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METACOGNITIVE, COGNITIVE, SOCIAL AND AFFECTIVE STRATEGY USE IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

A thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of PhD. in Applied Linguistics at Massey University

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This study examines the metacognitive, cognitive, social and affective strategy use of foreign language learners who are studying either in classroom situations or at a distance. The impact on learning strategy use of a number of variables is considered, relating to 1) the language learning context (mode of study, target language, level of study and language use opportunities) and 2) learner characteristics (age, gender, language learning experience, prior experience in learning the target language, motivation, proficiency).

The strategy use of learners is measured by means of 1) a self-report questionnaire (N=417) which also elicits relevant biographical information and 2) a verbal report procedure, the yoked subject technique, administered to a subsample of the questionnaire group (N=37). Canonical variate analysis was applied to the questionnaire data, and instances of strategy use were identified and classified in the verbal protocols using two independent raters.

Results indicated that the main influences on strategy use were mode of study and the age of learners; that distance learners were set further apart from classroom learners on metacognitive strategy use measures when the influence of the target language, proficiency, prior target language experience and level of study was considered; that learners who had had prior experience in learning the target language before enrolling in a university language course were maximally distinguished in their cognitive strategy use from learners without such prior experience; that mode of study exerted some influence on cognitive strategy use, but this was less than the influence of prior target language experience; that differences in cognitive strategy use between learners of French and learners of Japanese in the verbal report procedure could not be attributed solely to the influence of the target language; and that distance learners make less use of social strategies and greater use of affective strategies than their classroom counterparts.
Methodological and theoretical implications of the study are presented, and an appraisal is made of the usefulness of particular strategy use models for the investigation of language learning strategies. A number of tentative, practical recommendations from the study are proposed together with suggestions for further research.
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