Learning styles versus learning strategies: how Finnish upper secondary schoolers study vocabulary

Candidate's thesis

Mona Siltanen

University of Jyväskylä

Department of Language and Communication Studies

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JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO

Tiivistelmä – Abstract

Oppimistyylit ja erilaiset niitä tukevat oppimisstrategiat ovat iso osa onnistunutta oppimista ja niitä on tutkittu paljon. Tämä tutkimus keskittyy suomalaisten lukion toisen vuoden opiskelijoiden oppimistyylien ja heidän käyttämiensä oppimisstrategioiden väliseen korrelaatioon. Tutkimus suoritettiin kaksiosaisella kyselyllä, jossa ensin haluttiin määrittää oppilaiden käyttämät oppimisstrategiat ja heidän ajatuksiaan niiden käytön takana. Toinen osa keskittyi vastaajien oppimistyylien määrittämiseen. Kyselyn tuloksista selvisi, että suurin osa vastaajista oli visuaalisia oppijoita. Toiseksi suurin ryhmä olivat auditiiviset ja kolmanneksi kinesteettiset oppijat. Taktiilisia oppijoita ei kyselyssä noussut esiin yhtään. Neljän päätyylin lisäksi esille nousi muutamia vastaajia, jotka olivat kahden tai useamman tyylin edustajia. Käytetyistä strategioista suurin osa pohjautui visuaalisuuteen. Auditiiviset ja tyylejä sekoittavat strategiat olivat myös suosiossa. Taktiilisten oppijoiden puutteesta huolimatta moni nimetty strategia pohjautui taktiilisiin työtapoihin. Oppimistyyleistä huolimatta käytetyt strategiat olivat pohjimmiltaan samat kaikilla vastaajilla. Tämä johtuunee siitä, että ihmiset usein toistavat heille tuttuja toimintatapoja ja koulussa oppilaita ei erotella eri oppimistyyleihin, vaan kaikille käytetään samoja keinoja. Näistä oppilaat poimivat itselleen parhaiten toimivat käytettäväksi omalla ajallaan.

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1 Introduction

Language learning styles and strategies as terms are quite familiar to many be it from school or somewhere else. Strategies are conscious efforts to control language input and output and the best learning outcomes are possible if one uses multiple strategies that suit one's learning style(s). There are four most well-known learning styles which are visual, auditory, kinesthetic and tactile. Each of these styles focus on different sensory experiences and these are sight, hearing, movement and manipulation. The learning styles have an effect on how people take in new information. However, learning styles are a bit of a grey area and Dörnyei and Ryan (2015: 107) argue that this might be due to the theoretical confusion around the subject and difficulties in defining the styles. Some, like Kirschner and van Merriënboer (2013), argue that dividing people into learning styles is pointless as there are too many styles to take into account and people often fall into two or more styles. In addition, Kirschner and van Merriënboer (2013: 173) claim that promoting learning styles in teaching is more about the financial benefits for the promoters. However, the common consensus is that there are different learning styles but they are not strict and one may have more than one learning style. Ehrman (1996: 54) appropriately describes learning styles as "*comfort zone*s". This refers to the fact that learning styles are more of a preference where one likes to do things one way but can use other ways too if the situation demands it. Though learning styles are often seen as fluid, for the sake of this study I focus on the participants' primary learning styles.

My thesis aims to find out the correlation between the learning styles and the learning strategies that Finnish upper secondary schoolers use to learn English vocabulary. The participants were asked to answer a questionnaire about their vocabulary learning habits.

My thesis consists of two objectives: to find out which learning styles the participants represent and how their study methods relate to it. Seeing as there are multiple different learning styles I narrowed my research down to visual, auditory, kinesthetic and tactile styles. This thesis also intends to find out how these learning styles relate to the actual methods the participants use to learn. For example, do the kinesthetic learners use movements or auditory learners sounds to their advantage.

I conducted my questionnaire on 47 Finnish upper secondary schoolers. They were divided into two classes who were both taking the English 6 course focusing on specialized vocabulary. Because my participants are already in high school they should already be aware of how they learn most efficiently and be able to contribute to my thesis.

Different learning styles are quite well studied but their use in reality could be more researched. Researchers gain new knowledge on different learning styles and technology creates new possibilities for learning strategies all the time. In addition, more studies are needed in different contexts to create more in-depth knowledge on the matter. Most of the research is done somewhere else than Finland so this study will provide more information on the Finnish contexts. I was interested in the present day situation of language learning strategies and styles because when I was young we never addressed language learning styles or strategies explicitly. My research will hopefully benefit future teachers' careers and provide me with more information on the field I am interested in. Also, the participants' answers might give new insights to the matter and tips for future lesson plans. I hope my thesis will underline the need to provide classroom activities suitable for variety of learning styles and help students find their strong points and potential weaknesses in language learning.

2 Background

2.1 Learning styles

Learning styles are like personal traits. They attempt to explain why learners have different ways of learning most efficiently (Dörnyei and Ryan 2015; 106-108). They define learning styles as learners natural, habitual and preferred way of approaching and processing new information (Reid 1995: viii, cited in Dörnyei and Ryan 2015: 108). Kaminska (2014: 10) differentiates learning styles form learning strategies as something unconscious within learners while strategies can be taught and learned. Dörnyei and Ryan (2015: 110) agree and explain that *"style operates without awareness but strategies involve a conscious choice of alternatives"*. Being aware of one's learning styles helps one to realize why they prefer certain types of learning strategies over others. The decision behind choosing a strategy is a result of the situation (task) and the person (learning styles) (Schmeck 1988: 10-12) and so learning strategies vary from person to person and task to task. The situation also affects which learning strategy one chooses to process the task with (Ehrman 1996: 53). The learning task at hand correlates with the learning style and strategies and has a lot of influence on them. To get a clear picture of the decision both the person and the context need to be observed.

Learning styles can be classified in many ways and this study is focused on the sensory preferences. These preferences can be divided into visual, auditory, kinesthetic and tactile types (Dörnyei and Ryan 2015). These types affect the ways the learners take in information. *Visual learners* are the

most common group among all four. The learners of this group learn most efficiently through visual channels. Films and pictures are the preferred method of study and oral information can be strengthened with handouts and visual aids. They often prefer reading to listening and often use different highlighters and make notes of the main points of the text (Kalaja and Dufva 2005: 37). *Auditory learners* prefer auditory input to get the most out of their learning. Reading out loud, group work and discussions are most useful. In addition, teaching others is a good way for a auditory learner to learn (Kalaja and Dufva 2005: 36). *Kinesthetic* and *tactile* are similar and thus often grouped together as haptic styles. Kinesthetic learners learn through movement, something called the complete body experience. They need breaks between studying or else they might start to fidget. Moving while studying could be very helpful for them. Tactile learners prefer touching and more hands- on approaches to learning. The keyword for tactile learners is the manipulation of objects. Creating visuals, such as posters and models, can aid their learning. The different sensory preferences do not exclude each other and successful learners might have two or more preferences. Even with many preferences learners often lean on one type the most. Because they can process input in many different ways, those who have more than one preference are most likely to learn successfully (Dörnyei and Ryan 2015: 126-127).

2.2 Language Learning Strategies

Language learning strategies are methods the learner uses to process the input and control the output (Pavicic 2008: 30). They are often described as the general approaches learners take to learn and complete tasks. In addition to the general approaches, language learning strategies can also be described as specific actions (tactics (Pavicic 2008: 47)) taken to improve learning (Cohen 1998: 11). Language learning strategies, together with language use strategies, are means to improve one's language learning, use, or both (Cohen 1998: 5). Strategies are not constant and can be taught and practiced (Pavicic 2008: 46, 55). Already existing strategies can be adapted, new ones taken in and unsuccessful ones thrown away.

Many researchers argue that language learning strategies involve conscious choices made by the learner (Cohen 1990: 5, Pavicic 2008: 48). They are intentional choices made by the learner to make learning more effective and to reach better learning outcomes (Pavicic 2008: 51-52). However, some researchers argue that it is questionable to assume that strategies involve a conscious choice as their use can become so automatic they will work on an unconscious level (Pavicic 2008: 55). Pavicic explains that the level of consciousness depends on the task at hand and the learner.

Interlanguage is a term that refers to the language system the learner constructs with the use of language learning strategies. Interlanguage as a concept is special because it was made in an attempt to take into account the conscious efforts of controlling learning made by the learner (Pavicic 2008: 32). Strategies help the learner to create possible rules in their interlanguage which are then tested and modified in use. The strategies the learner chooses to approach tasks with may have an effect on their interlanguage.

Cohen (1998:8) argues that language learning strategies are only possible resources and do not guarantee success. Language learning strategies have an effect on the whole process of learning, success and failure (Pavicic 2008: 46). When choosing a correct strategy for a learning task, the learner needs to consider one's level of language proficiency and the nature of the task, such as difficulty (Cohen 1998; 264, Pavicic 2008: 32). Cohen (1998: 8) also adds context, individual differences and language structure to the list of aspects to consider.

Because language learning strategies affect learning both directly and indirectly, they can be divided into mental and physical activities. However, the most common way of classifying learning strategies is to divide them into cognitive, metacognitive, social and affective (Cohen 1998: 7, Dörnyei and Ryan 2015: 149, Pavicic 2008: 53). *Cognitive strategies* include the mental processes used during learning. It is the mental processing of the language material given (Pavicic 2008: 53). Cohen (1998: 7) lists the steps as identification, grouping, retention and storing of the material. Dörnyei and Ryan (2015: 149) simplify everything by explaining the cognitive processes as manipulation and transformation of the given material and input. *Metacognitive strategies* are more likely to be used by learners with higher proficiency and they control and monitor the learning process. Metacognitive strategies include setting goals, planning, assessment of learning and strategies and analysis of one's learning process (Cohen 1998: 7, Dörnyei and Ryan 2015, 149 Pavicic 2008: 53). Dörnyei and Ryan (2015: 149) grouped social and affective strategies together as something including everything that cannot fit the description of the three above. However, most researchers consider these two as their own groups. *Social strategies* do not affect learning directly (Pavicic 2008: 54). Social strategies are cooperation with others to increase communication and practice of the target language (Cohen 1998: 8, Dörnyei and Ryan 2015: 149, Pavicic 2008: 54). *Affective strategies* deal with control and regulation of emotions, motivation and attitudes (Cohen 1998: 8, Pavicic 2008, 54). Like social strategies, they do not directly affect learning but rather help create mental environment for effective learning (Pavicic 2008: 8). Dörnyei and Ryan (2015: 149) describe affective strategies as 'self-talk' that aims to regulate one's emotional conditions and experiences.

There are countless of language learning strategies and they have to be chosen and used carefully because some of them may cause errors in the learner's output. For example simplification, overgeneralization of rules and language transfer are strategies that need to be used carefully to guarantee the creation of correct rules in interlanguage (Pavicic 2008: 32). *Mnemonics* are aids often used in vocabulary learning. They can be divided into verbal and mixed mnemonics. Verbal mnemonics include, for example, rhymes, reduction, elaborated coding and semantic elaboration. Mixed methods, for example, are the keyword method, association and rituals. Cohen (1990: 32) lists word analysis, learning of cognates and using a dictionary as possible strategies to learn vocabulary. For practicing words he names flash cards, grouping and cumulative vocabulary studying. There are many possible strategies and it is important that the learner finds the ones that suit him or her best. This is made possible if teachers try to use as diverse strategies in their teaching as they possibly can.

2.3 Language Learning Strategies and Styles in Teaching

Learners approach different learning tasks in various ways (Dörnyei and Ryan 2015: 108) and it is important to take this into account in teaching. Language teaching is more effective if the teacher implements different learning styles into his or her teaching and makes students aware of their own style and the different possible strategies (Dörnyei and Ryan 2015; 134). Felder (1995: 23, 28) agrees and argues that students learn better when multiple strategies are implemented into teaching and diverse instructions help all the students not just ones with a particular learning styles.

Studies have shown that the use of language learning strategies and including learning styles in teaching are important for they generate better results in learners. Cohen (1990: 17-19) talks about a study conducted in Minnesota university where their aim was to find out whether strategy-based instruction would benefit the students. Their strategy-based instruction included making the learners more aware of the different strategies that could be used, giving more explicit description and having more discussion. The study found out that the strategy-based input had a direct positive effect in the learner outcomes. Kojic-Sabo's (1999) research on the relationship between EFL and ESL students' use of language learning strategies and learning success found out that there was a strong connection between efficient use of strategies and good learning results. The study reported that those students who showed a lack of effort in the use of strategies generally performed poorly.

Slack and Norwick (2007) tested young children on their learning styles and then implemented auditory and visual instruction in their vocabulary learning. In the case of auditory instruction, those students with auditory preferences did better than those with other styles. Subsequently, when they

used visual methods of instruction, the students with visual preference performed better. This shows how important it is to match the teacher's teaching style and learners' learning style. Peacock (2001) got similar results in a study that found out that students felt frustrated when their learning style did not match their teacher's teaching style and felt that their learning was affected by it. Peacock argued that mismatches between teaching styles and learning styles cause failure. This could be avoided by providing balanced teaching that acknowledges different learning styles and involving students in lessons planning (Peacock 2001: 15-16).

Learning new vocabulary is often the learner's responsibility so more instruction on different strategies is needed (Pavicic 2008; 76). Fan's (2003) study found out that Hong Kong university students' ideas of certain strategies' usefulness and their frequency of use did not coincide. The strategies the participants found most useful were seldom used and those associated with less benefits used more frequently. Because of mismatches like this, teacher's guidance in strategy use is very important. Making use of learning strategies enables learners to become more independent in their studies. By using language learning strategies the learners will be able to broaden their own vocabulary and focus on their individual vocabulary needs and interests (Pavicic 2008: 76).

The teacher has the responsibility to make his or her teaching methods as diverse as possible to make the learners aware of the different options and help them choose learning strategies that correlate positively with their learning styles (Cohen 1990; 190). Learners often use strategies that they have seen someone close to them use and if these strategies around them are not diverse enough, they might choose a strategy that does not fit their learning style. Strategies are only useful if they are used correctly.

3 Data and methods

3.1 Research aims and questions

My thesis has two main aims: to find out which learning style the participants represent and what learning strategies they use. I wanted to explore the connection between these two and include a small part asking the participants about their awareness of different learning strategies and styles. This is to find out how aware they are of the different options they could employ to maximize the efficiency of their learning. I will be focusing on vocabulary learning to make it easier for the participants to answer because they have to focus only on one aspect of language. My research questions were:

1) Which groups of learning styles the participants belong to?

2) Which strategies the participants employ in their vocabulary learning?

3) Is there a connection between the learning styles and learning strategies? Do the methods used reflect their learning style?

3.2 Participants

My research focused on Finnish students who are on their second year in upper secondary school. The questionnaire took place in the beginning of the sixth upper secondary school English course. This course focuses on specialized vocabulary such as economy and environment and as such it is ideal for a research focusing on vocabulary learning. I narrowed the participants down to this group hoping they would already have enough knowledge of themselves as language learners to be able to assess themselves as learners properly. In addition, language learning strategies would most likely have already been taught prior to my questionnaire. This is to prevent mishaps such as that the learning strategies would be scheduled to be taught later in their school career. The questionnaire was answered by two different classes, from now one called Group 1 and Group 2, both of which were taking the English 6 course. Altogether there were 47 respondents, 21 in Group 1 and 26 in Group 2. The age of the respondents is varied between 16 and 18.

3.3 Data Collection

I conducted my research using a questionnaire because I consider it to be the most efficient way of gathering the kind of data I am interested in. The questionnaire is divided into two: the first part of the questionnaire was focused on finding out what kind of learning strategies the participants use when studying and the second part's purpose was to find out the different learning types within the participants. First the questionnaire asked a few questions to determine the participants' background. These questions were age, sex and whether they have discussed different learning styles and strategies in their foreign language classes before. The learning strategies section had two open answer questions about what kind of learning strategies the participants use in their vocabulary learning, why they chose to use them and whether they feel the ones they use are efficient. For the last section, focusing on learning styles, I used Kalaja and Dufva's learning style questionnaire from their book *Kielten matkassa: opi oppimaan kieliä* (2005). I did not change the questions to avoid mistakes in the outcome of the questionnaire. The students then counted their points to find out their own learning style.

When conducting a research, ethics must be taken into account. In my research, the participants remain anonymous because the questionnaire did not require them to name themselves. In addition,

because many of the respondents are minors, anonymity and confidentiality were important. This is also the reason why acquiring research permission from the school and those involved was especially important. The data will not be given to any third parties and will be destroyed after this thesis is done.

3.4 Methods of analysis

To analyze the answers, I used mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative). I turned the data into numbers to have a better idea of the distribution of answers, especially on the different learning styles. Learning strategies used by the respondents also demanded simple statistics because most of the answers were repeated. Quantitative method of analysis is especially evident in the results section of this thesis. However, my primary method of analysis was qualitative to give the answers more depth. I used the background information to analyze the differences in answers between those who had previous knowledge of the different options of learning strategies to see if it had an effect on the strategies they use and their opinion of their efficiency. I analyzed the responses using generalizations drawn from the answers. However, I brought up a few interesting cases to exemplify the generalizations or to give examples of anomalies. .

4 Results

From here on I will state the results of the questionnaire. I will start by presenting the participants' background information and their previous knowledge of different language learning styles and strategies. Second, I will display the different learning styles found within the two groups. In the final part I will address the language learning strategies. This section presents the language learning strategies the participants use in their English vocabulary learning, why they have chosen to use these specific techniques and whether or not they have found them beneficial for their learning. Because the two English classes I conducted this study on had no significant differences, I decided to treat them as one group.

4.1 The participants' background information

The first part of my questionnaire dealt with the participants' background information and knowledge. The questions one and two asked the participants to state their age and sex while questions three and four inquired whether they have discussed different language learning strategies or styles in their language lessons. The group of participants (n=47) included 26 females and 19 males. There were also 2 people who did not specify their gender. The participants were between

the ages of 16 to 18 and on the second year of upper secondary school. The participants' age and sex do not relate to my research questions so they will not be further discussed.
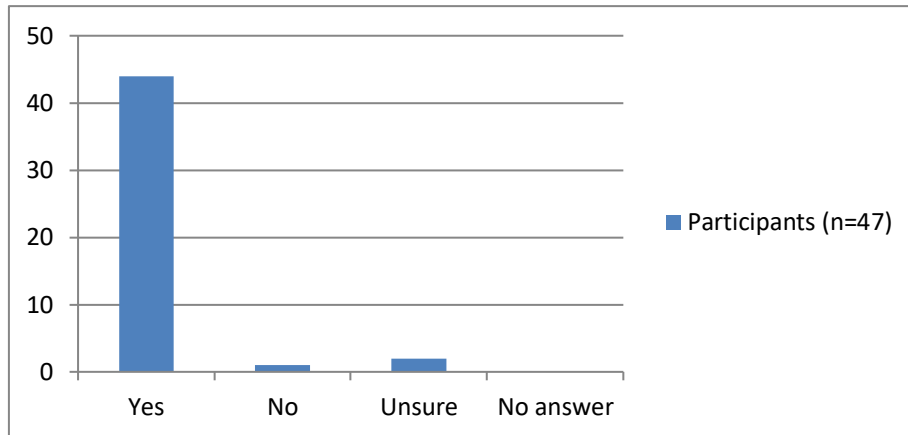

Figure 1: Participants' recollection of whether or not learning styles had been dealt with in teaching.

This question was asked because I was interested in the participants' previous knowledge of language learning styles and wanted to see whether it would have an effect on the answers. I did not specify which language's lesson because I thought they are fundamentally the same and the learning styles and strategies are transferable from one language to another. Altogether 44 out of 47 participants reported that they had discussed learning styles previously. One participant answered negatively and two were unsure.
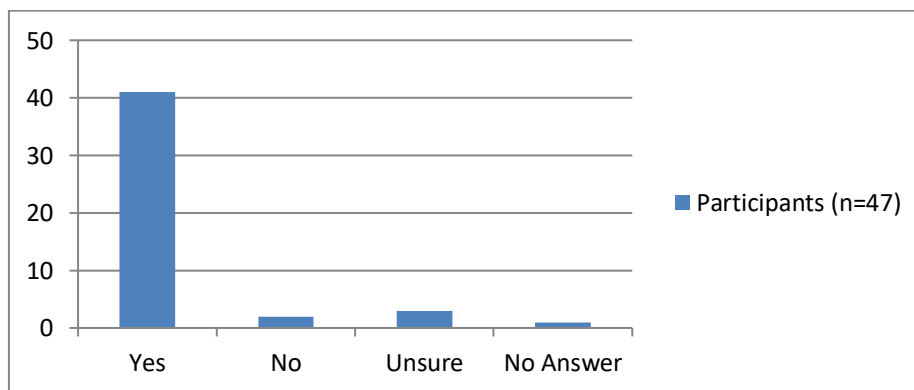

Figure 2: Participants' recollection of whether or not learning strategies had been discussed previously in language lessons.

This question was also asked so I could see whether the participants' previous knowledge of language learning strategies had an effect on their chosen strategies. 41 participants answered positively while two said they had not been discussed and three were unsure. Only one participant left this question unanswered.
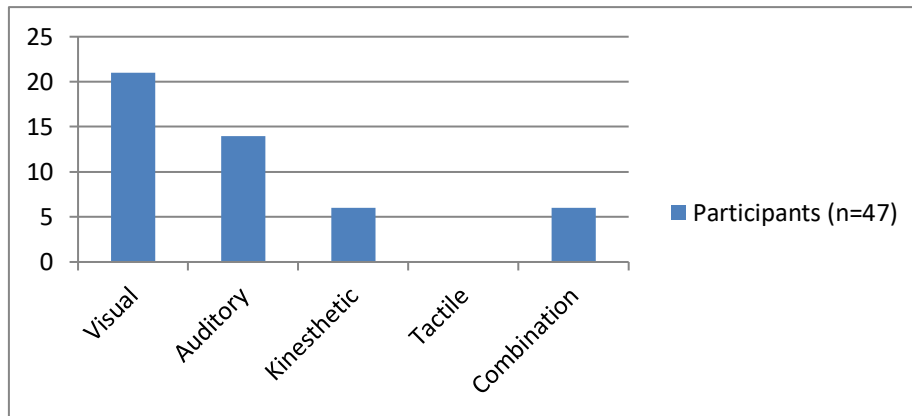
4.2 Language learning styles

Figure 3: Participants' language learning styles.

In the chart above one can see the primary learning styles within the two groups. The most common learning style within the group was visual by a large margin. Altogether there were 21 visual learners according to the test. The second most popular learning style was auditory with 14 students. Six students identified as kinesthetic learners but tactile learners were absent. Combination means that the learner has two or more learning styles that are equally strong. There were six of these combination learners. Two of them were visual/auditory learners, one visual/tactile and one participant whose style was a mix of all four main styles. In addition, there was one auditory/kinesthetic learner and one kinesthetic/tactile.

4.3 The classification of the resulted language learning strategies

The participants named many strategies they employ in their vocabulary studying. The two groups reported about 25 different strategies altogether. I divided these strategies according to the four learning styles and combination, which includes strategies that could belong to two or more learning styles depending on how they are used.

The visual strategies

- Covering words
- Reading through wordlists (alone or together with a friend)
- Dividing the words into smaller groups and rehearsing them
- Reading books
- Flash cards
- Memory notes (*muistilappu*)

The auditory strategies

- Explaining the words
- Teaching others
- Speaking English
- Reading out loud
- Reading out loud with a friend
- Someone asking the words from you
- Listening
- Music

The tactile strategies

- Writing down
- Drawing
- Creating one's own wordlists
- Creating one's own texts

The combination strategies

- Kahoot & Quizlet
- Movies
- Social media and The Internet
- Connecting the words to songs or movies
- Repetition
- Mnemonics
- Translating

4.4 The participants' usage of language learning strategies and their opinions on the benefits
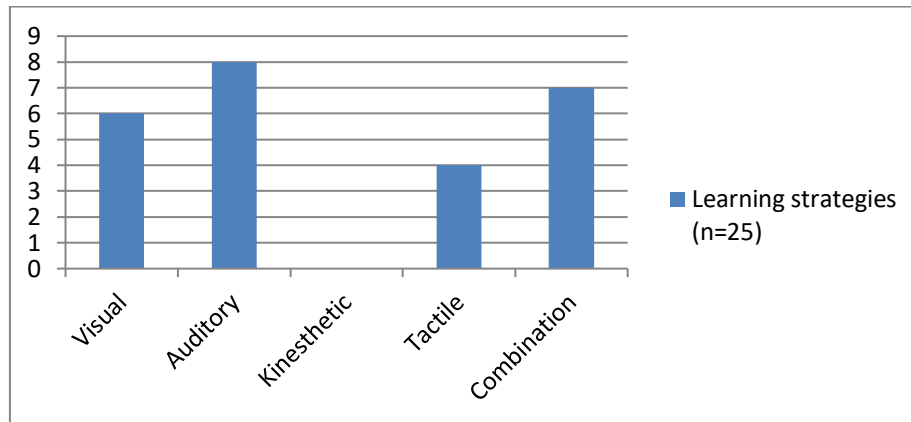

Figure 4: Participants' learning strategies divided into learning styles.

Figure 4 presents the amount of strategies each learning style had. As mentioned before, there were 25 strategies altogether and this chart shows all of them divided by the learning style each strategy employs. Most of the strategies the participants used belong to auditory strategies and eight out of the 25 mentioned strategies fell under this category. Visual strategies were mentioned six times and were the second largest group of learning styles out of the four main categories. Strategies making use of solely kinesthetics were none-existent. Four out of the 25 strategies were tactile. Listed here are seven strategies that I classified as combinations of two or more styles, depending on how one uses them.
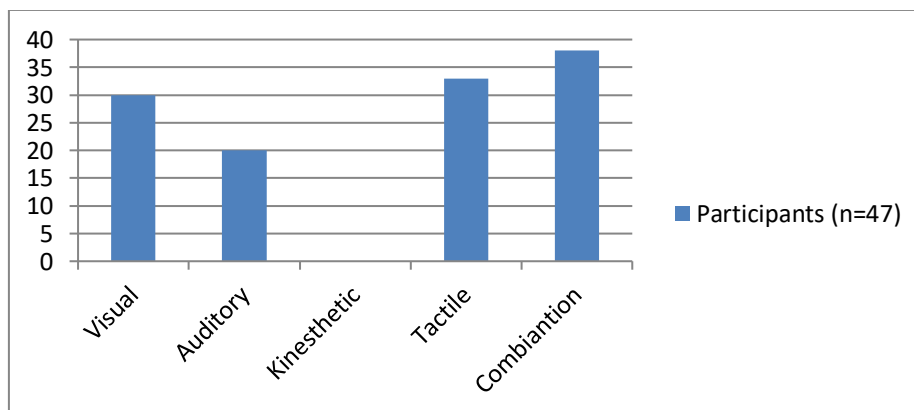

Figure 5: The amount of participants using each of the strategy categories.

Figure 5 shows the amount of participants using strategies under each of the learning styles. As one can see, 20 out of the 47 participants employed auditory strategies in their vocabulary learning. Visual strategies were used by 30 participants. Tactile strategies were mentioned very often and

were used by 33 participants. Out of the 47 participants, 38 used combination strategies making it the biggest language learning strategy category.
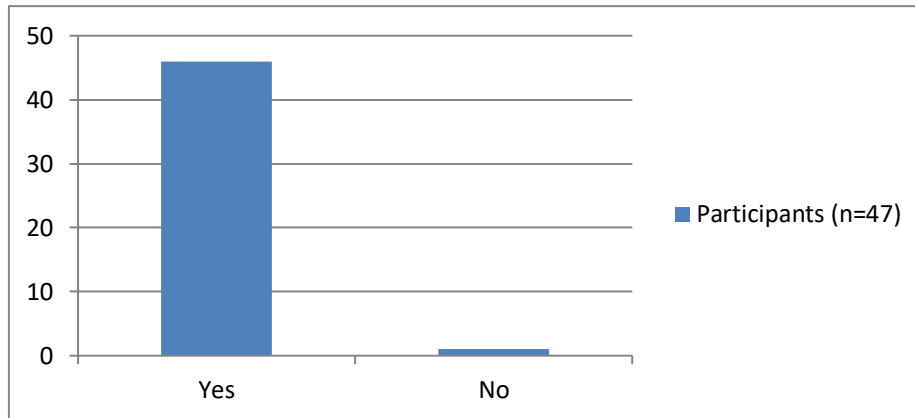

Figure 6: Participants experiences on the efficiency of the language learning strategies they employed.

The final chart presents the participants' answers to the question of whether or not they feel the strategies they employ in their vocabulary learning have benefited them. The participants feel positive about their own strategies use and its effect on their learning. Everybody but one out of 47 students said they think their chosen language learning strategies have benefited their studies.

5 Discussion and conclusion

5.1 Language learning strategies

Repetition was very popular among the participants as many of the strategies included repetition of the target vocabulary. It was mentioned in almost all of the answers explicitly or implicitly. This is very unlike what Fan's (2003: 233) study found. The study in question reported that repetition was used less than other strategies and the students did not find it useful. In my study, most of the strategies the participants mentioned included repetition in some form or another, most being strategies based on repetitive actions, such as repetitive reading, pronouncing and writing. In addition, many mentioned they just read through the vocabulary until they have learned all the words.

Another very popular strategy was using language learning apps, namely Quizlet, and 24 out of 47 participants named Quizlet as a part of their used strategies. For many, Quizlet was the only named strategy. One girl said she does not use the ready-made Quizlets but does the quizzes she uses herself. The other virtual gaming application mentioned was Kahoot. Surprisingly, no one

mentioned PC or console games as a resource for learning. This could be due to them not thinking of it as a learning experience because it is not the primary goal of the action. The participants might have thought of formal and more intentional language learning strategies.

Many participants preferred writing down the target words or reading them. Covering words from vocabulary lists was a very widely used strategy and was named by 13 participants. Some participants mentioned reading, whether it be books, social media posts or vocabulary lists. Someone mentioned reading wordlists together with a friend, making it a social action. Different ways of writing down the vocabulary were reported by 27 participants. They preferred writing down the words, making their own lists and creating their own example sentences. One participant mentioned writing her own texts and she learns the vocabulary through that. Another one mentioned writing a list of interesting and unfamiliar words she encounters in texts. These results agree with those of Kojic-Sabo (1999: 183-184), whose participants used writing and note-taking extensively in their language learning. Reviewing material was also a very popular option. The ESL participants of the study used traditional methods similar to my participants, for example reading, making learning a social activity and quizzing themselves about the words.

5.2 Reasons behind the participants' strategy choices and their experiences on whether or not they have benefited their learning

Everybody but one considered the strategies they used to be useful. I do not know what they have been taught about language learning strategies but I attribute this to the fact they strategies and language learning styles had been previously discussed. The participants thought their strategies benefit their learning and work well for them. One participant reported that she uses her strategies because she considers them to be a certain way to learn. Efficiency and suitability were one of the most popular reasons behind the learning strategy decision. Many reasoned their decision by saying they have noticed that these were the strategies that they have noticed work "the best" for them. For example, one girl (auditory) said she can focus the best while writing so she keeps using methods that use writing. Another auditory learner said she also uses strategies that use writing as a mean to learn. She learns the best when writing down the new words and connecting them to her previous knowledge. This is very curious as they both prefer strategies that do not coincide with their learning style. With these two examples one can see that the styles and strategies are not black and white. However, one auditory learner seemed very aware of her own learning style as she answered that she listens to recordings of the words because that is how she learns the best.

For some (4), especially the efficiency and fastness of the strategy is why they keep using them. One participant mentioned Quizlet being fast and using it she does not need anyone to ask the words from her when she can do it alone through a game. This coincides with Kojic-Sabo's (1999: 182) results, in which the students reported to use surprisingly little time studying English outside of the classroom. In Finland, there are very few English classes during the week so this emphasizes the importance of efficient and suitable language learning strategies that can be used out of class.

Three participants had chosen their strategies because they thought they were fun. Six participants brought up their strategies being easy and so attractive to them. One boy liked that they do not demand a lot of work ("*Ei vaadi liian suurta panostusta*"). He uses mainly visual strategies such as Quizlet and reading but tested out to be an auditory learner. He considers them efficient enough but I think he should explore the auditory strategies instead of settling for the easy ones.

Contrarily to many, one boy answered that his strategies work reasonably well ("*toimii kohtuullisesti*"). He is an auditory learner and named listening to the words as the only strategy he uses. In the group of participants, there was only one who did not mention any reason behind using his chosen strategies. He also marked writing as his only strategy and considered it unhelpful. He was the one who, according to the test, was a combination of all four learning styles. Whether these answers were due to his lack of motivation to answer the questionnaire or simply him not knowing the answer, is debatable.

5.3 The relationship between the learning styles and the strategies

Regardless of the participants' respective learning styles, the employed strategies were very similar to one another. Many of the participants seemed to be using mostly visual and tactile strategies regardless of their learning style. This could be due to them being easy and the most familiar to many. In school students often use writing and reading as a method to learn and this is where students take their strategies from. One of the participants said she has gotten used to the named strategies and therefore continues to use them. One visual learner, who prefers to write down the words but often ends up only reading them, mentioned that her teacher often decides which strategies to use beforehand.

Among *the visual learners* the most commonly used strategies belonged to the visual or tactile category. Visual learning strategies, such as covering half of the words, reading vocabulary, and flashcards, were mentioned many times. Tactile strategies like writing down the words in multiple ways were also very common. I counted writing down as a tactile strategy but it could also be seen

as a visual learning strategy because it activates one's sight. It is no wonder that visual learners like to use visual methods to study and find them the most effective. Quizlet was listed many times, sometimes even being the only listed strategy. This does not come up as a surprise since it combines a number of strategies, most of them being visual. One participant even said she goes as far as creating the quizzes herself instead of using the ready-made ones the application offers. Auditory strategies, such as speaking English, listening to music and vocabulary files were also very popular among visual learners. It might be due to them being easily accessible and fun. Music and movies are part of students' daily lives and are so easy to integrate into learning. This goes quite nicely with what Felder (1995: 28) said in his article about making the students relate to the learning target instead of just giving them something new to remember. Among the visual learners, there were some inconsistencies in the learning style quiz. Many visual learners answered in question 15 that in the classroom they learn the best by listening but in question 17 they answered that they learn better by reading than listening. This response might be because many of them had an auditory secondary learning style.

The auditory learners were very consistent in their learning style questionnaire and thought they learn the best by listening. However, this is not especially visible in the answers. Most commonly used strategy among the auditory learners was writing down the words, which counts as a tactile strategy. Writing was present in almost all of their answers. Auditory strategies were the second largest category in number of mentions. The mentioned strategies were reading out loud, listening to music and tapes, teaching others and someone asking the target words from them. Quizlet, which combines different strategies, was often mentioned in this group of learners as well. There were some other combination strategies such as watching movies and translating but they were not as popular.

The kinesthetic learners were also very consistent in their learning style questionnaire answers, marking that they preferred moving and actions, yet it is not visible in their learning strategies. There were only six kinesthetic learners among the 47 participants. Their strategies were no different from the other learner types'. Writing and reading were very common answers. Quizlet and listening were also mentioned quite a few times. The lack of kinesthetic learning strategies could be because they are not widely used in school and might be unfamiliar to many. One kinesthetic learner even marked "I mostly agree" on Question 13 that said one prefers lecture type of classes where the teacher talks and the students sit and listen. However, even with the lack of kinesthetic strategies being employed by kinesthetic learners, the participants were content with their strategies and found them efficient. Of course, this is questionable and I will not know whether

they have positive learning results as I do not have an access to their grades. However, as studies have shown, using any learning strategies is better than using none at all. However, schools should introduce more kinesthetic learning strategies to the students so they have a wider selection of techniques from which they can choose the ones that work most efficiently for them.

Even though there were no tactile learners, tactile strategies were very popular. Strategies such as writing down the target words and making one's own sentences using the target vocabulary were common answers among all the other four groups. Visual learners preferred to write down words and this is understandable as it could also be counted as a visual strategy. Quizlet, a very popular strategy also combines different learning styles, one of them being tactile. Tactile strategies, such as writing and group projects, are often used in the school context and this could be the reason behind their wide usage. They are familiar to the students and quite formal, often combining two or more styles.

Like all the other groups, combination learners used diverse strategies to learn vocabulary. Even among them, visual strategies were the most common ones, writing in the lead. Mnemonics and Quizlet were also mentioned and thought efficient. Only one participant, a boy with equal learning styles, felt that the strategies he used were not useful.

5.4 Conclusion

My first research question meant to find of the participants' learning styles. Most of them were visual and auditory learners. Kinesthetic and combination styles were present with a little fewer numbers but there were no tactile learners among the group. The second one focused on finding out which strategies the participants employed in their learning. The group of participants named various vocabulary learning strategies and were very content with the results they have gotten with them. The ones used most often were writing, reviewing, Quizlet and informal methods of study, such as listening to music and watching movies. The third research question was meant to find out whether there was a relationship between the participants' learning styles and their used strategies. There was no significant correlation between the participants' learning styles and the strategies they used. Most of the students used similar strategies regardless of their respective learning style(s). Those whose learning strategies related to their learning style(s) were visual and auditory learners, in general. Strategies falling under auditory and visual categories were widely used and familiar to most, which explains their wide use. I think the correlation between auditory and visual learners strategy use and learning style was mostly due to the coincidence of them being auditory and visual

learners. Some students showed signs of being aware of their own learning style as they reported having used strategies relating to their styles because with them they learn the best.

These answers could be quite widely recognized and generalized as the strategies the participants reportedly used are familiar to most of us. In addition, the group of participants was quite large for a small study, with 47 answers. The groups were quite homogenous and did not show any notable differences, especially with the choice vocabulary learning strategies. Any differences could have been explained by the possible differences in the instructions that were given before filling out the questionnaire. However, there were none. What could also have affected the results of the learning style questionnaire was whether the participants considered themselves as language learners in general or just their vocabulary learning while doing it. The questionnaire was designed for general language learning and if the students thought only of their vocabulary learning, the answers could be different from the reality. Another potential variable is the participants' motivation to answers as I could clearly see that some people put more thought into it than others. A good example of this is the overuse of 3 on the Likert scale which can manipulate the answers to one way or another. The language learning strategies section, however, I consider to be quite reliable as the named strategies are very common and widely used in schools and home.

I was surprised of how informed the participants were of the different learning styles and strategies. I was especially surprised that learning styles and strategies had been mentioned in language classes before. My presumption had been that they had not discussed learning styles and strategies explicitly and so the result came as a surprise. Whether it is due to the differences between schools and teachers or a change brought by the new National Core Curriculum (2014) that puts emphasize on teaching the students to learn, I do not know but I consider it a positive thing. I would suggest more researches to be done to see the effect the new Curriculum has on Finnish students' chosen learning strategies and learning results. It is clear that many of the strategies employed by the students are familiar to them from school. This further strengthens our belief of the importance of schools' role in students' learning. Students repeat at home what they have learned at school and because of this schools should provide them with as diverse means to study as possible. Especially the possibilities brought by new technology are infinite and very diverse as many applications combine learning styles together. For example, using Quizlet efficiently combines diverse learning styles and fun. Hopefully the new National Core Curriculum arouses discussion of language learning styles and strategies in schools where discussion about language learning styles and especially strategies has previously been absent from language courses.

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Appendix

The Questionnaire

OPPIMISSTRATEGIAT & OPPIMISTYYLIT
ENGLANNIN KIELESSÄ

1. Ikä _____
2. Sukupuoli

   MIES   NAINEN   JOKU MUU

Ympyröi oikea vastaus:

3. Muistele onko kielten tunneilla aiemmin puhuttu erilaisista oppimistyyleistä

   KYLLÄ   EI   EN OSAA SANOA

4. Entä onko kielten tunneilla puhuttu erilaisista oppimisstrategioista, joita hyödyntää opiskelussa?

   KYLLÄ   EI   EN OSAA SANOA

Seuraavat osiot koskevat englanninkielisen <u>sanaston oppimista</u>. Pidä tämä mielessäsi ja vastaa huolellisesti kysymyksiin.

Oppimisstrategiat:

A) Pohdiskele käyttämiäsi <u>oppimisstrategioita</u> (esim. nauhalta kuuntelu, ylös kirjoittaminen, sanan piirtäminen). Millaisia strategioita käytät tai olet joskus käyttänyt englannin sanaston oppimiseen? Voit vastata esimerkiksi muutamalla lauseella tai ranskalaisilla viivoilla.

B) Miksi olet käyttänyt juuri näitä strategioita?

C) Koetko, että käyttämäsi strategiat ovat edistäneet oppimistasi?

KYLLÄ   EI

Oppimistyylit

(Oppimistyylitesti Kalajan ja Dufvan kirjasta Kielten matkassa: Opi oppimaan kieliä (2005))

A) Tämä kysymys koskee oppimistyylejä. Pidä taas mielessäsi englannin <u>sanaston oppiminen</u> ja ympyröi kohta, joka kuvaa kokemuksiasi parhaiten.

1 Ehdottomasti eri mieltä
2 Jokseenkin eri mieltä
3 En osaa sanoa
4 Jokseenkin samaa mieltä
5 Ehdottomasti samaa mieltä

1. Ymmärrän tehtävän paremmin, jos opettaja kertoo minulle ohjeet.   1 2 3 4 5

2. Minulle sopii parhaiten sellainen oppiminen, johon liittyy tekemistä ja liikkumista luokassa.   1 2 3 4 5

3. Opin paremmin, jos opettaja kirjoittaa asiat taululle.   1 2 3 4 5

4. Opin paremmin, jos saan tunnilla ohjeet suullisesti.   1 2 3 4 5

5. Opin paremmin, jos saan tunnilla tehdä asioita kuuntelun tai Oppikirjan lukemisen sijaan.   1 2 3 4 4

6. Muistan tunnilla kuulemani asiat lukemiani asioita paremmin.   1 2 3 4 5

7. Muistan ohjeet paremmin, jos saan lukea ne.   1 2 3 4 5

8. Opin enemmän, jos saan mallintaa opittavan asian esimerkiksi käsitekartaksi (mind-map).   1 2 3 4 5

9. Ymmärrän tehtävän paremmin, jos saan lukea ohjeet.   1 2 3 4 5

10. Opin enemmän, jos saan tunnilla olla mukana tekemässä projektia.   1 2 3 4 5

11. Minusta on mukavaa tehdä tunnilla muutakin kuin istua paikallaan. 1 2 3 4 5

12. Opin paremmin, jos saan selvittää opittavia asioita piirtämällä. 1 2 3 4 5

13. Opin paremmin luentomaisessa opetuksessa: opettaja puhuu, oppilaat kuuntelevat. 1 2 3 4 5

14. Ymmärrän tunnilla käsiteltävät paremmin, jos niitä harjoitellaan roolileikeillä. 1 2 3 4 5

15. Opin luokassa paremmin kuuntelemalla. 1 2 3 4 5

16. Muistan oppimani asiat paremmin, jos saan työstää jotain käsilläni. 1 2 3 4 5

17. Opin lukemalla paremmin kuin kuuntelemalla. 1 2 3 4 5

18. Minusta on mukavaa osallistua projekteihin luokassa. 1 2 3 4 5

19. Opin luokassa parhaiten, jos aihetta käsitellään myös toimintaa vaativien tehtävien avulla. 1 2 3 4 5

20. Opin enemmän oppikirjaa lukemalla kuin opetusta kuuntelemalla. 1 2 3 4 5

B) Laske nyt yhteen saamasi pisteet ja saat selville oppimistyylisi.

Visuaalinen	Auditiivinen	Kinesteettinen	Taktiilinen
3.	1.	2.	8.
7.	4.	5.	10.
9.	6.	11.	12.
17.	13.	14.	16.
20.	15.	19.	18.
Yht. ____	Yht. ____	Yht. ____	Yht. ____

Testi oli nyt tässä.

Kiitos osallistumisestasi!