

# Using the SILL to record the language learning strategy use: Suggestions for the Greek EFL population

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## Abstract

The paper explores how comprehensively the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) records the language learning strategy use of Greek adult EFL learners. To this end, interview data describing the learning strategies of 10 interviewees are quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed and compared to the SILL strategies. Results indicate that the SILL manages to accurately record almost half of the strategies reported in interviews while the remainder consists of strategies that are either variations of SILL items or entirely different strategies. These findings suggest possible adjustments for the SILL, especially if it is to be used by Greek EFL population. Finally the function attributed by the interviewees to strategies is discussed while this issue raises concerns about the strategy classification.

**Keywords:** language learning strategies, SILL, Greek EFL learners, strategy taxonomy

## 1. Introduction

The use of language learning strategies of EFL learners has been widely investigated over the past 30 years through various elicitation methods and tools. One of the most widely used measures has been the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). (Dörnyei 2005, White, Schramm and Chamot 2007). It is a structured questionnaire, aiming to assess how often learners employ specific language learning strategies. It equips teachers with the strategy profile of their students and uncovers to learners the kinds of strategies they resort to when learning English as a second or foreign language (Oxford 1990).

However, each elicitation method and tool presents advantages and disadvantages. The SILL produces standardized data which are very useful for statistical treatment and group summaries but it does not provide any space for the individual's creative responses (Oxford 1993). LoCastro (1994: 43) raised her concern to this direction by stating that "...the inventory may not be sensitive to the concerns of the respondents and thus may not generate a clear picture of their learning strategies". She also questioned whether the SILL is transferable across learning environments and different sociocultural settings.

It is true that verbal report research tools can carry along such deficiencies and this is the main reason that researchers resort to data triangulation by combining different elicitation methods so that the strength of one method is matched to the weakness of the other (Sarantakos 1993). Alderson (1992) suggests that a questionnaire includes a pre-conceived idea about what is significant on a particular topic. However our knowledge expands when we ask individuals to talk about this topic.

Indeed this was followed in the present study where data about learning strategy use were collected with the SILL from a sample of 356 Greek adult EFL learners, and triangulated with data collected through 10 interviews. The results of this triangulation are currently presented and analyzed aiming to answer the following questions: a) Which language learning strategies do Greek EFL learners use if they are asked to report them through interviews? and b) To what extent are these strategies reflected in the SILL?

The ultimate purpose is to uncover the range of strategies used by Greek EFL learners through qualitative type of data and compare the content and variety of the strategies elicited, with the content of the SILL. Therefore the SILL will be constantly juxtaposed with interview data so it is considered useful to briefly present its structure.

## **2. The Structure of the SILL**

The SILL – version 7.0, which was used in this research – is comprised of 50 items (Oxford 1990: 293-300). Each item describes a language learning strategy and learners are asked to respond to the SILL items by indicating how often they employ these strategies by selecting one response out of five Likert scale options. The SILL classifies language learning strategies into 6 parts; each part comprises strategies with similar function. Since its development, the SILL has been used to assess the learning strategy use of more than 10000 learners world-wide and has been translated so far into a large number of languages such as Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Greek Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, Russian, Serbo-Croatian, Spanish, Swedish, Thai, Ukrainian and in Greek (Oxford 1996).

## **3. The Research**

### ***3.1 The Research Sample***

The sample of our study for which we conducted data triangulation was comprised of 10 adult Greek EFL learners studying English at the Foreign Languages Section of the

National Center of Public Administration in Athens, Greece. Their mean age was approximately 37 years old, while 40% were male and 60% female. All interviewees were of intermediate language proficiency level.

### 3.2 The elicitation method

Interview data were elicited from 3 long interviews lasting 120 to 150 minutes each and 7 short interviews lasting approximately 20 minutes each. Interviews were conducted in Greek, were recorded, transcribed and translated into English. Translations were checked by professional translators to ensure validity. Interview questions (see Appendix I for a representative sample) were structured along the following examples: a) What do you think are your strengths and weaknesses in English? and b) After all these years of learning English have you developed any particular learning habits?

### 3.3 Methodology of data analysis

Interview data were<sup>1</sup> classified according to the strategy group they belong to (namely, if they are cognitive, memory, etc), their frequency of strategy occurrence was coded and they were compared to the SILL items in order to identify similarities and differences. The basic criterion for this process was the content, namely, if the content of the interview item is similar or different to this of the SILL. Comparison yielded three categories of interview data describing learning strategies:

*First*, there were interview data that describe a SILL strategy in exactly the same way SILL does and are consequently similar. In the following table, the strategy is identical in the SILL and the interview data; in both cases it is the cognitive strategy of summarizing.

**Table 1: Example of similar strategies**

SILL no 23	I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English.	Int. data	I make summaries of what I read or hear.
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*Second*, there were interview data that bear some resemblance to a SILL item because the underlying strategy is the same but the manifestations of the strategy articulated by the interviewees are rather different from the relevant SILL item. Interview data of this type, called variations, might provide an alternative way of using the strategy, or they might uncover different applications of the strategy found in the

<sup>1</sup> For interview questions and transcriptions see Kazamia 2003.

SILL item. For example, in the following interview extracts the cognitive strategy of practicing naturalistically which underlies SILL item 15, is alternatively reported by the interviewees.

**Table 2: Example of variation**

SILL no 15	I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English.	Int. data	I watch English TV serials, <i>never read the Greek subtitles and try to listen to the words or the sentences as they are pronounced.</i>
		Int. data	I <i>listen to English songs</i> and try to understand them.
		Int. data	I <i>listen to the news on the radio (in English).</i>

*Third*, there were interview data that describe strategies which are not present in any form in the SILL because the latter lacks any similar strategies. These different strategies are not related or tied to the SILL; rather they contribute entirely new elements to this research and this renders them distinct. This is evident in the strategy of dictionary use reported by different interviewees.

**Table 3: Examples of different strategies**

Int. data	<i>'If I want to express something in English and I do not know the words, I look up the words at the Greek-English dictionary'</i>
Int. data	<i>'You encounter an unknown word. What are you likely to do? I resort to the electronic dictionary.'</i>

Although the strategy of using the dictionary is not comprised in the SILL inventory, it is recorded as a strategy in the taxonomy introduced by Oxford, it is classified under the cognitive strategy group of "Using Resources for Receiving and Sending Messages" (Oxford 1990: 81) and it is also incorporated in the SILL version 5.1 for English speakers learning a new language (ibid: 285). Nevertheless, the purpose of this paper is to explore the content of the SILL addressed to EFL learners and not the entire taxonomy proposed by the author of the SILL. Therefore, the focus of our discussion is the SILL and the results stemming from the examination of interview data with its content.

#### 4. Results

The analysis and comparison of interview data focused on answering the following questions: i) Which SILL items were reported in the interview data? ii) Which SILL items were reported in the interview data as variations? iii) Which SILL items were not reported at all in the interview data? iv) Which are the different (i.e. not included in the SILL) strategies that were reported during the interviews?

Similarities, variations and differences were detected in all six parts of the SILL (Kazamia 2003). Nonetheless this paper will elaborate extensively only on those referring to SILL part B cognitive strategy group and will present briefly those of the remaining five parts in tabulated form (see Appendix II) in order to comply with length limitations. Cognitive strategies have been selected as the focus of the analysis because they are frequently utilized by learners since they enable them to directly manipulate learning (Oxford 1990).

#### ***4.1 Cognitive Strategies***

Seven SILL items (SILL 10, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, and 20) were reported in an almost identical manifestation in the interview strategies. In addition to this, six SILL items were reported in the form of a variation (SILL 15, 18, 19, 20, 21, 23 see Appendix III). This implies that out of the 14 cognitive strategies found in the SILL, 13 had been reported either as variations or as being similar; the sole strategy not reported is: SILL 11 'I try to talk like the native English speakers'.

The variations detected suggest that there are some interview strategies that are partly described in the SILL. However, this may not be obvious for SILL respondents since they would find some obstacles when completing the questionnaire. More specifically they would not encounter the manifestation they actually use and therefore they may have some trouble in responding. For example, the strategy of translating is encountered in the SILL with SILL 22 'I try not to translate word-for-word' as opposed to the variations of translating reported in interviews (see Appendix III) which suggest different applications such as doing a direct translation in Greek, translating a text into English, using a computer program to translate. Yet the question that arises is how the relevant SILL item will manage to identify these manifestations or at least the most common manifestations such as translating a text into Greek? To start with, SILL 22 describes a negative use of translating so it is not possible to record a positive use of translating. In addition to this, the options a learner is provided with in the SILL are time adverbs marking the frequency of use, so the learner will have the options either to report that he does not use SILL 22 or that he uses it with varying degrees of frequency. In any case, the learner will not report that he/she uses direct translation simply because he/she was not provided with a similar item.

Regarding differences, there are 16 different strategies that were reported by the interviewees and are not included in the SILL (see Appendix IV). Most of them were

elicited from one or two interviews except for the strategy of using resources (use of dictionary) that was reported in three interviews. It is true that the names of the strategies (see Appendix IV), might suggest that some of them are partially included in one or more SILL items. However, this is not the case because the interview extracts reflect a different type or form of a strategy. For instance, transcribing the pronunciation of a word could be compared to SILL no 10 'I say or write new English words several times'. Yet writing new words which entails the strategy of 'formally practicing' is not similar to the strategy of 'repeating' that underlies in the system the learner devised to record the pronunciation of words (see Appendix IV item no 7). In fact the learner repeats the new sounds through his/her transcribing system and this is the technique he/she deliberately selects to retain the pronunciation.

Moreover, the interview strategy 6) 'checking spelling in the dictionary' and 8) 'using resources' (the dictionary) can be associated with the strategy of using resources which is part of Oxford's taxonomy but not included in the SILL, as mentioned earlier. This indicates that Oxford's taxonomy is comprehensive as opposed to the SILL content which presents some limitations. Indeed, the long list of different interview strategies suggests that the present sample employs a large number of cognitive strategies which are absent from the SILL. Therefore, this can cause some implications for the measurement of the SILL when the latter is used to record the strategy use of Greek adult EFL learners.

Another interesting finding of the present study is the function of strategies. Interview data have indicated that the interviewees attribute to the SILL items a different function than those suggested by the SILL. Although the wording is similar between the interview item and the SILL item, the function of interview item is different from the one the SILL item carries. For example, using circumlocution is compensatory in the SILL and cognitive in the interviews as the following interview extracts suggest:

*Respondent:* Sometimes they give us a sentence *and we must write the same meaning with other words*. So this way you are forced to write. Isn't this so? *You have to use different words*. You have to use the syntax.

*Interviewer:* Your teacher introduces a new word. What are you likely to do?

*Respondent:* To start with we may already know its meaning in Greek. *Another way is to explain it in English by using other English words; we do this quite often.*

As we may infer from the first response, the interviewee employs circumlocution as part of a classroom exercise that develops the ability of learners to express themselves in alternative ways. In the second interview extract, the interviewee is exposed to circumlocution when this is applied in the classroom in order to explain the meanings of unknown words. In both cases circumlocution does not aim to compensate for missing knowledge but to manipulate knowledge and this depends on the particular task the learner is involved in. Therefore its function is cognitive and not compensatory. Circumlocution is classified as a compensation strategy in the SILL; this implies that circumlocution has a different function in the SILL than the one detected in these interview items. Consequently, we may infer that strategies involving the same technique may be used for different functions. This renders them entirely different in terms of interpretation. Similarly, repeating words is cognitive in the SILL and carries a memory function in the interviews while asking questions is a social strategy in the SILL and has a cognitive function in the interviews (Appendix VII). This different interpretation of strategy function can be interpreted under the perspective of instruction versus communication. More specifically learners are not exposed to an authentic language environment requiring communication but to an instruction based context where English is taught and by implication learnt. In other words learners are probably affected by the medium of instruction rather by the actual communicative use of language (Psaltou-Joycey 2008 personal communication).

If we put together the data presented above together those of the remaining five parts of the SILL (see Appendix II) we may infer that 23 interview strategies are similar to 23 SILL items, 12 interview strategies are included in the SILL with a variation, 16 SILL strategies were not articulated at all and 27 different strategies were reported.

## **5. Discussion**

All these findings need to be placed in the context of the SILL in order to understand their significance for the operation of the SILL. The fact that 23 interview strategies are similar to 23 SILL items indicates that the present interviewees agree with approximately half of the SILL content.

The variations detected suggest that there are 12 interview items which are partly included in the SILL because they share the same strategy but they have a different manifestation. Therefore, SILL respondents might face the problems outlined in 4.1 when completing the inventory.

It is true that we are not expecting the SILL to record all possible manifestations of a specific strategy. However, some variations suggest a pattern of use because they were reported by three or more interviewees and can be inferred that they could be part of the strategy repertoire of the present sample. It is therefore suggested that the variations of translating, formally practicing grammar, repeating, and guessing by using the context (Appendix VI) could be included in any examination of strategy use as potential manifestations of the underlying strategies. Particularly for the strategy of guessing, it is insightful to report that relying on the context to guess the meaning of unknown words was also detected as being part of the reading strategy profile of Greek EFL students of the University of Western Macedonia (Griva 2005).

Another finding is that 16 SILL strategies had not been reported at all by the interviewees. In fact five of them, were also detected as low frequency use strategies – this implies that they are almost never used or generally not used– in the same study exploring strategy use through the SILL (Kazamia 2003). These five strategies are all memory strategies suggesting that the strategies serving a memory function are either not generally deployed or possibly they are substituted by other memory strategies which are not present in the SILL.

Finally, of the different strategies recorded, there are some that reveal idiosyncratic features, for example, using graphic representation of grammar or using syntax to find out the meaning, but there are also others that form a pattern of use since they were articulated in more than 3 interviews. These are: 1) Using resources (dictionary), 2) Checking the meaning of words 3) Making positive statements 4) Seeking assistance 5) Avoiding partially communication (Appendix VI). It is true that of these strategies, none is new in the sense that it has never been reported in any other study. For instance, dictionary use was detected as a high frequency strategy in a study conducted in a private English language school for international students in Auckland, New Zealand (Griffiths 2008). Similarly, avoidance – in writing – was also detected in another study examining the compensatory strategies of Norwegian EFL learners appearing in written texts (Olsen 1999). However, what becomes important for any examination of the language learning strategy use of the Greek adult EFL learners is that the strategies

mentioned earlier seem to be part of their strategy repertoire and could be incorporated in any questionnaire investigating the strategy use of the present population.

## **6. Implications for the SILL**

The identification of a group of five learning strategies that form a pattern of use along with the variations of the SILL strategies that were reported during the interviews, can uncover problematic aspects of the SILL when used for the particular population. This complies with the findings of researchers suggesting that different strategy repertoires may be encountered by learners of different cultures or in different learning settings (White, Schramm and Chamot 2007).

Furthermore, how learners perceive the function of strategies is one more issue that could cause problems; this is related to the way SILL items are interpreted by respondents. Interview data have indicated that the interviewees attribute to the SILL items a different function than those suggested by the SILL. Thus if learners mark that they frequently employ SILL 49 'asking questions' assuming that they do it for cognitive purposes, when the same SILL item does not serve this function but a social function, then the average score of social strategy use will not reflect the true picture. This is due to the fact that the score will include the frequency of use of a cognitive strategy that is placed in the Social strategy group in the SILL but is employed by the learner with a cognitive function, in other words it is a cognitive strategy. By implication, the discussion about the function learners attribute to the strategies might affect the classification of strategies of the SILL. When issues such as the learners' perceptions of strategy function is in opposition to theorists' assumption, this questions the classification schemes used so far, because empirical data suggest new directions to theoretical approaches. Therefore, the issue of strategy function might become one more point requiring investigation in the language learning strategy classification. Although concerns about the distinction between cognitive and memory strategies have been raised by Dörnyei (2005), it has not been suggested so far if the actual taxonomy used, is accurately conceptualized and implemented by the learners themselves. Similarly, the function of strategies has not been touched up to now even in Grenfell and Macaro (2007) and Cohen and Macaro (2007) where an updated critique on theoretical and practical issues of language learning strategies is attempted.

The findings presented along with the inferences made indicate that there are some limitations of the SILL in the recording of strategy use of the present population. Of course it may be argued that interview findings cannot be compared to questionnaire findings as the latter include richness and spontaneity and are idiosyncratic while the former may be summarized over the whole group of students (Oxford 1990, Oxford and Green 1995). While this is true yet we cannot ignore the fact that interview data act in a complementary fashion revealing strategies that are used by Greek EFL learners. This information may be suggestive for the ways in which the SILL or other instruments are developed, or used or even refined if they are used for the present population.

On the other hand we should also express caution since these findings should be considered tentative awaiting further empirical investigations using other measures examining the SILL. We suggest that the issue is worth further investigating since the SILL is a good measurement tool particularly if it is used as an introductory measure to identify the strategy use of a group of learners and enhance their awareness raising.

## **7. Summary of findings**

To summarize, the aim of this paper was to assess the strategy use elicited with Greek interviews in order to acquire a holistic picture of their strategy use and evaluate these against those of the SILL. Results indicate that the strategy use of the population under study is approximately 50% of what is reflected in the SILL. Yet, there is another 50% that is covered by variations and different (i.e. not included in the SILL) strategies. The interview strategy patterns reported indicate that five new strategies and four variations are employed by the majority of the interviewees, thus suggesting that these should be incorporated in a questionnaire recording the strategy use of the present subjects.

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## Appendices

### Appendix I: Representative sample of interview questions

- Generally speaking what techniques do you use in understanding English texts?
- Do you have any problems in writing texts in English?
- Is there anything particular you do in order to practice listening?
- Do you make any preparation before speaking? If yes, how?
- There may be situations that you feel you have not understood a point in grammar. What kinds of things do you do?
- Your teacher introduces a new word. What are you likely to do?
- Do you set any objectives in learning?

### Appendix II

Table II. 1: Memory strategies: similarities, variations, differences between interview data and the SILL

Interview strategies similar to SILL items	Interview strategies variations of SILL item(s)	SILL items not reported in interviews
SILL 2, 3, 8	SILL 1	SILL 5, 6, 7, 9
Different interview strategies		
1)memorizing new vocabulary 2)writing in order to remember new vocabulary 3) using letter combinations to remember pronunciation		

Table II. 2: Compensation strategies: similarities, variations, differences between interview data and the SILL

Interview strategies similar to SILL items	Interview strategies variations of SILL item(s)	SILL items not reported in interviews
SILL 24, 25, 29	SILL 24,27,28	SILL 26
Different interview strategies		
1) Adjusting the message 2) Seeking assistance from friends for a task 3) Using syntax to identify the meaning 4) Avoiding partially communication.		

Table II.3: Metacognitive strategies: similarities, variations, differences between interview data and the SILL

Interview strategies similar to SILL items	Interview strategies variations of SILL item(s)	SILL items not reported in interviews
SILL 31, 32, 35, 37,38	SILL 33, 38	SILL 30, 34, 36
Different interview strategies		
1) Identifying the purpose of a task.		

Table II.4: Affective strategies: similarities, variations, differences between interview data and the SILL

Interview strategies similar to SILL items	Interview strategies variations of SILL item(s)	SILL items not reported in interviews
SILL 42, 44	SILL 41	SILL 39, 40, 43
Different interview strategies		
1) Keeping calm during learning 2) Making positive statements.		

Table II.5: Social strategies: similarities, variations, differences between interview data and the SILL

Interview strategies similar to SILL items	Interview strategies Variations of SILL item(s)	SILL items not reported in interviews
SILL 45, 46, 48	SILL 41	SILL 47, 49, 50
Different interview strategies		
1) Seeking assistance from the teacher		

**Appendix III**

Table III.1: Variations between cognitive strategies of the SILL and interview items

No	SILL item	Interview data
15	I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English.	Respondent: I watch English TV serials, <i>never read the Greek subtitles and try to listen to the words or the sentences as they are pronounced.</i> Respondent: I <i>listen to English songs</i> and try to understand them. Respondent: I <i>listen to the news on the radio (in English).</i>
18	I first skim an English passage (read over the passage quickly) then go back and read carefully.	Respondent: <i>I simply divide it in paragraphs and write the subjects [discussed].</i> Interviewer: Do you mean that you divide it according to the subjects? What do you mean by subjects? Respondent: <i>The headings of each section.</i> Interviewer: Will you put the headings? Respondent: <i>Yes. If they do not exist who is going to put them?</i>
23	I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English.	
19	I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English.	Respondent: <i>I make word combinations to understand the meaning of unfamiliar words, especially with reference to Greek; I look for words that may have the same root in Greek.</i>
20	I try to find patterns in English.	Respondent: <i>I look for patterns in grammar.</i>
21	I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand.	Respondent: <i>If I come across a new word I try to find if it derives from another word.</i>
22	I try not to translate word-for-word.	Respondent: <i>I also translate what I read and I use a dictionary for this purpose</i> Respondent: <i>When I do not know the exact words, I type the word in Greek at the computer and I get the corresponding English [word].</i> Respondent: <i>Sometimes when the sentence is complex, I try to do a direct translation into Greek in order to understand the meaning.</i> Respondent: <i>I read about the lotions that we women buy. All this is good translation [practice]’.</i>

**Appendix IV**

Table IV.1: Different cognitive strategies detected in interview items

Name	Interview Data
1) Using grammar rules	Interviewer: When you do not understand a point in grammar what do you do? Respondent: Do you mean in a text or in the grammar itself? Interviewer: Both. Respondent: <i>Regarding grammar I check the rules and examples. Regarding texts I use elementary grammar since I know it</i>
2) Checking the meanings of words	Interviewer: You ‘ve said that you focus on words. What do you mean? Respondent: <i>I look for their meaning.</i> Interviewer: So you look for their meaning? Respondent: <i>Yes, with reference to the specific text.</i>  Respondent: <i>If I do not manage to understand from the context in order to carry on and check its accurate meaning another time, I will look it up in the dictionary.</i>
3) Accumulating background	Respondent: Let me tell you something. It depends on the culture of

knowledge	<p>each human being. For example if someone has been listening to foreign music since he was a child, he has been trying to understand the meaning of the verses.</p> <p>Interviewer: What stimuli do you have?</p> <p>Respondent: I have not got that much, so many stimuli, as I have lived in the country, in the county of Thesprotia, this is where I am from, during the first years of my life and there were not that many stimuli. At the age of 15-16 years I had to live an urban way of life, so I had other priorities. So, <i>I have not developed a culture that would assist me in learning some English.</i> You see nowadays many children know many many words; probably they do not know good English but they know slang English.</p>
4) Using phonological elements of speech	<p>Respondent: I haven't got anything else. Well, it depends on the speaker as well. If he doesn't say [the words] correctly or <i>if his voice has not got [the right] pitch so that I understand the full stops, the commas, the paragraphs, all these...</i></p> <p>Interviewer: So you mean that when somebody speaks you follow all these? the full stops, the commas, how they pause...</p> <p>Res.: <i>Yes.</i></p>
5) Advance preparation in speaking	<p>Respondent: Yes, if I have not spoken for a long time, <i>I try to find the words that I need to use. This happens for a few seconds.</i></p>
6) Checking spelling in the dictionary	<p>Respondent: <i>Yes, I check the spelling of the word</i> because someone else is going to read [the letter]. If I don't send it [the letter] I am not that interested [in checking]. Nevertheless I keep it in my mind so <i>that I check the word I had forgotten at some other time.</i></p>
7) Transcribing the pronunciation of a word	<p>Interviewer: Generally, do you do anything particular to learn the pronunciation of words?</p> <p>Respondent: If it is that difficult and I notice that I pronounce it wrongly at some point, <i>I may note it down in Latin characters and mark the stress where required.</i></p> <p>Interviewer: What do you mean with Latin characters? For instance what would you write for the word vegetables?</p> <p>Respondent: <i>I would write it like this: véjetabl̄s. I will put the stress on the first syllable. Note that I symbolise it with Greek ε̄ the clear /e/. I use English e to show that the second e is half, that is, something between /e/ and /i/.</i></p>
8) Using resources (dictionary)	<p>Respondent: ... but whenever I read a cosmetics brochure I get the dictionary to look up the specific word; or <i>I look up words in the dictionary</i>, when I read an advertisement in a magazine that looks interesting to me. If something looks interesting, I get the dictionary and I find [the unknown words]... <i>I have a dictionary because the leaflets are not written in Greek, and I may not understand what is said in them [by using] my English only.</i></p> <p>Respondent: ...now with <i>the electronic dictionary</i> you may see the word...</p> <p>Interviewer: Is there anything specific that you would do in order to read and understand a short text, mostly consisting of unknown words?</p> <p>Respondent: <i>I 'll find a dictionary.</i></p>
9) Dividing a word into syllables	<p>Interviewer: Could you read it again please?</p> <p>Respondent: Loh boro...</p> <p>Interviewer: I have noticed that you divided the word [in syllables]. You did not read it as a single unit.</p> <p>Respondent: <i>Yes... when the word is long...</i></p>
10) Highlighting	<p>Respondent: ...<i>I underlined the words and once I finished [reading] the chapter I wrote all unknown words in a copybook...</i></p>
11) Writing new vocabulary	<p>Respondent: Namely that I cannot translate. I say ok. I use the</p>

	<p>context. But...Yet, I cannot understand what the specific word means. <i>For instance, I write in my copybook in term of equals....What am I going to write next, a question mark? Can you follow me? I cannot write anything.</i></p> <p>Respondent: ...I underlined the words and once I finished [reading] the chapter <i>I wrote all unknown words in a copybook, I wrote the meanings next [to the words]...</i></p>
12) Using visual clues	<p>Respondent: I am more a visual learner. Interviewer: When you say visual learner, what do you mean? Respondent: <i>Looking at a text assists me a lot. Looking at an exercise helps too, looking at some letters that are written is also helpful.</i></p> <p>Respondent: Ok, our teacher gives us a text and while she or another student reads it [out loud], we look [at it]. Interviewer: Yes... Respondent: <i>It is really important to have a visual [image of the text].</i> Interviewer: Yes... Respondent: <i>But if I hadn't had a text [in front of me] and someone next to me was reading [the text] I do not know whether I would be able to understand. [If I hadn't had the text] I would have understood less.</i></p>
13) Formally using circumlocution	<p>Respondent: Sometimes they give us a sentence <i>and we must write the same meaning with other words.</i> So this way you are forced to write. Isn't this so? <i>You have to use different words.</i> You have to use the syntax. Interviewer: Your teacher introduces a new word. What are you likely to do? Respondent: To start with we may already know its meaning in Greek. <i>Another way is to explain it in English by using other English words; we do this quite often.</i></p>
14) Note taking	<p>Interviewer: What do you do during class to master knowledge? Respondent: I watch carefully the teacher, <i>I take notes</i> and try to retain as many things as possible. You see, whatever I do in class. At home I do nothing about English.</p> <p>Respondent: <i>I take notes.</i> Sometimes I repeat some new words and I write them down in order to remember them.</p>
15) Asking questions	<p>Interviewer: What do you do during class to master knowledge? Respondent: I ask many questions.</p> <p>Respondent: I ask questions. If I come across an unknown word I ask its meaning and write it above. This helps.</p>
16) Graphic representation of Grammar	<p>Respondent: I understand how grammar works. Especially if the teacher is a bit descriptive <i>and draws some sketches and says 'from this point onwards is the future; from this [point] backwards is the past'.</i> Similar systems may be found in the books, the new books Interviewer: Yes, yes... Respondent: <i>These help a lot. Given the fact that I am an engineer, OK?</i></p>

**Appendix V**

Table V. 1: Variations forming a pattern of use

No	SILL item	Interview data
22	I try not to translate word-for-word.	Respondent: <i>I also translate what I read and I use a dictionary for this purpose</i> Respondent: <i>When I do not know the exact words, I type the word in Greek at the computer and I get the corresponding English [word].</i> Respondent: <i>Sometimes when the sentence is complex, I try to do a direct translation into Greek in order to understand the meaning.</i> Respondent: <i>I read about the lotions that we women buy. All this is good translation [practice]’.</i>
10	I say or write new English words several times.	Interviewer: How do you learn grammar? Respondent: Through the exercises. Interviewer: Yes... Respondent: It’s the theory as well. Well ok, in theory you learn about the ordinary uses of words. However in doing exercises you identify some distinctive features, you see some rules, you better realize how language works.
10	I say or write new English words several times.	Respondent: When they correct the mistake [I make], I repeat it [the word] corrected Interviewer: Right away? Respondent: Right away. ‘I repeat some new words and I write them down in order to remember them.
24	To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses	Respondent: ... Nevertheless I carry on and <i>try to understand the meaning from the context.</i>

**Appendix VI**

Table VI. 1: Different interview strategies forming a pattern of use

1) Using resources (dictionary)	Respondent: ... but whenever I read a cosmetics brochure I get the dictionary to look up the specific word; or <i>I look up words in the dictionary</i> , when I read an advertisement in a magazine that looks interesting to me. If something looks interesting, I get the dictionary and I find [the unknown words] ... <i>I have a dictionary because the leaflets are not written in Greek, and I may not understand what is said in them [by using] my English only.</i>  Respondent: ...now with <i>the electronic dictionary</i> you may see the word...  Interviewer: Is there anything specific that you would do in order to read and understand a short text, mostly consisting of unknown words? Respondent: <i>I ’ll find a dictionary.</i>
2) Checking the meanings of words	Interviewer: You ‘ve said that you focus on words. What do you mean? Respondent: <i>I look for their meaning.</i> Interviewer: So you look for their meaning? Respondent: <i>Yes, with reference to the specific text.</i>  Respondent: If I do not manage to understand from the context in order to carry on and check its accurate meaning another time, <i>I will look it up in the dictionary.</i>
3) Making positive statements	Respondent: ...Not that I do not make mistakes; <i>we are all human so we make mistakes...</i>  Respondent: ...Yet this cannot be accomplished [immediately]. <i>No-one can understand it right away; one is [bound to] have some</i>

	<i>difficulty</i>
4) Seeking assistance	Interviewer :Do you have any problems writing e-mails? Repondent: No I don't have a big problem. <i>That is to say I call friends who know English and they dictate to me over the phone and I write.</i>
5) Avoiding partially communication	Respondent: I remember once, someone asked me something but I <i>could not understand a thing</i> . I could not even understand whether he spoke English. <i>In that case I said to myself 'I do not understand what he is talking about' and I left.</i>

## Appendix VII

### Interview extract 10: Repeating words

The following interview items are similar to SILL 10 'I say or write new English words several times'.

1. Res: ...I *write it [the word] two or three times* on a piece of paper.

Int: How do you learn the meanings of words?

Res: *I write them*, I see them.

Int: Is this the only way you use?

2. Res: I remember a friend, long time ago, she used to tell me -she had learnt English this way- that I should write the word, place my finger on top of it and write it again...

Int: Yes...

Res: It looked to me really funny. I do not generally do it but sometimes I do it because I feel disconcerted; this makes me feel that I do something. More specifically *I write a word four or five times*.

### Interview extract 11: Asking questions

The following interview items are similar to SILL 45 'If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again' while it carries a cognitive function in the interviews:

1. Int: Your teacher introduces a new word. What are you likely to do?

Res: *Ask him to explain it.*

2. Res.: No *I ask [the teacher] to repeat how it is pronounced.*