

## PERSONALITY TRAITS AS PREDICTORS OF THE SOCIAL ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES

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### ABSTRACT

*The present study aims to find out the role of personality traits in the prediction use of the Social English Language Learning Strategies (SELLSs) for learners of English as a foreign language. Four instruments were used, which were Adapted Inventory for Social English Language Learning Strategies based on Social category of Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) of Rebecca L. Oxfords, A Background Questionnaire, NEO-Five Factors Inventory (NEO-FFI), and Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). Two hundred and thirteen Iranian female university level learners of English language as a university major in Iran, were volunteer to participate in this research work. The intact classes were chosen. The results show that however, there is a significant relationship between four traits of personality and use of the SELLSs, but personality traits cannot be as a strong predictor to predict use of the SELLSs.*

*Key Words: Social Language Learning Strategies, English Learning, Personality Traits, English Learners*

### INTRODUCTION:

Since individual differences have been identified as variables influencing language learning outcome (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991; Skehan, 1989); and as it was shown by the study of Marttinen (2008), the high percent of source of learners' knowledge comes from teacher; Horwitz (1988) encourages teachers to discover the prescriptive belief of their own students. Moreover, in order to provide successful instruction, teachers need to learn to identify their students' individual difference, and even they need to become more aware that how their teaching styles are appropriate to their learners' strategies (Oxford & Cohen, 1992).

Recently some studies tend to concentrate more on individual differences in strategy performance (e.g. Oxford, 1992, 1993; Toyoda, 1998). In such related studies, it was showed that for strategy instruction to be affected; it should take all the variables into account (Oxford & Crookball, 1989).

Since 1990s, there has been a growing interest on how personality correlates to the academic performance. Personality has been conceptualized at different levels of breadth (McAdams,

1992), and each of these levels include our understanding of individual understanding. Moreover, individuals are characterized by a unique pattern of traits, and some study shows successful language learners choose strategies suit to their personalities (Oxford & Nyikos, 1989). In addition, since LLSs are not innate but learnable (Oxford, 1994), broad justifications have been offered for the evaluation of personality traits as a predictor of the Social English Language Learning Strategies (SELLSs).

In such way, the premise underlying line of this research is that success in SELLSs plays an important role in affecting learners' English language learning process.

#### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE:

The studies on individual and personality differences are a central theme in psychology as well as the other areas of social and behavior sciences (Saklofske & Eysneck, 1998).

The examination of variation in human behavior is referred to as the study of individual differences (Ehrman & Dornyei, 1998). Such study of individual differences includes many subsets of studies such as the study of personality differences (Hampson & Colman, 1995), and personality factors that are important in development of linguistic abilities (Ellis, 1985). Psychologically, it is a truism that people are different in many fundamental ways, and learners are individuals, and there are infinitive variables (Skehan, 1989). In this manner, Horwitz (1999) points out "language learners are individuals approaching language learning in their own unique way" (p.558). In addition, individuals who are characterized as a particular psychological type, adopt different learning strategies (Brown, 2001). In such situation, the teachers must make the students aware of the range of the strategies they can adopt (Cook, 2008); and they must aware of the relationship between personality and academic performance (Cattel & Butcher, 1968; Eysenck, 1967).

Foregoing has highlighted the main goal of the current study to document how personality traits related to the SELLSs. In such situation, there are some possible ways looking at the SELLSs and their relationship with personality traits. The first is to see the use of the SELLSs as an outcome of personality traits. The second one is to see them as having uni-directional causal role increasing personality traits. The third one is to see the relationship between the two as mutual, and causality is bi-directional.

#### METHODOLOGY:

##### Participants-

The participants for this study were 213 female studying in third grade (year) of English major of B. A. degree, ranging age from 19 to 28 (Mean = 23.4, SD = 2) at Islamic Azad University Branches of three cities which named Abadan, Dezful ,and Masjed-Solyman, Iran, were asked to participate.

The socio-economic status of participants, such as the participants' social background, and parents' level education was controlled as well by a questionnaire. Based on some indicators such as the parents' socio-educational background and occupation, the participants were matched

as closely as possible for socio-economic background to minimize the effect of social class. Accordingly, the participants were classified as a middle class.

Because of the nature of this work (regarding use of the SELLSs), a general English proficiency test for determining the proficiency level of participants in English was applied in order to minimize the effect of English language proficiency. As Jafarpour (2001) defines “the percent classification of subjects by the experimental test that corresponds to those by the criterion” (pp.32-33) (as cited in Golkar & Yamini, 2007), top of subjects are 27% and bottom of subjects are 27% (Golkar & Yamini, 2007), the participant whom were classified as intermediate subjects, were asked to participate in the study.

#### INSTRUMENTATION IN THE STUDY:

Four instruments were used to gather data in the current study.

Adapted Inventory for Social English Language Learning Strategies -

The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) of Rebecca L. Oxford (1990) is a kind of self-report questionnaire that has been used extensively by researchers in many countries, and its reliability has been checked in multiple ways, and has been reported as high validity, reliability and utility (Oxford, 1996). In addition, factor analysis of SILL is confirmed by many studies (Hsiao & Oxford, 2002; Oxford, 1996; Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995). In this way, as Ellis (1994) believes Oxford’s taxonomy is possibly the most comprehensive currently available. Several empirical studies have been found moderate intercorrelation between the items of six categories in SILL (Oxford & Ehrman, 1995).

The SILL includes Memory Strategies (9 items), Cognitive Strategies (14 items), Compensation Strategies (6 items), Metacognitive Strategies (9 items), Affective Strategies (6 items), and Social Strategies (6 items).

Based on the Social category of the SILL, the investigator adapted a questionnaire. In adaptation of each instrument from one language to another in research works, some problems occur, such as the problem of translation one questionnaire to another language (Perera & Eysenck, 1984). As same as the other two questioners (NEO-FFI and Background Questionnaire), adapted SELLSs inventory was checked through back translation into English by three English teachers, and three psychologists who were fully proficient in both languages (English and Persian), in order to check the consistency with English version, and based on the pilot study was performed. The items were corrected until full agreement among the translators was achieved, and the pilot study confirms such translated items. In addition, the balance between spoken and written Persian was checked.

In the case of such questionnaire, three psychologists, and three English teachers were asked to check the questionnaire from two points of view. Firstly, since both psychologists and linguists were fully proficient in both languages (English and Persian), they were asked to check the translated version of the questionnaire in order to check the consistency with English version of

them. Secondly, since both the psychologists and English teachers were professional in related study of the questionnaire, they were asked to check the psychometrics of the questionnaire.

After full agreement among the psychologists and linguists was achieved, and the pilot study confirmed the items of such questionnaire, it was administrated in the main study.

Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)

A Background Questionnaire

NEO-Five Factors Inventory (NEO-FFI)

The Big Five Personality Questionnaire is based on the Big Five Factor Model of personality whose major proponents are Lewis Goldberg, Paul Costa, and Robert McCare. This theory proposes that five broad dimensions provide complete description of personality.

The questionnaire of the Big Five Factors is one of the most widely used personality assessment in the world. In addition, evidences indicate that Big Five is fairly stable over time (Costa & McCare, 1988; Digman, 1989). Moreover, factor structure resembling the Big Five Factors was identified in numerous sets of variables (Digman & Inouye, 1986; Goldberg, 1981, 1990; John, 1990; McCare & Costa, 1985; Saucier & Goldberg, 1996). In addition, the scales of Big Five personality have proven to be a useful tool in a number of applied fields. In this way, the Big Five Factors Inventory has enjoyed wide spread popularity in applied organizational context. The reliability reported in the manual is adequate with mean of .78 across the five factors (Costa & McCare, 1992).

The idea of major dimensions include much of personality is long standing (Norman, 1963). In addition, Digman and Inouye (1986) state “the domain of personality of personality descriptors is almost completely accounted for by five robust factors” (p.116). In this way, the Big Five Factors personality questionnaire can be as a satisfactory tool to assess the relationship between personality and a number of academic variables (Chamorro-Premuzie, Furnham & Lewis, 2007). Despite the FFI enjoys international use, but the Big Five structure has not been accepted generally (Block, 1995; Eysenck, 1992, 1997; McAdams, 1992).

The dimensions composing the Big Five Factors (as cited in related literature by different dominant researchers such as Chamorro-Premuzie, Furnham & Lewis, 2007; Costa & McCare, 1992) are detailed as: a) Neuroticism represents the tendency to exhibit poor emotional adjustment, anxious, and pessimistic; b) Extraversion represents the tendency to be sociable and assertive, cheerful, active, upbeat, and optimistic; c) Openness to experiences (intellect) represents the tendency to imaginative, intellectually curious, imaginative, and artistically sensitive; d) Agreeableness is the tendency to be trusting, compliant, caring, gentle, compassionate, empathic, and cooperative; e) Conscientiousness represents the tendency to responsible, organized, hard-working, responsible, dependable, able to plan, organized, persistent, achievement oriented, purposeful, strong-willed, and determined.

The NEO-FFI is a sixty-item version of S form of the NEO-PI-R that is applied to measure the five domains of personality. It is consist of five 12-item scales. Each of these sixty items includes



five options. As same as the adaptation of the SILL, the participants were asked to choose the statement which how true of them it is. They were told that answer must be in terms of how well the statement describes them. In addition, they were told that there is no right or wrong answer to these statements. The NEO-FFI is self-scoring, and paper and pencil survey. The options were as: a) Strongly Disagree, b) Disagree, c) Neutral, d) Agree, e) Strongly Agree.

#### SAMPLE OF THE PILOT STUDY:

The sample for the pilot study, as “A small-scale replica and a rehearsal of the main study” (Riazi, 1999, p.198), was selected so as it represents the entire sample for participants whom asked to participate in the main study. Since sample size in pilot study ranges from 20 to bigger of 65 (Hinkin, 1998), thirty nine female students were asked to participate in the pilot study.

#### RELIABILITY OF THE INSTRUMENTS:

Since Cronbach's alpha is one of the standard ways of expressing a test's reliability (Foster, 1998); and its coefficient is commonly used to describe the reliability factors of multi-point formatted questionnaires or scales; the reliability of our experimental measures were assessed by calculating Cronbach's alpha over the items of the three instruments across all the participants in the current study which were found .73 for Adapted Inventory for Social English Language Learning Strategies,.82 for NEO-FFI, and .80 for TOEFL. The reliability coefficient indicated the degree to which the results on a scale can be considered internally consistent, or reliable (De Vellis, 2003; Ghiasvand, 2008; Moemeni, 2007; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Such finding of reliabilities for the three instruments confirms the finding of reliabilities in the pilot study.

#### DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES IN THE STUDY:

The data for the study described in this study was collected between September 2010 and November 2010 in Iran.

##### Stage One

At this stage, the participants were asked to answer TOEFL test. Approximately 80 minutes were taken to answer the test. Such duration of time was as the duration of time was calculated in the pilot study (The first week).

##### Stage Two

At the second stage, the respondents were asked to fill the Adapted Inventory for Social English Language Learning Strategies. The respondents were asked to respond to the questions within 5-10 minutes. The time that assigned for participants was determined according to the results obtained from the pilot study. Along Adapted Inventory for Social English Language Learning Strategies, Background Questionnaire was administrated (The second week).

### Stage Three

At this Stage, NEO-FFI was administrated. The time that assigned for the participants in order to complete NEO-FFI was determined according to the results obtained from the pilot study. 10 – 15 minutes was enough to complete NEO-FFI (The third week).

### DATA ANALYSIS:

After data collection, the data was entered onto databases (Excel and SPSS) to enable data analysis to be carried out.

The First procedure of data analysis includes Pearson Correlation that used to identify the strength and direction of the relationship between variables. In the current study, the classification that was suggested by Cohen, J. (1988) was chosen as a criterion to interpret and discuss about the strength of the correlation. It is as shown in Table 1: Table1: The classification was suggested by Cohen, J (1988)

Level of Strength	Amount of the Strength
Low	$r = .10$ to $.29$
Medium	$r = .30$ to $.49$
Strong	$r = .50$ to $1$

The second procedure of data analysis includes Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) that is an analytic tool.

The third procedure of data analysis includes Multiple Regression Analysis.

### RESULTS, DISCUSSION, AND CONCLUSION:

In the entire sample, the strategies in the Social category were the categorized as Medium frequently used strategies, with a mean of 3.1 (SD = .79) (based on the Oxford' key, 1990).

The means were calculated in order to determine the mean of the each of five traits of personality among the total group of the respondents (N=213) (Table 2).

Table 2: Means and Standard Deviations (SD) of the five traits of personality in the current study

Personality Trait	N	Mean	SD
Neuroticism	213	23.0	8.3
Extraversion	213	27.4	5.5
Openness to Experiences	213	27.9	4.7
Agreeableness	213	32.4	5.4
Conscientiousness	213	34.7	6.3

Table 2 showed that the mean of the Conscientiousness trait (Mean = 34.7, SD = 6.3) was more than each of the means of the other four traits, and the mean of the Neuroticism trait (Mean = 23.0, SD = 8.3) was less than each of the means of the other four traits.

The Pearson Correlation was performed to examine whether there is relationship between the overall Social strategy use strategies and the five traits of personality (Table 3).

Table 3: The summary of correlations among the overall Social strategy use and the five traits of personality

		Extraversion	Openness to Experiences	Agreeableness	Conscientiousness	Neuroticism
Social Strategies	Pearson Correlation	.168*	.212**	.127	.256**	-.223**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.014	.002	.064	.000	.001
	N	213	213	213	213	213

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

According to Table 3, the students' overall Social strategy use was significant positively correlated with the Openness to Experiences trait, and the Conscientiousness trait at the  $p < .01$  level (2-tailed), and the Extraversion trait at the  $p < .05$  level (2-tailed). The level of correlations was found low for the Openness to Experiences trait, for the Conscientiousness trait, and for the Extraversion trait. For the Neuroticism trait, the students' overall Social strategy use was significant negatively correlated with it at the  $p < .01$  level (2-tailed). The level of correlation was found low. For the Agreeableness trait, the correlation was non-significant ( $P > .05$ ). In Table 3, there were found both types of positive and negative correlations, but in both types of correlation, the level of correlation was found low. Moreover, except the case of the

Agreeableness trait, all types of correlations were significant at the  $p < .01$  or  $p < .05$  levels (2-tailed).

Table 3 indicated that based on increasing of the Extraversion trait level of the students, higher average of Social Strategies would be used, and based on decreasing of the Extraversion trait level, lower average of Social Strategies would be used. In such way, Table 3 showed that there was a meaningful significant positive relationship between the overall Social strategy use and the Extraversion trait ( $r = .168$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The positive relationship implies that the more extraverted students use Social Strategies more.

Table 3 indicated that based on increasing of the Openness to Experiences trait level of the students, higher average of Social Strategies would be used, and based on decreasing of the Openness to Experiences trait level, lower average of Social Strategies would be used. In such way, Table 3 showed that there was a meaningful significant positive relationship between the overall Social strategy use and the Openness to Experiences trait ( $r = .212$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The positive relationship implies that the students with higher level of Openness to Experiences trait use Social Strategies more.

According to Table 3, the students' overall Social strategy use was not significant correlated with the Agreeableness trait ( $p > .05$ ). In such way, Table 3 indicated that there was not a meaningful significant relationship between the overall Social strategy use and the Agreeableness trait.

Table 3 indicated that based on increasing of the Conscientiousness trait level of the students, higher average of Social Strategies would be used, and based on decreasing of the Conscientiousness trait level, lower average of Social Strategies would be used. In such way, Table 3 showed that there was a meaningful significant positive relationship between the overall Social strategy use and the Conscientiousness trait ( $r = .256$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The positive relationship implies that the more Conscious students use Social Strategies more.

Table indicated that based on increasing of the Neuroticism trait level of the students, lower average of Social Strategies would be used. In this way, Table 3 showed that there was a meaningful significant negative relationship between the overall Social strategy use and the Neuroticism trait ( $r = -.223$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The negative relationship implies that the more Neurotic students use Social Strategies less.

The Multiple Regression Analysis, for all the five traits of personality (as independent variables) and the overall use of Social Strategies (as a dependent variable) were analyzed through the stepwise method. Out of the five traits of personality, only two variables entered the equation (Table 4).



Table 4: The model summary of the equation

Model	Variables Entered	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	Conscientiousness	.256 <sup>a</sup>	.066	.061	.76566
2	Openness to Experiences	.313 <sup>b</sup>	.098	.089	.75422

Stepwise (Criteria: Probability-of-F-to-enter  $\leq$  .050, Probability-of-F-to-remove  $\geq$  .100).

Dependent Variable: Social Strategies

a. Predictors: (Constant), Conscientiousness

b. Predictors: (Constant), Conscientiousness, Openness to Experiences

According to Table 4, regression analysis has run up to two steps. In the first step, the Conscientiousness trait entered the equation that the Adjusted R-Square became .061. In the second step, when the Openness to Experiences trait entered the equation, the Adjusted R-Square increased up to .089. In other words, based on the Adjusted R-Square, the emerged model for the two independent variables with the Adjusted R-Square of .089, accounted for explaining about 8.9% of the variance of the students' overall Social strategy use.

Table 5: The results of regression ANOVA<sup>c</sup> of the equation

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	8.691	1	8.691	14.825	.000 <sup>a</sup>
	Residual	123.697	211	.586		
	Total	132.388	212			
2	Regression	12.929	2	6.465	11.364	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	119.459	210	.569		
	Total	132.388	212			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Conscientiousness

b. Predictors: (Constant), Conscientiousness, Openness to Experiences

c. Dependent Variable: Social Strategies

Further, Table 5 (regression ANOVA) showed that the effect was significant, and all the models had high F values (F = 14.825, F = 11.364, P < .01). Therefore, it could be concluded that about 8.9% of changes in the students' overall Social strategy use was accounted for by the Conscientiousness and Openness to Experiences traits.

As hinted, Table 5 indicates that the effect of the Conscientiousness and Openness to Experiences traits was significant at the p < .01 level. Remaining the three traits of personality did not enter the regression equation because of level of their errors were greater than .05, and they had very weak effect in the prediction of the overall Social strategy use. In such way, rest of the contribution for the overall Social strategy use was unaccounted for.

Table 6: The unstandardized coefficients<sup>a</sup>, t tests and significances for different models predicted of the equation

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	1.951	.296		6.599	.000
Conscientiousness	.387	.101	.256	3.850	.000
2 (Constant)	1.217	.396		3.070	.002
Conscientiousness	.350	.100	.231	3.498	.001
Openness to Experiences	.362	.133	.181	2.730	.007

a. Dependent Variable: Social Strategies

According to Table 6, although the amount of B for the Openness to Experiences was greater than the amount of B for the Conscientiousness trait, but the Conscientiousness trait has greater effect on change of the overall social strategy use, because of the obtained Beta for the Openness to Experiences trait showed that for each of one unit of value of change in the Standard Deviation of the Openness to Experiences trait, the amount of change .181 occurred in the Standard Deviation of the overall Social strategy use; however, the obtained Beta for the Conscientiousness trait showed that for each of one unit of value of change in its Standard Deviation, the amount of change .231 occurred in the Standard Deviation of the overall Social strategy use. From the above table, it was further evident that for all the predicted models and constants, the t values ranged from 2.730 to 6.599, which all were found to be significant, and significance levels ranged from .007 to .000 level.

Table 7 The excluded variables<sup>c</sup> of the equation

Model	Beta In	t	Sig.	Partial Correlation	Collinearity Statistics
					Tolerance
1 Extraversion	.098 <sup>a</sup>	1.403	.162	.096	.905
Openness to Experiences	.181 <sup>a</sup>	2.730	.007	.185	.981
Agreeableness	.066 <sup>a</sup>	.952	.342	.066	.934
Neuroticism	-.154 <sup>a</sup>	-2.207	.028	-.151	.888
2 Extraversion	.074 <sup>b</sup>	1.061	.290	.073	.888
Agreeableness	.051 <sup>b</sup>	.752	.453	.052	.928
Neuroticism	-.134 <sup>b</sup>	-1.919	.056	-.132	.876

a. Predictors in the Model: (Constant), Conscientiousness

b. Predictors in the Model: (Constant), Conscientiousness, Openness to Experiences

c. Dependent Variable: Social Strategies

Table 7 showed the excluded variables in this equation. The excluded variables in the first step were Extraversion, Openness to Experiences, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism. In the second step, the excluded variables were Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism. In summary, one can conclude that the traits like the Conscientiousness trait, and the Openness to Experiences trait best predicted the overall use of Social Strategies of the students.

#### LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY:

Generally speaking, there are some difficulties inherent in endeavor to conduct any research work on the learners of second/foreign language. Similarly, the present study due to using Ex Post facto type of research has certain limitations that must be taken in mind which interpretation of the results. Moreover, since all the education quasi-research deals with living human beings occur out of laboratory conditions have limitations (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003).

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