

A STUDY ON SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING AT AN ADULT AGE
- WITH FOCUS ON LEARNER STRATEGIES

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Tutkielman tavoitteena oli selvittää vieraan kielen (englannin) oppimista aikuisiällä. Tutkimus pohjautuu osaksi huomioihini kansalaisopiston englannin kielen opettajana sekä opiskelijoitteni keskuudessa tekemääni laadulliseen kysely- ja haastattelu-tutkimukseen. Olen tarkastellut vieraan kielen oppimista monelta näkökannalta: kielen oppimiseen vaikuttavat sekä affektiiviset, kognitiiviset että persoonallisuustekijät. Lisäksi on olemassa joukko aikuisiän oppimiselle ominaisia tekijöitä, jotka on syytä huomioida tämän ikäryhmän oppimista tarkasteltaessa. Näillä tekijöillä on todettu olevan vaikutusta siihen, millaisia oppimisstrategioita tai 'oppimisniksejä' opiskelija tietoisesti tai tiedostamattaan omaan oppimiseensa soveltaa. Strategioilla saattaa olla kielenoppimisessa ratkaiseva rooli, ja yksi tämän tutkimuksen päätavoitteista oli selvittää, millaisia strategioita aikuiset kielenoppijat käyttävät. Pohdinnan kohteena oli myös ns. hyvien oppimisstrategioiden 'opettaminen' sellaisille oppijoille, joiden omat strategiavalinnat eivät ole riittävän monipuoliset tuloksellisen oppimisen kannalta katsottuna.

Tutkimustuloksista ilmeni, että kohderyhmän käyttämien oppimisstrategioiden määrässä ja valinnassa oli paljon yksilökohtaista vaihtelua. Kieltä opetellaan eri tavoin; osa oppijoista on selvästi suuntautunut kielen muotoon, osa sen käyttöön. Sukupuolella tuntuu olevan vaikutusta strategioiden valintaan. Vaikka nykyisessä kommunikatiivisiin menetelmiin painottuvassa opetuksessa oppijaa ohjataan alusta pitäen aktiiviseksi kielenkäyttäjäksi, muotopainotteista opetusta ei pitäisi kokonaan hylätä.

Tutkimustulokset osoittivat, että kielioppi on edelleen oleellinen osa aikuisten vieraan kielen oppimista. Kohderyhmästä ne, jotka eivät olleet nuoruusiässä opiskelleet vieraita kieliä koulussa, kokivat kieliopin omaksumisen aikuisiällä vaikeaksi, joskin oleelliseksi osaksi opiskelua. Kouluaikanaan muita vieraita kieliä opiskelleet sen sijaan kokivat englannin kieliopin oppimisen vaivattomaksi. Aikuisopiskelun alkuvaiheessa tulisikin huomioida oppijan nuoruusvuosien kieliopinnot.

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Key Terminology

Communication strategies: strategies used by both native speakers and L2 learners to overcome communication problems resulting from lack of linguistic resources or inability to access them

Language acquisition: the subconscious process of 'picking up' a language through exposure

Language learning: the conscious process of studying a language

L1 or first language: native language or mother tongue

L2 learning or second language learning: learning an additional language than one's own native language

Learning strategies: behavioural or mental procedures used by learners to develop their interlanguage

1. Introduction

The aim of this study is to examine second language learning at an adult age. My interest in the topic is very personal, as I have worked as an English teacher at an adult education centre for the past twelve years. The role of my employer, Tuusulan kansalaisopisto (the adult education centre of Tuusula), is to offer voluntary, non-formal education mainly to the adult population. Anyone can attend the courses irrespective of their age, profession or educational background. The aim of the adult education centres in Finland is to promote cultural and educational equality by offering everyone opportunities for learning and developing their personality. Our curriculum consists of language courses in ten languages, English being the most popular. The range of the English courses varies from beginners' courses to advanced conversation courses by native teachers.

To add some personal view into the topic, I would also like to mention that I have worked with adolescent learners of English at some post-secondary institutions for several periods, which altogether count up to approximately five years. Last winter, I also had a chance to observe some primary school learners of English in the classroom learning situation. This period of observing lessons of the third, fourth and sixth year pupils in a comprehensive school, was part of my pedagogic teacher training. All the above experience has given me a practical view into L2 learning at different ages/stages. In fact, it was the experience of observing the primary school learners that opened my eyes to see how different learning is at different ages. Teaching methods may be basically the same, but what happens 'inside the learner's head', i.e. the learning process, seems to take different forms at different ages. What probably struck me most was the carefree attitude these child learners had towards learning. Naturally, like in all

language learning groups some of the learners were more successful and others were less successful, but the general attitude towards L2 learning seemed to be far less worrying than in adult L2 classrooms. However, there was a lot of enthusiasm in the air. Adults seem to be far more concerned about their own learning than children are.

During the past years, I have met a large number of adult beginners of English who are full of enthusiasm about a completely new challenge in their life. Among the beginners there are always people with some previous experience of L2 learning at school (in most cases the languages being Swedish or German) thus having at least a vague idea of what to expect. However, the majority of the beginners of English at our institute have no previous experience of L2 learning. They may not have been engaged in any kind of systematic study after their school years. Compared to the learners with some previous, perhaps more recent, experience of L2 learning, such learners' expectations of L2 learning seem to be extremely varied. Some of them might hold an unrealistic idea of acquiring the ability to use the language after only a few years of learning. It is particularly challenging for the teacher to keep these learners motivated in the elaborate process of L2 learning. As the learning process takes place 'in the learner's head', the learner himself/herself is ultimately responsible for his/her own learning. Therefore, the teacher can only offer some 'useful tools' to facilitate the process, but he/she cannot be claimed to take overall responsibility for the learning process of individual learners. What kinds of 'tools' would be useful and how could these 'tools' be distributed? Are they the sole property of highly capable individuals, or could they be learned by others who had not discovered them on their own? In this study, the focus will be on examining the strategies that adult learners apply in their learning.

Every learning group consists of unique individuals and consequently every group is unique. However, in every group of L2 learners there are, on the one hand, a number

of learners who seem to grasp the idea of L2 learning right in the beginning. On the other hand, there are a number of learners who seem to be unable to manage to their own satisfaction, no matter how hard they seem to try. As a result, they develop anxiety and stress for a variety of reasons. Negative feelings may be due to their previous learning experiences, lack of learning skills, competitive natures or pure unawareness of the complexity of the language learning process. Their perceptions of whether they are progressing or not may be the cause of discomfort and frustration. Learning at our institute is based on a completely voluntary idea. Consequently too many learners drop out feeling disappointed with either the course itself or their own performance on the course. As we shall later learn, there is a multitude of factors influencing L2 learning. Learners themselves seem to hold firmly to the importance of language aptitude or intelligence in the learning process. Yet, it would be far too simplistic to assume that L2 learning is solely dependent on these two factors. There must be more complicated structures involved in the process. Some learners obviously seem to be utilising powerful learning processes that are invisible to the teacher while others seem to have 'switched off' completely and thus get no hold of the process.

All the above observations, based on my own experience of teaching, had intrigued me for years and finally led to the idea of this study. What I hoped to find out was some reasons or explanations for the multitude of 'black holes' in the learning process in order to facilitate my own work as a teacher. Individual learner differences are traditionally divided into three categories: *cognitive factors* (e.g. intelligence, language aptitude and learning strategies), *affective factors* (e.g. attitudes, motivation and language anxiety) and *personality variables* (e.g. extroversion/introversion, tolerance of ambiguity, empathy, ego permeability, sensitivity to rejection). I decided to start from the cognitive side of learning, but leave out intelligence and language

aptitude as more or less stable factors, which the teacher has very little effect on. Learner strategies might be the 'tools' that some learners had discovered to facilitate their learning, but they might not be self-evidently available for all L2 learners. Raising the learners' awareness of the availability of such strategies became the leading idea for my study. In addition, the affective aspects seemed to have a considerable role in learning; therefore parts of this study will concentrate on finding out how to maintain motivation and positive attitudes in the laborious process of learning.

A great deal of investigation has been made to find out about differences between individual learners. To start with the theoretical background I shall first present some information on how human memory works. A theory of second language acquisition will offer an explanation on how knowledge about language is stored in memory and how the process finally results in language comprehension and production. Anderson's (1983, 1985) theory of the three stages of skill acquisition will be shortly presented and later on referred to because it seemed to be the most applicable way to explain how languages are usually learned in a tutored learning environment like our institute. This theory has important implications both for understanding the process of second language acquisition and for developing instructional approaches. Yet, as we shall find out there are some other routes to be followed when second languages are learned/acquired. As adults' learning is the topic of this study, special characteristics in adult L2 learning will also be discussed. There are theories both for and against learning second languages at an adult age. Additionally, there are a number of cognitive, affective and personality factors that influence individual learning. These factors are not related to age and they vary among individual learners. From the cognitive side, learning strategies together with communication strategies will be a topic of special interest in this study. Affective factors do have a key role in maintaining interest in

voluntary adult learning; therefore they are also worth some investigation. Personality variables will not be included in this study, although the importance of those factors should not be underestimated. In addition, some researchers (e.g. Ellis, 1992) have made a categorical division between two different types of learners: form-oriented and meaning-oriented learners. In other words some learners opt to develop the rule system of the L2, while others prefer to develop fluency. These factors will also be discussed in the course of this study.

In sum, my intention is to concentrate on the following questions in this study:

- What kinds of strategies do adult learners generally employ in their learning?
- What factors does strategy use depend on? (Motivation, sex, age, previous education)
- Could 'good language learning strategies' be transferred to all learners?
- Which of the four skills (listening, reading, writing and speaking) is/are acquired first/last in voluntary adult L2 learning?
- Is there a link between the acquisition of the skills and the use of strategies?

In connection with the four skills, the role of grammar skills in adult learning was taken up in the interviews. Grammar inevitably has a considerable role in adult learning. Based on the learners' contribution in the interviews, this aspect was included in my investigation.

2. Theoretical Considerations

When studying second language learning, a reader is likely to find a great deal of information on the different aspects of the process. Before making any further conclusions it should be pointed out that while studying literature on second language learning and teaching, one is likely to come across several disputable concepts that researchers in the field have discussed or are still discussing. Therefore, it is advisable to seek for plenty of theoretical information before making any fixed conclusions and take a critical view on the arguments that have been presented. After all this knowledge, one has to view one's own considerations from the theoretical angle that best suits his/her purposes.

One of the fundamental differences to be found is that some researchers base their views on those of the American linguist Noam Chomsky, whose "Universal Grammar (UG) approach claims that all human beings inherit a universal set of principles and parameters which control the shape human languages can take, and which are what make human languages similar to one another" (Mitchell and Myles 1998, 43). In that view second language learning is seen different from other kinds of learning. UG based researchers put the emphasis on the language dimension of L2 learning. Lately, the universal grammar approach has been challenged by other researchers who are primarily interested in the learning component of L2 learning. They view second language learning as one form of learning among many others. They are interested in how the human brain processes and learns new information. The focus is very much on the learner as an individual, but unlike UG theorists who base their studies on linguistic systems, the latter base their studies on cognitive psychology (Mitchell and Myles *ibid.*, 72). In terms of this study, the cognitive view seemed more applicable since I was more interested in finding out about the learning component than the language component. In

addition, the constructivist theory of learning, with the focus on the learner's individual way of perceiving the world and its interpretation as well as the idea of constructing new knowledge on the earlier learned knowledge, can serve as a basis for the views on learning (Rauste- von Wright and von Wright, 1994).

2.1 Memory: Short-term Memory and Long-term Memory

In adult learning, beginners are often concerned about the decline of memory, which is considered an inevitable consequence of ageing. Memory has no doubt a key role in learning, but it must be a false assumption to put all the blame for unsuccessful learning on decline of memory at an adult age. How does memory function in terms of second language acquisition? Are there any means to be found to support the effective use of memory?

In the cognitive framework of learning "information is stored in two distinct ways, either in short-term memory, the active working memory that holds modest amounts of information only for a brief period, or long-term memory, the sustained storage of information, which may be represented as isolated elements or more likely as interconnected networks" (O'Malley and Chamont 1990, 17). In some representations, working memory is used to describe short-term memory as a way of denoting the active use of cognitive procedures with the information being processed. In some connections, two kinds of long-term memories, a declarative and procedural are referred to (Anderson 1985).

2.2 Skehan's Theory on Memory Functioning

Second language acquisition researchers base their views on certain theories on how human memory functions. Below the outlines of Skehan's (1998) theory will be

presented. Skehan (1998, 44-45) argues that human beings only have a limited-capacity memory system available when input is received. Consequently, due to the limited-capacity memory system people's ability to handle the input is limited. Therefore, short-term memory has to select from the input meaningful items that are relevant for ongoing comprehension. As a result, there is constant interaction between the two sections of memory. The amount of input in learning is very large; every item of input cannot therefore be taken in. Therefore, selecting items from the input has a key role in learning.

In Skehan's (*ibid.*) view there are different ideas about the way in which input and short-term memory interact. The dispute mainly concerns the extent to which some input is processed on-line, directly by long-term memory with contextual knowledge from long-term memory, which is mobilised to enable this. In the case of second language context, capacity limitations are often present and, therefore short-time memory has the significant role in the process of learning. Especially at the early stages of learning, the memory span for second language information is considerably low, but it gradually increases during the process of learning.

After some progress in learning, the interaction of the two sections of memory is important for the production of speech. Material from long-term memory (e.g. knowledge of syntax, lexical items, lexical chunks) has to be accessed and combined. In this aspect, Skehan supports Gathercole and Baddeley (1994) who propose that short-term memory can function as a storage area where the different elements of a message are being conducted. So, as with the analysis of input, the central components of the information processing systems have an impact upon the way language output is synthesized. The model below (Fig.1.) will give us some more information on how skill

learning actually takes place utilising the interaction between short-term memory and long-term memory.

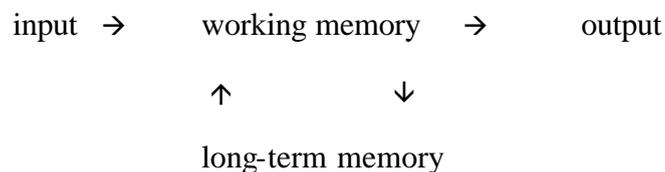


Figure 1. Memory systems and language (Skehan 1998)

2.3 Anderson's Theory of Three Stages of Skill Acquisition

In Anderson's (1983, 1985) theory, skill learning is based on three stages, during which the new skill has to be made automatic through systematic practising. A short description of the theory will be presented below (for more information see e.g. O'Malley and Chamont, 1990; Mitchell and Myles, 1998). It is important to note that skilled performance improves gradually. This theory assumes that individuals will learn the rules underlying the performance of a complex skill as a precursor to competent and automatic skill execution. The learner goes through three stages: the cognitive, associative and autonomous stage.

At the *cognitive* stage, the learner's attention may focus on the functional use of language, or to the formal aspects of the language, to its sound system, vocabulary, or to a combination of these all. The acquired knowledge at this stage is typically *declarative knowledge* (e.g. memorizing vocabulary or rules for grammar). This knowledge makes it possible for the learner to tell how to communicate in the second language, but the knowledge is still inadequate to be activated as skilled performance. Declarative knowledge may be acquired quickly, whereas *procedural knowledge* such as language acquisition is acquired gradually and only with extensive opportunities for practice.

The following stage is the *associative* stage, during which two main changes occur: firstly, the learner begins to develop familiarity with the knowledge acquired in the first stage so that it can be used procedurally and secondly, the connections among the various elements or components of the skill are strengthened. At this stage, the L2 learner is able to use the language for communication, although imperfectly, but may find difficulties in using the new language as a tool for learning complex information, because attention is still given to reinforcing the skill itself. During this stage declarative knowledge is turned into procedural form.

The third stage is called the *autonomous* stage and the performance becomes increasingly fine-tuned. The skill becomes virtually automatic and errors inhibiting successful performance disappear. When speech is produced, there is no more need to refer to the underlying rules. After having reached this stage, the learner is able to comprehend and produce utterances with little effort. In terms of memory, there is much less demand on working memory or consciousness at this stage. Nodes in long-term memory containing action sequences are activated, and the sequences can be performed without demands being placed on short-term memory. While a fact can often be learned fairly rapidly, complex skills such as second language acquisition can only be mastered after a relatively long period of practice.

It should be noted that according to O'Malley and Chamont (1990), in the cognitive theory, learning strategies are also viewed as complex cognitive skills learned more or less in the same way as any other skill. Therefore, some strategies learned through the three stages of learning have become proceduralised knowledge and may therefore be unobservable to the learner.

2.4 Special Characteristics in Adult L2 Learning

The effect of age in the process of learning is a question that has been scrutinized during the past decades, along with the coming of the concept of 'lifelong learning'. Traditionally learning had been connected with childhood and adolescence. In the past, learning was considered part of the process of learning a trade or a profession. After one had gained a settled position in life, there was officially no need for further learning or development. People seldom changed jobs or professions. Therefore, the idea of the power of learning at an early age remained the only established concept for a long time.

According to Cook (2001, 133), a variety of explanations have been put forward for the apparent decline in the learning capacity of adults. On the one hand, physical factors such as the loss of 'plasticity' in the brain and 'lateralization' of the brain have been mentioned. The critical period hypothesis (see e.g. Mitchell and Myles 1998; 49, 66-67) claims that human beings are only capable of learning language between the first years of life and the early teens. This hypothesis principally concerns L1 learning, but it is often applied to L2 learning, too. On the other hand, social factors such as the different situations that children encounter compared to adults as well as cognitive explanations such as the interference with natural language learning by the adult's more abstract mode of thinking have been presented (Cook, *ibid.*).

However, today it is common knowledge that age is no longer seen as a barrier to access to learning. Still, adult learners often use their age as an excuse for any difficulty they have with learning. Rogers (2001, 14) calls our present society an 'ageist' society where many companies reject 50-year-olds as 'too old' and presumes that this kind of thinking has had an effect on the self-esteem of aged learners. Naturally, suffering from certain physical difficulties such as hearing, sight and problems with mobility, which have an effect on learning skills, is more common among the aged than children and

adolescents. However, stereotypical generalisations should not be made to concern the whole group of adult learners.

Lightbown and Spada (1996, 42) find it difficult to compare children and adults as second language learners. The learning conditions are often different and young learners have more time to devote to second language learning. Adults have other time-consuming activities, second language learning being more like a hobby among family, work and other interests in life. Children do not experience strong pressure to speak fluently and accurately from the beginning. Their early, imperfect efforts are often praised or at least accepted. Older learners are often in situations that demand much more complex language and the expression of more complicated ideas. Adults are often embarrassed by their lack of mastery and may develop a sense of inadequacy after experiences of frustration in trying to say what they mean.

2.4.1. Theories in Favour of Adult Learning

Challenging the general perception about children being better L2 learners, Cook (2001, 133) argues in favour of age being a positive advantage for L2 learning. Several tests have showed that when children and adults are compared learning a second language in exactly the same way, whether as immigrants or in the classroom, adults are better. In these studies adult superiority is explained by adults' developed cognitive skills. Also Ellis (1985, 108) contends that older learners learn *about* language by consciously studying linguistic rules. They are prone to get form-focused instruction from the early stages of learning. They can also apply rules when they use the language. Younger children, while totally lacking in meta-awareness, are not so prone to respond to language as form. In case of children, e.g. acquiring a second language in immersion programmes, no form-focused language teaching is involved. For example, Harley

(1989), when investigating immersion programmes, has evidence that form-focused teaching works better on adults, whose cognitive abilities are greater than those of child learners and therefore adults are able to benefit from form-focused instruction.

Like many others, also Krashen and Terrell (1983, 45) have evidence against the popular idea of 'younger being better' as an absolute truth. Yet, they argue that children are 'better' with respect to ultimate attainment, since the length of the acquisition process is often longer for children than adults. However, the argument is that at the early stages of learning adults are faster in attaining second language skills than children. The researchers' assumption is that adults are able to receive more comprehensible input during the learning process. Adults are also likely to be able to control the input directed at them and make it comprehensible for themselves.

2.4.2 Theories in Favour of Child Learning

Contrasting what was said above about the positive effects of an adult's cognitive awareness, Rosansky (1975, 98) argues that cognitive development accounts for the greater ease with which young children learn languages. The young child is not consciously aware that he/she is acquiring language. Therefore, the child is cognitively open to another language. An adult is likely to hold strong social attitudes towards his/her own language and the target language. These may serve as blocks to natural language acquisition, forcing the learner to treat the acquisition task as a problem instead of a challenge.

In addition to Rosansky's view, there are other theories in favour of child learning. Research (e.g. Cook 2001) has presented evidence for child superiority in pronunciation. The claim is that an authentic accent cannot be acquired if the second language is learned after the early teens. In Ellis's (1985, 110) view child superiority in

pronunciation skills is often explained by the fact that children are more strongly motivated to become part of the language community than adults and consequently require a native-like accent to be able to integrate in the target language society.

When viewing the aspects of learning and ageing, MacKeracher (1998, 17-18) reports that from the late 40s learners may gradually become aware of two general physical changes that affect their learning, namely decline in sensory acuity and speed of physical responses. Sensory acuity affects the quality and quantity of the information input to the learning process by reducing accuracy and the amount of sensory information taken in. The speed of physical responses gradually declines along with ageing. However, this should have no effect on learning provided learners are allowed to pace their own learning (MacKeracher *ibid.*).

Kuikka and Pulliainen (1995, 439) state that although extra time in older learners' learning process is likely to promote their learning capacity, it does not dismiss young learners' benefit, since for young learners the total amount of input can be larger.

2.4.3 Effects of Ageing on Memory Capacity

It is a fact that changes in all physiological functions do occur along with ageing and the changes start to appear gradually at the late middle age. Yet, researchers (e.g. Kuikka and Pulliainen 1995, 427-430) point out that the number of changes in cerebral anatomy and physiology is relatively small when comparing healthy old and young people. Slow changes in the nervous system do not necessarily affect cognitive processes, but ageing can affect such parts of the brain, which can, when damaged, cause disturbances in memory. Yet, Kuikka and Pulliainen (*ibid.*) have test evidence for the fact that tasks requiring attention focused on several simultaneous tasks are more difficult for the aged than for the young, but that there are no notable differences in focusing and maintaining

attention. Minor problems in recalling are also more common among the elderly than among the young in tasks requiring the employment of long-term episodic memory.

Also, the slower process of information processing among the aged, which has been proved to be due to some changes in the brain, start to appear along with ageing. However, the effects of ageing on memory are highly individual and can be subtle. Naturally, the general health of an aged learner is of importance: some illnesses as well as medication are prone to affect the neurological system. As a conclusion, in case of healthy individuals, ageing does not result in notable differences in memory (Kuikka and Pulliainen, *ibid.*).

2.5 Other Factors Affecting Ability to Learn

Above, age-related factors were discussed, but there are also a number of other factors that are the cause for differences in people's ability to learn. These factors are highly individual, and they are not age-related. They are divided into *affective*, *cognitive* and *stylistic* factors. The affective domain is the emotional side of human behaviour and it may be juxtaposed to the cognitive side, which is connected with mental processes of understanding. Stylistic factors refer to general approaches to learning or problem solving as part of the larger issue of coping with everyday life. Brain hemisphericity, learning styles and personality types are some examples. O'Malley and Chamont (1990, 160-161) have evidence for various characteristics affecting the use of learner strategies, too. Motivation, aptitude, age, sex, prior education and cultural background play a role in the receptiveness of students to strategy training and their ability of acquiring new strategies.

2.5.1 Affective Factors

Motivation, attitude and *language anxiety* are sometimes referred to as the most powerful affective factors that affect L2 learning. The development of affective states or feelings involves a variety of personality factors, feelings about ourselves and about others with whom we come to contact. Ellis (1994, 522) points out that learners' affective states vary dynamically and have a significant impact on their ability to learn. Self-esteem appears to be an important variable in second language acquisition. With reference to what was said before in 2.4.2, Ellis (ibid.) claims that the child's eventual superiority in second language acquisition is hypothesised to be due to affective factors. He refers to the theory of the affective filter increasing in strength at puberty, which makes the person more likely to take a more critical view on his/her own performance.

Motivation in L2 learning is perhaps one of the most fully researched areas of individual differences. For example, Schumann (1997, xvii), grounding his views on neurobiological studies, claims that motivation strongly controls second language learning. Ellis (1997a, 76) claims motivation to be a highly complex phenomenon. It is dynamic in nature; it is not something that a learner has or does not have but rather something that varies depending on the learning context or task. Adults who enter into learning activities on a voluntary basis are usually well motivated and their attitudes towards learning are likely to be positive. Learners who have experienced success in learning have developed confidence in their ability to learn and their motivation is high. However, in the course of learning, motivation is easily affected by several factors, and it is prone to changes during the process. Learning does not progress at an even pace; the process is characterised by alternating feelings of 'ups and downs'. The periods when little progress is made can be risky in terms of motivation. If learning is voluntary, some supportive measures will be needed to prevent total fading of motivation. In Jaatinen's

(2003) experience motivation is influenced by such factors as the learning situation itself; how people are encountered and treated in the situation. Therefore, attitudes and atmosphere have a key role in maintaining motivation.

Further investigation into motivation shows that there is more than one category of motivation to be found. While examining the concept, researchers have divided it into subcategories, the prime categories being: *intrinsic* motivation (risen from an inner drive; related to the human need for self-esteem and self-confidence) and *extrinsic* motivation (risen from a promise of reward, threat or punishment or need for competition/cooperation with others) (e.g. Armitage et. al 1999). In addition the following subcategories are to be found: *integrative* motivation (innate interest in the speakers of the L2; desire to be like them) and *instrumental* motivation (learning for a utilitarian reason) (Ellis, 1994). Ellis (1997a) also mentions *resultative* motivation (success in learning may cause more motivation and vice versa).

Although the division of intrinsic-extrinsic seems to correlate, in some respect, with the division into integrative-instrumental motivation, in certain cases it is important to distinguish the two pairs. In terms of successful language learning, there are theories for both intrinsic and extrinsic as well as integrative and instrumental motivation (see e.g. Cook, 2001; Ellis, 1994; Williams and Burden, 1999). In certain cases, extrinsic motivation can turn into intrinsic or resultative motivation, if feelings of success can be elicited from the learners.

There are also many sorts of *attitudes* that are relevant in language learning. According to Johnson (2001, 132-134), by far the most studied is attitude towards the target-language speakers. In addition, Johnson mentions e.g. attitudes towards success referring to 'high achievers' who will strive to do well at everything and 'low achievers' whose ambitions are not high in any learning. High achievers are likely to struggle even

if their motivation occasionally sinks for one reason or another. In some cases, exceedingly competitive attitudes can have negative effects on the learning process, while in other cases a certain amount of increased ambition could be a beneficial factor in learning.

In addition to motivation and attitudes, *anxiety* is essential among the affective aspects of learning. Most researchers believe that different amounts of anxiety can have positive or negative effect on learning. In Skehan's (1989, 115-118) view a certain amount of anxiety may be beneficial and energizing, while excessive anxiety may be the cause of unproductive learning activities. Risk-taking and self-esteem are often discussed in connection with anxiety and other affective factors. According to researchers (e.g. Brown 1994, 140; Ellis 1994, 518) learners have to be able to take certain risks, to be willing to express themselves in the target language. They have to take the risk of being wrong. When mistakes are made, a person with high self-esteem is not daunted by the possible consequences of being laughed at.

In terms of strategy use, O'Malley and Chamont (1990, 107) argue that students with higher self-rated motivation to learn the language have significantly higher scores on strategy use. In the course of learning, the strategies of the early stages may not be sufficient and new ones have to be employed to manage the increasing demands.

2.5.2 Cognitive Factors

Mitchell and Myles (1998), include *intelligence*, *language aptitude* and *language learning strategies* in cognitive factors. Although they all are important factors in learning, the first two are not investigated in this study. In everyday conversation they still seem to be regarded as number one prerequisites for learning. Yet, tests (by e.g. Genesee 1976; Cummins 1980) have found no relationship between intelligence and

communication skills, but they do find a correlation between intelligence and academic language skills (reading and writing). O'Malley and Chamont (1990, 162-163) have found a link between aptitude and learning strategies. What they propose is that individuals with a special aptitude for learning languages may simply have found their own strategies that are effective for language learning. Effective listeners are known to make use of such strategies as *directed attention* and *selective attention* and recognition of grammar rules is assisted through the use of cognitive strategies.

2.6. Learner Strategies

Learner strategies have been a topic of interest to language studies. As was said, in this study the main focus will be placed on strategies. The concept will be discussed as a separate unit focussing on more detailed information than any other cognitive factor. It should be pointed out that some researchers (e.g. Faerch and Kasper, 1984; Tarone, 1981) make a distinction among *learning*, *communication* and *production* strategies. In addition, Tarone (ibid.) cites another type of strategy, *perception strategies*, which focus on the input that the learner receives. Learning processes account for how the learner accumulates new L2 rules and automatizes existing ones by attending to input and by simplifying through the use of existing knowledge. These distinctions may be useful, although overlap between them may occur. In this thesis all the above strategies will be discussed under the same concept; therefore the term *learner strategies* or merely *strategies* is used, since the development of learning, communication, production and perception skills is involved in the adult's process of second language acquisition.

2.6.1 Some Definitions of Strategies

In Oxford's definition strategies are "specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations" (Oxford 1990, 8). Ellis defines the concept in the following way: "A strategy consists of mental or behavioural activity related to some specific stage in the overall process of language acquisition or language use" (Ellis 1994, 529). In Cook's view, "a strategy is a choice that the learner makes while learning or using the second language that affects learning" (Cook 2001, 26).

2.6.2 Consciousness versus Unconsciousness of Strategy Use

The consciousness of strategy use is a question to be discussed, as it might have some effect on the findings of this study, too. When analysing the results, we have to keep in mind the following considerations about the consciousness or unconsciousness of the learners' use of strategies. The question of is a hot topic in second language acquisition studies and argumentative views on the concept are to be found.

O'Malley et al. (1985a) suggest that beginning and intermediate L2 learners are aware of strategies. At later stages, they may be represented as procedural knowledge, acquired through cognitive, associative and autonomous stages of learning. Therefore, they may be conscious at the early stages of learning and later performed without awareness. The learners in this study are estimated to be at the cognitive or associative stages and therefore they are likely to be more aware of the strategies that they employ than learners at more advanced levels.

Cohen (1990, 5) views strategies as learning processes, which are consciously selected by the learner. The element of choice is important because this is what gives a strategy its special character. However, also Cohen points out that once learned, some

of the strategies become automatic (cf. declarative and procedural knowledge), while others need to be consciously called into play in order to be accessible.

2.6.3 Degree of Observability

It is often difficult for teachers to know about their students' learning strategies; as was said some strategies might be hard to identify, even by the user. Another problem with observing strategies is the fact that the learner uses some strategies outside the classroom in informal situations unobservable by the teacher. In classroom conversations, the teacher could help learners become more aware of the strategies they use and evaluate the utility of them. It should be noted that not all strategies are useful for second language acquisition (e.g. Oxford's strategy *avoiding communication partially or totally*). Another thing worth mentioning is the fact that in the traditional teaching some decades ago (grammar-translation method) the use of certain strategies, such as *finding a compensatory expression for the missing word in one's own language or some other L2*, or *circumlocution*, was discouraged by the teachers. Therefore, adult learners may have been 'brainwashed' by the old methods and find it difficult to apply new ideas in their learning. Consequently, they might reject certain strategies that could promote successful communication in the target language.

2.6.4 Benefits of Strategy Use

In Oxford's definition (1990, 8), strategies are oriented toward the overall goal of communicative competence thus being highly beneficial. It should be noted, though, that strategy use depends on the individual; learners should not be pushed to use certain strategies unless they feel comfortable with using them.

Ellis (1997a, 34) contends that learners employ various strategies to develop their interlanguages. The different kinds of errors learners produce reflect different learning strategies. As an example, omission errors suggest that learners are simplifying their learning by ignoring certain grammatical features that they may not be able to process. Overgeneralization and transfer errors can be evidence of strategy use. The above facts indicate that learner strategies may be highly useful at the early stages of learning when little can be said and done due to limited knowledge of both grammar and vocabulary. At this stage, one could argue that such strategies do not promote learning; however, they help learners overcome communication gaps. Success in communication is likely to encourage the learner to continue his/her learning activities and ultimately promote the overall process of second language acquisition. However, Ellis (*ibid.*, 60) has doubts about the effectiveness of certain strategies (e.g. communication strategies) on L2 acquisition. He argues that successful use of communication strategies could in some cases obviate the need for learners to learn the correct target language forms.

2.6.5 Strategy Teaching

O'Malley and Chamont's (1990) research has suggested some positive effect of strategy teaching in certain fields of language acquisition (vocabulary development, listening comprehension and oral production). Also Schmitt (2000, 132) argues for the use of strategies especially for learning vocabulary.

O'Malley and Chamont (1990, 85) claim that strategies, like any other skills, begin as declarative knowledge that can be proceduralized with practice and like any complex cognitive skills, proceed through the cognitive, associative and autonomous stages of learning (cf. Anderson's model in 2.3). Before a skill is proceduralized, it will have to compete for working memory space with some other aspects of the task

concerned (cf. Skehan's theory of memory functioning in 2.2). Therefore, O'Malley and Chamont (ibid.) point out that strategies, like any other skills can be taught with the advantage that they will become proceduralized more quickly, therefore freeing working-memory space for other aspects of learning.

Ellis (1997a, 87) contends that the results of strategy teaching have been rather varied. He refers to the positive results in vocabulary learning, but claims that there are other studies that have been less convincing in demonstrating the effectiveness of strategy teaching. However, he finds the idea of strategy teaching attractive as it provides a way of helping learners to become autonomous in their learning. Yet, Ellis claims that not enough is known about which strategies and which combinations of them work best for L2 acquisition.

2.6.6 Taxonomies of Learner Strategies

Like most concepts, strategies have been divided into sub-categories. O'Malley and Chamont (1990, 137) have presented two detailed taxonomies of strategies: *cognitive* and *metacognitive*. Cognitive strategies are specific to distinct learning activities and they are often easily observable. Metacognitive strategies are less easily observable as they have become automatic in the process of learning. They involve thinking about the learning process, planning for learning, monitoring a learning task and evaluating how well one has learned. In addition, they name a smaller third set called *socio-affective* strategies. In this thesis, the taxonomy by Oxford (1990) was selected for the basis of the study. Oxford makes a primary division into *direct* and *indirect* strategies. In her system, direct strategies are divided into three sub-groups, namely *memory strategies*, *cognitive strategies* and *compensation strategies*. Also indirect strategies are divided into three sub-groups, namely *metacognitive strategies*, *affective strategies* and *social*

strategies. In Oxford's view the two sets are equally important in L2 learning and serve to support each other in many ways. Oxford's classification is more diversified than that of O'Malley and Chamont, but most of the concepts in the two classifications overlap.

In Oxford's (1990) definition, *direct strategies* deal with things like memorizing vocabulary and getting to understand new grammar rules in order to understand the structure of the new language and produce language in the most effective way. In terms of communicative competence, each aspect is of equal importance. Mere grammatical knowledge and understanding of the rules of grammar are not enough for successful language production. Although compensation strategies are not learning strategies, they can promote learning as they encourage the learner into more independent language use. *Indirect strategies* contribute indirectly to learning and they may not be as easily observed as direct strategies. However, they do have an essential role in learning. Below a diagram of Oxford's strategy system will be illustrated. In the following paragraphs each sub-group will be introduced with some practical examples of each group.

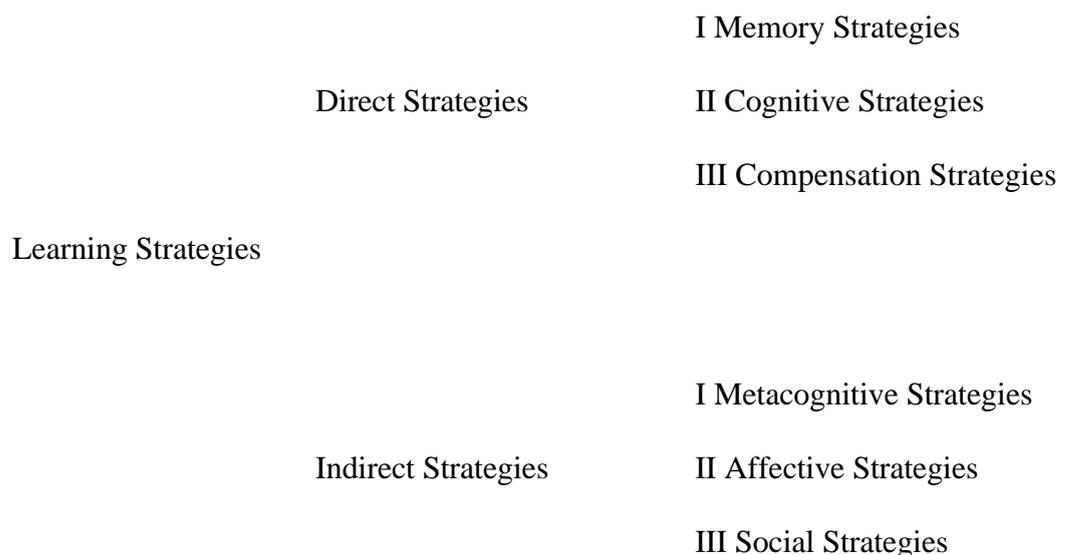


Figure 2. Diagram of the Strategy System: Overview (Oxford 1990)

- Memory Strategies

Memory strategies (also known as mnemonics) can involve relating a word to be remembered with some previously learned knowledge, using some form of *imagery*, or *grouping*. A new word can be integrated into many kinds of existing knowledge (e.g., previous experience or known words) or images can be specially made for retrieval (e.g. images of the word's form or meaning). *Groupings* are an important way to help recalling; people seem to organize words into groups naturally without prompting. Another kind of mnemonic strategy involves *focusing on the target word's orthographic or phonological form* to facilitate recall. It is worth noting that memory strategies generally involve the kind of elaborative mental processing that facilitates long-term retention.

Schmitt (2000, 132) argues that the most common vocabulary learning strategies seem to be simple *memorization, repetition, and taking notes on vocabulary*. He suggests that learners often favour relatively "shallow" strategies, even though they may be less effective than "deeper" ones. By the term "shallow" Schmitt means mechanical strategies like simple *memorization, repetition, and taking notes on vocabulary*. Indeed, research into some "deeper" vocabulary learning strategies, such as *forming associations* and *using keyword method*, have shown to enhance retention better than rote memorization. In Schmitt's view shallower activities may be more suitable for beginners, because they contain less material, whereas intermediate or advanced learners can benefit from the context usually included in deeper activities.

- Cognitive Strategies

Cognitive strategies are often specific to easily observable learning activities and include using operations in learning or problem solving that require analysis or

synthesis of learning materials. They often include repetition and using mechanical means to study. They are similar to memory strategies, but are not focused so specifically on manipulative mental processing. In O'Malley and Chamont's (1990, 99) view they operate directly on incoming information, manipulating it in ways that enhance learning. Certain cognitive strategies, such as *analysing* and *reasoning* are very useful for understanding new information. According to Oxford (ibid., 44) especially adult learners tend to "reason out" the new language. They need to work out how sentences are constructed. A useful example is *recombination*, which involves construction of a meaningful sentence by recombining known elements of the L2 in a new way. *Practising with sounds and writing systems* are cognitive strategies that are essential for successful learning. New sounds cannot be produced without repetition and practice. Second language learning involves a lot of practise. Therefore, the use of cognitive strategies should be extended outside classroom and a lot of time should be devoted to them.

- Compensation Strategies

Compensation strategies are used for coping with the language despite knowledge gaps. As was already said, compensation strategies are not learning strategies; they are communication strategies. Especially at the early stages of learning, compensation strategies aid learners in overcoming knowledge gaps and continuing to communicate. These strategies help communicative competence to progress. In Oxford's (1990, 9) words "compensation strategies - *guessing* when the meaning is not known, or *using synonyms or gestures* to express meaning of an unknown word or expression - are the heart of strategic competence". For instance *circumlocution* and *approximation* are compensation strategies that are often recommended to second language learners.

One of the major problems of beginning L2 learners is the limited vocabulary that they possess. Compensation strategies, if used effectively, can help the learner cope with communication situations. If a person is fluent in using communication strategies, the number of the dreaded 'silent moments' in speech production will be decreased and the learner's self-confidence in speech producing situations will be increased. Contrasting the effectiveness of compensation strategies, Ellis' (1997a, 60) claims that the learner's need to strive for the correct target language forms might be dismissed through active use of compensation strategies. Therefore, the role of compensation strategies should not be overemphasized.

- Metacognitive Strategies

In Schmitt's (2000, 134-136) observation, metacognitive strategies involve thinking about the learning process, planning for learning and evaluation. They are applicable to a variety of language learning tasks, although they may not be easily observable to the learner or the teacher. Oxford (1990, 8) contends that metacognitive strategies help learners to regulate their own cognition and to focus, plan and evaluate their progress as they move toward communicative competence. Metacognitive strategies involve a conscious overview of the learning process and making decisions about planning, monitoring, or evaluating the best ways to study. This includes improving access to input, deciding on the most efficient methods of study/review, and testing oneself. It also includes increased knowledge on deciding which words are worth studying and which are not, as well as persevering with the words one chooses to learn. In the latter task, the teacher's help is essential as the teacher is more able to point out such words that might be more useful than others.

Learners who have not been engaged in systematic learning activities for a long time are likely to lack metacognitive skills. In case of second language learning, especially at the early stages the flow of new information (vocabulary as well as grammar) is relatively large. Unless the learner becomes aware of how to select essential information from the less essential material, he/she might become overwhelmed by the large amount of input. Therefore, selecting information may be one of the key elements in second language learning.

- Affective Strategies

Affective strategies develop the self-confidence and perseverance needed for learners to involve themselves actively in language learning. Affective strategies are used to help the learner relax, or gain greater confidence, so that more profitable learning can take place (Oxford 1990, 8). Low level of anxiety and stressless learning situations facilitate L2 learners in adopting and developing the use of affective strategies. Lehtonen and Sajavaara (1997, 264) point out that "Finns generally believe that their aptitude for learning foreign languages is not as good as that of other people". This kind of attitude should be discouraged. Positive learning experiences are needed to change the deep-rooted attitudes. Casual classroom conversations about the learning process and the emotional aspects involved in it can be helpful for creating a relaxed atmosphere. The teacher is a key person in encouraging such conversations. Learners often feel relieved after realising that other learners might have had similar problems with learning.

- Social Strategies

Social strategies use interaction with other people to improve language learning. Generally, they are considered applicable to a wide variety of tasks. Social and affective

strategies involve "coping with the strain on the nerves that speaking and learning a foreign language can bring about as well as co-operation with others" (Oxford 1990, 8). One can ask teachers or classmates for information about a new word and they can answer in a number of ways (synonyms, translations, etc.) Sometimes a peer is more capable of explaining a new issue to an L2 learner than the teacher is. Someone at the same stage of learning may see things in a different way than the teacher does and be able to explain it in a more comprehensive way. One can also study vocabulary with other people, although research shows that most learners preferred to study vocabulary individually. Therefore, "social strategies (asking questions, cooperating with native speakers, cooperating with peers, and becoming culturally aware) can essentially facilitate sociolinguistic competence" (Oxford 1990, 9).

2.6.7 Studies on Good Learning Strategies

As the above considerations show there is a multitude of strategies for the second language learner to be practised. The learner has a key role in selecting the strategies that best suit his/her way of learning and promote learning. Ellis (1997a, 77-78) reports of studies that have aimed at relating learners' reported use of different strategies to their L2 proficiency. Researchers have tried to find out which strategies are important for language development. According to Ellis (ibid.) studies have shown that successful learners use more strategies than unsuccessful learners. In addition, different strategies have been found to relate to different aspects of L2 learning. For example, strategies that involve formal practice (e.g. *rehearsing a new word*) benefit the development of linguistic competence whereas strategies involving functional practice (e.g. *seeking out native speakers to talk to*) contribute to the development of communication skills. One of the main findings is that successful learners generally pay attention to both *form* and

meaning. Good learners are active and they show awareness of the learning process. They are flexible and appropriate in their use of learning strategies. They seem to be especially adept at using metacognitive strategies. Ellis argues that good learners may call on different strategies at different stages of their development. However, he sees a problem in interpreting all this research. When analysing the findings, he raises an interesting question: "Does strategy use result in learning or does learning increase the learner's ability to employ more strategies" (Ellis, 1997a, 78)? At the moment the answer is still not clear.

2.7 Summary on Theoretical Considerations

The theory section of this thesis contains a lot of information. However, I found it important to include the above aspects in it, as they all (theories on memory and skill acquisition, age, affective factors as well as intelligence and aptitude) seem to be linked with strategy use. In classroom conversations learners often ask questions about how they could promote their own learning and more generally how the process of learning actually takes place. As was said in the introduction, adults are often concerned about their learning. Therefore, general information about the process of learning is useful. Every learner has to go through the same stages of before they will be able to cope with the language. Some people are able to manage through the necessary stages at a faster pace than others, but generally speaking the learning process is fairly long.

As was said in 2.3, learning strategies are also viewed as complex cognitive skills learned more or less in the same way as any other skill. Learners are often unaware of the availability of learner strategies. They may use some strategies unconsciously without even knowing about alternative strategies that might benefit them more. Therefore, in addition to the language material the teacher should distribute knowledge

about the process of learning as well as learner strategies. One of the interesting questions in this study was to find out if useful strategies could be transferred to second language learners. The purpose of this study was to shed more light to the matter. There is a chance that mere information about the variety of strategies available might benefit some learners. Independent learners might like to try new means of learning. Actually, during the study some learners have reported of having employed new strategies that were included in the study. Still, the problem remains if the less independent learners could be trained to do the same. In my personal view, strategy training might even help these learners in the long run. Since the beginning of this study when Oxford's list of strategies was presented to the learners in my classes, several learners have reported of extended strategy use. They said these simple 'tricks' have been useful for them. As a conclusion, it seems to me that learner strategies seem to be important in second language learning no matter how they may be generated. I also tend to support the idea that successful learners are more resourceful in every respect and they use more strategies than unsuccessful learners. In my opinion also compensation strategies could be warmly recommended to the learners at our institute since in most cases the main purpose of their studies is to reach the 'survivor level' in the target language. At more advanced levels, where the learner aims at native-like competence, compensation strategies might not be as useful and the use of other strategies should be emphasized.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1 Choice of Target Group

The target group for this study was collected among my own L2 learners. I intended to find ten informants for the initial stage of this study. Ten was a recommended number to begin with as it was likely that some of the informants would drop out during the course of the study. However, this proved out to be a false assumption; all the learners were willing to continue till the end of the study. The only requirement for the informant was that he/she had started learning English at an adult age, in my definition after the age of twenty years. I presented the study plan in four groups of L2 English at Tuusula Adult Education Centre (Tuusulan kansalaisopisto). The groups consisted of learners who had been learning English from one to ten years, which meant they represented beginner, pre-intermediate and intermediate levels at the time of the study. I requested the learners to report their interest and fill in an initial questionnaire (Appendix 1) and return it to me in two weeks' time. I also asked the informants to be prepared to answer more detailed questions in interviews that would be carried out some weeks after the questionnaire. In addition to collecting information, my intention was to raise the learners' awareness of their learning process and give them some time to think about it before the interview. I purposefully aimed at an equal number of female and male informants in order to find out about potential differences in L2 learning between the two sexes. I also pointed out that the purpose of this study was not to concentrate on the learners' English skills, but rather on their process of learning.

I had no problem in finding the desired number of informants. In the first three groups that I met in the autumn I soon found four female and five male students who reported their interest in the study. In the fourth group that I met I told the learners that I still needed one female informant. In this group the choice was not open for anyone to

join as I already had the desired number of male informants. However, I explained the purpose of the study to the group and also introduced the list of strategies to the whole group to make them all aware of them. At this point of the study, it was easy to agree with O'Malley and Chamont (1990, 94) who argue that, "students are all the more motivated to respond in an interview because they are pleased to have someone take a personal interest in their learning process".

It should be noted that using my own learners as informants might be considered questionable in the sense that the presence of intention in their answers could be greater than in the answers of unknown informants. Therefore, there is a chance that the validity of the answers in this study was filtered through the personal relationship existing between the researcher and her informants. One could also question whether only the most active people in each learning group were willing to volunteer to be informants. Perhaps those with high anxiety and low self-confidence might have felt inferior and refused to let the teacher examine their learning. All these questions will remain unanswered, but they may be worth raising before any further conclusions are made.

Despite all the speculations, I decided to carry out the study among my own learners, as I thought more knowledge about their learning might make it easier for me to understand how an adult acquires/learns second languages. Learning is an individual process, but surely some shared features could be traced among adult learners of a second language. Besides, any eventual differences would be useful knowledge to the teacher to keep in mind when working with different learners of L2 English.

Background information about the ten informants, such as gender, age, education, number of years of L2 English at an adult age, previous L2 learning of some other languages than English, is available in Appendices 4 and 5.

3.2 Questionnaire

The study was initiated by explaining the purpose of the study and by handing the questionnaire (Appendix 1) to the ten informants who had reported of their willingness to participate. The questionnaire was composed of questions concerning the learners' background (gender, age group, education, number of years of L2 English at an adult age, previous L2 studies). There were also some open questions about the learner's personal learning experiences. Two questions (9 and 10) concerning the time the learners spent with their weekly homework and their observations on the use of everyday learning environment (the use of media, music, books etc.) included a Likert-type of scale to report of everyday learning situations. Finally, a list of learner strategies (based on Oxford's system of language learning strategies, 1990) was included in the questionnaire. The informants were simply asked to mark the strategies that they used in their learning and leave those they did not use unmarked. Some extra lines were added for the learners' own strategies, which might not have been included in the questionnaire.

Oxford's (1990) model of strategies was chosen for the questionnaire for personal reasons. There were a number of similarities to be found in the different taxonomies of the strategies presented by researchers (e.g. O'Malley and Chamont, 1990; Cohen 1990), but I was intrigued to apply Oxford's system for this study for a number of reasons. Firstly, her scale was the most detailed with the largest number of sub-categories and I thought it might be helpful for finding out about eventual learner differences when analysing the results. Secondly, what I found useful for this study was the fact that in Oxford's scale, compensation strategies were included as a sub-category, while e.g. O'Malley and Chamont (ibid.) do not have them on their list since they are not generally considered to be learning strategies but communication strategies. Communication

strategies are like 'techniques for coping' used by non-fluent learners during L2 interaction, in order to overcome specific communicative problems. I am sure that these kinds of strategies are common among adult L2 learners and besides they can be useful for the learners. In this respect I tend to support Johnson (2001, 153) who argues that communication strategies can also be learning strategies as they help the learner over a linguistic deficit, but they can also be a good way of getting to learn the meanings of new words. In addition, according to Mitchell and Myles (1998, 97) "strategic language use is part of adult competence; it has already matured and is therefore available to adults when they are learning an L2". Thirdly, I also thought that Oxford's classification would offer the learner more practical examples of the strategies than those of the other researchers. In other words, I thought Oxford's classification was the most comprehensive for an ordinary language learner without any theoretical knowledge about the learning process.

The list was translated into Finnish. The learners' native language was used for explaining the study, in the questionnaire as well as in the interviews. Using English would have made it difficult for most learners to participate. Even for the more advanced learners, English would have caused problems in describing the process of learning. O'Malley and Chamont (1990, 92), speak for the approach of permitting respondents to use their native language in describing their strategies in studies of second language acquisition. However, the total number of strategies had to be reduced, since the list was long (62 individual strategies were presented). O'Malley and Chamont (1990, 103) criticise Oxford's list for failing to prioritise the strategies that are most important to learning and for generating sub-categories that appear to overlap. Besides, as Oxford (*ibid.*, 16-17) herself admits that a large overlap exists among the strategy groups. In addition, she adds that there is no complete agreement on exactly what

strategies are, how many strategies actually exist, how they should be defined and whether it would be possible to create a real, scientifically validated hierarchy of strategies. Based on the comment, I took the liberty of combining some individual strategies and leaving out some. The choice was based on my personal view; I decided to choose the strategies that I found useful for my own learners. I decided to leave out certain strategies e.g. *avoiding communication partially or totally*, a strategy on Oxford's list of compensation strategies, since I think it is not a strategy to be recommended even though it surely is a common strategy among L2 learners. I also found that *using progressive relaxation, deep breathing, or meditation* as an affective strategy, might sound like exaggeration to Finnish adult learners. Finally, the total number of strategies in my questionnaire was 29.

Some criticism of the method of questionnaires has been presented in literature. One of the findings in Kivinen's (2003) study was that volitional self-regulation systems are hard to be measured and that a questionnaire is hardly the best way to find information about such systems. In addition, he pointed out that in his study among secondary school students "the students, aged 15 to 20, did not have a clear picture of themselves, yet, as students or learners" (Kivinen 2003, 6). There is also a chance that in a self-report format, the learners may select statements, which, according to their own values, are self-flattering. Alternatively, they may select statements that they believe the researcher would like them to select, regardless what their personal views are. However, my idea for the questionnaire was a practical way of starting the work. It served as 'a warming-up task' for the informants. I hoped it helped the informants gain awareness of their learning process and of the learner strategies they had employed. I was optimistic about the idea of the interviews helping me collect more detailed information, specify the learners' answers and get a deeper insight into each individual's world.

3.3 Choice of Methodology

In order to interpret the learners' perceptions, there is a need for careful consideration about the methodology for the study. The task is not an easy one. The learners should first be made aware of the concept they are asked about. Additionally, they should be able to communicate their ideas to the researcher. Actually, the work should be started with the ontological assumption that there is no absolute truth to be found about the learners' perceptions. However, Eskola and Suoranta (1996, 105) argue that there is no true access to reality and we always have to take reality in the form that it appears to us in the process of interpretation and understanding.

The role of a learner is often new to an adult who already has gained position both in personal and working life. Quoting Mitchell and Myles' (1998, 13) idea "second language learning is typified by incomplete success". The mere fact of accepting incompleteness may cause controversial feelings in the learner. Would the informants be able to describe their controversial feelings to the researcher? Would they prefer to 'put their best foot forward' rather than reveal their real problems. Also, the use of learning strategies may be a vague concept to be asked about. One of the important questions is whether the learners are aware of which strategies they employ in their learning. As was already discussed, some of the strategies are used unconsciously. It would also be interesting to find out if the learner uses the same strategies throughout the learning process or if he/she uses certain strategies at the early stages only and reject them later on while employing new more useful strategies.

3.3.1 Qualitative versus Quantitative Method

In order to make the choice between the qualitative method and the more traditional quantitative method, researchers (e.g. Wallace 2000, 161) often advice to opt for the

former, basing on the view that teachers are interested in their own unique situations: their own students, their classes, and so on. The specific focus of the study therefore becomes a positive advantage for researchers, since it may meet their professional needs better than more traditional empirical research studies. My intention was to get more insight into the role of an adult learner, particularly insight into such views that are usually not shared in the class. It should be remembered that the findings of this study would not necessarily be applicable to any groups of adult learners with different educational backgrounds or motives for learning a second language. According to Eskola and Suoranta (1996, 34), the qualitative method does not aim at making statistical generalisations but rather describing an event and understanding certain behaviour. Jaatinen (2003, 54) points out that all research that is focused on learning and teaching, as a subjective experience is qualitative research. For the above reasons choosing the qualitative method was a natural option for this study.

3.3.2 Case Study Method

In Eskola and Suoranta's (1996, 37-38) definition, a case study is a study investigating a present phenomenon in its real-life situation, in its own surroundings. It usually concentrates on a single case, but studies on several cases are also possible within the definition. The above researchers consider all qualitative studies case studies in the sense that no empirically generalising conclusions are intended to be made. Thus, an individual or a group can function as the case.

Wallace (2000, 160) describes the case study approach by contrasting it with the more traditional forms of investigation, which is practised in order to find out about the general scientific laws applying to the whole class of people or phenomena. This type of investigation usually involves two matching groups, which are representative of the

total population. The control group and experimental group are then tested using identical tests in order to establish their relative performance level. Then some treatment that is given to the experimental group is not given to the control group. The two groups are tested again to establish relative improvement. The case study approach works on quite different principle. Case studies concentrate on what is unique (i.e. with an individual student; a group etc). The results cannot therefore be statistically generalised to concern the whole population of which this particular example is a member.

What Wallace (*ibid.*, 170) points out as a very important issue relating to the target population of the case study is the description of the case study population. It has to be sufficiently detailed to give a clear picture of all the relevant aspects of the case study population. Since we are only talking about one learner, or as is the case with this study, a group of learners, the reader has to know enough about this unique case to decide whether the data generated by it might also relate to his or her own situation.

3.3.3 Action Research

This type of study could also be classified as action research or teacher research, which according to Ellis (1997b, 23) provides the teacher with a means to monitor his/her own practice and to improve local practices. Regular reflection of one's own work should be part of every teacher's work. Observation of the action provides material for reflection, which may lead to further planning and result in changes of classroom procedures. Ellis (1997b, 206) contends that since action research is inherently practical in nature it must conform to a set of practical guidelines such as those described by Hopkins (1985, 41). First of all the research should not interfere with or disrupt the teacher's primary job of teaching. Secondly, the methods of data collection must be practical (e.g. not too demanding on the teacher's time). Thirdly, the methodology employed must be one that

is applicable to the particular classroom situation in which a teacher is working. Fourthly, the teacher must be committed to the research question that he or she is investigating. Lastly, the teacher must pay close attention to ethical standards in the research (e.g. by ensuring confidentiality of the subjects).

All the above aspects are important and I had been thinking about them when I was planning this study. The study material should be comprehensible for an ordinary second language learner to perceive. I wanted to avoid making it too theoretical. In addition, I wanted to make the topic practical enough to be easy to analyse. Also the last item has to be under careful consideration when writing about the findings. It would be desirable that the informants give confidential information about themselves in the interviews and it is the researchers responsibility to make sure that the information will be analysed confidentially.

3.4 Interviews

The interviews were carried out individually with each informant and every interview was taped. All the informants who had filled in the questionnaire were willing to continue with the study and reserve forty minutes for the interview. There was a set of questions written for the interviews (Appendix 2), but the idea was to let the conversation flow freely without any strictly set frame to be followed. Although the questions were written in English, Finnish was spoken in the interviews. In order to avoid any anxiety or stress, I wanted to make the situation more like a casual conversation rather than an official interview. The interview questions were planned to support and deepen the information given in the questionnaire.

4. Analysis of Data

The information for the findings of the study was collected from the questionnaires and discussed in the interviews with the ten informants. I found that the interviews were extremely valuable for this study. The questionnaire had given me surface information, while the interviews helped me find deeper information about the learners' perceptions of themselves in the role of a learner. Also the informants seemed to feel urged to complete their answers in the interview. Some of them had even slightly changed their way of thinking after having a deeper thought on the matter. As I had hoped, the process of the study had made them more conscious of their learning. The learners' attitudes towards the study were generally positive and as was said there were no problems in arranging time for the interviews. In most cases, the interviews were carried out in the classroom, before the English lesson. The list of questions for the interview (Appendix 2) was used for every interview. Sometimes the order of the questions varied, depending on the general course of the conversation. As I already had a personal relationship with every informant, I do believe there wasn't any reason for nervousness and the informants were able to describe their learning openly. In case of certain informants I dare suggest that they had wanted to report their learning experiences a long time before the interview, but they had never had a chance to do it in an ordinary classroom situation. They thought their past learning history might have affected their present learning and they wanted their teacher to be aware of it.

In order to avoid misinterpretation of the information given in the questionnaire, the learning history of each informant was reviewed in the interview. Some of the learners had had earlier studies of L2 English in their past before joining our institute. The total period of each individual's L2 studies at an adult age was counted, in other words the earlier studies were included in the total number of years of L2 English

learning. Therefore, it should be pointed out that the number of years of L2 English does not necessarily mean that the individual had learned all this time at our institute. As was said above the only prerequisite for the informant was that L2 English learning had been started at an adult age. Detailed background information of each informant is to be found in Appendices 4 and 5.

Although learner strategies were of principal interest in this study, some other aspects of adult learning (motivation, the effect of age on learning, the role of memory, the traditional four skills as well as grammar skills and the eventual problems in L2 learning) were discussed as they are all said to influence the choice of learner strategies. Finally, information on each learner from the questionnaire and the interview was combined. The interviews were taped and later on listened to. In order to maintain confidentiality, the informants were given code names for the study (Appendix 3). Background information (age, education, number of years of L2 English, previous L2 studies) about the learners was summarised in Appendices 4 and 5. Appendix 5 presents information about each individual. This table also presents the informant's idea of the acquisition of the four skills and grammar skills. The skills marked with a (+) mark indicate that the learner felt confident with this particular skill, while a (-) indicates the learner's discontent with the development of this particular skill. The total number of strategies marked on each questionnaire was counted and the percentages for different strategy units were calculated and summarised (Appendix 6). It should be noted that although four informants in the study (F4, F5, M1, M4) had added a personal strategy that they used in their learning on the spare lines at the end of the questionnaire, this strategy was not included in the total number of strategies employed by the informants.

In what follows the most interesting findings on learner strategies according to the gender, age, education, and number of years of L2 English studies will be discussed.

5. Findings

After the first observations on the response sheets the most striking thing to me was that the number of strategies employed by the ten informants of this study varied from nine to twenty-one (the total number of the strategies in the questionnaire was twenty-nine), a fact that is likely to indicate considerable differences in learning habits. The first investigation of the response sheets did not reveal any link between strategy use and general factors like age, sex or educational background. As Appendix 5 shows, the informants with the highest score in strategy use (M4 with 21/29 strategies, F1 and F5 with 19/29 strategies) all represented different age groups. Although the person with the highest score in strategy use was male, there was evidence for slightly higher strategy use among the female than male informants: the total number of strategies employed by all females was 77, while the corresponding number for the males was 72 (Appendices 7 and 8). The most highly educated person (M3 with a university degree) had marked 13/29 strategies, which was exactly the same as the score of a female informant with elementary school background (F4). Thus, no clear link between the number of years of L2 English studies and their strategy use could be found, either.

Therefore, at the first sight the questionnaires did not give enough evidence for making any definite conclusions. What the response sheets did give was evidence for the fact that the highest strategy users were more optimistic in their statements concerning their learning than the lowest users. The informants with the highest score in strategy use had used adjectives like *enthusiastic* (innostunut), *persistent* (sitkeä), *motivated* (motivoitunut) and nouns like *pleasure* (iloa), *benefit* (hyötyä), *belief in one's own learning* (usko oman oppimiseen) when they were asked about their learning, while the informants with the lowest score had adjectives like *bad at learning* (huono oppimaan), *heikko* (poor), *slow* (hidas), *difficult* (vaikeaa), *satisfactorily* (tydyttävästi)

when they described themselves as learners or their attitude towards learning. In the interviews the role of affective and related personal factors was to be investigated in order to find out more.

Attitudes and motivation seemed to be a logical starting point. All the informants in this study learned L2 English on a voluntary basis and therefore their motivation was likely to be rather high, otherwise they would not have been our students any more. Surely, some differences in the strength of motivation would be traced. What I was also interested in was the nature of the learners' motivation; i.e. the learners' personal reasons for learning L2 English. I also wanted to find out if the learners' motivation had changed from one type to another (e.g. from extrinsic to intrinsic) during the process of learning. Naiman et al. (1995) have evidence for the fact that learners with highly intrinsic motivation are likely to be the most successful learners. As was said in 2.5.1, motivation is dynamic in nature and it varies from one moment to another depending on various factors. Also the strength of motivation varies individually during the different stages of learning. There is a multitude of factors that affect motivation. If several discouraging factors occur at the same time, motivation is likely to fade away.

After motivation some observations on the effect of age and earlier L2 learning experiences will be analysed. Thereafter, the acquisition of the four skills will be examined and comments on the effect of learner strategies on the acquisition order will be made. Finally, general observations of the learner strategies will be presented.

5.1 Motivation

O'Malley and Chamont (1990, 106-128) have evidence for the fact that students with higher self-rated motivation to learn second language(s) have significantly higher scores on learner strategies. This means that their study habits are better than those of students

with low motivation. In addition, O'Malley and Chamont (*ibid.*) claim that students of all ability levels were found to use learning strategies, but the more effective students used learning strategies more often and had a wider repertoire of strategies than did less effective students. Also Ellis (1997a) supports the latter view.

Based on the assumption that the learners in this study were likely to be well motivated, one could conclude that the ten informants were all likely to be high-strategy users. Yet, as was stated the number of strategies employed by the ten individuals varied considerably (from nine to twenty-one). The learners' motivation was not measured in this study nor was their ability level tested. Therefore, no definite conclusions for or against O'Malley and Chamont's (*ibid.*) claim could be made. However, one is tempted to draw a conclusion that the lowest strategy users (M2 with 9/29 strategies and F2 with 10/29 strategies) were likely to be less motivated and less effective in their learning than the rest of the informants. For example, in the answer sheet informant M2's statements concerning his own learning were not very self-flattering and the view was confirmed in the interview.

The informant with the lowest score in strategy use (M2) gave a detailed summary of his childhood learning experiences in the interview. He thought his early experiences might have had effect on his later motivation for learning as well as his eventual learning skills. His learning experiences at primary school were overwhelmingly more negative than those of any other informant. The informant said that the affective factors of his childhood learning had posed an actual threat on his later learning, even at an adult age. His present learning for the past few years was the second start; the first start more than twenty years ago had finished after a few years of learning. At a more mature age he had made conscious efforts to dismiss the negative effects of his earlier learning experiences. Learning in an adult group with a low level of

anxiety had been a positive experience for him. Encouraging classmates and relaxed learning atmosphere had helped him overcome most of the negative feelings. As can be seen in Appendix 6, M2's score on affective strategies (40%) was one of the highest of all his scores (in addition to cognitive strategies). However, he still claimed his learning skills to be insufficient, which had caused drops in motivation. Due to his age and life experience he felt he was more able to cope with occasional setbacks. Yet, he felt he was not confident with his progress, although he thought he had been able to overcome most of his past feelings of inferiority. However, he said second language learning at an adult age had involved a number of factors that had supported his personal growth in a wider sense than merely learning of a new skill. L2 learning had been an important experience for him, but he felt he had had to take more effort than the average learner to keep up his motivation.

5.1.1 Intrinsic Motivation

Three learners in this study (F1, F3 and F5) said they had started learning L2 for purely intrinsic purposes. Armitage et. al (1999, 55) contend that intrinsic motivation rises from an inner drive and is related to the human need for self-esteem and self-confidence as well as desire to satisfy curiosity. The activities are a reward in themselves and undertaken purely for the pleasure they give to the learner. Informant F5 (for background information see Appendix 5) said she had been a keen watcher of some soap operas on TV. When watching (and listening to) her favourite serials, she had developed an interest in English. Her previous studies of L2 Swedish and German in the past schooldays had helped her with the new language she was interested in. In her case, watching television had intrigued her to start learning English as a second language. At the time of the study, she had been learning English for six years and she was highly

motivated to continue. As Appendix 6 shows, she had a relatively high score on strategy use (19/29) and she said she had successfully extended the number of strategies along with her learning. It is worth pointing out that F5's score on cognitive and compensation strategies was very high; she was an analytic learner who put a great deal of effort on learning and she was a resourceful and active student in classroom situations. She was also lucky to be a pensioner with enough time to devote to learning activities.

In addition to informant F5 the remaining two informants with intrinsic motivation (F1, F3) said they had gained self-esteem and felt personal pleasure for learning (for background information see Appendix 5). They also said learning had been easier for them than they had anticipated before starting it. Informant F1 was slightly worried about her learning abilities at such a high age (age group 70-79 years), although she was more concerned of her problems with hearing than e.g. memory. However at the time of the study, her learning experiences had been mainly positive and she felt she had exceeded her own expectations.

As the results show (see Appendices 6 and 7), all the informants with purely intrinsic motivation had a fairly high score in strategy use and they were optimistic, keen learners who were fairly confident with their learning skills. Therefore it is evident that the study results in this respect support O'Malley and Chamont's (1990) evidence for the fact that students with higher self-rated motivation to learn second language(s) have significantly higher scores on learner strategies.

5.1.2 Extrinsic Motivation

Four informants (F4, M2, M4, M5) said they had started learning L2 English for purely extrinsic reasons, which meant they had initially started learning the language for work purposes. Two informants (F4, M4) said they had been pressed for L2 learning in order

to be able to manage new challenges in their work. They had both started from the very beginning with no background studies of English or any other L2 in elementary school.

Informant F4 had been offered new responsibilities in her job, which involved learning English. To accelerate learning, F4 had been offered a six-month course by a native teacher at her workplace, which later on proved out to be an unsuccessful learning experience. She did not have the patience to wait until her skills in understanding and producing the language would gradually have developed. She had felt insecure and wanted to start a course with all the basics explained to her in her native language. That is how she came to study on a beginners' course at our institute.

In a similar situation, urged by new challenges at work, in order to get a more effective start for L2 English studies, informant M4 had started learning the language on a three-month intensive course in the target language country (Britain). Also in this case the course had been too demanding and after the course M4 felt that the basis for the second language created on the course had been weak. However, it should be added that living in the target language country had encouraged/forced him to use of the second language in everyday life, which had created good ground for later development of his speaking and listening skills.

In addition to the four informants who had started L2 English for purely extrinsic reasons, three informants (F2, M1, M3) mentioned work as part of their motive for L2 learning, although the pressure for learning the language was not high. They all said their motivation had been partly intrinsic, too. In addition, two informants (M1, M5) had had a new situation in their family, which in turn had prompted them to start L2 English studies.

When comparing the three informants with purely intrinsic motivation with those four with purely extrinsic motivation, the former had relatively high scores in strategy

use and they felt successful in their learning. The latter had varying scores in strategy use; both the highest user of all (M4 with 21/29) as well as the lowest user (M2 with 9/29) was in this group (see Appendix 6). The rest were more or less average in their scores. Therefore, there must be a multitude of factors that affect the learning process, in which the person's whole life history is involved.

Although the majority of the informants defined their initial motivation to be of partly extrinsic kind, many of them (M1, M3, M4, M5) said that during the learning process they had developed an intrinsic interest in the target language and in the learning process itself. They had found second language learning an encouraging experience, which had increased their self-confidence as well as personal feelings of satisfaction. Therefore, their present motive could be claimed to be of intrinsic type, too. We can take informant M5 as a good example: he had started learning L2 English because he had needed the language skills at work, but after his retirement he had felt an urge to continue his studies mainly for intrinsic purposes.

5.1.3 Social Pressure as Motivation

It may also be worth pointing out that today one of the most popular motives for beginning adult learners of L2 English is the present position of English as the world language. Today English is the common language of advertising, media and information technology. With the flow of English, people with no knowledge of the language feel 'outsiders' even in their own country. Most of the informants in this study took up this view in the interview, although their primary reason for learning might have been something else. One of the informants (F3) said she had felt an urge to start learning English, as it seemed to her that "everyone else could speak English except for herself".

When considering social pressure as motivation for learning L2 English, it is not easy to say if this type of motivation is of extrinsic or intrinsic type. On the one hand, it could be extrinsic in the sense that there is external pressure for learning. Although learning at an adult age is voluntary, it seems that today everyone is 'expected' to know some English. On the other hand, intrinsic motivation is caused by an inner drive and it is related to the human need for self-esteem and self-confidence as well as desire to satisfy curiosity. In case of informant F3, for example, the latter is more likely to be valid for her motivation. She felt annoyed by the fact that everyone else seemed to be able to speak English except for herself. She, therefore, wished to gain more self-esteem and self-confidence by learning the language. English skills had made her feel more integrated in today's society.

5.2 Age in L2 Learning

Every learner in this study agreed that age was a positive rather than a negative factor in their learning. Although decline of memory is often a concern for adult learners, no informant in this study complained about memory-related issues. Only the oldest informant in the study was slightly concerned about her age. However, at the time of the study, her learning experiences had been mainly positive and she felt she had been able to exceed her own expectations. Sensibly enough, she had set her goals at a realistic level, which meant she studied the language for her own purposes, as 'brain gymnastics'.

All the informants unanimously agreed that learning at an adult age had been easier for them than learning as children. A better understanding of things was the most common cause of satisfaction in adult learning. L2 English learning was considered much more meaningful at an adult age than learning second languages (German and Swedish) at middle school. One informant (M1) said that at school he had been unable

to find a link between L2 learning and real life situations. There were very few opportunities to utilise language skills, as the second language(s) learned at school was (were) seldom heard or spoken outside the classroom. Language learning at the time was based purely on the grammar-translation method, which meant it was 'boring cramming' with word inflections and grammar rules for tests. Like most informants in the study, he said the present study methods with immediate opportunities to combine learning in real life situations seemed much more attractive to him. Also the fact that English is much heard and seen everywhere (television, music, advertisements etc.) had helped and encouraged the learners with their studies.

5.3 Other L2s Learned at School

There were seven informants in the study (F1, F2, F3, F5, M1, M3, M5) with previous experience of L2 learning (see Appendices 4 and 5) in their past schooldays (in middle school). The remaining three (F4, M2, M4) had not learned any second languages at school, as in the fifties and sixties second language learning was not included in school curriculum in elementary education. Those who did not go to middle school did not learn second languages. All the seven informants with former L2 studies agreed that knowledge of another Germanic language had helped them with their English studies, especially with learning grammar. Knowledge of some other Germanic languages had also helped them with vocabulary learning, although some of the informants said they had experienced negative transfer at the early stages of learning. There were so many related words in the vocabulary of the three Germanic languages. Especially at the early stages of learning the ones learned at school were likely to pop up when the more recently learned English words were called for. Items connected with vocabulary learning were therefore the most obvious examples of negative transfer. There is

evidence of negative transfer in grammar, too (e.g. use of the perfect tense is very different in German and English). However, despite the transfer the learners thought that learning second languages at school had been a beneficial rather than a disturbing factor.

When comparing the learning experiences of those with and without previous knowledge of another L2 learned at school, an interesting aspect came up in every interview: those with earlier experience of L2 learning at school found English grammar relatively easy, while those with no L2 learning in their schooldays confessed that they had suffered from the lack of a comprehensive idea of grammar. Although children are said to be lacking in meta-awareness and therefore they are not prone to respond to language as form, the evidence of this study suggests that the awareness, matured in the early years of adolescence¹⁾ might be the key element in creating a solid basis for the grammar of a second language. Based on this assumption, there might be a critical period for grammar-awareness (see e.g. Mitchell and Myles 1998, 18, 49, 66-67). It should also be pointed out that the learners with elementary school education said that in their school days grammar teaching in the native language had a minor role and therefore they felt they had never had a chance to learn the basis for a grammatical system of any language. Constructing such a system at an adult age had been hard for them. Some learners put the blame on their learning capabilities; some learners wondered if the grammar in adult study books had been based on the assumption that all the learners already had a clear idea of grammar before they started learning English.

1) Before the coming of comprehensive school in Finland in the seventies, middle school was optional and it started after four/five years of elementary school at the age of eleven/twelve and continued for five years up to the age of fifteen/sixteen.

5.4 Acquisition of the Four Skills

I wanted to ask about the acquisition of the traditional four language skills - reading, writing, listening and speaking - in order to find out if a connection between the strategies and acquisition of the skills could be traced. Researchers (e.g. Oxford, 1990; Cohen 1990) have found evidence that there is a link between the use of certain strategies and skills. Simple examples are easily found, e.g. it is evident that the frequent use of *practising by writing and note taking* (a cognitive strategy) is likely to strengthen writing skills and *using mimes and gesture* (a compensation strategy) is likely to facilitate speech production. The four skills have often been grouped into receptive skills (listening and reading) and productive skills (speaking and writing) (Johnson, 2001). Although the four skills are often treated separately, there are similarities and interconnections between them. There are different ways of testing the four skills and they are often tested in case a comprehensive idea of the learner's language skills is wanted. In this study, the four skills were not tested, but the informants were asked about their perceptions of the acquisition order of the four skills. They were asked to name the easiest skill(s) to be acquired first and mark it (them) with a (+) as well as the most difficult skill(s) to be acquired last and mark it (them) with a (-). It should be pointed out that in the role of their teacher, I had some assumptions on the eventual order of the skills that they might present. Therefore, in this sense the interviews offered no big surprises to me - only in some individual cases I had assumed the learner's (e.g. F3, M1, M5) listening skills to be marked with a (+) mark, whereas the learner her/himself was not satisfied with their success in this skill and marked them with a (-). The learners' opinion of the acquisition order of the four skills is to be found in Appendix 5.

5.4.1 First Skills to Be Acquired

As we can see in Appendix 5, the majority of the informants in this study, seven out of ten (F1, F3, F4, F5, M1, M2, M5), found reading the easiest skill to be acquired. The rest of the answers were divided less evenly: one learner (F2) considered writing the easiest, one learner (M3) thought listening was the easiest skill and one learner (M4) said speaking was the easiest skill.

One would have assumed one of the receptive skills (reading or listening) to be easier than productive skills (writing and speaking) for all the learners, but there were two exceptions (F2 and M4). In both cases, there was a clear connection to be found between their strategy use, their learning history and acquisition of the skill. In her response sheet, F2 reported of applying mostly cognitive strategies in her learning, a fact that supports the development of reading and writing skills. Informant M4 was a keen user of compensation, social and affective strategies, which are more useful for speaking skills than writing and reading skills, which he had marked to be the most difficult for him. More generally, there was a clear trend that those with a high score on compensation strategies (F5, M1, M4) had estimated their speaking skills with a (+) mark and those with a low score on them (F2, F4, M2) had estimated their speaking skills with a (-) mark. Thus, we could draw the conclusion that the informants in this study had found the use of compensation strategies beneficial for the development of their speaking skills.

5.4.2 Last Skills to Be Acquired

What was interesting to note in Appendix 5 was the fact that all the female learners found speaking to be the most difficult of the four skills. There were two female learners (F3 and F5) who pointed out that speaking was no problem for them in

classroom situations, but in real life they felt shy and hesitant when trying to use the language. They both said they would rather avoid authentic speaking situations than actively seek for them. Perhaps one of the major reasons for this was the scarcity of authentic speaking situations in their everyday life. They both had a high score on compensation strategies and were resourceful when using the language in classroom. In addition, F5 had a fairly high score on affective strategies and F3 on social strategies, which had facilitated language use in classroom. With more opportunities to use the language they could both become confident speakers.

When speaking skills were discussed, English pronunciation was generally considered difficult for adult learners although none of the informants said it was a major obstacle for speech production. Limited vocabulary was considered a bigger problem in speech production than pronunciation. Adults' speaking situations are usually of the kind that a relatively large vocabulary would be desirable. It is a fact, though, that skilled communicators can manage with a rather limited vocabulary, since there are useful compensation strategies to be employed in order to facilitate speaking (*circumlocution, approximation, literal translation, mime* etc.). Social pressure and high anxiety in speech situations were said to prevent fluent speech production. This opinion was clearly more common among the female than the male informants. The latter said they were not worried about the correctness of the speech in case there was a real need to convey messages in English. It should be pointed out that more men than women had opportunities to use English at work. Informant M5 was the only male informant who no more used English for work purposes as he was retired, while all the rest of the male informants had more or less opportunities to use English at work. In the case of the female informants, only F2 and F4 needed English for work. Yet, for them the situations where L2 skills were needed were less frequent than for the male informants.

Six learners out of ten (F1, F2, F3, F4, M1, M5) found listening problematic, one informant (F1) because of declined hearing and the rest mainly because of they said that there were so many different variations of English (accents, speed, formality/non-formality etc.). Effective use of certain metacognitive strategies (e.g. *overviewing and linking with already known material, paying attention to key words, seeking practice opportunities*) would aid these learners develop their listening skills. Four informants (of the six above) had not marked the former strategies (F2, M1, M3, M5). Only two informants (M3, M4) in the study said they practised the latter strategy [*seeking practice opportunities* (a metacognitive strategy)]. Consequently, none of the two had problems with their listening skills and M4 found also speaking easy.

Four informants (F1, M1, M4, M5) said that the spelling of words caused constant problems for them in writing. Writing was hard work, as they regularly had to check the correct spelling of words in their dictionaries. One of the male informants (M1) said he would rather convey messages in speaking than in writing; he felt he had more opportunities to make himself understood in speech (*using gestures, mime, circumlocution* etc) than in writing. The rest of the male informants (M2 and M3) said writing was no major problem for them; they had practised writing either at work (although for M2 most of the correspondence was based on short messages with technical phrases, which had become routine for him) or in connection with studies. Most of the female informants (F2, F3, F4, F5) found writing relatively easy (F2 said it was the easiest skill for her, the rest said it was the second easiest skill). When viewing the strategies that the female informants had marked, it was evident that all the females systematically *practised writing* (a cognitive strategy), while none of the male informants was keen on practising English in writing.

It should be pointed out, however, that due to the complicated spelling system, English is a difficult language for most foreign learners. In voluntary adult education, where the emphasis on most courses is laid on oral skills, writing does have a minor role in controlled learning. The responsibility for checking the correctness of spelling is often left to the learner, for example when homework is concerned. There were some learners (e.g. F4, F5 in this study) who regularly practised writing in their own time as a regular routine of their homework and therefore had no major problems with writing.

5.5 Grammar Skills

As Anderson's theory of skill acquisition (see 2.3 above) suggests, grammar does have an important role at the early stages of learning. Yet, a great deal of criticism has been presented towards form-focused teaching both in second language acquisition studies as well as in language learning classrooms. According to O'Malley and Chamont (1990, 30) arguments in line of the following are not uncommon: "Requiring students to learn rules as declarative knowledge before they can perform the steps in a complex skill is a tedious way to learn". Especially in the seventies and eighties along with the coming of the Communicative Approach form-focused instruction was banned. Some new theories were developed (e.g. Krashen 1982), according to which second languages should not be learned, they should rather be acquired naturally. There were theories (e.g. Johnson 1996) to suggest reversing Anderson's (1983) idea of turning declarative knowledge into procedural knowledge through practice by first learning to produce the language and later learning the grammatical structures by making conclusions on how the rules are built (procedural - > declarative knowledge).

However, it should be emphasised that what we call form-focused instruction today is not directed purely at grammatical form, but rather at the idea of grammatical

forms encoding meanings and much of the recent research has attended to the relationship between form and meaning (Ellis 1997b, 41). Also Dufva (1997, 6) points out that the present tendency for the 'functional use' of language does not involve the idea of rejecting the teaching of grammatical structures, but perhaps revising the methods of teaching them.

Although grammar is not included in the traditional four language modalities (reading, writing, listening, speaking) the informants were willing to bring up their perceptions of grammar. They actually brought it up themselves in connection with the four skills. I had often thought that grammar was an important indicator of the general 'well-being' of the learner. In terms of grammar some learners felt far more confident than others. Could this be evidence of the division between form-focused and meaning-focused learners (see e.g. Ellis, 1992)? In the interviews I asked if the informants found grammar teaching useful for their studies or if they thought grammar had an overemphasised role in L2 studies. For example Dufva (1997) contends that although during the past years language teaching has been strongly influenced by applied and pragmatic fields of study, still the general approach is highly form-focused. However, every informant in this study was unanimous about the necessity of grammar teaching in adult L2 learning, particularly at the early stages of learning. Due to their cognitive awareness, adults are prone to compare their L1 with the L2 they are learning. They wish to find logical explanations, especially for such aspects of language, which are different in L2 and the learner's native language. The two informants with a beginner's course with a native teacher (F4, M4) emphasised the insufficient basis the course had offered, especially in terms of grammar. Without sufficient knowledge of the grammatical system of the L2, most adult learners felt like 'floating on an unsound basis' unable to build their knowledge on a solid ground.

As was said before in 5.3, some informants (F4, M2, M4) brought up their lack of a comprehensive knowledge of grammar in the interviews. None of these learners had experience of previous L2 studies and they thought that grammar knowledge in adults' study books, even on courses by a non-native teacher, had been presented to them in unrelated units leaving the learner unable to organise it into a comprehensive unity in his/her mind. According to Rauste-von Wright and von Wright (1994), learning is based on transfer from one context to another. In case of the three adult learners with no previous experience of L2 learning, the earlier context, which they were supposed to build their new knowledge on, did not exist; therefore no basis for building new information on was available.

Ellis (1997b, 44) contends "little is to be gained by teaching grammar if learners are incapable of utilizing the instruction they receive". What Ellis (*ibid.*, 50-53) suggests there might be some grammatical features that are learned naturally (e.g. the resilient ones), whereas others (e.g. the fragile ones) are not, at least by older learners. Ellis even claims that the older learners might have passed the 'critical period' during which acquisition of native-like grammar norms is possible. So, is there a way to transfer grammatical knowledge to the beginning adult learners with no previous knowledge of an L2 or should the fragile features simply be ignored in adult teaching? As was said the informants in this study were unanimous about the importance of grammar teaching and they were likely to compare the features of their native language and L2. This raises a question if there is a need to revise the adult teaching methods. If there were a need, what kinds of methods would be useful for such learners?

In Ellis' (1997b) and Dufva's (1997) view there might be a need for revising the methods of teaching grammar. They argue that there should be a more distinct link between form and function. In the present system the grammatical items offered to the

learner might be too 'pre-digested' leaving the learner without any 'self-made tools' to link grammar with his/her own discoveries. In Dufva's (ibid.) view the learner should be provided with more opportunities to analyse the language and discover the structures him/herself - individually but not alone. The teacher should be available to help the learner make discoveries and provide him/her with the material to be analysed. In this way the learner would be able to make conclusions and grammar rules could be discovered instead of learned.

5.6 General Observations on Learner Strategies

In the literature, evidence can be found for the claim that more effective learner strategies develop with age. Older students are reported to use strategies spontaneously with increasing sophistication, which in turn results in improved performance (e.g. O'Malley and Chamont 1990, 106). There is also evidence for the fact that learners with high metacognitive awareness seem better able to control and manage their learning in terms of understanding and storing new information as well as finding the best way to practise and reinforce what they have learned (Johnson 2001, 155).

In the interviews, none of the informants directly referred to more effective use of strategies at an adult age, since they did not remember the strategies they might have used at school. Yet, they all emphasised the adult's better understanding of languages and learning in general (=cognitive awareness), which together with overall life experience was the greatest source of satisfaction. Although there was no evidence for the fact that they had been able to develop a larger repertoire of strategies at an adult age in order to cope with their learning, we could assume that their strategies were different at an adult age. The ones who had learned second languages at school all said their present learning was more meaningful than past learning at school.

When asked if the learners had been taught the strategies they presently employed or if they had developed them instinctively, all the informants opted for the latter alternative. One of the informants (F5) said that along with the learning process, as learning was getting more complicated, she had had to employ more diversified strategies in order to keep up with the process. However, she had developed her learning skills on her own rather than in conscious classroom instruction. New strategies simply had to be applied when the old methods seemed insufficient. The highest strategy user in this study (M4) said he had had "to clutch at as many straws as possible" in order to survive in the English-speaking situations with his limited language skills. Some learners (F3, F4, M1, M3, M4) seemed to be more open to new strategies (e.g. trying those listed on the questionnaire); some learners (M2, F2) expected the teacher to help them find new ways of supporting their learning.

5.6.1 Gender and Age

Research has identified gender, age and nationality differences in strategy use. In a number of studies, females have reported using a much wider, or at least a very different, range of strategies than males (Oxford 1990, 13). This study showed a somewhat similar trend. The total number of strategies used among all females was 77, while the corresponding number for the males was 72. However, the highest score in individual strategy use (21/29) was found in a male respondent's (M4) answer sheet. Also, clear differences in the use of different strategies were observed between male and female informants. These differences will be discussed in detail below. No age differences could be traced in this study. This must be due to the fact that all the informants in this study were middle-aged or elderly (i.e. they were all adults). They all

represent the same nationality (Finnish) and therefore this aspect was not investigated in this study.

5.6.1.1 Cognitive Strategies

When viewing appendices 6,7 and 8, we can find out that one of the most remarkable gender differences in terms of strategy use was the fact that compared to the women, the men were considerably low users of cognitive strategies, especially *practising in writing* as well as *note taking*. None of the male informants had marked these strategies. In comparison, all the female informants had marked these strategies for their active use. In the interviews, most of the female informants (F1, F3, F4, F5) specially pointed out writing practice to be one of the exercises they regularly practised at home. They all said this form of exercise had been extremely helpful for them, in terms of remembering vocabulary, applying grammar rules in practice and understanding how language works. This explains the fact that most of the female informants (four out of five) named writing as the second easiest (4/5) or the easiest (1/5) skill for them, while most of the male informants (3/5) said writing was relatively difficult for them. The exercises based on repetition (cognitive strategies) were also slightly more common among female informants. *Oral practising* and *rehearsing* (cognitive strategy) was equally common among the female and male.

5.6.1.2 Metacognitive Strategies

As was already said, learners with a high degree of metacognitive awareness are said to be better able to control and manage their learning (e.g. Johnson 2001, 155). The results of this study showed that metacognitive strategies were less frequent than any other strategies among the male informants. Especially *evaluating one's learning* and

planning one's learning were rarely used strategies among the males (only M1) (see Appendix 8). The results, therefore, suggest that most of the male informants in this study (especially M1, M2 and M5 with the lowest score on metacognitive strategies) seemed to lack learning skills and that they mastered the process in an unsatisfactory way. This matter was naturally discussed in the interviews with all the three informants. Informant M2's past learning history was explained in 5.1 above. His 'story' seems to give evidence for the connection between metacognitive awareness and management of one's learning process. However, informants M1 and M5 seemed to be able to control and manage their learning very well, although M5 said he still seemed to lack a comprehensive knowledge of grammar. Yet, the two informants were relatively pleased with their learning skills and they had been successful learners of L2 English. They had a fairly long learning history at an adult age (M5 had been learning L2 English for over ten years and M1 had learned L2 Swedish in his workplace for some years before starting L2 English) and therefore their metacognitive skills might have become automatic (= procedural knowledge). The earlier presumption was that the learners might not always identify their metacognitive strategies. M1 and M5 might be examples of such learners.

When females are concerned, their use of metacognitive strategies was, however, more frequent than the use of memory strategies, affective strategies and social strategies. The only metacognitive strategy that none of the female informants had marked was *seeking practice opportunities* (see Appendix 7). As was earlier discussed, this is in line with the female learners' acquisition of speaking skills; all the female learners felt that speaking was the most difficult of the four skills to be acquired. My assumption is that all the informants had interpreted this strategy to be connected with

spoken practice opportunities only, although there are many other practice opportunities to be sought for.

5.6.1.3 Memory Strategies and Social Strategies

If the female informants proved to be more active users of cognitive strategies, the male informants showed slightly more enthusiasm in using memory strategies and social strategies (see Appendices 6,7 and 8). This is somewhat surprising as the common belief is that women are likely to tend to social strategies more often than men (e.g. Cook 2001, 139). In this case, we could argue that the men who have joined in voluntary L2 learning groups are likely to be more sociable than the average men and therefore the men in this study are not the most typical representatives of the their gender.

In the case of social strategies it should also be pointed out that social strategies might not be popular among the elderly learners since in the past school system social strategies were not encouraged or even generally accepted. In my own schooldays (in the sixties and seventies) one was supposed to do the learning on his/her own. Group work was on its way to Finnish schools. Therefore, I have realised that working together with classmates may be a rejected idea among some of the middle-aged or elderly learners. Teachers have to work hard to encourage such people to cooperation and group work. As evidence of what was said above, there was a female informant (F4) in this study whose score for social strategies was zero (see Appendix 6). She was a fairly keen user of memory strategies (60%) and cognitive strategies (57%), while her score on compensation (33%) and affective (40%) was lower.

5.6.2 Most Common Strategies

As Appendices 7 and 8 show, there were three strategies on the list that proved to be equally frequent (the most frequent) among the ten informants. Nine learners out of ten said they regularly *used resources for facilitating their learning*, dictionaries and grammar books being most popular. This is one of the most obvious and easily observable cognitive strategies; therefore it could be anticipated to gain popularity in this group, too. Some learners had bought grammar books, dictionaries, CDroms for practising outside classroom. The use of the Internet in language learning was still fairly unusual among the target group, although most learners had got instruction in using it for L2 learning purposes at our institute.

Equally, nine learners out of ten listed *guessing* (compensation strategy) based on different clues to be a frequently used strategy. In Oxford's definition (1990, 49) "language-based clues may come from aspects of the target language that the learner already knows, from the learner's own language, or from another language. . . . Non-language clues may come from a wide variety of sources: knowledge of context, situation, text structure, personal relationships etc.". Most of the informants in this study who had learned another L2(s) than English, said knowledge of another Germanic language(s) had helped them in guessing meanings for unknown words (evidence of positive transfer).

As appendices 7 and 8 indicate, the most popular metacognitive strategy in this study appeared to be *planning for a language task*, if time allowed planning. Again it was easy to anticipate that, at this stage of learning, planning would be more common than the other metacognitive strategies. If there is enough time, one is likely to plan ahead what one is likely to say/do in a certain situation. This is a suitable strategy both for a spoken and a written language task and frequently practised in class. For example,

before making a telephone call or an oral presentation it is useful to write down the key words needed for the situation. This kind of planning is easily observable and conscious on the learners' part. Most informants (9/10) had marked this strategy in the questionnaire.

Metacognitive strategies were said to be the least observable, often unconscious and therefore rarely identified. This study clearly gave evidence for the statement. Except for the planning strategy all the rest of the metacognitive strategies were less frequent than most other strategies, especially among the male informants.

5.6.3 Least Common Strategies

The least frequently used strategy in this study appeared to be *keeping a language-learning diary* (affective strategy) (Appendices 7 and 8). This is a strategy for keeping a diary or journal to express one's feelings about learning the new language. The diary describes how one is learning and how one feels about it (Oxford, 1990). I put this strategy on my list as I thought it might be a useful one for adult learners who often discuss their feelings about the process of learning. In this study, none of the informants had marked this strategy. However, this could be anticipated, since the concept is a novelty in the field of learning. The informants in this study represented age groups with no experience of such forms of learning in their school-time. After giving a thought to it in the interview, some learners showed interest in adopting the idea. In order to be fully utilised it requires some practical training.

One of the least often employed strategies (marked by two out of ten informants - F3, F5) was *analysing long expressions by clipping them into shorter units*. This strategy was included in the cognitive strategies and it could be highly useful as well as easily applicable. Surprisingly, only few users of this strategy were found. Clipping

long units into functional categories would help the learner better understand complex texts as well as more generally the structure of the new language.

Equally infrequent (two out of ten) was the use of the metacognitive strategy to *seek opportunities for language use*. This strategy was marked by two male informants (M3, M4) only. It should be added that the two informants generally had more opportunities for using English both in their work and free time. Therefore, they were likely to feel less anxiety with authentic situations than the rest of the informants. However, it should be added that the informants might have perceived this strategy to be restricted to oral situations only, although it does include other areas of practice as well (listening, reading, watching TV). In the interviews, some informants admitted that they had not realised how many opportunities there actually are to practise language skills. Some interviewees said they had started to read easy instructions on packages and bottles in English, instead of/or in addition to Finnish wherever they see them in everyday life.

5.6.4 Interest in Target Language Culture

Only three learners out of ten (F3, M3, M4) had marked *learning the culture of the target language country* (social strategy) to be a strategy they had employed. In case of Anglo-American culture, one would have assumed people to be interested in it since this culture is brought to our living rooms via television on a daily basis. Most of the informants in the study (7/10) reported to watch English-speaking television programmes on a daily basis. There was one informant (F5) who reported that she had got the 'sparkle' for learning English from her interest in the television serials that she watched. Had watching television not intrigued her to learn about culture, too? Had she

not realised that observing people's behaviour on television might also involve learning about culture and manners?

5.6.4.1 Intercultural Communication in L2 Teaching

During the past decades, a great deal of attention has been paid to the role of culture in L2 learning. Research has been carried out in intercultural learning. Lehtovaara (1998) argues that culture and language are inseparable. In this view, learning a new language includes the culture of the country where the target language is spoken. The idea is included in the Framework Curriculum for the Comprehensive School 1994 (p.74-75) as one of the major aspects to be included in L2 learning in Finnish comprehensive schools. The role of cultural information and communication that is characteristic of the target language and its culture are among the major aims of foreign language learning.

Cultural matters do have a role in my classes, too. Differences in communication between Finnish and Anglo-American people are regularly discussed in class and adults pay attention to such aspects of language. Study books present a multitude of dialogues with prefabricated language chunks including typical language patterns used in the target language. Finnish and English are different in terms of these patterns. Explaining these differences to the learner involves introduction of culture, too. Myles et al. (1998, 1999) contend that analysis of L2 data produced by classroom learners shows extensive and systematic use of chunks to fulfil communicative needs at the early stages of learning. Prefabricated chunks are part of cultural behaviour. Learners tend to evaluate their own performance in the light of cultural differences.

5.6.4.2 English as Lingua Franca

In connection with the intercultural aspects of learning, the concept of integrative motivation could be analysed. As was said, integrative motivation involves an innate interest in the speakers of the L2. None of the informants in this study announced to have this kind of interest. One could raise a question, whether learning English as a second language in the average learner's mind involves an idea of learning Anglo-American culture at all. English is the native language of several nations in the world, the British and American being only two examples. Therefore, unless a person has for one reason or another developed an innate interest in the culture, English is considered more like a lingua franca to be used anywhere in the world as a means of communication between different nationalities. In the interview informant M3 said he was more generally interested in the cultures of the world. His interest was not focused on the Anglo-American culture in particular. Knowing the language did not seem to involve entrance to a particular culture, it rather involved entrance into the global world.

It may be worth pointing out that adults are less likely than children or adolescents to adore or admire any other nations/people. Young people often share the idols created by popular music, films etc. and they want to imitate their idols' behaviour. Adults already have established their personality, which is less likely to be influenced by other people. There is a lot of evidence for the fact that immigrant children and adolescents generally become native-like speakers of their L2, because they want to integrate in their new society, whereas their parents rarely do (e.g. Johnson and Newport 1989).

6. Conclusions

The aim of this study was to examine second language learning at an adult age with special interest in learner strategies. As has been said, the use of learner strategies is known to vary among learners in all age groups. In terms of the results given by this study, strategies might be the 'tools' that are needed for effective learning. There was a notable difference in the number of strategies employed by the learners, which might be result of both past and present learning experiences. Strategy use did not seem to be dependent on age or education, while gender did have some effect on it. The female informants in this study used slightly more strategies than males (the total number of strategies used by females was 77 and for males 72) and there were notable differences to be found e.g. in the use of cognitive strategies. Also 'the learning route' seemed to have effect on the learners' preferences in strategy use. Especially those females with previous experience of another L2 at school were more likely to follow the route from declarative to procedural knowledge and to employ more cognitive strategies than male learners in general. Those with the opposite 'learning route' (from procedural to declarative) tended to defer to any other than cognitive strategies in their learning. Such learners learning history was considerably different from that of the other type of learners

Consequently, the idea of learner training in strategy use got support in this study. Some researchers (e.g. Bialystok, 1990) argue in favour of training that helps the students to become aware of strategies rather than teaches specific strategies, while some other researchers (e.g. O'Malley and Chamont, 1990) give support to the idea that strategies could be taught along with any other aspects of the language. The preparatory work for this study gave me some practical experience of the first alternative and the follow-up conversations with the informants shed some light on the latter choice, too.

Some learners were willing to develop the weak domain of their learning by applying new strategies. Although, most of the informants in the study said they had acquired the strategies with no instruction, trying some new ones that were presented to them clearly appealed to some learners. Some asked for my advice to be able to find out what kinds of new strategies would be helpful for them in their future learning. As a matter of fact, intentional strategy training would be a challenging idea for continuing my work on learner strategies. Researchers [e.g. Oxford (1990), Cohen and Chi (2003)] have presented lists of strategies planned for developing certain skills. It would be interesting to know if the learners would welcome the new strategies into their regular repertoire of learner strategies. If learning habits were considered to be result of past learning, would it be possible to change them at an adult age?

What had worried me was the fact that adults seemed to put more conscious effort on learning than children, and while doing so some learners seemed to waste their energy on worrying rather than learning. Individual learner differences (e.g. aptitude, intelligence) could not be the only explanation for the fact that some learners felt far more successful than others. Obviously, age had something to do with the matter, but as was argued there are theories to contradict the view according to which young learners are better. This study has brought a great deal of evidence for the positive effects of age on second language learning. Adult learners' cognitive skills are more developed than those of children, a fact which was proved to be advantageous for all the learners of this study. In addition, the significant role of affective factors in learning was confirmed by this study. Childhood learning experiences seem to affect the learners' beliefs about themselves and their attitudes towards learning for the rest of their life. Negative learning experiences can block learning and such experiences tend to have a crucial effect on the person's further choices in life. Fortunately, there is evidence for the fact

that in encouraging learning circumstances, together with support from other people, such blocks can gradually be 'undone'. In an ideal situation, this kind of development can change the learner's life, extend his/her personality and help him/her grow as a human being.

Another aspect brought up by the study that proved out to be a crucial issue was the role of grammatical competence as a dimension of communicative competence. During the past decades, the focus on second language teaching has been moved from form to function, which has had its benefits in developing the learner's output. All the informants in this study were willing to abandon the traditional methods of teaching that were focused on grammar. They were more fascinated by the modern methods with the emphasis on the functional use of the second language. However, it was clear that all the learners with previous L2 studies during their school years had had great benefit from the grammar studies of their past, while the informants with no experience of second language learning in their childhood suffered from feelings of inferiority in terms of grammar learning. This information made me convinced of the importance of the strategies that support grammatical competence. Still the question remains how the use of these strategies could be reinforced in learners with no background knowledge of grammar? Due to a variety of reasons, learners tend to emphasise certain component(s) of their learning unconsciously and strengthen their strong component(s) by preferring the strategies that best support it/them. By avoiding the use of the strategies that might support development of the weakest component, they may unconsciously set aside the strategies that are needed for the development of skills in their weakest component(s). Strategy training might be a helpful method for strengthening all aspects of the language skill, but strong involvement from the learner would be an essential element for successful training. A grammar course aimed at those adult learners with no previous

L2 studies, concentrating on the basic knowledge of grammar needed for second language learning, could be an idea for the future. The grammatical terms would be explained in Finnish and learners of different L2s could participate the course before starting second language learning.

As a conclusion it could be stated that this kind of study seems to be useful both for the teacher and the learner; reflection on one's own working methods is a sound way developing one's work. Conscious thought of the learning process is likely to make the learner aware of his/her strengths and weaknesses. By identifying the strong/weak aspects, the learner might become aware of the need for developing his/her less developed component. The learners' own perceptions on the development of the traditional four skills as well as considerations on his/her strategy use could serve as a sensible starting point. Each learner's weak components could be reinforced by intentionally teaching them to use the strategies that would be the most advantageous for strengthening the least developed skills.

I am sure that both the findings of this study as well as the background literature studied for it have given me a lot of valuable knowledge that will be useful for my future work. As Jaatinen (2003, 35) contends, in teaching and education, knowledge does not only involve knowledge about the contents of the subject to be taught, it also involves knowledge about one self, one's students, one's own environment, society and the whole world.

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**KYSELYLOMAKE TUUSULAN KANSALAI SOPISTON ENGLANNIN
KIELEN OPISKELIJALLE**

Teen pro gradu -tutkielmaa aiheesta "Oppimisstrategiat aikuisopiskelijan englannin kielen opiskelun tukena" Tampereen yliopiston englantilaisen filologian laitokselle professori Anna Maurasen ohjauksessa. Olet ilmoittanut halukkuutesi antaa minulle tutkimustani varten tietoja omista oppimiskokemuksistasi. Tarkastelen saamiani vastauksia oppimisstrategioiden käytön ja soveltuvuuden kannalta yksittäisten oppijoiden kohdalla. Tutkimukseni on kaksivaiheinen; ensin kerään tietoa oheisen kyselylomakkeen avulla ja myöhemmin syksyllä syvennän saamaani tietoa haastattelututkimuksen avulla. Toivon, että voit olla mukana molemmissa vaiheissa. Antamasi tieto käsitellään luottamuksellisesti. Tutkimuksen avulla saatua tietoa ja kokemuksia aion hyödyntää opetustyötä kehittäessäni englannin kielen opettajana.

Kiitos yhteistyöstä jo etukäteen!

Kyllikki Tukiainen

puh. 09- 8718 3417 tai 040- 536 4991

**KYSELYLOMAKE TUUSULAN KANSALAISOPISTON ENGLANNIN
KIELEN OPISKELIJALLE**

Taustatiedot:

Nimi:

Rengasta tai alleviivaa itseäsi koskeva vaihtoehto.

1. Ikäryhmä, johon kuulut: 20-29 v. 30-39 v. 40-49 v.
50-59 v. 60-69 v 70-79 v.
2. Koulutus: kansakoulu keski-/ peruskoulu yo-tutkinto
opistotason tutkinto korkeakoulututkinto

3. Milloin ja missä aloit opiskella englantia?

4. Onko englanti ainoa vieras kieli, jota olet opiskellut? kyllä ei

(jos vastasit tähän kohtaan "kyllä", siirry seuraavaksi kohtaan 6.)

5a. Jos vastasit "ei" edelliseen kohtaan, mitä muita kieliä olet opiskellut?

ruotsi saksa espanja muu kieli: mikä? _____

5b. Jos vastasit "ei" kohtaan 4, oletko kokenut, että muun vieraan kielen opiskelusta on ollut hyötyä / haittaa nykyisille kieliopinnoillesi? Kuvaille millaista hyötyä / haittaa.

Nykyinen opiskelu:

Vastaa seuraaviin kysymyksiin omin sanoin. Jatka vastaustasi tarvittaessa kääntöpuolelle.

6. Millaiseksi olet kokenut itsesi kielenoppijana?

7. Mikä englannin kielessä on ollut Sinulle helppoa / vaikeata?

8. Oletko saanut / kaivannut opiskellessasi ns. opiskelun ohjausta?

Rengasta tai alleviivaa itseäsi koskeva vaihtoehto.

9. Kuinka paljon aikaa käytät englannin opiskeluun oppituntien ulkopuolella?

alle 1 tunti viikossa 2-3 tuntia viikossa

enemmän kuin 3 tuntia viikossa

10. a) Kuinka usein katsot televisiosta englanninkielisiä ohjelmia?

päivittäin 2-3 kertaa viikossa

kerran viikossa tai harvemmin

b) Kuunteletko katsellessasi ohjelman alkuperäistä puhetta vai luetko mieluummin vain suomenkielisen tekstityksen?

kuuntelen alkuperäistä puhetta kuuntelen joskus

luen vain tekstityksen

c) Luetko/silmäiletkö englanninkielisiä lehtiä tai kirjoja?

luen säännöllisesti luen joskus en juuri koskaan lue

d) Kuunteletko englanninkielistä musiikkia?

kuuntelen säännöllisesti kuuntelen joskus en juuri koskaan kuuntele

e) Kiinnitätkö kuunnellessasi huomiota sanoihin?

yritän aina kuunnella sanoja yritän joskus kuunnella sanoja en juuri koskaan kuuntele sanoja

f) Käytätkö arkiympäristöä hyväksesi. Luetko esim. pakkauksien kyljestä vieraskielisiä käyttöohjeita, sisällönkuvauksia tms. lyhyitä opasteita tai ohjeita? Tarkkailenko vieraskielisiä tuotteiden nimiä tai mainostekstejä sisällöllisessä mielessä?

luen aina vieraskieliset opasteet /ohjeet luen joskus vieraskieliset opasteet /ohjeet en juuri koskaan lue vieraskielisiä opasteita /ohjeita

11. Oletko käyttänyt englannin kielen opiskelussasi joitakin alla luetelluista "oppimisnikseistä" / opiskelutekniikoista? Rengasta tai alleviivaa kohta / kohdat, jota olet joskus soveltanut omaan kielenopiskeluusi.
- I
- a) Käytän mielikuvitustani uusien sanojen mieleenpainamiseksi (haen esimerkiksi ääntämyksellistä tai kirjoitusasuun liittyvää yhtäläisyyttä oman kieleni sanojen kanssa ja yritän keksimieni yhtäläisyyksien avulla painaa uusia sanoja mieleeni).
- b) Opettelen sanastoa ryhmittelemällä sanoja ja käsitteitä aihepiireittäin (merkityksen mukaan: esimerkiksi hedelmien nimet, kodin huonekalut, keittiön tarvikkeet, ruuat ja juomat omiksi ryhmikseen; lauseopillisesti yhteen kuuluvat sanat omiksi ryhmikseen: esimerkiksi kysyvät pronominit omaksi ryhmäkseen; etsin sanapareja, vastakohtia jne).
- c) Sijoitan uudet muistettavat sanat johonkin ennen oppimaani asiayhteyteen, jotta voisin paremmin painaa ne mieleeni.
- d) Silmäilen mieleenpainettavia avainsanoja ja -asioita aina uudelleen, kunnes muistan ne.
- e) Käytän hyväkseni erilaisia muistisääntöjä uusien asioiden mieleenpainamiseksi.
- II
- a) Harrastan oppimisessäni toistoa; kuuntelen, luen ja harjoittelen saman asian useaan kertaan.
- b) Harjoittelen ääneen yksittäisiä sanoja sekä kokonaisia sanontoja ja ilmaisuja. Luen ääneen oppikirjan tekstejä; mumisen itsekseni puoliääneen tai harjoittelen sanoja ja sanontoja hiljaa mielessäni.
- c) Harjoittelen uusia sanoja ja asioita kirjoittamalla ja tekemällä muistiinpanoja.
- d) Yritän yhdistää uusia opittavia asioita / sanoja jo ennen oppimiini. Yhdistelen uusia oppimiani sanoja ja ilmaisuja ennen oppimiini näin mahdollistaen monipuolisemman kielen käytön (esim. How are you? - > How are you this morning?).
- e) Puran pidemmät kokonaisuudet pienemmiksi, jotta voisin paremmin ymmärtää kokonaisuuden (esim. unemployment = un + employ + ment).
- f) Käytän hyväkseni erilaisia kielenoppimisen apuvälineitä (sanakirjoja, kielioppikirjoja, tietokoneohjelmia tms.).
- g) Teen yhteenvetoja oppimastani hahmottaakseni kielen rakennetta. Vertaan vierasta kieltä omaan kieleeni. Mietin niiden välisiä yhtäläisyyksiä ja eroavaisuuksia.

- III
- a) Ellen tiedä jotain sanaa, yritän asiayhteyden perusteella arvata mitä se voisi tarkoittaa.
 - b) Jos en muista jotain sanaa englanniksi, yritän keksiä jonkun muun tavan ilmaista asian (esim. kiertoilmaisu, toinen samaa tarkoittava sana, samaa tarkoittava sana omassa tai jossakin toisessa osaamassani kielessä).
 - c) Otan ilmeet ja eleet avuksi käyttäessäni vierasta kieltä.
- IV
- a) Keskitän huomioni avainsanoihin ja ennestään tuttuihin asioihin kuunnellessani puhetta / lukiessani. Yritän keskittyä pääasioihin, jotta ymmärtäisin oleellisen.
 - b) Suunnittelen sanottavani etukäteen, jos minulla on siihen aikaa. Kirjoitan etukäteen avainsanat tai -kohdat paperille, jos minulla on siihen mahdollisuus.
 - c) Arvioin omaa suoritustani jälkeen päin. Tarkistan onko sanomani ymmärretty oikein.
 - d) Ajattelen joskus asioita englannin kielellä. Laadin muistettavien asioiden luettelon, esim. kauppalistan, itselleni englannin kielellä.
 - e) Hakeudun tietoisesti tilanteisiin, joissa voin hyödyntää kielitaitoani.
 - f) Etenen opiskelussani suunnitelmallisesti. Asetan itselleni tavoitteita vieraan kielen oppimisessa.
- V
- a) Yritän tietoisesti poistaa jännitystä vieraan kielen käyttö- ja oppimistilanteissa. Esimerkiksi huumori on hyvä jännityksen poistaja.
 - b) Uskon onnistuvani uusissa oppimistilanteissa ja -tehtävissä ja harjoittelen poistaakseni jännitystä ja huolta omasta osaamisestani.
 - c) Otan riskin tulla väärinymmärretyksi / naurunalaiseksi yrittäessäni saada sanomani perille.
 - d) Pidän oppimispäiväkirjaa. Kirjoitan itseäni varten muistiinpanoja erilaisista oppimistilanteista sekä myös tuntemuksistani oppimisen eri vaiheissa.
 - e) Keskustelen kielenoppimiseen liittyvistä asioista opiskelutovereitteni kanssa.
- VI
- a) Pyydän lisäselityksiä ja -esimerkkejä varmistaakseni sen, että olen ymmärtänyt uuden asian oikein.
 - b) Pyydän tarvittaessa apua lähiympäristöstäni saadakseni ilmaistuksi itseni oikein.

c) Opiskelen myös kohdekielen kulttuuriin ja tapoihin liittyviä asioita, jotta voisin paremmin ymmärtää kohdekieltä puhuvien ihmisten ajattelua ja tapoja.

JOS SINULLA ON JOITAKIN OMIA "OPPIMISNIKSEJÄ", JOITA EI OLE TÄSSÄ MAINITTU

KIRJOITA NE ALLA OLEVAAN TILAAN!

Appendix 2

The List of Questions Used in the Interviews

The explanation below the question(s) is for the reader to clarify the purpose of each question.

(1) What is your previous language learning history? When did you start learning English and why?

- This question was a warming up question for every interview. It was a good way of reviewing the informants' learning history (background education, learning of other L2s than English). In addition, I wanted to make sure that the prerequisite for the study was fulfilled, in other words that none of the informants had had no L2 English studies in childhood or adolescence. Most learners wanted to comment on their previous learning experiences, too. By asking why they had started L2 English learning I wanted to find out if their initial motive for starting to learn L2 English had been of extrinsic/intrinsic type and if it was still of the same type or if any changes in motivation had occurred in the course of the learning process.

(2) Has learning English been easier or more difficult than you had expected?

(3) What is the effect of age in your learning process?

(4) Do you think that learning at an adult age has been different from learning as a child or an adolescent? In what ways is it different?

- The intention of these questions was to find out about individual differences between childhood learning and adult learning experiences. Today, the role of cognition is one of the basic concepts in learning. I wanted to find out if the informants could give any practical examples of the role of cognition based on their own views of learning.

(5) In terms of your own learning, which of the four skills, listening, reading, writing and speaking, are the easiest/the most difficult for you? What about your grammar skills? Do you think English grammar is easy/difficult for you? What is the role of grammar studies in adult learning?

(6) What have you learned so far? What are the things you feel you have not learned yet?

(7) Do you think you have learned enough vocabulary to be able to use the language?

(8) Do you have any opportunities to use English at work or in your free time? How do you find these situations? Do you feel comfortable/anxious when using the language?

(9) Do you need dictionaries/grammar books in addition to the study book to help your learning?

- All these questions are connected with the acquisition of the four skills. The purpose of these questions was to find out about the language itself in the process of learning. The acquisition of the four skills is known to be dependent on the use of learner strategies. Therefore, I wanted to see if a link between the use of certain type of strategies and the acquisition of certain skills could be established. By asking about the role of vocabulary and grammar for the ability to use the language I wanted to find out if using certain type of strategies might have made vocabulary/grammar learning easier or if the use of certain type of strategies might have facilitated language production in case of limited vocabulary resources.

(10) Have you given any conscious thought to your own learning process during this autumn while being an informant for this study? Have you had a think about the learner

strategies you have practised? Do you think you could employ some new strategies after finding out about them?

- The purpose of the final question was to find out if mere raising of awareness of learning and learner strategies might help the learners employ new useful strategies or if special instruction would be needed in order to extend strategy use.

CODE NAMES FOR THE INFORMANTS

In order to guarantee confidentiality for the informants of this study, code names were given to them. As gender was assumed to be of some importance when analysing the results of the study, the female informants were named with the letter F (F = female) and the male informants were named with the letter M (M = male). The number that follows the letter indicates the length of the informant's L2 English studies. The smaller the number the fewer years of L2 learning the informant has and vice versa. Thus, when reading about the findings of the study the reader will be able to conclude that informant M1 is male and has the smallest number of years in L2 English among the male informants, while informant F5 is female and has the largest number of years in L2 English among the female informants.

The following code names were used for the informants of this study:

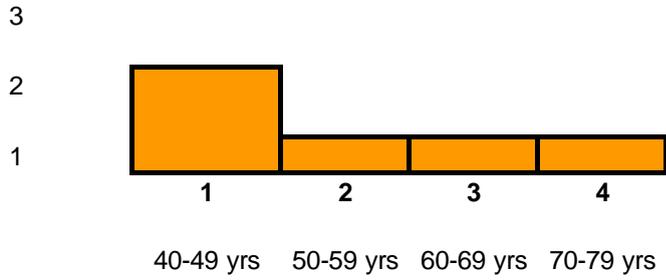
F1, F2, F3, F4, F5

M1, M2, M3, M4, M5

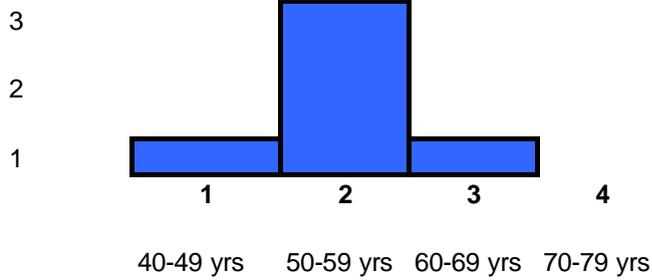
Background Information about Informants

Gender: female 5 male 5

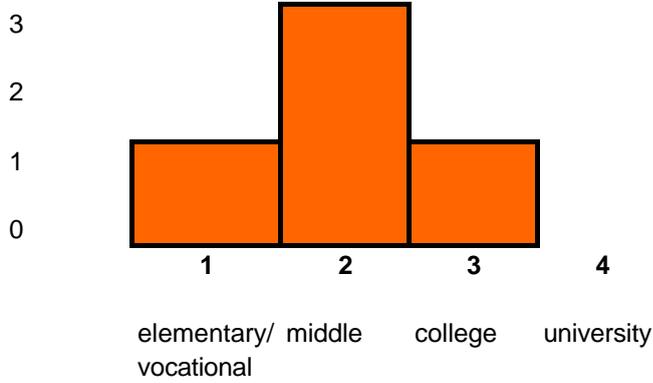
Age: Female Informants



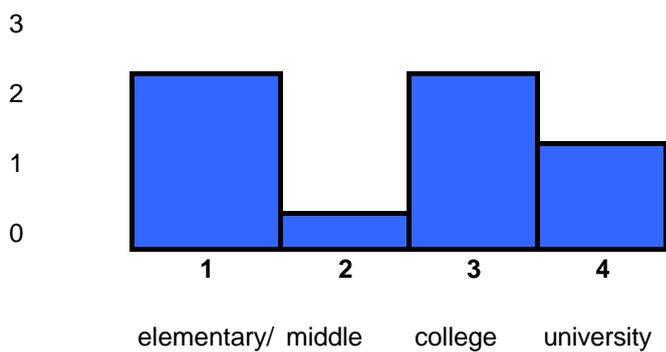
Age: Male Informants



Education: Female Informants

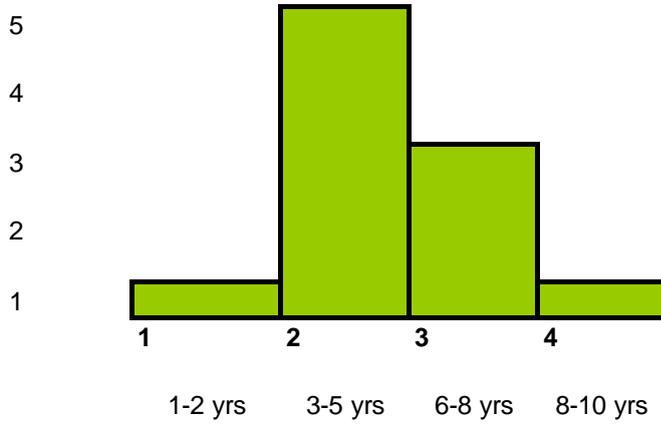


Education: Male Informants

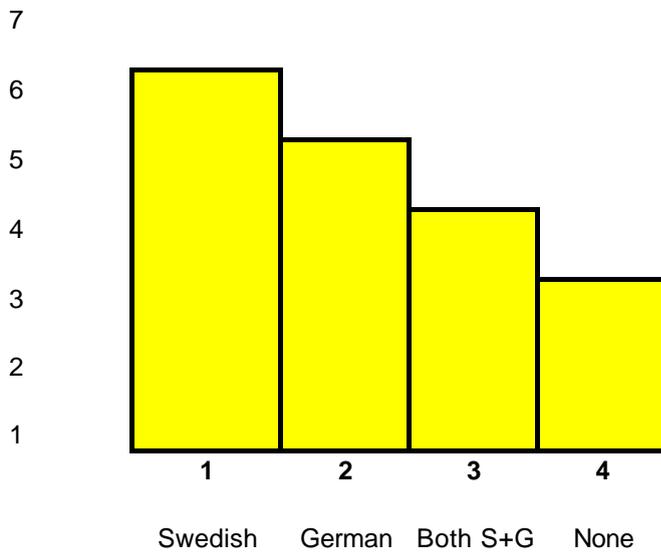


vocational

Number of Years of L2 English at Adult Age: All



Previous L2 Studies: All



Appendix 5

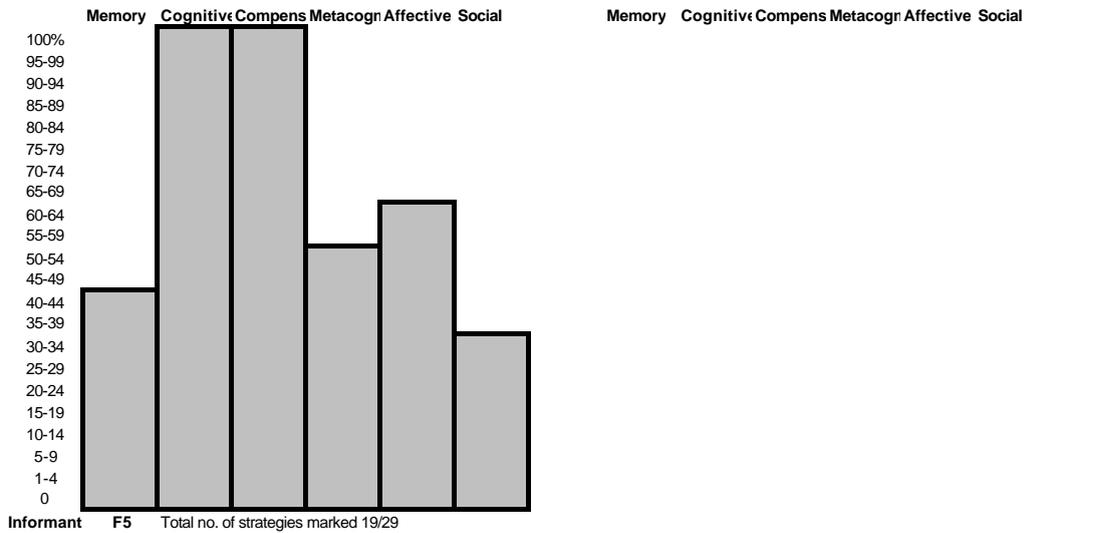
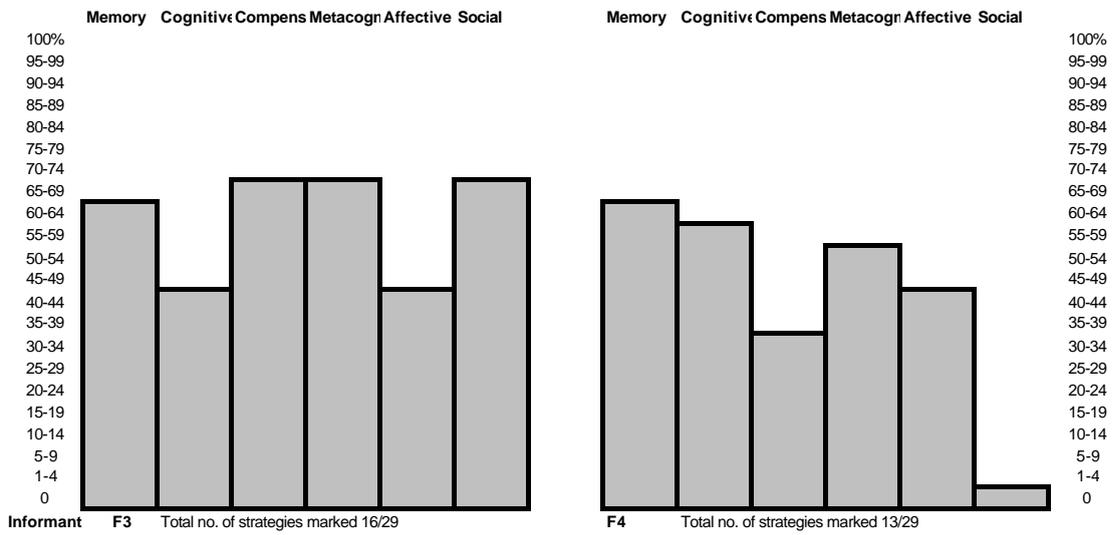
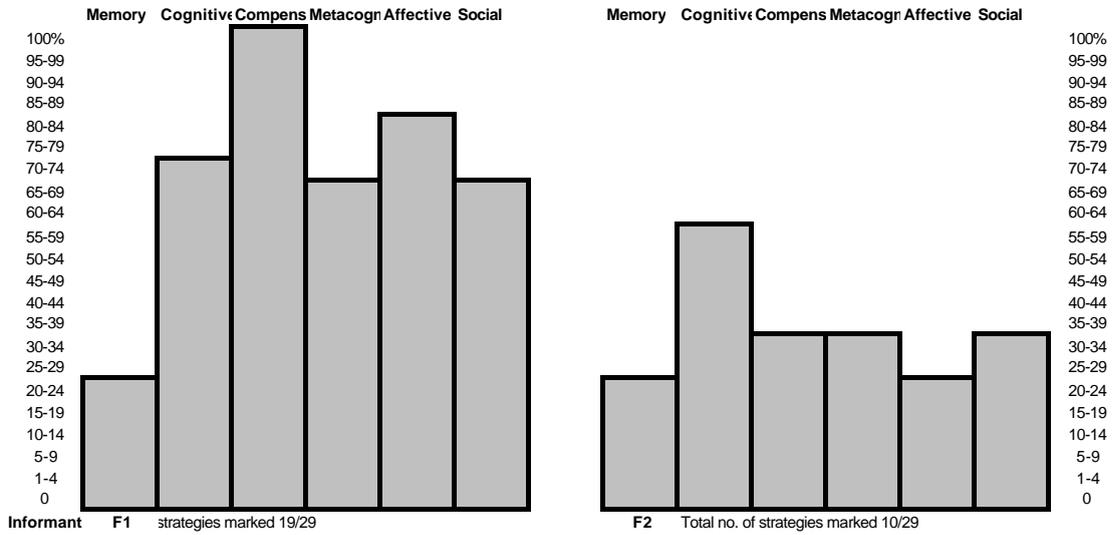
Informant Profiles:		Females:			Previous L2s	Acquisition of the Four Skills *) (+grammar skills)
Code	No. of yrs of L2 English	Age group	Education			
F1	1	70-79 yrs	middle / school	college	Swedish	+R -W -L -S (+G)
F2	3	40-49 yrs	middle school		Swedish	+W +R -L -S (+G)
F3	3	40-49 yrs	middle school		Swedish+ German	+R +W -L -S (+G)
F4	4.5	50-59 yrs	elementary school		none	+R +W -L -S (-G)
F5	6	60-69 yrs	middle school		Swedish+ German	+R +W +L +S (+G)

Informant Profiles:		Males:			Previous L2s	Acquisition of the Four Skills*) (+grammar skills)
Code	No. of yrs of L2 English	Age group	Education			
M1	3	50-59 yrs	middle / school	college	Swedish+ German	+R +S -L -W (+G)
M2	4	50-59 yrs	elementary / vocational		none	+R +L +W -S (-G)
M3	6	50-59 yrs	university		Swedish+ German	+L +R +W -S (+G)
M4	8	40-49 yrs	elementary		none	+S +L -W -R (-G)
M5	10	60-69 yrs	elementary / vocational / college		German	+R +S -W -L (+G)

*)
R=reading
L=listening
W=writing
S=speaking
(G) =grammar

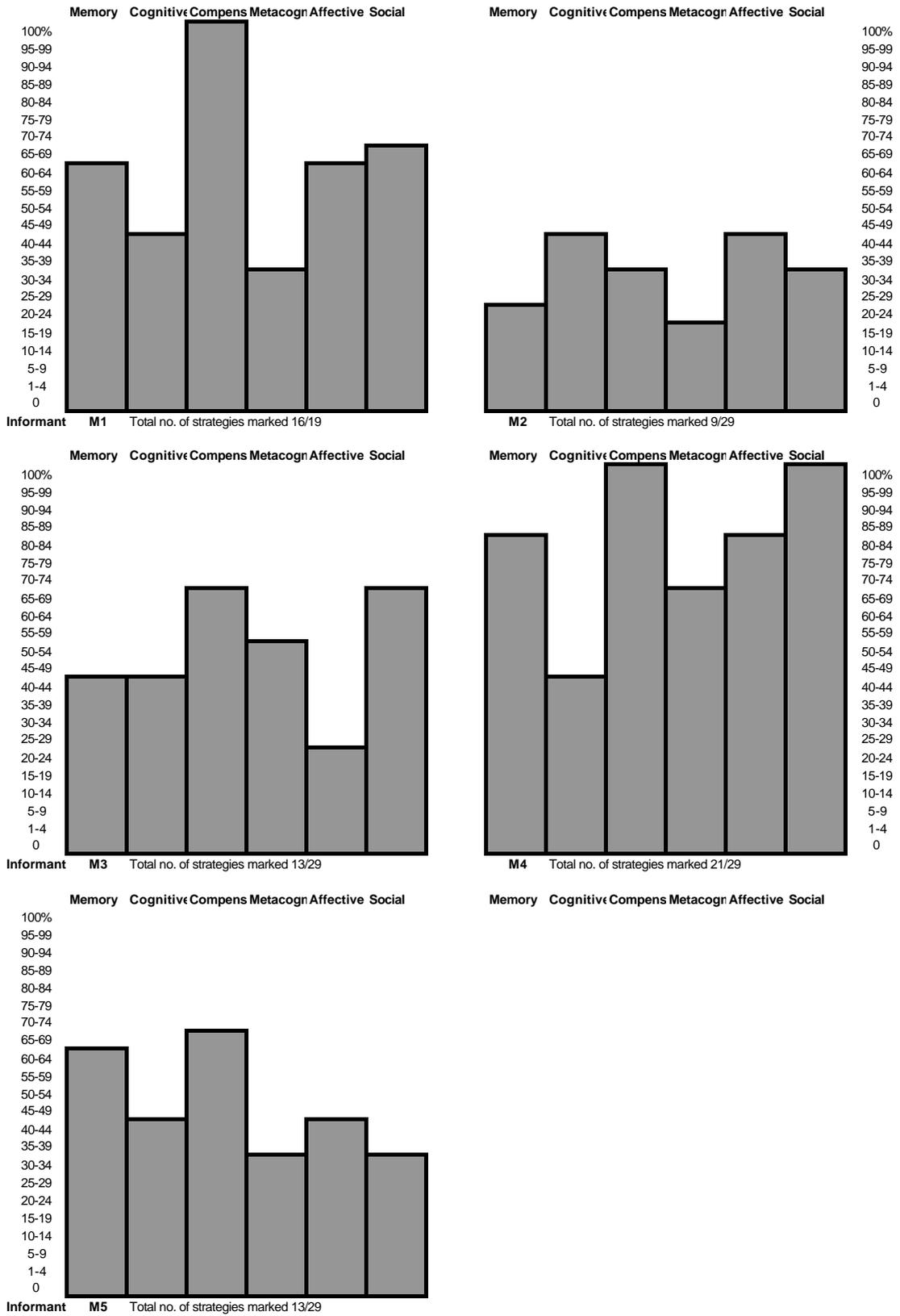
Individual learners

Individual strategy use (counted in percentage of the total number of strategies in each group)



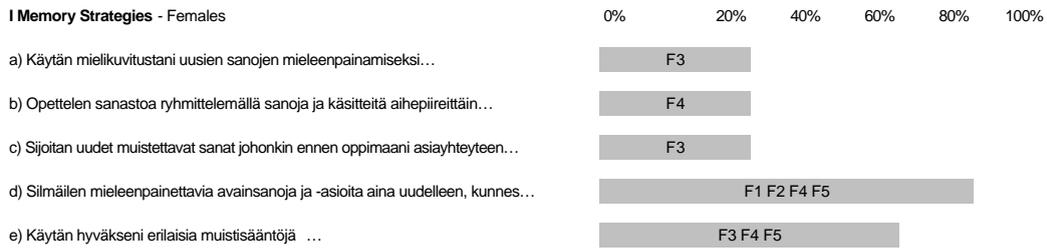
Individual learners

Individual strategy use (counted in percentage)



Frequency of Individual Strategies among Female Informants

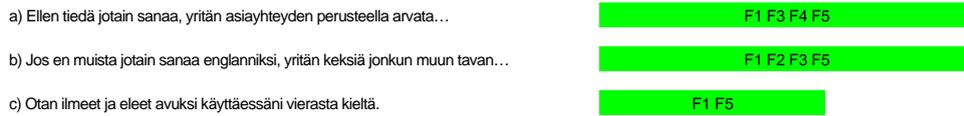
I Memory Strategies - Females



II Cognitive Strategies



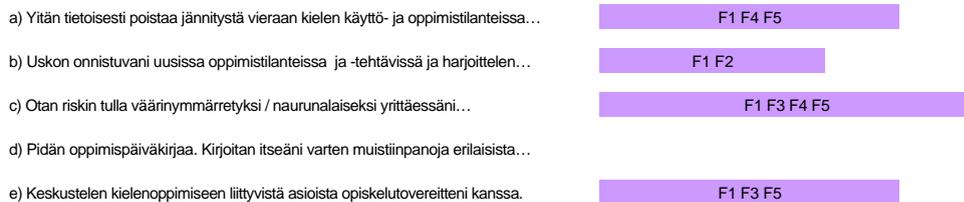
III Compensation Strategies



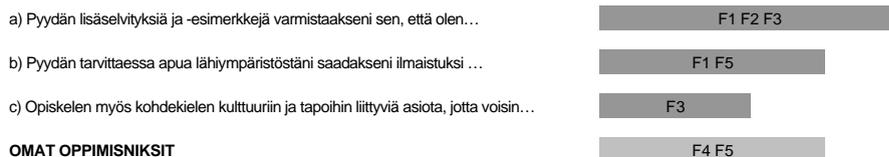
IV Metacognitive Strategies



V Affective Strategies



VI Social Strategies



OMAT OPPIMISNIKSIT

F4 F5

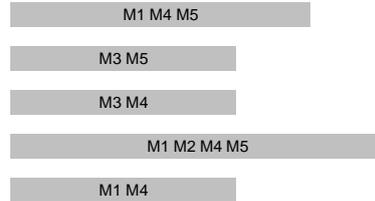
Frequency of Individual Strategies among Male Informants

Appendix 8

I Memory Strategies - Males

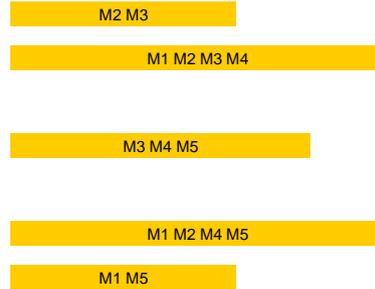
- a) Käytän mielikuvitustani uusien sanojen mieleenpainamiseksi...
- b) Opettelen sanastoa ryhmittelemällä sanoja ja käsitteitä aihepiireittäin...
- c) Sijoitan uudet muistettavat sanat johonkin ennen oppimaani asiayhteyteen...
- d) Silmäilen mieleenpainettavia avainsanoja ja -asioita aina uudelleen, kunnes...
- e) Käytän hyväkseni erilaisia muistisääntöjä ...

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%



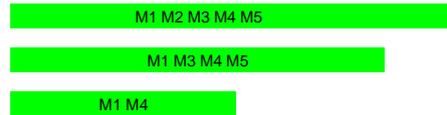
II Cognitive Strategies

- a) Harrastan oppimisessani toistoa...
- b) Harjoittelen ääneen yksittäisiä sanoja sekä kokonaisia sanontoja ja ilmaisuja...
- c) Harjoittelen uusia sanoja ja asioita kirjoittamalla ja tekemällä muistiinpanoja.
- d) Yritän yhdistellä uusia opittavia asioita / sanoja jo ennen oppimiini...
- e) Pura pidemmät kokonaisuudet pienemmiksi, jotta voisin paremmin ymmärtää...
- f) Käytän hyväkseni erilaisia kielenoppimisen apuvälineitä...
- g) Teen yhteenvetoja oppimastani hahmottaakseni kielen rakennetta...



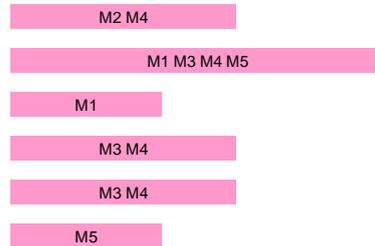
III Compensation Strategies

- a) Ellen tiedä jotain sanaa, yritän asiayhteyden perusteella arvata...
- b) Jos en muista jotain sanaa englanniksi, yritän keksiä jonkun muun tavan...
- c) Otan ilmeet ja eleet avuksi käyttäessäni vierasta kieltä.



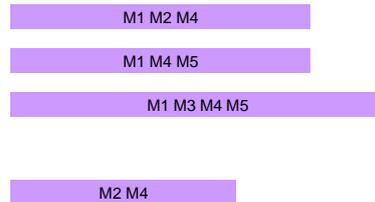
IV Metacognitive Strategies

- a) Keskitän huomioni avainsanoihin ja ennestään tuttuihin asioihin...
- b) Suunnittelen sanottavani etukäteen, jos minulla on siihen aikaa...
- c) Arvioin omaa suoritustani jälkeen päin. Tarkistan onko sanomani ymmärretty oikein.
- d) Ajattelen joskus asioita englannin kielellä. . Laadin muistettavien asioiden...
- e) Hakeudun tietoisesti tilanteisiin, joissa voin hyödyntää kielitaitoani.
- f) Etenen opiskelussani suunnitelmallisesti. Asetan tavoitteita vieraan kielen...



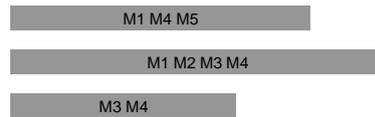
V Affective Strategies

- a) Yritän tietoisesti poistaa jännitystä vieraan kielen käyttö- ja oppimistilanteissa...
- b) Uskon onnistuvani uusissa oppimistilanteissa ja -tehtävissä ja harjoittelen...
- c) Otan riskin tulla väärinymmärretyksi / naurunalaiseksi yrittäessäni...
- d) Pidän oppimispäiväkirjaa. Kirjoitan itseäni varten muistiinpanoja erilaisista...
- e) Keskustelen kielenoppimiseen liittyvistä asioista opiskelutovereitteni kanssa.



VI Social Strategies

- a) Pyydän lisäselvityksiä ja -esimerkkejä varmistaakseni sen, että olen...
- b) Pyydän tarvittaessa apua lähiympäristöstäni saadakseni ilmaistuksi...
- c) Opiskelen myös kohdekielen kulttuuriin ja tapoihin liittyviä asioita, jotta voisin...



OMAT OPPIMISNIKSIT

