



University of Canberra

This thesis is available in print format from the University of Canberra Library.

If you are the author of this thesis and wish to have the whole thesis loaded here, please contact the University of Canberra Library at *e-theses@canberra.edu.au* Your thesis will then be available on the www providing greater access.

**LEARNING STRATEGIES OF
A GROUP OF
ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE
ADULT MALE STUDENTS**

John Fiedeldy

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts in Community Education,
University of Canberra.**

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

During the course of this research a number of people have made significant contributions for which I offer my sincere gratitude.

I would like to express much appreciation for the guidance and encouragement of my supervisor, Bronwen Macnamara. My many discussions with her focussed my ideas and sharpened my understanding of the issues with which I was grappling.

I owe a great deal of debt to my assistant supervisor, Sue Wharton, for her perceptive comments and advice on numerous drafts.

I am deeply grateful to the ACT Adult Migrant English Service for their cooperation, particularly the teachers and students who went out of their way to help me in this study.

I would to thank my wife Rie who always gave me encouragement in completing this thesis. I would also like to thank my mother and father who gave me so much support during my university studies.

ABSTRACT

This study examines the ways in which adult male students approach learning English as a second language. A number of recent studies have indicated that many male learners experience considerable difficulty participating in language classes. In particular several studies have found that course failure rates of male language students were higher than those of females. The objectives of the present study, therefore, are to: describe the preferred strategies of a group of male students for approaching language learning; describe the strategies they use when interacting in class discussion; and to examine the relationship between learning strategies and ESL academic achievement.

This broad subject has been narrowed down to a specific focus on how male ESL students develop oral and aural skills. The subjects are a small group of students of the Adult Migrant English Service Program, Canberra. Data have been obtained through questionnaires, interviews and observations in classroom settings. The questionnaires and interviews aim to reveal how frequently, and in what situations, certain learning strategies appear important to the male students' participation in language learning. These strategies include those of memory, cognition, compensation, meta-cognition, social communication and emotion. The observations examine patterns in interaction. Both the questionnaire and observations provide the basis for statistical analysis.

Literature covering the role of strategies and styles in second language learning; the characteristics of adult learners; and gender differences in the range of strategies used by adult learners has been examined and used as a foundation for the present study.

Strategies for listening and speaking are often used without conscious attention given to them. However, given the right learning environment, male students may develop a range of strategies that may assist them in ESL learning. This environment exists both informally, in the community, and in the ESL classroom. It was found that students who used ESL frequently in community life, such as in a workplace setting, had developed a “strategy awareness” and were able to call on a broad range of strategies to help them when interacting with other speakers. Within the classroom, it was observed that unstructured discussions using open-ended themes encouraged male students to use a variety of strategies, such as asking questions, asking for clarification and expanding ideas, to enable them to participate in the communication.

The findings of this study suggest that an awareness of and ability to apply appropriate learning strategies have an important place in helping male students participate in selected language learning activities and to develop their ESL skills. An examination of Australian Second Language Proficiency Rating scores and the Certificate in Spoken and Written English III results revealed that students who were successful in these assessment measures, were those who were observed and who reported frequent awareness and utilisation of the above mentioned strategies.

Finally, it can be suggested that because not all male students have equal opportunities to use ESL in community life, the English language teacher is in an ideal position to develop students’ strategy awareness. For this to occur, the teacher also needs to create a learning environment whereby students are encouraged to select from these strategies and to utilise them in appropriate ways.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	i
Acknowledgments	iii
List of Figures	vi
List of Tables	vi
Abbreviations	vii
1. Introduction	
1.1 Background	1
1.2 The problem and its significance	3
1.3 Purpose of the study	4
1.4 Research questions	4
1.5 Scope and limitations of the study	6
2. Literature Review	
2.1 Language learning	9
2.2 Adult learning	16
2.3 Male learners	20
3. Methodology	
3.1 Research design	31
3.2 Definition of terms	32
3.3 Sampling procedures	34
3.4 Selection of instruments	35
3.5 Data collection and recording	42
3.6 Data processing and analysis	46
4. Analysis of Data and Evaluation	
4.1 Teacher interviews	52
4.2 Student interviews	55

4.3	Self-report questionnaires	64
4.4	Academic Achievement Results	72
4.5	Class observations	79
4.6	Dyadic Observations	87
4.7	Interpretation	100
5.	Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations	
5.1	Statement of conclusions	104
5.2	Implications	108
5.3	Recommendations	109
6.	Reference list	111
7.	Appendices	
	Appendix A: Classification of Learning Strategies	117
	Appendix B: Authority to Conduct Research	119
	Appendix C: Teacher Interview	120
	Appendix D: Student Interview	122
	Appendix E: Student Consent to Conduct Research	125
	Appendix F: Student Questionnaire	126
	Appendix G: Reading Task	133
	Appendix H: Learning Strategies in Observations	136
	Appendix J: Dyadic Task	138

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.	Coding for Strategy Usage in Whole-Class Discussions	38
Figure 2.	Coding for Strategy Usage in Dyadic Discussions	39
Figure 3.	Sample of Coding in Class Observations	49
Figure 4.	Sample of Coding in Dyadic Observations	50

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.	Self-Report Occurrence of Memory Strategies	65
Table 2.	Self-Report Occurrence of Cognition Strategies	66
Table 3.	Self-Report Occurrence of Compensation Strategies	67
Table 4.	Self-Report Occurrence of Meta-Cognition Strategies	68
Table 5.	Self-Report Occurrence of Emotion Strategies	68
Table 6.	Self-Report Occurrence of Social Communication Strategies	69
Table 7.	Occurrence of Learning Strategies by Cultural Background	71
Table 8.	Achievement of CSWE III and Statements of Attainment	73
Table 9.	Final Mean ASLPR Scores and Gains by Cultural Background	74
Table 10.	Final Mean ASLPR Scores by Highest Level of Education	74
Table 11.	Achievement of CSWE III and Use of Learning Strategies	76
Table 12.	Gains in ASLPR Speaking and Use of Learning Strategies	77
Table 13.	Strategies Used in Class 3A Observations	81
Table 14.	Strategies Used in Class 3B Observations	84
Table 15.	Mean Word Count in Dyadic Observations	88
Table 16.	Strategies Used in Dyadic Observations	89
Table 17.	Strategies Used by Same and Cross L1 Dyads	97

ABBREVIATIONS

ACT	Australian Capital Territory
AMES	Adult Migrant English Service
ASLPR	Australian Second Language Proficiency Rating
CIT	Canberra Institute of Technology
COLT	Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching
CSWE	Certificate in Spoken and Written English
EFL	English as a foreign language
ESL	English as a second language
ILC	Individual Learning Centre
L1	First language
L2	Second language
MF dyad	Male-female dyad
MM dyad	Male-male dyad
NCELTR	National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research
NESB	Non-English speaking background
SA	Statement of attainment
SILL	Strategy Inventory for Language Learning
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences