

Biljana Radić-Bojanić
STRATEGIES AND STYLES IN
ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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The collection of articles *Strategies and Styles in English Language Teaching* [Original title: *Strategije i stilovi u nastavi engleskog jezika*], edited by Biljana Radić-Bojanić, is a detailed exploration of a rather controversial, yet important issue within the process of teaching a foreign language – that of individual differences between and among students. Although criticized as being too general and largely focused on far too many individual factors, it is still acknowledged that the analysis of individual differences may influence the overall achievement of language students.

Among the many individual differences that may be identified within a single classroom, such as language ability, work habits, motivation, cultural background, etc., learning styles and strategies may be identified as two quite tangible and applicable factors which may easily be related to performance in a language classroom. All the articles in this collection focus on these two factors at the level of tertiary education with the aim to stress their importance for the development of language students' competences and skills.

Each of the articles included in this collection is the result of elaborate theoretical and practical research conducted in different contexts while related to various individual differences, such as skills, age, gender, etc.

In the first article in the collection, Nataša Bikicki explored the differences between genders in the application of strategies for the purpose of teaching and learning vocabulary. The author wanted to explore if the learning of phrasal verbs might be influenced by different strategies as applied by male and female learners. The detailed statistical analysis did not indicate considerable differences between genders as far as the implication of learning strategies are concerned. However, based on a separate qualitative research and the additional technique of think-aloud protocol of several different strategies (applied in the process of understanding the meaning of unknown words and of learning new

vocabulary), the author could draw some interesting conclusions. A significant inference from the collected and analysed results was that male participants used context more often than the female ones when trying to understand the meaning of unknown words. However, female participants used bilingual and monolingual dictionaries more than the male ones and they wrote down unknown words, copied them, repeated them aloud or studied the context when learning new vocabulary. Male participants do not seem to resort to these techniques as often as that. Yet, the general conclusion still remains that both genders should be introduced to all strategies equally including all advantages and disadvantages.

Jagoda Topalov, the author of the second article, investigated reading strategies at university level as applied in the process of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL). The objective was to outline the results of a research aimed at testing EFL students' strategic competence for the purpose of reading comprehension. It is clear that students use different strategies in the determined process, but the author wanted to define precisely which strategies they use and how often they do so. Based on a specially prepared questionnaire, the author managed to determine that individual differences, among them gender as well, influence the specific choice of strategies deployed in the process of reading comprehension within the process of studying English as a foreign language at tertiary level. Results indicate that there are statistical differences in all factors that were tested, especially those regarding the students' learning and studying habits. For instance, results show that female respondents more often reported the use of different strategies in comparison to male respondents, who rely on a smaller set of various strategies. The author proposes that teaching EFL should include the different tendencies male and female learners obviously show when choosing strategies in their learning process since it is indisputable that they do exist.

In the third article, Isidora Wattles explored strategies of self-regulation in the development of writing skills. Given that writing skills are deemed difficult by both teachers and students, the article supports the idea that the process of teaching writing skills should be aided by techniques that implement efficient strategies. The objective of this article was to discuss the strategy of self-regulation within the context of metacognitive knowledge aiming at the general improvement of students' written production. As stated in the article, self-regulation may be implemented through the process of self-assessment of one's own written performance. The author presented results obtained within a research project which is an example of how the effects of self-regulation can be deployed by students for the purpose of improving their own writing. The instrument suggested is a questionnaire including statements devised based on metacognitive knowledge, procedures and strategies. The participants were expected to supply simple feedback to the statements included in the questionnaire. The point is that such a questionnaire should be completed by students immediately after they have finished writing their essay as only then can they assume a critical standpoint in regard to their own performance. At the same time, students may learn how to deploy certain positive aspects of their own writing in the future and avoid negative aspects they may have identified through the self-evaluation procedure. The general conclusion is that self-assessment will provide students with the necessary tools for self-regulation in the process of developing writing skills.

In the next article, Ljiljana Knežević investigated the transferability of cognitive and metacognitive strategies internalised within regular EFL tasks to the task of organising a presentation and delivering an academic speech. The research was conducted with EFL

students at the Department of Biology and Ecology with the aim to investigate the possibility of improving the quality of speaking skills among the participants based on strategies applied in the regular EFL context. In other words, the students were expected to use a set of specially prepared activities furthering and practising several cognitive and metacognitive strategies in the regular EFL process in the final organisation of an academic speech. Both qualitatively and quantitatively collected data were analysed in order to explore how many of the strategies internalised within the EFL process the participants would use for the purpose of organizing and presenting an academic speech. The results indicate that the participants from the experimental group, who had internalised cognitive and metacognitive strategies during regular English language classes, were able to transfer most of those strategies to the task of delivering a well-organized speech. The overall conclusion is that the possibility of transferring various sets of successfully internalised strategies should be implemented more elaborately and more often for other tasks not necessarily related to the tasks they were initially developed for.

Ivana Ćirković-Miladinović, in her article on affective strategies applied in the process of EFL teaching at university level, explored which language learning strategies with special reference to affective learning strategies are being used by students at teacher education faculties in Serbia. The research was based on a questionnaire distributed to 375 first-year students at three different teacher training faculties in Serbia and it showed that there are rather few students at these faculties who use affective learning strategies. The author started the research with the assumption that the usage of affective learning strategies may directly influence the students' language learning outcomes. In other words, students who use affective strategies should be more motivated for learning a foreign language, show a higher level of self-confidence in speech and have a better test performance and a significantly lower anxiety level. The data collected from this research, as well as the conclusions drawn from them, show that the English language learning strategies students prefer to use at the teacher training faculties primarily include practical activities. Affective strategies did not seem to be deemed important although students reported a certain level of satisfaction with the activities related to the practice of speaking skills. Unfortunately, the frequency of affective learning strategies usage in the university context proved to be rather low, which indicates they should be developed in the future.

In the article on the use of social strategies in the comprehension of figurative meaning of vocabulary in the EFL process, Biljana Radić-Bojanić investigated to what extent students could be trained to apply social strategies in the process of learning words with multiple meanings. The article relies on a one-year experiment with students at tertiary level, who received figurative vocabulary input and were observed during one academic year. Based on observation and a subsequent quantitative analysis, the author could investigate and describe the extent to which the participants managed to learn words with multiple meaning while utilising a precisely defined set of social strategies, such as asking questions, cooperating with peers, empathising with others, etc. The results indicate that the listed strategies were being used by students in the process of the comprehension of metaphorical vocabulary but not to their full potential. Students were aware of the benefits the input provided them with and they realised that the social exchange considerably contributed to both their linguistic and extra-linguistic knowledge. The author could also observe that the comprehension of some metaphorical meaning depended largely on the cultural background and knowledge the students had. The conclusion to be drawn is that social strategies may aid the comprehension of otherwise unknown culturally defined context related to certain words with multiple meaning.

The article by Bojana Komaromi explores the assessment of success achieved in adjusting teaching to different learning styles. The author warns against approaching all students in the same way so that the research presented in this article was aimed at proving that by using various learning strategies catering for different learning styles, students achieve better results. The factor of differentiation between learning styles was based on the assumption that individuals showing a dominance of the left hemisphere prove to perceive and process information in a significantly different way than individuals showing a dominance of the right hemisphere. In the experimental group participating in the research, both types of strategies were used in every class, whereas in the control group, only the strategies for the left hemisphere were used. The quantitative analysis of the collected data provided significant statistic insight; however, the qualitative research provided insight into the feedback all students supplied regarding the approach they used. The instrument used was an anonymous questionnaire by means of which students were expected to assess the efficiency of the approach and the progress they made as well as the usefulness of the strategies used in the classroom and their role in the classroom. To conclude, the research proved that the approach described in this article, yields positive outcomes in the teaching process.

In the last article of the collection, Tatjana Glušac explored the peer coaching strategy among English language teachers as a means of identifying students' learning styles. The article illustrates how peer coaching can be used to identify students' learning styles in order to adapt teaching materials to suit students' learning styles. Furthermore, a teacher's teaching practices may be improved improving thus students' learning. The paper is based on a nine-month research involving ten English language teachers employed in primary and secondary schools in Novi Sad. First, the participants participated in a preparatory training where they were instructed how to understand roles, participate in discussions regarding observations, collect data, etc. Following the training, each of the participating teachers was expected to draft a list of objectives they would like to achieve in regard to their own teaching practice and their students' performance. After that, they observed each others' classes, evaluated the level of realisation of objectives, analysed each others' findings and suggested possible solutions. The findings show that this experimental form of professional development is efficient in identifying students' learning styles, in adapting teaching materials and teaching methods to suit students' learning styles, as well as in evaluating the efficacy of the adapted materials and methods.

The articles presented in this collection do not cover all possible aspects, findings, conclusions and analyses related to teaching and learning strategies and styles. Yet, they initiate substantial re-evaluation of existing attitudes in the literature primarily directed at diminishing the value of individual differences in the process of planning, conducting and evaluating teaching English. Hopefully, the explorations will not stop here and thus provide further relevant research enabling improvement, further development and fresh approaches in the area.