive, metacognitive, and affective (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990); systems based on different types of learners (Sutter, 1989; Ehrman and Oxford (1989, 1990); linguistically based strategy systems (Bialystok, 1978, 1981; Tarone, 1983), and systems based on particular language skills such as oral production, vocabulary learning, reading comprehension, or writing (Cohen, 1990).

Although most authors agree on defining strategies as specific actions for active, self-directed involvement that is necessary for developing the second language, there seems to be a great need to help learners to become aware of their learning styles and preferences as well as a conscious selection in the light of learning objectives and task demands. In other words, learners need to plan, carry out and evaluate their own process of information. In so doing, they will become autonomous learners. According to Holec (1987), in order to be able to engage in autonomous learning, the learner must review her representation of what a language is and what learning a language is, so that he/she can move from the role of consumer to the role of producer of her own learning programme.

III. THE PILOT STUDY

1. Subjects and Procedure

There were three hundred and twenty subjects, all between eighteen and twenty-two years of age. All of them were studying at the University Jaume I (Spain). One hundred and seventy of the subjects were studying law, but had English as a compulsory subject in their curriculum. One hundred and fifty of the subjects were studying translation, where the Catalan language was also compulsory. Care was taken that all the subjects had been born and raised in Spain.

2. Data Collection

The data collection methods were questionnaires (Appendix). Questions in the questionnaire were separated into six sections. The first two sections focus on learners instrumental motivation in relation to their future – section A – or present situation – section B-. The following two sections indicate different learning strategies used by learners in order to understand and produce a second language – section C list some of the strategies normally associated with extrovert learners, while questions in section D list those associated with introvert learners-. Finally, the last two sections represent learners' attitude to language learning. The questionnaires were administrated in Spanish and it took approximately 15-20 minutes to complete.

3. Results

Numbers of student responses were tabulated and converted to percentages. The analysis of students responses are shown in table I.

TABLE I – *Percentages based on Students' responses to the questionnaires*

	English	Catalan
Motivation P	11%	72%
Motivation F	89%	28%
Estrateg. EX	25%	60%
Estateg. IN	75%	40%
Attitude AN	17%	26%
Attitude SO	83%	74%

P: Present; F: Future; EX: Extrovertion; IN: Introvertion; AN: Analytic; SO: Social.

As indicated in table I, the motivation observed in English language learners is different from the one claimed by Catalan language learners. Although they share an instrumental motivation, the English language is expected to be useful in the future, while the motivation to study the Catalan language is related to the present situation. As far as learners' strategy use is concerned, the socio-affective strategies used mainly by English language learners contrast with the analytic strategies used by Catalan learners. We can also observe that the attitude to learn a language is also different. The results observed in table I indicate that English language learners' attitude to learn the language appeared to benefit from social interaction, while Catalan learners' attitude value the analytic approach to language learning.

Our results support the literature on motivation and extroversion as affective variable that can influence learners' learning style and strategy use. Motivation, as reported by Guzman & Caballer (Forthcoming), is linked with attitudes towards the community of the target language, in this case English and Catalan. With regard to learners' strategy use, our results support the need to consider different types of learners if we want to understand how information is stored and retrieved in the mind of the learner. Besides, this study illustrates how cultural, social, or accepted values function as factors that can enhance different learning styles.

IV. CONCLUSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH

The purpose of this paper has been to examine the influence of motivation, extroversion, and learners' attitude to language learning on learners' strategy choice. Our pilot study illustrates that the mental processes in which learners are involved to enhance comprehension, retention or acquisition will be determined by individual learners differences. These, in turn, will influence individual learning styles, and strategies for language learning.

Although this study has not focussed on how language can be enhanced, we agree with Alcón (forthcoming) that an account of information processing considering the external and internal factors as well as psycholinguistic issues is still needed. We suggest the need to create a framework in which the combination of introspection measures and true experimental studies might help us to better understand the consequences of learners' representation of their learning.

V. REFERENCES

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APPENDIX

Sección A:

Indica el grado de acuerdo o desacuerdo con tales afirmaciones:

1. Estudiar lenguas en la Universidad puede ayudarme a encontrar trabajo
2. Estudiar lenguas en la Universidad me ayuda profesionalmente a comunicarme con hablantes nativos
3. Estudiar lenguas en la Universidad completa mi educación
4. Estudiar lenguas en la Universidad espero que me sea útil en mi carrera
5. Estudiar lenguas en la Universidad me facilitará la comprensión de los textos relacionados con mi especialidad
6. Estudiar lenguas en la Universidad puede mejorar mi lectura en lenguas
7. Estudiar lenguas en la Universidad me puede ayudar a mantener contactos en el extranjero.

Sección B:

¿Qué importancia, si la hay, consideras que tienen los siguientes aspectos en el proceso de aprendizaje de lenguas con fines específicos?

8. Conocer la temática propia de mi especialidad
9. Ser capaz de comunicarme con nativos
10. Entender a los nativos
11. Entender la correspondencia
12. Poder comunicarme por escrito
13. Expresar mis ideas en inglés
14. Intercambiar ideas en inglés con otros compañeros

Sección C:

¿Qué utilidad piensas que tienen los siguientes aspectos en el aprendizaje de lenguas?

15. Participar en clase
16. Utilizarlo con los compañeros
17. Adivinar el significado de las palabras
18. Oír hablar a los nativos
19. Comentar las palabras que desconozco con otros compañeros
20. Practicar en grupo
21. Escuchar cintas, programas de radio, ver películas en versión original...

Sección D:

¿Qué importancia, si la hay, consideras que tienen los siguientes aspectos en el proceso de aprendizaje de la lengua?

22. Estudiar el idioma individualmente
23. Compararlo con mi lengua (gramaticalmente)
24. Memorizar reglas gramaticales
25. Traducir mentalmente.
26. Resolver las dudas individualmente
27. Memorizar listas de vocabulario
28. Traducir lo que leo o escucho a mi lengua
29. Hacer un lista de palabras
30. Leer explicaciones gramaticales
31. Practicar con alguien
32. Repetir individualmente lo que he escuchado en la cinta
33. Buscar en el diccionario las palabras que desconozco
34. Repetir mentalmente las palabras nuevas
35. Conocer todas las reglas gramaticales
36. Conocer la mayor cantidad de vocabulario
37. Pronunciar correctamente
38. Tener buen acento
39. Escribir respetando las reglas gramaticales
40. Analizar la lengua gramaticalmente
41. Saber traducir todas las palabras

Sección E:

Si cerca de ti hubiese alguien hablando ...

42. Entendería de qué va la conversación
43. Intentaría entender todo lo que pudiera
44. Procuraría adivinar lo básico de la conversación
45. Intentaría entender unos pocos detalles
46. Escucharía las palabras claves e intentaría adivinar otras
47. Adivinaría el significado de las palabras atendiendo al contexto
48. Buscaría palabras que conociese e intentaría adivinar el significado de otras
49. Por la semejanza de algunas palabras de esa lengua con la mia entendería la conversación
50. Me encontraría satisfecha/o porque entiendo casi toda la conversación

Sección F:

51. Me desanimaría
52. No me preocuparía en escuchar
53. Me sentiría frustrada/o
54. Me sentiría incómoda/o
55. Traduciría rápidamente cada palabra
56. Buscaría el sujeto, el verbo, el objeto ...
57. Me concentraría en cada palabra
59. No me interesaría