

**Research Article**

## **SOCIOAFFECTIVE LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES: EXPLICIT USE IN TEACHING SYNTACTIC FEATURES**

**\*Fotokian M.**

*Department of English Language Studies, Islamic Azad Tonekabon Branch, Iran*

*\*Author for Correspondence*

### **ABSTRACT**

It has long been suggested that the development of syntax in second language acquisition can be thought of as the consequence of building mental grammars subconsciously by language learners. Syntax plays a pivotal role in the EFL classroom. Whereas a considerable amount of research has examined effective EFL syntax teaching and learning, missing are studies that provide examples of how to put various research findings into practice: that is, apply them to real texts including target syntactic items. In order to close the gap between research and practice, I reviewed a broad range of relevant literature addressing syntax learning. The researcher's interest in studying syntax is not only because it creates complexity for learners but also as much of the prior research is descriptive. In this study the researcher wished to unearth this difficulty, and make an attempt to show the most effective strategy. Teacher's strategy in the class through using repetition strategy in order to contextualizing the new input is much stronger than is portrayed in many SLA textbooks and that the role of teacher strategy in morpheme acquisition must be reconsidered. The emergence of strategy research in the 1970s made the researchers to examine many issues. As thus, the purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between strategy use on the one hand and affective factors in teaching syntax on the other hand. Finally, results indicate that Persian students do use a number of language learning strategies, but that they show distinct preferences for particular types of strategies.

**Keywords:** *Teachers' Strategy, Syntax, Acquisition, EFL, SLA*

### **INTRODUCTION**

In this study I have been guided mainly by the approach that focuses on the study of teaching strategies by investigating the acquisition of morphology. In the same line a number of different theoretical frameworks have been put forth as explanatory patterns. The acquisition of syntax in second language has been under investigation by many researchers to come up with a descriptive generalization. There are many logical possibilities for marking morphological features. A review of the literature on English syntax shows that whereas most studies have focused on effective teaching and learning, lacking are studies that provide examples of how to put various research findings into practice. Moreover, empirical research often focuses on a limited number of specific strategies, whereas classroom practice is more complex and uses a variety of strategies. In order to provide a model for EFL teachers to apply theories and insights provided by others in their own classrooms, I then apply some factors that may have more influence on teaching syntax and assumed to be important for EFL students for better understanding the section.

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

#### **Methodology**

The importance of syntactic features has been successfully recognized as a goal of language teaching and learning in the field of second language acquisition. Second language learners have the most difficulty in acquiring the syntactic features. With the growing popularity of learning English as a foreign language, here appears to be a substantial degree of sociocultural pressure for adults to learn or improve their language skills. However, there also appears to be indications that many EFL learners do not seem to be aware of or familiar with the impact or influence that their beliefs, attitudes, anxieties, motivations and use language learning strategies have on their language learning process. Language learning strategies

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have often been taught to EFL students to help them become more effective learners. However, explicit affective strategy instruction has not been addressed by EFL language teachers properly because as Johnson (1994) argued "the field of second language education lags behind mainstream education research in that it has neglected to focus adequate attention to the affective dimension of second language learning" (pp. 439-452). Horwitz (2001) gave further support and stated that to discuss foreign language learning without considering the emotional reactions of the learner to language learning was and remains a serious oversight. The overall purpose of this action research was to show that explicitly teaching socioaffective language learning strategies to positively impact the beliefs, attitudes, anxieties and motivations of a group of EFL students. However, syntax continued to occupy the important stages of language learning until very recently. I additionally wanted to see what factors, if there is any, cause this intricacy for EFL learners of English. Many teachers have long known that students often do not learn the syntactic features, that they are taught. They only internalize those features that they are ready to learn and they learn each feature very gradually, passing through a series of transitional stages. In order to tackle the problem of this study in a much consolidated way and legitimated manner it seems necessary to raise clear-cut research question as follows: What is the influential strategy in teaching syntactic features? Answering of this, study happened through a kind of questionnaire in the form of an interview form for collecting data. Interview form mentioned to perform their point of view about some question related to the main purpose of the study. The data obtained from testing the hypothesis of the study analyzed via calculating all forms and in a descriptive type.

#### **Participants**

This study follows a quasi-experimental path and, as such it includes a large number of subjects. A total of 159 of EFL teachers were participated in this study. However, by using open interview as an elicitation method, the researcher has almost no influence of the type of data elicited. Nevertheless, I decided to use open interviews to elicit data from participants. An interview form for collecting EFL teachers' opinions in whole Mazandaran and Guilan considered to find the easiest kind of mentioned inflectional morphemes and on the other hand to chose the important factors of acquisition and learning and effective strategies of teaching.

#### **Instrument**

By purpose of enhancing Iranian EFL teachers' opinion about the more effective ways for teaching syntactic features. The reliability of the questionnaire estimated by 8 faculty member of IAU found to be 0.82 suggesting that the questionnaire enjoyed a satisfactory reliability index. Afterward legal procedures for getting permission from Departments of education to carry out the survey in high schools and private institute in Mazandaran province were taken. Finally, the interview forms were administered to all the participants of the study by the researcher himself and they were informed of the following points before beginning to complete them: 1: The questionnaire was not a test or measurement of their teaching capability and did not affect their evaluation .Thus, the subjects are encouraged to answer as many questions as possible. 2: The participants were informed that there was no time limit for completing the questionnaire.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Data Analysis and Findings**

In the context of present investigation the factor analysis was used to seek the underlying structure of the whole set of syntactic features learning strategy inventory. It should be noted that the scores of request and suggestion questions in questionnaires are separately calculated; therefore I was able to collect data in order to focus the teachers' notes. After collection and review of the questionnaire and tabulating the different choices numbers, for each subjects the data of the study analyzed through descriptive statistics. Of course the comparison is so relevant to the purpose of this study because it shows a good result for the question of the study clearly. As it is mentioned above I used an interview form and as it is seen below most of Iranian teachers in my population believe that question for clarification is the most effective strategy in order to apply this strategy by mix of cooperative communications of teaching strategies. As it

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is shown and based on the main topic it is exhibit most of the teachers agree with the higher effect of question for clarification strategy among the other.

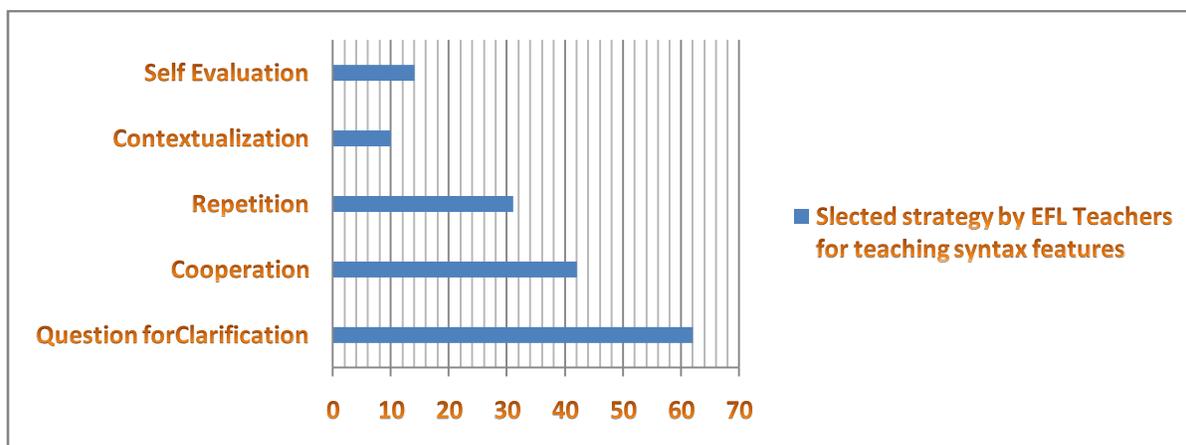


Figure 1: Distribution of Strategies (Teachers' Opinions)

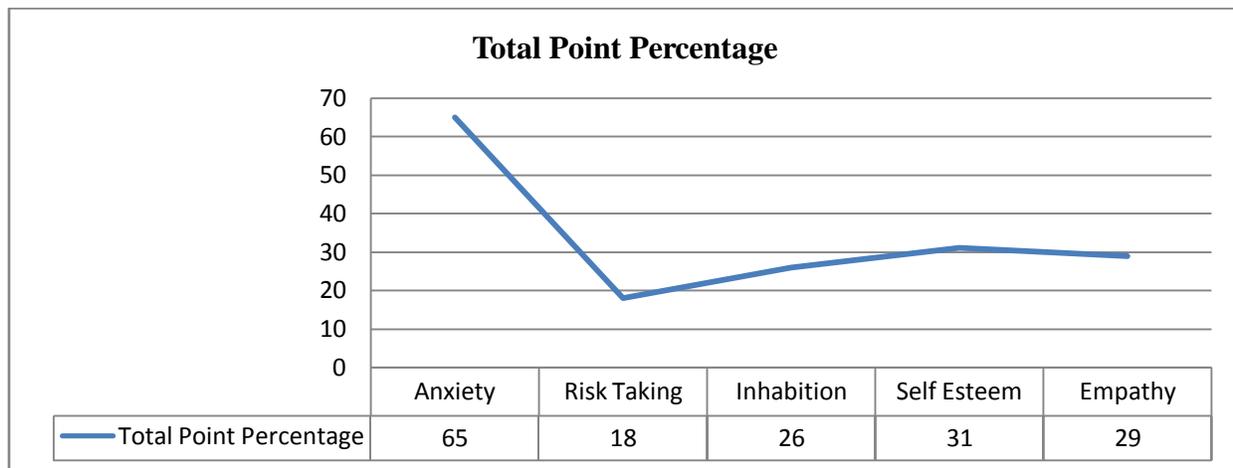
In order to obtain samples of language from L2 learners, researchers can use different methods. Learner language production varies due to both internal and external factors. Research has shown that the order of acquisition of different grammatical structures can vary according to the kind of task used to elicit learners' language. The results of the study suggest that explicit strategy instruction in socioaffective language learning strategies is helpful in heightening learner awareness of the importance of paying attention to their own feelings and social relationships as part of their learning process, which can improve the frequency and the quality of students' participation and interaction in class. Results also indicate that affective factors such as beliefs, attitudes, anxieties, motivations, are important considerations that both teachers and students need to ponder on in order to gain a deeper understanding of the nature of language learning, to develop autonomy and, ultimately, to get to know themselves better.

#### ***The Relation between Affective Factors Strategy and Syntactic Features***

Self-esteem can apply specifically to a particular dimension or have global extent. Psychologists usually regards self-esteem as an enduring personality characteristic, though normal, short term variations also exist. As a second factor, willing to communicate (WTC) may be defined as "an underlying continuum representing the predisposition toward or away from communicating, given the choice" or, more simply put, "the intention to initiate communication, given a choice". One variable that is closely related to the notion of self-esteem and self-efficacy is the concept of inhibition. All human beings, in their understanding of themselves, build sets of defenses to protect the ego. The human ego encompasses language ego or the very personal, egoistic nature of second language acquisition involves some degree of identity conflict as language learners take on a new identity with their newly acquired competence. A related concept here is empathy which is the quality of being able to imagine and share thoughts, feelings, and points of view of other people. Empathy is thought to contribute to the attitudes we have towards a person or group with a different language and culture from our own, and it may contribute to the degree of success with which a person learns another language. On the other hand it is seen that one of the prominent characteristics of good language was the ability to make intelligent guesses. Impulsivity was also described as a style that could have positive effects on language success. And we have just seen that inhibitions or building defenses around our egos can be detriment. These factors suggest that risk taking is an important characteristic of successful learning of a second language. At the deepest, or global, level, trait anxiety is a more permanent predisposition to be anxious. Some people predictably and generally anxious about many particular things. Trait anxiety because of its global and somewhat ambiguously defined nature has not proved to be useful in second language achievement. Based on the above explanation I wanted to check out the EFL teachers and professors points of view about this important. I

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made a question in my interview form and collected their opinion to find out which of those mentioned items has more influence when a teacher try to use socioaffective strategy in his/her method. Figure 2 considered after data analyzing and as it is shown anxiety is an important item which every instructor has to care about it due to using socioaffective strategy.



**Figure 3: EFL Teachers points about Affective factors in second language acquisition**

**General Discussion**

*Language Learning Strategy*

Second language strategy research dates back to the year 1975 (Grenfell and Macaro, 2007). According to Cohen & Macaro (2007), if there is one article which can be seen to have announced the birth of language learner strategy research, it was what the good language learner can teach us by Joan Rubin in 1975". Since then, various theorists have contributed to the definition of language learning strategies (Grenfell & Macaro, 2007). Various classification systems have sought to group individual strategies within larger categories. From them, the most frequently cited and applicable definitions of learning strategies to date is that of Rebecca Oxford (1990) who described learning strategies as „specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations" (p.8). Oxford (1990) in her Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) prescribes six categories namely: Memory strategies, cognitive strategies, compensation strategies, metacognitive strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies. Oxford’s classification has been selected for this study because it is comprehensive, detailed, and systematic (Vidal, 2002).

**Socioaffective Language Learning Strategies (SLLS)**

Evidently, language teaching is not just a simple and direct transformation of input given by the teacher into output produced by the student. It involves an active and meaningful language construction through the social activation of learners’ cognitive processes and affective traits (Valcárcel *et al.*, 1996). In addition, if language is communication, EFL/ESL learning and teaching should be aimed at establishing meaningful communication in the classroom, and the first requirement towards this end is an affective affirmation of the student (Veronica, 2002). What is needed, then, is awareness that a focus on the subject matter of learning is no longer enough to develop the ultimate aim of education: love of learning. If we want our students to develop their inherent potential to learn, the affective variables such as anxiety, motivation, self-esteem and inhibition can no longer be denied, the inner needs of the learners can no longer be neglected. Affective and social learning strategies are without doubt of paramount importance in language learning because, as Paola Bruna Scimonelli declared in 2002, these strategies involve the learner as a whole person who feels and interacts all the time with himself and others around him. The concept of socio-affective is discussed by O’Malley and Chamot (1990) to refer to interaction and affective control through the use of cooperation with peers, social-mediating activities, transacting with

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others, questions for clarification, self-talk and self-reinforcement. To Oxford (1990), affective strategies consist of lowering one’s anxiety, encouraging oneself and taking one’s emotional temperature whereas social strategies deal with asking questions, cooperating with others, and emphasizing with others. It is possible to link these taxonomies as follows in order to create a more complete list of socio-affective strategies for a research project to resort to:

<b>Social strategies</b>	<i>Asking questions</i>	Asking for explanation, verification, rephrasing, or examples about the material; asking for clarification or verification about the task; posing questions to the self (O’Malley and Chamot, 1990)  Asking for clarification and asking for correction (Oxford, 1990)
	<i>Cooperating with peers (others)</i>	Working together with peers to solve a problem, pool information, check a learning task, model a language activity, or get feedback on oral or written performance (O’Malley and Chamot, 1990)  Cooperating with peers and cooperating with proficiency users of the new language (Oxford, 1990)
	<i>Social-mediating activities (Exposing oneself to social activities in TL) and transacting with others</i>	Active participation in learning tasks, start and maintain conversations (show interest, use follow-up questions, make comments, etc)
	<i>Empathizing with others</i>	Developing cultural understanding and becoming aware of others thoughts and feelings (Oxford, 1990)

<b>Socioaffective language learning strategies</b>		
<b>Affective strategies</b>	<i>Lowering one’s anxiety</i>	Using progressive relaxation, deep breathing or meditation; using music, and using laughter (Oxford, 1990)
	<i>Encouraging oneself (self-reinforcement)</i>	Providing personal motivation by arranging rewards for oneself when a language learning activity has been successfully completed (O’Malley and Chamot, 1990)  Making positive statements; taking risks wisely and rewarding yourself (Oxford, 1990)
	<i>Taking one’s emotional temperature</i>	Listening to your body; using a checklist; writing a language learning diary; discussing your feelings with someone else (Oxford, 1990)
	<i>Self-talk</i>	Reducing anxiety by using mental techniques that make one feel competent to do a learning task (O’Malley and Chamot, 1990)

**Table 1: Complete List of Socioaffective Learning Strategies**

Based on the previous theoretical review, this research project largely assumes that socio-affective language learning strategies (SLLS) are related with social cognition and affect since not only do they involve communicating with other people to assist learning (asking questions, cooperating with peers, transacting with others, empathizing with others, exposing oneself to social activities in TL) but also they involve using affective control to assist a learning task (Lowering one’s anxiety, encouraging oneself / self-reinforcement, taking one’s emotional temperature, and self-talking). SLLS could and should be considered as an effective approach to improve learners' learning success as well as their speaking competence. SLLS explicit training, then, can assist students in facing up to the emotional difficulties of

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social interaction, communication and language learning. Thus, this research proposes and investigates an integration of SLLS into classroom contents and everyday learning as a useful way to help EFL teachers provide beginner EFL students with an explicit social-affective training that may help them lean and interact more and better. The next section discusses the attributes and strategies that characterize students. However, relatively little research has been done concerning the strategy instruction of beginner students.

#### **Anxiety**

At first, students as learners were a bit insecure or uncomfortable about their new role in class. Somehow they expected to be asked just to memorize vocabulary, fill out exercises, write short texts, answer questions and do role-plays from time to time. However, the learning-to-learn and the learner-centered approach of the Adult English Program demand an active and participative role from its students and some of them find it difficult to take on much autonomous work. Since students seemed not to be reviewing and preparing classes adequately, they experienced some degree of anxiety to do exercises and activities in class. Sometimes exercises were a bit difficult for them because they just did not have the needed syntactic features and structures.

This difficulty seemed to make them feel unsure of or uncomfortable with their level and skills. On the other hand, they just did not like being on the spot to be judged or evaluated by the teacher or their classmates. Most students can relate to that feeling because not many people like or feel comfortable in situations in which judgment and evaluation play an important part. In terms of learning level, some students used to get anxious because they paid attention to every little detail instead of paying attention to the general picture. This misled them and got them confused. Students' participation in front of the class was normally done by a few.

Those who volunteered were those with a better English level or those who had a conviction they would benefit from doing improvised dialogs. I noticed that another aspect that made students feel anxious was the fact that there was not as much time as they wanted to have to learn everything they were taught or presented with in class. Definitely, some classroom activities were anxiety-inducing; especially those in which students had to interact and speak. Anxiety was definitely an issue I had to struggle with in class because, as I observed, there were many instances and reactions of fear, distress, and shame (including shyness and guilt). Therefore, language performance and social interaction were other areas I needed to address explicitly and effectively in class.

#### **Conclusion**

In this article, I reviewed in detail some of L2 teaching strategies with teachers of EFL in two provinces. I have shown that the acquisition order of grammatical morphemes is highly affected by the teachers' method of teaching and as a matter of fact the students products and recognitions mainly relate to the strategy which is use in the English classrooms, to some extent, teachers believed that using socioaffective strategy is useful in teaching syntactic features and as I observed in my classes during my teaching period in these years it was obvious that anxiety playing as an important role in learning . Then based on this in mind I asked my colleagues about the importance of anxiety and most of them believed in this point and followed my opinion.

#### **AKNOWLEDGEMENT**

To my dear father.

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