A STUDY ON LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES AMONG MALE AND FEMALE MALAYSIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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ABSTRAK

Penyelidikan mengunakan strategi telah terbukti signifikan dan berguna di dalam strategi pembelajaran bahasa (LLS) untuk pelajar ESL. Tujuan tesis ini adalah untuk mengkaji sekiranya terdapat perbezaan yang signifikan di antara dua kumpulan pelajar iaitu lelaki dan wanita di tiga buah universiti tempatan di dalam mengunakan kes strategi. Di dalam kajian ini, 250 pelajar ijazah pertama lelaki dan wanita telah terlibat. Kaedah kuantitatif digunakan di dalam kajian ini analisa diskriptif dilakukan bagi mengenalpasti strategi yang perlu digunakan (tinggi, serdahana, rendah) dan untuk mengklasifikasikan sepuluh strategi paling banyak dan sepuluh strategi paling kurang digunakan secara amnya. Analisa independent t-test digunakan untuk memgenalpasti perbezaan antara pelajar lelaki dan perempuan didalam strategi LLS. Analisa data menunjukkan selain daripada strategi sosial, terdapat perbezaan signifikan di antara pelajar lelaki dan perempuan di dalam penggunaan lima jenis strategi pembelajaran bahasa iaitu memori, kognitif, pampasan, metakognitif dan afektif.

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ABSTRACT

Research on strategy has proven the significance and usefulness of language learning strategies (LLS) for ESL students. The aim of this research is to examine any significant differences among male and female university students in three universities in Malaysia regarding the use of strategies. In this research, 250 male and female undergraduate students who studied in public universities are involved. A quantitative method is used in this study. Descriptive analysis is conducted in order to identify each strategy range of use (high, medium, low) and also to classify the most and the least ten frequently used strategies in general. Also, independent t-test analysis is utilized to identify the differences between male and female students towards strategies of LLS. Data analysis shows that except social strategies, there are significant differences between male and female students in terms of using the other five language learning strategies; namely, memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive and affective.

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Some language students accomplish more success than others in second language learning. This incoherence has made a noteworthy subject for most of the researchers to study on the area of second language acquisition. The reason for this study is to examine which strategies are commonly utilized by Malaysian ESL university students. There are considerable amount of research which examined effective and successful LLS used by ESL learners during the last three decades (Oxford, 1990; Anderson, 2005).

1.1.1 Language Learning Strategies

Studies on language learning strategies (LLS) have long focused on the importance of strategy achievement progress in English instruction as a second language and henceforth, prepares learners for their academic education (Oxford, 1990). Teachers have also improved courses to address learners' language skill needs and to lead them to their academic studies through the English course.

Not only language learning strategies (LLS) have emerged as essential components of different theoretical models of language proficiency, but also as a means of getting students' autonomy in the language learning process (Oxford, 1990). In the area of second

language learning, research findings have proved the important role which students can play in the language learning process. Among the mentioned techniques, language learning strategies have received a considerable amount of attention since the late 1970s (Zare, 2010; Brown, 2007; Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2007; Baker and Boonkit, 2004; Oxford, 2003). According to Abedini, Rahimi, & Zare-ee (2011) and Ratana (2007), learning strategies are approaches which students utilize to succeed and improve their own learning; specifically it is essential for language learning because they can foster student autonomy in language learning. Furthermore, learning strategies can help students determine, guide, manage and direct their learning process (Hu & Tian, 2012).

For this research, Oxford's (1990) classification is used. It classifies and uses LLS in a systematic way. Ellis (1994) declared that Oxford's (1990) model was developed from best theoretical bases and defines cognitive and metacognitive strategies more explicitly than previous works. In addition, Oxford adds up compensation strategies into language learning strategies.

1.1.2 English Language

English language is not only utilized as an official language in many countries, but also affects various cultures in a large number of nations; it is the crucial language of communication in the world. The development of the English language has quickly expanded the needs to obtain improved communication all over the world. That is because

the skill of English is significantly required for further studies as well as for social and professional worldwide contacts of various kinds. Along the same line, English language is an international language that can be utilized for communication with native-speakers and non-native speakers all over the world, particularly in the education system, all students of university require it for their education to acquire knowledge and search information (Thongma, 2013).

The significance of English language as a global lingua franca has always been a main factor in learning in Malaysia, particularly to add up the information in technology, science and as well for academic purposes (Yunus et al., 2013). Montgomery (2004) declares "English has become the dominant language of science, with an estimated 80 to 90 percent of papers in scientific journals written in English" (p. 1334). Emphasising the important role of English as a lingua franca in engineering community, Joseba (2005) declares that as English has become the international language of science and technology, engineering students have to face this fact since books, papers, handbooks, journals, etc. written in English are included in their reading lists. Furthermore, the English language is one of their most valuable resources in the labour market.

English is not the first language for Malaysian students. Most of the learners use their native language in their daily life, such as Malay, Mandarin, or Tamil language and they learn English when they are in primary schools. In fact, Malaysian students use more English language during school hours. As a result, their English skills need to be in a certain level in order for them to be able to pass public examinations (Peng & Wen, 2012). Therefore, learners must use language learning strategies to study English. In this regard, the Ministry of Education has hired English teachers from foreign countries and sent local

teachers overseas with the goal that these teachers could develop the power of English language between students (The Star, 4 June, 2006).

All in all, Malaysia tertiary students of engineering must increase their ability of English learning that can improve both their career and social academics. However, a developing country like Malaysia is still looking forward in enhancing students' capability and proficiency in the English language (Apandi, 2011).

Malaysia language teaching system is struggling hard to enhance students' proficiency in the English language since English is mostly the second language (L2) for students. Basically, engineering students have problem with understanding lectures in English because they do not have sufficient exposure of the language skill (Apandi, 2011).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Through the learning process, some people could learn the entire subject or most of the subjects very well and fast. On the other hand, some people face learning problems. Consequently, a considerable amount of research (Ehrman and Oxford, 1989; Green and Oxford, 1995; Chandler, et al, 1998; Hashim and Salih, 1994; Sy, 1994; Wharton, 2000) attempts to discover what factors cause learners to be successful in learning. One of the main factors having an influence on the students' achievements in language acquisition is the language learning strategies.

In a survey of employers, undergraduates, graduates and university administrators were said to be lacking in personal qualities and communication skills (Shuib, 2005, p.1). This was expected from engineers to communicate well with other people from different backgrounds, to deal with various private organizations, stakeholders, government, and the public. Hence, graduated engineers need to get technically skilled in order to follow their job because these skills are of growing importance in the engineering workplace (Bennett, 2002; Dukhan, 2005; Emanuel, 2005; Patil & Riemer, 2004).

The skills employed by new graduates have received significant attention in the local media. Besides, lack of English language skills is one of the important reasons for the redundancies of graduate students (Yasin et al., 2010). Lack of English language proficiency has often been cited as one of the major factors contributing to graduate unemployment (Sharif, 2005). Some research has been done on employers in related industries; these surveys have reported that there is a lack of English language skills among fresh graduates and workers (MoHE, 2008; Tneh, 2008; Bank, 2005; Ambigapathy & Aniswal, 2005; Yasin et al., 2010). These studies showed that most of the workers and graduates were among restricted users of English, particularly in speaking and writing (Yasin et al., 2010). Lee (2003) found that employers prefer to work with new graduates who not only have technical skills but also have the non-technical competencies which are essential for project management.

The researcher holds that after the teacher taught the English subjects, the learners are not completely capable to utilize language learning strategies in their academic context. Nevertheless, by combining the strategies in the English program, teachers can help students become informed of how, when, and where the strategies must be utilized in the

development of learning English. In the 21st century, engineers need to have efficient technical information is required to have adequate social, communication, and interpersonal abilities. The English language has long been the most principal language for communication in the field of science and technology. Besides, many professional experts in the field of science and technology are also speakers of the English language (Omar & Ibrahim, 2010).

Former studies in the subject of engineering indicated that English language is of principal significance in the professional and academic lives of engineering learners (Pendergrass et al., 2001; Pritchard & Nasr, 2004; Joseba, 2005; Sidek et al., 2006; Hui, 2007; Venkatraman & Prema, 2007). For instance, Pendergrass et al. (2001) mentioned that English is a crucial tool in engineering education, and consequently "integrating English into engineering, science and math courses is an effective way to improve the performance of engineering students in oral and written communication" (p.1).

It is also essential for students of engineering to learn English successfully and excel in their studies as their success have an impact on their professional lives in the future. Therefore, students need to learn English in order to understand what they are studying. Moreover, students need to learn English because it is necessary for them to join the workforce (Omar & Ibrahim, 2010). Consequently, it is important to know how well the students are doing in their studies. Henceforth, we need to find out how engineering students cope with learning English. In addition, we also need to determine whether the students face any problems in their learning (Yasin et al., 2010).

According to Oxford and Nyikos (1989), learning strategies are considered as "processes utilized by students to help the learning, retrieval, and keeping information" (p. 291). They have been described to aid learners face some of their learning problems and develop their academic function. On the plausibility of language learning strategies, some researchers have classified the correlation among English achievement and a particular strategy instruction. In a nutshell, the significance of proper function of strategy instruction in the English program has been extensively identified (Kern, 1989; Carrell, 1998; Oxford, 1990; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).

Regarding the significance of language learning strategy, Oxford (1990) asserts:

…language learning strategies-specific actions, behaviours, steps, or techniques those students (often intentionally) use to improve their progress in developing L2 skills. These strategies can facilitate the internalization, storage, retrieval, or use of the new language. Strategies are tools for the self-directed involvement necessary for developing communicative ability. (p.18)

Claiming that there are a variety of factors affecting language learning strategies, the researcher maintains one of the essential factors (gender) that can have more impacts on the usage of strategies. Male and female students would differ in style and frequency of strategy usage. Furthermore, Green and Oxford (1995) realized that most of the female learners utilize learning strategies more than male, particularly social strategies.

Many research showed that female learners use more strategy than male learners (Jalal and Kaveh 2011, Zhou 2010, Izawati 2008). Nevertheless, there are few research

showed that male learners use more strategy than female learners (Adel 2011, Tercanlioglu 2004, Wharton 2000). The study conducted by Kashefian et al. (2011) about the differences among gender in Malaysian university students has proven that there is no influence of "gender" on learners' usage of the strategies (Kashefian et al., 2011). However, the research was limited to one university. Also, there is a research in this area on primary school students in Malaysia. The mentioned study has proven that there were considerable differences in the use of learning strategies among female and male students in primary school (Kaur & Embi, 2011).

According to findings of previous studies, there are some differences in use of language learning strategies between male and female students; female learners tend to utilize more strategies than male learners. One of the purposes of this research is to study whether or not gender differences are related to some differences in usage of language learning strategy.

Henceforth, the present research is conducted to examine engineering students in different universities in Malaysia; the main purposes of the research are to find out which language learning strategies are frequently utilized, and to study the important differences in usage of language learning strategies among male and female students.

1.3 Research Objectives

1. This research investigated which language learning strategies are frequently used by ESL Malaysian university students.

2. This research explores important differences in usage of language learning strategies among male and female Malaysian university ESL students in terms of:

   a) Memory strategies

   b) Cognitive strategies

   c) Compensation strategies

   d) Metacognitive strategies

   e) Affective strategies

   f) Social strategies

1.4 Research Questions

1. Which language learning strategies are frequently utilized by ESL Malaysian university students?

2. Are there any significant differences in the use of language learning strategies among male and female ESL Malaysian university students in terms of:

   a) Memory strategies

   b) Cognitive strategies

c) Compensation strategies

d) Metacognitive strategies

e) Affective strategies

f) Social strategies

1.5 Research Hypotheses

This research studies the following null hypothesis:

$H_0$1. There is no significant difference in the usage of language learning strategies among male and female ESL Malaysian university students in engineering courses in terms of:

a) Memory strategies

b) Cognitive strategies

c) Compensation strategies

d) Metacognitive strategies

e) Affective strategies

f) Social strategies

1.6 Significance of the Study

This research is significant as the awareness of choosing the proper language learning strategies can be a main feature in contributing to learners' success in their language learning. Students must be able to seek out or make opportunities to learn most effectively according to their own learning strategies which can improve the acquisition of English. The result of this research is significant to help learners overcome their learning difficulties and succeed in their studies. The findings can be utilized by engineering students to assist them with studying in English. Students could utilize the strategies recommended in the findings to cope with the problems when they study in English.

Cohen believes that unsuccessful students could be educated to employ more proper strategies and he also recommends that usage of best strategies

finally result in best language executions (Cohen, 1990).

Language learning strategies which are best prescriptive, facilitates the advances of syllabus to aid students recognize strategies which they use and improve the strategies of learning. The students could be thought to be more independent, effective, and successful in language learning. (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).

Besides, this research is significant because it uses Oxford's (1990a) model for LLS. The English language has achieved authority in the Malaysian society. Teachers and Learners pay a lot of attention to strategies of learning English. It causes great need in increasing efficient and effective teaching and learning techniques in English education.

One of the significant variables that is directly linked to language learning is gender (Bacon, 1992; Oxford & Nyikos, 1989).

This study is to examine overall strategies which Malaysian ESL students utilized and the different uses of strategies by gender. As a lot of studies have recognized the connection among a particular strategy achievement and instruction of English, the significance of proper application of strategy instruction has been generally known (Oxford, 1990; Carrell, 1998; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Kern, 1989).

1.7 Limitations

Firstly, the outcome of this study is limited to just Malaysian public university students who study in school or faculty of engineering; therefore, it cannot generalize the results as ESL learning strategies for other national groups and courses. Moreover, the study focuses on three Malaysian universities; therefore, the selected students may not be able to supply specific results which may be representative of the entire Malaysian students.

As the research mainly utilizes a quantitative approach to gather and analyze data, other detailed descriptive data on use of strategy from interviews or observations is not being included.

1.8 Definition of Key Terms

Language Learning Strategies (LLS): "Learning Strategies are specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations"(Oxford, 1990, p. 8). Oxford (1990) is particularly argued because her questionnaire strategy inventory for language learning (SILL) is the mainly influential instrument in the part of language learning strategies (Rivera-Mills, V, & Plonsky, 2007). This thesis follows the Oxford model for ESL students. Oxford classified language learning strategies into six main groups: (a) memory strategies; (b) cognitive strategies; (c) compensation strategies; (d) metacognitive strategies; (e) affective strategies; and (f) social strategies.

Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL): This questionnaire includes 50 items to study language learning strategy use of ESL and EFL learners (Oxford, 1990).

1.9 Summary

This chapter provides an introduction to the research. Then, it provides a background of the research on the language learning strategies of the English language as a second language. There is a statement of the problem which explains why it is necessary to research on LLS on Malaysian ESL students. This is followed by the objectives of the study, the research questions which are according to the objectives of the study, and also there is a research hypothesis based on the research question about gender. In addition, in

this chapter the significance of the study and some limitations to the study are explained.

Finally, there is a list of definitions of key terms used in this study.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature on LLS and the focus is mostly on second language (L2) learning strategies and strategy instruction of the learners. The study also investigates what variable may have an impact on the choice of LLS. Furthermore, the research chooses gender as an independent factor and makes an attempt to elaborate on it in relationship with LLS.

2.2 Language Learning Strategies (LLS)

Scholars and researchers offer the definitions of language learning strategies. Kasma, (2012) classifies that LLS are particular methods, behaviours, actions, and techniques that assist to facilitate the retrieval, storage or use of the new language to relate to a unique context. Takač, (2008) identifies LLS and mentions the learners' effort to learn which has become known in the field of foreign language or second language learning. White, (2008) states LLS are the procedures which pupils who employ and select to facilitate a language task and acquire the target language.

The dictionary meaning of "strategy" includes programming, handling and better managing things for a special goal (Hornby, et al., 1974, p. 1270). Research about language learning strategies in learning of second language (L2) started from middle of 1970 (Anderson, 2005). Oxford (1990) elaborates on the meanings for language learning strategies by specifying that "specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situation" (p.8). As a result, strategies point out to some special functions and techniques and not functions which describe a general attitude to learning (Wenden, 1986). Based on the wide range of technical meaning from cognitive psychology, strategies are "functions and operations used by the student for facilitating and helping the learning, storage, usage of information" (Oxford, 1990, p.8).

As it is obvious, learning strategies are behaviors which can be learned, modified, and rejected. It is named as "learning training", "strategy training", or "learning to learn training"; the teaching of learning strategies is really determinant and specifies the role of teacher (Oxford & Nyikos, 1989).

2.3 Classification of LLS

Diverse classifications of language learning strategies have been presented by various researchers (Stern, 1975; Rubin, 1981, 1987; O'Malley, 1985; Chamot & O'Malley, 1990; Oxford, 1990).

Oxford and Crookall (1989) explain language learning strategies as problem-solving, actions, learning to learn or learning skills, and learning techniques (Asgari & Mustapha, 2011). Language Learning's Strategy Inventory of Oxford (1990) utilized in more than 120 dissertations and translated into 23 languages (Lan, 2005).

2.3.1 Classification of LLS by Stern (1975, 1992)

Stern (1975) produced a list of ten language learning strategies. He believed that the good language learner is characterized by a personal learning style or positive learning strategies.

1. **Planning**: a positive or personal style of learning,

2. **Active**: use active method to the learning drill,

3. **Empathetic**: outgoing and an accepting method for target language,

4. **Formal**: knowledge of how to cope a language,

5. **Experimental**: experimentation strategies of creating the new language into an systematic structure,

6. **Semantic**: seeking for meaning continuously,

7. **Practice**: enthusiasm for practice,

8. **Communication**: enthusiasm to utilize the language in actual communication,

9. **Monitoring**: self-monitoring in language usage, and

10. **Internalization strategies**: capability to improve the target language as a distinct reference structure while learning to think about it. (as cited in Gardner & Miller, 1999, p.161).

Seventeen years later in 1992, Stern categorized language learning strategies into just five groups.

1. **Management and Planning Strategies**: These kinds of strategies are linked with the purpose of student to manage his own learning. A student has responsibility for the development of planning while the language teacher helps him merely like a resource person or an adviser. The student should choose what dedications to make to language learning, make rational objectives, select a proper methodology, and choose suitable resources, control development, and estimate success according to formerly determined prospects and objectives.

2. **Cognitive Strategies**: These strategies mention activities and procedures that students use to increase their skill to remember or learn the materials, particularly those actions that students utilize with particular tasks.

3. **Communicative - Experiential Strategies:** Communication strategies include the usage of verbal or nonverbal instruments in terms of suitable shift of information.

4. **Interpersonal Strategies:** Based on Stern (1992), interpersonal strategies control the students' progress and assess their performance. Students require communicating with native speakers and work together. Students must to know the target language's culture.

5. **Affective Strategies:** Obviously, successful language learners utilize several types of affective strategies. Sometimes, acquiring another language could be frustrating. It could stimulate feeling of confusion and strangeness. Successful language learners are comparatively aware of these feelings, and they try to have positive emotion towards the target language. Training could be helpful to the learners in order to confront these controversial emotions (Stern, 1992).

2.3.2 Classification of LLS by O'Malley (1985)

O'Malley et al. (1985) classified language learning strategies into three central parts: Metacognitive Strategies, Cognitive Strategies, and Socio affective Strategies.

1. **Metacognitive Strategies**: strategies that include planning for learning, perceiving of one's comprehension, considering process of learning, and modifying your own errors. According to O'Malley's grouping, advance managers, self-management, directed attention, useful planning, selective attention, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation are involved between the main metacognitive strategies.

2. **Cognitive Strategies**: Brown (2007) stated "cognitive strategies are more limited to specific learning tasks and they involve more direct manipulation of the learning material itself" (p.134). Resourcing, grouping, deduction, note taking, imagery, recombination, repetition, translation, elaboration, key word,

contextualization, and transfer are among the most significant cognitive strategies.

3. **Socio-affective Strategies**: Socio-affective strategies have close connection with social-mediating activity and interrelating with others. The socio-affective strategies include asking question for explanation and cooperation (Brown, 2007).

2.3.3 Classification of LLS by Rubin (1981, 1987)

Rubin (1981) provides a classification format that classified learning strategies in two main groupings (cited in Kashefian et al., 2011). Two main groups are presented as follows:

1. Strategies such as utilizing creation tricks and creating chances for practice.
2. Cognitive learning strategies which contain verification, deductive reasoning, guessing, monitoring of errors, and memorization.

Later in 1987, Rubin classified language learning strategies into three groups:

1. **Learning Strategies**: they are divided into two main groups: Cognitive Learning Strategies and Metacognitive Learning Strategies. Six main cognitive learning strategies are classified by Rubin as: monitoring, guessing/inductive inference, clarification/verification, practice, memorization, and deductive reasoning.

2. **Communication Strategies**: speakers achieved these strategies when they deal with some problems about their conversation and communication or when faced with mistake by a co-speaker.

3. **Social Strategies**: they are activities that students are exposed to the chances which can be a great aid to practice their information. Social strategies contribute to learning indirectly since they do not lead directly to the storing, retrieving, obtaining, and using of language (Rubin, 1987).

2.3.4 Classification of LLS by O'Malley and Chamot (1990)

O'Malley and Chamot (1990) suggest that LLSs could be divided into three groups:

1. **Metacognitive strategies**: refer to the activities that learners use to plan, to pace, and to monitor their own learning.

2. **Cognitive strategies**: refer to the activities that learners use to obtain, store, retrieve, and use language information.

3. **Socio-affective strategies**: refer to activities that are linked to interacting with others and social-mediating activities.

2.3.5 Classification of LLS by Oxford (1990)

The outcomes gathered from the questionnaire are analyzed based on six strategy classifications of Oxford (1990). The strategies are separated in two major groups, direct and indirect categories. Figure 2.1 shows direct and indirect strategies.

A. Direct Strategies

1. **Memory strategies**: Memory strategies help students keep the information.
2. **Cognitive strategies**: Cognitive strategies are techniques containing transformation, synthesis of the language, or direct analysis. Examples include translating, analyzing, reasoning, and practicing functions in natural situations.
3. **Compensation strategies**: Compensation strategies let students fill in gaps of information by guessing from context, using gestures, using descriptions, and native language use.

B. Indirect Strategies

4. **Metacognitive strategies**: Metacognitive strategies include establishing purposes and objectives, evaluation of progress, self-monitoring, planning of how and when to learn.

5. **Affective strategies**: Affective strategies are actions which allow the student to keep stable attitudes, motivations helpful, and emotions to consistent language learning.

6. **Social strategies**: They consist of interacting with others in different social environments.
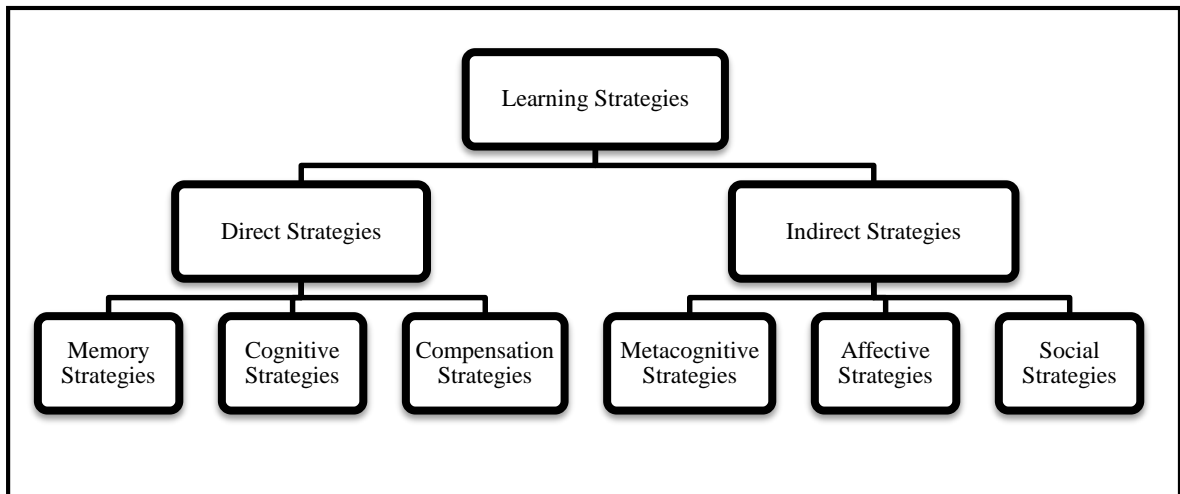
Figure 2.1 Direct and indirect strategies (Oxford, 1990)

As explained in Figure 2.1, memory, cognitive and compensation strategies are included in direct strategies and metacognitive, affective, and social strategies included in indirect strategies. Oxford (1990) has created the most comprehensive classification of LLS at the current moment. The below figures describe detailed framework of strategy classification of Oxford (1990) based on two groups of strategies. Figure 2.2 shows classification of direct strategies.

Memory
strategies

Creating mental
linkages

- Grouping

- Associating
  elaborating

- Placing new
  words into a
  context

Applying images
and sounds

- Using imagery

- Semantic mapping

- Using keywords

- Representing sounds in
  memory

Reviewing well

- Structured
  reviewing

Employing action

- Using physical
  response or
  sensation

- Using mechanical
  techniques

Cognitive strategies

Practicing

- Repeating

- Formally
  practicing with
  sounds and writing
  systems

- Recognizing and
  using formulas

- Recombining

- Practicing
  naturalistically

Receiving and sending
messages

- Getting the
  idea quickly

- Using
  resources for
  receiving and
  sending
  messages

Analyzing and
reasoning

- Reasoning
  deductively

- Analyzing
  expressions

- Analyzing
  contrastively
  (across
  languages)

- Translating

- Transferring

Creating structure for
input and output

- Taking notes

- Summarizing

- Transferring

Compensation strategies

Guessing intelligently
- Using linguistic
  clues
- Using other
  clues

Overcoming limitations in
speaking and writing

- Switching to the mother
  tongue

- Getting
  help
- Using mime or
  gesture

- Avoiding communication partially
  or totally

- Selecting the topic

- Adjusting or approximating the
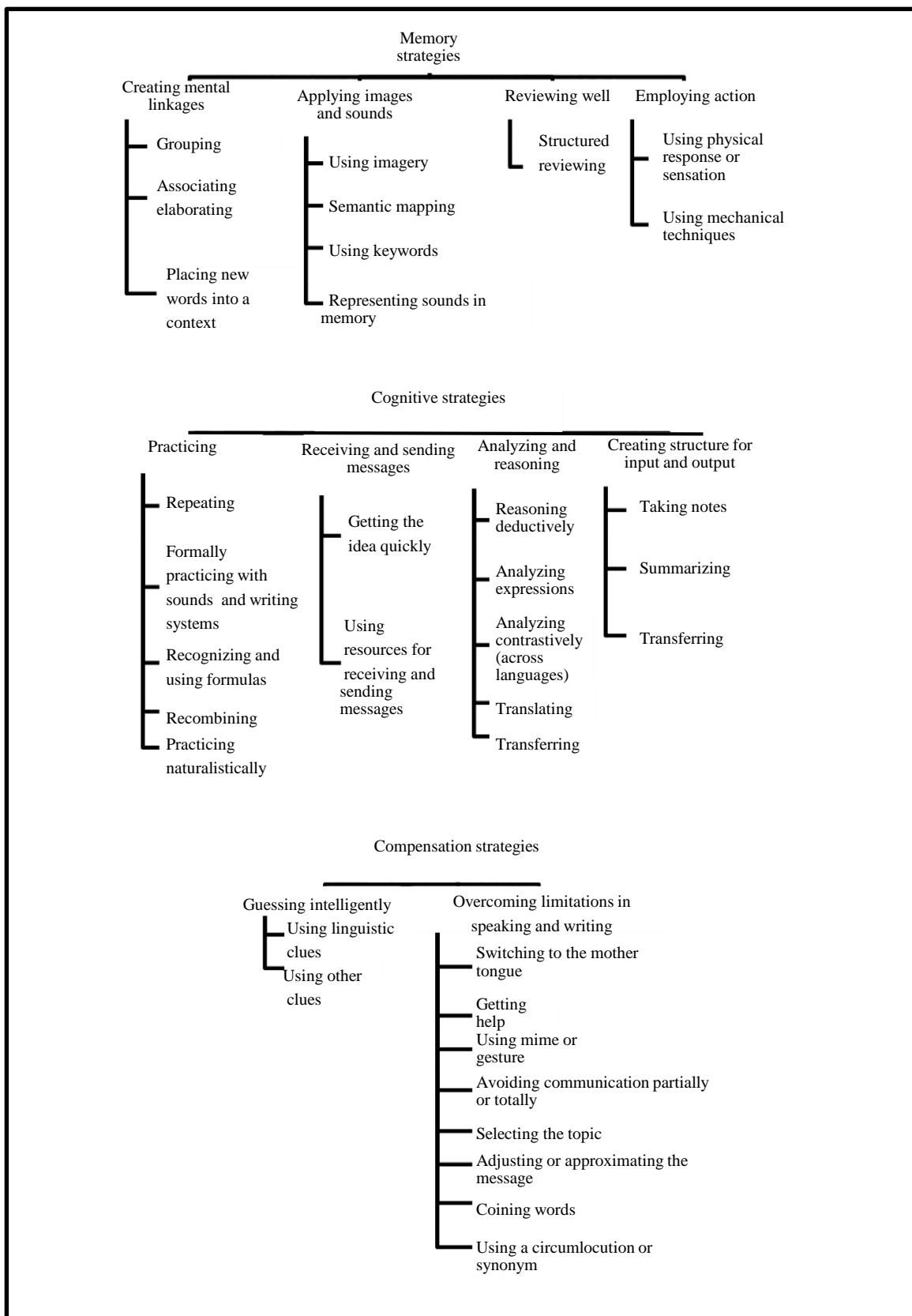 message

- Coining words

- Using a circumlocution or
  synonym

Figure 2.2 Classification of direct strategies (Oxford, 1990)

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