

LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES

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ABSTRACT:

Learning strategies in second language acquisition (SLA) have been a focus of a growing body of research for many years. Researchers have investigated the relationship of the use of language learning strategies and the success in mastering a second or foreign language. They have found evidence that learning strategies play an important role in gaining knowledge of second language skills. This paper is an attempt to describe a variety of language learning strategies that can be taught and used by teachers and learners.

Keywords: Learning strategies, metacognitive, cognitive, social.

1. What are learning strategies?

Many researchers have defined general learning strategies as techniques, devices, steps, procedures, or specific actions learners use to acquire, store, utilize, or retrieve information and knowledge (Rigney, 1978; Dansereau, 1985; Rubin, 1975). Oxford (1990) characterizes learning strategies as "specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed and more transferable to new situation" (p. 8). Because those definitions do not mention language which is one of the key words in the present paper, I prefer Oxford and Green's (1995) definition of language learning strategies which are "specific actions or techniques that students use, often intentionally, to improve their progress in developing L2 skills" (p. 262).

2. Classification of learning strategies

2.1. Classifications by others

There is a great amount of research trying to generate different sets of language learning strategies leading to overlapping and causing difficulty for later researchers to "compare research findings and suggestions for pedagogy" (Nunan, 1991, p.168). Bialystok's (1978) argues that learning strategies are "linguistically based strategy systems" (cited from Oxford, 1992, p.20)

containing four categories: "inferencing, monitoring, formal practicing, and functional practicing" (cited from O'Malley et al., 1985, p.559). Meanwhile, Rubin (1975) arranges learning strategies into two groups: strategies directly affecting learning (e.g. "clarification/ verification, monitoring, memorization, guessing/ inductive reasoning, deductive reasoning, and practice") and those contributing indirectly to learning (e.g. "creating practice opportunities and using production tricks such as communication strategies") (cited from O'Malley et al., 1985, p.560). Yet there is another classification scheme put forward by Naiman, Fröhlich, Stern, and Todesco (1978) including five categories: "an active task approach, realization of a language as a system, realization of language as a means of communication and interaction, management of affective demands, and monitoring of second language performance" (cited from O'Malley et al., 1985, p.560). Besides those, Ellis and Sinclair (1989) classify strategies based on particular language skills, that is, listening, speaking, reading, writing and vocabulary and grammar learning and Willing (1989) groups strategies into two broad categories: strategies for managing the learning process (for example, practicing, monitoring and

evaluating) and strategies for managing information (for example, attending selectively, associating and inferencing) (cited from Nunan, 1991)

2.2. Oxford's six general types of learning strategies

Oxford (1990) develops a strategy system containing six sets of L2 learning behaviours which "based on the theory that the learner is a "whole person" who uses intellectual, social, emotional, and physical resources and is therefore not merely a cognitive/metacognitive information-processing machine" (cited from Oxford, 1992, p.20). The strategy system includes six groups as follows (cited from Oxford, 1992, p.20; Oxford and Green, 1995, pp.264-265; Richards and Lockhart, 1996, pp.63 - 65):

1. *Affective strategies* help learners gain control over their emotions, attitudes, motivation, and values, including anxiety reduction (for example, using music or laughter and mediation), self-encouragement (through affirmations), and self-reward (through praise and tangible reinforcement).

2. *Social strategies* help learners interact with other people, such as asking questions (asking for clarification/verification), cooperating with native speakers, and becoming culturally aware.

3. *Metacognitive strategies* allow learners to control their own learning through organizing, planning, and evaluating, such as pay attention, consciously searching for practice opportunities, planning for language tasks (for example, setting goals and objectives), self-evaluating progress, and monitoring errors.

4. *Memory-related strategies* help students to store and retrieve information, including grouping, imagery (applying images and sounds), rhyming, moving physically, and reviewing in a structured way.

5. *General cognitive* enable learners to understand and produce new language, such as reasoning, analyzing (for example, analyzing expressions), summarizing, and practicing (for example, using formulas and patterns).

6. *Compensatory strategies* help learners to communicate despite deficiencies in their language knowledge, such as guessing meaning from context and using synonyms and gestures to convey meaning.

2.3. O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzanares, Küpper and Russo's strategy systems

In the paper by O'Malley et al. (1985) identifying learning strategies used by beginning and intermediate L2 learners, the authors provide a full set of strategy systems "based on psychological functions" (Oxford, 1992, p.20). They derive two categories of learning strategies such as metacognitive and cognitive from Brown and Palincsar (1982) and add a third type of learning strategy which is social mediation strategies (Cook, 1993; Chamot, 1987). The strategy systems were modified slightly in O'Malley and Chamot's later work in 1990 (Cook, 1993).

2.3.1. Metacognitive strategies

Metacognition is literally called cognition of cognition and many studies have tried to "investigate metacognitive awareness of, or perceptions about, strategies" (Carrell, Pharis and Liberto, 1989, p.648). The term metacognition pertains to "one's understanding of any cognitive process" (Carrell, Pharis and Liberto, 1989, p.650).

Metacognitive strategies, or indirect strategies, in Oxford's (1990) view are "those that support and manage language learning without directly involving the target language" (cited from Graham, 1993, p.121). O'Malley and Chamot (1990) claim that metacognitive strategies "are higher order executive skills that may entail planning for, monitoring, or evaluating the success of learning activity" (cited from Cook, 1993, p.114). Brown and Palincsar (1982) note "metacognitive strategies involve thinking about the learning process, planning for learning, monitoring of comprehension or production while it is taking place, and self-evaluation of learning after the language activity is completed" (cited from O'Malley et al., 1985, pp.560-561). Metacognitive strategies are divided into eight types, as detailed below (Two were dropped and one was added in their work in 1990) (cited from Cook, 1993, p.114).

1. *Advance organizers*: planning the learning activity in advance at a general level

2. *Directed attention*: deciding in advance to concentrate on general aspects of a learning task

3. *Selective attention*: deciding to pay attention to specific parts of the language input or the situation that will help learning

4. *Self-management*: trying to arrange the appropriate conditions for learning

5. *Functional planning*: planning for and rehearsing linguistic components necessary to carry out an upcoming language task

6. *Self-monitoring*: checking one's performance as one speaks

7. *Self-evaluation*: checking how well one is doing against one's own standards

8. *Problem identification*: identifying important points of learning task

These kinds of strategies really play an important role in learners' learning because they can be applied to all sorts of learning tasks (Chamot, 1987). Moreover, there is an indication that students who are not equipped with metacognitive strategies do not have direction and ability to review their improvement, achievements, and future learning directions (O'Malley et al., 1985). It is cautioned, however, that metacognitive strategies should be chosen with care to allow for both planning and evaluation in learning (O'Malley et al., 1985).

2.3.2. Cognitive strategies

Cognitive strategies, or direct strategies, are "directly related to individual learning tasks and entail direct manipulation or transformation of the learning materials" (Brown and Parlinclar 1982, cited from O'Malley et al., 1985, p.561). These are strategies learners use to apply directly to the language itself (Brown 2001), including sixteen types as follows (cited from Cook, 1993, pp.114-116)

1. *Repetition*: imitating other people's speech, silently or aloud

2. *Resourcing*: making use of language materials such as dictionaries

3. *Translation*: using the first language as a basis for understanding and/or producing the L2

4. *Grouping*: organizing learning on the basis of common attributes

5. *Note-taking*: writing down the gist of texts

6. *Deduction*: conscious application of L2 rules

7. *Recombination*: putting together smaller meaningful elements into new wholes

8. *Imagery*: turning information into a visual form to aid remembering it

9. *Auditory representation*: keeping a sound or sound sequence in the mind

10. *Key word*: using key-word memory techniques, such as identifying an L2 word with an L1 word that sound similar

11. *Contextualisation*: placing a word or phrase in a meaningful language sequence

12. *Elaboration*: relating new information to other concepts in memory

13. *Transfer*: helping language learning through previous knowledge

14. *Inferencing*: guessing meanings by using available information

15. *Rehearsal*: going over the language needed for a task

16. *Summarizing*: making a summary of new information received

2.3.3. Social mediation strategies

These types of strategies are also named social/affective strategies representing "a broad grouping that involves either interaction with another person or ideational control over affect" (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990, cited from Cook, 1993, p.115). There are only three strategies of this type

1. *Cooperation*: working with fellow-students on a language task

2. *Question for clarification*: getting a teacher to explain, help, and so on

3. *Self-talk*: boosting one's confidence to do a task more successfully

3. Rationale for learning strategy use

The most important reason why learning strategies should be used in language learning is that "strategies use correlates with improved performance" (Chamot and Rubin, 1994, p.772). This has been certified through empirical evidence indicating that the more and the wider range of language learning strategies are used, the greater proficiency in an L2 learners have (Rees-Miller 1993). Language learning strategies are considered one of the most crucial individual difference factors in L2 acquisition (Skehan, 1989, cited from Green and Oxford, 1995) and make it possible for learners to be responsible for their own improvement (Green and Oxford 1995).

Since the role of the learner is focused more intently in the process of language teaching, the tactics that the learner uses to perform language tasks are as important as those of the teacher. Based on this belief, the "Principle of Strategic Investment" formed by Brown (2001) says,

"Successful mastery of the second language will be due to a large extent to a learner's own personal "investment" of time, effort, and attention to the

second language in the form of an individualized battery of strategies for comprehending and producing the language" (p. 60)

There is also evidence for the relationship between success in mastering second language skills and language learning strategies use. In the study exploring learning strategies used by adult learners of foreign languages, for example, Oxford and Ehrman (1995) point out that the correlation between cognitive strategy use and speaking proficiency is not high but significant.

4. Applications of language learning strategies

Rubin and Chamot (1994) indicate that a particular strategy does not lead to improved performance and that "strategies are most useful when used effectively together so that success depends not on the use of an individual one but on the effective management of a repertoire of strategies" (p. 772), which in turn is "indeed useful for all learners" (p. 773). It is also noted by Oxford that high-performing L2 learners often use metacognitive and cognitive together (Oxford, 1992). In O'Malley et al.'s (1985) study, the metacognitive group which was instructed to use a combination of one metacognitive strategy (functional planning) and one socioaffective strategy (cooperation) in a speaking task outperformed the cognitive group who used only cooperation.

When discussing about the "good language learner" and learning strategy use, Oxford and Ehrman (1995) write:

"Recent research suggests that there is no single strategy pattern used by effective language learners. In fact, successful learners use an array of strategies, matching those strategies to their own learning style and personality and to the demand of the task (in the context of cultural influences). Optimal learners find ways to tailor their strategy use to their individual needs and requirements; they develop combinations of strategies that work for them" (p. 362).

It is obvious that the effective learner knows how to apply strategies in their studying and how to combine those strategies to enhance their language learning. Besides, they need to consider other factors such as their cognitive styles or the type of knowledge required for a given task.

Cognitive strategies are reported to be used much more frequently than metacognitive strategies or the combination of the two (O'Malley et al., 1985). Strategies are most regularly used with "discrete language tasks such as vocabulary and pronunciation, which may be less conceptually complex than integrative language tasks such as listening and making an oral presentation" (O'Malley et al. 1985, p.568) ■

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CHIẾN LƯỢC HỌC NGÔN NGỮ

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TÓM TẮT:

Đã từ lâu rất nhiều nhà nghiên cứu ngôn ngữ tìm hiểu về các chiến lược học tập mà người học áp dụng trong việc học ngôn ngữ thứ hai (SLA). Các nhà học giả đã nghiên cứu về mối quan hệ của việc sử dụng các chiến lược học ngôn ngữ và sự thành công trong việc thành thạo một ngôn ngữ thứ hai hoặc ngoại ngữ. Họ đã tìm thấy bằng chứng cho thấy các chiến lược học tập đóng vai trò quan trọng trong việc đạt được kiến thức về các kỹ năng học ngôn ngữ thứ hai. Bài viết này mô tả một loạt các chiến lược học ngôn ngữ có thể được dạy và sử dụng bởi các giáo viên và người học.

Từ khóa: Chiến lược học ngôn ngữ, siêu nhận thức, nhân thức, giao tiếp xã hội.