

## HOW LEARNER STRATEGIES CAN INFORM LANGUAGE TEACHING

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### Introduction

Every day in our classrooms and our travels we encounter attempts by learners to make sense of the language and communication system they are learning. Each of us can provide enough anecdotal examples to fill a very large book.

Margaret Van Naerssen reported on one of her early attempts at sense-making while using the Hong Kong mini-buses. On her first ride, she asked the driver in her best Cantonese to 'Please stop here.' and nothing happened. The bus driver continued on until a local person requested a stop three blocks later! Margaret quickly realized she needed to revise her hypothesis about how to accomplish the task and began paying attention to how local residents did so. She noted that they would either call out the name of a building or the words 'bus stop' or say 'I get down here.' In accomplishing her purpose, Margaret followed several steps: (1) She tried using the few words in Cantonese that she knew and transferring the phrase structure from English; (2) she monitored her performance and noted it didn't work; (3) she focused attention on how local residents accomplish their purpose; (4) she formulated an hypothesis on how this was done; (5) she tried out the hypothesis and (6) she noticed how successful it was. Margaret used her limited resources to make sense of her world to solve a problem and thus began learning more Cantonese.

To be successful, language learners need to be actively using their knowledge of language and the world. They can use this strategy in the classroom as well. Here is an example of the same sense-making reported by a successful language learner in a classroom:

While studying beginning Arabic, Rosie Henze, kept a diary of her thoughts about her learning. After approximately two months, the teacher began introducing dialogues and prose requiring quick decisions as to the meaning of utterances which were partially familiar, and thus Henze began noting far more examples of top-down or big picture reasoning. Here are a couple of examples she noted:

'felt for the first time in our class that I couldn't possibly keep track of all the new information being thrown at me. For once it was not fed to me in manageable tidbits. My analytical tendency went out the window when I realized that I couldn't adequately sort out both new vocabulary and unfamiliar variations of structure, and come out with an adequate response. This overload, however, forced me onto a very different level of language response. I found that I could still understand what the teacher was asking, and respond

adequately, if not accurately. I think semantics took precedence over morphology.' (3/11/80, diary). Henze started looking for ways to make sense using semantic or meaningful criteria to hypothesize about the class messages.

Here is another illustration showing Henze using prior knowledge and monitoring skills:

'When we began a new lesson in the book, George started by asking us questions with a few vocabulary words which we had not heard or studied previously. He asked me a question with the word /faransiyu/. I knew because of the context that it must be an adjective of nationality. I guessed Persian because I was thinking of the Persian language, Farisee, but it actually meant 'French'." (3/18/80, diary). In this instance, Henze tried transferring her prior knowledge but then observed that it wasn't correct and noted the correction.

In these examples, we may observe foreigners and learners actively acting on the language, trying to make sense of the world they encounter while learning a new language and culture. They do this by using the knowledge they bring to the situation about the nature of human relations, about the nature of the world, about the nature of communication while considering what is being presented in a new cultural setting. They focus their attention on the problem and notice when their hypotheses work and revise them accordingly.

Successful language learners are very effective in using prior knowledge to build a new system of communication. They do so by making hypotheses and monitoring their successes and failures and revising as needed. Good language learners use the knowledge and skills they bring to the learning task to effectively acquire, store, retrieve and use information.

But most language learners need some help in using the knowledge they have in more effective ways. Many people learning their first foreign language are not certain about how to approach the task. They are unaware that they bring a great deal of useful knowledge and skills that can be brought to bear. In fact, many students approach the task of language learning as if they were a *tabula rasa* or blank page. They assume that none of their prior knowledge can or should be applied to the learning task. They certainly do not know how to effectively apply the knowledge they bring. Indeed, they assume most of the work of organizing material can and will be done by the teacher. They often take a very passive stance in their learning.

In fact, some students go so far as to deny the relevance of their prior knowledge. My colleague, Irene Thompson, while teaching Russian at the U.S. Foreign Service Institute, found considerable student resistance to transferring their vast knowledge to speed up their learning. Some of her students insisted that their prior knowledge was in no way relevant to the body of knowledge Dr. Thompson was imparting. They found it difficult to recognize that their prior knowledge could be used as a scaffold to accelerate the learning process.

When students are instructed in the effective use of their knowledge, the results can be very rewarding and can serve as motivation for continued

learning. Recently, we conducted an experiment to teach some learner strategies to high school students of Spanish. One of the less effective learners doing an exercise which directed students in their use of their knowledge to enhance listening comprehension suddenly remarked 'I like this exercise. It makes me feel smart!' Her enthusiasm indicated that with her new found success she was more than willing to continue learning. It is well known that success in learning breeds more confidence and more learning.

Another simple example of the impact of guiding students in the use of their knowledge is the following: Recently, we selected a five minute clip of a Columbian film in Spanish chosen to hook into the world knowledge of the learner. We showed it to a man who had no knowledge of Spanish. We showed the clip first without the sound and asked him to tell us what the clip was about. Without the sound, the man was able to determine that the main focus of this five minute clip was a lesson in geography. He was able to do this because of his use of his prior knowledge of the world. He paid attention to the surroundings (one desk and chair, another set of chairs, and a globe) and proxemics (a young man who stood in front of the desk, a group of young people were seated in rows), and the interaction between them (the young people, seated where students might, came to the desk one at a time and pointed to spots on the globe; the young man, who stood where a teacher might, made comments about the young people's action). Given his awareness of the overall story, the man was next able to do something which beginning learners find very difficult to do. It is well known that one of the more difficult things for beginners to do is to segment natural speech. However, when we played the clip again with the sound up, the man listened and without prompting said 'Francia. That must mean France.' He was able to isolate this word because having recognized the framework of the story it was a fairly natural task to recognize that the sounds in 'francia' constituted a single word relating to geography. The man used his knowledge of the overall scene to make sense of the input.

Conversely, when learners do not have adequate tools to cope with a new learning situation or when the materials do not relate sufficiently to student knowledge, they tend to get restless, feel inadequate, and bored. Teachers may even suggest that students aren't interested in learning or in the subject when the solution may lie with the teachers' serving as a mediator helping students to improve their learning strategies or selecting materials which are cognitively supportive and serve as a scaffold to further learning.

We recently observed several adult students with inadequate tools to learn a language become quite frustrated and ready to quit the course. The students participated in an intensive ten day Arabic survival course. The best students in this course had extensive experience dealing with language—one had a bachelor's degree in linguistics and the other graduated from university with a major in German. The students who had no experience in learning a language were easily frustrated and ended up scoring the lowest.

The course was organized as a deep immersion course and offered the students no overt help with using the knowledge they brought to the course despite the fact that it would have been quite easy to do so. For example, students learned how to state their name, their profession, and their country of origin. Then they were assigned a role play at a cocktail party and were to ask each other questions about their name, profession and country. The poorer students soon got bogged down by insisting on word for word translation. Had they recognized or been taught to recognize that there were only three possible questions, and if they had caught the key word of 'name', 'profession' or 'country', then they would have been able to respond appropriately. If they had been taught to use these two strategies (1) anticipate the questions and (2) recognize key words, they would have been able to stay in the conversation, they would have been exposed to more language and they would have had the satisfaction of using their new L2 language.

Equally, when materials do not support learners' knowledge, they can become quite frustrated and bored. Materials should provide sufficient clues for information processing. Such materials provide what Bransford et al, 1985, call a 'haven for learning'.

Research findings in language learning and other subjects have been converging on the cognitive and metacognitive strategies which students use to effectively learn new material. In what follows we will first describe this knowledge and then make some suggestions as to how teachers can apply it in the classroom.

Good teachers are always looking for ways to improve the performance of their students and to motivate them to learn more. Increasingly, teachers of language learning and a wide array of other subjects are finding that performance can be greatly improved by providing students with greater understanding of the cognitive learning process. Since each learner brings different knowledge and skills to the learning task, learners need to become aware of and to begin to control that knowledge and skills. It is critical to help students identify which strategies they do use for particular tasks and to consider whether they are using these effectively. Further, they may need to acquire some new strategies or more effective planning, monitoring and evaluating skills to enhance learning.

### **Learner Strategy Research**

Effective use of learning strategies has come to be one of the hallmarks of the good or successful language learner. Learning strategies are the operations or steps used by a learner to facilitate the acquisition, storage, retrieval and use of information. As Wenden, in press, notes 'Learners are actively involved in the process of learning—selectively attending to incoming data, hypothesizing, comparing, elaborating, reconstructing its meaning, and integrating it with previously stored information for future use.' In other words, learning strategies are the processes which learners use to learn a language, to make



sense of the information being presented. In this view of learning, learners are constantly active as information processors. However, while all learners use learning strategies, successful learners learn how to use them effectively.

### Strategy Use

Informing our understanding of learning strategies in language is the enormous research base on cognitive learning processes which has demonstrated the value of strategy use and training (Brown and Baker, 1984; Brown and Palincsar, 1982; Chamot, et al, 1987; Weinstein, et al, 1988; Derry and Murphy, 1986; McCormick, et al, 1989; Anderson, 1983; Brown and Palincsar, 1982; Dansereau, 1985; Brown, et al, 1983; Rigney, 1978; Hosenfeld, 1977; O'Malley and Chamot, 1990; Politzer and McGroarty, 1985; Rubin, 1975; Rubin, 1987; Wenden, 1982; Naiman et al, 1978). This research suggests that learners use two kinds of information to process and comprehend input: cognitive strategies and metacognitive strategies and knowledge. Cognitive strategies are behaviors, techniques, or actions used by learners in a particular learning situation to facilitate acquisition of knowledge or skill (Derry and Murphy, 1986; Rubin, 1987). Metacognitive strategies and knowledge include learners' awareness and knowledge of their own learning processes, as well as their abilities and tendencies to control these processes during learning (Derry and Murphy, 1986).

### Cognitive Strategies

Researchers have reported an extensive list of cognitive strategies which language learners have been observed using or described using either through think aloud techniques or in diaries (Rubin, 1975; Rubin and Henze, 198; Rubin, 1981; Wenden, 1982; Chamot, 1987; Chamot et al., 1988; Hosenfeld, 1977). This research has generated several taxonomies of cognitive strategies (Rubin, 1981; Chamot, 1987; Oxford, 1989), some of which are more closely organized along the lines of what we know about the learning processes of getting, storing, retrieving and using information.

The *Getting Process* requires that students focus attention on selected aspects of the language input, using their prior knowledge, and monitoring abilities to make input comprehensible.

The *Storing Process* involves finding a *system* to store the information to be learned.

The *Retrieval Process and Use Process* involves deliberately finding ways to recall and use the information to be learned.

Based on this learning process approach, Table 1 lists some of the most commonly found learning strategies.

### Metacognitive Strategies and Knowledge

Knowledge of the functioning of metacognition in language learning has been greatly expanded through the work of (Wenden, 1982, 1987, and O'Malley and Chamot, 1990, O'Malley et al, 1985). Building on the work of cognitive learning theorists especially Flavell, 1979 and 1981, Brown and Palincsar, 1982, and Anderson, 1983, they have elaborated two major components to metacognition: knowledge about L2 learning and control of the learning process. Knowledge about cognition refers to 'the set of facts learners acquire about their own cognitive processes as they are applied and used to gain knowledge and acquire skills in various situations' (Wenden, 1987, p. 574). Of equal importance is the control function in learning. Good learners are able to plan their learning approach, monitor their success, and modify their approach as needed. This concept of 'executive control' comes from an information-processing model of human cognition. Learners use it to plan and regulate their learning. They recognize when their learning goals or strategies are effective or need revising.

Wenden 1982, 1986 was the first to systematically examine how language learners regulate their learning by planning, monitoring, evaluating and revising their learning activities. Learners can and do plan all aspects of learning from *what* they are going to learn on any particular day (focusing on verb forms, spelling, grammar among others) or in any particular course (by selecting courses which focus on reading, writing, language for special purposes among others) or *what* strategies they are going to use to complete a particular task. learners may also select the resources they will use to learn. In this planning, they also may specify to themselves or others *why* they are choosing a particular strategy, text, or course. They also can prioritize their learning specifying *when* they will focus on a particular goal.

Having selected their language goal, text, and strategy, good learners monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of a strategy in accomplishing their goal. They may determine that they need to revise their planning by clarifying or modifying their choice of goals, resources, strategies. There is ample research evidence that for the effective learner 'learning is goal oriented' as students strive to reach two goals: to understand the meaning of the tasks at hand and to regulate his/her own learning (Beau Fly Jones, 1987). These two goals constitute a combination of cognitive and metacognitive processing.

Several studies of beginning and intermediate/advanced language students of Spanish, Russian and English as a second language (Chamot et al, 1987, Chamot et al, 1988, Wenden, 1982) provide innumerable examples of student reports of the use of control and regulatory strategies in their language learning.

In making decisions about their learning, learners bring to bear what Flavell, 1979, 1981, calls metacognitive knowledge (see Table 2), that is, 'knowledge or beliefs about what factors or variables act and interact in what ways to affect the causes and outcomes of cognitive enterprises,' (Flavell, 1979, 907) Flavell (1979) identified three main categories of metacognitive knowledge: knowledge about person, task, and strategy.

*Person knowledge* refers to everything a person believes about him/herself or others as learners. It includes beliefs about how one learns best and the universal factors that may influence performance.

In her diary study, Henze reflects on her learning preferences, elaborating on her beliefs about how she learns best: 'I might as well describe a pattern which I feel is detrimental to my learning. I really hate it when, just as I am trying to formulate a response, the teacher gets impatient and either prompts me or gives me the answer outright. George does this quite often, and I've become so defensive about it that I usually blurt out something like 'wait' in the first few seconds, in order to give myself the space to formulate my answer. When a structure is unfamiliar to me (i.e. not automatic) I have to go through a process in which I decide why I must answer a certain way. If the teacher interrupts with the answer on a platter, it reinforces only the automatic aspect of language learning, not the problem-solving aspect.' (Henze diary, 3/27/80).

In this rich example, Henze describes her knowledge of herself as a learning person, describes her feelings about teacher interference in her learning strategy, and describes her attempt to ensure that she is allowed to learn in the way she feels is most effective. Further, she provides a fairly sophisticated rationale for why she prefers not to be interrupted: it allows her time to be a problem-solver and expand her knowledge.

*Strategic knowledge* refers to information learners have about the use of strategies. Wenden, in press, gives two facets to this knowledge: (1) knowledge regarding strategies that work best and (2) knowledge about how best to approach the language learning task.

In another diary exercise, my student Debbie Kitch, studying Hebrew, reports on her knowledge of learning strategies. Her diary entry of February 25, 1978, reads as follows: 'Goal: to (re) learn the future tense and make it 'stick'. Last semester I learned the future tense well enough to get an A on the final exam, but since then, through lack of use, I am not very familiar with it. I have used the future tense correctly on homework by referring to the book, and we have used it somewhat in class—therefore I think now if I memorize again how the future tense is formed I'll remember it for good. (Note: 3-22-78 as I rewrite these notes, I repeated the pattern of the future tense and I did know it'). Kitch reflects on the strategies used to learn the future tense: referring to the book, use in class, memorization, and selects the one she feels is most appropriate to the task—in this instance, memorization. Further, she confirms the success of her choice by repeating it one month later.

*Task knowledge* refers to knowledge about the specific work or activities learners are asked to perform or set themselves in learning a new language. Task knowledge includes knowing whether a task requires deliberate learning, knowing how demanding a task is (for example, knowing that it is easier to recall the gist rather than the exact wording of a story), and knowing how much information they bring to facilitate the task (for example, is the information abundant or meager, well organized or not, familiar or unfamiliar).

Again, Henze provides us with an example of her estimate of the relative ease of a task: 'We have done some work on case endings for nouns, and a couple of verb paradigms. The noun case system is very close to the Greek and Latin one, and I have verified this by asking questions to see how far the similarity extends. For example, when George mentioned the vocative case, I asked if a person's name also changes depending on whether it's nominative, vocative, genitive, or accusative. It does. I expect that the case system will cause problems for those people in the class who've never been exposed to it, or who are weak in grammar. It seems perfectly natural to me though because of Greek.' (2/10/80).

Henze recognizes that learning about cases is relatively easy for her because she has a basis for comparison. Not only does she recognize a great deal about the nature of the task, she also describes the cognitive strategy she is using, namely, deduction by transferring knowledge from a language she already knows, i.e. Greek.

Researchers have pointed to the critical importance of metacognitive control strategies. learners who have effective metacognitive strategies have what is called 'executive control' and not only can select a strategy which they feel is appropriate to a task but can then monitor whether that strategy was effective in accomplishing the task and modify their strategy selection accordingly.

There is a wealth of research substantiating the fact that both cognitive and metacognitive strategies are used by both expert and novice learners (examples are given in Brown and Palincsar, 1982; Dansereau, 1985; Derry and Murphy, 1986; Weinstein, et. al, 1988). More importantly, researchers have shown that when learners combine both, i.e., learning strategies and strategy regulation, they not only learn *more* (Brown and Palincsar, 1982), but they can also transfer the strategy from task to task and their ability to use the strategy over time endures (Wenden, 1987 provides a review of these studies).

The study by Brown and Palincsar, 1982, and others reviewed by Brown and Baker, 1984, provide evidence of the critical relationship between the two types of strategies and indicate that learning is much greater when both metacognitive and cognitive strategies are used together. In their study Brown and Palincsar, 1982, compared three treatments: blind, informed, and self-control (see Table 3 for a definition of these terms). They found that the self-control group outperformed both the blind group and the informed group, while the informed group outperformed the blind group. An example of blind training would be if in teaching listening comprehension you ask students to discuss the ideas which the title of a story evokes without naming the strategy. This guessing or prediction is an advance organizer though the teacher doesn't name it. If you then told the students that they were going to learn about a strategy called advance organizer and told them *why* it would be useful in listening, this would be informed training. Finally, if you provided students with opportunities to select the strategy to use for a particular task or text and discussed the rationale for their choice, this would be self-control training.



There are now several language texts that provide training in the use of strategy, often without naming the strategy or without discussing its importance and range of utility. Further, there are no foreign or second language texts that offer students opportunities to gain control of their strategy use. Future texts to be effective will have to incorporate informed and self-control training. Wenden, 1987, asserts that if learners are not told the significance of the strategy and taught to control its use, strategy maintenance and transfer will not occur, i.e. they will not have learned how to learn.

Research indicates that effective use of strategies depends on a number of variables: the demands of the task, the genre of the written or spoken text (for example, narrative, expository, instructional), the proficiency level of the learner, the ability of the learner, and beliefs about the nature of language learning.

Tasks can be rated as to their ease or difficulty in the amount of cognitive control required to perform them. Some can be performed quite mechanically while others require a great deal of attention, hypothesis formation and transformation of language. Bialystok and Ryan, 1985, note that when monitoring procedures are needed to oversee multiple aspects of a task: form and meaning, meaning and context, etc., control to coordinate information becomes more important.

Vann and Abraham, 1989, considered how learners linked strategies with task demands from planning to execution and used this linkage to understand differences in performance among learners. They found that unsuccessful learners often used a strategy repertoire similar to that of less successful learners. However, they differed in the way they used strategies appropriate to the task at hand. Vann and Abraham, 1989, p. 15, suggest that 'apparently, they lacked certain necessary higher order processes, what are often called metacognitive strategies or self-regulatory skills (see Wenden, 1987) which would enable them to assess the task and bring to bear the necessary strategies for its completion.'

Texts can vary as to the number of clues to comprehensibility they provide (Baker, 1985). They may differ in the amount of prior knowledge required, in the level of redundancy, in the cohesiveness of the propositions and structure and in the difficulty of the speech due to dialectic, speed or enunciation characteristics. Rubin et al, 1988, found that with difficult texts, effective use of strategies, enhanced listening comprehension performance.

Politzer and McGroarty, 1985, suggest that use of strategies may be related to student linguistic and communicative competence. Further, they note that 'good behaviors may be differentially appropriate for the various types of skills related to the purpose of second language study,' (p. 118).

We are just beginning to understand how cultural differences affect the use of learner strategies. A Master's thesis by Huang, 1984, studying the learner strategies of Chinese college students of EFL found that high achievers differ

from low achievers in much the same way that they do in other countries. Huang reported that high achievers tended to be more purposeful and insightful about their learning tasks (that is, demonstrating a greater degree of metacognitive knowledge and skills), they employed a wider variety of techniques, and they understood the need for a different array of strategies depending on whether it was formal versus functional practice (once again demonstrating a greater degree of metacognitive knowledge). Further, Huang reported that high achievers showed a higher level of independence in accomplishing their learning purposes.

Good language learners in China are distinguished by their more effective use of metacognitive strategies, much like learners from other countries. However, Huang reports that class syllabi do influence the selection of cognitive strategies which high achievers use. Given the heavy focus on vocabulary and grammar, all students reported more strategies relating to the learning for formal practice than for functional practice.

Although we may observe as did Politzer and McGroarty, 1985, that certain cultures may use particular kinds of strategies more frequently, for example, they noted that Hispanics scored significantly higher on all learning behavior scores than did Asians, it is essential to consider the behaviors of more effective learners within that culture. Effective use of strategies will not doubt turn out to be more related to the demands of the text and task, to the level of language proficiency and to the positive contribution of metacognitive knowledge than to the culture. As we have already mentioned, training in learner strategies is also known to enhance strategy use.

### Benefits of learner strategies

What are the benefits of learner strategies? In their investigation of learner strategies, educational researchers are discovering more and more how they function and identifying how much learner strategies can and do contribute to enhancing learning.

Perhaps the most important rationale for improving use of learner strategies is to help learners become more effective and efficient learners. Since each student can only learn in ways that are meaningful to him or herself and since each learns in a slightly different manner, it follows that the same approach cannot be equally effective for all students. Some learners are more intuitive, others more analytic. Some learn by reading a language, others by interacting in a social group. Some need to write the language, others need to hear the language, some need both. To help learners become more effective and efficient, teachers need to actively help students help themselves learn how to learn.

Active learners are better learners. All of the current learning theories agree that when students are active, they are more motivated and more learning occurs. Students who organize and synthesize information and actively relate to it should have more cognitive links to assist comprehension and recall. Being active, students are more in charge and become more self-reliant.

With students in control, learning becomes less of an unknown quantity. As learning becomes more controllable, students' anxiety level go down because they know what they are doing and know how to get there. Getting students to the point where they begin to control their learning is a serious endeavor but it is one that pays off many times over.

When students learn more about how they learn and what they want to learn, they become more focused in their objectives and in their approach to these objectives. Hence, they are clearer about where they are going and know when they get there.

Finally, being in charge of their own learning, learners can continue to learn, even when the teacher isn't there. If students are dependent on teachers to shape language to learn, to organize classroom activities, and to provide evaluation of their learning, they will not take charge of their learning when the teacher isn't there. Since learning a language can be a very long process, students need to be able to learn outside the classroom, whenever and wherever the opportunity presents itself. Further, once students are in a country where the language is spoken, they need to be self-reliant if they are to continue learning.

There are a number of resources now available for teachers and learners to learn more about learner strategies. Several books report on research on language learner strategies: *Learner Strategies in Language Learning*, edited by Wenden and Rubin, 1987; *Learner Strategies in Second Language Acquisition* by O'Malley and Chamot, 1990; and *Second Language Learning: Insights for Learners, Teachers and Researchers* by Cohen, 1990. There are three teacher's guides strategies. *Learner Strategies for Learner Autonomy* by Wenden, in press, provides detailed training in implementing learner strategies in the language classroom. *Language Learning Strategies: What Every Teacher Should Know* by Oxford, 1990, provides a description of strategies and suggestions for implementation. *Learning Strategies in English as a Second Language Instruction:—A Teacher's Guide* by Stewner-Manzanes et. al., 1985 provides model class lessons.

Then, there are a couple of guides for students to use to learn about strategies. *How to Be a More Successful Language Learner* by Rubin and Thompson, 1982, provides information about both cognitive and metacognitive strategies and knowledge. *Learning to Learn English: A Course in Learner Training* by Ellis and Sinclair, 1989, is both for student and teacher use.

Finally, learner strategies has also connected with high technology. In 1986, I produced an interactive videodisc program which trains speakers of English in the transfer of their knowledge and skills in learning a foreign language. The **Language Learning Disc** provides exercises, examples and models of learning from 20 languages and helps students examine how they approach the tasks of reading, listening and maintaining a conversation in their own language and then provides opportunities for students to accomplish these tasks in a second language.

## Role of the teacher with regard to learner strategies

Finally, let us address the question of what can teachers do to promote strategy use?

Recent research has demonstrated some effective modes of learner training (Derry and Murphy, 1986; Brown and Palincsar, 1982; Brown and Baker, 1984). Evidence is accumulating which suggests that an ideal training package would consist of both practice in the use of task-appropriate strategies, instruction concerning the significance of these activities, and instruction concerning the monitoring and control of strategy use. In other words, students are not only given practice in the use of strategies but they are informed of the potential usefulness of the strategies. Further, they should be trained to evaluate the extent to which the strategy helps them improve their learning for a particular task.

In the discussion that follows, I am going to provide some guidelines which can be implemented in the classroom. For the most serious consideration to the many factors involved in a full-fledged development of learner training for language students, see Wenden, in press.

### 1. Teachers should see themselves as collaborators in the *learning process*.

Chamot, 1987, argues 'If learning is to take place, it usually involves the collaboration of two people—a teacher and learner. The teacher cannot do it all alone, and most learners find the difficulties of doing it all alone overwhelming.' Teachers need to see themselves as helping learners with the process of learning how to learn as well as with actually learning a language.

### 2. Teachers should help students define their learning objectives—both for the whole course and for each day as well.

One way to help students define their more general language learning goals is to refer to the competency levels established by the American Council of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language. In addition, students need to be encouraged to evaluate their progress on a regular basis. One possible approach to the task would be for students to define their goals at the beginning of each week and then evaluate their success in reaching that goal at the end of each week. This is similar to the approach called 'contract learning' where students agree to try to attain particular objectives at the beginning of a period and then give themselves a grade at the end of the period. The purpose of the contract is to encourage student awareness of objectives (metacognitive planning) and then to encourage evaluation of their plan (also, metacognitive). The evaluation can be at two levels: (1) an overall evaluation of attainment of objectives and (2) an evaluation of the strategies used to attain that objective.

### 3. Teachers should make a point of discovering what strategies their students are learning.

Teachers can make identification of strategies a regular part of classes. For example, when a student gives an answer to a question, teachers can ask the student 'how they got the answer.' Many will find that not only will they learn a



great deal about their students' thinking but other students may discover that the good learner's approach to learning is something they could use as well. Often poorer learners don't have a clue as to how good learners arrive at their answers and feel that they can never perform as good learners do. By revealing the process, this myth can be exposed. Once students have stated how they got an answer, teachers can identify the strategy or strategies for the class.

Another way to reveal strategies is to have students write focused diaries. The diary should focus on specific kinds of strategies so that students can better evaluate what they have learned. In Henze's diary study she focused on inferencing. Henze then devised a system to keep notes beside her classwork. At the end of each day she wrote up her diary and at the end of each week we looked over the diary to be sure it was clear. Henze reported that doing the diary helped her be more aware of and more selective and effective in her use of strategies. As a teacher, I learned a great deal about how one particular student needed to learn.

Yet another way to discover strategies is for teachers to interview individual students or small groups to question them about the strategies employed for specific language learning tasks and also to begin to get at their metacognitive strategies. Sample survey questionnaires are provided by Chamot, et al, 1987, Oxford, 1989, Horwitz, 1987.

Finally, teachers can work with individual students using the 'think aloud' technique pioneered by Hosenfeld, 1997, for reading and applied by Chamot, et al, 1988, to listening. In this technique, the student is given a reading or listening task and the teacher stops the student from time to time to ask them how they are processing data. Through this very effective technique many strategies can be uncovered.

#### 4. Teachers can suggest strategies for students to try out.

For example, if students are looking for ways to retain or store information, the teacher can suggest a range of strategies for students to use and discuss the circumstances in which each might be useful. For example, if the task is to learn some new vocabulary, the teacher can suggest 3-4 ways to store that knowledge: organize by topic, mapping words onto pictures or the real thing, or generating images (for example, in order to remember the Spanish word 'carta' which means letter, you visualize a letter in a cart). Then, students can discuss which strategy appeals most to them or is most appropriate to the kind of vocabulary task at hand.

Or, if teachers want students to learn to use the knowledge they have, they can encourage use of inferencing in reading and listening. There are by now many ESL texts which help students use guessing as a strategy in reading. The texts need to be supplemented not only by teaching students to guess but also how to guess effectively and to recognize when their guessing has gone astray. This may require class discussion of what the clues are which make for better guessing. In this way, students can transfer these guessing skills to the next task.

Teachers need to give students permission to use what they know. Teachers can then supplement this by providing training in recognizing when the transfer of information leads to errors.

In making input more comprehensible, teachers can remind students of what they do in their *own* language to let their conversational partners know that they haven't understood a word or phrase. Students can practice using conversational management strategies with each other and with natives whenever possible.

#### 5. Teachers can help students evaluate which strategies work best for them.

For example, if students don't know a word, ask them if they would like (a) to see the word in a linguistic context, (b) to see or hear a group of related words or (c) to see a picture of the word. Once students have tried each strategy several times, the teacher can ask them to evaluate which strategy works best for them and why.

#### 6. Teachers should help students make comparisons between learning strategies.

Hosenfeld, 1981, described a sequence to teach reading strategies to foreign language learners. There are seven steps in the sequence: (1) Teach students to think aloud while reading. (2) Identify the student's reading strategies. (3) Help students understand the concept of strategy and recognize that some strategies contribute to success more than others. (4) Help students recognize the strategies they use to decode native language texts containing unknown words. (5) Help students define strategies which can be used to decode foreign language texts with unknown words. (6) Provide practice for specific reading strategies. (7) Identify reading strategies students use after the exercise and compare them to those used before instruction.

Hosenfeld's sequence is an example of training in self-control because not only are students provided with labels for the strategies they use and a discussion of why they are useful but they also consider which strategies are most effective in working with one task: namely in this instance, decoding unknown words.

#### Summary

In this review of learner strategies, we have discussed the following points:

1. There is ample evidence that learners use strategies to 'make sense' of learning material by using prior knowledge. Further, it is clear that less effective learners are not as effective in making sense because they may not have good skills in focusing attention or in monitoring the results of their sense making.
2. Research in language learner strategies is now informed by and corroborated by theory elaborated by researchers of cognitive learning and is being validated by a large cadre of researchers.

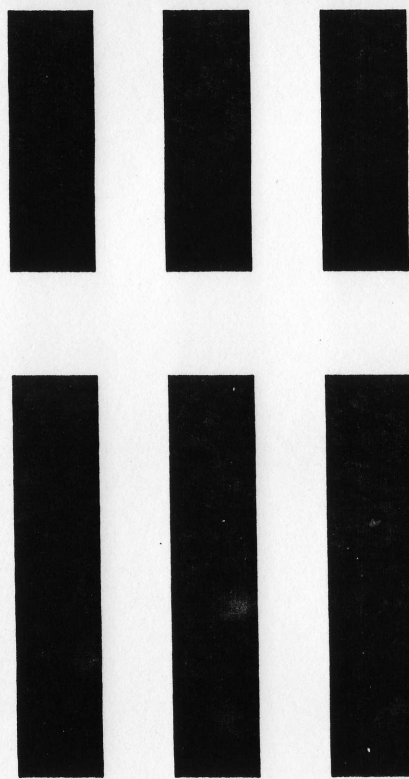
3. The role of metacognitive knowledge and strategies in promoting more effective use of strategies, in promoting transfer of strategy use, and in promoting strategy maintenance has now been clearly delineated.
4. It is increasingly clear that in training students to use strategies that the most effective training must include not only blind practice in the use of strategies but also a component which names the strategy and describes the utility of specific strategy use and also promotes comparison of strategies for particular tasks.
5. Materials presented for strategy training should include sufficient clues for information processing.
6. It is increasingly clear that strategy learning requires continual and extensive training if it is to become part of a student's tool kit.

We still need a great deal of research to inform us about how strategy selection interacts with text, task, proficiency level, and ability level. However, the results of strategy research and training make it amply clear that integration of strategy training in regular second and foreign language classes is critical for both teacher training and curriculum design.



# **LANGUAGE USE LANGUAGE TEACHING AND THE CURRICULUM**

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