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Language learner strategies and language competence: a case study in the Slovene higher education area

Abstract

The present article reports on the findings of a study conducted at the Faculty of Maritime Studies and Transport, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. The aim of the study was to confirm the findings of international studies in the Slovene higher education area in relation to the correlation between language competence and language learner strategy use. The first question that this study addresses is whether Slovene higher education students at different levels of language competence differ in terms of frequency of use of language learner strategies. The second question is which learner strategies are more frequently used by Slovene higher education students that had reached a high level of language competence before entering higher education. Based on the findings, the paper suggests some language learner strategies for implicit or explicit strategy based instruction.

Keywords: language learner strategies, strategy based instruction, language competence, language for specific purposes, higher education.

1. Introduction

The most important problems that students have to cope with at the beginning of their higher education studies include poor learner strategies and habits (Marentič Požarnik and Mihevc, 1997). Moreover, to be able to adapt to new demands of the rapidly changing European and world society each individual will need a wide array of key competences for lifelong learning, including communication in the mother tongue, communication in foreign languages, and learning to learn (Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December, 2006).

Language learning, or the specific aspect of learning which this study is concerned with, is affected by a number of factors, which can be classified into six broad categories (Ehrman, 1996): biographic background, learning style, affective factors, language learner strategies, learning aptitude, and interaction between students and

the environment. In informal conversations, language teachers in the Slovene higher education area have frequently reported that in elementary and secondary education many students had failed to reach satisfactory levels of language competence that would allow them to upgrade their knowledge of discipline-specific foreign language (see also Jurković, 2008). On the other hand, as early as their freshman year, many of their peers are characterized by high levels of language competence.

Stemming from these premises and based on a case study of a representative sample of students enrolled in the first year of studies in a Slovene higher education institution (Faculty of Maritime Studies and Transport, University of Ljubljana), this paper aims to answer to following research questions:

- 1) Do students at different levels of language competence use different language learner strategies?
- 2) Which language learner strategies are more frequently used by students at high levels of language competence?
- 3) Which are the language learner strategies that should be incorporated into strategy based instruction if implemented or in the study process in general?

In other words, this study aimed at exploring the relationship between the frequency of use of language learner strategies and language competence in a Slovene higher education setting and comparing the findings against the findings of international studies in this field.

2. Theoretical framework

In more than three decades of research a mass of competing definitions of language learner strategies has been developed. In an attempt to propose a viable definition, Griffiths (2008: 87) generally defines them as: "Activities consciously chosen by learners for the purpose of regulating their own language learning." A more precise definition, however, is needed in research studies whose main focus is language learner strategies and their effect on language learning. Macaro (2006) suggests that learner strategies should be described in terms of four essential features: their origins are in working memory, they are conscious mental activities, learners employ them to pursue a goal in a given learning situation, and they are transferable. Nevertheless, in the learner strategy research community a consensus regarding all elements that are necessary for learning behaviours to be considered strategies still has not been reached, in particular with reference to the employed level of consciousness, explicitness regarding action, degree of goal orientation, strategy size, and potential for leading to learning (Cohen, 2007).

Along with a number of definitions of language learner strategies different taxonomies of these strategies have been produced (e.g., Rubin, 1981; Oxford, 1990; Chamot and O'Malley, 1994; see also Macaro, 2006). Among the most

influential ones certainly is that proposed by Oxford (1990), which is supported by a strategy use questionnaire (Strategy Inventory for Language Learning; SILL) and results of numerous research studies in which it was used. According to Oxford (1990), there are six groups of language learner strategies. Memory strategies help students store and retrieve new information, cognitive strategies enable learners to understand and produce language, compensation strategies allow learners to use the language despite knowledge gaps, metacognitive strategies allow learners to coordinate and regulate their own learning process, affective strategies help them regulate their affect, and social strategies help students learn through interaction with peers or other speakers of the foreign language.

The second main variable (the first one being language learner strategies) that this paper examines is language competence. Mostly as a result of efforts within the Council of Europe, the European foreign language learning community has defined what language competence and the broader communicative language competence entail. Communicative language competence "can be considered as comprising several components: linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic." (Council of Europe, 2001: 13) In turn, linguistic competence as one of the components of communicative competence consists of lexical competence (knowledge of and ability to use the vocabulary of a language), grammatical competence (knowledge of and ability to use the grammatical resources of a language), semantic competence (awareness and control of the organisation of meaning), phonological competence, orthographic competence, and orthoepic competence (Council of Europe, 2001).

Within the field of language learner strategies, several research studies conducted in the international environment have examined the relationship between the frequency of language learner strategy use and language competence, expressed through exam grades, language test scores, and self-assessment scores, among others. The findings of studies that have yielded statistically significant results are briefly outlined in the following paragraphs.

In her study among 110 Thai students majoring in English, Mullins (1992) found a negative correlation between the frequency of use of affective strategies and admission test scores, possibly indicating that students at lower levels of language competence tend to be more tense when learning a foreign language and consequentially tend to resort to affective strategies more often than their more successful peers. In addition, she reported that students of English at higher levels of language competence use some groups of strategies frequently (compensation, cognitive, and metacognitive) while using the others at least with medium frequency (social, affective, and memory).

A comprehensive overview of studies made in the field of language learner strategies before 1995 in a variety of settings is provided by Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995). A summary of results shows significantly higher frequency of use of some metacognitive strategies among students at higher levels of language competence. These are in particular strategies for the regulation of the learning process (planning and self-evaluation) and the cognitive strategy of practicing. In most studies a strong correlation between language learner strategy use and language test scores was

found, which possibly indicates that language progress can be enhanced through strategy based instruction.

When comparing strategy use against the level of language competence, individual groups of learner strategies rather than the frequency of all language learner strategies have to be considered (Oxford and Ehrman, 1995). The main finding of the study conducted by Oxford and Ehrman (1995) among 520 highly educated native speakers of English working for US administration bodies is that language progress most strongly correlates with the frequency of use of cognitive strategies. The findings of their research have also been confirmed by Shmais (2003) in a study that involved 120 students majoring in English in Palestine. The author concludes that learners at higher levels of language competence are more aware of their learning needs and more frequently look for opportunities for learning a foreign language themselves. In this study no correlation was found between the use of metacognitive strategies and language competence.

Interesting findings were suggested by Takeuchi (2003) in his analysis of 67 books written by successful Japanese learners of foreign languages, in which their language learning experience is described. Language learner strategies that are preferred among students at early stages of learning a foreign language differ from those used by students at higher levels of language competence. It seems that the use of certain strategies is tightly connected with a stage of learning a foreign language given that students also reported a shift in the use of strategies after reaching a higher level of language competence.

A comprehensive research study was conducted by Griffiths (2003a; 2003b) at a private English language school for international students in New Zealand. The sample consisted of 348 learners aged between fourteen and 64 (74 percent were in their twenties). She explored the use of language learner strategies among basic and proficient users of English. The main findings of her research concern the use of strategies that are statistically significantly more often used by proficient users or 'plus' strategies. The main findings of her research are that learners at higher levels of language competence use strategies more frequently and that these are also more sophisticated (include manipulation rather than memorization) and oriented toward interaction with others. It seems that differences in strategy use between less and more proficient learners are both quantitative and qualitative. However, the question that remains open concerns the causal relationship between language competence and language learner strategy use. Griffiths (2003a: 381; 2003b: 216) describes this relationship as a "spiral" one. Similarly, Green and Oxford (1995) suggest that an active use of language learner strategies contributes to enhanced language progress which in turn stimulates students towards a more active use of learning strategies.

Given that this study refers to the relationship between language learner strategy use and language competence in a Slovene setting, findings of research studies that have explored the effect of the cultural background on the use of strategies will briefly be outlined. Bedell and Oxford (1996), for instance, summarize their main findings with the statement that learners often behave in certain socially acceptable ways, which means that their cultural and educational background exerts a

significant (but not key) influence on their choices regarding the use of language learner strategies. In a comparison between European and Asian students, Griffiths (2003b) found that Europeans use strategies more frequently in general and that mostly these are strategies that involve an active role of the student in their learning process (e.g., "I read for pleasure in English" or "I look for people I can talk to in English"). Moreover, research has shown that Chinese students use memory strategies more often than other learners of English (Huang and Van Naerssen, 1985) and that learners from Spanish speaking environments prefer communication and social strategies if compared to Asian students that prefer memorization (Politzer and McGroarty, 1985).

3. Methods

3.1 Setting

The Faculty of Maritime Studies and Transport is a member of the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. Only one foreign language (English) is taught at the faculty. When this study was conducted, the language course (which is a required course) covered ninety hours (thirty three-hour weekly sessions) in the first year of studies and ninety hours in the second year (after the full implementation of the Bologna reform the number of hours will be reduced to a total of 120 in two years). The learning objectives of the language course in the first year, which the present study is related to, included the development of the reading skill (understanding technical and semi-technical texts), the acquisition of technical and semi-technical vocabulary in relation to traffic technology and transport logistics, the revision of essential grammatical structures, and the improvement of writing, speaking, and listening skills in the fields of transport logistics and traffic technology. The language competence level that students were expected to reach by the end of the first year of studies was set at B1+/B2 as set in the syllabus and corresponding to the level of foreign language teaching in the first year.

3.2 Participants

The participants in the study were one hundred and one full-time first year students, aged between 18 and 24, attending classes of English as a foreign language for students of traffic technology and transport logistics from October, 2007, through May, 2008, that were taught by the same teacher (researcher). The average age of the participants at the beginning of the course was 20.27. Thirty-four participants were female and sixty-seven participants were male.

Twenty-four participants in the study were enrolled in the four-year programme of transport logistics, twenty-eight participants in the four-year programme of traffic technology, and forty-nine participants in the three-year programme of traffic technology.

A background questionnaire was used to determine similarities and differences between these groups in relation to age of participants, type of secondary school they had completed, secondary school cumulative grade point average, and secondary school English language grade. T-tests indicated no significant differences on any of these characteristics between these three groups of students.

One teacher of English as a foreign language, a native speaker of the Slovene language, participated in this study. She has fifteen years of teaching experience at secondary school and higher education levels as well as with general and discipline-specific foreign language courses for adults. She has a PhD in language teaching methodology awarded by the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia.

3.3 Instruments and data collection procedures

Data for the present study were collected by means of three instruments. In order to ensure reliability and validity, two instruments were used to collect data on language competence. The Oxford Placement Text (OPT; Allan, 2004) and the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) global self-assessment rating scale (Council of Europe, 2001) were used to collect data on the language competence of students at the beginning of the language course in October, 2007. The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL; Oxford, 1990) was used to collect data on the frequency of use of language learner strategies among students at the beginning of the language course.

The OPT is primarily used as a diagnostic test but can be used as a language test to determine differences in language knowledge at the beginning and end of a language course. The test is divided into two main sections. The first one mostly aims at the testing of reading, listening, and vocabulary size while the second section is a test of grammar, vocabulary, and reading skills. A significant advantage of the OPT is that it has been calibrated against a series of international language examinations and levels, including those of the CEFR, and its time-efficiency when detailed data in relation to language competence in separate language skills is not essential.

The CEFR self-assessment global rating scale summarizes the set of proposed common reference levels in six single holistic paragraphs where each paragraph refers to one reference level (ranging from A1 – breakthrough level to C2 – mastery). Because the heterogeneous nature of the enrolled population was expected (based on previous experience), the Slovene version of the global rating scale was used to collect data on the self-assessed language level of students at the beginning of the language course.

The instrument for measuring the frequency of language learner strategy use in the current study was the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), version for speakers of other languages learning English (Oxford, 1990). The SILL consists of 50 items (nine refer to memory strategies, fourteen to cognitive strategies, six to compensation strategies, nine to metacognitive strategies, six to affective strategies, and six to social strategies). It is a self-scoring survey in which learners respond on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never or almost never) to 5 (always or almost always).

The results are based on data collected through the use of these three instruments. Therefore, it was essential to calculate the psychometric properties concerning their reliability and validity under the conditions described in 3.1 Setting and 3.2 Participants.

Pearson's coefficient of correlation was used to calculate test-retest reliability of OPT scores. Its value (at 0.702) indicates a high level of test-retest reliability. Internal consistency reliability was determined using principal components analysis. The analysis (no rotation) showed high loadings of both items (0.840 at the beginning and at 0.834 at the end of the language course) on a single factor. Criterion-related validity of OPT scores was determined through the calculation of Spearman's rank correlation coefficient. Given that the OPT has been calibrated against CEFR levels (Allan, 2004), Spearman's coefficient was calculated between CEFR levels onto which students were placed according to OPT scores, and self-assessed levels of language competence determined by the students themselves through the use of the CEFR global self-assessment scale (Council of Europe, 2001). The values of Spearman's coefficient of correlation, significant at the level $p=0.000$, have shown a positive and marginally strong correlation between CEFR levels derived from both instruments at the beginning (0.505) and end of the language course (0.546). Finally, the predictive validity of the OPT has been confirmed by regression analysis. The results have shown that OPT scores at the beginning of the language course can explain 29% of the variance in achievement test scores ($R^2=0.294$, $p=0.000$, $b=0.542$).

Test-retest reliability of CEFR self-assessment scores was calculated using Pearson's coefficient of correlation. Its value at 0.689 ($p=0.000$) indicates a high level of test-retest reliability. Criterion-related validity of CEFR self-assessment scores was determined through the calculation of Pearson's coefficient of correlation with students' scores using the OPT (Allan, 2004). The value of the coefficient at 0.535 ($p=0.000$) indicates a statistically significant and positive marginally strong correlation between both values. Finally, the predictive validity of the CEFR self-assessment scores was confirmed using regression analysis. The results have shown that self-assessment scores at the end of the language course can explain 21% of the variance in achievement test scores ($R^2=0.214$, $p=0.000$, $b=0.463$).

The internal reliability of the SILL was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha (0.865).

3.4 Design, variables, and statistical procedures

In order to be able to answer the research questions stated in 1. Introduction, the following variables had to be considered:

- 1) interval variable "OPT level", which reflects CEFR levels onto which students were placed based on their OPT scores.

Figure 1 shows students' CEFR levels based on OPT scores.

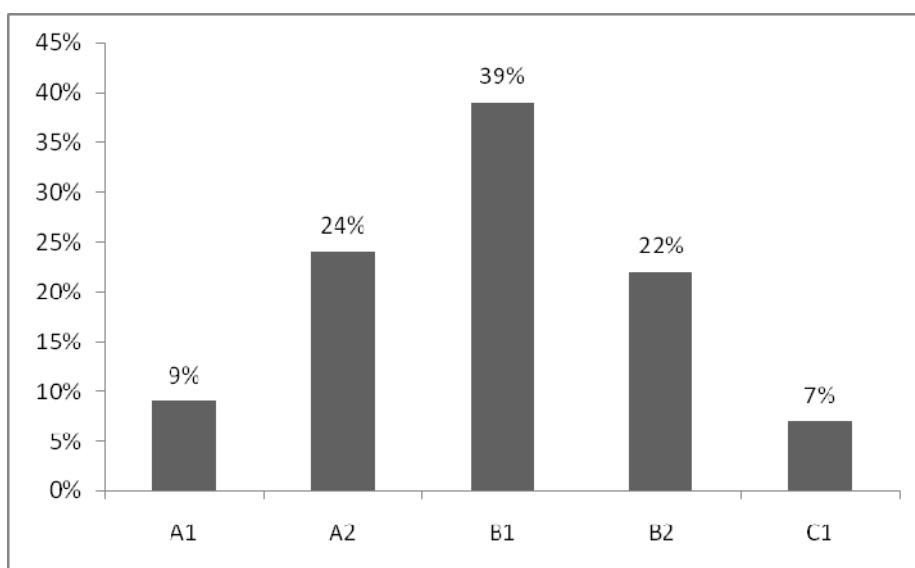


Figure 1 CEFR levels based on OPT scores

Data presented in Figure 1 show that most students' English language competence as measured by the OPT was at level B1 (39%). These are followed by similar shares of students at levels A2 (24%) and B2 (22%), and at A1 (9%) and C1 (7%). The mean value of all scores was at 2.9 (2 = A2, 3 = B1) and the standard deviation value 1.0. The data also reveal the high heterogeneity of students in terms of their pre-existing language competence.

- 2) interval variable "CEFR level", which reflects CEFR levels onto which students were placed based on their self-assessment scores.

Figure 2 shows students' CEFR levels based on self-assessment scores.

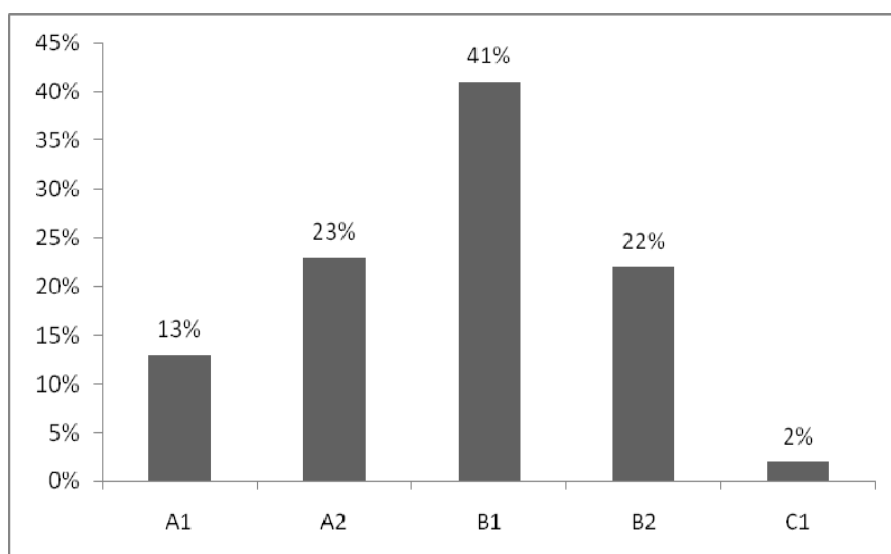


Figure 2 CEFR levels based on self-assessment scores

Data presented in Figure 2 reveal that most students self-assessed their English language competence to be at level B1 (41%). As noted with CEFR levels based on OPT scores, these are followed by almost equal shares of students at A2 (23%) and B2 (22%). However, more students than the OPT scores revealed self-assessed their language competence to be at A1 (13%) and fewer at C1 (2%). The mean value of all scores was 2.8 (2 = A2, 3 = B1), and the standard deviation value 1.0.

- 3) variables derived from the SILL, which reflect the frequency of use of different groups of language learner strategies ("memory", "cognitive", "compensation", "metacognitive", affective", and "social"). In order to create these variables, factor analysis (principal axis factoring) was used. Indicators with lowest loadings on each factor were eliminated. Similarly, indicators that made the level of Cronbach's alpha rise were eliminated from the factors, too. Table 1 presents the number of included indicators, the number of eliminated indicators, the degree of explained variance, and the value of Cronbach's alpha for each factor.

	Number of (eliminated) indicators	Degree of explained variance (%)	Cronbach's alpha
"memory"	4 (5)	47.5	0.63
"cognitive"	8 (5)	40.8	0.79
"compensation"	3 (3)	54.6	0.58
"metacognitive"	6 (2)	42.8	0.77
"affective"	4 (2)	47.5	0.63
"social"	4 (2)	54.2	0.70

Table 1 Language learner strategies factors

Data in Table 1 show that the levels of Cronbach's alpha for all constructs are at least marginally acceptable, and are higher than 0.70 for cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategy constructs.

The statistical measure to determine the level of correlation between the frequency of language learner strategy use and language competence was Pearson's coefficient of correlation.

4. Results

In the first part of the Results section we will try to provide an answer to the first research question or "Do students at different levels of language competence use different language learner strategies?"

Pearson's coefficient of correlation was calculated to test the correlation between the two variables indicating the level of language competence ("OPT level" and "CEFR level") on one hand and each language learner strategy factor on the other. Figure 3 presents the values of Pearson's coefficient of correlation and level of significance ($*p < 0.05$, $**p < 0.01$, $***p < 0.001$).

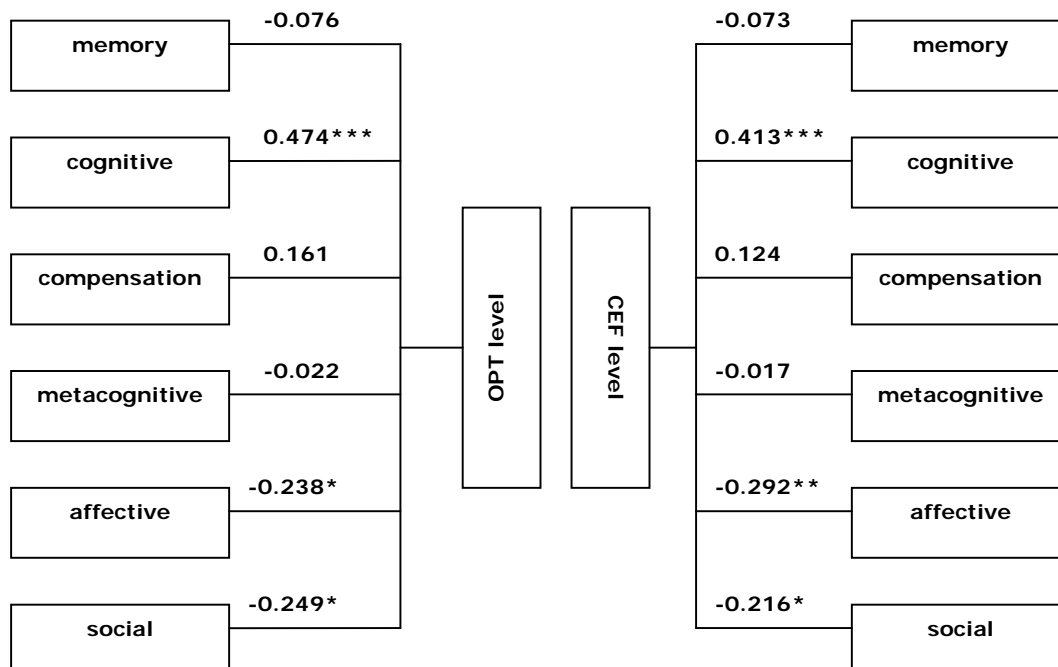


Figure 3 Correlation between language competence levels and language learner strategy factors

Data presented in Figure 3 reveal several statistically significant correlations. Firstly, the strongest (marginally strong) correlation was found between the frequency of use of cognitive strategies and language competence as expressed by both instruments. This is also the only positive correlation found. On the other hand, the frequency of use of affective and social strategies seems to be negatively correlated with language competence. Even though the value of Pearson's coefficient of correlation is lower and indicates a weak correlation between variables, the correlations still are statistically significant.

Obviously, students at higher levels of language competence use cognitive strategies more often and social and affective strategies less often than their less successful peers. In order to explore these findings further and provide answers to the second and third research questions ("Which language learner strategies are more frequently used by students at high levels of language competence?" and "Which are the language learner strategies that should be incorporated into strategy based instruction if implemented or in the study process in general?") Pearson's coefficient of correlation was calculated. The aim was to find out how the level of language competence correlates with each language learning strategy. Statistically significant correlations are shown in Table 2 (* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$).

Group	Language learning strategy	Mean	OPT	p	CEFR	p
COG.	I try to talk like native English speakers.	3.8 ^a	0.342	***	0.342	***
COG.	I start conversations in English.	2.4	0.285	**	0.243	*
COG.	I watch English language TV shows or go to movies spoken in English.	3.9	0.285	**	0.264	**
COG.	I read for pleasure in English.	2.5	0.475	***	0.289	**
COG.	I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English.	2.1	0.475	***	0.292	**
COG.	I try not to translate word-for-word.	3.2	0.224	*	0.365	***
COMP.	If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing.	3.7	0.271	*	0.287	**
METAC.	I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better.	3.3	0.311	**	0.371	***
AFF.	I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English.	3.0	-0.316	**	-0.420	***
AFF.	I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake.	3.4			0.263	**
SOC.	I ask proficient speakers to correct me when I talk.	2.8	-0.223	*	-0.206	*
SOC.	I practice English with other students.	2.4	-0.225	*	-0.269	**
SOC.	I ask for help from proficient English speakers.	2.8	-0.221	*		
SOC.	I ask questions in English.	2.9			0.362	***

^a – values between 1.0 and 2.4 indicate low frequency of use, values between 2.5 and 3.4 indicate medium frequency of use, and values between 3.5 and 5.0 indicate high frequency of use (Oxford, 1990).

Table 2 Correlation between the level of language competence and language learning strategies

Data presented in Table 2 show which language learner strategies correlate with language competence. In other words, they show which language learner strategies are more frequently used by more and which by less proficient learners of the English language.

Most learner strategies that emerged as a result of this analysis can be described as 'plus' strategies, which means they are more frequently used by more proficient users of the English language. On the other hand, some learner strategies have also emerged that are obviously more frequently used by less proficient learners of English. These include the affective strategy of listening to one's body ("I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English."¹) and some social strategies, in particular practicing English with other students.

5. Discussion

This study aimed at exploring the relationship between the frequency of use of language learner strategies and language competence in a Slovene higher education setting and comparing the results against the findings of international studies in this field.

Firstly, the results have confirmed that the level of language competence correlates with the frequency of use of language learner strategies, as international studies have shown. This means that in the Slovene learning environment students at different levels of language competence use different language learner strategies and also that there is a reciprocal dependence between the frequency of use of (factors of) language learner strategies and language competence.

In addition, it has also been confirmed that when exploring the correlation between language learner strategies and language competence individual groups of learner strategies rather than the frequency of strategy use in general have to be considered (Oxford and Ehrman, 1995). In fact, there is a positive correlation between the frequency of use of cognitive strategies and language competence expressed through the scores at both tests used in this study. This indicates that students at higher levels of language competence use cognitive strategies statistically significantly more often than their less successful peers (see Oxford and Ehrman, 1995; Oxford and Burry-Stock, 1995; Griffiths, 2003a; Griffiths, 2003b).

On the other hand, the results have shown that the frequency of use of affective strategies negatively correlates with language competence, possibly indicating that students at lower levels of language competence tend to be more tense and anxious when learning or using a foreign language (see Mullins, 1992).

¹ All statements referring to language learner strategies have been borrowed from the Strategy Inventory of Language Learning – version for speakers of other languages learning English (Oxford, 1990).

Another group of language learner strategies negatively correlates with language competence, which is social strategies. It seems that students that had reached lower levels of language competence before enrolment in a tertiary education institution feel the need to cooperate with their peers and other users of English while the same need is absent among students at higher level of language competence. Interestingly, in his model of learning styles Vermunt (1996) suggests that learning with others as a mental model of learning typical of the undirected learning style should be discouraged in higher education because in this way the learning process is externally regulated. The results of the current study seem to confirm that students at lower levels of language competence seek for external sources for assistance in their learning process, which can be related to the higher frequency of use of social strategies among these students. On the other hand, among higher level students the learning process seems to be more internally regulated.

No statistically significant correlations were found between language competence and memory, compensation, and in particular metacognitive strategy factors (see also Shmais, 2003). This finding is important in particular in the light of the fact that several studies have shown that language progress can be enhanced through instruction in metacognitive strategies (Sengupta, 2000; Kusiak, 2001; Rasekh and Ranjbar, 2003; Graham and Macaro, 2008).

Secondly, the results have revealed which individual language learner strategies are used more frequently by students at higher or lower levels of language competence. Students at higher levels of language competence take a more active role in their learning process (e.g., "I start conversations in English.", "If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing.") not only in the formal school setting but also in informal situations outside language classrooms (e.g., "I watch English language TV shows or go to movies spoken in English.", "I read for pleasure in English."), where they look for opportunities for learning a foreign language themselves (see Shmais, 2003; Griffiths, 2003a; 2003b). The only social strategy that positively correlates with language competence is the one that entails an active role of the student ("I ask questions in English.") while the other social strategies, in which students rely on external sources for assistance in their learning, are more frequently used by students at lower levels of language competence ("I ask proficient speakers to correct me when I talk.", "I practice English with other students.", and "I ask for help from proficient English speakers."). These results do not confirm the findings reported by Griffiths (2003a; 2003b) who found that students at higher levels of language competence are more oriented toward interaction with others.

Students at higher level of language competence also seem to be more aware of their learning needs (see Shmais, 2003) and evaluate the progress they are making (see Oxford and Burry-Stock, 1995) ("I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better.").

The role of various aspects of affect in language learning is undisputed, which has also been revealed by the present study. In fact, students at lower levels of language competence feel tense or nervous when they are studying or using English ("I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English.") (see Mullins, 1992), which may hinder their learning process and thus lead to poorer results in the future. On the other hand, students that have already reached a higher level of language competence are more self-confident learners that are less afraid to use English also when they risk making a mistake ("I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake.").

The last research question set in 1. Introduction concerns the language learner strategies that should be incorporated into strategy based instruction if this is implemented or included into the teaching process in general, and thus concerns the implications for teaching. To summarize the research results, they have shown that students that have reached higher levels of language competence take a more active role in their learning, look for opportunities for learning a foreign language also outside the formal school setting, evaluate their process of learning which is usually internally regulated, and display a higher degree of self-confidence as learners. Therefore, it seems that strategy based instruction and teaching in general should focus on strategies, tasks, and activities that will stimulate students for independent use of the foreign language and will allow them to monitor and evaluate the progress they are making, which should in turn raise their self-confidence and lower levels of anxiety when learning or using a foreign language. An activity that entails all of the above is setting short- and long-term learning objectives and evaluating the degree to which these have been reached. Learners that set their own learning objectives (with teacher assistance) that are based on their learning needs and self-assessed level of language competence will probably take a more active control of their learning process. In turn, their learning process might become less externally and more internally regulated. And finally, through experiences of success as learners, assuming that students' previously set short- and long-term objectives have been met, their learning self-confidence should be enhanced.

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