

In the Name of God

29011



**Tarbiat Modarres University
Faculty of Humanities
English Department**

**The Effect of Field independence
on the Students' Choice of Cognitive Strategies
in the EFL Situation**

**A Thesis Submitted in Partial Satisfaction for the
Degree of Master of Arts in Teaching English as a
Foreign Language**

**By :
Hadi Mehrabi**

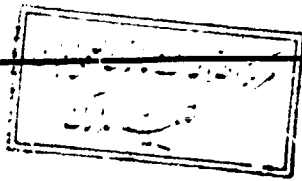
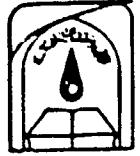
**Supervisor
Dr. P. Maftoon**

**Advisor
Dr. M. M. Vahedi**

Tehran, Iran

January 1999

۲۹۰۸۸



شماره:
 تاریخ:
 پست:

۱۳۷۸ / ۴ / ۲۰

آیین‌نامه چاپ پایان‌نامه (رساله)‌های دانشجویان دانشگاه تربیت مدرس

نظر به اینکه چاپ و انتشار پایان‌نامه (رساله)‌های تحصیلی دانشجویان دانشگاه تربیت مدرس میسر بخشی از فعالیت‌های علمی - پژوهشی دانشگاه است بنابراین به منظور آگاهی و رعایت حقوق دانشگاه، دانش‌آموختگان این دانشگاه مست به رعایت موارد ذیل متعهد می‌شوند.

- ماده ۱ در صورت اقدام به چاپ پایان‌نامه (رساله)ی خود، مراتب را قبلاً به طور کتبی به مرکز نشر دانشگاه اطلاع دهد.
- ماده ۲ در صفحه سوم کتاب (پس از برگ شناسنامه)، عبارت ذیل را چاپ کند:
 «کتاب حاضر، حاصل پایان‌نامه کارشناسی ارشد نگارنده در رشته آموزش زبان انگلیسی است که در سال ۱۳۷۷ در دانشکده علوم انسانی دانشگاه تربیت مدرس به راهنمایی سرکار خانم/جناب آقای دکتر پرویز مفتون و مشاوره جناب آقای دکتر محمد مهدی واحدی از آن دفاع شده است.»
- ماده ۳ به منظور جبران بخشی از هزینه‌های نشریات دانشگاه تعداد یک درصد شمارگان کتاب (در هر نوبت چاپ) را به مرکز نشر دانشگاه اهدا کند دانشگاه می‌تواند مازاد نیاز خود را به نفع مرکز نشر در معرض فروش قرار دهد.
- ماده ۴ در صورت عدم رعایت ماده ۳، ۵۰٪ بهای شمارگان چاپ شده را به عنوان خسارت به دانشگاه تربیت مدرس، تأدیه کند.
- ماده ۵ دانشجو تعهد و قبول می‌کند در صورت خودداری از پرداخت بهای خسارت، دانشگاه می‌تواند خسارت مذکور را از طریق مراجع قضایی مطالبه و وصول کند؛ به علاوه به دانشگاه حق می‌دهد به منظور استیفای حقوق خود، از طریق دادگاه، معادل وجه مذکور در ماده ۴ را از محل توقیف کتابهای عرضه شده نگارنده برای فروش، تأمین نماید.
- ماده ۶ اینجانب هادی مهرابی دانشجوی رشته آموزش زبان انگلیسی مقطع کارشناسی ارشد تعهد فوق و ضمانت اجرایی آن را قبول کرده، به آن ملتزم می‌شوم.

**To the Sole Teacher
and His Realizations**

And

to My Wife

Acknowledgements

I have to express my thanks to those who have made this study possible: To Dr. Maftoon, my thesis adviser, who kindly shouldered the burden of leading me through all my study; to Dr. Vahedi, my thesis reader and the head of the department, who spent unnumbered hours reading the text, and who provided me with invaluable and constructive suggestions; to Dr. Mirhasani and Dr. Kiyani, who heedingly read my thesis and made valuable suggestions.

My sincere thanks also to all teachers and friends who helped me in conducting this study: Mr. Mashkani, Taghdosifar, Afchangi, and Mr. Safaei.

Finally the researcher is profoundly indebted to his wife for her constant encouragement in the course of the development of the text.

ABSTRACT

For a long time language teaching was only concerned about teaching methods, and few attention was paid to the role of learner in learning a foreign language. But in the recent decades there has been a shift toward learning and the learner. Now the focus is on how learning takes place, how learners learn, and how the learners can be helped to learn better.

The focus of this thesis, therefore, was on the learner, learning and the learning styles and strategies utilized by students. The learning style investigated in this study was that of field independence (FI) and field dependence (FD). And among different learning strategies, the cognitive strategies were involved in this research. The area of language learning which was studied here was the reading comprehension skill and vocabulary knowledge. Based on these factors, five hypotheses were proposed.

1-There is no relationship between field independence and the number and frequency of strategy use.

2-There is no relationship between types of cognitive strategies used by students, and their reading ability and vocabulary knowledge.

3- There is no relationship between types of cognitive strategies used by students and their level of field independence.

4-There is no relationship between Field independence and reading ability and vocabulary knowledge of the students.

5-There is no relationship between the frequency of cognitive strategy use of the students and their reading ability and vocabulary knowledge.

The subjects of the study were 54 high school students. Two language tests, a Nelson test and a high school test, were administered to determine the reading proficiency of the subjects. The Nelson test was used only for the validation of the high school test. The levels of field independence and field dependency of the subjects were determined by the administration of the Group Embedded Figure Test (GEFT). Since these subjects were not familiar with different cognitive strategies, these strategies were briefly explained to them by their own teachers. Then, a learning strategy questionnaire was administered to them. The questionnaire used in this study was Oxford's (1990) "Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)" (cited in Merrifield, 1996).

The obtained scores on the tests and inventories were analyzed through correlation and t-test formulas in order to show the robustness of the hypotheses mentioned in the study. The findings showed that :

1-FI/D was not a determining factor in the choice of different cognitive strategies.

2-There was no relationship between reading ability and vocabulary knowledge of students and the type of cognitive strategies they used (except for the category of receiving and sending messages).

3-There was no difference between the level of field independence of the students and the type of cognitive strategies they used.

4-FI students are better readers.

5-There was no significant relationship between reading ability of students and the frequency of strategies they used.

6-There was a difference between males and females concerning the cognitive style of field independence. Females were more FI than males.

Table of Contents

<u>Contents</u>	<u>Page</u>
Chapter one: Introduction	1
Background and Purpose	1
Statement of the Problem	3
Statements of the Hypotheses	6
Delimitation for the Study	6
Justifications for the Study	7
Definition of Terms	8
Chapter Two: Review of the Related Literature	10
Introduction	10
Learning Styles and Strategies	11
Learning Style	13
Style Dimensions	13
Cognitive Style	17
Field Independence	18
Field Independence vs. Field Dependence	19
FI and Success	20
Learning Strategies	21
Strategy Training	23
Reading	26

A History of Reading	28
Reading Process	29
Top-down and Bottom-up Processes	29
Problems in Reading	29
Components of Reading	33
Reading Strategies	35
Cognitive Strategies in Reading	36
Strategy Training in Reading	38
Chapter Three: Methodology	40
Subject	40
Instruments	41
The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)	41
SILL Utility	43
SILL Reliability	44
SILL Validity	44
The Group Embedded Figures Test (GEFT)	45
Design of the Study	46
Procedure	47
Data Analysis	49
Chapter four: Data Analysis and Results	50
Introduction	50
SILL Results.....	51
GEFT Results	55
GEFT vs. SILL	56
Investigation of the Hypotheses	57

Introduction	65
Conclusion	68
Hypothesis 1	69
Hypothesis 2	70
Hypothesis 3	71
Hypothesis 4	72
Hypothesis 5	73
Peripheral Findings	74
Summary	75
Implications of the Study	77
Implications for Further Study	78
References	80
Appendix A : A Sample Lesson	96
Appendix B : The Language Test For Third Grade High School Students	99
Appendix C : The Nelson Test	106
Appendix D : The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)	114
Appendix E : The group Embedded Figures Test (GEFT)	119
Appendix F : Persian Version of the SILL	138
Appendix G : Correlation between the scores on the GEFT and the SILL Scores	142
Abstract	144

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Background and Purpose

For many years teaching has been the main concern of the educational specialists. There have been large amounts of efforts and studies, along with hypotheses and theories, which have tried to devise a way to enable teachers to “teach” better. There has been, however, little attention paid to the learner and the process of learning as it is taking place in the mind of the learner.

Nowadays, fortunately, the trend has shifted toward investigating what learners do when they are involved in a learning task. There are many psychologists who try to define how learners approach a learning task, how they cope with problems inherent in learning, and so on. The increasing interest in finding and describing what “a good language learner” does (Kern, 1989; Oxford, & Nyikos, 1989; Ehrman, & Oxford, 1995) has resulted in researches on affective learning processes and learning behaviors of successful language learners. Moreover, these researches have led to different classifications of strategies and

other factors related to learning. But, as Vann and Abraham (1990) state, the exclusive observation of good language learners has resulted in problems in strategy training. Vann and Abraham believe that many studies on strategies of good language learners are based on this assumption that poor language learners lack these strategies. All these studies provide us with a number of strategies which, if used properly, can help learners be more successful in language learning.

There are many studies conducted to find the best strategies which can help students succeed most. There are also many researchers who try to find out which students, regarding learning styles and personality types, are better and more successful learners. But, again, there is one point which is usually neglected in these studies: One cannot rely exclusively on just learning strategies or styles or any other phenomena as predictors of success in language learning. As "the whole is not the exact sum of parts," discrete parts of a person's characteristics cannot be simply summed up to find the whole personality of him unless we consider all these factors in accordance with each other. Of course, there are studies which investigate a number of personality factors altogether in order to find a profile of characteristics of more successful learners, and, in some cases, in order to find the best way a certain student with a specific characteristic can learn a foreign language.

This study, however, is an attempt to investigate the relationship between the most popular dimension of learning style, Field independence (FI) and Field dependence (FD), and cognitive strategies. Since these two cognitive phenomena are investigated in relation to each other, there may be enough reason to hope a clearer insight of their effect on each other and ultimately on success in language learning.

One more point to mention is the inclusion of reading in this study. On the one hand, as English is a foreign language in Iran, and there are few opportunities for natural use of it, the reading skill has rooted deeply in the English curriculum as one of the mostly approved skills. On the other hand, reading, in general, has been viewed as one of the most important skills which can be used to learn language itself and also to get information from print. This skill is not unrelated to other language skills; developing reading skill has been positively related to achievement in other areas, as it is expressed by many scholars (e.g., Rivers, 1981).

Statement of the Problem

Oxford and Green (1996) quote some of their students' histories about their problems in language classes:

My first graduate class was taught by a professor who was obviously totally opposite from me [sic]. His directions for the papers he assigned were ambiguous and auditory. ...

He was being global and I was being analytic. The next semester I was teamed with an analytic professor who handed out a seven page syllabus. He left no stone unturned. I was at home. (p.21)

Another student mentions her silence and the fear she had had from speaking English because of her deficiencies in grammar:

It was my compensation strategy. I did not agree with the way the school handled my silent period. Authorities moved me down a level, rather than simply giving me what I needed--a day of rest from oral production only. Hence, their decision made me angry, and I withdrew even more. (p.22)

These two examples, which are about style conflict between students and teachers and misunderstanding the way a student plans her learning, represent the problems which originate from the mismatch between learning habits of learners and teaching methods of teachers. Many studies have shown that teachers are generally unaware of the strategies employed by their students. Studies have shown a lack of understanding of students' strategies on the part of teachers (O'Malley, & Chamot, 1987).