

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSION

This chapter begins with the summary of the study and the results presented in the previous chapters regarding the use of language learning strategies by Thai and Vietnamese students and the roles of gender, motivation, and experience in studying English, affecting the choices of language learning strategies. Then, the discussion of the results is presented. Finally, some pedagogical implications and suggestions for future research in the area of language learning strategies and learning English are offered.

#### **8.1 Summary of the Study**

The present study aims at investigating Thai and Vietnamese university students' language learning strategies, and the effects of gender, motivation, and experience studying English on the choices of the strategies. The participants of the study were 84 Thai and 52 Vietnamese first- or second-year students studying fundamental English courses of the academic year 2006 at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand, and the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Hanoi, Vietnam, respectively. The data were collected with the use of the SILL questionnaires (Strategy Inventory for Language Learning) and semi-structured interviews. The analysis was conducted both quantitatively and qualitatively. SPSS program was utilized to analyze the quantitative data. In addition, the t-test was calculated to determine the influences of gender, motivation, and experience on studying English in the strategies. The results of this study are to address the hypotheses mentioned in Chapter 1 as follows:

1. With respect to hypothesis no. 1: language learning strategies commonly used by both Thai and Vietnamese undergraduate students include *Direct Strategies* and *Indirect Strategies*, the analysis demonstrated that the most frequently used strategy category by Thai students was Compensation, followed by Cognitive, Metacognitive, Social, Affective, and Memory categories, whereas Vietnamese students preferred to use Compensation category most, followed by Social, Metacognitive, Affective, Cognitive, and Memory categories. Therefore, the Thai and Vietnamese students clearly used both direct and indirect strategies. More precisely, what is different between Thai and Vietnamese students is that Thai students reported using direct strategies ( $M=3.24$ ) in learning English more than indirect strategies ( $M=3.17$ ). Likewise, Vietnamese students, distinctively, preferred using indirect strategies ( $M=3.46$ ) than direct strategies ( $M=3.31$ ).

2. With respect to hypothesis no. 2: Thai undergraduates use their learning strategies differently from those of Vietnamese undergraduates. That is, Vietnamese undergraduates tend to use a wider range of strategies than Thai undergraduates. Moreover, it is hypothesized that Vietnamese undergraduates probably use more Metacognitive, Cognitive, Social, and Affective strategy categories than Thai undergraduates. This hypothesis is partly accepted because the analysis showed that of all of the six categories, Vietnamese students used Social, and Affective strategy categories more than Thai students.

The interviews also showed certain differences in the use of additional learning strategies by the two groups of students when studying English. For instance, memorizing new English words, using synonyms and mnemonic devices were strategies that Thai preferred to use in memorizing new vocabulary. Furthermore, Thai students preferred to take notes in Thai. For Vietnamese students,

writing new English words down on a piece of paper, recording the lecture in class, and reviewing the English lessons were additional learning strategies they preferred. It was also discovered that Vietnamese students realized the importance of speaking, and pronunciation, by imitating the way native speakers talk.

Moreover, Thai and Vietnamese students differed as to the least used strategies. For Thai students, they infrequently used flashcards to remember a new English word, attended events in which English was spoken, changed to a topic which they knew words, and planned objectives in learning each week. For Vietnamese students, they infrequently acted out physically new English words, used idioms or other routine words, anticipated what a person would say, and found people to talk to in English. However, both Thai and Vietnamese students shared similarities in terms of the two least used strategies: recording their feelings in diaries and having a regular English learning conversational partner.

3. With respect to hypothesis no. 3: there are three assumptions about factor affecting the choices of language learning strategies. First, among Thai and Vietnamese undergraduate students, females use more and a wider range of strategies than men. Second, Thai undergraduates, both highly-motivated and lowly-motivated groups employ language learning strategies less frequently than Vietnamese undergraduate students, respectively. Third, Thai undergraduates, both additional experienced and without additional experienced groups use more and wider range of strategies than Vietnamese undergraduates.

In terms of gender, a statistically significant difference in the use of the six strategy categories was found only in the use of Cognitive category. Thai male students had higher use of Cognitive category than Thai female students. However, for Vietnamese students, gender is not an important impact factor as there was no

statistically significant difference. Therefore, the hypothesis regarding gender is rejected.

However, when the reported use of learning strategies by gender between Thais and Vietnamese was compared across nationalities, the t-test revealed that there was no statistically significant difference in the use of the six strategy categories between the Thai and Vietnamese male students. Likewise, for female students, statistically significant differences were found in the use of Memory and Social categories. Vietnamese female students had higher use of the six of strategy categories than Thai female students.

With reference to motivation, Thai highly-motivated students used the six strategy categories significantly more frequently than lowly-motivated Thai students except Memory category. For Vietnamese students, a statistically significant difference was found only in the use of Metacognitive category, with the highly-motivated students making higher use of Metacognitive category.

When the data from Thais and Vietnamese were compared across nationalities, the t-test showed that Thai and Vietnamese highly-motivated students are significantly different in the use of Memory category. However, the lowly-motivated Vietnamese students used all of the six categories of learning strategies more frequently than the lowly-motivated Thai students, except Compensation category. The findings, thus, confirm the hypothesis regarding motivation in this regard.

Additionally, for Thai students, additional experience in studying English had a significant effect on the choices of language learning strategies, particularly in the use of Cognitive and Metacognitive categories. Meanwhile, for Vietnamese students,

a statistically significant difference was found only in the use of Memory category between the students with and without additional experience.

Moreover, when compared across nationalities, the Thai students with additional experience significantly used Cognitive and Compensation categories more than the Vietnamese students who had additional experience. Meanwhile, the Vietnamese students without additional experience showed statistically significant difference, with reporting higher use of all of the six strategy categories except Compensation category than the Thai students without additional students. Therefore, the hypothesis regarding nationality is partly accepted.

## **8.2 Discussion of the Results**

1. The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) version 5.1 developed by Oxford (1990) could illustrate the use of the strategies by both Thai and Vietnamese students. Since the results of the present study revealed that the two groups of students used both direct and indirect strategies categorized in the six categories of language learning strategy, it is concluded that the hypothesis no. 1 was confirmed in this regard. More precisely, the analysis showed that Thai students used direct strategies in learning English more than indirect strategies. Meanwhile, Vietnamese students, distinctively, used indirect strategies more than direct strategies. These findings may be from the differences in teaching and learning English of these two countries. That is, as shown in Chapter 2, Thailand has a long history of English education. In the past, English teachers employed grammar translation method, and then the audio lingual method in English instruction. These two teaching approaches may be deep-rooted in teaching English until now, even though education planners have changed the English curriculum in order to suit international needs, and

communicative language teaching has been adopted. Moreover, English teachers probably are not used to such a new method (Maskhao, 2002). Therefore, it is possible that Thai students are still familiar with traditional approach in learning English. As opposed to Thailand, teaching English in Vietnam was mostly promoted when Vietnam adopted *Doi Moi* policy in 1986. That is the time when communicative language teaching emerged in teaching languages. Therefore, the way Vietnamese students learn English may focus on communicative functions, which does not involve directly the structures of the target language.

2. The hypothesis assuming that Thai students used their learning strategies differently from those of Vietnamese students is partly accepted. The analysis showed that of all the six categories, Vietnamese students used Social and Affective categories more than Thai students. One explanation is that, as mentioned earlier, teaching pedagogy between Thai and Vietnam may be different. Thai students may learn English and have a chance to use English only in class, while Vietnamese students are probably pushed to learn English by interacting with others in society. Moreover, Vietnamese are active in learning foreign languages since Vietnam was colonized by numerous western countries. Speaking English or other foreign languages, therefore, is more common in Vietnam than Thailand.

3. The results of the present study concerning three factors: gender, motivation, and experience in studying English remain inconclusive. With respect to gender, the findings of the present study are consistent with the previous studies in this area, confirming that gender difference was not one of the variables contributing to the differences in the choices of language learning strategies (Goh & Kwah, 1997; Gu, 2002; Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006; Moshizuki, 1999; Wen & Wang, 1996). Since the analysis showed that Thai male and female students are different in the use

of Cognitive category only, while there is no difference between Vietnamese male and female students in the use of learning strategies, gender is not a factor that affects the choices of learning strategies. There are two possible explanations for these findings in this regard. First, the different pattern and frequency of strategies use by gender in the current study may be affected by other variables such as ethnic background, cultural background, language learning environment, etc. Second, the number of participants of each gender is another factor that cannot be controlled in the present study.

With respect to motivation, the analysis showed a significant effect on the use of language learning strategies by motivation between the two groups of students, Thai students in particular. The results of this study are congruent with a number of the previous SILL research findings, such as the study conducted by Dreyer and Oxford (1996) and Yu (2003). Therefore, the consistency of the finding designates that motivation in studying English could lead some benefits to learning a language. However, it is noteworthy that the cut-off (60%) used in this study is arbitrary (see Chapter 3 for details). Further in-depth investigations need to verify this factor in order to add more evidence about the roles of motivation and the use of learning strategies.

Additional experience in studying English has a great influence on the two groups of students, especially on Thai students. This is because Thai students with additional experience used more strategies than those without additional experience. Moreover, when compared to the Vietnamese students without additional experience, the Thai students without additional experience use the six categories of language learning strategies less than Vietnamese counterparts. The results of the study confirmed Oppen et al (1990) and Purdie and Oliver's (1999) findings showing that

the more experienced students obtained significantly higher mean scores for Cognitive strategies and for Memory strategies than those who had less experience. As a result, the Thai students who had less experience in studying English should be focused in terms of their use of the strategies to promote their English learning advancement. However, it should be noted that the criteria used to classify the students with respect to their experience in this study is arbitrary (see Chapter 3 for details). There are other factors e.g., the role of exposure to English such as passive listening to English songs, watching movies, etc. which can affect the choices of language learning strategies. These factors, again, cannot be controlled in the present study. The findings concerning experience in studying English, affecting the choices of learning strategies, therefore, should be carefully interpreted.

4. Previous research studies revealed that successful language students behaved in unique ways in learning a language. For example, Kaotsombut and Suwattananand (2004) as well as Mullins (1992) stated that most of Thai high-level English language students frequently guessed meanings of unfamiliar words, used circumlocutions or synonyms, and using gestures. The present study also discovered that Thai students engaged in active use of such strategies. Therefore, if such strategies are typically used by successful learners, they can be useful to less successful learners to help them learn a foreign language effectively and become better language learners as claimed in several studies (e.g., Green & Oxford, 1995; Oxford, 1990; Wharton, 2000), substantially, such strategies should be continuously promoted and used as guidelines for helping less-successful Thai learners to improve the effectiveness of their English learning.

5. Collecting data by using the SILL questionnaires has both advantages and disadvantages. The advantages are that participants feel at ease with reporting their



answers regarding the use of language learning strategies on a Likert scale. Also, the SILL questionnaires can be distributed to large group of participants. However, the use of the SILL questionnaires has disadvantages in that each strategy statement listed in the SILL may not cover all aspects of strategies used in learning English. This should be taken into account in using the SILL questionnaires to explore language learning strategies, and improving the subsequent version of the SILL questionnaire.

6. Since language is the primary medium through which a society articulates its culture and history, it provides the cognitive structure through which its people comprehend their world (Kachru & Nelson, 2001). Language ecology in Thailand and Vietnam is very different. This reason may lead to the differences in the use of learning strategies of these two groups of students. To illustrate, according to Think (2000), the Vietnamese have been influenced by foreign interventions and the subsequent use of a foreign language as the national or official language spread through the country. Particularly, in the twentieth century, direct involvements in Vietnam of such powers as China, France, Japan, the Soviet Union and the United States exerted various profound influences on language attitudes, language change, and language choice and use. Consequently, such influence over Vietnam indeed helped not only shape Vietnam's foreign language education policy, but also the Vietnamese's thoughts and worldview in acquiring a language. Simply put, they may be more open and enthusiastic to learn a foreign language when compared with Thai students. Unlike Vietnam, Thailand has never been colonized by a foreign country. The official language is Standard Thai, which is a national symbol. Moreover, Thailand is a largely monolingual society where Thai is the medium of communication. This reason probably makes it difficult to learn a language. That is, the widespread use of Thai may influence and hinder the Thai students from acquiring

the target language for certain aspects such as the difference of language system among the two languages, attitude towards foreign language, etc.

7. The results of the present study, particularly the reported use of language learning strategies of Vietnamese students are congruent with Grainger's (1997) study revealing that students of Asian background preferred Compensation and Social strategy categories. However, the results of the use of Memory category reported by the two groups of students are not consistent with several studies (e.g., Politzer & McGroarty, 1985; Wharton, 2000; Yang, 1999), revealing that Asian students have strong preferences for the Memory category rather than other communicative strategies such as working with others, asking for help, and cooperating with peers. One explanation for the contradictory findings is that such studies may report the whole picture of learning strategies used by students from several different cultural backgrounds, which may be too generalized. Likewise, it should be noted that the present study investigated only two nationalities: Thai and Vietnamese, thus, the results cannot lead to a big claim.

However, it is interesting when the results are compared with other previous studies (e.g., Grainger, 1997; Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006; Yang, 1999; Wharton, 2000) conducted with students of Europe and English-speaking country background, that it can be seen that most of the studies agree that Social, Compensation, and Metacognitive strategy categories are the strategy categories that these students prefer to use most among the six categories of language learning strategies. Put another way, Social and Metacognitive categories are grouped in indirect strategies according to Oxford (1990). Therefore, it may be said that, when Thai and Vietnamese students are compared, the Vietnamese students are quite similar to students of European and English-speaking country backgrounds in terms of the higher use of indirect

strategies, while the Thai students mostly prefer to use direct strategies. Again, this may be the results of colonization of Vietnam by both western and European countries, leading to the difference of language ecology between the two nations.

### **8.3 Implications and Future research**

#### **8.3.1 Implications of the Results**

1. The results indicated that both Thai and Vietnamese students differentially used language learning strategies. Therefore, a practical implication is that students should know how to use a variety of language learning strategies effectively, as well as understand how to use language learning strategies flexibly. According to Fedderholdt (1998), in language learning, it is indispensable for learners to reflect on their own learning process, and habitually estimate whether the use of language learning strategies is effective for improving their language proficiency. Meanwhile, as Chamot (1999) suggests that language teachers should concentrate on the training of integrating language learning strategy in class and explain the effectiveness of each strategy. This is because the awareness of using language learning strategies can empower students to become proficient in English. Therefore, teaching English should include strategies in using English effectively. Students should not be forced in their English learning to follow only one strategy. A combination of language learning strategies is imperative.

2. In addition, classroom teachers, in turn, should become more aware of students' learning strategies that their students are (and are not) using so that teachers can develop teaching methodologies that are compatible with their students' ways or behaviours of learning. According to Ellis (1994), language learning is enhanced when students' language learning strategies match the teaching methodology. In this

case, the results of this study identify that both Thai and Vietnamese university students dominantly use Compensation strategy category in learning English. Therefore, in order to facilitate learning, especially in an EFL context where students do not have a much chance to be exposed to their English, classroom management should be designed and conducted to promote using circumlocutions during communication such that compensation-type activities are well suited to Thai and Vietnamese students.

3. Given that the use of Social and Affective categories by Thai students is relatively low, compared to other category strategies and to Vietnamese students, one implication is that applying these two learning strategies in the language classrooms should be treated as a long-term instruction. The successful acquisition of speaking competence can be achieved only on the condition that language teachers should patiently promote continuously Social and Affective strategy categories to the Thai students.

4. Language curricula, materials and instructional approaches should incorporate the strategies used by students to accommodate their learning behaviours. In this regard, Dickinson (1987) states that using appropriate learning strategies can enable students to take responsibility for their own learning by enhancing autonomy, independence and self-direction. In EFL contexts, particularly, learners do not usually have a chance to develop these strategies naturally outside their classes due to the fact that they do not usually have direct contact with native speakers in their environment. Therefore, as claimed by Dörnyei (1995), material developers should include activities encouraging students to take risks and use available language knowledge without being afraid of making errors.

5. There appears to be little effort by Thai and Vietnamese students to memorize the meanings of new English words and language rules they have learned. The students should be encouraged to be more diligent in memorizing new English words during the English learning process. Moreover, they should be encouraged to discover the meanings of new words, make an effort to remember them, and apply and revise what they have learned.

### **8.3.2 Suggestions for Future Research**

A replication of the study involving language learning strategies in some areas would provide further support for the generalizability of the findings. These areas could include the following aspects:

1. Future studies should be conducted in other academic institutes and/or the participants in different fields of studies, with a larger scale of participants. Also, it may also be illuminating to investigate how students studying in international schools or programs use learning strategies in learning English to shed some light on the roles of those factors which may play in the choices of language learning strategies.

2. Further investigation should include studies which combine various qualitative approaches, such as think-aloud protocol, observation, and diaries in collecting data so that every aspect of using language learning strategies is covered. This is because it is believed that qualitative data can substantiate or verify the findings obtained from using the SILL as a main instrument.

3. Besides looking at the differences among Southeast Asian student groups, it would also be useful to investigate native speakers' improvements over time in their use of language learning strategies, especially in their use of Compensation and Cognitive strategies. This is because the current study found that such strategies were

the important learning strategies for both Thai and Vietnamese students in learning English. According to Kachru and Nelson (2001), this would demonstrate whether the differences in using language learning strategies are due to the great influence of using of English in the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle and the Expanding Circle.

4. The present study found the large influences of motivation and experience in studying English on the use of language learning strategies. Thus, it would be fruitful if future research focuses on examining the effects of other variables on learning a language, such as age, cultural background, etc. These issues could not be investigated fully in the present study because of the scope and scale of the study.

5. Future research might also investigate the effects of instruction. It would be of interest to know the extent to which instruction facilitates acquiring a second language and development of second language learning.