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Nolan Weil
Utah State University

Jianzhong Luo
Northwest A&F University

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Jianzhong Luo

Northwest A & F University

Yangling, China

Nolan Weil

Utah State University, USA

Jianzhong Luo earned his master's degree at Northwest A & F University, in Yangling, China and is currently a lecturer there in the Department of Foreign Languages. His primary responsibility is teaching English to non-majors. He is keenly interested in language learner strategies, learner autonomy, teaching in higher education, and translation studies.

Nolan Weil is Associate Professor of ESL in the Intensive English Language Institute at Utah State University, where he teaches English for academic purposes. His current scholarship revolves around issues in the teaching of reading and writing, including evaluation of materials, the role of teachers, and the uses of text.

Abstract

This study employed the Strategy Inventory for Language Learners (SILL) to investigate the frequency and types of language learning strategies used by 65 students studying English as a Second Language (ESL) in a university Intensive English Program (IEP) in the western United States. Students came from 15 different countries and represented three instructional levels within the program. Results indicated that frequency of strategy use increased from the lower intermediate to the upper intermediate level and also from the upper intermediate to the advanced level. However, only differences between the lower intermediate and the advanced level were statistically significant. IEP students reported most frequent use of social and metacognitive strategies. The study supports observations from other studies indicating that

learners in ESL environments use social strategies more frequently than do learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The researchers, an experienced EFL teacher in China and a veteran ESL teacher in an American IEP, highlight the differential use of social strategies as a prominent feature that may distinguish ESL and EFL learning contexts.The authors finish with a brief discussion of the implications of this observation for teachers of EFL.

Keywords: language learning strategies, metacognitive strategies, social strategies, ESL vs. EFL, intensive English programs

Introduction

An idea with considerable intuitive appeal, both for language teachers and for many foreign or second language students, is the idea that students can take "specific actions … to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations" (Oxford, 1990, p. 8). Indeed, it is an idea that has inspired a substantial body of research under the designation of language learning strategies. To the extent that it can make a difference in the lives of learners, the idea has obvious relevance for teachers and learners alike.

Another widely acknowledged idea is that the context within which teaching and learning takes place makes a difference both for teaching and for learning. In the world of English language teaching, it has become virtually general knowledge that EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts and ESL (English as a Second Language) contexts tend to afford participants quite different experiences in terms of language input, social environment (both in and out of the classroom), perceived utility (of tasks, activities, language focus), and multiple other factors.

The current study is situated in a university Intensive English Program (IEP) in the western United States. The researchers, a visiting scholar from China (where English language teaching is primarily EFL, and his host, a professor in the IEP (an ESL setting), both with an interest in the cross-cultural dimensions of language teaching and learning, employed the Oxford (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learners (SILL) to compare the strategy profiles of a diverse cohort of university-aged international students. The participants, from diverse countries around the world, differed in instructional level, gender, and nationality. The original intent of the study had been to examine whether strategy profiles, as measured by the SILL, would differ across groups differentiated according to nationality. However, along the

way, we found it necessary to disregard nationality because many countries were represented in the program by only one or two individuals. Nevertheless, the study provided a glimpse into the world of an IEP with a multi-national student body composed largely of students newly entering an ESL setting after having undergone their foundational English language learning primarily in EFL settings. The research therefore makes a modest contribution to our understanding of language learning strategy use in the relatively under explored heterogeneous context typical of Intensive English Programs in many Anglophone countries that host international students. It also perhaps has something to say about how language learning strategy preferences might respond to changes in context and may have important implications for EFL teachers vis-à-vis the promotion of social learning strategies.

Review of Literature

Overview of language learning strategies

The idea that more effective language learners are strategic, in ways that less effective learners perhaps are not, is generally traced (within the literature that applied linguists and language teachers tend to read) to articles by Rubin (1975), Stern (1975), and Naiman, Frohlich, Stern & Todesco, 1978) on the "good language learner," which has subsequently grown into a large body of research on language learning strategies.

Since the seminal articles of Rubin and of Stern, cited above, investigations of language learning strategies have been carried out using a number of methods to address several closely related problems. The earliest work was primarily directed at clarifying the construct by enumerating the variety of strategies that learners seemed to use and by trying to categorize them in ways that make sense. Researchers working on projects to characterize and label strategies devised a number of taxonomic schemes. Widely cited examples include those of O'Malley and Chamot (1990) and Oxford (1990).

Arising naturally out of efforts to enumerate and arrange strategies in taxonomic families and at the same time contributing to the endeavor, researchers have also tackled the problem of how best to detect and assess learners' patterns of strategy use. Some studies have employed relatively more subjective self-reports, such as surveys, interviews, learner diaries and journals. Other studies have aimed for greater objectivity, seeking to observe learners in the process of using strategies. For example, think-aloud methods, in which learners report what they are doing, at the moment, in response to a particular task have been especially useful for this purpose.

The advantages and disadvantages of various approaches have also been thoroughly discussed. (See, for example, Cohen & Scott, 1996). In short, surveys and interviews—and to a lesser extent perhaps diaries and journals—depend on a learner's ability to recall and assess behavior that may or may not have occurred recently, and may or may not be memorable enough to easily or exhaustively recollect and quantify. Nevertheless, researchers, attracted perhaps by the relative ease and convenience of surveys, have favored them over other methods; consequently, survey studies are surely the most widely published types of research on language learning strategies. Methods designed to make strategies-in-use for a particular purpose more open to inspection, although potentially more illuminating, are more difficult to conduct and have been relatively rare by comparison.

Another avenue that has received a lot of attention from researchers is the question of whether or not strategies can be taught and whether strategy training can make a difference in a learner's achievement. Strategy training studies have seemed particularly appealing to language educators because they promise to move past mere profiling, to the possibility that language learning strategies research might have pedagogical implications. Although some studies have showed strategy training to be beneficial for some measured aspects of language learning, in some contexts, overall the effects of controlled programs have been mixed at best (Chamot, 2005).

Interventions dedicated with single-mindedness of purpose to strategy training may lead to increases in students' use of strategies, but results have not been consistent across various contexts and the magnitude of benefits often seems too small to justify the time and energy spent. Nevertheless, several studies have shown that simply calling students' attention to the notion of strategic learning may have positive effects on student motivation, and may equip students with a knowledge and appreciation of the potential value of strategies (Flaitz & Feyton, 1996; Nunan, 1997). What seems a most reasonable implication for teachers to take from the collective strategies training literature is that, at least, talking with students about language learning strategies, or making strategies an auxiliary focus of any language class is a worthwhile goal (Redfern & Weil, 2002).

As interest in the notion of strategic language learning has waxed and waned over several decades, researchers have carved out more specialized niches often focused on particular domains of language use and development. Scholars and teachers of reading, for instance, have found it necessary to specify more precisely the strategies that readers employ (See, for example, Anderson, 1991). Moreover, the identification of types and categories of

strategies specific to reading have in turn led to the construction of more detailed subdomains, for example, vocabulary learning strategies used in relationship to reading (Gu, 2003).

Meanwhile, among the earliest advocates of the field, there has been a general shift in focus away from a preoccupation with the defining, enumerating, classifying, and teaching of strategies-as-skills towards a greater recognition of the motivational aspects of strategy use, in which "will" (i.e., motivation) is at least as important as "skill." This has led some researchers to emphasize the self-regulatory aspects of strategic action (e.g., Tseng, Dörnyei & Schmitt, 2006), and some scholars that pioneered the earlier work on language learning strategies have been rethinking how their work fits into the more current trend, whereby language learning strategy frameworks are being subsumed by the notion of self-regulated learning. (See, for instance, Oxford, 2011)

Yet despite the apparent shift away from earlier preoccupations, some of the original research directions still enjoy a following, a result perhaps owing to the globalization of English language teacher training. Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learners (SILL), for instance, arguably the most widely used instrument for getting a general picture of a learner's self reported language learning strategy use, has been widely adopted in recent years by researchers in Asia and the Middle East, where English is widely studied and taught as a foreign language. Simultaneously, in countries such as the U.S., where the number of international students studying in Intensive ESL settings grows annually, teachers and researchers find themselves presented with fresh opportunities to investigate the extent to which EFL contexts and ESL contexts might promote different types of strategies, or whether learners coming into ESL settings from different cultural/educational backgrounds might exhibit between group differences in strategy use.

The Strategy Inventory for Language Learners (SILL)

The Strategy Inventory for Language Learners (SILL) (ESL/EFL version) has come to be the most widely used survey for investigating language learning strategies across multiple contexts and cultures. The SILL consists of 50 statements reflecting various actions learners (across a wide range of language learning contexts) typically take when trying to learn a language. For example, "I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn in English;" or "I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English." Respondents make frequency judgments, by means of a 5-point Likert scale, reflecting the extent to which they feel a statement is true of them:

1. Never or almost never true of me
2. Usually not true of me
3. Somewhat true of me
4. Usually true of me
5. Always of almost always true of me

The SILL yields an overall score based on the 50 items. Researchers typically differentiate three levels of strategy use based on frequency ranges recommended by Oxford (1990): high use (3.5-5.0), medium use (2.5-3.4), and low use (1.0-2.4). The most widely used Strategy Inventory for Language Learning is Oxford's (1990) scheme, which hypothesizes a 6-factor categorization of strategies:

1. Memory strategies are actions that a learner takes to make connections between one L2 item and other things that the learner knows. The purpose is to facilitate storage and retrieval of new L2 items.
2. Cognitive strategies involve more elaborate manipulation of L2 material to foster greater understanding.
3. Compensation strategies are actions taken by a learner to overcome limitations in his/her L2 knowledge, e.g., in the vocabulary or grammar necessary for comprehending or communicating.
4. Metacognitive strategies involves the ways in which a learner sets goals, plans for learning, monitors progress, and in general manages the overall learning process.
5. Affective strategies refer to the measures that a learner employs to control mood, anxiety, motivation and the like, especially in the face of discouragement.
6. Social strategies are those actions a learner employs that involve interacting with people not only linguistically but in all the various ways that facilitate interpersonal and cultural understanding.

Sub-scores are often reported for each of these hypothesized factors, although attempts to validate scales that represent clearly distinguishable categories have generally not been entirely successful (Heo, Stoffa & Kush, 2012; Woodrow, 2005). Interpretation of studies, too numerous for us to mention, that have been conducted assuming the validity of the 6-factor SILL, current study included, should take this uncertainty into account in interpreting results of studies based on the SILL.

Nevertheless, despite the SILL's shortcomings, it is still about as good a standardized tool as we currently have for gauging the overall general strategic preferences of particular groups and subgroups of learners. It typically has high reliability, (ranging between .85-to mid .90s) across many reported studies, and reasonable evidence has been put forward to demonstrate content, criterion-related, and construct validity (Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995). It has been shown, for instance, that groups of individuals that share particular identifiable

characteristics often have different profiles. For example, students learning English in second language contexts (e.g., ESL settings) often report greater use of strategies than students in foreign language (e.g., EFL) contexts (Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995). In addition, advanced level students, students with higher achievement or higher measured proficiency, and students at higher levels in the educational system (e.g., university vs. high school) have reported using strategies with greater frequency (Alhaisoni, 2012; Green & Oxford, 1995; Griffiths, 2003; Khalil, 2005; Liu, 2004).

Strategy use has also been shown to vary by gender. Studies have consistently shown overall strategy use to be higher for girls and women (Ehrman & Oxford, 1988; Green & Oxford, 1995; Khalil, 2005; Liu, 2004; Ok, 2003). Fewer studies seem to have reached contradictory conclusions; however, a few have (Griffiths, 2003; Nisbet, Tindall & Arroyo, 2005; Shmais, 2003). There is evidence that strategy use is associated with factors such as college major, disciplinary focus, or career choice (Oxford & Ehrman, 1988; Oxford & Nyikos, 1989; Peacock & Ho, 2003) and with personality (Ehrman & Oxford, 1988, 1990).

In spite of the ambiguities that have surrounded efforts to define the factors comprising the overall SILL, researchers have typically reported scores on various hypothesized subscales to compare the supposed strategy preferences of various groups. Across many studies, metacognitive strategies tend to be either the most frequently reported or sometimes the second most frequently reported of strategies. Memory strategies (and affective strategies unless combined with social) tend to be less frequently reported. Social strategies often rank among the top three; however, our (the writers') reading of the literature leads us to conclude that compared with learners in foreign language learning contexts, learners in second language environments may make greater use of social strategies. Griffiths and Parr (2001), for instance, found social strategies to be the most frequently used among ESL learners in New Zealand, and Hong-Nam and Leavell (2006) found social strategies to be the second most frequently used strategies, after metacognitive, among ESL learners in an intensive English program in the U.S. The current study, like that of Griffiths and Parr, found that ESL students reported the greatest use of social strategies, followed by metacognitive strategies.

Current Study

The purpose of this study was to assess the language learning strategies of 65 students from 15 different countries, who were attending a university Intensive English Program in the western United States during the 2012-2013 academic year. The study might very well be seen as a companion study to that of Hong-Nam and Leavell (2006) because of the similarity

between their context and ours. Hong-Nam and Leavell described their study as an investigation of the language learning strategy use of 55 ESL students (30 males and 25 females) representing different nationalities and different proficiency levels in a college IEP located in the western United States. The current study, also conducted in an American IEP, like that of Hong-Nam and Leavell, began with the objective of determining:

1) the frequency of self-reported strategy use among IEP students, both overall and across the 6 strategy types (memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social) as defined by the Strategy Inventory for Language Learners, and

2) whether there would be any differences in strategy use among students as a function of nationality, level of instruction, or gender.

The two studies are significant because there have been relatively many studies of language learning strategy use in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings and relatively fewer studies in English as a Second Language (ESL) settings. There is thus a need for more data bearing on the question of whether students in EFL and ESL settings exhibit similar or dissimilar strategy preferences.

Methods

Participants

Seventy students enrolled in the university's small Intensive English Program (IEP) volunteered to participate in the study. The researchers made an effort to visit all classes in the program over two semesters to recruit as many volunteers as possible. Students from all four levels of the program participated, yielding the following distributions: level one (5), level two (21), level three (21), and level four (23). The 5 level-one students were subsequently dropped from the study due to concerns that they may have had difficulty understanding the survey. The sixty-five remaining students represented 15 countries. Table 1 below summarizes the demographic characteristics of the participants in this study.

Instrument

The 50-item Strategy Inventory for Language Learners (SILL), version 7.0 for ESL/EFL learners, described in detail in the literature review section, was used to measure the participants' self-reported use of language learning strategies. Cronbach's α was calculated as a measure of the instruments reliability, using the overall scores of the sixty-five participants. Reliability was .95. A brief additional questionnaire was attached to the SILL to gather

necessary background information, such as age, gender, nationality, level in the program, and several other program-related items.

Data collection and analysis

The first author, who had been a participant observer in many classes within the program, described the project to prospective participants in several classes across the program. The classes were chosen to maximize outreach so that as much as possible every student in the program had an opportunity to participate. The voluntary nature of the activity was stressed, including the fact that participating or not participating would have no effect on a participant's grade. Prospective participants were invited to complete the SILL and the demographic information at a time and place of their own choosing, but time was reserved at the end of several classes if anyone wished to complete the survey then; most chose to complete the survey on the spot.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of participants

	n = 65	%
Instructional Level		
L2 - lower-intermediate	21	32.3
L3 - upper intermediate	21	32.3
L4 - advanced	23	35.4
Gender		
Male	40	61.5
Female	25	38.5
Nationality		
China	29	44.6
Saudi Arabia	12	18.5
South Korea	6	9.2
Chile	5	7.7
Japan	2	3.1
Libya	2	3.1
Brazil	1	1.5
Burma	1	1.5
Cambodia	1	1.5
Congo	1	1.5
Dominican Republic	1	1.5
France	1	1.5
Iran	1	1.5
Iraq	1	1.5
Turkey	1	1.5

As can be seen from Table 1, the distribution of participants by nationality was heavily skewed towards Chinese students, and to a lesser extent, Saudis, with over half of the

other countries represented by only one student. This made the original intent to compare strategy use across culture or nationality impracticable. We therefore confined our analysis to just two independent variables: gender and instructional level within the IEP. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to evaluate the overall differences in strategy preferences of all program participants as a group. Scheffé post hoc comparisons were used to determine where differences lay. Multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVA) was used to evaluate frequency of use for the six strategy subtypes that comprise the overall SILL as a function of gender and instructional level; Scheffé post hoc procedures were used to make pair-wise comparisons.

Results

Overall strategy use

Table 2 gives basic descriptive statistics for overall strategy use and for the six strategy subtypes that comprise the SILL. Mean overall frequency of strategy use among students in the program was high (falling within the 3.5-5.0 range). Moreover, use of all types of strategies, except memory strategies, was also high, with even memory strategies (M=3.49) falling just below the threshold value of 3.5.

Table 2: Frequency of strategy use overall and for each of 6 types of language learning strategies

Strategy Type	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Rank	F	Sig	Differences
Memory	3.49	0.72	1.33	5.00	6	6.85	0.00	Meta, Soc>
Cognitive	3.73	0.60	2.07	4.79	4			Cog, Aff
Compensation	3.80	0.67	1.83	5.00	3			
Metacognitive	3.97	0.62	1.90	5.00	2			
Affective	3.55	0.71	1.80	5.00	5			
Social	4.06	0.81	1.50	5.00	1			
Overall	3.76	0.55	2.20	4.78				

One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) comparing mean frequencies of strategy types by IEP students as a group indicated a statistically significant difference in strategy type preferences, $F(5, 384) = 6.85$, $p < 0.00$. Scheffé post hoc comparisons ($p < .05$) showed that students in the IEP reported more frequent use of social and metacognitive strategies as

compared with affective or memory strategies. Although mean frequencies of use for social and metacognitive strategies were also greater than those for cognitive and compensation strategies, the differences were not statistically significant. There were also no statistically significant differences in mean frequencies for affective or memory strategies as compared with compensation or cognitive strategies.

A rank ordering of the mean scores for individual items on the SILL (see Appendix) gives a sense of IEP students' strategy preferences item by item. Overall, IEP students reported high use (M = 3.5-5.0) of 47 separate strategies with metacognitive and social strategies occupying 8 of the top 10 rankings. No strategies were ranked as low use (M = < 2.5), and only 7 were ranked as medium use; these included 4 memory strategies, 3 cognitive strategies, and an affective strategy.

Strategy use by gender and instructional level

Descriptive statistics for participants grouped by gender and by level of instruction are shown separately in Table 3 and Table 4 respectively. Since the SILL survey consists of six subsections, each representing a different strategy type, data was analyzed by means of a two-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with gender and instructional level as independent variables and the scores on each of the six strategy types as dependent variables.

Table 3: Frequency of strategy use by gender

Strategy Type	Male		Female	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Mem	3.44	.76	3.57	.65
Cog	3.76	.58	3.67	.65
Comp	3.75	.68	3.87	.65
Meta	4.07	.61	3.86	.65
Aff	3.56	.73	3.66	.67
Soc	4.02	.79	4.11	.85
Overall	3.77	.54	3.76	.56

The two-way MANOVA revealed significant multivariate main effect for level, Wilks' λ = .660, F (12, 108) = 2.078, p = .024, partial eta squared = .188; power to detect the effect

was .913. A significant multivariate main effect was also observed for gender Wilks' $\lambda = .766$, $F (6, 54) = 2.742$, p = .021, partial eta squared = .234; power to detect the effect was .833. The interaction effect was not significant, Wilks' $\lambda = .740$, $F (12, 108) = 1.461$, p = .150.

Given the significance of the main multivariate effects, the univariate main effects were examined for level and gender. Significant univariate main effects for level were obtained for memory strategies, $F (2, 59) = 4.169$, $p = .020$; cognitive strategies, $F (2, 59) = 7.411$, $p = .001$; compensation strategies, $F (2, 59) = 4.027$, $p = .023$; and for affective strategies, $F (2, 59) = 4.984$, $p = .010$. No significant effects were found for gender. (Bonferroni adjustment for multiple comparisons was applied.)

Table 4: Frequency of strategy use by level of instruction within program with p-values for significant Scheffé results

Strategy Type	Lower Intermediate Mean	SD	Upper Intermediate Mean	SD	Advanced Mean	SD	Sig	Difference
Mem	3.12	0.60	3.58	0.54	3.75	0.84	p = .014	L4 > L2
Cog	3.40	0.62	3.72	0.53	4.03	0.51	p = .002	L4 > L2
Comp	3.54	0.70	3.73	0.69	4.09	0.51	p = .024	L4 > L2
Meta	3.80	0.70	4.00	0.57	4.15	0.59	NS	
Aff	3.42	0.68	3.40	0.73	3.95	0.57	p = .020;	L4 > L2
							p = .015	L3 > L2
Soc	3.90	0.87	4.03	0.88	4.22	0.66	NS	
Overall	3.50	0.54	3.74	0.49	4.02	0.49		

Pair-wise comparisons for instructional level, using Scheffé post hoc tests (p < .05), indicated that Level 4 (advanced) IEP students reported significantly more frequent use of memory, cognitive, compensation, and affective strategies than did Level 2 (lower intermediate) students. Level 4 students also reported significantly more frequent use of affective strategies than Level 3 (upper intermediate) students. No other significant differences were found between Level 3 and Level 4 students, and no significant differences were found between instructional levels in the use of social or metacognitive strategies (See Table 4).

Interpretation of results

These results support several generalizations about language learners that have been widely reported by other researchers. First learners at higher levels of proficiency or advanced stages of learning (the proxy variable here being advanced level of instruction) tend to make greater use of strategies than do students at lower proficiency levels or novice stages of learning (the proxy here being lower intermediate level of instruction). Students in the Intensive English Program (IEP) that were the focus of this study showed evidence of increasing use of strategies across instructional levels from lower intermediate through upper intermediate to advanced instructional levels. This observation is based, of course, on a cross-sectional analysis, not a longitudinal one, and is therefore subject to the limitations inherent in cross-sectional analyses. Secondly, the results support the widely reported observation that metacognitive strategies tend to be among the most widely used of the language learning strategy types represented by the SILL, especially as contrasted with memory strategies and affective strategies.

On the other hand, students in this second language immersion setting reported much greater use of social strategies than is often reported in research done in foreign language settings. This finding is consistent with the parallel finding of Hong-Nam & Leavell (2006) who found that students in another IEP in an American setting favored metacognitive and social strategies over other types of strategies. However, the results of Hong-Nam and Leavell were more mixed suggesting that only advanced students favored social strategies over all other strategies, while our results suggest that social strategies are favored over other types of strategies at all instructional levels.

The most notable difference between our results and Hong-Nam and Leavell's is that the latter found a curvilinear relationship between proficiency level and strategy use, with intermediate students exhibiting more frequent strategy use than either beginning or advanced levels, whereas we found no such relationship.

Studies on the relationship between gender and strategy use have been somewhat ambiguous, and this study only reinforces that ambiguity. While many earlier studies suggested that women make greater overall use of language learning strategies than men, there have been a number of recent studies, as cited earlier in the review of literature, that contradict this notion. The current study is consistent with many of these more recent studies. In this IEP, men's and women's mean overall use of strategies was similar, and there was no statistically significant difference between their use of strategies either overall, or by strategy type.

Discussion

A consistent finding in many studies that have employed the SILL is that metacognitive strategies often rank among the most widely used of language learning strategies in both EFL and ESL settings. While social strategies are sometimes reported among the top strategies in EFL settings, the finding is not consistent across contexts. On the other hand, the current research lends support to the proposition that in the ESL context, social strategies consistently rival and may even surpass metacognitive strategies in frequency of use.

Perhaps it is not a great surprise that students in a second language immersion setting would make greater use of social strategies than do students in a foreign language learning setting. The immersion setting clearly offers greater opportunities to employ social strategies. Moreover, university-based IEPs tend to benefit from the richness of the campus environment, which affords students opportunities to extend language learning to settings outside the formal classroom through participation in student organizations, sports clubs, etc. In EFL environments, on the other hand, social strategies are more likely to rank lower on the list of strategies that students find relevant to their learning. It is our assumption that social strategies are more likely to be seen as relevant when the target language is seen as having an authentic purpose. Therefore, ESL teachers are clearly in an enviable position, compared to EFL teachers, who may find it extraordinarily challenging to create a learning environment in which learners have a real need, if not a want, to use the target language functionally.

Indeed, the first author, a visiting scholar and experienced university EFL teacher in China, is currently analyzing interview data collected subsequent to the completion of the present study. He finds that Chinese students, newly arrived in the American university setting, are acutely aware of and trying to respond to contingencies that are likely to naturally increase social strategy use. A frequently expressed generalization is that when studying English at home in China, classes were teacher-centered, focused extensively on grammar and on the reading and writing of English, and students were concerned primarily with passing exams, finding very little need or opportunity to engage in English for social purposes. As a consequence, although students felt somewhat prepared for tasks involving reading and writing, they felt particularly inadequate with regard to their listening and speaking abilities, often referring to their perceived lack of oral ability as "deaf and dumb English."

On the other hand, in the American IEP that is hosting them, English is the very currency of social life. Moreover, although reading and writing are certainly prominently featured in the curriculum, classes are small and the conditions are optimal for their teachers to arrange classroom activities that often involve small group interactions, often around texts,

or around recorded video media with classmates who do not speak Chinese, thus placing a premium on the use of English for genuine communication. These kinds of highly social academic interactions often come as a shock to students whose past classroom experiences were with teachers who did all of the talking (and not always exclusively in English).

What are the implications for EFL teachers? Considering the steady increase in the numbers of their students who need or want functional ability in English, for education, career advancement, business, or travel, EFL teachers must continue to both improve their own English language proficiency, especially their oral proficiency, and to experiment with teaching methods that encourage their students to employ social learning strategies. EFL teachers can design lessons and organize their classes in ways that simulate, approximate, and perhaps even achieve genuine social interaction. The obstacles, as recently elaborated by Chen and Goh (2011), are of course well known. However, we will not repeat them here, preferring rather to express the optimistic opinion that the obstacles of the past are not insurmountable. Indeed, the first author has witnessed a slow but steady change in teaching methods in his institution in China, and has himself worked and is still working to transform his own classes in ways that make them more socially interactive.

Moreover, beyond simulating and approximating conditions that promote social learning strategies, which are admittedly challenging in the homogenous classrooms of most EFL settings, there are other innovative things that EFL teachers can do. To the extent that EFL teachers can orchestrate opportunities for their students to engage in authentic communication with proficient users of English, they would no doubt see a parallel rise in their students' use of social learning strategies. Constructing learning environments that include fluent speakers of English in contexts where English speakers are rare may be a problem best solved by collaborative interaction between teachers in EFL settings and those in Anglophone settings, perhaps through innovative use of social networking tools in the classroom or distance learning platforms. Wu and Marek (2010), for instance, have demonstrated this by successfully employing live videoconferencing via Skype to connect Taiwanese EFL students with a native English speaker at a cooperating American university. Participating students expressed considerable enthusiasm over the experience, and the authors documented positive effects on students' motivation and confidence in their ability. Wu and Marek have suggested that opportunities for cooperative arrangements such as this are likely to arise when EFL instructors network and socialize with native speakers whenever possible, looking for ways to give their students experience in interacting with fluent speakers of English through the use of technology.

Conclusion

This study highlights the central role that social language learning strategies play in the ESL as contrasted with the EFL context, particularly in university IEPs. It also highlights the inherently strategic approach of language learners in an IEP with a diverse population of international students, for whom the IEP may be a major developmental steppingstone. The prominence of social strategy use in the IEP studied here parallels the findings of other studies that have involved IEPs and in this sense argues for the generalizability of the current findings, despite the caveat that must always be acknowledged regarding the non-generalizability of small samples taken from specific, local educational contexts. The generally high level of strategic awareness reported by IEP students, which also reinforces similar results from other ESL contexts does not point to a need for systematic, direct strategy training (at least in the IEP setting) that would only compete for time with tasks and activities designed simply to develop functional skill in the use of language. Many EFL instructors, on the other hand, probably can and should do more to promote social learning strategies, which they may however be able to do by structuring their classes in ways that encourage their use and by innovative use of technologies for connecting their students with fluent speakers of English.

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Appendix 1: Language learning strategy preferences of IEP Students

Strategy type	Strategy Number	Strategy Statement	Rank	Mean
High use				
(3.5-5.0)				
Meta	33	I try to find out how to be a better learner of English.	1	4.28
Soc	49	I ask questions in English.	2	4.26
Soc	50	I try to learn about the culture of English speakers.	3	4.23
Comp	29	If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing.	4	4.17
Meta	32	I pay attention when someone is speaking English.	5	4.15
Meta	30	I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English.	6	4.08
Meta	38	I think about my progress in learning English.	7	4.05
Soc	45	If I don't understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again.	8	4.02
Soc	48	I ask for help from English speakers.	9	4.00
Cog	17	I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English.	10	3.98
Meta	31	I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better.	11	3.97
Meta	35	I look for people I can talk to in English.	12	3.97
Meta	37	I have clear goals for improving my English skills.	13	3.95
Aff	40	I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making mistakes.	14	3.95
Cog	11	I try to talk like native English speakers.	15	3.94
Cog	19	I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English.	16	3.94
Cog	15	I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English.	17	3.92
Comp	25	When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures.	18	3.92
Soc	46	I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk.	19	3.92
Cog	12	I practice the sounds of English.	20	3.91
Soc	47	I practice English with other students.	21	3.91
Mem	1	I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn in English.	22	3.89
Cog	13	I use the English words I know in different ways.	23	3.86
Cog	14	I start conversations in English.	24	3.86
Aff	39	I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English.	25	3.83
Cog	20	I try to find patterns in English.	26	3.80

Strategy type	Strategy Number	Strategy Statement	Rank	Mean
High use				
(3.5-5.0)				
Meta	36	I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English.	27	3.78
Mem	3	I connect the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of the word to help me remember the word.	28	3.75
Mem	4	I remember a new English word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used.	29	3.75
Comp	26	I make up new words if I don't know the right ones in English.	30	3.75
Cog	21	I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand.	31	3.74
Mem	2	I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them.	32	3.71
Cog	10	I say or write new English words several times.	33	3.69
Comp	24	To understand unfamiliar words, I make guesses.	34	3.68
Meta	34	I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English.	35	3.68
Aff	44	I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English.	36	3.66
Comp	27	I read English without looking up every new word.	37	3.63
Comp	28	I try to guess what the other person will say next in English.	38	3.63
Aff	41	I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English.	39	3.63
Aff	42	I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English.	40	3.60
Mem	9	I remember new English words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on a street sign.	41	3.57
Cog	16	I read for pleasure in English.	42	3.57
Cog	18	I first skim an English passage (read over the passage quickly) then go back and read carefully.	43	3.54
Med. use				
(2.5-3.45)				
Mem	8	I review English lessons often.	44	3.43
Mem	7	I physically act out new English words.	45	3.40
Cog	22	I try not to translate word-for-word.	46	3.23
Cog	23	I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English.	47	3.18
Mem	5	I use rhymes to remember new English words.	48	3.03
Aff	43	I write down my feelings in a language learning diary.	49	2.92
Mem	6	I use flashcards to remember new English words.	50	2.86