The learning strategies of (in)effective korean language learners

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Gwon-Jin Choi. THE LEARNING STRATEGIES OF (IN)EFFECTIVE KOREAN LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Abstract. The paper discusses the various teaching methods and strategies concerning Korean language learning. The main focus is on the problems that arise between effective and ineffective learners and the reasons for them. The strategies are discussed in great detail and the differences between the two groups are explained through an exhaustive survey.

Keywords: learning strategies, effective learning, ineffective learning, Korean language learners.

Гуон-Джин Чой. СТРАТЕГИИ ЗА УЧЕНЕ ПРИ (НЕ)ЕФЕКТИВНОТО ЧУЖДОЕЗИКОВО ОБУЧЕНИЕ ПО КОРЕЙСКИ ЕЗИК

Резюме. Докладът разглежда различните методи на преподаване и стратегиите, касаещи чуждоезиково обучение по корейски език. Основно внимание се обръща на проблемите, които възникват между ефективните и неефективните учащи, и причините за тях. Стратегиите са разгледани обстойно и разликите между двете групи са обяснени чрез подробно изследване.

Ключови думи: стратегии за учене, ефективно обучение, неефективно обучение, чуждоезиково обучение по корейски език.

There is an enduring and unsolved question of why some leaners do so much better than others and what differentiates the good leaner from the unsuccessful ones, though they are taught with the same teaching material, with the same teaching method and in the same environment. It is well-assumable that language learners use their own learning methods, handle and keep information via individually different learning strategies in the whole learning process.

It is necessary to look into types of learning strategies and their effectiveness in learning, and examine how learning strategies as leaners' individual differences are present in the learning process. Analyzing learning strategies used in the learning process by learners can provide help for language learning, as individual learners' difficulties are detected and any deficiencies in strategy using can be supplemented by the results of the analyses. And ultimately the learners can be offered and introduced more effective strategy use, so that they can be helped to have much better achievements in learning a foreign language.

The main motive to proceed with this study is to find out any correlation between the learning strategy use and achievement of those who are learning Korean as Korean Government Postgraduate Scholarship Program (KGSP) recipients in a second language learning environment in Korea. Every year about 15% of them are left behind as unsuccessful learners after one-year Korean language course. The researcher presumes that the (un)success of the achievement is related to the (in)effective use of learning strategies. Therefore he tries to know if the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) score may have any sufficient strength to be used as a predictor for academic achievement.

Theoretical Background

Language learning strategies

Many researchers have tried to define language learning strategies. Wenden & Rubin (1987) defined them as various devices or measures which learners utilize in the process of using a certain language. This definition has too narrow a meaning to exhibit multifaceted aspects of the strategies. O'Malley & Chamot (1990) identified language learning strategies as specific thinking or behaviors which language learning individuals use in order to understand, learn and store new information easily. They identified that language learning strategies are the specific mental and communicative procedures that learners employ in order to learn and use language (Wong & Nunan, 2011: 145). Every task and exercise will be underpinned by at least one strategy, although in most classrooms learners are unaware of these strategies. One of the hypothesis being tested by learning strategy researchers is that awareness and deployment of strategies will lead to more effective language acquisition (Macaro, 2001). According to Weinstein & Mayer (1986: 315), the goal of learning strategies is to affect the learner's motivational or affective state, or the way in which the learner selects, acquires, organizes, or integrates new knowledge.

Oxford (1990) mentioned that we should understand the term strategy in order to understand learning strategies. She stated that strategy means ability to command an army and warfare technique, that is, strategy is to lead optimally the military units, warships and airplanes in a battle. She extended this idea and defined that learning strategies are specific actions which learners take with the intention of transferring well learning to a new situation with an easier, faster, more pleasant, more self-initiated and more efficient way. Her definition implies how the effective use of learning strategies is significant in learning a language. Oxford divides language learning strategies into two main classes, direct and indirect, which are further divided into 6 sub-groups. She sees that direct and indirect strategies and these six strategy groupings function as a mutual support network within which various types of strategies support and enhance each other's effects in order to improve L2 learning (Hsiao & Oxford, 2002: 370).

The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) developed by Oxford is organized according to strategy group using a statistical procedure called factor analysis. This procedure allows the researcher to subdivide an instrument into dimensions usually referred to subscales or factors. Six subscales were developed with the intent to facilitate more in-depth research and understanding of the learning strategies originally for ESL/EFL (Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995: 5). The following Table 1 shows the construct of Strategy Inventory for Language Learning.

Table 1. Construct of Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)

categories	**strategy types**	**behaviors**
Memory strategies	Direct strategy	grouping, imagery, rhyming, structured reviewing
Cognitive strategies	Direct strategy	reasoning, analyzing, summarizing, general practicing
Metacognitive strategies	Indirect strategy	paying attention, consciously searching for practice opportunities, planning for language tasks, self-evaluating one's progress, monitoring error
Compensation strategies	Direct strategy	guessing meanings, using synonyms and gestures to convey meaning
Affective strategies	Indirect strategy	anxiety reduction, self-encouragement, self-reward
Social strategies	Indirect strategy	asking questions, cooperating with native speakers, becoming culturally aware

Direct strategies are those involving the direct use of the language. They include memorizing, analyzing, reasoning and guessing intelligently. These are specific procedures that learners can use to improve their language skill. Indirect strategies are those supporting language learning such as evaluating one's learning and cooperating with others, which do not directly involve using the language.

The (in)effective language learner

In foreign language education, including teaching Korean, instructors and researchers usually divide learners into two groups, based on their academic achievement; good or successful learners and bad or unsuccessful ones. Even the terms 'excellent learners' and 'retarded learners' are often used in Korean language education. As the author presupposes in this paper that a good, excellent (or bad, retarded) achievement may be a result of using language learning strategies in an effective or ineffective way, the term '(in)effective learners' are most suitable in expanding the argument in this work.

Quite many research works are made to find out sources which divide language learners into effective and ineffective ones in the realm of learning styles and strategies. Researchers mainly have tried to identify the source that characterizes the effective language learners. Rubin (1975), Stern (1975), Naiman et al. (1978) pointed out some major characteristics of effective language learners as having awareness of learning styles and strategies, autonomy and self-direction in the learning process, and active language use.

Though much research has been done to identify the characteristics and the range of strategies of the effective language learners, little attention has been paid to carry out comparative investigations of effective versus ineffective learners and to examine their differences in the use of specific learning strategies. That is why this current study which will attempt to detect possible differences and preferences in the strategy use of effective and ineffective learners is a meaningful task.

The study

The aim of this study reported here is to explore if there are identifiable differences in learning strategy preferences between effective and ineffective learners taking Korean language courses as a second language in the Korea context. And the research is ultimately intended to provide practical guidelines for teachers wishing to add a learning-how-to-learn dimension to their teaching Korean as a second language. Academic achievement is operationalized in terms of pass or fail according to the standard of the language training center where the subjects are learning Korean. The Korean language courses are organized for 2 beginner's levels (levels 1 and 2), 2 intermediate levels (levels 3 and 4) and 2 advanced levels (levels 5 and 6). Each level of proficiency is provided with Korean language classes 4 hours per day for 5 days per week, which lasts for 10 weeks. One mid-term and one

final examinations are administered during the course. Learners are evaluated for their speaking, reading, listening and writing achievements of the corresponding levels which learners are enrolled for. The learners who gets average 70 points or above out of 100 points in an accumulation of all the examination are to proceed to an upper level, and they are categorized here as effective learners. Those who gets less than 70 point must repeat the same level again, and they are categorized here as ineffective learners.

Research questions

The following research questions are posed about the four groups of learners; effective and ineffective Korean language learners of Korean Government Postgraduate Scholarship Program (KGSP), and effective and ineffective Chinese learners of the Korean language. These research questions have the ultimate aim to find out whether there is any meaningful differences or preferences in terms of learning strategy use among these four groups and to find out a reliable explanation for the (in)effectiveness of their Korean language learning.

Instrument

Surveys are commonly used in studying learning strategies, and they are useful for collecting data from a large number of subjects. The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) Version 7.0 (ESL/EFL) developed by R. Oxford in 1989 is used here with a slight adaptation. It is a well-established instrument assessing second or foreign language learners, having been tested and applied in various contexts over the years world-widely, and it is proved to have high reliability and validity.

The data collection instrument consists of a three-part survey of a printed questionnaire. The first part is for the directions which explain how to answer the survey. The second part solicits the surveyed for some basic biographical information like age, sex and nationality, followed by a short state for the purpose of the survey and for asking sincere answers. The third part of the survey consist of a 50-item questionnaire adapted from the original SILL survey, where 'English' was substituted for 'Korean'. This Korean version of SILL (I will hereafter call it K-SILL), which is reproduced at Appendix 2, asked Korean language learners to indicate their attitude towards the fifty learning strategies by rating them on a five point scale. Total possible K-SILL scale scores range from 50 to 250. Higher scores indicate greater use of strategy inventory items, while lower scores indicate a less use of strategy inventory items. A questionnaire prepared in English was administered to the KGSP recipients, and a questionnaire translated into Chinese was administered to the learners from China.

44 KGSP learners with multinational background and 72 Chinese learners of the Korean language were given a K-SILL questionnaire and asked to complete the

survey within a designated period of time. The learners finished within the time span of 15~25 minutes under control of instructors. The survey was done in June 2016 in the classrooms where the Korean language was being taught. The learners started to learn Korean at the basic level from September 2015. As was mentioned above, the learners without any repetition of the same level is grouped as effective leaners, while the learners with any repetition of the same level is grouped as ineffective ones. In that way, four comparison sub-groups were formed out of the total number of valid responses 113; 27 effective learners of KGSP (abbreviated hereafter as EK), 17 ineffective learners of KGSP (abbreviated hereafter as IK), 52 effective learners from China (abbreviated hereafter as EC), and 17 ineffective learners from China (abbreviated hereafter as IC).

1) Overall analysis

The Cronbach alpha reliability of K-SILL used for this study was indicated at 0.928, which secures a strong base for the current research. The K-SILL with 50 questions consists of six strategy scales: remembering (memory strategies, from No.1~9), using mental processes (cognitive strategies, from No. 10~23), compensating for missing knowledge (compensation strategies, from 24~29), organizing and evaluating learning (metacognitive strategies, from 30~38), managing emotions (affective strategies, from 39~44), and learning with others (social strategies, from 45~50).

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for each of the K-SILL sub-scales, the overall K-SILL score of all learners (n=113)

Strategies	**Mean**	**SD**	**skewness**	**k(Kutosis)**
Memory	3.095	0.655	-0.150	0.140
Cognitive	3.366	0.652	-0.030	-0.152
Compensation	3.249	0.712	0.088	-0.187
Metacognitive	3.704	0.705	-0.296	-0.296
Affective	3.080	0.731	0.260	-0.439
Social	3.637	0.853	-0.334	-0.642
Total SILL	3.362	0.549	-0.264	0.395

The table above shows the mean for total strategy use of these learners is at the slight high level at 3.360 out of a possible 5. With the regard to the subscales, metacognitive (M=3.704) and social (M=3.637) strategies were high in use, with each of the other strategies falling in the medium use, and none with low usage.

Analysis of learning strategies of KGSP learners

The total number of KGSP learners surveyed are 44. The Cronbach alpha reliability of their K-SILL responses is indicated at 0.912.

The overall statistics shows that metacognitive strategies and social strategies are used at the high level, respectively at 3.674 and 3.652. The other strategies are used at the medium level, with compensation strategies at 3.337, cognitive strategies at 3.195, memory strategies at 3.174 and the least used affective strategies at 2.936.

The table below show 10 most highly and lowly used strategies of the KGSP learners surveyed in the study.

Table 4. 10 most highly and lowly used strategies of KGSP learners

	Effective leaners (n=27)		**Ineffective learners (n=17)**	
	Item No.	**Mean**	**Item No.**	**Mean**
10 highly used strategies	Social 45	4.259	Meta 31	4.176
	Comp 25	4.185	Meta 38	4.118
	Meta 38	4.111	Social 45	4.059
	Memo 1	4.000	Meta 32	4.059
	Comp 24	3.963	Comp 25	4.059
	Social 49	3.963	Meta 33	4.000
	Meta 32	3.963	Social 50	4.000
	Meta 33	3.926	Meta 37	3.882
	Social 50	3.926	Memo 1	3.882
	Comp 29	3.889	Cog 19	3.706
10 lowly used strategies	Memo 3	2.889	Cog 11	2.882
	Comp 26	2.889	Memo 7	2.824
	Memo 6	2.667	Cog 23	2.765
	Cog 23	2.667	Affec 41	2.706
	Memo 7	2.630	Comp 26	2.588
	Cog 17	2.519	Comp 28	2.529
	Affec 41	2.444	Cog 17	2.471
	Cog 16	2.222	Comp 27	2.235
	Memo 5	1.889	Cog 16	2.059
	Affec 43	1.407	Affec 43	1.706

The most frequently used strategy by the effective learners of KGSP is social strategy 45, while their ineffective colleagues use most highly metacognitive strategy 31. The mostly rarely used strategy by the two groups of KGSP learners are affective strategy 43.

In order to examine whether there are any differences in learning strategy use between the effective and the ineffective learners of KGSP, a t-test was conducted as presented below.

Table 5. T-test of learning strategy use of KGSP learners (n=44)

categories	**group**	**Mean**	**SD**	**t**
Memory	EK	3.078	0.571	-1.270
	IK	3.327	0.721	
Cognitive	EK	3.243	0.576	0.702
	IK	3.118	0.582	
Compensation	EK	3.481	0.694	1.918
	IK	3.108	0.507	
Metacognitive	EK	3.642	0.680	-0.386
	IK	3.725	0.727	
Affective	EK	2.846	0.533	-1.299
	IK	3.078	0.646	
Social	EK	3.679	0.745	0.316
	IK	3.608	0.695	

* $p<0.05$. ** $p<0.01$ EK(n=27), IK(n=17)

The t-test result shows that there is no meaningful difference in using learning strategies by the two groups of KGSP learners, as the t-value of their total K-SILL is 0.006 ($t=0.006$, $p<0.01$).

Analysis of learning strategies of Chinese learners

The total number of Chinese learners of Korean language surveyed are 69. The Cronbach alpha reliability of their K-SILL responses was indicated at 0.939. The overall statistics of the Chinese learners shows that cognitive, social and metacognitive strategies are used at the high level, respectively at 3.475, 3.628 and at 3.723. The other strategies are used at the medium level, with memory strategies

at 3.045, compensation strategies at 3.193 and affective strategies at 3.171. Any of the categories of strategies is not used at the low level.

The table below shows 10 most highly and lowly used strategies of the Chinese learners surveyed in the study.

Table 6. 10 most highly and lowly used strategies of Chinese learners (n=69)

	Effective leaners (n=52)		**Ineffective learners (n=17)**	
	Item No.	**Mean**	**Item No.**	**Mean**
10 highly used strategies	Meta 37	4.346	Meta 32	3.824
	Meta 32	4.250	Social 45	3.824
	Meta 33	4.173	Social 49	3.765
	Comp 29	4.154	Cog 11	3.765
	Cog 19	4.096	Meta 37	3.706
	Meta 38	4.077	Meta 33	3.706
	Social 50	4.077	Comp 25	3.706
	Meta 31	4.019	Social 50	3.706
	Cog 14	3.981	Social 47	3.647
	Cog 12	3.923	Cog 20	3.588
10 lowly used strategies	Memo 2	2.981	Memo 4	2.706
	Affec 44	2.962	Cog 22	2.706
	Cog 17	2.827	Affec 43	2.706
	Affec 43	2.827	Cog 21	2.706
	Memo 3	2.827	Memo 7	2.706
	comp 26	2.558	Comp 26	2.471
	Memo 6	2.500	Memo 2	2.412
	Cog 16	2.212	Cog 16	2.176
	Memo 7	2.115	Memo 6	2.176
	Comp 27	2.058	Comp 27	2.118

The most frequently used strategy by the effective Chinese learners is metacognitive strategy 37, while their ineffective colleagues use most highly metacognitive strategy 32. The mostly rarely used strategy by the two groups of Chinese learners are compensation strategy 27.

In order to investigate whether there are any differences in using learning strategies between the effective and the ineffective Chinese learners of Korean, a t-test was conducted as shown below.

Table 7. T-test of learning strategy use of Chinese learners (n=69)

categories	**group**	**Mean**	**SD**	**t**
Memory	EC	3.139	0.601	2.096*
	IC	2.758	0.786	
Cognitive	EC	3.573	0.652	2.147*
	IC	3.176	0.687	
Compensation	EC	3.263	0.740	1.358
	IC	2.980	0.759	
Metacognitive	EC	3.859	0.662	2.899**
	IC	3.307	0.740	
Affective	EC	3.208	0.768	0.664
	IC	3.059	0.917	
Social	EC	3.641	0.905	0.201
	IC	3.588	1.044	

* $p<0.05$. ** $p<0.01$ EC(n=52), IC(n=17)

The table above manifests that the means of the memory, cognitive, and metacognitive strategies of the effective Chinese learners are meaningfully high than those of the ineffective colleagues at the critical level of significance 0.05 (*$p<0.05$ ** $p<0.01$). This means that the effective Chinese learners use more actively those three categories of strategies and that they get better achievement in learning Korean as a second language.

Discussion

It is identified that the surveyed participants use the learning strategies at the medium level and at the high level. The Korean language learners of KGSP make frequent use of the learning strategies as the following order: 'metacognitive > social > compensation > cognitive > memory > affective strategies'. While their colleagues from China employ them highly as the following order: 'cognitive > social > metacognitive > memory > compensation > affective strategies'. The affective strategies are the least used by all of the learners. Any of the categories of

the learning strategies is not used at the low level by the two groups of the learners, which means that they use the learning strategies quite actively.

Social strategy 45 is the most highly used learning strategy by the effective KGSP learners, while metacognitive strategy 31 is the most frequently used by the ineffective KGSP learners. This means that the effective KGSP learners do not hesitate to ask Korean language speakers to slow down or repeat what is being said if they have any difficulty in understanding Korean. The ineffective KGSP learners, on the other hand, try to improve their Korean language abilities by detecting and correcting their own mistakes. Both groups of the KGSP learners save their energy by making the least effort of noting down what they feel in a language learning diary.

The effective Chinese learners of the Korean language most frequently use metacognitive strategy 37, while their ineffective colleagues use most highly metacognitive strategy 32. This shows that the effective Chinese learners have definite aims for improving their Korean skills, though the ineffective counterparts pay more attention when somebody is speaking Korean. Both groups of the Chinese learners is noticed that they do not use guessing strategy in reading Korean and they do use dictionaries to look up every new word.

The results of the comparative analysis so far represent some seeming differences between the surveyed participants. The t-test results done in Table 7 and 9, however, does not render a convincing proof for a substantial difference. Table 7 presents that there is no statistically meaningful difference in using learning strategies between the effective and the ineffective KGSP learners. Table 9 displays that the effective Chinese learners use more frequently memory, cognitive, and metacognitive strategies than the ineffective colleagues, while no meaningful difference is identified in using compensation, affective, and social strategies.

In order to draw a more precise conclusion, the researcher conducted an ANOVA (repeated measures analysis of variance) test and checked statistical significance of the mean differences among the four surveyed groups. Duncan is used for the post-hoc analysis.

Table 8. Results of ANOVA test

strategies	**groups**	**N**	**Mean**	**SD**	**F (different groups)**
Memory	EK	27	3.078	0.571	2.375
	IK	17	3.327	0.721	
	EC	52	3.139	0.601	
	IC	17	2.758	0.786	
	Total	113	3.095	0.655	

Cognitive	EK	27	3.243	0.576	3.598* (2, 4, (1) < (1), 3)
	IK	17	3.118	0.582	
	EC	52	3.573	0.652	
	IC	17	3.176	0.687	
	Total	113	3.366	0.652	
Compensation	EK	27	3.481	0.694	2.051
	IK	17	3.108	0.507	
	EC	52	3.263	0.740	
	IC	17	2.980	0.759	
	Total	113	3.249	0.712	
Metacognitive	EK	27	3.642	0.680	2.844* (4, (1), (2) < (1), (2), 3)
	IK	17	3.725	0.727	
	EC	52	3.859	0.662	
	IC	17	3.307	0.740	
	Total	113	3.704	0.705	
Affective	EK	27	2.846	0.533	1.482
	IK	17	3.078	0.646	
	EC	52	3.208	0.768	
	IC	17	3.059	0.917	
	Total	113	3.080	0.731	
Social	EK	27	3.679	0.745	0.046
	IK	17	3.608	0.695	
	EC	52	3.641	0.905	
	IC	17	3.588	1.044	
	Total	113	3.637	0.853	

*: $p<0.05$, **: $p<0.01$

The results of the ANOVA test reveal that the four groups of the learners do not have a meaningful difference in using memory, compensation, affective and social strategies. But significant differences are manifested in using cognitive strategies ($F=3.598$, $p<0.05$) and metacognitive strategies ($F=2.844$, $p<0.05$). But

it can be said definitely that only the effective Chinese learners use highly the two categories of learning strategies.

It is identified that there is no difference in the individual learning strategy preferences between the effective and the ineffective KGSP learners of the Korean language. However it is noticed that there are some differences in using learning strategies between the effective and the ineffective Chinese learners of the Korean language. That is, the effective Chinese learners more actively use memory, cognitive, and metacognitive strategies and get better academic achievement than the ineffective colleagues.

The ANOVA test reveals positively that the effective Chinese learners are active users of cognitive and metacognitive strategies. But it is identified that there is no statistically meaningful differences in using the other 4 categories of the learning strategies among the Chinese participants. It is shown that, in overall, the differences between the 4 groups of the effective and the effective learners are not meaningful and the difference is marginal. So the research comes to a conclusion that the use of learning strategies exerts a slim influence in deciding and predicting academic achievements and that the use of learning strategies cannot be used a convincing and reliable predictor for the academic achievements of the Korean language learners. The analyzed research result rather insinuates that the academic achievements possibly are consequences of a series of complex learning behaviors like learning styles, motivations, psychological conditions, age, gender, attitudes and so on, which are required to be examined further.

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