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ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES

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Abstract. This article provides an overview of language learning strategies for second and foreign language teachers. To do so it outlines the background of LLS and LLS training, discusses a three step approach teachers may follow in using LLS in their classes, and summarises key reflections and questions for future research on this aspect of language learning education. It also lists helpful contacts and internet sites where readers may access up-to-date information on LLS teaching and research.

Key words: Language learning strategies, second language, the learner-centered curriculum, linguistics, field of education, key issues.

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Language Learning Strategies: An Overview for L2 Teachers

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First published in Essays in Languages and Literatures, 8, at Kwansei Gakuin University, December 1997.

This article provides an overview of language learning strategies (LLS) for second and foreign language (L2/FL)

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Introduction

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This article provides an overview of key issues concerning one consequence of the above shift: the focus on and use of language learning strategies (LLS) in second and foreign language (L2/FL) learning and teaching. In doing so, the first section outlines some background on LLS

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In a helpful survey article, Weinstein and Mayer (1986) defined learning strategies (LS) broadly as "behaviours and thoughts that a learner engages in during learning" which are "intended to influence the learner's encoding process" (p. 315). Later Mayer (1988) more specifically defined LS as "behaviours of a learner that are intended to influence how the learner processes information" (p. 11). These early definitions from the educational literature reflect the roots of LS in cognitive science, with its essential assumptions that human beings process information and Lessard-Clouston - Language Learning Strategies: An Overview fo... http://iteslj.org/Articles/Lessard-Clouston-Strategy.html

1 of 16 1/13/12 1:38 PM

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Language Learning Strategies Defined

Within L2/FL education, a number of definitions of LLS have been used by key figures in the field. Early on, Tarone (1983) defined a LS as "an attempt to develop linguistic and sociolinguistic competence in the target language -- to incoporate these into one's interlanguage competence" (p. 67). Rubin (1987) later wrote that LS "are strategies which contribute to the development of the language system which the learner constructs and affect learning directly" (p. 22). In their seminal study, O'Malley and Chamot (1990) defined LS as "the special thoughts or behaviours that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information" (p. 1). Finally, building on work in her book for teachers (Oxford, 1990a), Oxford (1992/1993) provides specific examples of LLS (i.e., "In learning ESL, Trang watches U.S. TV soap operas, guessing the

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From these definitions, a change over time may be noted: from the early focus on the product of LSS (linguistic or sociolinguistic competence), there is now a greater emphasis on the processes and the characteristics of LLS. At the same time, we should note that LLS are distinct f r o m

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1 of 16 1/13/12 1:38 PM

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1 of 16 1/13/12 1:38 PM

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Learning strategies are identified through various self-report procedures. Although self-report is always subject to error, no better way has yet been devised for identifying learners' mental processes and techniques for completing a learning task. Learning strategies are for the most part unobservable, though some may be associated with an observable behavior. For example, a student listening to new information may use *selective attention* (unobservable) to focus on the main ideas and might then decide to *take notes* (observable) on these main ideas. The only way to find out whether students are using *selective attention* during a listening comprehension task is to ask them. More observation has proven unsatisfactory in identifying learners' strategies.

The language learning strategies identified through these self-report methods have identified characteristics of good language learners and compared the strategies of more-and less-effective language learners. Such studies have been important in identifying and classifying strategies used by language learners and understanding how strategies are actually used in the learning process. This information has in turn guided instructional investigations that have sought to teach learning strategies to language learners and to measure relationships between strategy use and language proficiency, metacognition, motivation, and self-efficacy.

Conclusion

The study of language learning strategies will continue to develop as second language acquisition researchers seek to understand different learner characteristics and the complex cognitive, social, and affective processes involved in processing language input and using the language for a variety of purposes. Likewise, language educators and methodologists will continue their quest for more effective instructional approaches, and, with the increasing emphasis on learner-centered instruction and learner empowerment in all areas of education, instruction in learning strategies will assume a greater role in teacher preparation and curriculum design.

First, rigorous intervention studies would provide information about the effects of learning strategy instruction on achievement and language proficiency. Such studies need to be conducted with a variety of language students, including children in foreign language immersion and nonimmersion programs, school-aged students in bilingual and second language programs, older students with differing educational levels in their native language, and students in different learning contexts around the world.

A second area for future research is in the development of language teacher expertise for integrating learning strategies into classroom instruction. The evaluation of different models for teacher preparation in learning strategies instruction could lead to refining and improving current models. In addition, studies need to be undertaken to identify the relationship of effective learning strategy instruction to teacher characteristics such as teaching approach, attitude and teacher beliefs, amount and type of preservice and/or in-service preparation in learning strategy instruction, and years of teaching experience and length of time teaching learning strategies—it might be that effective learning strategy instruction is closely tied to specific individual teacher characteristics and experiences.

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March 20th-21st 2022

It is important that learning strategies research continue, both in these and other directions, for only through a better understanding of the learning and teaching process can more language learners achieve the level of success that currently characterizes only a small proportion of all students studying a foreign or second language around the world. Strategy instruction can contribute to development of learner mastery and autonomy and increased teacher expertise, but additional research in specific language learning contexts is essential to realizing its potential to enhance second language acquisition and instruction.

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