Language Learning Strategies Adopted by Tribal Learners

[1]Afia Nazar, [2]Dr. C. Alamelu

ABSTRACT--- *It is of great importance in language learning research to analyse language learning strategies. It has been explored by many over the years and given different definitions and classifications. Language learning strategies, as defined by Griffiths, are actions chosen by learners to regulate their learning [5]. According to Oxford, language learning strategies are classified as direct and indirect strategies. Direct strategy includes memory, cognitive and compensation strategy and Indirect strategy includes social, affective and metacognitive. The strategies adopted by the learners differ due to various sociological and psychological factors.Many qualitative and quantitative types of research are carried out to identify the language learning strategies of learners of different communities. Tribes are indigenous communities who are quite reluctant to adapt to changes, so this has got an impact on the language learning strategies they use. The present paper explores the language learning strategies that are adopted by the tribal learners of Attapadi area of Palakkad district to enhance their language learning ability.*

Keywords--- Strategies, Tribal Students, Enhancing Learning

I. INTRODUCTION

In the study of language learning, it is very important to research on the learners and how they use learning strategies to learn a language. Language learning strategies can be defined as the actions that learners take to accomplish several learning tasks. Based on the studies that have been conducted over the years, various definitions and classifications are given to language learning strategies. Language learning strategies, as defined by Griffiths, are actions chosen by learners to regulate their learning. There are various factors that influence a learner in choosing a particular language learning strategy. The strategies they use in various learning situations help them acquire a language. Studies suggest that successful learners use combinations of strategies [5].

This research focuses on the tribal groups of the Attapadi area of Palakkad district of Kerala, India. The areas inhabited by the tribal groups constitute economically underdeveloped areas of Kerala. The literacy rate of tribal people in Kerala is less owing to external as well as internal constraints like socio-economic backgrounds, geographical factors, cultural background, and psychological problems of first-generation learners, etc. The positive impact of education is slowly bringing them to the mainstream and allowing them to be a part of development gradually.

II. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Tribes are indigenous groups of people who rely mostly on the forest resources for living. Most of the tribal people, who still follow the tradition and culture, do not show much interest in relocating themselves for better

[1] *Research Scholar, School of Social Sciences and Languages, VIT, Chennai, India. afianazar@gmail.com*
[2] *Professor, School of Social Sciences and Languages, English Division,VIT,Chennai,,India, alamelu.c@vit.ac.in*

exposure or getting educated. Some of them even think that getting educated can spoil their culture. The tribal group of Attapadi in Kerala is also one such group that is evolving and transforming slowly. The tribal people of Attapadi use Muduga and Irula languages as their mother tongue, which do not have written script. The schools in Attapadi area have teachers who speak Malayalam or Tamil as the place is situated at the Kerala-Tamilnadu border. Students learn Malayalam or Tamil as the second language at school and learn English with the help of the second language. This makes learning English language difficult for learners. The children in the tribal groups have started going to school as a result of the social service of many teachers, social workers and various schemes provided by the government. Still, somewhere they lag due to reasons like their environment at home and school, unavailability of proper transportation facilities, lack of awareness about the opportunities, language issues etc. The effective use of learning strategies can be of some help in improving their language learning.

III.   LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES

Learning strategies are strategies used by learners to regulate their learning. Learners use different kinds of strategies to learn a new language. According to Oxford the primary goal of strategy use is to achieve communicative competence in the target language [9]. O'Malley and Chamot highlight that learners use learning strategies to develop their sociolinguistic competence as well as linguistic competence [2].The language learning strategies of the students can be analysed based on the different ways they follow to learn a language. Oxford divides language learning strategies into two main groups, direct and indirect strategies, which are further subdivided into eight sub-groups. Direct strategies involve the manipulation of the target language and include memory strategies, cognitive strategies, and compensation strategies. Indirect strategies include social, affective and metacognitive strategies [9]. These strategies are related to how learners manage their learning and behaviour while learning a language.

According to Oxford and O'Malley and Chamot, **cognitive strategies** involve the learner to manipulate the target language and input to enhance their learning. Oxford considers the strategies used for practicing the target language as the most essential cognitive strategies. Also O'Malley, Chamot, Oxford and Rubin argue repeating words and structures and grouping and recombining language input is practice strategy. The learners understandthe language better through deduction and reasoning of the content; by recognizing and using grammar rules. Learners utilize a wide array of cognitive strategies, but these strategies are all characterized by their relation to target language input and learners manipulating this input to enhance their learning [2].

Oxford states that memory **strategy** is adopted by the learners to arrange learned elements in order; to make associations between them and to review. Based on the semantics and syntax, learners group language items into meaningful units. "Elaboration or association means creating relations between information and these links can be formed between new items or between old and new information" [2]. One method of memorizing and recalling information addressed by both Oxford and Rubin is the use of keywords [9]. Oxford also notes that learners rarely report using these strategies, either they are not using them or they are unaware of using the strategy [9]. Memory strategies are used to organize and create links between information from target language input.

Language learning is a process that also involves society. Oxford identifies three types of **social strategies**: asking questions, cooperation and empathising with other people. In a classroom, students use different strategies like asking their peers or teachers for clarification, additional information or rephrasing [9]. O'Malley and Chamot define cooperation as a strategy that language learners use with their peers for problem-solving, sharing information and peer feedback [2]. Oxford, however, argues that cooperation also includes learners working with more proficient language users, such as native speakers [9]. Strategies for developing empathy identified by Oxford include learners developing an understanding of different cultures and observing other people's behaviour to understand their thoughts and feelings [9]. And also states that empathy is important for both communication and language learning. Understanding other people and cultures can be an important motivation for learning a language.

The awareness of the learning process will improve the performance of the learners. Learners can monitor and direct their learning processes through **metacognitive strategies**. This strategy helps the students to manage the new information by coordinating their learning process and thus helping them to stay focused. "Planning is also a strategy that comes under language learning strategy, as it includes learning about language learning as a concept, organizing conditions for learning, setting goals, identifying the purpose of and preparing for language tasks and looking for opportunities for practice" [9]. Learners also monitor and evaluate their learning. Oxford argues that monitoring and evaluating are closely related, as learners monitor their errors in producing and understanding the target language and evaluate their progress in the language [9]. Wenden remarks that "monitoring happens while planning or performing a language task, while evaluation takes place after the learner attempts at learning or using the language with focus on the outcome of the attempt"[6]. The main feature of metacognitive strategies is that they are not specific to language learning, but reflect the ways people generally control their learning.

The emotional aspects of the learners are very much important during the teaching-learning process. "The learners use **affective strategies** to lower their anxiety and to encourage themselves and assess their feelings,motivation, and attitudes concerned with language tasks" [9]. Oxford states that these strategies have both physical and mental aspects. Effective use of affective strategy helps the learners to keep a good mental state required for learning the target language. Only through self encouragement and reinforcement, learners will be able to control their language learning.

Students tend to have many issues while learning a new language. **Compensation strategies** are used by the learners to overcome limitations in the knowledge and use the new language learned for production and comprehension. Oxford divides the strategies into two categories; guessing intelligently and overcoming limitations in speaking and writing [9]. Effective use of the strategy helps the learners to communicate with each other despite their limitations in knowledge. Oxford defines guessing strategies as using linguistic and non – linguistic clues to make guesses. The learners derive linguistic clues from their prior knowledge of the target language, their first language or other languages, which the learners depend on deducting the meaning of an unknown word or expression.

IV.   LITERATURE REVIEW

Various researches have been conducted on analysing the language learning strategy of different populations of learners. Questionnaires are given to analyse their learning and with the help of statistic tools, the language learning strategy of the students are analysed.

A study conducted by Ekrem Solak and Recep Cakir on "Language learning strategies of language e-learners in turkey" states that the participants mostly used metacognitive and memory strategies and affective and cognitive strategies were used less. "Turkish e-learners mostly said or wrote new English words several times, and they asked the other person to slow down or say it again if they did not understand something in English. Regarding the least used strategies, they did not prefer to practice English with other students and they did not prefer to write down their feelings in a language learning diary". They also worked on the impact of gender differences in using strategies and found that there was a significant difference in females in cognitive strategies and for males in metacognitive strategies [11].

A study conducted by Fithriyah, Usman Kasim, Yunisrina Qismullah Yusuf titled "language learning strategies used by learners studying Arabic and English as foreign languages" throws light upon the most and least used strategies by Arabic and English language learners. The study exposed those students learning English employed more strategies like metacognitive, cognitive and social strategies than students learning Arabic. "English major students have more chances to practice their English with other students more frequently outside the classroom. Moreover, because of its popularity, materials for English learning are more available and easy to obtain, such as in local or public libraries. . On the other hand, most students of Arabic at the university under study graduated from the traditional pesantren or dayah (Islamic boarding schools). They were obligated to use Arabic language in their daily conversations ... thus, it can be assumed that as the English major students are more exposed to the target language, this has assisted them in using more strategies than the Arabic major students"[4].

A study conducted by Anitha Habok and Andrea Magyar titled "Effects of language learning strategies on proficiency, attitudes and school achievements" examine language learning strategies among lower secondary students in Hungary. The results showed that metacognitive strategy was the most adopted strategy by the Hungarian learners. They also inferred that the adopted strategy had an impact on school achievements and foreign language marks [6].

Norhiza Ismail &Nurul Liyana Binti AbJabar conducted "A study on the language learning strategies used among UHB1412 students (English for Academic Communication)" and investigated the language learning strategies used by them while completing a group task. Meta cognitive strategy was the most used strategy by the students. They used the strategies to seek all existing opportunities to practice the language inside and outside classroom setting. By having clearer objectives to improve and acquire the language as well as to prepare them for course-examination purposes, students were more guided to achieve their objectives when they apply metacognitive strategies by planning, organizing and evaluating their own learning. The least used strategy was social strategy by the students [7].

A study conducted by A. Jancy Nandhini Feleciya and K. Meenakshi titled "English Language Learning Strategies used by Female ESL Learners of Vellore district – An Empirical Study" discusses, the overall strategy

7292

use and the relationships between strategy use, language proficiency and medium of instruction. The students adopted metacognitive strategy the most and compensation strategy the least. Also their medium of instruction had no significant difference in the choice of strategy. They also gave strategy instruction in the recommendations [3].

Many studies have been conducted in the context of analysing language learning strategies. Student communities from different backgrounds are taken as samples for the analysis; but there has been no studies conducted on the language learning strategies of Attapadi tribal groups.

V. OBJECTIVE

•To analyse the different strategies used by the tribal learners.

•   To check whether there is a significant relationship between the mother tongue and usage of language learning strategy.

•To check whether there is a significant relationship between gender and usage of language learning strategy.

VI. METHODOLOGY

6.1. *Study* population

The research sample included 100 students of class ix[th] from the schools of Attapadi area in Palakkad, Kerala. The students come from different hamlets of Attapadi Tribal Area.

6.2 Data Collection Instrument & Procedure

The research is carried out as quantitative research wherein the students are given a questionnaire for analysing their language learning strategies. First, the percentage of learning strategy is calculated to find out the strategy that was most and least adopted by the students. Then ANOVA test was carried out to check whether there is any significant relation between the mother tongue and the language strategy used by the learners of English. Finally, t-test was carried out to compare the language learning strategies of male and female students.

VII. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

7.1 Different Strategies Used by Tribal Learners

Learning strategies are used by learners to learn the target language effectively. A questionnaire was given to the students to analyse the usage of learning strategies such as memory strategy, cognitive strategy, compensation strategy, social strategy, affective and metacognitive strategy. Out of the six strategies, memory strategy is the highest adopted strategy by the learners, whereas cognitive strategy is the lowest adopted strategy. Memory strategy was followed by metacognitive, social, compensation, affective and cognitive strategy.
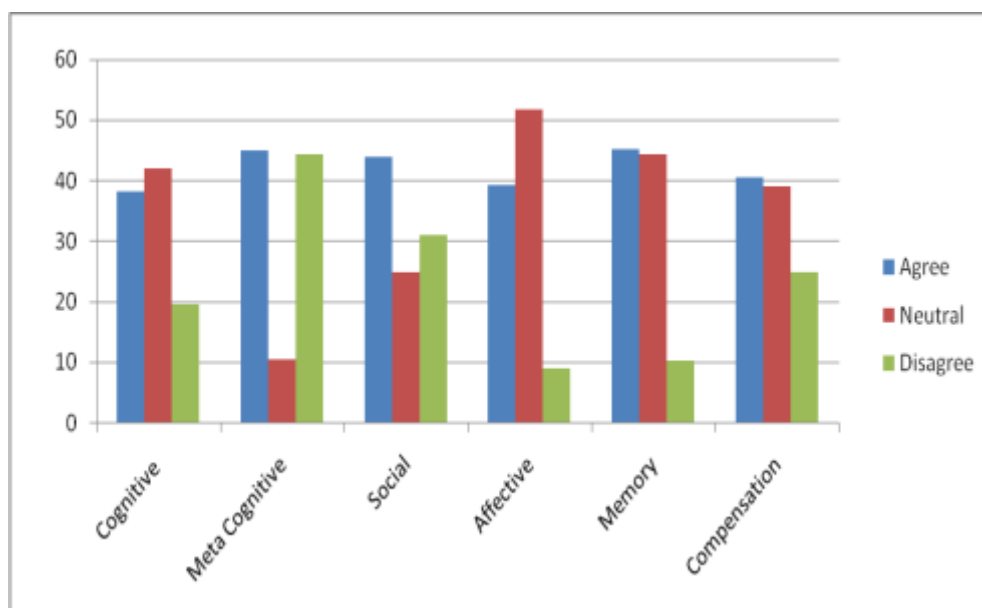
Figure 1: Percentage of students using different kinds of strategies

The questionnaire that was given to the students had questions that analysed their existing learning strategies. Percentage analysis is carried out to identify the usage of strategy use. 38.3% students agreed to adopting cognitive strategy 42% had neutral opinion and 19.7% disagreed using the strategy. Metacognitive strategy is used by 45% students, 10.6% had neutral opinion about the strategy use and 44.3% disagreed to the usage of the strategy. 44% use social strategy, 25% are uncertain and 31% disagreed to the usage of social strategy. Affective strategy was used by 39.3%, 51.7% took neutral opinion and 9% disagreed to the use of strategy. 45.3% had agreed to the usage of memory strategy, 51.7% had neutral opinion about affective strategy and 9% disagreed about using the strategy. Compensation strategy was adopted by 40.6%, 39% had neutral stand and 25% disagreed to the strategy use. Memory strategy was the highest adopted strategy and cognitive strategy was the lowest adapted strategy by students. Since English is an alien language for tribal children and owing to the difficulty that the teachers faced to make the students understand; they want the students to memorise and make association with the new information. It is evident that the method followed by students was memorizing information by making connections.

The graph depicts that the least adopted strategy is cognitive strategy, which stresses on the point that the learners are not carrying out their learning process by means of manipulating the target language and input by the teachers to enhance learning. Most of them are unable to accomplish and support their learning by planning, cooperating and making opportunities for language practise.

7.2. Relationship between Mother Tongue and Language Learning Strategies

ANOVA test was done to understand whether there is a significant relationship between mother tongue of the students and the language learning strategies used by them. The students belonged to groups that used 5 different mother tongues viz. Malayalam, Tamil, Kannada, Irula and Muduga. The results of the test indicated that there is a significant difference between the mother tongue and usage of metacognitive strategy in the learners($F=3.043$, $p=.012$).

Table 1: ANOVA of usage of Learning Strategies and Mother Tongue

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
COG	Between Groups	14.306	4	3.577	2.062	.092
	Within Groups	164.782	95	1.735		
	Total	179.088	99			
MC	Between Groups	23.614	4	5.904	3.403	.012
	Within Groups	164.826	95	1.735		
	Total	188.440	99			
SoSTR	Between Groups	11.173	4	2.793	1.588	.184
	Within Groups	167.154	95	1.760		
	Total	178.328	99			
AFFE	Between Groups	4.274	4	1.068	.479	.751
	Within Groups	211.810	95	2.230		
	Total	216.083	99			
Memo	Between Groups	13.826	4	3.457	1.509	.206
	Within Groups	217.617	95	2.291		
	Total	231.443	99			
Compen	Between Groups	9.110	4	2.277	.855	.494
	Within Groups	253.196	95	2.665		
	Total	262.306	99			

The mother tongue has an effect on this particular strategy as the teachers who instruct them, uses Malayalam/ Tamil to teach English. But majority of the students are from tribal background where they use Irula/ Muduga as their mother tongue. So they learn Malayalam/ Tamil as the second language from school. Also they are taught English as a third language using this second language, which makes the understanding of English language more difficult for them. This in turn shows an effect on the monitoring and directing of their learning process as the instructions are not clear to the students.

7.3. Relationship between gender and language learning strategy

An independent samples t- test was performed to check whether there is any significant relationship between gender and language learning strategy. The results of the independent sample t- test revealed that there is a significant relation only between gender and memory strategy. However all other strategies do not have a significant relation with the gender.

Table 2: Independent Samples Test for analysing gender difference in using strategies

Strategy	Boy			Girl					
	N	M	S.D	N	M	S.D	Sig	t	df
Cognitive Strategy	55	2.10	1.270	45	2.70	1.376	.246	-2.238	98
Metacognitive Strategy	55	2.42	1.337	45	2.96	1.388	.294	-1.966	98
Social Strategy	55	3.64	1.265	45	4.30	1.357	.510	-2.526	98
Affective Strategy	55	1.47	1.383	45	2.61	1.356	.209	-4.117	98
Memory Strategy	55	2.01	1.164	45	3.10	1.711	.000	-3.783	98
Compensation Strategy	55	1.88	1.520	45	3.14	1.497	.908	-4.139	98

It is evident from the mean scores presented in table 2 that girls use different language learning strategies than boys. However, only one of the mean scores of strategy use denotes statistically significant difference. Statistically significant difference result is observed in relation to usage of memory strategy; the mean score of boys is 2.01 and girls is 3.10, $t(98)= -3.783$, $p=000$. Significant differences were not found in the usage of other strategies as shown in table -2 above. But the comparison of mean scores indicate that girl students made more use of the strategies, the t- test failed to prove a statistically significant difference between the gender and strategy in all other categories except memory strategy.

VIII.   CONCLUSION

Successful students tend to use more learning strategies over a period of time or uses combinations of language learning strategies. If a particular group does not have proper awareness of their learning strategies, then their learning practises has to be analysed and they need to be taught in such a way that they can make use of combinations of learning strategies for better results. The analysis done shows those students are restricting themselves to one or two strategies which have a significant impact on their learning. Memory strategy is the most adopted strategy which highlights the point of rote learning. Mother tongue has got an effect on the memory strategy used by the students. Also analysis for the gender variation shows that female students mostly use memory strategy. Most of them don't understand the concepts, they learn for the sake of scoring marks. The difference in language is also a reason for the adoption of memory strategy.

REFERENCES

1. Aunurrahman, Kurniawati, T., & Ramadhiyanti, Y. (2013). Exploring Indonesian college students' strategies in learning English language.Arab World English Journal, 4(3), 317-330.

2. Chamot, A. U. (2004). Issues in language learning strategy research and teaching.ElectronicJournal of Foreign Language Teaching [online] 1(1), 14-26.https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/3ce0/76a90d4985351fba7ba40c16b8b677f402d0.pdf

3. Feleciya, A. JancyNandhini, and K. Meenakshi."English Language Learning Strategies Used by Female ESL Learners of Vellore District – An Empirical Study."Indian Journal of Science and Technology, vol. 9, no. 39, 2016, doi:10.17485/ijst/2016/v9i39/98843.

4. Fithriyah. Kasim and Yusuf "Language Learning Strategies Used by Learners Studying Arabic and English as Foreign Languages." Dirasat, Human and Social Sciences, , vol. 46, no. 1, 2019.

5. Griffiths, C. (2008). Strategies and good language learners. In C. Griffiths (ed.), Lessons from good language learners. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 83-98.

6. Habók, Anita, and Andrea Magyar. "The Effect of Language Learning Strategies on Proficiency, Attitudes and School Achievement." Frontiers in Psychology, vol. 8, 2018, doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2017.02358.

7. Ismail, et al. "A Study On The Language Learning Strategies Used Among UHB 1412 Students. (English For Academic Communication)." A Study On The Language Learning Strategies Used Among UHB 1412 Students. (English For Academic Communication) - UniversitiTeknologi Malaysia Institutional Repository, 16 Dec. 2010, eprints.utm.my/id/eprint/11492/.

8. Khosravi, Maryam. "A Study of Language Learning Strategies Used by EFL Learners in Iran: Exploring Proficiency Effect on English Language Learning Strategies." Theory and Practice in Language Studies, vol. 2, no. 10, 2012, doi:10.4304/tpls.2.10.2122-2132.

9. Mamat, A., &Sideh, I. (2013).Language learning strategies applied by Arabic learners: A case-study at Institute of Education,International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). IOSR Journal of Research and Method in Education, 3(3), 48-53.

10. Oxford, R. (1994). Language learning strategies: an update. CALL Online Resources: Digest [online].https://s3.amazonaws.com/academia.edu.documents/43969377/LanguageLearningStrategies.pdf?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAIWOWYYGZ2Y53UL3A&Expires=1508713792&Signature=YQeDn2tjERwfrdA0cQcx3%2FEB6Fo%3D&response-content-disposition=inline%3B%20filename%3DLanguage_Learning_Strategies.pdf (25 August, 2017)

11. Solak, Ekrem, and Recep Cakir. "Language Learning Strategies of Language e-Learners in Turkey." E-Learning and Digital Media, vol. 12, no. 1, 2015, pp. 107–120., doi:10.1177/2042753014558384.