Spanish as a foreign language at university level: the role and use of language learning strategies by absolute beginners

by

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Lord, I am very grateful for the guidance received and for the consistent support of my family. Without them, this would not have been possible.

SUMMARY

This research is logged in the field of language acquisition, focusing on Spanish as a foreign language learnt at university level. It investigates how learning strategies are used by students to develop proficiency in Spanish over a three-year period (from the first year to the third year). Adopting a cognitive lens that places special attention to how linguistic knowledge is constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed, this study focuses on the language learning process, specifically on what the students do to learn a language.

Taking into account that the learning of foreign language poses particular and distinctive challenges – as opposed to the learning of a second language – and using a multiphase design that combines sequential strands encompassing quantitative and qualitative techniques, this study finds that those who successfully complete all the Spanish courses are the ones who report significantly more use of metacognitive strategies in the first year.

The study concludes by proposing a framework that helps to classify the role that the use of strategies play in learning a foreign language from a student's perspective. This framework adds a new dimension and provides valuable information to similar types of studies.

Considering the above-mentioned findings, the study recommends introducing first-year students to the potential value of using metacognitive strategies in foreign language learning, and suggests that lecturers should recommend more activities for students to engage in the language outside the classroom.

KEY TERMS:

Acquisition of Spanish

Foreign language acquisition

Foreign language teaching

Learning strategies

Metacognitive strategies

Longitudinal study

Mixed methods

Psycholinguistic processes

Spanish didactics

Successful learners

STATEMENT

I declare that the thesis, which I hereby submit for the degree Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at another university. Where secondary material is used, this has been carefully acknowledged and referenced in accordance with university requirements. I am aware of University policy and implications regarding plagiarism.

March 2017

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SPANISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE AT UNIVERSITY LEVEL: THE ROLE AND USE OF LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES BY ABSOLUTE BEGINNERS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

In today's globalised world characterised by "increased personal mobility related to more accessible mass transit and the shrinkage of real and perceived distance" (Deas, 2015:1) and where several businesses and organisations operate across international borders, the learning of foreign languages (FL) has become an ever more important issue and is considered a necessity in the business and social contexts (Yilmaz and BuzlukluoĞLu Arslan, 2014:1182, Deas, 2015:1). Influenced by this trend of globalisation, learning world languages such as English, Spanish, French and Chinese has become more popular in countries where these languages are not spoken (Bao and Du, 2015:14, Lee, 2014:1, Gargalianou et al., 2015:1).

Fuelled by this new globalised order, interest in learning Spanish has grown significantly in recent years (Long and Lacorte, 2007:84, Molina, 2006:19, Sabater, 2009:201). The Cervantes Institute [1], after conducting a comprehensive compilation of data concerning the number of students studying Spanish worldwide, states that Spanish is the second most studied language in the world after English (Molina, 2006:19), with almost 20 million people studying it as a FL (Instituto Cervantes, 2013b). Spanish is also currently considered the second most widely used language globally after English, with over 500 million native speakers in both native and non-native Spanish-speaking countries (Sanz et al., 2015:1439). In addition to this, Spanish is the third most widely used language on the Internet. (Instituto Cervantes, 2013a)

[1] The Cervantes Institute was created in 1991 by the Government of Spain to promote and oversee the teaching of Spanish, and to disseminate the cultural wealth and diversity of Spanish-speaking countries.

In the United States, Spanish is the first most studied FL (Heldt, 2010) but in Europe, Spanish is the fourth most studied language after English, French and German (Baidak et al., 2012:11). Although English and French are extensively used for global communication in business, education, arts, gastronomy and international organisations across vast regions of the globe, strictly in terms of number of speakers of the language, Spanish is ranked fourth after Chinese[2], English and Hindi (Ouane and Abdulaziz, 2003:6, Alcorta-Garza et al., 2016:3).

In South Africa[3], at the University of Pretoria, Spanish is the second most studied FL after French. However, despite being a university where the majority of students are at least bilingual, learners who have not had the previous experience of learning a FL – like French, German, Spanish or any other language that is not used in the country – have been struggling to either complete and pass the beginners' courses or carry on until the third year. When studying the multiple and intertwined factors that have the potential to explain why some learners struggled with the beginners' courses and others did not continue until the third year, this research paid special attention to the aspects related to the learners' ability to learn Spanish and the actions that they undertake to self-regulate their learning, from the very beginning to the more advanced levels of proficiency in Spanish (Cohen, 2011b:7).

1.1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

At the Faculty of Humanities, FLs are mostly studied as "elective modules" by students of different academic programmes. Only students registered in the BA Languages programme[4] study them as "core modules", that is, as modules which are essential or central to achieving the particular outcomes of their academic plans (Faculty of Humanities, 2015:24).

Since the introduction of Spanish at undergraduate level at the University of Pretoria (UP) in 2008, examination statistics show that the average pass rates for the

[2] Chinese is the most spoken language, however Chinese-speaking populations are largely limited to China itself. Even though languages such as English, Spanish and French have less speakers than Chinese, these languages are more widely used globally.

[3] South Africa has eleven official languages: Afrikaans, English, Ndebele, Northern Sotho, Southern Sotho, Swati, Tsonga, Tswana, Venda, Xhosa and Zulu.

[4] In 2014, these students were 22 out of a total of 82 first-year students of Spanish.

beginners' courses in the last eight years were 56% for French (FRN), 55% for German (DTS) and 41% for Spanish (SPN). Table 1 shows the pass rates for all of these modules from 2008 up to the beginning of this study.

Table 1: Pass rates for French, German and Spanish since 2008
Source: UP Faculty of Humanities – Student Administration

Year	FRN104	DTS104	SPN101
2008	48%	44%	42%
2009	50%	47%	41%
2010	47%	44%	32%
2011	56%	68%	42%
2012	55%	62%	39%
2013	63%	62%	28%
2014	61%	53%	41%
Average	**54%**	**54%**	**38%**

Although reasonable and consistent efforts were made throughout the years to improve these figures (efforts such as the implementation of new teaching methods, the revision of the assessment criteria, the adoption of new textbooks, more tutoring and consulting hours, as well as the hiring of special tutors), it was noticed that they made no substantial difference to the statistical figures in the beginners' courses. Students continued to struggle with the learning of FLs at the beginners' level.

During the time in which the low pass rate situation was monitored and some measures were put into place, it was thought that perhaps too much attention had been paid to teaching aspects (what teachers do) and not enough attention had been paid to learning aspects (what students do). It was also noted that the main assumption, namely that students knew reasonably well how to approach the learning of a FL because they had already studied a second language at school "to be able to interact effectively with other South Africans", as mandated by the National Curriculum (Department of Education, 2002:9), was not necessarily true. This assumption did not take into full account all the implications of the fact that

students in FL settings do not have as much exposure to the target language as students who study a second language (L2) do. The fact that students who learn a FL have much less opportunities to hear and practise the target language outside the classroom than learners who study, for instance, Zulu or Afrikaans as a second language in South Africa, makes the learning of an FL more challenging and complex than it initially seems.

Technically speaking, "learning a second language means that the language being learnt is that which is spoken in the community where the language learning is taking place" (Cohen, 2011b:8). This means that a second language has immediate social and communicative functions within the country where it is learnt, allowing for multiple opportunities to practise it, whereas the use of a FL is often limited to the classroom setting and it is neither used in the immediate community nor in the country where it is taught (Oxford, 1990:6). Because of this, opportunities for practising a FL are limited and authentic materials and resources are usually not readily available (Rao, 2006:498).

Krashen's acquisition/learning hypothesis sheds some light to further understand the complexity of learning a FL. He makes a distinction between what it entails to *acquire* a language as opposed to what it entails to *learn* a language (Krashen, 1982:14-15). He sees language acquisition as a *subconscious process* very similar to the process children undergo when they acquire their first language (Schütz, 2014). Krashen sees language learning as a *conscious process* that is accomplished through formal instruction.

Krashen's dichotomy (1982:14-15) of learning versus acquisition might also suggest that second language learners – who are continually exposed to the target language outside the classroom – not only learn the language, but also acquire it subconsciously through the multiple interactions they naturally engage in by being immersed in the community. Conversely, FL learners – who have limited opportunities to engage in real and authentic interactions with native, advanced or intermediate speakers – mostly accomplish their learning goals through formal instruction (conscious learning). The lack of opportunities to use the language outside the classroom seems to make the environment less conducive to acquiring the language subconsciously.

How much exposure do students of Spanish at the University of Pretoria have to Spanish speakers? The results from the general questionnaire that was administered to students in 2014 showed that (i) only 22% of first-year students knew a person they could practice the language with at least on a weekly basis; (ii) more than 80% of first-year students just wanted to study Spanish for one year; and (iii) almost 70% of first-year students had never studied a FL before. This confirms what Marsh (2012:1) asserts, namely that "learning a foreign language presents different challenges for learners in different contexts."

Empirical observations over the years seem to indicate that students who overlook the distinction between the different challenges posed by learning a second language as opposed to learning a FL and who are not fully aware that learning a FL requires the use of particular learning strategies that differ to a certain extent from the learning strategies used in other subjects such as maths, history, English or biology, normally struggle to complete the first year and, in most cases, do not continue studying the language until the third year.

In contrast, it has been observed that students who take the initiative in their learning process by making use of multiple learning strategies are seemingly not only able to learn faster, but also enjoy the learning process. They are usually among the first students to realise that FL learning is not confined to what happens in the classroom, but that it can – and should also – occur when they make use of the language outside the classroom in meaningful contexts.

1.2 THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

When faced with the reality shown in Table 1, that on average – since 2008 – only 38% of students who started studying Spanish were successfully completing and passing the beginners' courses every year, the first possible explanation that was considered was that perhaps there was a direct relationship between the low pass rate and the small number of students who were studying Spanish as a core module, as opposed to studying it as an elective module (meaning that perhaps students of Spanish as a core module had an advantage over the students of Spanish as an elective module). Table 2 shows us the percentages of students doing Spanish as a core/elective module in first year and the total average.

Table 2: Students studying Spanish as a core or elective module in first year (%)
Source: UP Faculty of Humanities – Student Administration

Year	As a core	As an elective	Total
2008	17%	83%	106
2009	8%	92%	92
2010	16%	84%	134
2011	10%	90%	134
2012	13%	87%	140
2013	16%	84%	148
2014	14%	86%	131
Average	**13%**	**87%**	**126**

However, when analysing the final marks of students from both groups and noticing that some students, irrespective of studying Spanish as a core or elective module, were doing well whereas other students from either group were struggling to successfully complete the first-year course, the first possible explanation was discarded.

When further analysing the situation and noticing that only a small fraction of beginners – irrespective of students studying Spanish as a core or elective module – had carried on until the third year (see Table 3), it became obvious that the problem was more complex than it seemed and was not necessarily limited to what the lecturers were doing or not doing.

Through personal reflection, informal interviews with current and former students of Spanish, literature reviews, discussions within the Spanish Section and talks with a more senior colleague at the Department, it became clear to the researcher that the focus should be placed not only on the teaching aspects, but also on the learning aspects, specifically on what students were doing or were supposed to do to learn a FL like Spanish.

Table 3: Number of beginners who carried on and completed third year
Source: UP Faculty of Humanities – Student Administration

2010	8 out of 106 who started as beginners in 2008
2011	7 out of 92 who started as beginners in 2009
2012	8 out of 134 who started as beginners in 2010
2013	10 out of 134 who started as beginners in 2011
2014	5 out of 140 who started as beginners in 2012
2015	8 out of 140 who started as beginners in 2013
2016	7 out of 82 who started as beginners in 2014

The shift of attention from teaching aspects to learning aspects came as a result of observing during these years that some students – who successfully passed and carried on until the third year – were neither overly gifted for FL learning nor excessively motivated to learn Spanish. They were simply committed students working hard and consistently, who were seemingly making use of a variety of strategies that they considered appropriate to complete specific language tasks at different points in time throughout their learning process in the Spanish courses of their respective undergraduate studies.

Inspired by the same motives that led Rubin (1975) to write her highly cited research article titled *What the 'good language learner' can teach us*[5], this research studied the use of language learning strategies (LLS) by students who completed three years of Spanish at undergraduate level and its potential contributions towards the enhancement of learning Spanish as a FL among university learners. Rubin's motivation was to identify the LLS employed by successful learners in order to draw on this information to help less successful learners (Rubin, 1975:42, Grenfell and Macaro, 2007:11, Simeon, 2014:14). Rubin noticed that some people were more successful (however this is defined) than others at learning a second/foreign language (Rubin, 1975:41) and tried to isolate what successful learners were doing to impart this knowledge to less successful learners (Rubin, 1975:41-42).

[5] According to Google Scholar, Rubin's article "*What the 'good language learner' can teach us"* has been academically cited 2706 times. [Accessed: 05 March 2017].

Rubin was quite aware that identifying and observing strategies was a complicated task because they involved cognitive processes which neither the learner nor the teacher were perhaps able to specify (Rubin, 1975:45). Although she managed to identify seven distinctive strategies which distinguished successful learners from less successful learners, her main contribution to the field was to draw the attention of other scholars to the strategy construct and to the kind of strategies researchers should be looking for. Rubin's work also encouraged other scholars to identify and classify strategies.

Around the time of the publication of Rubin's article, research in the field of LLS was motivated by a genuine desire to shift the emphasis from language instruction to language learning (Macaro, 2006:325). This seems to be in response to changes in the '60s and '70s where – under the influence of generative grammar and cognitive psychology – the direction in language education shifted from teaching to learning, and from teacher to learner[6]. Rather than focusing on what instructors do, the interest was placed on what learners do to learn a new language; that is, "thinking about learners and their approaches to learning" (Oxford et al., 2014a:20). Nowadays, after forty years of continuing research, the interest in the field of LLS remains as vibrant as it was in the past, as shown by its continuing presence in the literature (Griffiths and Oxford, 2014:1).

In 1990, Oxford formulated a well-known definition that has lasted for several years and has been used by numerous researchers since then (Ellis, 2008:706, Tam, 2013:5, Griffiths and Oxford, 2014:2). She defined learning strategies as "specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective and more transferrable to new situations." (Oxford, 1990:8)

Research findings on LLS[7], while not conclusive and sometimes contradictory, have shown that LLS have the potential to enable students to develop autonomy and language competence, to gain a large measure of responsibility in their learning process, and to make the language learning experience more successful by

[6] Finocchiaro and Bonomo 1973; Jakobovits 1970; Oller and Richards 1973 cited in Kim (1983:84).

[7] See studies conducted by Oxford (1990:1), Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995:18), Wharton (2000:204), Hsiao and Oxford (2002:372), Cohen (2007:39), Pineda (2010:97), Alhaisoni (2012:115), Oxford et al (2014b:11).

producing the desired learning effect and allowing the student to work in a well-organised and competent way, while also enjoying the learning process.

Making use of the well-known proverb which states that if we give a man a fish, we would feed him for a day, but if we teach him how to fish, we will feed him for a lifetime, Griffiths (2003a:1) states that if language learners were only provided with answers, their immediate problem would be solved; but if they were encouraged to use strategies to work out the answers for themselves, they would be empowered to manage their own learning.

Rubin's initial claim (1975:42) that "if we knew more about what the 'successful learners' did, we might be able to teach these strategies to poorer learners to enhance their success record" has been extensively debated. On the one hand, it has been widely supported in the literature[8], but on the other hand, it has also been criticised by other researchers who have questioned the fundamental assumption of this claim – that passing on the behaviours of successful learners to less successful learners was an achievable process mainly dependent on instruction (Grenfell and Macaro, 2007:12).

Moreover, some researchers have claimed that LLS are not as teachable in practice as the literature suggests because there are multiple aspects that complicate the transferability of such strategies to less successful learners, such as cultural and individual differences, educational background of students, students' personalities, motivations and self-esteem, students' and teachers' beliefs about language learning, and varying cognitive styles (Rees - Miller, 1993:679, Rodríguez-Lifante, 2015:20).

However, taking into account that at the University of Pretoria (UP) both successful and less successful students were making use of a similar variety of cognitive styles, were composed of a similar spectrum of cultural backgrounds, and fell into the same age category, it was assumed that these differences would not have a significant impact on the intended outcomes of this research. Thus, based on the work of Griffiths (2008a) that shows that the historical attempt to identify a single type of successful language learner has given way to an understanding of many different

[8] As found in Naiman et al (1978:8), Chamot (2001:26), Peacock and Ho (2003:180), Chamot (2004:14), Rodríguez Ruiz and García (2005), Griffiths (2008a:95), Lai (2009:255).

types of successful language learners from which multiple lessons can be learnt (Oxford, 2011:262, Oxford et al., 2014b:31), this study attempts to explore the use of LLS in a specific FL context and identify the spectrum and different combinations of strategies used by different kinds of successful students who completed Spanish up to the third year level. This study also examines how these strategies change over time in order to present all these findings – and the possible value they may have – to the reader so that he/she may assess the relevance that the implementation of these strategies may have to the learning of a FL.

1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

To gain a better understanding of the use of LLS and the role that these strategies play in learning Spanish as a foreign language among university students who started as beginners in 2014 and completed three years of studies at the undergraduate level in 2016 at the University of Pretoria, with the intent of improving the current situation.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In order to reach its goals, this study aimed to answer the following research questions:

- What is the profile of students that study Spanish at undergraduate level at the University of Pretoria?
- What language learning strategies do students perceive and report using at different points in time during three consecutive years of studying Spanish as a foreign language at undergraduate level?
- What factors do students report affecting their perceived use of language learning strategies at different points in time as they become progressively more proficient in Spanish?
- How does the use of particular language learning strategies emerge, evolve and consolidate or disappear?
- What role does the use of language learning strategies play in learning Spanish as a foreign language at the undergraduate level?

1.5 THESIS STATEMENT

Students who start as beginners and complete three years of Spanish at undergraduate level seem to make consistent use of a variety of strategies and develop common patterns in strategy use as their proficiency in the language grows. However, when using LLS to develop their reading, writing, speaking and listening skills at different points in time, some strategies become more prominent while others consolidate or sometimes disappear. Students who report high use of LLS do not necessarily achieve high levels of language proficiency, and students who report low use of LLS are not necessarily less successful than others.

1.6 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Since the publication of Rubin's article in 1975, researchers on LLS have made important contributions to the field of FL acquisition, which includes FL learning (Paredes, 2010:162, Mitits, 2015:26). The field of FL learning is nurtured by both studies focusing on language acquisition and studies focusing on language learning. Studies focusing on language acquisition emphasise the innate process of acquiring a language and the pivotal role that interaction with other speakers plays in this regard (Oxford, 1990:4, Peçenek, 2010:269). Acquisition can be seen as a subconscious process similar to the way a child learns his/her first language (Bahrani, 2011:281).

Studies focusing on language learning see learning as a conscious process, and at the heart of these studies lies the concept of "learning to learn". These studies focus on, among other things, the pivotal role of learning to use LLS, as "language learning involves much more than teacher and learners simply interacting with one another", acquiring new vocabulary or displaying a full command of grammar rules within a classroom setting (Macaro, 2001:1).

When discussing learning strategies, two taxonomies are cited most commonly among researchers: O'Malley and Chamot's taxonomy (1990), and Oxford's taxonomy (1990).

On the basis of Anderson's (1983:215-216) cognitive theory[9], O'Malley and Chamot made fundamental distinctions among learning strategies (Hsiao and Oxford, 2002:371, Grenfell and Macaro, 2007:17). They differentiated and classified strategies according to their function namely cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies and socio-affective learning strategies (Cohen, 2011a:682).

Oxford's taxonomy is hierarchical and distinguishes between direct and indirect strategies, each of which is then broken down into a number of subcategories (Ellis, 2008:705). Oxford made use of the two kinds of learning strategies identified by Rubin (1981) as direct and indirect, and then further subdivided these two major classes into a total of six groups: memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies under the direct class, and metacognitive, affective, and social strategies under the indirect class (Oxford, 1990:14-16, Griffiths and Oxford, 2014:2).

This study chose Oxford's taxonomy because O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) classification did not have enough explanatory power to differentiate between social and affective strategies, and did not further categorise cognitive strategies into memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies[10]. Oxford's taxonomy has been regarded by the some scholars[11] as a superior classification of strategies because it is more comprehensive and detailed than the other classification models. Furthermore, according to these same scholars, Oxford's taxonomy is not only comprehensive and detailed, but also precise and systematic in accounting for the variety of strategies reported by language learners. Table 1.1 below shows how Oxford classifies LLS.

Table 1.1: Oxford's taxonomy.
Source: Oxford (1990:16)

Language learning strategies					
Direct strategies			**Indirect strategies**		
Memory	Cognitive	Compensation	Metacognitive	Affective	Social

[9] See section 2.4.1 for further discussion.

[10] Refer to section 2.4.2 for an in-depth discussion on the reasoning of the choice of Oxford's taxonomy.

[11] See Chamot (2004:16-17), Nisbet et al. (2005:100), Wong (2005:247), Rodríguez Ruiz and García (2005:6), Ghebremuse (2007:8), Rezaei and Almasian (2007:66), Alptekin (2007:5), Magogwe and Oliver (2007:340), Rahimi et al. (2008:34), Zahedi (2008:164), Lai (2009:256-257), Magno (2010:41), Kashefian-Naeeini and Maarof (2010:198), Khamkhien (2012:182), Alhaisoni (2012:116-117), Chang and Liu, 2013:199).

As described by Oxford (1990), direct strategies are directly involved with the target language and require mental processing. They can be further divided into the following subcategories: memory strategies, cognitive strategies, and compensation strategies. Indirect strategies – which comprise metacognitive strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies – are used to "manage and support language learning without (in many instances) directly involving the target language… through focusing, planning, evaluating, seeking opportunities, controlling anxiety, increasing cooperation and empathy, and other means." (Oxford, 1990:135,151)

Although Oxford (1990:8) defined LLS as the use of "specific actions", as mentioned above, other scholars have questioned the precise nature of these "specific actions" to be counted as learning strategies, as not all of them are observable and easy to distinguish. Some strategies are behavioural, while others are mental and therefore not directly observable (Ellis, 2008:705). Macaro (2006:325) has also challenged the difficulties of providing a proper definition of strategies by arguing that strategies must contain not only an observable action but also be described in terms of a goal, a learning situation, and a mental action. He does not *define* strategies but prefers to *describe* them as having a series of essential features, such as the ones mentioned above. For him, strategies are "more appropriately described in terms of thinking rather than doing" (Macaro, 2006:327); that is, "more cognitive in nature than behavioural." (Ellis, 2008:705)

Despite the lack of consensus in defining learning strategies among some researchers, Griffiths and Oxford (2014:2) have argued that in order to conduct research, it is essential to have a clear understanding and a working definition of the construct being researched. These two researchers, as well as other scholars in the field (Oxford et al., 2014a:11), have agreed on defining learning strategies as: "the steps or actions that learners consciously take to improve and regulate their own language learning."

One of the important features of this definition is that it seeks to draw attention to what learners consciously do as opposed to focusing on what teachers do, and makes the construct a more clearly defined topic to be researched. Moreover, the element of choice is important because it is what gives a strategy its special character (Cohen, 2011b:7). According to Takač (2008:51), "the element of choice seems to be one of the key features of learning strategies" because it entails a clear

understanding that LLS have the potential to intentionally make learning more effective, and by doing so, positively influence the motivational and affective state of the learner. Although the notion of consciousness is still a controversial issue, it is, apparently, what actually distinguishes strategies from processes or actions that are not necessarily strategic (Cohen, 2011b:7)

As far as this research study is concerned, the definition below – which was earlier provided by Griffiths and Oxford (2014:2) – was considered the working definition for conducting this research.

Language learning strategies:

Steps or actions that learners consciously take to improve and regulate their own language learning.

1.7 OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Since the 1970s, most studies on the use of LLS have offered snapshot views of strategy frequency use[12] and have failed to provide further details on why strategies were or were not used, and under what circumstances. Quantitative statistical studies have been dominating the field, despite the fact that snapshot-type research has proven to be weak when investigating changes over time because of its cross-sectional approach[13]. Therefore, longitudinal research seems more appropriate to describe patterns of change over time and to explain correlation or causal relationships (Dörnyei, 2007:79).

Due to the fact that this study wanted to gain a deeper understanding of the use of LLS and the role that these strategies play in learning Spanish as a FL, it seemed appropriate to use a mixed methods design in which the investigator combined quantitative and qualitative methods (Dörnyei, 2007:44, Gunning and Oxford, 2014:85).

[12] See Peacock and Ho, 2003, Alptekin, 2007, Vlčková, 2007, Wait, 2007, Ambrosi-Randić and Kostić-Bobanović, 2008, Alhaisoni, 2012, Bozorgian and Pillay, 2013.

[13] According to Cawthon (2016:15), a cross-sectional approach refers to "a method of data collection, in which all data are gathered at one point in time, rather than multiple times over an extended period of time."

In terms of the type of mixed methods design, Oxford (2011:232) distinguishes between concurrent and sequential mixed designs. She explains that concurrent mixed designs consist of gathering qualitative and quantitative data at the same time, whereas in sequential studies it is possible to distinguish between two phases, with quantitative data collection and analysis coming first, followed by qualitative data collection and analysis, or vice versa. Using Oxford's terminology, this study followed a sequential mixed methods design in which a quantitative data collection technique was followed by a qualitative data collection technique at different points in time. Using Dörnyei's terminology, this study followed a prospective longitudinal design which was characterised by taking successive measures at different points in time from the same respondents (Dörnyei, 2007:82). Using Creswell and Plano Clark's terminology (2011:71), this study followed a multiphase mixed methods design which was characterised by the combination of sequential explanatory designs[14].

Quantitative data were gathered by the administration of Oxford's Strategy Inventory of Language Learning (SILL). Oxford developed this instrument in 1990. Since then the SILL has been used worldwide[15]. As stated by Oxford, the purpose of the SILL is "to provide a general picture of the learner's typical strategy use, rather than a specific portrayal of the strategies used by the learner on a particular task" (Oxford, 2011:159). This general picture can be of great value if it is used appropriately and in tandem with qualitative data.

In this research, Oxford's SILL was administered in conjunction with follow-up interviews on five occasions which were evenly distributed over a period of three years. Taken together, these interviews provided information on how, why and under what circumstances LLS were used. Thus, qualitative data helped the researcher to better understand the quantified information gathered by the SILL and revealed underlying nuances and meanings that helped to make sense of the numbers, especially when some results seemed inconsistent or contradictory

[14] Further discussion on existing mixed methods designs and the particular design chosen for this study can be found in section 3.6.

[15] See Oxford (1999:114), Peacock and Ho (2003:179), Chamot (2005:114), Nisbet et al. (2005:101), Alptekin (2007), Vlčková (2007), Wait (2007), Ambrosi-Randić and Kostić-Bobanović (2008), Al-Buainain (2010:95), Kafipour et al. (2011:162), Psaltou-Joycey and Kantaridou (2011:313), Alhaisoni (2012), Ananisarab and Abdi (2012), Bozorgian and Pillay (2013), Chang and Liu (2013), Ismail and Al Khatib (2013), Tam (2013), Tragant et al. (2013:96), Ghafournia (2014).

(Leedy and Ormrod, 2012:259). Furthermore, the collection, analysis and interpretation of qualitative and quantitative data helped the researcher to triangulate and resolve puzzling findings.

Pragmatism and practicality were some of the reasons for choosing and mixing quantitative and qualitative techniques. This helped to gain a greater understanding of the phenomenon, and in so doing, fulfil the purpose of this research.

Numeric data were analysed by using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Data originating from interview responses were treated as qualitative data, which were further analysed following the steps presented by Cohen et al. (2007:183-185); that is, (1) by establishing units of analysis by means of ascribing codes and by pulling together a wealth of material into some order and structure; (2) by creating a "domain analysis" that involved grouping the units into domains, clusters, groups, patterns, themes and coherent sets to form domains; (3) by establishing relationships and linkages between the domains; (4) by making speculative inferences; (5) by summarising; (6) by seeking negative and discrepant cases; and (7) by generating theoretical statements derived from the data.

The sample of this study consisted of the entire group of Spanish students that started as beginners in 2014 and completed their third year in 2016. The fact that the researcher and students were able to see each other on a regular basis facilitated the implementation of the cycles in which the administration of Oxford's SILL was followed by qualitative interviews.

1.8 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This research can be classified as applied research because it strives to improve the understanding of a particular phenomenon – the low pass rate at the beginners' level and the low throughput rate up until the third year – with the intent of contributing to its improvement (Guest et al., 2012:2, Bickman and Rog, 1998:x). However, this study differs from the majority of previous studies in that it does not follow a cross-sectional, quantitative approach that only focuses on quantifying the perceived and reported use of LLS to draw some generalisations of what successful and less successful learners do.

As the literature review shows in the following chapter, not much research has been conducted by means of longitudinal studies to see how the use of LLS emerges, evolves, consolidates or disappears as learners progressively develop their language proficiency. In this respect, the significance of this study lies in its three-year longitudinal design to study how the perceived and reported use of LLS changes over time, and to what extent such changes relate to the development of proficiency in the new language.

As far as the researcher's knowledge is concerned and based on the National Research Foundation (NRF) report on current and completed research projects in South Africa (Thulare, 2014), no studies have been conducted on the use of LLS to learn Spanish as a FL in South Africa.

There is also a scarcity of research that triangulates the data gathered by successive administrations of Oxford's SILL with qualitative data over an extended period of time. As researchers are apparently becoming increasingly aware of the need to triangulate their findings by means of complementary research methods and in-depth descriptions of LLS use (Griffiths and Oxford, 2014:3), the need for conducting research by mixing quantitative and qualitative techniques arises naturally as a means to gain deeper understanding.

Therefore, this study attempts to fill the abovementioned research gap left by previous studies by conducting a longitudinal study to closely monitor how learners make use of LLS as their language proficiency develops, paying attention to the particularities related to learning Spanish as a FL at the University of Pretoria, and using a mixed methods approach.

1.9 ASSUMPTIONS

Taking into account that the validity of the results in any research study depends largely on the underlying assumptions, which are not necessarily obvious but can affect the study enormously (Hofstee, 2006:88), the following assumptions have been identified in this study:

- That the methodology used for eliciting frequency of strategy use through the administration of Oxford's SILL is generally applicable to the learning of Spanish as a FL in the South African context;

- That the quantitative methods used for analysing the data (such as statistical analysis) can render equally valid and reliable results as the methods used to analyse qualitative data;
- That Oxford's SILL is a valid and reliable instrument to measure perceived and self-reported frequency of strategy use, and is a useful and comprehensive tool to classify LLS;
- That students throughout the three-year study did report accurately (when answering Oxford's SILL) and comprehensively (when answering the interview questions). In other words, that the participants' self-reports of frequency of strategy use were relatively accurate and that these data lent themselves to be triangulated with sufficient and meaningful qualitative data collected from the interviews over the conduction of the three-year research study;
- That the phenomenon studied is knowable within a specified level of probability representing a single reality, but each participant has his/her own unique interpretation of it (Mertens, 2010:11);
- That there are multiple intertwined aspects related to the use of LLS that can be studied over time in order to be in a better position to find out if they play a pivotal role in learning Spanish as a FL at the undergraduate level;
- That the use of LLS has a positive impact on learning a FL, irrespective of the language learnt and the learners' individual differences.

1.10 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The following section outlines the structure of the thesis and provides a short description of each chapter.

1.10.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 introduces the study, the background of the study, presents the research problem, the main purpose, and the research questions. It briefly discusses the methodology, the significance of the study, the assumptions, and ends by presenting the structure of the study.

1.10.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter 2 presents a review of relevant literature that supports the study and sets the theoretical framework from which this study is conducted. It also presents the lenses by which the data are analysed.

1.10.3 METHODOLOGY

Chapter 3 discusses and justifies the methodology used and the techniques employed in collecting and analysing the data as well as the ethical considerations that are followed.

1.10.4 DATA COLLECTION AND DATA ANALYSIS

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 focus on the students that participated in the study in the first, second and third year. The purpose of these chapters is to present and analyse the information gathered in a systematic and structured way and to discuss the findings, taking into account the lenses provided by the literature review and following the methodological steps presented in the third chapter.

1.10.5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter 7 attempts to answer each research question and provides a synthesis of the findings. It then presents important implications for teaching and learning aimed at enhancing the learning of Spanish at undergraduate level in FL contexts. This chapter also discusses some challenges and limitations of the present study, and concludes by presenting recommendations and suggestions for further research.

2 LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES

2.1 FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The teaching of foreign languages as a scientific endeavour with its own objectives and instruments was properly established after the Second World War (García Santa-Cecilia, 1996:5, Kırmızı, 2011:14). In the past, the teaching of FLs followed the way in which Latin and Greek had been taught for centuries. This way of teaching was later known as the grammar-translation method (GTM).

The goal of learning a FL using the GTM was to gain a deeper understanding of the morphology and syntax of the FL in order to enable the student to read and understand foreign literature (Lamie and Lambert, 2003:92). It focused on the teaching of grammar and the translation of texts as the primary teaching and learning activities; that is, the focus was on reading and writing translations rather than on communication and the transfer of meaning by listening and speaking. The reading texts used dictated the words to be learnt; the basic unit of teaching and practice was the sentence, accuracy of translations was strongly emphasised, grammar was taught deductively in an organised and systematic way, and learners' native language was the medium of instruction (Griffiths, 2008c:255, Richards and Rodgers, 2014:6-7).

Committing things to memory was a chief component of the GTM (Mukalel, 2007:54). Learners were heavily burdened with the memorisation of large lists of vocabulary (Griffiths and Parr, 2001:247) and correct forms of words, as well as sets of grammar rules and their exceptions (Mukalel, 2007:55, Sapargul and Sartor, 2010:26). The GTM did not encourage learners to practice the new language in

natural, realistic settings, and focused on reading and writing rather than on listening and speaking[16].

The birth of modern linguistics in the nineteenth century was characterised by an initial emphasis on phonetics, phonology and morphology, and an increasing process of globalisation in Europe towards the end of the nineteenth century. The need for oral proficiency in FLs became an important and practical priority (Edisherashvili, 2014:17). During this time, prominent scholars and other reformers also challenged the GTM and proposed innovative principles on which a new approach should be based. They believed that (i) the focus needed to be placed on the spoken language and not on the written language; (ii) the findings regarding the study of speech sounds and how they are produced needed to be applied to the teaching of a language; (iii) learners should first hear the language before studying it in written form; (iv) sentences should be practiced and studied in meaningful contexts and not be taught in isolation; and (v) grammar should be taught inductively (García Santa-Cecilia, 1996:6, Richards and Rodgers, 2014:10-11).

Although attempts to match FL learning to first language acquisition had already been made at different times in history, it was during this time that a special interest in first language acquisition developed with the intention to build a methodology of how a FL should be taught. The Direct Method emerged as a result of this, and also in opposition to the GTM[17]. Its main idea was that FLs had to be learnt in the same way children pick up their first language (Richards and Rodgers, 2014:11, Edisherashvili, 2014:17). Reformers started to believe that the use of the learner's first language(s) was not necessary to teach a FL if meaning was conveyed using the target language and assisted with demonstration and action. The underlying idea was to encourage direct and spontaneous use of the target language so that learners would then be able to understand new vocabulary by using known words and to induce learners to realise the grammar rules through some form of guided discovery (Richards and Rodgers, 2014:11,17, Ratna Sagar, 2015).

The Direct Method was successful in private language schools where students, who had the necessary time to accomplish their language goals, registered to develop

[16] For a more thorough definition and history of the GTM refer to Sanchez (1992:178-182).

[17] Awan and Shafi (2016:35-42) present a useful comparison between the GTM and Direct Method, emphasising the advantages and techniques of each.

communicative competence and become more confident, primarily in listening and speaking. However, the Direct Method was difficult to implement in public secondary schools for two reasons. It was time-consuming as it only allowed the use of the target language in class, despite the fact that a short explanation in a language understood by the student would have led more efficiently to comprehension, and it required skilful teachers with native proficiency in the FL, which was not always the case (Richards and Rodgers, 2014:11-13).

The audiolingual method arose in the first half of the twentieth century, partly out of a reaction against the limitations of the GTM and partly out of the urgent wartime demands for fluent speakers of German, Italian and Japanese (García Santa-Cecilia, 1996:7, Richards and Rodgers, 1986:23, Griffiths, 2008c:256). Theoretically, the audiolingual method was influenced by structuralism[18], a linguistic theory that viewed language as a "system of structurally related elements for the coding of meaning" (Richards and Rodgers, 2014:40-41), and by behaviourism[19], a learning theory that viewed learning as a process in which specific behaviours are acquired or modified in response to specific stimuli (Field, 2011:162, Richards and Rodgers, 1986:23, Griffiths, 2008c:256, Nassaji, 2015).

The audiolingual method emphasised speaking and listening before reading and writing (Griffiths, 2008c:256) and promoted the teaching of grammatical structures sequenced in a linear manner by repetition, imitation, memorisation and pattern drills because it conceived that language habits were reinforced and formed in this

[18] Structuralism originated with Saussure in linguistics. It holds the view that "phenomena of human life are not intelligible except through their interrelations. These relations constitute a structure, and behind local variations in the surface phenomena there are constant laws of abstract structure… One of the early successes of structuralist investigation in linguistics was the discovery that phonetic units (phonemes) gain their identity through a network of relationships (opposition, difference) between sounds rather than through the brute physical nature of a given sound. Structuralism in linguistics embraced not only phonetics but also semantics" ("Structuralism" in Blackburn 2007). "The term itself was in general use before the Second World War, with reference to a discipline in which the study of a language system was abstracted from the spoken and written use of languages and from their history" ("Structuralism" in Matthews 2007b).

[19] Behaviourism "was first of all a methodological view, counselling the avoidance of introspection and the subjective in favour of the scientific measurement of behaviour and its causes… It was later identified with a simplistic vision of the springs of human action, and with the prospect of control of action by relatively simple manipulation of the stimuli and patterns of reinforcement that are allowed to impinge on an agent" ("Behaviourism" in Blackburn 2007). "It sought to eliminate all reference to subjective concepts or experience. The data were accordingly restricted to the observable reactions of subjects to observable stimuli. Originated just before the First World War and developed further after the Second World War. It was rapidly abandoned, in both psychology and linguistics, in the early 1960s" ("Behaviourism" in Matthews 2007a).

way (Nassaji, 2015, Griffiths, 2008c:256). Learners were discouraged from taking initiative in class so as to reduce the possibility of them making mistakes, as errors were considered bad habits that hindered the learning process (Nassaji, 2015). Because of this, "there was little or no recognition given to any conscious contribution which the individual learner might make in the learning process" (Griffiths, 2008c:256) and first-language interference was considered an important cause of errors (Nassaji, 2015).

Chomsky's critiques and views – exposing the limitations of the behaviourist paradigm in explaining the cognitive dimension of language acquisition – brought about a paradigm shift, a new way of looking at language learning (Chomsky, 1959:6, Hualde et al., 2009). Chomsky's ideas focused the attention of the whole academic community on the mental properties people bring to bear on language use and language learning (Richards and Rodgers, 1986:59, "Competencia gramatical" in Centro Virtual Cervantes, 2015b). Chomsky postulated that all human beings are born with a language acquisition device that enables them to develop language from an innate set of grammatical principles which, in turn, explains how original utterances are generated from a language user's underlying competence (Griffiths, 2008c:257). He drew the attention of linguists and educators to the deep innate structure of language and professed that language learning was more about creativity than habit formation, and "showed that humans are capable of coming up with linguistic structures that they have never heard before, not merely copying the model provided but creating them on their own." (Edisherashvili, 2014:18)

> "The generative grammar arose in the context of what is often called 'the cognitive revolution' of the 1950s, and was an important factor in its development. Whether or not the term 'revolution' is appropriate, there was an important change of perspective: from the study of behaviour and its products (such as texts), to the inner mechanisms that enter into thought and action." (Chomsky, 2000:5)

As it is explained later, "the cognitive revolution" brought about an interest in how humans (not animals) process information from the environment, and in how information is constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed. Nevertheless, the Chomskyan revolution still held an asocial view of language learning (Grenfell and Macaro, 2007:10). Language learning was still seen as a psychological phenomenon in which the development of grammatical competence was considered an individual experience devoid of social context.

When Hymes (1972:278) pointed out that "there are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless" he was providing "a new paradigmatic perspective to language teaching and learning, one which focused much more on social context" (Grenfell and Macaro, 2007:10). He was pointing out that effective linguistic behaviour was not only determined by deep innate structures (Grenfell and Macaro, 2007:10), but also by the "rules of use" which can be learnt either through informal means or in formal classroom settings through direct instruction, which may be self-generated or copied from others (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990:75).

Hymes' view of communicative competence evidenced a paradigm shift from structural linguistics to sociolinguistics. He introduced the concept of communicative competence and asserted that to communicate properly a speaker needed not only to have command of the grammatical rules but also the ability to produce appropriate statements according to the situation and use the language effectively (Bobb et al., 2008:25, "Competencia comunicativa" in Centro Virtual Cervantes, 2015a).

Another key theoretical development came from the redefinition of the concept of communicative competence[20] in 1980. Canale and Swain (1980:27) redefined what was understood by communicative competence and postulated that it was composed minimally of grammatical competence[21], sociolinguistic competence,[22] and strategic competence[23]. They did not find any strong theoretical or empirical motivation for the view that grammatical competence is more or less crucial to successful communication than is sociolinguistic competence or strategic competence. Later on, in 1983, Canale enriched the understanding of the concept of communicative competence by proposing that it minimally included four areas of knowledge and skill: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence.

According to Canale (1983:6-11), grammatical competence concerns mastery of the language code (verbal or non-verbal) and rules of the language such as vocabulary,

[20] For a more thorough definition of communicative competence and the evolution of the concept refer to Cenoz Iragui (2016:449-465) and Council of Europe (2001:13) or Consejo de Europa (2002:13).

[21] For a thorough discussion of grammatical competence see Peris (2016:467-490).

[22] For a thorough discussion of sociolinguistic competence see Council of Europe (2001:13-14) or Consejo de Europa (2002:13-14).

[23] For a thorough discussion of strategic competence see Fernández López (2016:573-592).

word and sentence formation, pronunciation, spelling, and linguistic semantics. Sociolinguistic competence refers to sociocultural rules of use that address the extent to which utterances are produced and understood appropriately – in terms of meaning and form – in different sociolinguistic contexts. Discourse competence concerns mastery of how to combine grammatical forms and meanings to achieve a unified spoken or written text in different genres. Strategic competence refers to the mastery of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that may be called into action to compensate for breakdowns in communication or to enhance the effectiveness of communication.

Although Canale was referring to "communication strategies" and not necessarily to learning strategies *per se*, the inclusion of the strategic competence as a component of communicative competence enhanced the understanding of the role that individual factors play in learning a second/foreign language, especially because students who are good at being strategic apparently know when to use strategies and how to match strategies according to the learning task. In this respect, it is possible to assert that being strategic means to be skilful at using different strategies in a way that leads to achieving the best possible results in language learning.

2.2 Background information on Language Learning Strategies

Research on LLS began in the 1960s under the influence of cognitive psychology (Rezaei and Almasian, 2007:66, Asgari and Mustapha, 2011:84, Tajeddin, 2013, Nemati, 2009:14). The interest in learning strategies developed at a time when the behaviourist views of learning were challenged by the emerging views of cognitive psychology (Moya, 2014:49). It was during the 1970s that a renewed interest in the language learning process coupled with an emphasis on meaning started to emerge (García Santa-Cecilia, 1996:8). Although interest in learning and the learner had already existed in the past, it was only in the late 1960s that theorists became aware that "a more direct understanding of the learning process and the language learner was needed to improve teaching methods" (Naiman et al., 1978:1).

In those days, the dominant behaviourist paradigm limited the nature and the way studies in psychology were conducted by expecting that everything had to be framed in terms of observable stimuli and responses, and by not acknowledging the need for theorising about mental mechanism of any sort (Hyman, 2014:xv). The new

cognitive paradigm brought about an interest in information processing and constructive processing; that is, in how humans (not animals) process information from the environment, and in how information is deconstructed and reconstructed. Researchers no longer studied animals responding to stimulus; instead they followed information through the human processing systems that lead to perception, memories, thoughts and behaviours. Within the cognitive paradigm, information processing is not seen as passive, but constructive. According to Hyman (2014:xvi), humans are active processers of information who search for, select, manipulate, and reconstruct information.

LLS research emerged in a context in which "a fundamental shift of perspective in thinking about the process of language learning" was taking place (Grenfell and Macaro, 2007:9). Learners were finding repetition boring and not conducive to learning (Hutchinson and Waters cited in Griffiths, 2008c:256) as grammar was being taught as an individual habit essentially devoid of social context (Grenfell and Macaro, 2007:9). Though LLS research started in second language settings, it quickly spread to FL environments (Gu, 2012:320).

The basic assumption that accompanied LLS research was that unlike a first language learner, a second/foreign language learner would always find the learning of a new language problematic (Grenfell and Macaro, 2007:10). Against this background, the strategy construct emerged as a way to overcome these problems. The term strategy gained momentum and established itself as part of the conceptual vocabulary of applied linguistics because it had the potential to capture a wide range of linguistic behaviour that was exerted to overcome challenges within discourse, within the social context, or inside the head of the learner (Grenfell and Macaro, 2007:10).

Initial research on strategies intended to find out what successful learners were doing that made them successful in language learning. Rubin (1975) was one of the primary figures in this type of research that was later labelled as "good language learner research". In her article *What the 'good language learner' can teach us* (Rubin, 1975), she indicated that her aim was to identify the LLS employed by successful learners[24] in order to draw on this information to help less-successful

[24] In this research, "successful learner and/or good learner" refers to a fast learner who is able to achieve the desired level of language proficiency and in so doing gets good marks.

learners (Grenfell and Macaro, 2007:11, Simeon, 2014:14). Rubin's article inspired researchers worldwide to focus on what she called "language learning strategies" (Griffiths, 2013:x) and was able to identify seven key strategies that characterised good language learners, namely: guessing/inferring, communicating, managing inhibitions, attending to form, practising, monitoring one's own and the speech of others, and attending to meaning (Griffiths, 2013:5).

Another important article to consider is *What can we learn from the good language learner?* by Stern (1975), who like Rubin[25] assumed that it was possible to identify a single set of characteristics possessed by a good language learner that could be transferred to less successful learners. He identified ten characteristics or learning strategies, namely: experimenting, planning, developing the new language into an ordered system, revising progressively, searching for meaning, practising, using the language in real communication, self-monitoring, developing the target language into a separate reference system, and learning to think in the target language (Griffiths, 2013:5). The assumption of identifiability of a single set of characteristics gradually gave way to the realisation that no single ideal set of characteristics existed and showed that many different kinds of successful language learners figure out their varied talents in a wide range of settings (Oxford and Lee, 2008:306) .

Four books also contributed to bringing the attention of other scholars to the LLS construct and provided the theoretical underpinnings for future research (Macaro, 2006:320). These books are often cited and can be regarded as fundamental to understanding LLS research. They are: *The good language learner* (Naiman et al., 1978), *Learning strategies in second language acquisition* (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990), *Language learning strategies: what every teacher should know* (Oxford, 1990) and *Learner strategies in language learning* (Wenden and Rubin, 1987).

2.3 DEFINITION OF LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES

LLS have existed for a long time before we became aware of their existence. For instance, memory strategies, sometimes called mnemonics, were used by

[25] Rubin's (1975) research was based on the assumption that it was possible to identify a single set of characteristics that could be transferred to less successful learners via instruction. Although this assumption was later contested, her main contribution to the field was to draw the attention of other scholars to the strategy construct and to inspire them to identify and classify strategies.

storytellers and orators in ancient times to remember their lines and long speeches (Oxford, 1990:1, 38).

Other strategies ranging from naturalistic language practice techniques to analytic, rule-based strategies were also used by language learners over the centuries (Oxford, 1990:1). However, it is widely accepted today that strategy research got its start and gained vibrancy with the article *What the 'good language learner' can teach us*, published by Rubin in 1975 (Grenfell and Macaro, 2007:11, Gu, 2007:vii, Griffiths, 2008b:83, Cohen, 2011a:683). Although there have been other researchers working along similar lines, Rubin's article introduced the concept of strategies from a new perspective and highlighted the importance that teachers needed to pay attention not only to the target language or the teaching methods, but also to the learning process itself.

Rubin (1975:43) defines strategies as "the techniques or devices which a learner may use to acquire knowledge". From the beginning, strategies are conceptualised in relation to what the learners do (not the teachers) with the explicit intention of acquiring knowledge; in other words, aimed at learning. As the years passed, the strategy concept became influential in education, where it acquired a new meaning and evolved into learning strategies (Oxford, 1990:8).

Nevertheless, the concept of LLS has not been easy to define because of a lack of consensus (Griffiths, 2007, Griffiths, 2008b:83). In this respect, Macaro (2006:322-325) indicates that there has been a lack of clarity in the definition of what a strategy actually is because, among other things, there is no apparent consensus about the location where learning strategies occur: inside the brain or outside it, and if they consist of knowledge, intention, action, or all three. This lack of consensus has led Macaro (2006) to quit the attempt to achieve an all-encompassing definition of LLS and to opt instead for listing defining characteristics (Griffiths and Oxford, 2014:2), such as "strategies are located in working memory… are to be classified as conscious mental activity… must contain not only an action but also a goal and a learning situation…" (Macaro, 2006:327).

Although Ellis (2008:705) also points out that there is uncertainty about the precise nature of behaviours that are to count as learning strategies, he mentions key characteristics to be taken into account when attempting to define strategies. He

mentions that strategies refer to general approaches as well as to specific actions; they are problem-orientated and aim to overcome a learning or communication challenge; learners are generally aware of the strategies they use; strategies involve linguistic and non-linguistic behaviour; and some strategies are behavioural and observable while others are mental and not necessarily observable (Ellis, 2008:705).

Griffiths (2008b:85-86), in an attempt to pull the areas of consensus together, identifies six essential features that should be taken into account when defining LLS:

> (1) they refer to what students do, suggesting an active approach;
>
> (2) there is an element of consciousness, although sometimes they may be deployed automatically [as Cohen (2012:136) asserts that "the element of choice is crucial because it is what gives a strategy its special character… it is what distinguishes strategies from those processes that are not strategic."];
>
> (3) strategies are chosen by learners depending on contextual factors (such as teaching/learning methods, learning situation or task requirement), individual factors, (such as motivation, style, age, gender, nationality/ethnicity/culture, personality, beliefs) and the nature of the learning goal;
>
> (4) strategic behaviours imply goal-oriented, purposeful activity on the part of the learner;
>
> (5) learners make use of strategies in an attempt to regulate or control their own learning;
>
> (6) the ultimate goal of LLS is the facilitation of learning (Jooneghani et al., 2012:75).

Considering that there is a certain level of agreement on linking strategies not to what teachers do, but to what learners do to facilitate, monitor and/or consolidate their learning, and taking into account the elements presented by Macaro (2006:327), Ellis (2008:705) and Griffiths (2007:91, 2008b:87, 2013:7-15), "language learning strategies" refers in this dissertation to activities, steps or actions

consciously chosen by learners to improve and regulate their own language learning.

It is believed that a simple definition like the above-mentioned one touches the heart of the matter (Griffiths and Oxford, 2014:2, Oxford et al., 2014a:11) and is essential to conduct meaningful research (Perry, 2011:16, Griffiths and Oxford, 2014:2). Methodological aspects regarding how this operational definition is dealt with are presented in more detail in chapter three.

2.4 CLASSIFICATION OF LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES: TAXONOMIES

Since 1975, LLS have been classified in different ways and with considerable effort. According to Ellis (2008:705), two taxonomies are cited most commonly among researchers: O'Malley and Chamot's taxonomy (1990) and Oxford's taxonomy (1990).

2.4.1 O'MALLEY AND CHAMOT'S TAXONOMY (1990)

On the basis of Anderson's (1983:215-216) cognitive theory, O'Malley and Chamot make fundamental distinctions among learning strategies (Hsiao and Oxford, 2002:371, Grenfell and Macaro, 2007:17), and differentiate and classify strategies according to their function namely cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies and socio-affective learning strategies (Cohen, 2011a:682).

When engaging with the literature under review, it is possible to recognise that one of the concepts used by O'Malley and Chamot – when distinguishing between knowing about the language and knowing how to use the language functionally – refers to the distinction made by Anderson's cognitive theory between declarative knowledge and procedural knowledge (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990:20-26). Declarative knowledge refers to *what we know about*, such as definitions of words, facts and rules; in other words, knowledge that can be usually expressed verbally or declared. Procedural knowledge refers to *what we know how to do*, such as our ability to understand and generate language or apply our knowledge of rules to solve problems.

According to O'Malley et al. (1987:295),

> "Knowing about language as a grammatical system, which involves knowing the rules underlying syntax, semantics, and phonology, is not a sufficient condition for knowing how to use the language functionally… In order to use a language for communicative purposes, procedural knowledge is required."

One way to explain how declarative knowledge turns into procedural knowledge to later become gradually fine-tuned and virtually automatic is offered by Anderson (1983:215-260). According to him, skill acquisition (including language acquisition) undergoes three distinctive stages: the cognitive stage, the associative stage, and the autonomous stage. During the cognitive stage, the learner receives instruction or attempts to figure out how to do the task. Although it involves conscious activity on the part of the learner, knowledge is typically declarative. "This type of knowledge enables one to describe how to perform a complex task but is inadequate to guarantee skilled performance." (O'Malley et al., 1987:299)

During the associative stage, declarative knowledge is turned into procedural knowledge by the following mechanism: "first, errors in the original declarative representation of the stored information are gradually detected and eliminated. Second, the connections among the various elements or components of the skill are strengthened." (O'Malley et al., 1987:300) Although performance of the skill may be slow and errors may still occur, it starts to resemble expert performance.

During the autonomous stage, the performance of the skill becomes gradually fine-tuned and virtually automatic, while errors that inhibit successful performance of the skill disappear (O'Malley et al., 1987:300).

O'Malley and Chamot (1990:44-46) differentiate learning strategies into three categories on the level or type of processing involved:

- Metacognitive strategies are higher order executive skills that may entail planning for, monitoring, or evaluating the success of a learning activity.
- Cognitive strategies operate directly on incoming information, manipulating it in ways that enhance learning.
- Social/affective strategies represent a broad grouping that involves either interaction with another person or ideational control over affect.

The figure below (Figure 2.1) shows a preliminary summary of the classification of learning strategies presented by O'Malley and Chamot in 1990. It shows the three category classification, as well as the representative strategies for each category, followed by the respective definitions.

Figure 2.1: O'Malley and Chamot taxonomy
Source: O'Malley and Chamot (1990:46)

Generic strategy classification	Representative strategies	Definitions
Metacognitive strategies	Selective attention	Focusing on special aspects of learning tasks, as in planning to listen for key words or phrases.
	Planning	Planning for the organisation of either written or spoken discourse.
	Monitoring	Reviewing attention to a task, comprehension of information that should be remembered, or production while it is occurring.
	Evaluation	Checking comprehension after completion of a receptive language activity, or evaluating language production after it has taken place.
Cognitive strategies	Rehearsal	Repeating the names or items or objects to be remembered.
	Organisation	Grouping and classifying words, terminology, or concepts according to their semantic or syntactic attributes
	Inferencing	Using information in text to guess meanings of new linguistic items, predict outcomes, or complete missing parts
	Summarising	Intermittently synthesising what one has heard to ensure the information has been retained.
	Deducing	Applying rules to the understanding of language.
	Imagery	Using visual images (either generated or actual) to understand and remember new verbal information.
	Transfer	Using known linguistic information to facilitate a new learning task.
	Elaboration	Linking ideas contained in new information, or integrating new ideas with known information.
Social/affective strategies	Cooperation	Working with peers to solve a problem, pool information, check notes, or get feedback on a learning activity.
	Questioning for clarification	Eliciting from a teacher or peer additional explanation, rephrasing, or examples.
	Self-talk	Using mental redirection of thinking to assure oneself that a learning activity will be successful or to reduce anxiety about a task.

2.4.2 OXFORD'S TAXONOMY (1990)

The other classification cited most commonly among researchers is Oxford's (1990) taxonomy. It is hierarchical and distinguishes between direct and indirect strategies, each of which is then broken down into a number of subcategories (Ellis, 2008:705).

Here, Rubin's dichotomy between direct and indirect strategies is used and further developed by Oxford (Martínez Rebollo, 2014:82). Rubin's taxonomy is one of the first taxonomies in LLS research (Rose, 2011:2). She makes a clear distinction between strategies that contribute directly to learning and strategies that contribute indirectly to learning (O'Malley et al., 1985b:560, Rubin, 1981:124-125, Hsiao and Oxford, 2002:370, Alsinjlawy, 2014:25).

Rubin identifies six types of direct strategies: (1) clarification/verification, (2) monitoring, (3) memorisation, (4) guessing/inductive inferencing, (5) deductive reasoning, and (6) practice; and two types of indirect strategies: (1) creating opportunities for practice and (2) production tricks (Rubin, 1981:124-126).

However, after conducting confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) tests on the comparison of strategy taxonomies, it was noted that careful inspection of results obtained by Rubin's taxonomy showed that her classification resulted in overlapping of strategies, as some strategies fall under more than a single category (Hsiao and Oxford, 2002:370-371) and failed to produce mutually exclusive categories by appearing in more than a single grouping (O'Malley et al., 1985a:23).

Hsiao and Oxford (2002:377) also showed that O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) classification does not have enough explanatory power to differentiate between social and affective strategies, and that the empirical evidence suggests that it is preferable to subdivide O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) cognitive strategies into memory, cognitive, and compensation dimensions, rather than to consider cognitive strategies as a unitary dimension. Although in the 1990s other scholars[26] also conceptualised and classified LLS, their taxonomies were not used extensively by other researchers because there was little consensus in the area of strategy classification (Griffiths and Oxford, 2014:3).

> "There was not complete agreement on what strategies were; how many strategies existed; how they should be defined, demarcated and categorised; and whether it was – or ever would be – possible to create a real, scientifically validated hierarchy of strategies" (Oxford, 1990:17).

Although Oxford's taxonomy is not perfect, and some cases may occur where one strategy may be classified into two distinct strategy groups, research has shown that Oxford's strategy system and the SILL[27] are very useful tools to examine the perceived and self-reported use of strategies. According to a considerable number of scholars, Oxford's taxonomy seems to be not only more comprehensive and

[26] See Griffiths and Oxford (2014:3) and Ellis (2008:705-707) for a further discussion on LLS taxonomies and alternative models that also conceptualised and classified LLS.

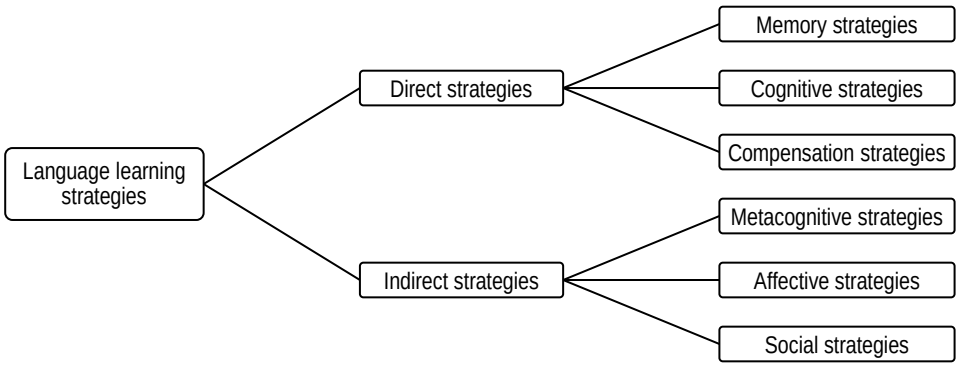
[27] Since the 1990s, Oxford's SILL has been reported as the most frequently used instrument for assessing the perceived use of LLS. It was developed by Oxford (1990) based on her strategy classification (Tseng et al., 2006:82).

detailed than other classification models, but also superior, precise and systematic in accounting for the variety of strategies reported by language learners[28].

It is precisely for the above-mentioned reasons that this research study uses Oxford's taxonomy to identify and categorise LLS for analysis purposes. In this respect, the researcher acknowledges that Oxford's taxonomy has not been chosen because it is considered perfect or flawless, but rather because it is useful in providing a clear, systematic and integrated framework to classify LLS.

Oxford's taxonomy is presented in detail below as it was introduced in her landmark book *Language learning strategies: What every teacher should know* (Oxford, 1990). She makes use of the two kinds of learning strategies identified by Rubin as direct and indirect, and further subdivides these two major classes into a total of six groups (Oxford, 1990:14-16, Griffiths and Oxford, 2014:2). Direct strategies deal directly with the new language, while indirect strategies help with the general management of learning (see Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2: Oxford's taxonomy
Source: Oxford (1990:16)



2.4.2.1 DIRECT STRATEGIES

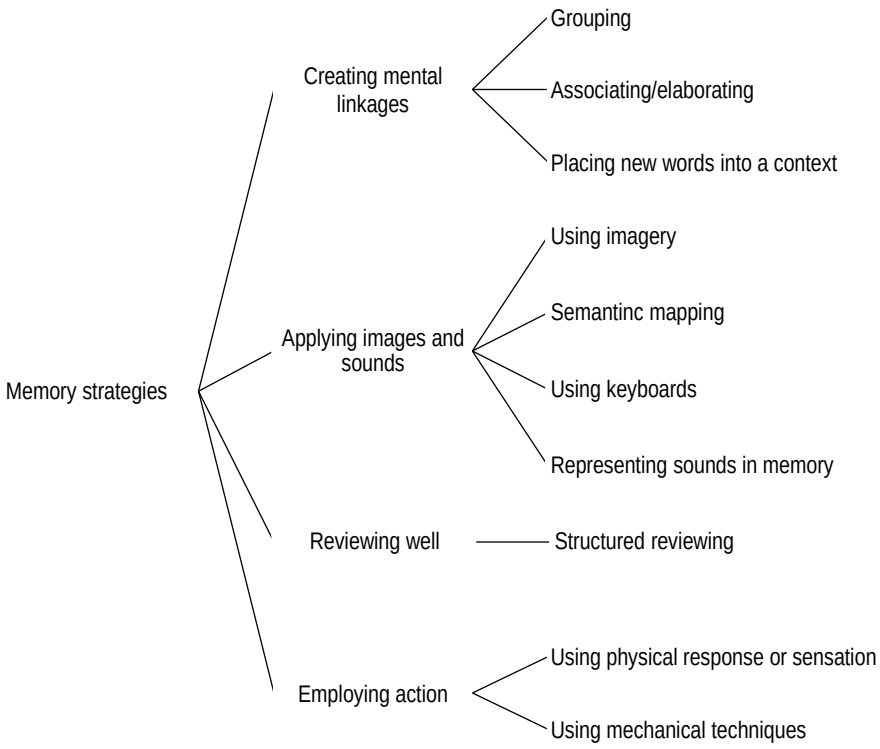
Direct strategies are directly involved with the target language and require mental processing, but they do this processing differently and for different purposes. They can be further divided into the following subcategories: memory strategies, cognitive strategies, and compensation strategies (Oxford, 1990:135,151).

[28] See Ellis (1994:539), Chamot (2004:16-17), Nisbet et al. (2005:100), Wong (2005:247), Rodríguez Ruiz and García (2005:6), Ghebremuse (2007:8), Rezaei and Almasian (2007:66), Alptekin (2007:5), Magogwe and Oliver (2007:340), Rahimi et al. (2008:34), Zahedi (2008:164), Lai (2009:256-257), Magno (2010:41), Kashefian-Naeeini and Maarof (2010:198), Khamkhien (2012:182), Alhaisoni (2012:116-117), Chang and Liu (2013:199).

Memory strategies have a highly specific function: they help students to store new information and then retrieve it when needed for communication. They reflect simple principles (such as arranging things in order, making associations, and reviewing) that are personally meaningful to the learners and have significance to them. Memory strategies are more effective when they work in conjunction with metacognitive strategies (e.g. paying attention) and affective strategies (e.g. reducing anxiety). Memory strategies often involve pairing different types of material; for instance, depending on learning style preferences, some students link verbal material with visuals, sound, motion or touch. However, it has been noted that students do not report using memory strategies beyond elementary levels of language learning (Oxford 1990:38-40).

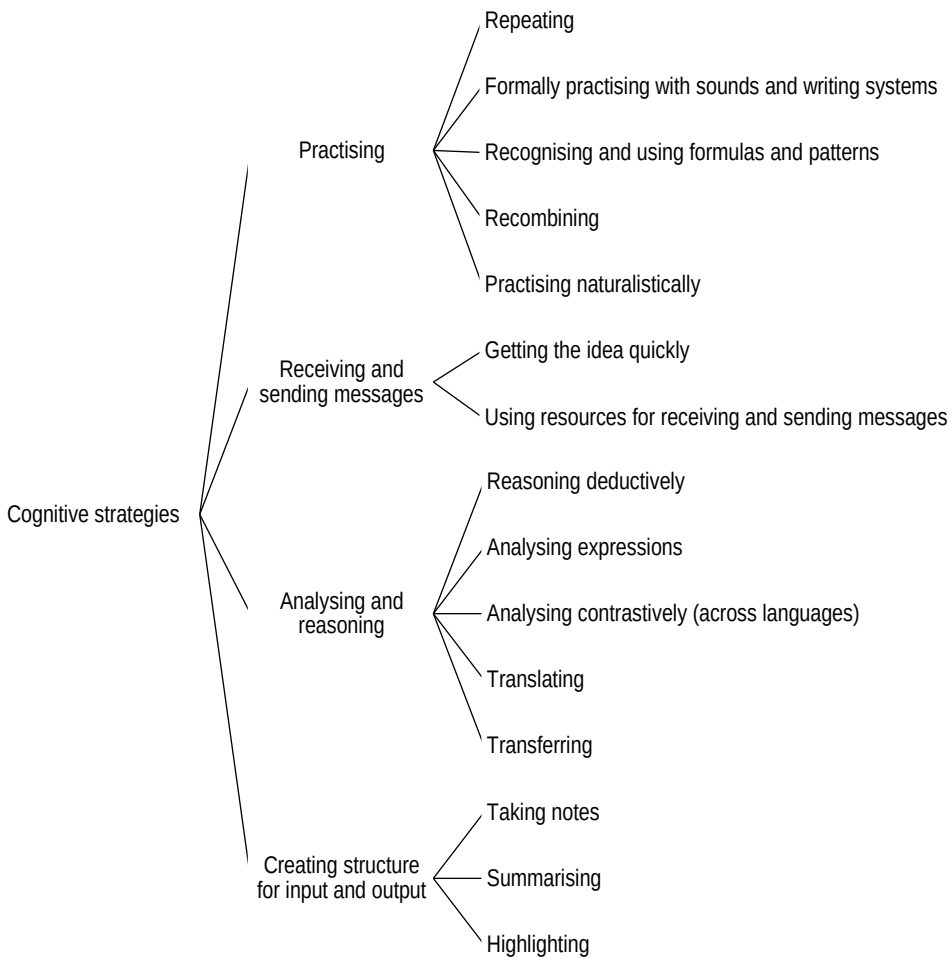
Memory strategies can be clustered into four strategy sets: creating mental linkages to make the material easier to remember, applying images and sounds to trigger the remembering process, reviewing well to increase the chances of remembering, and employing action for those who employ kinaesthetic or tactile modes of learning. Figure 2.3 shows the memory strategy clusters and further subdivisions.

Figure 2.3: Memory strategies
Source: Oxford (1990:39)



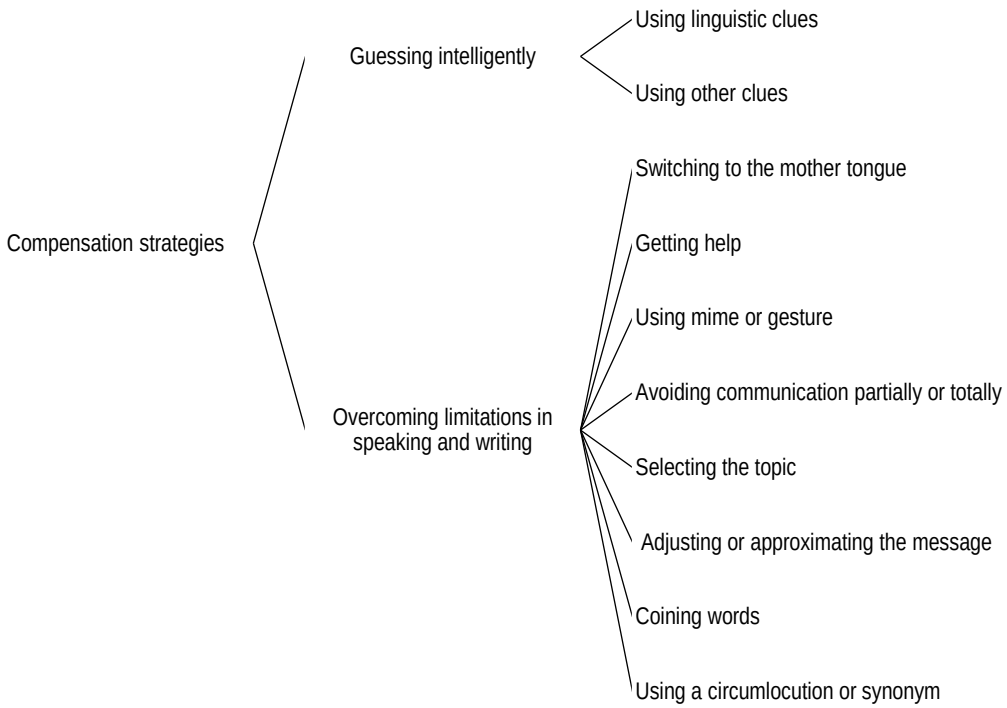
Cognitive strategies are essential in learning a new language and vary significantly from each other. They are unified by a common function: manipulation or transformation of the target language by the learner, and range from repeating, to analysing expressions, to summarising. Cognitive strategies can be clustered into four strategy sets: strategies for practising, which are among the most important strategies because they are essential for learning; strategies for receiving and sending messages, which involve comprehension and production; strategies for analysing and reasoning, which make evident the existence of a hybrid form of language (called interlanguage) that lies somewhere between the native language and the target language; and strategies for creating structure for input and output, which are necessary for both comprehension and production (Oxford 1990:43-47). Figure 2.4 shows the cognitive strategy clusters and further subdivisions.

Figure 2.4: Cognitive strategies
Source: Oxford (1990:44)



Compensation strategies enable learners to use the new language for either comprehension or production, despite limitations or inadequate repertoire of grammar and especially of vocabulary. Compensation strategies can be clustered into two sets: guessing intelligently in listening and reading, and overcoming limitations in speaking and writing. Guessing intelligently involves using a wide variety of linguistic and non-linguistic clues to guess meaning. Contrary to what some may believe, beginners are not the only ones who use guessing. Advanced learners and even native speakers use guessing when they have not heard something clearly enough. Compensation strategies for production help learners to practice the language and become more fluent, and to gain new information about what is appropriate or permissible in the target language. Learners skilled in such strategies sometimes communicate better than learners who have a larger vocabulary and know more linguistic structures (Oxford 1990: 47-51). Figure 2.5 shows the compensation strategy clusters and further subdivision ns.

Figure 2.5: Compensation strategies
Source: Oxford (1990:48)



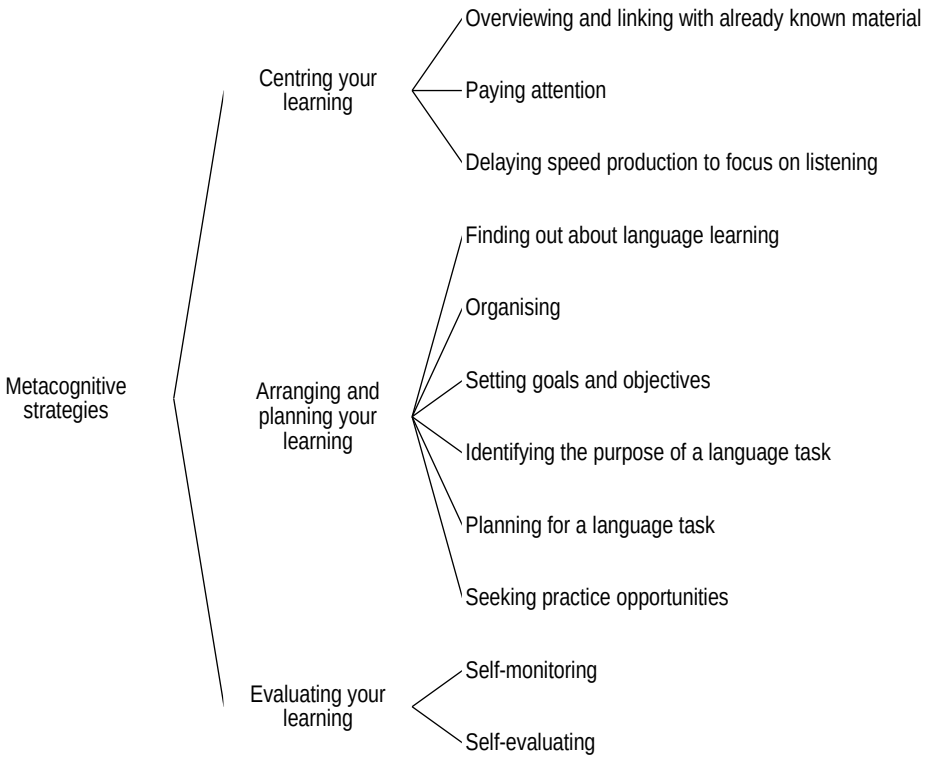
2.4.2.2 INDIRECT STRATEGIES

Indirect strategies are used to manage and support language learning without directly involving the target language. Indirect strategies can be clustered into

metacognitive strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies. All these clusters of direct and indirect strategies work in tandem with each other and support each other. “Indirect strategies are useful virtually in all language learning situations and are applicable to all four language skills” (Oxford, 1990:135).

Metacognitive strategies – which involve knowledge of one’s own cognitive processes and the ability to control them (White, 1999:38, Lewalter, 2003:179) – can be described as actions that allow learners to regulate their own cognition with the purpose of coordinating their own learning process. They go beyond the cognitive level and involve functions such as focusing, arranging, planning and evaluating. These strategies are essential for successful language learning and include three sets of strategies: (1) strategies to focus and centre learning in order to converge attention and energy on specific aspects; (2) strategies to arrange and organise learning in an efficient and effective way to get the most out of language learning; and (3) strategies to self-evaluate and self-monitor learning in order to check one’s own language performance (Yang, 2009:135, Oxford, 1990:135-138,153). These strategies also contain the aspect of learners’ awareness of their own strategy use (Takač, 2008:53). Figure 2.6 shows the metacognitive strategy clusters and further subdivisions.

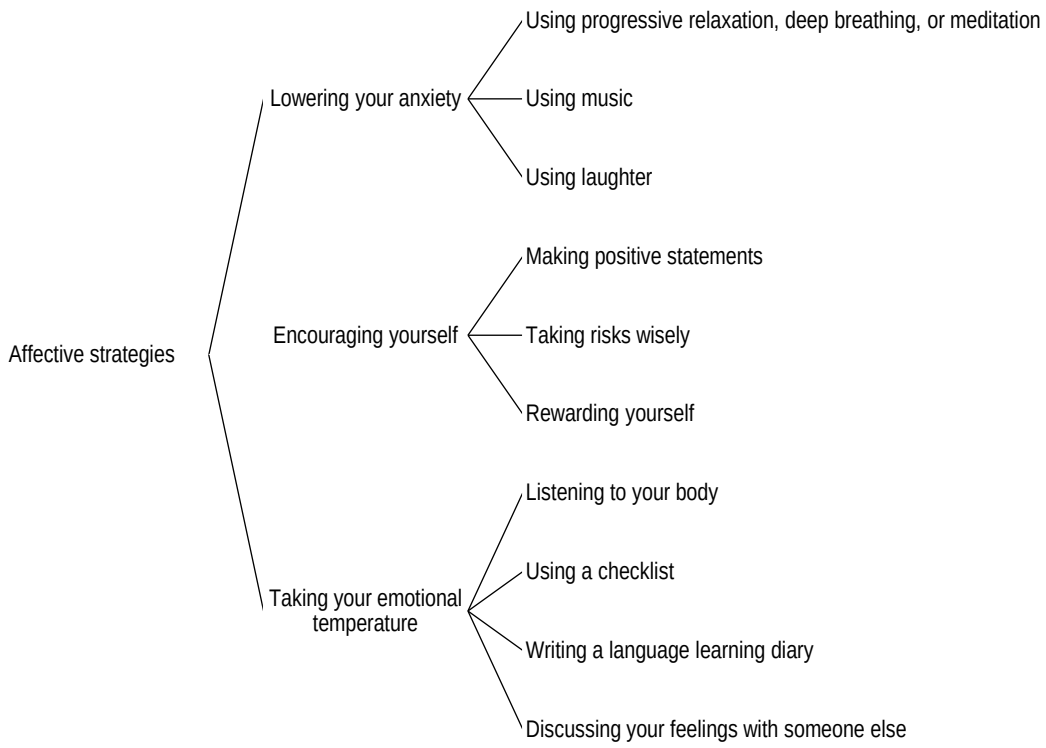
Figure 2.6: Metacognitive strategies
Source: Oxford (1990:137)



Affective strategies deal with the emotions, attitudes, motivations and values that influence language learning. “The affective side of the learner is probably one of the biggest influences on language learning success or failure” (Oxford 1990:135-138, 140). Successful language learners are often those who know how to regulate their emotions and attitudes to foster and consolidate learning. Affective strategies can be clustered into strategies for lowering anxiety, strategies for encouraging oneself, and strategies for measuring emotional temperature.

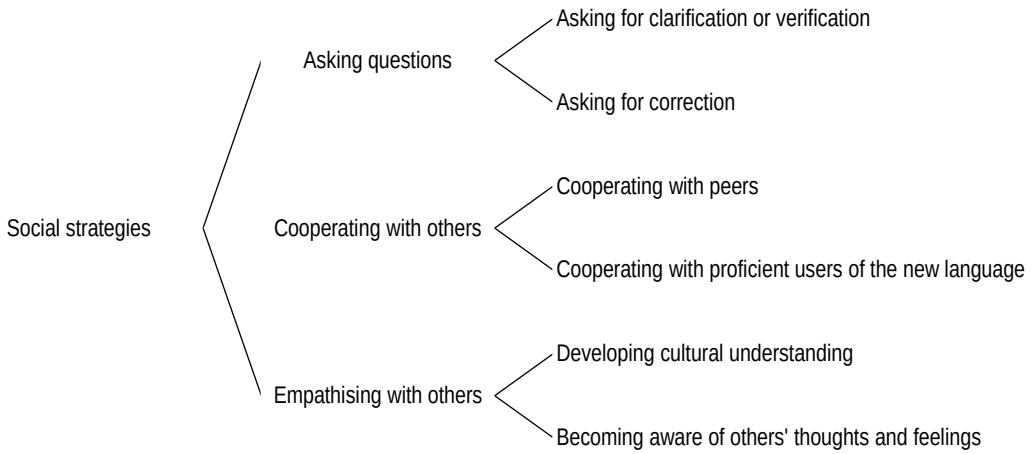
As Oxford (1990:140) asserts, the affective side of the learner is probably one of the biggest influences on language learning success or failure. On the one hand, negative feelings can hinder or block progress, even for a learner that fully understands all the technical aspects of how to learn a new language. On the other hand, positive attitudes can make language learning far more effective as well as enjoyable and can boost the learner’s self-esteem. These aspects are critical and influence the learner’s motivation to keep on trying to learn. Research shows that highly motivated students with positive attitudes normally perform better in language learning than less motivated students with negative attitudes (Oxford 1990:140-143). Figure 2.7 shows the affective strategy clusters and further subdivisions.

Figure 2.7: Affective strategies
Source: Oxford (1990:141)



Social strategies take into account that "language is a form of social behaviour" and thus that learning a language necessarily involves other people. Social interactions are very important in this process and learners gain great benefit from them. Social strategies can be clustered into (1) strategies for asking questions for clarification, verification or correction that help learners get closer to the intended meaning; (2) strategies for cooperating with others; and (3) empathising with others by developing cultural understanding and becoming aware of others' thoughts and feelings. Although research shows that cooperative learning leads to, among other things, higher self-esteem, increased confidence and enjoyment, greater and more rapid achievement, greater use of cognitive strategies, and mutual concern, it is necessary to help learners confront – and possibly modify – their culturally defined attitudes towards cooperation and competition, as they do not typically report natural preference for making use of cooperative strategies (Oxford 1990:144-147). Figure 2.8 shows the social strategy clusters and further subdivisions.

Figure 2.8: Social strategies
Source: Oxford (1990:137)



2.4.3 OXFORD'S RECENT TAXONOMY (2011)

In 2011, Oxford developed a new model of language learning called the Strategic Self-Regulation model (S^2R) which clusters strategies in a slightly different way (Oxford, 2011, Tragant et al., 2013:97, Griffiths and Oxford, 2014:4). The six initial categories (memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social) are redefined into four categories: cognitive, affective, sociocultural-interactive, and the master category of metastrategies – which includes but is not limited to

metacognitive strategies. This is done in order to eliminate overlap and encourage greater theoretical cohesion (Griffiths and Oxford, 2014:3-4).

According to Oxford (2011:14-19) and Gregersen and MacIntyre (2013:150), cognitive strategies are used to remember and process language; affective strategies are used to handle emotions, beliefs, attitudes and motivation; sociocultural-interactive strategies are used to deal with issues of contexts, communication and culture; and metastrategies are used as a general management mechanism for the cognitive, affective and sociocultural-interactive domains to control and "help the learner know whether and how to deploy a given strategy and aid in determining whether the strategy is working or has worked as intended" (Oxford, 2011:19). Figure 2.9 compares Oxford's taxonomies (1990 & 2011).

Figure 2.8: Social strategies
Source: Own

<table>
<tr><th>Oxford's taxonomy (1990)</th><th>Oxford's taxonomy (2011)</th></tr>
<tr><td>Memory strategies</td><td rowspan="2">Cognitive strategies</td></tr>
<tr><td>Cognitive strategies</td></tr>
<tr><td>Metacognitive strategies</td><td>Metastrategies, which are not anymore restricted to the cognitive domain, but also help in handling the general management and control of the affective and sociocultural-interactive domains.
Metacognitive strategies
Meta-affective strategies
Meta-sociocultural-interactive strategies</td></tr>
<tr><td>Affective strategies</td><td>Affective strategies</td></tr>
<tr><td>Social strategies</td><td rowspan="2">Sociocultural-interactive strategies</td></tr>
<tr><td>Compensation strategies</td></tr>
</table>

This research makes use of Oxford's (1990) taxonomy because it is the only one that has been widely used in research in tandem with the SILL and has led to valid

results[29]. As mentioned earlier, this taxonomy was chosen because it was found to be comprehensive and detailed, as well as precise and systematic in accounting for the variety of strategies reported by language learners.

At this stage it is worthwhile to mention that despite discrepancies over concepts, definitions and classifications, there has been consensus among experts on two points: (1) that learners deploy strategies in sequences or clusters; and (2) that strategies enhance performance in language learning and use, both in general and on specific tasks, by making language learning easier, faster, and more enjoyable (Cohen, 2011a:681-682)[30].

2.5 FACTORS INFLUENCING STRATEGY CHOICE

One of the key features of using LLS is the fact that learners can choose strategies, which suggests a dimension of consciousness (Griffiths, 2003b:369). As Cohen (2011b:7) asserts, "the element of consciousness is what distinguishes strategies from those processes that are not strategic." Although some of the decisions are deliberate and others eventually become automatic, they are neither subconscious nor unconscious (Griffiths, 2013:9). In this respect, Griffiths (2013:9) suggests that "perhaps 'deliberate' versus 'automatic' would be a more useful distinction when talking about LLS than 'conscious' versus 'unconscious'."

According to Oxford (1989:236, 1990:13), multiple factors in varying degrees affect the choice of learning strategies, such as the stage of learning, degree of awareness, task requirements, teacher expectations, age, sex, nationality or ethnicity[31], general learning style, personality traits, motivation level, and purpose for learning the language. However, these factors do not affect students in the same way because language learners vary considerably, in both the particular types of

[29] See Chamot (2004:16-17), Nisbet et al. (2005:100), Wong (2005:247), Rodríguez Ruiz and García (2005:6), Ghebremuse (2007:8), Rezaei and Almasian (2007:66), Alptekin (2007:5), Magogwe and Oliver (2007:340), Rahimi et al. (2008:34), Zahedi (2008:164 (Lai), 2009:256-257 (Magno), 2010:41 (Kashefian-Naeeini and Maarof (2010:198), Khamkhien (2012:182), Alhaisoni (2012:116-117), Chang and Liu (2013:199), Platsidou and Kantaridou (2014:255).

[30] Here, Cohen reports on a survey conducted among twenty-three international experts who met at Oxford University in 2004.

[31] Nationality and ethnicity are understood here as the fact or state of belonging to a social group that shares some common cultural values, beliefs and practices.

strategies they use and the overall frequency with which they employ strategies (Ellis, 2008:711).

From a slightly different perspective and taking into account studies that investigate how individual factors affect the choice of learning strategies as students develop their language proficiency, Rao (2006:492) identifies and groups these studies into studies that focus on:

- how **motivation** affects strategy choice;
- how **gender** affects strategy choice;
- how **career orientation** affects strategy choice; and
- how **educational setting** affects strategy choice.

However, when examining how other researchers have clustered the factors that are believed to affect strategy choice, it is noticed that Ellis (2008:711) groups them into individual factors relating to the learner, contextual factors relating to the situational context of learning, and factors relating to the sociocultural domains. For Griffiths (2013:10) strategy selection depends on individual factors, contextual factors and the purpose for which students are learning a new language. For Cohen (in Ananisarab and Abdi, 2012:14), strategy choice depends on the learners themselves, the learning task at hand, and the learning context.

Taking into account Cohen's and Ellis' groupings and noticing that the third factor mentioned by Griffiths, called the "purpose factor", can be clustered within the group of individual factors, this study groups the factors influencing strategy choice into the following clusters:

- Individual factors relating to the learner,
- Contextual factors relating to the learning task and situation, and
- Sociocultural factors relating to the learning context.

2.5.1 Individual factors relating to the learner

AGE: Although this research focuses on students whose ages fall in the 21-24 range, this section starts by presenting some age-related differences that affect the use and choice of LLS. The intention of presenting this is to get a general picture of

how age influences strategy choice and then to highlight the distinctive features that characterise the choice of LLS by adult learners.

One of the differences that has been noted by Ellis (in Griffiths, 2013:25) is that socio-affective factors are less inhibiting for children and teenagers than for adults because they are “less cultural bound than adults”.

From another perspective, Krashen, Ellis, Snow and Hoefnagel-Hohle (in Griffiths, 2013:25) suggest that adult students learn faster at the beginning because (i) they are able to obtain more comprehensible input by means of their greater experience, knowledge and ability to negotiate communication; (ii) adults consciously think about the rules of the new language; and (iii) adults seem to be more capable of rationalising the systems of the target language and of comparing them with existing knowledge. From the above it is possible to see that the last two characteristics of adult language learning seem to suggest that adults tend to use more cognitive strategies than younger learners do.

Griffiths (2013:25) also suggests that more mature students may have a larger and better established strategy repertoire from which they can select strategies to optimise their own learning, and that older students can be expected to exercise better metacognitive control over their learning with respect to time management, planning, monitoring and evaluating their own learning.

Research conducted by Ehrman and Oxford (Oxford, 1989:238) found that adult language learners seem to use more sophisticated LLS than younger learners in other studies. Ellis (2008:711) also found that older students make use of more sophisticated strategies which they generalise in a flexible way, while younger students employ less sophisticated strategies in a task-specific manner. In this respect, older learners do not necessarily possess more cognitive strategies than younger learners, but they become more flexible and efficient in how they invest their resources (Flavell et al in Macaro, 2006:327).

MOTIVATION: Although motivation is an extremely complicated phenomenon, which Oxford (in Griffiths, 2013:70) describes as “dynamic and changeable depending on internal and external influences”, it is another factor that has been identified as affecting strategy choice.

In this research study, motivation is monitored qualitatively by asking students regularly why it is that they are learning a FL[32]. This is done to determine whether their motivation is dynamic and to see the extent by which motivation influences strategy choice and perceived use of LLS.

Oxford (1989:239) considers motivation as the prime determining factor in language learning success because it "determines the extent of active personal engagement in language learning" and affects "the tendency of language students to use (or not use) strategies." Early research found that learners who are highly motivated to learn a language are more likely to use a wider variety of strategies than less motivated learners (Oxford and Nyikos, 1989:295). Early research also shows that strategy use is "not affected by the participants' particular type of motivational orientation (whether it is instrumental or integrative), but, rather, by motivational level" (MacLeod in Rahimi et al., 2008:36). According to Oxford and Nyikos (1989:296), motivation is also affected by external factors, such as teaching and testing practices, peer interaction, overall task requirements, and the institutional environment. However, motivation must emanate from the language learner, rather than be externally ignited and regulated by the teacher. "Learners must see themselves as agents of the process that shape their motivation" (Ushioda, 2008).

LEARNING STYLES have been identified as having a significant influence on learners' learning strategy choices (Bull and Ma, 2001:196, Jie and Xiaoqing, 2006:67, Griffiths, 2013:8), which, in turn may modulate levels of FL achievement (Bailey et al., 2000:128). Learning styles differ from learning strategies in that the former embody unconscious individual learner traits, while the latter are specific behaviours selected by the learner to make learning more efficient and may change in accordance with the nature of the learning problem faced (Jie and Xiaoqing, 2006:68). Learning styles are commonly identified either in adjectival terms (e.g. aural, visual, kinaesthetic) or as nouns (e.g. converger, accommodator, assimilator, diverger), whereas strategies are usually expressed by means of verbs (practising, using, planning and so on) (Griffiths, 2013:8). Learning styles are relatively fixed and stable and do not change dramatically from one learning task to the next (Brown

[32] During the three-year period in which this study was conducted, each administration of Oxford's SILL was followed by qualitative interviews that were used to check the data collected by the SILL and to get a better understanding of the phenomenon being studied. These questions included, but were not limited to, how and why students were studying Spanish.

in Ananisarab and Abdi, 2012:15, Abbasian and Shirazifard, 2014:38). Thus compared with learning strategies, "learning styles are relatively stable characteristics which learners bring to the learning situations" (Jie and Xiaoqing, 2006:68). It is reported that high achievers are more capable of exercising strategies that are not associated with their preferred learning styles than low achievers (Jie and Xiaoqing, 2006:68).

PROFICIENCY LEVEL has a significant impact on strategy choice and use. Foreign language students at the initial stages focus on the alphabet, basic pronunciation and the learning of a basic vocabulary, whereas more advanced students look for opportunities to engage in social interactions to practice the new language. Thus, both beginners and advanced students choose learning strategies to meet their own language learning requirements, taking into account their level of proficiency.

When studying the perceived use of LLS among first-year students of English in a Taiwanese university, Lai (2009:273) reported statistically significant differences between the group with a high level of proficiency and the group with a low level of proficiency. It was found that although both groups were exposed to the same amount of learning hours, the group that show higher proficiency reported greater LLS use than the group that showed lower proficiency.

Nevertheless, when comparing two totally different groups (that is, an advanced group and a beginners group) Rahimi et al. (2008:35) found that the advanced group with a high level of proficiency (which was gained as a result of studying the language for a longer period) did not necessarily report greater use of LLS than the beginners group. This could be because when students become proficient in the new language and are capable of understanding and communicating reasonably well, they are no longer anxious to learn more, or perhaps because their use of strategies has become so automated that they are no longer aware of the strategies they are using and for that reason they do not report using them.

THE PURPOSE for which learners are studying a new language affects strategy choice. According to Griffiths (2013:10-11), students whose primary motive is to study a new language for communicative purposes will most likely choose strategies that will best meet their communicative needs such as social strategies, but students who study a language to pass an exam or comply with the requirements for a

qualification will most likely prioritise memory strategies over social strategies to achieve this goal.

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE in learning a foreign a language affects the choice and use of learning strategies. Hong-Nam and Leavell (2007:72) found that "bilinguals were more flexible in seeking and utilising strategies appropriate to the task and knew more readily than monolinguals which learning approach would work best for them." Bilingual students are also found to work out better meanings than their monolingual peers (Grenfell and Harris, 2013:144).

PERSONALITY can affect strategy choice. Ehrman and Oxford (in Bailey et al., 2000) suggest that "introverts, intuitivers, feelers, and perceivers appeared to have a learning advantage in the classroom."

LEARNERS' BELIEFS can affect strategy choice. Rao (2006:493) reports that "language learners who believe teachers to be the authoritative source of knowledge were more prone to avoid self-directed strategies necessary to achieve language proficiency." It is reported that learners who believe that fluency can be achieved solely through such traditional means as translation, grammar application and rote memorisation can restrict his/her range of strategies (Rao, 2006:493). Chi-Him Tam (2013:27) also found that university students from the Hong Kong Polytechnic University restrain themselves from asking for help because seeking help from others is believed to be a sign of showing a sense of inferiority, which hamper particularly male subjects' interest in cooperating with others. Magogwe and Oliver (2007:350) also found that the relationship between type of strategy use and successful language learning is mediated by a number of factors, among them self-efficacy beliefs.

AS FOR GENDER, there is no conclusive evidence as to whether being a female or male has a different influence on strategy choice (Wharton, 2000:235). Studies conducted in different parts of the world have shown contradicting results. On the one hand, studies conducted in the United States of America by Ehrman & Oxford (1989), Macaro (2000), Oxford and Niykos (1989) and Sheorey (1999) have shown that females report using more strategies than males (Macaro, 2006:321). On the other hand, studies conducted by Abbasian et al. (2012) among Iranian university students and Özyılmaz (2012) among Cypriote university students show that males

use more strategies in comparison to females. Since it is not appropriate to generalise any of these findings, it is important to note that some researchers have found significant differences in the perceived use of LLS by males and females. Although researchers like Tercanlioglu (2004:57), Alhaisoni (2012:122) and Chi-Him Tam (2013:27) have found that female learners use social strategies more widely and frequently in naturalistic settings than their male counterparts, it has been also acknowledged that gender difference findings may be tempered by the cultural context in which the language is learnt (Hong-Nam and Leavell, 2006:401, Sadeghi and Soleimani, 2016:3).

2.5.2 CONTEXTUAL FACTORS RELATING TO THE LEARNING TASK AND SITUATION

THE LANGUAGE being studied influences the strategies that are used to learn that particular language. When choosing the appropriate learning strategies, it matters whether the language being studied is phonetic or not[33]. In terms of learning to read and write, non-phonetic languages present more difficulty to students than phonetic languages, because the way non-phonetic languages are written is not always the way it is pronounced. To overcome the difficulty of learning a non-phonetic language, students use memory strategies to create mental linkages by grouping similar words and creating associations. However, students who learn a phonetic language do not rely on memory strategies for this purpose as much. They prefer to use cognitive strategies by recognising and using rules and patterns. Furthermore, when the language being learnt is a phonetic language, students who are not familiarised with phonetic languages normally struggle with writing and reading it at the initial stages, but students who are already familiarised with phonetic languages seem to learn to read and write faster. In this respect, it has been observed over the years that students who are fluent in phonetic languages like Afrikaans (Van Schalkwyk, 1988:6) or Zulu (De Sousa and Broom, 2011:11) learn to read and write in Spanish faster than students who only speak English.

Similarly, students that study a FL with alphabet symbols radically different from their own alphabet and dissimilar phonetic sounds will undoubtedly have greater and

[33] A phonetic languages is a language whose graphemes are consistently read in the same way and form reliable patterns of pronunciation, whereas a non-phonetic language is a language whose graphemes are not consistently read in the same way and hence do not always form reliable patterns of pronunciation.

different challenges than students whose languages have the same alphabet symbols and share similar phonetic sounds. This is perhaps one of the reasons that explains why Chamot et al. (cited in Oxford, 1989:236) found that a group of English-speaking students of Russian reported statistically significantly greater strategy use than the group of English-speaking students of Spanish. However, this could also be because the proximity – in terms of lexicon and semantics, morphosyntax and linguistic framing – between English and Spanish is closer than the proximity between English and Russian[34] – causing the anglophone students of Russian to make use of more learning strategies to tackle the encountered difficulties.

As for the FIRST LANGUAGE LEARNT, it seems that this also affects strategy choice when learning a new language. In this respect, Rao (2006:504), after studying the reported use of LLS by Chinese students who were learning English, suggested that Chinese learners' preference for using repetition strategies for memorising vocabulary could originate from using memory strategies to learn thousands of Chinese characters. In the same way, Cohen (2014:23-24) points out that English-speaking students might need to use a variety of visual memory strategies to memorise Japanese kanji characters because of the lack of a connection to the English alphabet, but "native Chinese-speaking students would not need the same number of visual memory strategies, as the characters for writing in Chinese formed the basis for the development of Japanese kanji" (Cohen, 2014:23-24). This supports Oxford's initial assertion that different target languages pose different challenges for people who speak other languages, causing them to select different strategies in varying degrees of frequency (Oxford, 1996:249).

THE PACE of a language programme (whether it is a normal course or an intensive one) influences the preferred use and selection of both metacognitive and social strategies (Hong-Nam and Leavell, 2006:408). Students who register for intensive courses have large amounts of course content to learn in a relatively short period of time. Under such pressure, students have to arrange and organise their learning in a very efficient and effective way. They – by making use of metacognitive strategies – monitor and evaluate their learning process very closely and make changes when

[34] See Pavlenko (2003:40-51) for more details with respect to the difficulties anglophone students faced when learning Russian.

necessary. Over the years, it has been observed that students who register for intensive courses prefer to learn the language in isolation. For them, language learning is an individual experience that happens when they study by themselves. They do not see language as a form of social behaviour that necessarily involves other people. They usually prefer not to engage in social interactions because social interactions seem to go at a slower pace or consume too much of their time.

THE SETTING in which the new language is learnt affects the choice of strategies used by learners. Students in second language settings are more motivated to use the language for communication purposes, which naturally encourages the use of a variety of LLS. Wharton (2000:209), who examined the self-reported LLS use of university students learning Japanese and French as FLs in Singapore, found that, in general, learners in second language learning contexts used strategies more frequently than learners in FL learning situations. This could be because learners in second language settings have access to numerous authentic materials, enjoy opportunities to interact with native or proficient speakers, and can make use of the language for daily survival and communication, whereas learners in FL settings have limited opportunities for practising the language outside the classroom as the FL plays a lesser role in communication (Rao, 2006:498). Although students in FL settings tend to learn the language in a more isolated way, which greatly limits their chances for strategy use, Chacin et al. (2009:143-144) argue that under such disadvantageous circumstances the deliberate use of LLS provides an alternative to counteract these limitations.

THE NATURE OF THE LEARNING TASK influences strategy choice. Whether it is a learning task that involves a single language skill, namely listening, reading, speaking or writing, or a combination of them, strategy choice will depend on what the learners are required to do.

2.5.3 SOCIOCULTURAL FACTORS RELATING TO THE LEARNING CONTEXT

THE SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS of the family from which a student comes may also play a role in strategy choice. Students whose parents can afford expensive satellite or internet packages with access to movies in the FL being studied will indirectly promote the use of particular strategies of the cognitive cluster to

compensate for the lack of exposure to the target language that characterises the learning of FLs (Gao, 2006:291). Cognitive strategies that involve comprehension (by understanding and receiving messages, reasoning deductively and analysing expressions in context) are normally implemented while watching movies several times to get the main idea without translating it word-for-word, and to promote thinking in the new language. In this respect, it is possible to assert that high socioeconomic status increases the likelihood of having resources that may facilitate LLS choice and use (Mohseni and Rabiee, 2013:81).

CULTURAL ASPECTS – understood as distinctive ideas, habits, behaviours or ways of life of a nation, society, group of people or period (Sousa et al., 2016:12) – can affect strategy choice.

> Levine et al. (1996:36) found that "students who had been brought up within a highly structured, uniform educational system develop learning strategies that differed from the strategies of those students who received a less structured, more democratic education."

In other words, Levine et al. (1996:45) found that learners studying in a specific educational system develop learning strategies reflecting that system. This confirms what Magogwe and Oliver (2007:350) found, that particular strategies may be culturally more appropriate than others, and therefore preferred, or it may be that the educational experience of students in a particular country leads them to prefer some strategies over others. Rao (2006:505) also noticed that in societies like China – which confers high acceptance of power and authority to teachers – students rely heavily on their teachers in all aspects regarding their language learning process, and in some cases, end up orchestrating strategies in the same way that was prescribed by the teacher. In these cultures, obedience is valued higher than becoming active and self-regulated, which may influence how students manipulate or transform the target language at cognitive level. Psaltou-Joyce and Kantaridou (2011:319) also reported that "in societies where teachers are vested with considerable power and authority, the types of strategies students report using the most are the ones required by the teaching methodology and types of activities." Although the notion of cultural and educational influence on strategy choice has been to a certain extent absent from LLS research (Rao, 2006:492), today it is widely recognised and researched that cultural aspects influence strategy choice.

2.6 PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON REPORTED LLS USE

Fully aware that findings from a research study conducted within a group in one particular country cannot and should not be generalised to all members of that group or even across that particular nation, the following section presents key studies that have inspired not only the topic of this research, but also the way in which this study is conducted. These studies relate to the use of LLS across different nations with the aim of understanding their respective meanings, their weaknesses and their potentials to provide specific lenses to interpret the data collected.

Griffiths and Parr (2001:250-251) conducted research using Oxford's SILL among students of English from private language schools, tertiary institutions and high schools in New Zealand. Their sample consisted of 569 male and female learners from 31 different nations, whose ages were between 14 and 64 years old and whose level of proficiency ranged from beginner to advanced. However, due to the fact that the questionnaire was anonymous, the researchers were not able to subdivide the responses from such a large and varied sample into significant groups of analysis for closer examination of the varying factors involved in the selection and use of learning strategies.

Peacock and Ho (2003:182) conducted research on LLS use among a large number of students (n=1006) in Hong Kong. They focused on university students and also administered Oxford's SILL. One of the key differences from the previous study is that the forms were not completed anonymously, as students wrote their student numbers on the form to enable the researchers to contact certain students for follow-up interviews (Peacock and Ho, 2003:184). The reason behind this decision was to be able to subdivide the responses into significant groups for further analysis. Moreover, in order to counterbalance the weakness of Oxford's SILL in collecting data on the reasons behind the use of learning strategies, they made use of a mixed methods approach and conducted semi-structured interviews with a stratified, purposeful sample of 48 students taken from the group of 1006 participants. One of the apparent weaknesses of this study was that not all participants were interviewed. However, one of its strengths was that quantitative and qualitative data were analysed differently, but with the clear understanding that the qualitative analysis had to help with understanding the quantitative results. They found that the self-

reported, most frequently used strategies among university students in Hong Kong were compensation, cognitive, and metacognitive.

Rezaei and Almasian (2007:65) conducted research to investigate the relationship between creativity, LLS and language proficiency among 29 male and female first-year students at the University of Tehran. One of the highlights of this study was the use of parametric tests to determine whether there were positive, negative or no relationship among the three variables. It must be noted that the fact that the administration of the different questionnaires was not anonymous enabled the research to cross the information from the three different instruments. Another interesting finding was that contrary to previous studies, this study did not find any significant relationship between proficiency and the perceived frequency of strategy use. A possible explanation for this may be found in connection with the fact that the analysis was only conducted at the strategy category level (using averages) and not at the strategy item level. Analysis at the strategy item level could have indicated if there were significant differences between more proficient and less proficient students. A weakness of this study seems to be the lack of a longitudinal approach to shed more light as to how the relationship between proficiency and the degree of strategy use changes from the beginner stages to the more advanced stages of proficiency. Rezaei and Almasian (2007:73) found that “the favourite strategy type for the high proficiency group was compensation strategies, and the favourite strategy type for the low proficiency group was metacognitive strategies.”

Randic and Bobanovic (2008:89), who conducted research among 638 school learners in Croatia, used Oxford’s theoretical framework of six groups of strategies to develop their own instrument. One of the highlights of this study was that from the beginning they subdivided the group of students into “successful learners” and “less successful learners” according to their grades and analysed the data taking into account the six strategy groups proposed by Oxford. One of the strengths of this study was the incorporation of statistical techniques and tests to analyse the quantitative data gathered by the SILL. However, one of the weaknesses of this study was that they assumed that the data complied with all the parametric assumptions and, therefore, they made use of parametric tests instead of non-parametric tests. Their analysis included a two-way analysis of variance that was carried out to find out whether or not there were statistically significant differences

in the reported use of strategies between successful and less successful language learners. They found that successful learners reported statistically significantly more use of memory, cognitive, metacognitive and social strategies, whereas less successful learners reported significantly more use of compensation strategies. Nevertheless, it is important to note that this study only reported correlation at strategy category level, hence no cause-effect relationships can be drawn or generalised.

Kashefian-Naeeini and Maarof (2010:200, 220-221), who conducted research among university students at Shiraz University in Iran, found that both beginner and intermediate students identified and reported using a variety of strategies but that their teachers were unaware of the strategies used by their students. One of the strengths of this study is the inclusion of the teachers' perspective into the investigation of the matter and the implicit recognition that the teachers' way of teaching influences strategy choice and the perceived frequency of strategy use of the learners. This is something that should be taken into account when analysing students' perceived use of strategies. However, though they found that the self-reported most frequently used strategies were metacognitive, cognitive and compensation, no clear distinction was made to indicate whether there were significant differences with respect to the perceived and reported use of LLS between beginner and intermediate students.

Chang and Liu (2013:196), who conducted research among Taiwanese university learners of English, found that compensation strategies were reportedly used most often by less proficient students, while metacognitive strategies were reportedly used most by more proficient students. Although the results from this study were not consistent with previous research that reported the opposite (see Rezaei and Almasian, 2007), the apparent contradiction highlighted the need to include cultural aspects in the analysis. The literature review (see previous section) suggests that cultural aspects seemingly influence not only the way teachers teach, but also strategy choice and the perceived frequency of strategy use.

From the above-mentioned findings, it is possible to see that preferences for strategy choice vary across the studies conducted in different contexts. For that reason, no generalisations can be drawn from these studies. Cause-effect relationships can also not be established. Moreover, another aspect that must be

noted is that the quantitative approach adopted in these studies only reports on frequency of strategy use and correlations, and hence is limited when accounting for reasons underlying strategy choice. As we can see, there are no fixed patterns of strategy usage by either effective or less-effective language learners. In the same way that it was previously acknowledged that successful learners do not possess a single set of characteristics, it is possible to assert that less successful learners do not possess a single set of characteristics either.

In this respect, as mentioned earlier, LLS research was initially brought to widespread attention by Rubin's (1975) article titled *What the 'good language learner' can teach us* (Griffiths, 2008a:83, Cohen, 2008:7-9, Griffiths and Oxford, 2014:1) that suggested that a model of "the good language learner" could be constructed by looking at the strategies employed by learners who successfully learn a second/foreign language (Chamot, 2005:115). Rubin's research was based on the underlying assumption that it was possible to identify a single set of characteristics of what she understood a good language learner is. Another important assumption made by Rubin was the idea that these characteristics could be transferred to less successful learners via instruction. Although these two assumptions were later highly contested, they inspired other researchers to conduct similar studies and contributed to a better understanding of the use of LLS and the role they play in learning a foreign/second language. Since the 1970s, LLS research has been ongoing and many theoretical and empirical efforts have been made (Takeuchi et al., 2012:136).

Research in LLS has mostly fallen into two broad categories: descriptive studies and intervention studies (Macaro, 2001:71). Descriptive studies have aimed at reporting what good language learners do to learn a new language, whereas intervention studies have primarily focused on studying the extent to which changes in strategy use bring about improved language competence. According to Chamot (2004:15), "the preponderance of research on language learning strategies has been descriptive, as researchers have sought to discover what learning strategies are reported by learners of different languages."

Literature on LLS is still inconclusive and presents mixed results and sometimes contradictory findings (Griffiths, 2003a:54, Al-Buainain, 2010:99, Ananisarab and Abdi, 2012:18). Initial findings, mostly based on studies that followed a cross-sectional

approach[35], point out that successful language learners report using more learning strategies than underachieving language learners (Oxford, 1989:235), and that "effective learners reported greater frequency and greater range of strategy use" (Oxford, 1989:238). However, other studies like the one conducted by Porte (in Griffiths and Oxford, 2014:2) show that underachieving students sometimes report using a large number of strategies, though they do not use them appropriately.

A number of important findings on reported use of LLS have been generated by studies using Oxford's SILL, which is a self-report questionnaire that is widely used to collect and analyse information from language students (Peacock and Ho, 2003:179). Oxford's SILL plays a pivotal role in LLS research and has led to numerous findings. As a research instrument, Oxford's SILL has undergone significant revisions during the 1990s and has been translated into numerous languages, with multiple reliability and validity checks performed by Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995). Oxford's SILL is currently acknowledged as "the most comprehensive and widely used instrument for identifying strategy preferences of language learners throughout the world, and it has been extensively checked for reliability and validated in multiple ways" (Nisbet et al., 2005:101). Oxford's SILL is still one of the most useful tools currently available for LLS assessment (Al-Buainain, 2010:95). "As such, it has become a suitable instrument to measure the [perceived] strategy preferences of many language learners" in various contexts (Alptekin, 2007:5).

2.6.1 Claims and critiques on language learning strategy research

Macaro (2006:320), who provides a summary of the findings produced by LLS research in the last thirty years, points out that LLS studies have yielded a body of evidence leading researchers to make important claims. The following claims are directly related to the matter that is being researched in this study.

The first claim is that "[reported] strategy use appears to correlate with various aspects of language learning success" (Macaro, 2006:320-321). For example, there seems to be correlations between generally high strategy use and learning success,

[35] Early studies were more like survey-type studies, which consisted of choosing a sample, administering Oxford's SILL at a particular point in time, and then analysing the data quantitatively, paying attention to the quantity and not necessarily to the quality of strategy use.

and between success and preference for certain kinds of strategies. There also seems to be a link between success and combinations of strategies (Macaro, 2006:320-321). However, research over the years has shown that the relationship between reported strategy use and proficiency is complex (Griffiths and Oxford, 2014:2). Although causal relationships between LLS use and language learning success are not conclusively demonstrated, longitudinal research seems to be more appropriate to describe patterns of change over time and better in identifying possible causal relationships or correlations (Dörnyei, 2007:79).

The second claim is that there are group differences and individual differences in LLS use (Macaro, 2006:321). As for gender, although studies conducted in different countries have shown contradicting results and no conclusive evidence has been shown either way, it is worthwhile to mention that the majority of studies seem to indicate that female learners report using more strategies, and report using them differently, than males (Peacock and Ho, 2003:182). Even though the above-mentioned assertion is controversial, it could be explained by acknowledging that gender difference findings may be tempered by the cultural context in which the language is learnt (Hong-Nam and Leavell, 2006:401, Sadeghi and Soleimani, 2016:3). As for culture, it is widely acknowledged that cultural groups seem to differ in their strategy use. As for previous experience learning a FL, it seems that experienced L2/FL learners use different combinations of strategies than inexperienced ones.

The third claim[36] has to do with the acceptance of the methodology used for eliciting LLS use (Macaro, 2006:321, Oxford, 1999:114). The administration of Oxford's SILL for eliciting LLS use is widely implemented in conjunction with interviews and/or observations. In this particular study, the researcher agrees with Chamot (2004:15) and other researchers that the only way to identify learners' mental processing is through self-reporting, despite the fact that this may be inaccurate if they are not truthful when reporting LLS use, and that learners might not always be fully aware of the strategies they are using.

[36] This claim includes – but is not limited to – the administration of Oxford's SILL which, though imperfect, has been shown to have acceptable levels of validity and reliability.

Chamot (2004:15) also asserts that in most learning contexts, LLS use is for the most part unobservable, though in some cases it may be associated with an observable behaviour. She asserts that asking learners themselves during a language task is currently the best way to find out whether students are making use of learning strategies. Thus, self-reporting is pivotal to understanding LLS use. Learners are the only ones who can tell us what is going on in their heads. As Grenfell and Harris state (in Chamot, 2004:15), “it is not easy to get inside the ‘black box’ of the human brain and find out what is going on there. We work with what we can get which, despite the limitations, provides food for thought.” In this respect, this study believes that data collected over three years by successive administrations of Oxford’s SILL followed by qualitative interviews provide enough “food” to critically analyse how LLS use evolves, consolidates or disappears as learners become progressively proficient in Spanish.

2.6.2 STUDIES INVOLVING LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY AND REPORTED LLS USE

To better understand the relationship that involves language proficiency and reported LLS use, let us start by saying that in this study language proficiency is defined as "the degree of skill with which a person can use a language, such as how well a person can read, write, speak, or understand language." (Richards and Schmidt, 2002:292).

Although there are some debatable correlations established between the level of proficiency of learners and the amount and types of strategies they use, it must be acknowledged that there is consensus in LLS research that all learners, regardless of success in language learning, consciously or automatically employ a variety of learning strategies (Hong-Nam and Leavell, 2006:400). Since the 1970s, researchers in different parts of the world have been conducting studies to seek patterns in strategy use and/or to determine whether there are statistically significant differences between students with different levels of language proficiency with respect to LLS use, which may contribute to the characterisation of a successful type, or successful types, of language learner(s).

Studies conducted in different scenarios and contexts report that students with high proficiency, in general, normally use strategies more frequently than students with

low proficiency[37]. Griffiths (2007:96) also found that "in general, higher level students report using a larger repertoire of strategies more frequently than lower level students." However, we need to be aware that these research findings only show correlation. No cause-effect relationship of any nature can be suggested or generalised.

Differences between proficient and less proficient students seem to relate to the number and range of strategies used, how the strategies are applied to the task, and the appropriateness of the strategies for the task (Chamot, 2004:18). Moreover, the studies conducted by the above-mentioned authors also indicate that more proficient learners (1) report using strategies more frequently; (2) report using more types and a greater variety of strategies; (3) seem to be better at choosing the appropriate strategy for the task; and (4) distinguish themselves from less proficient learners in how they apply the strategies to the task.

Although these studies suggest a positive correlation between reported strategy use and proficiency, the relationship is not so simple or straightforward. While it is true that the above-mentioned studies show that more proficient students report using more strategies, it is important to know that those results cannot be generalised, as other researchers have reported no correlation, or even negative correlations, between LLS frequency use and level of proficiency (Lai, 2009:258).

Magogwe and Oliver (2007:340), who conducted research and included students from the University of Botswana, found that the relationship between developing language proficiency and strategy use was more complex than a simple linear correspondence, and depended to a large extent on the type of strategy employed. Chen (1990:178-179), who conducted research among Chinese students, found that more proficient students reported using fewer communication strategies than less proficient students, but that the former used strategies more effectively than the latter. He found a positive correlation between proficiency level and communicative effectiveness.

Chamot (2005:120), who explored the effects of task difficulty on the use of reading comprehension strategies, found that for easy reading tasks, there was little

[37] See Green in Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995:10), Bruen (2001:221), Wharton (2000:205-206), Griffiths (2003b:373), Peacock and Ho (2003:182), Hong-Nam and Leavell (2006:400), Lai (2009:255), Yılmaz (2010:686), Alhaisoni (2012:122), Chang and Liu (2013:196).

difference in strategy use between more and less proficient readers, whereas for more difficult reading tasks, less proficient students used more strategies than their more proficient peers. These findings were attributed to the fact that the more and less proficient readers did not perceive the difficulty of the reading tasks equally. "The 'difficult reading' was actually not much of a challenge for the more proficient students, and thus they did not need to use many learning strategies" (Chamot, 2005:120). It seems that as learners develop proficiency in the language, the perception of task difficulty diminishes, causing the task to seem less challenging. This suggests a negative relationship between the level of proficiency and the perception of task difficulty, which can lead to more LLS use (when there is low proficiency and the task looks challenging) or to less LLS use (when there is high proficiency and the task is perceived as less challenging).

Contrary to the majority of studies that indicate that "more proficient language learners use a greater variety and often a greater number of learning strategies" (Chamot, 2004:18), the following studies suggest that learners with intermediate proficiency are the ones who report more use of learning strategies.

Rao, who conducted research among university students at Jiangxi Normal University in China, found that students with moderate proficiency are the ones that use more strategies than either high-level or low-level students. Green (in Bedell and Oxford, 1996:22) found that "higher proficient students used more strategies overall than lower proficient students, but mid-proficient students used more strategies than either high or low proficient students, thus creating a curvilinear pattern." Hong-Nam and Leavell (2006:399) found "a curvilinear relationship between strategy use and English proficiency, revealing that students in the intermediate level reported more use of learning strategies than beginning and advanced levels."

Although at first glance all these results might look inconsistent, these contradictory findings show the need to investigate the matter closely by using different approaches. The quantitative approach used by this large group of researchers indirectly highlights the need to use qualitative methods to better understand the underlying reasons behind the use of learning strategies by more and less proficient learners.

2.6.3 STUDIES INVOLVING LEVEL OF SUCCESS IN LEARNING AND REPORTED LLS USE

Research findings on reported use of LLS by successful and less successful learners are very debatable and sometimes contradictory. Differences in reported use of LLS by successful and less successful learners seem to vary according to the level of proficiency, individual factors, contextual factors, and the learning tasks. Although some studies suggest that more successful language learners do not always use strategies more frequently than less successful learners, the majority of studies point out that successful learners report using a larger number of strategies and use them more frequently than less successful learners (Lai, 2009:258, Magno, 2010:43).

For instance, Randic and Bobanovic (2008:90) indicate that successful language learners are usually aware of the strategies they use and the reasons why they use them. They also know how to adapt strategies to meet their own personal needs, whereas students who are less successful in FL/L2 learning do not necessarily know how to choose the appropriate strategies for a particular task or how to adapt them to meet their learning needs.

Successful learners also seem to differ not only in the number and type of strategies they report using, but also in the reported use of several strategies concurrently (Ghebremuse, 2007:9). In this respect, Hong-Nam and Leavell (2006:400) found that successful language learners reported engaging in more purposeful language learning than their less successful counterparts. They found that both the frequency with which learners report using LLS and the type of strategies they choose are distinguishing characteristics between more successful and less successful learners (Hong-Nam and Leavell, 2006:400).

Nevertheless, other studies suggest that less successful learners also report using strategies generally considered as useful, and often the same ones as those employed by successful learners. The difference in use seemingly lies in the degree of flexibility the students show when choosing strategies and how appropriately they are applied to the given situation (Rao, 2006:491, Randic and Bobanovic, 2008:93). Similarly to successful learners, less successful learners also “actively use and apply a great number and variety of strategies, but in a different manner, and usually

fail to choose and use the most appropriate or efficient strategies for the task" (Lai, 2009:258).

More recent studies comparing successful and less successful learners have revealed a recurring finding: that less successful learners report using learning strategies, sometimes even as frequently as successful learners, but in a different way, confirming a distinct difference between these two groups of students: (1) that successful learners seem to be skilled at matching strategies to the task they are working on; and (2) that less successful learners apparently do not have the metacognitive knowledge about task requirements needed to select the appropriate strategies (Chamot, 2005:115-116). These studies also support the claims that "metacognitive and cognitive strategies are closely related to a higher level of language proficiency" (Abraham & Vann, 1987; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Park, 1997 in Lai, 2009:276-277).

Another distinctive characteristic of more successful learners found by Zahedi (2008:164) is that they do not always use strategies more frequently than less successful learners, but they are more aware of their needs and use strategies more efficiently. Cohen (2004) believes that learners who use strategies (especially metacognitive ones) are more successful than those who do not. However, as he puts it, language researchers are beginning to link success in language learning to the effective use of strategies and not necessarily to the amount of strategy use. Therefore, it can be said that being strategic is different from being a frequent user of strategies. Being strategic means to be skilful at using different strategies in a way that leads to achieving the best possible results in language learning.

What can be summarised from all these studies involving level of success in learning and reported LLS use?

- Results are not conclusive and level of success should not be attributed to a single factor, such as differences in reported use of LLS using Oxford's SILL. Differences in reported strategy use seem to vary according to individual factors, contextual factors and the learning task. In this respect, it matters if the study is conducted among beginners, intermediate or advanced students, and if – for instance – the learning task is to prepare a speech or to translate a text.

- The quantitative approach used by these studies to investigate the relationship between reported strategy use and success is insufficient. Focusing on frequency alone overlooks the qualitative aspect of strategy use and fails to notice if learners are using strategies efficiently and effectively to complete a task.
- Successful learners are not necessarily successful because they use strategies. They are successful, possibly, because they are more aware of their learning needs and are skilled at matching strategies to the task they are working on. Successful learners seem to use strategies more efficiently and are rewarded with their own success.

2.6.4 Reported LLS use and rate of progress

The relationship between reported LLS use and rate of progress has also been studied. In fact, rate of progress is better monitored by longitudinal studies than by studies that use the snapshot approach. Griffiths (2003b:381), conducting a longitudinal study, found "a statistically significant relationship between rate of progress and increase in reported LLS use", meaning that students who were learning at a faster pace were the ones who were reporting high strategy use, whereas students who were learning at a slower pace were the ones who were reporting low frequency LLS use.

A positive correlation between rate of progress and strategy use has also been reported by Kyungsim and Leavell (2006) (in Griffiths and Oxford, 2014:2). They found that "the more active strategy users in their study made faster progress than those who employed strategies less often."

When Griffiths compared the strategies favoured by higher level students to the strategies favoured by lower level students, she found that the strategies typical of higher level students who learnt faster appeared to be both more sophisticated and more interactive (involving manipulation rather than memorisation), suggesting that the differences in strategy use by faster and slower learners may also have a qualitative dimension and not only a quantitative one (Griffiths, 2003b:381).

Faster learners not only differ from slower learners in the types and self-reported frequency of strategy use, but also in the qualitative differences that exist between the preferred strategies they use. This raises the question of whether such

differential reported strategy use might be the cause or the effect of the rate of progress at which the students are learning. Only longitudinal studies can place us in a better position to suggest possible cause-effect relationships that could, in future, be tested by experimental studies.

2.6.5 STUDIES INVESTIGATING VARIATION IN LLS USE AS PROFICIENCY DEVELOPS

Only longitudinal studies can capture variation in LLS use as learners develop proficiency in the new language. Studies investigating variation have noticed that students at different learning stages use different strategies, with more frequent and more effective strategy use by more advanced learners (Wharton, 2000:208). This could be because "learners at different levels have different needs in terms of teacher intervention in the learning process" (Alhaisoni, 2012:123).

Adult beginners, for instance, prefer to start their learning process by getting to know the new language and the differences that exist when compared to the language(s) they already know. Adult beginners are also concerned with pronunciation as well as the acquisition of a basic vocabulary, coupled with a growing interest in grammar. Beginners possess little declarative knowledge regarding their foreign/second language learning – that is knowledge about the language – and much less procedural knowledge – that is knowledge about how to use the language and how to effectively apply strategies to learn the language (Ackerman, 2008:445). For this reason, beginners need teachers to be very explicit in developing declarative and procedural knowledge to heighten understanding of the what and how to successfully learn a new language. Initially, beginners tend to be more passive due to shyness or lack of vocabulary. At this beginners' level, the teacher's role normally aims at increasing vocabulary and introducing simple conversation opportunities to build confidence and fluency (Hong-Nam and Leavell, 2006:408-412).

Intermediate learners focus on grammar and maintain an interest in expanding their vocabulary. They have a growing body of strategic knowledge, along with a fair amount of content (vocabulary, grammar, etc.). They are becoming very conscious of how a new language is learnt and they are learning to select the right strategies for specific learning tasks and for themselves as individuals (Hong-Nam and Leavell, 2006:408-412).

Advanced students seem to be more concerned with communication and display a growing interest in using the language for communicative purposes. Advanced learners are more autonomous in their ability to guide their language learning process. The need to consciously administer and deliberate about their learning choices becomes less necessary. The teacher's role here shifts from mediator to facilitator (Hong-Nam and Leavell, 2006:412).

Although higher-level students normally report using strategies of all kinds significantly more frequently than lower-level students (Green and Oxford in Griffiths and Oxford, 2014:2), Takeuchi (in Chamot, 2005:123) found that learners reported shifting their use of strategies as they advanced to higher proficiency levels. Other studies found a negative variation, meaning that as proficiency grows and develops, less strategies are used or strategies are used less frequently (Wharton, 2000:231). For instance, Bedell and Oxford (1996:52) found that the use of compensation strategies, such as reverting back to the mother tongue and coining new words, diminishes with higher proficiency. These varying interests displayed by learners at different stages influence not only strategy choice but also the reported frequency use of those strategies.

From the above we can see that not many studies have studied variation in LLS use as learners develop proficiency in the new language. The richness of this study is that it aims at capturing how LLS use emerges, evolves, and consolidates or disappears as learners develop proficiency in the language.

2.7 GOOD LANGUAGE LEARNER RESEARCH: CLAIMS AND CRITICISMS

Since the 1970s, the possibility that success in language learning might be related to how students regulate and go about their learning tasks has continued to suggest that the use of LLS can help to learn languages more effectively (Griffiths, 2013:1-2).

Initial research on LLS aimed to unearth the secrets of the successful language learner. Early researchers wanted to identify strategies and other features assumed to be crucial for all good language learners (GLLs) (Jooneghani et al., 2012:77). The aim was based on the implicit assumption that it was possible to identify a single set of characteristics that all successful or good language learners possessed. As the years passed, most researchers discarded the idea of a single GLL profile and

came to the realisation that no single ideal set of characteristics existed. Research studies have shown that there could be striking differences between equally successful language learners (Macaro, 2001). Good learners do not necessarily share common and fixed characteristics and they differ from each other in the use of strategies to achieve what they set out to accomplish, especially regarding the use of metacognitive strategies (Cohen, 2011a:683).

When further studying the concept of the GLL in a theoretical sense, Griffiths (2008) pointed out that there are many different types of GLLs who are capable of reaching success in a variety of language skill areas (Oxford et al., 2014b:31) and that not all learners learn in the same way using the same strategies (Ismail and Al Khatib, 2013:136). Wharton (2000:205-206) also found that no single pattern of strategy use exists for either successful or unsuccessful learners. Though all learners use strategies, it seems that more successful learners know better how to choose the right strategies for the right occasion (Skehan, 1991:288).

As explained by Jooneghani et al. (2012:77), GLLs do not necessarily use the same strategies. Even if they do, they might not use them for the same purposes. Conversely, there is also the possibility that strategies regarded as good may be used by less successful language learners.

Taking into account that GLLs do not necessarily utilise the same strategies, and being fully aware that one of the distinctive characteristics of GLLs is that they make rapid progress in their learning by using LLS frequently, the following strategies have been identified by Griffiths (2008b:92) as the ones that are mostly used by GLLs:

- strategies to manage their own learning (metacognitive);
- strategies to expand their vocabulary;
- strategies to improve their knowledge of grammar;
- strategies involving the use of resources (such as TV, internet or movies);
- strategies involving all language skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking).

However, according to Cohen and Macaro (in Grenfell and Harris, 2013:124), what characterises a GLL is not necessarily the number or type of strategies used, but how the strategies are used and orchestrated in combination with other strategies and how they vary according to the language learning task.

One of the criticisms that GLL research has received has to do with the emphasis placed on the individual, rather than on the group, and on the cognitive rather than

on the sociocultural dimension. This way of looking at language learning has mistakenly led to the belief that a FL can always be learnt in isolation.

This being the case, it is important to take into account Vygotsky's (1980) contributions and to remember that the ultimate goal of learning is to develop an independent, self-regulated, problem-solving individual, which can only develop with the help of "more capable others" such as teachers, more competent peers, parents, or others who are called to interact and offer assistance to the learner. "This assistance is metaphorically known as scaffolding" (Oxford, 1999:111).

2.8 SUMMARY

This chapter aimed to provide a historical and contextualised background of LLS research and central issues that underpin the basic concept of LLS. It showed that this research was inspired by Rubin's article (1975) and showed that the assumption of the identifiability of a single set of GLL characteristics gradually gave way to the realisation that no single ideal set of characteristics existed. It also showed that there are many different kinds of successful language learners, and that successful learner characteristics are not necessarily transferrable to less successful learners.

This chapter also provided an operational definition of the LLS construct and presented a theoretical background underpinning the classification of LLS and how they are used in FL contexts. The fact that some strategies are observable while others are mental – coupled with the disagreement as to whether they consist of knowledge, intention, action, or all three – has led some researchers to quit their attempts for a comprehensive definition and opt instead for listing essential features or defining characteristics. However, due to the fact that an operational definition is essential to conduct meaningful research, "language learning strategies" refers in this dissertation to activities, steps or actions consciously chosen by learners to improve and regulate their own language learning.

Although Oxford's taxonomy is more comprehensive, detailed, precise and systematic than the other classification models in accounting for the variety of strategies reported by language learners, it is chosen not because it is considered perfect or flawless, but rather because it is simply useful in providing a clear, systematic and integrated framework to classify LLS.

Multiple factors in varying degrees affect the choice of learning strategies, their use and the overall frequency with which learners employ them. Among these factors, we have the stage of learning, degree of awareness, task requirements, teacher expectations, age, sex, nationality or ethnicity, general learning style, personality traits, motivation level, and motivation for learning the language.

Research in LLS has mostly fallen into two broad categories: descriptive studies aimed at reporting what good language learners do to learn a new language, and intervention studies which are primarily focused on studying the extent to which changes in strategy use bring about improved language competence.

LLS research is still not conclusive and presents some contradictory findings. Causal relationships between LLS use and language learning success have not been categorically demonstrated. Longitudinal research seems to be more appropriate to describe patterns of change over time and better in identifying possible causal relationships or correlations. Differences in reported strategy use vary according to individual factors, contextual factors, and the learning task.

The quantitative approach used to investigate the relationship between reported strategy use and success has proven to be insufficient. Focusing on frequency alone overlooks the qualitative aspect of strategy use and fails to notice if learners are using strategies efficiently and effectively to complete a task. According to the literature review, it seems that what characterises a successful language learner is not necessarily the number or type of strategies used, but how the strategies are used and orchestrated in combination with other strategies and how they vary according to the language learning task.

The following chapter goes into detail on how this research was conducted, why it was conducted in that way, and how the data were obtained and analysed. The methodology chapter also provides information about the participants and the context in which Spanish is taught at the University of Pretoria.

3 THE METHOD

This chapter is about methodology. The purpose of this chapter is to describe how this study was conducted, and how the data were obtained and analysed. It consists of seven sections. The first section starts with a brief presentation of the purpose of the study followed by a short description of the research objectives. The second section introduces the setting and context in which this research was conducted. The third section provides information about the students that participated in the study. The fourth section presents the reasons why a mixed methods approach was chosen, and then describes how the quantitative and qualitative approaches were mixed and organised. The fifth section describes in more detail what a mixed methods approach is and consists of, and then deals with the distinctive methodological characteristics in relation to the design and implementation procedures. The sixth section covers the practical reasons that justify the usage of the particular mixed methods design chosen: a multiphase design. This section also explains how the data collection techniques were organised throughout the study and specifically how the quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analysed. Finally, the seventh section explains how the findings that emerged from the data analyses are presented.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In order to discuss the methodology used in this study, it is important to remember that the purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the use of LLS and the role that these strategies play in learning Spanish as a FL among university students who started as beginners in 2014 and completed three years of studies at

the undergraduate level in 2016 at the University of Pretoria, with the intent of improving the current situation.

As mentioned in chapter one, five research questions were formulated to specify, as precisely as possible, what this research study aimed to find out (Hofstee, 2006:85).

- What is the profile of students that study Spanish at undergraduate level at the University of Pretoria?
- What language learning strategies do students perceive and report using at different points in time during three consecutive years of studying Spanish as a foreign language at undergraduate level?
- What factors do students report affecting their perceived use of language learning strategies at different points in time as they become progressively more proficient in Spanish?
- How does the use of particular language learning strategies emerge, evolve and consolidate or disappear?
- What role does the use of language learning strategies play in learning Spanish as a foreign language at the undergraduate level?

After careful consideration of these research questions, five research objectives were set to show what this study wanted to achieve (Hofstee, 2006:86). Below are the research objectives.

- To identify the profile of students that study Spanish at undergraduate level at the University of Pretoria.
- To determine the language learning strategies that students perceive and report using at different points in time during three consecutive years of studying Spanish as a foreign language at undergraduate level.
- To find out what students report affecting their perceived use of language learning strategies at different points in time as they become progressively more proficient in Spanish.
- To explain how the use of particular language learning strategies emerge, evolve and consolidate or disappear.
- To explain the role that the use of language learning strategies plays in learning Spanish as a foreign language at the undergraduate level.

3.2 RATIONALE

Due to the fact that the purpose of this study was "to gain a better understanding" of the use and role that LLS play in learning Spanish, quantitative techniques were used in tandem with qualitative techniques to collect and analyse the data. This decision was taken because it is believed that "one tradition may usefully address the limitations of the other" (Barbour, 2014:206) and would yield a better understanding of the research problem which either approach alone could not provide (Mertens, 2010:16). Thus, a mixed methods research design was considered appropriate to follow because it utilises the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative approaches (Creswell, 2009:203) and provides a more complete picture of the phenomenon being studied (Barbour, 2014:206). Although further light on the distinction between mixing methods is provided in the fifth section of this chapter, at this stage it is important to mention that the mixing of the quantitative and qualitative strands can occur at four possible levels. It can occur at the level of design, during the data collection, during the data analysis, and/or during the interpretation phase. In this particular case, the mixing occurred at the level of data collection.

Quantitative data were systematically gathered by the administration of Oxford's SILL, an 80-item questionnaire that uses Likert-scaled ratings for each strategy item ranging from 1 to 5, with the poles being "never or almost never" and "always or almost always". Oxford's SILL was administered five times during a three-year period. There was an interval of approximately six months between each administration. Oxford's SILL was administered at the following points in time:

- At first-year level, in the second half of the year course for beginners.
- At second-year level, in the second half of the first semester course.
- At second-year level, in the second half of the second semester course.
- At third-year level, in the second half of the first semester course.
- At third-year level, in the second half of the second semester course.

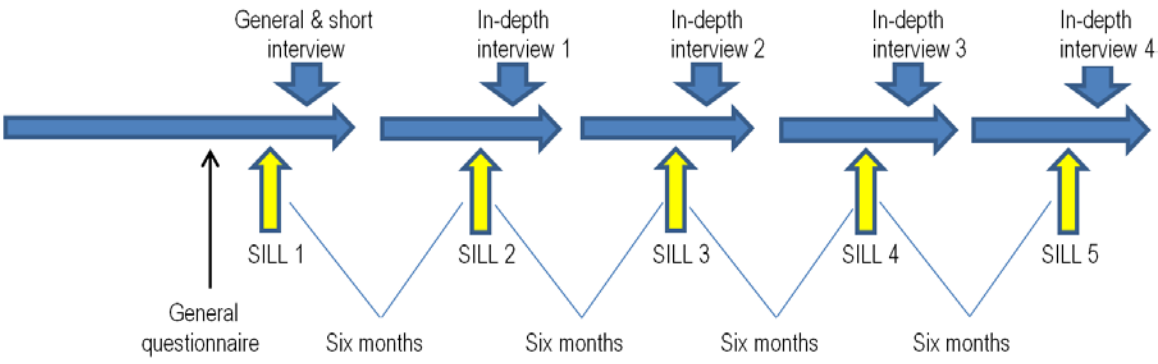
Qualitative data gathered by in-depth interviews provided rich information on the when, the how, the how often, the why, and under what circumstances LLS were used. The use of complementary research methods and in-depth descriptions of

LLS use helped to better understand the quantitative findings obtained by Oxford's SILL (Griffiths and Oxford, 2014:3), specifically because there has been an ongoing concern as to the limitations of self-reported instruments used to access learners' mental processing (White et al., 2007:93).

In-depth interviews also collected information on the factors associated with students' perceptions and self-reports of low and high frequency of particular strategy use, and on the factors associated with both positive and negative significant differences of self-reported frequency of strategy use for particular strategies across different administrations of Oxford's SILL.

The diagram in Figure 3.1 shows the two types of data collection techniques that were systematically used to collect quantitative and qualitative data. The first long blue arrow on the left represents the year course for beginners and the subsequent four arrows represent the semester courses in second and third year respectively. The vertical blue arrows pointing down represent the qualitative data collection techniques, while the opposite yellow arrows pointing up represent the quantitative data collection techniques.

Figure 3.1 Data collection techniques used in this study
Source: Own.



As with many previous LLS studies that have analysed quantitative data generated by Oxford's SILL[38], this research study made use of SPSS version 23 to generate tabulated reports, charts and plots of distributions, and to perform descriptive statistics and statistical analyses.

[38] See Oxford (1999:114), Peacock and Ho (2003:179), Chamot (2005:114), Nisbet et al. (2005:101), Alptekin (2007), Vlčková (2007), Wait (2007), Ambrosi-Randić and Kostić-Bobanović (2008), Al-Buainain (2010:95), Kafipour et al. (2011:162), Psaltou-Joycey and Kantaridou (2011:313), Alhaisoni (2012), Ananisarab and Abdi (2012), Bozorgian and Pillay (2013), Chang and Liu (2013), Ismail and Al Khatib (2013), Tam (2013), Tragant et al. (2013:96), Ghafournia (2014).

Qualitative data originating from the in-depth interviews were analysed by establishing units of analysis and grouping the units into categories. Links and relationships were sought and established between emerging categories in order to make speculative inferences and generate theoretical statements derived from the data (Cohen et al., 2007:183-185, Sampieri et al., 2014:418).

3.3 RESEARCH SETTING: UNDERGRADUATE SPANISH COURSES AT UP

Undergraduate studies in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Pretoria mostly last three years. Students register for up to ten courses or modules per year. Some of the courses are year modules while others are semester modules. Students registered for year courses attend classes for 28 weeks while students registered for semester courses attend classes for 14 weeks. The Spanish courses are offered in the first, second and third year. Figure 3.2 shows details of the Spanish academic courses offered by the Spanish Section at undergraduate level.

Figure 3.2: Academic courses in Spanish at undergraduate level.
Source: Undergraduate Regulations and Syllabi of the Faculty of Humanities

Name of course	Duration	Contact sessions	Level of proficiency to be reached	Groups & number of students
FIRST YEAR:				
Spanish for beginners	1 year	5h per week	A 2	4 groups, 25 to 30 learners per class
SECOND YEAR:				
Spanish intermediate 1	1 semester	5h per week	B 1.1	1 group, 25 to 30 learners per class
Spanish intermediate 2	1 semester	5h per week	B 1.2	1 group, 25 to 30 learners per class
THIRD YEAR:				
Spanish intermediate 3	1 semester	5h per week	B 2.1	1 group, 10 to 15 learners per class
Spanish intermediate 4	1 semester	5h per week	B 2.2	1 group, 10 to 15 learners per class

Spanish constitutes a key language course in programmes such as BA Languages, International and Political Studies, and International Relations. However, for the majority of students, Spanish is taken as an elective course.

In the survey that is traditionally administered to students in first year on the first day of classes, most students usually indicate that they decided to study Spanish because they had to choose a first-year elective course and thought that studying Spanish was going to be a relatively easy challenge. Since the launch of the Spanish courses in 2008, first-year students have been reporting that their main goal is to obtain the credits and not necessarily to carry on with the learning of Spanish until the third year.

Spanish is considered a FL in South Africa because it does not have immediate social and communicative functions within the country. As a language with a "foreign language" status, it is only spoken beyond the borders of the country where it is learnt (Oxford, 1990:6). Under such circumstances, the majority of FL teaching takes place in the classroom as students have limited opportunities outside the classroom to actively engage in using the target language (Marsh, 2012:1).

At national level, there are no official figures as to how many people speak Spanish in South Africa. The most reliable information available dates from 2005. According to Rowe and Maree (2005), the Spanish-speaking community residing in South Africa in 2005 consisted of almost 6000 people. In a country with a population of approximately 45 million[39] people in 2005 (Lehohla, 2011:18, Sonrei, 2008:1), 6000 native speakers of Spanish represented 0.013% of the population. This means that the chances to find a native Spanish speaker to communicate with in 2005 were 1 in 7500. Although the 2010 Soccer World Cup temporarily brought a large number of Hispanics to South Africa, the chances to find native or proficient Spanish speakers are still very low.

At institutional level, not many students register in FL courses at the University of Pretoria. In 2014, according to official figures (International Students Division, 2015), there were 62275 registered students from which only 619, representing 1% of the

[39] This figure was calculated by considering the official figures of the census in 2001 and 2011, and the drop to 43.9 million in 2007 due to HIV/AIDS.

total, were registered in a FL course. In that year[40], it was found that among all the FL courses offered at first-year level, French (57%) was the most studied, followed by Spanish (21%), German (13%) and Portuguese (9%).

3.4 THE PARTICIPANTS: STUDENTS OF SPANISH

For the sake of gaining a deep and comprehensive understanding of the matter being investigated, the entire group of beginners who started in 2014 were invited to participate in this investigation. However, only students who had no previous knowledge of Spanish and whose parents were not native speakers of the language were included in the study. This decision was taken because the purpose of this research was to focus on absolute beginners and not necessarily on students who started studying Spanish in first year with previous knowledge of the language.

A language that is learnt at home from one or both of the parents and is not widely used in the larger society is called a "heritage language" (Yeh et al., 2014:255). In this respect, it is important to mention that heritage language learners (HLLs) face different challenges than foreign language learners (FLLs). Although the distinction between learning and acquiring a language is disputed among scholars in this field, Krashen (in Correa, 2014:108) suggests that HLLs "acquire" the language (a subconscious process), while FLLs "learn" it (a conscious process).

Furthermore, HLLs are familiarised with part of the vocabulary, already understand some grammatical concepts and rules, know native speakers to practise with, and are normally less anxious about learning the language than FLLs (Correa, 2014:108).

Thus, as the main purpose of this research was to study the evolution of self-reported use of LLS as absolute beginners become progressively proficient in Spanish, it was critical to conduct this study among learners who had no previous knowledge of Spanish.

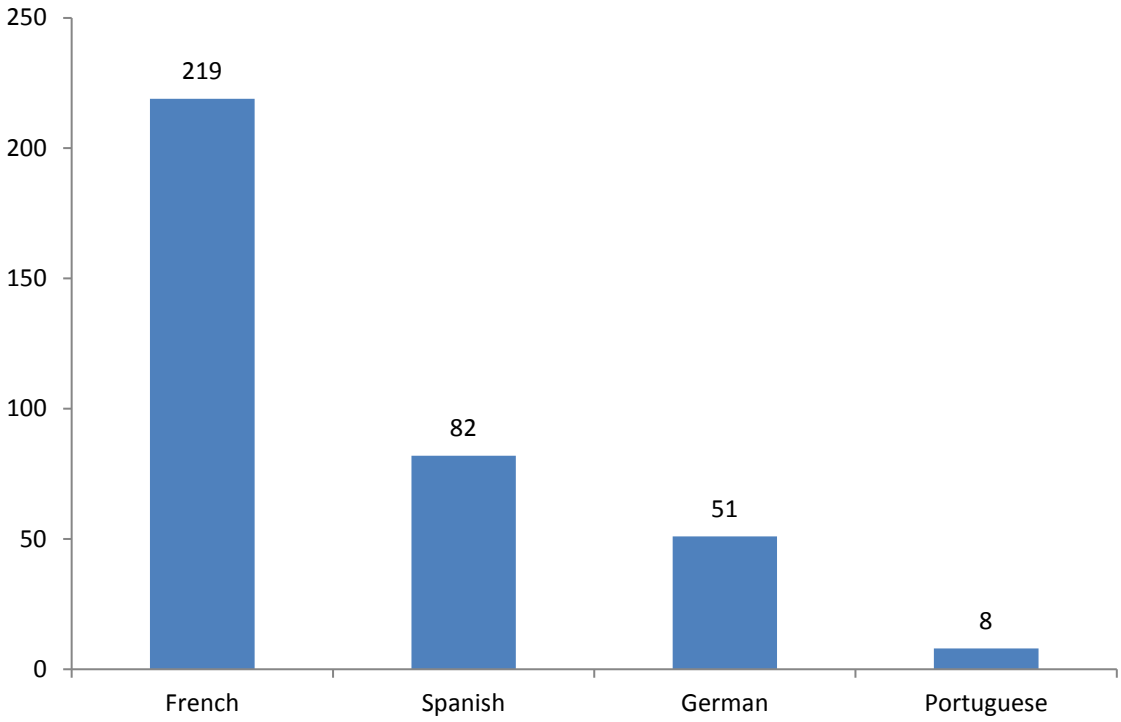
However, due to the high degree of structural congruence and small lexical and orthographic distance between Spanish and Portuguese (Cavalho and Bacelar da Silva, 2006:187, Heeringa et al., 2013), Lusophone students who were part of the

[40] 2014 was the year in which this research study started.

group of students that started studying Spanish in 2014 were also not considered in the sample. The reason for leaving these Lusophone students out was to avoid the inclusion of intervening variables – such as pre-existing knowledge of common vocabulary or a relative understanding of similar grammatical rules – that would distort the results and exert a particular influence on the self-reported use and role of LLS at particular stages of proficiency level.

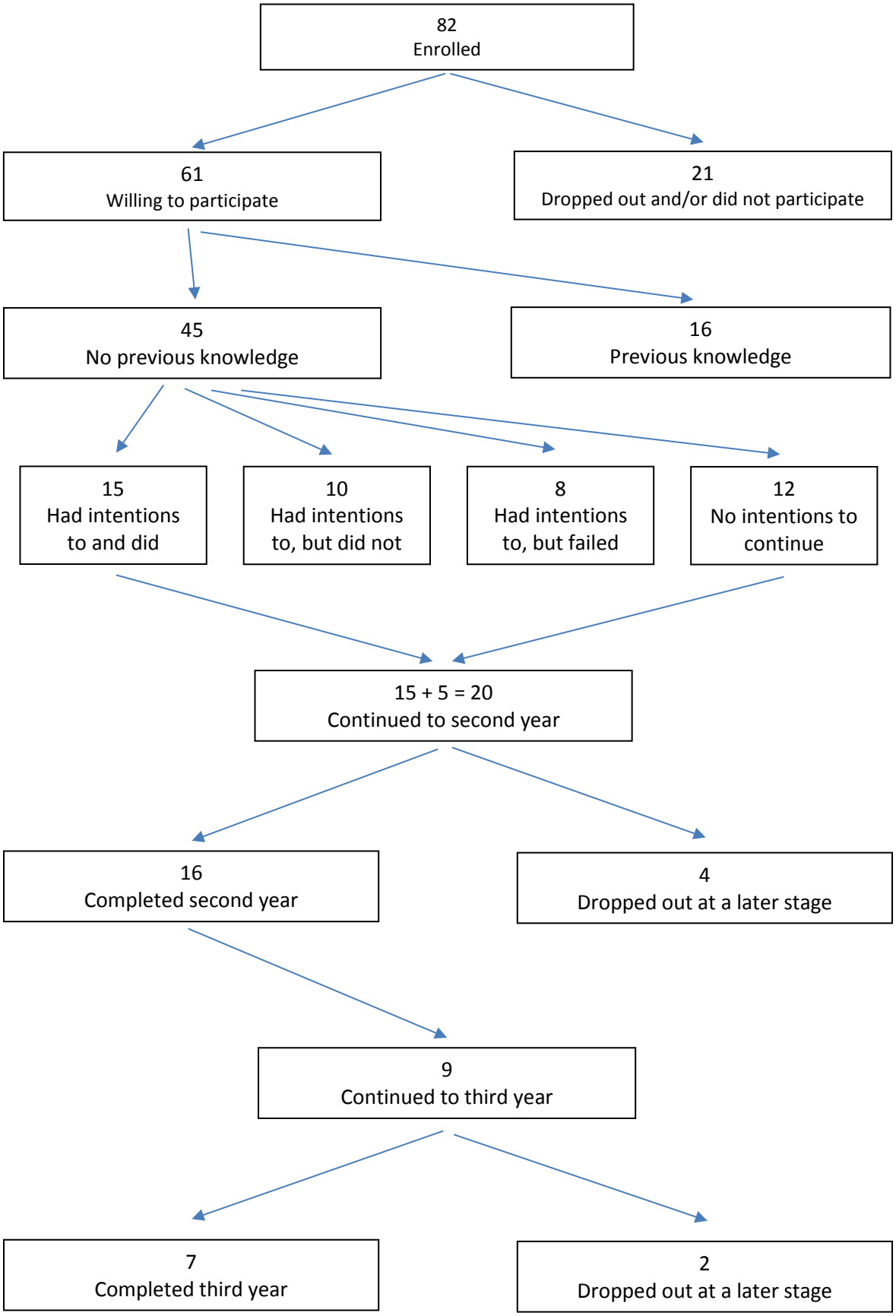
In order to have a panoramic view of the number of enrolments, Figure 3.3 shows the number of students that started studying various FLs at UP in 2014.

Figure 3.3: Students who started a FL course in 2014.
Source: Faculty of Humanities: Student Administration.



Subsequently, it needs to be taken into consideration that not all students who registered for the beginners' Spanish course in 2014 had the intention to continue until the third year. Since this study was going to be a longitudinal one that wanted to study the role and evolution of strategy use over a period of three years, it only considered those learners who had been identified as absolute beginners and who had expressed an intention to continue with Spanish until the third year. Figure 3.4 shows the number of students enrolled in Spanish and the different subgroups thereof.

Figure 3.4: Composition of student enrolments in Spanish in 2014.
Source: Own



This group of students consisted of males and females ranging in age from 19 to 27, and were all born in South Africa. As can be seen in Figure 3.2, the study started with 61 students and ended with seven. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 will go into greater detail about the composition and demographics of the group. In order to retain the involvement of the participants in the longitudinal research process (Gao, 2010:5), the researcher made a brief presentation on what LLS was about in the beginning of the second year of enrolment. In that presentation students were reminded of the importance of participating in the research project and were encouraged to self-report strategy use with honesty and accuracy.

3.5 RESEARCH METHOD: A MIXED METHODS APPROACH

In the editorial of the first issue of the *Journal of Mixed Methods Research* that was published in 2007, mixed methods was broadly defined as "research in which the investigator collects and analyses data, integrates the findings, and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches or methods in a single study or a programme of inquiry" (Tashakkori and Creswell, 2007:4).

A mixed methods approach is often employed "to compensate for the perceived shortcomings of standalone methods, with the aim either of providing a more complete picture or enhancing coverage" (Barbour, 2014:206). On the one hand, it capitalises on the strength of the qualitative approach to provide a more complete picture, and on the other hand, it capitalises on the strength of the quantitative approach to enhance coverage.

One of the reasons why mixed methods have become a popular research approach in recent years is due to its ability to address the research problem more comprehensively, because "researchers can address both confirmatory and exploratory questions and get answers to What? How? and Why? questions at the same time" (Ivankova, 2015:3-4). Mixed methods research involves both collecting and analysing quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative approaches emphasise *a priori* categories to collect data in the form of numbers. In most educational research, descriptive statistical concepts and procedures are used to analyse quantitative data as a basis for making conclusions about presumed effects and relationships (McMillan and Schumacher, 2001:192). Data collected in qualitative approaches usually consist of words in the form of rich verbal descriptions.

There are three distinct approaches to mixing quantitative and qualitative methods, according to Greene et al (in Barbour, 2014:209).

- A dialectic stance, which intentionally mixes philosophical assumptions and methods to be generative of new insights and fresh perspectives.
- A pragmatic stance, which advocates for an alternative inclusive philosophical framework that de-emphasizes differences in philosophical traditions, and considers that multiple assumptions and diverse methods can co-exist and complement each other.
- An a-paradigmatic stance, which argues that philosophical assumptions are useful conceptual tools but that they should not drive practice.

Dialectics can be described as “the relationship that [joins] two ostensibly opposed concepts or positions. This relationship is sometimes represented by way of a third position that transcends the two” (Calhoun, 2002). The two opposed positions in this case would be qualitative and quantitative modes of inquiry, with the third position being the mixed methods approach.

Mixed methods research is commonly associated with the philosophy of pragmatism which argues that “what has practical and functional value is ultimately important and valid” (Ivankova, 2015:16).

Mixed methods research has distinctive methodological characteristics in relation to the design and implementation procedures. There are four important decisions that need to be taken to choose an appropriate type of mixed methods design for a particular study (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011:63-68). These decisions involve the following aspects.

1. The level of interaction between the quantitative and qualitative strands

According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2011:63) and Ivankova (2015:18), a strand is a component of a mixed methods research study that encompasses the basic process of conducting quantitative or qualitative research. It includes posing a question, collecting data, analysing data, and interpreting results based on the data. A simple mixed methods research approach, for instance, includes at least one quantitative strand and one qualitative strand (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011:63, Ivankova, 2015:18).

The level of interaction refers to the extent to which the quantitative and qualitative strands are kept independent from or interact with each other. This interaction "can occur at different stages in the research process, from the study conceptualisation to posing research questions, to data collection, to data analysis, and to interpretations of the study results" (Yin 2006 in Ivankova, 2015:21).

- An independent level of interaction occurs when the researcher keeps the quantitative and qualitative research questions, the data collection and the data analysis separate and only mixes the two strands when drawing conclusions (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011:64).
- An interactive level of interaction occurs when a direct interaction exists when the two methods are mixed before drawing the conclusions (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011:65).

2. The emphasis given to either or both of the quantitative and qualitative strands

As for the relative priority given to either or both quantitative and qualitative methods, Creswell (2009:207) asserts that it "depends on the interest of the researcher, the audience for the study, and what the investigator seeks to emphasise in the study." Nevertheless, Teddlie and Tashakkori (in Ivankova, 2015:21) argue that priority of one method over the other "cannot be completely determined before the study is implemented" because there is always room for flexibility in both the collection strategies and the research process. Thus, based on the need to better understand the studied phenomenon, the priority can shift from one method to the other during the implementation of the study. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2011:65), there are three possible priority options for a mixed methods design:

- Both methods have an equal priority and play an equally important role in addressing the research problem.
- A greater emphasis is placed on the quantitative methods, and the qualitative methods are used in a secondary role.
- A greater emphasis is placed on the qualitative methods, and the quantitative methods are used in a secondary role.

3. The sequence of quantitative and qualitative strands to be implemented

Based on the initial intent of the researcher and the nature of the research purpose, a decision has to be taken as to whether quantitative and qualitative data are collected and analysed at the same time, or one following the other (Creswell, 2009:206, Ivankova, 2015:20). According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2011:66), timing within mixed methods designs can be classified in three ways:

- Concurrent, when the researcher implements both the quantitative and qualitative strands of the research during a single phase of the study;
- Sequential, when the researcher implements the strands in two distinct phases, one after the other; and
- Multiphase combination, when the researcher implements multiple phases of sequential and/or concurrent timing during a particular research study.

4. Where and how to mix the quantitative and qualitative strands

According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2011:66), researchers need to decide the approach for mixing the quantitative and qualitative approaches within the mixed methods design. Mixing may occur at four possible points during a study research process (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011:66-68).

- Mixing at the level of design occurs when the researcher embeds one of the quantitative or qualitative designs within a design associated with one of the other strands. It can also occur when the researcher mixes the quantitative and qualitative strands within a theoretical framework or when the researcher mixes the strands within an overall research objective (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011:67-68).
- Mixing during data collection occurs when the results of one strand inform the collection of the other type of data, in other words, when “the results of one strand are used to shape the collection of data in the second strand by specifying research questions, selecting participants, and developing data collection protocols and instruments” (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011:67).
- Mixing during data analysis occurs when the researcher explicitly brings the two sets of results together through a combined analysis. For instance, when the researcher further analyses the quantitative and qualitative results by

relating them to each other in a matrix that facilitates comparisons and interpretations (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011:67).

- Mixing during the interpretation phase occurs when the researcher mixes the strands during the final step of the research, after both sets of quantitative and qualitative data have been collected and analysed independently (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011:66-67).

3.6 A SUITABLE TYPE OF MIXED METHODS DESIGN: A MULTIPHASE DESIGN

The four factors mentioned above help to shape the design and implementation procedures of a mixed methods study: the level of integration, the relative weighting of the methods, the sequence of quantitative and qualitative strands to be implemented, and the level at which these strands are mixed (Creswell, 2009:208).

Taking into account that the purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the role and use of LLS in learning Spanish as a FL over a period of time, it was considered appropriate to use a multiphase design because it lent itself to the study of the evolution of strategy use over three years and matched the flow of the academic year, causing the least possible disruptions to the students.

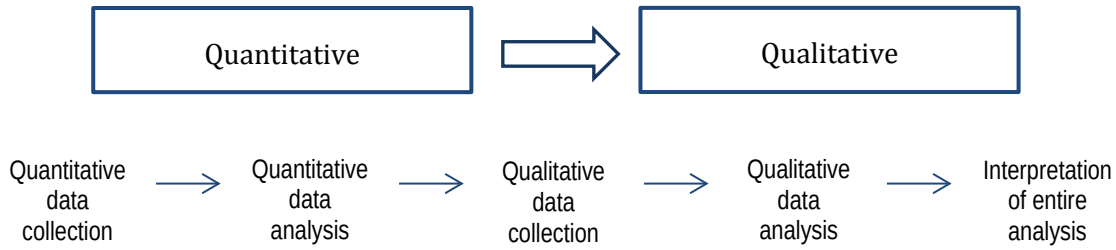
Lund (2012:156) defines a multiphase design as “flexible large-scale enterprise, where quantitative and qualitative methods are combined within and between several phases, and where the phases depend on each other and on an overall objective for the enterprise.” In this respect, the plan of study that a multiphase design provides helps to examine a topic or problem through an iteration of connected quantitative and qualitative studies that are sequentially aligned, with each new strand or phase building on what was learnt previously to address central research objectives (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011:100). A multiphase design combines sequential and/or concurrent strands over a period of time to address an overall research objective (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011:72).

The multiphase design used in this study combines a series of sequential explanatory designs. A sequential explanatory design is characterised by the collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data in two distinct interactive phases (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011:71). Quantitative data are collected and

analysed in a first phase, whereas qualitative data are collected and analysed in a second phase to build on the results of the quantitative strand (Creswell, 2009:211).

A sequential explanatory design is typically used to explain and interpret the quantitative results by collecting and analysing follow-up qualitative data. The mixing occurs at the level of analysis, when the analysis of the quantitative results informs the secondary qualitative data collection (Creswell, 2009:211, Hernández Sampieri et al., 2014:554). Figure 3.5 illustrates a sequential explanatory design.

Figure 3.5: Sequential explanatory design.
Source: (Creswell, 2009:209)



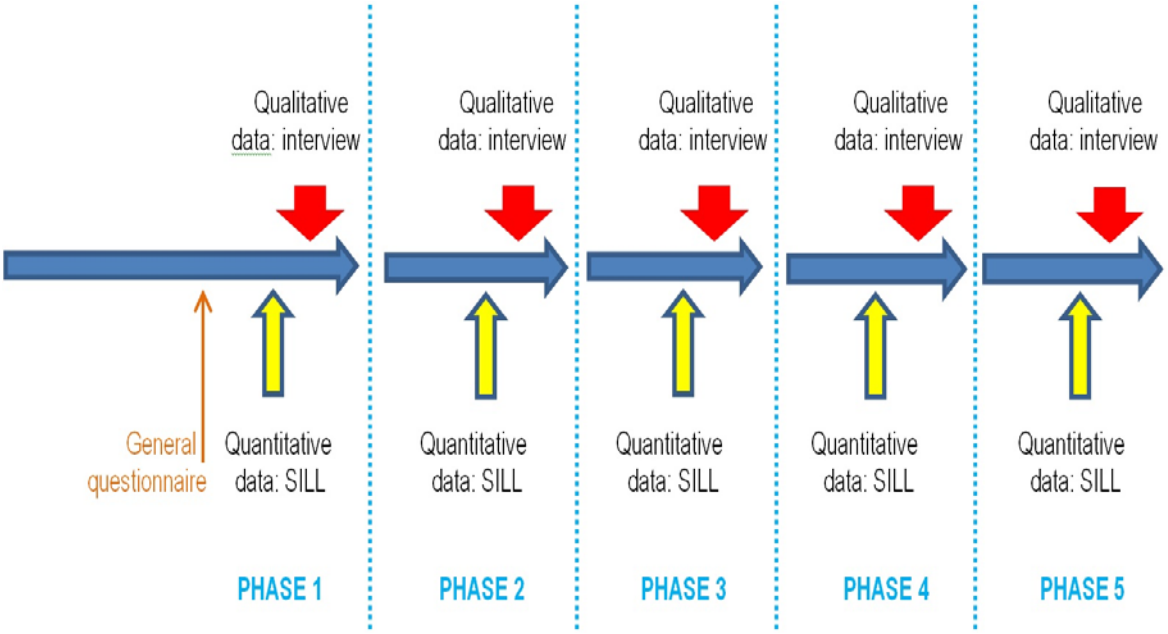
A sequential explanatory design normally places a greater emphasis on the quantitative strand, which has the priority for addressing the study's questions (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011:71). However, this is not always the case as priority can be given to either one or both strands.

Although Creswell (2009:211) indicates that "the main weakness of a sequential design is the length of time involved in data collection, with the two separate phases", it is worth mentioning that in this particular case this did not represent a weakness because the research objectives of this longitudinal study sought precisely to describe the extent to which the use of LLS helps students to develop language proficiency during three consecutive years and to explain how reported use of LLS fluctuates or consolidates during this period.

3.6.1 Data collection in a multiphase design

The multiphase design that was used in this study encompassed five phases. Each phase consisted of a sequential explanatory design in which a quantitative strand (a questionnaire) was followed by a qualitative strand (an interview). Figure 3.6 shows a diagram that depicts what was done in each phase.

Figure 3.6: Multiphase design showing the quantitative and qualitative strands.
Source: Own



Phase 1 started with the administration of a general questionnaire that was used to collect data on the students' profiles. The first administration of Oxford's SILL (the quantitative strand) happened one month later and was followed by an interview (the qualitative strand).

Phase 2 encompassed a second administration of Oxford's SILL, which was followed by an in-depth interview that looked into similarities and significant differences between the self-reported use of strategies of the current SILL results and the previous SILL results.

Phase 3 encompassed a third administration of Oxford's SILL, which was followed by a second in-depth interview that looked into similarities and significant differences between the self-reported use of strategies of the current SILL results and the previous SILL results.

Phase 4 encompassed a fourth administration of Oxford's SILL, which was followed by a third in-depth interview that looked into similarities and significant differences between the self-reported use of strategies of the current SILL results and the previous SILL results.

Phase 5 encompassed a fifth administration of Oxford's SILL, which was followed by a fourth in-depth interview that looked into similarities and significant differences between the self-reported use of strategies of the current SILL results and the previous SILL results.

Phase 1 was conducted to achieve the first research objective and to identify the general profile of the students. An interactive level of integration was implemented during the data analysis procedures. A quantitative data collection technique (a general questionnaire) was first administered to the students to collect information on gender, programme enrolled, proficiency in other languages, experience in learning a FL, exposure to Spanish, motivation to study Spanish and plans to continue studying Spanish until the third year. Then, after analysing the quantitative data, a qualitative data collection technique (a general interview) was implemented to clarify and verify the information obtained by the general questionnaire.

Phases 2, 3, 4 and 5 were conducted in order to achieve all the other research objectives. Each phase consisted of a sequential explanatory design that was implemented every six months, during the second half of the respective course. In each case, the administration of Oxford's SILL was followed by an in-depth interview that focused on the what, the how and the why of LLS use and on the fluctuations of self-reported strategy use over a period of time.

3.6.2 Quantitative data collection in a multiphase design

As shown in Figure 3.3, quantitative numeric data were collected by administering Oxford's SILL five times in total. As a structured questionnaire, Oxford's SILL is the most often employed instrument for assessing LLS use (Dörnyei, 2005:181, Nemati, 2013:33).

The SILL has been developed primarily as a tool for assessing a broad range of general second/foreign LLS and has undergone significant revisions (Hsiao and Oxford, 2002:379). The 80 items in it have a clear factor structure that specifies that there are six strategy factors, each of which is represented by a specific set of strategy items: (a) memory strategies (items 1 to 12), (b) cognitive strategies (items 13 to 40), (c) compensation strategies (items 41 to 48), (d) metacognitive strategies (items 49 to 64), (e) affective strategies (items 65 to 71), and (f) social strategies (items 72 to 80) (Hsiao and Oxford, 2002:373).

Although the SILL was originally designed for native English speakers learning FLs, and is therefore susceptible to the influence of cultural and educational differences (Rao, 2006:496), a number of important findings on the perceived use of LLS have

been generated by studies using Oxford's SILL all over the world (Peacock and Ho, 2003:179).

The basic purpose of the SILL is to provide a self-reported general picture of the individual learner's typical strategy use, rather than a specific portrayal of the strategies used by the learner on a particular language task (Oxford, 1999:114).

As with any other instrument, Oxford's SILL has weaknesses. There is always the possibility that students may not accurately report the frequency of their perceived use of strategies and/or that they may not remember the strategies they have used in the past and may claim to use strategies that they, in fact, do not use (Chamot, 2004:15). Another weakness is that the SILL does not clearly show whether the respondents use several strategies simultaneously or one strategy at a time (Ghebremuse, 2007:21). It is precisely because of these weaknesses that complementary data collection techniques, such as qualitative interviews, were used to check the results and get a better understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

Oxford's SILL has also been criticised. For instance, regarding the possibility of ambiguity when rating LLS use on Likert-scale instruments, Gu, Wen and Wu (in Griffiths and Oxford, 2014:4) have questioned the degree to which student self-reports can be relied on to be an accurate reflection of actual use, since what is "often" to one respondent may be rated quite differently by another. Nevertheless, they have also pointed out that such scales can be useful if they are administered and interpreted with care.

In 2005, Dörnyei attempted to demonstrate that the SILL was psychometrically flawed (Macaro, 2006:322). He found that the scales in the SILL were not cumulative and that computing mean scale scores was psychometrically not justifiable because Likert-scales produce ordinal data for which non-parametric statistical tests, rather than parametric ones, are appropriate (Dörnyei, 2005:182, Jamieson, in Griffiths and Oxford, 2014:4). Although Dörnyei and Jamieson highlighted a very important issue to be taken into account when using the SILL, it will be shown in the data analysis section that statistical tests conducted to check the appropriateness of using parametric statistical analyses instead of non-parametric ones lead to results that are quite similar to each other.

Nevertheless, Oxford's SILL is still recognised as the most comprehensive and widely used instrument for identifying self-reported strategy preferences of language learners throughout the world and has also been identified as superior – though sometimes superficial – in accounting for the variety of strategies reported by language learners when compared with other instruments (Nisbet et al., 2005:101, Kafipour et al., 2011:162, Chang and Liu, 2013:199, Nemati, 2013, Tragant et al., 2013).

Oxford's SILL has been translated into different languages, with multiple reliability and validity checks successfully performed. It has become a suitable instrument to measure the perceived use of strategies by language learners (Alptekin, 2007:5, Oxford, 1999:114). The SILL has been validated in multiple ways, and tests for reliability range from .85 to .98 (Oxford and Burry-Stock, in Al-Buainain, 2010:95).

3.6.3 Quantitative data analysis in a multiphase design

Data originating from the successive administrations of Oxford's SILL were treated as numeric data and analysed using SPSS.

A descriptive statistical analysis was conducted for each of the six categories of Oxford's SILL. Charts and tables for each phase were generated considering gender, level of proficiency, previous experience learning a FL and other related variables. They showed minimal and maximal values, arithmetic means and standard deviations. Pearson's and Spearman's coefficients of correlation were also calculated to see whether there were statistically significant correlations between different LLS and language achievement (Aydoğan and Akbarov, 2014).

The statistical methods used in this study included an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to examine and determine whether there were any significant differences among learners with regard to strategy use at the overall and category levels, considering a .05 level of significance (Khamkhien, 2012:185). For instance, Friedman's ANOVA (non-parametric) test helped to determine if there were any significant variations among the three levels of proficiency: beginner, intermediate and upper-intermediate. Two-independent-samples test analyses were also performed to determine if there were significant differences in the overall learning strategy use in

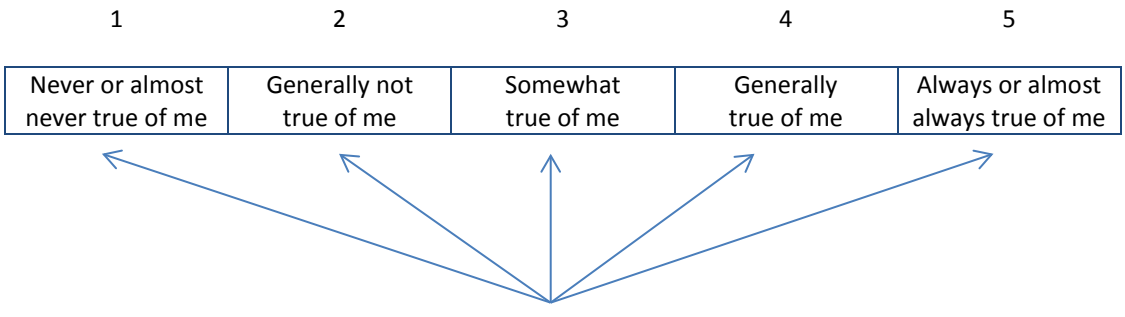
relation to gender and previous experience learning a language (Ismail and Al Khatib, 2013:138).

The quantitative analyses also included Mann–Whitney U tests to examine the variations of LLS use at strategy category level as well as at strategy item level (Zhou and Intaraprasert, 2014:157).

While this study made use of non-parametric statistical tests, the researcher is aware that in some cases the results of parametric statistical tests and their non-parametric equivalents are small enough to be negligible. As Griffiths and Oxford (2014:4) have stated, the justification for using parametric statistical tests, such as ANOVA, Pearson's coefficient of correlation, Pearson Chi-square, T-test analysis and multiple regression procedures, instead of their non-parametric equivalents, can be to a certain degree tolerated when two important facts are considered:

- That this does not seem to affect Type I and Type II errors[41] dramatically, especially if the sample of participants is large or if the scale has at least five categories, as is the case with Oxford's SILL.
- That there is a minimal difference caused by using parametric tests rather than non-parametric tests when analysing results of scales with non-equal intervals, such as Oxford's SILL (see Figure 3.7).

Figure 3.7: Analysis of Likert-scales used in the SILL.
Source: Own



These intervals are not necessarily equal, as what is "generally" or "somewhat" to one respondent may be rated quite differently by another.

[41] A Type-1 error is falsely reporting a statistical difference when none actually exists. A Type-2 error is not detecting a statistical difference when there is one (Takeuchi et al., 2012:146).

3.6.4 QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION IN A MULTIPHASE DESIGN

The quantitative data collection technique yielded discrete – and to a certain extent superficial – information about LLS use. In order to probe beneath the surface of self-reported strategy use, it was important to combine quantitative and qualitative methodologies for data collection, as verbal data is very useful to properly understand and interpret numerical data (Cohen et al., 2007:96).

As indicated by Griffiths (2003a:58), the SILL questionnaire provided a base for launching further probes in the form of the interviews. Interviews provided a means of adding a qualitative dimension to the quantitative data obtained from Oxford's SILL (Griffiths, 2003a:110).

Qualitative data (text) were collected by conducting two types of interviews:

- A general non-structured interview which had the purpose of getting to know the student, to build up a relationship and to verify the information provided in the general semi-structured questionnaire comprising closed and open questions; and
- Four in-depth interviews that generated data on the what, the how and the why of particular LLS use, and also data concerning the factors associated with persistent use of individual LLS and significant differences in the use of individual LLS over a period of time.

Although other data collection techniques, such as class observations, could have given the researcher the opportunity to gather rich and "live" data from naturally occurring class lessons (Cohen et al., 2007:396), class observations were not included in this study for practical and ethical reasons.

Overt class observations at university level, when the researcher is not the lecturer and happens to be much older than the learners, invades the privacy and private space of the students and disrupts the natural course of the learning process. Under these circumstances, it is obvious that the researcher's influence over the situation being investigated is not negligible. It gets worse when the students know that they are being observed because they may try harder in class, feel more anxious, or behave much better or much worse than normal (Cohen et al., 2007:410). All this

causes the undesired effect of reducing the reliability of the data and seriously affects the validity of the results.

Another challenge of using class observations as a data collection technique is that many LLS cannot be observed since they are mentalistic and not behaviourist (Cohen, 2011b:73). As a matter of fact, a considerable number of strategies take place in the mind and require the students themselves to report on the use of them and to explain when, how, how often and why they are using them.

Although class observations can provide rich oral and visual data at the precise moment a strategy is being used, it has been found unsuitable and ineffective to observe students in the FL class at university level. The singular fruitlessness of class observations as a technique of identifying learning strategies has also been reported by Chamot and other scholars (2001:26). Class observations, in this context, have been found to be disruptive as the researcher does not have all the necessary freedom to ask questions to the students that are being observed without affecting the normal flow of the learning process or distracting the other students.

3.6.5 Qualitative data analysis in a multiphase design

As mentioned earlier, qualitative data (text) were collected by conducting a general interview and four in-depth interviews. All interviews were recorded using an electronic voice-recording device. Interviews were then transcribed for analysis purposes.

The data generated by the first general interview in tandem with the data collected with the general questionnaire were used to construct the profiles of the students and to examine their reasons or motivations to study Spanish. The data generated by the subsequent in-depth interviews were qualitatively analysed according to the guidelines presented by Cohen (2007:183-185) and Sampieri et al. (2014:418).

Taking into account the largest and most statistically significant differences observed in the Likert-scale self-ratings between two consecutive administrations of the SILL, emerging units of analysis such as the following ones shown in Figure 3.8 were considered in the analysis:

Figure 3.8: Examples of units of analysis
Source: Own

- When some strategies are used;
- How some strategies are used;
- Why some strategies are not used;
- Why some strategies have become more relevant;
- Why certain strategies are not relevant anymore;
- Why it is that some strategies are consistently reported with high use;
- Why it is that some strategies are consistently reported with low use.

These units of analysis were grouped according to the six subcategories of Oxford's taxonomy and were carefully analysed against the development of the four language skills[42] and the acquisition of grammar and vocabulary.

3.7 PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS

The way of organising and presenting the data analyses was determined by following the order in which the research questions were presented and by answering each one of them (the research questions can be found in section 1.4). This way of organising and presenting the data analyses was found to be very useful because it draws together all the relevant data for the exact issue of concern to the researcher, preserves the coherence of the material, and provides a collective answer to the research question (Cohen et al., 2007:468). This way of organising the findings of the study formed the structure used for presenting the results and conclusions in chapter seven.

[42] The four language skills referred to here are speaking, writing, listening, and reading. These skills can be classified as productive (speaking and writing) or receptive (listening and reading). "In oral production activities (speaking) the language user produces an oral text which is received by an audience of one or more listeners. In written production activities (writing) the language user as writer produces a written text which is received by a readership of one or more readers. In aural reception activities (listening) the language user as listener receives and processes a spoken input produced by one or more speakers. In visual reception activities (reading) the user as reader receives and processes as input written texts produced by one or more writers" (Council of Europe, 2001:58-68).

3.8 CONCLUSION

This chapter explained what mixed methods research is and why it was appropriate to be used in these circumstances. Since the practical goal of this research was to find out why students were failing or not continuing with Spanish – from a LLS perspective - the use of qualitative interviews was deemed valuable as it allowed the researcher to delve deeper into the results of the quantitative analyses to look for possible explanations. The underlying assumption was that the weaknesses of one approach could be compensated for with the strengths of the other, and that these two approaches would complement each other and, in so doing, enrich the understanding of the phenomenon being studied. In this respect, the researcher is aware that this is not the first time that a mixed methods approach has been applied to research of this nature.

This chapter also reported on the particular mixed methods research design that was used in this study: a multiphase sequential design. Despite the length of time involved in data collection, this design was found suitable because the study was conducted over three years to capture the change in LLS use over time.

The chapter ended by showing how the findings were going to be organised and presented. This way of presenting the results – in the same order that the research questions were posed – was chosen because it provides a clear and direct link between what initiated the research and the findings that came from it.

The following chapter – the first of three chapters on data collection and data analysis – will focus on the group of students that participated in the study in 2014, and will then discuss the findings of the quantitative and qualitative analyses.

4 FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS: DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This study seeks to capture the evolution of self-reported use of LLS during three consecutive years. Chapter four – the first of three chapters on data collection and analysis – focuses on the group of students that participated in the study in 2014.

The purpose of chapter four is twofold: first, to present and analyse the information gathered by the general questionnaire, the first administration of Oxford's SILL, and the general and short interview; and second, to discuss the findings from these. Chapter four starts with a basic description of the researched group and then moves on to an in-depth analysis of the data.

The first section is very descriptive and provides an overview as well as a detailed picture of the participants. This type of description is critical and necessary to establish a contextual framework in order to facilitate deeper analysis and interpretation of the preliminary findings from the general questionnaire.

The second section reports on LLS use as perceived by the students. Data generated from Oxford's SILL were analysed and cross-tabulated with the information obtained from the general questionnaire using SPSS. Data generated from the general and short interviews were used to enhance the understanding of strategy use at first-year level. Emergent findings are presented and discussed in this section, taking into account the lenses provided by the literature review and following the methodological steps presented in the previous chapter.

4.2 PARAMETRIC AND NON-PARAMETRIC DATA

Before starting with the first section, it is important to note that all data collected and analysed in this chapter can be classified as parametric or non-parametric data. Parametric data refers to data whose distribution adheres closely to a normal distribution, and to data that meet certain assumptions, such as homogeneity of variance, interval level data, and independence of scores (Hartas, 2015:338, Lochmiller and Lester, 2016).

Data reflecting FL achievement (such as progress marks and final marks) were mostly treated as parametric data (unless it was found that they did not meet the parametric assumptions) and analysed using parametric statistical tests, such as Pearson's correlation coefficient test and independent samples t-test.

Data gathered by the general questionnaire – reflecting biographical and background information with the intention to draw a basic profile of the students – were analysed using descriptive statistical procedures.

Data collected by Oxford's SILL reflecting reported perceived frequency of strategy use were treated as non-parametric and analysed using non-parametric statistical tests, such as Spearman's correlation coefficient, Mann-Whitney and Friedman tests. However, in some cases, parametric tests were performed to make useful comparisons.

In order to determine whether the data reflecting FL achievement could be treated as parametric data, four assumptions were checked.

NORMALITY TESTS

The first assumption that was checked was whether the data were normally distributed. The Shapiro–Wilk's test and a visual inspection of the histograms, normal Q-Q plots and box plots showed that not all the marks were approximately normally distributed. Only the progress marks for speaking, listening and reading ($p > .05$) were approximately normally distributed with skewnesses of .017, -.121, and -.408, and kurtoses of -.331, -.371, and -.325 respectively (see Table 4.1). The progress marks for writing and the final marks were not normally distributed.

Table 4.1 Tests of Normality for the progress and final marks
Source: Lecturer's records and SPSS

	Shapiro-Wilk			Descriptives	
	Statistic	Df	Sig.	Skewness	Kurtosis
Speaking	.987	61	.762	.017	-.331
Writing	.938	61	.004	-.611	-.521
Listening	.991	61	.930	-.121	-.371
Reading	.971	61	.165	-.408	-.325
Final Marks	.948	61	.012	-.522	-.673

HOMOGENEITY OF VARIANCE

The second assumption that was checked was homogeneity of variance. It was important to be sure that the spread of scores was roughly equal in different groups of cases or throughout internal subgroups (Field, 2009:152). The statistical test that was used to analyse homogeneity of variance was Levene's test and it was performed across key subgroups. Table 4.2 shows the results of Levene's test.

Table 4.2 Tests of homogeneity of variance through Levene's test across key subgroups
Source: Lecturer's records and SPSS

	Was there homogeneity of variance throughout the progress marks?	Was there homogeneity of variance throughout the final marks?
Across male and female students	Yes (p > .05)	No (p < .05)
Across students who speak two/three languages	Yes (p > .05)	Yes (p > .05)
Across students with/without previous knowledge of Spanish	Yes (p > .05)	Yes (p > .05)
Across students with/without previous experience in learning a foreign language	Yes (p > .05)	Yes (p > .05)
Across students with/without Spanish speaking friends or relatives	Yes (p > .05)	Yes (p > .05)
Across students with/without intention to continue studying Spanish	No (p < .05)	Yes (p > .05)
Across students who actually continued/did not continue studying Spanish	No (p < .05)	No (p < .05)
Across students who passed/failed the Spanish course for beginners	Yes (p > .05)	Yes (p > .05)

INTERVAL DATA

The third assumption that was checked was whether the data are interval data. It was critical to be sure that equal intervals on the scale represented equal differences in the property being measured (Field, 2009:133). A careful inspection of the scores

used to measure foreign language achievement revealed that the numerical scale used in the South African education system (ranging from 0 to 100) complied with this requirement (that is, the order of the scores was not only evident, but also the exact differences between the scores).

INDEPENDENCE

The fourth assumption that was checked was whether the data from different participants were independent. Since the data under consideration were grades that indicated students' FL achievement (which, by virtue of their nature, are independent scores earned by students' own efforts), it was deemed appropriate and correct to assume that the progress and final marks of each student were independent from the marks of the other students.

All numerical data that did not meet the four above-mentioned parametric assumptions were treated as non-parametric data and carefully analysed using non-parametric statistical tests. The main reason why data collected using Oxford's SILL were treated as non-parametric data was because the Likert-scaled ratings used in the SILL ("Never or almost never true of me", "Generally not true of me", "Somewhat true of me", "Generally true of me" and "Always or almost always true of me") were neither cumulative nor producing interval data. The Likert-scaled ratings were producing ordinal classes that are not necessarily equal, as what is "generally" or "somewhat" to one respondent may be rated quite differently by another. They were generating ordinal data for which non-parametric statistical tests, rather than parametric ones, are appropriate (Dörnyei, 2005:182, Jamieson, in Griffiths and Oxford, 2014:4).

4.3 FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS' PROFILES: PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

As the entire group of students of the course SPN101 (Spanish for beginners) were invited to participate in this study, no sampling procedure was used. They started studying Spanish on the 27th of January 2014 and completed their first-year course on the 4th of November 2014. The course was 28 weeks long with recesses in March-April (two weeks), June-July (eight weeks), and October (one week). Final and supplementary exams were written in November and December, respectively. No previous knowledge of Spanish was required to register in this course. The course offered an introductory study of the Spanish language and focused on the

acquisition of basic listening, reading, speaking and writing skills. First-year students had daily classes, from Monday to Friday, in three different groups and were allowed to interchange groups as long as they attended one of the three identical consecutive sessions per day. Considering that each session was 50 minutes long, it is estimated that by June students had accumulated 60 hours of lessons, and by November, almost 120 hours. Students who successfully complete the course normally reach the A1 level by June and the A2 level[43] by November.

Approval was granted by the University of Pretoria Research Ethics Committee to commence with data collection as from August 2014. However, before commencing with data collection, it was deemed appropriate to introduce the students to what the research project was about and then invite them to participate in the study.

During the first meeting, the researcher introduced himself and handed out a letter of consent to each student. The letter explained the purpose of the study, the type of study that was going to be conducted (a longitudinal one) and the data collection techniques that were going to be used. It also outlined the potential benefits that students could obtain from becoming aware of the wide variety of strategies that they can use to enhance their learning of a new language.

The letter guaranteed that no personal information would be disclosed to any third party and that confidentiality would be guaranteed at all times. Students were told that their participation in the study was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without negative consequences.

All students who signed the letter of consent and opted to participate in the study were then given a general questionnaire to complete. Students that were absent from class on that day were approached later on the following days.

A total of 61 out of 82[44] students filled in the general questionnaire in August and completed Oxford's SILL in September. The researched group (or just "group" as it is also called) consisted of 61 students (n=61) in 2014, but then decreased in size because not all of them continued studying Spanish in the following years.

[43] See the Common European Framework for Languages for further details on these two levels (Council of Europe 2001:24).

[44] Although the official attendance list showed 82 registered students, not all of them attended classes. About 16 students dropped out of the course and did not write the final and supplementary exams at the end of the year. Only a few students decided voluntarily not to participate in the study.

The study started with the administration of a general questionnaire used to collect biographical information in order to build a basic profile of the researched group. The need to draw a basic profile of the students emerged as a requirement to be in a better position to analyse and interpret, in context, data generated by Oxford's SILL. The general questionnaire was the first in a series of quantitative data collection techniques and was used to collect key preliminary information. The study employed a multiphase design that encompassed five phases. Each phase consisted of a quantitative strand (a questionnaire and/or Oxford's SILL) followed by a qualitative strand (an interview). The general questionnaire was designed to collect preliminary information from the students that were enrolled in the annual Spanish course for beginners on the following aspects: (1) general biographical and academic information; (2) proficiency in first, second and third languages (where applicable); (3) previous knowledge of Spanish; (4) experience in learning FLs; (5) exposure to people who spoke Spanish, and (6) plans to continue studying Spanish in the future.

4.3.1 GENDER

Data collected from the researched group indicated that 26.2% were male and 73.8% were female students, showing a gender distribution that was consistent with the figures obtained from the entire population of the same course in previous years (see Table 4.3) and consistent with the average gender distribution of all the first-year FL courses offered that year (see Table 4.4).

Table 4.3 Gender distribution in SPN101 since 2008
Source: UP Faculty of Humanities: Student Administration

	Male	Female	TOTAL
2008[45]	23 (32.9%)	47 (67.1%)	70 (100%)
2009	15 (27.8%)	39 (72.2%)	54 (100%)
2010	27 (36.5%)	47 (63.5%)	74 (100%)
2011	21 (28.4%)	53 (71.6%)	74 (100%)
2012	17 (23%)	57 (77%)	74 (100%)
2013	22 (26.2%)	62 (73.8%)	84 (100%)
2014	22 (26.8%)	60 (73.2%)	82 (100%)
Average %	**147 (28.7%)**	**365 (71.3%)**	**512 (100%)**

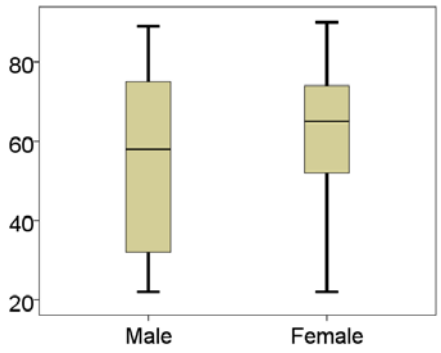
[45] The year in which Spanish was first launched as an academic course.

Table 4.4 Gender distribution of first-year FL courses in 2014
Source: UP Faculty of Humanities: Student Administration

Year 2014	Male	Female	TOTAL
French	44 (20.1%)	175 (79.9%)	219 (100%)
German	18 (35.3%)	33 (64.7%)	51 (100%)
Spanish	22 (26.8%)	60 (73.2%)	82 (100%)
Average %	**84 (23.9%)**	**268 (76.1%)**	**352 (100%)**

Relating to FL achievement, the Mann-Whitney U test showed no statistically significant differences ($p > .05$) across gender with respect to the progress and final marks earned for the course SPN101 in 2014. Table 4.5 shows that the interquartile range for males was larger than the interquartile range for females, which could be due to the fact that females outnumbered males and their marks looked less scattered than the male marks within the same range.

Table 4.5 Final marks across gender in 2014
Source: Lecturer's records and SPSS



No statistically significant differences across gender were found with respect to FL achievement in Spanish ($p > .05$). Progress and final marks[46] were compared and analysed using a two-tailed parametric independent t-test. The results showed that male students were as successful in learning Spanish as female students. Further descriptive analyses showed that both males and females were primarily motivated to study Spanish because they wanted to travel, work and/or study overseas.

The relatively large standard deviations shown in Table 4.6 indicate that the marks were not necessarily centred but spread out around the mean.

[46] Progress marks for speaking, writing, listening, and reading, as well as the final mark for the Spanish course for beginners were used in the analyses.

Table 4.6 Progress marks and final marks in Spanish in 2014
Source: Lecturer's records and SPSS

Gender		Speaking	Writing	Listening	Reading	Final marks
Male	Mean	53.97	58.37	50.39	61.41	54.63
	Std. Deviation	18.431	22.591	19.358	15.254	22.704
Female	Mean	52.44	64.18	51.67	63.74	61.60
	Std. Deviation	16.503	23.385	18.166	18.774	16.428

4.3.2 THE ACADEMIC PROGRAMMES STUDENTS CAME FROM

Spanish is an elective course for all academic programmes, except for students enrolled in a BA Languages degree who have chosen Spanish as one of the two majors in which they are supposed to develop an in-depth knowledge of the language, literature and culture (Faculty of Humanities, 2015:26).

Students who registered in the Spanish course for beginners (SPN101) did so for different reasons and came from different academic programmes. Some students were pursuing a degree in BA Languages, International Studies, International Relations, or Heritage and Cultural Tourism (careers that to some extent require a certain level of proficiency in a FL to perform well), but others were enrolled in programmes such as BCom Accounting, Marketing or Statistics, Social Sciences, BA General, Law, Business Management, Criminology, Economics, Education, English, Music, Chemistry, Psychology, and Recreation and Sports (careers that do not necessarily require a level of proficiency in a FL to perform well). Table 4.7 shows the composition of students according to the academic programmes they belonged to.

Table 4.7 Academic programmes of the learners that participated in the study in 2014
Source: General questionnaire and SPSS

Academic programmes	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
BA Languages	11	18.0%	18.0%
International Studies & International Relations	8	13.1%	31.1%
Heritage & Cultural Tourism	3	4.9%	36.1%
Other programmes	39	63.9%	100%
TOTAL	**61**	**100%**	

When compared to previous years, it was noticed that the composition of the academic programmes was consistent with the distribution shown in the entire population of 2014 and previous years (see table 4.8).

Table 4.8 Academic programmes of the whole group of 2014 and previous years
Source: UP Faculty of Humanities: Student Administration

	Languages	International Studies & International Relations	Heritage & Cultural Tourism	Other	Total
2008	14 (20%)	9 (12.9%)	1 (1.4%)	46 (65.7%)	70 (100%)
2009	3 (5.6%)	8 (14.8%)	0 (0%)	43 (79.6%)	54 (100%)
2010	14 (18.9%)	8 (10.8%)	2 (2.7%)	50 (67.6%)	74 (100%)
2011	12 (16.2%)	13 (17.6%)	1 (1.4%)	48 (64.9%)	74 (100%)
2012	11 (14.9%)	9 (12.2%)	1 (1.4%)	53 (71.6%)	74 (100%)
2013	12 (14.3%)	6 (7.1%)	1 (1.2%)	65 (77.4%)	84 (100%)
2014	15 (18.3%)	11 (13.4%)	3 (3.7%)	53 (64.6%)	82 (100%)
Total	**81 (15.8%)**	**64 (12.5%)**	**9 (1.8%)**	**358 (69.9%)**	**512 (100%)**

4.3.3 AGE AND ENROLMENT AT UNIVERSITY LEVEL

Students' ages ranged from 18 to 27 years old, and the majority (91.8%) fell into the 18 to 22 years old bracket.

In terms of the number of years enrolled at university level, the data showed (1) that 88.5% of students were in their first or second year of enrolment; and (2) that students with two years of enrolment had a higher pass rate (93%) than students with one year of enrolment (61.5%). (See Table 4.9)

Table 4.9 Number of years enrolled at university by the researched group in 2014
Source: General questionnaire and UP Faculty of Humanities: Student Administration

	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage	Pass rate
First year	39	63.9%	63.9%	24 (61.5%)
Second year	15[47]	24.6%	88.5%	14 (93%)
Third, fourth, fifth or sixth year	7	11.5%	100%	6 (85.7%)
Total	**61**	**100%**		

[47] Only 1 out of these 15 students was repeating the Spanish course for beginners.

Further analysis of the data using the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test (see Table 4.10) found that students with two years of enrolment at university level performed significantly better than students with one year of enrolment. A possible explanation is that longer exposure to academic requirements may have a positive impact on the successful completion of the course.

Table 4.10 Statistical analysis of enrolment at university level and performance
Source: General questionnaire, UP Faculty of Humanities: Student Administration and SPSS

	Speaking	Writing	Listening	Reading	Final mark
Mann-Whitney U	186.000	187.500	200.000	201.500	162.000
Wilcoxon W	966.000	967.500	980.000	981.500	942.000
Z	-2.057	-2.028	-1.786	-1.758	-2.521
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.040	.043	.074	.079	.012
Exact Sig. (2-tailed)	.039	.042	.075	.080	.011
Exact Sig. (1-tailed)	.020	.021	.037	.040	.005
Point Probability	.000	.001	.001	.001	.000

4.3.4 PROFICIENCY IN LANGUAGES

As for the languages in which students reported proficiency, the data showed the following (see Table 4.11):

- English was the first or second language for the whole group of students (62.3% indicated first language and 37.7% indicated second language);
- Afrikaans was the first or second language for 64% of the students;
- An African language was the first or second language for 17.8% of the students;
- A FL was the first or second language for 17.6% of the students.

Table 4.11 First and second languages of the research group in 2014
Source: General questionnaire

	Afrikaans (L2)	**English (L2)**	**African language (L2)**	**Foreign language (L2)**	**Total**
Afrikaans (L1)	0	16	0	0	16 (26.3%)
English (L1)	23	0	5	10	38 (62.3%)
African language (L1)	0	6	0	0	6 (9.8%)
Foreign language (L1)	0	1	0	0	1 (1.6%)
Total	**23 (37.7%)**	**23 (37.7%)**	**5 (8%)**	**10 (16%)**	**61 (100%)**

The data showed that no monolingual students were part of the researched group. All were proficient in at least two languages and almost 64% of them were able to communicate in at least three languages. Table 4.12 shows the number of languages in which students reported proficiency[48].

Table 4.12 Number of languages students reported to be proficient in
Source: General questionnaire

Students that…	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
understand six languages	3	4.9%	4.9%
understand five languages	3	4.9%	9.8%
understand four languages	8	13.1%	23.0%
understand three languages	25	41.0%	63.9%
understand two languages	22	36.1%	100%
Total	**61**	**100%**	

Did students who reported proficiency in three languages have statistically significantly higher grades than those who reported proficiency in two languages? The Mann-Whitney U test showed no statistically significant differences.

Do these results contradict previous studies that suggest that multilingual students are better at learning FLs than bilingual or monolingual students? The answer is no, not necessarily.

Both groups were experienced L2 learners and not necessarily experienced FL learners (Wharton, 2000:211). They had the expertise to learn second languages (enjoying ample exposure to the language within their own communities) and not necessarily the expertise to learn a FL (which is not spoken in the country in which the language is studied, and normally requires greater implementation of metacognitive strategies to counterbalance the lack of exposure).

Nevertheless, when the average pass rates of both groups were compared, it was found that bilinguals had slightly lower and more scattered marks than trilinguals (see Table 4.13).

[48] Students reported native or advanced proficiency in their first and second languages, but for the subsequent languages, reported proficiency ranging from beginner level to native competence.

Table 4.13 Number of known languages and academic achievement
Source: General questionnaire, Students Administration and SPSS

Students who…	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Understand two languages	55.36	22	19.532
Understand three languages	60.96	25	14.673

4.3.5 Previous knowledge of Spanish

Although the Spanish course was designed for students with no previous knowledge of the language, 21.3% of students reported starting the course with beginner's level and 4.7% with intermediate level proficiency.

Did students who had previous knowledge of Spanish earn higher grades than those who did not? No, they did not. Contrary to what was expected, it was found that beginner students who reported no previous knowledge of Spanish at the start of the course completed the course with higher grades (see Table 4.14).

Although the Mann–Whitney U test found no statistically significant differences ($p > .05$) across these two groups, it was surprising to see that the mean grade (indicating FL achievement in Spanish) of students with no previous knowledge was higher than the mean grade of students who reported previous knowledge (compared means: 60.89 > 56.63).

A possible reason, however, is that students who start the course with previous knowledge of Spanish usually seem to rely on what they know about the language and, in most cases, do not strive to develop the necessary metacognitive skills (extremely necessary in FL contexts) to plan, monitor and evaluate their own learning. They outperform in the beginning of the course, but underperform in the long run.

Table 4.14 Average marks according to previous knowledge of Spanish
Source: General questionnaire, Students Administration and SPSS

Level of previous knowledge of Spanish	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
No knowledge	60.89	45	16.598
Basic or intermediate knowledge	56.63	16	22.867

4.3.6 PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE IN LEARNING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

The data analysis showed that only 37.7% of students reported previous experience in learning a FL (see Table 4.15), and that they did not earn higher grades than those who reported no previous experience. Although the Mann–Whitney U test did not find statistically significant differences ($p > .05$) across these two groups, it was noted that the mean grade (indicating FL achievement in Spanish) of those who reported previous experience was higher than the mean grade of those who reported no previous experience (see Table 4.15). A possible explanation, however, is that those who reported previous experience seem to be more aware of what learning a FL entails and, therefore, are apparently better prepared to overcome the challenges that this poses.

Table 4.15 Academic achievement and previous experience in learning a FL
Source: General questionnaire, Students Administration and SPSS

Previous experience	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Std. Deviation
No	23	56.74	38	18.491
Yes	38	64.78	23	17.323
Total	**61**	**59.77**	**61**	**18.340**

4.3.7 OPPORTUNITIES TO PRACTISE SPANISH

In order to develop language proficiency, language learners need to engage in authentic communicative exchanges with more proficient speakers, or "more capable others" as defined by Vygotsky (cited in Shabani, 2016:3). These social engagements are critical and contribute to the development of lexical competence (to build up vocabulary) and phonological competence (to get familiar with the sounds of the new language). Opportunities to practise a new language are indispensable for consolidating either second or FL learning. A distinct difference between second and FL learning is that FL learners have limited opportunities to practise the language outside of the classroom.

The data showed that 50.8% of students reported having friends or relatives that spoke Spanish, from which 21.3% of them knew a person to practise the language with at least on a weekly basis, and 29.5% less than once a week (see Table 4.16).

Table 4.16 Exposure to a person who speaks Spanish
Source: General questionnaire

Students who…	Frequency	Percentage
Have no friends or relatives who speak Spanish.	30	49.2%
Have a friend or relative who speaks Spanish and meets him/her less than once a week.	18	29.5%
Have a friend or relative who speaks Spanish and meets him/her at least on a weekly basis.	13	21.3%

The data also showed that the pass rate of those who reported knowing a person who speaks Spanish (83.85%) was significantly higher than the pass rate of those who reported none (60%) (see Table 4.17), and that the average pass mark of the former was higher than the average pass mark of the latter (see Table 4.18).

Table 4.17 Level of achievement vs. interactions with a person who speaks Spanish
Source: General questionnaire & Students Administration

	Reported knowing a person who speaks Spanish	Reported NOT knowing a person who speaks Spanish
Passed	25 (83.85%)	19 (60%)
Failed	5 (16.15%)	12 (40%)
Total	**30 (100%)**	**31 (100%)**

Table 4.18 Average pass rate of students who know and do not know a Spanish speaker
Source: General questionnaire & Students Administration

Students that…	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
do not know a person who speaks Spanish	55.70	30	19.239
know a person who speaks Spanish	63.71	31	16.801
Total	**59.77**	**61**	**18.340**

However, when the average pass mark of those who reported practising with a Spanish speaker less than once a week was compared to the average pass mark of those who reported practising more than once a week, it was found that the average pass mark of the less-than-once-a-week group was higher than the average pass mark of the more-than-once-a-week group. This seems to suggest that what really counts is not necessarily the quantity of those practising opportunities but the quality of them (see Table 4.19).

Table 4.19 Frequency of practising opportunities and academic achievement
Source: General questionnaire & Students Administration

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Practises less than once a week	64.44	18	14.853
Practises more than once a week	62.69	13	19.780

4.3.8 MOTIVATION TO STUDY SPANISH

Motivation – whether intrinsic or extrinsic, self-determined or externally imposed, instrumental or integrative – is what drives students to learn. In other words, motivation refers to what moves learners to make certain choices, engage in action and persist in action (Ushioda, 2008:19).

When students were asked to say why they wanted to study a FL like Spanish, they mentioned a variety of reasons that are summarised in Table 4.20, and across gender in Table 4.21.

Table 4.20 Reasons for learning Spanish
Source: General questionnaire

Reasons	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Travel, work or study overseas	28	39.4%
Passion for the language	20	28.2%
Reputation of Spanish	9	12.7%
Career requirement	8	11.3%
Need to communicate with others	2	2.8%
Other reasons[49]	4	5.6%
Total	**71**[50]	**100%**

The fact that the reason most frequently mentioned was “travelling, working and/or studying overseas” suggests that a large number of learners were instrumentally motivated (Mitchell et al., 2013:23) to learn Spanish and saw it as the key to open

[49] Other reasons mentioned were “need to communicate with others”, “to refresh previous knowledge”, “want to try something new”, “need the credits” and “a friend influenced me”.

[50] The increase in the total number (n>61) is because some respondents mentioned more than one reason when they were asked to say why they were learning Spanish.

new horizons and the passport needed to go overseas. No major differences were noticed between male and female students (see also Obeidat, 2005:14). Both regarded travelling, working and/or studying overseas as their primary reasons. However, male students regarded "reputation of Spanish" (a pragmatic reason) as their secondary reason, whereas female students regarded "passion for the language" (an emotional reason) as their secondary reason. Previous research has also found that males seem to be more instrumentally motivated than females (Ludwig, 1983:224).

Table 4.21 Reasons for learning Spanish across gender
Source: General questionnaire

	Male	Female
Travel, work or study overseas	7 (43.8%)	21 (38.2%)
Passion for the language	2 (12.5%)	18 (32.7%)
Reputation of Spanish	3 (18.8%)	6 (10.9%)
Career requirement	2 (12.5%)	6 (10.9%)
Other	2 (12.4%)	4 (7.3%)
Total	**16 (100%)**	**55 (100%)**

4.3.9 INTENTIONS TO CONTINUE STUDYING SPANISH

How many students who started in 2014 reported their intentions to continue studying Spanish in the following year? The data showed that 45 out of 61 students expressed an intention to continue studying Spanish at least for the following year. However, not all of them actually did. Only 20 students – out of those 45 students who said they were going to – continued with Spanish in the following year.

What happened to those 25 students who also reported intentions to continue studying Spanish the following year but did not? The data showed that 11 students failed and 14 passed but preferred not to continue. A possible reason that perhaps explains why students that passed preferred not to continue studying Spanish is that they could have found the course unpleasantly challenging. Since the nature of this inquiry falls outside the scope of this research, further research is recommended to investigate this matter.

4.4 LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGY USE

Oxford's SILL (version 5.1) was designed in 1990 and was used as the instrument for investigating reported frequency use of LLS[51].

The SILL is an 80-item questionnaire that uses Likert-scaled ratings for each strategy item, ranging from 1 to 5, with the poles being "never or almost never" and "always or almost always". The instrument is structured in accordance with Oxford's taxonomy (1990) and is divided into six sets of strategy items. The intention of the subdivision is that each set would have an adequate number of items to facilitate more in-depth research and understanding of the use of learning strategies as reported by the learners (Oxford and Burry-Stock, 1995:5). The six sets are:

- Memory strategies (items 1 to 12);
- Cognitive strategies (items 13 to 40);
- Compensation strategies (items 41 to 48);
- Metacognitive strategies (items 49 to 64);
- Affective strategies (items 65 to 71); and
- Social strategies (items 72 to 80).

According to the records, a total of 61 students completed Oxford's SILL in September 2014. Data generated from the instrument were analysed using SPSS.

Cronbach's Alpha test was performed to ensure reliability and internal consistency; that is, to determine whether the instrument as a whole and with respect to its six sets of strategy items was consistent in measuring reported frequency of use of LLS. The number of cases processed was 61 and all of them were valid cases. Table 4.22 shows the results.

Table 4.22 Cronbach's Alpha Reliability test for the SILL
Source: Oxford's SILL in 2014

Cronbach's Alpha	Number of items in the questionnaire
.937	80

[51] See section 3.6.2 for issues concerning validity and reliability of the instrument as well as critical comments on it.

Cronbach's Alpha values range from 0 to 1. Values at or above .7 are desirable and considered acceptable. The Cronbach's Alpha value for Oxford's SILL was high (.937) and very respectable, indicating that the measurement error was minimal. This value was consistent with the values obtained in previous research studies conducted by Arslan (2014:66), Aydogan and Akbarov (2014:17), Ghafournia (2014:161), Tang and Tian (2015:4) and Risueño et al (2015:138).

With respect to the six sets of strategy items, the calculated Cronbach's Alpha values of reliability for the six subgroups were as follows (see Table 4.23):

Table 4.23 Cronbach's Alpha Reliability test for the six strategy categories
Source: Oxford's SILL in 2014

Strategy category	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of items
Memory	.725	12
Cognitive	.872	28
Compensation	.448	8
Metacognitive	.854	16
Affective	.704	7
Social	.755	9

All subcategories (except for compensation strategies) showed Cronbach's Alpha values higher than .7 and below .9 which indicated that the internal consistency of the instrument was acceptable and reliable. The results were consistent with Cronbach's Alpha values obtained in previous studies conducted by Zareva and Fomina (2013:79), Platsidou and Kantaridou (2014:255), Del Ángel Castillo and Gallardo Córdova (2014:709).

The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for the subsection that deals with compensation strategies was .448, which according to the standard tables indicated low and unacceptable consistency. A possible explanation, however, is that students did not respond as consistently to the compensation strategy category as they did to the other strategy categories, as the qualitative data revealed that some of the strategy items of this category were not necessarily valued in the same way or perhaps due to the fact that the small number of items (only eight) directly affected the final calculation of Cronbach's Alpha coefficient (Zareva and Fomina, 2013:79). The fact that students were at the early stages of language learning may also have influenced the consistency of their answers by not necessarily reporting what they were currently doing, but rather what they wanted to do.

4.4.1 FINDINGS ON REPORTED PERCEIVED FREQUENCY OF STRATEGY USE

Students reported perceived frequency of strategy use by choosing the value that best matched their perceived frequency of use on a scale from 1 (never or almost never) to 5 (always or almost always) for each strategy item of the SILL. Taking into account that the scale range was 4, three class intervals of range 1.33 were considered to classify reported perceived frequency of use of strategies. These were the following: low frequency use = [1.00 , 2.33], middle frequency use = [2.34 , 3.66] and high frequency use = [3.67 , 5.00]. Table 4.24 shows the reported strategies that fell into the high-frequency-use class interval.

Table 4.24 Reported strategies most frequently used
Source: Oxford's SILL in 2014

Strategies	Item	Statement (paraphrased for brevity)	Mean	SD
Compensation	Q41	When I do not understand a word, I guess the general meaning by using any clue I can find.	4.48	0.59
Cognitive	Q31	I use reference materials such as glossaries or dictionaries to help me use the new language.	4.41	0.86
Cognitive	Q36	I look for similarities and contrasts between the new language and my own.	4.30	0.84
Compensation	Q44	If I cannot think of the right expression, I use gestures or switch back to my own language.	4.21	0.78
Metacognitive	Q59	I clearly identify the purpose of the language activity.	4.20	0.73
Cognitive	Q32	I take notes in class in the new language.	4.16	1.13
Compensation	Q45	I ask the other person to tell me the right word if I cannot think of it in a conversation.	4.10	0.94
Cognitive	Q39	I look for patterns in the new language.	4.10	0.93
Metacognitive	Q63	I learn from my mistakes in using the new language.	4.05	0.76
Compensation	Q46	When I cannot think of the correct expression, I find a different way to express the idea.	4.03	0.82
Cognitive	Q30	I seek specific details in what I hear or read.	4.03	0.93
Metacognitive	Q50	When someone is speaking the new language, I concentrate on what the person is saying.	4.02	0.88
Metacognitive	Q51	I decide in advance to pay special attention to specific language aspects.	3.97	0.91
Memory	Q07	I visualize the spelling of the new word in my mind.	3.95	1.06
Affective	Q65	I try to relax whenever I feel anxious about using the new language.	3.93	0.95
Memory	Q01	I create associations between new material and what I already know.	3.93	0.89
Metacognitive	Q58	I prepare for language tasks by considering their nature, what I have to know, and my current language skills.	3.89	0.91
Metacognitive	Q56	I plan my goals for language learning.	3.87	1.15
Cognitive	Q38	I am cautious about transferring words/concepts directly from my language to the new language.	3.82	1.01
Metacognitive	Q54	I arrange my physical environment to promote learning.	3.82	1.07
Social	Q79	I try to learn about the culture or the place where the new language is spoken.	3.80	1.00
Metacognitive	Q55	I organize my language notebook to record important language information.	3.79	1.18
Metacognitive	Q62	I try to notice my language errors and find out the reasons for them.	3.77	1.06
Cognitive	Q40	I develop my own understanding of how the language works.	3.75	0.92

Social	Q73	I ask other people to verify that I have understood or said something correctly.	3.74	0.91
Affective	Q67	I actively encourage myself to take wise risks in language learning.	3.74	1.03
Cognitive	Q29	I skim the reading passage first to get the main idea, and then I go back and read it carefully.	3.74	1.21
Affective	Q66	I make encouraging statements to myself.	3.72	1.07
Metacognitive	Q64	I evaluate the general progress I have made in learning the language.	3.72	1.02
Cognitive	Q18	I read a story or dialogue several times until I can understand it.	3.72	0.92

According to the data analysis, compensation (M=3.596) and metacognitive strategies (M=3.512) were the two perceived strategy categories most frequently used as reported by first-year students (see Table 4.25).

Table 4.25 Average reported frequency use of strategies
Source: Oxford's SILL in 2014

Strategies	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Compensation	61	3.596	.4527
Metacognitive	61	3.512	.5936
Cognitive	61	3.447	.5185
Social	61	3.308	.6729
Memory	61	3.012	.5673
Affective	61	2.918	.6893
OVERALL	**61**	**3.3314**	**.44630**

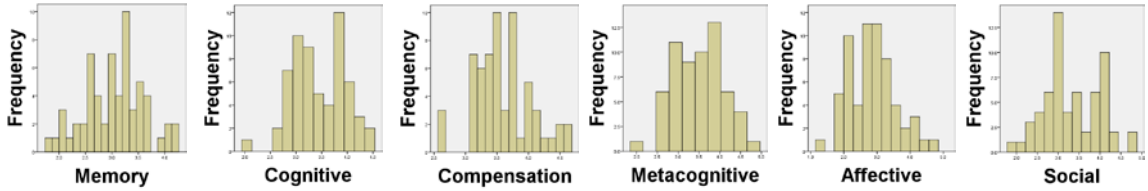
Two tests (see Table 4.26) were conducted to see if the distribution of the reported scores of frequency of strategy use deviated significantly from a comparable normal distribution. The first was the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test and the second was the Shapiro–Wilk test, which has more power to detect differences from normality.

Table 4.26 Tests of Normality for the six strategy categories
Source: Oxford's SILL in 2014

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Memory	.072	61	.200	.984	61	.629
Cognitive	.104	61	.096	.982	61	.503
Compensation	.125	61	.019	.963	61	.065
Metacognitive	.106	61	.083	.982	61	.510
Affective	.083	61	.200	.985	61	.667
Social	.092	61	.200	.978	61	.331

Both tests (especially the Shapiro–Wilk test) yielded p-values larger than .05, indicating that the distribution of the scores were not significantly different from a normal distribution and thus met some of the parametric assumptions. However, to better visualise normality, Table 4.27 shows plots of the data that can help to make further decisions about the extent of normality for each strategy category.

Table 4.27 Histograms to visualise normality for the six strategy categories
Source: Oxford's SILL in 2014



4.4.2 Reported perceived frequency of strategy use across gender

Taking into consideration that the perception of strategy use across gender has often been investigated and debated in the field (Ehrman and Oxford, 1989, Oxford and Nyikos, 1989, Tercanlioglu, 2004, Yılmaz, 2010, Salahshour et al., 2013), a Mann-Whitney U test was conducted to determine whether there were statistically significant differences with respect to reported perceived frequency of strategy use across gender. The test showed that no statistically significant differences were found across gender for each of the six strategy categories ($p > .05$) (see Table 4.28).

Table 4.28 Test for significant differences across gender
Source: Oxford's SILL in 2014 and SPSS

	Memory	Cognitive	Compensation	Metacognitive	Affective	Social
Mann-Whitney U	307.000	344.500	329.500	334.000	293.000	336.000
Wilcoxon W	443.000	480.500	465.500	1369.000	1328.000	472.000
Z	-.870	-.254	-.503	-.427	-1.102	-.394
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.384	.799	.615	.669	.270	.693
Exact Sig. (2-tailed)	.390	.804	.621	.675	.275	.699

This study does not only report that no statistically significant differences were found, but also that the perceived strategies most often used for both male and female learners were compensation and metacognitive strategies (see Table 4.29).

Table 4.29 Average reported frequency use of strategies across gender
Source: Oxford's SILL in 2014 and SPS

Strategies	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Compensation	Male	16	3.547	.4741
	Female	45	3.614	.4490
Metacognitive	Male	16	3.547	.6867
	Female	45	3.500	.5649
Cognitive	Male	16	3.398	.6409
	Female	45	3.464	.4748
Social	Male	16	3.201	.6743
	Female	45	3.346	.6760
Memory	Male	16	2.908	.5877
	Female	45	3.049	.5620
Affective	Male	16	3.089	.8789
	Female	45	2.857	.6084

Although the above-mentioned results are consistent with previous studies (Wharton, 2000:229, Nisbet et al., 2005:104, Rahimi et al., 2008:31, Yeh, 2014:429), these findings are not conclusive. They, at least, suggest that strategy choice and perceived use of strategies in the Spanish course for beginners are not necessarily influenced by gender. Males are apparently not significantly different to females in the way they approach the learning of Spanish probably because they have been brought up in the current South African education system, which does not implicitly or explicitly encourage or perpetuate differences across gender.

Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that the literature is full of mixed results regarding reported perceived use of LLS across gender (Ananisarab and Abdi, 2012:18). Research conducted in different parts of the world have shown contradicting results. Some studies [52] found that males reported using more

[52] Studies conducted by Abbasian et al (2012) among Iranian university students, Özyılmaz (2012) among Cypriote university students, and Tercanlioglu (2004:57) among Turkish university students

strategies than females, while other studies[53] found just the opposite. Contradicting results such as these highlight the need to be aware that perceived and reported frequency use of strategies across gender seem to be tempered by the social context and cultural factors in which the language is learnt (Hong-Nam and Leavell, 2006:401, Sadeghi and Soleimani, 2016:3).

4.4.3 PERCEIVED STRATEGIES MOST FREQUENTLY USED

This study found that both male and female students perceived themselves using compensation strategies and metacognitive strategies the most. As for the types of compensation strategy items, they found themselves frequently guessing, using gestures and asking the interlocutor for help. They perceived themselves using these strategies to compensate for their very basic grammar knowledge and limited vocabulary.

As for the types of metacognitive strategy items, they found themselves trying to identify the purpose of the language activities, learning from their mistakes and concentrating hard on what the lecturer was saying. This was consistent with previous research conducted by Chang and Liu (2013:201)[54]. The close similarity of the findings seem to suggest that, irrespective of whether university students are learning English or Spanish as a FL, they apparently go through common developmental phases in which they report similar preferences of strategy choice and use, at least at the beginner level.

The results of this study, however, were also found to be partially consistent with research conducted by Del Angel Castillo and Gallardo Córdova (2014:705)[55] and Ismail and Khatib (2013:139)[56], and contrary to research conducted, in India, by

[53] Studies conducted by Ehrman and Oxford (1989) among American university students and Sheorey (1999) among Indian college students found that female students reported using more strategies than males (in Macaro, 2006:321). Alhaisoni (2012:122) and Chi-Him Tam (2013:27) also found that female learners reported using social strategies more widely and frequently than their male counterparts.

[54] Chang and Liu (2013:201) found that beginner Taiwanese university students who were studying English as a FL reported using compensation and metacognitive strategies most frequently.

[55] Del Angel Castillo and Gallardo Córdova (2014:705) found that beginner Mexican EFL university students reported using metacognitive strategies most frequently (M=3.65).

[56] Ismail and Khatib (2013:139) found that beginner Emirati EFL university students reported using metacognitive strategies most frequently (M=3.39), followed by social (M=3.28) and compensation strategies (M=3.22)

Madhumathi (2014)[57]. The dissimilarity of the findings reminded the researcher that strategy choice and perceived frequency of strategy use can also be influenced by cultural factors, different teaching styles and the status of the language. In this respect, further analysis of the studies found that, in the particular case of India, a distinguishing factor was that English was taught as a second language and not as a FL, which has particular and distinguishable implications that substantially influence strategy choice and reported use of strategies.

4.4.4 PERCEIVED STRATEGY USE AND FOREIGN LANGUAGE ACHIEVEMENT

Did students who passed the course for beginners report the same frequency of strategy use than those who failed? On average, as shown in Table 4.30, students who passed the course reported higher frequency of strategy use – for each of the six strategy categories (except affective strategies) – than students who failed the course. However, the researcher was fully aware that apparent correlation between high reported use of strategies and FL achievement does not necessarily imply a cause-effect relationship.

Table 4.30 Mean reported perceived frequency use across students who passed or failed
Source: Oxford's SILL in 2014

Strategies	Students who	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Memory	Passed	44	3.065	.5929
	Failed	17	2.875	.4841
Cognitive	Passed	44	3.525	.4872
	Failed	17	3.245	.5569
Compensation	Passed	44	3.628	.4563
	Failed	17	3.515	.4461
Metacognitive	Passed	44	3.608	.5740
	Failed	17	3.265	.5878
Affective	Passed	44	2.860	.6235
	Failed	17	3.067	.8393
Social	Passed	44	3.417	.6594
	Failed	17	3.026	.6425

[57] Madhumathi et al (2014) conducted research among Indian ESL university students and found that the least reported strategy used was metacognitive (M = 2.48) and the highest were affective (M=3.31) and memory strategies (M=3.30).

The above-mentioned differences between students who passed and students who failed regarding reported use of strategies were found to be non-significant, using the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test (see Table 4.31).

Table 4.31 Tests for significant differences across students who passed or failed
Source: Oxford's SILL in 2014

	Memory	Cognitive	Compensation	Metacognitive	Affective	Social
Mann-Whitney U	301.500	261.500	324.500	257.500	315.000	254.000
Wilcoxon W	454.500	414.500	477.500	410.500	1305.000	407.000
Z	-1.168	-1.811	-.802	-1.877	-.952	-1.934
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.243	.070	.423	.061	.341	.053
Exact Sig. (2-tailed)	.247	.071	.429	.061	.346	.053

The fact that statistically significant differences had initially been found using the parametric independent-samples T-test with respect to social strategies[58] and metacognitive strategies[59] lead the researcher to wonder whether there was a correlation between reported frequency of use and students' final marks in Spanish.

Two tests were conducted to analyse correlation: Pearson's correlation coefficient test that works well with distributions that are normally distributed, and Spearman's correlation coefficient which is a non-parametric statistical test that can be used when the data have violated the parametric assumptions (See Tables 4.32 and 4.33).

Table 4.32 Pearson's correlation coefficient test between averages of reported perceived frequency use of strategies and final marks in Spanish
Source: Oxford's SILL in 2014 & Students Administration

	Correlation coefficient	Sig. (2-tailed)	N
Memory	.004	.976	61
Cognitive	.168	.196	61
Compensation	.043	.740	61
Metacognitive	.273*	.033	61
Affective	-.214	.098	61
Social	.179	.168	61
*. Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).			

[58] The results for the independent-samples T-test for social strategies: $t(59) = 2.088$, $p = .041$, $p < .05$

[59] The results for the independent-samples T-test for social strategies: $t(59) = 2.088$, $p = .042$, $p < .05$

Table 4.33 Spearman's correlation coefficient test between averages of reported perceived frequency use of strategies and final marks in Spanish
Source: Oxford's SILL in 2014 & Students Administration

	Correlation coefficient	Sig. (2-tailed)	N
Memory	-.023	.858	61
Cognitive	.142	.275	61
Compensation	.030	.819	61
Metacognitive	.267*	.037	61
Affective	-.182	.161	61
Social	.119	.363	61
*. Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).			

Both parametric and non-parametric tests indicated that the reported average of perceived frequency use of metacognitive strategies was statistically significantly correlated with the final marks in the Spanish course for beginners[60].

Did students who continued studying Spanish report the same perceived frequency of strategy use than those who only studied it for a year? On average, as shown in Table 4.34, students who continued studying Spanish reported higher perceived frequency of strategy use in the majority of the strategy categories (except for compensation and affective strategies).

However, as shown in Table 4.35, differences were only found to be statistically significant in the case of metacognitive strategies $p = .041$, $p < .05$.

[60] The test results were: $r = .273$, $p = 0.033$, $p < .05$ (Pearson's correlation coefficient) and $r = .267$, $p = 0.037$, $p < .05$ (Spearman's correlation coefficient).

Table 4.34 Averages of reported perceived frequency of strategy use across students who did/did not continue studying Spanish
Source: Oxford's SILL in 2014

	Students who…	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Memory	Did not continue	41	2.976	.5458
	Continued studying Spanish	20	3.087	.6168
Cognitive	Did not continue	41	3.371	.5153
	Continued studying Spanish	20	3.602	.5022
Compensation	Did not continue	41	3.640	.4474
	Continued studying Spanish	20	3.506	.4615
Metacognitive	Did not continue	41	3.392	.5587
	Continued studying Spanish	20	3.759	.5999
Affective	Did not continue	41	2.955	.7146
	Continued studying Spanish	20	2.843	.6454
Social	Did not continue	41	3.249	.6735
	Continued studying Spanish	20	3.428	.6728

Table 4.35 Test for statistically significant differences between students who continued and did not continue studying Spanish
Source: Oxford's SILL in 2014

	Memory	Cognitive	Compensation	Metacognitive	Affective	Social
Mann-Whitney U	351.500	306.500	345.500	277.500	363.000	338.500
Wilcoxon W	1212.500	1167.500	555.500	1138.500	573.000	1199.500
Z	-.900	-1.591	-.998	-2.039	-.724	-1.100
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.368	.112	.318	.041	.469	.271
Exact Sig. (2-tailed)	.373	.113	.323	.041	.474	.275

The fact that students who continued studying Spanish reported using metacognitive strategies significantly more than the other students was consistent with previous studies conducted by Chang and Liu (2013:206) who found that metacognitive strategies were the reported strategies most frequently used by advanced learners who can also be seen as students who at some point in the past decided to continue with their language studies. It was also consistent with research conducted by Bruen (2001:223), who found that more successful learners reported using more metacognitive strategies than less successful learners.

When a separate analysis was conducted across students who continued and did not continue studying Spanish, it was found that metacognitive strategies were the reported strategies most frequently used by students who continued studying Spanish, whereas compensation strategies were the reported strategies most frequently used by students who did not continue. The apparent link between

students who continued studying Spanish and reported perceived frequency use of metacognitive strategies suggests that these students apparently possess the distinctive characteristics of planning, monitoring and evaluating their own learning, which makes them better prepared to continue studying Spanish. What exactly were these students doing? Based on the answers provided by them, it was noticed that they were setting individual goals and paying special attention to specific language aspects. They were organising actions to take in and outside the classroom. They were planning their activities and arranging their physical environment to promote learning. They were monitoring and evaluating their progress. They were organising their notes and coming prepared to class. They were fully aware that implementing these types of strategies were essential for the successful completion of the course (Oxford, 1990:135-138).

Did students who enrolled for a degree in BA Languages report the same perceived frequency of strategy use as students who enrolled for other study programmes? The answer was yes for almost all the strategy categories. Table 4.36 shows similar averages of reported frequency of strategy use. However, it was noticed that BA Languages students reported statistically significantly lower frequency of strategy use with respect to compensation strategies ($p < .05$) than students from other academic study programmes (see Table 4.37).

Table 4.36 Average reported perceived frequency use across students who enrolled in BA Languages and other study programmes
Source: Oxford's SILL in 2014

	Study programme	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Memory	BA Languages	11	3.024	.6090
	Other study programme	50	3.009	.5642
Cognitive	BA Languages	11	3.611	.4740
	Other study programme	50	3.410	.5253
Compensation	BA Languages	11	3.341	.3216
	Other study programme	50	3.653	.4603
Metacognitive	BA Languages	11	3.705	.5442
	Other study programme	50	3.470	.6007
Affective	BA Languages	11	2.987	.6209
	Other study programme	50	2.903	.7084
Social	BA Languages	11	3.657	.4955
	Other study programme	50	3.231	.6863

Table 4.37 Test for statistically significant differences across students who enrolled in BA Languages and other study programmes
Source: Oxford's SILL in 2014

	Memory	Cognitive	Compensation	Metacognitive	Affective	Social
Mann-Whitney U	272.500	211.000	165.500	210.000	244.500	163.500
Wilcoxon W	1547.500	1486.000	231.500	1485.000	1519.500	1438.500
Z	-.047	-1.202	-2.068	-1.221	-.574	-2.095
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.963	.230	.039	.222	.566	.036
Exact Sig. (2-tailed)	.967	.235	.038	.227	.574	.035
Exact Sig. (1-tailed)	.483	.117	.019	.114	.287	.018
Point Probability	.004	.002	.001	.002	.003	.000

Tests and statistical analyses were also conducted to determine whether there were statistically significant differences across other subgroups. The results of these statistical tests are listed below.

- No statistically significant differences were found across students who had Spanish-speaking relatives or friends and those who did not.
- No statistically significant differences were found across students who had previous experience learning a FL and students who had no previous experience. Nevertheless, the descriptive analysis of the data showed that students with previous FL experience had slightly higher grades and reported higher use of strategies than students with no previous FL experience[61].
- No statistically significant differences were found across students who reported studying Spanish because they had a passion for the language and students who reported studying Spanish because they wanted to travel, study or work overseas.
- No statistically significant differences were found across students that spoke two languages and students that spoke three languages.

[61] Compared means of final grades: 64.78 > 56.74. Compared means of reported use of LLS: 3.44 > 3.26.

4.5 PRELIMINARY FINDINGS FROM THE GENERAL INTERVIEW

As indicated in the previous chapter, a short and general interview was implemented to clarify and verify the information obtained by the general questionnaire. Data collected by this short interview were recorded and then transcribed for further analysis. With the intention of protecting the anonymity of all participants, all the answers to each interview question have been transcribed as though they were answered by the same gender of students.

To illustrate, and with no intention to generalise, the answers to the question below represent, to some extent, two different and classical attitudes to the learning of a FL, which by definition refers to a language that is not used in the community and country where the language is taught.

> **Interviewer:** How do you practise the language?
>
> **Participant 2a[62]:** I do activities and I redo them before exams and I read given texts like uhm if we've done a writing activity then I'll redo that and sometimes I practise with my peers.
>
> **Participant 13a:** I try to immerse myself by listening to radio over the Internet watching movies in Spanish reading Spanish newspapers on the internet and putting my cellphone in Spanish and immersing myself that way.

As shown above, the first student practises the language by redoing the textbook activities and reading the given texts. The space where he practises is the classroom setting wherein he sometimes practises with his peers. The second student goes beyond the textbook and the classroom boundaries. He tries to immerse himself in the language and creates opportunities to get exposure to the language, and in so doing, counterbalances the lack of exposure to Spanish. The second student seems to be proactive and more skilful in arranging and planning his language learning process (metacognitive strategies).

4.6 CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

In conclusion, significant results have been found in the first year with reference to the reported perceived frequency of use of two strategy categories. Compensation

[62] The numbers are used to differentiate between students and the letters indicate the specific round of interviews. Thus, "a" refers to the interview in 2014, "b" to April 2015, "c" to October 2015, "d" to April 2016, and "e" to October 2016.

strategies and metacognitive strategies are the perceived strategy categories most frequently used at the beginner level. However, between these two categories, the category of metacognitive strategies is the one with the highest number of individual strategy items perceived as highly frequently used.

The positive correlation between the perceived use of metacognitive strategies and the final grades of the course for beginners seems to suggest that the use of metacognitive strategies could have been one of the determining factors that helped students achieve these higher grades. What exactly did these students report doing? They reported that they devoted themselves to identifying the purpose of the activities; learning from their mistakes; concentrating on what they heard; paying attention to key language aspects; preparing themselves for specific language tasks; setting achievable goals; arranging their physical environment to promote learning; organising their language notes; identifying and finding out the reasons for their language errors; and evaluating their general progress.

When comparing the reported perceived use of metacognitive strategies across students that continued studying Spanish and students that did not continue, it was found that the former reported statistically significantly higher use of metacognitive strategies than the latter. This seems to suggest that the long-term commitment to learn Spanish of the former somehow encourages them to engage at a deeper level with the Spanish course and helps them to plan, monitor and evaluate their learning in a better way than the latter.

Finally, and contrary to what was expected, it was found that students who reported previous knowledge of Spanish at the start completed the beginner course with an average final grade lower than the average final grade earned by absolute beginners, suggesting that the former seem to rely primarily on what they already know about the language instead of focusing on developing the necessary metacognitive skills to plan, monitor and evaluate their own learning. Students who report previous knowledge at the start usually outperform in the beginning, but underperform in the long run.

The following chapter presents and analyses the data collected from the group of students that continued studying Spanish in the second year and participated in the study in 2015.

5 STUDENTS AT SECOND YEAR: DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

As mentioned in the previous chapter, this study seeks to capture the evolution of self-reported use of LLS over three consecutive years. Chapter five – the second of three chapters on data collection and analysis – focuses on the group of students that participated in the study in 2015 while completing their second year.

As with chapter four, the purpose of chapter five is also twofold: first, to present and analyse the information gathered by Oxford's SILL and the qualitative interviews in a systematic and structured way; and second, to discuss the findings, taking into account the lenses provided by the literature review and following the methodological steps presented in chapter three. The first part of the chapter deals with the quantitative analysis of the data and the second part, with the qualitative analysis thereof.

The last section of this chapter summarises the findings and concludes by trying to describe the role that the reported use of LLS plays in learning Spanish as a FL in second year.

Due to the fact that the group of students became smaller, as not many continued studying Spanish further, it was deemed necessary to analyse and determine what data relating to FL achievement could be treated as parametric and what data should be strictly treated as non-parametric.

5.2 PARAMETRIC AND NON-PARAMETRIC DATA

Unlike what happened with the first-year group (where there was only one set of data coming from the year course of Spanish for beginners), in the second year there were two sets of data coming from the first and the second semester courses. Data reflecting FL achievement were mostly treated as parametric data and analysed using parametric statistical tests such as Pearson's correlation coefficient test and independent samples t-test. Data that did not meet the parametric assumptions were treated as non-parametric data and analysed using non-parametric statistical tests. Like in the previous chapter, data collected by Oxford's SILL reflecting reported frequency of strategy use were treated as non-parametric and analysed using non-parametric statistical tests such as Spearman's correlation coefficient, Mann-Whitney tests and Friedman tests. However, in some cases, parametric tests were also performed on data collected by Oxford's SILL to make useful comparisons. As carried out in the previous chapter, four assumptions were checked in order to determine whether the two sets of data reflecting FL achievement in second year could be treated as parametric data.

NORMALITY TESTS

The first assumption that was checked was whether the data from both semesters were normally distributed. Table 5.1 shows the results of the Shapiro–Wilk test.

Table 5.1 Tests of Normality for the progress and final marks
Source: Lecturer's records and SPSS

	Shapiro-Wilk			Descriptives	
	Statistic	Df	Sig.	Skewness	Kurtosis
SEMESTER 1					
Speaking	.852	17	.012	-1.647	3.691
Writing	.900	17	.068	-1.105	.791
Listening	.933	17	.249	.698	1.526
Reading	.981	17	.969	-.414	.851
Final Marks	.918	17	.138	-.974	.573
SEMESTER 2					
Speaking	.803	16	.003	-1.721	3.085
Writing	.743	16	.001	-2.019	4.076
Listening	.938	16	.327	.509	-.742
Reading	.823	16	.006	-1.499	1.895
Final Marks	.868	16	.025	-1.275	1.643

As seen in the table above, the test of normality showed that the marks of the first semester were more normally distributed than the marks of the second semester.

In the first semester, the progress marks for the language skills of writing, listening, reading and the final marks ($p > .05$) were approximately normally distributed with skewnesses of -1.105, .698, -.414, -.974 and kurtoses of .791, 1.526, .851 and .573 respectively.

In the second semester only the progress mark of listening was approximately normally distributed with skewness of .509 and kurtosis of -.742 (see Table 5.1).

Though a possible explanation for the different results might be found in connection to the fact that the second-semester sample size was slightly smaller than the first-semester one, the results undoubtedly suggest that non-parametric statistical tests seem to be more appropriate to be used when analysing these numerical data.

HOMOGENEITY OF VARIANCE

The second assumption that was checked was homogeneity of variance with respect to the two sets of data gathered from students of Spanish in the second year. This was checked across students that registered in the first semester and students that registered in the second semester.

Homogeneity of variance was also checked between key subgroups, such as (1) students whose study programme was BA Languages and students of other programmes, (2) students who continued and students who did not continue studying Spanish in the third year, and (3) students that were top achievers in second year and the rest of the students.

In all cases it was important to be sure that the spread of achievement scores was roughly equal in different groups of cases and throughout internal subgroups (Field, 2009:152).

The statistical test that was used to analyse homogeneity of variance was Levene's test and it was performed with respect to the two sets of data and across key subgroups. Table 5.2 shows the results of Levene's test.

Table 5.2 Tests of homogeneity of variance through Levene's test across key subgroups
Source: Lecturer's records and SPSS

	Was there homogeneity of variance throughout the progress marks?	Was there homogeneity of variance throughout the final marks?
Across students who enrolled in the course for the first and students who enrolled for the second semester.	Yes ($p > .05$)	Yes ($p > .05$)
FIRST SEMESTER		
Across students whose study programme was BA Languages and students of other study programmes.	Yes ($p > .05$)	Yes ($p > .05$)
Across students who continued/did not continue studying Spanish in the third year.	Yes ($p > .05$)	Yes ($p > .05$)
Across students who were top achievers in the first semester and the rest of the students.	No ($p < .05$)	Yes ($p > .05$)
SECOND SEMESTER		
Across students whose study programme was BA Languages and students of other study programmes.	Yes ($p > .05$)	No ($p < .05$)
Across students who continued/did not continue studying Spanish in the third year.	Yes ($p > .05$)	No ($p < .05$)
Across students who were top achievers in the second semester and the rest of the students.	No ($p < .05$)	No ($p < .05$)

INTERVAL DATA

Like in the previous chapter, the third assumption that was checked was whether the data were interval data. Once again a careful inspection of the scores used to measure FL achievement revealed that the numerical scale used in the South African education system (ranging from 0 to 100) complied with this requirement. It was important to be sure that equal intervals on the scale represented equal differences in the property being measured (Field, 2009:133).

INDEPENDENCE

The fourth assumption that was checked was whether the two sets of data from the participants were independent from each other and independent within each set. Since the two sets of data involved the same group of participants in which repeated measures were taken after a while, the expected scores were considered to be non-independent for a given participant (Field, 2009:133). However, when the participants' scores were analysed separately within each set of data, it was deemed appropriate and correct to assume that the progress and final marks of each student were independent from the marks of the other students.

5.3 SECOND-YEAR STUDENTS' PROFILES: PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

In the first year, the researched group consisted of 61 students. However, not all of them successfully completed the first-year course and then registered in the second-year courses[63]. Only 15 out of 33 students who indicated their intention to continue did so, and 5 out of 12 students who indicated no intention to continue decided to continue studying Spanish in the second year.

Although the official list showed that twenty-seven students had registered in the second year, only seventeen out of the initial sixty-one students continued studying Spanish in the first semester, and only sixteen out of these seventeen continued studying Spanish in the second semester. The rest of the students were either new enrolments or students that were not part of the study because they had previously reported having some knowledge of Spanish at the beginning of their first year.

No new participants were added into the researched group of second-year students in 2015 because the purpose of the study was to gain a better understanding of the use of LLS by students who started as absolute beginners in the first year in 2014 and continued studying until the third year in 2016.

In 2015, the entire intermediate class of second year consisted of 27 students in the first semester and 25 students in the second semester, but the research group consisted of 17 students (n=17) in the first semester and 16 students (n=16) in the second semester.

As with the first year, second-year students also had daily classes from Monday to Friday. The second-year class consisted of one group of students who had classes for fourteen weeks during each semester. Students who successfully completed the first semester course were expected to reach the B1.1 level by June. Students who successfully completed the second semester course were expected to reach the B1.2 level[64] by November.

[63] Unlike the first year that comprised a year course, the second year consisted of two semester courses: SPN211 and SPN221.

[64] See the Common European Framework for Languages for further details on these two levels (Council of Europe 2001:24).

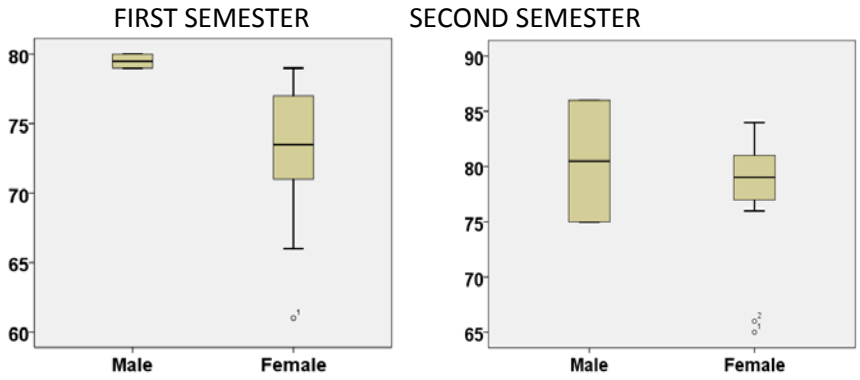
5.3.1 GENDER

Consistent with the ratios found in all the FL undergraduate courses, and especially in second year, the data showed that females outnumbered males in both semester courses (see Table 5.3). In addition to this, Graph 5.1 shows the scores of FL achievement of both semesters in a comparative way.

Table 5.3 Gender distribution of the researched group in second year, in 2015
Source: General questionnaire and SPSS

	SPN211	SPN221
Male	03 (17.6%)	02 (12.5%)
Female	14 (82.4%)	14 (87.5%)
Total	**17**	**16**

Graph 5.1 Final marks across gender in first and second semesters in 2015
Source: Lecturer's records and SPSS



The Mann-Whitney test found statistically significant differences ($p < .05$) across gender with respect to FL achievement for the first semester course and no statistically significant differences ($p > .05$) for the second semester course. These contradictory results seem to confirm that statistical tests results are not reliable enough when working with very small samples (such as three males in the first semester and two males in the second semester). However, statistically significant differences were found with respect to FL achievement between the entire group of students of 2015 and former groups of students from previous years. In all cases, it was found that the grades were significantly higher in 2015 than in previous years (see Table 5.4). This finding is discussed later in section 5.4.3.

Table 5.4 Progress marks of Spanish in second years between 2009 and 2015
Source: UP Faculty of Humanities: Student Administration

Year	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
2009	64.91	23	11.759
2010	57.73	22	12.654
2011	61.30	27	15.213
2012	63.25	24	12.390
2013	64.82	33	15.218
2014	63.00	16	13.196
2015	74.56	27	9.768
Total	**64.51**	**172**	**13.797**

5.3.2 THE ACADEMIC PROGRAMMES STUDENTS CAME FROM

Unlike the first year in which the majority of students in the research group came from a variety of different academic programmes, in the second year the majority of students were either pursuing a degree in BA Languages, International Studies or International Relations. The data showed that only six students were enrolled in programmes such as Marketing Management, Education (2), Social Sciences and English studies (2), that is, in careers that do not necessarily require a level of proficiency in a FL to perform well. Table 5.5 shows the composition of students according to the academic programmes they belonged to.

Table 5.5 Academic programmes of the learners that participated in the study in 2015
Source: General questionnaire and SPSS

Academic programmes	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
BA Languages	6	35.3%	35.3%
International Studies & International Relations	5	29.4%	64.7%
Other programmes	6	35.3%	100%
TOTAL	**17**	**100%**	

The distribution of students according to their academic programmes was fairly consistent with the distribution found in previous years (see table 5.6), showing that Spanish is not only studied by students from careers that require proficiency in a FL to perform well, but also by students who are primarily motivated by personal reasons. Discussion and analysis on this is presented in section 5.4.1.

Table 5.6 Distribution of academic programmes of second-year learners since 2009
Source: UP Faculty of Humanities: Student Administration

	Languages	International Studies & International Relations	Other programmes	Total
2009	5 (21.7%)	0 (0%)	18 (78.3%)	23 (100%)
2010	3 (13.1%)	5 (21.7%)	15 (65.2%)	23 (100%)
2011	7 (25.9%)	2 (7.4%)	18 (66.7%)	27 (100%)
2012	5 (20.8%)	3 (12.5%)	16 (66.7%)	24 (100%)
2013	8 (24.2%)	5 (15.2%)	20 (60.6%)	33 (100%)
2014	9 (56.3%)	1 (6.3%)	6 (37.5%)	16 (100%)
2015	8 (29.6%)	5 (18.5%)	14 (51.9%)	27 (100%)
Total	**45 (26.1%)**	**21 (12.1%)**	**107 (61.8%)**	**173 (100%)**

5.3.3 STUDENTS WHO CONTINUED AND DID NOT CONTINUE STUDYING SPANISH

Not all students who started the Spanish semester courses in the second year completed three years of Spanish. The data showed that only 7 out of 17 students continued until the third year. Did students who ended up studying Spanish for three years perform significantly differently to students who didn't? A comparative analysis of the final marks of both semesters and the Mann-Whitney test found no statistically significant differences between those who continued studying Spanish in the third year and those who didn't.

Table 5.7 Foreign language achievement vs intention to carry on with studies in Spanish
Source: General questionnaire

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Students in SPN211 who continued	7	73.14	6.768
Students in SPN211 who did not continue	10	74.90	4.581
Students in SPN221 who continued	7	77.57	8.541
Students in SPN221 who did not continue	9	78.33	2.291

5.4 LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGY USE

Oxford's SILL was again used to investigate reported frequency use of LLS. A total of 17 students completed the SILL in March and 16 students completed the SILL in September 2015. The Cronbach's Alpha test was performed to ensure reliability and internal consistency (see Table 5.8).

Table 5.8 Cronbach's Alpha Reliability test for the SILL
Source: Oxford's SILL in 2015

	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of items in the questionnaire
SPN 211	.913	80
SPN 221	.951	80

The Cronbach's Alpha values[65] for the two SILL administrations were high (.913 and .951) and very respectable, indicating that the measurement error was minimal. These values were also consistent with the values obtained from previous research studies conducted by Arslan (2014:66), Aydogan and Akbarov (2014:17), Ghafournia (2014:161), Tang and Tian (2015:4) and Risueño et al (2015:138).

The Cronbach's Alpha values of reliability for each of the six strategy categories of the SILL were also calculated. Separate calculations were made for each administration of the SILL during the first and second semester (see Table 5.9).

Table 5.9 Cronbach's Alpha Reliability test for the six strategy categories
Source: Oxford's SILL in 2015

Strategy category	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of items
SPN 211	**SPN 211**	**SPN 211**
Memory	.776	12 items
Cognitive	.738	28 items
Compensation	.692	8 items
Metacognitive	.786	16 items
Affective	.679	7 items
Social	.779	9 items

[65] Cronbach's alpha values range from 0 to 1. Values at or above .7 are desirable and considered acceptable.

Table 5.9 (cont.) Cronbach's Alpha Reliability test for the six strategy categories
Source: Oxford's SILL in 2015

Strategy category	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of items
SPN 221	**SPN 221**	**SPN 221**
Memory	.788	12 items
Cognitive	.857	28 items
Compensation	.451	8 items
Metacognitive	.874	16 items
Affective	.780	7 items
Social	.846	9 items

All subcategories (except for the subgroup of compensation and affective strategies in the first semester, and compensation strategies in the second semester) showed Cronbach's Alpha values higher than .7 and below .9 which indicated that the internal consistency of the instrument was acceptable and reliable. The results were consistent with Cronbach's Alpha values obtained in previous studies conducted by Zareva and Fomina (2013:79), Platsidou and Kantaridou (2014:255), Del Ángel Castillo and Gallardo Córdova (2014:709).

5.4.1 QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS ON REPORTED FREQUENCY OF STRATEGY USE

As was done in the first year, students reported – according to their perception – how much they were using strategies by choosing the value that best matched their self-perception on a scale from 1 to 5 for each strategy item of the SILL. In this respect, the researcher is fully aware that Oxford's SILL measures self-reported perception of strategy use and not necessarily strategy use as such. As a matter of fact, even a dedicated observer cannot fully capture the whole spectrum of strategy use as many strategies are not observable and can only be studied from the moment learners report they are making use of them.

Moreover, as mentioned in chapter 3, the researcher is aware that when reporting strategy use, there is always the possibility that students' self-reports may be inaccurate because it is possible that they may not remember the strategies they have used in the past and may claim to use strategies that they, in fact, do not use (Chamot, 2004:15). However, it is precisely because of these weaknesses that complementary data collection techniques, such as qualitative interviews, were used to better understand the use of LLS.

The report that follows on perceived frequency of strategy use starts by presenting quantitative information through tables and graphs. This information is then analysed using SPSS. Qualitative information is also presented and analysed with the intention to provide a contextual background and enable the reader to better understand the quantitative findings.

What are the strategies that students perceive as the most frequently used in second year? Table 5.10 shows the top twenty strategies that second-year students reported with high frequency use. “Mean 1” refers to the administration of the SILL in March, and “Mean 2” refers to the administration of the SILL in September 2015.

Table 5.10 Reported strategies most frequently used
Source: Oxford’s SILL in March and September 2015

Strategies	Item	Statement (paraphrased for brevity)	Mean 1	Mean 2
Cognitive	Q31	I use reference materials such as glossaries or dictionaries to help me use the new language.	4.86	4.50
Compensation	Q46	When I cannot think of the correct expression to say or write, I find a different way to express the idea.	4.57	4.43
Cognitive	Q36	I look for similarities and contrasts between the new language and my own.	4.29	4.57
Cognitive	Q39	I look for patterns in the new language.	4.43	4.36
Cognitive	Q32	I take notes in class in the new language.	4.43	4.36
Compensation	Q41	When I do not understand all the words I read or hear, I guess the general meaning by using any clue I can find.	4.29	4.43
Compensation	Q45	I ask the other person to tell me the right word if I cannot think of it in a conversation.	4.36	4.36
Metacognitive	Q59	I clearly identify the purpose of the language activity.	4.50	4.21
Cognitive	Q18	I read a story or dialogue several times until I can understand it.	4.21	4.43
Cognitive	Q30	I seek specific details in what I hear or read.	4.36	4.21
Metacognitive	Q62	I try to notice my language errors and find out the reasons for them.	4.07	4.36
Metacognitive	Q63	I learn from my mistakes in using the new language.	4.21	4.14
Cognitive	Q15	I go back to refresh my memory of things I learnt much earlier.	4.21	4.07
Cognitive	Q38	I am cautious about transferring words or concepts directly from my language to the new language.	4.07	4.21
Metacognitive	Q50	When someone is speaking the new language, I concentrate on what the person is saying.	4.07	4.14
Social	Q72	If I do not understand, I ask the speaker to slow down, repeat, or clarify what was said.	4.14	4.07
Cognitive	Q19	I revise what I write in the new language to improve my writing.	4.00	4.14
Social	Q79	I try to learn about the culture or the place where the new language is spoken.	4.07	4.07
Cognitive	Q37	I try to understand what I have heard or read without translating it word-for-word into my own language.	3.93	4.14
Metacognitive	Q51	I decide in advance to pay special attention to specific language aspects.	3.86	4.21

As shown above, cognitive, compensation and metacognitive strategies were the reported perceived strategies most frequently used by second-year students. Discussion and analysis of these findings in tandem with emerging findings from first year (Chapter 4) and third year (Chapter 6) is shown in section 7.2. Table 5.11 shows the averages of reported frequency use for each strategy category.

Table 5.11 Average reported frequency use of strategies
Source: Oxford's SILL in 2015

FIRST SEMESTER

Strategies	Mean
Cognitive	3.6971
Social	3.6671
Compensation	3.6418
Metacognitive	3.6188
Memory	3.0882
Affective	2.8576

SECOND SEMESTER

Strategies	Mean
Cognitive	3.7581
Compensation	3.7369
Metacognitive	3.6913
Social	3.6325
Affective	3.2056
Memory	3.1925

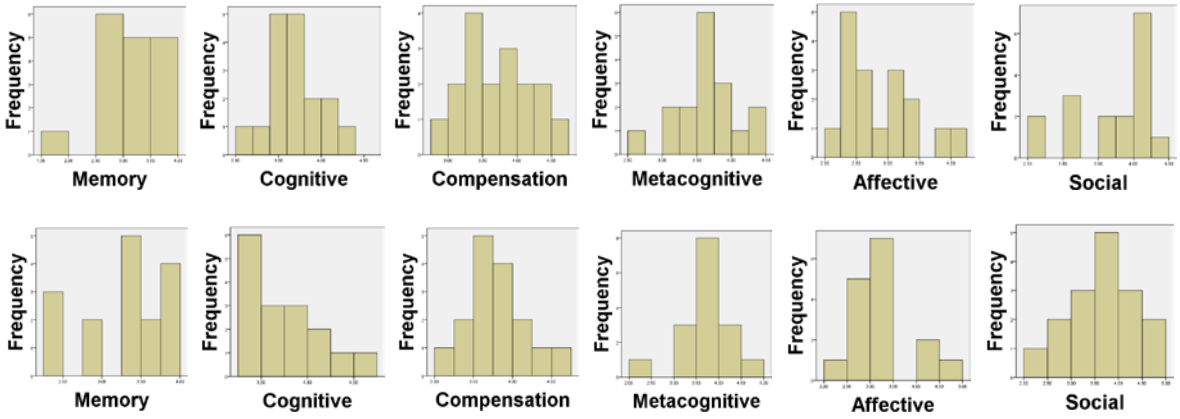
Like in the previous analyses of the data, the Shapiro–Wilk test was conducted to see if the distribution of the reported scores of frequency of strategy use deviated significantly from a comparable normal distribution (see Table 5.12).

Table 5.12 Tests of Normality for the six strategy categories
Source: Oxford's SILL in March and September 2015

	First semester			Second semester		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Memory	.905	17	.084	.879	16	.037
Cognitive	.970	17	.825	.918	16	.155
Compensation	.984	17	.986	.962	16	.702
Metacognitive	.964	17	.705	.952	16	.519
Affective	.921	17	.154	.868	16	.025
Social	.901	17	.070	.965	16	.761

The Shapiro–Wilk test yielded p-values larger than .05 ($p > .05$) in all cases of the first semester course, and in almost all cases of the second semester course, indicating that the distribution of the scores seemed to be not significantly different from a normal distribution. However, a closer look at the plots of the data helped to assess the extent of normality for each individual case (see Graph 5.2).

Graph 5.2 Histograms to check normality for the strategy categories in both semesters
Source: Oxford's SILL in March (top) and September 2015 (bottom)



A visual inspection of the histograms revealed that the cognitive, compensation and metacognitive strategy categories in the first semester, and the compensation, metacognitive and social strategy categories in the second semester were approximately normally distributed.

Did the self-reported perception of strategy use of the six strategy categories correlate with FL achievement? Spearman's correlation coefficient test was conducted to determine whether there was a statistically significant correlation. Table 5.13 shows the results per semester.

Table 5.13 Spearman's correlation coefficient test between averages of reported frequency use of strategies and final marks in first and second semesters
Source: Oxford's SILL in 2015 & Students Administration

FIRST SEMESTER	**Correlation coefficient**	**Sig. (2-tailed)**	**N**
Memory	-.352	.165	17
Cognitive	-.338	.185	17
Compensation	-.438	.079	17
Metacognitive	-.019	.942	17
Affective	-.037	.889	17
Social	-.340	.182	17
SECOND SEMESTER			
Memory	-.289	.278	16
Cognitive	-.286	.283	16
Compensation	-.512*	.043	16
Metacognitive	-.126	.643	16
Affective	-.143	.598	16
Social	.018	.948	16

*. Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

The analysis of the data showed that the only finding that was found across both semesters was a statistically significant negative correlation (Spearman's correlation coefficient: r = -.512, p = 0.043, p < .05) between the self-reported perception of strategy use of compensation strategies and the final marks of Spanish in the second semester. (Discussion and analysis on this is shown below.)

Was the self-reported perceived use of LLS statistically significantly different across the administrations of the SILL in 2014, 2015 (March) and 2015 (September)? Since this was one of the major questions of the study, non-parametric statistical tests were conducted at two levels: (1) at the level of strategy categories, and (2) at the level of strategy items. In both cases, the tests first analysed the data from 2014 and 2015 (March), then the data from 2014 and 2015 (September), and finally the data from 2015 (March) and 2015 (September).

Table 5.14 Statistically significant differences between 2014 and 2015 (March)
Source: Oxford's SILL in 2014 and 2015 (March)

	Memory	Cognitive	Compensation	Metacognitive	Affective	Social
Mann-Whitney U	112.000	103.500	105.500	121.000	119.000	100.000
Wilcoxon W	232.000	223.500	225.500	274.000	239.000	220.000
Z	-.586	-.907	-.837	-.246	-.322	-1.044
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.558	.364	.402	.806	.747	.297
Exact Sig. (2-tailed)	.569	.374	.413	.816	.758	.306
Exact Sig. (1-tailed)	.285	.187	.207	.408	.379	.153
Point Probability	.006	.005	.005	.007	.007	.004

Table 5.15 Statistically significant differences between 2014 and 2015 (September)
Source: Oxford's SILL in 2014 and 2015 (September)

	Memory	Cognitive	Compensation	Metacognitive	Affective	Social
Mann-Whitney U	96.000	87.000	70.000	109.000	75.500	101.500
Wilcoxon W	216.000	207.000	190.000	229.000	195.500	221.500
Z	-.951	-1.306	-1.999	-.435	-1.768	-.733
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.341	.192	.046	.663	.077	.464
Exact Sig. (2-tailed)	.352	.198	.046	.675	.079	.475
Exact Sig. (1-tailed)	.176	.099	.023	.337	.039	.238
Point Probability	.005	.003	.001	.007	.001	.006

Table 5.16 Statistically significant differences between 2015 (March) and 2015 (Sept.)
Source: Oxford's SILL in 2015 (March) and 2015 (September)

	Memory	Cognitive	Compensation	Metacognitive	Affective	Social
Mann-Whitney U	119.500	132.000	120.000	117.000	89.000	128.500
Wilcoxon W	272.500	285.000	273.000	270.000	242.000	264.500
Z	-.598	-.144	-.579	-.686	-1.703	-.271
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.550	.885	.563	.493	.089	.786
Exact Sig. (2-tailed)	.561	.894	.574	.504	.090	.796
Exact Sig. (1-tailed)	.280	.447	.287	.252	.045	.398
Point Probability	.006	.007	.006	.006	.002	.007

The analysis of the data showed that statistically significant differences were only found with respect to compensation strategies between first-year students and second-year students. The average self-reported use of compensation strategies in September 2014 was 3.46, and in September 2015 was 3.74. There was a statistically significant increase in the perceived use of compensation strategies in this period. At the level of strategy items, the statistical tests also found statistically significant differences with respect to three particular strategy items from the cognitive and compensation categories (see Table 5.17 and Table 5.18). This finding is further discussed in section 5.4.3 and chapter 7.

Table 5.17 Strategy items where statistically significant differences were found
Source: Oxford's SILL in 2014 and 2015 (September)

Item	Subcategory	Statement (paraphrased for brevity)	Mean 2014	Mean 2015a	Mean 2015b
Q18	Cognitive	I read a story or dialogue several times until I can understand it.	3.76	4.40	4.21
Q24	Cognitive	I watch TV shows or movies or listen to the radio in the new language.	2.53	3.40	3.71
Q46	Compensation	When I cannot think of the correct expression to say or write, I find a different way to express the idea.	4.00	4.47	4.57

Table 5.18 Significant differences at strategy item level
Source: Oxford's SILL in 2014 and 2015 (September)

	Q18	Q24	Q46
Mann-Whitney U	73.000	48.000	67.000
Wilcoxon W	226.000	201.000	220.000
Z	-2.288	-2.931	-2.269
Exact Sig. (2-tailed)	.032	.003	.031
Exact Sig. (1-tailed)	.013	.002	.017
Point Probability	.011	.001	.009

Findings were consistent with results at strategy-category level, which found that the perceived use of two specific cognitive strategies and one specific compensation strategy were statistically significantly higher in second year than in first year.

Did students registered for BA Languages report significantly different perceived use of LLS than students from other academic programmes? Two Mann-Whitney U tests were conducted to determine whether there were statistically significant differences. Table 5.19 and Table 5.20 show the results.

Table 5.19 Statistically significant differences across academic programmes
Source: Oxford's SILL in 2015 (March)

	Memory	Cognitive	Compensation	Metacognitive	Affective	Social
Mann-Whitney U	33.000	32.500	24.500	26.500	25.000	31.000
Wilcoxon W	99.000	98.500	90.500	47.500	91.000	97.000
Z	.000	-.050	-.856	-.655	-.812	-.203
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	1.000	.960	.392	.512	.417	.839
Exact Sig. (2-tailed)	1.000	.981	.415	.541	.441	.858
Point Probability	.019	.020	.011	.017	.014	.014

Table 5.20 Statistically significant differences across academic programmes
Source: Oxford's SILL in 2015 (September)

	Memory	Cognitive	Compensation	Metacognitive	Affective	Social
Mann-Whitney U	22.500	29.000	23.500	26.000	24.500	21.000
Wilcoxon W	77.500	84.000	78.500	81.000	79.500	76.000
Z	-.823	-.109	-.710	-.435	-.600	-.981
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.411	.913	.478	.664	.549	.327
Exact Sig. (2-tailed)	.438	.938	.507	.694	.580	.352
Point Probability	.015	.022	.016	.020	.019	.012

The analysis showed that no statistically significant differences were found in either semester, with respect to self-reported use of LLS across students who were registered in BA Languages and students from other academic programmes. In all cases, the p-value was greater than .05 ($p > .05$).

Did students who carried on studying Spanish until the third year report statistically significantly different perceived strategy use than students who only completed second year? Two Mann-Whitney U tests were conducted again to determine whether there were statistically significant differences across these two groups. Table 5.21 and Table 5.22 show the results.

Table 5.21 Statistically significant differences across students who continue/didn't continue
Source: Oxford's SILL in 2015 (March)

	Memory	Cognitive	Compensation	Metacognitive	Affective	Social
Mann-Whitney U	30.000	27.500	33.000	31.500	18.000	27.500
Wilcoxon W	58.000	55.500	88.000	59.500	73.000	82.500
Z	-.490	-.733	-.196	-.343	-1.676	-.738
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.624	.464	.845	.732	.094	.460
Exact Sig. (2-tailed)	.650	.489	.869	.755	.099	.490
Point Probability	.017	.014	.021	.021	.005	.016

Table 5.22 Statistically significant differences across students who continue/didn't continue
Source: Oxford's SILL in 2015 (September)

	Memory	Cognitive	Compensation	Metacognitive	Affective	Social
Mann-Whitney U	27.500	26.000	29.000	30.000	30.500	17.500
Wilcoxon W	72.500	71.000	74.000	75.000	75.500	62.500
Z	-.428	-.584	-.266	-.159	-.106	-1.488
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.669	.559	.790	.874	.915	.137
Exact Sig. (2-tailed)	.700	.587	.814	.897	.938	.149
Point Probability	.021	.018	.018	.021	.021	.009

The analysis of the data and the test results indicated that – with respect to self-reported perceived use of LLS – there were no statistically significant differences between students who continued studying until the third year and students who only completed the second year.

Did top achievers report perceived strategy use statistically significantly different than the rest of the class? Two Mann-Whitney U tests were conducted again to determine whether there were statistically significant differences across these two groups. Table 5.23 and Table 5.24 show the results.

Table 5.23 Statistically significant differences across top achievers and the rest
Source: Oxford's SILL in 2015 (March)

	Memory	Cognitive	Compensation	Metacognitive	Affective	Social
Mann-Whitney U	15.000	19.000	18.000	28.000	25.500	19.000
Wilcoxon W	70.000	74.000	73.000	83.000	80.500	74.000
Z	-1.959	-1.563	-1.663	-.685	-.936	-1.575
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.050	.118	.096	.493	.349	.115
Exact Sig. (2-tailed)	.051	.126	.102	.520	.372	.122
Point Probability	.003	.006	.006	.016	.015	.005

Table 5.24 Statistically significant differences across top achievers and the rest
Source: Oxford's SILL in 2015 (September)

	Memory	Cognitive	**Compensation**	Metacognitive	Affective	Social
Mann-Whitney U	25.500	21.500	11.500	31.500	27.500	27.500
Wilcoxon W	61.500	57.500	47.500	67.500	63.500	63.500
Z	-.690	-1.107	-2.167	-.053	-.475	-.475
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.490	.268	.030	.958	.635	.635
Exact Sig. (2-tailed)	.518	.289	**.029**	.979	.663	.664
Point Probability	.016	.012	.002	.019	.019	.019

As shown in the tables above, statistically significant differences were only found with respect to the self-reported perceived use of compensation strategies between top achievers and the rest of the students. According to the analyses, top achievers were reporting statistically significantly lower perceived use of compensation strategies than the rest of the group.

Thus far, the quantitative analysis has rendered the following findings that will be discussed in the following sections.

- **A significant negative correlation in the second semester between the self-reported perception of use of compensation strategies and the final marks of Spanish.** In order to analyse this finding it is important to remember that students make use of compensation strategies when they experience limitations in comprehension and/or production[66]. Thus, taking into account that students have limited exposure to Spanish and considering that their interaction is primarily with the lecturer, it seems plausible to think that their main concern (when speaking and writing) is not necessarily conveying meaning with fluency, but rather correctness and accuracy. Moreover, the use of compensation strategies (specifically in oral communication and written production) is seemingly seen as something that should rather be avoided because it might not help to earn the highest possible marks.
- **A statistically significant increase of the perception of use of compensation strategies from the first year to the second year.** This finding seems to suggest that as students develop proficiency in Spanish their growing interest in practising the language leads them to naturally get involved in

[66] In most cases, due to an inadequate repertoire of grammar and vocabulary (Oxford, 1990:47).

interactions wherein their main concern is conveying meaning with fluency. Thus, towards the end of the second year, students become more capable of finding different ways to express an idea and accurately guessing the meaning of a word.

- The fact that no statistically significant differences were found with respect to the perceived use of strategies across BA Languages students and students from other academic programmes seems to indicate that the commitment from both groups to drive their language learning process is very similar.
- Though no statistically significant differences were found with respect to the perceived use of LLS between students who continued studying until the third year and students who only completed the second year, it was noticed that the entire group of participants in the second year of study were more readily reporting high perceived use of cognitive strategies, whereas the subgroup of students who actually continued and completed the third year reported high frequency of use of social strategies. Although seemingly contradictory, this finding seems to reveal that students who eventually completed three years of studying Spanish were apparently already engaged in social activities from the second year. This finding will be discussed further in the following section in tandem with qualitative data gathered by the interviews.

5.4.2 QUALITATIVE FINDINGS ON REPORTED FREQUENCY OF STRATEGY USE

Qualitative data were collected by means of interviews that were recorded and then transcribed for further analyses. Data from interviews were coded and categorised according to major common themes. Interviews were conducted after each administration of the SILL to further understand students' perceived use of LLS at different points in time.

To help students remember the description of each strategy item and the respective scores given by them reflecting their perception of strategy use at different points in time, participants were always given a hard copy of Oxford's SILL during the interviews and were also allowed to see their previous scores for each strategy item.

Taking into account that there were only two male students in the group of participants of 2015, and with the intention of protecting the anonymity of all

participants, all the answers to each interview question have been transcribed as though they were answered by the same gender of students.

The following section reports on the findings that emerged from the analyses. The analyses of the qualitative data revealed recurring themes that need to be taken into account if there is a serious commitment to improve the current situation.

5.4.2.1 KNOWING HOW TO LEARN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Did all students who continued studying Spanish in the second year know at the beginning how to study a FL? A student answered this question indirectly when reporting on the frequency use of a specific strategy.

> **Interviewer:** Ok strategy number 5, you mentioned that you were using it much more than you did it in the past. Why?
>
> **Participant 1b[67]:** Uh in the past I didn't really have any knowledge I didn't know how to study uh the language uh so I was kinda finding my feet, but then, now I know that some words share uh some words that sound familiar share the same meaning in English and in Spanish so that has helped me.

When discussing the use of rhyming to remember words, this student also mentioned that he "did not know how to study the language" in the past, and that he was "kinda finding his feet". Far from asserting that this student now knows how to study a FL, and despite having experience in learning a second language, what he says seems to suggest (1) that the student realised that studying a FL was something he did not know how to do in the past when he started, and (2) that in this respect, he felt more confident in second year than in first year. An analysis of further comments and answers from him partially reveals whether he was finding his feet in the second year.

> **Interviewer:** [While looking at Oxford's SILL with the student] Strategy 24, you've increased the use of this strategy. More than in the past. Can you explain why and how you do it?
>
> **Participant 1b:** Uh I listen to a lot of music uh and I watch uh short movie clips online just to familiarise myself with the language
>
> **Interviewer:** So, why didn't [this strategy] help you so much in 1st year, and now in 2nd year is helping you more? Why is it so?

[67] The numbers are used to differentiate between students and the letters indicate the specific round of interviews. Thus, "a" refers to the interview in 2014, "b" to April 2015, "c" to October 2015, "d" to April 2016, and "e" to October 2016.

> **Participant 1b:** Because in 1st year I just couldn't comprehend most of what was being said now that I have a better understanding of the language. I can understand most of it

To counterbalance the lack of exposure to Spanish, he is now listening to music and watching short videos online to familiarise himself with the language. His new level of proficiency allows him to understand better than before, and therefore enables him to enjoy both activities more. As authentic interactions with native or proficient speakers are critically needed in FL learning, students who do not have Spanish-speaking friends or relatives and want to practise the language normally end up interacting with other classmates.

> **Interviewer:** As for strategy item 61, the information you gave us shows that you have increased the use of this strategy. Can you explain how you do it and why?
>
> **Participant 1b:** Uh now… I used to refrain from interacting with my classmates in the past now I interact more freely with them and we try to use the language when speaking together…

Why did this student refrain from interacting with his classmates in the first year? He mentioned that he experienced stress and was mostly nervous.

> **Participant 1b:** Yeah in the past for 1st year like you're a new student everything is stressful you're mostly nervous all the time so this year is you're accustomed to everything so you're more relaxed so ja.

However, in the second year, it seems that the need for practising and using Spanish became stronger as the student developed proficiency in the language. The experience of practising with a classmate is reported as helpful, but it is not fully rewarding. "The sense" that both students are learning is not strong yet.

> **Interviewer:** Ok, ok, strategy 76 'I have a regular language learning partner' you said you didn't use it. Very low in the 1st SILL and then you are now using it more. How is this happening?
>
> **Participant 1b:** I have ja [a friend] yes we get together most of the time and then we talk in Spanish it's helpful but not a lot, but like we'll get we'll getting the sense we're both learning.

A second distinguishing characteristic of some students who seem to know how to study a FL is that they revise the notes taken in class in the new language. This revision activates the use of cognitive strategies and seems to be a key element in achieving success in learning Spanish as a FL. Below is a report of two students regarding taking notes and revising their notes.

Interviewer: Strategy 32 is reported by you with high use. Why is this strategy so important to you?

Participant 7c: Because uhm what we do in class I'll revise at home and then it helps me to remember it and then I just study it for the exam.

Interviewer: Ok and how often do you uh revise what you write?

Participant 7c: Often like every day I try to revise every day yeah.

[Another student on the same topic]

Participant 8c: Uh, ja, I definitely review often I mean when you learn a new language especially in a country where they don't speak the language as a the first language you have to review often so you can be in that mindset.

Interviewer: What does often mean to you?

Participant 8c: Often means that mostly whenever I can to be honest when I'm studying because I spend lot of time in the library so.

Interviewer: *"Whenever you can"* means daily, weekly, monthly?

Participant 8c: Uh daily, daily, yeah daily, definitely.

In some cases, the scope of the revision includes work done in the previous year.

Interviewer: Ok, strategy 15. You reported high use for two consecutive times. What are you doing?

Participant 5c: I'm revising some of my old textbooks and notes that I made last year and last semester I find that it helps, ja, it helps me understand what's happening uh now although sometimes it's sometimes it's helpful if the work is very hard but I'm generally it is helpful.

For some students, the learning of a FL is limited to what the teacher says or does in class and to what the student studies by himself at home or at the library. In other words, their learning depends on the teacher. They have not learnt to learn by themselves and become autonomous learners.

Participant 4c: I feel it's very important to understand what the teacher is saying. I feel sometimes if you don't understand, you might misunderstand what [the lecturer] is saying and then not actually learn anything so for me it's very important to try and grasp what [the lecturer] is trying to teach to us.

However, other students that continued studying Spanish until the third year expressed something that is considered pivotal in FL settings: arranging their schedule to study and practice the new language consistently (metacognitive strategies) irrespective of whether they have homework or not. In this respect, the

data pointed out that these students seem to be fully aware that the learning of a FL requires great amounts of self-study and practice.

> **Interviewer:** Ok strategy 53
>
> **Participant 2b:** 53
>
> **Interviewer:** There's an increase on this strategy you used. Is there a reason why?
>
> **Participant 2b:** Uhm I think it's because we have to do a lot of self-study as well so I need to read over the things I've learnt in class and make sure I understand it so I can ask questions if I don't ja so

A third distinguishing characteristic is that these students seem to have realised that relaxing and keeping themselves constantly motivated is crucial to remembering vocabulary and performing well, and to remaining committed to their study of Spanish.

> **Interviewer:** Ok, strategy 65. How is it helping you to learn the language? You reported high use of this strategy for two consecutive years.
>
> **Participant 7c:** Uhm relaxing helps me to remember new vocab that I might have learnt to uhm keep me calm in the test so I can improve my marks and not go blank so it really helps because uh when I stress I can't remember anything I just go blank and I don't know what to do and I forget new vocab.
>
> **Interviewer:** What do you do to relax?
>
> **Participant 7c:** Uhm I listen to music before the test or uhm I inhale deeply and just try to keep myself calm ja and to motivate myself and then I have friends to motivate me to help me to relax just calm down […] motivating myself helps me to uhm be positive to keep calm uhm and stay positive even though I make a lot of mistakes and my marks aren't always that good just try to help myself.

Some students who have been able to study Spanish for almost two years kept their levels of motivation high by constantly remembering the reasons why they were learning Spanish. Below is an answer provided by one student regarding his language learning goals.

> **Interviewer:** Strategy 56. Why is it so important that you are using it so much?
>
> **Participant 8c:** Uh I want to be a diplomat so I do plan out my language goals and stuff like that because to be a diplomat you have to be fairly comfortable with the language and yeas so I do definitely plan it even helps me to improve more because if I have a plan or I aim the bar low and then I just do more so it does help me a lot.

A fourth distinguishing characteristic seems to be related to the reported use of metacognitive strategies. As mentioned in chapter four, the statistically significant

reported use of metacognitive strategies was a distinguishable characteristic of the group of students who completed first year and continued studying Spanish in the second year. In this respect, the student below reports that he makes use of flash cards to learn new words, and monitors and evaluates his learning by testing himself on how much he has actually learnt (metacognitive strategies).

> **Interviewer:** How do you use, in what context does strategy number 11 help you?
>
> **Participant 2b:** It's the easiest way for me to learn vocab vocabulary and the meanings and to also uhm test myself on how much I actually do know and don't know and I go over and over and over it again and then I can say ok I don't know this I'm not grasping this let me go back and research it more

Other students have reported that they know what type of learners they are (e.g. visual) and how they can understand things quicker and better. For instance, the student below does art and is able to make a mental picture of the words he wants to memorise.

> **Interviewer:** Oh ok strategy number 6 has undergone an increase from 2 to 5 why is it so?
>
> **Participant 8b:** Yeah uhm I'm a I'm a very visual person so when I try to make a mental picture of it I understand it quicker so ja that's how I use like uhm cause I do draw I do art and stuff like that so ja I'm a
>
> **Interviewer:** But why you were not doing so much that thing in 2014, and now more in 2015?
>
> **Participant 8b:** I think last year we had a lot of modules and stuff like that so there wasn't really a lot of time for me to take my time with Spanish and stuff like that so this year I've only got four modules and I think I have more time with it

However, it is interesting to note that although he was an art student and probably especially gifted in making mental images, his time constraints in first year did not allow him to use this strategy as he would have wanted. This shows that time constraints can influence – and perhaps determine – the use of learning strategies and the reported perceived use thereof.

Planning achievable goals is also a very important aspect in metacognition. Sometimes the possibility of reaching these goals serves as a motivation to remain committed. For some students, the idea of living overseas and being able to communicate in a foreign country helps them to remain focused or motivated. When discussing the setting of language learning goals, a student made the following remarks:

Interviewer: Strategy 56, you're using it very high for two consecutive years. Why?

Participant 8b: Uh obviously my my eventual goal after studying this I do want to speak Spanish fluently maybe even live in Spain or in a Latin American country so for me I have to plan goals in order to get to that level of speaking the language.

5.4.2.2 EXPOSURE TO THE LANGUAGE

For some students, it is slightly easier to participate in out-of-class events where the language is spoken.

Interviewer: Oh ok question 26 has also experienced an increase why?

Participant 8b: Yeah uhm I've recently ok I've always had one friend that speaks Spanish but recently I've started working at this other place where I ref I officiate the games and I've met more Spanish people so I'm trying to communicate a lot with them so ja

When discussing the extent to which students take responsibility for finding opportunities to practise the new language, it is encouraging to note that some students do not miss an opportunity, but rather try to make the most of it. Some students who found Spanish speakers try to establish "connections" more frequently with them.

Interviewer: Ok there have been an increase in the reported use of strategy 60. Why have you reported an increase in the use of this strategy?

Participant 8b: I think it's helped me a lot as I say I do try to communicate with my new Spanish friends I do text them in the new language cause then I find out that like I can write in different ways and stuff like that I can speak in different ways obviously you learn their slang and ja you know stuff like that yeah

When discussing how to contact people that speak Spanish over the Internet, it was noticed that some students do not know how to do it.

Interviewer: Have you made effort to get to know them or…

Participant 2c: I don't know how to like how do you that's the thing I don't know what platforms you know I don't know what places to go to how to get into contact with someone also I feel like it's very awkward cause it's like hi they speak Spanish it's very awkward a little bit.

5.4.2.3 PERCEIVED DIFFERENCES BETWEEN FIRST AND SECOND YEAR

Although not all students commented and drew comparisons between their language learning experiences of first and second year, some students did and highlighted the following aspects:

Unlike in the first year, one of the distinguishing characteristics of the second year is that the medium of instruction is only Spanish, which has some repercussions as the one mentioned below by one student.

> **Interviewer:** Question number 17. You have increased in that use of this strategy. Why?
>
> **Participant 2b:** I think it's because our lecturer speaks a lot more Spanish. So because [the lecturer] speaks a lot more Spanish, I can hear the way the words are pronounced better and then I can imitate it much more easily and then we're getting exposed to much more to audio as well so.

As the second-year lecturer only speaks in Spanish, learners are indirectly encouraged to develop their listening skills which in turn affects the reported use of the strategy that deals with the imitation of how words are pronounced.

Another difference is that the small classroom setting of second year is perceived by some students as less intimidating than the large classroom setting of first year. As a result of this, it has been reported that the new classroom setting allows some students to get to know each other better and ask for help when needed.

> **Interviewer:** Ok, for [strategy] 71 uh do you have friends that you study with or people that you trust in class?
>
> **Participant 9b:** Yes I think more this year than last year last year I think because the classes were big so I didn't know a lot of people
>
> **Interviewer:** So would you say that because of that you are using more strategy 71?
>
> **Participant 9b:** Yes
>
> **Interviewer:** Ok but let's move on to strategy 72 you also increased on this strategy use why?
>
> **Participant 9b:** I think because this year I'm a bit more confident in asking for help than last year

As for creating associations between new material and what students already know, it was reported that the large amount of information given in the second year prevented some students from creating associations. Some students perceived that the associations, instead of helping, were making them a little confused. This was

possibly happening because the associations were not linear (monosemic) anymore, involving concrete and simple words or expressions, but rather abstract and involving polysemic structures.

> **Interviewer:** Why have you reported a decrease in the use of strategy 1?
>
> **Participant 2b:** Uhm usually because now that we're in 2nd year we get so much new information to learn that I just sort of write notes and I don't really create associations anymore I feel that the content is a lot more and that creating associations sometimes make me a little confused and so I will then obviously try and do it in a different way.
>
> **[Later on]**
>
> **Interviewer:** Oh, ok. Why [you don't physically act out the word anymore]?
>
> **Participant 2b:** I don't know uhm… in 1st year the words were very simple that we were learning so to run or to like, to hit or something that would have been, I suppose, easier, but this year maybe they're more complex so I suppose it changes

The data also showed that there seems to be an interesting difference between studying the language and using it for communicative purposes. It appears that first-year learners are more inclined to study the language, whereas second-year students are more inclined not only to study the language, but to use it for communicative purposes. The shift of emphasis from studying only to studying and using the language is necessary and crucial in the development of language proficiency. The student below reflects on this when he acknowledges that to get comfortable (meaning more confident) in learning and using the new language, he needs to practise it more.

> **Participant 2b:** Well we've set up… my friends and I… we go to… we meet up and then we speak Spanish together… it helps to practice speaking because we do a lot of reading and practice in class, but uhm to actually speak the language and to get comfortable with it you need to practice it more. So, we just… we do that more often.

How do students perceive both the first-year course and the second-year semester courses? Towards the end of the second semester, a student's perception was that the focus had shifted from vocabulary to grammar.

> **Participant 3c:** I started listing the new verb groups and nouns that I use in previous semesters with the new work because now everything is focusing more on grammar than vocabulary so I have to continually refresh my vocabulary.
>
> **Interviewer:** Oh, you have noticed a progression from vocabulary to grammar?
>
> **Participant 3c:** Yes.

Interviewer: Oh ok. So you are more aware of the grammar…

Participant 3c: I am more aware of how important it is.

A normal developmental progression that occurs between first year and second year is that the students' expansion of vocabulary in tandem with an increasing knowledge of verb tenses and grammatical structures seem to enable students to start thinking in the new language. Nevertheless, due to the lack of exposure to and interaction with Spanish speaking people, just thinking in Spanish seems to be an asocial, isolated experience.

Interviewer: Oh ok thank you strategy 25 reads 'I try to think in the new language' so you've reported an increase on that strategy

Participant 6b: I think it's simply cause I know more now cause I'm 2nd year cause it uhm I have more vocabulary and I know more tenses so it's easier to think in it the language now

Interviewer: And do you do it often?

Participant 6b: Yes especially when I'm when I'm bored and I have nothing else to do then I try to like think of conversations I would have with someone in Spanish…

In addition to this, students have also reported that they feel more confident and comfortable to take risks in the second year than in the first year.

Interviewer: Ok, ok, question 67 you have increased from average to top high use so why is it so?

Participant 7b: Uhm because in 1st year you felt you feel very self-conscious you don't want to speak the language you feel that you're going to make many mistakes then I realised but that's what language is all about the oral exam and everything you have to do that otherwise you're never going to learn it it's not just it doesn't help just to read it so it just I want to speak the language and get better in it so I have to speak even though I make mistakes so

Some students have reported that they did not want to speak the language in the first year because they felt they were going to make many mistakes, and only realised in the second year that "that's what language is all about." Although reading in the new language was regarded as essential to expand one's own vocabulary, some students have recently started to realise that to get further in the language learning process, they need to use it, speak it and practise more.

When discussing the need to say or write expressions in the new language, some students reported having a growing interest in practising the language.

Interviewer: Why is this so important for you now and not in the past?

> **Participant 2b:** Because I realise that I need to learn to practice the language verbally so that I can become more comfortable when speaking to people so I want to be able to answer questions in Spanish in class but in order for me to do that I need to be comfortable and not get so nervous so I want to practice as much as I can.
>
> **[Other student]**
>
> **Interviewer:** And why did you report before [last semester] low use of strategy 16, and now [second semester] is higher?
>
> **Participant 5c:** Uh I think it was I was a bit too shy to say the things mostly so now I'm I've decided to stop being so shy and need to actually practise.

However, when the second student specified later on what he meant by "practising", it was noticed that for this student "practising" referred to an isolated experience that did not necessarily involve other interlocutors, and was an activity done on his own because the student knew no one outside the classroom to speak the language with.

> **Participant 5c:** Uhm the writing [of] personal notes. I write to myself even when I'm writing another language then I make notes in Spanish so that I can practice my Spanish while getting information about the other language.
>
> **[Later on, when discussing about initiating conversations in Spanish]**
>
> **Interviewer:** Ok 23 you've decreased the use of 23 why are you using it less?
>
> **Participant 5c:** Uhm I I just haven't had anyone to talk to yeah.

It has also been reported that as students develop proficiency, new interests and goals emerged in their learning journey towards the end of the second year. Some students started to indicate that they wanted to develop fluency in the language.

> **Interviewer:** Question, uh, strategy 56. You reported middle use in the first semester but now you reported high use of it. So, why has strategy 56 become so important to you?
>
> **Participant 1c:** Because I really want to become fluent by the end of the course and it's really important to me I like to do finish everything that I do and I like to do finish it well so that's why I just I started being serious about uh ja structuring my goals and stuff.

A major characteristic that seems to be a distinguishing feature from second-year students is the realisation that students need to learn the language more independently and that they should now try to understand the language without translating it word-for-word into their own language.

> **Interviewer:** Strategy 37. Why is this so important to you?

> **Participant 5c:** Uh it's to learn the language more independently so that you don't have to rely on your own language to understand so you to learn it better.
>
> **Interviewer:** Do you find that this is becoming one of your major concerns now that you want to understand the language itself better?
>
> **Participant 5c:** Yes.

A growing interest in learning about the culture or the places where the language is spoken was also reported. The increasing proficiency that some students started to enjoy made them entertain the possibility of further studying in a Spanish-speaking country.

> **Interviewer:** Uh strategy 79, it looks like you have increased the use of 79 tell me why is it now becoming more important than before?
>
> **Participant 4c:** Well as I'm learning more of the language I feel it's also important to learn more about the culture uhm I'm hoping I'm going to see if it is a possibility to do my honours overseas either in Spain or in a South American country uhm so you know I'd like to and I'm mean because I'm learning the language I feel it's you should just learn the culture as well it's they come hand in hand that's not separated for me that's a culture and the language together.

An interesting progression of how students' perception of some strategies changed over time was found in connection with strategy 47, which refers to the making up of new words when the right ones are not known. During the first semester and even during the second semester some students made the following remarks.

> **Participant 1b:** I just don't think it's going to be helpful to make up new words if I don't understand a word it will just lead me into the wrong direction I guess
>
> **Participant 8b:** No, I just don't think it's rational to try make up words for yourself so I rather like go into a dictionary and look for the word itself yeah
>
> **Participant 4c:** Uhm I'd rather not make up words uhm I'd rather learn the correct words and uhm instead of making them up otherwise it's not correct.

However, during the second semester, a slight change of perception was noticed in respect of this strategy. Some students started to think that it was perhaps worthwhile to make up new words in order to communicate fluently when needed.

> **Interviewer:** Uh strategy 47. It shows that you've increased the use of 47. Why is it that it was not relevant to you and now it is becoming more relevant?
>
> **Participant 7c:** Because I still want to say something and I don't always know the right word and I uhm so I just say a word and then if it's wrong then someone can help me to correct it but usually it's right because there are a lot of similarities in English and in Spanish so you can just…

Interviewer: Guess?

Participant 7c: Ja, exactly. My friend, also in Spanish, uses it a lot and it works for her.

Finally, it was also reported that some second-year students stopped practising the sounds or alphabet of the new language because they felt confident that by then they knew it well. This could mean that as students become more proficient in the language we should not always expect increasing frequency of strategy use for all strategy items. The reported use of some strategies seem to vary according to the respective stage of language proficiency.

Interviewer: Strategy number 20 is becoming less relevant to you, why?

Participant 6c: Uhm also probably because I feel more confident that I know the alphabet, I think.

5.4.2.4 FACTORS AFFECTING STRATEGY CHOICE AND FREQUENCY OF USE

As discussed in chapter two, the literature review indicates that different and multiple factors affect students' strategy choice and reported frequency of strategy use. Far from presenting a comprehensive list of all these factors, what follows is a presentation of the findings in this study after careful analysis of the qualitative data.

Firstly, it was noticed that student's choice and perceived frequency of strategy use was greatly influenced by the lecturer. Recommendations and advice given by the lecturer were reported to have a direct impact on the way students approached texts in the target language.

Interviewer: You have decreased using strategy 42 is there specific reason for that?

Participant 2b: Ja again that's because our lecturer said we shouldn't need, we don't need to know every single word in the passage especially if we're learning new things with new vocab. We should take out maybe the things that you find are the main verbs things that come up a lot but ja I think it will take up too much time.

The lecturer's way of teaching was also reported as affecting the use of cognitive strategies, strategies such as the one that involves the mental processes when taking notes.

Interviewer: Ok there's a decrease in the use of strategy 32

Participant 4b: A decrease… this year I barely take notes in class last year I took notes almost every single day I filled up a book actually the whole of last year uhm

Interviewer: And why you are not doing that this year?

Participant 4b: Uhm this year uhm last year our lecturer actually wrote a lot on the board so I copied down what [the lecturer] wrote and I felt that helped a lot because you're reading it and you're copying it so I felt like I was learning a lot more whereas uhm our lecturer this year [the lecturer] doesn't write on the board we just do we just uh it's not really notes we just work from the book so I feel like we don't do any extra work and if [the lecturer] does explain something [the lecturer] will explain it to us orally [the lecturer] doesn't explain it on the board.

Interviewer: Which of the two you feel more comfortable with or much more meaningful for your learning?

Participant 4b: 1st year when [the lecturer] wrote on the board I took notes because I have it's almost like a my help book even even to this day I go back and I look cause [the lecturer] explains it and how to use it and I find it very very useful so.

This student also reported a decrease in the frequency of organising his language notebook to record important language information because the lecturer of that semester was only using the exercise book in class.

Interviewer: 55 there's also a decrease

Participant 4b: uh that's also once again because I'm not taking notes this year we're only working from the exercise book so I don't have any notes to arrange.

However, the impact of a lecturer that does not use the whiteboard for explanations is not the same on all students. In some cases, it caused students to report a decrease in the frequency use of certain strategies, but in other cases, it appeared to force them to use other strategies and report an increase of their frequency use.

Interviewer: Ok, strategy 32 you are also using this [strategy] a lot why?

Participant 9b: Because I just find it easier to look at my notes than the textbook

Interviewer: Ok

Participant 9b: Yes

Interviewer: Do you write a lot of notes in class?

Participant 9b: Yes

Interviewer: Ok ok does the lecturer writes a lot in the white board?

Participant 9b: No, not any note this year

Interviewer: How do you make your notes from?

Participant 9b: Uh I just make notes from what [the lecturer] is saying

Interviewer: Oh, ok.

Some students also reported that sometimes it was difficult for them to learn from their mistakes because the lecturer was sometimes not capable of explaining clearly what the error was and why.

> **Interviewer:** 63 is also decreased
>
> **Participant 4b:** well I do still learn from my mistakes I think just not maybe as often whereas last year I was a lot more active in the class and sometimes I find I don't really understand what the mistake is for example I'll ask the lecturer but uhm I won't… [the lecturer] explains but I still won't fully understand so it's, it's the not understanding of the mistakes ja […] I feel that when it is explained I don't understand why I made the mistake or [the lecturer] will say it's just the way it is but we'll do a lot more to practice so then you just need to learn it so I feel I don't actually understand what the mistake is or why it's a certain way

When talking about how students memorise words by establishing relationships between new words and already learnt words (strategy 9), it was found that the type of material used in class could also affect the reported use of some strategies.

> **Interviewer:** Ok, you have reported a decrease in the use of strategy number 9. Why is it so?
>
> **Participant 8b:** Uhm I just think that with that uhm I just think more it's more of a mental thing for me because last year we did a lot of work where we had to write things down and this year we've got like the books and stuff like that so we're not writing that many words new words down so I think that's why I'm not using that as much as I was last year.

The lecturer's attitude towards the Hispanic culture also influenced both strategy choice and reported frequency of strategy use regarding the reported use of social strategies. The analysis of the data showed that some students were capable of perceiving the extent to which the lecturer appreciated, loved or engaged with the Hispanic culture in general, and in particular with his/her home country.

> **Interviewer:** Ok, strategy number 80, there is an increase as well
>
> **Participant 3b:** Yes uhm because [the lecturer] wasn't like a Spanish born person you can't really expect [the lecturer] to talk to you with the love of the culture so now when you talk to [other lecturer] or when we talk to you, you talk about your country with such passion like you actually listen to what you feel about it because the only thing we know about your country is just stereotypes so like Peruvian we all expect the crazy drugs and stuff and then like with the Mexicans we always expect like the sombrero and the moustache but now when you listen about how you explain your country and how you feel about things and like how your country or your countrymen feel about things it's very interesting.

Whether the lecturer does this consciously or not, the students were able to perceive the love for the culture that a lecturer seemingly displayed, which in turn may indirectly affect the extent to which students approach the learning of the culture of the places where the target language is spoken.

Secondly, as students develop command of the language, some students reported using certain strategies more frequently and other strategies less frequently. For instance, the student below reported an increase of the frequency of strategy use related to reading for pleasure in the new language because his newly acquired broadened vocabulary allowed him to read more fluently than in the past.

> **Interviewer:** Yeah, there is also an increase in strategy 27
>
> **Participant 4b:** Uh yes because now that uh my vocabulary is a bit more broadened I feel I can understand better so I don't have to sit and I don't feel like I have to … I don't feel I have to sit with a dictionary and look at every single word I understand the general idea of the passage.

For this student, the activity of reading no longer required the looking up of every word in the dictionary or glossary (strategy 31) which implies that he probably decreased the frequency of use of dictionaries when reading in Spanish, while at the same time increasing the frequency of reading for pleasure (strategy 27).

In the second semester, the same student reported that the expansion of his vocabulary made him consult the dictionary less frequently when he was reading texts in Spanish as he was starting to read without looking up every unfamiliar word.

> **Interviewer:** Ok strategy 42 has experienced change it was to use and now it's low use why is it not as relevant to you as it was in first semester?
>
> **Participant 4c:** There are less unfamiliar words now because as I said my vocabulary I think is expanding so I have to look up unfamiliar words a bit less and a bit less as I'm going on.

In some cases, it was noted that advice given by the lecturer could also influence not only the frequency of reported use of strategies, but also the choice students made when choosing the right strategy to use.

> **Interviewer:** Ok question 59 you reported a very high use why is it so?
>
> **Participant 8b:** Yeah uhm uh our lecturer always tells us that it's not necessarily important to understand every single word uh in like the context maybe it's a listening comprehension but if you get the the overall idea of it that means you are progressing with the language so it's better to understand the message in all instead of listening word for word ja

The data also showed an indirect way of influencing frequency of strategy use. A student reported that being exposed to two different accents confused him to some extent which caused him to report a decrease in the frequency of strategy use with respect to imitating the way native speakers spoke.

> **Interviewer:** [You reported that strategy] 17 also experience a decrease in use why?
>
> **Participant 2c**: Oh uhm I don't know I feel like because now we've got [one lecturer] who speaks with like a Mexican accent and then [another lecturer] who has the Argentinean accent so it kinda confuses me sometimes so I'll just say it the way the pronunciation will highlight it then I suppose ja.

As discussed in the literature review, previous learning experiences in different contexts can also influence strategy choice and frequency of strategy use. In agreement with this, it was observed that students seemed reluctant to use what they had never used in the past.

> Interviewer: Ok strategy 11 (flash cards) as well seemingly has not been important to you why?
>
> Participant 4c: Uhm I don't use flashcards when I uhm when I study it's just never used one of those things.

As students developed proficiency in the language, the expansion of the vocabulary appeared to indirectly cause some students to stop placing new words into groups of other similar words, not only because of the large vocabulary they had learnt so far, but also because some words fell into different groups and that confused them.

> **Interviewer:** I see that the importance that you give to strategy 3 is decreasing. Why is it becoming not so important to you?
>
> **Participant 6c:** Uhm probably because I know more words now. I mean I think so it's not necessary to place them in groups. […] Uhm I suppose because there are so many words now that it would be difficult to place them in groups and also because to me if you uhm have to group words now they will fall into many different groups one word in like 6 different groups so that would be a bit confusing.

Similarly, when discussing the reported low frequency of strategy use with respect to how students noticed their own language errors, a student made the following remark that also showed clearly how proficiency in the language seems to affect frequency use of certain strategies.

> **Interviewer:** 62 you decreased why 62 is becoming less important to you now?

Participant 8c: I don't think uhm its becoming less important I think I'm making less mistakes when speaking so it's not a thing of I'm not focusing less on it I just think that I'm becoming much better with the language.

Classmates can also influence each other in strategy choice and frequency of strategy use. When discussing what students do to remember a word by making a clear image of it or by drawing a picture, one student asserted that he tried a new strategy just because a classmate told him about the benefits of that particular strategy.

Interviewer: Ok ok what made you start doing this?

Participant 7c: Uhm I studied with my friend a lot and she used it and uhm once she told me she used it and she said it works so I tried it and it worked [also] for me.

Reported strategy use is also affected by changes within the surrounding environment of the students. For instance, a student reported that he had to stop practising the language outside the classroom because his Argentinian friends moved back to their country, and because of that he reported a lower frequency of strategy use.

Interviewer: Strategy 75. You indicated that you decreased its use. Why is it not so important as before?

Participant 8c: Uh the classes are smaller and two of my Spanish friends that I used to speak with they moved back to Argentina so it's not a case of I don't want to it's a case of not…

Interviewer: You don't have the opportunities…

Participant 8c: Ja I don't have the same opportunities as last year.

5.4.2.5 How students expand their vocabulary

In a context where it is very rare to find opportunities to be exposed to the language and learn vocabulary subconsciously, students make use of different strategies to memorise words and expressions. The following student described what worked best for him.

Interviewer: Why is it that you were you using strategy 11 low last year and now you are using it very high. Why?

> **Participant 3b:** Uhm I found an app that makes the flashcard for me I just enter the information and I was a bit lazy so now I have something that makes it for me and flashcards help a lot
>
> **Interviewer:** Ok, how do they help you?
>
> **Participant 3b:** Uh I used to do drama so to learn the lines without reading them all so then you like make it little instant connection instead of like having to sit with the dictionary definition.

Other students reported that going through the prescribed readings expanded their vocabulary.

> **Interviewer:** Ok there's also an increase uh for strategy use in referring to the 42
>
> **Participant 4b:** Oh yes uhm once again it's also to do with vocabulary and uhm if I yes it's just because I know more words now in 2nd year I feel that obviously having done Spanish for a year already and uhm the level has obviously upped as well and the the prescribed readings that we're given are not difficult but they use so many new words as well so just from those in class I feel like I learn so many words so just from reading the prescribed readings at home I feel that I've learnt so many more new words so I feel I don't have to look up as much like little words I feel I know them now

However, as students reached the end of their second year, some of them perceived that the learning of vocabulary had become more complicated, not necessarily because of the increasing amount of words, but rather because they had noticed that it did not consist of simple, mostly monosemic words anymore.

> **Interviewer:** Ok because … it's easier for you to remember good thank you you've shown there's a decrease in strategy number 5 why?
>
> **Participant 2c:** Ja… uhm I think it's because the vocabulary now is getting a lot more difficult so it's not just simple words anymore and I think now because they're longer and also they do show more similarities to English words I don't have to use rhyming to remember it.

As students developed proficiency, it was noticed that in order to memorise they established connections between the new language and their own languages to better learn vocabulary and make sense of it.

> **Interviewer:** Ok, 36, high use for two consecutive times, why?
>
> **Participant 2c:** Uh because it's easy it's easier uhm because sometimes the root word is the same as it would be in English and then you put like a [-mente] it means like that word with a –ly at the end you know like so that's how I learn the new vocabulary and make sense of it and it sticks in my brain longer.

5.4.2.6 LACK OF OPPORTUNITIES TO PRACTISE THE LANGUAGE

The majority of students stated that they did not have opportunities to practise the language outside the classroom, but there were a few cases in which opportunity crossed the path of a student.

> **Participant 3b:** Uhm my brother's friend from Argentina is now living in South Africa so I talk a lot with him and he uses a lot of hand gestures so I can guess the meaning so now I built my vocabulary up a bit cause he's very accommodating in speaking with me.

When discussing the opportunities to practise with a native language speaker, some students reported that they knew nobody besides the lecturer.

> **Interviewer:** Ok ok [strategy] 77 you decrease quite a big number, minus 3, the use of this strategy
>
> **Participant 9b:** Uhm… because I don't usually speak with a native speaker

Other students expressed similar statements, but indicated that they practised with their own classmates.

> **Interviewer:** Do you have friends that you WhatsApp to in Spanish?
>
> **Participant 2c:** Yeah, yeah
>
> **Interviewer:** How did you contact them?
>
> **Participant 2c:** No just my classmates I don't know anyone who's actually from a Spanish speaking country.

Thus, for some students, the learning of the language was an isolated experience. As reported by the student below, some did not have a language learning partner. This was not necessarily by choice, but usually due to circumstances as the majority of students did not continue with Spanish after the first year.

> **Interviewer:** Oh there's a huge decrease from 4 to nothing for strategy 76
>
> **Participant 4b:** Uh 76 uh well uhm last year there were uhm a lot a lot more people in the class so some of my friends didn't continue studying Spanish this year so I don't have as many like friends to actually you know converse with and what not and also last year the tutorials were compulsory and we did a lot more interaction there so I'd always have someone that I'd sit next to and I'd be able to talk with him there it was always the same person whereas this year the tutorials are more just as a tutorial to help you out and uhm they're very small and so ja I don't really have a language learning partner it's just my people in class yes

In the second semester, the learning of Spanish was still an asocial experience that happened when some students studied on their own. In two different moments of the interview a student made the following comments.

> **[Moment 1: when discussing about how the student overcomes limitations in speaking and writing with Spanish-speaking people]**
>
> **Interviewer:** Do you have or have you had the opportunities to be in front of a native Spanish speaker?
>
> **Participant 4c:** Uh besides [the lecturer] uhm when I was in Israel a few years ago I lived with Colombians so they spoke a lot of Spanish but it was…
>
> **Interviewer:** But then you were not studying Spanish at the time so it meant not too much to you, didn't it?
>
> **Participant 4c:** Yes so aside from the lecturer, no, no native Spanish speakers.
>
> **[Moment 2: when discussing about having a regular language learner partner]**
>
> **Interviewer:** Uh… strategy 76 doesn't mean too much to you. Why is this not so important to you?
>
> **Participant 4c:** Uhm it's I don't know we just go to class and then we do what we do in class and then I go home and I'll work on my own so I don't really have…
>
> **Interviewer:** Do you work also on your own on other subjects?
>
> **Participant 4c:** Uhm well for example in international relations we did we just did a big group project, but English is on our own as well, and I prefer working on my own as well.

After almost two years of studying Spanish, some students reported that they were still not in contact with native speakers of the language.

> **Interviewer:** Tell me do you have friends that you regularly speak to in Spanish?
>
> **Participant 7c:** Yes, yes.
>
> **Interviewer:** Are they native speakers or friends that are also studying Spanish?
>
> **Participant 7c:** Also studying Spanish yes.
>
> **Interviewer:** Tell me… Do you know of native speakers that are around you - friends they are native speakers?
>
> **Participant 7c:** No.

Although some students reported that they were working together with other language learners to practise, review and share information, the issue of not having access to native speakers still remained a challenge.

> **Interviewer:** Yeah ok strategy number 75. You reported an increase. Tell me what is happening there?

Participant 9c: I think I just gained confidence to speak to other learners.

Interviewer: Who are the other learners here, your classmates or other students?

Participant 9c: My classmates, just classmates.

Interviewer: Ok. Do you know of native speakers that can talk with you?

Participant 9c: No.

5.4.2.7 STUDENTS HELP EACH OTHER AND PRACTISE WITH EACH OTHER

Due to the fact that there are not many people that speak Spanish who students could practise the language with, it was reported that students met with their own classmates to speak in Spanish.

> **Participant 3b:** Uh, yes. My… like, the friends in my class… We decided to get together like twice a week to spend like half an hour just talking about things in Spanish so we would like decide the day before today we're talking about say the 'conquistadores' and then we would like prepare and speak about it so we're not caught off guard every time with the orals.

Sometimes the weaknesses of one student are covered by the skills of another and vice versa. Some students knew their strengths and came closer to other students to improve their language learning experience or language achievements. When discussing having a regular language learning partner, a student mentioned the following:

Interviewer: There's also an increase on strategy 76

Participant 5b: Yeah me and [my friend], we always do our orals together because he's very shy but his grammar is perfect and I'm not as shy but my grammar isn't perfect so I would help him out if he can't improvise on a word and then he would correct my grammar for me if I make a mistake so we work well together

Interviewer: Ok synergy

Participant 5b: Yeah synergy we work very well together

Learning a FL can be a very stressful challenge that can become lighter and more enjoyable if students share their attitudes and feelings concerning the language learning process with others.

Interviewer: Ok yeah, [strategy] 71 you have increased the use of that strategy

> **Participant 5b:** Uh yeah it has increased uhm because there's a lot more stress this year I think so I've just started talking to one of my friends and it does help it helps to relieve stress to some degree

Some students relieved stress by helping each other and working together. This is something that does not happen overnight, but rather as a consequence of getting involved in class activities.

> **Interviewer:** Strategy 71, you reported a high use 4 and now 5. So, why is 71 helping you so much?
>
> **Participant 3c:** I think because when I came to varsity I didn't have any friends and then in the Spanish class we got really close because you start doing orals together and presentations and stuff so you get really close and you become friends so now that we're all going through the same thing we can kind like trustworthy talk to each other about this is getting real like we need to go study now like this is getting really difficult like I'm not the only one who didn't understand in class today right, so I think that's kinda where the conversation goes and we're like ja we think [the lecturer] said this and no but I think [the lecturer] said this and this and this is where like miscommunications and stuff get cleared up.
>
> **Interviewer:** So would you say that your horizontal relations with your classmates boost up your learning process?
>
> **Participant 3c:** Yes, it does. Especially like just before class just a quick round what are we supposed to do this week and…

5.4.2.8 THINGS THAT DEMOTIVATE STUDENTS

One of the things that demotivates students is not having the opportunity to practise the language with other speakers outside the classroom. When discussing the possibility of attending or participating in out-of-class events where Spanish is spoken, it was noticed that for some students, this was not possible.

> **Interviewer:** Oh ok question 26 you're not using it at all in two consecutive years you rank it the lowest why?
>
> **Participant 9b:** I don't know I just don't know any people out of class who speak Spanish …uhm

The data showed that setting unreachable goals could also be a demotivating factor. It was noticed during the interviews that something that is generally regarded as a positive tool can be perceived as something that can make the students disappointed with themselves. When discussing how a student planned his goals, he mentioned something that affected his emotional or affective status.

> **Participant 2b:** I think i'm it's a way of me managing my feelings so because I feel that I'm not one of the best in the class I don't want to be like I'm going to be the best in the class whereas I should be saying I'm going to do my best and if I set goals and I don't reach them I feel like I'll be too disappointed so I'll just try to do my best in everything that I do and improve on that so but I don't think that I'm setting goals for me personally it does more damage than it would to make motivate me ja

This shows that setting unreachable goals can be more harmful than not setting goals at all. The problem does not lay in setting or not setting goals, but rather in not knowing, in practical terms, what is reachable and achievable.

Another thing that demotivates students is the perception that learning a FL is more difficult in second year than in first year.

> **Interviewer:** Ok there's a slight decrease in the use of strategy 66, so why is it happening?
>
> **Participant 2b:** I think the language is getting very difficult so it's like frustrating sometimes so I just… I just have to work harder I suppose then that's how I'll get through it, I suppose.

In some cases, students lost interest in studying Spanish and found it difficult to plan because the lecturer's way of teaching did not match the learning style of the learner.

> **Interviewer:** [As for] strategy 57…
>
> **Participant 4b:** Is there a decrease as well? I think it just maybe has to do uhm I don't want to not I don't want to blame the lecturer but I feel I've lost interest in Spanish but uhm I like organising things so for example last year in class I'd write down everything quickly so I'm reading it and I'm copying it down and then I'd go home and rewrite it nicely using colours because once again I'm very visual uhm so I find uhm that also helped me plan and I could see I had in my book uhm how far I was getting in the language whereas now it's just really day to day and I'll read the odd article online but I find it more difficult to plan where I am in the language and my the learning process yes

When students perceive that they are not progressing, they feel demotivated to evaluate their general progress that they have made in learning the language. That was exactly what happened to one student.

> **Interviewer:** [In respect of strategy 64] you have decreased from 5 to 3. Is there a reason for that?
>
> **Participant 4b:** Uhm it's also I don't feel that I'm making a lot of progress so that's why I also don't feel the need to really evaluate it. I don't know.
>
> **Interviewer:** There is also a decrease in the strategy 66

Participant 4b: Uhm I think I've lost a bit of the once again just being completely honest but last year I had a lot more uh

Interviewer: Enthusiasm?

Participant 4b: Yes, enthusiasm. That's exactly it a lot more enthusiasm whereas this year I feel that it's changed a lot and once again I don't want to blame the lecturer it's just it's a different teaching style maybe which doesn't really suit not ja suit me so I feel that I don't try and participate as much so I've lost a bit of the enthusiasm our lecturer last year was always pushing us and asking us and you know uhm [the lecturer] connected a lot more with us so whereas this lecturer is a bit uh not aloof but doesn't connect with us [but] is purely our lecturer whereas our lecturer last year would uhm I don't I don't really know how to explain it but I've lost a bit of the enthusiasm that's mainly it yes

5.4.3 Discussion of the quantitative and qualitative findings

One of the first findings yielded by the data analyses was that students' grades were significantly higher in 2015 than in previous years. After researching the matter and conducting some interviews, it was found that the reason why the grades were significantly higher in 2015 was because the new Spanish lecturer had been very gracious when marking students' work. No reasonable evidence was found to suggest that the research process *per se* was artificially raising students' marks or improving their FL learning performance.

The data analysis also showed that the Cronbach's Alpha value of reliability for the compensation category was low in both semesters. A possible explanation for this is that the resulting low coefficient of reliability could be attributed to an apparent change in perception of the role that some compensation strategies play when speaking or writing to proficient speakers. This was consistent with the statistical analysis of the data (see Table 5.15) and the results of the Mann-Whitney test that found statistically significant differences with respect to compensation strategies across first-year and second-year students. This was also consistent with the qualitative data analysis (see section 5.4.2.3) that showed that some students had reported a slight change of perception with respect to a compensation strategy item and had started to think that it was perhaps worthwhile to make up new words in order to communicate fluently when needed.

Furthermore, the fact that a statistically significant negative correlation was found between the self-reported perception of strategy use of compensation strategies and the final marks of Spanish in the second semester seemed to indicate that students with higher grades apparently hold a negative perception towards compensation strategies or an incomplete view of the role that compensation strategies can play when communicating with others. This is something that could also be linked to the fact that a considerable number of second-year students did not know proficient or native speakers to practise the language with and thus had no need to make use of these types of strategies. Their interaction was primarily with the lecturer and mainly concerned with correctness and accuracy in order to earn the highest possible marks.

Statistically significant differences were found with respect to three strategy items: (1) reading a story or dialogue several times until it is understood; (2) watching audio-visual material or listening to the radio in the new language; and (3) finding a different way to express an idea when one cannot think of the correct expression. In all cases the reported perceived frequency use was higher as students became more proficient in the language. However, higher proficiency does not necessarily translate into higher perceived use of learning strategies. (For further discussion on the role strategies play in learning and how the perceived use of strategies changes over time, see section 7.2.)

As for exposure to the language, the analysis of the data showed that the majority of students who did not have friends or relatives that spoke Spanish learnt the language in isolation. They revised their notebooks and textbooks, they listened to the audio material provided by the textbooks and read aloud to themselves. For them the learning of the language appeared to be an asocial experience that mostly occurred during class time and when the language was studied at home or in the library. There seemed to be an understanding that studying and “practising” the language does not necessarily involve the use of the language for communicative purposes. Watching audio-visual materials and listening to music or radio were apparently regarded as the most advanced and “interactive” activities that some students engaged in outside the classroom. The statistical tests as well as the analysis of the information provided in the interviews pointed out that the increasing level of proficiency correlated with a perceived higher frequency use of activities such as watching audio-visual materials and listening to different types of audio material.

However, the lack of opportunities to engage in authentic conversations with native or proficient Spanish speakers had encouraged a minority of students to associate with each other as a way to counteract the lack of exposure to the language. Small study groups that gathered once a week or every second or third week had emerged and had been reported in the research group. Students regarded these as very useful, but not completely helpful because there was always uncertainty as to whether the language was being used correctly or not.

5.5 CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Comparisons using Oxford's SILL across groups of learners from different levels and at different stages of learning should be made very cautiously. Learners with higher proficiency in the language should not be expected to always report higher frequency of strategy use, but rather differently than lower proficiency learners. This is because some strategies become less useful to them at certain points of their development and other strategies become more relevant to them later.

As for conducting the analysis, in the course of this research, specifically in the analysis of the data of this chapter, it was found that fluctuations at the level of strategy items were not necessarily visible at the level of strategy categories. A useful example to illustrate this can be found in the cognitive strategy category. The significant variation of the reported frequency use of two strategy items was not evident when the average for the whole category was calculated, which represents a loss of rich information. However, when the data from Oxford's SILL was analysed at the strategy item level the picture was different. It was observed that the frequency of use of strategy 20 – that deals with practising the sound of the alphabet – decreased as proficiency in the language increased. Conversely, use of strategy 24 – that deals with watching TV shows and listening to the radio in the new language – increased as proficiency in the language increased. These two changes in strategy use represented normal and expected progressions for students in FL contexts. This is valuable information that would not have been obtained if analyses where only conducted at the category level using the average for the whole category.

In conclusion, after evaluating all the findings, it has become apparent that it could be beneficial for students to be encouraged to form study groups from an early stage because it is very rare to find proficient or native Spanish speakers to practise the

language with. This is valuable because it forces the students to use the language outside of the classroom context, allowing them to engage with the language at a deeper level, which will likely improve their learning experience. However, students need each other not only to practise the language, but also to ensure that their motivation levels are kept high.

6 STUDENTS AT THIRD YEAR: DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

As mentioned in the two previous chapters, this longitudinal study seeks to capture the changes of perceived self-reported use of LLS during three consecutive years. Chapter six – the third and last of three chapters on data collection and analysis – focuses on the group of students that continued participating in the study in 2016.

The purpose of chapter six is also twofold: firstly, to present and analyse the information gathered from third-year students by Oxford's SILL and the qualitative interviews in a systematic and structured way; and secondly, to discuss the findings, taking into account the lenses provided by the literature review and following the methodological steps presented in chapter three. As in the previous two chapters, chapter six starts with the quantitative analysis of the data and then continues with the qualitative analysis thereof.

The last section summarises the findings of the third year and concludes by trying to describe the role that the reported use of LLS plays in learning Spanish as a FL in third year.

As not all students who successfully completed the second year continued studying Spanish the following year, the researched group became smaller and decreased from sixteen to seven participants. Due to the fact that seven participants constituted a very small sample size, all data collected regarding the perceived use of LLS was treated as non-parametric.

6.2 THIRD-YEAR STUDENTS' PROFILES: PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

One of the most significant changes that was noticed throughout the study was the consistent decrease in the number of participants as well as the total number of students registered for the respective Spanish courses.

A preliminary analysis of the data showed that, on the one hand, this decrease was seemingly linked to the fact that the majority (86%) of students who started studying Spanish in the first year reported that they were doing it as an elective module and therefore they were not necessarily required by their academic programmes to continue studying it until the third year. Their main goal – as stated by them in the first year – was to earn the required number of first-year credits and not necessarily to become proficient in the language.

However, on the other hand, the data also showed that in some particular cases what apparently had a significant influence on the students' long-term commitment to study Spanish until the third year was a genuine motivation to become proficient in the language and not necessarily what was required by their specific academic programmes. Table 6.1 shows the change of the number of participants in the study per year of enrolment from 2014 until 2016.

Table 6.1 Number of participants in the study per year of enrolment
Source: Lecturer's records and SPSS

Spanish courses	Participants	Non-participants	Total number of students
2014 annual course SPN101	61	21	**82**
2015 first semester SPN211	17	10	**27**
2015 second semester SPN221	16	9	**25**
2016 first semester SPN311	7	7	**14**
2016 second semester SPN321	7	5	**12**

As shown in Table 6.1, only seven out of the initial sixty-one participants continued and completed the third-year course in 2016. No new participants were added into the researched group after 2014 because one of the main purposes of the study was to investigate the evolution in the use of LLS among students who started as beginners and then continued until the third year.

As for gender composition, the researched group consisted of one male student and six female students. This was consistent with the gender ratios found in all the third-year courses of French, German, Spanish and Portuguese in that year. Nevertheless, no statistical analysis was conducted across gender to avoid the misleading effect of having such a small sample size of male students (one participant), as it limited the statistical power of the analysis.

As for the academic programmes the participants came from, the researched group in the third year consisted of five students pursuing a degree in BA Languages and two students pursuing a degree in International Studies[68].

Finally, those students who successfully completed the first-semester course were expected to reach the B2.1 level by June, and those who successfully completed the second-semester course were expected to reach the B2.2 level[69] by November.

6.3 LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGY USE

As set out in the research plan, Oxford's SILL was used again to investigate changes in the reported perceived frequency use of LLS. Seven students completed the SILL in March 2016 and again in September 2016. The Cronbach's Alpha test was again performed to ensure reliability and internal consistency (see Table 6.2).

Table 6.2 Cronbach's Alpha Reliability test for the SILL
Source: Oxford's SILL in 2016

	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of items in the questionnaire
SPN 311	.971	80
SPN 321	.979	80

[68] Graduates from these two careers normally require a certain level of FL proficiency in order to succeed in their chosen fields.

[69] See the Common European Framework for Languages for further details on these two levels (Council of Europe, 2001:24).

The Cronbach's Alpha values[70] for the two SILL administrations were high (.971 and .979) and very respectable, indicating that the measurement error was minimal. These values were also consistent with the values obtained from previous research studies[71].

The Cronbach's Alpha values of reliability for each of the six strategy categories of the SILL were also calculated. Separate calculations were made for each administration of the SILL during the first and second semester (see Table 6.3).

Table 6.3 Cronbach's Alpha Reliability test for the six strategy categories
Source: Oxford's SILL in 2016

Strategy category	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of items
SPN 311	SPN 311	**SPN 311**
Memory	.910	12 items
Cognitive	.902	28 items
Compensation	.514	8 items
Metacognitive	.888	16 items
Affective	.833	7 items
Social	.757	9 items
SPN 321	SPN 321	**SPN 321**
Memory	.944	12 items
Cognitive	.950	28 items
Compensation	.817	8 items
Metacognitive	.892	16 items
Affective	.752	7 items
Social	.910	9 items

All subcategories (except for the subgroup of compensation in the first semester) showed Cronbach's Alpha values higher than .7 which indicated that the internal consistency of the instrument was acceptable and reliable. The results were consistent with Cronbach's Alpha values obtained in previous studies conducted by Zareva and Fomina (2013:79), Platsidou and Kantaridou (2014:255), Del Ángel Castillo and Gallardo Córdova (2014:709).

6.3.1 Quantitative findings on reported frequency of strategy use

As previously stated, this research was based on the assumption that Oxford's SILL is a reliable instrument to measure self-reported frequency of LLS use, and a useful

[70] Cronbach's alpha values range from 0 to 1. Values at or above .7 are desirable and acceptable.

[71] See Arslan (2014:66), Aydogan and Akbarov (2014:17), Ghafournia (2014:161), Tang and Tian (2015:4) and Risueño et al (2015:138).

tool to classify strategies. In this respect, the researcher agrees with Chamot (2004:15) that learners' mental processing can be studied through self-report, despite two risks: (1) that in some cases students may be inaccurate if they are not truthful when reporting perceived use of LLS, and (2) that learners might not always be fully aware of all the strategies they are using.

As was done in the previous years, the group of participants reported how much they perceived they were using strategies by choosing the value that best matched their perceived frequency on a scale from 1 to 5 for each strategy item of the SILL.

What are the strategies that students perceive as the most frequently used in third year? Table 6.4 reports on the perceived strategies most frequently used by third-year students that started as absolute beginners in 2014. The table shows the top twenty strategies that were perceived and reported with the highest frequency use. "Mean 1" refers to the administration of the SILL in March 2016, and "Mean 2" refers to the administration of the SILL in September 2016.

Table 6.4 Reported strategies most frequently used
Source: Oxford's SILL in March and September 2016

Strategies	Item	Statement (paraphrased for brevity)	Mean 1	Mean 2
Cognitive	Q32	I take notes in class in the new language.	4.71	4.57
Social	Q72	If I do not understand, I ask the speaker to slow down, repeat, or clarify what was said.	4.57	4.71
Compensation	Q46	When I cannot think of the correct expression to say or write, I find a different way to express the idea.	4.57	4.57
Affective	Q65	I try to relax whenever I feel anxious about using the new language.	4.57	4.57
Compensation	Q45	I ask the other person to tell me the right word if I cannot think of it in a conversation.	4.43	4.57
Social	Q73	I ask other people to verify that I have understood or said something correctly.	4.43	4.57
Cognitive	Q17	I imitate the way native speakers talk.	4.43	4.43
Cognitive	Q29	I skim the reading passage first to get the main idea, and then I go back and read it more carefully.	4.43	4.43
Cognitive	Q31	I use reference materials such as glossaries or dictionaries to help me use the new language.	4.43	4.43
Cognitive	Q30	I seek specific details in what I hear or read.	4.29	4.43
Cognitive	Q36	I look for similarities and contrasts between the new language and my own.	4.29	4.43
Cognitive	Q38	I am cautious about transferring words or concepts directly from my language to the new language.	4.43	4.29
Compensation	Q41	When I do not understand all the words I read or hear, I guess the general meaning by using any clue I can find.	4.29	4.43
Metacognitive	Q50	When someone is speaking the new language, I concentrate on what the person is saying.	4.43	4.29
Metacognitive	Q59	I clearly identify the purpose of the language activity.	4.43	4.29
Metacognitive	Q62	I try to notice my language errors and find out the reasons for them.	4.43	4.29
Cognitive	Q18	I read a story or dialogue several times until I can understand it.	4.29	4.29

Cognitive	Q25	I try to think in the new language.	4.29	4.29
Metacognitive	Q63	I learn from my mistakes in using the new language.	4.29	4.29
Metacognitive	Q54	I arrange my physical environment to promote learning.	4.14	4.43

As shown above, cognitive, social and compensation strategies were perceived and reported as the strategies most frequently used by third-year students. However, contrary to what happened in the previous years, no memory strategies were included in this top list. The discussion of these findings is presented below in section 6.3.2. Table 6.5 shows the evolution of the averages of perceived strategy use since the first year to the third year for each strategy category.

Table 6.5 Evolution of perceived strategy use in first, second and third year
Source: Oxford's SILL from 2014 to 2016

FIRST YEAR: YEAR COURSE

Strategies	Mean
Metacognitive	3.61
Social	3.43
Cognitive	3.43
Compensation	3.31
Memory	3.06
Affective	2.86

SECOND YEAR: FIRST SEMESTER

Strategies	Mean
Social	3.79
Cognitive	3.65
Compensation	3.64
Metacognitive	3.62
Affective	3.12
Memory	3.07

SECOND YEAR: SECOND SEMESTER

Strategies	Mean
Social	3.99
Cognitive	3.85
Compensation	3.79
Metacognitive	3.76
Affective	3.29
Memory	3.23

THIRD YEAR: FIRST SEMESTER

Strategies	Mean
Cognitive	4.39
Social	4.06
Metacognitive	3.90
Compensation	3.70
Affective	3.44
Memory	3.31

THIRD YEAR: SECOND SEMESTER

Strategies	Mean
Cognitive	4.27
Social	4.17
Compensation	3.91
Metacognitive	3.84
Affective	3.41
Memory	3.07

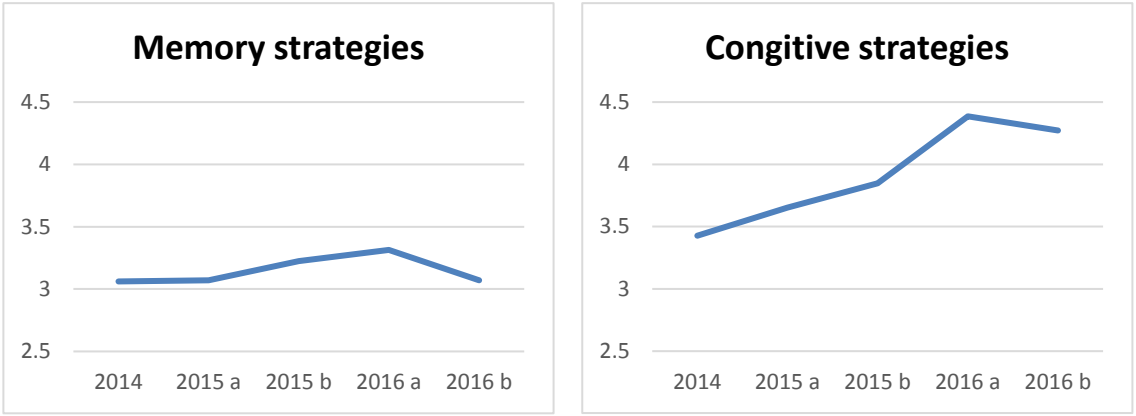
As shown in Table 6.5, the most frequently used strategies as perceived and reported by the students that started as absolute beginners and continued studying

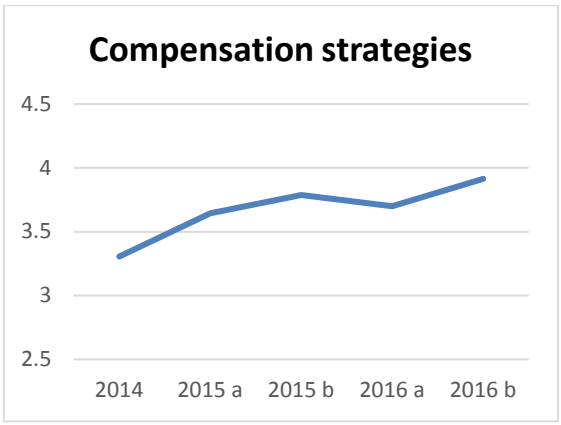
Spanish for three consecutive years were the following: metacognitive strategies in the first year, social strategies in the second year and cognitive strategies in the third year. The perceived strategies used least frequently were affective strategies in the first year, and thereafter memory strategies.

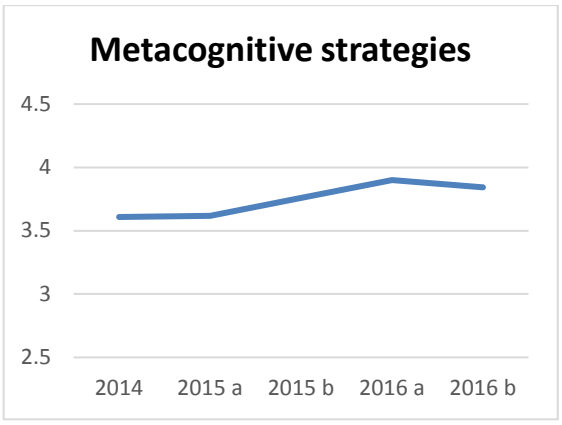
At first year level, the realisation that language learning does not only happen in the classroom, but also when engaging in a variety of activities outside the classroom, seems to make students proactive in arranging and planning their own language learning process. At second year level, the need to engage in interactive activities with more capable peers seems to encourage the formation of "practice groups" that emerge as a more sophisticated alternative to counterbalance the lack of opportunities to practise the language outside the classroom. At this level, students also start to realise the "social nature of learning and the key role that teacher and students' peers play in facilitating learning for an individual" (Pearson and Cervetti, 2015:7). At third year level, their advanced level of proficiency seems to allow students to engage more prominently with strategies related to the "ways of using" the language than with strategies related to the "ways of learning" the language. For further discussion on these findings see section 7.2.2.

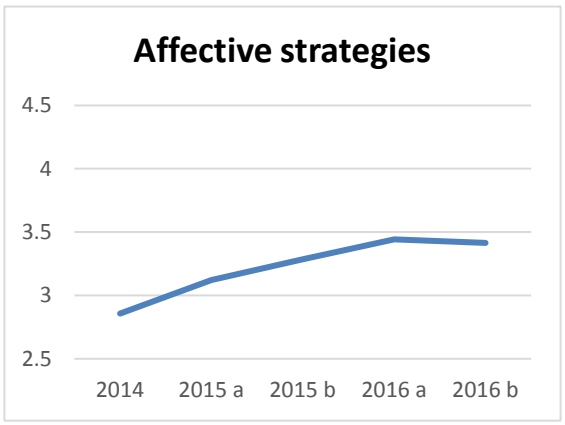
How does the perceived use of each of these strategy categories vary from the first year to the third year? Table 6.6 shows figures in relation to the perceived use of language-learning strategy categories. The interpretation of these findings are further discussed below.

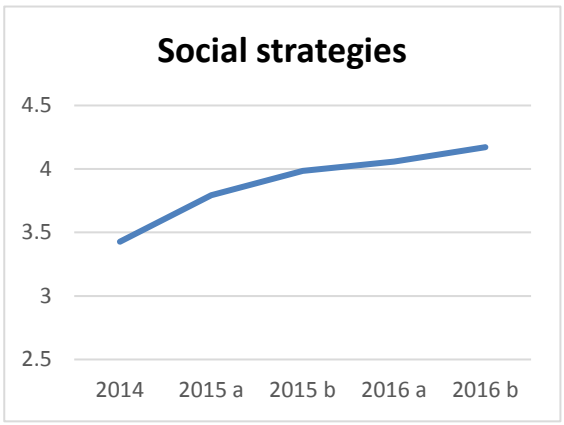
Table 6.6 Evolution of perceived strategy use per category in absolute figures
Source: Oxford's SILL from 2014 to 2016











Unlike the data analysis conducted in the two previous chapters, no normality tests were performed this time due to the very small sample size (n=7). As normality tests are known to be more appropriate for larger sample sizes, with very small sample sizes it is difficult to detect deviations from normality and determine whether or not the distribution as a whole deviates from a comparable normal distribution. Under such circumstances, normality tests have low power and the respective graphs are hard to interpret with so few data points (Field, 2009:156).

Did the self-reported perception of strategy use in the third year correlate with FL achievement? Kendall's correlation test was used to answer this question (and not the Spearman's correlation test as before) because Kendall's correlation test is more appropriate for small samples (Field, 2009:186). Tables 6.7 and 6.8 show Kendall's correlation coefficients.

Table 6.7 Kendall's correlation coefficient test between averages of reported frequency use of strategies and final marks in first semester
Source: Oxford's SILL in 2016 & Students Administration

	Correlation coefficient	Sig. (2-tailed)	N
Memory	-.293	.362	7
Cognitive	-.390	.224	7
Compensation	-.410	.214	7
Metacognitive	-.150	.645	7
Affective	-.205	.534	7
Social	-.250	.442	7

Table 6.8 Kendall's correlation coefficient test between averages of reported frequency use of strategies and final marks in second semester
Source: Oxford's SILL in 2016 & Students Administration

	Correlation coefficient	Sig. (2-tailed)	N
Memory	-.524	.099	7
Cognitive	-.048	.881	7
Compensation	.195	.543	7
Metacognitive	0.000	1.000	7
Affective	-.250	.442	7
Social	-.350	.282	7

The data analysis showed no statistically significant correlation between the self-reported perception of strategy use with respect to each of the six strategy categories and the final marks in first and second semesters.

Was the self-reported perceived use of LLS statistically significantly different across all[72] the administrations of the SILL? Since this was a critical question in this research study, data gathered from each of the five Oxford's SILL administrations were compared to one another and then statistically analysed using the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test. The data analysis was conducted at the level of language-learning strategy categories, and at the level of individual strategy items. Statistically significant differences were only found in the following cases (see Table 6.9):

[72] Oxford's SILL was administered in 2014 (September), 2015a (April), 2015b (September), 2016a (April) and 2016b (September).

Table 6.9 Statistically significant differences across strategy categories
Source: Oxford's SILL in 2014, 2015a, 2015b, 2016a and 2016b

2014 and 2015b	Memory	Cognitive	Compensation	Metacognitive	Affective	Social
Mann-Whitney U	20.500	11.500	5.500	19.500	16.500	14.000
Z	-.513	-1.665	-2.455	-.641	-1.032	-1.355
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.608	.096	.014	.522	.302	.175

2014 and 2016a	Memory	Cognitive	Compensation	Metacognitive	Affective	Social
Mann-Whitney U	19.000	1.500	7.500	19.000	9.000	10.000
Z	-.704	-2.942	-2.204	-.704	-1.989	-1.865
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.482	.003	.028	.481	.047	.062

2014 and 2016b	Memory	Cognitive	Compensation	Metacognitive	Affective	Social
Mann-Whitney U	24.000	6.500	7.500	20.000	11.000	14.000
Z	-.064	-2.302	-2.201	-.576	-1.733	-1.348
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.949	.021	.028	.564	.083	.178

2015a and 2016a	Memory	Cognitive	Compensation	Metacognitive	Affective	Social
Mann-Whitney U	19.000	5.000	23.000	16.000	18.500	18.000
Z	-.703	-2.492	-.192	-1.087	-.770	-0.835
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.482	.013	.848	.277	.441	.404

2015a and 2016b	Memory	Cognitive	Compensation	Metacognitive	Affective	Social
Mann-Whitney U	22.000	9.000	18.500	17.000	15.000	17.000
Z	-.319	-1.981	-.768	-.959	-1.222	-.961
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.749	.048	.442	.337	.222	.336

The data analysis found statistically significant differences with respect to the perceived use of compensation strategies. The perceived and reported use of these compensation strategies were significantly more frequently used towards the end of their second year and throughout their third year than what they did during their first year. This can be partially explained by what seems to be a perception shift of the role attributed to compensation strategies. As students become more proficient in the language, the perception with respect to the wide use of compensation strategies becomes less negative and more positive and even desirable. (This is further discussed in the following section.)

The data analysis also showed that students perceived and reported using statistically significantly more cognitive strategies in their third year than what they did during their first and second year[73]. Though this seems to represent a natural progression, the perception of an increased frequency of use of cognitive strategies may also be seen as a cause and effect of language proficiency. As third-year students become more capable of processing larger amounts of information in the target language, it seems plausible to think that they engage more frequently in the use of cognitive strategies. However, language proficiency may function not only as a prerequisite to engage in the use of these strategies, but also as an outcome that develops by implementing strategies that involve regular and growing manipulation of the target language.

This research also found that students perceived themselves using statistically significantly more affective strategies in their third year than what they did during their first year. They were more frequently paying attention to affective aspects[74] that could affect their language learning.

At the level of individual strategy items, the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test also found statistically significant differences with respect to the following nine strategy items that are listed in Table 6.10.

Table 6.10 Strategy items where statistically significant differences were found
Source: Oxford's SILL in 2014 and 2016 (September)

Item	Subcategory	Statement (paraphrased for brevity)	Mean 2014	Mean 2015a	Mean 2015b	Mean 2016a	Mean 2016b
Q24	Cognitive	I watch TV shows or movies or listen to the radio in the new language.	2.43	3.57	3.57	3.86	3.71
Q42	Compensation	I read without looking up every unfamiliar word.	2.57	3.29	3.00	3.29	4.00
Q45	Compensation	I ask the other person to tell me the right word if I cannot think of it in a conversation.	1.71	1.71	2.14	2.14	2.43
Q53	Metacognitive	I arrange my schedule to study and practice the new language consistently.	2.86	3.00	3.00	3.71	3.57
Q60	Metacognitive	I take responsibility for finding opportunities to practice the new language.	3.43	3.71	3.86	4.14	4.00
Q69	Affective	I pay attention to physical signs or stress that might affect my language learning.	2.29	3.00	3.00	3.29	3.43

[73] On a scale from one to five, the average perceived and self-reported use of cognitive strategies was 3.43 during their first year and reached 4.39 when the same group of students were in their third year.

[74] Affective aspects such as relaxing whenever they felt anxious, encouraging themselves to continue studying Spanish in order to complete what they started, sharing their feelings with others in the practice groups, and so on.

Q73	Social	I ask other people to verify that I have understood or said something correctly.	3.71	4.14	4.29	4.43	4.57
Q74	Social	I ask others to correct my pronunciation.	3.14	3.86	3.57	4.14	4.43
Q77	Social	When I am talking with a native speaker, I try to let him or her know when I need help.	3.71	3.43	4.00	4.14	4.29

The data analysis showed that the perceived use of the strategy of *"listening and/or watching audio-visual material in the new language"* was significantly higher in second and third year than in the first year. This finding was consistent with the expected patterns of development in FL students and seemed to confirm the fact that in countries where Spanish enjoys a FL status, a large amount of the cognitive engagement is generally stirred and developed by watching and/or listening to audio-visual material due to the lack of opportunities to interact with proficient Hispanic speakers.

Statistically significant differences were found with respect to the perceived use of the strategy of *"reading without looking up every unfamiliar word."* The data analysis showed that students perceived themselves using this strategy more frequently in the third year than what they were doing in the first year. This finding was consistent with the fact that as students increase their vocabulary, they were quicker and more accurate in being able to deconstruct unfamiliar words. They were now able to identify stems, affixes and related keywords in constructing meaning and understanding of the text by using a bottom-up approach (Pearson and Cervetti, 2015:2-3).

Statistically significant differences were also found with respect to the perceived use of the strategy *"asking the other person to tell the right word if one cannot think of it in a conversation."* Like in the previous case, students perceived themselves using this strategy more frequently in the third year than in the first year. This finding was also consistent with the observation that in FL contexts, advanced students mostly interact with the lecturer and, because of that, they seem to be more focused on expressing themselves lexically and grammatically correct rather than speaking fluently. As the surroundings outside the classroom do not require them to use the new language for communicative purposes, their main concern is not necessarily conveying meaning with fluency, but rather correctness and accuracy.

Statistically significant differences were also found with respect to the perceived use of the strategy *"arranging my schedule to study and practice the new language*

consistently." Despite the fact that the perceived and reported frequency use of metacognitive strategies was the highest in the first year (see Table 6.5), the data analysis showed that students perceived themselves using this strategy statistically significantly more in the third year than what they did in the first year. This finding shows an interesting progression with respect to the understanding of where FL learning mainly takes place. At first-year level students seem to believe that the class setting is the only space where learning takes place, but as they develop proficiency in the new language, it seems that they come to the realisation that learning can and does take place outside the classroom when they study and practise the language consistently on an ongoing, regular basis and not only in preparation for tests.

Statistical significant differences were also found with respect to the perceived use of the strategy *"I take responsibility for finding opportunities to practice the new language."* Although this finding indicates that third-year students perceive that they are taking significantly more responsibility for finding opportunities to practice the new language than what they did in the first year, this does not necessarily mean that they are actually finding these opportunities. What this finding is indicating is that they are much more aware that they need to practise the language and that they have seemingly realised that they are the ones who should take the responsibility for finding those opportunities, not the university.

Statistically significant differences were also found with respect to the perceived use of the strategy *"I pay attention to physical signs or stress that might affect my language learning."* Students perceived themselves using this strategy more frequently in the third year than in the first year. A possible reason for this may be that after three years of studying Spanish, students seem to be better at identifying when a rise in the level of stress may affect their FL learning process. However, it may also indicate that, at first-year level, students do not necessarily experiment with levels of stress affecting their language learning process, but only at third-year level. Although students read Spanish literature texts every year, it was only reported in the third year that the reading of Spanish novels was seemingly a source of stress among students who find the texts quite challenging.

Statistically significant differences were also found with respect to the perceived use of the strategies *"I ask other people to verify that I have understood or said*

something correctly" and *"I ask others to correct my pronunciation."* Students perceived themselves using these social strategies more frequently in the third year than in the first year. Taking into account that the majority of the remaining participants had indicated in the interviews that they did not know native or proficient speakers to practise the language with, these findings were found very consistent with the observation that third-year students mostly interact with the lecturer and tutor in FL contexts and, because of that, they seem to be more concerned with being lexically and grammatically correct than with speaking fluently. As the use of the language is restricted to the classroom setting, they tend to prioritise correctness and accuracy in their conversations with the lecturer rather than engaging in ordinary conversations primarily aimed at conveying meaning with fluency.

Finally, statistically significant differences – indicating the perception that this strategy was more frequently used in the third year than in the second year – were also found with respect to the perceived use of the social strategy *"When I am talking with a native speaker, I try to let him or her know when I need help"*. A possible explanation for this may be related to the fact that a considerable number of students in the second year reported that their "practice moments" mainly consisted of studying the language by themselves and doing some exercises and did not necessarily involve interactions and/or the use of the language with others, whereas when the same group of students were in the third year, the majority of them reported that they were having regular meetings with their classmates to interact in Spanish. A further discussion on how the perception of the use of strategies evolves from the first year to the third year is presented in chapter seven.

Were statistically significant differences found between other subgroups in the data set? Despite the very small sample size, the analysis showed no statistically significant differences in either semester with respect to self-reported use of LLS across third-year students who were registered in BA Languages and students from other academic programmes. In all cases, the p-value was greater than .05 ($p > .05$). Likewise, no statistically significant differences were found with respect to the self-reported perceived use of compensation strategies between top achievers and students who were not top achievers.

6.3.2 PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS ON THE QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis shows that some of the reported changes in the perception of strategy use throughout these three years seem to affect and be affected by the level of language proficiency students were at when Oxford's SILL was administered to them. The analysis also shows that the group of participants perceived that they used more metacognitive strategies at first-year level, social strategies at second-year level and cognitive strategies at third-year level.

Nevertheless, it must be noted that the perception of strategy use is not necessarily always higher as students attain higher proficiency level in the language. With the exception of compensation and social strategies, all the averages of the perceived frequencies of use of the other four strategy categories experienced an initial increase and then a decrease in the frequency of use towards the end of the third year. Further research needs to be conducted to determine whether the perceived decrease of use of the four strategy categories (towards the end of the third year) is substantiated or rather a situation in which the use of some strategies are becoming automated and subconscious, with the result that they are no longer perceived and reported by the students.

6.3.3 QUALITATIVE FINDINGS ON REPORTED FREQUENCY OF STRATEGY USE

Once again qualitative data were collected by means of interviews that were recorded and then transcribed for further analysis. Data from interviews were coded and categorised according to major common themes.

Taking into account that there was only one male in the remaining group of participants, and with the intention of protecting the anonymity of all participants, the answers to each interview question have been transcribed as though they were answered by the same gender of students, as done in the preceding chapters.

Moreover, and as mentioned in the previous chapter, the analysis of the qualitative data revealed recurring themes that need to be taken into account if there is a serious commitment to improve the current situation.

6.3.3.1 REASONS FOR CONTINUING STUDYING SPANISH UNTIL THIRD YEAR

Why was it that some students had gone so far with their Spanish studies? In order to delve into the reasons for studying Spanish until the third year, let us see what the answers were when the students were asked this question.

> **Interviewer:** Why are you studying Spanish?
>
> **Participant 1c[75]:** Uh, because I like the language. I fell in love with the language in high school when I was messing around with my friends watching telenovelas [tv soap opera] and I was like ok this is a very nice language I'd like to learn it and from there my curiosity just got me here.
>
> **Participant 3c:** Well, at first I was studying because I thought it was interesting and then I was… like maybe I could teach it at some point when I'm fluent enough which seems to be very far in the future.
>
> **Participant 4c:** Uhm, I'm studying Spanish because I fell in love with it when I was overseas I met a lot of Colombians and they were such a vibrant colourful people, and… languages have always interested me. And I chose between it and French and I chose Spanish because I enjoy it so much more and I'm studying Spanish cause I hope to one day use it in my career… perhaps teach overseas, teach English in a Spanish speaking country and something like that.
>
> **Participant 5c:** Well, I'm studying Spanish because I do like it and I want to travel. Uhm, yeah, I'm not entirely sure what I want to do with it just yet probably go into interpretation uh but yeah still figuring that out.
>
> **Participant 6c:** [Because] it sounds nice when you speak it it's a nice language and uhm I think in the future I would like to go and maybe work in a Spanish country in like Spain or Argentina or something.
>
> **Participant 7c:** Uhm, because I'm doing a degree in languages and I would like to travel the world especially… I would like to go to Spain… Uhm, and I love the language it's really interesting so.
>
> **Participant 8c:** Well, ok, I'm basically studying international relations with Spanish so I feel it's important for me to learn a European… a modern European language because what I'm studying it helps you know in terms of being an ambassador or a diplomat so I'm studying Spanish in order to help me with getting jobs in the future and I also like to learn the language because I do like the Spanish culture.

As expected, all the remaining participants in third year indicated that they were studying Spanish because they loved the language and were passionate about it. However, when analysing their answers it was noticed that for the majority of students, their love for the language was devoid of personal encounters with the

[75] The numbers are used to differentiate between students and the letters indicate the specific round of interviews. Thus, "a" refers to the interview in 2014, "b" to April 2015, "c" to October 2015, "d" to April 2016, and "e" to October 2016.

Hispanic culture, and more suggestive of an idealised view of reality than a practical, realistic love that originated as a result of enjoying contact with concrete Hispanic groups in South Africa or overseas. In this respect, it is perhaps worthwhile to mention here that this researcher had observed over the years that alumni who could not establish meaningful connections with the Hispanic world have unfortunately started to decrease their proficiency in the language and forget what they managed to learn. Conversely, former students who completed the third-year courses and came into contact with Hispanic people and/or could afford the costs to go overseas to have personal encounters with the Hispanic world have managed to keep their motivation up, and in many cases have significantly improved their proficiency in the language.

It was also noticed that phrases such as *"my curiosity just got me here…", "maybe I could teach it at some point", "[I] perhaps teach overseas, teach English in a Spanish speaking country", "I'm not entirely sure what I want to do with it"*, and *"I would like to go and maybe work in a Spanish country"* show that not all of the students have a clear picture of the role that Spanish will play in their future. A possible reason for this could be found in connection with the almost null contact they have with the Hispanic world in South Africa and abroad, and with the lack of opportunities to use Spanish in South Africa.

6.3.3.2 Perceived use of strategies to develop reading skills in Spanish

What did the students report doing to develop their reading skills in Spanish? Below are excerpts of the interviews conducted in the first and second semester that were used in the qualitative data analysis to substantiate and validate the findings.

> **Interviewer:** What strategies or actions are you doing to develop your reading skills?
>
> **Participant 1c:** I follow Spanish personalities on social media... just to get a feel of how the language is used I also read like the textbooks uh and the ones that we had previously, just to get a vocabulary also… almost every day… I will read it until I find something that's really difficult and then I'll leave for the day… maybe 15 minutes to 30 minutes yes… always by myself at home.
>
> **Participant 1d:** I read short stories just short not extensive and easy to understand… from the internet… maybe 5-10 [pages] so really short.
>
> **Participant 3c:** a friend was very thoughtful and bought me a parallel textbook with the Spanish short stories and then the English translation next to it so I can if I don't understand something because it's in colloquial then I can just check it up on the

next page and it is working quite well… I try weekends sometimes… I try to finish the whole short story so it should be like an hour around…

Participant 3d: uhm I do read parallel text so the one page is in Spanish and the other is in English and when you get stuck you just turn the page.

Participant 4c: I practice a lot what I do is uh I'll read uh say for example a passage [from the textbook] I'll read it over first and then I'll read it over again but more slowly and then I'll highlight the words or phrases that I perhaps don't understand… During class sometimes for example we'll go over a passage but sometimes very quickly so when I go home again I'll go over it again to make sure I understand everything…

Participant 4d: I'll look for secondary sources on the internet there are often short stories that I can read and what's helping is the literature that we're doing this semester… we're required to read a novel… that helps a lot as well.

Participant 5c: I'm going over more of the texts that we do in class like revising notes yeah so that helps with the reading... I read by myself sometimes at home sometimes on campus at any time in the day.

Participant 5d: I keep reading like the texts that we have. I read over it a few times and if I don't understand I'll highlight the bits I don't understand and if I really don't understand then I'll look in a dictionary otherwise I tried to see what the words mean.

Participant 6c: There are Spanish books in the library and I read some of those to practice reading and understanding… I have a lot of uhm off hours on Monday so I go sit in the library and read the books then…

Participant 6d: Uhm, we're doing the literature now so that really helps and there's uhm other articles online like news articles and stuff and there's a lot not a lot but some Spanish books in the library as well.

Participant 7c: I'll uhm download a piece uhm in Spanish and I'll read it uhm out loud uhm for the pronunciation and it also helps for the vocab and every day I'll uhm write a word down in Spanish and I'll uhm rehearse that word every day and remind myself what that word means so.

Participant 7d: Well, I try to read… At the moment very often because uhm I read the [prescribed] novels.

Participant 8c: When I do get the time to read in Spanish I do so I use like uh novels and short stories and stuff like that…

Participant 8d: I try to read… I'm currently doing the literature which is kinda hard because we're doing el *Conde Lucanor*. We just finished with it and it is 14th century Spanish so that is a bit difficult but obviously just reading yeah I try to read as much as I can in Spanish and yeah.

Interviewer: Why do you want to develop your reading?

Participant 3c: Because you want to expand your vocabulary but reading the dictionary isn't that interesting so learning a meaning of a word in different contexts

would be more applicable to an actual conversation with someone from whichever country.

Participant 4c: because it helps a lot with my vocabulary I learn a lot of new words through reading and it's also good to see how the sentences are structured especially with the new tenses that we're learning… I do it at home I have a desk in our study at home.

Participant 6c: Uhm, to practice and some of the stories are really interesting.

From the above, it is possible to see that what students reported doing to develop their reading skills in Spanish varied from each other. Nevertheless, they have been classified into two broad categories. On the one hand, there were generic answers referring to what one could do to develop the skill of reading in Spanish, and on the other hand there were specific and descriptive answers referring to what students were currently doing. As expected, the qualitative data analysis focused on the latter because the information provided seemed to be more reliable and authentic.

The data analysis showed that students reported doing different things to develop their reading skills in Spanish, such us: following Spanish personalities on social media, reading short stories on parallel books, reading the texts from their textbook several times, and reading leveled books[76] from the library. Their answers seem to reflect an understanding that reading in the target language is important not only for the sake of improving the reading skill *per se*, but also because it helped them to expand their vocabulary and see how the sentences were structured, especially with the new tenses and advanced grammatical structures they were learning in class. However, when considering that upper-intermediate FL learners were reading for different purposes[77], it was noticed that reading was mostly an asocial activity. The reading approach mostly used by the students favoured a bottom-up approach that matched letters and strings of sounds[78] (including words) to dig out meaning (Pearson and Cervetti, 2015). However, the fact that one student reported that he was also reading to learn the meaning of a word in different contexts (with the intention to learn when and how to use it in an actual conversation with someone)

[76] A **leveled book** is a book whose lexicon, morphology, syntax and grammar structures have been adapted and adjusted to simpler levels of difficulty.

[77] Such as to get the main idea of a text, to locate specific information, to learn something, to synthesise or summarise information, and above all, to basically comprehend what they were reading (Khaki, 2014:186)

[78] Either internally during oral reading or internally during silent reading (Pearson and Cervetti 2015:2)

reveals that he was engaging with the text by taking the role of a "text user"[79] and focusing on the pragmatics of the use (Freebody and Luke, 1990:10-11).

The fact that only one student referred to the leveled or graded books located in the library made the researcher wonder why it was that the majority of students were not reporting the use of these essential and valuable resources. Though it is unknown whether the other students were aware of the existence of these books, they were seemingly not investing time and energy into reading them, possibly because the reading of those materials was not part of the assessment requirements of the course. The data analysis also showed that during the first semester, most students were only reading the excerpts from the textbook lessons. However, during the second semester, they reported that in addition to the textbook excerpts, they were reading the prescribed novels. Taking into account that by the end of the third year most of the advanced grammatical structures have already been dealt with in class, the difficulties students encountered when reading the novels seemed to be rather associated with vocabulary constraints, which happens to be a direct consequence of little reading. This leads us to the tautological assertion that reading helps reading, and that leveled reading contributes to reading engagement.

6.3.3.3 PERCEIVED USE OF STRATEGIES TO DEVELOP WRITING SKILLS IN SPANISH

What did the students report doing to develop their writing skills in Spanish? Below are excerpts of the interviews conducted during the first and second semester that were used in the qualitative data analysis to substantiate and validate the findings.

> **Interviewer:** What strategies or actions are you doing to develop your writing?
>
> **Participant 1c:** I do the exercises that are required for class that's basically what I do. I don't do anything extra but I probably should.

[79] Freebody and Luke (1990:7) and Luke and Freebody (1999:5) suggest that a successful reader needs to develop and sustain the resources to adopt four roles when reading a text: the "code breaker role" that aims at cracking the code by recognising and using key features and structure; the "meaning-maker role" that aims at understanding and composing meaning taking into account each text's interior meaning systems in relation to previous knowledge and experiences; "text user" that focuses on the pragmatics of use; and "text critic" that aims at critically analysing and transforming texts by acting on knowledge that texts are not ideologically natural or neutral.

Participant 1d: I do the writing activities that we do for the homework and uh the lecturer also encourages us to write more to develop our writing skills so just uhm choosing a random topic and writing about it just to see if I'm progressing

Participant 3c: Well I was a little bit overambitious and I did attempt to create a blog on a Spanish blog site to try to do poetry and I failed miserably but I am trying and it's slowly getting better but I do try to write because writing the just like little stories is a little frustrating because I don't know all the tenses so I can't express myself in a more like higher intelligent manner…

Participant 3d: It really helped that this year the lecturer asked us to write a story in a specific way and then he would check the writing for you… writing is something we neglect sometimes because you focus more on studying the grammar than actually using it…

Participant 4c: Not much actually I haven't been focusing on my writing as much it's more on my reading say and audio writing we only I only practice during class.

Participant 4d: uhm I don't do a lot of extra work on my writing… I just say like when we come to tests otherwise I don't practise my writing… I've never particularly focused on it I feel like writing is one of my strong points. I've always done well when we have to create stories so I think that's the only reason.

Participant 5c: Well we always get homework so that helps with the writing I guess… Sometimes I make notes yeah like for different subjects. I write notes to myself… when I'm in class and sometimes when I'm studying.

Participant 5d: I like to make notes like in my other subjects but in Spanish.

Participant 6c: Uhm not much but uhm we do get a lot of exercises in class that uhm that are supposed to help us with writing.

Participant 6d: [The lecturer] gives us a lot of class activities and homework to do and then we hand it in to him and then he gives it back to us with corrections and I feel like that also helps to uhm it shows you what mistakes you make commonly and then you can work on that.

Participant 7c: Uhm, I'm still struggling with the writing. Although prepositions is… I'm still struggling a lot with that so and concordance. But uh so still have to work on that one, but at the moment, I'll just write something that I did yesterday and what I like to do and I'll just give it to a friend and she'll tell me oh you're a girl so you have to use you know the [female] concordance so they'll just help but ja… I write it by myself but uhm my friend checks it she edits it and gives me advice what I can do to better myself.

Participant 7d: I try to write something just about anything and then uhm take it to the lecturer so he can revise it and edit it and help me

Participant 8c: I try to write as much as possible in Spanish uhm when we're given activities in the classes I try to do more than what they ask us to do so that I can improve my writing. I try to, you know, incorporate things that I learnt in to my writing as well not just the topics that we're doing currently.

> **Participant 8d:** Writing obviously the exercises we do in the classes… most of the writing is done in class... I did try once to change my phone settings to be in Spanish then when I communicate with my Spanish friends I text them in Spanish.

The data analysis showed that writing in the new language for some students seemed to be an activity that only happened within the classroom setting, an activity whose primary purpose is not necessarily communication, but to comply with the textbook requirements of correctness and precision. Even though the lecturer tried to encourage its practice during the second semester, writing was still presented as an activity devoid of social interaction in which students had to choose a random topic and write about it. This situation seems to point out that in FL contexts where real and authentic communication with Spanish speakers is very limited, students write only in class as dictated by the textbook. For them, writing seems to be an activity not necessarily framed within communicative intentions or aimed at conveying meaning, but rather an activity primarily concerned with correctness and accuracy with the ultimate – and sometimes exclusive - purpose of getting the highest possible marks.

The data analysis also showed that some students were not practising their writing at all because they were seemingly *"focusing more on studying the grammar than actually using it"*. This statement mentioned by one student revealed to some extent a different way of understanding how FLs are best learnt. It showed a fictitious compartmentalisation between two activities that are closely related and, to a great extent, activate similar cognitive processes. The inability to see the extent of the connection between "using the grammar to write" and "studying the grammar" seems to indicate not only a lack of understanding about the benefits that the former can bring to the latter, but also exposes a limited comprehension of the multiple ways in which grammar can be studied, practised and internalised. "Studying the grammar" and "writing" should be viewed as complementary, and not necessarily as mutually exclusive.

Although Chamot (2005:121) states that writing in a second or FL is arguably the most difficult of the language skills in which to achieve communicative competence, it has been observed that written production is the skill that better lends itself to revision when compared to the productive activity of speaking. The cognitive strategies of recognising and using formulas and patterns in the target language,

according to Oxford (1990:72-73), enhance the ability to write in the target language, and the more frequently students use these patterns and formulas, the better the chances to remember them are, which is one of the main goals of studying grammar.

6.3.3.4 PERCEIVED USE OF STRATEGIES TO DEVELOP LISTENING SKILLS IN SPANISH

What did the students report doing to develop their listening skills in Spanish? Below are excerpts of the interviews conducted in the first and second semester that were used in the qualitative data analysis to substantiate and validate the findings.

> **Interviewer:** What strategies or actions are you doing to develop your listening?
>
> **Participant 1c:** I listen to songs and watch series but it's still a problem... I listen to music every day… only in Spanish almost every day.
>
> **Participant 1d:** I listen to the audios the books provide and Spanish music and I also watch programmes with the intent of seeing if I can actually hear what they're saying.
>
> **Participant 3c:** I recently found a pretty decent app that has a bunch of audios in Spanish about random topics even some of them are in like the colloquial languages and then they would have the script of the audio right next to it so you can listen and read at the same time so it does get your ear in four different accents and also I have a lot of Spanish music a lot and it does help because some people sing faster than others and some people use different subjunctives where you're like ok this helps… Well listening to the listening activities I sometimes do while I'm walking to classes so if I leave Spanish and I walk to a next one I'll have my earphones in and listen to whatever this person is saying.
>
> **Participant 3d:** I fell in love with Raeggeton so a lot of Raeggeton like the music or watching the show in Spanish or something like that or like even watching sport in Spanish.
>
> **Participant 4c:** I uh like to watch Spanish series and uhm that is with native Spanish speakers and it helps me to hear what they are saying so that I can perhaps understand better during class. The lecturer does speak very clearly and it is much easier to understand especially this year we hardly speak English in class which is fantastic but I do I watch a lot of series uhm often with the Spanish subtitles as well so I can hear and understand what I'm hearing… I feel it helps as well uhm with just the listening to the Spanish you know even if I don't always understand what they're saying I can just expose myself to Spanish being spoken so much not just the reading I need to get used to how people say word and how they because in audio in a test is not my strong point I struggle so I thought if I'd watch these and perhaps see the context and listen better I'll be able to recognise words in the future.
>
> **Participant 4d:** I watch say a Spanish series uhm and I try and get used to hearing the sound of native speakers talk to I get used to the accent because they talk very quickly so if I can you know practice that you know it will help me when we're doing tests.

Participant 5c: I like listening to Spanish music and uhm some movies like some movies that uhm have Spanish subtitles or Spanish audio as well as soon as I like a movie that I like but I put it in Spanish with the subtitles so I can see what's happening but I can also hear it and also because I know what the story is I can still follow.

Participant 5d: uhm listening I talk to I have a friend in class and we talk a lot of Spanish so that helps with the speaking and the listening cause she's a lot better than I am so she helps me with both.

Participant 6c: well obviously uhm some of me and my other classmates sometimes talk in Spanish to each other and then uhm I also like to watch movies and shows in Spanish... I want to develop that skill to listen to understand when someone speaks very fast.

Participant 6d: Watch Spanish videos mostly cause that's you know they speak it very fast and you have to concentrate to…

Participant 7c: uhm I watch movies and series in Spanish uhm but… with Spanish subtitles cause you don't always know, hear what they're saying and to have English subtitles well that doesn't help me at all so uhm I try to do that or we have CD's that we get with our books and we do the exercises that are in the book but I do it with friends always with friends… listening activities in the classes also outside…

Participant 7d: I with [another classmate] sometimes we'll take our laptop and listen to some audios or we'll just talk with each other and listen what we're saying… it's mostly audios from the book from our book so it's about uhm the environment.

Participant 8c: it's one of my biggest problems because I feel like the Spanish people speak very quickly so I'm still training my ears to understand like Spanish properly… On the internet there's a link it's called the Mexican institute of sound… they make nice music. I've recently found them and I listen to them and obviously listening activities in the classes also outside as well and yeah that's how I try improve my listening.

Participant 8d: I use the CDs that are given to us in the books and also I've also tried to watch series without subtitles and listen to how the native speakers speak so that's what I do for listening.

The data analysis showed that students reported developing their listening skills in three different ways: by listening to songs, by watching Spanish series, and by listening to the CD's supplied with their textbooks. In all cases the listening activity was of a unidirectional comprehension nature.

Nevertheless, declarations such as *"it's still a problem..."*, *"audio in a test is not my strong point. I struggle"* and *"it's one of my biggest problems"* indicated that listening in the target language represented a challenge for the students and, in some cases, was "the biggest" problem they were struggling with. This finding was consistent with previous research conducted by Vandergrift (2007:191) who also reported that

listening was often perceived by FL learners as the most difficult language skill to develop and, consequently, a source of anxiety for FL learners.

Vandergrift (2007:193) also found that the real-time listening difficulties FL students experienced had been investigated by Goh (2000) and analysed in light of Anderson's (1995) three-phase model of perceptual processing, parsing and utilisation, which are three interconnected, recursive cognitive processes that interact in the construction of a plausible interpretation of what is heard.

In order to identify and analyse the possible factors that cause students to struggle with the listening activities in the target language, Anderson's (1995) three-phase model (as presented in Goh, 2000:57) was used to analyse the data collected from the interviews.

In Anderson's model (1995) *perceptual processing* in listening refers to the encoding of the acoustic message, which involves segmenting phonemes from the continuous speech stream. *Parsing* refers to the process in which words are transformed into a mental representation. In this process utterances are segmented according to syntactic structures or cues to meaning, which are then recombined to generate a meaningful representation of the original sequence. *Utilisation* refers to the process by which the mental representation of what is heard is related to existing knowledge in order to draw different types of inferences to complete the interpretation. Although perception, parsing and utilisation represent different levels of processing, they are interrelated and recursive and can happen concurrently during a single listening event (Goh, 2000:57).

The above-mentioned lenses provided by Anderson (1995) allowed the researcher to better understand and, in some cases, identify some of the factors that explain why it was that students reported having problems with the listening activities. When students reported that they were not able to "hear what it was said", they were not necessarily referring to the loudness of the voice, but possibly to the ability of segmenting the phonemes in Spanish (difficulties in perceptual processing) and as a result of this, they perceived that Hispanic people "spoke very fast". They also reported having great difficulties with the "recognition of words" and hence with the construction of meaning (difficulties in parsing). As students could not construct enough meaning to generate a meaningful representation, they were unable to

relate what was heard to existing knowledge and incapable of drawing different types of inferences to complete the interpretation (difficulties in utilisation).

What did the students report doing to overcome these difficulties? Some students reported having scripts in front of them while doing the listening activity. Although this action immediately helps to gain more understanding, it seems that it does not help to improve the listening skills in the long run. The problem is that a listening activity under such circumstances ends up becoming a reading activity and not a listening activity anymore. For the above-mentioned reason, it can be concluded that for developing listening skills, it is better to watch movies without subtitles, whereas for developing reading skills, watching movies with subtitles can be of great help.

6.3.3.5 PERCEIVED USE OF STRATEGIES TO DEVELOP SPEAKING SKILLS IN SPANISH

What did the students report doing to develop their speaking skills in Spanish? Below are excerpts of the interviews conducted in the first and second semesters that were used in the qualitative data analysis to substantiate and validate the findings.

> **Interviewer:** What strategies or actions are you doing to develop your speaking?
>
> **Participant 1c:** every day I speak with my classmates yeah I try to speak in Spanish… I don't have access to other people who speak Spanish or who are studying Spanish besides in class.
>
> **Participant 1d:** Uhm this only happens inside the classroom because ja I engage with the topics and I try to answer questions when asked so outside ja there's nothing more I can do because I think it would need another person to interact with the speaking because being by myself I can't judge whether I'm going in the right direction or not.
>
> **Participant 3c:** I do try to speak more with my classmates… on the phone we only talk in Spanish and if we're outside of class we only talk in Spanish like if you really can't express yourselves we would go to Afrikaans or English but we do try to speak mostly in Spanish… we had like this whole unanimous decision after we got our first marks back this year and we were like yeah no we need to practice cause it was quite bad so we should practice because it's really hard to find someone to speak to in Africa cause Latin American people are quite scarce… it's important because uhm if you don't hear a language or if you don't speak it you tend to lose your fluency.
>
> **Participant 3d:** well especially because I have like friends in the class who I've become very close to so if we walk on campus we'd speak in Spanish and gossip

about people without them knowing and then my best friend and boyfriend he speaks a lot of Spanish so I speak with him a lot which helps.

Participant 4c: speaking I only actually practice in class at home it's really just because I'm by myself I don't really have anyone to speak to sometimes when I'm driving in the car I'll say a sentence it's more just me thinking about things in my head than actually speaking it.

Participant 4d: my only interaction with Spanish is well with other Spanish speakers is in class so I don't really do anything else to develop it.

Participant 5c: I have a friend in class and she and I speak uhm in class and also after class we hang out for a little bit and we speak Spanish… [we started] this year.

Participant 5d: I talk to I have a friend in class and we talk a lot of Spanish so that helps with the speaking and the listening cause she's a lot better than I am so she helps me with both.

Participant 6c: well like I said some of my classmates we talk to each other in Spanish often or we try.

Participant 6d: read out loud that's the easiest like there's not really anybody I can talk to at home or uhm anywhere else mostly it's just the lecturer and our classmates so I don't see them all the time so reading out loud is the easiest.

Participant 7c: an hour after class every Monday uhm about the whole group if they have time comes together and we'll just try to speak in Spanish about what we like what we don't like but usually it's about stuff we handled in class and we try to uh speak to each other in Spanish but we try to keep it simple just simple Spanish… it helps with the pronunciation and also with being fluent in the language and so ja also for vocab so.

Participant 7d: I'm actually teaching my brother now to so that helps to teach him how to speak and write and also with [other classmates] we'll also speak in Spanish.

Participant 8c: uh in classes we always try to speak as much Spanish as possible so whenever I'm with my classmates inside or outside the class I'm always trying to speak with them obviously the people that know it so I just feel like if you just always trying to speak regardless if you make mistakes you will become better and so that's what I'm doing just speaking as much as I can… I do play football so I do know a few players uh that do speak Spanish from Argentina and Chile and I also try to speak when we're playing on the field we're also speaking Spanish also outside of the field as well.

Participant 8d: I just try to speak as much as possible with anyone that I can uh this year I've made it a point that even with my classmates I do try to speak Spanish with them even outside the class instead of speaking English so I am trying to develop that.

The preliminary data analysis showed that the majority of students reported developing their speaking skills mainly in class by speaking with their classmates inside or outside the classroom. Except for two students – and without counting the

Spanish lecturer – the common characteristic of the majority of students was that they were not practising the language with other proficient speakers because students reported that it was "really hard to find someone to speak to" and/or they were "not having access to other people who spoke Spanish."

However, when looking at the data using the lenses provided by the literature review, it was possible to see a distinct common characteristic in all students. Irrespective of whether it was with their classmates or other proficient language users, students were now using the language for communicative purpose. This was consistent with research conducted by Takeuchi (in Chamot, 2005:123) that found that learners reported shifting their use of strategies as they advanced to higher proficiency levels, and also consistent with the quantitative data analysis results that showed statistically significant differences with respect to students' perception of using more cognitive strategies in third year than in previous years.

When using Oxford's (1990) taxonomy to analyse the data, it was possible to see that behind the multiple reported activities of "engaging with topics and answering questions", "gossiping in Spanish", "speaking about likes and dislikes" and "coming together to discuss about stuff [they] handled in class", students were actively engaged in "receiving and sending messages" and "recognising and using formulas and patterns for communicative purposes." They were using strategies that activated cognitive processes.

Moreover, using the metaphor of how to feed a baby appropriately, it was noticed that in the same way that milk becomes progressively less sufficient food for a six-month old baby, daily classes are apparently perceived by third-year students as no longer providing them with sufficient exposure for the further development of their speaking skills. Thus, as they become more eager for greater opportunities to use the language, they start to speak to each other in Spanish and even create opportunities to practise the language outside the classroom.

6.3.3.6 Perceived use of strategies to develop grammar in Spanish

What did the students report doing to develop their grammar in Spanish? Below are excerpts of the interviews conducted in the first and second semesters that were used in the qualitative data analysis to substantiate and validate the findings.

Interviewer: What strategies or actions are you doing to develop your grammar?

Participant 1c: [doing] exercises in the grammar book…

Participant 1d: I practice not every day but a couple of times a week I do grammar.

Participant 3c: again I found like a bunch of apps that will you type say a sentence and it will correct your grammar… I also found a great website that has really interesting ways of remembering the grammar so that does help and I do try to review it every day and to do my notes every day from class.

Participant 3d: I tend to revise everything like weekly… everything that we did and then like practice the new grammar that we did or like something that we did in first year but in third year you add more detail to it then I would practice the detail to apply it properly.

Participant 4c: uhm grammar so we obviously focus on that in class and then I go home and I go over the rules we have learnt specially with the sentence structures it does differ from English so I need to take note of how it differs and uhm why then I say practice the sentence… when I go home I go over what we've learnt during the day and it's nice because [the lecturer] actually gives us a lot of homework which is good cause we need the practice so he provides us with a lot of extra worksheets and I find that helps a lot because then I can actually see and I can think about how it would work and yeah

Participant 4d: grammar it's also just basically in class and also when I read or ja when I read say outside of class I see how the words are put together in a sentence where the adjective is and that's something that helps me learn the structure of a sentence as well.

Participant 5c: homework I go I do the homework and then I go over it when I get home and then I see where I made a mistake and yeah and if I have questions then I will ask… I do the homework and then the exercises in the textbook as well the exercise book uhm I do that.

Participant 5d: I have to revise and I try to do the homework like when we have homework like I do it before we hand it in and then again so I do it twice.

Participant 6c: uhm well [the lecturer] is giving us a lot of extra exercises for grammar which is very helpful and uhm we do the exercises in class and I have an extra Spanish book that I bought last year I just do the exercises from that book too… I mostly do them alone and then I'll have some of my classmates check for me or look at it if they don't mind.

Participant 6d: Study a lot… like learn the rules and go over them a lot and try to remember them.

Participant 7c: uhm well obviously reading will help with that uhm and I don't know I'll just write it down to remember everything we did in class I just revise everything we did in class and write down the grammar try to remember it ja that's about it… it helps with my reading skills and my writing skills and it helps to know why I use this sentence and structure.

> **Participant 7d:** I usually just go through the rules that we've learnt in class revise it that's about it.
>
> **Participant 8c:** I do all the activities they give us I'm trying to do that I'm trying to do more as well uhm I'm always trying to do more than what they give us in classes so you know also looking on the internet to find more grammar and stuff like that so I always try to improve myself and do activities most of the time… I think it's important to like grasp that and once you know your grammar it's easier to speak it's easier to understand certain concepts and stuff like that.
>
> **Participant 8d:** you have to just practice and practice and practice so doing the homework uhm I guess ja just doing the homework always practice that's.

A preliminary analysis of the answers revealed that in order to develop their grammar, students reported "doing exercises and practising", "using mobile applications to correct their grammar", searching the internet for "interesting ways of remembering the grammar" and "learning the rules and going over them a lot." From their answers it was possible to see that students apparently held the view that learning grammar consisted primarily of two things: the memorisation of discrete grammatical structures and the practice thereof, a view that Ellis (2006:84) has described as the traditional way of understanding grammar.

The data analysis also showed that some students had a wider view of grammar development. They saw it as a necessary skill that could help with reading and writing, as well as with speaking and understanding. This was also consistent with a more comprehensive view of grammar development as a growing ability to pay attention to the rules and structure of a language in such a way that it helps either to understand it metalinguistically, and/or process it in comprehension and/or production so that it can be internalised (Ellis, 2006:84). However, it is important to mention that things that hamper grammar development can refer to (a) the difficulty students have in understanding a grammatical feature, (b) the difficulty students have in internalising a grammatical feature so that they are able to use it accurately in communication, or (c) both (Ellis, 2006:88). In this respect, it has been observed that in many cases the problem students have is not about understanding a rule, but rather internalising it and/or remembering when to use it.

Students also reported that to develop their grammar skills they first needed to go over the rules and take note of how – and why – specific Spanish grammar rules differed from English ones. This point showed that students were involved in a deep level of cognitive engagement which was consistent with the reported perceived

high frequency of use of the cognitive strategy "I look for similarities and contrasts between the new language and my own" (Oxford, 1990).

6.3.3.7 PERCEIVED USE OF STRATEGIES TO EXPAND VOCABULARY IN SPANISH

What did the students report doing to expand their vocabulary in Spanish? Below are excerpts of the interviews conducted in the first and second semester that were used in the qualitative data analysis to substantiate and validate the findings.

> **Interviewer:** What strategies or actions are you doing to expand your vocabulary?
>
> **Participant 1c:** I listen to the song without looking at any lyrics just to see if I can follow what's being said… the reading in class that also helps with my vocabulary and the exercises also help with the vocabulary.
>
> **Participant 1d:** I find that the reading has helped to expand my vocabulary uh also the listening.
>
> **Participant 3c:** I do have flashcards of the new words that we learn… I do try to practice the new vocabulary with classmates but I will also do uhm cause a lot of interesting YouTube videos made by different Spanish speaking people so from different countries so you learn the vocab from their countries and they have these interesting videos like in this country this means this but for us it means something else so that does help it is interesting.
>
> **Participant 3d:** well every time you learn a new unit they give you the new vocab so you can read up say go to the business pages of a newspaper on the internet and then you can read and they'll use words you don't necessarily know but you can derive the meaning of so you just check them in the dictionary which is better I suppose or else when you read older stories you'll use like different vocab and stuff like that so I think to build up your vocabulary you just need to be exposed to the language and then you'll pick up new words naturally.
>
> **Participant 4c:** that is the reading and then the watching the series I learn a lot of new words uhm from that especially the reading it's nice because I can see actually how it's spelled.
>
> **Participant 4d:** that's definitely reading and then watching series that helps a lot if there's a word I don't know I write it down uhm so I can try and remember it and then uhm if I have the chance to I will try and use it in a sentence say the next day in class or something.
>
> **Participant 5c:** oh when I read or hear something that I don't understand I write it and then I look up the meanings later on or if I don't have if I might forget then I ask someone if they know what it means or I google it like immediately then I define them… [Expanding your vocabulary] opens doors for conversation uhm you can talk about different topics more topics if you have the vocabulary.
>
> **Participant 5d:** whenever I catch something that I don't understand I put it in one of my books and then I look for the meaning and then I try to use the words later.

> **Participant 6d:** well, if I encounter a word in reading or listening then I'll look it up
>
> **Participant 7c:** well I'll read and if I don't understand a word I'll write it down with a English word next to it and I'll revise it every day until I know what that word is so… it [also] helps with reading writing being fluent in the language
>
> **Participant 7d:** I read and listen and then if I don't understand a word I'll go search it in the dictionary.
>
> **Participant 8c:** uh look in the dictionary listen to people if I don't understand a word they said I would ask them uh also from reading as well so there's a lot of things I do to expand my vocabulary yeah.
>
> **Participant 8d:** vocab I obviously from reading and listening I use a lot of times I use a dictionary so if I don't know a word I'll look it up and then I'll write that word and I'll group it with other words that are similar to get my vocab to be better.

A preliminary analysis of the data revealed that in order to expand their vocabulary students reported listening to Spanish songs and reading texts in class (activities that activate cognitive processes). Whether it was text in audio or written format, students were seemingly expanding their vocabulary by deriving the meaning of words from the surrounding context and/or by looking up the words in the dictionary. Words learnt in context lent themselves to be associated with other words and in so doing increased the chances of them being permanently stored in long-term memory. Furthermore, the fact that some students reported that they were looking for a chance to use the newly learnt words in the following days shows that some students were aware of the benefits of using "structured reviewing"[80].

Students also reported that to expand or consolidate their vocabulary they were making use of flashcards (memory strategies) and watching videos/series from the Internet (cognitive strategies). In both cases, they were taking the initiative of doing something outside the classroom to expand their vocabulary. This finding was very consistent with what the quantitative statistical analysis showed, that third-year students perceived using significantly more cognitive strategies than other strategy categories.

Finally, the fact that students reported that they were asking others for the meaning of a word when they did not know it, practising vocabulary with their classmates, and engaging in conversations (cognitive and social strategies), seems to indicate

[80] Structured reviewing involves "reviewing in carefully spaced intervals, at first close together and then more widely spaced apart" (Oxford 1990:42) in order to optimise retention. See Oxford (1990) for further discussion on structured reviewing.

that in the third year learning a FL is not an isolated, individual experience anymore, but rather a social one. Furthermore, taking into consideration that "knowledge can be gained and represented either implicitly or explicitly" (Doughty and Williams cited in Hunt and Beglar, 2005:24), it seems that the expansion of vocabulary is happening simultaneously at two distinct levels: on the one hand, the connection of a word form with its meaning is being learnt explicitly, whereas on the other hand, the orthographic, phonetic and phonological features are being learnt implicitly[81].

6.4 CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This section gathers and summarises the findings made in this chapter. This findings will be analysed and interpreted in chapter seven.

Even though the above-mentioned findings will be further discussed in conjunction with reference to the theorisation of language acquisition in the following chapter, at this point, after analysing the data, it has been found that the perceived and reported frequency of use of learning strategies is not necessarily always higher as students develop proficiency in the language. With the exception of compensation and social strategies, all the averages of the perceived frequencies of use of the other strategy categories experienced an initial increase and then a decrease in frequency use towards the end of the third year. This finding was consistent with a study conducted by Hong-Nam and Leavell (2006:399) who found a curvilinear relationship between strategy use and FL proficiency, revealing that students in the intermediate level reported more use of LLS than at beginner or advanced levels.

The perceived use of learning strategies in the third year played a key role in the development of the four language skills, including grammar and vocabulary. With respect to reading, it was found that students reported implementing different strategies to develop their reading skills in Spanish. They were following Spanish personalities on social media; reading short stories on parallel books; reading the texts from their textbook several times, and reading leveled books from the library because it helped them to expand their vocabulary, understand grammar in context and see how the sentences were structured.

[81] For a further discussion on *explicit and implicit language learning,* see Ellis (2015:3-23).

With respect to writing, it was found that students were not doing much to develop their writing skills. The writing activities were dictated by the textbook and presented as activities devoid of social interaction whose primary concern was correctness and accuracy with the ultimate – and sometimes exclusive – goal of getting the highest possible mark.

With respect to listening, it was noticed that this represented a serious challenge for students and was perhaps the biggest problem they were struggling with. Although the strategies used for the development of reading or writing were also useful for the development of listening skills, it was noticed that when using the transcripts to carry out a listening activity, the activity under such circumstances ended up becoming a reading activity and not a listening activity anymore.

With respect to speaking, it was noted that students were developing their speaking skills mainly with their classmates inside and outside the classroom. Behind the multiple reported activities of “engaging with topics and answering questions”, “gossiping in Spanish”, “speaking about likes and dislikes” and “coming together to discuss about stuff [they] handled in class”, students were actively engaged in “receiving and sending messages” and “recognising and using formulas and patterns for communicative purposes” (cognitive strategies). Statistically, students perceived and reported using significantly more cognitive strategies in their third year than what they did during their first and second year. In the third year learning a FL was not an isolated, individual experience anymore, but rather a social one. However, as students mostly interacted with their lecturer, they tended to be more focused on expressing themselves lexically and grammatically correctly than on speaking fluently and conveying meaning.

With respect to grammar development, the data analysis showed that some students seemed to hold the view that learning grammar consisted primarily of two things: the memorisation of discrete grammatical structures, and the practice thereof. However, other students reported that they were developing their grammar by understanding how and why specific Spanish grammar rules differed from the English ones. In other words, they were looking for similarities and contrasts between the new language and their own (cognitive strategies).

With respect to expanding vocabulary, students reported listening to Spanish songs (cognitive strategies) and reading texts in class (cognitive strategies). They also reported that they were making use of flashcards (memory strategies) and watching videos/series from the Internet (cognitive strategies). The fact that students reported that they were asking others for the meaning of a word and engaging in conversations (cognitive and social strategies) seemed to indicate that in the third year learning a FL was not an isolated, individual experience anymore, but rather a social one. This finding was very consistent with what the quantitative statistical analysis results showed, that third-year students perceived using significantly more cognitive strategies than other strategy categories.

Finally, a shift of perception with respect to the role attributed to compensation strategies was also reported. As students become more proficient in the language – and for the sake of overcoming limitations in speaking or writing – the perception with respect to the wide use of compensation strategies became less negative and more positive and even desirable. In the third year, students seemed to be more willing to make calculated guesses, use circumlocutions and even to coin new words or expressions.

7 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This study was motivated by the realisation that despite being a university where the majority of students are at least bilingual, it was observed that a considerable number of them fail to complete and/or pass the beginner's course of Spanish. It was also observed that some students who continued studying Spanish further struggled to pass the second and third-year courses.

Contrary to the traditional approach of dealing with this matter from a teaching perspective, special attention was paid to aspects related to the learners' ability to learn and the actions that they undertake to self-regulate their learning. Although previous research on LLS has provided inconclusive and, in some cases, contradictory results (Griffiths, 2003a:54, Al-Buainain, 2010:99, Ananisarab and Abdi, 2012:18), this study was inspired by research findings that suggest that the use of LLS seem to have the potential to make the language learning experience more effective, efficient, and enjoyable[82].

Hence, to gain a better understanding of how students perceive themselves using LLS and the role that these strategies play in learning Spanish as a FL at the University of Pretoria, five research questions guided this study: (1) What is the profile of students that study Spanish at undergraduate level at the University of Pretoria? (2) What language learning strategies do students perceive and report using at different points in time during three consecutive years of studying Spanish

[82] See Oxford (1990:1), Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995:18), Wharton (2000:204), Hsiao and Oxford (2002:372), Cohen (2007:39), Pineda (2010:97), Alhaisoni (2012:115) and Oxford et al. (2014a:11).

as a foreign language at undergraduate level? (3) What factors do students report affecting their perceived use of language learning strategies at different points in time as they become progressively more proficient in Spanish? (4) How does the use of particular language learning strategies emerge, evolve and consolidate or disappear? (5) What role does the use of language learning strategies play in learning Spanish as a foreign language at the undergraduate level?

This study lasted three years and closely followed a group of Spanish students that started as beginners in 2014 and completed their third year in 2016. The study used a multiphase mixed methods design (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011:71) that encompassed five phases. Quantitative data were gathered by successive administrations of Oxford's SILL and qualitative data were gathered by interviews that were conducted after each administration of the SILL.

This chapter is structured around the five research questions that guided the study and therefore starts by answering each one of the above-mentioned research questions. It then presents a summary of the findings followed by a section of reflections on the practical implications for teaching and learning with the intent of improving the current situation. The chapter concludes by outlining the challenges and limitations of the present study, and by presenting some recommendations and suggestions for further research.

7.2 RESPONSES TO THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As indicated before, the data analyses follows the order in which the research questions were presented because it draws together all the relevant data for the exact issue of concern to the researcher, preserves the coherence of the material, and provides a collective answer to the research questions (Cohen et al., 2007:468).

7.2.1 WHAT IS THE PROFILE OF STUDENTS THAT STUDY SPANISH AT UNDERGRADUATE LEVEL AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA?

The general questionnaire was designed to construct a profile of students that study Spanish at undergraduate level at the University of Pretoria based on the following aspects: academic programmes, years of enrolment, first and second languages, gender, intention to continue with Spanish up to the third year, previous knowledge of Spanish, and previous experience in learning FLs.

ACADEMIC PROGRAMMES: Students enrolled in the first year came from a great variety of academic programmes. However, those who managed to complete three years of studies were mainly from the BA Languages programme and the rest from the International Studies programme. Students who studied Spanish did it for different reasons: males for more pragmatic reasons, and females for more emotional reasons (see section 4.3.8 for more details on this finding).

YEARS OF ENROLMENT: Students' ages ranged from 18 to 27 years old. Statistical analysis showed that students who started studying Spanish with two years of enrolment or more at university level had a higher pass rate and earned higher final grades in the beginner Spanish course than those who started studying Spanish in their first year of enrolment at university.

FIRST AND SECOND LANGUAGES: No monolingual students were found to be part of the researched group and no significant differences were found indicating that students who reported proficiency in three or more languages were more successful in terms of academic achievement than students who reported proficiency in only two languages. Students who participated in the study came from different linguistic backgrounds. As indicated in section 4.3.4, English was the L1/L2 for all students; Afrikaans was the L1/L2 for 64% of the students; one of the other nine South African languages was the L1/L2 for 17.8% of the students; and a FL was the L1/L2 for 17.6% of the students.

This unique language composition (often found in the South African context) seems to have an effect on students' FL learning. Contrastive analysis studies provide us with a lens to understand how students' L1 could impede or facilitate L2 acquisition or FL learning (Ellis, 1994:29). Work done by Odlin (1989) and Towell and Hawkins (1994) suggests that cross-linguistic differences can lead to errors in the L2 because of erroneous extrapolations from the L1, whereas similarities can lead to easier L2 acquisition or FL learning because the students may recognise features that are common in both languages (Melby-Lervåg and Lervåg, 2011:115). Contrastive theorists like Odlin (1989:36) assert that cross-linguistic similarities and differences can produce a positive transfer, negative transfer and/or differing lengths of acquisition. Transfers seem to affect FL learning in differing degrees at various levels, from phonetics and phonology, to syntax, to morphology, to lexicon and discourse (Towell and Hawkins, 1994:7). Transfers do not affect FL learning in the

same way, nor are they always traceable or distinguishable. At the initial phase, it was noticed that one of the domains in which transfer occurred was at the phonetic level (specifically when learning how to read the vowel sounds in first year). Taking into account the distinction made earlier between languages whose graphemes are consistently read in the same way and form reliable patterns of pronunciation (phonetic languages) and languages whose graphemes are not consistently read in the same way and hence do not always form reliable patterns of pronunciation (non-phonetic languages), it has been noted that when learning Spanish – a phonetic language (Maysonet, 2010:76) – it matters whether the student comes from a phonetic or a non-phonetic background.

Empirical observations over the years have shown that students whose first language is English – a non-phonetic language (Alimemaj, 2014:160, Ahmad, 2016:124, Oweini and Hazoury, 2016:379) – struggle with learning to read and write in Spanish at the initial stages. Conversely, students who are already familiarised with phonetic languages like Afrikaans (Van Schalkwyk, 1988:6) or Zulu (De Sousa and Broom, 2011:11) are quicker to learn to read and write in Spanish than students whose L1 is English.

GENDER: In terms of gender distribution, female students outnumbered males by a ratio of three to one in 2014, and by a ratio of four to one in 2016. No statistically significant differences across gender were found with respect to FL achievement and with respect to the reported perceived use of LLS.

INTENTION TO CONTINUE WITH SPANISH: Though preliminary findings showed that the majority (72%) of the researched group in first year reported no intention to carry on with Spanish until the third year, it is worth noticing that this was not only because their primary goal was to earn the required number of elective first-year credits, but also because a large number of students seemed to believe, at this early stage, that English as a world language was enough for their careers and to explore new horizons. This finding – that could simplistically explain why it is that a large number of students do not carry on studying Spanish until the third year – seems rather to reveal a more complex reality that to some extent coincides with the reported decline of learning FLs in England (Macaro, 2008). The view that English is enough in this new global order, and more specifically in the post-apartheid South Africa (Alexander, 2005:2, Seargeant, 2008:217), is a linguistic perception that could

also explain why it is that less than 1% of students (approximately 619 out of 62275) study a FL at the University of Pretoria. Though this finding challenges one of the main goals of the study, this research was conducted because it contributes to further understanding how the perceived use of strategies changes over time and, while doing so, explores the relationship between reported perceived use of LLS and FL achievement over this period.

PREVIOUS KNOWLEDGE OF SPANISH: Not all students who started studying Spanish were absolute beginners. About 21% of students reported some sort of previous knowledge. However, those who reported previous knowledge completed the course for beginners with an average final grade lower than the average final grade earned by those who indicated that they were absolute beginners. This finding (in tandem with the positive correlation found between FL achievement and the reported perceived use of metacognitive strategies) suggests that students who start the course with previous knowledge of Spanish seem to primarily rely on what they already know about the language instead of focusing on developing the necessary metacognitive skills (extremely necessary in FL contexts) to plan, monitor and evaluate their own learning. Students who report previous knowledge usually outperform in the beginning, but underperform in the long run.

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE IN LEARNING FOREIGN LANGUAGES: Although the findings are not conclusive, the data showed that students who reported previous experience in learning a FL (other than Spanish) earned grades, on average, slightly higher in the course for beginners than those who reported no previous FL experience. This finding suggests that previous experience in learning a FL to some extent acts as an “advance organiser”, which can be described as a tool to activate prior knowledge and to bridge the gap between established knowledge and new knowledge (Ausubel, 2000:11). According to Yang (2014:349), advance organisers can alleviate the cognitive load on students. Cognitive load theory refers to the total amount of mental effort being used in the working memory and highlights the limitations of the human brain as an information processor (Lübbe, 2011:1, Franssila et al., 2016:436). Since FL learning is highly memory intensive in the early stages – due to the large amount of vocabulary and new linguistic structures that need to be memorised – it is understandable why previous FL learning experience (which can act as an advance organiser) can seem to improve students’ FL learning

achievement in the early stages by reducing their cognitive load. Thus, previous FL learning experience seems to play a mediating role by bridging the gap between what students already know (how to learn a FL) and what they are about to learn (Spanish) and, in doing so, enables students to learn more actively and expeditiously (Yang, 2014:349).

7.2.2 What strategies do students perceive and report using to learn Spanish during their three-year journey at undergraduate level?

Considering that learners who successfully complete the undergraduate Spanish courses do not necessarily share common and fixed characteristics, and taking into account they differ from each other in strategy choice and their perceptions about frequency of strategy use, the following findings are presented below:

At first-year level, compensation and metacognitive strategies were the perceived strategy categories most frequently used. However, between these two categories, the category of metacognitive strategies was the one with the highest number of specific strategy items[83] perceived as highly frequently used.

As for the types of metacognitive strategy items, and using Oxford's taxonomy (1990:135-138), students reported that they were trying to identify the purpose of the activities; learning from their mistakes; concentrating on what they heard; paying attention to key language aspects; preparing themselves for specific language tasks; setting achievable goals; arranging their physical environment to promote learning; organising their language notes; identifying and finding out the reasons for their language errors; and evaluating their general progress.

Although, on average, students who passed the course for beginners reported higher frequency of strategy use than students who failed, these differences were found to be not statistically significant. However, when a correlation analysis was conducted across top-achievers and the rest, a statistically significant positive correlation was found between the perceived use of metacognitive strategies and the final grades of the course for beginners, suggesting that the use of metacognitive strategies could have been one of the determining factors that helped students achieve these higher grades. This finding was consistent with a study conducted by

[83] Each strategy category is composed of specific, individual strategy items.

Dreyer and Oxford (1996:71) who found that among Afrikaans students, reported perceived use of metacognitive strategies seemingly predicted proficiency in English[84]. Though it is not possible to assert that students who report low frequency of strategy use fail and that students who report high frequency use pass, it seems plausible to assert that students who perceive and report higher frequency of strategy use are likely to earn higher grades.

The analysis also showed that those who continued studying Spanish reported using metacognitive strategies significantly more than those who did not continue, suggesting that perhaps their long-term commitment to learn Spanish led them to engage at a deeper level with awareness of their learning and cognitive processes, the learning tasks, and the employment of strategies to plan, monitor and evaluate their own learning.

At second-year level, the perceived strategy categories most frequently used by the whole group of participants (in order of preference) were the cognitive, social, and compensation strategies. However, for the group that continued studying Spanish until the third year, the reported strategies most frequently used were the social, cognitive, and compensation strategies. Why was there a difference? The qualitative data analysis showed that the difference seemed to lie in the fact that some of those who continued studying Spanish until the third year started to meet with their own classmates to practise the language on a regular basis. These practice groups emerged as they became aware that Spanish was not supposed to be learnt in isolation (García Santa-Cecilia, 1996:6, Richards and Rodgers, 2014:10-11) and that they needed the support of "more capable peers" to take their language proficiency to a higher level. More capable peers can help their other peers by "scaffolding" them within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Morrone et al., 2004:20). Vygotsky (1980:86) defines the ZPD as the "distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers". In other words, it is the "distance" between what a learner can do with the help of others and what a learner can do without help. Furthermore, Vygotsky claims that what a

[84] A stepwise multiple regression analysis showed that reported perceived use of metacognitive strategies accounted for 41.1% of the total ESL variance.

learner is able to do with assistance at a particular moment may indicate his/her future unassisted performance (Shabani, 2016:3).

The role of more capable peers as mediators to foster language learning has already been studied in the L2/FL literature (Herazo Rivera and Sagre Barboza, 2016:151). Krashen's input hypothesis, which states that humans acquire language by receiving "comprehensible input" that contains *i + 1* structures that are a bit beyond their current level of competence (Krashen in Dunn and Lantolf, 1998:415), can be used to understand certain aspects of what happens within these practice groups. Taking into consideration that more capable peers can produce *i + 1* input, it seems plausible to think that interactions within the practice groups can lead to language learning that focuses on the meaning and not necessarily on the form of the message (Krashen, 1982:22).

The data analysis also showed statistically significant differences with respect to the perceived use of compensation strategies between top achievers and the rest of the students. Moreover, a statistically significant negative correlation was found between the perceived use of compensation strategies and the final grades in the second semester. Data gathered by the interviews helped to further understand these findings and showed that for some students the use of compensation strategies in oral communication or written production was something that should rather be avoided, because their interaction was primarily with the lecturer and their main concern (when speaking or writing) was not necessarily conveying meaning with fluency, but rather correctness and accuracy in order to get the highest possible marks. However, for those students who were not only interacting with the lecturer but also with more capable peers, their main concern was conveying meaning with fluency and they were prepared to take risks.

At third-year level, according to the responses provided by the students, the perceived strategy category most frequently used by the remaining group of participants was cognitive strategies, and the least, memory strategies. Students reported using strategies that activated cognitive processes primarily related to the use of the language[85] more frequently than strategies aimed at understanding and learning the new language. For instance, in the past, students reported that their

[85] Involving either or both of the communicative activities of production, interaction and reception.

most frequently used strategies were using reference materials to understand the new language and looking for similarities and contrasts to improve their learning of the language. At third-year level, students reported that they were using the new language to take notes in class, imitating the way native speakers talk, and skimming a text to get the main idea – all strategies that focus on using the language.

However, contrary to what was expected, the data analysis showed that the perceived use of the majority of the strategy categories in the third year was lower at the end than at the beginning of the year. Taking into account that at the end of the third year these students can still be considered to be at an upper intermediate proficiency level, this finding was consistent with previous research that found that students in the intermediate level reported higher frequency of strategy use than students in the beginner or advanced levels (Hong-Nam and Leavell, 2006:399). Only the perceived frequency use of compensation strategies and, in particular, social strategies were consistently higher. This showed that it was perhaps possible that students were reporting lower use of certain strategies because they had started to use them automatically or subconsciously.

Nevertheless, the realisation that language learning was not supposed to happen in isolation, coupled with a growing perception of the need to practise the language with more capable peers, became widespread to the whole group in the third year. Thus, despite the lack of opportunities available to practise the language outside the classroom, the majority of students reported that language learning had become a social experience in the third year. Practice groups emerged as an alternative to use the language together to compensate for the scarcity of proficient or native Spanish speakers to practise with.

7.2.3 WHAT FACTORS DO STUDENTS REPORT AFFECTING THEIR PERCEIVED USE OF LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES AT DIFFERENT POINTS IN TIME AS THEY BECOME PROGRESSIVELY MORE PROFICIENT IN SPANISH?

Multiple factors have been identified to affect strategy choice and perceived use of strategies (Oxford, 1989:236, 1990:13). However, based on the data provided by the students and the analysis thereof, and taking into account the order in which students mentioned the factors, it was found that students' choice and perceived

frequency of strategy use were to some extent influenced by the advice provided by the lecturer, specifically in the way students approached texts in the target language. They were told that it was unnecessary to know every single word in order to process information. They were told that texts could by deconstructed by identifying keywords as well as key linguistic structures, and then reconstructed to provide enough meaning to answer specific comprehension questions.

The lecturer's way of teaching was also reported to affect the perceived use of the cognitive strategy of note-taking and the metacognitive strategy of organising and reorganising content knowledge in the language learning notebook. As these two strategies are closely related, it was noted that note-taking requires cognitive effort to comprehend what is being read or heard, to write important information with structure, and to learn the content for later use (Reed et al., 2016:308), and in doing so activates cognitive processes such as fostering connections between new content and students' existing knowledge (Valtonen et al., 2011:577).

Nevertheless, the lecturer's way of teaching was not affecting all students in the same way (Ellis, 2008:711). The qualitative data showed that the impact of a lecturer that did not use the whiteboard for explanations in class was not the same on all students. In some cases, it caused students to report a decrease in the frequency use of taking notes, but in other cases, it forced them to listen carefully in order to take notes. In this respect, the literature shows that note-taking seems to be affected by the ability and capacity to hold and manipulate information in working memory, prior knowledge about the lecture topic, and/or the cognitive style of the learner (Kiewra, 1989:163).

This being the case, it seems that the reason why students reported opposite effects is because they had different learning styles. The student who reported a decrease in the frequency use of taking notes was possibly field-dependent and bound by the inherent organisation of the stimulus, whereas the student who reported an increase in the frequency use of taking notes was possibly field-independent and observed less differentiation between the stimulus and its context (Kiewra, 1989:163, Agree et al., 2015:3). Research, however, shows that both field-dependent and field-independent learners can perform equally well, but approach learning differently (Agree et al., 2015:3).

The lecturer's attitude towards the Hispanic culture was also reported as influencing the perceived frequency use of social strategies. The analysis of the data showed that students were capable of perceiving the extent to which a lecturer appreciated, loved or engaged with the Hispanic culture in general, and in particular with his/her home country. Being fluent and highly proficient in the target language was not sufficient to make students passionate about the Hispanic culture or encourage them to learn about the culture of the places where the target language is spoken. Taking into account that the goal for students is to develop communicative competence and considering Canale's (1983) inclusion of the sociolinguistic domain, which is concerned with the knowledge and skills required to deal with the social dimension of language use (Council of Europe, 2001:118), the researcher believes that having a native speaker as a lecturer gives the students the opportunity to further develop intercultural understanding and become more aware of others' thoughts, and in doing so, enables students to empathise with others – a key component of Oxford's definition of social strategies (Oxford, 1990:145).

7.2.4 How does the use of particular language learning strategies emerge, evolve and consolidate or disappear?

Research findings confirmed that students who started as beginners and completed the third year in Spanish made consistent use of a variety of strategies, and to some extent developed common patterns in strategy use as their proficiency in the language developed (Rao and Liu, 2011:49, Chiang, 2016:65).

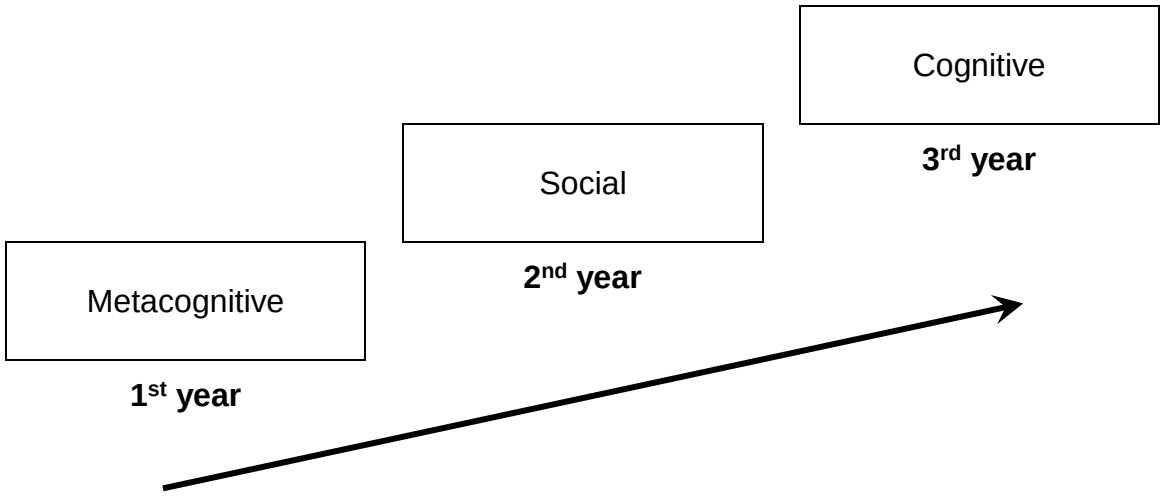
At the strategy category level, it was found that the most frequently used strategies as perceived by students were metacognitive strategies in the first year, social strategies in the second year, and cognitive strategies in the third year (see Table 7.1).

Qualitative information provided by the students in the interviews helped to understand these quantitative findings. At first year level, the analysis showed a clear distinction between those who continued studying Spanish and those who only studied for one year. Those who continued studying Spanish reported that they created and engaged in a variety of activities[86] outside the classroom to immerse

[86] Activities such as going home and rewriting the notes they had taken in class; listening to radio over the Internet; singing songs (with lyrics) in Spanish; watching movies with subtitles in Spanish; reading

themselves in the language and in so doing, counterbalanced the lack of exposure to Spanish. This shows that they were proactive and seemed to be more skilful in arranging and planning their language learning process (Oxford 1990:135). On the contrary, those who did not continue studying Spanish reported that they were mainly focusing their work on the activities suggested in the textbook and not doing much to engage in activities related to the language outside the classroom.

Table 7.1 Evolution of perceived strategy use in first, second and third year
Source: Data analysis in chapter 6, Table 6.5



At second year level, students reported higher overall strategy use (M=3.53 in first semester, M=3.70 in second semester) compared to the first year (M=3.35). However the increase was not consistent across all the strategy categories. Social strategy use increased from M=3.43 to M=3.99, making it the most frequently reported perceived strategy category in the second year. This may be because, with the level of proficiency they were currently at, they felt that the solitary activities they were engaging in (such as studying at home or at the library) were not enough to continue developing their language skills. At this point in their language learning journey, they realised that they needed to include interactive activities involving

Spanish newspapers on the Internet; setting their cell phones to Spanish and sending messages to each other or more proficient Spanish speakers, etc.

more capable peers. Second-year was the year in which "practice groups" emerged as a more sophisticated alternative to counterbalance the lack of opportunities to practise the language outside the classroom.

At third year level, the data analysis showed that students perceived themselves as eager – and to some extent more confident – to engage in activities that involved more direct manipulation and transformation of the target language than in the past. They reported that their recently acquired level of proficiency allowed them to engage more prominently with strategies related to the ways of using the language than with strategies more related to the ways of learning the language. Thus, a distinctive characteristic seemed to be that in the past they were primarily interested in how to learn the language, but in the third year they were also interested in how to use the language.

Changes were also observed with regard to memory strategy use and memorisation. Information-processing models, common in cognitive psychology, can help to further understand memorisation mechanisms (Ellis, 2008:406). Information-processing models assume that successive stages of processing are organised in a particular way (Barber, 2015:14). From this view, learning involves transferring knowledge from short-term memory to long-term memory, and moving from controlled processing to automatic processing of language (Mitchell et al., 2013:47). Short-term memory is considered to have a very limited capacity, whereas long-term memory is seen to have much greater capacity and durability (Kopelman, 1987, Ellis, 2008:407).

At the strategy category level, it was observed that as students developed proficiency in the language, they reported a decreasing frequency of use of memory strategies[87] (M=3.31 in first semester, M=3.07 in second semester). Memory strategies range from rote learning[88] actions, to listing and grouping, to using associations of various kinds, and to reviewing at different intervals (Cohen and Aphek, 1980:222, Oxford, 1990:38-43, Ellis, 2008:715). The lower reported

[87] Specific memory strategies include, among others: listing new and known words to establish relationships, acting out the new words, using sound and images to remember words, using flashcards, etc.

[88] It refers to memorisation without proper understanding or reflection ("Rote learning" in Oxford English living dictionary).

perceived frequency of use of memory strategies does not necessarily mean that they are memorising less words, but that students are deducing the meaning of words by making more use of compensation strategies (M=3.70 in first semester, M=3.91 in second semester) which, instead of them looking up every unfamiliar word, help them to guess the meaning by using contextual clues. Thus, memorisation mechanisms from short-term memory to long-term memory are not explicit as before, but are becoming more implicit. Where previously students made a list or cue cards to memorise words, they can now deduce the meaning from known surrounding words. This activates more cognitive processes, increasing the likelihood of transferring the meaning of the word to long-term memory.

Students' perception of the utility of some compensation strategies also changed over time. Initially, students reported that it looked irrational and pointless for them to make up new words, but at a later stage they reported that it was perhaps worthwhile to take that risk in order to communicate fluently and effectively when needed. Similarly, as students became more proficient in the target language, they reported a consistent increase in the implementation of strategies aimed at improving their reading skills, and a steady decrease in the implementation of strategies related to consulting reference materials (which activates cognitive processes that involve comprehending what is being read by forming connections between unknown content and existing knowledge). This was something expected as the ongoing expansion of vocabulary and knowledge of grammatical rules allowed them to read more fluently and confidently than in the past.

However, it is still important to acknowledge the role that memory strategies can play at the intermediate and advanced level. Taking into account that listing and grouping strategies was reported to work best for beginners, while associations were reported to work better for learners who already possessed a fair level of proficiency in the new language (Brown and Perry, 1991:655), it seems plausible to hypothesise that memory strategies that activate more cognitive processes – such as analysing, reasoning and practising (Oxford, 1990:69) – can allow students to increase retention (Cohen and Aphek, 1980:655) when learning vocabulary at the receptive and productive level (Moir and Nation, 2008:159).

7.2.5 What role does the use of language learning strategies play in learning Spanish as a foreign language at the undergraduate level?

Before answering this question it is vital to keep in mind that this study used the term "learning strategies" and not "learner strategies" or "communicative strategies" for practical reasons (see Macaro, 2006:325, Cohen and Macaro, 2007, Oxford, 2011:13). Firstly, the focus was on using strategies for learning purposes, as opposed to using them primarily for communicative purposes. Secondly, focusing principally on learning seemed to be more intertwined with the journey our students were going through, although learning was often embedded in communication exchanges. Thirdly, the majority of learning-focused researchers employ the term "learning strategies" (Oxford, 2011:13).

In order to be able to discuss the role that the use of LLS played in learning Spanish, it was considered appropriate to distinguish between five roles that these strategies can play, as defined in the tentative framework below proposed by this researcher. Based on the extent to which students perceive strategies as useful or useless to develop language proficiency at different points in time, strategies can be perceived to fulfil the following roles: an essential role, a catalytic role, an imperceptible role, a retarding role, or a preventing role (see Table 7.2 for a definition of these roles).

Table 7.2 Role of language learning strategies in FL learning
Source: Own

Role of LLS in adult FL learning				
Desirable effect		**Neutral**	**Undesirable effect**	
Essential role:	**Catalytic role:**	**Imperceptible role:**	**Retarding role**	**Preventing role**
When students perceive that the use of certain strategies is indispensable and absolutely necessary to develop language proficiency.	When students perceive that the use of certain strategies facilitates and/or speeds up the development of language proficiency.	When students perceive that the use of certain strategies has no effect on the development of their language proficiency.	When students perceive that the use of certain strategies slows down their further development of language proficiency.	When students perceive that the use of certain strategies prevents them from further developing their language proficiency.

The research done suggests that the role LLS play is mostly a supporting, constructive role which is dynamic in nature, as the perceived benefit of LLS use changes over time according to changing levels of language proficiency.

However, in order to indicate the role that the use of LLS play in learning Spanish as a FL at the undergraduate level, there seems to be more value in considering the perception of strategy use at strategy item level, as opposed to considering the big strategy categories or looking at the SILL instrument as a whole. See Table 7.3 below for an example of using the proposed framework to define the perceived role (at strategy item level) that individual strategies play.

Table 7.3 Examples of the role of language learning strategies in FL learning
Source: Own

Examples of the role of LLS in adult FL learning (Depending on the level of proficiency)				
Desirable effect		**Neutral**	**Undesirable effect**	
Essential role:	**Catalytic role:**	**Imperceptible role:**	**Retarding role**	**Preventing role**
• (Especially for beginners) Using reference materials such as dictionaries and glossaries; • Imitating the way native speakers talk; • Reading in the new language; • (Especially for intermediate and advanced students) Actively looking for people with whom to speak the new language.	• Looking for patterns in the new language; • Planning goals for language learning. • (Especially for intermediate and advanced students) Watching TV shows or movies or listening to the radio in the new language; • (Especially for intermediate and advanced students) Trying to think in the new language;	• Keeping a private diary or journal where they can write their feelings about language learning; • Physically acting out a new word to remember; • Giving themselves a tangible reward when they have done something well in their language learning.	• (Especially for beginners) Reading without looking up every unfamiliar word, while the students' vocabulary is very small; • (Especially for intermediate or advanced students) Listing known words that are related to a new word and drawing lines to show relationships. This slows down the pace of their work, as by this time the students' vocabulary is larger and contains more complex, polysemic terms, making this a time-consuming activity.	• (Especially for beginners) In some cases, watching movies or listening to radio can be a very frustrating experience if not done appropriately. • (Especially for intermediate or advanced students) Looking up every unfamiliar word can impede the development of compensation strategies, such as "'learning to guess the general meaning by using clues that can be found in the text" or "finding a different way to express an idea when one cannot think of the right expression."

This framework was created because the researcher found a lack of practical categories with which to classify strategies from a student's perspective according to the strategy's perceived usefulness. Thus, from a practical point of view, this framework adds a new dimension and provides valuable information to snapshot type studies, which have been the dominant type of study in LLS research. This will allow students to not only report the frequency of strategy use, but also the perceived value of that strategy to them. This can address one of the weaknesses of snapshot type studies by adding a second dimension to the quantitative data. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the five roles defined in the framework can also be coded as ordinal data, and could therefore form part of statistical analyses.

As for longitudinal studies using a mixed methods approach, this framework can elicit key information on strategy use that could be easily followed up by in-depth interviews. Knowing from the start what students perceive as essential, catalytic, imperceptible, retarding or preventing in their language learning process can further inform and improve the quality of the data captured in the qualitative strand of the study.

As this study focused on the evolution of strategy use from the beginner stage to a more advanced stage, it was deemed necessary to specify the role that strategy use plays in this process. Since LLS research has regularly reported inconsistent results regarding strategy use at different levels of proficiency (beginner, intermediate, advanced), it seems plausible that this framework could shed light on these varying results by adding information on what is regarded by students as essential to develop language proficiency at different phases of their language learning journey. However, due to the fact that this framework was created after all data collection techniques were conducted, this study did not make use of the proposed framework.

7.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

Before discussing the implications of this research, the researcher acknowledges that it is not guaranteed that students who are introduced to the concept of LLS, the different strategy types and the potential benefits thereof will necessarily make increasing use of them or report higher perceived frequency of strategy use accordingly. Furthermore, the researcher is aware that the literature has not conclusively shown that high frequency use of these strategies necessarily improves

FL achievement (Griffiths, 2003a:54, Al-Buainain, 2010:99, Ananisarab and Abdi, 2012:18). That being said and based on the results reported in the previous sections, it is the view of the researcher that this study can still yield practical answers to the problems that sparked this investigation, namely the low pass rate for first-year Spanish and the low throughput rate to third-year Spanish.

However, before discussing what can be suggested for both cases, it is important to distinguish between student dropouts due to learning-related factors and student dropouts due to non-learning-related factors. The former dropouts are influenced by the students' performance during the Spanish course and fall within the scope of this research, whereas the latter dropouts are influenced by decisions made prior to the beginning of the course and therefore fall outside the scope of this research. In this respect, this study found that for a considerable number of students (see section 4.3.9 for further details) their main goal was to meet the elective credit requirements for first year and not necessarily to become proficient in the language or to continue studying Spanish until the third year.

Given the findings that have been discussed in previous sections and taking into account the two original issues that sparked this investigation, the following implications for teaching and learning are presented.

What can be suggested to reduce the dropout rate of the course and increase the pass rate at first year level?

The statistically significant positive correlation that was found between the perceived use of metacognitive strategies and the final grades earned in the course for beginners leads this study to recommend introducing students to the potential value of using metacognitive strategies in FL learning. This correlation, in tandem with the observation that those who eventually continued studying Spanish reported more use of metacognitive strategies, seems to suggest that the use of metacognitive strategies plays a crucial role in the learning of Spanish as a FL in the first year.

As mentioned previously, researchers have questioned the assumption that passing on the behaviours of successful learners to less successful learners is an achievable process mainly dependent on instruction (Grenfell and Macaro, 2007:12). Indeed, pure top-down instruction to encourage students to implement LLS in their FL learning appears to have limited results, and this researcher agrees that less

successful learners will never be able to imitate successful learners in all respects. However, there are certain actions that seem to play a positive role in FL learning, irrespective of the types of students that put them into practice. These actions involve active participation by students in their learning and self-regulation thereof, and are described in the literature within the domain of metacognitive strategies.

Taking into account that (1) a statistically significant positive correlation was found between the perceived use of metacognitive strategies and the final grades earned in the first-year course, and that (2) this is in agreement with the fact that in the literature it is widely accepted that when students think about their learning with the intention to understand the way they learn and take ownership of their own learning by planning, monitoring and evaluating their progress, better results can be expected, this researcher recommends that metacognitive strategies should be introduced to all first-year students to increase the likelihood of successful completion of the first-year Spanish course.

One of the first things students need to realise is that long-lasting learning takes place not necessarily inside the classroom, but outside of it when they practise what they have been taught in class. Also, when planning when and how to study a FL, it is more advisable to space out the study sessions as opposed to doing one long session. Furthermore, students should be aware of managing the intervals between reviewing previous work. One such management method is structured reviewing, which involves “reviewing in carefully spaced intervals, at first close together and then more widely spaced apart” (Oxford 1990:42) in order to optimise retention.

A practical way to promote self-monitoring and self-evaluation (considering that learning Spanish in South Africa is characterised by a scarcity of proficient or native speakers) is by encouraging the use of study groups and specific websites that provide platforms through which students can test themselves on vocabulary, basic linguistic structures and verb conjugations, and receive immediate feedback.

Below are some activities that can be recommended to first-year students. These consider the preferred self-reported progression of LLS use identified in this study, namely metacognitive strategies in the first year. These take into account that first-year students are particularly concerned with the acquisition of basic vocabulary and

the understanding of simple linguistic structures while showing eagerness to engage in simple and direct exchanges of information.

- Encourage students to think about their learning mechanisms and explain them what it takes to learn a foreign language.
- Discuss with the students the concept of communicative competence and its critical components to develop an understanding of what needs to be learnt and how this is going to happen.
- Encourage students to schedule their study times by using the structured reviewing technique and by spacing out their study sessions as opposed to studying in one long session just before tests or towards the end of the semester.
- Encourage students to analyse the feedback received from their class exercises, marked tests and homework in order to understand the reasons for their mistakes and learn from them.
- Encourage students to practise what they have learnt in class in carefully spaced intervals by using some of the free online resources available.
    - www.studyspanish.com
    - www.bbc.co.uk/languages/spanish/
    - www.donquijote.org/lessons/archivo.asp
    - ave.cervantes.es/pruebe-los-cursos-de-espanol-en-linea-ave-global

From the beginning of their first year, students need to be made aware of the importance of being proactive in their learning and of the value of practising the language outside of the classroom. If better throughput rates are to be sought in Spanish, critical changes need to be made at this level.

What can be suggested to improve the throughput rate to the third year?

Though the majority of first-year students indicate every year that they have no intention to continue studying Spanish until the third year, it is possible that the introduction of metacognitive strategies may contribute to the development of a feeling that learning a FL (such as Spanish) is an achievable task, which is something that could eventually increase the throughput rate to third year.

As second and third year students progressively realise that significant learning also occurs outside of the classroom, and that it also has a social dimension, this study suggests that lecturers recommend more activities for students to engage with the language outside the classroom. These recommendations should be tailored according to the findings in this research regarding the preferred self-reported use of LLS for the level of language proficiency they are currently at, namely social strategies in second year, and cognitive strategies in third year.

As for second-year students, their expansion of vocabulary in tandem with an increasing knowledge of grammar and linguistic structures enables them to take their language proficiency to a higher level. However, for a considerable number of students the lack of exposure to and interaction with proficient or native Spanish speakers seems to confine their learning to what they do in class or by themselves at home. Taking into account that learning and practice seems to be largely dependent and centred on what the lecturer does in class, and that it can also be described as an asocial experience that mostly happens in isolation, the researcher suggests the following activities for second-year students.

- Encourage students to form practice groups from the beginning of the year and provide students with guideline activities they could perform in these groups. These activities should focus on – but not be limited to – the expansion of vocabulary, reading comprehension, listening comprehension, spoken interaction, and cultural aspects. The following websites can be used for this purpose:
    - http://edelsa.es/es/sala-de-profesores/
    - http://www.todoele.net/actividades/Actividad_list.asp
    - http://www.cervantes.es/lengua_y_ensenanza/recursos_espanol/ensenar_espanol.htm

Students' engagement in these groups seems to be valuable as they reported in the interviews (at the end of their second year) being able to overcome their own individual weaknesses by working with other classmates for whom these were strengths. Students need the support of more capable classmates to take their language proficiency to a higher level. Such practice groups offer a safe, low-anxiety environment in which learners motivate themselves to take risks with the language

and practise it to gain confidence, and in doing so they get better equipped for success in FL learning (Chang, 2005:218).

Considering that language learning is a process that involves both objective and affective factors (Du, 2009:162) and taking into account Krashen's affective-filter hypothesis (1979:164, 1982:30), which suggests that learners learn best under non-threatening conditions, it seems plausible to assert that there seems to be value in encouraging students to form practice groups for studying and practising the language from at least the second year onward.

Though seeking out or creating opportunities to practise the new language falls under Oxford's subcategory of arranging and planning your learning (metacognitive strategies), it is evident that the students' intentions in forming these practice groups (as reported during the interviews) was primarily to work with other language learners to improve language skills, which falls under the subcategory of cooperating with others (social strategies).

As for third-year students, it seems that not much can be suggested to improve the throughput rate of these students completing their last year. The reason being is that over the years it has been noticed that those who register for third year Spanish normally successfully complete these courses. However, taking into account that third-year students seem to be more interested in using the language and engaging in direct manipulation and transformation thereof, the researcher suggests the following activities to practise the language outside the classroom.

- Encourage students to continue working in practice groups outside the classroom. The focus should now be on debating given topics, and discussing films, television programmes and books.

- Students' practice groups should get connected through WhatsApp or similar platforms with native speakers who they can practise the language with. To guarantee at least a minimum level of success, lecturers should provide to the groups a list of "more capable others" with their respective profiles from which the students can pick someone with whom to practise.

As a concluding remark of this section, it is the view of the researcher that, concerning FL learning, greater attention should be paid to what students do

outside the classroom in order to increase the likelihood of increasing the throughput rate to the third year. The current students' approach to the study of Spanish seems to be unintentionally reinforced by the Spanish lecturers who are solely focusing on what they have to teach in the classroom. By doing so, the current lecturers are neither encouraging their learners to learn how to learn (metacognition), nor helping them to progressively take more responsibility for their learning process. The focus should not only be placed on the lecturers' efficiency to teach, but also on the students' efficacy to understand what it takes to learn and regulate their learning process. In this respect, more resources should be invested in encouraging student-centred learning approaches instead of solely promoting effective teacher-centred approaches.

If students are encouraged to think about their learning with the intention to understand the way they learn, and assisted to plan, monitor and evaluate their own learning by themselves from the beginning of their first year (something that has never been done in the past within the Spanish Section), and provided with suggestions (as the ones mentioned above) concerning how they can also learn and practice the language in non-formal settings outside the classroom, it seems plausible to believe that the dropout rate of the Spanish courses can be reduced and the respective pass rates can increase. Nevertheless, further research will have to be conducted to determine whether the statistically significant positive correlation that was found (between the perceived use of metacognitive strategies and the final grades earned in the course for beginners) shows an actual cause-effect relationship between these two variables.

7.4 CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS OF THE PRESENT STUDY

Like others studies, this study faced challenges and had a number of limitations, among which might be the possibility that students did not report accurately (when answering Oxford's SILL) or comprehensively (when answering the questions in the interviews). In this respect, the researcher was fully aware that LLS research depends to a large extent on the learners' ability and willingness to describe the actions they consciously take to improve and regulate their own language learning (Oxford and Burry-Stock, 1995:5)

As indicated by Grenfell and Harris (in Chamot, 2005:115), it has not been easy to research inside the human brain and find out what was going on there. From the beginning it was acknowledged that strategies were not always observable. The researcher has worked with the information he could get, which, despite the limitations, provided useful data for analysis.

The researcher was fully aware that Oxford's SILL only quantifies the perceived use of LLS and does not say much about the motivations and quality of strategy use (Ellis 2008:706). For this reason, follow-up interviews focusing on the how, the why, the how often and the context in which learners used LLS were deemed relevant and necessary to be conducted in order to better understand the quantitative data generated by the administration of Oxford's SILL.

To decrease the risk of students dropping their participation from this research study, learners were strategically reminded[89] of the valuable contribution they were making towards the learning of FLs at UP and that they themselves would benefit from this study in the long run. This was done very carefully to minimise negative effects on the data.

To overcome the tendency of only providing a snapshot view of strategy use, this study paid attention to the qualitative aspects of strategy use and focused on how the use of LLS changed over time.

To decrease the possibility of responding incorrectly to Oxford's SILL, a brief explanation of what language strategies were and how they were classified always preceded the administration of the questionnaire. However, this was done very carefully to minimise the impact on students' self-reporting of strategy choice and use thereof, but the potential risk that the participants were subject to "self-reporting social-desirability biases in responses, over-subjectivity, inability to verbalise clearly, and low self-awareness" (Oxford and Burry-Stock, 1995:2) was always present in this research study.

Finally, there has been no intention to generalise the findings. On the contrary, as stated by McMillan and Schumacher (2001:414), the richness of this type of

[89] Students were reminded of the value of their contribution before each administration of Oxford's SILL and at the end of each individual interview.

research relies on the fact that it "enables others to understand similar situations and apply these findings in practical situations or subsequent research."

7.5 RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The above discussion of the limitations of the study provides us with some initial recommendations for future research.

As for the limitation of relying on the accuracy or comprehensiveness of students' self-reporting, there could be value in limiting the scope of similar studies to only one aspect of FL learning (reading, writing, listening, speaking, vocabulary and grammar). This would allow students to enhance the quality of their self-reporting of the aspect being studied, albeit at the expense of the other aspects. The weaknesses of self-reporting instruments can also be mitigated by incorporating qualitative strands such observations or think-aloud exercises. Furthermore, indirect observations such as video recordings of practice groups can also provide another perspective to study the processes that take place in the human brain and allow us to attempt to infer what strategies are being used.

In the South African context, where school students are obliged to learn a second language, it would be interesting to investigate the effect that students' L2 learning history might have on their current FL learning. Possible research questions could be: *What effect does previous second language learning experience have on current foreign language learning? Does previous proficiency in specific South African languages have differing effects in learning a foreign language like Spanish?*

As for data analysis conducted on results from administrations of Oxford's SILL, the literature review has shown that the traditional snapshot approach to study the use of LLS has yielded, over the years, a corpus of knowledge that has been mainly generated by data analysis at the level of strategy categories[90].

However, if the intention is to study changes over time with respect to reported and perceived use of LLS, researchers need to take into consideration that fluctuations in strategy use are not completely and sufficiently visible at the level of strategy categories. For example, when analysing how the use of particular strategies

[90] See Peacock and Ho (2003), Alptekin (2007), Vlčková (2007), Wait (2007), Ambrosi-Randić and Kostić-Bobanović (2008), Alhaisoni (2012), and Bozorgian and Pillay (2013).

emerged, evolved and consolidated or disappeared, this study found that significant variations of strategy use at item level were not evident when the average for the whole category was calculated. If the analyses had only been conducted at the category level using the average for the whole category, rich information would have been lost. Therefore, it is suggested that future research of this nature may consider using analyses at both strategy category and strategy item level.

As for the limitations of single strand studies, the mixed methods approach proved to be a very useful way to conduct this type of research. The mixing of Oxford's SILL (a quantitative technique) in tandem with interviews (a qualitative technique) provided a tool for confirming findings or getting a deeper understanding, especially when results from previous studies seemed inconsistent or contradictory[91] (Leedy and Ormrod, 2012:259). Data from the interviews allowed the researcher to interpret the quantitative results and delve into what, how and why strategies were used (Ivankova, 2015:3-4), and in doing so, provided the researcher with a more complete picture of the matter being researched (Barbour, 2014:206). It is therefore recommended that a mixed methods approach be used in research such as this conducted over a period of time.

Finally, taking into account that the above-mentioned proposed framework adds a new dimension to the study of LLS by allowing students to not only report the frequency of strategy use but also the perceived value of each strategy to them, it is recommended that future research may include the above-mentioned framework when administering Oxford's SILL to know from the start what strategies students perceive as essential, catalytic, imperceptible, retarding or preventing in their language learning process at different points in time.

[91] See previous sections 2.5.1 ("As for gender…") and 2.6 ("Previous research on reported LLS use)

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: LETTER OF APPROVAL

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Humanities
Research Ethics Committee

20 August 2014

Dear Prof Mühr

Project:	**Spanish as a foreign language at university level: the role and use of language learning strategies by absolute beginners**
Researcher:	**LA Lancho Perea**
Department:	**Modern European Languages**
Reference number:	**04360230**

I am pleased to be able to inform you that the above application was **approved** by the **Research Ethics Committee** on 31July and by the Dean of Humanities on 15 August 2014. Data collection may therefore commence.

Please note that this approval is based on the assumption that the research will be carried out along the lines laid out in the proposal. Should the actual research depart significantly from the proposed research, it will be necessary to apply for a new research approval and ethical clearance.

We wish you success with the project.

Sincerely

Prof Karen Harris
Acting Chair: Postgraduate Committee &
Research Ethics Committee
Faculty of Humanities
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
e-mail:Karen.harris@up.ac.za

APPENDIX 2: LETTER OF CONSENT

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Department of Modern European Languages
University of Pretoria
Luis Andres Lancho Perea – (012) 4205312

Spanish as a foreign language at university level:
the role and use of language learning strategies by absolute beginners
(for students)

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the use of language learning strategies by beginners like you who are prepared to undertake three years of Spanish as a foreign language at undergraduate level. In order to do this, an extended study (covering 2014-2016) will be conducted from the time you are in first year until your third year. Questionnaires, interviews and class observations will be implemented several times over this extended study.

An 80-item questionnaire (Oxford's SILL) will be administered at the beginning of every August and will be followed-up with 20-minute interviews during the second and third weeks of the same month. In 2015 and 2016, class observations focusing on strategy use will be carried out during the first semesters to supplement and enrich your self-report on strategy use.

The month of August has been strategically chosen to minimise the risk of clashing you're your other modules' semester tests and/or major assignments. We hope that by participating in this study and becoming aware of the wide variety of foreign language learning strategies, you will enhance your approach to study a foreign language and increase the likelihood to pass the Spanish modules and enjoy them.

Your participation in this extended study is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time without negative consequences. Your personal information will not be disclosed to any third party and confidentiality will be guaranteed at all times. If you withdraw, all data provided by you would be destroyed. If you accept to participate, data provided by you will be stored in a secure place and only used in further research upon subsequent approval.

You may contact the researcher at any time with any enquiries relating to the study.

Student's signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX 3: GENERAL QUESTIONNAIRE

General questionnaire

Name: _____ Student No. _____ Male:__ Female:__ Chosen pseudonym: _____

Home Tel: _____ Cell: _____ e-mail : _____

How long ago did you finish school? __ last year __ 1-3 years __ 4-6 years __ 7-9 years __10^{+} years

What year are you in now? __1st year __2nd year __3rd year __ postgraduate __ personnel

Which degree are you enrolled for? _____ What is your mother tongue? _____

Do you have previous knowledge of Spanish? ___ yes ___no If yes, kindly specify _____

_____

_____

Have you previously studied a foreign language? ___ yes ___no If yes, please specify

_____

_____

What other languages do you speak or understand?

_____

_____

Do you have friends/relatives who speak Spanish? ___ yes ___no If yes, specify

_____

_____

How did you get to know about this Spanish module SPN 101?

___ UP timetable ___ a friend who did Spanish ___other (specify) _____

Why do you want to study Spanish?

_____

_____

What do you expect from this module SPN 101?

_____

_____

Are you thinking of continuing your studies of Spanish until third year? Kindly motivate

_____

_____

APPENDIX 4: OXFORD'S SILL

Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)
Version 5.1 (c) R. Oxford (1989)

This instrument is designed to gather information about how you go about learning a new language. Please read each statement and mark the response (1, 2, 3, 4, or 5) that tells how true the statement is in terms of what you actually do when you are learning the new language.

Never or almost never true of me	→	1
Generally not true of me	→	2
Somewhat true of me	→	3
Generally true of me	→	4
Always or almost always true of me	→	5

Part A

When learning a new word...

1. I create associations between new material and what I already know. [ ].
2. I put the new word in a sentence so I can remember it. [ ].
3. I place the new word in a group with other words that are similar in some way. For example: words related to clothing or feminine nouns. [ ].
4. I associate the sound of the new word with the sound of a familiar word. [ ].
5. I use rhyming to remember it. [ ].
6. I remember the word by making a clear mental image of it or by drawing a picture. [ ].
7. I visualize the spelling of the new word in my mind. [ ].
8. I use a combination of sounds and images to remember the new word. [ ].
9. I list all the other words I know that are related to the new word and draw lines to show relationships. [ ].
10. I remember where the new word is located on the page or where I first saw or heard it. [ ].
11. I use flashcards with the new word on one side and the definition or other information on the other. [ ].
12. I physically act out the new word. [ ].

When learning new material...

13. I review often. [ ].
14. I schedule my reviewing so that the review sessions are initially close together in time and gradually become more widely spread apart. [ ].
15. I go back to refresh my memory of things I learned much earlier. [ ].

Part B

16. I say or write new expressions repeatedly to practice them. [ ].
17. I imitate the way native speakers talk. [ ].
18. I read a story or dialogue several times until I can understand it. [ ].
19. I revise what I write in the new language to improve my writing. [ ].
20. I practice the sounds or alphabet of the new language. [ ].
21. I use idioms or other routines in the new language. [ ].
22. I use familiar words in different combinations to make new sentences. [ ].
23. I initiate conversations in the new language. [ ].
24. I watch TV shows or movies or listen to the radio in the new language. [ ].

25. I try to think in the new language. [ ].
26. I attend and participate in out-of-class events where the new language is spoken. [ ].
27. I read for pleasure in the new language. [ ].
28. I write personal notes, messages, letters or reports in the new language. [ ].
29. I skim the reading passage first to get the main idea, and then I go back and read it more carefully. [ ].
30. I seek specific details in what I hear or read. [ ].
31. I use reference materials such as glossaries or dictionaries to help me use the new language. [ ].
32. I take notes in class in the new language. [ ].
33. I make summaries of the new language material. [ ].
34. I apply general rules to new situations when using the language. [ ].
35. I find the meaning of a word by dividing the word into parts which I understand. [ ].
36. I look for similarities and contrasts between the new language and my own. [ ].
37. I try to understand what I have heard or read without translating it word-for-word into my own language. [ ].
38. I am cautious about transferring words or concepts directly from my language to the new language. [ ].
39. I look for patterns in the new language. [ ].
40. I develop my own understanding of how the language works even if sometimes I have to revise my understanding based on new information. [ ].

Part C

41. When I do not understand all the words I read or hear, I guess the general meaning by using any clue I can find. For example, clues from the context or situation. [ ].
42. I read without looking up every unfamiliar word. [ ].
43. In a conversation I anticipate what the other person is going to say based on what has been said so far. [ ].
44. If I am speaking and cannot think of the right expression. I use gestures or switch back to my own language momentarily. [ ].
45. I ask the other person to tell me the right word if I cannot think of it in a conversation. [ ].
46. When I cannot think of the correct expression to say or write. I find a different way to express the idea; for example. I use a synonym or describe the idea. [ ].
47. I make up new words if I do not know the right ones. [ ].
48. I direct the conversation to a topic for which I know the words. [ ].

Part D

49. I preview the language lesson to get a general idea of what it is about, how it is organized, and how it relates to what I already know. [ ].
50. When someone is speaking the new language. I try to concentrate on what the person is saying and put unrelated topics out of my mind. [ ].
51. I decide in advance to pay special attention to specific language aspects; for example. I focus on the way native speakers pronounce certain sounds. [ ].
52. I try to find out all I can about how to be a better language learner by reading books or articles or by talking with others about how to learn. [ ].
53. I arrange my schedule to study and practice the new language consistently, not just when there is the pressure of a test. [ ].
54. I arrange my physical environment to promote learning: for instance. I find a quiet comfortable place to review. [ ].
55. I organize my language notebook to record important language information. [ ].
56. I plan my goals for language learning. For instance, how proficient I want to become or how I might want to use the language in the long run. [ ].
57. I plan what I am going to accomplish in language learning each day or each week. [ ].
58. I prepare for an upcoming language task (such as giving a talk in the new language) by considering the nature of the task, what I have to know, and my current language skills. [ ].
59. I clearly identify the purpose of the language activity. For instance, in a listening task I might need to listen for the general idea or for specific facts. [ ].
60. I take responsibility for finding opportunities to practice the new language. [ ].

61. I actively look for people with whom I can speak the new language. [ ].
62. I try to notice my language errors and find out the reasons for them. [ ].
63. I learn from my mistakes in using the new language. [ ].
64. I evaluate the general progress I have made in learning the language. [ ].

Part E

65. I try to relax whenever I feel anxious about using the new language. [ ].
66. I make encouraging statements to myself so that I will continue to try hard and do my best in language learning. [ ].
67. I actively encourage myself to take wise risks in language learning, such as guessing meanings or trying to speak, even though I might make some mistakes. [ ].
68. I give myself a tangible reward when I have done something well in my language learning. [ ].
69. I pay attention to physical signs or stress that might affect my language learning. [ ].
70. I keep a private diary or journal where I write my feelings about language learning. [ ].
71. I talk to someone I trust about my attitudes and feelings concerning the language learning process. [ ].

Part F

72. If I do not understand, I ask the speaker to slow down, repeat, or clarify what was said. [ ].
73. I ask other people to verify that I have understood or said something correctly. [ ].
74. I ask other people to correct my pronunciation. [ ].
75. I work with other language learners to practice, review, or share information. [ ].
76. I have a regular language learning partner. [ ].
77. When I am talking with a native speaker. I try to let him or her know when I need help. [ ].
78. In a conversation with others in the new language. I ask questions in order to be as involved as possible and to show I am interested. [ ].
79. I try to learn about the culture or the place where the new language is spoken. [ ].
80. I pay close attention to the thoughts and feelings of other people with whom I interact in the new language. [ ].

APPENDIX 5: LIST OF CODES AND ABBREVIATIONS

Codes	
Participant (number)(letter) Example: Participant 3b	The numbers are used to differentiate between students and the letters indicate the specific round of interviews. "a" refers to the interviews in October 2014, "b" refers to the interviews in April 2015, "c" refers to the interviews in October 2015, "d" refers to the interviews in April 2016, and "e" refers to the interviews in October 2016.
Abbreviations	
ANOVA	Analysis of variance
CFA	Confirmatory factor analysis
DTS	German undergraduate course
FL	Foreign language
FLL	Foreign language learner
FRN	French undergraduate course
GLL	Good language learners
GTM	Grammar-translation method
HL	Heritage language
HLL	Heritage language learner
L1	First language
L2	Second language
LLS	Language learning strategies
S^2R	Self-regulation model
SILL	Strategy inventory of language learning
SPN	Spanish undergraduate course
SPSS	Statistical package for the social sciences
UP	University of Pretoria