

# Cognitive Strategies: Sri Lankan Learners Prefer to Use in Arabic Composition

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**Abstract:** Learning to write in Arabic is signified as default for learners. However, research on writing strategies in Arabic as L2 or a foreign language (AFL) is still in its early point this study examined the cognitive writing strategies employed by Sri Lankan Arabic as foreign language learners in essay composition. Six pre university stage level proficient learners from the Fathih Institute in Sri Lanka were participated in this study. They were instructed to write an essay in Arabic. The think aloud protocol, observation and retrospective interview were adapted for data collection. The results indicated that proficient learners have employed eleven types of writing strategies in different perspectives for completing the task. However, learning strategy instructions required to the competence with which the learner approaches a learning task.

**Keywords:** Arabic Language, Cognitive Strategies, Proficient Learner, Sri Lanka,

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Learning strategies (LSs) are procedures that a student uses to achieve something with a task that would be difficult without extraordinary effort. Strategies can be outdoor aids, like a clock and a calendar to help remain track of time, lists to keep in mind things to do, a calculator to help with difficult math troubles, a graphic organizer for multifarious tasks like writing a narrative. LSs have been at the heart of attention in L2 learning since the mid-1970s. Anderson, 2003; Cohen, 1996, 1998; Hosenfeld, 1979; Macaro, 2001; O'Malley and Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1993, 2002; Rubin, 1975; Stern, 1975; Wenden, 2002 are the basic founders of LS. Pressley & McCormick, 1995; Bialystok, 1990; Oxford, 1990, 1996 are define the LS as method for understanding, remembering and using information that are purposely used and intentionally restricted by the learner.

## II. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Research on writing strategies in Arabic as L2 or a foreign language (AFL) is still in its early point. A small number of studies have treated with papers written in Arabic as a final product and explained insufficiencies that faced. The focus of Salim's (2000) study is an attempt to explore processes and strategies learners of Arabic use as they compose two argumentative essays. He has found on the learning strategies used by fourty three proficient and less proficient American learners of Arabic as a foreign language (AFL) in their writing tasks. Analysis of the data demonstrates that all learners - proficient and less-proficient - were active experienced a high level of worry adopted a negative attitude

toward writing and did not show complete control and mastery of the language structures of AFL. The finding of this study encourages the researcher to inspect on Sri Lankan AFL learner writing strategy use in Arabic composition. This paper presents a small part of the complete research conducts on this principle as Why Proficient learners prefer to use cognitive strategies in Arabic composition?

## III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Many researchers sustain the classification of second language (L2) LSs into six distinct categories that correspond to Oxford's six dimensions of strategy classification for the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) including cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, memory strategies, compensatory strategies, affective strategies and social strategies. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) have differentiated the range of cognitive categories into two main types: metacognitive and cognitive strategies. On the other hand, Anderson (2003) categorized language learning strategies into seven major categories: cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, mnemonic or memory related strategies, compensatory strategies, affective strategies, social strategies, and self-motivating strategies.

A cognitive strategy serves to support the learner as he or she increases internal procedures that facilitate him/her to execute tasks that are complex (Rosenshine, 1997). The use of cognitive strategies can enhance the competence with which the learner approaches a learning task. These academic tasks can contain, but are not limited to, constructing sentences and paragraphs, remembering and applying information about course content, editing written work, classifying and paraphrasing information to be learned. Aini (2008); Arndt (1987); Riazi (1997) and Wenden (1991) have investigated ESL learners' cognitive writing strategies and have classified how the learners used to complete the task in success.

## IV. METHODOLOGY

The current study engages second-year Arabic class learners in the Fathih Institute of Sri Lanka which is one of the non state's private institutions, with more than 45 students in pre university programs in 2013. Preliminary college of language at this institution developed as a basic Arabic language course in response to increasing student needs for learning Arabic language skills. The participants involved in the study were in their second semester of study which represented

with backgrounds in the first year Arabic classrooms. The six participants included two from commerce stream and others from Arts stream who are preparing stage for sit the university entrance exam of Sri Lanka in 2014.

Data for this study were collected during the period of September - January 2013/2014. Think aloud protocol employed to elicit their thinking mind on their Arabic writing task and to recognize the strategies. The Observation conducted to identify the infinite level of writing use and retrospective were carried out after the observation to verify the strategies they implemented on their composition. The learners requested to write an essay in giving two topics. The transcribed interviews were returned to participants for verifying the information. The verified transcribed information coded according to writing strategy list prepared from previous studies and researcher's teaching experience. Coded data were submitted to three experts in teaching and learning AFL for checking the validity.

## V. FINDINGS

The following eleven cognitive writing strategies were preferred by the Proficient learners in Arabic when the composing essay.

### a) Memorizing

The participants reported using the 'memorizing' strategy to elaborate the essay. for example, they were mentioned that they repeated the memorized phrases and vocabulary for the scope of the sentences in the essay. For example, A participant's strategy use is shown in his observation transcript "while he was writing the essay, he was trying to bring the memorized Arabic phrase of Kullu amin wa anthum Be khair"

### b) Retrieval

Apart from that, the proficient learners reported using 'retrieval' strategy in the writing task to recover the ideas and continue the writing till the idea occurred. A participant for example, used the 'retrieval' strategy to produce the idea to write the essay. He said, "I didn't get ideas very early, how to start the writing part. So I was writing a few sentences as free writing until the way clicked to my mind."

### c) Note taking

In Addition, the participants reported using the 'note taking' strategy in the writing task for the following reasons. (a) They used to note the new vocabularies which were needed to compose the essay. For example, in retrospective interview, I don't know the meaning of words such as 'Kaadu' (jungle) in Arabic. I wanted to note words like these which would be used in the essay to provide suitable words in Arabic. (b) They used to take note of the sentence format to apply in the essay. For instance, I saw this used in a short story book (Baithy fil hadeeqa) and took note of the sentence pattern and applied it in my essay.

### d) Imitation

Besides that, they were stated using the 'imitation' strategy due to lack of experience in writing Arabic, they used the model essays written in the text book and classroom notebook to compose their own task. for instance, a participant reported that he used the model written essay in the textbook due lack of experience in the writing skill. He said, " I had no experience in essay writing in Arabic. Therefore, I used the essay namely "eidu saiddun " from the textbook of alarabiyathun linnashieen to follow the way to compose the essay.

### e) Comparing

A few number of participants reported using the 'comparing' strategy to compare their own writing presentations with their friend's writing performance. A participant said, "Then I wrote in a separate paper and observed to see if there were any corrections? Shortly, I was rewriting it and comparing my essay with my friend's draft to verify whether I had completed it well

### f) Drafting

The entire proficient learners used the 'drafting' strategy in the writing task for three reasons. The first reason was to locate their ideas into complete thought in sentences and paragraphs. For example, a participant indicated that, during the drafting stage he erased unusual sentences and reorganized the paragraph to read with coherence. He said, "When I drafted the essay I also deleted some sentences and reorganized it in order to read without complication."

### g) Editing

The entire participants used the 'editing' strategy for avoiding the errors in grammar and sentence structure. They persevered to ensure the quality of the essay and to help to avoid communication errors to the reader. A participant specified in his retrospective interview transcript, "according to your correction and feedback, I reduced unwonted sentences and I wrote it as the final copy."

### h) Revising

Besides that, they reported using the 'revising' strategy in the writing task. There are two reasons contributing to their use of the strategy. A participant for instance, reported revising the plan prepared earlier to compose the essay when he was starting to write sentences. He felt that he could not compose as planned earlier to write the sentences in Tamil and translate them into Arabic language. If he procures as planned he would not complete the essay within the specified time. Hence, he decided to compose the ideas in Arabic without writing in Tamil. This reason is indicated in the following retrospective interview transcript. "I translated the sentences into Arabic as one paragraph. Then I felt it was difficult to me. So I changed my plan and tried to write the sentences in Arabic with my ideas noted in Tamil and completed the essay.

Another reason for the use of this strategy is to make changes in the written text in order to correct the grammar and spelling. For example, A participant found grammatical errors when he was completing the pre-writing stage and he was revising the essay when he was writing the draft copy. He said, “When I wrote the draft I found many mistakes in writing sentence patterns and vocabulary usage and I made changes in the task before submitting for editing.”

#### *i) Elaborating*

The ‘elaborating’ strategy was reportedly used in the writing task. It was used for developing the sense either by developing the phrase or developing sentences. For example, A participant was observed that he was describing the beach activities on the festival day. He developed a sentence as ‘hunaka sharakna fil musabaqa’ by adding a sentence as ‘wa shahadna al-manazirat tabiea.’

#### *j) Clarifying*

One of the participants reported using the ‘clarifying’ strategy. He used it for verifying the confusion on how to use the ‘huroof’(Letters) when making a sentence in Arabic Language. “I had doubts how to use the ‘huroof- ‘fi’, ‘Ala’, ‘Bi’. However I verified the correct punctuation through my friend and used it in the essay.

#### *k) Reducing*

Apart from that, A few number proficient learners also used the ‘reducing’ strategy in the writing task. It was used for modifying the essay either by deleting sentences or dropping phrases. For example, A participant was not satisfied with the written sentences earlier. When he reorganizes the essay before the editing stage he dropped few sentences that he considered did not match to be added in the essay. His retrospective interview is reported as follows. “Mm.. it ...is .. If I am not satisfied with the written sentence, I rewrote the sentence until I understood the correct position of the sentence structure. Sometimes I deleted the words and added new words and read aloud to verify whether it was correct.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Cognitive types of strategies were mostly used by the proficient learners in writing essay in Arabic, because the participants’ cognitive strategies led them to work with ‘think about’ and ‘manipulate materials’ required to complete the task. They included such specific strategies as note taking, elaboration, revising and editing multiple drafts of their papers (Riazi 1997). In addition, Flower & Hayes 1981a; Paris et al. 1991 and Pressley 1991 declared that experienced writers purposefully select and coordinate cognitive strategies that are appropriate for the literacy task at hand, while Langer (1991) remarked, “As children learn to engage in literate behaviors to serve the functions and reach the ends they use

modelled around them, they become literate in a culturally appropriate way; they use certain cognitive strategies to structure their thoughts and complete their tasks and not others” (Olson and Land, 2007 ).

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