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Put your foot on English words through strategies

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ABSTRACT

In the present world scenario, in most of the places, people have been using English (American, British, Australian, etc) for business communication. There are a few pockets in this world, where English is not spoken. But, majority of the people in the world speak, read, and write English; they also use it to further their business needs, skills, and requirements. People who are from non-native English speaking countries need to learn this language separately as their second language, whereas native speakers, whose first language is English, not only speak it fluently since their childhoods but also it in their day - to - day interaction. Interest in learning-strategies began with the publication of papers collectively known as the "good language learner" studies (Cohen & 998). Since then, hundreds of studies have been generated that look at different aspects of learning-strategies and their roles in second language learning.

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Introduction

As seen earlier, L2 learning strategies are specific behaviors or thought processes that students use to enhance their own L2 learning. The word strategy comes from the ancient Greek word strategies, which means steps or actions taken for the purpose of winning a war. The warlike meaning of strategy has fortunately fallen away, but the control and goal-directedness remain in the modern version of the word (Oxford, 1990). The results of several "good language learner" studies suggest that successful foreign language (FL) learners use a variety of strategies to assist them in gaining command over new language skills (O'Malley, 1987). The selection of appropriate language learning strategies enable students to take responsibility for their own learning by enhancing learner autonomy, independence, and self-direction, necessary attributes for life-long learning (Oxford and Nyikos, 1989).

Yet students are not always aware of the power of consciously using L2 learning strategies for making learning quicker and more effective (Nyikos & Oxford, 1993). Skilled teachers help their students develop an awareness of learning strategies and enable them to use a wider range of appropriate strategies. The work described in this paper explores some of the practical and theoretical challenges of teaching and learning of English as a second language by talking about learning English strategies.

Review of Literature

Language learning strategies have been defined as "the often - conscious steps or behaviours that learners adopt to help them learn" (Ehrman and Oxford 311). Learning strategies are operations or steps used by a learner to facilitate the acquisition, storage, or retrieval of information (Rigney 1978, Dansereau in press).

Learning strategies help learners become more autonomous. Autonomy requires conscious control of one's own learning processes, discussions of autonomous language learning (Holec 193, 1985; Allwright 1990; Wenden 1991; Cotterall 1995; Dam 1995). Learning strategies also enhance self-

efficacy, individuals' perception that they can successfully complete a task or series of tasks (Bandura 1997).

Ellis (1994:555) concluded that "the strategies that learners elect to use reflect their general stage of L2 development." When left to their own devices and if not encouraged by the teacher or forced by the lesson to use a certain set of strategies, students typically use learning strategies that reflect their basic learning styles (Ehrman & Oxford, 1989; Oxford, 1996a, 1996b). Learning strategies are intentionally used and consciously controlled by the learner (Pressley with McCormick, 1995).

In subject areas outside of L2 learning, the use of learning strategies is demonstrably related to student achievement and proficiency (Pressley & Associates, 1990). Research has repeatedly shown this relationship in content fields ranging from physics to reading and from social studies to science (Rebecca L. Oxford, Ph.D, 2003).

Methodology

This study has been done by using digital library books, papers about English strategies to explain some good and useful way for learning English through strategies.

Findings and Discussion

Strategy definition: Oxford (1990) considers that "any specific action taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations" is a language learning strategy. Learning strategies are defined as "specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques -- such as seeking out conversation partners, or giving oneself encouragement to tackle a difficult language task -- used by students to enhance their own learning" (Scarcella & Oxford, 1992, p. 63).

Oxford (1990) divides strategies into two types, direct and indirect. She defines direct strategies as those requiring mental processing of the language. However, the three groups that compose direct strategies do this processing differently and for different purposes. For example, memory strategies, such as grouping or using imagery, have a highly specific

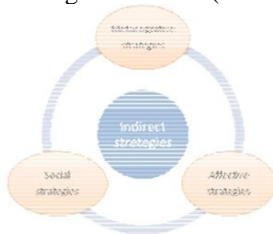
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function, which is to help students store and retrieve new information. Cognitive strategies, on the other hand, such as summarizing or reasoning deductively, enable learners to understand and produce new language by many different means. Finally, compensation strategies like guessing or using synonyms, allow learners to use the language despite their often-large gaps in knowledge (see figure 1).



The second group of strategies discussed by Oxford (1990) is indirect strategies. These are called “indirect” because they support and manage language learning without directly involving the target language. They are divided into met cognitive, affective, and social strategies. Metacognitive strategies, like centering your learning and evaluating and monitoring, are “actions which go beyond purely cognitive devices, and which provide a way for learners to coordinate their own learning process” (p. 136). Affective strategies, however, such as lowering your anxiety, encouraging yourself, and taking your emotional temperature, deal with emotion, attitudes, motivations, and values. Finally, the third indirect strategy group defined by Oxford involves social strategies, like asking questions, cooperating peers and proficient users of the target language, and empathizing with others (see figure 2).



Learning Strategies: Learning strategies are “techniques, approaches, or deliberate actions that students take in order to facilitate the learning and recall of both linguistic and content area information” (Wenden, 1987:6) When the learner consciously chooses strategies that fit his or her learning style and the L2 task at hand, these strategies become a useful toolkit for active, conscious, and purposeful self-regulation of learning. Learning strategies can be classified into six groups: cognitive, metacognitive, memory-related, compensatory, affective, and social. Each of these is discussed later in this chapter.

A given strategy is neither good nor bad; it is essentially neutral until the context of its use is thoroughly considered. What makes a strategy positive and helpful for a given learner? A strategy is useful if the following conditions are present: (a) the strategy relates well to the L2 task at hand, (b) the strategy fits the particular student’s learning style preferences to one degree or another, and (c) the student employs the strategy effectively and links it with other relevant strategies. Strategies that fulfill these conditions “make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations” (Oxford, 1990, p. 8). Learning strategies can also enable students to become more independent, autonomous, lifelong learners (Allwright, 1990; Little, 1991).

Positive Outcomes from Strategy Use: In subject areas outside of L2 learning, the use of learning strategies is demonstrably related to student achievement and proficiency (Pressley & Associates, 1990). Research has repeatedly shown this relationship in content fields ranging from physics to reading and from social studies to science. In light of this remarkable association between learning strategy use and positive learning outcomes, it is not surprising that students who frequently employ learning strategies enjoy a high level of self-efficacy, i.e., a perception of being effective as learners (Zimmerman & Pons, 1986).

In the L2 arena, early studies of so-called “good language learners” (Naiman, Frhlich, Stern, & Todesco, 1975; Rubin, 1975) determined that such learners consistently used certain types of learning strategies, such as guessing meaning from the context. Later studies found that there was no single set of strategies always used by “good language learners,” however.

Those studies found that less able learners used strategies in a random, unconnected, and uncontrolled manner (Abraham & Vann, 1987; Chamot et al., 1996), while more effective learners showed careful orchestration of strategies, targeted in a relevant, systematic way at specific L2 tasks. In an investigation by Nunan (1991), more effective learners differed from less effective learners in their greater ability to reflect on and articulate their own language learning processes. In a study of learners of English in Puerto Rico, more successful students used strategies for active involvement more frequently than did less successful learners, according to Green and Oxford (1995). The same researchers also commented that the number and type of learning strategies differed according to whether the learner was in a foreign language environment or a second language setting. In their review of the research literature, Green and Oxford discovered that second language learners generally employed more strategies (with a higher frequency) than did foreign language learners.

Six Main Categories of L2 Learning Strategies: Six major groups of L2 learning strategies have been identified by Oxford (1990). Alternative taxonomies have been offered by O’Malley and Chamot (1990) and others.

- Cognitive strategies
- Metacognitive strategies
- Memory-related strategies
- Compensatory strategies
- Affective strategies
- Social strategies

Cognitive strategies enable the learner to manipulate the language material in direct ways, e.g., through reasoning, analysis, note-taking, summarizing, synthesizing, outlining, reorganizing information to develop stronger schemas (knowledge structures), practicing in naturalistic settings, and practicing structures and sounds formally. Cognitive strategies were significantly related to L2 proficiency in studies by Kato (1996), Ku (1995), Oxford and Ehrman (1995), Oxford, Judd, and Giesen (1998), and Park (1994), among others. Of these studies, three were specifically in EFL settings: Ku (Taiwan), Oxford, Judd, and Giesen (Turkey), and Park (Korea). The other two studies involved the learning of Kanji by native English speakers (Kato, 1996) and the learning of various foreign languages by native English speakers (Oxford & Ehrman, 1995).

Metacognitive strategies (e.g., identifying one’s own learning style preferences and needs, planning for an L2 task,

gathering and organizing materials, arranging a study space and a schedule, monitoring mistakes, and evaluating task success, and evaluating the success of any type of learning strategy) are employed for managing the learning process overall. Among native English speakers learning foreign languages, Purpura (1999) found that metacognitive strategies had “a significant, positive, direct effect on cognitive strategy use, providing clear evidence that metacognitive strategy use has an executive function over cognitive strategy use in task completion” (p. 61). Studies of EFL learners in various countries (e.g., in South Africa, Dreyer & Oxford, 1996; and in Turkey, Oxford, Judd, & Giesen, 1998) uncovered evidence that metacognitive strategies are often strong predictors of L2 proficiency.

Memory-related strategies help learners link one L2 item or concept with another but do not necessarily involve deep understanding. Various memory-related strategies enable learners to learn and retrieve information in an orderly string (e.g., acronyms), while other techniques create learning and retrieval via sounds (e.g., rhyming), images (e.g., a mental picture of the word itself or the meaning of the word), a combination of sounds and images (e.g., the keyword method), body movement (e.g., total physical response), mechanical means (e.g., flashcards), or location (e.g., on a page or blackboard) (see Oxford, 1990 for details and multiple examples). Memory-related strategies have been shown to relate to L2 proficiency in a course devoted to memorizing large numbers of Kanji characters (Kato, 1996) and in L2 courses designed for native-English speaking learners of foreign languages (Oxford & Ehrman, 1995). However, memory-related strategies do not always positively relate to L2 proficiency. In fact, the use of memory strategies in a test-taking situation had a significant negative relationship to learners’ test performance in grammar and vocabulary (Purpura, 1997). The probable reason for this is that memory strategies are often used for memorizing vocabulary and structures in initial stages of language learning, but that learners need such strategies much less when their arsenal of vocabulary and structures has become larger.

Compensatory strategies (e.g., guessing from the context in listening and reading; using synonyms and “talking around” the missing word to aid speaking and writing; and strictly for speaking, using gestures or pause words) help the learner make up for missing knowledge. Cohen (1998) asserted that compensatory strategies that are used for speaking and writing (often known as a form of communication strategies) are intended only for language use and must not be considered to be language learning strategies. However, little (personal communication, January, 1999) and Oxford (1990, 1999a) contend that compensation strategies of any kind, even though they might be used for language use, nevertheless aid in language learning as well. After all, each instance of L2 use is an opportunity for more L2 learning. Oxford and Ehrman (1995) demonstrated that compensatory strategies are significantly related to L2 proficiency in their study of native-English-speaking learners of foreign languages.

Affective strategies, such as identifying one’s mood and anxiety level, talking about feelings, rewarding oneself for good performance, and using deep breathing or positive selftalk, have been shown to be significantly related to L2 proficiency in research by Dreyer and Oxford (1996) among South African EFL learners and by Oxford and Ehrman (1995) among native English speakers learning foreign languages.

However, in other studies, such as that of Mullins (1992) with EFL learners in Thailand, affective strategies showed a negative link with some measures of L2 proficiency. One might be that as some students progress toward proficiency, they no longer need affective strategies as much as before. Perhaps because learners’ use of cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies is related to greater L2 proficiency and self-efficacy, over time there might be less need for affective strategies as learners progress to higher proficiency.

Social strategies (e.g., asking questions to get verification, asking for clarification of a confusing point, asking for help in doing a language task, talking with a native-speaking conversation partner, and exploring cultural and social norms) help the learner work with others and understand the target culture as well as the language. Social strategies were significantly associated with L2 proficiency in studies by the South African EFL study by Dreyer and Oxford (1996) and the investigation of native-English-speaking foreign language learners by Oxford and Ehrman (1995).

Assessing Learners’ Use of Strategies: Many assessment tools exist for uncovering the strategies used by L2 learners. Self-report surveys, observations, interviews, learner journals, dialogue journals, think-aloud techniques, and other measures have been used. Each one of these has advantages and disadvantages, as analyzed by Oxford (1990) and Cohen and Scott (1996). The most widely used survey, the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (an appendix in Oxford, 1990), has been translated into more than 20 languages and used in dozens of published studies around the world.

Conclusion:

Learning strategies are intentionally used and consciously controlled by the learner (Pressley with McCormick, 1995). In our field, virtually all definitions of strategies imply conscious movement toward a language goal (Bialystok, 1990; Oxford, 1990, 1996a) and we must also collect more evidence of the strategies they are deploying to learn and use English. In practical terms learning strategies enable us harness the knowledge about language that already have and use it more constructively to extend our skills as more successful learners of English as a second language.

Learning strategies allow students to be successful despite their impoverished language systems. These strategies can provide us as L2 students with perfectionist tendencies with the skills necessary to circumvent their weaknesses and inhibitions. We as L2 learners can be inspired to resist underachievement by participating in meaningful real-life learning activities. This population of language learners deserves every effort possible to develop their talents and maximize their gifts by considering that which they already bring to the classroom and focusing on how they learn best.

Language learners need a wide array of target language words to be able to tackle successfully both production and comprehension activities in the second or foreign language. One way to help learners to enhance their knowledge of L2 vocabulary is through equipping learners with a variety of vocabulary learning strategies (Lotfi, 2007).

Further research is necessary to discover what strategies are effective at certain levels of proficiency. When should memory strategies diminish and social strategies flourish? (I.e., when is it most beneficial for a language learner to set aside vocabulary lists and instead look for oral interaction?) When should language learners put aside the use of compensation strategies to

rely more heavily on cognitive strategies? (I.e., Instead of inventing a word or switching to the mother tongue, would it be more advantageous as proficiency increases to implement more analysis and reason?) With the initial indicators revealed in this study, it would also be interesting to see if these results are confirmed in larger populations and in longitudinal fashion (Alvarado, 2001).

Various learning strategy instruments have disclosed research results beyond those that have been mentioned above. These additional findings include the following: L2 learning strategy use is significantly related to L2 learning motivation, gender, age, culture, brain hemisphere dominance, career orientation, academic major, beliefs, and the nature of the L2 task. A number of these findings have been summarized in Oxford (1999a, 1999b).

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