

1. State of the art and objectives

The term language learning strategies in the literature refers to the methods adopted by people learning a second or a foreign language in order to acquire, integrate and consequently make better use of the target language. O'Malley & Chamot (1990) define learning strategies as thoughts or behaviours that individuals use to understand, learn or retain new information, while Oxford (1990) defines them as specific behaviours, actions, steps or techniques students use to improve their progress, as they develop specific skills during language learning.

Already in the 70s, research in the field of language teaching had begun to investigate the profile of the person who learns a second/foreign language 'effectively', i.e. the methods and tactics to which he resorts, and who has conventionally been called 'the good learner', in order to create educational tools and methods that would help the so-called 'weak' learners to become more effective (Rubin 1975, Stern 1975).

During the 80s and 90s, research was largely influenced by the prevalence of both the communication approach, which seeks new teaching models, and the empirical findings of cognitive psychology. It focused even more on the study of learning strategy use in second / foreign language learning (language learning strategies, *stratégies d'apprentissage*; Cohen 1998, O'Malley & Chamot 1990, Oxford 1990) and sought the strategic profile of learners enrolled in different levels of education. In particular, there was an attempt to highlight empirically the role of the individual who learns a second/foreign language – a role which had been neglected for a long time – as well as the influence of cognitive and emotional factors that affect the learning process.

Within this attempt, there were detailed studies on the effect of **gender** (Ehrman & Oxford 1989, Green & Oxford 1995, Lan & Oxford 2003, Lee 2003, Mochizuki 1999, Nyikos 1990; Oxford & Nyikos 1989, Peacock & Ho 2003, Politzer 1983, Sheorey 1999), of the **target language** (Chamot et al 1987, Politzer 1983), of the **language level** (Chamot & El-Dinary 1999, Hong-Nam & Leavell 2006, Green & Oxford 1995, Griffiths 2003, Kantaridou 2004, Kazamia 2003, Lan & Oxford 2003, O'Malley & Chamot 1990, Purdie & Oliver 1999), of motivation (Gardner, Tremblay, and Masgoret 1997, Kantaridou 2004, Oxford & Nyikos 1989, Pintrich 1989, Pintrich & De Groot 1990, Psaltou-Joycey 2003, Wharton 2000), of the **cultural background** (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990, Oxford 1996, Reid 1995, Psaltou-Joycey 2008, Rossi-Le 1995), of the **teaching methods** employed (Ehrman and Oxford 1989, Oxford & Nyikos 1989, Politzer 1983) and of the **direction of studies** (Mochizuki 1999, Oxford & Nyikos 1989, Peacock 2001, Peacock and Ho 2003, Politzer & McGroarty 1985) in the selection of specific strategies.

At the same time a series of methodological questions emerged, the most basic one concerning that of the most suitable and valid instrument for data collection. In order to record the learners' strategy use, researchers made use of interviews, questionnaires, diaries or classroom observations. Oxford (1990) designed the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) which has since been widely used in many countries for the study the strategies (for an informative review of the literature on methodological issues in strategy research cf. Chamot 2005).

The new trends in the study of learning strategies took place during the first decade of 2000, primarily from the perspective of educational research and educational psychology. More specifically, Rubin (2001, 2005) replaced the term 'strategies' with the term 'self-management', meaning the learner's ability to use metacognitive strategies (self-regulation, planning, self-evaluation, etc.) and related knowledge (i.e. knowledge associated with strategy use, the particularities of specific language tasks, and awareness of personal abilities) in order to achieve effective learning. Boekaerts, Pintrich and Zeidner (2000), on the other hand, proposed the term 'self-regulation' by focusing on the process of learning (self-regulation) rather than on its product (strategy use). The aim in both cases is learner autonomy, in other words, the student to be able to become master of the learning process, and manage acquisition of knowledge in the best possible way.

Integration of strategy instruction into the curricula of language teaching programmes can play a special role as such programmes aim at sensitizing learners towards strategy use, informing them about the value and purpose of each strategy and then helping them practice the use of strategies in authentic communicative situations. Such practice ensures, on the one hand, the development of the learners' metacognitive ability, and on the other, transfer of strategies in other similar language tasks (Chamot & O'Malley 1987, Chamot et al. 1999, Nunan 1997, Oxford 1990, Oxford & Leaver 1996, Wenden 1986). However, research has shown that learner awareness can not be achieved without prior language-teacher awareness and familiarization with strategy instruction (Wenden 1986).

Research on learning strategies in the Greek context is found mainly in the work of Papaefthymiou-Lytra (1987), Psaltou-Joycey and Joycey (2001), Psaltou-Joycey (2003), Kazamia (2003), Gavriilidou (2004), Gavriilidou 2006 , Psaltou-Joycey (2008), Papanis 2008, Gavriilidou and Papanis (2009), Gavriilidou and Papanis (2010), Psaltou-Joycey, and Kantaridou (2009a), Psaltou-Joycey and Kantaridou (2009b), Psaltou-Joycey and Sougari (2010), and Vrettou (2011). Two more publications have contributed to the rising interest in the respective field: (a) the collective volume of selected papers by Psaltou-Joycey & Gavriilidou (eds) (2009) which was the result of the proceedings of a workshop on learning strategies, organized during the 19th International Symposium of Theoretical and Applied Linguistics, organized by the Department of Theoretical and Applied Linguistics, School of English, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. During that workshop, the need for a standardized instrument for data selection became apparent as well as the need for the designing of educational programmes for language instruction with the use of strategies; and (b) Psaltou-Joycey's book entitled "Language Learning Strategies in the Foreign Language Classroom" (2010) which covers a wide range of topics related to language learning strategy research and classroom instruction.

The present research project aspires to promote theoretical research into learning strategies which could have applications in education. More specifically, it aims to adapt and standardize in Greek and Turkish the widely used instrument **STRATEGY INVENTORY OF LANGUAGE LEARNING (SILL)** which evaluates the use of learning strategies by learners of a second or foreign language. Its adaptation and standardization are considered essential so that henceforth data selection on learner use of strategies will be conducted in a valid and reliable manner and the resulting outcomes will be comparable in all cases.

The adjusted SILL will be used in the second phase of this proposal in order to investigate

(a) the learning profile of foreign language learners in primary and secondary education, i.e. research into all the cognitive, metacognitive, memory, compensation, affective and social strategies that these students use when learning a foreign language,

(b) the learning profile of Muslim students in Thrace, who learn Greek as a second language in order to enhance the specific learner group's learning of Greek.

The expected results may be used as feedback for the designing of language learning curricula as well as for teacher training programmes in order to sensitize teachers towards classroom strategy instruction.

An additional aim of the present research is the comparison of strategies promoted in class by teachers in primary, secondary and minority education with those used by learners to determine the possible effect of strategy use by teachers on the type and number of strategies that these learners resort to during the learning process. The ultimate goal of this aspect of the research will be a more effective model to help teachers teach their learners how to learn.

To achieve these goals four research teams cooperate in the present research project each having a distinct (to a certain degree) field of study (1st research team: strategic profile of Muslim students in primary education learning Greek as second language and strategic profile of teachers in minority education, 2nd research team: strategic profile of students in primary education learning English as foreign language and strategic profile of teachers in primary education, 3rd research team: strategic profile of students in secondary education learning English as foreign language and strategic profile of teachers in secondary education, 4th research team: adaptation of SILL in Greek and Turkish and construction and validation of a questionnaire for investigating teachers' strategic profile) and 21 external partners/ experts each connected to one of the research teams.

The overall coordination of the project is held by the coordinator who defines the frame of activities of each research team leader, ensures communication and uninterrupted cooperation among the four teams, observes the research deadlines and, in the final stage, coordinates the four teams in order to produce the final output through the synthesis of results of each research team. Team leaders coordinate the members of their team and their external partners/ experts, define responsibilities of each member and external partner and safeguard the research process in relation to the time schedule and their deliverables. Team leaders regularly meet with each other and the external partners/experts.

The expected results include

- 1) The elaboration of the Greek version of SILL,
- 2) The elaboration of the Turkish version of SILL,
- 3) The elaboration of a standardized Questionnaire to trace teacher-used strategies.

- 4) The strategic profile of Muslim students in primary education learning Greek as second language and strategic profile of teachers in minority education,
- 5) The strategic profile of students in primary education learning English as foreign language and strategic profile of teachers in primary education
- 6) The strategic profile of students in secondary education learning English as foreign language and strategic profile of teachers in secondary education
- 7) The Presentation of the results in conferences and publications in journals.
- 8) A handbook based on the outcomes of the present research which will be published for the use of educational institutions such as the Pedagogical Institute and community with suggestions for improving second/foreign language teaching.

The progress expected to be achieved through the proposed research consists in the following main points:

- At a methodological level, the adaptation of a valid and reliable data collection tool in the Greek language will enable all researchers involved in language learning strategies research in Greece to collect data in a uniform way and, moreover, to reach comparable results. Such a practice is not possible today, as data collection procedures are accomplished via different research protocols. At the same time massive data collection in a uniform way is bound to lead to the evaluation of the strategic profile of the pupils attending primary, secondary and/or minority education.
- At a language teaching level, investigating the strategy use by the teachers in the classroom environment, is expected to reveal the teaching practices exerted during the process of language teaching. On the other hand, the suggested evaluation of the strategic profile of the primary and secondary education pupils is expected to be the background for language teaching programs design, which will make the pupils autonomous and self-dependent through the learning process, something that contributes to a more effective and quick learning. Such a fact becomes even more important within the frame of EC whose aim is the mutual understanding between different cultures and intercultural contacts, to be achieved through multilingualism. That is why they (EC) have put the ambitious, nevertheless realistic, ‘mother tongue plus two’.
- At a theoretical level, the study of the pupils’ strategic profile is expected to contribute towards a better comprehension of a language learning process.

From this research great benefits are expected to emerge regarding:

- a) The language proficiency of learners in general education. The implementation of the program for students of elementary and secondary education will contribute to effective foreign language learning. This will promote multilingualism in our country, which will enhance the communication of Greek speakers with other European partners and will provide the opportunity to Greek citizens to seek better jobs home or abroad.
- b) The functional and effective learning of the Greek language by minority students. In the region of Thrace, the unemployment rate is very high. Muslims hold, almost exclusively, low-paid jobs, which require neither expertise, nor any special training. The implementation of the proposal aims at helping Muslim students to achieve a higher level of knowledge of Greek which will result in higher rates of those students in the Universities, more job choices for better paid jobs, better communication with the majority, all of which will ensure better social integration of this group.
- c) The overall language proficiency of minority students
- d) Training of teachers of foreign languages at schools and of those who teach Greek as a second language in minority schools

Consequently, the immediately benefited are:

- a) primary and secondary education pupils learning a foreign language at school,
- b) Muslim pupils attending minority education learning Greek as a Second Language,
- c) foreign language teachers
- d) teachers involved in teaching Greek as a Second Language,
- e) educationalists specializing in curriculum designing focusing at foreign/second language teaching. The evaluation of the strategic profile of primary, secondary and minority pupils will provide for the curricula design specialists with empirical data which will enable the creation of effective programs for the strategic teaching of language. Thus, the multilingualism of Greek learners will increase fulfilling in this way the

'Mother tongue plus two' target set by the EC; on the other hand Muslim pupils will learn Greek in a strategic way which will increase their communicative competence.

The indirectly benefited are Greek researchers investigating learning strategies and they will gain a valid and reliable data collection instrument.

2. Methodology

The use of self-report instruments for the investigation and diagnosis of various aspects of learner individual characteristics and the differences that emerge among different groups is a common research practice in the field of second/foreign language acquisition. The adaptation of original, prototypical instruments is also another common practice, whenever these instruments are to be used in a different linguistic and/or socio-cultural environment.

The current research proposal suggests the adaptation into Greek and Turkish of a valid and reliable instrument, such as the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) (Oxford 1990), for the collection of data, in order to determine the language learning strategies used by primary and secondary school students learning a foreign language as well as those used by Muslim students learning Greek as a second language. (For an extensive literature review concerning research on strategies, see Chamot 2005).

Parallel to that, another aspect that will also be studied is the degree to which strategies are promoted by teachers in their classroom practice, so that it can be deduced whether the use of strategies by teachers during the learning procedure in the classroom contributes to an increased use of strategies by the learners. This research will serve as the theoretical background, for strategy training to be introduced smoothly in the language teaching curriculum for primary and secondary education at a later stage.

To be more specific, during the first stage of the research proposal (duration 12 months: 1-7-2011 to 30-6-2012) it is expected that the SILL (Oxford 1990), a widely-used data selection instrument in learning strategies research, will be adapted in both Greek and Turkish. Research teams 1, 2 and 4 participate in this phase. The participation in this phase, on the one hand, of the invited investigator from the University of Colorado (U.S.A), Achilles Bardos (member of research team 4), who specializes in research methods and applied statistics, educational assessment and measurement and program evaluation and, on the other, of the Professor of the University of Swansea, James Milton (member of research team 2) who is a world-wide known specialist of language teaching and the founder of the Center of Applied Language Studies guarantee the validity and the reliability of the experimental procedure.

The adaptation will include two phases:

- a) the translation and cultural adaptation and
- b) the testing of the psychometric properties of the SILL.

The translation phase

The translation phase will include five stages: forward translation in Greek and Turkish by two translators for each language, resolution of the discrepancies between the couples of translation for each language, back translation in the original language, revision of the translation by an expert committee, pretesting. More precisely, initially, the SILL will be translated into Greek and Turkish by two translators for each language. The mother tongue for each translator will be the target language (Greek and Turkish). The couples of translations for each language will be compared in order to resolve discrepancies in translation that may reflect more ambiguous wording in the original test or discrepancies in the translation process. Then the translated texts will be translated back in the original language, i.e English, by bilinguals, English native speakers in order to verify if each item of the SILL translation conveys an equivalent meaning as in English. This is a process of validity checking to make sure that the translated version of SILL is reflecting the same item content as the original version. An expert committee will consolidate all the previous translation versions and will develop the prefinal version of SILL translations. Decisions will be made by that expert committee in four areas: semantic equivalence, idiomatic equivalence, cultural equivalence and conceptual equivalence. Finally, the prefinal version will be administered to a small number of pupils for each language. The pupils will fill in the questionnaire and then will be interviewed to probe about what they thought was meant by each questionnaire item and the given response. This pilot study will investigate the linguistic efficiency and accuracy of the translation of the original version into Greek.

The testing of the psychometric properties of the SILL phase

Once the most suitable sampling procedure for the research method is selected, the Greek version of SILL will be administered on a random and representative sample of the Greek student population. The administration will be conducted on a national level throughout Greece, having in mind the aforementioned sampling procedure.

Following the codification and insertion of the data, the main work of adaptation will take place, concerning, on the one hand, the piloting, and, on the other, the final level of data analysis, which is the main target.

The procedure of adaptation of such instruments requires a factor analysis of their structure, which will take place at two levels: the exploratory and the confirmatory, so that the best possible and most reliable factorial solution regarding the Greek situation will be decided upon.

Similar procedures will be conducted in the case of Turkish, but to a more limited sample and to a more restricted geographical area, due to the concentration of the specific target population in a small area.

The new instruments in Greek and Turkish should retain both the item-level characteristics such as item-to-scale correlations and internal consistency; and the score-level characteristics of reliability, construct validity, and responsiveness.

The deliverable of the specific work package will be the final technical report regarding the adaptation of the instrument in Greek and in Turkish, which will include all the relevant sampling and statistical procedures that have been applied.

The adaptation of the SILL in Greek will give Greek researchers who are interested in learning strategy research the opportunity to use a valid and reliable instrument, which will allow them to collect comparable data, something that has not been possible till now.

Upon completion of the adaptation of the SILL procedure, the research teams 1, 2, and 3 will work in parallel and will embark on the selection of data for the determination of the profiles of the language learning strategies used by primary and secondary students who learn a foreign language and the Muslim students of Thrace who learn Greek as a second language (duration 15 months: 1-7-2012 to 30-9-2013).

The first research team will focus on the study and definition of language learning strategies used by Muslim students in Muslim minority primary schools who learn Greek as L2. The members of that team specialize in language learning strategies study and also have contacts with the local Muslim community, since they teach at the Democritus University of Thrace and have participated in education programs designed for the Muslim Minority. The second research team will focus on the study and definition of language learning strategies used by primary school students in Greek schools who learn English as a foreign language. The members of the second research team demonstrate a wide and long experience in issues of early and primary school language learning. Finally the third research team will focus on the study and definition of language learning strategies used by secondary school students in Greek schools who learn English as a foreign language, since its members have a wider experience of children of that age.

More specifically the following will be studied:

- The overall strategies that learners report they use in class
- The type of strategies (cognitive, metacognitive, social, affective, etc.) they use
- The impact of gender, age, school location, language proficiency, and motivation on the strategies that learners use.

The determination of the learners' strategy profile is considered worthwhile, so that the attitudes and preferences of the sample during the learning process emerge. This is a pre-requisite for the planning of programmes relevant to the strategic use of the language.

In the frame of surveying the learners' profile of language learning strategies, teachers themselves constitute quite a crucial factor in their undertaking to support and to guide such efforts of their learners. A central issue for such a role is the teaching strategies they use in their classroom practice in order to be more effective as teachers. Thus, after the selection of data for the designation of the learners' strategy profile, the research will focus on how teachers cultivate various types of strategies in their teaching, as well as on how

the use of strategies implemented by teachers during the lesson affects the use of strategies by their students. All four scientific teams participate in this phase (duration 18 months: 1-7-2013 to 31-12-2014).

To be more specific, the research will focus on the following:

- The set of strategies that teachers report they employ.
- The type of strategies (cognitive, metacognitive, memory, social, affective, etc.) used.
- The impact of factors such as age, gender and the location of the school on the use of strategies.
- Any correlation between strategies used by teachers and those used by learners.

As far as the strategies being used and cultivated by the teachers in the classroom are concerned, a specific questionnaire will be designed, based on related previous instruments, which will be administered to a sample of foreign language teachers.

The questionnaire will include scaled questions and will be materialized in two phases:

(a) during the first phase, the questionnaire will be put together and then the pilot questionnaire will be administered to a limited number of teachers, and

(b) during the second phase, the questionnaire will be administered to a larger number of foreign language teachers (i.e. this will use random sampling).

The validity of the research instrument will be assessed by a panel of experts who will evaluate the appropriacy of topics/suggestions used. The reliability of the research instrument will be assessed in the following two widely-used ways: factor analysis and cross-checks of internal consistency. In the final phase, the relationship between the two research instruments, the students' and the teachers' questionnaires, will be assessed.

Based on the results that will be deduced from the designation of the learning strategy profile of primary, secondary and Muslim students, as well as of the teachers, a book, which will serve as a manual, will be put together for the improvement of teaching techniques implemented for the teaching of a foreign/second language.

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