

A POLYGLOT'S STRATEGIES IN LEARNING FOREIGN LANGUAGES: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

Polyglots typically have specific learning strategies to learn new languages. This study aims to tap into the learning strategies employed by a female Indonesian who speaks six languages, namely Javanese, Minang, Malay, Indonesian, English, and Russian, and is currently learning three additional languages, namely French, Spanish, and Arabic. This case study used an interview to gain a deeper understanding of the learning strategies. The interview revealed that the participant used direct and indirect strategies in a balanced proportion. Further discussion also revealed that she used cognitive strategy and social strategy most frequently, i.e. in the form of practice and social interaction, respectively. The case study is expected to serve as a reference for language learners seeking to learn new languages.

Keywords: foreign language acquisition, language learning strategy, multilingualism, polyglot

Introduction

When meeting multilingual individuals or learning that they are multilingual, people would most likely be amazed, often considering them for “rare” individuals due to the notion that they speak, or are learning, more than two languages. However, the surprising fact is that they are amazingly large in number and are distributed widely across the globe. The number of multilingual individuals and/or communities is much greater than that of monolingual, rendering monolingual individuals and communities the “rare” population in today’s world (Anastassiou, Andreou & Liakou, 2017). Multilingual individuals and communities are very much a common phenomenon that some even labeled multilingualism “a global norm” (Anisimova, 2019; Kidwell & Triyoko, 2021; Ortega, 2013). This is true as most people around the globe, especially in Europe and many parts of Asia, speak at least two languages. Furthermore, multilingualism is even encouraged by, among others, the European Union’s “1+2” recommendation (Anastassiou et al., 2017). The European Union recommends citizens of the Union’s member states learn at least three languages, i.e. their mother tongue or national language and two other languages. In the current study, we focus on polyglot individuals; the term ‘polyglot’ itself is

defined as an individual who learns additional language(s) ‘for the sake of learning itself’ (Styxova, 2021).

While multilingualism is a common phenomenon, the study of multilingualism is relatively a new branch in the extensive scope of language and linguistic studies. Anisimova (2019) pointed out that multilingualism is multifaceted, and can be examined from a range of different perspectives, such as linguistics and psychology (Bin-Tahir, Atmowardoyo, Dollah, Rinantanti, & Suriaman, 2018; Botes, Dewaele, & Greiff, 2020; Shishova, 2020), socio-linguistics (Kidwell & Triyoko, 2021; Qomariyah, Anam, & Setiawan, 2022) or socio-economics (Chattaraj, 2017), education (Bensalem, 2018; Brosh, 2018; Castillo, 2013; Cenoz, 2013; Macatuno-Nocom, 2022), and even neuroscience (Wattendorf, Festman, Westermann et al., 2014). More specific studies have also been conducted to tap into the different areas of multilingualism, including the characteristics of multilingual individuals and/or communities (Cenoz, 2013), the emotions and emotional dynamics of multilingual individuals from the perspective of positive psychology (Botes et al., 2020), and the learning strategies that they employ when learning foreign languages (Alshaghel & Pappuswamy, 2021; Chattaraj, 2017; Dolgunsöz, 2013; Zarei & Baharestani, 2014).

Among the various aspects being studied up to the present time, learning strategy stands out as one of the most interesting and beneficial aspects. This is because it correlates with various variables, such as motivation and anxiety, and it plays a significant role in facilitating effective learning, predicting outcomes, and even determining the success of learning (Castillo, 2013; Calafato & Simmonds, 2023; Hemaidia, 2013; Shishova, 2020). The significance of learning strategies about multilingualism and foreign language learning also lies in the general acknowledgment that multilingual individuals indeed possess unique characteristics that both provide and result in advantages and superiority against monolingual individuals (Anastassiou et al., 2017; Dolgunsöz, 2013; Wattendorf et al., 2014). Considering the unique characteristics of multilingual individuals, it comes as no surprise that they typically would employ a set of learning strategies that are often relatively, or may even be significantly, different compared to those of monolingual and even bilingual individuals (Brosh, 2018; Calafato & Simmonds, 2023; Chattaraj, 2017; Dolgunsöz, 2013; Hemaidia, 2013; Macatuno-Nocom, 2022; Qomariyah et al., 2022; Zarei & Baharestani, 2014).

Given the significant role of learning strategies in language learning, especially within the context of foreign language learning, the current study aims to identify the learning strategies employed by a female Indonesian polyglot individual in learning multiple foreign languages simultaneously. She speaks six languages and, as of the writing of the current study, was learning three foreign languages simultaneously. The results of the study are expected to provide a basis for language enthusiasts in general and language students in particular, as well as to offer a reference for future studies in language acquisition, especially within the context of multilingualism.

Multilingualism

Multilingualism has spread across the globe and the number of multilingual individuals and/or communities continues to increase, making it a very common phenomenon across the world (Cenoz, 2013). Researchers and scholars have even

dubbed multilingualism a global norm rather than an exception in today's society (Anisimova, 2019; Hayakawa & Marian, 2019; Kidwell & Triyoko, 2021; Ortega, 2013). Especially in the 21st century, the visibility of multilingualism is further strengthened by globalization and the transnational mobility of the world's population, as well as by the advancement and spread of new technologies (Cenoz, 2013). However, the definition of multilingualism varies among researchers and studies (Anastassiou et al., 2017), not because multilingualism is a relatively new field of study, but more because researchers and even the common people are still debating over the dimensions that it encompasses.

The most widely accepted and used definition is the one proposed by the European Commission in 2007 (in Cenoz, 2013), i.e. that multilingualism is the ability of societies (including communities, institutions/organizations, and groups) and individuals to use more than one language for communication in their day-to-day lives regularly. The definition seems simple enough as it is, indeed, but the dimensions of multilingualism are not. Studies have pointed out that multilingualism can be perceived in various ways, including origin, channel of learning, degree of proficiency, and functions/use (Anastassiou et al., 2017). Cenoz (2013), then, summarized that multilingualism can be perceived and understood from three dimensions, i.e. individual vs. social, proficiency vs. use/function, and bilingualism vs. multilingualism. The dimensions that Cenoz proposed are comprehensive as they are frequently referenced in subsequent studies of multilingualism.

From the individual vs. social perspective, multilingualism can be perceived as a phenomenon at both the social and individual levels (Cenoz, 2013). Studies examining multilingualism as a social phenomenon are typically aimed at understanding the aspects and multifaceted structure of multilingualism (Anisimova, 2019), including the social factors, social construct, and social impacts, especially in terms of social interaction and/or inclusion (Calafato, 2021; Marácz & Adamo, 2017; Pitkänen-Huhta, 2019). On the other hand, studies aimed at examining multilingualism at the individual level have also been growing, and a specific term, i.e. plurilingualism, was coined to emphasize the focus of the study (Calafato & Simmonds, 2023; Cenoz, 2013; Jeoffrion, Marcouyeux, Starkey-Perret, et al., 2014). Most studies focusing on individual multilingualism addressed the characteristics of multilingual individuals, such as motivation (Calafato, 2021; Macatuno-Nocom, 2022; Thompson & Erdil-Moody, 2016), learning strategies (Alshaghel & Pappuswany, 2021; Brosh, 2018; Chattaraj, 2017; Dolgunsöz, 2013; Macatuno-Nocom, 2022; Qomariyah et al., 2022; Raftari & Vosoughi, 2013), learners' performance and the factors affecting the performance (Bin-Tahir et al., 2018; Bensalem, 2018; Brosh, 2018; Shishova, 2020), the cognitive and neural characteristics of multilingual individuals (Bright, Ouzia & Filippi, 2015; Hayakawa & Marian, 2019; Wattendorf, Festman, Westermann et al., 2014), as well as the impacts and benefits of multilingualism (Botes et al., 2020; Calafato, 2021; Calafato & Simmonds, 2023; Dolgunsöz, 2013; Lewis, 2023; O'Brien, Curtin & Naqvi, 2014; Pitkänen-Huhta, 2019).

The proficiency vs. use/function perspective has sparked debates among researchers regarding the degree of proficiency that multilingual individuals must possess to be considered multilingual. Initially, there was a belief that an individual could only be considered multilingual if he/she demonstrated a native-

like proficiency when using a foreign language(s) (Anastassiou et al., 2017). The belief stemmed from Leonard Bloomfield's idea of what he called 'true multilingual.' However, the belief has been criticized as the imposing of a native-like proficiency on foreign language learners would mean showing a monolingual bias towards them, and that foreign language learning is much more complex than learning a first language (Anastassiou et al., 2017; Calafato & Simmonds, 2023; Jeoffrion et al., 2014; Macatuno-Nocom, 2022; O'Brien et al., 2014; Pinto & Alexandre, 2004; Pitkänen-Huhta, 2019; Shishova, 2020; Souza, 2018), especially if the learners are learning the new language not as a second language but as a third language or fourth language and so on (Hayakawa & Marian, 2019; Jeoffrion et al., 2014). On the other hand, Cenoz (2013) states that accepting minimum competence and/or proficiency for one to be considered multilingual is also rather problematic. He further explains that achieving balance in multilingualism has also been an issue regarding the degree of proficiency. In this regard, balanced multilingualism is defined as being equally proficient or fluent in the different languages that an individual is using.

Nowadays, however, the view has shifted to a more open definition that the degree of proficiency may vary from one language to another as it is affected by factors, such as register, occupation, and education (Anastassiou et al., 2017; Bin-Tahir et al., 2018). Similarly, Cenoz (2013) states that today perfect mastery and native-like proficiency in foreign languages no longer constitute a requirement for one to be considered multilingual. On another note, the shift also resulted in the perception that multilingualism is not a result, but rather a process of language learning and acquisition (Anisimova, 2019; Hemaidia, 2013; Kostadinov, 2023; Krasowska, 2020; Morar, Boștină-Bratu & Negoescu, 2020; Romanowski, 2020; Shishova, 2013), and thus full mastery should not be a definite requirement.

The third dimension, i.e. bilingualism vs. multilingualism, deals with the scope of multilingualism, that is, the number of languages involved. Initially, bilingualism and multilingualism were traditionally regarded as distinct concepts and fields of study, mainly due to the perceived differences in complexity between them. Nowadays, researchers have accepted that bilingualism can be considered a part of multilingualism (Cenoz, 2013; Dolgunsöz, 2013). As such, multilingualism is now accepted as the umbrella term which includes not only bilingualism but also trilingualism, pentalingualism, and beyond. This perspective makes more sense as each of the terms deals with the same phenomenon, albeit having different degrees in terms of the number of languages involved (Calafato & Simmonds, 2023).

Another term that also often causes doubt is the distinction between 'multilingual' [individual] and 'polyglot.' While the two terms carry the same meaning, i.e. 'many tongues (languages)' (Wei & Chang, 2016), people have distinguished between the two terms. A multilingual [individual] is often defined as an individual who uses and/or learns multiple languages, and the specific focus is usually on communities where more than one language is used and for different but specific purposes; on the other hand, a polyglot is defined as an individual who learns additional language(s) 'for the sake of learning itself' (Styxova, 2021). In other words, multilingual individuals are those who use or learn additional language(s) for different yet specific contexts and/or purposes, while polyglots learn additional language(s) as a hobby.

One of the reasons that studies in multilingualism continue to grow is the fact that multilingualism is known and has been proven to offer significant benefits to both individuals and society. Indeed, it does not necessarily mean that multilingualism is entirely free of adverse effects, especially within the context of political conflicts (Amara, 2018), but research has found that the benefits of multilingualism far exceed its shortcomings. Bright et al. (2015) found that multilingual individuals benefitted from their multilingualism in terms of the control over cognitive functions, such as attention and comprehension abilities, as well as over metacognition functions, such as task switching, language performance monitoring, planning, and communication strategies. Similarly, multilingualism also leads to individuals gaining enhanced cognitive, psycholinguistic, and cultural awareness/capacities (Cenoz, 2009). On another note, multilingualism is also known to provide therapeutic and neurological benefits (Calafato, 2021; Hayakawa & Marian, 2019), as well as a higher tolerance to ambiguity (Thompson & Erdil-Moody, 2016).

The benefits of multilingualism at the individual level have also been known to extend further as it allows individuals to perform better in non-language subjects, primarily thanks to their enhanced performance monitoring abilities (Calafato & Simmonds, 2023). On a broader scope, multilingualism, especially in terms of learning a new language, has been known to help slow down certain aspects of age-induced cognitive decline (Cenoz, 2013). Furthermore, within the broader context of society, multilingualism is known to help promote social and linguistic diversity and inclusion (Marác & Adamo, 2017) and help promote language socialization, which opens opportunities for multilingual individuals to be socialized into new identities or communities (Calafato, 2021), and improve individuals' and communities' cultural awareness (Alsaghel & Pappuswamy, 2021; Anisimova, 2019; Calafato, 2021; Kidwell & Triyoko, 2021; Krasowska, 2020; Lewis, 2023; Marác & Adamo, 2017; Oxford, Rubin, Uhl et al., 2014; Pinto & Alexandre, 2004; Raftari & Vosoughi, 2013; Souza, 2018; Qomariyah et al., 2022).

Learning strategy

One of the most prominent definitions of language learning strategy (LLS) is the one proposed by Oxford et al. (2014), i.e. a set of 'specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques' that learners employ to handle and/or complete a task. Such a strategy will allow individuals to progress through their language development skills (Brosh, 2018; Chattaraj, 2017; Qomariyah et al., 2022). As language learning continuously requires the learners to exercise their problem-solving ability, language learning strategy constitutes an integral part of solving the encountered problems, by which the learners receive, process, and integrate information (Brosh, 2018). Throughout the process of learning a language, learning strategy holds a significant role as it helps make the learning process more effective and enjoyable (Chattaraj, 2017; Macatuno-Nocom, 2022), and in the long run will affect the success of the learning (Alshaghel & Pappuswamy, 2021; Anastassiou et al., 2017; Brosh, 2018; Calafato & Simmonds, 2023; Chattaraj, 2017; Dolgunsöz, 2013; Macatuno-Nocom, 2022; Oxford et al., 2014; Shishova, 2020; Raftari & Vosoughi, 2013; Qomariyah et al., 2022; Zarei & Baharestani, 2014).

Researchers have tried to group LLS into different categories. Citing Cohen, Brosh (2018), for example, categorizes LLS into three main types, namely strategies related to the learning and use of language, strategies related to the four basic language skills (reading, listening, writing, and speaking), and strategies by function, i.e. cognitive (reception, processing, and integration of information), metacognitive (planning, monitoring, and judgment of cognitive processes), affective (emotions), and social (e.g. social interaction). Hardan (2013) also cites O'Malley's 1985 work, which categorized LLS into cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, and socio-affective strategies.

Similarly, citing Rubin's (1987) work, Hardan (2013) differentiates LLS into direct and indirect strategies, i.e. strategies that contribute directly versus strategies that contribute indirectly to language learning. According to Rubin, direct LLS comprises learning strategies, which further is categorized into cognitive and metacognitive strategies. Indirect strategies, on the other hand, comprise communication and social strategies. Another categorization that is also very similar to Rubin's categories of LLS is Oxford's taxonomy of LLS, which has been referenced in subsequent studies (Brosh, 2018; Chattaraj, 2017; Qomariyah et al., 2022). Much like Rubin, Oxford classified LLS into direct strategies (comprising memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies) and indirect strategies (comprising metacognitive strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies).

Furthermore, Hardan (2013) provides the examples of the use of LLS as per Oxford's taxonomy. Memory strategies may be employed by 'creating mental linkages, applying images and sounds, reviewing, and employing actions.' Cognitive strategies may be in the form of practice, analysis and reasoning, and structured inputs and outputs. Compensation strategies may include making informed guesses when the learners are lacking information, or finding ways to address limitations in their speaking and writing skills (e.g. using facial expressions and/or gestures, consulting dictionaries, etc.). In terms of indirect strategies, metacognitive strategies may be employed by developing a structured planning of learning and evaluation of progress. Affective strategies include finding ways to address anxiety, encourage oneself, and strengthen motivation. Social strategies may be in any form involving others, preferably native speakers of the language being learned, e.g. by communicating with them (through oral or written speech) or asking questions.

With regards to multilingualism, studies have found that there is a strong link between multilingualism and LLS, i.e. multilingual learners have a notably higher tolerance to ambiguity, higher language aptitude, lower anxiety, and better learning strategies (Thompson & Erdil-Moody, 2016); they exhibit improved cognitive functions when learning new language(s) (Bright et al., 2015; Hayakawa & Marian, 2019); they have better self-perception of their proficiency and improved capabilities of addressing language learning anxiety (Botes et al., 2020); they show greater flexibility in employing and switching learning strategies, as well as in modifying new strategies and reducing or removing less useful strategies (Cenoz, 2013). Moreover, Dolgunsöz (2013) found that multilingual learners are generally more proficient in grammar as the result of the more frequent use of LLS. Hence, the more languages the learners have been exposed to, the more frequent their use of effective LLS. On a broader note, as

multilingual learners can employ LLS effectively, they benefit from their multilingualism in that it improves their linguistic awareness and thus facilitates subsequent learning of more or new language(s) (Botes et al., 2020; Dolgunsöz, 2013; Jeoffrion et al., 2014; Qomariyah et al., 2022; Wattendorf et al., 2014).

Method

The study is a case study conducted through an interview. Following the literature review, an interview guideline was constructed to direct the interview process and interview questions. At the preliminary stage of the respondent selection process, five candidates of respondent were originally selected randomly from a group of language learners. They were all residing in or listed Yogyakarta, Indonesia as their place of (or one of the places of) residence. However, a preliminary check showed that only one of them was learning more than one language simultaneously, while also admitting to and/or showing a proficiency level higher than a beginner in some of the new languages being learned. This candidate was then approached further with several follow-up questions to check the suitability of the purpose of the current study, including the duration of learning and the channel by which the learning took place (i.e., formal education or informal education).

The participant was Putri Sekar Ningrum, a 23-year-old Indonesian citizen who has been studying and living in Tyumen, Russia for approximately seven years. She speaks six languages at varying levels of proficiency, i.e. Javanese, Minang, Malay, Indonesian, English, and Russian, and at the time of the writing of the current study was learning three foreign languages simultaneously, i.e. French, Spanish, and Arabic. In addition to studying Anthropology-Sociology at the School of Advanced Studies, Tyumen State University, she also taught Russian to Indonesians in an online language course. For the current study, she has provided her consent for the interview sessions to be recorded, as well as for the recordings to be analyzed further and the result presented in the current study.

The interview took place on June 17, 2023. Due to the distance and time zone differences between the authors of the current study and the participants, the interview was divided into three sessions; each lasted for forty-five minutes, all of which were conducted via Zoom meetings. The results of the interview were then interpreted to highlight the learning strategies that the participant employed while learning additional languages aside from her first languages.

The interpretation of the results of the interview is made by referring to the categorization of language learning strategies, primarily the ones proposed by Rubin and Oxford. As such, the discussion is divided into two sub-sections, i.e. direct strategies and indirect strategies, with the specific classification for each type made according to Oxford's taxonomy of language learning strategies.

Findings and Discussion

The interview began with several preliminary questions concerning the duration of learning, channel of learning (i.e. formal or informal learning), and level of proficiency. In terms of duration of exposure to the languages, the participant mentioned that she learned her first language in early childhood. She first started learning English in 2006 and Russian in 2016. As for the additional languages, she first learned Arabic during her early childhood, then went on a

hiatus and eventually resumed her learning in 2022. She learned Spanish in 2017 and French in 2022. In terms of the channel of learning, she learned Indonesian through both formal education and exposure from her immediate family (i.e. her mother), and Malay and Javanese through exposure from peers and immediate environment. Similar to Indonesian, she learned English, Russian, and Arabic through both formal education and exposures from her immediate environment and peers, as well as from the media. Spanish, on the other hand, was learned mostly through exposures from peers and the media, while French was learned only through informal education, i.e. language courses with no exposure from the immediate environment.

In terms of proficiency level, she mentioned that she was fully fluent in Indonesian, Malay, and Javanese. This is not surprising as these languages are her native languages. However, an exception was found in Minang, which, despite being learned since early childhood, was classified as having a lower-intermediate proficiency level. She revealed further that she could listen to and understand the language well, but remained unable to use it actively, which perhaps was because the exposure had only been occasional. For her second languages, i.e. English and Russian, she stated that she achieved near-native proficiency, meaning that she could use the languages fluently in both formal and informal settings, and understands the grammar well.

As for the additional languages, she mentioned an upper-intermediate proficiency in Spanish (i.e. can comprehend well and can use rather fluently for communication, but does not understand the grammar too well). Similarly, she also listed upper-intermediate as her level of proficiency in Arabic, which she further elaborated by explaining that she can write and read well in Arabic, and understands the grammar and media-related contents, but she remains not confident enough to use it in oral speech. Lastly, she listed beginner as her level of proficiency in French, i.e. she only understands basic grammar rules and expressions.

Table 1 presents the summary of her level of proficiency in each of the nine languages:

Table 1. The participant's proficiency level in different languages

Language	Proficiency Level	Skills
Indonesian	Native	Can use fluently
Malay	Native	Can use fluently
Javanese	Native	Can use fluently
Minang	Lower-intermediate	Can listen and comprehend, but unable to answer or speak
English	Near-native	Can use fluently
Russian	Near-native	Can read and speak formally and informally, can use it almost fluently
Spanish	Upper-intermediate	Can comprehend well, listen and answer/speak rather well, but don't understand the grammar well
Arabic	Upper-intermediate	Can write and read well, understand the grammar, can understand media-related contents, but unable to speak
French	Beginner	Only understand basic grammar and expressions

Direct strategies

Early in the interview, the participant admitted that among the languages that she learned or is currently learning, she listed Russian as the most difficult one. When asked what makes the language difficult to learn, she mentioned that grammar was what caused her struggle. She did admit that Russian tenses are simpler than English tenses, but the language has six cases, i.e. nominative, genitive, dative, accusative, instrumental, and prepositional cases. Each of the cases comes with a set of rules on how to change the forms of the syntactic functions, including the pronouns, possessive pronouns, nouns, adjectives, and so on. As a comparison, English has no cases, while German has four cases (nominative, genitive, dative, and accusative). She also mentioned that another thing that makes Russian difficult to learn is the highly detailed semantic properties assigned to several verbs, especially verbs of motion. She went on to provide another example, i.e. the conjugations, including the syntactic structure for ‘причастие’ (‘prichastiye’/participles) and ‘депричастие’ (‘deprichastiye’/gerunds).

The interview further revealed that the participant used all three strategies belonging to the direct strategy category, i.e. memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies. As the participant had been exposed to other languages before learning the three additional languages (Spanish, Arabic, and French), it is interesting to first tap into the cross-linguistic influence that she might have encountered when learning languages other than her first languages.

The term cross-linguistic influence is often used interchangeably with cross-linguistic interference, but recent studies have replaced it with the currently more widely used term of cross-linguistic influence to avoid the implication that the influence is more negative than positive (Ortega, 2013). Furthermore, Ortega defined cross-linguistic influence as the influence between languages that an individual encounters as the result of the ‘knowledge and capabilities for competent language use’ from previously acquired or learned languages. It is worth noting that the term ‘influence’ emphasizes the possibilities that the influence may be in the form of either similarities or differences, as well as that it may be positive (i.e. facilitating the learning of subsequent languages) or negative (i.e. hindering the learning of subsequent languages).

During the interview, the participant mentioned that her knowledge and capabilities in Indonesian did help her when she started learning English, particularly in terms of vocabulary, as Indonesian has a relatively large number of loan words from other languages, including English and Arabic. However, in terms of grammar, she admitted that her proficiency in Indonesian did not help much in learning the subsequent languages, primarily because Indonesian grammar differs greatly from the other languages, most notably in terms of genders of nouns and tenses. She went on to explain that, for her at least, it was her second and third languages that did help her when learning new or additional languages. Again, the benefits came primarily from the similar vocabularies between the languages.

For Indonesian, I'd say that it helped a lot when I started learning English during childhood, because in Indonesian there are a lot of loan words from English, and Arabic as well, with almost the same meaning, like 'kursi',

'kitab', etc. ...When comparing with the other languages that I learned or that I am still learning, I'd say that Indonesian grammar is the least difficult, because for example in Russian, they have совершенный вид ('soversheniy vid'/perfective kind of verbs) and несовершенный вид ('nesoversheniy vid'/imperfective kind of verbs). So that's why Indonesian doesn't help me when learning the other languages. It's the other way, the second and the third languages that I learned, they helped each other, like, a lot... because in each of these languages they have loan words from each other, even in English there are loan words from Russian as well.

With regards to memory strategy, the participant revealed how she memorized certain language features of the languages that she has learned or is currently learning, especially for features that are different from those of the previously acquired and/or learned languages. A good example of how she did this is the strategy she employed when learning Russian and Arabic, as the two languages have their alphabet system, i.e. Cyrillic and Arabic alphabets, respectively. However, she admitted that she did not remember clearly enough about how she learned the Arabic alphabet and pronunciation, particularly because she started learning it when she was a very young child. She mentioned that her mother taught her to read and write in Arabic. Learning the Arabic alphabet happened almost fully implicitly, and she could not say much about the strategies she employed during that time.

However, she stated that she remembered pretty clearly how she learned the Russian (i.e. Cyrillic) alphabet, as she only started learning the language when she was 17 years old. As such, she provided a specific example of how she memorized the Cyrillic alphabet, i.e. she did not try to memorize all the alphabets. Instead, she “eliminated” (cognitively) the alphabets that look and/or sound the same as the Latin alphabets, leaving her with only a handful of alphabets to memorize. For example, she would “eliminate” the letters ‘м’ and ‘о’ because they look and are pronounced the same way as their Latin counterparts. She would also “eliminate” the letters ‘н’ or ‘р’ (pronounced ‘n’ and ‘r’, respectively, the same way we would pronounce ‘n’ and ‘r’ of the Latin alphabet).

For Russian, I would eliminate the letters and the sounds that look and sound the same as the Latin ones, like ‘м’ and ‘о’ because in Russian there are 33 alphabets so I eliminated [the letters] that I don't have to remember, then I eliminated [letters] that look the same [as Latin alphabets] but sound different, like ‘н’ [looks like ‘h’ but is pronounced ‘n’], or like ‘р’ [looks like ‘p’ but is pronounced ‘r’].

Still, in terms of memory strategy, she also shared that she used to read and write a lot in the language(s) that she was or is learning. She further admitted that it did help her to memorize language features, in this case, the alphabet and pronunciation, by writing them down and reading them in her handwriting. She also went the extra mile by changing the language settings on her devices, especially her laptop and phone, as well as on her social media accounts. This way, she would be “forced” to memorize them and use them as much as she could.

I used to read them in my handwriting a lot because for me it has been proven true when I read something with my handwriting I can memorize it much better, but also when I wanted to master Russian fast and well, I changed the setting on my laptop & my phone into Russian, even [on] my Instagram [account] and everything. So every time I open them I always see the Russian letters so it helped me memorize them faster and better.

About cognitive strategy, she mentioned that taking notes and writing everything down has also been helpful to her when learning a new language. She later admitted that this was especially true when learning Russian, which she learned through both formal education at the university (all the subjects taught were delivered in Russian) and a language course. The fact that she was learning Russian while also actively using it in day-to-day life is already interesting in itself. While most people would typically learn a language through lessons and practices first, then gradually move on to using the language, she was in a situation where she had to simultaneously learn and use the language. This was because she started learning Russian only after relocating to Russia, which means she had neither prior knowledge nor competence in the language before moving to the country. Another interesting thing is that she had to learn and use the language in a higher education setting, which implies that the communication involved complex topics, ideas, and concepts.

Discussing further cognitive strategy, she mentioned that when learning a new language, she would usually write everything down, and then ask the teacher/tutor for confirmation to make sure she understood the explanation correctly and that she did not miss any information on the topic being taught. She also noted that she employed the strategy primarily when she was learning the language in a formal setting, for example during lessons at the university or during classes at the language course. When the language was learned through informal channels, e.g. through informal learning or social interaction, she would also try as much as she could to re-explain the newly received information and confirm her understanding with the interlocutor.

If it's something that I learned formally, like at the uni or [language] course, I'd write down everything, like literally everything, including some miscellaneous explanation from the teacher or tutor. So at first I'd write it down, and then I'd re-explain it to the teacher or tutor, so if there's a misunderstanding, the teacher or tutor can confirm that part.

She also stated that she would practice the languages a lot, especially the grammar. When asked how she practiced the languages, she mentioned that she would usually develop her language skills by practicing reading first, followed by writing and grammar practices. In terms of language skills, she revealed that she felt reading has been undoubtedly helpful and that she would read as much as she could, especially content related to media and culture, including popular culture. Reading various texts, she added, also helped her practice her understanding and mastery of both the vocabulary and the grammar.

I'd say reading comes first, regardless of the language. I can comprehend much better if I read. And then writing also... I used to train my grammar a lot, like, a lot, and also train my vocabulary as much as possible.

Speaking of compensation strategy, she began the discussion by emphasizing that it was always helpful to talk to a native speaker of the language that she learned. Aside from helping to improve the fluency in the languages, she also noted that speaking with native speakers was a good way to help her understand the cultural aspects of the language, which typically were reflected in how the native speakers expressed ideas and concepts. She explained further that of all the languages that she learned, she had always had colleagues or friends who were native speakers of the language, except for French. She further noted that it does not necessarily mean that we would need to be surrounded by the native-speaker community; just one or two native-speaker friends were enough to help us learn the language.

When asked to describe the compensation strategies that she employed, she provided examples from her process of learning Spanish. When speaking with Spanish native speakers and there were particular terms or expressions that she did not fully understand or had no sufficient information about, she would compensate for the lack of understanding and/or information by either asking for clarification, paraphrasing, re-explaining using simpler words or adding information in English, re-explaining using body language (facial expression and/or gestures), demonstrating the actions in question, or by using and showing any items that she could access.

For example in Spanish, if I don't understand, I'd ask '¿Cómo?' or simply 'Huh?', and then they will explain using simpler words. If there are items that can be grabbed or shown, I'd grab them as well... I do "What did you say?" or "I don't understand", or explain with body language, re-explain using other words, paraphrasing like "When you use la-la-la-la, what do you say?"... Something like that.

From the explanation that she provided above, it is evident that both cognitive and metacognitive strategies play a significant role in her path of learning new languages, and this is particularly true in learning several languages simultaneously. This goes in line with the premise of direct learning strategies proposed by Hardan (2013), especially the fact that the learners, as proven by the participant, try to create mental linkage, conduct [self] review, and employ actions. Furthermore, the participant's explanation also correlates with the result of the study conducted by Qomariyah et al. (2022) in terms of compensation strategy, by which the participant made use of any available resources, including acquaintances of hers who were native speakers of the languages she was learning.

Indirect strategies

Moving on to the discussion on indirect strategies, the participant admitted that she did not consciously employ the strategies; instead, it came to her almost naturally, presumably due to the habits and patterns that were taught by her mother and that she had developed from years of learning different languages.

Furthermore, she mentioned that she believed motivation (primarily one that is driven by pure interest in languages) and curiosity were keys to helping her obtain enjoyable learning experiences. She also noted that of the three indirect strategies (metacognitive, affective, and social strategies), she felt that social strategies were the ones that she adopted most frequently and that have helped her greatly in her language learning.

I've been quite good with time management since high school, so I don't know, I just divide my time [when learning languages].

With regards to monitoring and/or evaluating her learning progress, she revealed that she would regularly track her progress by either practicing or working on exercises, or both, as well as by asking her teachers, tutors, peers, or native speaker colleagues and friends to help evaluate her progress by giving her questions or by testing her comprehension. She later explained that, in most cases, the “tests” were not planned; she would just ask her teachers or friends to ask her questions or give her random language-related activities for her to complete.

...track down my progress, ask my friends, tutors, native speaker [friends] to test me, ask them to give me some random questions, activities...

Speaking of effective strategies, the interview revealed that the participant has generally a lower level of foreign language anxiety (FLA), except in French. This is presumably because she has learned many languages, and with each new language that she learned, the level of anxiety was gradually reduced even more. This is in line with the result of other studies which found that as the number of languages increased, multilingual individuals typically exhibited a gradually lower level of anxiety (Bensalem, 2018; Botes et al., 2020). She also noted that in all the languages that she learned, except French, she did not feel anxious; in fact, she felt excited to learn as much as she could about the new languages and the cultures. She also consciously attributed her low level of anxiety to the fact that she has always been strongly interested in languages, as well as to the support that she has received from her native-speaker colleagues and peers. This particular revelation shows an agreement with the results of the study conducted by Wijaya (2023), which stated that the existence of an enjoyable L2 learning circumstance is believed to help alleviate anxiety in foreign language learning.

Her strong interest in languages and cultures has also become the greatest source of motivation for her when learning new languages. She emphasized that with a strong interest in languages, which later turned into motivation, not only would the learning process feel enjoyable, but also it would help her to adopt a new perspective on the languages and the associated cultures. Furthermore, she also noted that the excitement she gained from finding out more about the languages and the cultures has helped her overcome any potential for anxiety.

However, she did admit that she felt very anxious when learning French, which she attributed to the difficult pronunciation, the lack of prior exposure to the language, and the absence of French-speaking colleagues or peers to help her progress through her learning. All these factors led to her being rather anxious especially when it came to speaking. Her anxiety seemed to stem from her low

level of self-belief, which was primarily driven by the fact that she considered French pronunciation to be difficult. This is in line with the results of the study conducted by Siboro, Agung, and Quinones (2022), which reveals that belief is one of the key factors that affect the performance of non-native learners in speaking classes.

The only language that I feel a bit anxious about is French, because of the pronunciation first. Second, I have never had exposure to French, and no French-speaking friends, so that's why I was very anxious about it. ...I don't know but mostly it's just because I love languages, so after learning more languages, I started to see them from a different lens as they also reflect the culture, so I can learn new meanings as well...

Lastly, about social strategies, she stated that interacting with native speakers has helped her greatly in learning new languages. She emphasized that when interacting with native speakers, it was not necessary to think too much about grammar. Instead, she would usually focus on achieving mutual understanding during the interaction to keep the interaction going and to improve her fluency. Nevertheless, she did point out that it was still necessary to learn grammar, especially if she was to use the language in a formal context or setting (e.g. for education or work).

As a conclusion of the interview, she suggested that it would be beneficial for language learners to always be curious about everything, not only the language itself but also the culture, and to interact with native speakers as much as possible in terms of social interaction. She also noted that it was helpful to ask as many questions as possible, to learn the common expressions and the reasons behind such expressions, and to learn idioms and slangs.

Always ask everything, like literally everything, for example, the culture, the traditions, and the habits, why [native speakers] express things this way or that way, and interact with native speakers as much as possible. Ask everything, learn about everything...

The results of the interview regarding indirect strategies indicate that the participant's approach aligns with findings from previous studies, particularly in terms of better utilization of both direct and indirect learning strategies. The interview also reveals that the participant indeed shows a notable superiority, especially in addressing language learning anxiety (Botes et al., 2020), employing and switching learning strategies (Cenoz, 2013), as well as a high level of linguistic awareness (Botes et al., 2020; Dolgunsöz, 2013; Jeoffrion et al., 2014; Qomariyah et al., 2022).

Conclusion

The results of the current study revealed that the participant employed all strategies, both direct and indirect strategies, in a relatively balanced proportion. However, a more detailed discussion revealed that she adopted cognitive strategies and social strategies most frequently. The strategies have helped her learn multiple languages, some of which are generally considered the most difficult languages in the world (e.g. Russian and Arabic). As such, it is expected

that the results of the current study can offer benefits to language learners, i.e. by serving as a reference in terms of the language learning strategies to employ when learning new language(s).

On a broader note, the results of the current study show an implication that to help language learners achieve more enjoyable, successful learning, they need to be made aware of the different language strategies, as well as to be trained on how to utilize them for optimum learning experiences. As the results of the current study revealed that both direct and indirect strategies are equally important in the path of language learning, it is expected that the current study can serve as a ground of reference for future research, particularly in individual learning strategies.

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