

Journal of English Language  
Teaching and Learning  
University of Tabriz  
No. 19, 2017

## **English Vocabulary Learning Strategies: the Case of Iranian Monolinguals vs. Bilinguals \***

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### **Abstract**

The main objective of the present study was to investigate the differences between Iranian EFL monolinguals and bilinguals in terms of vocabulary language learning strategies. In fact, it was an attempt to investigate whether bilingual/ monolingual learners differ significantly in using vocabulary learning strategies. To this end, 70 EFL, 45 monolingual (Persian) and 25 bilingual (Arabic-Persian) pre-university students were selected to answer Schmitt's Vocabulary Learning Strategies Questionnaire (VLSQ). The participants were homogeneous in terms of age, sex, nationality and level of instruction. Following the administration of a general English proficiency test and one VLSQ, interviews were conducted. Then, descriptive statistics and independent t-test were used to analyze the data. The findings obtained through comparison revealed significant dissimilarities between bilinguals and monolinguals' usage of determination, memory, cognitive and metacognitive strategies. There was no significant variation, however, in their use of social strategies. Further, interviews exhibited some aspects that were not mentioned in the VLSQ.

**Keywords:** Vocabulary Learning Strategies, monolinguals, bilinguals, EFL learners, Schmitt's VLS

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\* Received date: 2016/12/08      Accepted date: 2017/05/24

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### **Introduction**

The increasing spread of multilingualism and the importance of languages in societies have led several scholars to investigate multilingual behavior over the past years, as evidenced by the strong tradition of work on sociolinguistic and educational aspects of multilingualism (Cenoz & Genesse, 1998; De-Angelis, 2007; Jessner, 2008).

Given the increasing prevalence of bilingualism and multilingualism in the world, it is important to perceive how individuals learn multiple languages and what methods or strategies of language instruction may facilitate learning. According to Jessner (2008), the multilingual learners develop certain skills and abilities that monolingual speakers lack. These skills include language-specific and non-language-specific skills used in language learning, language management, and maintenance. She highlighted that a multilingual learner is assumed to use an enhanced multilingual monitor. As Ben-Zeev (1977) suggested, a child growing up in a bilingual environment in which the two domains of language usage overlap is continually encountered with interference between his/her two languages, and this situation forces the bilingual to adopt characteristic strategies due to the difficulties s/he faces in order to resolve interlingual interference. In this regard, vocabulary as an important part of any language program, should be taken into account by both teachers and learners. Moreover, according to Schmitt (1997), the area of vocabulary language study and learner strategies has seen the reemergence of interest. Appreciation of the importance of both these areas has led to considerable research in each, yet the place where they intersect—vocabulary learning strategies—has suffered from a considerable lack of attention.

There is increasing evidence to suggest that monolinguals and bilinguals may employ different strategies or have different biases for word learning (Bialystok, 2011). Most previous studies in the field of bilingualism have only focused on the bilingual/monolingual lexical, syntactical knowledge, and learning strategies (e.g., Keshavarz & Astaneh, 2004; Debaji, 2011; Seifi & Abdolmanafi, 2013). While there has been myriad research into language learning strategies, little attention has been given to vocabulary learning strategies in mono- and bilingualism. The present study aimed at evaluating and investigating

vocabulary learning strategies used by monolingual and bilingual foreign language learners in Iran. A mixed method design incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data gathering tools was employed in the study guided by three research questions: 1. Is there any significant difference between Arabic-Persian bilinguals (APBs) and Persian Monolinguals (PMs) in English (as a foreign language) vocabulary learning strategies? 2. Is there any significant difference between monolinguals and bilinguals considering the most and the least vocabulary learning strategies? 3. What are the bilinguals' and monolinguals' opinions about their EFL vocabulary learning strategies?

### **Research Background**

#### **Bilingualism and Strategy Use**

Nayak et al. (1990) noted that in the long run, since multilingual subjects are more flexible in shifting strategies and restructuring their internal representations of the linguistic system, we do expect them to perform better in language learning precisely. People with multiple language skills have been generally assumed to be individuals with "notable facility" in language learning (Marion & Ramsay, 1980). Based on such expectations, Marion and Ramsay (1980) acknowledge that, "when learning a new language, adults will approach tasks with strategies and behavior that they consider productive, and these strategies will be drawn from past experience" (p. 90).

Comparing language learning skills, Wharton (2000) examined language learning strategy use of bilingual foreign language learners, using Oxford's 80-item Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). In his study, participants who were all bilingual from multicultural settings, 678 university students learning Japanese and French as foreign languages in Singapore, reported a greater use of social strategies, but less frequent use of affective strategies on the SILL. He pointed out that: "Perhaps bilinguals' use of social strategies, for example, has been reinforced by previous success at acquiring or learning other languages." (p. 230)

Hong-Nam and G. Leavell (2007) similarly compared 428 monolingual Korean and 420 bilingual Korean-Chinese university students in terms of language learning strategies use in an EFL context. They applied Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). According to them, monolinguals used compensation

strategies most and memory strategies least. Totally, bilingual Korean-Chinese used higher learning strategies.

Another study, conducted in Iran, by Seifi and Abdolmanafi Rokni (2013) investigated the difference between Iranian monolingual and bilingual language learners with an intermediate level of language proficiency in terms of language learning strategies. The findings revealed that bilinguals had an advantage over monolinguals in terms of using strategies. They used more cognitive and metacognitive strategies. Moreover, the findings showed that bilinguals and monolinguals had a little different preference in using strategies. Bilinguals used metacognitive, social, cognitive, affective, compensation and memory strategies, respectively, while monolinguals used metacognitive, cognitive, social, affective, compensation and memory strategies, respectively.

### **Vocabulary Learning Strategies**

Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLS) is one approach to facilitating vocabulary learning, a technique that students use to succeed in vocabulary learning (Schmitt, 2000). Pavičić Takač (2008, p. 52) explains that VLS are “specific strategies utilized in the isolated task of learning vocabulary in the target language”, and adds that learners could, in fact, use them in any other field of language learning. According to Schmitt (1997), research into the area of language strategies began in the 1970s as part of a movement away from a predominantly teaching-oriented perspective, to one which included interest in how the actions of learners might affect their acquisition or learning of language. Concurrently, there was a growing awareness about how individual learners approached and controlled their own learning and use of language. Language researchers have made various attempts to categorize vocabulary learning strategies employed by learners. Such categorization resulted in the taxonomies proposed by Brown and Payne (1994), Schmitt (1997) and Nation (2001), which are discussed below.

Brown and Payne (1994) argue that vocabulary learning strategies fall into five essential steps: (1) encountering new words, (2) getting the forms of new words (clear image either visual or auditory), (3) learning the meaning of the word, (4) making a strong memory connection between the forms and meanings of the words, and (5) using the words.

For the purpose of this study, however, the taxonomy developed by Schmitt (1997) was used. He proposes two aspects of vocabulary learning strategies: discovery strategies and consolidation strategies. Discovery strategies refer to strategies used to uncover the meaning of the words presented to the learner for the first time while consolidation strategies are applied to help the learner internalize the meaning when he/she encounters the word afterwards. These strategies are subdivided into five categories as: determination strategies (DET) referring to individual learning strategies which help learners to discover the meaning of words by themselves without getting any help from their teachers or peers; social strategies (SOC) which engage learners in interaction with others; memory strategies (MEM) which involve learners in learning the newly-learned word by relating their current or background knowledge with the new word; cognitive strategies (COG) in which learners are not involved in mental processing rather they are engaged in more mechanical processing; and metacognitive (MET) strategies which are strategies concerning processes such as decision-making, monitoring and evaluating learner's progress.

### **Research on Vocabulary Learning Strategies.**

There is an accelerating trend towards vocabulary learning strategies and researchers have specified a large number of them, since the utilization of learning strategies is very important in vocabulary learning. Some of the following studies have investigated how learners use vocabulary learning strategies.

Nation (2001) proposed that a large number of vocabulary learning strategies are helpful at all steps of vocabulary learning and can be used in an extensive range of vocabulary. He punctuated that language learners, by help of these strategies, can control their own learning without the presence of a teacher. In addition, Nation, in the same research, revealed that learners are very different in the proficiency that they apply strategies to. Thus, language learners should be instructed in the use of vocabulary learning strategies.

Still, another survey carried out by Gu and Johnson (1996) on 850 Chinese college students showed that there was a significant relationship between vocabulary learning strategies, language proficiency, and vocabulary breadth. Interestingly, there was a positive correlation between learners' scores and these strategies: dictionary use,

guessing from context, and note-taking, paying attention to word formation, and contextual encoding. However, they found that visually repeated words had a negative correlation with the size of vocabulary and general proficiency.

In another study, Al-Shuwairekh (2001) investigated the relationship between vocabulary strategy use and success among AFL (Arabic as a Foreign Language) learners. The result of the survey indicated that the two situational factors (course type and variety of Arabic used outside classroom) had a fairly strong relationship with vocabulary strategy use. Individual factors such as, students' first language, proficiency level and level of achievement appeared to have a very weak relationship with the use of vocabulary learning strategies.

Lok (2007) probed the effects of vocabulary learning strategy training on Chinese learners in a local EMI secondary school. After administering a questionnaire adapted from Schmitt's taxonomy (1997) to 68 secondary students before and after a training program, it was found that students used discovery strategies more often than consolidation strategies. Repetition was used more commonly among learners.

The most recent Iranian study on the use of vocabulary learning strategies and its contribution to reading comprehension was conducted by Kafipour and Hosseini Naveh (2011). They explored vocabulary learning strategies among 164 EFL undergraduate students in Kerman. The results for descriptive statistics showed EFL undergraduate students in Kerman Province as medium strategy users who used metacognitive strategies most frequently and social strategies least frequently. Kafipour and others also carried out a quantitative piece of research to investigate the vocabulary learning strategies and vocabulary level of Iranian EFL learners and any potential relation and contribution between these two variables. This research was conducted among 238 participants—both male and female—from Semnan universities (Kafipour et al., 2011). The results of this study were similar to the previous one's (i.e., Kafipour & Naveh, 2011). They, in this later study, showed that all vocabulary learning strategy use contributed to the overall vocabulary learning of the students. The highest contribution was related to memory strategy and the lowest to social strategy.

## Method

### Setting and Participants

This study was designed to compare vocabulary learning strategies among Iranian bilingual and monolingual learners. Thus, seventy intermediate level pre-university students were selected in Tehran, Iran during the fall semester in 2014. Twenty-five were bilinguals (Arabic-Persian) and the remaining forty five were monolinguals (Persian only). The participants were homogeneous in terms of age (16–18 years old), sex (they were all female), nationality (they were all Iranian), and level of instruction (intermediate). It is worth mentioning that Arabic-Persian bilinguals, like other Iranian students, do not receive any Arabic literacy in their schooling like other Iranian students, they start Persian literacy skill (reading and writing) at the age of seven and continue till their high school diploma. Throughout the school years, Persian is the medium of instruction.

### Instrumentation

1. Oxford Placement Test (2007)
2. Pilar and Jorda's Background Questionnaire (2003) adopted by Dibaj (2011)
3. Schmitt's VLSQ adopted from Bennett (2006)
4. Semi-structured Interview

### Oxford Placement Test (2007).

To ascertain the homogeneity of the learners' English proficiency before carrying out the study and as Iranian EFL curriculum is heavily grammar-focused, we used the grammar and vocabulary parts of OPT (2007) to homogenize the participants. The grammar section consisted of 25 items and the vocabulary part consisted of 25 items too, with an estimated time of fifty minutes for completion. They were asked to return it as soon as they completed it. They were instructed to read the stem and choose the right choice.

### Background Questionnaire.

A survey questionnaire was used to ascertain what the participants' mother tongues were and also what their families' native tongue was. Furthermore, through this questionnaire, we could know of not only the

language(s) each could speak or understand but also the language(s) they used at school. The level of proficiency in sub-skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing) of the spoken languages was also rated by the participants themselves. They were also expected to name the languages they knew and specify their proficiency in each of the skills on a Likert scale ranging from 'a little' to 'fluently' (questions 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17). The questionnaire was originally prepared by Pilar and Jorda (2003) and was later adopted and used by Dibaj (2011) in EFL context of Iran. To have a better picture of the context in which participants were learning the third language, the questionnaire also asked the educational level and occupational background of participants' parents (questions 18, 19, 20) as well as the city from which they came. Due to the sensitivity of the items related to families' educational and occupational background, participants were free to answer these questions. To make sure of understandability of the questionnaire, it was written in Persian. As Dibaj (2011, p. 200) pointed out, "the purpose of this questionnaire was to ensure that the language background of the participants in both groups was the same". The participants were asked to complete the questionnaire and raise their hands if they faced any problem or had a question.

#### **Schmitt's VLS Questionnaire.**

The present study used Schmitt's Vocabulary Learning Strategies Questionnaire (VLSQ) adopted from Bennett (2006). It is a 40-item Likert-scale questionnaire with the reliability coefficient of 0.73; the reliability coefficient obtained by Kafipour and Hosseini Naveh (2011) for Iranian learners. The learners then gave their responses on five-point Likert scales, with the available answers being: never (1), seldom (2), sometimes (3), often (4) and always (5). This range of answers, which seemed to offer a reasonable variety of responses and was simple for the learners to answer, was adopted. Schmitt's taxonomy of vocabulary learning strategies was both clear and extensive so became the source of the strategies to be surveyed. The questions were translated into Persian so as to ensure accurate responses. Although the completion of the questionnaire took approximately 15-20 minutes, the researchers informed the participants that there was no fixed time in completing it. The questionnaire was also back-translated by two experienced translators to examine the accuracy of translation. An inter-rater



reliability analysis using Kappa statistic was performed. Its reliability was found to be  $\kappa=0.625$  ( $p<0.001$ ).

### **Interviews.**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten bilinguals and twenty monolinguals within the same group of students, to allow students to reveal aspects of their beliefs and opinions about vocabulary learning and their use of strategies not addressed in the questionnaire or in general to check any hidden aspect which may not have been obtained from the questionnaire. In so doing and to check strategies not addressed in the questionnaire, among Persian-monolinguals, 10 high reported strategy users and 10 low reported strategy users; and among bilinguals 5 high and 5 low strategy users were chosen to be the interviewees. During the interviews, participants gave responses to the questions in Persian and the interviews were also conducted in Persian. To ensure privacy, interviews were conducted individually and with pseudonyms. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researchers and some parts were translated to be used as samples in the results and discussion parts of the qualitative phase of the study.

### **Procedure**

Data collection started with Oxford Placement Test (2007). It was administered to make sure that the participants were of the same level of background knowledge. It took sixty minutes. In the following week, Pilar and Jorda's Questionnaire (2003) adopted by Dibaj (2011) was implemented. Through questionnaires, bi/monolinguality of the students was discovered. On the first day of the first week, the researchers explained the study to the students. Then Schmitt's VLSQ adopted from Bennett (2006) was handed out. They had enough time to complete it. Some participants completed and returned it on the same day, but others gave it back within one week. There were not any treatments in the present study, so the data was collected using different instruments like questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Since the class was handled by another teacher, there was the opportunity for the researchers to give the questionnaire to the students and also do interviews during students' break time and after the class. The questionnaire was employed primarily to collect data from at least 70 participants. The researchers were present at the research site to explain

the purpose and importance of the research as well as answering any questions and clarifying any items in the VLSQ that they might not understand or might find ambiguous and also to make it clear that the result would not have any effect on the students' grades in the courses they were taking as well as answering any questions and clarifying any items in the VLSQ that they might not understand or might find ambiguous.

Next, after the collection and analysis of the questionnaire, interviews were made to get more specific observations based on purposeful sampling. Among bilinguals, 5 high reported strategy users and 5 low reported strategy users and among monolinguals 10 high and 10 low strategy users were selected to be interviewed. The semi-structured interview, which took place orally, was conducted at various time intervals. All interviews were conducted in Persian, to assure the comprehension of the questions. The interview gave an opportunity to the researchers to check the hidden aspects of the vocabulary learning strategies use.

### Results

The results of OPT test and the family education comparison of the two groups indicated that the difference between the participants was not significant. Therefore, the two groups were equivalent with regard to English proficiency and family educational background. For the OPT, Levene's test of equality of the variances indicated that the variances of the two groups are equal [ $F = 3.56$ ;  $p = 0.63$ ]. The results of the t-test [ $t(68) = 0.38$ ;  $p = 0.70$ ] indicated that there was no significant difference between the Oxford placement test scores of the bilingual and monolingual groups thus it was concluded that both groups were homogeneous in terms of proficiency level.

**Table 1** Descriptive statistics for Oxford Placement Test Scores of Bilinguals and Monolinguals

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
OPT Bilingual	25	39.00	2.062	.412
monolingual	45	38.84	1.348	.201

### Results of the VLS

To determine to what extent the learners use the vocabulary learning strategies and also to answer the first research question, i.e. *Is there any significant difference between EFL Arabic-Persian bilinguals (APBs) and Persian Monolinguals (PMs) in vocabulary learning strategies*, descriptive statistics including the mean scores, the standard deviations and t-test were computed to summarize the students' responses to the use of 40 strategies listed in Schmitt's VLS questionnaire. As mentioned before, according to Oxford (1997, 2001), learners with the mean score in the range above of 3.5 were considered as high strategy users, learners with the mean of 1 to 2.4 were low strategy users and the mean for medium strategy users was between 2.4 to 3.5. The results follow: considering the means of vocabulary learning strategy use among monolinguals and bilinguals of intermediate level, both groups were considered as medium strategy users but bilinguals had to some extent an advantage over monolinguals (Table 2).

**Table 2** Group Statistics of Vocabulary Learning Strategy among Monolinguals and Bilinguals

Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
monolinguals	45	2.79	.4028	.0600
bilinguals	25	2.98	.0495	.2476
total	70	2.88	.3815	.0456

An independent samples t-test was run to see the differences between bilinguals and monolinguals in terms of vocabulary language learning strategies. The results of Levene's Test [ $F= 5.66$ ;  $p = 0.02$ ] did not show equality of variance. Moreover, the results of the t-test [ $t(67.99) = 1.32$ ;  $p = 0.190$ ] showed there was not a significant difference in using vocabulary language learning strategies among bilinguals and monolinguals.

### Results of the Second Research Question

To respond to the second research question i.e. *Is there any significant difference between monolinguals and bilinguals considering the most and the least vocabulary learning strategies*, descriptive statistics and

a series of t-test were run to observe mean differences of bilinguals and monolinguals respondents on each vocabulary learning strategy. According to descriptive analysis, and as can be observed in Table 3, Arab-bilingual learners used cognitive, metacognitive, social, determination and memory strategies respectively. The bilingual EFL learners reported medium use of strategy categories, since the mean of overall strategy use was 2.98.

**Table 3** Descriptive Statistics of Vocabulary Learning Strategies by Bilinguals

STRATEGY	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Cognitive	25	4.14	.5008	.1001
Metacognitive	25	4.07	.3920	.0785
Social	25	2.80	.6232	.1246
Determination	25	2.20	.3375	.0675
Memory	25	1.70	.4248	.0849
Total	25	2.98	.0495	.2476

B: Bilingual M: Monolingual

Table 3 shows 45 Persian monolingual learners' responses to vocabulary language learning strategies. Monolingual learners used determination, social, metacognitive, memory and cognitive strategies, respectively. The monolingual EFL learners reported medium use of strategy categories, as the mean of overall strategy use was 2.79.

**Table 4** Descriptive Statistics of Vocabulary Learning Strategies by Monolinguals

STRATEGY	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Determination	45	3.12	.5665	.0844
Social	45	3.05	.9832	.1466
Metacognitive	45	2.74	.8180	.1220
Memory	45	2.60	.5028	.0749
Cognitive	45	2.44	.7787	.1161

As Table 4 indicates, monolinguals' mean score for determination, social, metacognitive, memory and cognitive strategies are 3.12, 3.05, 2.74, 2.60, and 2.44 respectively. This is while bilinguals' mean score for cognitive, metacognitive, social, determination and memory strategies are 4.14, 4.07, 2.80, 2.20, and 1.70, respectively. These numbers illustrate that Arab-bilingual learners in the current study were more oriented toward using cognitive and metacognitive strategies than Persian-monolingual learners; monolinguals, on the other hand, seem to be more attracted to use determination and social strategies than bilinguals. However, before making any statistical claims on the obtained results, a t-test was conducted for each category separately to check the significant difference between the most and the least vocabulary learning strategies used by bilinguals and monolinguals.

An independent samples t-test was run to see any significant difference between bilinguals and monolinguals in terms of using determination strategies. The result of Levene's Test [ $F= 8.67$ ;  $p=0.004$ ] did not show equality of variances. Moreover, the results of the t-test [ $t(67.59)=8.5$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ] indicated there was a significant difference in using determination strategies by bilinguals and monolinguals and the means signaled monolinguals used determination strategies more.

As regards social strategies, the result of Levene's Test [ $F= 4.12$ ;  $p=0.04$ ] did not show equality of variances. Moreover, the results of the t-test [ $t(66.7)=1.29$ ;  $p=0.19$ ] showed there was not any significant difference in using social strategies between bilinguals and monolinguals and the means indicated monolinguals used social strategies more.

About memory strategies, the result of Levene's Test [ $F = 1.65$ ;  $p=0.20$ ] showed equality of variances. The results of the t-test [ $t(68)=6.91$ ;  $p<0.05$ ] indicated there was a significant difference in using memory strategies between bilinguals and monolinguals and the means displayed that monolinguals used it more often.

Regarding cognitive strategies, the result of Levene's Test [ $F=12.17$ ;  $p=0.001$ ] did not show equality of variances. The results of the t-test [ $t(66.41) =11.09$ ;  $p<0.05$ ] showed there was a significant difference in using cognitive strategies between bilinguals and monolinguals and the means indicated that bilinguals used it more.

And finally concerning metacognitive strategies the result of Levene's Test [ $F=5.79$ ;  $p=0.019$ ] did not show equality of variances. The results of the t-test [ $t(66.93) = 9.14$ ;  $p<0.05$ ] indicated there was a significant difference in using metacognitive strategies between bilinguals and monolinguals and bilinguals used it more.

All in all, considering the most and the least frequent strategies, one can conclude cognitive strategies were identified as the most and memory strategies as the least frequent strategies used by bilingual learners while determination strategies were the most and cognitive strategies were the least frequent strategies used by monolingual learners.

### **Results of the Third Research Question**

The third research question concerned investigating the attitudes of the Arabic-Persian bilinguals and Persian monolinguals towards English vocabulary learning strategies as a foreign language and to find the answer to this question, a semi-structured interview was conducted through the following procedure: based on the number of monolingual and bilingual participants, among Arabic-Persian bilinguals, 5 high reported strategy users and 5 low reported strategy users and among Persian-monolinguals, 10 high reported strategy users and 10 low reported strategy users were picked out to be interviewed. The interview, conducted in Persian, included four main questions. All the interviews were recorded, transcribed, and translated to analyzed or reported patterns (themes) for each question in a table. The interview questions and some sample answers are provided below:

**Question 1.** *Is there anybody who encourages you to learn new English words in your family? Who helps you when you have problems in learning English words?*

In answering the first question, Arabic-Persian bilingual high strategy users stated that their parents and their brothers or sisters encouraged them to learn new vocabulary and that when they had problems, their sisters and brothers helped them. Some of the learners mentioned that since their brothers or sisters are educated, they encourage them to learn new words. They also said that they talk and practice English at home with their sisters or brothers.

- *My sister is an English teacher and she helps me. Sometimes we speak English at home, even just for three or four words. For example, we practice some words we know. She really encourages me to learn English language.*

- *Because my father works at ALKOSAR TV channel, and he is in charge of translating news into Arabic. He really encourages me to learn English especially vocabulary. My father translates the subtitled news. He always says that learning vocabulary is fundamental for job opening.*

Low strategy users mentioned that when they faced some problems regarding the meaning of new words, their relatives such as their uncles or cousins helped them. They said that since many of their relatives live abroad or commute, they help them when they have problems.

- *My sister is an English teacher and she advises me. Sometimes we speak English at home, even just for three or four words. For example, we practice some words which we know. She encourages me to learn English.*

- *My cousin is my age and their family lives in London. We always chat with each other. Regarding my English problems, I ask her for help. Chatting with her makes me study English more.*

In comparison with Arab-bilingual learners, Persian-monolingual high strategy users stated that they were supported mostly by their parents and their siblings. Although they had some relatives abroad, they rarely chatted with them.

- *My cousin is an English student. When I have problems, I ask her for help. When we chat with each other, I ask some words which I don't know. I have learned common expressions and words in chat rooms, Facebook, Line etc.*

- *My mother is studying natural sciences. We mostly study together, especially English. We read the text then we translate it. We look the meaning of the words up or sometimes guess their meanings.*

Some monolingual low strategy users mentioned that they were just encouraged by their parents and they were not supported by them when

they faced a problem. Some others stated that since there was nobody in their home, they were forced to solve their problems themselves.

*- I practice and study English alone. There is nobody in my family who can help and encourage me to learn English. When I face a problem, for example when I don't know the word, I search in my phone dictionary. And when I have grammatical problems, I read the grammatical points at the end of my book.*

*- There is just my brother who encourages me to learn and study English. But he can't help me when I have problems since he doesn't know English.*

**Question 2.** *How important do you think vocabulary learning is? Why?*

Having collected the answers to this question of interview, the opinions were classified into two major themes: high strategy bilingual users stated that if they know and learn more vocabulary, they can chat easily.

*- When our relatives come to visit us from Iraq, we talk in Arabic. But when we don't understand each other so we switch to English.*

*- If you know more words, you can work easily with computers, phones and other devices. Since my brother knows many words he can easily work with computer, he is Jack of all trades.*

Although both bilingual high strategy users and low strategy users were pre-university students, low strategy users were more worried about the university entrance exam than high strategy users. They also believed that they needed to learn vocabulary as well as grammar to be successful in the university entrance exam and also in passing school's exams.

*- I think when you know vocabulary, you can learn grammar better and both will help you to do better in multiple choice tests. Since we have to take part in Konkur<sup>1</sup> soon, learning vocabulary is very important and essential to us.*

*- When we know a lot words, we can guess the correct answer with translating the sentence. Even if we have grammatical problems, we can take tests easily and understand the text better especially while doing reading tests.*



Persian-monolingual high strategy users stated that knowing enough vocabulary would help them when they surf the Internet and when they work with their phones and computers.

*- My brother has an iPhone; first he didn't know how to work with it. I helped him. When he has problems, I help him by translating its phone programs.*

*- I use PowerPoint and Word programs for my class projects. Because I know many of their toolbars' words and their applications, I can easily work with them. But I see that my classmates can't work with these programs as well as I do. They say that they don't know the meaning of their toolbars' words and even its applications. I believe that even if you know just a few words and use these programs, your vocabulary knowledge will improve.*

While low strategy users reported the same, they believed that knowing more words would help them to be successful both in their exams and in the university entrance exams.

*- I have many grammatical problems. Since my teacher speaks English most of the time and I don't know many words that she uses, I can't learn grammar. If I knew enough words, I would have learnt grammar completely.*

*- Knowing and learning vocabulary is very important. If you know many words, you can read the test in the university entrance exam very fast, and even you can easily read the reading text. So there is no need to put a great deal of time on the English test, thus save time in this exam.*

*Question 3. What additional strategies can you think of that are not listed in the questionnaire?*

In answering this interview question, some Arab-bilingual high strategy users stated that they learn new words through the gifts and souvenirs such as chocolates, magazines, creams, soft drinks, etc. their relatives send them.

*- My father commutes to Sweden every six months and he sometimes brings foods and fruits. I ask their names and I memorize the words.*

- *My aunt lives in London. When she sends me different skin creams, I read carefully their descriptions to know their usage. Some of the words stick in my mind.*

But some Arab-bilingual low strategy users said that there are some words which are common between the two languages and they are more eager to search for similar words in English and Arabic, such as tomato, potato, bus.

- *I search similar and common words such as tomato, potato, driver, etc. I learn these words better and they stick in my mind.*

- *There are words which are common in our language for example, tomato, bicycle, bus, potato, and so on. I learn these words so fast and they stick in my mind.*

Other bilingual low strategy users tended to use phone dictionaries and they set their phone language to English to learn words. Some others downloaded story books from *Bazar*<sup>2</sup>. They believed that this program would help them learn words.

- *I set my phone programs to English in order to learn more words, and I often use my phone dictionary to check words.*

Persian-monolingual and Arab-bilingual EFL students employed a variety of vocabulary language learning strategies as listed in Schmitt's VLS questionnaire when learning English as a foreign language. Regarding an interview question asking them to mention additional strategies that are not mentioned in the questionnaire, Arab-bilingual learners reported different strategies while Persian-monolinguals did not mention any additional strategies they used. They just mentioned the strategies they used more and they imagined that they were practical. High strategy users and low strategy users all wrote down some vocabulary learning strategies which they used more. Two strategies will be analyzed here because so many students opted for them: communicating and using phone dictionary reported by high strategy users and asking classmates or teachers for meaning of words and writing while memorizing reported by low strategy users.

Persian-monolingual's high strategy users believed communicating is a very useful vocabulary learning strategy. All high strategy users agreed that communicating with advanced speakers can help them learn a great

number of new words. Many students mentioned that communicating with native speakers or teachers can help them use more accurate words. They all thought this strategy was a very useful one in vocabulary learning process but there are two problems: Firstly, it is hard to find native speakers in daily life; as a result they had less chance communicating with native speakers or English teachers. Secondly, when they communicated with a native speaker, they could not understand what s/he was talking about. They just did not have enough vocabulary expression to understand the speaker or express their own thoughts. These two reasons hinder communication; as a result the students cannot learn new words through communicating.

*- I don't dare to chat with them. Because I think when we want to chat with native speakers, we should know many words. One time, I had just a short chat with a native person. At first, I didn't have any problems, but after we continued, I didn't understand anything. I didn't understand even just one word.*

*- I guess they are not patients enough to chat with somebody like us. Because we are not able to chat for a long time. We can only greet.*

*- Chatting with foreign speakers is practical if we are the same age. And even if they are students, we can learn many words and we can chat with them better than other native speakers.*

Other Persian-monolingual high strategy users stated that instead of browsing and looking the words up in print dictionaries, they preferred to use their phone dictionaries. They also mentioned that in the technology era, there is no need to buy not only an expensive but also a large dictionary that is not mobile. So it is logical to use phone and computer dictionaries that are mobile and that we can easily use and update.

*- I rarely use my print dictionary. Since it wastes time to browse and look up words in the dictionary. I just use it when I want to check the verb tenses.*

*- I have a print dictionary, but I mostly use the CD version so I can hear the words pronunciation. I can also practice my pronunciation by recording my voice. It also has different tests of vocabulary, listening, etc.*

Moreover, Persian-monolingual low strategy users reported that asking classmates or teachers for meaning of new words and writing while memorizing them are good strategies and very useful. They argued that these strategies do not require any skill of learning vocabulary. They also mentioned that these strategies are suitable for them because they only need to spend a great deal of time and make some effort, and a learner who does not have enough vocabulary can also use these strategies to learn new words.

*- I always ask my classmates if I don't understand a word. When I know something better, I explain it to them and this helps me learn the point better.*

*- Sometimes we ask our teachers to explain more or to recommend us the way to learn and memorize new words. But we mostly use our own way that we are used to such as writing them several times, and asking our classmates their meanings.*

Other monolingual low strategy users mentioned that they just practiced the words' spelling. They memorized the words once they wrote them down. They stated that they just use this simple way to practice and learn words.

*- I learn this way that I write English words down several times. I write them while memorizing and thinking of what they mean.*

*- I am used to spelling the words many times. While I practice the words 'dictation, I repeat them many times. I learn more this way.*

*Question 4. If you have access to cable or satellite TV with programs in the foreign language you are learning, answer the following questions: What programs do you usually watch? How often do you watch programs in the English language you are learning?*

The themes which emerged from the responses to this question includes: "the use of native language programs", "English language programs" or "native language programs with English subtitles" used by both bilinguals and monolinguals either high or low strategy users. On the other hand, though both groups watched the above mentioned programs, the difference was that the monolinguals were less interested or eager to follow the English programs.

In answering this question, the bilingual high strategy users said that they were more eager to watch Arabic channels such as *mbc*, *mbc2*, *mbc3* and *mbc4* following their movies which sometimes come with English subtitles and sometimes English movies are shown with Arabic subtitles. They added that when they see the English subtitles, they learn new words as well as the words' spelling.

*- I watch mbc2, mbc3, and mbc4 every night. Their movies are in English but with Arabic subtitles. I check the subtitle to know the meaning of a word once I hear it.*

*- My mother takes part at the Quranic Exegesis class in Abdolazim Holy Shrine. And she often watches HADI TV1 channel. I watch this channel with my mother. It broadcasts a program titled "Qur'anic Exegesis in Arabic and English language". I try to interpret those English parts for my mother. I guess some words which I don't know.*

The bilingual low strategy users stated that if they have enough time, they watch BBC learning English program, Euro news Arabic, BBC Arab TV and BBC World News. They also mentioned that, they see them since their families followed BBC documentary programs. They believed that these kinds of programs help them learn a few words although they cannot understand completely all the spoken words.

*- Since my father and my brother are interested in documentary programs, sometimes I watch these programs too and I repeat and check the new words with my brother. Sometimes we learn just one or two words. We watch ANIMAL PLANE channel too.*

*- My father works at ALKOSAR channel. He is in charge of subtitling the news. Because of this he watches news channels every night especially BBC ARAB TV and EURONEWS ARABIC. I am also used to hearing them. Sometimes I check with my phone the words' meanings which I hear a lot. I have learned a lot of vocabularies.*

Persian-monolingual high strategy users stated that they watch satellite programs and movies too. They regarded watching satellite programs or movies as a useful strategy in vocabulary learning process. High strategy users stated that this strategy can help students improve listening and speaking, meanwhile, acquiring new words in the learning process. They also claimed that there are so many native words and

sentences in the movies, and that they can acquire words' meaning and application in the movies' context.

*- My brother and I usually watch EURO SPORT2 PL. That is an amazing channel. We have learned technical sports vocabulary a lot. Since I am an athlete and really interested, I learn them easy as a pie, and they stick in my mind.*

*- I am interested in BBC Learning English program. In this program new words come with related pictures, and then follows a conversation with these new words that we get familiar with their usage. But I don't regularly watch this program since I forget its show time.*

While monolingual low strategy users mentioned that watching satellite TV or movies is a good strategy, they believed it can be useful. However, they do not have enough vocabulary expression.

*- I watch movies and serials broadcast via satellite. Since I don't know enough words, I can't understand them completely. Sometimes I just guess the meanings of some words. I regularly watch such serials since I want to improve my listening skill. Since I usually watch them, many words are familiar to me, but I don't exactly know their meanings.*

*- I am interested in English songs. I just follow one channel which shows songs with its lyric subtitles. I also download many songs using TTPod program. I pay attention to subtitles and check words.*

*- I watch satellite programs. But I don't understand anything. The words are new and not simple. I just like commercials. I learn many words by means of commercials. They use attractive animations and pictures and also the words used are simple and short.*

### **Discussion**

There have been various assumptions underlying different studies that bilinguals performed better in language learning because of their superior ability and their dual language status to shift strategies and restructure their internal representations of the linguistic system (Nation et al. 1986; Nayak et al. 1990). However, the result of the current study showed that there was no significant difference between monolinguals and bilinguals in terms of using vocabulary learning strategies. As

reported, both bilingual Arab-Persian and monolingual Persian students showed medium use of vocabulary learning strategies.

The results of this study is also in compliance with the study by Cenoz et al. (2001), which indicates that cognitive and metalinguistic development could also be related to cross-linguistic influence, and especially, to psycho-typology, because older children when transferring terms from one of the languages they know, can have a more accurate perception of linguistic distance that could influence the source language they use or it has an important role in the activation of languages other than the target language. So the similarity of the languages the individual has learned to the target language also contributes to cross-linguistic influence as Arabic-Persian bilingual learners reported that they searched for common words in their language. Since they were more frequent commuters to Iraq especially during *Muharram*, and also as they talked Arabic at home with their parents and relatives even in the social contexts, they completely became acquainted with their own language and culture. They were aware of the features of the Arabic language such as form and grammar, as Bialystok (2001) mentioned that metalinguistic awareness is the ability to attend to, and reflect upon the features of ones' language. Since they used more common words such as bus, potato, tomato and the like and also they searched for the common words, it follows that bilingualism will positively affect the degree of metalinguistic awareness. This finding revealed that the degree of metacognitive awareness is affected by the number of languages known by the learner. It can, based on interviews, be concluded, that there were some strategies not included in the questionnaire but revealed in the interviews such as "*asking parents, siblings, relatives*". In other words, it might be said that, first of all questionnaires should be used along with interviews. Moreover, these strategies used might be context-based. Other researches' interviews in other contexts may show the use of other strategies which all can add to the items of the questionnaire especially to the learning in general. As Schmitt (1997) pointed out, for vocabulary, culture is another learner characteristic which has been shown to be important. In addition, he stated that learners from different culture groups sometimes have quite different opinions about the usefulness of various vocabulary learning strategies.

### **Conclusions**

The first part of the quantitative phase of this study indicated that intermediate-level monolinguals and bilinguals were not remarkably different in terms of using vocabulary learning strategies and both groups were considered as medium strategy users.

The second part of the quantitative phase of the study focused on determining which strategies were used most and which ones least by the learners. Persian-monolingual learners used determination strategies as the most frequently used strategies followed by social, metacognitive, memory strategies, and cognitive strategies, respectively. But Arabic-Persian bilingual learners used cognitive strategies as the most frequently used strategies followed by metacognitive, social strategies, determination strategies, and memory strategies respectively. Moreover, bilinguals had to some extent an advantage over monolinguals and they used more metacognitive and cognitive strategies which were considered more important and effective ones in learning another language (Ben-Zeev, 1977). Craik and Lockhart, 1972; Craik and Tulvingm 1975 (as cited in Schmitt, 1997) admitted that there are many learners who have used these strategies to reach high levels of proficiency. They preferred to use metacognitive and cognitive strategies more than other strategies. This can be due to the existence of an extensive number of commercially produced educational materials. Today, the Internet and other electronic resources are easily accessed. While monolinguals were more oriented toward using determination and social strategies, the results show significant differences between bilinguals and monolinguals' use of determination, memory, cognitive and metacognitive strategies. There was no significant difference, however, between bilinguals and monolinguals in their use of social strategies.

The last part of the study and its qualitative phase focused on exploring bilinguals' and monolinguals' opinion of English (as a foreign language) vocabulary learning strategies. The results of semi-structured interview indicated that Arabic-Persian bilinguals and Persian monolinguals believed that they needed to learn vocabulary as well as grammar to be successful in the university entrance exam. Since they were pre-university students, they were more worried about the university entrance exam. They also stated that if they know and learn



more vocabulary, they can chat easily. Generally, the more vocabulary they know, the better they can surf the Internet. Arab-bilingual learners also mentioned that they can easily chat with their relatives abroad. Since they were encouraged by their parents, siblings and relatives, they tended to use different vocabulary learning strategies in contrast with the Persian-monolingual learners. In terms of the Arabic culture, they were supported by their relatives inside Iran and abroad. Hence, they had more opportunities to communicate with them in comparison with Persian-monolinguals. This made chatting affectionate for them, but monolinguals feared chatting with the natives and did not try to communicate any more. All these opportunities lead to the usage of different kinds of strategies by Arabic-Persian bilingual learners.

### **Pedagogical Implications**

The results of the current study indicated differences in the monolinguals' and bilinguals' preferences for using vocabulary learning strategies: monolinguals used determination, social, metacognitive, memory and cognitive strategies respectively. The findings revealed that Persian-monolinguals used cognitive and memory strategies less than other ones. This finding can help teachers choose and design appropriate materials and activities to assist monolingual learners improve such vocabulary learning strategies. It can have the same implication for Arab-bilingual learners regarding improving memory and determination strategies. Since they used these strategies less than other ones, teachers can apply appropriate methods to introduce these strategies to them. It is worth mentioning that since learners are more eager to have group work and cooperation, teachers can encourage both monolingual and bilingual learners to share their dominant strategies with each other. In other words, teachers can also encourage students to use strategies involving practice, which aids the development of communicative competence. This may cultivate approaches to learner-centered learning in learning English in our communities.

### **Acknowledgments**

We would like to express our gratitude to Dr. Sotoudehnama for her great comments that improved this manuscript.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> National University Entrance Exam

<sup>2</sup> An Iranian cell-phone software offering many applications to download, mostly free or at low costs.

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