

Language Learning Strategies Employed by L2 Learners

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Abstract

Learning strategies are involved in all types of learning and teaching like science, maths, history, languages and other subjects, both in formal (classroom) and informal learning environments. Language learning strategies are the often-conscious steps or behaviours used by language learners to enhance the acquisition, storage, retention, recall, and use of new information (Rigney, 1978; Oxford, 1990). In this paper I am going to discuss the role of language learning strategies which are supposed to facilitate the language learning process. I will also review some of the latest literature related to language learning strategies. Research supports that there is a relationship between language learning strategies and proficiency.

Learning strategies are procedures, employed by the learners, in order to make their own language learning as successful as possible.language learning strategies — specific actions, behaviours, steps, or techniques that students (often intentionally) use to improve their progress in developing L2 skills. These strategies can facilitate the internalization, storage, retrieval, or use of the new language. Strategies are tools for the self-directed involvement necessary for developing communicative ability. (Oxford, 1992/1993:p.18). According to O'Malley and Chamot (1990: 43) learning strategies may include:

focussing on selected aspects of new information, analysing and monitoring information during acquisition, organizing or elaborating on new information during the encoding process, evaluating the learning when it is completed, or assuring oneself that the learning will be successful as a way to allay anxiety.

Learners have been found to vary considerably in both the overall frequency with which they employ strategies and also the particular types of strategies they use (O'Malley et al. 1985a; Chamot et al. 1987; 1988; Ehrman 1990). Different students adopt different behaviours or strategies to learn a new language. Some learners who are very shy and introvert learn a second language through grammar drills and sentence analysis. They do the rehearsal as much as they can in isolation. On the other hand, sociable and extrovert learners avoid grammar drills but seek out social conversation in English. They are satisfied that they can get the general meaning without knowing

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every word. Some learners constantly try to build a mental model or big picture of the language. They avoid step-by-step language learning. Few of them are familiar more to the senses (movement, sound, sight, and touch) than to intuition, look for English texts that proceed one step at a time. They use flashcards, and with other classmates, they initiate “total physical response” exercises that involve all the senses.

These learners use different kinds of language learning strategies, or specific actions and behaviours to help them learn. Their strategies differ greatly, at least in part because their general learning styles (overall approaches to learning and the environment) are so varied. Some students learn words by breaking them down into their components. Some of them consciously use guessing when they read. Strategies are the tools for active, self-directed involvement needed for developing L2 communicative ability (O’Malley & Chamot, 1990). There is research evidence that conscious and tailored use of such strategies is related to language achievement and proficiency. According to O’Malley and Chamot (1990), there are three main types of strategies used by L2 learners.

1. Metacognitive Strategies involve planning and thinking about learning, such as planning one’s learning, monitoring one’s own speech or writing, and evaluating how successful a particular strategy is.

2. Cognitive Strategies ‘operate directly on incoming information, manipulating it in ways that enhance learning’ (1990:44). They involve conscious ways of tackling learning, such as note-taking, resourcing (use of dictionaries and other resources) and organizing information.

3. Social Strategies mean learning by interacting with others, such as working with fellow students or asking the teacher’s help. The powerful social and affective strategies are found less often in L2 research. This is, perhaps, because these behaviours are not studied frequently by L2 researchers, and because learners are not familiar with paying attention to their own feelings and social relationships as part of the L2 learning process (Oxford, 1990b).

Some of the strategies or group of strategies are associated with particular language skills. For example, L2 writing, like L1 writing, benefits from the learning strategies of planning, self-monitoring, deduction, and substitution. On the other hand L2 speaking demands strategies such as risk-taking, paraphrasing, circumlocution, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation. L2 listening comprehension is facilitated by strategies of elaboration, inferencing, selective attention, and self-monitoring, while reading comprehension uses strategies like reading aloud, guessing, deduction, and summarizing (Chamot & Kupper, 1989). Well tailored combinations of strategies are more effective than single strategies. There is research evidence that (see reviews by Skehan, 1989; Oxford 1989; Oxford & Crookall, 1989) successful learners have a tendency to use learning strategies that are suitable to the material, the task, and to their own

objectives, needs, and stage of learning. More proficient learners use a wider range of strategies in a greater number of situations than do less proficient learners, but the relationship between strategy use and proficiency is complex. Research indicates that language learners at all levels use strategies (Chamot & Kupper, 1989), but that some or most of them are not fully aware of the strategies they use or the strategies that might be most helpful to use.

Good language Learner Strategies. Good language learners show full involvement in language learning. They appreciate teachers who are systematic, logical and clear, but prefer to treat them as ‘informants’ rather than to rely on them. (Picket 1978). Naimen et al (1978) quoted in Cook (1996) found six types of strategies which were common in (GLLs) Good Language Learners.

GLL Strategy 1: find a language learning style that suits you.

GLL Strategy 2: involves yourself in the language learning process.

GLL Strategy 3: develop an awareness of language both as system and as Communication.

● GLL Strategy 4: pay constant attention to expanding your language.

GLL Strategy 5: develop the L2 as a separate system.

GLL Strategy 6: take into account the demands that L2 Learning imposes.

In her teacher-oriented text, Oxford (1990a: 9) describes her view of LLS (Language Learning Strategies) by mentioning the following features.

- *expand the role of language teachers*
- *are problem-oriented*
- *involve many aspects, not just the cognitive*
- *can be taught*
- *are flexible*
- *are influenced by a variety of factors.*
- allow learners to become more self-directed

Factors Influencing the Choice of L2 Learning Strategies Oxford (1990a) synthesized existing research on how the following factors influence the choice of strategies used among students learning a second language.

Motivation. Motivated students tend to use more strategies than less motivated students, and their particular reason for studying the language (motivational orientation, especially for career prospects) was important in the choice of strategies.

Gender. Female learners reported greater overall strategy use than male learners in many studies (although sometimes males do better than females in the use of a particular strategy).

Cultural background. Rote memorization and other forms of memorization found to be more common among some Asian students than among students from other cultural backgrounds.

Attitudes and beliefs. These two factors showed a positive effect on the choice of learners' strategy use. Those with negative attitudes and beliefs often show poor strategy use or lack of orchestration of strategies.

Type of task. The type of the task helps to decide the strategies employed to carry out the task.

Age and L2 stage. Students of different ages and stages of L2 learning use different strategies, with certain strategies often being used by older or more advanced students.

Learning style. Learning style (general approach to language learning) often helps in the choice of L2 learning strategies. For example, analytic-style students prefer strategies such as contrastive analysis, dividing words and phrases, while overall students use strategies to find meaning (guessing, scanning, predicting) and to communicate without knowing all the words (paraphrasing, gesturing).

Tolerance of Ambiguity. Students who are more tolerant of ambiguity use different learning strategies in some instances than do students who are less tolerant of ambiguity.

Language Learning Strategies and Second/Foreign Learning and Teaching According to Oxford (1990a:1) Language learning strategies "...are especially important for language learning because they are tools for active, self-directed involvement, which is essential for developing communicative competence". Within 'communicative' approaches to language teaching a key goal for the learner is to develop communicative competence in the target language. Communication strategies are used by speakers intentionally and consciously in order to cope with difficulties in communicating in a L2/FL (Bialystok, 1990).

Research supports this idea that training students to use LLS can help them to be better language learners. Naiman, Frohlich, Stern, and Todesco (1978, 1996), Rubin (1975), and Stern (1975) commenting on 'good language learners' suggested a number of strategies that such students employ, ranging from using an active task approach in and watching one's L2 performance to listening to the radio in the L2 and communicating with native speakers. A study by O'Malley and Chamot (1990) also supported this fact that successful L2 learners are aware of the strategies they employ and why they use them. But an interesting argument is also raised by Skehan (1989) which suggests that "there is always the possibility that the 'good' language learning strategies...are also used by bad language learners, but other reasons cause them to be unsuccessful" (p. 76). Vann and Abraham's (1990:192) study answered this argument which found that both 'good' and 'unsuccessful' language learners can be active users of similar strategies, though it is important that they also discovered that their unsuccessful

learners “apparently...lacked...what are often called metacognitive strategies...which would enable them to assess the task and bring to bear the necessary strategies for its completion”. All this discussion suggests that a number and mixture of strategies are important if L2 teachers help students both in learning the Second/Foreign language and in becoming good language learners.

Conclusion

In this research paper we have tried to present a brief description of language learning strategies (LLS). We also tried to explain what LLS are and how different learners in different contexts use them. Relevant literature presented by latest researchers has also been reviewed in order to keep the readers up to date. Our own teaching experience shows that, using LLS in the L2 class helps learners in their language learning and also teachers to improve their teaching.

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