A look into young learners' language learning strategies: A Croatian example

Vičević Ivanović, Sanja; Košuta, Nataša; Patekar, Jakob

Source / Izvornik: **Training, Language and Culture, 2021, 5, 83 - 96**

Journal article, Published version
Rad u časopisu, Objavljena verzija rada (izdavačev PDF)

https://doi.org/10.22363/2521-442X-2021-5-3-83-96

Permanent link / Trajna poveznica: https://urn.nsk.hr/urn:nbn:hr:186:244541

Rights / Prava: Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International/Imenovanje-Nekomercijalno 4.0 međunarodna

Download date / Datum preuzimanja: **2024-12-24**

Repository / Repozitorij:

Repository of the University of Rijeka, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences - FHSSRI Repository

Volume 5 Issue 3, 2021, pp. 83-96 doi: 10.22363/2521-442X-2021-5-3-83-96

Original Research

A look into young learners' language learning strategies: A Croatian example

by Sanja Vićević Ivanović, Nataša Košuta and Jakob Patekar

Sanja Vićević Ivanović Greenfield International School, United Arab Emirates sanjavicevic@gmail.com
Nataša Košuta University of Rijeka, Croatia nkosuta@ffri.hr
Jakob Patekar Rochester Institute of Technology, Croatia jakob.patekar@outlook.com
Article history Received July 27, 2021 | Revised September 13, 2021 | Accepted September 20, 2021
Conflicts of interest The authors declared no conflicts of interest
Research funding No funding was reported for this research
doi 10.22363/2521-442X-2021-5-3-83-96
For citation Vićević Ivanović, S., Košuta, N., & Patekar, J. (2021). A look into young learners' language learning strategies: A Croatian example. *Training, Language and Culture, 5*(3), 83-96.

Language learning strategies (LLS) have been in the focus of researchers for the past five decades. However, few studies have explored young learners' LLS. Starting with the assumption that the intensity of second language (L2) exposure is one of the factors in the use of LLS, the aim of this paper is to investigate whether there is a difference between the use of LLS in young children with different L2 exposure in Croatia. The analysed data was collected from a sample of 35 participants aged 5 to 7 using a structured interview at two points. In the interview, participants were explaining how they would help a plush toy to learn to say certain words and structures in L2. This method enables participants to become aware of the LLS they are using and to verbalise them. Based on an analysis of the results from the first and second data collection, we describe the similarities and differences in LLS use regarding the intensity of L2 exposure. A key finding, in relation to the criterion of similarity considering the intensity of L2 exposure, is that participants prefer to use the memory strategies such as listening to the interlocutor, model repetition, and autonomous repetition. Regarding the differences in the use of LLS considering the intensity of L2 exposure, a key finding is that children at an early age with a higher intensity of exposure to L2 show a tendency to use informal strategies, such as learning through rhyme in rhymes and chants and exposure to media, as well as social strategies such as establishing contact with a native speaker. The results show that certain LLS are used regardless of L2 exposure, whereas the use of others may be linked to the intensity of L2 exposure.

KEYWORDS: *language learning strategies, early language learning, second language, foreign language, immersion programme, young learners*

This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, including transformation and building upon the material for any purpose, provided the original author(s) and source are properly cited (CC BY 4.0)

1. INTRODUCTION

Thanks to Selinker (1972) and his understanding of language learning strategies (LLS) as one of the central processes underlying the concept of interlanguage, LLS enter SLA (second language acquisition) in the last quarter of the 20th century and quickly become one of the key topics (Dörnyei & Skehan, 2005). At the beginning of the 21st century, the field of LLS is still quite relevant because of the potential of LLS in making language

© Sanja Vićević Ivanović, Nataša Košuta, Jakob Patekar 2021
This content is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License

Volume 5 Issue 3, 2021, pp. 83-96 doi: 10.22363/2521-442X-2021-5-3-83-96

'In addition, research has thus far shown that multilingual learners use language learning strategies more frequently than monolinguals or bilinguals, but it has not provided an answer to the question of whether and how different languages affect language learning strategies use'

learning more effective (Griffiths & Oxford, 2014). Although Thomas and Rose (2019) find that there is a steady decline in LLS studies, Pawlak (2019) believes that such studies have not lost their appeal with practitioners who recognise the role of LLS in enhancing language learning.

In studying variations in L2 strategy use, researchers have found that age, among other variables, generally affects the use of LLS (Takeuchi, 2019). With regard to this, it is important to determine which LLS young learners use (Gürsoy & Eken, 2018), and for this reason it is this target group of participants that should be studied in order to create a scientifically-based theoretical foundation for the practical application of LLS at the very beginning of children's education.

In addition, research has thus far shown that multilingual learners use LLS more frequently than monolinguals or bilinguals, but it has not provided an answer to the question of whether and how different languages affect LLS use (Pawlak & Oxford, 2018). Therefore, we believe it is highly important to provide qualitative insights into LLS use among children with different levels of L2 exposure.

Based on the trends described in the field of LLS, the aim of this paper is to describe the use of LLS at an early age considering the intensity of L2 exposure. In our research, we were guided by the following questions.

1. Which LLS do young learners use considering the intensity of L2 exposure?

2. Are there similarities in LLS that young learners use considering the intensity of L2 exposure?

3. Are there differences in LLS that young learners use considering the intensity of L2 exposure?

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

2.1. Instrument

The instrument consisted of a structured interview (based on Mihaljević Djigunović, 2001) with six questions that stimulated the participants to say how they would help certain plush toys (a cat, a dog, a kangaroo, a panda, an elephant, a parrot) to learn to say certain words and structures in L2. We find that this method enables participants to become aware of language learning strategies they are using and to verbalise them by explaining how they would help a plush toy.

2.2. Participants

The sample consisted of 19 girls and 16 boys ages 5 to 6 in the 1st and 6 and 7 in the 2nd data collection (N=35) who were at different levels of exposure to a different L2: German, French, or Italian. The participants who were exposed to German (N=12) were included in the early language learning (ELL) of German as part of a kindergarten programme delivered in Croatian and enriched with some content in German. This 10-hour kindergarten programme was aimed at Croatian-speaking children who wanted to learn German as a foreign language. In line with this, by embedding German songs, stories, and games, children were motivated to use German. The participants whose L2 was French (N=9) were in an ELL course that involved 4 hours of French per day. In this course children were predominantly exposed to French through various age-appropriate activities and prompted to use French actively. This programme was aimed at Croatian-speaking children who wanted to learn French as a foreign language in an intensive course. The last group of participants were exposed to Italian (N=14) in a 10-hour kindergarten immersion programme for members of the Italian minority. Compared to the other two programmes, this kindergarten programme was delivered in Italian only because it was aimed primarily at preparing Italian-speaking children for Italian primary school in Croatia. All kindergartens were in Croatia. In part 3, we look at previous theoretical considerations and key research findings relevant to our study.

'LLS theory is 'highly complex, dynamic, and eclectic, drawing inclusively on insights from many different theoretical traditions' and interrelated with 'cognitive base, complexity/chaos theory, behaviourism, sociocultural theory, activity theory and, perhaps, others'

2.3. Procedure

The research was carried out in accordance with the ethical requirements of doing research with children as participants and in line with the guidelines set out in the Code of Ethics for Research with Children (Ajduković & Kolesarić, 2003). The research involved two data collection (DC) periods. The first DC was carried out toward the beginning of the academic year, from mid-October to mid-November, and the second DC was carried out toward the end of the academic year, from mid-May to mid-June. The first DC was used to establish the initial state of LLS use, and the second to determine the similarities and differences in the use of LLS during one academic year considering the intensity of L2 exposure.

Each child was interviewed for 10 minutes and the interview was video-recorded. Participants were able to choose the language in which the interview would be conducted. Learners of German and French chose Croatian, while Italian leaners generally chose Italian. Considering the participants' ages, each interview question was asked twice to provide respondents with sufficient time to answer the questions. Following the completion of the interviews, the recordings were transcribed and the data was used to identify the reported LLS.

Data for this study originated from a larger set of data collected within research conducted for a doctoral thesis (Vičević Ivanović, 2017).

3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

3.1. Definition of language learning strategies

LLS theory is '*highly complex, dynamic, and eclectic, drawing inclusively on insights from many different theoretical traditions*' (Griffiths, 2019, p. 3) and interrelated with '*cognitive base, complexity/chaos theory, behaviourism, sociocultural theory, activity theory and, perhaps, others*' (Griffiths & Oxford, 2014, p. 2). Upon taking a closer look into the theoretical background, cognitivist theory stands out as the oldest and most influential. The cognitivist view has started to shape the traditional stream of LLS theory starting with O'Malley and Chamot (1990) and continues to stand as a theoretical framework for understanding LLS (Wenden, 2002; Harris & Grenfell, 2004).

However, seeing that the traditional line of research attempts has not resulted in a clear, precise, and universally accepted theoretical model and definition of LLS, other concepts entered the field, such as '*self-regulation, agency, autonomy, self-efficacy, mindsets, resilience, hope, and internal attributions*' (Thomas & Rose, 2019, p. 251). There have lately been increased efforts to define the notion from the aspect of self-regulation of academic learning (Dörnyei, 2005; Oxford, 2013; Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015), which provides an opportunity for a potential terminological clarification of LLS (Lazarić & Vičević Ivanović, 2017). However, seeing that self-regulation was not constructed to operate specifically within SLA, it has not been taken up by the wider LLS research community (Rose et al., 2018).

On the other hand, Pawlak and Oxford (2018) are convinced that the theory of complex dynamic systems could reflect well the dynamism of LLS. This, indeed, is the latest attempt to understand the nature of LLS. According to Oxford (2017), '*all complexity perspectives are ways of comprehending the world that involve complexity, holism, dynamism, and nonlinearity, as opposed to simplicity, fragmentation, stasis, and linearity*' which '*might help us understand learning strategies and strategy instruction in deeper ways than ever before*' (Oxford, 2017, p. 129). Thomas et al. (2019) note that researchers who study language learning are beginning to show increasing interest in complex dynamic systems theory because they realise that learning cannot be segmented into separate constructs and that individuals cannot be seen as detached from their groups and contexts.

Volume 5 Issue 3, 2021, pp. 83-96 doi: 10.22363/2521-442X-2021-5-3-83-96

Rose et al. (2018) recognise the potential of conducting LLS research without being bound to a theoretical framework as researchers can thus explore LLS from a variety of perspectives. Seeing that there is no universally accepted theoretical model of LLS, in this paper as we analyse the use of LLS we consider the complex relationship of different phenomena (at individual cognitive and metacognitive level, at individual affective level, and at social level) elaborated within various theories. However, our language learning strategy analysis considers known strategy taxonomies, and emerges as an adaptation for young learners which links this research to the traditional stream of language learning research.

Finally, considering there is no universally accepted definition, and bearing in mind the aim of this research, in this paper LLS are understood in line with the updated definition by Griffiths and Cansiz (2015, p. 476) who define LLS as '*actions chosen (either deliberately or automatically) for the purpose of learning or regulating the learning of language*'.

3.2. Studies on young learners' language learning strategies

LLS research thus far has primarily focused on determining and classifying LLS, which is the case with studies in the context of ELL (English Language Learning) as well (Nikolov, 1999, 2002; Mihaljević Djigunović, 2001; Tragant & Victori, 2003, 2006; Kirsch, 2012; Psaltou-Joycey et al., 2014; Chilkiewicz, 2015; Hrozková, 2015; Veraksa & Belolutskaya, 2021; Lütze-Miculinić & Vičević Ivanović, 2018).

Mihaljević Djigunović (2001) identifies formal strategies as the most frequently reported LLS, followed by TPR (Total Physical Response) strategies; the least reported strategies are affective strategies. Ćirković-Miladinović (2017) found that social strategies and memory strategies are the most common in ELL, whereas metacognitive strategies were used significantly less. According to Nikolov (1999, 2002), memory strategies play an important role in ELL, especially taking into account that memory strategies are probably the first strategies that young learners start to develop (Vičević Ivanović, 2020). Furthermore, Nikolov (1999, 2002) explains that the importance of cognitive strategies grows with age – young learners like to repeat songs and games, and they do this unconsciously, whereas at the age of nine or ten this propensity for repetition diminishes. Nikolov (1999, 2002) concludes that the younger the learners are, the fewer LLS they use as they rely on the natural acquisition process; however, as they grow, they tend to use more and more LLS.

Mihaljević Djigunović (2001) finds that LLS are a reflection of what the learners were exposed to or the way they were taught. In line with this, Psaltou-Joycey and Gavriilidou (2018) and Psaltou-Joycey (2019) highlight the importance of instruction in LLS use. In contrast, Kirsch (2012) claims that languages learning strategies are not always a reflection of class activities.

Gürsoy and Eken (2018) found moderate use of LLS, and Tragant and Victori (2003, 2006) identified fewer reported LLS among ten-year-olds in comparison to older learners, which were mostly memory strategies of repetition and copying and, more frequently, social strategies. The authors presume that more proficient learners report, and hence probably use, a wider spectrum of LLS. This has also been confirmed by Gu et al. (2005) and Nikolov (1999, 2002). Platsidou and Sipitanou (2015) also confirmed the link between language proficiency and greater use of languages learning strategies, regardless of age.

Unlike the previous quantitative approach that was predominantly focused on collecting and classifying LLS (see Oxford, 1990), the focus of contemporary LLS studies is on the qualitative analysis of data (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015). Rose et al. (2018) highlight that '*quantitative approaches need to be built upon richer qualitative data in order to fully understand the complexities of strategy use in context, but it is uncertain as to whether an uptake of qualitative research has occurred*' (Rose et al., 2018, p. 153). At the basis of qualitative analysis is a description of LLS from various aspects of their use, for example, among learners of different age. Bearing in mind that LLS studies with young learn-

ers are sporadic (Gürsoy & Eken, 2018), we have decided to investigate 5-6-year-old children with different L2 exposure within the Croatian context to gain an insight into the use of LLS considering the intensity of L2 exposure.

4. STUDY AND RESULTS

4.1. Quantitative analysis

In order to answer the first research question regarding which LLS were used by the participants, we carried out a quantitative analysis of the collected data. Drawing on the theoretical background which points to scarce research on LLS among young learners, with some contradictory results as well, we did not opt for a set LLS categorisation but focused on data-driven categorisation of reported LLS groups and sub-groups. As highlighted in the theoretical section, we analyse the use of LLS considering the complex relationship of different phenomena at individual cognitive and metacognitive level, at individual affective level, and at social level elaborated within various theories. Considering known strategy taxonomies, our categorisation is an adaptation for young learners. The reported LLS were categorised into six groups: (1) memory strategies, N=223 (1st DC), N=242 (2nd DC); (2) informal strategies N=69 (1st DC), N=113 (2nd DC); (3) formal strategies N=53 (1st DC), N=71 (2nd DC); (4) analysing strategies N=53 (1st DC), N=58 (2nd DC); (5) social strategies N=39 (1st DC), N=34 (2nd DC); (6) metacognitive strategies N=2 (1st DC), N=6 (2nd DC). Surprisingly, affective strategies were not reported.

Memory strategies comprise actions focused on memorising linguistic material. Informal strategies are centred around acquiring a second language in a natural way, while formal strategies include learning actions typical for the classroom context. Analysing strategies are related to translation. Social strategies include learning with someone. Metacognitive strategies help with regulating the process of learning. Affective strategies enable the emotional management of learning.

A number of subgroups were identified in each group. Memory strategies include: (1) listening to the interlocutor; (2) model repetition; (3) autonomous repetition; (4) singling out and repeating certain sounds (Table 1).

Table 1
Number of LLS sub-groups within memory strategies, according to L2

	LISTENING TO THE INTERLOCUTOR		MODEL REPETITION		AUTONOMUS REPETITION		SINGLING OUT AND REPEATING CERTAIN SOUNDS	
Data collection	1st	2nd	1st	2nd	1st	2nd	1st	2nd
GE	19	32	71	62	13	5	0	0
FR	9	19	32	30	11	8	1	0
IT	22	35	42	47	3	4	0	0
TOTAL	50	86	145	139	27	17	1	0

If we compare different sub-groups of memory strategies, listening to the interlocutor, model repetition, and autonomous repetition were used by all participants. However, model repetition stands out as the most frequently reported in the 1st as well as in the 2nd DC.

Informal strategies include: (1) showing the object; (2) showing and naming the object; (3) use in language context; (4) physically manipulating what the word means; (5) learning through rhyme in rhymes and chants; (6) learning through participation in games; (7) exposure to media.

Volume 5 Issue 3, 2021, pp. 83-96 doi: 10.22363/2521-442X-2021-5-3-83-96

Only two subgroups within informal strategies, showing and naming the object and use in language context, were reported in the 1st and 2nd DC among all participants. On the other hand, learning through rhyme in rhymes and chants, learning through participation in games, and exposure to media were reported only among participants with higher L2 exposure (Table 2).

Table 2
Number of LLS sub-groups within informal strategies, according to L2

	SHOWING THE OBJECT		SHOWING AND NAMING THE OBJECT		USE IN LANGUAGE CONTEXT		PHYSICALLY MANIPULATING WHAT THE WORD MEANS		LEARNING THROUGH RHYME IN RHYMES AND CHANTS		LEARNING THROUGH PARTICIPATION IN GAMES		EXPOSURE TO MEDIA	
Data collection	1st	2nd	1st	2nd	1st	2nd	1st	2nd	1st	2nd	1st	2nd	1st	2nd
GE	0	4	2	16	7	5	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0
FR	0	2	9	11	10	26	10	2	1	1	4	0	0	4
IT	2	2	5	9	2	8	6	12	0	0	0	0	11	6
TOTAL	2	8	16	36	19	39	16	19	1	1	4	0	11	10

Formal strategies include: (1) learning through drawing words; (2) learning through writing words; (3) reading a picture book; (4) spelling. Learning through drawing words and through writing words were two formal strategies reported by all participants, regardless of L2 exposure (Table 3).

Table 3
Number of LLS sub-groups within formal strategies, according to L2

	LEARNING THROUGH DRAWING WORDS		LEARNING THROUGH WRITING WORDS		READING A PICTURE BOOK		SPELLING	
Data collection	1st	2nd	1st	2nd	1st	2nd	1st	2nd
GE	1	5	2	1	7	0	21	10
FR	1	3	4	4	3	4	5	9
IT	4	7	4	13	1	8	0	7
TOTAL	6	15	10	18	11	12	26	26

Regarding the analysing strategy, only one subgroup was identified: translation. Translation is a LLS reported by all participants, N=53 (1st DC), N=58 (2nd DC), regardless of L2 exposure: German N=18 (1st DC), N=13 (2nd DC); French N=34 (1st DC), N=24 (2nd DC); Italian N=1 (1st DC), N=21 (2nd DC). The result that stands out is only one reported strategy in 1st DC among participants learning Italian. Regarding social strategies, they include: (1) learning with someone; (2) learning with a caretaker; (3) learning with a friend; (4) learning with family; (5) establishing contact with a native speaker; (6) L2 immersion in a kindergarten programme. Based on the data related to social strategies in Table 4, it is clear that these LLS were sporadically reported.

Table 4
Number of LLS sub-groups within social strategies, according to L2

	LEARNING WITH SOMEONE		LEARNING WITH A CARETAKER		LEARNING WITH A FRIEND		LEARNING WITH FAMILY		ESTABLISHING CONTACT WITH A NATIVE SPEAKER		L2 IMMERSION IN A KINDERGARTEN PROGRAMME	
Data collection	1st	2nd	1st	2nd	1st	2nd	1st	2nd	1st	2nd	1st	2nd
GE	2	0	4	4	1	7	2	1	0	0	0	0
FR	0	4	0	2	2	7	0	0	0	3	0	1
IT	1	0	2	0	5	2	5	3	0	0	15	2
TOTAL	3	4	6	4	8	16	7	4	0	3	15	3

Finally, metacognitive strategies include: (1) mental and physical preparation for learning, N=6 (German, 2nd DC); (2) error correction, N=1 (German, 1st DC); (3) assessment, N=1 (French, 1st DC). These LLS are the least reported and we would like to highlight that metacognitive strategies were not recorded among participants exposed to Italian.

In the following part of the paper, we focus on certain research aspects considering the intensity of L2 exposure. In order to answer the second and the third question, we analysed the data qualitatively. Hence, we first describe similarities among the three groups and then we show differences in reported LLS considering the intensity of L2 exposure.

4.2. Similarities in the use of LLS in the 1st and 2nd data collection

In view of similarities in reported LLS, it should be noted that within four groups of LLS (memory strategies, informal strategies, analysing strategies, and formal strategies) in several subgroups LLS were reported in both first and second DC regardless of the intensity of L2 exposure. The subgroups are: listening to the interlocutor, model repetition, and autonomous repetition (memory strategies), showing and naming the object, and use in language context (informal strategies), translation (analysing strategy), learning through drawing words and through writing words (formal strategies). The fact that these strategies were reported in both DCs might indicate that young learners are aware of them at that age and that they could be seen as characteristic to the strategic behaviour of children at an early age, regardless of the intensity L2 exposure.

In relation to memory strategies, which are the most frequently reported LLS in both DCs, our research shows that children at an early age, regardless the intensity of L2 exposure, consciously invest effort in memorising information and, in doing that, use different repetition strategies, such as listening (Example 1) and model repetition (Example 2). In contrast, previous research has shown that memory strategies are not used at a conscious level, although they play an important role in ELL (Nikolov, 1999, 2002). We find that a young child gives precedence to memorising information through repetition, primarily because that is one of key developmental features of six- and seven-year olds (Patekar, 2014). Furthermore, a child's working memory is limited, with its retention period extending as the child grows, which opens up an opportunity to process more information, which leads to the growth of complexity of retained information (Vasta et al., 1998).

Henceforth, (I) stands for the interviewer and (I) with a number stands for a given interviewee. The word in bold marks that the word was emphasised in speech. The symbol || indicates overlapping utterances. The utterances were translated from Croatian and Italian into English, retaining only the key word or phrase in the original language.

Volume 5 Issue 3, 2021, pp. 83-96 doi: 10.22363/2521-442X-2021-5-3-83-96

1. LISTENING

(I): How would you help the kitty to learn to say 'blau'?

(I10): I would tell her blau.

2. MODEL REPETITION

(I): And how would you help the kangaroo to learn to say 'la mano'?

(I63): La mano.

(I): And he? (interviewer points to the toy)

(I63): Repeats la mano.

In the aforementioned research (Nikolov, 1999, 2002) it was found that young learners rely more on the natural acquisition process and use fewer LLS. However, if we look at the strategy of showing and naming the object (Example 3) and the strategy of use in language context (Example 4) from our study, it can be seen that participants apply L1 acquisition mechanisms as LLS, regardless of the intensity of L2 exposure. This is expected as children at that age are still acquiring their L1 and are possibly applying the mechanisms of L1 acquisition when acquiring or learning L2.

3. SHOWING AND NAMING THE OBJECT

(I): How would you help the kitty to learn to say 'blau'?

(I13): Blau means blue.

(I): (interviewee is silent for a second) And how else would you help the kitty to learn to say 'blau'?

(I13): To make it easier for her, then I would show her blue sky.

(I): And she would learn that that is blau?

(I13): (nods affirmatively)

4. USE IN LANGUAGE CONTEXT

(I): And how would you help the panda to learn to say 'la giacca'?

(I62): Put on your jacket!

(I): Ah, you would say: put on your jacket and she would learn the word?!

We consider evidence of a translation strategy use a valuable find (Example 5). Translation as a strategy is characteristic of all participants in the sample, regardless of the intensity of L2 exposure, which might indicate metalinguistic awareness that develops in the early childhood due to children's cognitive and language development (Berk, 2006).

5. TRANSLATION FROM CROATIAN TO L2

(I): Mmm, so you would tell it that la pomme is an apple. And how else would you help the baby elephant learn to say 'la pomme'?

(I33): Mmmm, that I say... mmm apple, and he says la pomme.

The use of formal strategies such as learning through drawing words (Example 6) and writing words (Example 7) is typical for school-age children. However, participants in our research were not pupils. Nonetheless, children in Croatia begin preparing for school as part of the pre-school programme, which evidently plays an important role in shaping their (language) learning, regardless of the intensity of L2 exposure. As previously stated, Mihaljević Djigunović (2001) believes that the evidence of formal LLS in young learners is a reflection of how the children were taught or to what they were exposed. The data from our research points in the same direction. Note, however, that this is in contrast with Kirsch's (2012, p. 393) finding that *'the strategies are similar, though not identical to the actual experiences'*.

6. LEARNING THROUGH DRAWING WORDS

(I): And how would you help the kangaroo to learn to say 'die Hand'?

(I15): Mm... (silent for 16 seconds) That he fiiirst... (silent for 2 seconds) Aaaaa, draws, colours, and says, aaaaa...

(I): Die Hand.

(I15): (nods affirmatively)

7. LEARNING THROUGH WRITING WORDS

(I): And how else would you help the kangaroo to learn to say 'la main'?

(I35): Well, I'd write it on the board.

4.3. Similarities in the use of some formal and informal LLS in the 2nd data collection

Based on the results of the second DC, it was found that spelling (as part of formal strategies) and showing the object and physically manipulating what the word means (as part of informal strategies) were reported in all three groups of participants. Although these LLS were not reported in the first DC within all three groups, we can assume that learners are quite aware of them and

that they are characteristic of learners at an early age, regardless of the intensity of L2 exposure. It is possible that participants simply did not report them in the first DC for some reason.

The strategy of showing the object (Example 8) and physically manipulating what the object means (Example 9) also supports the fact that, regardless of the intensity of L2 exposure, participants recognise L1 acquisition mechanisms and apply them consciously as L2 learning strategies.

8. SHOWING THE OBJECT

(I): And how else would you help the baby elephant to say 'der Apfel'?

(I10): || Ooouch! I would… I would show the apple.

(I): How?

(I10): I would show the apple.

9. PHYSICALLY MANIPULATING WHAT THE WORD MEANS

(I): And how would you help the elephant to learn to say 'la mela'?

(I59): La mela.

(I): You say la mela, and the elephant?

(I59): Answers.

(I): What does he answer?

(I59): That… that… he eats the apple.

(I): Aaaah, he eats the apple when you say la mela?

(I59): Yes.

The use of spelling as a formal strategy (Example 10) suggests that LLS are a reflection of what the learners were exposed to or of the way they were taught (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2001). Therefore, exposure to typical school activities could be linked to the use of formal LLS, regardless of the intensity of L2 exposure.

10. SPELLING

(I): And how would you help the elephant to learn to say 'der Apfel'?

(I14): Mmm... D-e-r Apfl. Hhh... d, hee... Der Apfel.

(I): Mhm.

(I14): Mm, aaaand... D-e-r A-p-f-l-e-l.

(I): So, you would spell d-e-r A-p-f-e-l, and the elephant?

(I14): Would repeat after me.

4.4. Similarities in the use of metacognitive LLS in the 1st and 2nd data collection

Data on metacognitive strategies (mental and physical preparation for learning, error correction, and assessment) indicates that they are reported sporadically in the first and second DC, which is in line with the findings of Ćirković-Miladinović (2017). The results related to the occurrence of mental and physical preparation for learning (Example 11), error correction (Example 12), and assessment (Example 13) confirm that while children can think about their language acquisition, they do not prefer to do so. Children in the early childhood can indeed think about their own thinking, thanks to cognitive and language development (Berk, 2006).

11. MENTAL AND PHYSICAL PREPARATION FOR LEARNING

(I): And tell meee, how else would you help the puppy tooo learn to say 'drei'?

(I19): (interviewee silent for 1 second) Ittt maybe haaas to run a lot and so, and I didn't sa– I couldn't (murmurs) …say three so I ran as fast as I could and I did it.

(I): Then you learned to say drei?

(I19): (nods affirmatively)

12. ERROR CORRECTION

(I): And tell me how would you help the baby elephant to learn to say 'der Apfel'?

(I14): Apf… l… (children's voices in the background), there's a baby coming.

(I): Mmh. (indistinguishable voices in the background for 6 seconds)

(I14): Mmmmm, that we together… then him then me… letter by letter, and then... only… he tries, and then if it's not correct, then I help him.

13. ASSESSMENT

(I): And is there another way in which you could help him to learn to say 'la pomme'?

(I34): I would give him homework to write pomme, and then he gives it back to me.

(I): Aha, so he would write pomme and give it back to you?

(I34): Yes.

(I): Ooooh.

(I34): And I mark it.

Volume 5 Issue 3, 2021, pp. 83-96 doi: 10.22363/2521-442X-2021-5-3-83-96

'The results related to the occurrence of mental and physical preparation for learning (Example 11), error correction (Example 12), and assessment (Example 13) confirm that while children can think about their language acquisition, they do not prefer to do so'

4.5. Differences in the use of LLS regardless of 1st and 2nd data collection

In the following part of the paper, we focus on the differences in reported LLS. The differences could not be related to the two different data collection points; rather, they are connected to the intensity of L2 exposure. With regard to this, within informal strategies we see differences between the strategies of learning through rhyme in rhymes and chants and exposure to media, and social strategies where the differences are noted in the strategies of establishing contact with a native speaker and L2 immersion in a kindergarten programme. The above-mentioned informal and social strategies surface among the participants with greater intensity of L2 exposure, and they appear to link institutional and non-institutional language acquisition. Let us recall that Tragant and Victori (2003) claim that more proficient learners report and probably use a wider spectrum of LLS. Seeing that in our sample only the participants with a higher intensity of L2 exposure (French and Italian) reported LLS typical for non-institutional language acquisition, we assume that these participants are more proficient and this shows a tendency toward a more diverse and effective use of LLS. Learning through rhyme in rhymes and chants (Example 14), exposure to media (Example 15), establishing a contact with a native speaker (Example 16), and L2 immersion in a kindergarten programme (Example 17) prove that participants with a higher intensity of L2 exposure are already at an early age able to use more diverse LLS than participants with less exposure because they extend institutional language acquisition to non-institutional contexts.

14. LEARNING THROUGH RHYME IN RHYMES AND CHANTS

(I): Now you will help, aaaa, puppy... eeh and how would you help him learn to say trua?

(I36): Number three. (interviewee silent for 2 seconds) Like this!... Let's say now the puppy wants to know a rhyme…

15. EXPOSURE TO MEDIA

(I): Now tell me how would you help the dog to learn the word 'tre'?

(I64): Eeer, now (interviewee looks and touches the toy) the word... there is a cartoon where they say number tre and then he knows.

(I): Then he knows?! Only if they say it in the cartoon!

(I64): (interviewee continues to look at and touch the toy)

16. ESTABLISHING CONTACT WITH A NATIVE SPEAKER

(I): Mhm! And how would you help the panda to learn to say 'le blouson'?

(I34): Le blouson. (interviewee silent for a second) Aaaand...

(I): Aha, you would say that, and what would she do?

(I34): Le blouson.

(I): She would repeat.

(I34): (nods affirmatively)

(I): Mhm. (interviewer silent for a second)

(I34): And she would re... she would also... aaand, also she would go to the zoo to the French paaaandas.

17. L2 IMMERSION IN A KINDERGARTEN PROGRAMME

(I): And how would you help the parrot to learn to say 'Mi chiamo Ara'?

(I60): She would go to the kindergarten and after the teacher says it in Italian, she speaks Italian and then (murmurs)

(I): Then? Repeats?

(I60): (nods affirmatively)

Interesting data was collected for the following subgroups of social strategies: learning with a caretaker, learning with a friend, and learning with family. Although a number of authors (Nikolov, 1999, 2002; Tragant & Victori, 2003, 2006; Kirsch,

2012) underscore the importance of social LLS at an early age, our research shows that the strategies of learning with a caretaker (Example 18), learning with a friend (Example 19), and learning with family are only reported in the first and second DC by participants with a lower intensity of L2 exposure. Considering the results of previous research, we expected that the importance of a more proficient language model from the immediate social surrounding would be equally acknowledged by all participants, and we wonder why this has not been the case. It is possible that participants with lower exposure recognise the effectiveness of social strategies, become aware of their use, and hence seek help from a more proficient language model, unlike participants with higher exposure who might be using these strategies without being aware of them.

18. LEARNING WITH A CARETAKER

(I): And now try really, really hard, how would you help the dog to learn to say 'drei'?

(I19): Eeem… (silent for 2 seconds), kindergarten teachers taught us.

(I): Kindergarten teachers taught you?

(I19): Yes, when we count… counted and then we had to say 'drei' so the teacher taught us.

(I): Aha, when you were counting?

(I19): Yes.

20. LEARNING WITH A FRIEND

(I): Aahhaaa to look at it and then to say it. And how else would you help him, aaaa, to learn to say 'le blouson'?

(I31): (interviewee silent for 2 seconds) Hm... weeell... (interviewee silent for 3 seconds) ...to think and... and, eem... s, sss, aaaa s, s... a friend whispers it to him.

(I): Aaah, great!

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the theoretical framework described in this paper, we can conclude that the results of previous research into LLS mainly refer to ten-year-old participants (see Psaltou-Joycey et al., 2012; Sadeghi & Khonbi, 2013; Savić, 2014; Platsidou & Sipitanou, 2015; Ćirković-Miladinović, 2017; Gürsoy & Eken, 2018), and that studies with younger participants are sporadic. Bearing in mind the child's cognitive profile and other characteristics (Berk, 2006), differences among the age groups are significant and possibly determine the use of LLS. For this reason, we undertook to carry out this study to gain an insight into the strategic behaviour of children at an early age, considering the intensity of L2 exposure.

The results of this study enabled us to describe LLS based on the similarities and differences in LLS use with regard to the intensity of L2 exposure. A key finding, in relation to the criterion of similarity considering the intensity of L2 exposure, is that participants prefer to use the following memory strategies: listening to the interlocutor, model repetition, and autonomous repetition. The use of these strategies is determined by the limited working memory capacity, and not by the intensity of L2 exposure. Furthermore, another key finding is an insight into the use of certain informal strategies, such as showing and naming the object and use in language context. Based on the results related to these strategies, we believe that the strategic behaviour typical of L1 acquisition is transferred to L2 acquisition regardless of L2 exposure. Another important finding is related to the analysing strategy, that is, to the subgroup of translation. The use of this strategy might indicate that participants have developed metalinguistic awareness, regardless of the intensity of L2 exposure. The use of formal strategies such as learning through drawing words and learning through writing words found in this research shows that exposure to typical school activities as a part of pre-school preparation for the start of formal education could be linked to the use of LLS regardless of the intensity of L2 exposure. These findings are not surprising if we take into consideration that all the participants included in this research went through pre-school preparation, which is based on activities that are part of everyday school routine. Given that all of these results come from the first and second DC, we believe that the described use of LLS is typical for young learners, whereas the results related to the similarities of LLS from the second DC should be explored in further studies, that is, why spelling (as

Volume 5 Issue 3, 2021, pp. 83-96 doi: 10.22363/2521-442X-2021-5-3-83-96

part of formal strategies) and showing the object and physically manipulating what the word means (as part of informal strategies) were not reported in the first DC. The sample might be expanded to a greater number of participants to gain better insights into strategic language behaviour of young learners.

With regard to the differences in the use of LLS considering the intensity of L2 exposure, we find that children at an early age with a higher intensity of exposure to L2 show a tendency to use informal strategies, such as learning through rhyme in rhymes and chants and exposure to media, as well as social strategies such as establishing contact with a native speaker and L2 immersion in a kindergarten programme. This might indicate that already at this age children with a higher intensity of L2 exposure are prepared to extend institutional language acquisition to non-institutional. Seeing that previous research has highlighted social strategies as characteristic of young learners, our findings are somewhat surprising as they show that only participants with lower intensity of L2 exposure report such strategies. They might be reporting the use of these strategies because they are aware of their usefulness, unlike young learners with a higher intensity of L2 exposure who might not be reporting them because they are using them without being aware of them.

Although our study has yielded valuable results regarding the use of LLS in young learners and considering the intensity of L2 exposure, it has also opened up certain questions related to the strategic behaviour of children at an early age, which should be explored in further research. For example, it would be interesting to explore whether not reporting LLS (such as affective strategies) means that young learners do not use them or that they are simply not aware of them. Likewise, the question of metacognitive strategy use in young learners is also quite interesting and requires further investigation into which metacognitive strategies are typical within the age group in view of different intensity of L2 exposure.

We find the results of this study to be a solid starting point for further research which should be verified through further studies of participants from other countries and contexts.

At this point we would like to highlight the insights from this study into conducting research with young learners. We found that there are certain preconditions that need to be met in order to carry out such research properly. The first is that the researcher establishes a warm, emotional, and respectful relationship with the participants so that they would be willing to cooperate. The second is to understand young participants' emotional and social world, which means the researcher will use familiar content and games to get closer to respondents and motivate them to participate. Finally, and equally important, the researcher needs to be aware of young learners' cognitive development as this affects the choice of instrument.

Regardless of the challenges that research with young learners poses, such studies are needed to establish theoretical models for the description of LLS of very young learners. Only on the basis of such models will it be possible to design effective guidelines for integrating the teaching of LLS in foreign language education from an early age.

References

Ajduković, M., & Kolesarić, V. (Eds.). (2003). *Etički kodeks istraživanja s djecom*. Vijeće za djecu Vlade Republike Hrvatske. (In Croatian)

Berk, L. E. (2006). *Child development* (7th ed.). Pearson Publishing.

Chilkiewicz, K. (2015). Direct language learning strategies in the theory by Rebecca Oxford in English vocabulary acquisition at the age group of 11–12-year-olds. *World Scientific News, 7,* 179-206.

Ćirković-Miladinović, I. (2017). Foreign language learning strategies used by young learners. *Studia Anglica*, *226*(7), 66-76.

Dörnyei, Z. (2005). *The psychology of the language learner: Individual differences in second language acquisition*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Dörnyei, Z., & Ryan, S. (2015). *The psychology of the language learner revisited*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315779553

Dörnyei, Z., & Skehan, P. (2005). Individual differences in second language learning. In C. J. Doughty & M. H. Long (Eds.), *The handbook of second language acquisition* (pp. 589-630). Wiley.

Gu, P. Y., Hu, G., & Zhang, L. J. (2005). Investigating language learner strategies among lower primary school pupils in Singapore. *Language and Education, 19*(4), 281-303. https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09500780508668682

Griffiths, C. (2019). Language learning strategies: Is the baby still in the bathwater? *Applied Linguistics, 41*(4), 607-611. https://dx.doi.org/10.1093/applin/amy024

Griffiths, C., & Cansiz, G. (2015). Language learning strategies: An holistic view. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching, 5*(3), 473-493. https://dx.doi.org/10.14746/ssllt.2015.5.3.7

Griffiths, C., & Oxford, R. L. (2014). The twenty-first century landscape of language learning strategies: Introduction to this special issue. *System, 43*, 1-10.

Gürsoy, E., & Eken, E. (2018). Identifying children's language learning strategies: Turkish example. *Porta Linguarum, 30,* 43-56. https://dx.doi.org/10.30827/Digibug.54037

Harris, V., & Grenfell, M. (2004). Language-learning strategies: A case for cross-curricular collaboration. *Language Awareness, 13*(2), 116-130. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09658410408667090

Hrozková, I. (2015). Do young learners exploit the same learning strategies as adults? *Practice and Theory in Systems of Education*, *10*(1), 74-80.

Kirsch, C. (2012). Developing children's language learner strategies at primary school. *Education 3-13: International Journal of Primary, Elementary and Early Years Education, 40*(4), 379-399. https://doi.org/10.1080/03004279.2012.691372

Lazarić, L., & Vičević Ivanović, S. (2017). O pitanju teorijske (ne)utemeljenosti strategija učenja jezika. *Školski Vjesnik, 66*(4), 573-588. (In Croatian)

Lütze-Miculinić, M., & Vičević Ivanović, S. (2018). Sprachlernstrategien bei Vorschulkindern am Beispiel des Französischen und des Deutschen als Fremdsprache. *Jezikoslovlje*, *19*(2), 257-287. https://hrcak.srce.hr/207895 (In German)

Mihaljević Djigunović, J. (2001). Do learners know how to learn a foreign language? In Y. Vrhovac (Ed.), *Children and foreign languages* (pp. 57-71). University of Zagreb.

Nikolov, M. (1999). Strategy use in Hungarian children's classrooms through a story-based syllabus. *Strani Jezici, 28*(34), 225-233.

Nikolov, M. (2002). *Issues in English language education*. Peter Lang.

O'Malley, J. M., & Chamot, A. U. (1990), *Learning strategies in second language acquisition*. Cambridge University Press.

Oxford, R. L. (1990). *Language learning strategies: What every teacher should know*. Newbury House.

Oxford, R. L. (2013). *Teaching and researching language learning strategies*. Pearson Education.

Oxford, R. L. (2017). *Teaching and researching language learning strategies: Self-regulation in context* (2nd ed.). Routledge. https://dx.doi.org/10.4324/9781315719146

Patekar, J. (2014). Implikacije razvojnih obilježja djece rane školske dobi za nastavu stranoga jezika. *Metodički Ogledi*, *21*(1), 67-81. (In Croatian)

Pawlak, M. (2019). Investigating language learning strategies: Prospects, pitfalls and challenges. *Language Teaching Research, 25*(5), 817-835. https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168819876156

Pawlak, M., & Oxford, L. R. (2018). Conclusion: The future of research into language learning strategies. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching, 8*(2), 525-535. https://dx.doi.org/10.14746/ssllt.2018.8.2.15

Platsidou, M., & Sipitanou, A. (2015). Exploring relationships with grade level, gender and language proficiency in the foreign language learning strategy use of children and early adolescents. *International Journal of Research Studies in Language Learning, 4*(1), 83-96. https://doi.org/10.5861/ijrsll.2014.778

Psaltou-Joycey, A. (2019). Guidelines and materials for integrating language learning strategy instruction into the language lesson. In A. Uhl Chamot & V. Harris (Eds.), *Learning strategy instruction in the language classroom* (pp. 171-183). Multilingual Matters.

Psaltou-Joycey, A., Mattheoudakis, M., & Alexiou, T. (2014). Language learning strategies in CLIL and non-CLIL classes: Which strategies do young learners claim they use? In A. Psaltou-Joycey, E. Agathopoulou, & M. Mattheoudakis (Eds.), *Cross-curricular approaches to language education* (pp. 305-322). Cambridge Scholars Publishing. http://dx.doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.1.3240.2088

Volume 5 Issue 3, 2021, pp. 83-96 doi: 10.22363/2521-442X-2021-5-3-83-96

Psaltou-Joycey, A., & Gavriilidou, Z. (2018). Language learning strategies in Greek primary and secondary school learners: How individual characteristics affect strategy use. In R. L. Oxford & C. M. Amerstorfer (Eds.), *Language learning strategies and individual learner characteristics: Situating strategy use in diverse contexts* (pp. 167-188). Bloomsbury Academic. https://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350005075.ch-008

Rose, H., Briggs, J. G., Boggs, J. A., Sergio, L., & Ivanova-Slavianskaia, N. (2018). A systematic review of language learner strategy research in the face of self-regulation. *System, 72,* 151-163. https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2017.12.002

Sadeghi, K., & Khonbi, Z. A. (2013). Learners' starting age of learning EFL and use of language learning strategies. *English Language Teaching, 6*(1), 28-34. https://dx.doi.org/10.5539/elt.v6n1p28

Savić, V. (2014). Investigating reading skills of Serbian young learners learning English as a foreign language. In J. Enever, E. Lindgren, & S. Ivanov (Eds.), *Proceedings of the Early Language Learning: Theory and Practice 2014 Conference* (pp. 110-116). Umeå University.

Selinker, L. (1972). Interlanguage. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching, 10*(3), 209-231.

Takeuchi, O. (2019). Language learning strategies: Insights from the past and directions for the future. In X. Gao (Ed.), *Second handbook of English language teaching* (pp. 683-702). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-58542-0_37-1

Thomas, N., & Rose, H. (2019). Do language learning strategies need to be self-directed? Disentangling strategies from self-regulated learning. *TESOL Quarterly, 53*(1), 248-257. https://dx.doi.org/10.1002/tesq.473

Thomas, N., Rose, H., & Pojanapunya, P. (2019). Conceptual issues in strategy research: Examining the roles of teachers and students in formal education settings. *Applied Linguistics Review, 12*(2), 353-369. https://dx.doi.org/10.1515/applirev-2019-0033

Tragant, E., & Victori, M. (2003). Learner strategies: A cross-sectional and longitudinal study of primary and high-school EFL learners. In M. García Mayo & M. L. García Lecumberri (Eds.), *Age and the acquisition of English as a foreign language* (pp. 182-209). Multilingual Matters.

Tragant, E., & Victori, M. (2006). Reported strategy use and age. In C. Muñoz (Ed.), *Age and the rate of foreign language learning* (pp. 208-236). Multilingual Matters.

Vasta, R., Haith, M. M., & Miller, S. A. (1998). *Child psychology: The modern science* (3rd ed.). Wiley.

Veraksa, N. E., & Belolutskaya, A. K. (2021). Emotional and cognitive development of preschool children: Overview of international and Russian studies on role of dialectical thinking in the regulation of affect and recognition of complex feelings. *RUDN Journal of Psychology and Pedagogics, 18*(1), 104-121. https://dx.doi.org/10.22363/2313-1683-2021-18-1-104-121

Vićević Ivanović, S. (2017). *Utjecaj Jezičnoga portfolija na samostalnost u ovladavanju inim jezikom u predškolskoj dobi* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Zagreb. (In Croatian)

Vićević Ivanović, S. (2020). Possible developmental patterns of language learning strategies among young learners. In W. Zoghbor, A. Shehadeh, & S. Al Alami (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 2nd Applied Linguistics and Language Teaching Conference Engaging in Change: New Perspectives of Teaching and Learning* (pp. 165-176). Zayed University Press.

Wenden, A. L. (2002). Learner development in language learning. *Applied Linguistics, 23*(1), 32-55. https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/23.1.32

SANJA VIČEVIĆ IVANOVIĆ
Greenfield International School | 1 Dubai Investment Park, DIP 2 Dubai, United Arab Emirates
sanjavicevic@gmail.com

NATAŠA KOŠUTA
University of Rijeka | 10 Trg braće Mažuranića, 51 000 Rijeka, Croatia
nkosuta@ffri.hr

JAKOB PATEKAR
Rochester Institute of Technology | 6 Don Frana Bulića, 20 000 Dubrovnik, Croatia
jakob.patekar@outlook.com